UMPA Chronicle

Fall Newsletter

Hello! We are UMPA!

slack Share, collaborate, support!
Email UMPA@umassmed.edu for access

UMass Med Postdoc Association
https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8959298/

https://www.facebook.com/UMassMedPostdocAssociation

https://twitter.com/UMassMedPostDoc

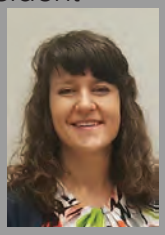
https://www.instagram.com/umassmedpostdoc/

Email us: umpa@umassmed.edu

Visit us:
https://www.umassmed.edu/gsbs/postdocs/about/umass-medical-school-postdoc-association-umpa/

UMPA Board 2021-22

Co-president



Dan O'Reilly
Olesea Cojohari

Vice-president

Irina Radu

Secretary

Ishani Dasgupta

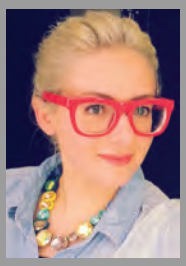
Committee on Equal Opportunity and Diversity (CEOD)

Dan O'Reilly
Benedikt Mortzfeld

Treasurer

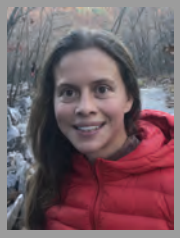
Benedikt Mortzfeld

Outreach



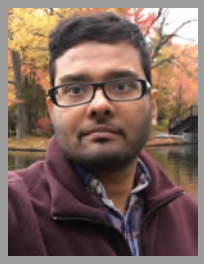
Jenn Ziegenfuss
Preeti Thakur

Networking



Heleen van 't Spijker
Maya Spichal

Communications



Shankar Ramachandran

Social media

Manish Muhuri
Matteo Bosso

Thank you to UMPA Board 2020-21

President

Heleen van 't Spijker

Vice-president

Shankar Ramachandran

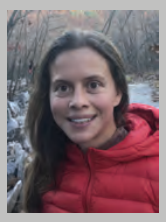
Secretary

Ishani Dasgupta

Heleen van 't Spijker

Networking

Ambily Abraham



Maya Spichal

Committee on Equal Opportunity and Diversity (CEOD)

Dan O'Reilly
Benedikt Mortzfeld

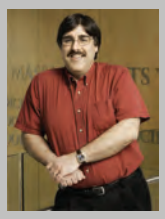
Outreach

Sneha Shah
Olesea Cojohari

Social media

Manish Muhuri

Special thank you to the Office of Postdoctoral Scholars



Anthony N. Imbalzano, PhD
Associate Dean
Academic Affairs
and Postdoctoral Scholars
Irina Parker

Editorial Committee

Ishani Dasgupta

Sushobana Bandyopadhyay

Heleen van 't Spijker

Shankar Ramachandran

Graphics design

Leonora Martinez-Nunez

UMPA, a vibrant postdoc group promoting community engagement and collective development

By Shankar Ramachandran

The University of Massachusetts Medical School Postdoc Association (UMPA) was created in the Summer of 2020, in collaboration with Dr. Tony Imbalzano and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. The goal of the association is to promote a collaborative professional and social forum for postdocs to have greater interactions with current and alumni postdocs, develop a sense of community and support. Key to our efforts is actively pursuing diversity inclusion and equal opportunity for all postdocs. We would like to thank the Chancellor, administrators and community for embracing us with openness, supporting us and aim to work towards developing resources and supporting UMMS postdocs towards achieving their career goals.

Postdoc Heleen van't Spijker, who led a team of postdocs in creating the association, shares "The University of Massachusetts Medical School has a great welcoming community and when I first joined as a postdoc I received so much help and support from students and other postdocs in my department. Every time I would socialize with other postdocs we would discuss the need to develop more events for postdocs to network and learn from each other. After my first year as a postdoc, I decided to initiate the University of Massachusetts Medical School Postdoc Association. Every postdoc I asked replied positively and most even agreed to help me with organizing. I'm so grateful to everyone who has put their free personal time in to help me start our association. As a new association, we have already achieved so many great goals and I'm very excited for all our future plans."

