



# FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER

## Introduction

*CHET Director, Nancy Schoenberg*

“Dreams come in a size too big so that we can grow into them.” (Josie Bissett)

A new school year brings a vibrancy as refreshing as the lovely early autumn weather. At CHET, this sense of excitement is heightened by unprecedented growth and accomplishments, including the start of another cohort of our SPARK (Students Participating as Ambassadors in Research) program, a new cohort of the Research Scholars Program, new Graduate Research Assistants and postdoctoral fellows, several new large health equity NIH grants, a series of impactful publications and presentations, and so much more. We celebrate several new babies and the send off of young children to school for the first time.

Featured in this quarterly newsletter is one of our greatest accomplishments—bringing four extremely talented individuals together to CHET and UK overall to form a health equity cluster hire. As you read about Drs. Esiaka, Littlejohn, Mattingly, and Moore, you will become as excited as we are about the potential for collaborating on impactful and innovative discovery. These four scholars aim to address some of the leading causes of morbidity, mortality, and suffering, ranging from substance use disorders to cancer to neurological conditions. Representing diverse disciplinary, geographical, and substantive areas, our newest shining stars enhance our UK campus and help us grow into our dreams.

To achieve this dream requires extensive partnerships. We are grateful that we share a mission to advance health equity through inclusive research and training excellence with the following campus partners: The Office of the Provost, the Office of the Vice President for Research, the College of Medicine, the Department of Behavioral Science, the Department of Internal Medicine, the Markey Cancer Center, the UNITE Research Priority Area, the SUPRA Research Priority Area, the Sanders-Brown Center on Aging, and so many individuals who served on our search committees, interacted with candidates, conveyed to them that UK is an excellent environment in which to thrive, and provided and continue to provide extensive support and collaboration potential. That’s the UK way!

Please join us as we rejoice in welcoming our new colleagues and recognizing CHET’s many other accomplishments during our 5th year celebration on October 13th, from 2-5 pm. Please see below for details. We look forward to seeing you there!



### NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

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Introducing Our New CHET GRA

Faculty Updates

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Speaking of Five Years... Join Us to Celebrate!

# Introducing Our New Primary Faculty: What Excites Them About CHET and UK

## DARLINGTONA ESIKA, PHD, CPG, CPH, POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLAR



Darlingtona Esiaka's research examines pathways to health outcomes and chronic disease (e.g., Alzheimer's and related dementia, cancer) survivorship in Black/African American and African diaspora men.

*"This is the opportunity to establish and grow my research in a way that I would like to grow it, and part of the reason why that excites me is that UK offers me a lot of opportunity not to start from ground zero. There are these existing structures, people and places, resources to support me to help me grow as quickly as possible and as efficiently as possible. And I'm also excited about the people here. Not just that they're doing research that I'm interested in, but that the approaches that they're using are approaches I've always desired to use."*

## ERICA LITTLEJOHN, PHD, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Erica Littlejohn's interests include interdisciplinary research at the intersection of health disparities/equity and neurological disorders including traumatic brain injury (TBI) and Vascular contributions to cognitive impairment and dementia (VCID).

*"When I think about one of the most exciting parts about joining the UK community, for me, it was really the wealth of resources for conducting disease and health equity research. UK is a community that's actually ideal. It's a close-knit community, and it's located in a city with a small hometown feel, and at the exact same time you have renowned researchers and clinicians. It's really an excellent place. A really great environment to develop your career."*



## DELVON MATTINGLY, PHD, MS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR



Delvon T. Mattingly's research aims to promote racial health equity by better understanding the roles systemic racism, discrimination, and exposure to the criminal legal system play in the development of substance use and misuse, dependence, and associated physical and mental health outcomes.

*"I am most excited about making connections with people, including students and other faculty who are truly invested in improving public health in Kentucky, nationwide, or at the global level and in promoting health equity. I appreciate that UK fosters collaboration, and the support here for newcomers seems endless."*

# Introducing Our New Primary Faculty (Cont.)

## JUSTIN X. MOORE, PHD, MPH, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Justin Moore's work utilizes epidemiologic, biostatistical, and community-based participatory approaches to investigate the intricate interplay of social identity, geographic factors, and physiological stress in cancer health outcomes, revealing critical insights into health inequities among minority and rural populations.

