A Lasting Legacy

A look back at the academic accomplishments of retired Provost Dr. Alex F. Johnson

Nursing Leadership Programs Begin
PAGE 7

Solidifying Pipeline to Mass General Brigham
PAGE 11

Research Grants Focus on Improving Care
PAGE 25
Last year, we welcomed 664 students to the IHP who chose to enter the complexities of health care to improve the lives of others. Students in all our professional disciplines joined the IHP with the courage to participate in classes and engage in clinical practice at a time when health care delivery is so difficult. Their choice to embrace this challenge is a testament to their commitment to their profession. Their drive and determination are nothing short of inspiring.

We invite you to join in making a difference in their lives through the MGH Institute of Health Professions. President Paula Milone-Nuzzo has made a generous offer. She will match all NEW and INCREASED donations up to $5,000 made by September 1st. Please make a gift today. Whether you choose to support scholarships, an academic program, research, or another fund with a special meaning for you, every gift of every size makes a powerful, immediate, and long-lasting impact. Your collective support makes a difference!

MAKE YOUR GIFT TODAY.

https://giving.mghihp.edu/
Table of Contents

First Words
President Paula Milone-Nuzzo reflects on the changes the MGH Institute has experienced during her first five years of leading the school.

Five Questions
Associate Provost of Research Nara Gavini discusses the recent expansion of the IHP’s total research portfolio.

Along the Waterfront
Nursing leadership programs begin, in-person Commencement returns after a two-year hiatus, the Speech Center is named for Professor Emerita Julie Atwood, Dr. Laura Plummer is appointed Chair of the PT Department, faculty address monkeypox and infant formula issues, and the war in Ukraine hits close to home for one graduating student.

COVER STORY
A Lasting Legacy
The academic accomplishments of the Institute have been many during the 14 years Dr. Alex F. Johnson was the school’s first Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

FEATURED
Recent Research
A recap of grants received by Dr. Joanna Christodoulou, Dr. Annie Fox, Dr. Jordan Green, Dr. Julie Keysor, and Dr. Elise Townsend and Dr. Michael Kieffer.

Alumni News
An OTD graduate without borders, a beloved former faculty member and alum passes, and Class Notes.

Last Words
Reproductive Health Is a Human Right That Everyone Deserves, by Dr. Kathy Simmonds, MS-NU ’93.
On Making a Great Institution Even Better

They say as you get older, the time seems to go by faster. That is certainly the case for me.

As I write this message, I am approaching my five-year anniversary as President of the Institute, and I can’t believe how fast the time has gone by. Maybe it was because of a global pandemic that arrived just two years into my presidency and still lingers with us today. Perhaps it was because of a major social change that made us question everything we do around equity and inclusiveness in our culture and at the IHP.

Both major changes in our world have had an impact, but I believe the most significant variable affecting the passage of time for me has been the progression and growth of the IHP over these last five years. When I arrived in August 2017, I came to a great academic institution with strong academic programs, a budding research enterprise, stellar faculty and staff, and exceptional students. Why make any changes?

We knew that healthcare delivery was rapidly evolving, and it was critical that we keep up with that transformation. We also knew that higher education, including health professions education, was evolving—so to remain competitive, the IHP had to evolve as well. We had a strong foundation on which to grow and change, and that is what we have done over this past half-decade.

Undeterred by what was going on in the world, or perhaps spurred by it, the IHP is on the cutting edge of health care and health professions higher education. Our place within Massachusetts General Hospital and the Mass General Brigham system has given us a unique advantage to develop new master’s programs in Healthcare Leadership, Healthcare Digital Analytics, and two nursing leadership degrees—Nursing Administration and Nursing Education—and research that aligns with the best hospitals in the world.

Our faculty have emerged as leading voices in their fields in such media as the New York Times, American Business Journals, CBS Boston, and the Boston Globe. And we are building and rebuilding connections with new and existing international partners to expand our reach and impact around the world in such countries as Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

When I arrived in August 2017, I came to a great academic institution with strong academic programs, a budding research enterprise, stellar faculty and staff, and exceptional students. Why make any changes?

In this magazine, you will read about our researchers who are developing the science that will improve the lives of children, and the clinical care of people with chronic and acute illnesses. You will learn about how we are helping our students with more on-campus support services and creating resources for people in our community with food insecurity. And you will see how our Center for Climate Change, Climate Justice, and

Health is leading the way to mitigate the critical climate-induced health issues facing our planet and our population. These are just a few of the examples of how the IHP is on the cutting edge of health care and health professions education. Along with this innovation, we remain committed to our core mission of preparing the next generation of healthcare leaders to provide care for a diverse society.

I have been honored to serve as President for the last five years and look forward to a very productive future. Each one of you plays an important part in that future, and I look forward to working with you to continue our success. Please consider coming to campus for a visit.

Stay well, and I wish you peace.
The First Five Years

It was August 2017 when the Dean of Penn State University’s College of Nursing took over as President of MGH Institute of Health Professions, capping off a months-long national search. From the day Dr. Paula Milone-Nuzzo stepped on campus five years ago, the MGH Institute has been on an upward trajectory, increasing its brand awareness, expanding the campus footprint, strengthening partnerships within the Mass General Brigham system, and shoring up finances while augmenting academic offerings.

**2017–2022 BY THE NUMBERS**

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Nara Gavini, PhD, MPhil, is the Associate Provost for Research and a Professor at the MGH Institute, and has a faculty appointment at Harvard Medical School. Prior to joining the IHP, he served as Chief of the Office of Extramural Programs at the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Nursing Research. He also ran the Biological Sciences Program at Mississippi State University and was director of the Center for Biomolecular Sciences at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

1. What is the status of research at the IHP?

Nara Gavini: A little over 10 years ago, the Board of Trustees approved a strategic plan to grow and elevate the school’s research profile, including allocating fiscal resources and space to attract highly successful researchers. At that time, the school’s funding portfolio was approximately $400,000. Today, 45 faculty have 60 grants, which has grown the total research portfolio to more than $36 million. The growth in scholarship, impact, excellence, and external funding is rare for a college of our size. It includes National Institutes of Health R01, R21, R15, K99, K23, K24, F31, and F32 grants as well as numerous foundation awards. We also have received Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer grants from the NIH.

The research focuses on neuroscience, literacy, teaching, communication science, health services, engineering, global health, telehealth, disability sciences, and cancer rehabilitation. Last year, faculty members published over 200 research articles in journals including Nature, Lancet, and JAMA, which was the highest level of productivity seen in the school’s history.

2. Can you talk about with whom researchers are working?

NG: We’re doing a lot of collaborative research, a key component of the NIH research roadmap that involves combining clinical, research, statistical, and technical expertise to answer complex scientific questions. For example, Institute Professors Dr. Yael Arbel, Dr. Sofia Vallila Rohter, and Dr. Lauryn Zipse bring together their common research interests as speech-language pathologists in the Cognitive Neuroscience Group. Outside collaborations include Dr. Jordan Green, the IHP’s Chief Scientific Advisor, and Dr. Brendan Pomahac of Brigham and Women’s Hospital, who are studying post-surgery facial motor recovery using 3D facial motion analysis; Dr. Julie Keyser, Director of the IHP’s Behavior, Abilities, and Technology Lab, and Dr. Paolo Bonato of Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, who are examining how technology can be used to foster behavior change and motor practice in the home environment for stroke survivors; and Dr. Teresa Kimberley, Director of the IHP’s Brain Recovery Lab, with Dr. Leigh Hochberg and Dr. David Lin of Massachusetts General Hospital, who are studying brain recovery and transcranial magnetic stimulation.

3. How does your office support IHP researchers?

NG: Our office awards faculty seed grants for innovative ideas, bridge funding between grants, proposal resubmission supports, and grant writing groups. In addition, we provide consultation services for grant initiatives and connect our students, faculty, and staff with professional development resources within MGB and the Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute. We also have a variety of mentoring programs to support early-stage faculty, doctoral students, and postdoctoral fellows. Our most recent initiative is speed mentoring, which is brief targeted conversations in which people with expertise in a specific topic area talk with those who have less experience in that field.

4. Can you talk about how your office is working to increase scientists of color in research?

NG: We recently successfully used an NIH funding mechanism to support developing more researchers of color at the Institute. Dr. Ana Luiza Costa Zaninotto, a postdoctoral research fellow in the Speech & Feeding Disorders Lab, and Dr. Savetrie Bachan, a doctoral research fellow in the Cognitive Neuroscience Group, received fellowships. These are important steps toward diversifying the research workforce, and we will continue to promote that development.

5. What do you see for the future of research at the IHP?

NG: We will continue to support faculty’s research ideas and translate their work to impact people’s lives. We will build additional clinical research connections with our MGB partners. And we will continue to recruit new faculty to strengthen our current areas of excellence as well as expand the breadth of research and deepen its impact. There is no doubt the future continues to be extremely promising.
Continuing initiatives to add new programs that focus on leadership, education, and administration, the MGH Institute has launched two new degree programs that will complement its clinical practice degrees while providing opportunities for new jobs and advancing careers.

