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About Us:

The Provost is committed to the development and success of faculty, academic staff, and students in Wayne State’s 13 schools and colleges and views student and faculty/staff success as inextricably linked. With this vision in mind, Faculty Impact is aimed at celebrating faculty successes and encouraging interdisciplinary collaborations that inspire junior colleagues and students to persist and be successful in their endeavors.

Faculty Impact

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Social Justice and Health



Stock Image: Person holding ice bag; courtesy -Pexels

Welcome to this issue of Faculty Impact, a newsletter aimed at showcasing faculty who are engaging in important work that may spark additional interdisciplinary collaborations and inspire junior scholars and students in their educational and professional endeavors.

Based on the feedback I received from faculty, staff, and students, there is great interest in a publication like this. Thank you to those of you who submitted suggestions for future issues, including the topic of this second issue: Social justice and health. Each scholar’s research addresses a different aspect of health and social justice.

Sheryl Kubiak investigates mental health and substance use disorders to transform the criminal justice system. Noah Hall’s work in en-

vironmental law seeks to protect the water we drink and the air we breath. Finally, Hayley Thompson examines race and class disparities in healthcare to increase equity in cancer treatment. Happy reading and I look forward to your suggestions!

- Keith E. Whitfield, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs



Correcting the correctional system

By Kelsey Husnick

At one point in her life, there was a warrant out for Sheryl Kubiak's arrest. The dean of the School of Social Work forgot to pay a parking ticket and realized the warrant was out when she was denied entry to the local jail when arriving to teach her inside/out course.

"I had the \$250 to pay it," she recalls, "but if I didn't have it, I would be sitting in jail. And that's the travesty of the criminal legal system for you."

About 1,800 people get booked into Wayne County jails on misdemeanors—like unpaid parking tickets or other non-violent crimes—each year, and of those individuals, about 93% have mental health problems.

As the director of the new Center for Behavioral Health and Justice, which opened on Wayne State's campus last November, Kubiak and her team are working with the Wayne County judge and police chief to prevent these individuals from spending time in jail.

"You've got a population that is cycling into the jail and likely can't afford bail. So they sit in the jail and get deregulated on their medications," Kubiak explains. "And you know, jail is no place for somebody who has mental health problems. I mean, if you have symptoms going in, you're going to have worse symptoms coming out. So we're trying to get them from that cycling and kind of catch them at the front door."



Dean Kubiak speaks at the launch event for the Center for Behavioral Health and Justice on November 1, 2018. Photo Courtesy Betsy Vanderstelt

The goal of the Mental Health Navigator Pilot Program is to set up what she calls "patient navigators" who can provide a work-around with the county judge even when bail can't be posted on a misdemeanor charge and then help set up housing and treatment for people with mental health issues in the community.

In addition, through the Michigan Re-entry Project, Kubiak focuses on identification and treatment for opioid use disorder in prisons, and, with the project's next step, in local jails. The reality is that some prisons and jails aren't even trying to assess whether someone has been using, and others aren't doing a good enough job, Kubiak said. This causes people to go into withdrawal behind bars.

"We've had some deaths in some of the jails because of people going

through withdrawal, so we're trying to work with them on how do you identify when someone has an opioid use disorder? What's your plan of treatment? If they do [use], will you allow medication assisted therapies in your jail?," she said.

These are just some of many projects Kubiak is working on through the Center for Behavioral Health and Justice. The mission of their work lies at the intersections of mental health, substance use disorders, and the criminal legal system, which she describes as a continuum.

Kubiak hopes that through the Center, work at this intersection will become a stronger focus both within the School of Social Work and across the university.

Please contact Sheryl Kubiak at spk@wayne.edu to learn more about her research.



“Jail is no place for somebody who has mental health problems.”

--Sheryl Kubiak

In the name of nature

By Kelsey Husnick



Noah Hall firmly believes that Michigan, and the greater United States, are failing in the areas of environmental and water law. The

Wayne Law professor has been trying like heck to transform the laws for the last two decades.

“I have assumed, generally in my work, that humanity wants to breathe clean air, and drink clean water, and have a home that’s essentially safe from poison and toxins and pollution. And also I’ve assumed in my work that humanity values other forms of life in a fundamental way,” Hall explained. “And yet our laws do not do nearly enough to protect people from pollution or to ensure that the air we breathe and the water we drink are safe. And our laws have made nature an afterthought, really, and the results have been disastrous.”

That means there’s a lot of work to do in the area of environmental law, and Hall is stretched thin trying to tackle as many problems as he can. He’s been serving on the special counsel team for the Flint water investigation since 2016, leading the civil litigation and aiding in the criminal prosecution.

