

# A Shared Passion: Public Health

## Hudson Fellows Prepare for a Future in Public Health

**T**hey come from different walks of life, different parts of the world, with different upbringings and different viewpoints, but there is a common thread that binds together five outstanding research scholars at the OU College of Public Health. They all share a passion for public health. These five also are members of the latest class of Hudson Fellows at the college.

### Ngoc Quyen Duong



Ngoc Quyen Duong is a doctoral student in biostatistics at the college. Born in Vietnam, she grew up in Minnesota, where she first conquered English as a second language and then quickly learned she also had a knack for numbers. Duong earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics and then a master's degree in statistics. It was a desire to use science and innovation to positively im-

pact people's lives that led to her interest in public health.

"Being a Hudson Fellow has given me opportunities to pursue my passion for research," Duong said.

Duong's research involves developing models to predict infants at risk for severe intraventricular hemorrhage (bleeding in the brain). Currently, there are no

effective methods of prevention. Her work aims to better predict at-risk infants utilizing measures taken from special, near-infrared headbands.

"With the hands-on experience and the education I am receiving here, I feel well-trained to be a successful researcher in my field," Duong said. "I hope to someday work on a clinical trial for a pharmaceutical company."

### Kaitlin McGrew



The road to public health began in nursing for Kaitlin McGrew, a doctoral student in epidemiology. McGrew worked as a nursing assistant for several years at a children's rehabilitation and long-term care center.

"I loved working with the children and their families. However, I continued to notice a lot of big-picture problems in my community that were contributing to the development of preventable health issues in the people with whom I worked. I felt I could make a larger impact on the health of Oklahomans

by pursuing a degree in public health," she said.

McGrew's research focuses on quantifying health disparities in Oklahoma and decreasing the burden of stigmatized illnesses such as Hepatitis C virus and substance use disorders. Over the past few years, she has been involved in several multidisciplinary projects aimed at eliminating Hepatitis C in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. McGrew believes both the challenging academic environment and the diverse research opportunities afforded to her at the

college will prepare her well for the future.

"The teaching opportunities and research experiences have been invaluable through my progression in the doctoral program," she said. "I think all of us in public health share the desire to find a job that improves the lives of people in our communities. I hope to have a career that combines teaching and mentoring students with conducting research to improve the health and quality of life for underserved populations of Oklahoma."

## June Dao



Even in high school in Vietnam, numbers and biology piqued the interest of June Dao, a doctoral student in epidemiology with a strong interest in cancer prevention.

“I became interested in epidemiology during my senior year, as it allows me to use my mathematical skills in my field of interest, medicine,” she said.

Dao earned her master’s in epidemiology from the OU College of Public Health before deciding to work to earn a doctoral degree as

well. Her research aims to better understand the spatial effect of environmental exposures on cancer. She is currently involved in multiple research projects, including one that is looking at benzene exposure and birth defects.

“My passion lies in preventive measures, which leave less negative impact on patients and allow for health care to be provided more economically,” Dao said.

She is especially grateful to have been chosen as a Hudson Fellow.

“This fellowship provides me a

great opportunity to focus on my education and to get the necessary research experience for my future as an epidemiologist,” Dao said.

She added that her education at the college has been rewarding in many ways. It has helped her to acquire essential knowledge for her professional career, but also practical skills through her work on a number of projects in a variety of fields.

“I believe that I will be prepared and well-equipped for my future public health career.”

## Kathleen “Kae” Aithinne



It was while working in occupational safety at a manufacturing plant that Kae Aithinne first realized there was a field in which people focused on occupational and environmental safety and health. While earning her bachelor’s degree in biology, she worked in a microbiology lab, learning techniques that have proven useful on the biological side of occupational safety and health.

A first-year doctoral student in

occupational and environmental health, Aithinne’s research interests center on bacteria or viruses that can be suspended in liquids or aerosolized. She hopes to uncover new information that can lead to new mechanisms to reduce infection or re-infection.

“Receiving the Hudson Fellowship takes an enormous amount of financial and emotional pressure off of me and my family. It allows me to continue to work

toward my doctorate full time without worrying about accruing further debt,” Aithinne said.

Upon completing her doctorate, she plans to work in biosafety and environmental microbiology as a Certified Industrial Hygienist at a national laboratory before returning to academia to teach and mentor future occupational safety and health industry professionals.

## Wei-Jen Chen



Wei-Jen Chen, a first-year doctoral student in biostatistics and epidemiology, traces his passion for public health to an awakening, of sorts, that happened while he was an undergraduate student in Taiwan, his native country.

“I entered Professor Yu-Mei Hsueh’s Gene and Elements Species Laboratory to learn how to apply my textbook learning to research,” Chen explained. “This experience changed my thinking about public health. I now believe that public health is not simply a title affiliated with doctors and hospitals, but that public health initiatives can improve health promotion and disease prevention,

and reduce the burden of disease on the health care system.”

Chen’s previous research focused on arsenic and urologic cancer in Taiwan. He now plans to research environmental influences in children’s health and knows the Hudson Research Fellowship will be instrumental in helping him achieve his goals.

“With this support, I can receive more professional training and have sufficient resources to expand in depth and breadth my doctoral research,” he said.

As a first-year doctoral student, Chen believes it is very important

for him to gain increased exposure to the programs and research opportunities available at OU. He also serves as a graduate research assistant and teaching assistant in the Biostatistics and Epidemiology Department. He believes such experience will better prepare him as a professional.

“In the future, I plan to commit myself to epidemiology research and to improve the field of epidemiology in Taiwan,” Chen said, adding that he also hopes to educate many students in Taiwan to help expand interest in and to further enhance the field of epidemiology for future generations.