

VOICES

The newsletter of the Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations (CEESP) program • Summer 2021



CEESP Director Amr Soliman with CEESP mentors and students

Lessons Learned



Like the rest of the world, CEESP pivoted last year with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the abrupt change from in-person to remote work. Thanks to supplemental funding from the National Cancer

Institute (NCI), we were able to maintain our on-site mentorship infrastructure and to help facilitate the shift from in-person to remote research and learning in 2021. As we celebrate our 15th anniversary this summer, I'm delighted to announce that we have 15 CEESP students conducting fieldwork in 15 sites around the world. Some of those students are working remotely from the U.S. in places like Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania and Jordan. Others are conducting on-site research in countries as diverse as Morocco and Peru.

We've learned many lessons from Covid, including which CEESP training sites are best suited for remote research training. Going forward, as mandated by

the NCI, our program will consistently include a contingency plan for remote work, should the need arise.

The pandemic has reminded us how vital mentorship is to the success of our students—whether they're working remotely or in-person. Since the start of CEESP in 2006, we have created a robust network of mentors across the globe. Some of our mentors have been with us from the beginning. At least 10 current mentors are former CEESP students—a wonderful development.

I know from experience that when it comes to building a career in cancer epidemiology research, mentorship is indispensable. That's become even clearer this summer, with so many of our students conducting remote research. Daily Zooms with off-campus mentors and staff, as well as with CEESP team members, has been crucial.

As you'll see in this issue of *Voices*, CEESP mentors are well-versed in helping students manage expectations,

adjust to new cultural settings, and achieve both long-term goals and short-term outcomes. Our mentors know how to foster the vigorous exchange of ideas and to nurture independent research and learning. It's thanks to them that scores of CEESP graduates have secured leadership positions in key institutions worldwide, among them the NCI, the American Cancer Association, and Partners in Health. For our part, my CEESP colleagues and I make every effort to provide our mentors with career-development opportunities and materials. This fall, for example, I will be leading a 10-week remote learning workshop on scientific publication for more than a dozen of our foreign field-site mentors and collaborators.

Please join me in celebrating our 15th anniversary by applauding our extraordinary team of CEESP mentors!

Amr S. Soliman, MD, PhD
CEESP Program Director

About the Program

The Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations (CEESP) Program includes a four-month summer field research experience in foreign countries and among minority populations in the U.S. CEESP faculty and field collaborators have the experience to provide expert field mentorship, with the aim of training participants to implement studies in ethnically diverse settings. Since its founding in 2006, CEESP has trained over 150 students who are now pursuing careers around the world.

For more visit
ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu

APPLY NOW
Application Deadline:
January 16, 2022

The Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations (CEESP) program is now accepting applications for the summer of 2022. The program is open to PhD and first-year MPH students in public health.

Application form and information at
ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu

VOICES

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Send comments to asoliman@med.cuny.edu. Select features from Voices are available online at ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu ©2021.

MENTOR PROFILE

Everyone Is a Winner



Amanda Gordon, left, and mentor Mohamed Khalis visit Habous Market in Casablanca.

By Zoom from Casablanca this June, CEESP mentor **Mohamed Khalis**, PhD, and CEESP student **Amanda Gordon**, who worked with Dr. Khalis over the summer, talked about the meaning and importance of mentorship. Dr. Khalis is an assistant professor in public health at the Mohammed VI University of Health Sciences and has been a CEESP mentor since 2018. This summer, he mentored both Amy Luo (see the accompanying article) and Gordon, an MPH student in epidemiology at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, who spent the summer comparing the use of private vs. public hospitals in Morocco by women with breast cancer. Her preliminary findings suggest women use private hospitals more than public; Gordon hopes her research will help public hospitals identify areas for improvement.

Q: What’s the mentorship process been like for both of you?

AG: I meet with Dr. Khalis every morning, Monday through Friday. He’s been great with making me think about what I want to be writing, since the main goal of my research is to have a publication. It’s given me a different mindset. In school, you collect the data first, then you analyze it, and then you think about how you want to write it. Whereas Dr. Khalis got me thinking first about how I want to write my paper, so I can maximize my short amount of time in Morocco and only look for what I’ll actually need.