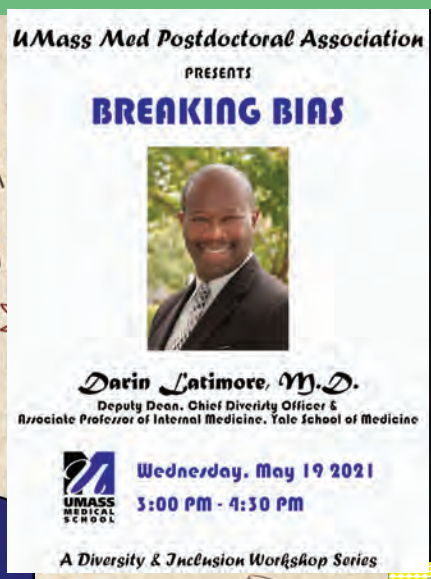
Celebrating its one-year anniversary, UMPA looks back at a successful year, organizing a diverse range of events and activities, organically growing as a group. Life as a postdoc is fast paced, and presents numerous scientific and personal challenges. These have been further intensified by the current pandemic. To support each other, we organize monthly virtual socials, including fun game nights and mixers, aimed towards bringing postdocs together, enabling new connections and friendships. To further develop professional career development resources for postdocs, we have been organizing monthly networking events with alumni postdocs, providing a forum for insightful conversations about diverse career paths. UMPA was graciously accepted into the UMMS Committee on Equal Opportunity and Diversity Groups (CEOD) providing a forum for postdocs to develop their understanding and engage in diversity and equity issues.

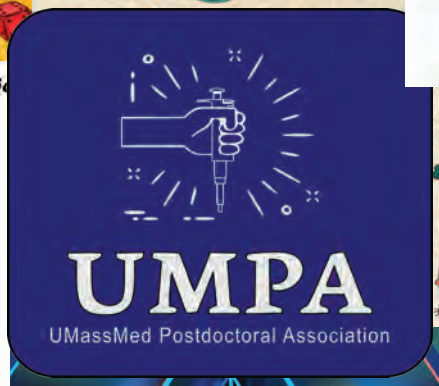
Our Mission:

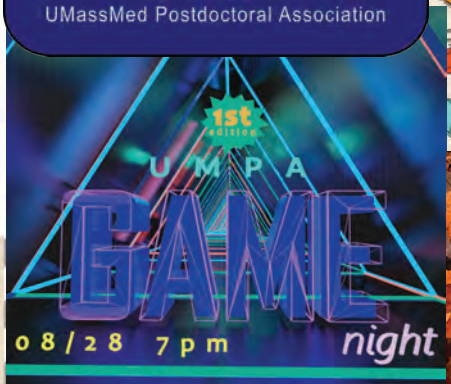
- To foster an interconnected community by aiding social and professional interactions among postdoctoral scholars at UMMS.
- To encourage productive dialogue among postdoctoral scholars and help build a network with current and former postdocs of the UMMS.
- To organize outreach events for postdocs of the UMMS to engage with the public in scientific discussions, e.g. local school students.
- To support international postdocs by providing a network to help with practicalities such as housing and provide an opportunity to make new friends and share a diversity of cultural backgrounds.
- To collaborate with student groups and diversity interest groups to foster dialogue and interactions on campus between postdoctoral scholars and other groups at our university.
- To provide a consolidated forum where postdoctoral scholars can share insights in a variety of issues, such as lab techniques and career development, using collective experience in faster resolving issues that may have been previously faced by peers. If possible, insight in these issues will be shared with the appropriate administrators and faculty of the school.

