

Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

Weekly Newsletter

AUGUST 31 – SEPTEMBER 4, 2026



UMass Chan
MEDICAL SCHOOL

WELCOME



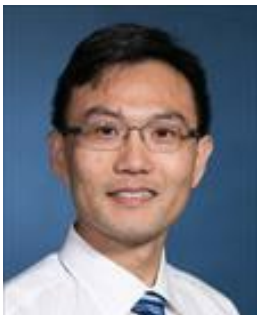
We welcome **Mahsa Salsabili, PharmD, PhD**, as Assistant Professor in the Division of Epidemiology. Dr. Salsabili is a Lead Pharmacoeconomics Specialist at ForHealth Consulting within UMass Chan Medical School, where she leads data-driven pharmacoeconomic analyses, pharmaceutical policy evaluations, and value-based assessments for clients. Her work focuses on generating evidence to support payer decision-making, manage pharmaceutical spending, and assess the value of pharmaceuticals and digital therapeutics. Before joining ForHealth Consulting, she gained more than six years of inpatient clinical pharmacy experience and conducted four years of pharmaceutical policy and economic research at the PRIME Institute, bringing both practice-based and research perspectives to her health policy and value-assessment work.

Dr. Salsabili has also worked closely with Dr. Matthew Alcusky, including their joint efforts applying pharmacoeconomic methods to support MassHealth's value-based drug pricing initiative, evaluating digital therapeutics, and co-mentoring the two postdoctoral fellows who completed the Applied Pharmacoeconomics and Pharmacoepidemiology fellowship they launched together several years ago. There are strong opportunities to continue expanding collaborations with Dr. Alcusky and others in PQHS through future publications, co-mentorship, and grant proposals.



We welcome **Dr. Tran Le Cong Tru** who is a physician, lecturer, and Fulbright U.S.–ASEAN Visiting Scholar from Can Tho University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Vietnam. His academic interests include public health, medical education, mental health, and the application of digital technologies in healthcare. During his time at UMass Chan Medical School, he will engage in research activities and academic exchange with Professor Hoa Nguyen, including participation as a research team member in an ongoing hypertension research project. He looks forward to contributing his experience in clinical medicine and public health while learning from UMass Chan's research environment and exploring opportunities for future collaboration between UMass Chan and his home institution in Vietnam.

NEW GRANT



Award Number: 1 U48DP006936-01-00

Awarding Agency: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Type: New

Title: Developing and Evaluating Computable Phenotypes to Identify Active Surveillance in Prostate Cancer Using Electronic Health Record Data

Project Period: 9/30/2026 – 09/29/2028

PI: Feifan Liu

Total approved for this period: \$399,303

UPCOMING EVENTS

Research Methods Meetings – starting September 2 through June 2027

The goal is to share innovative research methods, explore current challenges like reducing inequities, highlight method-focused publications, seek feedback on research problems for grants, and identify collaborators for new or ongoing projects.

Meetings are scheduled on the first and third Wednesdays of each month through the end of June 2027. Always advertised in this newsletter, but if you would like to receive a calendar invite and reminders before each seminar, please email judi.saber@umassmed.edu to be added to the distribution list.

Wednesday, September 2, 10:00 – 11:00 AM, In-Person (AS9.2072 Conference Room) or Zoom (link below)

Research Methods Meeting



Presenter: Anru Zhang, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Biostatistics and Bioinformatics and Dept of Computer Science, Duke University

Title: Making EHR Ready for AI: Statistics at the Data Frontier

Abstract: Electronic health records (EHR) are increasingly central to clinical research and AI, but they are not simply “big data.” They are irregular, heterogeneous, imbalanced, privacy-sensitive, and sometimes internally inconsistent. As a result, reliable statistical inference often requires first solving problems of data readiness. In this talk, we will discuss statistical and computational methods our group has developed to make longitudinal EHR more comparable, learnable, shareable, and trustworthy. Topics include timeline registration for aligning patients along latent disease progression; synthetic data augmentation for learning from imbalanced EHR; privacy-preserving synthetic EHR generation; and large-language-model-assisted detection of clinical documentation inconsistencies. These examples motivate a broader perspective in which preparing EHR for analysis and AI is itself a statistical problem, and a necessary foundation for trustworthy clinical and generative AI.