MK: This internship is helping Amanda build resources to make her an excellent researcher in the future. Even though this looks like a 1-3 month project, my hope is that she will keep in touch with us in the future and continue to collaborate. It’s important to keep a relationship like this going, to develop future projects. We will benefit from her current project—it can help us build new systems. As a mentor, I try to help students from other cultures learn a new context. The first day she was in Casablanca, I invited her to a restaurant, and she tried Moroccan food.

AG: I liked it! I’m hoping to see more of Morocco while I’m here. I’ve made friends with some of the staff who’ve told me they want to take me to other cities. I’m obviously most interested in health, but it’s also good just to talk to people here, not necessarily about health but about life. The old model, where Americans went into other countries thinking everything should be like the U.S., is not how things should work. This model makes you more understanding.

MK: We benefit, too. CEESP students come from another system, and I learn from their system—how they train, how their system works. So I learn from the students. And it’s not just me—our institutions, our universities, our hospitals learn. The data Amanda is collecting benefits us, and it is useful for research activities in our university. When she publishes her paper, it will be very beneficial for the university and the country. Everyone is a winner. Everyone benefits. ■

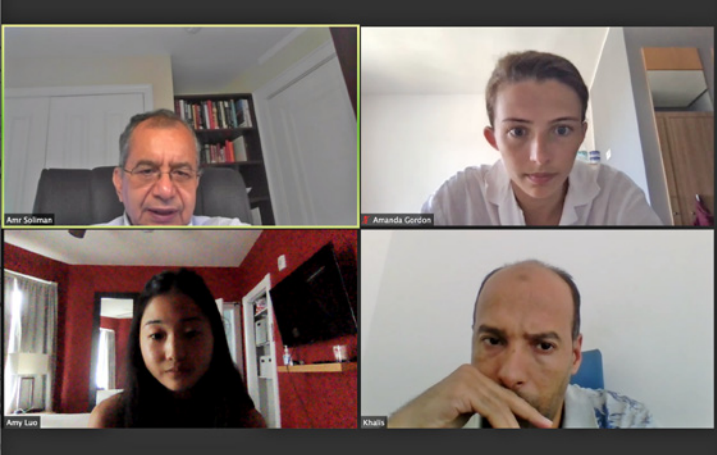
ALUMNI PROFILE

By Zoom: Insights into Morocco’s Cancer-Care Continuum

When Covid restrictions kept her from being able to travel outside the U.S., **Amy Luo** opted for a virtual CEESP training project. An MPH student in global health and populations at Harvard, Luo teamed up with Dr. Mohamed Khalis of the Mohammed VI University of Health Sciences in Casablanca to help evaluate a new certificate program at the university, Patient Partners in Cancer Care. The program trains cancer survivors to become community resources—or “cancer caregivers”—for people newly diagnosed with cancer and undergoing treatment.

The program trains cancer survivors to become community resources.

Luo had been to Morocco before, so she was familiar with the country—a huge “comfort,” she says. For her CEESP project, she partnered by Zoom with colleagues in Casablanca to organize interviews with women who’d recently completed the six-month Patient Partners in Cancer Care training. Luo hopes findings from the interviews will yield insights into both the cancer-care continuum and the empowerment of women in Morocco.



Her dream would be “for this study to help promote other programs in neighboring countries, or other universities.” Without the mentorship of Dr. Khalis and CEESP Director Amr Soliman, Luo adds, a remote project like hers would have been even more daunting—if not impossible. ■

A Vital “Pay-Forward”

A conversation with CEESP Associate Director Robert Chamberlain



For the past 15 years, **Robert Chamberlain**, PhD, has chaired the advisory committee of CEESP and mentored numerous CEESP students in the areas of molecular, genetic, and social epidemiology. The founder and past director of the Cancer Research Training Program at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center and a past president of the American Association for Cancer Education, Chamberlain believes passionately in the need to train the next generation of scientists. He is himself the beneficiary of a graduate school training program, and he helped shepherd CEESP Director Amr Soliman through a post-doctoral training program at M.D. Anderson.

Q: Why is a training program like CEESP so critical?

A: It’s a pay-forward to future scientific innovation. There are so many barriers to scientific careers. For example, of the five people in my cohort in graduate school, I’m the only one who finished my PhD. All the others were either hired away after they got a master’s degree, or they had family or other issues. That’s what happens to every generation of scientists—the attrition rate during graduate school, or early in their careers, is really significant. One of the reasons we’re supported by the National Cancer Institute is that the NCI recognizes that they need the next generation of cancer scientists, and that next generation needs to be nurtured.