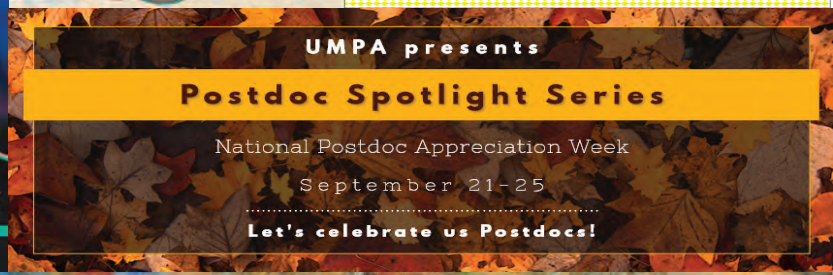
Postdocs at UMass Medical School engage in cutting edge exciting research, providing novel insights into biological processes, with major focus towards understanding diseases, developing therapeutics and finding cures. While we actively engage in professional meetings and conferences with our peers, engagement with the general public about our research is currently somewhat lacking and key to promoting community engagement and investment in science. To address these needs, we developed the "Science Cafe" outreach series, open to the general public. At these events, postdocs present their research in an informal manner and engage in vibrant discussions. The series is currently held virtually, with the hope of having "in-person" events in the future soon. We look forward to lively engagements and collaborations with the UMass Community, as well as with the greater Worcester community.

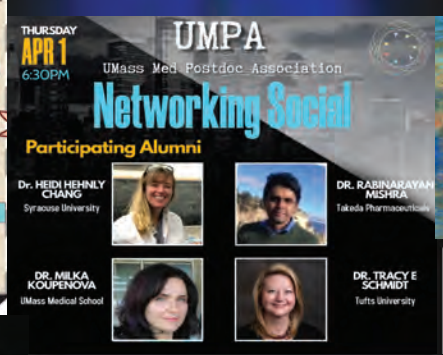
UMPA's first year at a glance ...

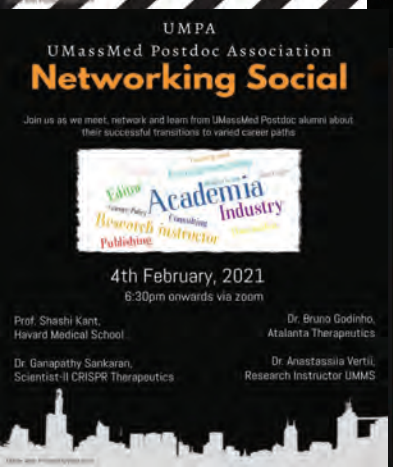


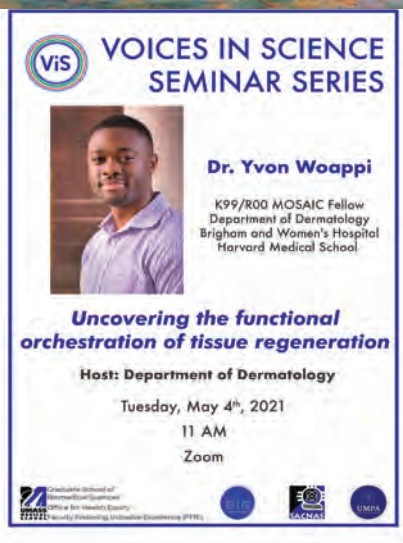








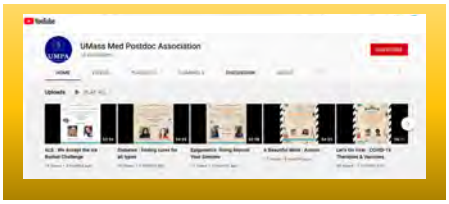




Science Cafes

By Ishani Dasgupta

Science Cafés are interactive live events that take place in casual settings, are open to everyone from the community, and feature an engaging conversation with researchers about a particular topic. We at the UMassMed Postdoctoral Association (UMPA) believe that sharing our science with a wider audience is a great way to showcase the excellent work at UMass Chan Medical School.



"We aim to demystify science by bringing together local scientists and the public to discuss how science applies to everyday life," Ana Maldonado-Contreras, PhD

Science Cafés are designed to discuss the fun questions that researchers ask and the new and innovative ideas that may lead to therapies in the future. Engaging with the public also is a great way for scientists to gain a broader perspective of their research. We hope that through Science Cafés members of the community can chat with local scientists working on various topics like diabetes, neurological disorders, cardiovascular health, gene editing, infectious diseases, etc. Science Cafés are a great way to learn about the science taking place in the area, its relevance to society, and ask all the questions you may have.

