Dr. Josiimer Mattei Is Named This Year's Recipient of the Alice Hamilton Award!

The Committee on the Advancement of Women Faculty has formally announced this year's recipient of the Alice Hamilton Award, Dr. Josiimer Mattei, Donald and Sue Pritzker Associate Professor of Nutrition. Alice Hamilton was the first woman to be on the faculty at Harvard University. The award recognizes an especially promising junior woman investigator in public health whose work has already made a significant impact and who demonstrates exceptional future promises.

Dr. Mattei’s research agenda focuses on the role of dietary, genetic, and sociocultural factors, on type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity in minority groups. Dr. Mattei’s emphasis is on Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S. and Latin America. Her projects include longitudinal cohort studies in Puerto Rico, mixed-methods projects on food access, stress, and on eating behaviors and weight stigma, and culturally-tailored dietary interventions to improve cardiometabolic health in Latinos in Boston and in Puerto Rico.

She is the Principal Investigator of the PROSPECT project funded by the NIH. PROSPECT is an island-wide longitudinal cohort studying the lifestyle and psychosocial risk factors of chronic diseases of adults in Puerto Rico. Dr. Mattei is a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leader promoting evidence-based policy and programs for chronic disease prevention in Puerto Rico and US-Latino Communities. She is also engaged in several global collaborative projects on
traditional diets and cardiometabolic health, especially in Latin America, and on projects addressing food access and health during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, Dr. Mattei’s goal is to help Latinos and other ethnic and minority populations eat healthy and be healthy.

In addition to her many accomplishments in research and teaching, Dr. Mattei is a mentor for students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior researchers, and a strong advocate for the inclusion and advancement of underrepresented groups in science and academia, for which she has received multiple accolades. She was a longtime member of the Committee for the Advancement of Women Faculty, including as a co-chair.

Dr. Mattei will be awarded during the 2021 Alice Hamilton Award ceremony which, due to the current circumstances will be held virtually on November 15th at 11:00AM. For event information please visit: https://www.eventbrite.com/x/alice-hamilton-award-virtual-ceremony-tickets-195910833577.

NEWS IN THE DEPARTMENT

AWARDS

The Dean’s Fund for Scientific Advancement: Acceleration Award selection committee chose Dr Jorge Chavarro’s, Associate Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology, application for funding in the amount of $99,828. The funding period for this award is December 1, 2021 – November 31, 2022.

The Dean’s Fund for Scientific Advancement: Acceleration Award selection committee chose Dr Josiemer Mattei’s, Donald and Sue Pritzker Associate Professor of Nutrition, application for funding in the amount of $50,000. The funding period for this award is December 1, 2021 – November 31, 2022.

PUBLICATIONS

Many of the Department’s MPH and PhD students contributed to the following article:

NEW FACES IN THE DEPARTMENT

RACHEL LIBRETT
Research Assistant
Nurses’ Health Study 3

Greetings! My name is Rachel, and I was recently hired as a Research Assistant on the Nurses’ Health Study 3 in the Department of Nutrition. I graduated in May 2021 from Tufts University with a double major in International Literary and Visual Studies and Spanish. I’m also doing a fifth year with Tufts to get my master’s in public health, concentrating in Biostatistics and Epidemiology. Looking ahead, I hope to become a pediatrician.

I’m originally from Philadelphia, PA, although I’ve also lived in New York and Canada. I am an only child to a single mother, to whom I give great credit for pushing me to tackle inequity in my day-to-day life. Another mentor of mine is Dr. Lucy Marcil of Boston Medical Center Pediatrics who encouraged me to turn my passion for advocacy into a career in public health. In my free time, I love to bike around Boston, cook my way through Yotam Ottolenghi’s recipes, and read anything related to magical realism.

Looking forward to working together!

MONDAY NUTRITION SEMINARS

The Department of Nutrition holds its weekly Monday Nutrition Seminar Series every Monday throughout the academic year. The talks are varied, but they highlight the many different aspects of cutting-edge research that is currently being conducted in the fields of nutrition and global public health. These seminars are held from 1:00-1:50 pm and are free and open to the public. Because of COVID-19, the seminars have been presented via Zoom since March of 2020, and this zoom format will continue for now. A zoom link for viewing will be available one week prior to each seminar.

