

Dear Fellows, Colleagues, and Friends,



When I joined CMB's Board of Trustees in 2016, the Equity Initiative had just welcomed its first cohort of Fellows and was taking initial steps toward its goal of building a community for health equity in Asia. Those were early days for this ambitious undertaking but the commitment of my predecessor, Lincoln Chen, the creativity of Phuong, Piya, and their team, and the enthusiasm of that inaugural cohort made it clear that the Equity Initiative was poised to accomplish great things. Five years later, in my role as CMB president, I feel very privileged to be involved in this program, and my Zoom conversations with Fellows are absolutely the best part of my day.

The need for health equity leaders has never been greater. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the increased risk for minority populations, as well as the importance of equity in addressing public health emergencies. Vaccine equity is an immediate concern, with most vaccines designated for rich countries and limited immunization to date in low- and middle-income countries. Solving these problems calls for what Harvey Fineberg, a global health leader and CMB trustee, calls "enlightened altruism." That means recognizing that COVID in any one country is a threat to all countries, and our Fellows can help us translate the spirit of enlightened altruism into ground-level action.

We ask our Fellows – all busy professionals – for a significant commitment of their time and energy. This past year, we also have had to ask for their forbearance and resilience as COVID restricted our programming options. I thank our EI team for their hard work in transforming our programming for the virtual environment, and our Fellows for keeping the EI spirit of innovation, resourcefulness, and fun going strong in a difficult year!

Barbara J. Stoll
CMB President

P.S. Please see details below about our plans for **Equity Community Building Funds**. I encourage our Senior Fellows to respond to this new funding opportunity with creative ideas!

Visit our website for more information on The Equity Initiative

NEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Support for Building Equity Community Networks

Attention, Senior Fellows! EI has launched a new source of funding to support EI Senior Fellows' efforts to strengthen equity community networks in their respective countries as well as in the region. The **2021 Equity Community Building Funds** will provide support for innovative projects and action-oriented research that engage a network of cross-sectoral organizations and leaders and work to solve pressing equity challenges and promote innovative approaches for systemic change. The deadline for proposals is June 30.



2021 Fellowship Year Gets Underway



The orientation for our 2021 Fellows, held virtually on March 10, was an opportunity for Fellows to get to know each other and to preview of the program’s signature blend of peer, experiential, and online learning. With travel restrictions still in place, several of the learning events are being transformed for virtual learning, with the expectation that in-person gatherings may resume in the second half of the program year. However, as the program team explained, the curricular goals

of “know-do-be” remain intact, driven by the 3 C’s of comprehension (What do we want Fellows to know?); competency (What do we want Fellows to be able to do?); and commitment (What do we want Fellows to be?). Our Fellows – 26 in number, representing 12 countries and a wide range of professions – are enthusiastic about helping us pioneer new formats for learning!

COVID-19: OUR FELLOWS RESPOND

Delivering COVID-Related Care

Two of the doctors among our Fellows have direct responsibilities for delivering COVID-related care. [Leslie Ann Luces](#) (2021), a provincial health officer in Aklan province, Philippines, is overseeing the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in the province, as well as operations of the provincial hospital. In Brunei, [Noor Affizan Rahman](#) (2021) has been named medical superintendent of PMMPMHAMB Hospital, Tutong, which is treating COVID patients, and also is part of the vaccine rollout for Tutong region.



Risks to Hospital Cleaners: Perspectives from Four Countries



Fellows from four countries undertook a comparative study of government hospital workers, with particular attention to their occupational health and safety risks during the pandemic. As [Rennta Chrisdiana](#) (Indonesia, 2019), [Viengnakhone Vongxay](#) (Lao PDR, 2021), [Alfredo \(JR\) Coro](#) (Philippines, 2019), [Letchimi Devi](#) (Malaysia, 2019), and their co-authors point out, hospital cleaners typically are low-income earners, whose lower levels of education and training limit their employment mobility. During the pandemic, their responsibilities for hygiene of care facilities put them at risk of infection and, for some, their status as contract workers, rather than hospital employees,

raised fears about job security during a period of economic constraint. To read the case studies, which were supported by an Atlantic Institute Solidarity Grant and matching funds from EI, [click here](#)

Recruiting the Post-COVID Workforce

[May Sripatanaskul](#) (Thailand, 2018) has been working with a team of designers to develop a “jobs bot,” an app that aims to bridge the gap between businesses recruiting employees and the groups of job seekers who have been most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The team has started recruiting collaborative partners who can bring the SAKU jobs bot to scale, as well as job seekers. Over time, data on skills gaps gathered through the jobs bot can provide new insights on how to better prepare them for available positions in the job market. Development of the bot was supported by a Solidarity Grant from the Atlantic Institute and a matching grant from EI.



Virtual Annual Forum



Eighty Fellows participated in our Virtual Annual Forum February 5-7 and demonstrated that the virtual space can be a welcoming environment for shared learning and exchange. Keynote speakers **Roger I. Glass**, Director of the Fogarty International Center and Associate Director for International Research at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, and **Sohail Inayatullah**, a futurist and professor at the Graduate Institute of Futures Studies at Tamkang University, Taipei, urged Fellows to seize the

challenges of the moment. Dr. Glass stressed bringing the benefits of science – including stunning success in the development of COVID-19 vaccines – to as many people as possible, while Dr. Inayatullah reminded Fellows that novel, even utopian, ideas can move into mainstream thinking and ultimately be translated into policy. Fellows also enjoyed the opportunity to meet new CMB President **Barbara Stoll** and to provide updates on equity developments from their own countries and professions. [Click here for a more detailed report.](#)

Brown Bag Session Looks at Youth-Friendly Services

Young people in the Philippines lack access to youth-friendly sexuality and reproductive health education as well as to contraceptives, factors that contribute to the country's high teen pregnancy rate. At EI's March 18 Brown Bag Session, [Amina Swanepoel](#) (2021) described how young people often face disapproval from health workers when they seek contraceptives and are stigmatized if they become pregnant. Amina's NGO, Roots of Health, has developed a youth-friendly assessment for clinics, designed to gauge their accessibility (operating hours, proximity to schools, waiting time); environment (welcoming, private, security of records); and staff preparedness (nonjudgmental attitude, appropriate training and certification). Adopting a youth-friendly approach, Amina said, can be beneficial to any organization that designs health interventions or offers other forms of support to young people.



