



Braun School of Public Health  
and Community Medicine  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem  
Hadassah Medical Organization



THE HEBREW  
UNIVERSITY  
OF JERUSALEM

# International MPH Newsletter

SPRING 2022

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# Spring 2022

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*Front Cover: IMPH Cohort'22 observing the Ein Lavan Valley*



## Dear Alumni,

We are nearing the end of another academic year. This year was the closest we got to a normal year since the pandemic started. I sincerely hope that the next one will be as normal as possible.



We, as public health experts, have high responsibility in facing the great and emerging public health challenges. For sure there are going to be new emerging communicable diseases. With supply chain disruptions, climate change and the accompanying droughts and floods, wars and pandemics, we already face food shortages in some parts of the world, and disruptions in energy supply in these and other parts of the world. Inflation is an economic problem that the world is facing. This will affect individual expenditures, adding to increases in social and health gaps. One of the new challenges is the high distribution of fake news and increase in vaccine resistance.

What can we do? We could advocate – first and foremost - for universal health coverage. We could advocate for the involvement of our leaders in mitigation of climate change and for securing clean water and food to all. I am sure that many of you are already doing these and more. We need to build a coalition of public health practitioners to find ways to rise up to these global challenges. Lastly, at the Braun School - we should and hopefully will give more training to our coming IMPH cohorts for health communication, providing useful tools for advocacy and for tackling fake and misleading information and promoting evidence-based knowledge.

We are proud of our alumni who achieve high positions in academia, governments, NGOs and in clinical work. Please share with us your career stories and spread the word of our wonderful IMPH experience.

If possible - please join us for the Graduation ceremony on October 14, 2022. Please congratulate the new coming alumni to your community of IMPH graduates. Together we can promote better health globally.

*Sincerely,*

**Prof. Ronit Calderon Margalit, MD, MPH, Braun School Director**

## Dear Alumni

We are nearing the end of the second semester. Students are hard at work on their thesis and Master Paper proposals, COPC groups are meeting, prioritizing and planning. We have marked Shavuot, Remembrance Day and Independence Day. After Passover we marked Holocaust Memorial Day and the week before that, celebrated freedom from slavery and the exodus from Egypt. So much suffering and yet so much to celebrate, all mixed together.



*Shabbat at Ora's with IMPH students*

Spring always brings with it a feeling of hope, light and rejuvenation. After a relatively long and cold winter (by Jerusalem standards), we indeed have entered a warm spring with beautiful and abundant wildflowers everywhere. However, for several days a fine dust has covered our beautiful country. visibility is limited and at times, it feels we are living in a fog. I fear that this is a metaphor for how much of the world feels this spring. climbing out of the two years of Covid-19 we hoped to wake up to a bright spring, marked by hope and renewal; hope due to medications, vaccinations, acquired immunity and less virulent variants, renewal due to the lifting of many restrictions and limitations. Public health and health systems were gravely challenged but lessons were learned and it seemed that we were seeing the light, finally!



Instead, our fine spring is covered with dust - the dust of worry. We worry about the world, about war and the slim hopes for peace, about the plight of refugees, the threat of mass destruction (even nuclear war!), food security and energy shortages. And still... Covid.

As public health teachers, researchers and practitioners we need to keep reminding those around us that health is not just the absence of disease, that good governance and political will are necessary in order for people to be healthy, happy and fulfilled, and that solidarity is required when our fellow humans are suffering. We must work understand to combat disease, promote health and lessen the plight of those displaced by war, famine or poverty.

Even if we can't change basic human nature, fortunately, in Public health, we do have the tools to improve many lives. We know you are using those tools daily! We continue to be inspired by the work of our students and alumni. We are so thrilled to hear about the naming of the Fred. N. Binka School of Public Health at the University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho Ghan. What an honour for Prof Binka and for the entire Braun School family! Yes, a ray of light!

Stay strong, stay committed and focus on what can be done, not what can't. We are proud of all of you.