Bio: Anru Zhang is a tenured full professor with primary appointments in the Department of Biostatistics & Bioinformatics and the Department of Computer Science at Duke University. He also serves as Vice Chair for Research in Duke’s Department of Biostatistics & Bioinformatics. His current research interests include generative models, biomedical data science, and tensor learning. He has received the Leo Breiman Junior Award, COPSS Emerging Leader Award, IMS Tweedie Award, ASA Gottfried E. Noether Junior Award, AMIA Data Science Outstanding Paper Award, Bernoulli Society New Researcher’s Award, and NSF CAREER Award. He is a Fellow of the American Statistical Association (ASA). He currently serves as an associate editor for *The Annals of Statistics*, *Journal of the American Statistical Association Theory & Methods and Applications & Case Studies*, *Statistica Sinica*, and *ASA Discoveries*. His research is currently supported by two NIH R01 grants, one as sole PI and one as MPI with clinical investigators.

Click [here](#) to join.

Wednesday, September 16, 10:00 – 11:00 AM, Zoom



Research Methods Meeting

Presenter: Shih-Yen Pan, PhD student in Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

Title: The Impact of IMF Programs on Tuberculosis Outcomes and Government Health Spending: A Cross-National Difference-in-Differences Analysis, 1980–2019

Abstract: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set targets (Target 3.3) for tuberculosis (TB) control, including a 90% reduction in TB deaths and an 80% reduction in incidence by 2030 relative to 2015 levels. Progress has fallen far short of these targets, however, as over 10 million people continue to fall ill and over a million die from the disease every year, making TB among the top 10 causes of death worldwide. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has faced sustained criticism for the adverse population health consequences of its lending programs, which often require policy conditionalities prioritizing macroeconomic stability and market liberalization over public provision of social protection. These policies may affect TB outcomes both by constraining government health spending and by exacerbating underlying social determinants such as poverty and malnutrition.

This study employs a local projections difference-in-differences design to estimate the impact of IMF programs on TB outcomes and government health spending using cross-national panel data from 1980 to 2019. Focusing on first-time IMF program participation, the approach enables cleaner comparisons between treated and control countries while accounting for prior program exposures. Outcomes examined include TB mortality, prevalence, and incidence rates, alongside government health spending as a key mediating pathway.

The results indicate that IMF programs, on average, lead to a 7% increase in participant countries' TB mortality rate, a 4.8% increase in TB incidence rate, and a 4.8% reduction in government health spending per capita over six years following program entry. These findings suggest that IMF programs may be undermining TB control by weakening health systems and worsening socioeconomic conditions, with important implications for global health policy.

Bio: Shih-Yen Pan is a PhD student in Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His research applies causal inference methods to study how political-economic forces shape population health and incarceration in the U.S. and globally.

Click [here](#) to join.

Greetings from the New England Addiction Technology Transfer Center Team!

Summer is fast approaching, and we have an exciting lineup of trainings ahead. Take a look and save the dates on your calendar, and register now. We look forward to learning with you this summer!

Tuesday, September 1, 12-1:30 PM, Zoom

Gambling & Youth: Understanding the Why, Spotting the Signs, and Having Better Conversations

Sports betting apps, instant deposits, and 24/7 access have changed the game for today's college students. What was once occasional or social is now fast, frequent, and often difficult to detect – leaving many students vulnerable to gambling-related harm before it's recognized. As access expands and normalization grows, the line between "just for fun" and real harm is becoming increasingly blurred. This 90-minute webinar goes beyond the basics to examine the unique vulnerabilities of college students and the evolving culture of gambling on campus.

[Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)

Wednesday, September 16, 12:00 - 1:30 PM, Zoom

Synthetic Cannabinoids and Hemp-Derived Intoxicants: A Discussion of Policy & Public Health

This webinar will provide participants with an overview of the federal and state regulatory landscape governing hemp-derived cannabinoids, including emerging efforts to address regulatory loopholes and recent legislative actions. Participants will explore the pharmacology and health effects of synthetic cannabinoids and hemp-derived THC products, review current public health surveillance data and poison center trends, and examine the short- and long-term medical and psychiatric consequences associated with use, including intoxication, overdose, and psychosis.

[Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)

Please feel free to share this with anyone who may be interested. We hope to see you there!