The Master of Science - Leadership in Nursing Administration and Master of Science - Leadership in Nursing Education—part-time, online programs that begin in Fall 2022—are designed for nurses looking to advance their careers.

“We’re filling the void in the healthcare workforce landscape because there is great demand for these kinds of graduates,” said President Paula Milone-Nuzzo. “Nurse educators and administrators who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to effect change will play a key role in the future of health care.”

Graduates of the programs, both of which will take about two years to complete, will be part of a new generation of healthcare leaders using what they learn in order to lead with a lens that focuses on social determinants of health and health equity.

Along with taking courses in the School of Nursing, students will also take courses in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences and in the Institute’s new School of Healthcare Leadership. This interprofessional aspect—students from different programs collaborating via group discussions, simulations, and case studies—is a critical differentiator at the Institute.

“Having well-rounded students who are versed in a variety of disciplines makes for a more effective professional,” said Dean Kenneth R. White.

expanding the IHP’s interprofessional lens to include the administrative and educational side of the healthcare industry,” said Dr. Kenneth R. White, Dean of the School of Nursing. “It’s important that we utilize our faculty expertise and knowledge in topic areas that aren’t typically found in nursing schools, such as economics, marketing and entrepreneurship, data analytics, and other business domains.”

“Not many, if any, places in higher ed are implementing specialty tracks like this in nursing education.”

~ DEAN KENNETH R. WHITE

The new programs, along with new programs launched earlier this year in the SHL, are part of a growth initiative that will increase the Institute’s student population by 40%, to more than 2,300 over the next few years.

The goal of the administration program is to prepare graduates for roles as nurse administrators, nurse managers, and nurse directors, or to work in specialty roles in nursing informatics, quality management, or consulting.

The education program is aimed at nursing faculty in higher education, clinical instructors in their respective organizations, nurse educators in healthcare organizations, and experts in continuing professional development. Graduates will have the ability to run innovative education models with inventive approaches for teaching and learning in a rapidly changing environment. With the rise in simulation, the popularity of interprofessional education and equity, and inclusion principles embedded in all aspects of education, students will learn the tools needed to be successful in whatever job they pursue after graduation.

Both programs will offer a focus on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI), which will help prepare graduates to lead and educate an increasingly diverse workforce.

“We are weaving the Institute’s JEDI principles into the curriculum, into the fabric of admissions and placements, and we’re thinking about social justice and the social determinants of health so we can prepare nurse leaders to educate increasingly diverse populations and care for a progressively diverse patient population,” noted White. “Not many, if any, places in higher ed are implementing specialty tracks like this in nursing education.”
Classmate hugs, group photos, tassels turned on mortar boards, the graduate recessional into the tunnel of faculty, and loud applause. The pomp and circumstance finally returned when the MGH Institute held its 2022 Commencement in person for the first time in three years.

The school’s 42nd commencement ceremony, held at the Boston Convention and Exposition Center before 3,000 family, friends, faculty, and staff, was a welcome return after the pandemic forced the 2020 and 2021 events to be held virtually. Although masks were mandated for entry, that didn’t dampen the spirits of those who were there.

“I couldn’t be more pleased to be here with you today to celebrate this momentous occasion,” President Paula Milone-Nuzzo told the audience. “I know I speak for the faculty, the staff, and the Trustees when I say it is so wonderful to be with you today, in person, to celebrate the amazing Class of 2022.”

“Our program was demanding, as will be our careers, but today is a celebration of new beginnings.”

– LYDIA DEPINA, BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING GRADUATE

The 612 graduates, who made up the largest class in the school’s 45-year history, included the first degrees granted in the PhD in Health Professions Education and post-professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy programs.

Dr. David Brown, the new president of Massachusetts General Hospital, spoke of how the Institute continues to be a vital part of the hospital. “As IHP graduates, you are a critical part of our collective future and a proud part of the MGH legacy,” he said, a reference to the Institute being launched at the same time the hospital was closing its century-old diploma nursing school in the early 1980s.

Ashley Victor, who earned a Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology, spoke about the intersectionality of rest and health during her keynote address. “When we show up in the world well rested, we show up fully and authentically as our best selves,” said Victor, a first-generation college student whose parents are from Haiti. “We allow others to see that we are more than just what we can accomplish, and that gives them the courage to believe that of themselves. You are worthy because you are you, not because of what you have done.”

For many students, being able to celebrate in person after contending with the pandemic was gratifying.

“Starting before the pandemic and then shifting to remote learning was challenging but made us appreciate human connection so much more,” said Kevin Berney, who earned a Master of Science in Nursing. “We couldn’t be happier to be around each other and share this celebration today.”

Added graduate Greg Laudani, who started the Doctor of Occupational Therapy program in September 2019, “We’ve had to overcome considerable adversity, which is just a testament to the dedication and capabilities we will offer the world in the years to come.”

Bachelor of Science in Nursing graduate Lydia Depina said, “Completing our degrees in a pandemic prepared us even more for a hospital setting, teaching us to power through challenges. That’s why
Although the coronavirus pandemic prevented students who graduated in 2020 and 2021 from experiencing commencement in person, an event held the week after this year’s ceremony provided some of them the opportunity to gather for the first time since they completed their degrees.

“It’s been great to reconnect after being away for a year,” said Molly Donovan, a 2021 Doctor of Physical Therapy program graduate, who along with dozens of other new alumni gathered on campus. “I’m glad the IHP put this together.”

Donovan, who works at NYU Langone Health in New York City, was chatting with classmates Megan Moisand and Tori Misitano, both of whom work at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital. “It’s nice to see some of our faculty also,” said Misitano, as the trio shared some laughs.

Nearby, four graduates from the 2020 Master of Science in Speech-Language pathology graduates Hope Kentala, Stephanie Gaglioti, Sarah Blushi, and Alexandra Lovric—were catching up with Dr. Marjorie Nicholas, Chair of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders.

Director of Alumni Relations Katie Mulcahy provided puzzles featuring the Shouse Building as a way for attendees to remember their connection to the IHP as they continue on their career path. “It is my hope that this event shows you how important you are to the IHP community and that you—our alums—truly complete the IHP puzzle,” she said. “For without you, we will always have a missing piece.”

**Honorary Degrees, Alumni Awards Are Presented**

Dr. Peter Slavin, President of Massachusetts General Hospital from 2003-2021, received an honorary Doctor of Science for his work as a renowned physician, scientist, educator, health care leader, and philanthropist, and for his consistent belief and commitment to the mission of the MGH Institute and its role as a leading force in both higher education and health care.

Dr. Alex F. Johnson, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs from 2008-2022, was named Provost Emeritus for his successful work in changing the Institute into a nationally recognized health professions college.

Dr. Mary Evenson, who was Director of Clinical Education in the Department of Occupational Therapy, was named Professor Emerita.

Naseem Challawala, DPT ’07, MSPT ’04, received the Bette Ann Harris Distinguished Alumni Award, the highest honor given to an alumnus. Dr. Challawala, owner of Rehab Health 360, which provides physical therapy for clients with neurological disorders, has been instrumental in developing the Vestibular Task Force at Spaulding Rehabilitation Network and the neurological and concussion programs at the Clough Family Center for Rehabilitative and Sports Therapies at Emerson Hospital.

Harrison Keyes, MPAS ’18, received the Emerging Leader Award, given to an alumnus within the first 10 years of their graduation. He has held several positions at Boston Healthcare for the Homeless, most recently as interim medical director at the nonprofit’s Jean Yawkey Place homeless shelter.

**A Celebration—Just a Little Later Than Expected**

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It was the early 1970s when Julie Atwood first learned Massachusetts General Hospital wanted to launch what was being called at the time MGH University. As the director of the hospital’s speech-language pathology department, whose staff regularly mentored students, she immediately was drawn to the idea of developing an educational program that would increase the number of practitioners treating patients with communication and learning disorders.

More than 50 years after hospital leaders tapped her to lead the creation of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at what became the MGH Institute, her passion, drive, and determination will be forever linked at the newly named Julie Atwood Speech, Language, and Literacy Center.

“As the founding leader of the CSD program at the IHP, I feel enormous pride and gratitude to have my name associated with this center,” Atwood told an audience of family, friends, colleagues, and faculty during a June ceremony at which the center was named in her honor. “What a privilege it has been to have had the opportunity to build from scratch a highly successful speech-language pathology program. This crowning achievement was an endeavor of teamwork, leadership, and love.”

President Paula Milone-Nuzzo noted how Atwood’s contributions to the Institute went well beyond speech-language pathology. “She was a visionary in those conversations about what the goals of the Institute were and how the Institute should be organized,” the president said. “So many of us are here today because you were there to conceptualize the Institute.”