**Prof. Ora Paltiel MDCM, MSc, FRCPC, IMPH Director**



***Prof. Ora Paltiel and current IMPH students at Pears International Programs Joint Event***

## Dear Alumni,

We are coming to the end of our second semester and the beginning of what seems to be a fairly normal summer with regard to Covid. As always, we use this term "normal" cautiously as so many people, communities, countries continue to face horrendous outcomes from conflict, war, displacement. Many of you are working in these areas and we are always so very proud of our alumni and your work in all regions of the world.

We are grateful to all our scholarship donors, particularly Pears Foundation, and want to remind you of the two funding awards available: Pears Seed Grant Awards (including mentorship) and Pears Career Development support for alumni to present in international conferences. These are open for application year-round.



Our current IMPH students will be added to our IMPH alumni WhatsApp groups in the next few weeks. Please do welcome them when they join as they begin to think about their next step post-graduation. Your inter-alumni network is invaluable to all of us. If you have not yet joined a WhatsApp/WeChat group, please do so. As Hanna wrote a few weeks ago, the HUJI platform will no longer be accessible - our way to connect all alumni via email. Until we find a better platform, contact with you all will be through the newsletter and WhatsApp or WeChat groups.

Regarding graduation on 14 September, we are thrilled to announce that Dr. Grace Miheso (IMPH '96 - Kenya) will be this year's Keynote Speaker.

We would like to thank Hanna for her amazing work as IMPH Alumni Communications Coordinator. Hanna will be leaving her post on the 20 June to move with her family to New York State where her husband begins a post-doctoral fellowship. We will miss your energy and creativity, Hanna. We are also grateful to Jeanette Spitz who has agreed to return to this post on an interim basis (Jeanette filled this post while Hanna was on maternity leave last year) and welcome her back!

Sending you all warm regards from Jerusalem and the IMPH team!

**Dr. Maureen Malowany**  
**IMPH Alumni Academic Coordinator**

**Dear Alumni,**

Summer in Israel is a special time of year, filled with intense heat, endless energy vibes and a certain sense of being in a liminal space - in transition between the past and the future.

Nine months of the Jewish calendar, the whole academic year, are behind us. Now, IMPH team and students are on the home stretch, preparing for the graduation and welcoming of the next IMPH cohort at Hebrew University, and Alumni activities continue.



There's been a great deal happening over here in Spring 2022: major holidays, trips and visits to museums, Virtual Open Day for IMPH, the Annual International Programs Joint Event sponsored by Pears Foundation and MASHAV and Braun School Second Series of Webinars "Public Health Priorities and Challenges across the Life Course".

I myself am moving on this summer, following my husband to his post-doc program at Stony Brook University. These past 18 months have been life-changing for me, in so many ways. Being part of the IMPH community enriched my life and allowed a sneak peek at the world of Public Health here in Israel and around the globe.

I am grateful for having met such unique and admirable people among IMPH Alumni, Academic and Administrative Staff. You are doing incredible things to make this world a better place in any way possible.

Thank you for letting me be a part of this family, even if it was for such a short while. I would love to keep following your journeys on social media and spreading the word about you and the program!

I'm glad that one of our own will fill in the spot and continue with Alumni activities, please welcome back Jeanette Spitz (IMPH'21, USA).

Kind regards,

*Ms. Hanna Sloutski, IMPH Alumni Communications Coordinator*



## Highlighting Alumna

### Meet Ms. Ardita Besnik Kongjonaj (Albania | IMPH'13)

*Ardita has ten years of experience in the governmental and international nongovernmental sectors working various health projects both in Albania and overseas. She is a Public Health professional, whose goal is to make meaningful contribution in all facets of life.*

*Previously, she worked at the Swiss Development Agency (SDC) for the Health for All Programme (HAP) providing a solid understanding of the role of public health in policy making, disease prevention and education on Nutrition, MCHC, WASH and vaccination. While working as Health Program Implementation Officer at Save the Children International, she helped improve Health Care system and services in several rural communities in northern rural and remote areas of Albania. Ardita has also undertaken one- year training on good governance and leadership, supported by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. She is an excellent communicator with strong interpersonal and mentoring skills. Since 2017, Ardita serves as Health Advisor at the Prime Minister's office, Albania.*

