



NEWSLETTER

INSTITUTE FOR SUCCESSFUL LONGEVITY

Sheila Salyer talks 25 years of guiding Tallahassee's senior services

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**ISL Director Neil Charness
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Looking at gaps in digital equity and ways to provide all ages with access

I was recently asked to give a talk during the United Nations International Day of the Older Person on the topic of Digital Equity for All by the International Association on Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG). I was to represent the region of North America, which includes Canada, the United States, Mexico (and geographically speaking, Greenland). It was an interesting challenge to try to find comparable statistics across countries for indicators of digital equity.

The term digital equity is not that recent, going back to at least 2006, to its use in an International Society for Technology in Education article: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED497214>: “Digital Equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy.” As the pandemic made clear, having access to internet information and services was important for everyone but particularly to those older adults in sheltered care settings who were locked down earliest and longest. Even before the pandemic, a variety of groups were calling for internet access to be declared a human right, and at least one country, Finland, adopted that stance. Of course, misinformation promulgated across the internet has also been quite problematic for fighting off this pandemic, so access does not equal access to validated information.

I took the following as indicators of digital access: internet access, smartphone ownership, and broadband access. Through sources such as Pew Research and Statistics Canada I found that the North American Region is doing much better than the world as a whole. On average, half the world is offline, and the gap between the most developed countries (87% access) and the least developed ones (19% access) is huge (<https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx>). There is clear digital inequity.

However, we need to dismiss the idea that all is right in North America. For instance, for internet access in the United States, older adults age 65+ clearly lag younger age cohorts. Whereas nearly all age 18-64-year-olds are online (~98%) there are still a quarter of those age 65+ offline. That’s a significant gap.

Age breaks are a bit different in Canada. Whereas roughly 98% of Canadians age 15-54 years old are online, that drops to 86% for those 65-74 year old, and to 62% for those age 75+. Again, figures are hard to compare across countries, as the Canadian data refers to access in the last three months and for the United States internet access refers to the past year.

Other comparisons are relevant for examining digital equity for all people. For instance, in Canada aboriginal persons have lower access (88%) than non-aboriginals (92%). People with a disability are at 89%, and those without a disability are at 93%. For those with a high school or lower education, access is 85% compared to 98% for those with a bachelor’s degree or higher. In both the United States and Canada there is gender equity for internet access. The picture is somewhat similar for the two other indicators, smartphone ownership and broadband access, where in the USA there are age, race/ethnicity, education, income, and rural/urban inequities.

Data for smartphone ownership in Mexico in 2019 showed wider age, education, and gender gaps. Males were more likely to own a smartphone than females (57% vs 48%), as were people with more education compared to those with less (79% vs 35%) and younger (age 18-34) compared to middle-aged (35-49) compared to older adults age 50+ years (66% vs 53% vs 30%).

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Neil Charness, Ph.D.,
is the William G. Chase
Professor of Psychology,
FSU Distinguished Research
Professor and Director of
the Institute for Successful
Longevity.

What are the reasons for digital inequity? Access to broadband or cell service, cost of devices to connect to the internet and the cost of leasing it from internet service providers, and learning costs are likely very important. So, too, are barriers such as differences in digital proficiency, particularly as a function of age as FSU research has shown (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0733464816642582>).

Fear of loss of privacy and security breaches may also play a role, though Canadian data suggest that even as cyber security incidents increased from 2018 to 2020, those age 65+ experienced far fewer incidents than other age groups.

So, how might we promote greater digital equity, both in North America

and the rest of the world? Cost barriers can probably be addressed by subsidies. Proficiency gaps might be addressed by using community centers to teach relevant skills to seniors. However, the cyber security issue is going to be a tougher nut to crack because the large companies that serve as gatekeepers to internet resources (e.g., Facebook) have very strong financial incentives to keep selling our data to advertisers who are hoping to sell us goods and services. Government regulation is going to be needed here to safeguard data. The need is just as urgent for requiring software and hardware manufacturers to be more responsible about ways to safeguard their software programs and hardware devices to prevent hacking. ■

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financial incentives to keep selling our data to advertisers who are hoping to sell us goods and services.