Before we embarked on our Science Cafes, we were very fortunate to learn from Jennifer Berryman, Vice Chancellor, Office of Communications in UMass Chan Medical School about effective science communication skills. Our Science cafes provide an optimum opportunity to communicate the cutting-edge research being conducted here by the UMassMed postdocs. Over the past year, starting from November 2020 we hosted several science cafes, attended by a wide group of audience. We were overwhelmed with the response we received which encourages us to organize more such events in future. Owing to the pandemic, all our science cafes were virtual but we hope to host them in cafes soon. We had a diverse array of topics ranging from the revolutionary gene editing technology, CRISPR to diseases, like ALS, autism, diabetes, COVID that impacts the society at large.

Testimonials from our attendees

- "Grateful that you are offering these topics and others. Very well organized!"
- "The presenters are well prepared and their presentations accessible. I appreciated (them) taking the time to answer all questions."
- "The presentations and the follow up questions were engaging and thought provoking. Thanks for providing the learning stimulation. I am curious to know more."
- "Both talks were excellent! As a type 2 diabetes patient, I was pleased to see there is some hope for the future. Keep it up!"
- "I thought both speakers gave excellent talks at just the right level that generated lots of great discussion. Very well done!"

Email UMPA@umassmed.edu to subscribe to our email list.

Breaking bias

By Shankar Ramachandran

"Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization."

Mahatma Gandhi

Inclusiveness, fundamental and a strength, is actively promoted at UMass Chan Medical Medical School. UMPA endeavors to further promote diversity and inclusion awareness and discussions amongst the postdocs and the broader scientific community here at UMass Chan Medical School, with a key focus towards proactive training provide training on how to recognize and prevent bias in everyday life. The Committee on Equal Opportunity and Diversity at UMass Chan Medical School works towards creating an inclusive and unbiased workplace for everyone. Under the umbrella of the CEOD, there are 9 executive committees that report to the CEOD to achieve this goal. UMPA is grateful to be one of them, and UMPA CEOD subcommittee co-chairs Benedikt Mortzfeld and Daniel O'Reilly serve to represent UMPA as part of CEOD, and lead UMPA efforts in actively addressing these issues.

With this in mind, the UMPA CEOD subcommittee has initiated "*Breaking bias*: *A Diversity and Inclusion Workshop Series*", a recurring event where eminent speakers discuss about unconscious biases and discrimination as well as provide training on how to recognize and prevent bias in everyday life. Each event is an interactive 90min session, featuring a talk by the invited speaker followed by a discussion on unconscious biases and discrimination.

The UMPA CEOD committee has organized two events so far, which were very insightful in dealing with unconscious bias. Our first event organized on March 24th 2021 featured Marlina Duncan, the UMass Chan Medical School Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion, with discussions on the history of unconscious bias and discrimination as well as ways to provide training on how to recognize and prevent bias in everyday life.

Building on our first event, we organized a second event on May 19th, 2021 featuring an engaging discussion with Darin A. Latimore, the Deputy Dean and Chief Diversity Officer from the Yale School of Medicine. Dr. Latimore shared with us his passion for promoting diversity and inclusion.

We aim to continue inviting speakers who are passionate about these issues towards fostering an inclusive environment at the workplace. Currently these events are virtual via zoom, however we hope to have in-person events soon, which we hope will further enhance the richness and impact of this workshop series.

Our next event, on September 30th, 2021, will feature Joanne Kamens, Interim Executive Director at GCI Center for Women and Business, from Bentley University. Join us in stimulating and enlightening discussions on the concept of Implicit Bias, arising as a way towards explaining why inequity and discrimination in all forms persists, even though extensive research clearly shows that people oppose it, with examples, supporting data and calls to action.

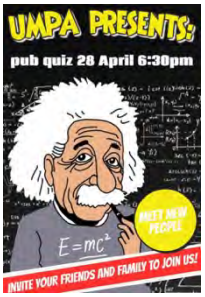
Networking

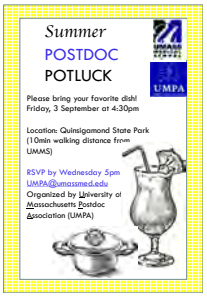
By Ishani Dasgupta and Shankar Ramachandran

UMPA endeavored to develop greater opportunities to network and establish connections amongst the current research community as well as with alumni of UMass Chan Medical School. With this in mind, and a broader goal of providing professional and social support and resources to postdocs towards reaching their career goals and establishing a consolidated platform where postdocs share learnings and insights, UMPA created the social networking and well-being committee.

