

Ellen Chan-- Manager of Statistical Training/Biostatistician, Center for Biostatistics in AIDS Research



Background

Ellen Chan is a Biostatistician and the Manager of Statistical Training in the Center for Biostatistics in AIDS Research (CBAR). Originally from Hong Kong, Ellen moved to Vancouver, Canada with her family when she was in high school. She completed bachelor and master degrees in Statistics from Simon Fraser University. Ellen developed a love for math and working with numbers when she was young. That passion led her to study Statistics, but she never imagined she would become an HIV clinical trial researcher. During the winter break in her second year of graduate study, Ellen applied to dozens of open statistics- or biostatistics-related jobs across Canada and the United States. She didn't know exactly where she wanted to land after graduating, but wanted to explore any opportunity she could find in her field. Luckily for her and for us, the first call she received was from CBAR at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Ellen realized there was something special about CBAR and our School during her first phone screen. She felt that not only would the work be interesting, but the research was meaningful and important. She was also impressed by the way she was treated by the interviewers, who were all friendly and showed her around the Boston area when she flew from Vancouver for her final interviews. With all those things combined, she knew it was an opportunity to begin her career she could not turn down.

Ellen first joined the School of Public Health as a Biostatistician I. She says the role was great for starting her career because it offered a smooth transition from student to professional biostatistician with the comprehensive training CBAR provided. After two years in that position, she was promoted to Biostatistician II in the same organization. Throughout her time as Biostatistician I and II, what most stuck out to her most was the senior statisticians she worked with – who taught her a lot about HIV pathogenesis, clinical trials, biostatistics and programming, and reinforced her commitment to the work. She feels especially grateful for her supervisor, who trusts her completely to work independently in her projects, but always supports her when she needs help. Ellen's experience at CBAR taught her that a good mentor is vital to success. When the Manager of Statistical Training role opened up in CBAR, she knew it was the perfect opportunity to pay that experience forward to new Biostatisticians starting their careers in CBAR. She now supervises 4 Biostatistician I's in the ACTG (AIDS Clinical Trial Group) and provides guidance and training through their promotions to Biostatistician II. She coordinates their work and priorities, ensures their work proceeds efficiently, and takes lead in their career advancement decisions. She also works with CBAR's hiring manager to screen applicants and assists with interviewing job candidates to onboard the next generation of Biostatisticians for CBAR. Ellen continues to work as a Biostatistician as well, working on HIV clinical trials in partnership with the ACTG.

Ellen shared that one of the biggest lessons she has learned during her time here is to always keep a positive attitude. That doesn't necessarily mean ignoring problems, but acknowledging that sometimes a situation will not turn out as she expected. Remaining positive and looking at things

with optimism helps keep her motivated when she is met with an obstacle. She tries to bring the same perspective as a supervisor, and likes to lead with encouragement and positive reinforcement!

Recommendations for Staff

Ellen advises SPH employees to look for opportunities to take on responsibilities beyond their typical job descriptions. Before her promotion to Manager of Statistical Training, Ellen served as a chair for various CBAR committees and working groups. Those experiences helped her learn about how to identify others' strengths and effectively delegate work, and most importantly, what it means to be a good leader. She feels those lessons were crucial in preparing her to become a manager in CBAR.

Additionally, she says Harvard offers many opportunities for trainings, workshops, and seminars for employees. Employees should take advantage of these opportunities as they can be a great way to learn more about yourself and your skills.

What do you like most about working at SPH?

Ellen believes the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health is one of the best places to work! The main factors that stick out to her are the diverse and friendly environment, due in part to her amazing coworkers. Ellen also says one of the most unique aspects of working at Harvard is the access to great resources and information. If she or anyone in her group ever has a question, they can easily turn to an expert in the field within CBAR or HSPH's Biostatistics department. Ellen also says Harvard offers a great level of flexibility that makes it easy to balance work and life, and that is part of what has kept her here for many years. When talking about CBAR specifically, she says she feels fortunate to play a role in the impactful work they do and gets a great deal of satisfaction out of coaching people and seeing them grow as Biostatisticians.

Resource to You

Interested in learning more about Ellen and her work, or getting one-on-one advice from Ellen herself? Contact her directly via email at echan@sdac.harvard.edu!

How about You?

Interested in telling us your success story? Let us know by sending an email to employment@hsph.harvard.edu.