You can volunteer to help ISL's longevity research

FSU's Institute for Successful Longevity needs research volunteers to help us achieve our mission of improving health and well-being for Florida's aging population.

You can be paid to advance the science of successful longevity, helping your friends and family achieve longer, more productive, and enjoyable lives. You will be able to choose what studies you participate in.

To volunteer, visit <https://isl.fsu.edu/volunteer>, or call 850-644-8571, or send an email message to ISL@fsu.edu.

The Institute for Successful Longevity conducts research into how to live longer, stay active and be fully engaged in life. The institute takes a multidisciplinary approach to better explore the complexities of life as an older individual. Learn more at <https://isl.fsu.edu/>. ■

Sheila Salyer talks of 25 years guiding senior services in Tallahassee

To understand what makes up successful longevity, it helps to take the long view. And Sheila Salyer, with 25 years of experience guiding Tallahassee's senior services, definitely does so. She knows that successful longevity is many things, working together toward key goals: "The mission of a senior center is, you know, active aging," she said, "helping people stay engaged and connected to their community."

In two-and-half decades as head of the Tallahassee Senior Center and manager of Senior Services for the City of Tallahassee, Salyer has worked, year to year, to build a catalogue of activities that keep people engaged.

"Part of our mission is to offer opportunities for people to explore optimal aging — stay active and stay socially fit," she said, in a conversation that looked back over her time directing and expanding the Tallahassee Senior Center. "What we hear most is keep moving," she said, in describing the

many exercise classes and other activities that draw older adults to the Senior Center, at 1400 N. Monroe St., and its branches countywide. "But people are people, and they need purpose in their life, too," she said.

Salyer said this sense of purpose is central to individuals' finding satisfaction as they age. "If people quit having purpose they might quit getting up and out in the morning and staying connected," she said. "As you know, that leads to potential negative health impacts."

Aging is about life changes, Salyer said, and a sense of purpose helps people find their way through those adjustments. "Maybe they've retired," she said. "Maybe they're widowed. Maybe they've got just a new life situation and they're looking for 'What can I do now? What do I need to do now? I need to be fulfilled. I need to find my purpose. I need to use the skills that I've developed.'"



Sheila Salyer, Tallahassee's Senior Services Manager and Executive Director of the Tallahassee Senior Center, with Neil Charness, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for Successful Longevity. In addition to her role guiding senior services citywide, Salyer serves on ISL's Community Advisory Board. Salyer recently marked her 25th year as head of Tallahassee's senior services.

Under Salyer, the Tallahassee Senior Center has developed a philosophy that addresses the complexities of aging — the need to remain active, the wish to be connected and the desire to hold a sense of purpose.

Older adults need to be able to look ahead, she said, and see ways they can remain active and engaged with their family, their friends and their community. “I’m not lost,” she said. “I’m not finished yet. I’m not done with contributing yet.” That is what is going through the hearts and minds of older adults as they work through changes. “The Senior Center is set up to offer different opportunities to meet these needs,” she said.

Fitness is a large part of Salyer’s approach to fostering successful longevity. “We offer more than 20 different fitness opportunities every week in all of our sites, in county community centers, here at the Senior Center, in all different levels,” she said.

Salyer stressed that successful longevity is more than being physically active and fit, and that’s why she directs the Senior Center to provide venues for creativity and lifelong learning. That can prove to be a big task. “I found as people get older they don’t become more alike, they become more unique in their wants, their interests and their skills,” she said, “so it’s important to offer a wide variety of things that fit different people’s interests and skills.” The Senior Center’s classes (some ongoing, some one-time events) have astounding variety. There are art classes, of course, (drawing, painting, sculpture and more), but also “A Brief Introduction to Coffee,” “The Pursuit of Justice After the Holocaust,” “Native American Cosmology,” “Vitamins and Minerals for Grown-ups,” “Come and Play with the Trains,” and others. Many are now offered virtually.