Designing
Youth-friendly
Services

Thai Fellows Retreat: An Escape to the Future



Our Thai Fellows' retreat, December 19-21 in Prachinburi, was an opportunity to step away from day-to-day responsibilities and consider future scenarios. Ittinat Seeboonruang of The Change Initiative kept Fellows focused on the future as he facilitated several sessions on "Strategic Foresight and Social Justice." [Sornchai Chatwairiyachai](#) (2021) brought his performing arts expertise to an exercise in "Social Presencing Theater," designed to help Fellow explore and perform future outcomes. We hope Fellows felt refreshed and recharged by the getaway!

FELLOWS SPOTLIGHT

Raising Awareness through Performance

[Sornchai \(Sonny\) Chatwairiyachai](#) (2021) created a 10-minute piece of "invisible theater" designed to raise awareness about ethnic minorities and marginalized people. His piece focused on a community of Karen people who were displaced when Kaeng Kracharn Forest in Petchaburi Province was declared a national

forest in 1981. A simple scene in an ice cream shop provokes a debate about who discrimination and bias. The performance was staged in a Bangkok department store without advance notice but went viral when an influential blogger posted a recording of it on his Facebook page.



Rebalancing Thailand's Healthcare Workforce



Thailand produces more healthcare workers every year, yet many Thai universal healthcare (UHC) beneficiaries still have limited access to quality healthcare. That's due, in part, to an imbalance in the healthcare workforce, evidenced by long waiting lines at the outpatient departments of public hospital. Using a system dynamics approach to explore workforce planning scenarios, [Borwormson \(Ack\) Leerapan](#) (2018) and his co-investigators recommend giving greater emphasis to professionals that provide primary intermediate, long-term, palliative, and end-of-life care. As they argue in [an article](#) published in *Human Resources for Health*, that would be a high-leverage policy of health workforce planning – though one that will be challenging to implement in the short term.

Combatting Online Sexual Exploitation of Children

[Gideon Cauton](#) (2019) was interviewed on Eagle News' morning news show, "Balitalakayan," about online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), or the livestreaming of sexual abuse of children on the Internet. Gid described how the Philippines has become a global hotspot for OSEC, how victims are often 12 years old or younger, and how coordinated national and global law enforcement efforts are needed to shut down sprawling online networks. Gid's organization, International Justice Mission, takes a multisectoral approach to combatting OSEC, working with law enforcement and also raising awareness of the nature and extent of these crimes. To watch the interview (in Tagalog), [click here](#).



FELLOWS RECOGNITION

Promotions for Two Fellows



Congratulations to [Jiang Fan](#) (2018) and to [Shi Nan](#) (Harry) (2017)! Jiang Fan was recently appointed Chair of the Deans Council at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Harry has been promoted to Deputy Director of the Department of Education at Peking University First School of Clinical Medicine.

...And a "Study Break" for Another

[Ana Santos](#) (2018) is enrolled in a postgraduate program in gender (sexuality) at the London School of Economics and Political Science with the support of [Chevening](#), the UK government's competitive international awards program aimed at developing global leaders. While Ana intended for this to be a break from journalism, her studies are providing more inspiration for her writing. Her recent article on sexism in the Philippines can be found [here](#).



Photo by VJ Jusi

Using Media to Influence Policy



[Nguyen Quoc Thanh](#) (2019) has been selected for a four-week training program on media impact and narrative change, offered by Brave New Films in cooperation with the Atlantic Institute. The training will teach participants how to use media, film, and digital strategies to persuasively tell the stories of their communities, create new narratives, and have an impact policy. This opportunity is an ideal match for Thanh, who combines his gifts as an artist and curator with a vision for community engagement.

Vaccines and Equity

[Alfredo \(JR\) Coro II](#) (2019) and [Rennta Chrisdiana](#) (2019) are participating in the Rapid Action Lab on Vaccine Equity, a global Atlantic Fellows endeavor to catalyze action toward COVID-19 vaccine equity. Both Fellows bring frontline experience to this initiative – JR as mayor of the Municipality of Del Carmen, Philippines and Rennta as an advocate for patients' rights.



New Advisory Forum



[Khaulah Fadzil](#) (2018) and [Natarajan \(Raj\) Rajaraman](#) (2019) are serving on the Global Atlantic Fellows Advisory Forum, an advisory group of 14 Senior Fellows (two from each of the seven Atlantic Institute programs) to consider how the Atlantic Institute can best serve its community.

EI CALENDAR

Brown Bag Session- Facing the Climate Crisis: June 2021

Public Narrative Workshop: June 2021

Adaptive Leadership Workshop: July 2021

EI Guest Speakers Series: June, July and August 2021

Send us your news!

Help us build an engaged community for health equity by sending us updates on your speaking engagements, highlights of your work and travel, and interesting projects you encounter. Send your news to:

info@equityinitiative.org