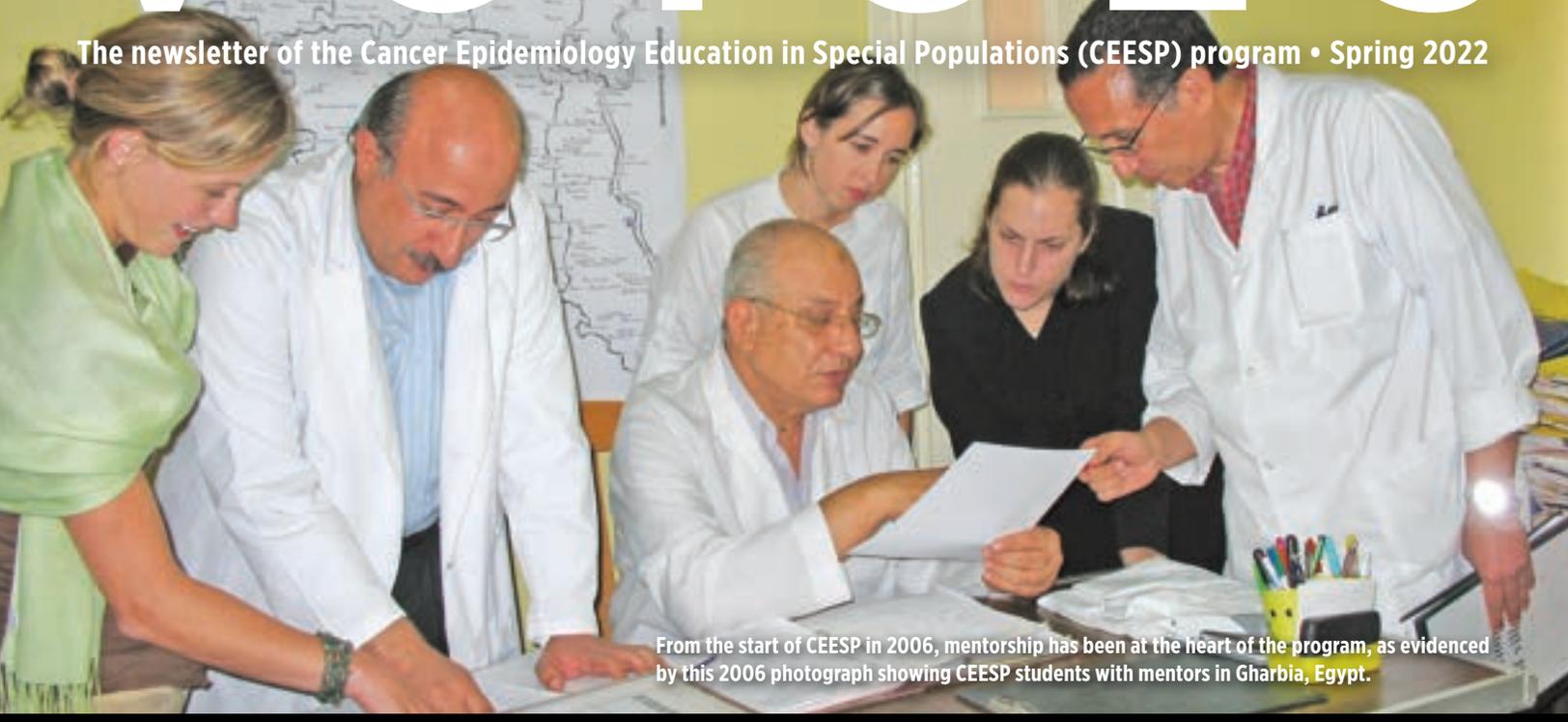


# VOICES

The newsletter of the Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations (CEESP) program • Spring 2022



From the start of CEESP in 2006, mentorship has been at the heart of the program, as evidenced by this 2006 photograph showing CEESP students with mentors in Gharbia, Egypt.

## Win-Wins



Since the inception of CEESP 16 years ago, mentorship has been at the heart of our continued success. Thanks to a dedicated global and domestic team of CEESP mentors—some of whom have been with us since

2006—we've provided rigorous and productive training to more than 200 public health students, many of whom have gone on to prominent careers in cancer research and epidemiology.

