

New faculty members bring additional research expertise to CHEPA

The breadth of CHEPA's research expertise expanded in 2010 with the addition of two new faculty members. Each holds a provincially-funded research chair.

Arthur Sweetman, the inaugural holder of the Ontario Research Chair in Health Human Resources at McMaster University, and **Hsien Seow**, who holds a Cancer Care Ontario Health Services Research Chair, will increase CHEPA's capacity for producing knowledge to inform policy in their respective fields.

Doctor shortages, health care budgets and the number of different types of health professionals needed in the province of Ontario are examples of the issues that Sweetman will address as part of his focus on economic and policy issues related to health human resources.



Arthur Sweetman

Sweetman was director of the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University before joining McMaster on July 1, 2010 as the chairholder and

professor in the Department of Economics. His research to date has ranged from economic issues regarding labour markets – including immigration, education, poverty and unemployment insurance – to development and health.

Sweetman earned both his master's and PhD in economics at McMaster.

He joined Queen's University in 2000, and held the Stauffer-Dunning Chair in Policy Studies.



Hsien Seow

Seow came to McMaster University in the summer of 2009 and is an assistant professor in the Department of Oncology. His research interests

involve improving quality and the delivery of palliative care health services for patients with cancer and other serious, chronic illnesses.

In 2010 he earned a Young Investigator Award from the Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer, and was successful in obtaining grants from the Juravinski Cancer Centre Foundation and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

His newly funded MOHLTC study will address questions relating to current and future government policy for the funding of palliative care in hospices. Study findings will have implications for reducing alternative levels of care, and will provide insights about optimal models for the provision and funding of palliative care.

Seow earned a B.Sc. from Yale University and a PhD in health policy and management from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. ■

CHEPA's new home enhances interaction



The lobby of CHEPA's new offices in CRL

The Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis relocated to new office space on the McMaster University campus in May 2010, after being housed for more than 20 years in the McMaster Health Sciences Centre.

The Centre is now located on the second floor of the Communications Research Laboratory building, adjacent to the McMaster University Medical Centre. In addition to providing expanded space on one floor for CHEPA faculty, staff and students, the newly renovated space also includes the administrative home for McMaster's Health Policy PhD program.

There is also a seminar room that is technologically-equipped to enhance the learning experience of the classes and monthly seminars held there, and a spacious lobby area that allows for gatherings of students and faculty for networking events.

Increased interaction among faculty, students and staff is facilitated by the new office space which is larger and more conducive to collaboration. ■

CHEPA faculty foster training of PhD students, post-doctoral fellows

CHEPA's educational and training capacity continues to expand as the PhD in Health Policy program flourishes and more post-doctoral fellows choose to advance their research programs under the supervision of CHEPA faculty.

Enrolment in the PhD program has risen to 14 with the addition of six new students in 2010. A fourth cohort of students will begin studies in September 2011. The majority of the faculty providing instruction and supervision in the PhD program are CHEPA members.

Unique in Canada, the Health Policy PhD program offers training in theory and empirical methods for framing, examining and answering crucial questions about health policy.

The high calibre of students accepted into the program is evident in the success they have achieved in recent awards competitions.

Jessica Shearer, who joined the PhD program in 2009, was granted a Frederick Banting and Charles Best Canada Graduate



Jessica Shearer

Scholarship in 2010, valued at \$35,000 for each of three years. The funds will allow her to advance her research on measuring the effects of knowledge translation network structures on

policy outputs and outcomes using social network analysis methods.



Sarah Boesveld

Sarah Boesveld joined the program in 2010 and was granted the Harry Lyman Hooker Senior Fellowship from McMaster University. The award will support her work in contributing to the understanding of the participation of registered nurses as key stakeholders in Canadian health policy dialogues.



Daniel Patino

Daniel Patino, who also joined the program in 2010, was granted a Francisco Jose de Cladas doctoral scholarship from the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation

in the Republic of Colombia, to support his studies at McMaster. The award provides professionals the opportunity to study abroad, in order to strengthen the South American country's human capital in strategic areas.

CHEPA is also providing the training environment for five post-doctoral fellows funded by a variety of agencies and pursuing a diverse range of research topics.

Nancy Carter, who is funded by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, **Cristina Catalo**, who is funded by the European Observatory for Health Policy and Systems, and **Moriah Ellen**, who holds a McMaster University post-doctoral award, are supervised by John Lavis.

Meredith Lilly is supervised by Arthur Sweetman and funded by his Ontario Research Chair in Health Human Resources.