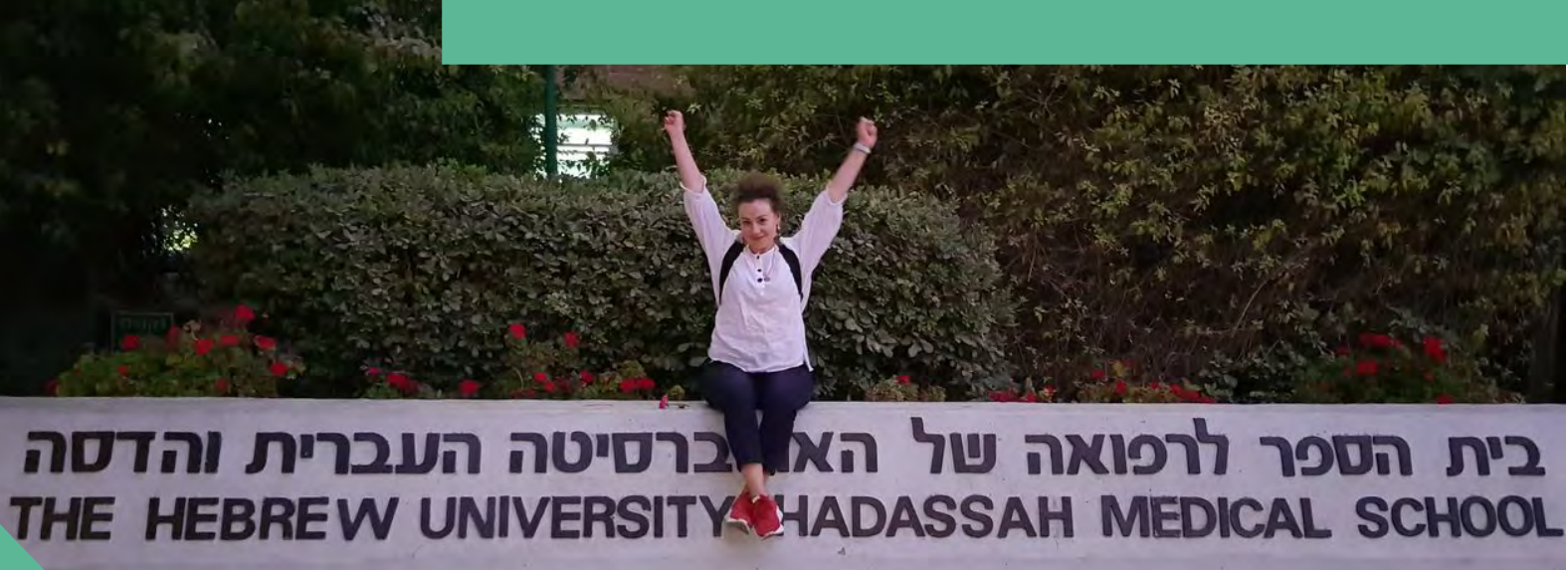


### **Why did you choose the IMPH program at Hebrew U?**

First, I am glad to be a part of this newsletter. Hebrew U is among the best Universities in the world, and this is the reason that does not allow time to think long about the choice. This invites you to hurry to be part of the first opportunity given to join the programme. What has emerged as an education from this University, is a "traveling Israel" around the world, where we the students of yesterday, professionals of today, have become more and more attached to the field of knowledge, thanks to this investment in this University. Another impetus I chose this university, is Israel (...) where I feel quite good spiritually and I have an unusual appreciation for the history, the culture, the sacrifice, the dedication, for what the Jewish nation represents. Israeli resembles to me a lifelong University.







### **What motivates you about public health?**

Public health is defined as "the science and art of disease prevention", this naturally improves the quality of life, its prolongation. There is room for coordination of efforts by both institutional and private bodies. We are at the forefront of identifying the risks and dangers that our health faces. We are researchers of physical, psychological, social health, being present in daily life. We are not just surveillance of individual health needs, but more of the community, being also preventers of costly outbreaks.

