I hope this issue of the Scoop finds you healthy and safe. These are historic times for Public Health. New York City and Mount Sinai has been right in the epicenter. I have never been more proud of our students, faculty and staff than in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether through clinical care, research or volunteering, I am thankful to you for all your efforts. Our students have organized into task force teams working in the following areas: PPE, pharmacy, telehealth, administrative, operations, labs, and morale. Our students have become an essential part of the support system Mount Sinai needs to save lives and care for the communities it serves. Our faculty is on the frontline of diagnostic testing, vaccine development, epidemiologic studies, and the development and rapid implementation of therapeutics. It is extremely inspiring to see how the community at Mount Sinai is coming together for an extraordinary response. In our program I see an unwavering dedication to the public's health. We are all reminded how important the role of public health education, practice and leadership is during this pandemic. I could not be more grateful to continue training our students this term.

In the months to come we also have to have an honest look at the failures which brought us to the current situation. The World Health Organization has been warning for many years that infectious diseases are spreading more rapidly than ever before and new infectious diseases are being discovered at a higher rate than at any time in history. SARS, MERS and Ebola are just a few examples from which we could have learned during the most recent years. Instead, initially Wuhan authorities covered up the current outbreak, ordered to stop tests, destroy samples, suppress the news, and silenced the doctors who raised early concerns. The Trump administration's initial response was characterized by missed warnings, conflicting messages, and broken promises. The White House, through some combination of ignorance, arrogance, and incompetence, failed to heed the warnings of its own experts. Even the surgeon general and chief medical officer for the United States downplayed the coronavirus threat, pointing out that “fried

continued on page 5

Student Leadership: COVID-19 Response

This Spring has been especially challenging. This article recognizes just some of the work that our students have done related to COVID-19 relief efforts in March and April 2020. Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai students have shown the capacity taken action, offer support, and serve their communities during New York City’s response to this pandemic.

A Coalition of Student Volunteers

The COVID-19 Student WorkForce is a student-led workforce of over 500 medical and graduate students from the ISMMS, addressing COVID-19 specific needs throughout the Mount Sinai Health System in order to alleviate burdens on the healthcare system. The group operates task forces encompassing 6 areas: Pharmacy, Administrative Services, Hospital Operations, Telehealth, Labs, and Morale. The WorkForce collaborates with school and hospital leadership to assist in filling various needs, and the volunteers have made an impact by supporting the hospital staff and researchers, at all levels, to contribute to patient care and the combating of the spread of COVID-19.

- Rohini Bahethi, MD Candidate, COVID-19 Student WorkForce Co-Leader

I have been volunteering with the Student WorkForce's Patch 24 Telehealth project. In this role, I have been alleviating call volume by taking calls from across the Mount Sinai system and patching them through to the appropriate palliative care attending physicians and fellows.

- Britney Parillon, MPH Candidate
Members of the COVID-19 Student WorkForce teamed up to move dozens of high flow oxygen machines from a warehouse to a staging area, then assembled and prepared them to be delivered to affiliate hospitals that same day. Volunteer Miti Saksena, MSCR Candidate, poses with a cart of supplies. Picture from Alexandra Agathis, MD Candidate and Shravani Pathak, MD Candidate.

I volunteered alongside medical and nursing students in the pharmacy department at Beth Israel Hospital. I helped refill the supply of essential medications for COVID-19 patients, backfilled the secondary supply medications that we were running low, and assisted with inventory management.

– Anne Loftus, MPH Candidate

I am volunteering at the NYC DOHMH in the Health Systems and Support Branch where I am supporting work to surge and maintain health care access. As a physician, I am reviewing the medical records of people detained in ICE detention centers to help release those with high-risk health conditions. Finally, I am organizing a group of physicians to work on advocacy toward a stronger public health response that addresses structural inequity and racism.

– Betty Kolod, MD, MPH Candidate

During the past few weeks, I helped set up the Samaritan’s Purse patient care tents in central park. I have also been working with Sinai Inpatient COVID teams to contact family members of hospitalized patients and update them on the status of their loved ones care and answer whatever question or concerns they may be having.

– Aisosa Omorogbe, MD-MPH Candidate

Telehealth: Optimizing Care for More and More Users

Telehealth is a means of providing personalized, secure on-line access to health-related consultations, prescriptions, test results, messaging, and other services, using telecommunication technology. Telehealth has seen a drastic increase in the number of users, and as part of the Student WorkForce, I help newly-discharged patients and their proxies sign-up for the MyChart telehealth platform over the phone. I have had the privilege of encountering some wonderful individuals and families who were not aware of these services and benefitted greatly. One such example was a mother of 2 who also serves as a patient-proxy for 3 family members living in different boroughs. With telehealth, she has been better able to manage the care of her relatives alongside the new home-schooling requirements. My public health training helped me identify and bridge the communication gaps with many patients and their families. This volunteer role is now transitioning to a pilot program with the help of the nursing staff and clinical social workers.