This is not the first time Atwood’s contributions have been recognized by the Institute. In 1997, Dr. Robert Hillman, a renowned speech-language pathologist who was director of the Institute’s program at the time, led the establishment of the Julie Atwood Award for Excellence in Speech-Language Pathology, which is given each year to a graduating student who demonstrates both academic and clinical excellence.

Hillman also said Atwood was at the vanguard of broadening the definition of speech-language pathologists. He described how, during her 33-year career at the hospital, Atwood added cutting-edge programs such as swallowing disorders and transgender voice therapy, developed SLP outpatient programs at three of its community health centers, and focused on increasing diversity among staff as a major goal to better meet patient needs.

For her efforts, Atwood has been named a Fellow of the American Speech-Language Association and a recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the Massachusetts Speech-Language Hearing Association, among other accolades.

Ellen Zane, a long-time friend who is an Honorary Trustee of the Institute, noted that Atwood has volunteered with the Big Sister Association of Boston and MSPCA, and for years read the Sunday Cape Cod Times to the visually challenged for an hour each week on a radio broadcast. “Julie’s involvement and service to her community is absolutely inspiring,” Zane said.

While Atwood was named Professor Emerita upon retiring from the Institute faculty in 2012, she never really has left. She has continued to meet and mentor students, regularly attends big events at the school, and supports a student scholarship fund she founded years ago. As she said after the event concluded, while the close to 100 people in attendance waited to give her hugs and pose for pictures, “Being part of the IHP all these years has been a love affair for me.”
Solidifying the Pipeline to Mass General Brigham

BY JOHN SHAW

With more than 1,400 graduates working at hospitals within Mass General Brigham, the MGH Institute has always played a major role in staffing the system’s hospitals with well-prepared healthcare practitioners.

The connection became stronger when nearly two dozen teams of administrators, clinical directors, and hiring managers attended the IHP’s recent career fair, set up exclusively for the system.

“Any time I have seen a resume from a MGH Institute student, I would always consider the individual for a position given how strong the nursing programs are and because of the positive experience with clinical groups on my unit,” said Suzanne Algeri, the Associate Chief Nurse for Surgical, Orthopedics, and Neurosciences at Massachusetts General Hospital and a former nursing director. “The IHP has been a great pipeline to hire new nurses over the years.”

Organized by Russ Abbatiello, the MGH Institute’s Director for Career and Professional Development in the Office of Student Affairs and Services, the event featured presentations by Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Massachusetts Eye & Ear, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Spaulding Rehabilitation Network.

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“We’ve always had a strong relationship with the IHP,” added Rob Welch, Vice President for Outpatient Services at Spaulding, noting the large number of alumni working at the hospital. “That’s why we’re here, because we’re looking to hire more IHP graduates.”

MGB conducted more than 190 interviews with students in the Class of 2022 for positions in nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant studies, and speech-language pathology.

“It was very helpful to hear about the different hospitals and what they offer,” said OTD student Allison Tokar. Noted Allie Masullo, a PAS student, “It’s a great opportunity to make connections that hopefully will lead to a job.” Added BSN student Chris Raymond, “It was good to hear about different options. It’ll help me narrow down where I’d like to work.”

If history is any indication, they and dozens of other students in the Class of 2022 will soon be part of a workforce development pipeline and working at a Mass General Brigham hospital.

New Focus Increases IHP’s Visibility

BY JOHN SHAW

The first thing Sean Hennessey wanted to do when he became the Chief Communications Officer in February was raise the visibility and profile of the MGH Institute.

In six months, Hennessey is well on his way to accomplishing that goal.

“It’s about finding the stories and thought leadership here, and then utilizing the right channels to amplify the content,” said Hennessey, a former television reporter in Boston and New York City who has also worked at Boston College and area public relations agencies. “There is some incredible research going on, not to mention compelling student and faculty stories.”

The newly reconfigured Office of Strategic Communications, which includes veteran staffer John Shaw and new hires Carolyn Barrett and Kate Chaney, has already notched more than 30 media hits in outlets like CNN, The National Observer, the Boston Globe, Boston Herald, WBZ Radio, CBS Boston, and NBC Boston.

The increased visibility has extended to the Mass General Brigham system and its hospitals. In addition to running the school’s media placements, MGB communications emails have featured new academic programs and courses that can provide career advancement opportunities for the system’s 82,000 employees.

“We’ve taken a different approach to raising the IHP’s visibility, and it’s working,” said Hennessey.

Sean Hennessey has an extensive background in broadcast media and public relations.
New Initiatives Strive to Improve Well-Being on Institute Campus

BY KATE CHANEY

Improving the health and well-being of everyone on the MGH Institute campus continues to be addressed, thanks to the creation of two new initiatives launched this year.

Food insecurity on college campuses has long been an under-the-radar issue. And when the coronavirus pandemic began in March 2020, its ripple effect was felt on campus, as the part-time jobs students often rely upon were scaled back or vanished completely.

“It became a real problem for a lot of students,” said Mike Boutin, Assistant Dean for Faculty and Student Success in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. “It was something we knew needed to be addressed.”

Boutin, along with Jessica Bell, Director of Library and Instructional Design, and Luella Benn, Director of Accessibility Resources and Wellness in the Office of Student Affairs and Services, had heard how some students had to skip meals because they couldn’t afford food, something most students were reluctant to discuss.

“It’s not easy to admit that you need help,” said Bell. “There’s still a stigma attached to it for a lot of people, but we knew it was something that wasn’t going away.”

After meetings with stakeholders including students, faculty, and staff plus student clubs, the Wellness Council, and the Office of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, the IHP Community Pantry was launched in response. Located behind the Building 39 lounge, the self-service pantry, staffed by volunteers, is stocked with jars of peanut butter, boxes of pasta, cans of tuna and soup, bags of beans, and personal care products such as deodorant and shampoo.

Mental Health Training

The Institute also created mental health first aid (MHFA) training to teach participants to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health challenges, including substance use disorders.

“We wanted people to feel comfortable talking about mental health challenges and those that escalate into crises,” said Dr. Jack Gormley, Dean of Student Services and Chair of the IHP’s Wellness Council. “If they’re trained to know the difference between an early symptom or challenge versus an emergency, and they’re equipped with a protocol to support their response, they can help those in need.”

Like CPR, MHFA offers community-based protocols for laypeople who are not healthcare providers so they know what to do in case of an emergency until professional care can be obtained.

“First aid for our mental health is just as important as it is for our physical health,” said Jessica Upton, Manager of Programming and Advising in the Office of Student Affairs and Services, noting that 123 people on average die by suicide in the United States every day and nearly 1 in 5 adults live with mental illness.

The course has been held more than a dozen times this year, with 115 students and 35 faculty and staff becoming certified. Upton, Gormley, Boutin, Benn, and Eliza Cutler, Academic Support Counselor in the School of Nursing, are instructors. Emily “M” Meyer, Accessibility and Wellness Coordinator in the OSAS, is a certified coordinator for the course. Participants say the course has empowered them.

“I felt a tremendous amount of internal resistance about approaching others regarding mental health prior to the course,” said Clarence Lee, DPT ’24. “While I still appreciate the difficulty of those conversations and the need to recognize the unique needs, preferences, and circumstances of each individual, I feel that I have more tools at hand to better assist others.”
BY JOHN SHAW

The Doctor of Nursing Practice is the top-ranked nursing program in Boston, while the Master of Science in Nursing is ranked third in Massachusetts, according to the most recent rankings by U.S. News & World Report.

The DNP moved up two positions nationally to 67th, while the MSN program jumped eight positions nationally and is now tied for 61st.

“Our jump of eight spots nationally in the master’s programs in nursing, coupled with the number one ranking in Boston for the DNP program, underscores the momentum for excellence here at the MGH Institute,” said School of Nursing Dean Dr. Kenneth White. “The U.S. News recognition affirms our programs are among the best in the country—made possible by the accomplishments of our exceptional faculty, students, and alumni as well as our academic and practice partnerships with Mass General Brigham and other clinical teaching sites in New England. Our nursing programs continue to raise the bar on a 150-year tradition of preparing the next generation of nursing leaders, and the U.S. News rankings reflect that.”

When the nation’s private institutions are measured, the programs are in the top 25: the DNP is 19th and the MSN is 25th. From a regional perspective among private schools, the DNP is No. 1 in New England and the MSN ranks No. 2 in Massachusetts and No. 3 in New England.

Last September, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program was ranked 58th nationwide, making it the third-highest in New England in U.S. News’ first year of ranking BSN degrees.

The Doctor of Nursing Practice is 19th and the MSN is 25th among private colleges in the nation.

Nursing Programs Move Up in U.S. News & World Report Rankings

BY JOHN SHAW

If you’re looking for an example of a physical therapy graduate who has fulfilled the goals of educating tomorrow’s healthcare leaders, look no further than Dr. Laura Plummer.

The double-IHP degree recipient (Master’s in 2002, Doctorate in 2003) recently was named Chair of the Department of Physical Therapy after serving as interim chair for the past year.

