Award Winners for 2017 AJPH Paper and Reviewer of the Year

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As a way to acknowledge contributions to the AJPH, the Editorial Team is proud to present our award winners for 2017 AJPH Paper and Reviewer of the Year.

The award for AJPH Paper of the Year recognizes a published paper that substantially contributes to our knowledge and understanding of a significant public health issue. Criteria for selection include a paper that addresses an important and timely public health issue; is innovative, offering new knowledge or insights; has the potential to have a significant public health impact; and advances public health.


This paper focuses on trends in premature death rates by specific underlying cause, age, race/ethnicity, and urbanization level in the United States, across 2 time periods: 1999 to 2001 and 2013 to 2015. Premature death rates improved for most race/ethnicity and urbanization groups; however, all 9 subpopulations with increased death rates were among Whites, largely in rural and in small or medium metropolitan counties, mostly attributable to deaths from suicide, accidental poisoning, and liver disease. The authors conclude that these deaths are attributable primarily to self-destructive health behaviors and may be related to underlying social and economic factors in these communities.

The second category is the AJPH Reviewer of the Year which was established to recognize a reviewer who has done the most to strengthen a paper or papers prior to publication. Specifically, this award recognizes a reviewer who is willing to devote time, care, and expertise and offers honest and constructive feedback to authors that ultimately enhances the quality of a paper.

The following write-ups were prepared by members of the AJPH Editorial Team.

This thoroughly documented, persuasively argued, and very effectively written paper presents a penetrating study of Thomas Parran, US Surgeon General from 1936 to 1948. Parran has become a controversial figure, seen by many as an impediment to government-backed national health insurance and as someone who was ethically compromised by his roles in the Tuskegee Study and in Public Health Service experiments in Guatemala. Focusing on Parran’s contributions to health policy, Sledge makes a powerful case that Parran was not an opponent of national health insurance but the proponent of an approach that sought to link public health and individual medicine. He also argues that as a pragmatist he believed that effective policymaking required compromise with the American Medical Association.


Polinski et al. empirically demonstrated the impact on smoking after CVS’s well-publicized decision to stop selling tobacco products in its store as part of its transformation from being a “drug store” to becoming CVS Health. Published in the April 2017 issue, and highlighted in a Public Health of Consequence review1 in that issue, the team presented a rigorous, well-originated and well-executed study using both nationally representative household data and state-level data to interrogate the hypothesis. They confirmed that CVS shoppers were more likely to stop buying tobacco products from any source, and that cigarette consumption was down overall in intervention states versus control states. The team was transparent around the possible weaknesses of the study, and it was refreshing to see the authors outline the possible limitations of their work. Besides modeling good journalistic style, and implementing and analyzing a solid study, the authors added to the population health road map by illustrating that there are many sectors, including private, that have levers to pull to positively influence population health.

REFERENCE


I respectfully nominate the paper by Wang and Singhal on East Los High as AJPH Paper of the Year. Moving beyond scientific publication to public health action, East Los High reached millions of viewers on Hulu and hundreds of thousands via its Web site, which served as a portal to additional health and social service contacts via embedded widgets and referrals to partnering organizations. Regarding the effectiveness of transmedia as explored in the laboratory experiment with nonviewers, the authors explained,

There were encouraging positive trends over time and tendencies showing the advantages of transmedia, but most were not statistically significant and warrant future investigation. However, one revealing result regarded knowledge of correct condom use: transmedia yielded significantly better outcomes than did other conditions over time. This may have resulted from the extended scene of Maya’s conversation with a health counselor about condom use. . . . This suggests that . . . using transmedia to highlight critical and accurate information as incorporated in the dialogue with a main character can give the intervention a turbocharged boost. (pp. 1008–1009)

Public housing in the United States almost always comes with negative perceptions and connotations. One of these negative perceptions is the odor from tobacco smoking that many of us associate with smoking in public housing. The authors describe and analyze a November 2016 rule mandated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that prohibits smoking in public housing projects. Then they identify the difficult challenges that facility managers face to implement the rule.

