

Jackson Heart Study Graduate Training and Education Center

Jackson State University

—Mentors—



Dawn M. Aycock, PhD, RN, ANP-BC, FAHA is an Associate Professor and Director of the PhD program in the School of Nursing at Georgia State University. She received her BSN from Prairie View A&M University, her MSN from Emory University and her PhD in Nursing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. Aycock is registered nurse and certified adult health nurse practitioner who has spent the majority of her career involved in clinical and nursing research. She has coordinated pharmaceutical funded analgesic clinical trials, and NIH funded studies investigating family caregivers of stroke survivors, women with migraines, and mothers of low-birth weight infants. As a nurse scientist, Dr. Aycock has advanced primary stroke prevention science by bringing awareness to the problem of stroke in young adult African Americans. She has developed, tested and disseminated the innovative **Stroke Counseling for Risk Reduction (SCORRE)** intervention which has shown promise in reducing stroke risk in this understudied, at-risk group. Dr. Aycock has received National Institute of Nursing Research funding for this research and was one of 11 nurses selected for the 2020 inaugural cohort of the Betty Irene Moore Fellowship Program for Nurse Leaders and Innovators. Additionally, her work has been published in top-tiered journals and presented at professional conferences and events. Dr. Aycock is an active member of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association, and Chi Eta Phi International Nursing Sorority Inc.



Alain Bertoni, MD, MPH, is a board-certified general internist and an epidemiologist. He is Professor and Chair of the Department on Epidemiology & Prevention, and also appointed in the Department of Internal Medicine (Section on General Medicine) at Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. His education was at Yale (BA, Political Science 1990) and Johns Hopkins (School of Medicine 1995, School of Public Health 1999); his training was also at Johns Hopkins (1995-1998, Osler Medical Service, and 1998-2001 a post-doctoral fellowship (NHLBI Training Grant 5-T32-HL07180-24) in General Internal Medicine/Epidemiology). Dr. Bertoni joined the Wake Forest faculty in 2001 as an Assistant Professor, and his research interests lie in epidemiology and translational research in the areas of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and disparities in health and healthcare. Dr. Bertoni is currently the Principal investigator or Co-Principal Investigator of the Lifestyle Intervention for Treatment of Diabetes study, the Targeted

Analyses of Diabetes and Obesity in the Jackson Heart Study, and the MESA Early Heart Failure study. Dr. Bertoni is also a co-investigator in the Multi Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA) and the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study. Dr. Bertoni has been a co-investigator in the NIDDK-funded Look AHEAD trial of weight loss in type 2 diabetes, and the NHLBI funded Action to Control Risk in Diabetes clinical trial. Dr. Bertoni is a faculty member of the Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity, and the Translational Science Institute's Program for Community Engagement. Dr. Bertoni has contributed to over 120 peer-reviewed manuscripts, and has taught medical student courses on Epidemiology, Population Health, and Evidence Based Medicine.



Leslie A. Lange, PhD, is trained in epidemiology, statistical genetics and classical biostatistics. Dr. Lange has worked in these fields for over 20 years. Her research focuses on identifying genetic variants associated with complex traits, with a particular interest in cross-study collaborations and the genetics of multi-ethnic populations. Dr. Lange collaborate on a number of large genetic consortia, including next generation sequencing studies. These studies currently include the Cohorts for Heart and Aging Research in Genomic Epidemiology (CHARGE) consortium, the Accelerating Medicines Partnership Type 2 Diabetes (AMP T2D) Knowledge Portal project, the NHLBI Trans-Omics for Precision Medicine (TOPMed) Program, and the Consortium on Asthma among African-ancestry Populations in the Americas (CAAPA). She has extensive experience in the analysis of epidemiologic, genotype and sequence data across a range of phenotypes and study designs. Dr. Lange has expertise in integrating phenotype data from multiple studies through leading the phenotype harmonization efforts in several consortia, and leading and participating in multi-site genetic analysis projects. Dr. Lange is the co-chair of the Jackson Heart Study (JHS) Genetics Working Group, and she works on numerous genetic projects within JHS. Dr. Lange is also an investigator for the Reasons for Geographic Differences in Stroke (REGARDS) study, where she is co-leading large-scale genotyping efforts in ~12K African American participants, and the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA), where she is co-leading the multi-omic data analysis “best practices” committee and analysis for obesity related traits. In addition, Dr. Lange is working with several studies focused on cardiometabolic traits in children, adolescents, and young adults. These include the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey (CLHNS) and the Exploring Perinatal Outcomes in Children (EPOCH) Study. Finally, Dr. Lange also regularly collaborate on projects and work with data from additional NHLBI-funded studies, including the Framingham Heart Study, and the Hispanic Community Health Study / Study of Latinos (HCHS/SOL), the Cardiovascular Health Study, the Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA) Study, and others.