Our November 2021 speakers will be:

Nov 1  Dr Kathryn Dewey, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor Emerita, Department of Nutrition, UC-Davis, California – “Meeting Nutrition Needs During the First 1000 Days: Challenges & Opportunities” - NGHP

Nov 8  STARE-HEGSTED LECTURE: Dr. Shiriki K. Kumanyika, PhD, MS, MPH, Research Professor, Community Health and Prevention, Drexel University - “The Syndemic Perspective on Decreasing U.S. Obesity Prevalence: Opening The Door to New Solutions”

Nov 15 Dr Qi Sun, Associate Professor in the Departments of Nutrition and Epidemiology - TBD

Nov 22 Dr Yuan Ma, Research Scientist, Department of Epidemiology, HSPH – TBD

Nov 29 Dr Lorena Pacheco, Yerby Fellow, Department of Nutrition, HSPH - TBD
Dr Frank Sacks believes the FDA’s new sodium-reduction goals for industry is a ‘really good move’ for a healthy heart

On October 13th the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) released new voluntary guidance on encouraging the food industry to gradually reduce sodium in commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods over the next two and a half years. Its aim was to help Americans reduce their average levels of sodium from 3,400 to 3,000 mg/day.

Dr Frank Sacks, Professor of Cardiovascular Disease Prevention, was recently asked to comment on this. Sacks was the principal investigator in the landmark Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Sodium Trial. This study rigorously examined the effect of sodium intake on blood pressure and concluded that the relation is strong and causal. Dr Sacks also offered tips for eating a lower-sodium diet without sacrificing taste.

Dr Sacks believes that the FDA’s offering guidelines for specific sodium reduction goals is more effective than other health organizations doing so because the others don’t have the force of a regulatory department behind them. Thus, the new guidance is actually groundbreaking.

Because packaged foods are a big source of sodium in the U.S. diet, this guidance will likely reduce heart attacks and strokes if it is followed. However, it’s just a beginning towards incrementally reducing overall sodium intake.

Dr Sacks offers a number of suggestions for cutting back on sodium in people’s diets. First, they can examine the nutrition labels on various items when food shopping and not buy products that contain too much sodium. However, he advises that making food from scratch is a whole lot healthier. Second, when dining out at a restaurant, a customer can ask if they could hold back on the salt. Finally, when cooking at home try substituting for salt by adding herbs or lemon instead. He says that lemon actually covers the taste receptors for sodium in the mouth, so it can substitute biologically for salt as a flavoring.
Both our health and daily food habits can be improved by mindful eating

Drs Lilian Cheung, a lecturer in the Department of Nutrition and editorial director of The Nutrition Source, and Teresa Fung, adjunct professor of nutrition, recently spoke to CNN about making the switch to distraction-free meals focusing on the full experience of eating. Both of them emphasize that taking a more mindful approach to eating may be a way to jumpstart better food habits and boost health.

According to Cheung, “Mindfulness is an intentional focus on one’s thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations in the present moment.” Fung added that the goal of mindful eating is to become more in tune with your senses and thoughts as you eat, putting aside distractions. “When I’m going to eat breakfast, I’m not going to be holding my iPad and reading today’s news,” she said. When making coffee, she noted, she takes the time to savor each step, from fragrant brew to warming sip.

Both of them state that studies have shown that mindful eating can have certain health benefits such as weight loss or stability, and a reduction in stress and anxiety.

Cheung further suggested that mealtime distractions should be cut out gradually. She also advised eating slowly, taking small bites, and chewing thoroughly. This can help make it easier to recognize when you’re satisfied and ready to stop eating.

Read the CNN article: https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/14/health/mindful-eating-techniques-tips-wellness/index.html

MEET A NUTRITION STUDENT: ALAN ESPINOSA

Alan Espinosa-Marrón, SM2 in Nutritional Epidemiology, together with his research team at Universidad Marista de Merida (Mexico), has conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials to assess the effects of these food additives on body weight and BMI. Their approach considered different comparators, sex, age at inclusion, baseline body weight, and distinct dietary
settings. They also explored non-caloric sweeteners' roles in other clinical settings, such as women of reproductive age, renal function, and diabetes-related outcomes.

Alan’s other research includes sarcopenia assessment among older adults with prostate cancer and peer-leader education in Mayan communities with Type 2 diabetes. To optimize the clinical follow-up and diagnosis of patients with prostate cancer undergoing sarcopenia, Alan and his colleagues at the National Institute of Medical Sciences and Nutrition "Salvador Zubirán" (Mexico City) developed and validated a predictive equation. This manageable but accurate algorithm identifies elderly patients with PC at risk of muscle impairment.

They also conducted a two-year trial to assess the effects of a support education program in people with type 2 diabetes from two semi-urban Mexican Mayan communities. They found that a peer support approach is a promising intervention for diabetes care, as these communities improved glycemia and diabetes self-management.

As part of his passion for public health nutrition, Alan co-founded Espinosa & Musi Company to reduce malnutrition-related anemia in children. They created a thoughtfully developed dietary complement based on iron, folic acid, vitamin B12, and vitamin C. This fortified low-calorie and sodium product cost less than 1 USD. It comes as an edible gel designed to be consumed directly from the container and can be preserved without refrigeration for eight months. It is distributed in government pilot programs in Mexico and Honduras in government assistance programs. He and his colleagues are currently expanding their initiative to the Harvard i-lab Venture Program, targeting more vulnerable communities worldwide.