**AWARD WINNERS FOR AJPH REVIEWER OF THE YEAR**

I am very pleased to acknowledge Jonathan Bearak, PhD, and Jennifer J. Carroll, PhD, MPH, for their recent service to the *AJPH* as reviewers. Both were assigned the same submission and drew similar conclusions regarding the work. Each reviewer was clearly knowledgeable of the authors’ area of study and provided honest and insightful comments on a paper that was ultimately not approved for further publication consideration. While reviewers are typically acknowledged for their expertise in strengthening a paper for publication in the *AJPH*, there are many that take the time and effort to provide thoughtful, constructive comments to help authors improve the quality of the paper should they choose to revise and submit to another journal. For the time and expertise they devoted to the review, it is with great pleasure that I recognize Drs. Bearak and Carroll as 2017 *AJPH* Reviewers of the Year.

I respectfully nominate Donald L. Chi, DDS, PhD, as *AJPH* Reviewer of the Year. Dr. Chi is unfailingly supportive of the authors, editors, and staff and graciously timely in rendering his constructively critical recommendations. In the past 6 years, Dr. Chi has served as a reviewer for *AJPH* 8 times, including 3 times in 2016. His insightful reviews meaningfully strengthened the scientific underpinnings and public health relevance of the published papers to which he contributed his expertise and experience, including for the special issue on oral health (in)equity. Dr. Chi is also a valued *AJPH* author, serving to broaden the understanding of oral health as integral to overall health and well-being.
I nominate Gerald M. Oppenheimer, PhD, Professor of Health Policy and Management at the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health. Prof. Oppenheimer’s work focuses on the social and scientific factors that shape perceptions of disease and epidemics, and in his books and articles he has explored the ethical, social, and economic ramifications of HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular disease, and chronic disease generally. He has also been a pioneer in the study of the history of modern risk factor epidemiology and of the effect of epidemiology in biomedical policy. He is one of my most reliable and trusted reviewers on a wide range of topics, and I count on him for as many as a half dozen reviews per year. His reviews are invariably smart, probing, judicious and well-balanced.

I would like to nominate Donna Spiegelman, PhD, for reviewer of the year for her double duty reviewing 2 articles1,2 and transforming them to fit as a pair that will serve as a reference for Group Randomized Trials for another decade.

REFERENCES

I nominate Valerie Yeager, DrPH, for her review of “Prioritizing Public Health Workforce Development Needs in State and Local Health Departments” by Dr. Angela Beck. Dr. Yeager noted, “This paper provides a new and important contribution to what is known about the public health workforce. To my knowledge, it is the first report on workforce needs from the perspective of state and local public health leaders and human resources management with clarification of the types of needs according to positions.” She goes on to provide careful, thoughtful comments and suggestions for each major section of the manuscript. Rather than simply bulleting her comments, she often phrases her comments in the form of a question (e.g., “I believe there have even been workforce papers published in AJPH that are not included in these references. Wouldn’t it serve the field to be more thorough?”). Many of her comments and questions were subsequently incorporated into the revised manuscript, making it a much stronger paper. It is coincidence, I believe, that the author of this paper was actually my choice of reviewer of the year last year.

I nominate Tara Zolnikov, PhD, MS, as AJPH Reviewer of the Year. Dr. Zolnikov is passionate about auto-ethnography and has published reports of her experience in the AJPH. She has put her expertise to the service of authors who submitted papers about their personal experience in specific public health context. She always conducts thorough reviews, proposes detailed revisions and follows up until the piece reads well and satisfies the standards of auto-ethnographic criteria. Her reviews have allowed the AJPH to expand the diversity of its publications.

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YEAR 2016–2017 PEER REVIEWERS

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Basil Aboul-Enein
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