Welcome to the Epidemiology Section Newsletter!

Greetings from the TOS Epidemiology Section!

Covered in this Newsletter:

- ObesityWeekSM 2015
- [NEW!] Career Insight: Coffee with a Mentor
- Student Poster Prize & Section Fund Drive Update

ObesityWeek 2015

Save the date: The Epidemiology Section meeting will take place on Friday, November 6, 2015 from 7:00am - 8:00am PT.

At this year’s meeting we will showcase young investigator work with a poster competition. Our agenda will include a brainstorming symposium and Section ideas for the 2016 meeting and a brief business affairs meeting, bookended by socializing and informal mentoring.

Please let us know if you are willing to volunteer for being an abstract reviewer or student poster judge. We need you!

Career Insight: Coffee with A Mentor

Pasquale Rummo, PhD candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and 2014 student poster winner, sat down with his doctoral advisor Dr. Penny Gordon-Larsen, Professor of Nutrition in the Gillings School of Global Public Health, to talk about career success, advice for early career investigators, the future of obesity research, successful grant-writing techniques, and how to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Pasquale Rummo      Penny Gordon-Larsen
Rummo: What's the best or worst decision you made for your career success?

Gordon-Larsen: I think my best decisions have been related to being open to learning new things. I came to UNC as a post doc to learn nutritional epidemiology but then I wound up taking advantage of opportunities to learn new skills and techniques. So I think being unafraid to learn these new techniques and methods was important, even though they may have been a little off topic relative to the main purpose of my post doc. When I started at UNC I was trying to find other people who I could learn from and work with. Being open to making new connections and broaden my network of collaborators was a good move I think, and it helped me to be able to stay here.

Rummo: Do you have any advice or suggestions for early career investigators? (e.g., someone who just finished their PhD or post-doctoral fellowship?)

Gordon-Larsen: I think that people who are just finishing their dissertations oftentimes don't value themselves enough or are unsure of their ability to succeed. They may compare themselves to their mentors who are full professors and perhaps say: there's no way I can do that. But it takes a very long time to learn to be efficient and productive, so while early career investigators are developing they should have faith in their ability to be successful and try not to doubt themselves. I think that's the biggest mistake people make - they are afraid to either apply for a certain job or they're afraid they can't do the job or they're afraid that they would not be a top pick for a job. It is really more about positioning and career goals. It is possible to be very early in one's career and have a unique set of skills that could really be useful at that institution or department.

Rummo: In your expertise, what areas of research do you see growing or shrinking in the near future within obesity research?

Gordon-Larsen: I think for growing areas, it's important to be thinking about translation and team science. A lot of progress has been made in certain areas, but linking across those areas in different biological systems and across different kinds of methodologies seems to be where a lot of interesting work is developing. There are also areas that are benefiting from some of the newer technologies - like some of the new sequencing technologies, microbiome, etc. - those kinds of advancements offer very exciting opportunities to learn more about novel areas of science. Similarly, novel approaches to use of big data offer the possibility to use statistical approaches to implement natural experiments or pseudo-interventions in the context of large datasets like electronic medical records.
Rummo: Given the tightening NIH budget, what are your thoughts or strategies to not just survive but thrive in academic research?

Gordon-Larsen: I think you need to be as educated as you can about the NIH process. It is important to understand how an application makes it to a study section and gets reviewed. The more you know about the process, the better you are at creating a good application. It is important to think like a reviewer and really hone in on the weaknesses and then to strategize to find appropriate solutions to those weaknesses. Also, I think the more people who have read the application with a critical eye and even finding external reviewers to critique the grant before it gets submitted is a great idea. It seems like a surprising number of grants that get submitted haven't been carefully reviewed. I think the biggest key to success is actually making a timeline that will allow you to finish far in advance of the due date so that more people can read it. It is also important to not be afraid to share the proposal with your trusted colleagues and with experts within the field - either somebody from your institution or people that you trust. People are sometimes afraid to have that feedback. You need scientific cohesion, with strong hypotheses and tightly linked methods and aims, but you also need to make sure it's aesthetically pleasing and well-written and doesn't have errors. You want to collaborate with people you really respect and trust to give you honest feedback. It's part of building a really good team and learning to communicate your ideas.

Rummo: How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

Gordon-Larsen: A healthy work-life balance is really important for your work. I personally found that I got more efficient after having kids because of new limits placed on my time. Even if you're leaving work and you're going home, you can still do some mental processing and mental "writing". Time away from work is actually really important to refresh and reframe ideas. Over time, I have developed a much greater ability to focus and hone in at work and then go home and leave work behind. But it did take time for me to learn to do that. You have to make tough decisions about how you spend your time - some things may have to be given up. If your most important thing is your hobby then you want to make sure you have time for the hobby. If your most important thing is your kids, you want to make sure you have time for your kids. You also need to find time to make yourself happy and refreshed. But you may not have time for your kids and five hobbies - maybe you have time for one big hobby and few little ones, you know?

Student Poster Prize & Section Fund Drive Update

In planning for ObesityWeek 2015, we are pleased to share that we have raised $150 towards our Section meeting and poster session. We thank you for your participation and your support. There is still time to make a tax-deductible contribution to support this year's student poster competition. A donation in the amount of $25 or more will help us pay for poster display boards, coffee and light breakfast, and a small prize for the top-rated poster. These activities have made a difference for poster competition finalists in the past in their transition to become an independent and outstanding researcher in the field of obesity epidemiology and...
population health.

Please make your check payable to:

The Obesity Society (list Epidemiology in the memo)
8757 Georgia Avenue, Suite 1320
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Or

Donate Online, our online donation form is fast, easy and secure. Please list Epidemiology in the Tribute message section on the donation form.

Thank you, and see you in November!

2014-2015 Epidemiology Leadership Roster

Y. Claire Wang, MD, ScD, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, Chair

Kendrin Sonneville, ScD, RD, LDN, University of Michigan School of Public Health, Chair-Elect

Shakira Suglia, MPH, ScD , Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, Secretary/Treasurer

Jesse Jones-Smith, MPH, RD, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Early Career Representative

Pasquale Rummo, MPH , University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Student Representative

Best Wishes,

The Epidemiology Section Leadership

STAY CONNECTED