### **What are your research or work interests?**

Of course, continuing education is the projection of education in the century we are in. Hi-Tech, development of artificial intelligence, brings a dizzying competition with the human being, putting us in the face of growing challenges. Harmonized and processed information in an infinity of computer exchanges, gives us fast data, with rotating accuracy, and seeks to produce in this environment the healthiest solutions and orientations with sustainable security. The Covid19 pandemic attracted the maximum attention of humanity by reminding us that we are facing epidemics, pandemics, local or global that require intensive care and advanced research work, to be able to increase protection, to prevent the consequences of the attack on health.

### **Which experiences have been most influential at the Hebrew U?**

I wasn't just a student, and I am not just a graduate of Hebrew U, but simultaneously the professors made me part of their projects, their research and scientific work, supporting with help and useful guidance. We must always keep deepening our investment in knowledge. (...) there are always things that we do not yet know. As one of the founders of our University Albert Einstein said that: "as our circle of knowledge expands, so does the circumference of darkness surrounding it." It is very special to mention our international family at the IMPH, where your classmates become your siblings and best friends, a community where you study, live and support each other on growing together professionally and as people, with no limits toward good will.

I am very lucky to have a family member in 19 countries of the world. There is permanently a connecting point for most of us, in Jerusalem, the International Health Policy conference, where we follow each other's presentations and are proud of our mates.

### **Do you have any advice for prospective students?**

Today's young people are demanding, they are a generation that is more and more surrounded by rapid technology developments. The opportunities and speed of learning have both the advantages and difficulties of actuality. I would suggest all to compete with knowledge, to be more and more skilled, to always remember that they study at a university that bears the image of a lifelong scientific genius, of a model that makes every generation proud. To strive their time through education, to be devotion to the new, to be creative, to be the Israeli brand and model (...), as a rare legacy for them and the humanity.

**BE HUJI**





## From IMPH to PhD

### Meet Dr. Selin Girgin (Turkey | IMPH'21)

Shalom, I am Selin from Izmir on the Western Mediterranean coast of Turkey. I am a graduate of IMPH '21. It was a great year, not very far ago though. Now, I am writing from Israel again, as a PhD student this time. What brought me to Israel to IMPH and what brought me back to Israel again, I will share with you.

After graduating from medical school in Turkey, I started my residency in Public Health at a university where I had a great supervisor, Prof. Dr. Belgin Unal (Turkey, IMPH'98). She told me about the IMPH program and recommended it. I was a bit hesitant at the beginning about whether to apply or not; I did not know it was going to be a turning point in my life. I decided to apply for it since I was interested in diving deep into the knowledge of public health. Another aspect that caught my interest was the international nature of this program. The idea of getting the chance to meet people all over the world interested in public health seemed very exciting to me. Indeed, it proved to be a very interesting adventure to meet my classmates as diverse from Tanzania to Fiji. I believe having met these people widened my perspective on the world, increasing my understanding of it and breaking my prejudices.



*Selin with her Classmates of the IMPH'21 Cohort*

During the IMPH, what influenced me the most was the scientific approach of the school and teachers. They taught us to think critically, follow the up-to-date literature, methods, and tools, and think beyond the current conventions in the field. One valuable skill that I gained was to think research-oriented. Whether there is a problem faced in practice or an issue one wonders, they taught us how to turn it into a scientific question and investigate it using the most recent research methods.

After graduation, I participated in a WHO fellowship program in the PROACT Care project in Azerbaijan. The aim of the project was to strengthen primary care in a pilot rural area in Azerbaijan and one target was to empower the healthcare workforce. There, I organized a COPC workshop for local primary care workers. I shared with them the tool to integrate public health into primary care, called COPC, which I gained thanks to IMPH. As a product of the workshop, we determined the prioritized health problem of the region and planned an intervention for it.