“I’ve worked with a majority of the faculty for several years, so I have an understanding of the department’s culture, the history of the IHP, and what makes it special,” said Plummer, who has been involved at the IHP for all but one of the past 24 years.

“I can continue to honor that culture and history while still helping the department grow.”

“She is well positioned to guide an already outstanding department to even greater excellence.”

– DR. PETER CAHN, ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Plummer, who was director of the Sanders IMPACT Practice Center in 2019–2021, has received the Nancy T. Watts Award for Excellence in Teaching (the IHP’s highest faculty honor), was named a Teaching Excellence Academy for Learning Fellow, and received an Advancing Interprofessional Education and Practice award. She also was accepted to the American Physical Therapy Association’s Education Leadership Fellowship.

Plummer Is Clear Choice for Physical Therapy Chair

BY JOHN SHAW

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“I can continue to honor that culture and history while still helping the department grow.”

“Dr. Plummer has steered the department successfully through a curricular review, created professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, prepared for an accreditation visit, and offered stability during unexpected crises,” noted Associate Provost for Academic Affairs Dr. Peter Cahn. “She is well-positioned to guide an already outstanding department to even greater excellence.”

Among Plummer’s immediate goals: continue to strengthen the department’s collaboration between its clinical partners within the Mass General Brigham system and beyond to connect the clinic and academia; create an inclusive environment while preparing students to treat a diverse society; and grow faculty scholarship to transform patient care and physical therapy education.

Dr. Laura Plummer has spent most of her professional career at the IHP.
A Decade of Growth for Health Professions Education Department

BY JOHN SHAW

It’s been a decade of dramatic growth for the Health Professions Education program at the MGH Institute. Begun in 2011 with one full-time faculty and about a dozen students enrolled in one degree offering, it now has 20 full- and part-time faculty and approximately 100 students enrolled in certificate, master’s, and PhD programs, the latter of which was launched in 2019. As a result, the former HPE program was reclassified this spring as a department.

Dr. Roger Edwards, whose title was subsequently changed from director to Chair, said the expansion has really taken off since the start of the pandemic in 2020. “Healthcare professionals became a focal point in our society in a way they never have been before because of the pandemic,” he said. “So much of education had to be moved to online platforms, and many people discovered that they needed to adapt to new learning models that support teaching remotely.”

The department’s expansion recently became more international when it signed a partnership with a university in Saudi Arabia, which is expected to expand health professions education in the Middle East.

The partnership will offer the IHP’s Master of Health Professions Education at Alfaisal University, located in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh. While current students in the HPEd master’s and doctoral programs take classes exclusively online, 70% of the classes for Alfaisal students will be held on its Riyadh campus to meet the region’s preference of providing in-person education.

“Our partnership fits the needs of the region,” said Dr. Janice Palaganas, who is leading the initiative. “Although this in-person requirement is not unique to Middle Eastern countries, we are happy that we can meet the needs of those who work in these cultures.”

According to Dr. Khaled Al-Kattan, dean of Alfaisal University’s College of Medicine, the partnership will go a long way toward advancing the university’s goals of being the region’s leader in the field. “The agreement with the MGH Institute enables better access for improving health professions education faculty in the Middle East,” he said. “It is aligned with Alfaisal’s mission of leadership to advance the skills of educators in the region.”

The Alfaisal students, who will be integrated into the part-time, two-year master’s program, will choose between two tracks: Simulation-Based Education to improve their teaching; or Simulation Operations, for administrators, directors, and technical specialists looking to acquire skills in simulation program administration, leadership, and management.

“Alfaisal University wanted to import the best of our teaching modalities and scholarship into the Middle East,” said Edwards. “Improved training of health professions education faculty will have domino effects on the educational outcomes of students across the health professions.”

Edwards, who grew up in Los Angeles and whose grandparents were born in Lebanon, Syria, and Mexico, noted that he and Palaganas are people of color—a factor he said has contributed to the department’s ongoing success. “Our rich backgrounds and passion, combined with the excellent HPEd team, have facilitated our ingenuity in growing the IHP’s health profession offerings into its newest academic department,” he said.

The program already has an agreement with faculty at St. George’s University Medical School in Grenada, who have enrolled in its Teaching and Learning Certificate program over the past two years. By 2024, eight cohorts are expected to have completed the course.
Ukraine War Hits Home for MSN Graduate

BY SEAN HENNESSEY

The final year of the Master of Science in Nursing program at the MGH Institute is always filled with anxiety over finishing clinicals, taking exams, and finding a job after graduation. But for Olesya Simonova, the stressors of the spring semester were taken to another level in late February when Russia invaded her native Ukraine, with her 12-year-old daughter, Eva, trapped in the war-torn country.

Simonova’s daughter was living in Crimea with her grandparents, who are Russian and Ukrainian. Crimea has been part of Ukraine since 1954 and was illegally annexed by Russia in 2014. Now Russian territory, it’s where Russia stores military equipment and has launched many of its military offensives in this war.

“Russian troops are moving into Ukraine from Crimea. This is the main area where the attacks are coming from. I didn’t know what was going to happen and how it was going to evolve,” said Simonova, who was wracked with guilt after having sent her daughter back to Crimea in early February after the holiday break. “I knew I needed to get her out of there no matter what.”

Despite rumblings of an imminent Russian invasion, she said few in her native land had taken the rumors seriously. “I was in denial that something was going to happen, and how it was going to evolve,” said Simonova, who was wracked with guilt after having sent her daughter back to Crimea in early February after the holiday break. “I knew I needed to get her out of there no matter what.”

To remove their daughter from Crimea, where Simonova’s parents were receiving only Russian-approved news, her ex-husband embarked on a daring—but ultimately successful—10-day rescue that involved a combination of planes, trains, buses, hitchhiking, and taxis.

Simonova regularly keeps in touch with her Ukrainian friends via social media. Some of her girlfriends have become refugees in other countries, with their husbands choosing to stay and fight. “They say ‘This is our land. We’re protecting our land. We’re going to fight until the very last drop of blood,’” she said.

Now reunited with her daughter in Newton, where Simonova lives with her younger son, she can’t help but divide her attention between her budding new career and her home country as the war rages on. “I just want everyone to be safe, I want there to be peace,” she said. “That’s all I’m thinking right now.”
Lessons, Solutions from Infant Formula Crisis

BY CAROLYN BARRETT

When grocery stores began running out of baby formula in April, there was an assumption that mothers could turn to breastfeeding their children—an incorrect assumption Associate Professor of Nursing Rebecca Hill says must be changed.

“Breastfeeding,” said the infant feeding specialist, “was simply not a quick fix for a crisis like this.”

According to Dr. Hill, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that while more than 87% of mothers report having the desire to breastfeed and 84% initiated breastfeeding immediately following birth, less than 26% of those parents can sustain exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of their infant’s life.

A 2019 study Hill conducted found low milk supply, sustained pain during feeding, lack of lactation support, medications, health conditions of the mother, and a lack of paid family leave are some of the many reasons parents rely on formula to supplement or replace breast milk. “Even for parents with full-term infants without any medical complexity, it is very common to have feeding concerns,” she said.

Because of this, normalizing milk sharing and improving affordability and insurance coverage for donor milk is crucial, she said.

“We absolutely need to increase the number of certified lactation consultants throughout the country and invest in the development of pharmacological treatments to increase milk supply,” Hill said. “We also need to push for federally funded paid parental leave so that parents have the time needed to develop a sustained breastfeeding relationship with their infant.”

Three Honored as Nursing “Living Legends”

BY SEAN HENNESSEY

Ask Elaine Tagliareni about her life decisions, and she will tell you the best one she ever made was to become a nurse. Few would argue with that, especially the American Nurses Association of Massachusetts, which honored her with its 2022 Living Legend Award.

“To have the leadership opportunities that I’ve experienced within the profession, to be aligned with the ANA on a national level, and to help create standards within the profession to improve integrity and quality, this honor is the culmination of that work,” she said. “It’s also a wonderful tribute to the Institute because it is committed to focusing on leadership, improving health care, and building a diverse health care workforce.”

Dr. Tagliareni, who also is a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing, was Dean of the School of Nursing at the MGH Institute of Health Professions from August 2019 until August 2021, when Dr. Kenneth White assumed the role.

Two other nurses with Institute ties were honored as Living Legends at the spring conference: 2021 awardee R. Gino Chisari, DNP ’11, Director of the Norman Knight Nursing Center for Clinical & Professional Development at Massachusetts General Hospital, and 2020 awardee Sheila Davis, DNP ’08, CEO of Partners in Health.
Colleges Must Prepare for Monkeypox Outbreaks

BY CAROLYN BARRETT

With millions of college students soon returning to campus, epidemiology and infectious disease expert Dr. Rachel Cox says colleges must be prepared for monkeypox to become a problem.

“College students often engage in higher-risk sexual activity and are in close contact with people in classes, their dorms, and other places on and off campus,” said Cox, an Assistant Professor of Nursing at the MGH Institute and a board-certified family nurse practitioner. “Colleges need to make sure they’re prepared to allocate resources like tests, vaccines, and antivirals to places that may become hotspots.”