Our goal now is to build on this robust legacy by launching formal mentorship training for both CEESP students and mentors. We want to incorporate new science-based findings and insights from the emerging field of mentorship so that our mentors, both on- and off-campus, are at the top of their field, and our students are ensured of receiving the best-possible education and training during their CEESP experience.

By formalizing our CEESP mentor training, we'll not only enhance the productivity of our student trainees, but we'll also expand and strengthen the capabilities of our CEESP mentors, both in their own research and in their mentorship for other National Institutes of Health programs. I call that a win-win.

My own experience during the past 16 years has taught me how crucial it is to make the right match between mentor and mentee. Many variables need to be considered, among them a student's background, previous education and experience, access to resources, career aspirations, and proposed project and site. Sometimes a single on-site mentor is all that's needed, but in other cases a committee of two to three mentors is advised.

Well-trained public health scientists investigating complicated research topics like cancer require multidisciplinary training and skills from well-trained mentors who are accessible, enthusiastic, and empathetic, as well as

being active listeners and non-directive facilitators. Mentors should be resourceful in providing students with ideas for scientific writing and connections to jobs and career opportunities.

Top on our list of expectations for all CEESP mentors is that they provide sufficient time and resources for mentees and help with the inception and development of student research proposals. Once a student embarks on the relatively short summer training period, we expect mentors to facilitate access to data and other resources and to continue to provide mentorship after the summer session—including providing expertise for finalizing manuscripts and responding to reviewer comments.

As you can see, we expect a lot from our mentors and from our mentees. In return, as you'll see in these pages, we get spectacular results.

**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 200 students who are now pursuing careers around the world. For more visit [ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu](http://ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu)

## VOICES

CEESP Director: Amr Soliman, MD, PhD

CEESP Associate Director:  
Robert Chamberlain, PhD

Editor: Leslie Stainton

Art Direction/Design: Hammond Design

Voices is published twice a year by CEESP.

CEESP is funded by National Cancer Institute grant R25 CA112383 Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations, City University of New York School of Medicine, Amr Soliman, PI.

Send comments to [asoliman@med.cuny.edu](mailto:asoliman@med.cuny.edu). Select features from *Voices* are available online at [ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu](http://ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu) ©2022.

## STUDENT PROFILE

# A Wider Impact

The revelation came the year **Bryan Valcarcel, MD**, was a medical intern at a hospital in his home city of Lima, Peru. One of his patients, a four-year-old boy, was admitted with leukemia. The child—who happened to share Valcarcel's first name, Bryan—lived only a few weeks. Valcarcel was shaken. “The boy was so young,” he remembers. “He'd had to squeeze an entire life into just four years.”

The child's death convinced Valcarcel, who was then completing his MD, that after becoming a physician he should go into public health, where, as he puts it, “I could have an impact on many more people—entire populations.”

Today Valcarcel is poised to complete his MPH from George Washington University, where his specialty is cancer epidemiology with a focus on leukemia. Last summer, as a CEESP trainee, he spent the summer in Lima conducting research on pediatric leukemia, the leading cause of cancer mortality in young Peruvians ages zero to 19.

Valcarcel wanted to understand the distribution of the disease in Lima, and to determine if there was any correlation between leukemia incidence and mortality rates and socioeconomic status.

“I expected that districts with a lower socioeconomic index would have higher mortality,”



Bryan Valcarcel (far right) at the National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases in Lima, Peru.

he says, “but that was not the case.” Valcarcel credits this to a national program called *Plan Esperanza* (Plan Hope), introduced in 2012, which covers the full costs of diagnosis and treatment for all cancer patients in Peru. Thanks to this program, “socioeconomic status is not a factor in leukemia mortality in Peru.”