The New England ATTC Team

Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

UMass Chan Medical School

NewEnglandATTC@umassmed.edu

[New England ATTC - Addiction Technology Transfer Center \(ATTC\) Network](#)

[New England ATTC | LinkedIn](#)

Monday, September 14, 9:00 - 9:30 AM, Zoom

Live Webinar: OAI CORE Knowledgebase

Presenter: Dr. Shao-Hsien Liu, Associate Professor, PQHS

Title: Causal Inference Using Osteoarthritis Initiative Data: Opportunities, Challenges, and Practical Considerations

Description: This webinar will introduce researchers to opportunities for conducting causal inference studies using the Osteoarthritis Initiative's rich longitudinal clinical, imaging, medication, behavioral, and patient-reported data. The presentation will highlight practical considerations for defining research questions, selecting analytic samples and time-varying measures, addressing confounding and missing data, and choosing appropriate causal inference methods.

[Register here](#)

For questions, contact the OAI CORE Team at oaiknowledgebase@umassmed.edu.



Tuesday, September 22, 12:30 – 5:30 PM

Health Education Academy for Leadership and Learning (HEALL) Education Day

Location: Paul J. DiMare Center, N1-1200 - N1-1500

Education Day offers an ongoing opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation, connect with like-minded colleagues, plan collaborations, and celebrate our educational activities and scholarship. This annual event serves to highlight the academic scholarly work that happens here, complementing your daily teaching, lab or clinical responsibilities, and curriculum development.

Education Day features plenary speakers who address topics such as the influence of Academies, conducting educational scholarly projects, and innovative trends in Health Sciences education. The event brings together key institutional leaders and educators who shape the future of Health Sciences education at UMass Chan and beyond. It also provides a forum for presenting and discussing novel educational initiatives underway at UMass Chan, enhancing our school's reputation and fostering collaboration within our educational community.

- 12:30-12:45 pm, Welcome Remarks
- 12:45-1:45 pm, Plenary (details coming soon)
- 1:55-4:00 pm Workshops
- 4:10-5:30 pm, Collaborative and Conversations (includes reception)

Click [here](#) to register.

Friday, September 25, 12:30 – 5:30 PM, Zoom

Qualitative Research Interest Group Webinar

Presenter: Katie Sveinson, PhD, Associate Professor, Associate Department Chair Charles J. Dockendorff Endowed Faculty Fellow, Isenberg School of Management at UMass Amherst



Title: Introduction to Discourse Analysis as Theory and Methodology

Abstract: Communication in our multimodal world goes beyond spoken words and written text. Images, videos, symbols, icons, body language, sound, music, body language, and physical arrangements make unique contributions to effective messaging. Discourse analysis allows for the study of these elements of communication in social processes. With a focus on meaning-making, discourse analysis highlights how the relationship between language and what language represents is far from straightforward (Gee, 2011; Sveinson, 2026). This approach offers opportunities to investigate and to be conscious of artifacts that may communicate (un)intended

and implicit messaging that may reveal hidden assumptions and power structures encoded in common documents. It goes past literal words to show how other aspects of messaging content may shape beliefs and behaviors. In this talk, Dr. Sveinson will discuss the inextricably linked theory, methodology, methods, and analysis of discourse analysis, with a focus on the uniqueness of this approach compared to other qualitative methodologies. Emphasis will be placed on how this work links micro-level language use to macro-level structures. Examples of her work will be provided as well as suggested areas of interest to utilize this approach.

Bio: Dr. Sveinson has published 13 articles utilizing (critical) discourse analysis, including empirical pieces, methodological perspectives, and scoping reviews and has received the Isenberg School of Management Outstanding Research Award. She serves on the editorial boards of the Journal of Sport Management, Sport Management Review, and Sociology of Sport Journal and is a NASSM Research Fellow.

Click [here](#) to register.

Sunday, September 27, 12:00-1:00 PM

2026 UMass Cancer Walk

Polar Park, 100 Madison Street, Worcester

Join Us for the Cancer Walk!

We're putting together a team for this year's cancer walk, and everyone is welcome to join! It's a great opportunity to support cancer research, honor those affected by cancer, and connect with colleagues outside of work. If you're interested in participating, please use the team invitation link below. We'd love to have you with us!

To register, click [here](#).



2024 PQHS Team

[Watch Chancellor McManus's video message](#) to learn about how you can help.

Friday, October 9, 12:00-1:00 PM

Qualitative Research Office Hours

This is an open online meeting for all interested in qualitative research methods, where participants may choose to present to other qualitative researchers their research project, proposal, manuscript, or idea for discussion and feedback. A short basic methods presentation will also be planned, such as using conceptual models, immersion/crystallization, or developing a coding structure. Click [here](#) to join.

