

December 21, 2016

Dear Team,

We're down to the last days of 2016, and it's a great time to reflect on this year.

It's no surprise that our students continue to impress. Congratulations to Andrew Braith, who was selected to receive a 2016 Excellence in Public Health Award from the U.S. Public Health Service Physician Professional Advisory Committee. Our first Suzanne and Ward Chambers Global Health Fellows, Jonathan Ali, Bijaya Padhi, PhD, Trang Hoang, and Kushal Karan, MD completed projects around the world that resulted in recommendations to improve the public health systems in their project areas. We have the excellent leadership of a Student Association who really stepped up this year with many great events for all of us. Thanks to Kushal Karan, Kandy Do, Shelby Braun, Jessica Semin, and Tatiana Tchouankam, we had a fantastic National Public Health Week with so many events to celebrate our field. A highlight of the week was the Student Research Conference. The professionalism and competitiveness seems to increase every year.

Our student body continues to grow and it was quite exciting that the College held its first convocation ceremony this year. Former Associate Dean, Dr. Alice Shumaker, Ms. Kristi Gifford and Dr. Chandran Achutan made sure it was a spectacular celebration worthy of our students! The fall convocation was held Friday, December 16, 2016, and I hope many of you were able to make it. Going forward, convocation will be held at the end of each fall and spring semester.

This year, there were many BIG initiatives on the forefront.

In June, we had an all college strategic planning retreat with a great turnout. As a community, we began to identify steps to become a world-renowned leader in the College's four priority areas: Student Experience, Cancer Prevention and Control, Community-Driven Health Transformation, and Health System Transformation. We owe the Strategic Planning Steering Committee a big round of applause for ensuring this process continues in a successful, meaningful way.

In October, after years of preparation, we had our CEPH Accreditation Site Visit. I was excited to showcase our College, programs, and partners and to gain insights on how we can grow even stronger. The site visit was a great success. CEPH's preliminary findings showed that, out of 27 criteria, we met 23, which is a great accomplishment. There were three criteria that were met with commentary, meaning they made suggestions for improvement. They determined one criteria to be partially met, related to our PhD programs. Even before we received their draft report, which came to us very recently, our team was hard at work to ensure that plans are developed and actions are taken to ensure compliance and improve our programs. The accreditation process is never-ending, with new criteria being required annually. We look at this as a good thing; it ensures that we're providing the best to our students and community. The dedication and commitment made it a successful site visit and I cannot thank everyone who contributed to this important process, enough.

We continued to work toward making Nebraska the healthiest and most equitable state. We focused on expanding our ties to our communities and meeting new partners. It seems everyone we connected with was eager to work with us to make this a reality. We continue to visit our state health departments, provide legislative testimony to support the increase of taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products, provide comments to lawmakers on binge drinking, and provide testimony on a climate change resolution. Although there can be disappointment, that will not sway our commitment to speaking up and providing scientific evidence on a variety of important public health issues.

The College continues to forge collaborative relationships with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS). Representatives from the College are meeting regularly with teams at NDHHS to identify new actions to directly target the Nebraska America's Health Rankings health indicators in 2016 as well as funding opportunities for Accountable Health Communities, a model that addresses a critical gap between clinical care and community services.

The College has also been asked to play a new role addressing significant community health issues such as substance abuse, diabetes, and cancer amongst our Winnebago and Omaha American Indian tribes. We have been asked to respond to tragic epidemic of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome at the Pine Ridge reservation from the annual sale of 3.5 million cans of beer in Whiteclay, NE.

As always, there are many exciting things happening with our faculty and staff. We welcomed Dr. Paul Estabrooks as the first endowed chair in the college, an endowment that was generously established by Ruth and Bill Scott and the Scott Family Foundation, as well as Dr. Deborah Levy as Chair of the Epidemiology Department. A big thank you to Dr. Kendra Schmid for taking on the Interim Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs as we go through our search process.

We also had numerous award winners like Drs. Johansson, Rajaram, Schumaker, Schmid, Watanabe-Galloway for their outstanding teaching, research, and service. Dr. Melissa Tibbits was awarded a 2016 Distinguished Scientist Award and Ms. Mary Morris, Administrative Associate in Biostatistics, who was awarded the Chancellor's Commendation "Gold 'U' Award. Mary is only the third 'Gold U' recipient in the college's history and this award is well deserved.

Several of our faculty are part of the Great Plains IDeA-CTR Network leadership team that has secured the largest grant ever for the University. The National Institutes of Health five-year research grant totals nearly \$20 million. Additionally, Drs. John Lowe and Sharon Medcalf are part of the project team awarded nearly \$20 million by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to develop a Training, Simulation and Quarantine Center to teach federal health care personnel procedures in treating highly infectious diseases and to create a place to monitor persons who have received a high-risk exposure to a highly infectious disease, such as Ebola.

With all of this, we have also experienced loss. Several people important to the College, their communities and loved ones will be missed. Dick Holland was a true public health champion and generous donor to not only our College and campus, but the entire Omaha community. Jackie Hill from our Center for Reducing Health Disparities worked tirelessly to ensure women had



resources to prevent and deal with breast cancer. Roxanne Jessen from HSRA was a trusted resource and friend.

I truly believe the future of the College is secured with your continued enthusiasm, engagement and support. I am humbled and proud to know that you will not shrink from championing for social justice, including Medicaid expansion, climate change, an improved environment, STD prevention, comprehensive sex education and increased diversity, inclusion and engagement with our communities. No matter the financial or the political climate, our mission does not change. We strive every day for a better tomorrow with a focus on disease prevention, health equity, healthy communities, and social justice.

Wishing everyone a lovely holiday season and a healthy and fulfilling 2017.

Always listening,
Ask

Ali S. Khan, MD, MPH

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Dean and Professor

College of Public Health | Office of the Dean