

CHEPA builds on strengths in health equity, policy ethics

Workshops foster knowledge exchange among researchers, policymakers



Michel Grignon

CHEPA's efforts to promote and contribute to knowledge exchange in the fields of health policy ethics and inequities in health were highlighted at two CHEPA-sponsored workshops in 2009.

The complexities of inequalities in health care and health outcomes were the focus of a workshop in December entitled *Equity in Health and Health Care Utilization*. Organized by CHEPA Associate Director **Michel Grignon**, the one-and-a-half-day event aimed to build bridges between health economists involved in the measurement of equity and its causes, and health policy experts and policymakers.

The workshop brought together health economists, policymakers and policy scholars from Canada, the U.S. and Europe to discuss a series of research papers dealing with a range of topics on gauging and achieving equity in health and the provision of health care.

Keynote speakers were John Roemer, the Elizabeth S. and A. Varick Professor of Political Science and Economics at Yale University, and Pedro Rosa Dias, a research fellow at the University of York's Centre for Health Economics in the United Kingdom.

Topics discussed included how factors such as educational policy and cultural differences can have an impact on health and the use of health care

services, and different approaches that can be used to measure health care utilization and health outcomes.

At another workshop earlier in the year, the focus was on developments in the emerging field of health policy ethics and its future evolution. Health policy ethics concerns the pursuit of "the good" through policymaking, as well as the normative analysis of policy agendas, processes and outcomes.

Issues such as the distinctiveness of health policy ethics from clinical or research bioethics, appropriate training for health policy ethics expertise, and how ethics can affect the design and implementation of health policy were discussed by keynote speakers at the workshop, organized by CHEPA member **Mita Giacomini**.

Jennifer Prah Ruger, an associate professor of public health and medicine from Yale University, gave the opening address, which focused on the development of a distinctive, new field of health policy ethics that embraces health ethics, policy and law.

The workshop was a pre-conference event to the 20th Annual Canadian Bioethics Society Conference held in Hamilton in June. CHEPA member **Lisa Schwartz** was co-chair of the conference.

For more details on these workshops, visit: www.cheпа.org/Knowledge-Exchange/Activities/Briefings-workshops. ■

Ministry supports new research chair

Producing research to inform policies associated with the fundamental and long-standing goals of the Canadian and Ontario health systems will be the focus of a newly established research chair at McMaster University.

Recruitment is underway for an outstanding researcher to assume the **Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis/Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Chair in Health Equity**, funded by CHEPA, the ministry and McMaster's Faculty of Health Sciences.

The new chairholder will lead a dynamic and innovative research program focused on the production and communication of timely, relevant research that addresses the challenges of ensuring equity of access to health services and resources for the achievement of equitable health outcomes.

The new research chair will build on CHEPA's record as a world leader in the production and dissemination of knowledge about inequalities in health and health care. Several CHEPA faculty members include equity in health services and systems as a major focus of their research programs.

The successful candidate will direct a high-quality research program that will examine and offer policy solutions to address inequities within or external to the health care system.

More details on the chair recruitment can be found at www.cheпа.org/news-archives. ■

Health Policy PhD program grows with CHEPA expertise

Canada's only Health Policy PhD program continues to expand and attract new interest with the support of CHEPA faculty who bring diverse research expertise and policy service to the interdisciplinary program.

CHEPA members form the majority of the more than 20 faculty of McMaster University who provide instruction and supervision to the growing number of students enrolled in the program that offers training in theory and empirical methods for framing, examining and answering crucial questions about health policy.

Faculty of the program represent a broad range of departments and schools of McMaster, including Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics; Economics; Health, Aging and Society; Political Science; History; Anthropology; DeGroote School of Business; School of Social Work; and School of Geography and Earth Sciences.

Launched in 2008, the Health Policy PhD program is a unique initiative in Canada to train health policy experts of the future. Students receive general training in the fields of health economics, political studies and social organization, and choose to specialize in one of these areas.

