

UMass MIND Network Newsletter



AMY CHEUNG: REFLECTING ON A SEVEN-YEAR JOURNEY WITH CIP

BY BRENNA CHUANG



Our Community Intervention Program (CIP) is proud to see one of its co-founders, MD/PhD graduate of UMass Chan, Amy Cheung, embark on the next chapter of her medical career at Yale School of Medicine's psychiatry residency program!

While shadowing Dr. Xiaoduo Fan at his clinic seven years ago, Amy began thinking of ways in which patients could be better served through sustainable community programs, designed to have a real impact on their daily lives. She, along with a few other medical students, pinpointed different areas of health and daily life that could be targeted through an evidence-based community-oriented approach. By building relationships with community members and entities, Amy learned about the interests and needs of the vulnerable patient population she wanted to serve and started to develop what would later become UMass MIND's Community Intervention Program.

Amy explained that CIP began with an emphasis on arts and music and healthy living projects; some of the earliest projects were guided imagery art therapy and healthy cooking demonstrations in the community. From there, CIP expanded by building off its one-time community events to create full evidence-based interventions such as the nutrition program currently being run at local group homes. As CIP's membership grew - a combination of psychiatry residents, medical students, interns, and MIND staff - so did its initiatives. In addition

"I'M JUST REALLY PROUD WITH HOW MUCH THE PROGRAM HAS GROWN."

– Dr. Amy Cheung, MD, PhD

to its Arts and Music and Health Living modules, CIP has added an Early Detection and Intervention module that engages local colleges to provide mental health programming. Amy has contributed to eight peer-reviewed publications with UMass MIND, five of which she was the first author. One of Amy's favorite parts of being involved with CIP was having the opportunity to be involved in all the modules, and seeing so many new initiatives being launched. "Being able to hear all these different ideas and meet the people behind them is really exciting," Amy said.

As she transitions into residency, she hopes CIP will continue to become more ingrained into the community and promote the specific needs of the population it serves. She also notes the importance of "remembering one aspect of the program is that evidence-based approach, where we want to make sure that these programs are being developed to make sense on a larger scale."

Amy remarks that her involvement with CIP has greatly influenced her desire to pursue psychiatry and work closely with the community in the future. She notes, "I just really like being a part of the community, hearing people's stories, and getting to know them... A big part of psychiatry is that social, compassionate piece and I absolutely love that."

FIRST AUTHOR PUBLICATIONS:

"Food4Thought: a medical trainee led, remotely delivered nutrition outreach program for individuals with serious mental illness"

"A pilot remote drama therapy program using the co-active therapeutic theater model with people with serious mental illness"

"Walking together: exploring perspectives, attitudes, and barriers on nutrition and exercise among individuals with serious mental illness"

"Dual diagnosis theatre: a pilot drama therapy study for individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder"

"Treatment and services for psychosis: are college campuses a novel frontier for early detection and intervention?"

PUBLISHED IN:

Academic Psychiatry

Psychiatry Research

Community Mental Health Journal

Current Psychology

Schizophrenia Research

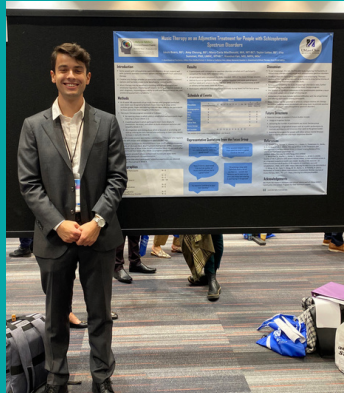
UMASS MIND PRESENCE AT APA ANNUAL MEETING

BY BRENNA CHUANG AND AUDRA CURTIN

UMass MIND is proud to announce that two of our members, UMass medical students Louis Beers and Clara Cabot, presented their work on expressive art therapies at the 2023 American Psychiatric Association (APA) Annual Meeting. This conference is the largest annual gathering of psychiatry professionals in the world, and includes speakers, workshops, and presentations on the latest breakthroughs in clinical practice and research.

Expressive arts therapies have the potential to help emotional expression, social skills development, and improvement in self-esteem. These types of therapies offer unique forms of emotional expression that do not necessarily require an individual to directly discuss their mental condition. UMass MIND is pursuing research on expressive arts therapies, such as drama therapy and music therapy, to determine whether these interventions are beneficial for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI).