*"There's some authenticity, there's a lot of care and passion behind the work that I see in my colleagues here. There's a lot of investment. So I feel like there's just so many different reasons, things that I love about being here. The Center for Health Equity Transformation is beautiful, because you can see, literally from our graduate students through our senior investigators, everyone is very passionate about the work that they do and they care about those communities in which we're doing that work. And that to me is very motivating."*



### Want to learn more about the new Primary Faculty?

[Click here to read the recent College of Medicine article covering their arrival.](#)

## Introducing Our New Core Faculty

### Darwin L. Conwell, MD, MS, FACC

Chair of Internal Medicine, College of Medicine



Dr. Conwell is an international authority on pancreatic disorders and champion of diversity, equity and inclusion. He is also an advocate of community engagement and health equity.

### Keith J. Watts, PhD, MSW

Assistant Professor of Social Work, College of Social Work



Dr. Watts' research explores the complex and intersectional experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals with multiple marginalized identities, including Black LGBTQ+ individuals, with a focus on belongingness to identity-based communities.

## Introducing Our New CHET GRA: Courtney Martin



Courtney Martin is a second-year graduate student in the College of Education where she is pursuing a Master's in Health Promotion. Courtney received her undergraduate degree from the University of Kentucky in May of 2022. During her undergraduate years, she became aware of the significant health challenges being faced in the Appalachian region and has since committed her research to better understanding the unique challenges Appalachian residents face. Courtney recently joined CHET and is excited to have the opportunity to be a part of a transdisciplinary research team. She looks forward to working with and learning from other researchers where she hopes to use her skills to help improve the lives and overall well-being of people in Appalachia.

# Faculty Updates

## **Dr. Nancy Grant Harrington (CHET Core Faculty):**

- Recently published the second edition of her health communication textbook, [Health Communication: Research and Practice for a Diverse and Changing World](#). For this edition, she and the other co-author adopted an antiracist/anti-discrimination position throughout the text, as well as added a new chapter devoted to discrimination and health communication.



## **Dr. Aaron Kruse-Diehr (CHET Core Faculty):**

- Co-directing the new D&I core in CCTS alongside fellow CHET Core Faculty, Dr. Matthew Bush, named the Center for Implementation, Dissemination and Evidence-based Research (CIDER).
- Will be chairing the 2024 CCTS Spring Conference, which is dissemination and implementation (D & I) focused.

## **Dr. Ana Maria Linares (CHET Core Faculty):**

- Has received the following accolades in 2023:
  - Fellow of the International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA)
  - Hispanic Nurse of the Year, National Association of Hispanic Nurses (NAHN)
  - Women's Month Celebration Researcher, International Child Health Nursing Network (ENSI)



## **Dr. Keith J. Watts (CHET Core Faculty):**

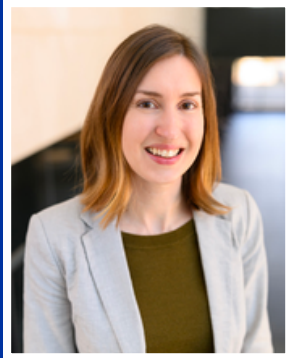
- Recently published article entitled "The impact of community belongingness on mental health and well-being among Black LGBTQ adults" in *Race and Social Problems*.

## **Dr. Lauren Whitehurst (CHET Core Faculty):**

- Recently received an R01 from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism titled "Sex and Sex Hormone Factors Influencing Acute Alcohol Effects on Sleep Physiology." In this project, she will be examining how the effect of alcohol on sleep varies for women at different phases of the menstrual cycle and how hormonal fluctuations in estrogen and progesterone impact these effects.



## Dr. Laurie McClouth Receives R01 and is Named White House Moonshot Scholar



Dr. Laurie McClouth, CHET Primary Faculty Member, has received an R01 from the National Cancer Institute and was named as one of eleven Cancer Moonshot Scholars last month in a Faculty Member, has received an R01 from the National Cancer Institute and was named as one of eleven Cancer Moonshot Scholars last month in a [White House Press Release](#). This inaugural

cohort of Biden Cancer Moonshot Scholars was announced as part of an initiative to bolster early-career investigator-led research aimed at addressing cancer inequities in medically underserved populations. This initiative has allotted over \$5 million dollars in the first year for such research projects, which will be supported through the National Cancer Institute.