Professional networking is a key requirement in the career development of postdocs, and an invaluable asset in understanding potential possibilities, and in the job search and application process. In order to present greater opportunities for postdocs at UMass Chan Medical School to be able to network with peers and alumni, we established the "*alumni networking events*". Organized as a recurring event, each event featured 4-5 alumni postdocs, from a wide range of job trajectories such as academia, industry, business development, patents and intellectual property, corporate relations, etc. These events presented wonderful opportunities for participating postdocs to engage in illuminating discussions on wide range of topics, including working in these diverse job environments, identifying possibilities and gauging interests, networking ideas and tips, job searches, applications and interviews, growth and evolution as a postdoc, fears and worries, and tackling difficulties, hardships, setbacks and rejections. Often our events featured alumni from the Massachusetts and New England region. We have begun to expand our events towards featuring alumni from other parts of the United States as well. A significant number of postdocs at UMass Chan Medical School are internationals, and may wish to seek employment opportunities in their home country or explore other potential regions in the world. With this in mind, we have begun expanding our networking events to incorporate region specific events. For instance, in May 2021, we organized a networking event with alumni currently working in Europe. We hope to continue to broaden these events, both in terms of diversity in job possibilities, as well as geographical locations. We seek to partner with, and collaborate, with other postdoc communities and organizations in Massachusetts, towards developing more diverse networking events. While currently our events are virtual, we hope in the near future we would be able to have in-person events with greater engagements and interactions.

The committee also endeavors to develop resources to support and supplement the professional development of postdocs. We are excited to have our first event, a grant writing workshop by Dr. Lisa Nielsen from Purdue University, on October 4th, 2021. Join us as for an interactive discussion on grant writing and searching for funding options.



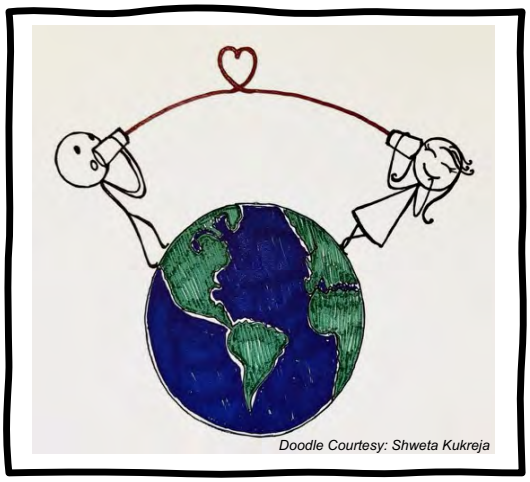


While our research, and professional and career development, form our primary focus as postdocs, social engagement and developing friendships and relationships are equally important for balanced and wholesome development. Postdocs, often, live an isolated existence, with limited opportunities for engaging socially with their peers, and members of the greater UMass Chan Medical School community. To foster new friendships and build a platform for interacting with our peers outside of work, we organized several fun virtual events, like socials, pub quiz, game nights and parties over the last year. These events were met with positive feedback and enthusiastic engagement, particularly given the social isolation we have faced as a result of the pandemic. As the number of vaccinated increases and in-person engagement slowly resumes, we have begun to organize in-person social events, while being mindful of safe practices, such as pizza party and potlucks. Needless to say, all these events have been a lot of fun, where we got time to unwind and connect with fellow postdocs, and develop beautiful friendships.

Stories in Science: Solace and saudade

by Sushobhana Bandyopadhyay

While adulting, there are always those little changes in our lives that remain obscure. For example, while filling out forms we hardly notice that our ‘present address’ and our ‘permanent address’ are miles and sometimes thousands of miles away. The earlier carefree ‘going home’ is no more an occasion, a dreaded cumbersome one, where you need to plan at least a quarter of a year ahead of your journey. Your decisions should be meticulous, so that it is comforting for both your soul and profession. Most importantly, one must check and re-check their visa papers with utmost diligence. And if you are lucky enough to procure a cheaper flight ticket than your friends, then you do have a reason to celebrate. All these might sound like a lot of hassle, but my fellow immigrants can never deny the fact that it is one of those hassles that we never complain about.