Recreational activities vary as well. There is an outdoors group for hiking, biking, fishing, kayaking and such. Bridge, the card game, is big, as is the tile game mahjong. Pickleball is raging. There is, without a doubt, plenty to do. And plenty of places to do it. Over time, Salyer said, “we learned that people are more likely to participate on a more regular basis if it’s close to their community, in their neighborhood. It wasn’t just about the one place. You needed to be much broader than that, much more available and accessible to meet people where they were.” The Tallahassee Senior Center now operates in community centers throughout Leon County, in addition to its headquarters in the old armory at Seventh Avenue and Monroe Street, near Lake Ella. A new facility, in northeast Leon County, is in the design stage.



Sheila Salyer, at the annual Capital City Senior Games, an annual competition for older adults in various sports. Salyer played basketball in high school and college in her native Kentucky and once coached the girls team at Tallahassee’s Lincoln High School.

Throughout all that expansion, Salyer has observed and reacted to changes in the interests and needs of older adults. She's also been a witness to social changes, especially in the lives of women. "Back in the '70s, '80s even the early '90s, older adults were still in that mentality of relying on Social Security," she recalled. "You had a lot of the older women who had not been in the workplace, were widowed or they had followed their husbands' careers. Over time, more women had their own incomes and their own retirements and their own careers, and so today there's not as much of an entitlement mentality," she said. "Women want more ownership of what they're doing. They want to direct themselves more."

Another big and rapid change has been online — the Tallahassee Senior Center has gone big on Zoom. "The pandemic pushed us into having to get into that," she said, "and older people embraced it. Not all of them, but a lot. They got on there and tried to figure it out. And the Tallahassee Senior Center was one of the first to offer virtual programs, thanks to the resources we have available to us. The Institute for Successful Longevity, in fact, was a big part of helping us train people on Zoom." ([Find ISL's free how-to-use-Zoom guides here](#)). Virtual is now a solid part of the Senior Center operations. "I don't think that's going away," Salyer said. "I don't think any of that replaces the in-person contact, though. It's just really hard to do fitness virtually (only about a third of fitness seniors participated virtually). But for our lifelong-learning folks, it was almost opposite — about two-thirds of those folks were virtual and comfortable with it."

Going forward, Salyer said, the Tallahassee Senior Center will keep the virtual options available. "We have the opportunity now to keep people connected when they're not physically able to come to the Senior Center anymore," she said. "Now we can do hybrid classes where they can still have some connection with their support network, their friends and their activity, even when they're past the point of being able to get into the building."

One thing Salyer and her staff have learned in its response to the pandemic is that technology plays a big role in the lives of older adults. Technology is now essential. "Even if it's a fitness class, there's a dependence on technology, to register for classes, to keep up with the schedule, to pay online," she said. "So the technology, that's what's going to happen going forward." Use of technology will be a key part of providing services to older adults in the future, she predicted. "We're still going to be keeping that personal, hands-on, cash acceptance of fees and things like that," she said. "You can come here and fill out a hard copy form, and all that's going to be a transition. But in the future, it's going to be a lot a lot more virtual, a lot less paper kinds of things, programming-wise."

In dealing with all these changes, Salyer acknowledged that the success of the center is tied to the support she and her staff enjoy from the city administration and the Tallahassee City Commission, as well as the "generous contributions of time and resources from our leadership groups over the years," she said.

Other changes will come, as Salyer and her staff keep up with the desires and interests of older adults. Much of that is hard to predict. Who'd have thought pickleball would take off in Tallahassee? Salyer, with an eye of what's happening among seniors in South Florida — "you know how things kind of work their way north sometimes" — anticipates a surge in dominoes. We'll see. But whatever catches the interest of older adults will be on Salyer's radar and in her plans. "We're thinking as much as we can about what's going to be current in the next couple years and what we can adapt and transition to be relevant for the next 50 years," she said. ■



Sheila Salyer, out on a hike. She likes to stay active out of doors, hiking, biking and on the water.

Research by ISL Faculty Affiliates finds sense of purpose associated with better memory

A new study led by Faculty Affiliates of the Institute for Successful Longevity showed a link between an individual's sense of purpose and their ability to recall vivid details. The researchers found that while both a sense of purpose and cognitive function made memories easier to recall, only a sense of purpose bestowed the benefits of vividness and coherence.

The study, which focused on memories related to the COVID-19 pandemic, was published in the journal [Memory](#).

