

Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

Weekly Newsletter

APRIL 27 – MAY 1, 2026



UMass Chan
MEDICAL SCHOOL

CONGRATULATIONS



Dustin Burns, PhD was promoted to Affiliate Assistant Professor in the Division of Epidemiology. Dr. Burns is a Senior Managing Scientist at Exponent, Inc., an engineering and scientific consulting firm based in Irvine, CA. In his current role at Exponent, Dr. Burns leads multidisciplinary teams to respond to some of the world's most impactful problems and to evaluate emerging technologies using AI. Employing expertise in statistics, AI and Machine Learning, programming in multiple languages and cloud computing environments, Dr. Burns leads teams to assist with developing custom algorithms, modernizing analytics programs, advising on regulatory issues, and evaluating intellectual property. At UMass, Dr. Burns will give seminars on how epidemiologic methods intersect and differ from methods in physics, sit on career panels for students considering non-academic career trajectories, provide guidance on use of e, provide sessions on machine learning and AI in causal inference electronic health data used in clinical setting, techniques, and conduct sessions on missing data methods for electronic health record data for pharmacoepidemiologic research. We congratulate Dustin and express our sincere appreciation for his support of the Medical School.

We are thrilled to celebrate a major milestone for our colleague, **Sharina D. Person, PhD**. Sharina was recently elected as a Fellow of the American Statistical Association (ASA), the highest honor the organization bestows. To understand the scale of this achievement, the ASA only selects one-third of one percent of its membership for this honor each year. It isn't just a membership upgrade; it is a national recognition of Sharina's significant impact on the field of statistical science. Sharina also continues her leadership as a member of the ASA Board of Directors. Having a PQHS faculty member recognized at this level is a win for the whole department. Please join me in congratulating Sharina on this incredible, well-earned distinction.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, May 6, 10:00 – 11:00 AM

Research Methods Meeting



Presenter: Lucy Xiaolu Wang, PhD

Title: Health IT Diffusion and Physician Density (with Jason Huh, Jianjing Lin)

Abstract: This paper examines how the diffusion of advanced health information technology (HIT) affects the density of hospital-based (HB) physicians. Leveraging sharp county-level increases in HIT adoption driven by federal incentives, we compare physician density per 100k population in counties with rapid diffusion (treatment group) to those with slower or no uptake during our sample period (control group). Using an event-study framework, we find that HIT diffusion increased the HB physician rate in treated counties relative to control counties, and medical and surgical specialties account for most of the increase. Moreover, the growth in HB physician density is evident, absent major consolidation activities, and contributes to overall growth in total physicians. This growth is concentrated among early-career physicians and in physician shortage areas. Mechanism tests suggest that physicians benefit financially from practicing in treated counties, with higher Medicare reimbursement, services performed per physician, and hospital profits. Physician extenders also increase (rates), though the ratios-to-physician vary. Outpatient surgeries rise most in counties with moderate pre-period care utilization. Various robustness checks support our results. Our findings suggest that strategic HIT investments can attract physicians, expand care capacity, and reduce geographic disparities in health care access. (draft available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5159315>)

Bio: Lucy Xiaolu Wang is a tenure-track Assistant Professor at University of Massachusetts Amherst, a Faculty Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition (Germany), and a Faculty Associate at the Canadian Centre for Health Economics. Her research focuses on the economics of innovation & digitization in health care markets (national and global), particularly in the biopharmaceutical and digital health industries. She is a co-founder of the Digital Health Technology special interest group at the International Health Economics Association and currently serves as the inaugural program chair for the Innovation and Digitization program area at the American Society of Health Economists. Click [here](#) to join.



New England Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) Presentations

Friday, May 1, 12-1:30 PM

Trapped in Cyberspace: Understanding Internet Addiction – click to register

Learn about the link between problem gambling and death by suicide, including key risk factors like financial strain, relationship challenges, and co-occurring alcohol use. Gain insights from emerging data to better inform prevention, improve data collection, and strengthen clinical support.

Tuesday, May 5, 12-1:00 PM

A Primer on the Revised ASAM Criteria for Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents with Substance Use Disorders – click to register

Discover ASAM Criteria 4th Edition updates to support safety and empowerment for pregnant and parenting adolescents, and explore developmentally appropriate approaches, system-level implications, and practical implementation strategies to apply key concepts for improving outcomes in today's behavioral health landscape.

Tuesday, May 12, 1:00-2:00 PM EST

A Practical Overview of Treating Cannabis Use in the Perinatal Period – click to register

Navigate an evidence-based framework for perinatal cannabis use, covering key clinical considerations and co-occurring mental health factors while applying case-based interventions for pregnancy and postpartum settings.

