

## MPH RESEARCH UPDATE

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

### FROM THE CHAIR



#### Char Schmidt, PhD, RDN, LDN

As chair of the MPH Research Committee this year, I am pleased to present our research update for UTC and our MPH partners. Our faculty continues to make significant contributions to public health through research, community engagement, and educational initiatives.

Through a grant with Common Spirit, I have been supporting Welcome Home of Chattanooga residents and staff with 2 MPH: ND students, Rebecca Powers and Abby Wysor, providing nutrition education, food samplings, grocery shopping tours, food safety information, cancer recovery foods, and affordable nutritious meal planning guidance. It is such an honor to serve this population of formerly homeless folks on their journey with Sherry Campbell, Director and other staff.



Welcome Home of Chattanooga

### SUSTAINABILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

#### Amir Alakaam, PhD, RDN, LDN

##### Research Project:

Nutrition Education for a Healthier Chattanooga: A nutrition education program implemented to expose communities within Chattanooga, TN to healthy and simple meals and provide needed nutrition education. About 30 sessions were conducted at six community centers and public library in Chattanooga, TN. This program is supported by the Office of Community Health, City of Chattanooga.

##### Presentations:

Alakaam, A. (Author & Presenter) (December 24, 2024). "Sustainability in Action: Exploring the Connection Between Green Building, Nutrition Intake, and Health Behavior." Seminar at, Turkey. İstanbul Gelişim University

Alakaam, A. (Author), Carr, E. (Author & Presenter) (September 2024). "Nutrition Care for Healthy Aging." Session at Nutrition Site Coordinator/Senior Center Director Training, Chattanooga, TN. Southeast Tennessee Area Agency on Aging and Disability

Alakaam, A. (February 2024). "Public Health and Nutrition Education & Collaboration." Session at Partnerships for Aging in Place Conference, Chattanooga, TN. Tennessee Department of Health

##### Grants:

Public Health Workforces in Tennessee. Alakaam, A. (PI). Awarded: \$36,838. 2024 – 2025

Developing a curriculum for public health workforces in Tennessee. Alakaam, A. (PI). TN Department of Health. Awarded: \$332,500. 2022 – 2024

Nutrition Education Program. Alakaam, A. (PI). City of Chattanooga. Awarded: \$74,632. (\$49,632 + \$25,000). 2024

##### Publications:

Alakaam, A. King, M. (2024). Green buildings and their impact on health outcomes and dietary intake: What do we know?. International Journal of Healthcare, 10(1):22-28. doi.org/10.5430/ijh.v10n1p22



"Sustainability in Action: Exploring the Connection Between Green Building, Nutrition Intake, and Health Behavior." Seminar at, Turkey. İstanbul Gelişim University



Nutrition education program for underserved communities in Chattanooga. Led by Dr. Amir Alakaam, alongside Indu Mhang, RDN and MPH Graduate Assistants Madeline Barton and Erica Carr.

### NUTRITION EDUCATION & STEM EMPOWERMENT



#### Marissa McElrone, PhD, RDN

##### Publications:

McElrone M, Gupta P, Miller ME, Bode B, Hollis-Hansen K. Incorporating Trauma- Informed Practices in Nutrition Education. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior. 2025;57(1):3-4. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2024.11.001.

McElrone M, Osment K, Evans E, Nolan S. Acceptability of pilot school-based food pantries compared to weekend feeding BackPack programs among food pantry clients in rural Tennessee: A mixed-methods approach. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior. 2025;57(1):40-46. DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2024.09.002.

##### Presentations:

Affare S, McElrone M, Ramnarine A, Barbosa J. "Agriculture & Nutrition for Girls while Encouraging Leadership & STEM-Enrichment (ANGELS) Program." Oral presentation at 2025 Collaborative Network for Engineering & Computing Diversity. February 9-12, 2025.