Valcarcel worked with two primary mentors during his time in Lima—Daniel Enriquez, a former affiliate of the National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases in Peru, and Robert Chamberlain, associate director of CEESP. During Valcarcel's training, Chamberlain flew to Lima to meet with him. “My on-site mentoring reinforced my confidence in his abilities,” Chamberlain says. “All of his mentors and collaborators were delighted with Bryan's research progress.” ■

# Mentorship in the Spotlight



Session presenter Dr. Kelly Hirko discussed being a CEESP mentor.

mentees and mentors from the Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations (CEESP) program described their experiences of mentorship and shared best practices with an online audience of scientists and educators. The session focused primarily on mentorship for public health graduate students conducting

During a 90-minute session last October at the Annual Conference of the American Association for Cancer Education,

research projects in special populations (both global and minority populations in the U.S.) through CEESP. Speakers included global and domestic mentors as well as recent CEESP students. Speakers touched on such issues as expectations and responsibilities, the ethics of scientific research, the relationship between mentor and mentee, and the challenges of conducting research in low-resource settings. The presenters also offered recommendations for optimizing the mentoring experience. “We got a lot of praise for this session, and are working on making this an annual event,” said Amr Soliman, CEESP director. Leaders from the National Cancer Institute facilitated the session, which is available for viewing on YouTube. The session can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/Imi4fR5UaPg> ■

## IN MEMORIAM

# Dr. Ibrahim A. Seifeldin



The CEESP leadership, on-campus and off-campus mentors, and alumni send our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of **Dr. Ibrahim A. Seifeldin**, former director of the Tanta Cancer Center and director of the Gharbia Cancer Society in Egypt, who passed away in June 2021. An effective and dedicated off-campus mentor who trained many CEESP students over the past 16 years, Dr. Seifeldin had a long and productive career as a surgical oncologist with expertise in cancer management,

cancer registration, and cancer prevention. He mentored numerous CEESP students, providing them with immense guidance and time before, during, and after their training in Egypt. He developed ideas for research projects and training and assisted students in publishing, as evidenced by his co-authorship of 36 papers during his years as a CEESP mentor beginning in 2006. Students who trained with Dr. Seifeldin in Egypt say they will always remember him as a creative, devoted, and innovative mentor. The entire CEESP community expresses its profound gratitude to Dr. Seifeldin for his extraordinary service. ■

## ALUMNA PROFILE

## The Stages of Mentorship

As someone who emigrated to the U.S. from Vietnam in her teens, **An Nguyen, MPH '20**, is at home crossing borders. She did it again in 2018, going to Egypt as a CEESP trainee from George Washington University to code and analyze cancer registry data in Gharbia province. “I arrived as a stranger,” she says of her four months in Egypt that year, and left as a friend. “This is not goodbye,” she told her Egyptian mentors shortly before leaving. “It’s I’ll see you again.” Nguyen indeed saw them again—the following year, in fact, when she went back to Gharbia to mentor a new CEESP cohort. Thanks in part to those experiences, Nguyen says, she’s now employed as a technical scientist and researcher with the U.S. Department of Defense, where one of her duties is protecting U.S. troops from infectious agents and carcinogenic exposures. Earlier this year, Nguyen described what she calls the “three stages” of her experience as a CEESP mentee:

**Stage 1:** The first stage, which is very challenging, is coming together as strangers. I had to work so hard to earn my mentors’ trust. They didn’t know me, I didn’t know them. They were all senior surgeons or scientists, with high profiles. I was just a graduate student who shared their

passion for cancer prevention and control. I had to work around their schedules. I had to be both genuine and professional, and also respectful. It took about a month before my mentors were comfortable enough to have one-on-one conversations with me in their offices—to call me and check on how I was doing, what they could do to help. During that time, CEESP Director Dr. Amr Soliman kept in touch with all of us, and I really appreciated that. He made it clear that he was not just sending me to a country and leaving me there—and that if I needed something, he would step in.

**Stage 2:** In the second stage, my relationship with my mentors reached a different level. Now it was both professional and personal. In this stage we focused on what we could do then, while I was in Egypt, and we talked about what I could take back to the U.S., and what they would share with me after I left. I



L-R: 2018 CEESP mentee An Nguyen, 2019 CEESP mentee Mariah Murray, CEESP mentor Dr. Ahmed Hablas, CEESP mentor Dr. Mohamed Ramadan, 2019 CEESP mentee Christina Baum, and CEESP Director Amr Soliman in Gharbia, Egypt, during summer 2019.

promised to send them my draft manuscript to revise, to credit their co-authorship, and to acknowledge their

mentorship and contributions during and after the CEESP program.