– Tania Chen, MPH Candidate

The East Harlem Health Outreach Partnership is a student-run free clinic dedicated to the healthcare of underserved patients in the Mount Sinai neighborhood. As part of the student leadership team, I am helping to implement a telehealth program that allows patients to continue to receive time-sensitive primary care from volunteer Mount Sinai physicians and students, and that serves as a bridge to COVID-19 prevention and outreach. Adapting this role to the unique needs of the current pandemic has been an instructive and meaningful experience. Above all, it has reinforced my conviction that our world cannot advance without attaining universal health coverage and creating preferential options for those who have been excluded from the traditional health system. For all the suffering that it has generated, the COVID-19 crisis urges us to transform our interconnectedness from a vulnerability into a strength through more equitable health practices, prioritization of vulnerable groups within society, and heightened focus on population and preventative health.

– Esha Bansal, MD-MPH Dual Degree Candidate

Research Support

I am volunteering for a non-concurrent cohort study that falls under quality improvement analysis protocols for COVID positive patients in The Mount Sinai Hospital. The goal of the study is to see if current treatments are working. My role involves reviewing patient charts for key patient information including duration of intubation and time spent in intensive care so that we can study the effects of the drug Tocilizumab on COVID patients. Dr. Stephanie Factor is leading the group of students assisting in this work.

– Adrienne Dean, MPH Candidate
I’ve been doing a lot of social media chats, putting out blog posts and creating videos to create awareness for why we need to practice social distancing and consider the immunocompromised, elderly, and other high-risk individuals during this time. I did an Instagram Live with News 12 New Jersey to explain what it means to be immunocompromised and have invisible illnesses during the pandemic. I also did an Instagram Live with a renowned gastroenterologist on how to manage Crohn’s and ulcerative colitis from a distance during this pandemic, and a Facebook Live with the Crohn’s and Colitis Foundation on Coping with Anxiety and Stress During the Pandemic. As a patient influencer, I’m working with the American Gastroenterological Association to bring guidance forward to patients and their caregivers during such a difficult time. Recently, I did a video with the patient advocacy company Inspire for their #KeepUsAllSafe campaign. There’s a lot more I’m working on, including blog posts of patients who have recovered from COVID-19 and stories of international patients and what they’re going through with the pandemic.

– Tina Aswani Omprakash, MPH Candidate

COVID-19 has caused tremendous chaos, uncertainty, and increased depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. I decided to join the Crisis Text Line which helps guide texters through a current mental or emotional crisis they might be going through. If anyone is going through a crisis during this time, big or small, text SHARE to 741-741. I have also joined the Student Morale Task Force’s Phone-Based Well-Being Resource at Mount Sinai. This phone line is open to all Mount Sinai members who need help navigating Mount Sinai’s well-being resources such as therapy groups, childcare, carpool or transportation, etc.

– Cristina Liriano Cepin, MPH

I’ve been helping by assisting patients in creating MyChart accounts for telemedicine appointments, and I’ve been babysitting for a physician who was reassigned to work with COVID patients and can’t be home with her four year old son.

– Jordan Francke, MD, MPH

I connected with GrowNYC, a nonprofit focused on improving NYC’s quality of life through environmental programs. I volunteer with their Fresh Food Box program to hand out fresh produce from local farms to families in Brooklyn. I have also been recently hired as a COVID-19 contact tracer for NYC Health + Hospitals.

– Dijon Parker, MPH Candidate

I have been volunteering with the Mount Sinai Human Rights Program to send groceries and basic medical items to clients. Their clients are individuals who are seeking asylum in the United States and have experienced human rights abuses or torture in their countries of origin. Given the current political climate and uncertainty, these individuals are especially vulnerable to food insecurity. I have also been volunteering with the Student WorkForce. At first, I was helping The Mount Sinai Hospital contact the family members of COVID patients with daily updates, but now we’re starting to focus on Mount Sinai patients who have been identified as at-risk patients for drug and alcohol abuse. Many of these patients have gone without proper harm reduction education and resources due to the pandemic. Thus, we provide a telehealth trainings about naloxone in coordination with mailing Narcan kits.