McElrone M, Jiang W\*. "SNAP participation is associated with residing in culturally similar communities among recently resettled refugees in the United States: Results from the National Annual Survey of Refugees." Poster presentation at the American Public Health Association 2024 Annual Meeting & Expo. October 27-30, 2024.

Lamichhane H, Trainor L, Araoz B, McElrone M, Allison, C. Contributors of negative attitudes towards sleep data in biometric-tracking ring users: A qualitative study. Poster presentation at the American Public Health Association 2024 Annual Meeting & Expo. October 27-30, 2024.

Allison C, Trainor L, Araoz B, Lamichhane H, McElrone M, Selby C. Employee definitions of wellness at a higher education institution with a health-focused mission. Oral presentation at the American Public Health Association 2024 Annual Meeting & Expo. October 27-30, 2024.

McElrone M, Jiang W\*, Affare S, Ramnarine A, Barbosa J. "Participant acceptability of the STEM-focused ANGELS pilot for adolescent females from racial/ethnic minority groups." Oral presentation at the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior Annual Conference. July 29-August 1, 2024.

##### Grants:

2024 University of Tennessee Grand Challenges Grant Program, Advancing K-12 Education. Yoo (PI), Ravi, Kim, Navarro Flores, Spence, McElrone, Kohl, Dalton. University of Tennessee System. Machine Learning Approach to Studying the Intersection of SDoH, Physiological Well-being, and Academic Performance, and Subsequent Holistic Intervention Development (TennWell Project). Awarded \$150,000. 2024-2025

### NUTRITION EDUCATION & STEM EMPOWERMENT

#### Caitlin Crews-Stowe, PhD, MPH

Since May 2024, Dr. Crews-Stowe has been examining microbial contamination in long-term care centers in the Chattanooga area, with MPH student Abby Nelson contributing to the research.

##### Research Spotlight:

Preliminary findings on Staphylococci contamination in communal showers will be presented in poster format in April at the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA) annual conference.

##### Ongoing Research:

Continuing work examining the Staphylococcus prevalence in the nares of Physical and Occupational Therapists in the Chattanooga area.



### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT



#### Melissa Powell, PhD, RDN, LDN

##### Mission Moment from North Side Neighborhood House, Chattanooga, TN

We just wrapped up this session of cooking classes. Our Lead Case Manager, Tina Williams, shared this about this group that I wanted to share with all of you.

"This past semester of cooking class participants were fully engaged and trying new things. We made fast, fresh, and affordable dishes. The UTC grad students took this class to the next level by providing participants with nutritional education. This content was placed on the back of each recipe card that went with their class participant recipe ingredient bags. This was by far the most engaged cooking class that I have had the privilege of working with. Big wins:

1. Family meal time became a standard with one participant and her teenage daughter.
2. Another class participant is in a specialized group with a partner agency and she along with her aid were making recipes at the facility.
3. All class participants tried ingredients that they had never had never eaten or cooked before.

I have a lot of favorite things with NNH, this program is very near the top. We made homemade pizzas with fresh dough in under an hour! They were delicious!"

##### - Tina Williams, Lead Case Manager



Northside Neighborhood Cooking Classes. Conducted by MPH Graduate Students Madeline Barton, Abby Wysor, and Hadya Tjornhom

### EPIDEMIOLOGICAL RESEARCH: LONG COVID

#### Gregory W. Heath, DHSc, MPH, FACSM, FAHA

##### Current Research:

Dr. Heath has been working with two graduate students (Emily Holden, public health; Gloria Oppong, biostatistics) and with Professor David Levine on an analytic project using the 2023 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Data (N = 422K). The team has been examining the prevalence of 'Long Covid' and associated risk factors among US adults 18 years and older.

##### Upcoming Presentations:

Abstract accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine

Research submission for the UTC Research Day on April 9th, 2025

##### Publications in Progress:

Currently working on 3 manuscripts from these data with plans to submit before the close of the spring semester.



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