Mary Ann O'Brien is supervised by Cathy Charles, with funding from the Psychosocial Oncology Research Training Program (PORT), which is a CIHR strategic initiative. ■

Phil DeCicca named Canada Research Chair in Public Economics

Understanding the impact of various policies related to one of the world's top killers – smoking – is being advanced by CHEPA faculty member Phil DeCicca, who was granted a Tier II Canada Research Chair in Public Economics in 2010, one of five people at McMaster University to receive new CRCs under a \$275-million investment in the program announced as part of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the chairs program.

With the overwhelming evidence of smoking's negative impact on human health, DeCicca is working to find the answers to questions such as whether the rate of smoking is affected by increased

cigarette prices, and at what point rising taxes encourage smokers to turn to smuggling.

A health economist and associate professor in the Department of Economics, DeCicca has been researching the effectiveness of cigarette tax policy for more than a decade, during which time he has discovered that some generally held beliefs about what prompts people to give up smoking aren't necessarily true.

For instance, conventional wisdom holds that younger smokers are more likely to quit due to increases in the cost of cigarettes than older, more established smokers, but DeCicca's research has found otherwise.

"There is actually a fairly small responsiveness to cigarette taxes," he said. "It's just not the case that most smokers quit when taxes increase. I would say that the largest effects imply that a one dollar tax increase would lead, at most, 10 per cent of smokers to quit."

Now DeCicca wants to understand why most people don't quit smoking because of higher taxes. His specific topics of interest include tax avoidance behaviours such as smuggling, cross-border purchasing and buying illegal cigarettes from 'smoke shacks'. He is hoping to expand his research to include the impact of higher cigarette taxes on maternal smoking behaviours, and asthma and other respiratory conditions.

DeCicca has been a CHEPA faculty member since 2006. In 2008 he was granted the John Charles Polanyi Prize in Economics from the Ontario government. He is also a Faculty Research Fellow with the National Bureau of Economic Research, Program in Health Economics. He earned both a master's degree and a PhD at the University of Michigan. ■

At left: Phil DeCicca receives his Canada Research Chair pin from Minister of Industry Tony Clement at a ceremony in Toronto.



Informing health system decision-making in Ontario

CHEPA faculty continue to expand the range of expertise they provide to inform decision-makers in Ontario's health system.

A key area where CHEPA faculty contribute is in the development of methods for incorporating social values in health technology assessment (HTA) and related policy decisions. While there are strong methods for addressing effectiveness and economics in the evaluation of health technologies, a better understanding of how to ensure social values and ethics are adequately considered in the decision-making process is needed.



Mita Giacomini is active in several initiatives to provide the provincial government with the knowledge required to guide deliberations in this area.

As the principal investigator on a research project launched in 2010, Giacomini is leading collaborative efforts between policymakers and interdisciplinary researchers to develop new and workable methods for considering ethics and social values in health technology policy analysis. Pilot work was funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in early 2010, with a larger project subsequently funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The research involves the development of a conceptual framework that will guide the seeking, analyzing and using of social and ethical research concerning health technologies. This framework will then guide the development of practical methods to be applied to four case studies of actual health technology policymaking at the provincial level. Based on these experiences, methods will be refined to meet the needs of these policymakers as well as those of the international health technology research community.

Giacomini is also continuing her role as a member of the Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee (OHTAC) as well as chair of OHTAC's Social Values and Ethics Evaluation Subcommittee. The subcommittee is responsible for articulating basic values and developing methods to address topic-specific values issues, to guide OHTAC's health technology assessments.

She submitted two reports in 2010 to the health ministry's Medical Advisory Secretariat, detailing qualitative and ethics research related to two specific HTA topics – the 'mega-analysis' of noninvasive cardiac imaging technologies, and multi-gene expression profiling for guiding chemotherapy in women with early stage breast cancer. Early findings were also presented to policy and academic audiences at the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technology in Health, and the Canadian Association for Health Services and Policy Research.

CHEPA Director **Julia Abelson** is also



Julia Abelson

contributing to the health ministry's efforts to include social values in its evidence-based HTA process. In 2010 she submitted the final report of the study *Consulting with Ontario Citizens about Health Technologies*. The report details the findings from the study which involved the establishment of Ontario's first ever Citizens' Reference Panel on Health Technologies to deliberate, and provide input to the Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee, about which social values should help guide health technology assessments, and how these values should be gathered. Citizens from Ontario's 14 Local Health Integration Networks were selected for panel membership and met five times between February 2009 and June 2010. A publication of the study findings is in press and available at www.sciencedirect.com ■

Expertise sought on range of topics

Several other CHEPA faculty members were involved in projects during 2010 to provide expertise on various aspects of the province's health care organization and delivery. Among these:

- Arthur Sweetman is leading a project to explore behaviours of primary care physicians, such as referral to specialists and hospital admissions, and whether there are differences based on the model and remuneration structures within which they work. The project is expected to take three years to complete.