“Personal memories serve really important functions in everyday life,” said Angelina Sutin, a professor in the College of Medicine and the paper's lead author. “They help us to set goals, control emotions and build intimacy with others. We also know people with a greater sense of purpose perform better on objective memory tests, like remembering a list of words. We were interested in whether purpose was also associated with the quality of memories of important personal experiences because such qualities may be one reason why purpose is associated with better mental and physical health.”

Nearly 800 study participants reported on their sense of purpose and completed tasks that measured their cognitive processing speed in January and February 2020, before the ongoing coronavirus pandemic took hold in the U.S. Researchers then measured participants' ability to retrieve and describe personal memories about the pandemic in July 2020, several months into the public health crisis.

Participants with a stronger sense of purpose in life reported that their memories were more accessible, coherent and vivid than participants with less purpose. Those with a higher sense of purpose also reported many sensory details, spoke about their memories more from a first-person perspective and reported more positive feeling and less negative feeling when asked to retrieve a memory.

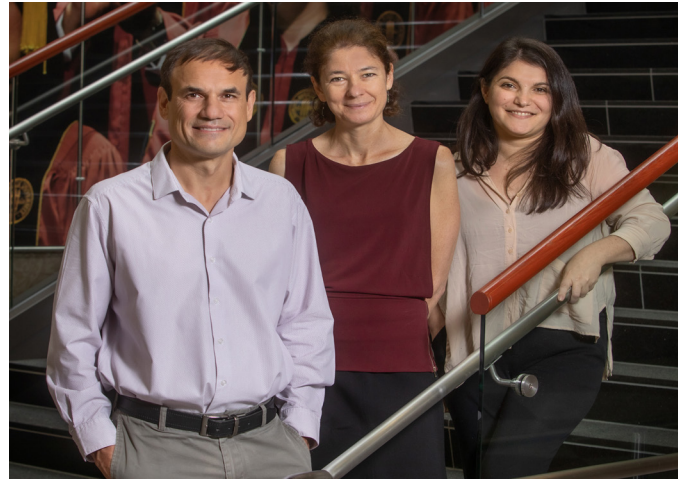
Purpose in life has been consistently associated with better episodic memory, such as the number of words retrieved correctly on a memory task. This latest research shows a correlation between purpose and the richness of personal memory.

“We chose to measure the ability to recall memories associated with the COVID-19 pandemic because the pandemic is an event that touched everyone, but there has been a wide range of experiences and reactions to it that should be apparent in memories,” said co-author Martina Luchetti, an assistant professor in the College of Medicine.

Along with the association with better memory, previous research has found other numerous benefits connected with having a sense of purpose, from a lower risk of death to better physical and mental health.

“Memories help people to sustain their well-being, social connections and cognitive health,” said co-author Antonio Terracciano, a professor in the College of Medicine. “This research gives us more insight into the connections between a sense of purpose and the richness of personal memories. The vividness of those memories and how they fit into a coherent narrative may be one pathway through which purpose leads to these better outcomes.”

Damaris Aschwanden, a postdoctoral researcher at the FSU College of Medicine and also an ISL Faculty Affiliate, and Yannick Stephan, a researcher at the University of Montpellier in Montpellier, France, contributed to this study. ■



From left, Professor Antonio Terracciano, Professor Angelina Sutin and Assistant Professor Martina Luchetti from the Florida State University College of Medicine.

ISL Faculty Affiliate Amy Ai receives Innovation Award from International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) has honored Amy L. Ai, Ph.D., Professor of Social Work and a Faculty Affiliate of the Institute for Successful Longevity, with its Innovation Award.

Dr. Ai is only the second person to receive the society's Innovation Award. The honor is given to an individual or group who has used innovative methods to advance the field of traumatic stress in the areas of prevention, research, treatment, teaching, policy and advocacy.

ISTSS President T.H. Eric Bui, a French psychiatrist and scholar, noted that Dr. Ai's interdisciplinary research focuses on trauma/resilience, existential crises, and positive psychology, using mixed-methods, and covers diverse populations and events. He also highlighted her "seminal tool book, Assessing Spirituality in a Diversified World."