Gerontology Speaker Series

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Gerontology and Gerontology Institute,
Donna M. and Robert J. Manning College of Nursing and Health Sciences
&
University of Massachusetts Medical School
Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences
For more information contact Whitney Mills: whitney.mills@umb.edu

Monday, September 14, 1:00-2:15 PM

via Zoom: <https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/94175483404>, Password: Boston

Title: Patient Priorities Care

Speaker: Aanand D. Naik, MD, Professor and Chair, Management, Policy and Community Health, Associate Dean for Learning and Health Systems, Director, Institute on Aging, Nancy P. and Vincent F. Guinee, MD Distinguished Chair, and Uzi and Micki Halevey and Carmel Dyer, MD Interprofessional Research Fellowship, School of Public Health, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Houston, TX



Monday, September 21, 1:00-2:15 PM

via Zoom: <https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/94175483404>, Password: Boston

Title: Age-Friendly Ecosystem

Speaker: Karon Phillips, PhD, MPH, MS, CHES, CAPS, FGSA, Policy Development Manager, Trust for America's Health, Washington, D.C.



Monday, October 5, 1:00-2:15 PM

via Zoom: <https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/94175483404>, Password: Boston

Title: Implementation Science and Rehabilitation Research

Presenter: Lisa Juckett, PhD, OTR/L, CHT, Associate Professor, Division of Occupational Therapy, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, The Ohio State University



Monday, November 9, 1:00-2:15 PM

In-person: Gerontology Classroom, Wheatley Peters Hall, 3rd floor, Room 125

And via Zoom: <https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/94175483404>, Password: Boston

Title: Narrative Gerontology: Theory, Research, and Practice

Presenter: Gabriela Spector-Mersel, PhD, MSW, Associate Professor and Director,, Sadot Institute for the Study of Shared Trauma and Growth, Sapir Academic College

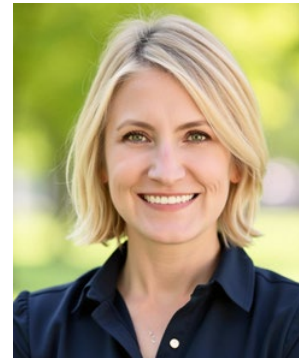


Monday, December 7, 1:00-2:15 PM

via Zoom: <https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/94175483404>, Password: Boston

Title: Montessori In Nursing Homes

Presenter: Michelle Hilgeman, PhD, Associate Chief of Staff for Research, Tuscaloosa Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Associate Adjunct Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Alabama



VIETNAM RESEARCH INTERNSHIP

This summer, we had the privilege of traveling to Hai Phong, Vietnam, to support and learn from the HTN-URBAN implementation research team (NHLBI funded-R33 trial, PIs: **Hoa Nguyen and Bo Wang**). Through visits to community health stations, hypertension screening events, and engagement with local health workers and community leaders, we gained firsthand insight into the complexities of translating research into practice. The experience deepened our understanding of community-based healthcare, implementation science, and the importance of strong local partnerships in advancing health equity. We are grateful to the Health Strategy Policy Institute Vietnam team and our local collaborators for welcoming us and providing such a meaningful learning experience.



- Brian Do, UMass Chan Medical Student | Fulbright Research Scholar
- Amanda Cho, M.D. Candidate, Class of 2029

UMASS REMINDERS

UMass Chan Farmers' Market



**Every Tuesday through October 27
(No market on Sept.15)
10 AM - 1 PM**

Two Locations:

- Market Vendors will be set up in the Albert Sherman Center, MPR - East, First Floor.
- Food Trucks and Food Vendors will set up outside on the Medical School Building Terrace.

[Click here](#) for more details and to view the list of attending food trucks and vendors



✚ Labor Day – Monday, September 7th

✚ Indigenous Peoples' Day – Monday, October 12th

✚ Veterans Day – Wednesday, November 11th

✚ Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 26th

✚ Day After Thanksgiving – Friday, November 27th

✚ Christmas Eve – Thursday, December 24th

✚ Christmas Day – Friday, December 25th

PQHS Weekly will be sent to all members of PQHS on Monday mornings. The intent is to provide a snapshot of what is going on that week in PQHS and to share our faculty and staff activities with the department. We depend on you to provide the items we need to share. Please send suggestions of events, faculty invited seminars & talks, honors, student thesis presentations, and news – new babies born! – to Judi (judi.saber@umassmed.edu) & Sarah (sarah.yeboah@umassmed.edu) by Friday each week.