- Paul Contoyannis is conducting a literature review on the effectiveness of lifestyle interventions during pregnancy or early life that can prevent the progression of disease and enhance quality of life, and what long-term cost savings they yield. Based on the findings, the project will examine the feasibility of conducting a cost-benefit analysis of an early life intervention in the Ontario context. A draft report is expected to be completed in 2011.

- Jeremiah Hurley was the lead author on the final report of *The Response of Ontario Primary Care Physicians to Pay-for-Performance Incentives* research study, which gauged whether financial incentives and types of payment had an impact on the delivery of primary health care. A working paper on the project is available on the CHEPA website.

- Amiram Gafni and Stephen Birch submitted the report *Economic analysis of physician assistants in Ontario: Literature review and feasibility study*. The analysis, which looked at existing studies on physician assistants (PAs) working in a variety of settings, in order to determine the feasibility of performing an evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of introducing PAs in Ontario, concluded that the limited literature available is difficult to use. It recommends the ministry consider options for a randomized controlled trial involving physicians, PAs and nurse practitioners, to explore the difference in costs and effects of various service modalities. ■

CHEPA founding member earns lifetime award

David Feeny, a founding member of CHEPA, was honoured in 2010 with a prestigious award for his outstanding contributions to the advancement of health-related quality of life research. Feeny, an emeritus member of CHEPA who is now senior investigator and assistant program director at the Kaiser Permanente Northwest Center for Health Research in Portland, Ore., received the International Society for Quality of Life (ISOQOL) President's Award.

CHEPA's contributions extend around the world

Internationally based initiatives aimed at improving the delivery of health care in countries around the world are benefitting from the research expertise of several CHEPA faculty members.

Through newly funded research projects and representation on international bodies that are leading efforts to help countries develop and implement more efficient, effective and equitable health systems, faculty members are enhancing CHEPA's reputation as a world-class interdisciplinary research centre.



John Lavis

John Lavis, an international leader in knowledge transfer and exchange, is the principal investigator on a new, CIHR-funded project to evaluate 'knowledge translation platforms'

in several dozen low- and middle-income countries. These platforms encompass the efforts of various groups and initiatives to address the challenges of linking research evidence to policy about health systems. The \$455,000 study will examine the work of these platforms that have been established in response to the problem of poorly informed policies weakening, or failing to strengthen, health systems, which ultimately has a negative impact on the health status of citizens. The research findings have the potential to inform future research and decision-making about KT platforms, both in Canada and in low- and middle-income countries.

Lavis was also key in having the McMaster Health Forum designated in 2010 as the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Evidence-Informed Policy.

The designation gives the Forum, which Lavis directs, a greater international role in increasing the capacity of countries and institutions to make better-informed decisions about health care policy and delivery.



Lisa Schwartz

Lisa Schwartz is advancing knowledge related to the provision of humanitarian care in areas affected by natural disasters, military conflict or extreme poverty, through her ethics-

based program of research. During 2010 she continued work on a CIHR-funded project that focused on the ethical dilemmas faced by Canadian health workers who travelled to areas of deprivation or devastation to provide assistance. She led a multidisciplinary research team that conducted the analysis – believed to be the first of its kind – as it gathered information from Canadian-trained health care professionals on their experiences in disaster areas, conflict zones, providing post-disaster assistance or working in countries of extreme poverty.

The research team found four main ethical challenges faced in these conditions: scarce resources, dealing with longstanding political, social and commercial structures; restrictive policies and agendas of aid agencies; and perceived norms about the various roles of health professionals and how they interact with each other.

Schwartz was invited to present the project findings at several forums during 2010, including the World Health Organization,

the Geneva Health Forum, Medecins sans Frontieres International and the World Congress of Bioethics. The research was also the subject of publications in the journals *Public Health Ethics* and the *American Journal of Bioethics: Primary Research*.

Schwartz is continuing this work through a second CIHR grant, awarded in 2010, which is focused on professional ethics and conflicts of roles for health care professionals in military/humanitarian contexts.



Michael Grignon

Michel Grignon is also ensuring CHEPA's expertise is made available around the world, through his involvement with two international organizations. He led the efforts that saw

CHEPA enter a partnership as the expert group for Canada of the International Network on Health Policy and Reform, a 20-country project initiated by Germany's Bertelsmann Foundation, and associated with the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. The partnership provides CHEPA with an additional forum to showcase ideas, ongoing work and published materials at the international level.

Grignon's knowledge and experience in the area of equity in health is also being shared with other countries through his role as the Canadian representative on the EquiLAC project of the Pan American Health Organization. EquiLAC is a large-scale initiative that is examining health systems inequalities in the countries of the Americas. ■



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