– Sanjana Inala, MPH

These times of crisis are exactly when our expertise, knowledge, skills, and experiences as health professionals must be put into practice. I have had the privilege of contributing in many ways, from expanding patient access to telemedicine to proposing a model for ethical engagement of health trainees in pandemics. Notably, I have collaborated with engineers, physicists, and biomedical scientists across the country to develop a way for hospitals to use existing infrastructure to facilitate UV irradiation of PPE for decontamination and reuse. Most recently, I have been working on Sinai’s convalescent plasma transfusion and Tocilizumab clinical trials to determine if these are viable treatments. Specifically, we have created a seamless process for plasma donation from recovered COVID+ patients and set up the world’s largest convalescent plasma transfusion program. Our current efforts seek to automate longitudinal monitoring of patients’ health outcomes and to understand the efficacy of this novel treatment for COVID.

– Charles Sanky, MPH, MD Candidate

Tina is a minority health advocate and MPH student sharing her experiences as an immunocompromised patient during COVID-19. Find her work on ownyourcrohns.com and follow @ownyourcrohns for more information.

– Tina Aswani Omprakash, MPH Candidate
New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, a Long-Term Partnership

Over the past 5 years, a number of ISMMS students have completed their MPH Applied Practice Experience requirement by interning at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai (NYEE). The Applied Practice Experience (APE) is an integral part of a student’s learning experience in a public health setting. Below are interviews with ISMMS alumni and current MPH candidates.

Alexandre Ly van manh, MPH, 2016

In Fall 2015, while working as a research coordinator, I saw an opportunity to connect with the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary (NYEE) Ambulatory Care Services leadership and interviewed with both the division director and the practice manager. In parallel, the Graduate Program in Public Health staff supported me in the creation of my project and voilà: the NYEE APE was born.

The exciting part of the APE was the exposure to leadership and seeing the implications for initiatives and operations. The team helped me develop my “voice” by asking for my insights as we discussed potential solutions to implement. However, the most meaningful part of this APE was the personal bond I created with the Ambulatory Care leadership.

After my APE ended, I saw a need for the Ambulatory Care team to fill my role and at the same time, I wanted to share my experience with other students. The Graduate Program in Public Health staff helped refine the details and we welcomed our first intern in Summer 2016. The NYEE APE has now been running several years and our interns have become an essential support for the Ambulatory Care Services leadership, from working with data to helping with improvement processes. As healthcare keeps evolving towards a patient-centric model, there is a need to keep enhancing strategies and operations within Ambulatory Care Services and an opportunity for MPH students to be part of this effort. The success of the NYEE APE can be attributed not only to the talented individuals that have completed the APE over the years, but also the Program administrators who support ISMMS students and help them create new opportunities within or beyond Sinai.

Dominique Pean, MPH, 2018

What would you like students to know about the NYEE APE?

Completing the APE at NYEE is a unique experience that can support your growth as a budding public health professional. This is a chance to apply what you have learned during class in a real-world setting and can be a springboard for many other career opportunities. The NYEE APE provided me with an environment that cultivated my professional growth, encouraged independent thinking, and guided me toward the completion of a very gratifying practicum experience.

Anaika Azimyt, MPH, 2020

What are you learning through your work at NYEE?

During my time at NYEE, my main project consisted of measuring the patient volume for appointments using Meditech, a software that tracks the total number of appointments booked, missed, cancellations and no shows. With the data, I determined which days had higher no shows or cancellations and, as a team, we tried to understand the factors involved and find ways to add or reduce our ambulatory care services.
tools I needed to understand and succeed among the many tiers and different levels of leadership and organization that exist in the clinic setting.

**Katie Maguire, MPH Candidate 2021**

I initially chose to pursue my APE at NYEE because I was looking for more exposure in the healthcare management field. I wanted to understand more about what happens behind the scenes in ambulatory care settings and understand the thought processes and strategy involved in providing quality care.

A few weeks into my APE, I was not only exposed to the many moving parts of NYEE’s outpatient Eye and Ear clinics, I also felt that my contributions made an impact. The projects that we worked on were discussed and implemented almost immediately. I felt that I was able to be a part of important conversations, and I had never felt that before. My APE was a wonderful experience in which I could directly apply my public health training, learn from accomplished hospital administrators, and continue to grow in the Mount Sinai community.

The skilled Ambulatory Care leadership team are incredibly talented professionals and care deeply for their patients - which made this experience all the more inspiring and affirmed that I am on the right career track!

My advice to future students interning at NYEE is to be creative and confident. NYEE Ambulatory Care Services is a great learning environment where new perspectives are welcome.