I was accepted as a PhD student in Public Health at the Hebrew University in the same year of my graduation as the valedictorian. The scientific environment I mentioned before played a role in my decision. My current advisor Prof. Raanan Raz also supervised my master's thesis. I have learned a lot from his way of thinking logically and creatively in research and I believed I still had more to learn from him. His research in the field of environmental epidemiology was very interesting to me, so I wanted to continue to work with him. My research topic is climate change and pregnancy outcomes. I study how the weather is affecting pregnancies and what challenges the changing climate might bring in terms of adverse pregnancy outcomes in the future. I am also interested in causal inference and improving statistical methods to better understand the causal effects of climate. I wish I will contribute to the research in environmental epidemiology.





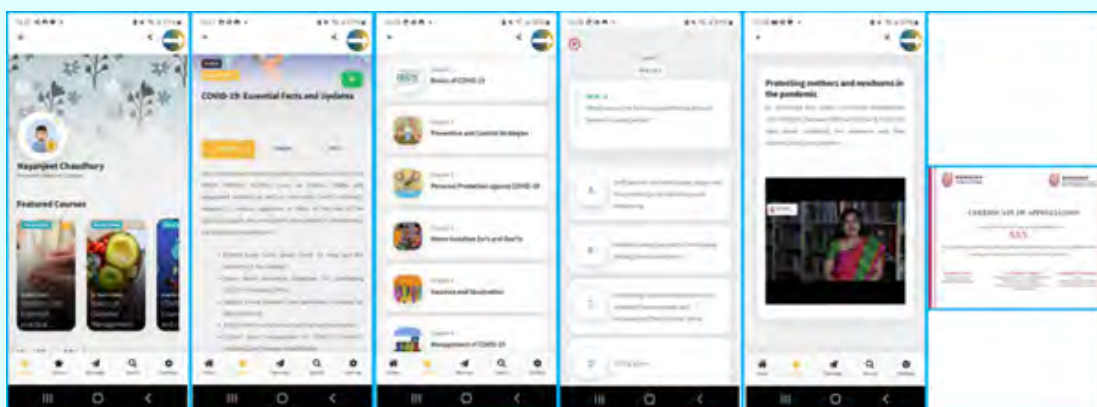
## Experiments with an Online Training Platform

Dr. Nayanjeet Chaudhury (India, IMPH'06) shares information about the Digital Training Platform trademarked in his name as "SHARPEN trainer".



The SHARPEN trainer is a robust platform that can be utilised in multiple ways. For instance:

- Create and deliver online training modules across various domains at different levels of complexity of the content aimed at specific target audiences, using the "flipped classroom" technique;
- Customize a bouquet of courses for specific organizations depending on organizational need and requirements and deliver such courses as complementary to other pedagogical methods.



**Screenshots from the SHARPEN trainer application**

Essentially, S.H.A.R.P.E.N. has three important applications merged into one: 1) an end-user friendly application available in Android and web version 2) a convenient content builder for trainers and course developers to create courses via pre-curated templates, and 3) a reviewer panel for reviewers to easily access the entire course and provide comments without changing any content of the pre-existing course.

Since we formally launched the platform in February 2021, SHARPEN trainer has been successfully used by over 1,000 professionals that included nursing staff, paramedics, social workers and volunteers. The "COVID-19: Essential facts and updates" and "Basics of Diabetes Management" courses have been studied by learners from across multiple states in India. Faculty from India and beyond have contributed to development of the courses on the platform. We are continuously soliciting intent from state and central government, educational, healthcare, and allied institutions to further explore opportunities on how we can mutually prepare training modules available to the end users in different regional languages.

Watch about SHARPEN trainer [HERE](#).

For queries about the platform, please contact: [nayanjeetc@gmail.com](mailto:nayanjeetc@gmail.com)

## Storytelling to Raise Diabetes Awareness

**Dr. Mridula Kapil Bhargava** (India | IMPH'18) shares her experience working as Community Leader with Diabetes Storytelling Lab.

Her team won the Diabetes Storytelling Lab 2021 in India with the project **Ok Tata Horn Please**, targeting a segment of the population that is highly vulnerable to diabetes: long-distance truck drivers. They proposed an animated film series, media broadcasts and health checks to assess truck drivers' health and increase their diabetes awareness. Under the project, they have screened around 150 truck drivers in the screening camp for blood glucose levels.