Dr. McClouth's newly funded R01 through the Moonshot Scholars Initiative is titled "Pathways, a Hope-Based Intervention to Support Personal Goal Pursuit, Mental Health, and Quality of Life during Advanced Lung Cancer Treatment." This five-year project aims to improve the mental health and quality of life for individuals undergoing treatment for advanced lung cancer treatment through a brief, hope-enhancing intervention in which they reflect on personal values and are supported in pursuing valued goals. The intervention is designed to facilitate reach and improve equity among people who have been underrepresented in psychosocial intervention trials and underserved in supportive services, including rural and older adults. Dr. McClouth's receipt of this award was also detailed in an [article in UKNOW](#) and in several local media [outlets](#). CHET is excited to celebrate Dr. McClouth's tremendous achievement and her ongoing commitment to health equity research.

## Dr. Lauren Whitehurst Promotes Sleep Equity Through Community Events

The UK Cognition, Health and Sleep Equity Lab's (CHaSE Lab) Sleep Salon, led by CHET Core Faculty, Lauren Whitehurst, hosted events that took place on July 12th and July 26th. CHaSE invited participants to spend the evening learning about the importance of sleep while enjoying a free 3-course meal provided by Daughters' Southern food truck. At this event, they learned about the importance of sleep and rest for health and well-being and were included in a discussion about the negative impact of "grind culture" on health longevity.

This event was funded by the UNITE RPA and the attendees overwhelmingly provided very positive feedback and are eager to engage with future UK CHaSE Lab events.



*Dr. Whitehurst, UK's Cognition, Health and Sleep Equity Lab Members, and support staff for the Sleep Salon take a break in the Sleep Salon's Sensory Immersion Room.*

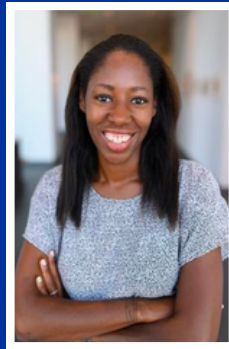


*Sleep Salon attendees engage with Dr. Whitehurst during event programming.*

[Click here to read more about CHaSE.](#)

## CHET Pilot Awardees

CHET and the Food as Health Alliance (FAHA) awarded pilot funding to support two faculty members' research projects to identify, reduce and eliminate health disparities. [Click here to read about their projects.](#)



**Dr. Jessica Burris**

Associate Professor

Department of Psychology

*Project: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Cancer Patients Who Use Tobacco*



**Dr. Yuqing Zheng**

Associate Professor

Department of Agricultural Economics

*Project: You Are What You Eat: Connecting Health Outcomes with Grocery Food Purchases, Food Insecurity and Health Eating Index*

## CHET Updates Land Acknowledgement Statement

As is increasingly common across the nation, CHET has expanded our land acknowledgement to now include a statement recognizing the vital, but oftentimes overlooked, contributions that enslaved and exploited people have made to build our society overall and our university specifically. Our updated statement, which will be reflected on our website and in future weekly digests, now reads as follows:


### Land & Labor Acknowledgement and Commitment

**CHET is located in Lexington, KY, on the original homeland of diverse Native peoples who arrived over 10,000 years ago, including the ancestors of the Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and other Nations. Today, Kentucky is still home to over 25,000 Native people. CHET recognizes the injustices Native peoples have endured. We also recognize the contributions and sacrifices of enslaved Africans, their descendants, and other minoritized peoples whose labor has been stolen or otherwise have been exploited, despite critical contributions to our society and University. We acknowledge those enslaved, displaced, and dispossessed and, in solidarity, commit to recognizing and honoring their legacies. We join with others in our commitment to value with a living wage all those whose labor continues to sustain the University and Commonwealth of Kentucky. We hope to begin the long process of healing by acknowledging, reconciling, and redressing those histories and legacies through our work and this commitment.**


## CHET Report Now Available

CHET recently developed a report covering the first five years of the Center's progress entitled "Transforming Health in the Commonwealth: The First Five Years of the Center for Health Equity Transformation." The report includes comprehensive coverage of the health equity research conducted at the Center, as well as an overview of the training programs and health equity programming supported by CHET. [Click here to access the report.](#)

**Transforming Health in the Commonwealth:  
The First Five Years of the Center for Health  
Equity Transformation**



**2018  
-  
2023**

 **Center for Health  
Equity Transformation**

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760 Press Avenue  
Lexington, KY 40536-0679

## Speaking of Five Years... Join Us to Celebrate!


**SAVE  
the  
DATE**

**October 13, 2023**

**CHET 5 YEAR CELEBRATION**

Join us for a very special event featuring musical entertainment, health equity speakers, and refreshments as we celebrate.

**HEALTHY KENTUCKY RESEARCH BUILDING  
2:00-5:00PM**

 **Center for  
Health Equity  
Transformation**

If you plan to attend, please fill out the [registration form](#) by **September 25th.**