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**The Director’s Column (continued from page 1)**

food” and “sitting on your couch” were more likely to lead to your death. Locally, the Governor of New York State and the Mayor of New York City promised widespread testing and contact tracing after the initial patient tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 in New York City, but that did not happen. Unfortunately, the list of missed opportunities is long. In general, countries or parts of a country where the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is guided by science and public health experts, are faring much better with lower infections and mortality.

The point of looking at mistakes made is not to point fingers but to avoid them next time and learn for the future. The Graduate Program in Public Health at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine is part of this learning process. Here, our students are acquiring the skills to implement best public health practice and prevent the next pandemic. One of the things we need to learn from the current COVID-19 pandemic is that we have to invest in our public health infrastructure, in science, and in global surveillance so things like we are experiencing right now will never happen again.

These are very difficult times, not just because of COVID-19, but because we are brutally confronted by the inequitable and unjust systems built into the structures of our society. The more we learn about COVID-19, the more we note the disproportionate impact it has on communities of color, which are also burdened by the economic pain caused by the pandemic and which lack the resources to absorb the loss of jobs and income that is currently reverberating across the nation. We witness example after example of the egregious discrimination that many of our fellow citizens face daily, most recently evidenced in the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. The origins of America’s unjust racial order lie in the institution of enslavement, and for me it is difficult to imagine an end to racism and oppression without a clear break and systematic change. The Graduate Program in Public Health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai is committed to anti-racism and health equity. It is our social responsibility as both members of society and public health professionals to tackle these systems and push back against racism and bias. Achieving justice requires action, not just words. Uprising brings visibility to a movement. We stand in solidarity with those campaigning for racial justice and an end to all forms of oppression.

Our program pledges to accelerate our commitment to address racial injustice by teaching skills to advocate for the essential public health values of compassion, empathy, justice, and equity, by advancing research on the structures that shape health inequities and applying that knowledge into practice. We will work with community partners to model the behaviors and values that we must demand of our national leaders and those who serve in law enforcement. We will continue to support the recruitment and retention of a diverse group of faculty, students, and staff to achieve inclusive excellence.

In the end, achieving a more just world depends on more than statements and slogans. As an academic public health community, we recommit to our deeply held tenets of public health: human rights, social justice, and health equity. The Graduate Program in Public Health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai will never be silent on racial injustices. We will use our platform to advance our mission of improved health for everyone, everywhere.

I might not see most of you on campus for a while. Until then, remember to seek uplift. Be cognizant of those in need. Stay safe, stay in touch and know that I am thinking of you. We will get through this.
The Applied Practice Experience is an essential component of the MPH degree, providing students with the opportunity to apply public health theory to real-world projects. The APE provides the mentored, hands-on training necessary to be successful in the workforce.

Team Salmonella
Rebecca Burns, MPH, Epidemiology Track

How did you find your Applied Practice Experience (APE) and what did you do?

I found an opportunity on the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH) website to be a Disease Control Intern in the Bureau of Communicable Disease. I was actually the first ISMS student to be a part of Team Salmonella, a unique disease control team.

I conducted surveillance for food borne diseases such as Salmonella, Shigella, Campylobacter, and Shiga-toxin producing e. coli infections. This involved collecting patient data from health care providers and laboratory personnel, and interviewing patients about their illness and exposures. Team Salmonella also conducted cluster investigations, where we would track cluster-associated cases and compare their exposure histories for commonalities. If the investigations were successful, we would work with CDC, state or city officials to create supplemental questionnaires and conduct interviews regarding specific common exposures. Team Salmonella also took on outbreak investigations when illnesses were linked with a restaurant or food supplier anywhere in the five boroughs of New York City. In these investigations, I was responsible for data entry, management, and analysis, and ultimately prepared final reports to be presented for the Bureau. I helped lead an outbreak investigation of a Cyclosporiasis infection associated with a restaurant in Manhattan, and my analyses were sent to FDA officials, ultimately leading to an ingredient traceback of a basil farm in Mexico.

How did the project or team work-style change with the COVID pandemic?

Being in the Bureau of Communicable Disease during the start of a global pandemic was an extremely rare experience. When the first cases were identified in New York City, I was tasked with contact tracing which involved calling people who may have had contact with the aforementioned case to ask them questions regarding exposure and if they currently had any symptoms. As COVID-19 progressed, the team started working remotely and developed electronic questionnaires that allowed us to continue Salmonella patient interviews from home. My experience within the NYCDOHMH at this time also gave me the opportunity to interview for and accept a position as a City Research Scientist, now working on the ongoing emergency response for the COVID-19 outbreak in New York City.

Histogram of reported cases by day for the Cyclosporiasis outbreak, provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Never Underestimate Your Ideas
Isaiah Brown, MPH, Health Care Management Track

Tell us about your search for an APE.