Q: How, specifically, does CEESP nurture future scientists?

A: This is really the first independent research project these students have done. It’s their idea, they’re in charge of it, and they have to carry it out on their own, based on their own skills—and in many cases, based on their own perseverance and the ability to solve unexpected problems in the process.

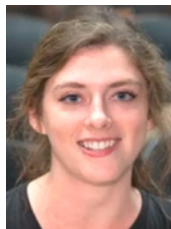
“We’re a highly selective program.”

So it’s really their baby. We’re a highly selective program, and we have had great success—which is really the success of the students, of course, but it’s also our mentorship and the field site coordinators. ■

ALUMNI PROFILES

Research Grounded in Life Experience

For Emilee Benos, a childhood brain tumor is the inspiration behind “everything I do.”



Emilee Benos has no memory of the cancer diagnosis she received at 15 months, but she vividly remembers having to go to the hospital until she

was 10 years old. “That’s what I really remember—waiting in the hospital.” It’s why Benos wanted to study pediatric brain tumors when she went to Casablanca in 2019 as a CEESP trainee.

Working with mentor Dr. Mehdi Karakouri of the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Ibn Rochd, Benos, MPH, CEESP ’2019, combed through patient records

in search of treatment data. She found that glioblastomas were the third most common histological subtype in children in Casablanca—“which was odd, because these aren’t typically childhood tumors”—

Given her own experience with cancer as a kid, Benos took time to talk with both patients and their families.

and that just over 75 percent of children diagnosed with brain tumors had neurosurgery. Fewer than a quarter of those children received chemotherapy, and even fewer received radiotherapy.

Because of disparate record systems, a lot of information was missing, and Benos says this highlighted the need for extensive and cooperative record-keeping—a finding Benos shared with hospital staff.

Given her own experience with cancer as a kid, Benos took time to talk with both patients and their families. She even showed her surgical scars to some of the children undergoing treatment.

Now a global health officer with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Benos says, “CEESP absolutely helped me get the job I have today. What I learned from the program applies to everything I do.” ■

Make an Impact

A CEESP mentor shows the way to overcoming cultural barriers.



As a member of the Navajo Nation, **Joel Begay**, MPH, CEESP ’2017, raised not to question the authority of elders. So in college and graduate

school he struggled. “Teachers would say, ‘Don’t be afraid to ask questions, this is a learning opportunity,’” he remembers. “But I didn’t understand what that was.”

It’s why Begay is so grateful to his CEESP mentor, Marilyn Roubidoux, a physician and professor of radiology in the Division of Breast Imaging at the University of Michigan, who identifies

as Native American. “Dr. Roubidoux had a similar upbringing to mine, and she provided me with so many tips on how to overcome cultural barriers.”

Begay spent his CEESP internship in the Great Plains region of the U.S., collecting data from a mobile mammography unit run by the Indian Health Service and helping Roubidoux evaluate screening and follow-up adherence among women who accessed the unit.

The skills Begay acquired from CEESP inform his work today as a data manager and analyst with the Lifecourse Epidemiology and Adiposity and Diabetes (LEAD) Center at the University of

Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. While his focus is not directly on cancer, Begay says he’s contributing indirectly to cancer prevention by working to develop interventions to prevent overweight and diabetes among native populations.

“Dr. Roubidoux had a similar upbringing to mine.”

Both he and Roubidoux share a commitment to working to improve the health of native populations. “It doesn’t matter how big of an impact you have,” Dr. Roubidoux often reminds him. “It just matters that you make an impact.” ■

New@CEESP

► **CEESP Director Amr Soliman** recently edited a special supplement on global cancer education for the American Association for Cancer Education’s

(AACE) *Journal of Cancer Education*. The supplement includes publications by former CEESP students, papers by CEESP field-site mentors, and an article

by Soliman and CEESP Associate Director Robert Chamberlain tracing the development of the program’s global infrastructure over the past 20 years.

► **As chair of the AACE’s Global Cancer Committee**, CEESP Director Amr Soliman will lead a session on mentoring

at the organization’s fall conference, to be held remotely October 12–16. During the session, CEESP alumni mentors will discuss their experiences, and experts in cancer education will share insights on ways to further improve CEESP’s mentorship programs.