The number of students in the four-year program continues to rise with five joining in September 2009. More than 20 have applied for admission in 2010. Students currently enrolled are pursuing interests on a variety of research issues ranging from health literacy to public health challenges and policymaking in low- and middle-income countries.

CHEPA provides a special intellectual home for the program, with workshops, seminars, resources for collaboration and learning, and student funding support.

Two of the students who joined the program in 2009 were awarded CHEPA Doctoral Fellowships. **Kaelen Moat**, who earned his M.Sc. in International Health Policy at the London School of Economics, is studying the use of research to inform policy in low-income countries. **Yaw Owusu**, who holds a degree in agricultural economics from Ghana, and a degree in environmental sciences from the United States, is focusing his research on the relationship between health insurance, environmental health policy, and health care accessibility and financing in developing nations.

For more information on the Health Policy PhD program, visit <http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/hpphd/index.html>.

High calibre students earn a range of research, scholarship awards

CHEPA students have been extremely successful in awards competitions in 2009.

Andrea Smith and **Deidre DeJean**, both former recipients of CHEPA Doctoral Fellowships, were each awarded Frederick Banting and Charles Best Canada Graduate Scholarships, by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The scholarships provide special recognition to students pursuing a doctoral degree in a health related field in Canada.

Smith's award, valued at \$35,000 a year for three years, will support her research program to analyze the ethical and moral consequences of different theories about the causes of asthma.

DeJean's award of \$35,000 annually for two years will support her research on patient and provider understandings of "inappropriate" ambulance use and the implications for ambulance operations and policy.

Leslie Malloy-Weir, who joined the Health Policy PhD program in September 2009, was awarded the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The award is valued at \$35,000 per year for three years and will support her research examining health literacy and decision-making.

Jessica Shearer was granted the Harry Lyman Hooker Senior Fellowship from McMaster University. Valued at \$24,000 a year for four years, the award will support her research exploring public health policymaking in West Africa, including the role of research evidence and networks of stakeholders. She joined the Health Policy PhD program in September 2009.

Emmanuel Guindon and **Michael Wilson**, who are each working towards a PhD in Health Research Methodology, each received 2008-09 Rising Star Awards from CIHR's Institute of Health Services and Policy Research. The awards recognize excellence in Canadian knowledge translation or research carried out by graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

Guindon's award was for his paper *A second look at pharmaceutical spending as determinants of health outcomes in Canada*, published in Health Economics. Wilson's award recognizes his work on the PPD/CCNC database, recently renamed Health Systems Evidence (www.healthsystemsevidence.org), which is a continually updated repository of syntheses of research evidence about governance, financial and delivery arrangements within health systems, and about implementation strategies that can support change in health systems.

Kathy Li, who is in her second year of the Health Policy PhD program, attended the 2009 Summer Institute of the Ontario Training Centre in Health Services and Policy Research (OTC), as part of the \$10,000 award she received in 2008-09 from the centre to pursue her OTC-related academic training. She also holds an Ontario Graduate Scholarship (2007 to 2010).

Dorina Simeonov, a first-year master's student in the Health Research Methodology program, earned a McMaster University Provost Award, which recognizes students with a perfect 12.0 average over 30 units of study. She earned the award for her final year in the Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) program. ■

CHEPA faculty earn teaching honours

Two CHEPA faculty members were recognized in 2009 for their teaching excellence.

Christopher Longo, an assistant professor in the DeGroote School of Business, was awarded the Dr. S. Basu Award. The award for faculty in the School of Business is given in honour of the type of teaching excellence achieved by Dr. S. Joe Basu, who passed away in January 1983.

John Lavis, a professor in the Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, earned the Mentoring/Supervision Excellence Award, an annual award for a full-time faculty member in the department's affiliated education programs.

CHEPA faculty making a difference in Ontario's health system decisions

The expertise and intellectual resources of CHEPA faculty and researchers provide Ontario's health system with a wealth of information necessary to guide decisions and policymaking related to maintaining an efficient and effective health care system.