Finding an APE didn’t come easy for me and took a lot of persistence. I went to Christine Cortalano, Manager for Public Health Practice, to help me learn how to search for an APE project and she would even email me positions tailored to my interests. I ultimately found my APE in the Friday Finds email, applied, and was finally accepted into a position.

What was your APE project?

I assisted the Center for Health Equity and Community Wellness (CHECW) at NYCDOHMH with the construction of a biweekly event calendar and the production of CHECW video and photography projects, cataloging consent, and tracking health topics on social media. My APE work products included four months of social media tracking data and my analysis and recommendations for the division’s outreach and future directions.
What was a lesson you learned that you’ll use in your career?

Never underestimate your ideas! During my first division meeting, I was surprised by how my colleagues considered my suggestions for a project. Also, always make connections, no matter how small they may seem. You never know where those connections can lead you.

Health Education with Actionable Information
Allison Reichel, MPH Candidate, General Public Health Track

As a part-time student working full-time, the prospect of finding an APE that I could complete alongside my professional commitments was initially daunting. Christine Cortalano helped me identify some great (and flexible!) opportunities and ultimately connected me with Mount Sinai’s Health Education Department, where I completed my APE.

While working with Mount Sinai’s Health Education Department, I helped create informational materials to support school-based health education programming for middle schoolers in the East Harlem area. My primary project was creating a series of parent newsletters to complement the department’s health education curriculum. The newsletters contained actionable information to empower and support parents in productively, meaningfully, and respectfully talking with their child about health, particularly sexual and mental health.

Of all the skills I practiced during my APE, creating materials that support positive health beliefs and behaviors and contain only relevant, actionable information is one of the most valuable. The health messaging being shared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced just how important this is, and I anticipate using this skill often as I continue my work in public health.

Visit https://icahn.mssm.edu/education/masters/public-health to learn more about how Master of Public Health students complete the Applied Practice Experience.

Discussing Job Seeking and Internship Hunting in Uncertain Times

On April 9, 2020 Kelly Gentry, MA, LPC, Program Manager, Public Health Career Services and Alumni Relations, and Christine Cortalano, Program Manager, Public Health Practice, hosted a webinar regarding the how, when, and why (or why not) to search for new opportunities during a pandemic.

In our discussion, I learned that the public health job and training opportunities are vast during the current pandemic and potentially will continue to be after the pandemic. For some, this may actually be a great time to seek new opportunities. The webinar conversation also led me to think about if stability in my current job is important to me right now, and consider if jumping to a new position is a good fit right now.

– Stacey Pinto, MPH

My main takeaway from the webinar with Kelly and Christine is to think ahead to post-pandemic needs. Focusing on public health areas and populations that are being impacted the most will be beneficial when applying to future job and internship opportunities.

Current students and alumni can visit https://icahn.mssm.edu/education/masters/public-health/career-services to engage in career services activities.
Reflections on the First Virtual Public Health Career Fair

The career fair gave me the time to touch base with dozens of potential employers and make new connections.

– Majdi Alghader, MPH Candidate

It was a great chance to keep my interview skills sharp in this period of increased virtual connection. It was also helpful to learn how each of the organizations have responded to the pandemic and what that means for available opportunities."

– Jacob Freedman, MPH Candidate

Despite the current limitations due to the pandemic, I am well pleased with the outcome of the virtual career fair. I participated because I am currently on a job search for a position more in alignment with my field of interest. I was able to learn about endless opportunities and network with employers from NADAP, New York City Department of Health and Hygiene, and the Mount Sinai Health System. One of the recruiters from Mount Sinai even explained different career trajectories she had witnessed.

– Samantha St Elin, MPH Candidate

I decided to participate in this career fair because I was actively searching for an Applied Practice Experience. The most exciting group I talked to was the HRTP Public Health Internship Program at the NYC Health Department. They were very welcoming and interested in hearing about my work experience in my home country of Indonesia, my passions, and the reasons behind my decision to pursue a public health degree here in the United States. They asked me to contact them and submit my application directly!

– Welmi Pello, MPH Candidate

Congratulations to all June 2020 MPH graduates! A number of graduates were selected for awards related to the rigor of their research and writing, the excellence they demonstrated in their Applied Practice Experience, and their outstanding leadership in the School community and larger New York City community.

Outstanding Public Health Culminating Experience Award
Vibhor Mahajan
Anne Impellizeri Hahn
Sofia Viviana Bengoa

Excellence In Public Health Practice Award
Stacey Heather Pinto

Excellence In Public Health Leadership And Service Award
Acacia Lynn Smash
Gavriella L.Y. Hecht

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