Louis, a rising third year student presented his work titled “Music Therapy as an Adjunctive Treatment for People with Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders.” This was an 8-week virtual music therapy pilot program, tailored for people with schizophrenia spectrum disorders and led by a certified music therapist. Music therapy can help participants to develop skills of physiological and emotional regulation, aid in the formation of an individual’s identity apart from psychiatric diagnosis, and help to manage mental symptoms. This program, being in a group format also encouraged the formation and maintenance of social ties. After the program was complete, participants were given the opportunity to provide their feedback on the program and made remarks such as: “Now if I’m in a bad mood, I can put on a piece of music and it will put me in a good mood,” and “[The



sessions helped me] be more positive and in a good mood at the end.” UMass MIND is hoping to complete future iterations of this program with a few modifications based on the feedback given by participants!

Clara, also a rising third year student, presented “Perseverance in Recovery: A Remote Drama Therapy Program for People With Serious Mental Illness in the Clubhouse Setting,” which was funded by the National Endowment of the Arts. This 12-week virtual drama therapy program for individuals with SMI was done in collaboration with Genesis Club and Lesley University and used the co-active therapeutic theater (CoATT) model, which allowed participants to develop a theme around their own mental health recovery. While mental health recovery programs often focus on the past and the stressors that facilitated maladaptive behaviors and psychiatric symptoms, the CoATT model shifts the participant focus towards the future through the goal of working towards a public performance. In this way, the CoATT model works to empower participants in mental health recovery and restore to them a sense of personal belonging in their community and an identity apart from their mental illness. This program led up to a virtual public performance and created a space to engage in a dialogue with the audience on different aspects of mental illness. After the performance, participants reflected on their experiences, emphasizing the collaborative effort that went into the program: “we all got through it together – we persevered.” Of the performance and audience engagement, it was noted that “[it’s nice] to be heard... mental illness kind of gets pushed in[to] the background, so it’s kind of nice [to be heard].”



We are excited that the new cycle of drama therapy started in June 2023 at Genesis Club in response to the continued interest of its members!

CHINESE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY FINDINGS PUBLISHED

BY ALIX BARRY

Among people with mental illness, Asians are less likely to utilize mental health services than other racial and ethnic groups. In 2021, only 25% of Asian adults reported receiving mental health services compared to 52% of White adults. Increased discrimination and hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to worsening mental health among Asians. These statistics highlight the importance of understanding help-seeking behaviors and mental healthcare gaps in the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

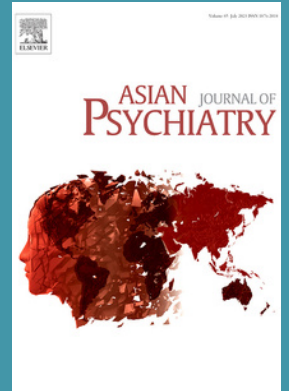


To investigate the relationship between attitudes towards mental health and help-seeking behavior among Asian Americans, UMass MIND and Project Harmonious, a Chinese mental health program,

collaborated on a year-long survey. The Chinese Community Mental Health survey was conducted among a community sample of 325 Chinese Americans in Massachusetts between 2020-2021. To read the survey report, [click here](#).

The first research paper based on the survey, "Acculturation and Mental Health Help - Seeking Behavior in a Community Cohort of

Individuals of Chinese Descent," was just published in *The Asian Journal of Psychiatry*. Analysis of the results found significant correlations between higher levels of acculturation and increased public stigma, greater psychological openness,



and reduced indifference to stigma. First author and project leader Zilin Cui, a graduating UMass Chan medical student, emphasized the importance of understanding that the Chinese community is not a homogeneous group, as those who are more "acculturated have grown up here, taken up a lot more American culture, could be different from those who have grown up in a different culture," meaning that different generations and subsets of this community face unique barriers to accessing mental health services. These findings shed light on the intricate factors contributing to the under-utilization of mental health services within the Chinese population and provide valuable guidance for future research on targeted mental health education and intervention programs. To read the published paper, [click here!](#)

CURRENT STUDIES: ACTIVELY RECRUITING!

Study #1: Substance Use Study

The purpose of this study is to see whether Brexpiprazole, an FDA approved antipsychotic medication for schizophrenia treatment, may help reduce substance abuse in individuals with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. This study is 3 months in length with weekly meetings.

Study #2: Drama Therapy

The purpose of this study is to see whether participating in drama therapy can help reduce symptoms of Serious Mental Illness. This consists of meeting in a group setting facilitated by Drama Therapists and constructing a play to promote recovery that will be performed publicly. The current cohort is in conjunction with Genesis Club of Worcester.

Our studies are conducted at 26 Queen Street, Worcester, MA 01610. You will be compensated for your time being involved in any study. If you are interested or would like more information about any of our studies, please call 508-856-MIND (6463) or email MIND@umassmed.edu

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