Alan’s expected graduation date is May 2022. His overall research interests include public health nutrition and epidemiology of non-communicable diseases, and the non-nutritive sweeteners' effects on weight and plant-based diets in human and planetary health.

UPDATES FROM THE DEPARTMENT’S DIB COMMITTEE
By Bristian Justice, Committee Member

Welcome to the first of monthly updates regarding Diversity, inclusion and Belonging within the Department of Nutrition! This column will provide updates regarding NUT-DIB committee efforts along with departmental wide updates for newest developments, changes, and initiatives. While we are currently establishing useful forms of communication to/from the committee, please feel free to submit anonymously via our Qualtrics form https://harvard.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8D642fDG6wcRNUG

First of all, the Nutrition Departments’ DIB has been holding sessions with students & postdocs, faculty & researchers, and staff over the last several weeks to review and discuss our findings from our survey of the departments’ DIB climate. The goal is to ensure thoughts/ideas are shared across the department, not only to effectively make progress in the immediate future but to also shed light on consistent practices for the long term. If you have additional ideas, concerns, questions, or general observations you’ve made you are welcome to share with the committee related to diversity, inclusion, and belonging.
NUTRITION SOURCE UPDATES

Anti-inflammatory diet review
An anti-inflammatory diet is promoted as a remedy to battle chronic, low levels of inflammation in the body. Learn more about anti-inflammatory diets: How they work, potential pitfalls, and what the existing research says. https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-weight/diet-reviews/anti-inflammatory-diet/

Nutrient feature: Iodine
Iodine is needed to make the thyroid hormones thyroxine and triiodothyronine, which assist with the creation of proteins and enzyme activity, as well as regulating normal metabolism. Learn more about this essential trace mineral. https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/iodine/

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH SCHOLAR IN LIFESTYLE, METABOLOMICS, AND LONGEVITY
We have an opening for a full-time post-doctoral research scholar who is interested in research on metabolomics, lifestyle, and longevity to work on a recently NIH-funded project in the Department of Nutrition at Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health. The researcher will review literature on the topic and be primary responsible for conducting statistical analysis, working in collaboration with other researchers in the Department, Channing Division of Network Medicine, and other international groups. This is a two-year full-time post-doctoral position. Award of the second year is contingent upon performance during the first year. Doctorate in epidemiology, nutrition, biostatistics, or related areas is required.
To apply, please send a cover letter, CV, and list of references to mguasch@hsph.harvard.edu.
SAVE THE DATE!

We are pleased to announce that the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health will hold its 16th Annual Stare-Hegsted Lecture on Monday, November 8, 2021, from 1:00-2:15 pm.

To register: https://harvard.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJIlf-ytqzwsG9Scjn0UCYs7sL7DiNd5QrJP

Dr. Shiriki K. Kumanyika, PhD, MS, MPH, Research Professor, Community Health and Prevention, Drexel University, will be this year’s speaker. She is Founder and Chair of the Council on Black Health (formerly the African American Collaborative Obesity Research Network (AACORN). CBH is a national network that seeks to have a significant impact on health in Black communities through collaboration, discovery, and innovation. In addition to her Drexel affiliation, Dr. Kumanyika retains an appointment as an Emeritus Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). She was the founding director of Penn’s Master of Public Health program.

Dr. Kumanyika’s research has focused on identifying effective strategies to reduce nutrition-related chronic disease risks, with a particular emphasis on achieving health equity for black Americans. Over more than three decades, she led or collaborated on single- or multi-center randomized clinical trials or observational studies related to obesity, sodium intake, and other aspects of diet and lifestyle. Several of these studies evaluated interventions to promote healthy eating and physical activity in black children or adults in clinical or community-based settings. Her recent research with Council on Black Health colleagues has included studies of the targeted marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to black children and adults and food price influences on food purchases of black household food shoppers.

Dr. Kumanyika was Vice-Chair of the HHS Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Healthy People 2020 objectives and is also involved in efforts to develop Healthy People 2030. She is a past president of the American Public Health Association and a member of the National Academy of Medicine (NAM, formerly known as the Institute of Medicine (IOM)). Dr. Kumanyika has extensive experience in advisory roles related to public health and nutrition policy in the US and abroad. She is currently chair of the NAM Food and Nutrition Board, a member of the CDC Task force on Community Preventive Services, Co-chair of the Policy and Prevention Section of the World Obesity Federation, a member of the Lancet Commission on Obesity, and a nutrition policy advisor to the World Health Organization and the World Cancer Research Fund.