*"Neglected communities like the truck drivers community is at a very high risk of chronic medical conditions like diabetes and BP. As the community leader in the Diabetes Storytelling Lab, supported by Dalberg Media, World Diabetes Foundation and USAID, I got this opportunity to work with the film makers and storytellers to bring out the real stories and the root causes associated with the poor health outcomes of the community. Besides looking into the technical part of diabetes, **I actually realized the power of stories and the art of storytelling.** Interacting with truck drivers in their surroundings and areas was an eye-opener. Many of them disclosed that they didn't even get a single finger prick test for diabetes done ever before our health camp. And it wasn't a surprise for us to see critically high blood sugar levels in several participants including truck drivers, their assistants or labors associated with truck manufacturing. We just hope that our initiative reaches to the top level of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and a positive action is taken towards the cause",* tells Mridula.



**OK Tata Horn Please** team created animated character, **Raju**, a truck driver, who is on his path to a healthy lifestyle. They are also producing videos with real truck drivers who share their stories to create a positive influence, raise awareness and promote diabetes screening.

Learn more about the project [here](#).



# Alumni News

## Congratulations

Congratulation to **Dr. Sravani Kante** (India, 2021), Sravani and her husband welcomed their first son, Sriyukth, here in Israel.

*"I'm very thankful for all the support, love and care given by my colleagues, professors, program secretaries and social coordinator,"* says Sravani and shares with the IMPH family the photo of her boy celebrating the Independence Day.



Congratulation to **Calvin Mhango** (Malawi, 2021). Calvin and his wife welcomed their first son, Chigo, on 14 July 2021 in Lilongwe, Malawi. Calvin currently works as an Associate at IDinsight Inc. IDinsight is a mission-driven global advisory, data analytics, and research organisation dedicated to fighting global poverty with data and evidence by helping decision-makers design effective programs to improve the lives of the world's poorest people. Calvin participated in developing the Malawi Social Cash Transfer Program SCTP five-year strategic plan for 2021 - 2026.

***The entire IMPH family is wishing Sravani and Calvin and their families a lifetime of joy and good health!***



**Congratulations to Moses Banda Aron** (Malawi, 2019) on publishing his new abstract in Lancet Global Health on the relationship between COVID-19 waves and Malaria negative cases in Neno, Malawi. See the full article [here](#).



**Congratulations to Dr. Miguel Reina Ortiz** (Ecuador, 2011) on publishing his new article at Europe PMC. The publication explores the use of financial incentives and behavioral nudges to optimize voluntary HIV testing among pregnant women in a high-HIV burden urban area of Ecuador. See the full article [here](#).



**Congratulations to Ms. Yangzi Sherpa** (Nepal, 2015) on receiving the Token of Love from Nepal Health Research Council in April, 2022 for the presentation of her abstract "Routine Data Quality Assessment; System and Data Verification Gaps in Selected Hospitals of Lumbini Province, Nepal" at 8th National Summit. And **kudos** for completing 4th Dhara Nepalgunj Marathon in the category 21 KM Open Female.



**Congratulations to Dr. Mbong Eta Ngole** (Cameroon, 2012) on publishing his research article in EID Journal on use of preexposure and postexposure recombinant vesicular stomatitis virus–Zaire Ebola virus vaccine as an intervention associated with improved death rates, illness, and recovery time among patients with EVD. See the full article [here](#).



**Congratulations to Dr. Jonathan Abuga Abel** (Kenya, 2013) on earning his PhD. May this be the stepping stone of his future endeavors!

Dr. Abuga was born and raised in Nakuru, Kenya. After completing his undergraduate studies in 2011 at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya, he joined the Neurosciences Department at the Kenya Medical Research Institute – KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research

Programme in Kilifi (KWTRP), for post-graduate training in research methods. During his IMPH studies in Israel, Dr. Abuga developed a strong interest in applying epidemiology, biostatistics, and geographical information systems (GIS) to investigate infectious and non-infectious diseases. Upon his return to Kenya, he joined the School of Health Sciences, Kisii University, to teach undergraduate courses in Public Health. In January 2018, he registered for a PhD at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Funded by the Sub-Saharan Africa Consortium for Advanced Biostatistics Training (SSACAB) and the Initiative to Develop African Research Leaders (IDeAL), his doctoral project at the KWTRP applied epidemiological and statistical approaches to investigate geographical and changes over time in the burden of childhood-onset neurological impairments and disabilities in Kilifi, Kenya. Dr Abuga also investigated barriers to healthcare access and utilization, particularly rehabilitation, by the affected children in low-and middle-income countries.