Most confirmed cases of monkeypox have occurred within the men who have sex with men (MSM) community, but Cox cautions that it is possible to see outbreaks in other populations. “I don’t think people need to panic,” she said, “but if you are engaging in high-risk sexual activity, you need to have a high level of awareness and caution.”

“If you are engaging in high-risk sexual activity, you need to have a high level of awareness and caution,” said Dr. Rachel Cox.

COVID-19, although Cox expects more cases may be seen in the general population in the future.

Cox says the focus must be on several crucial areas. This includes contact tracing in high-risk groups, ensuring healthcare facilities are adequately prepared with screening protocols, tests, treatments, and vaccines, and focusing on equity.

“It is crucial that we avoid creating stigma by recognizing that a person’s sexual orientation does not cause monkeypox,” she said. “We need to focus on vulnerable groups like those who are immunocompromised, people of color, the MSM community, and people with low socioeconomic status who may not have the resources to access testing and treatment and ensure they are at the forefront of our response.”

Recognizing a Reluctant Hero

BY SEAN HENNESSEY

It wasn’t long after the pandemic began in 2020 that it became clear Boston-area hospitals couldn’t handle the daily overload of COVID-19 patients. That’s when Jeanette Ives Erickson received a call from Massachusetts General Hospital’s then-president, Dr. Peter Slavin.

With the country’s largest public health crisis in a century looming, he asked her to become co-medical and operations director of a new 1,000-bed Boston Hope field hospital to treat overflow patients that area hospitals could not accommodate.

“I knew immediately I needed to get into the fight. I think we all felt as if we needed to do something,” said Dr. Ives Erickson, who is Chair of the MGH Institute’s Board of Trustees and Chief Nurse Emerita at MGH. “I said, ‘I’m in. What do I do now?’”

For successfully operating the field hospital, as well as for leading the COVID-19 vaccination site, Ives Erickson was recognized as a Nursing Hero by the Massachusetts chapter of the American Red Cross.

“I simply answered the call because that’s what we nurses do,” said Dr. Jeanette Ives Erickson.

With the World Health Organization and the United States having declared the monkeypox outbreak a global health emergency, health officials continue to assure the public the disease won’t rise to the level of concern that exists with
IHP Hosts Conferences with Expert Panelists

BY KATE CHANEY

The MGH Institute continues to extend its extensive knowledge and expertise, as evidenced this year during three conferences that focused on a wide range of topics.

“Climate Change & Health 2022: A Roadmap for Grassroots Advocacy” in April had 200 attendees from 22 states and six countries and an all-star lineup of panelists who presented glimmers of hope that the negative effects of climate change can still be reversed in time to head off disaster.

The virtual event was co-hosted by the school’s Center for Climate Change, Climate Justice, and Health and the Massachusetts General Hospital’s Center for the Environment and Health. Renowned activist and author Bill McKibben gave the keynote talk. Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, U.S. Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), and Congresswoman Lauren Underwood (D-IL) also addressed the audience via pre-recorded videos.

McKibben, who detailed a long list of reasons why the world is faced with this crisis, was encouraged by actions such as the surge in producing renewable energy sources and Harvard University’s recent decision to divest its endowment from fossil fuels. “We cannot stop global warming one Tesla at a time, or by eating vegan food four times a week,” he said. “We need dramatic shifts in how we power our society.”

Dr. Patrice Nicholas, Director of the Institute’s climate center and the event’s emcee, said that because nurses have been ranked as the most trusted profession in the country for 19 out of the last 20 years, they can play a major role in the battle to reverse climate change.

Nearly 400 clinicians and researchers from across the country attended the virtual conference “Implementation Science IS for All: A CSD Practice-Research Exchange” in April.

It was co-organized and co-hosted by Dr. Tiffany P. Hogan, Director of the Speech and Literacy Lab (SAiL), and Dr. Sofia Vallila Rohrer, Co-Director of the Cognitive Neuroscience Group. “Conferences that focus on implementation science aren’t new,” said Hogan, whose presentation focused on school-based research projects and how implementation science helps strengthen both research and outcomes. “But a conference focused solely on implementation science for CSD? Well, that is new.”

Vallila Rohrer, who co-presented with Laura Kasparian from Brigham & Women’s Hospital, said there are inherent benefits in “naming the work that you are doing,” and that implementation science provides a vocabulary and structure to do just that.

MGH Institute presenters also included Dr. Megan Schliep and Dr. Rouzana Komesidou. Other presentations were made by SLPs from the University of Florida, Florida State University, Central Michigan University, and University of Kansas.

“The Genetic Counseling Community: Restoring and Rebuilding Relationships” in June brought together practicing genetic counselors, current and prospective students, and geneticists from around the country to hear guidance on restorative justice, relationship building, supervisory techniques, and breaking down biases.

“Restorative justice heals and restores human relationships,” said Ann Seman, an Assistant Professor of Genetic Counseling and the Director of Clinical Education. “We are a profession, a community in need of healing.”

Jammy Torres-Millet, Associate Director, Social Justice Education & Student Engagement in the MGH Institute’s Office of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, discussed how restorative justice heals people by providing community connection, a sense of belonging, radical self-love, and healthier relationships.

Other presentations were from experts at Mass General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, and Mass Eye and Ear.
A Lasting Legacy

Retiring Provost Dr. Alex F. Johnson looks back at his accomplishments at the IHP

BY ALYSSA HAYWOODE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER
When a search firm in 2007 asked Dr. Alex F. Johnson if he wanted to apply for the newly created position of provost at the MGH Institute of Health Professions, he had a quick answer. “I think you might have the wrong person,” he recalls saying, noting that he was happily established as chair of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Wayne State University in Detroit. “I thought of myself as someone who was very close to students, someone who focuses on content, teaching, clinical work, and research. I had never thought of myself as an academic executive.”

However, the opportunity to join the Institute, which he was familiar with due to its well-regarded speech-language pathology program, sounded intriguing. So instead of heading to vacation in Florida with his wife, Linda, Johnson hopped on a plane to Boston.

“Alex had a national reputation and was well respected,” then-President Janis P. Bellack says, referring to Johnson’s stint as president of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and the ASHA Foundation. “He had connections. He had the ability to look down the road at the healthcare landscape, the academic health professions landscape, and the higher education landscape and really see the big picture.”

Johnson also had a history of launching programs, something that appealed to Bellack as she and the Board of Trustees were in the beginning stages of expanding the school beyond the 800 or so students at which enrollment had plateaued for some time. “It was clear that in order to move the Institute ahead—and Jan and the Board were very clear about this—we had to grow,” he recalls.

Fourteen years later, as Johnson begins his retirement after being the IHP’s first Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, he can look back with pride on the Institute’s expansive, visionary growth under his watch. The faculty and student body doubled in size. Research programs bloomed. And the IHP has deepened its commitment to providing an interprofessional education that prepares students to provide optimal care to their patients and clients.

It turned out that Johnson was exactly the right person for the job.

**Getting Right to Work**

Johnson arrived in Boston in Spring 2008, he and Linda moving into a condo just down the street from the school’s lone building in the Charlestown Navy Yard.

Although Johnson was used to working in large institutions, the IHP’s small size meant that he could be nimble in his thinking. One of his early actions was to create a School of Nursing and reorganize the physical therapy, medical imaging, clinical research, and speech-language pathology programs into a new School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. Programs became departments, their directors became chairs, and deans for the two new schools were hired, giving the schools a traditional academic feel and structure.

Johnson also recognized that the Institute needed to have a robust research portfolio. When he arrived, the majority of faculty saw themselves as clinicians who were teaching the next generation of healthcare leaders. He quickly moved to adjust that, encouraging long-time faculty to pursue their research interests and publish more regularly, while hiring newer academics who were expected to do the same.

He worked with Trustee Dr. John Guttag and faculty members Dr. Robert Hillman and Dr. Alan Jette to raise the Institute’s research profile and reputation. He hired the school’s first full-time research faculty and launched an accompanying PhD in Rehabilitation Sciences degree from where budding researchers could launch their careers. In a little more than a decade, funded research grew from $400,000 to more than $36 million today.

But, as Johnson explains, grants are not the only measure of growth. “Having a vibrant research community can expose students to important content across health care, like neuroscience and genetics, health policy and public health,” he says. “It organically exposes students to interesting topics that they might not otherwise hear about because research can be ahead of what’s being taught in classrooms. It created an explosion of research activity that made the Institute more attractive to faculty and created role models for our students who might want to become researchers.”
During his tenure, direct-entry programs in occupational therapy, physician assistant studies, and genetic counseling were added, as were post-professional master’s and doctoral degrees in health professions education, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology. But he also had to make some difficult calls—closing, for example, the medical imaging program due to unanticipated shifting market conditions.