Keith C. Norris, MD, PhD, is an internationally recognized clinician scientist and health policy leader who has been instrumental in shaping national health policy and clinical practice guidelines. He attended Cornell for undergraduate studies and then Howard University College of Medicine where he was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha medical honor society. He also completed his residency training and chief residency in internal medicine at Howard University Hospital. From 1983-86, he trained in nephrology at the combined West Los Angeles Veterans Administration-UCLA program. In addition to being board certified in internal medicine and nephrology, he is an American Society of Hypertension, Specialist in Clinical Hypertension. Currently, and has a doctoral degree In Religious, Spiritual and Metaphysical Philosophy. After recently serving as Executive VP for Research and Health Affairs and Interim President at Charles Drew University he returned to UCLA as a professor of Medicine where he co-directs the UCLA CTSI Community Engagement Research Program. In 1995, he was selected to join the inaugural National Kidney Foundation (NKF) Dialysis Outcomes Quality Initiative, where he worked for a decade helping to transform practice guidelines and national health policy for patients with chronic kidney disease. He was also a founding member of the CMS end-stage renal disease (ESRD) Continuous Performance Measures Workgroup. He presently serves as a member of the NKF Kidney Early Evaluation Program (KEEP) executive committee, the American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP) Medical Advisory Board and the ESRD Network 3 Medical Review Board. He also serves as an advisor to pharmaceutical and dialysis companies. His research interests focus on hypertension and chronic kidney disease in minority and disadvantaged populations. Other research areas include the role of Vitamin D and oxidative stress in health disparities, and enhancing community-academic partnerships. He was one of 19 principal investigators for the multi-site NIH funded African American Study of Kidney Disease and Hypertension (AASK) and the AASK Cohort Study, the largest comparative drug intervention trial focusing on renal outcomes conducted in African Americans. Dr. Norris was the founding principal investigator for the first national translational research network dedicated to reducing health disparities, the NIH-RCMI Translational Research Network, which he led from 2007-2013. Dr. Norris has received numerous honors and awards from students, peers, community, and professional organizations. He has co-authored over 270 articles in peer-reviewed journals, 25 textbook chapters, and over 240 scientific abstracts. He currently serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *Ethnicity and Disease*, a multidisciplinary journal focusing on minority ethnic population differences in health promotion and disease prevention, including research in the areas of epidemiology, genetics, health services, social biology, and medical anthropology. He also serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*.



Emily O'Brien, Ph.D., Associate Professor in Population Health Sciences at Duke University School of Medicine and an epidemiologist and health services researcher at the Duke Clinical Research Institute at Duke University. Her research focuses on comparative effectiveness, patient-centered outcomes, and pragmatic health services research in cardiovascular and pulmonary disease. Dr. O'Brien is an Associate Professor in Neurology, a member in the Duke Clinical Research Institute and a Core-Faculty Member, Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy.



Robert L. Newton, Jr. Ph.D., Associate Professor, Physical Activity & Ethnic Minority Health. Dr. Newton's research interests center on addressing health disparities in African American children, adults, and older adults. Although much of his work involves developing physical activity promotion interventions, he also engages in weight loss studies. Dr. Newton utilizes community-based and technology-based interventions to address health disparities. Currently, Dr. Newton leads studies assessing the effect of a community-based physical activity intervention in older-African American adults and a mobile phone-based intervention targeting increased physical activity in young children. Dr. Newton has also been involved in two primary care weight management programs and several childhood physical activity and/or weight management studies. Dr. Newton also serves as the Co-Chair of the Jackson Heart Study Nutrition and Physical Activity Working Group.



Sameera Talegawkar, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences. Dr. Talegawkar is also an Affiliated Faculty at the Sumner Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness and holds a courtesy appointment in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Dr. Talegawkar's research focuses on the role of diet and other lifestyle predictors on aging-related outcomes, and on the role of diet on health disparities experienced by underserved and minority populations. She has expertise in nutritional assessment in diverse populations. Currently, she leads a project examining the role of dietary trajectories over the adult life course with physical function, disability, and mortality. She also serves as a co-investigator on a project in Odisha, India, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that seeks to change social norms surrounding behaviors to reduce anemia among women of reproductive age. Dr. Talegawkar is the co-chair of the Jackson Heart Study

Nutrition and Physical Activity Working Group and a member of the study's scientific council. Dr. Talegawkar has served as the PI or co-PI on research funded by the National Institutes of Health, the American Heart Association, the World Health Organization, Harvest Plus, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She teaches at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including Assessment of Nutritional Status (EXNS 2120) and Epidemiology of Aging (PUBH 6248).



Robert John Mentz, MD, is a cardiologist with a clinical and research interest in heart failure (going from Failure to Function) including advanced therapies such as cardiac transplantation and mechanical assist devices or “heart pumps.” He serves the group as the Chief of the Heart Failure Section. He became a heart failure cardiologist in order to help patients manage their chronic disease over many months and years. He is strongly committed to compassionate patient care with a focus on the quality of life and patient preference. He is an Editor in Chief of the Journal of Cardiac Failure – the official journal of the Heart Failure Society of America. His research interests are focused on treating co-morbid disease in heart failure patients and improving outcomes across the cardiovascular spectrum through clinical trials and outcomes research. He serves as the Chair of the Jackson Heart Study Cardiovascular Disease Working Group.