Tuesday, May 12, 12:00-1:30 PM

Older Adults and Casino Gambling: Behaviors, Motivations, and Risk – click to register

Learn what motivates older adults to gamble and the factors that increase their risk for Gambling Disorder as this population evolves. Explore key implications for prevention and reducing gambling-related harm among older adults.

Friday, June 5, 1:00-2:30 PM

Understanding ASAM Criteria: A Foundational Overview and 4th Edition Highlights – click to register

This session provides a foundational overview of the ASAM Criteria, including key updates in the Fourth Edition (2023) and major changes from prior versions. The ASAM Criteria offers a patient-centered, evidence-based framework for assessing and treating substance use and co-occurring conditions, with an increased emphasis on a chronic care model and continuity across the care continuum. The training will also highlight practical applications in correctional settings, including screening, level-of-care decision-making, and care transitions during reentry—areas further emphasized in the Fourth Edition.

ATTC Monthly Blog Posts

[National Nutrition Month: Centering Nutrition in Substance Use Recovery](#)

[Brain Injury Awareness Month: Why it Matters for Substance Use Services](#)

The New England ATTC

Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

UMass Chan Medical School

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

SHOUT OUT



It is great to see [Kurt Hager, PhD](#), Assistant Professor, Epidemiology getting some national spotlight in the Times article, Having a member of our faculty linked there is impressive, but his editorial in JAMA Internal Medicine, [The Future of Nutrition Interventions in Medicaid](#), is where the real substance is. He lays out a clear case for why this is more than just a trend, but a necessary shift in how we approach population health.

DEPARTMENT RESOURCE REMINDER

Grant Review Internal Process (GRIP)

GRIP is a departmental initiative, now in its second year, designed to support and enhance the grant-writing skills of our postdoctoral fellows and faculty (at all levels) as well as improve the overall quality of grant submissions from our department. This program will offer voluntary, constructive reviews to increase the success rates of submitted proposals.

Bi-weekly 30-minute Zoom sessions are held on the first and third Thursdays of each month from 8:30 to 10:00 AM. This year, the program runs from December 4 through May 30. To sign up for a session, [click here](#).

This is a valuable resource, and we encourage you to take full advantage of it to strengthen your proposals. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please feel free to reach out.

Rob Goldberg and Bruce Barton
Co-Committee Chairs
Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

UMASS BENEFIT REMINDERS

LAST WEEK- ends May 1, 2026 - Annual Benefit Enrollment

The [Annual Enrollment](#) period runs from April 1 - May 1, 2026. Annual Enrollment is your opportunity to [review your benefit options](#) and make benefit changes for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2027, July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027.

Each year GIC benefit plans provide GIC members with a [virtual benefits fair](#) for your review. Please [contact the benefit plans](#) you're evaluating to ask questions about guidance or assistance regarding plan benefits and network coverage, tiering, costs, finding a provider, and more.

If you do not want to select a different health plan during [Annual Enrollment](#) no further action is needed to remain in your current health plan.

Note (employees only): You must re-enroll if you wish to participate in a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) effective July 1, 2026.

Use Your Excess Vacation Leave by June 27, 2026

As we get closer to fiscal year end, we want to remind you of the maximum accruals outlined in the [UMass Chan Holiday, and Personal and Vacation Time Policy](#) so you can plan accordingly.

As of the last full pay period of the fiscal year, the maximum number of vacation hours employees may carry over into the next fiscal year is 240. During the fiscal year, employees are allowed to accrue hours over

240. Hours over this accrual limit are automatically re-set in the payroll system to the accrual maximum. This year, **the relevant pay period ends Saturday, June 27, 2026**. You are encouraged to use any vacation balances that exceed the 240-hour maximum before that date. To avoid the loss of accrued vacation hours, review the following recommendations:

- Take all vacation over 240 hours before Saturday, June 27, 2026. Keep in mind that the vacation accrual for the pay period ending on that date that will not appear on your paycheck.
- Any hours over the cap will automatically be reset to 240 and will appear on your paycheck **on Friday, July 3, 2026**.
- If you are approaching 240 hours of accrued vacation time, talk with your manager about planning time off before June 27 and make sure it is approved by them.
- Ensure your vacation time has been entered into the Time Reporting system **by June 27, 2026**.



HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

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|  Memorial Day – Monday, May 25 th |  Veterans Day – Wednesday, November 11 th |
|  Juneteenth National Independence Day – Friday, June 19 th |  Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 26 th |
|  Independence Day – Friday, July 3 rd (observed) |  Day After Thanksgiving – Friday, November 27 th |
|  Labor Day – Monday, September 7 th |  Christmas Eve – Thursday, December 24 th |
|  Indigenous Peoples' Day – Monday, October 12 th |  Christmas Day – Friday, December 25 th |

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.