Several CHEPA faculty members played key roles in advising Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care during 2009 on a range of topics affecting the current state and future of health care delivery.

Three meetings of a citizen's reference panel providing input to Ontario's evidence-based health technology assessment process were held during the year, under the leadership of CHEPA Director **Julia Abelson**.



Julia Abelson

The panel consists of citizens selected from each of Ontario's 14 Local Health Integration

Network regions who meet to discuss challenging questions about what social values should be used to guide health technology assessments and how these values should be gathered. The panel's views contribute to the work of the Medical Advisory Secretariat (MAS), which oversees the province's health technology evidentiary processes, and the arms-length Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee (OHTAC), which is committed to increasing public engagement and soliciting feedback from private citizens.

The panel has discussed topics such as patient information and choice in screening technologies for the early detection of colorectal cancer, the challenges of combining scientific evidence about existing and novel breast cancer screening modalities with social values judgments, and pharmacogenetic testing, specifically gene expression profile testing.

CHEPA member **John Lavis** continued his work in training policymakers on how to access and make use of research evidence to inform government decisions. Following a successful series of workshops for policy analysts and policy advisors that wrapped up early in 2009, a second series of one-day workshops was planned, to continue training participants on the availability of tools and resources to support their use of research evidence. The second series of workshops was expanded to include a three-hour webinar, as well as a 1.5-hour workshop for more senior MOHLTC executives who set expectations for these staff.

Other activities of CHEPA members during 2009 to inform policymaking included:

■ **Mita Giacomini** was named chair of the Social Values and Ethics Evaluation Sub-committee of OHTAC. The committee will guide OHTAC's health



Mita Giacomini

technology assessments and deliberations by articulating basic values and developing processes to identify and address topic-specific values issues;

■ **Jeremiah Hurley** led a team of five other CHEPA faculty in developing a framework document to support the economic analyses



Jeremiah Hurley

conducted as part of the MOHLTC policy development process. This will enable policy analysts who have limited economics expertise to better anticipate the kinds of economics issues associated with policy proposals, and to better understand and use economic analyses conducted to inform policy development;

■ **Alina Gildiner**, who has been a CHEPA member since 2004, is on a one-year leave after being recruited in September 2009 to serve as a senior policy



Alina Gildiner

advisor with the Health System Strategy Division, Health Program Policy & Standards Branch of MOHLTC. She brings a high level of cross-sectoral knowledge as well as policy development knowledge to the role. ■

John Lavis awarded inaugural research chair to advance health research in Africa



John Lavis

CHEPA's **John Lavis**, a leader in researching and implementing knowledge transfer and exchange initiatives, was recognized for his role as a mentor for health policy scholars in developing nations when he was awarded

one of the inaugural International Research Chairs in conjunction with a leading advocate of advancing health research and policy in Africa.

The \$1-million project is part of a cutting-edge program sponsored by Canada's International Development Research Centre in collaboration with the Canada Research Chairs Program. Lavis and Nelson Sewankambo, principal of the College of Health Sciences at Makerere University in Uganda, are leading a study of "knowledge translation platforms," which have been developed by the World Health Organization and others to harness research knowledge in the policy and program development and implementation process to bolster health system effectiveness in developing countries.

Persisting high rates of death and illness in many developing nations have brought a renewed focus on the importance of research evidence in policymaking. However, those striving to support evidence-informed health policies and systems face various obstacles, such as the perceived relevance, value and ease of use of research evidence. The project will evaluate knowledge translation platforms in 11 African countries, to enable researchers and policymakers to better understand the processes and variables that facilitate knowledge translation for improved health.

The International Research Chairs Initiative pairs top research talent from universities in Canada with their counterparts in developing nations to share their advanced skills and knowledge to confront issues of common concern, while mentoring a new generation of scholars and practitioners.

Leveraged funds help build McMaster Health Forum profile, programs

Leveraging research funding to broaden the knowledge base on an expanding range of topics related to health economics and policy analysis is a key factor contributing to CHEPA's reputation as a world-class interdisciplinary research centre.