“These decisions are always hard and come after much discussion and deliberation from all perspectives,” Johnson says. “It is never just a financial or an academic decision. Bringing together stakeholders, looking at the data, understanding the needs of students and the community, and aligning decisions with IHP values is the framework most helpful for me in tough situations.”

Dr. Jack Gormley, Dean of Student Services, has seen firsthand Johnson’s proactive approach to improving the welfare of students.

Even before the pandemic, Gormley had been hearing from students that the pressures of being in intensive programs was weighing heavily on them. They could access the Employee Assistance Program offered by Massachusetts General, but there was nothing specifically tailored for student needs, nor was anything available on the IHP campus. That, says Gormley, was not acceptable to Johnson. “He really was concerned about them having everything they needed to succeed, and he saw the value of this service,” Gormley says. Today, two counselors are on campus twice a week to provide students with easy access to free sessions.

Gormley also notes that Johnson singlehandedly got students access to the nearby Harborview Health fitness center—“For a fraction of what it would cost the Institute to create its own,” Gormley says—and championed the creation of the Bellack Library & Study Commons to give students access to an on-campus facility, which the school had lacked since moving into the Navy Yard in 2002.

“No matter what project or topic came up, Alex always made sure to ask, ‘How is this going to affect students?’,” Gormley says. “I’ve always found him to be open-minded, inclusive, and concerned about students’ mental health and wellness and would make sure improving their experience was at the forefront of everything the Institute does.”

Johnson was also keenly aware of the growing amount of additional time faculty of color were dedicating to assist students of color in navigating stress not only in their academic...
experience but outside of school as well. Working with Chief Equity Officer Kimberly Truong, who leads the school’s Office of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, a new policy was implemented in 2021 to enable faculty of color to reduce their teaching load accordingly.

“The invisible labor faculty of color were doing was not invisible to any of us who work in health professions education,” Johnson says. “Kim came up with a great solution to acknowledge the work our faculty had been doing for years without formal recognition.”

Johnson’s impact also stretched into the Charlestown community, specifically to Harvard-Kent Elementary School, where his wife volunteered as a fundraiser and a mentor. For years, the IHP had been sending SLP students there to get clinical experiences, but he recognized that partnership could be greatly expanded.

“As I learned more about the school and its successes, I began to wonder if it might not be a great place for all of our students to learn about the health needs of school-age children in a diverse urban setting,” he recalls.

The affiliation began to grow more than a decade ago, when teams of incoming students would spend a morning volunteering at the school during the annual Community IMPACT Day each September. Soon, other programs began sending students to provide activities such as teaching science lessons, holding exercise classes, and completing health screenings. In 2018, the two schools signed a formal agreement that cemented an affiliation in which hundreds of IHP students from a wide range of academic programs regularly receive valuable learning experiences each year while improving children’s education and well-being. “It’s been an amazing relationship that keeps getting better all the time,” Johnson says.

Developing a Plan for the Future

It was 2019, and the Institute had hit another plateau. It had become clear the school needed to continue growing, but the difficulty of adding more direct-entry students who would need clinical placements had stalled enrollment. So Milone-Nuzzo turned to Johnson once again for a solution.

Drawing together faculty and staff from across the school, Johnson developed an innovative initiative aimed at adding a suite of online, post-professional programs for working healthcare professionals that did not require clinical placements. Called ENRiCH, its goal is to increase enrollment capacity in current programs, identify potential new areas for expansion, enhance the Office of Continuing and Professional Development, redesign the clinical experience, and support innovation.

The result: the creation of a new School of Healthcare Leadership, which launched this spring. With master’s degrees in leadership, nursing administration, and data analytics, combined with a new tuition incentive program that could provide students with as much as a 40% discount, ENRiCH is expected to increase the number of students from 1,600 to 2,000.

“All who are part of or care about the IHP owe you a debt of gratitude for all you have done in your role as chief academic officer.”

– FORMER PRESIDENT DR. JANIS P. BELLACK
more than 2,400 while giving the school a more solid financial footing.

In the middle of this development came another barrier: the COVID-19 pandemic that threatened to shut down the school. Undaunted, Johnson kept the initiative moving forward while working to ensure current students had the support necessary to continue their studies.

“I have a saying about Alex,” says Dr. Jordan Green, the IHP’s Chief Scientific Advisor and one of the first three researchers hired by the school more than a decade ago. “‘When the going gets tough, Alex gets very decisive.’ The whole ENRiCH initiative is an example of this. Where other schools were contracting in a time of crisis, we were actually expanding.”

To steer the IHP through the pandemic, Johnson formed response groups that included CART, the Covid Academic Response Team; START, which focused on students; and CERT, the Continuing Enrollment Response Team. His use of acronyms was deliberate. Gormley, the dean of students, notes they are easy to remember, they pulled people together, and they added a touch of light-heartedness in the middle of a global disaster.

And it worked. All students scheduled to graduate in 2020 and 2021 completed their programs—no small feat when many schools were struggling to adapt to the pandemic’s restrictions.

Johnson is quick to point out this success was a team effort. “I think the thing that the IHP does very well—and I’m proud to be a part of that—is to face up to challenges when they hit us,” he says. “The level of work that our staff had to do, as well as our faculty and our students, to overcompensate for more than two years of disruption was extraordinary.”

During several on-campus events that were held in June for Johnson, a month after he was designated as the school’s first Provost Emeritus at 2022 Commencement, former president Dr. Bellack and Dr. Milone-Nuzzo gave touching tributes.

“Thinking back on the day I first met you, I could not have imagined how perfect my choice would prove to be in hiring you as the IHP’s first provost,” Bellack said. “All who are part of or care about the IHP owe you a debt of gratitude for all you have done in your role as chief academic officer.”

“I can’t imagine someone could have as much impact on the IHP as Alex has had over the years,” said Milone-Nuzzo. “That is the legacy he leaves for us to protect and grow successfully into the future.”

As for Johnson, he remains true to his unassuming personality. “If I could write my epitaph, I guess it would be as somebody who cared deeply about the uniqueness of the Institute, someone who worked with the entire community to build its academic integrity and helped it become a better understood and well-respected academic institution with a lot of great, interesting, and distinctive characteristics,” he says.

That’s a legacy well worth celebrating—and remembering.
Reamer L. Bushardt, PharmD, PA-C, DFAAPA, a tenured Professor and Senior Associate Dean in the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, began as the MGH Institute’s new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs on August 1.

“Reamer Bushardt is the right person at the right time for the MGH Institute of Health Professions,” said President Paula Milone-Nuzzo. “When you look at his experience at a large academic medical center, extensive research collaborations, clinical experiences as a pharmacist and PA, and research interests in workforce development and translational research, along with shared values for equity, inclusion, and creating a diverse community, it’s clear that Dr. Bushardt will make a sizable impact going forward.”

At George Washington, he oversaw departments and centers comprising more than 40 programs in healthcare and research fields. In addition to teaching and administration, he led several federal training grants and workforce development programs, including a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration-funded program focused on care for individuals with substance use disorders, a Health Resources and Services Administration-funded program to advance workforce diversity, and a National Research Service Award fellowship for post-doctoral trainees pursuing primary care research careers. He also co-led the NIH-funded clinical and translational science award operated jointly by GW and Children’s National Hospital.

“MGH Institute of Health Professions is distinctive in its interprofessional approach to training and its ability to shape caring leaders for health care and research careers,” Bushardt said. “In my 20-year career in primary care and higher education, I have often observed how collaborative problem-solving leads to better outcomes and encourages innovation—that’s true in the classroom, the clinic, the lab, and the community.

“The faculty, staff, and students within the MGH Institute are exemplars at embracing teamwork to improve the ways we learn, discover, translate knowledge, and improve care,” he continued. “I immediately felt the strong sense of caring and collaboration that exists throughout the MGH Institute. Building on the Institute’s existing strengths, my goals are to nurture an inclusive culture and help the faculty, staff, students, and community partners connect passion with purpose, so all feel supported and can realize opportunities to thrive in their education, research, service, and leadership pursuits.”

Throughout his career, Bushardt developed and led programs that strive to help individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds become health professionals and work within underserved communities. This work was inspired by his own experiences growing up and working in a rural, medically underserved community in South Carolina.

Before his tenure at GW, he served as a department chair at Wake Forest School of Medicine and associate vice president for workforce innovation at the Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center. Previously, he was associate professor and division chief for physician assistant studies at the Medical University of South Carolina. He currently serves on the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professional Education and is editor-in-chief emeritus for the Journal of the American Academy of PAs.

Bushardt earned his BS in Pharmaceutical Sciences and his PharmD from the University of South Carolina, as well as a BS in Physician Assistant Studies from the Medical University of South Carolina.
RECENT RESEARCH

BY SEAN HENNESSEY

DR. JOANNA CHRISTODOULOU

Grant Will Study Brain Basis of Dyslexia and ADHD

Many educators and parents might expect that students with dyslexia will have a more difficult time reading if they also have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and that the frequent co-existence of the two neurological disorders must be connected. But preliminary research findings co-led by an MGH Institute researcher show that reading may be burdened by executive function (EF) deficits, rather than by ADHD diagnosis.