"I am immensely grateful for this award," said Dr. Ai. "It is a great honor and pleasant surprise, because I am not an ISTSS member, have not joined its meetings, and have not published my research on its renowned journal after my Kosovar War study 20 years ago. This area used to be dominated by a medical model concerning individuals' posttraumatic pathology. Since 9/11, collective trauma due to increasing impacts of deadly disasters presents a major challenge and awareness to a larger picture. For example, major hurricanes and Covid-19 have disproportionately hit hard nursing-home and poor-minority communities. I am glad that my studies on both individual and collective trauma with an emphasis on posttraumatic growths and character/cultural strengths, especially our 2021 book, may have important implications for a new direction."



Amy Ai, Ph.D.

The ISTSS is dedicated to sharing information about the effects of trauma and the discovery and dissemination of knowledge about policy, program and service initiatives that seek to reduce traumatic stressors and their immediate and long-term consequences.

"This Innovation Award only makes me think that there is so much work to be done," said Dr. Ai. "I am hoping to collaborate with ISTSS' members and other interdisciplinary scholars for its future."

Dr. Ai's current interests involve Gerontology, Health Disparities, and Existential Issues following Major Disasters. ■

Jing Wang, Dean of Nursing, named an emerging leader

Jing Wang, Ph.D., dean of Florida State University's College of Nursing and a Faculty Affiliate of the Institute for Successful Longevity, has been named a 2021 Emerging Leaders in Health and Medicine Scholar by the National Academy of Medicine (NAM).

Wang was one of 10 individuals selected by the academy for the Emerging Leaders in Health and Medicine (ELHM) Program, which provides a platform for a new generation of leaders to collaborate with the academy and its members to advance science, combat persistent challenges health care and spark transformative change.

"I'm honored to be included in this group of prestigious health care professionals in the 2021 cohort of NAM ELHM," Wang said. "It is a wonderful example of an interdisciplinary array of colleagues whose common goal is to expand quality and equitable health care. I am grateful for this opportunity and for the possibilities ahead." ■



**Jing Wang, Ph.D.,
Dean of Nursing**

ISL NEWS BRIEFS

Ravinder Nagpal to speak on 'Diet-Microbiome Interactions' in the next ISL Brown Bag on December 6

You are invited to hear Ravinder Nagpal, Ph.D., speak on "Diet-Microbiome Interactions in the Aging Gut." His talk, via Zoom at noon December 6, is part of the Institute for Successful Longevity's Brown Bag Series.

For the Zoom link, please send an email message to ISL@fsu.edu.



Ravinder Nagpal, Ph.D.

Dr. Nagpal is Assistant Professor of Nutrition, Food & Exercise Sciences in the College of Health and Human Sciences. His research spans around understanding the host-associated microbiome and the dynamics of diet-gut-brain interface at the extremes of aging and in aging-associated metabolic and cognitive health.

Aaron Wilber's Brown Bag on his Alzheimer's research now on ISL's YouTube channel

If you missed the recent talk by Aaron Wilber, Assistant Professor in FSU's Department of Psychology, on his research on Alzheimer's disease, you can now watch it on ISL's YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/--cv5Po3JDY>.

He gave his talk October 25 as part of the Institute for Successful Longevity's Brown Bag Series.

Dr. Wilber's research is directed at understanding how we get oriented in space so we can navigate our environment and what goes wrong when this system fails.

He is currently exploring why Alzheimer's disease leads to difficulty navigating new surroundings, what brain changes may underlie getting lost, and treatments for reversing these impairments.



Aaron Wilber, Ph.D.

ISL Director Neil Charness opens FSU's Milton S. Carothers Faculty Lecture Series

Neil Charness, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for Successful Longevity, opened the Milton S. Carothers Faculty Lecture Series with a talk October 18 on "The Promise and Limits of Technology to Promote Successful Longevity." He gave his address in the Robert B. Bradley Reading Room in Strozier Library.

NSF supports Yanshuo Sun's development of technology to aid transportation use

A multi-university team of researchers led by Yanshuo Sun, Ph.D., from the FAMU-FSU College of Engineering will conduct a new three-year National Science Foundation-funded project to promote social equality and improve transportation accessibility for millions of transportation-disadvantaged people.