Dr Abuga is grateful to his PhD supervisors, and mentors in Israel, Kenya, South Africa, the UK, and the Netherlands, friends, and family for their support. Currently, he is a faculty member at Kisii University and seeking early career opportunities.

**The thesis** is publicly available, including 6 publications emanating directly from this piece of work, [here](#).

**Congratulations to Dr. Obsie Baissa** (Ethiopia, 2017) upon being awarded a Blumendal Family Award Scholarship for excellent academic achievements as a doctoral student and in recognition of her invaluable assistance to students in the IMPH class of 2021.

We are, of course, very concerned about the situation in Europe and in the Ukraine in particular. Our Alumna, **Dr. Antonina Dorokhina** (Ukraine, 2018), was forced to flee her country. Thanks to IMPH team and British Friends of Hebrew University, Antonina is relatively safe now in London, UK.



## Congratulations to Professor Fred Newton Binka (Ghana, 1988)

The UHAS (University of Health and Allied Sciences) Governing Council, on 15 April 2021, approved a proposal from the Academic Board to name several facilities of the University in honour of the University's founders.



### The School of Public Health was named in honor of Professor Fred Newton Binka.

Professor Fred Newton Binka was the foundation Vice Chancellor of the University. As Chief Executive Officer, he executed his mandate during the most difficult phase of the University. He worked closely with the Governing Council to implement the development of the incubation facilities at Trafalgar, Hohoe and the Main Campus at Sokode. Five Schools, namely, Allied Health Sciences, Basic and Biomedical Sciences, Nursing and Midwifery, Medicine, and Public Health were established during his tenure. Since his retirement, he has spent his time nurturing the establishment of graduate programmes at the School of Public Health.

Prof. Fred N. Binka: *"We invite you our faculty in research collaborations that would create the ideal environment to educate more Public Health Specialists".*





# Braun School News



Braun School of Public Health  
and Community Medicine  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem  
Hadassah Medical Organization



Prof. Yehuda Neumark  
received the Hebrew University  
Rector's Award for Excellence in  
Teaching for 2021/22!



Dr. Ronit Sinnreich received the  
HUJI, Faculty of Medicine Dean's  
Award for Excellence in  
Teaching for 2021/22!



Dr. Yael Bar-Zeev published  
article in Nature Medicine about  
electronic cigarettes as a harm  
reduction approach during  
pregnancy.



Prof. Adam Raz received the  
NIHP (National Institute for  
Health Policy) research grant.



# Braun School News:

## Photo Report from IMPH'47



Braun School of Public Health  
and Community Medicine  
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# Stay Connected



One of the many ways we connect and engage with our alumni, students, colleagues and friends is through social media. While we enjoy sharing news, photos, and fun facts with you, we also love receiving your photos and stories. You are doing incredible work that is worth sharing. We are thrilled to increase IMPH engagement on Twitter, and thanks to the reminder from Dr. Gbenga Adebayo (IMPH'16, Nigeria), we are back on Instagram. Please explore the many ways you can connect and engage with each other and the students on our social media:

- Follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)
- Use [#MPHLikeNoOther](#), [@IMPH\\_Alumni](#), [@IMPH\\_HUJI](#) in your posts
- Tag [@imph.huji](#) on your Insta, [@HebUIMPH](#) - Twitter
- Propose your photos and stories to be featured on IMPH pages
- Like, share and re-tweet our posts

Do you have a new research study, grant, award, or other achievements that you would like showcased in our media outlets? You are, as usual, invited to submit your news via email, or share it with your colleagues on our WhatsApp/WeChat groups.

**Remember that life at HebrewU does not end when you graduate;  
it continues, grows and thrives.**



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