To try to solve this puzzle, the National Institutes of Health has awarded a five-year R01 grant to a team led by Dr. Joanna Christodoulou, Director of the Institute’s Brain, Education & Mind (BEAM) Lab, that will take an in-depth look at whether a student with dyslexia is impacted when reading by ADHD, EF challenges, or both.

The $3,875,958 award is one of the three largest in IHP history and aims to be the nation’s largest and longest neurocognitive study of dyslexia to date.

The grant could uncover whether EF deficits, ADHD, or both may prevent some students with dyslexia from closing gaps in reading performance.

“It was a surprise to learn that ADHD and executive function are not synonymous,” said Christodoulou, who is the principal investigator for the grant, about the preliminary findings.

The preliminaries findings also showed the reading ability of students with dyslexia wasn’t affected if they also had ADHD but was affected by EF.

“So we are finding that EF matters more than an ADHD diagnosis for understanding what kind of reading struggles students are going to have,” said Christodoulou.

Christodoulou and collaborators including Dr. John Gabrieli, cognitive neuroscientist at MIT, published the preliminary findings in the journal Cortex. To complete this study, Drs. Ellen Braaten and Alysa Doyle, clinicians from the Learning & Emotional Assessment Program (LEAP) at Massachusetts General Hospital, will join the team.

The team’s longitudinal study will utilize annual brain scans of third- and fourth-grade students over three years to determine how reading, ADHD status, and executive function are intertwined over time. This study will enroll over 350 students including typically developing readers, students with dyslexia, and students with dyslexia and ADHD.

“Not everyone with executive function challenges has ADHD and not everybody with ADHD has executive function challenges.” – DR. JOANNA CHRISTODOULOU

DR. ANNIE FOX

Grant to Study Stigma and Mental Health in Young Adults

The stigma surrounding mental health is well documented. Despite progress around the acceptance of mental health challenges and those seeking treatment, stigma still prevents people from seeking treatment, or even acknowledging they may be experiencing a problem. But does stigma change over time? And if we know how stigma changes, can specific times be identified to encourage people to seek treatment?

Those are some of the questions Dr. Annie Fox wants to answer through a new National Institute of Mental Health research grant. Fox, an Associate Professor of Quantitative Methods in the School of Healthcare Leadership, is co-principal investigator on the five-year,
$2,608,875 grant; Valerie Earnshaw of the University of Delaware is the other co-principal investigator.

“There are a lot of goals with this study,” said Fox. “We’re trying to understand how stigma and mental health change over time, how it impacts treatment, and when the best points might be to intervene.

“This kind of research has not been done before.”

Fox and Earnshaw will be following 4,000 emerging adults (age 18-25) for three years and surveying them every three months to better understand the following: 1) how stigma changes over time; 2) how it impacts mental health symptoms; and 3) how it impacts their decision to seek (or not seek) treatment.

“The chosen age group has the highest rates of mental health problems and the lowest rates of seeking treatment.

Fox and Earnshaw will examine seven different types of stigma.

“This is going to be the first study that has looked at all of the different stigma mechanisms, over time, in this particular age group,” said Fox. “One of the big weaknesses in previous research is that researchers don’t always treat the different types of stigma as unique, instead measuring them all together without trying to disentangle their effects. But when you measure everything together, you can’t really tease them apart. By measuring each of these mechanisms separately, we’ll have a better sense of which types of stigma are most important, and this is key to developing effective interventions.”

DR. JORDAN GREEN

AI-Based App Promises to Help Diagnose ALS

Can a digital health app that analyzes speech patterns be used to help diagnose amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), track its progression, and determine whether the medicine used to treat the disease is even effective?

The National Institutes of Health is about to find out. It has awarded a $2.3 million grant to the MGH Institute and Modality.AI to determine if speech data collected from an app is as effective, or more effective, than the observations of speech made by clinical experts who provide services to persons with ALS. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) to assess speech could have a profound impact on improving ALS diagnosis, decreasing costs for patients and healthcare providers while eliminating the need for patients to travel for their speech assessments.

“This could be a game-changer for tracking speech decline due to ALS and understanding the impact of the medicines used to treat it,” said Dr. Jordan Green, the grant’s principal investigator and Director of the Speech and Feeding Disorders Lab. “If we’re successful, it’ll change the standard clinical care practice. With this app, we’ll be able to capture more data and in turn, help more people. It will be cheaper, faster—and we’ll get more accurate speech assessments.”

The app developed by Modality features a link that activates the camera and microphone; “Tina,” the AI virtual agent, begins giving instructions. The patient is asked to count numbers, repeat sentences, and read a paragraph, for example, while the computer extracts sensitive measures of speech and facial movements from the video signal using signal processing and machine vision technologies.

The potential implications of this groundbreaking app include:

• Reducing misdiagnosed and delayed diagnoses;
• Increasing accuracy and accessibility of speech assessments while reducing the cost of clinical care;
• Improving clinical trials of new experimental drugs.

“Dr. Annie Fox”
It can take up to 18 months to get diagnosed with ALS, and by the time diagnosis arrives, the patient usually has already lost motor neurons that are responsible for speech, swallowing, breathing, and walking. The benefits of drug therapies and other interventions will be maximized if they are administered upon initial diagnosis while motor neurons are still intact, Green said.

DR. JULIE KEYSOR

Expanding Telerehabilitation Care

If you’ve ever been to a physical therapy appointment, you’ve experienced someone moving around your leg, shoulder, knee, or foot to measure joint motion and task performance. That physical connection and ability to gather objective measurements is the tried-and-true method of clinical decision making and evidence-based practice.

What happens, however, when physical therapy is delivered through the internet with people in their homes? How can the therapist accurately measure and quantify clinical assessments necessary for decision making and monitoring progress? A researcher at the MGH Institute of Health Professions may soon have those answers.

A research grant has been awarded to Dr. Julie Keysor, a Professor of physical therapy, and Dr. Serge Roy and Bhawna Shiwani from Altec Inc., a research arm of Delsys Inc. and a global leader in sensor technologies. The grant, awarded by the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute on Aging, is a Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant, the first one that the MGH Institute has ever received.

Together, the two collaborative teams will develop a telehealth platform to let physical therapists use video conferencing to measure and quantify joint range of motion, muscle strength, alignment, posture, and how the trunk and upper
RECENT RESEARCH

leg works with the lower leg—tasks typically done in person.

“While there is a little research in using augmented reality for physical therapy treatment, I haven’t seen anyone provide the therapist assessment metrics quantifying movement in real time in the home setting,” said Keysor, the primary investigator on the SBIR subcontract.

The platform consists of augmented reality, high-resolution cameras, and custom-designed 3D body tracking algorithms—which can be used by a smartphone or tablet.

Once the app is activated, the patient is led through a step-by-step physical assessment while a clinician watches a real-time video overlay with quantitative measures that provides measurement of, for example, how far a patient can extend and flex their knee.

“What’s most exciting for me about this technology is the ability to link what can happen in the clinic to what is happening in the home for the patient,” said Keysor. “If we can build those bridges, we can really have that clinical care extend into people’s home and improve their daily lives.”

Along with Keysor, this research grant includes four other IHP physical therapy faculty: Assistant Professor Dr. Christopher Clock, Associate Professor Dr. Douglas Gross, Assistant Professor Dr. Rania Karim, and Assistant Professor Dr. Cathy Schmidt.

DR. ELISE TOWNSEND
DR. MICHAEL KIEFER

Game-Changer for Infants with Rare Neurogenetic Diseases

For decades, doctors, researchers, and therapists have been limited in disease-specific clinical tools to evaluate function in children with Tay-Sachs, a rare genetic disease caused by the death of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord.

But this limitation might be changing, thanks to upcoming research by Associate Professor of Physical Therapy Dr. Elise Townsend and PhD in Rehabilitation Sciences Fellow Dr. Michael Kiefer.

The duo recently received a two-year, $139,000 grant from the National Tay-Sachs & Allied Diseases Association (NTSAD) to develop a remotely administered, disease-specific rating scale that evaluates the status and progression of infants who have Tay-Sachs or Sandhoff disease. The new tool will be called the Infantile GM2 Rating Scale (Tay-Sachs and Sandhoff diseases are sometimes referred to as GM2 gangliosidoses).

“This tool could be a game changer in terms of clinical trials for GM2,” said Townsend. “We will be able to assess vulnerable babies in their homes, where they’re safe and comfortable, and where they can show us the best of what they can do, and it will happen in a much shorter time. We need a way to assess virtually, and we need to be able to track them frequently over time.”

The remote component will allow clinical researchers to better understand the disease because they will be able to access children anywhere in the world with internet; as these diseases are quite rare, broad international access is paramount.

The research grant is in collaboration with the Center for Rare Neurological Diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital and its Leukodystrophy Service run by Dr. Florian Eichler.