Yanshuo Sun, Ph.D.

Sun, an assistant professor in the college's Department of Industrial and Manufacturing and a Faculty Affiliate of the Institute for Successful Longevity, is principal investigator for the project involving Florida A&M University, Morgan State University and the University of Utah.

The NSF project sprang from research Sun conducted with support from an Institute for Successful Longevity Planning Grant.

Neil Charness, Paul Katz speak at Westminster Oaks' Brain Health Symposium

Paul Katz, M.D., Chair of Geriatrics in the College of Medicine and Medical Director of the Westminster Oaks, and Neil Charness, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and Director of the Institute for Successful Longevity, gave talks at a Brain Health Symposium in recognition of the opening of a new Memory Care Center at Westminster Oaks in Tallahassee.

Katz spoke on "Successful Aging," and Charness addressed "Interventions for Cognitive Aging." ■

NEW FACULTY AFFILIATES

The Institute for Successful Longevity welcomes three new Faculty Affiliates from the College of Nursing.

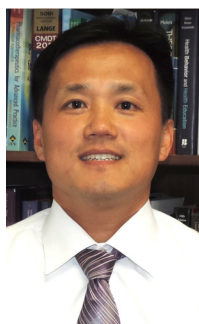
Jing Wang, Dean, College of Nursing

Jing Wang, Ph.D., MPH, RN, FAAN, is the new Dean in FSU's College of Nursing. Previously she was vice dean for research at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio School of Nursing.

Recently Wang was named a 2021 Emerging Leaders in Health and Medicine Scholar by the National Academy of Medicine.

Hyochol "Brian" Ahn, Associate Dean for Research, College of Nursing

Hyochol "Brian" Ahn, Ph.D., MSN, MS-ECE, MS-CTS, APRN, ANP-BC, FAAN, is Associate Dean for Research and Professor in the College of Nursing.



**Hyochol
"Brian" Ahn,
Ph.D.**

Recently, Ahn was recognized as a Distinguished Educator in Gerontological Nursing through the National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence (NHCGNE) Recognition Program.

Mia Newlin-Bradner, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing

Mia Newlin-Bradner, Ph.D., R.N., M.S.N., is Assistant Professor in FSU's College of Nursing.

Newlin-Bradner's research is focused on the role of physical activity in prevention and management of chronic disease, with emphasis on women with heart failure with preserved ejection fraction. ■



**Mia Newlin-Bradner,
Ph.D.**

Zhe He elected Fellow of American Medical Informatics Association

The American Medical Informatics Association has elected Zhe He, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the School of Information and a Faculty Affiliate of the Institute for Successful Longevity, as a Fellow of the association.

The American Medical Informatics Association has 5,600 members who are subject-matter experts in the science and practice of informatics as it relates to clinical care, research, education, and policy.

"This is an important recognition of my long-term dedication to informatics research and education", Dr. He said. "I wouldn't have achieved this without our nurturing research environment, amazing colleagues, and fantastic students/trainees. In particular, ISL is instrumental to my success. I'd like to thank my mentors Dr. Neil Charness [ISL's Director] and Dr. Mia Liza A. Lustria [also an ISL Faculty Affiliate] for their unwavering support!"



Zhe He, Ph.D.

Dr. He, who also holds a courtesy appointment with the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine in the College of Medicine, is the Informatics Lead of the UF-FSU Clinical and Translational Science Award. His research lies in biomedical and health informatics, clinical research informatics, data mining, knowledge representation, and big data analytics. The overarching goal of his research is to improve the population health and advance biomedical research through the collection, analysis, and application of health data from heterogeneous sources.

As Principal Investigator, Dr. He has been funded by National Institutes of Health, Eli Lilly and Co., Amazon, NVIDIA, FSU Council on Research and Creativity, and the Institute for Successful Longevity.

Dr. He obtained his Ph.D. in Computer Science from the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Before joining FSU, he was a Postdoctoral Research Scientist at Columbia University. He has published more than 80 peer-reviewed papers in leading biomedical informatics venues. His papers received a number of prestigious recognitions including two Distinguished Paper Awards of AMIA 2015 and 2017 Annual Symposium. ■