Doodle Courtesy: Shweta Kukreja

Every year, thousands of ambitious researchers leave their country in the search of a promising future. Most of us share the passion for science, to learn, to innovate and most importantly to grow among the people who seek and nurture similar interests. It is never a journey of running away from the homeland, rather it is a journey towards oneself. During this journey, we often happen to come across a void, or should we call this ‘*saudade’* as the Portuguese would refer. The one that is caused when you miss the food, or the laughter with your dear ones, the seasons, the commute or just in ‘*la dolce far niente*’.

In the past pandemic year, this void tried to engulf most of us. We proved ourselves resilient enough by engaging ourselves in learning about the virus and spreading awareness to fight against it. The turmoil we went through when we received untimely phone calls or scrolling down social media sites did not stop us from meeting our deadlines at work. Unfortunately, some of us had to rush back home, while others just prayed for the nightmare to be over. We found our salvage in our work and in friends we met since we had left our homeland.

Working as immigrants in the land with vast opportunities teaches us a lot of virtues. The strongest of which are to be grateful and accepting. Our workplace is dynamic and vibrant with people from varied ethnicity, speaking different languages and various socio-economic backgrounds. But we celebrate humanity everyday by greeting each other and moving towards solving one major probing question after another. We juggle between the time zones at home and work, and we go back to bed every night finding solace in the little contribution we are able to make to society.

At times, I come up with a feeling that we are much closer to our loved ones than we had been if we had not left our country. As we don’t see them every day, we desperately feel how much they are valued in our lives. We check on them often and share with them even the tiniest of our emotions. Each time when our flights land at our home country, our heart races a thousand times faster to hear the welcome note from our pilot. We never knew that ‘missing’ which is a very personal space, could ever be a global one and the one that makes us feel real and connected.

“I long, as does every human being, to be at home wherever I find myself.”

~ Maya Angelou

VOICES IN SCIENCE SEMINAR SERIES

By Shankar Ramachandran

Voices in Science (ViS) is a newly created and ongoing monthly seminar series, sponsored by the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) and Office for Health Equity, towards highlighting outstanding underrepresented scientists from diverse backgrounds and research interests. The series aims to identify potential new faculty candidates, establish networking with scientists from other institutions, helping to identify and recruit future candidates, and provide networking opportunities and role models for our GSBS students and postdocs.

The ViS seminar series is organized by students, postdocs and faculty from the GSBS office, Diversity Interest Group (DIG), Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), the UMass Medical School Postdoctoral Association (UMPA), and Faculty Fostering Inclusive Excellence (FFIE) Community, in partnership with UMass Medical School research departments.

Dr. Yvon Woappi

K99/R00 MOSAIC Fellow
Department of Dermatology
Brigham and Women's Hospital
Harvard Medical School

ViS kickstarted the series, featuring Dr. Yvon Woappi from Harvard Medical School, on May 4, 2021. The ViS team aims to bring more speakers from diverse underrepresented backgrounds.

Cierra Smith, a postdoc previously at UMass Chan Medical School, served as the coordinator for the ViS series in 2020-21. She completed her PhD in 2020 in Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience) at UMass Chan Medical School. Speaking on what drew her into this position, “it was primarily my leadership and recruiting experiences that inspired me to pursue a career in diversity and academic administration. Organizing the different programs through DIG allowed me to develop passions in programming and student support. I saw the value in the programs DIG provided and I wanted to continue to work towards diversity recruiting, retention and build inclusivity, and enhance student support.” Her efforts included developing diversity programs for the GSBS, collaborating with DIG, helping with recruiting and admission efforts, and aiding Initiatives for Maximizing Student Development (IMSD)/PREP programming, and the Faculty Fostering Inclusive Excellence (FFIE) Community and the Diversity Task Force (DTF).