The McMaster Health Forum, a new organization that aspires to be recognized as a leading hub for improving health outcomes through collective problem solving, is a prime example of how CHEPA faculty continually expand their expertise to encompass new initiatives to face the ever-changing challenges being confronted in health systems.

John Lavis, who oversees CHEPA's knowledge exchange program, is the director of the Forum, which is focused on harnessing information, convening stakeholders and preparing action-oriented leaders to meet pressing health challenges creatively.

Among the more than \$1.2 million in funding secured during 2009 for the Forum's work is a \$110,000 grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research on which Lavis is principal investigator. The funds are being used to produce an evidence brief and convene a deliberative dialogue – two core facets of the Forum's work – to inform a pressing health challenge being faced in a provincial health system.

The Forum organizes stakeholder dialogues to convene influential doers and thinkers from across the province, country and globe to deliberate and work towards creative solutions to pressing health challenges. An evidence brief developed prior to each dialogue contains the most relevant background and synthesized research evidence on the topic under discussion, to help participants hold informed deliberations that lead to concrete follow-up and action.

The Forum is also involved in various other initiatives to provide innovative opportunities for students with a particular interest in health systems and decision-making, and to include citizen representatives in the health system decision-making process. To learn more about the Forum, visit www.mcmasterhealthforum.org.

The CIHR grant for the work of the Forum is among more than \$4 million in research funding that CHEPA faculty were overseeing in 2009 as principal investigators on more than 60 ongoing research projects. In addition, CHEPA faculty are co-investigators or collaborators on another 50 ongoing projects.

Research helps guide ministry decisions on physician payment

Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) continues to seek the expertise of CHEPA faculty to provide relevant research in collaborative projects aimed at informing decisions about the future direction of the province's health system.

During 2009, work advanced on four projects covering a broad range of topics that will inform decision making within an environment of limited resources and ongoing changes to the ways in which health care is delivered.

Jeremiah Hurley is wrapping up a three-year project entitled *The Response of Ontario Primary Care Physicians to Pay-for-Performance Incentives*. This data-intensive research study was designed to gauge the impact of various performance-based incentives in the delivery of primary health care.

It examined whether financial incentives for specific services increased the provision of those services, and how the provision of certain services by physicians in Family Health Networks and funded by capitation payments have changed since 2002. Results indicate physician responses to incentives are mixed, which provides a cautionary message regarding the effectiveness of pay-for-performance schemes for increasing quality of care in Ontario.

Work continued to progress during the year on three other Ministry-responsive projects led by CHEPA faculty.

Effects of an evidence service on health system policymakers' use of research evidence: A randomized controlled trial: **John Lavis** is leading this project to evaluate the effects of an evidence service specifically designed to support health system policymakers in finding and using research evidence. It will examine whether a "full-serve" evidence service increases the use of synthesized research evidence by policy analysts and advisors with the MOHLTC, as compared to a "self-serve" evidence service.

Economic analysis of physician assistants in Ontario: Literature review and feasibility study: This project led by **Amiram Gafni** and **Stephen Birch** will review the existing literature on the effectiveness and efficiency aspects of physician assistants and of nurse practitioners, in order to make recommendations to MOHLTC regarding the feasibility of conducting an evaluation of the role of physician assistants in Ontario. A report will be submitted to MOHLTC during 2010.

Costs and benefits of International Medical Graduates from a societal (Ontario) perspective: Review of the literature: CHEPA Associate Director **Michel Grignon** is leading this literature review on International Medical Graduates (IMGs) in the context of culturally sensitive physician care. The issues being explored include the benefits of bringing IMGs into the health care system from a societal perspective, medical education and re-training of IMGs, how medical education, local influences and peer groups affect IMGs' practice style, and matching physicians with patients who are from the same ethnic or cultural background. A report will be submitted to the MOHLTC during 2010. ■



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