“Even more than water, what Flint is really all about is that government and society as a whole failed, and more affirmatively, poisoned the city. And much of government and society at large to this day continues to deny and dismiss



One of Hall’s hobbies is paddling. Here he paddles on the Detroit river, which he enjoys because, he says, “You get to experience the environment from the river’s perspective. You see the how the water flows through the landscape and how everything is connected.”

Photo courtesy Noah Hall

what went on there,” Hall said.

It’s a legal battle with no end in sight, and although no amount of money is enough to truly right the wrongs that occurred in Flint, Hall said that one good thing coming out of the case is that courts are beginning to acknowledge water as a human right.

“If we can get a recognition of the constitutional right to water in Michigan it would be tremendous,” he said.

As another, but related, part of his research, Hall spent part of the winter break in Ecuador. He was prompted to go there because Ecuador’s government instated a new constitution ten years ago in which an active stance was taken to try to protect all of the values that Hall assumes a society holds.

“Their constitution has a human right to a healthy environment, a human right to water, and recognizes—this is its most remarkable thing, Article 71 of the Ecuador constitution—recognizes that nature has rights,” he said.

Since the change was made in 2008, Hall wants to see how the

constitutional rights are actually enacted on the ground. There’s an on-going legal battle taking place over a river dam, built by a foreign company, that’s causing flooding and starvation in the nearby village.

“I’m going down to learn a bit and to help a bit,” he said. “Ecuador took a step toward the future, and I want to see how it’s playing out and I want to help it play out better.”

Although the country’s new constitution might not be the perfect or only model for such a value to be instilled in a nation’s laws, Hall says it is at least proof that making a change isn’t as hard as people think.

“To me, human law is not first and foremost. The laws of the state of Michigan and of the United States of America are not the most important things,” Hall said. “I think we have a great morality and spirituality and life that connects us, and our laws are the things that need to conform to that stuff.”

Please contact Noah Hall at nhall@wayne.edu to learn more about his research.



The fight for equity in cancer care for all Michiganders

By Keena Neal

For Hayley Thompson, the fight against racial and socioeconomic disparities in healthcare began when, as a child in Brooklyn, she would listen to her mother talk about her day.

Thompson's mother, a nurse at Kings County Hospital, often described her interactions with her predominantly Black and immigrant patients.

"And she would talk about how they [the patients] would go in to talk to White doctors...and then come out and then try to debrief with the Black nurses," said Thompson, a clinical psychologist and associate professor, Department of Oncology, Wayne State University School of Medicine.

Her mother's stories were an example of the sociocultural factors that influence healthcare and outcomes; Black patients were more comfortable asking health-related questions of the Black nurses than their White doctors. Hearing those stories about the lack of trust, and its impact on doctor-patient communication, influenced Thompson's research.

Early in her career, she developed the Group-Based Medical Mistrust Scale. The scale, which assesses raced-based medical mistrust, has application for a number of populations on the margins.

Thompson said the scale is widely used by researchers interested in the sociocultural factors that may influence medical mistrust when it comes to patient care.

"...it stems from racial differences and social distance—it's important



Dr. Hayley Thompson, Associate Center Director for Community Outreach and Engagement for the Karmanos Cancer Institute.

Photo courtesy Hayley Thompson

in dynamics of care," said Thompson.

Beyond medical mistrust, Thompson's research explores a wider examination of the effects of healthcare disparities on the cancer care continuum.

Thompson is the Associate Center Director for Community Outreach and Engagement for the Karmanos Cancer Institute. The center, which is based in Detroit, is the largest cancer research and network provider in Michigan. Community outreach and engagement is a core principle of the center's mission and it is the heart of Thompson's research.

"I think as a cancer center and as a university we want to show impact," said Thompson.

The Detroit Healthlink for Equity in Cancer Care is one example of Thompson's research and its impact in the metro-Detroit area. The region-wide coalition brings together community members, community-based organizations, and cancer

researchers to identify local research priorities and pursue specific research questions. Healthlink is a part of the newly created Office of Cancer Health Equity and Community Engagement (OCHECE). OCHECE is charged with eliminating cancer health disparities in Michiganders, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or class.

Thompson's research addresses cancer health disparities in other ways. She developed a novel eHealth assessment to gauge cancer survivors' use of the internet and technology for health-related purposes; the ongoing project is funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Thompson said there are now many evidence-based apps and interactive tools that serve as patient-facing interventions that are available to cancer survivors.

The study focuses on Black and White survivors of breast, prostate, and colon cancer. According to Thompson, preliminary data show that White cancer survivors engage in more e-health activities, and engage with them more frequently, than Black survivors.

One explanation for the disparity may be the lack of knowledge of the e-health resources available; something Thompson and her team are working to address.

"We want to make sure that—that everyone, all populations, all groups, have access to these tools that can help," Thompson said.

For more information about Thompson's research, please contact Hayley Thompson at thompsonh@karmanos.org.