If the research is successful, Townsend says this tool could be used with or modified for other rare diseases. “Thankfully, now there are more options and renewed hope for families and children.”
Class Notes

Class Notes are compiled through a variety of sources, including information sent in by alumni, hospital publications within Mass General Brigham and beyond, and public information released by various organizations.

Communication Sciences and Disorders

Michelle Adessa, MS-SLP ’14, who works at the Cleveland Clinic’s Voice Center, discusses vocal aging in singers in “How Age Forces Rock Stars to Adjust: ‘It Happens to All of Us,’” published by Ultimate Classic Rock & Culture.

Scott Sussman, MS-SLP ’14, presented at the Estill Voice International’s North American Summit. Since 2018, he has worked at the Sean Parker Institute for the Voice, Weill Cornell Medicine as a voice specialist.

Nursing

Jenny Gormley, MS-NU ’88, received the 2022 Outstanding School Nurse Educator Award from the National Association of School Nurses at the organization’s annual conference in June. She is Director of Northeastern University’s School Health Academy.

Gargi Cooper, MS-NU ’03, received the Beacon of Hope Award from Lynn Continuum of Care for her work to embody the organization’s mission of ending homelessness, doing more than what is required to make a visible difference in people’s lives, and demonstrating dignity and respect when engaging with people. “Our community relationships have been invaluable to help problem solve and advocate for our most resilient populations in the city of Lynn,” Cooper told Itemlive.com.

Shelly Beckley, MS-NU ’11, discusses skin changes related to breast cancer in “If You See This on Your Skin Get Checked for Cancer,” published on the “Let Life Happen” blog.

Heather Pietrantonio, BSN ’15, received the Margaret C. Tibbs Award from McLean Hospital in recognition of her leadership in nursing, which includes advocacy in the advancement of nursing practice, teaching, and research.

Caroline Johnson, BSN ’16, was recently recognized by the Massachusetts General Hospital Clinical Recognition Program, at the advanced clinician level, for her expertise in nursing and patient care services.

Diana Benevides, BSN ’18, received the Mrachek Award from Brigham and Women’s Faulkner Hospital in recognition of her clinical skills and in support of her continuing education in the nursing profession.

An OTD Graduate Without Borders

A decade-long affiliation with Tanzania led Sophie Bellenis to co-found a nonprofit agency to assist young children in the African country.

Asali supports English education, music education, program development, and health care. The organization’s name means “honey” in Swahili, one of two official languages in Tanzania. For the last five years, it has worked with Simba’s Footprint’s Community Center, a nonprofit that aims to unlock youth potential through creative programming and community-driven solutions, as well as other locally led, grassroots initiatives in the area. Bellenis, OTD ’17, is treasurer of Asali, which in 2021 invested over $10,500 in locally led initiatives that have assisted more than 2,000 young people.

After college, she moved to Tanzania to volunteer with the Tanzanian Children’s Fund, a nonprofit that had been started by a close family friend. Her connection to Tanzania continued in 2017, during her last year as a member of the OTD program’s first cohort; when she completed her 14-week Advanced Practicum Experience at the Plaster House in Tanzania, a pediatric pre- and post-surgical home for children with treatable disabilities.

“My work will guide me to my next adventure, whether that’s supporting Asali as we take on more partners in Tanzania or identifying and filling gaps in student transition support here stateside,” said Bellenis, who is part of a transition team and runs the Real-Life Skills and Executive Function program at Neuropsychology and Education Services for Children and Adolescents in Newton. “Whatever comes my way, I’m eager and able to take it on.”

Megan Camp, BSN ’21, received the Newly Licensed Nurse award from Brigham and Women’s Faulkner Hospital in recognition of her personal and professional growth during the past 12 months.

Kayleigh Dugan, BSN ’21, recently began working at Duke University Hospital in Durham, NC, where she works as a general, trauma, and transplant operating room RN.

Physical Therapy

Lisa Scialla, MS ’99, DPT ’03, recently opened her own private practice, Boston Chiropractic and Physical Therapy.

Nancy Devine, DPT ’06, was honored as a Distinguished Faculty at Idaho State University, where she has taught for the past 31 years. Her research interests include using virtual/ augmented reality as an intervention to improve motor control following neurologic injury and for reducing chronic pain.

DJ Mattson, DPT ’07 (above, far right), a former faculty in the Department of Physical Therapy, passed away on May 8. Dr. Mattson spent eight years at the IHP starting in 2006, and in 2013 received the Nancy T. Watts Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Mattson also was Faculty Chair in 2012–2013. For several years, he led DPT students (in photo) to the New England Center for Homeless Veterans to work with clients through its Back On My Feet program, which promotes self-sufficiency. After retiring from the IHP, he moved to California, where he graduated from a seminary program and taught courses in anatomy and physiology at a small college.

Nicole Durand, DPT ’13, was the conference leader for Mass General Brigham’s first athletic training conference on the Comprehensive Management of the Interscholastic Athlete, held at Gillette Stadium this past spring.

Physician Assistant Studies

Christina Hacking, MPAS ’18, recently began working at St. Luke’s Obstetrics & Gynecology Associates in Duluth, MN.

We invite you to submit your news and photos to alumni@mghihp.edu, or at www.mghihp.edu/alumni.
It was a chilly Saturday morning in March 1992, and as I came out of the Tremont Street Green Line T station to report for my shift, I saw the Operation Rescue protesters assembled in front of the abortion clinic where I worked as a per diem nurse.

It was fairly common for there to be protesters when I arrived for my weekly shift, but on this morning, the crowd was larger than usual. As I got closer, I saw at the center of the group about 25 people sitting with their necks chained together with bicycle U-locks. They had positioned their human chain in front of the door to the clinic, effectively blocking all entry to the building.

My clinic manager huddled the staff together at the side of the building, and we quickly made a plan to try to identify the patients who were there so we could figure out how to best serve their needs. As the morning wore on, many of them left, frustrated and upset they wouldn’t be able to get the service they had come for that day. Finally, around 1:00 p.m., the protesters relinquished their keys to the police, and we were able to get into the clinic. Only a few patients had stayed, undeterred in their determination to have their procedure that day.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, working at the clinic wound up informing my future career as a women’s health nurse practitioner—including in my roles as a clinician, educator, researcher, and policy advocate—in profound ways. Unbeknownst to me at the time, working at the clinic wound up informing my future career as a women’s health nurse practitioner—including in my roles as a clinician, educator, researcher, and policy advocate—in profound ways.

The Supreme Court’s recent decision to overturn Roe v. Wade will only further existing disparities in access to this life-changing and—in some cases—life-saving service. By banning and severely restricting abortion, inevitably more people will continue unwanted pregnancies, putting them at greater risk of death and other negative health outcomes. Carrying and delivering a pregnancy is 12–14 times more likely to result in death than having an abortion. In a nation where sharp inequities in maternal mortality already exist between Black and Indigenous versus white people, limiting access to abortion will only worsen this crisis.

In spite of this harsh new reality, there are a few bright spots on the horizon. First, medication abortion presents a safer, more accessible way—at least for some—to end an unwanted pregnancy compared with the dangerous methods used in the pre-Roe era. Innovative models of providing medication abortion that accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, including use of telehealth and “meds by mail,” may be even more relevant in this shifting policy landscape. Second, as a long-time advocate for nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, and physician assistants as safe, effective, and acceptable providers of abortion, I am encouraged that a number of states have recently passed laws and regulations to allow for this; several, such as Massachusetts, did so in anticipation of the overturning of Roe.

Looking back over the 30 years since I first started providing abortions and advocating for access, there is no doubt in my mind that it is essential, life-saving health care, and that determining our reproductive destiny is a human right everyone deserves. History tells us that people will seek abortion whether it is legal or not; making it illegal only makes it unsafe. As health care providers, it is our duty to use evidence, compassion, and our power to serve our patients, and to respect and uphold their dignity, including when it comes to abortion.

Dr. Kathy Simmonds served as a full-time faculty member at the MGH Institute from 2000–2022, and since 2007 was Track Coordinator of the Women’s Health/ Gender-Related and Adult-Gerontology/ Women’s Health NP Specialties. She now is an adjunct Associate Professor.
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The IHP Education Collaborative Incentive Plan

The MGH Institute of Health Professions, the only degree-granting affiliate of Mass General Brigham, is offering employees across the system incentives to pursue additional education. Receive a reduction in tuition of between 15% and 40% for select academic programs and all Continuing Professional Education offerings.

All Full-time MGB Employees and IHP Alumni

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IHP Preceptors

5–15%

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Full-time employees who work at Mass General Hospital, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, or the Spaulding Rehabilitation Network (Premier) receive an additional 10% incentive. Full-time employees of all other MGB entities (Preferred) receive an additional 5% incentive.

Full-time employees who directly precept IHP students receive an additional 5% (preceptor for 1–3 years); 10% (preceptor for 4–6 years); or 15% (preceptor for 7+ years).

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Thursday, September 15, 2022