**Stage 3:** By the third stage, it was no longer a relationship between mentor and mentee, but a lifelong friendship. Today my colleagues in Gharbia consider me as one of them. I’ve learned to read and write Egyptian Arabic and other dialects. I have a family in Egypt, I have a place to stay. It warms my heart. From the U.S., I send them messages during Islamic holidays, I remember their birthdays, small things like that. If I see something in the news about Egypt—say, that they’ve become a top tourist destination—I let them know, and I say “I’m so proud to be Egyptian.” We’ve become lifelong friends. All through Covid, we’ve kept checking up on each other and promising each other, “See you again in Egypt!” ■

## STUDENT PROFILE

# Real-World Learning



Even remotely, mentorship is vital. Unable to leave the U.S. to do her CEESP research in Tanzania in the summer of 2021,

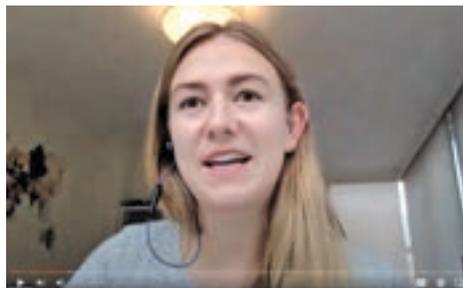
**Caroline Fuss**, an MPH student at George Washington University, stayed in D.C. But with the help of colleagues in the Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI) in Dar es Salaam—most notably her mentor, Dr. Khadija Msami—Fuss completed her research in a process she describes as “seamless.”

Throughout the summer, Fuss and Dr. Msami, who directs the epidemiology department at ORCI, met weekly online to go over Fuss’s research and resolve questions. They also chatted informally—“just epidemiologists talking about their days”—which gave Fuss a welcome glimpse of life inside ORCI.

“I would love to have been in Tanzania and experience the country and the culture and the hospital,” Fuss admits, “but I do feel like I was really able to get to know my site mentor. Dr. Msami always gave me updates on Covid, so I got the Tanzanian perspective on the virus and how the vaccine rollout was going.

Even without being there and experiencing the realities of what life’s like in Tanzania, it was really exciting.”

Fuss has continued meeting virtually with Dr. Msami as she prepares her research for publication. For her CEESP project, Fuss used ORCI data to assess the impact of a new pathology lab inside the hospital, and its effect on late-stage cervical cancer diagnoses among rural Tanzanian women. Fuss found that the presence of the new on-site lab—which means women no longer have to wait so long for pathology results—seems to have contributed to a notable reduction in late-stage diagnoses, and cervical cancer is now more likely to be discovered at stage 1 or 2. Fuss calls the results “very exciting.”



Fuss spoke about her experiences as a CEESP mentee during a session of the online 2021 International Cancer Education Conference.

After earning her MPH this spring, Fuss, whose specialty is global health policy, hopes to find work helping to strengthen health systems in lower-to-middle-income countries. She’s especially interested in helping to increase the distribution and financing of HPV vaccines aimed at preventing cervical cancer.

**“Even without being there and experiencing the realities of what life’s like in Tanzania, it was really exciting.”**

Her CEESP training is indispensable. “It’s rare for master’s students to develop a proposal and lead their own research project from start to finish,” Fuss says. Chief among the benefits she’s gleaned from her training are better time-management and data-analysis skills. In the classroom, she notes, “I always got a perfect data set—no missing or handwritten data. But that’s not a real grant project.” Her work with ORCI has taught her how things work outside the classroom—and that, she says, “is invaluable.” ■

## 2022 CEESP Program

As this issue of *Voices* went to press, applications for the 2022 summer training program were being reviewed. Public health graduate students from states across the U.S., among them Montana and Pennsylvania, have submitted proposals for cancer research at sites spanning the globe, from Romania to Colombia. The emphasis, as always, is on finding the right match between research project and site, and between mentee and mentor. We look forward to reporting on the 2022 cohort in the next issue of *Voices*!

