

## Message from the Director

Happiness is a New Year!



On my desk sits a small figure of Snoopy sitting on his doghouse. He is looking pretty happy - the caption says

“Happiness is a new day”, and well, who could argue that this doesn’t apply to 2019 as a whole.

When THETA was younger, and certainly when I was, I would have passed this sentiment right by as being so banal as to be unworthy of notice. Days? We’ve got a million! But as days and years have passed in THETA’s life, the gift of each new day does actually look to me like happiness.

Mainly, lately, though, because they are not just days...they are days with good things...

(i) We continue to have amazing space on the 10th floor of the Eaton Wing of TGH, which we are very pleased to share with the lovely folks at the Biostatistics Research Unit (BRU). Our days are filled with light, and blue and green;

(ii) Our scientists Val Rac, Beate Sander, and Lusine Abrahamyan, and close collaborators William Wong and Nicholas Mitsakakis are building national and international collaborations, bringing in new grants, students by the dozen, and an ever-increasing number of collaborators across disciplines;

(iii) We have had extraordinary support from institutions of which we have been a part. The Faculty of Pharmacy supported several of our senior researchers for several years. TGHRI is supporting us with amazing space, Canada Research Chair salary

support, and administrative support. The Ted Rogers and Family Centre of Excellence in Heart Function and the Division of Cardiology at UHN are also providing salary support, and the Divisions of General Internal Medicine, Respiriology, Cardiology, and Infectious Diseases are supporting our neighbours, the BRU;

(iv) We have also had wonderful support from some of our research partners such as the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, Public Health Agency of Canada, CIHR, and Prostate Cancer Canada, to name a few;

(v) Our staff is amazingly positive, in addition to being hard working and impressively competent. As a result, our work environment is just a nice place to be. We’ve had some impressive new additions too in the last year (see ‘New Faces’ section);

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# Gallery 10th Anniversary Symposium & Open House

It was a long-time coming, but THETA finally opened its (newly renovated) doors to the THETA Community and celebrated an Open House and 10th Anniversary Symposium. We had a great time seeing and chatting with everyone – thinking big thoughts together, and celebrating the past and future.



From L-R: Dr. Fredrika Scarth, Shahira Bhimani, Dr. Wendy Ungar, Dr. Hamid Sadri, Dr. Maartin IJzerman, Dr. Valeria Rac



Dr. Maarten IJzerman



From L-R: Dr. Edward Cole, Dr. Heather Ross, Dr. Mansoor Husain, Dr. Bradly Wouters



From L-R: Dr. Irfan Dhalla, Dr. Murray Krahn, Dr. Beate Sander, Dr. Wendy Ungar



Dr. Irfan Dhalla



Dr. Bradly Wouters



Dr. Heather Ross



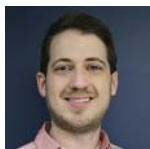
Dr. Edward Cole



From L-R: Karen Liu, Beena Vyas, Dr. Valeria Rac, Dr. Aleksandra Stanimirovic, Steven Carcone

# New Faces

## Welcome New Staff



Rafael Neves Miranda  
Research Associate  
THETA



Julie Hudson  
Biostatistician  
BRU



Jim Bowen  
Clinical Research Manager  
THETA

## Students under the supervision/co-supervision of Dr. Murray Krahn

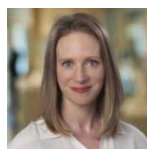


Dr. Doug Cheung  
MSc Student



Zehra Fatima  
Undergraduate  
(internship)

## Students under the supervision/co-supervision of Dr. Beate Sander



Dr. Kali Barrett  
MSc Student



Dalton Budhram  
Medical Student  
(summer)



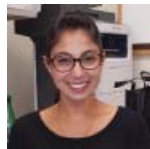
Dr. Karen Chung  
MSc Student



Dr. Diana Magee  
MSc Student



Maya Murmann  
BA Student



Dr. Ambika Parmar  
MSc Student



Marina Richardson  
PhD Student



Panashe Tombindo  
MSc Student  
(summer)

## Students under the supervision/co-supervision of Dr. Valeria Rac



Rick Maharaj  
MSc Student



Anna Cooper Reed  
MSc /PhD Student

## Students under the supervision/co-supervision of Dr. Luisne Abrahamyan



Selai Akseer  
MSc Student



Laura Oliva  
MSc Student

## Visting Scholars



Varsha Sankar  
PhD Student  
University of West Indies  
St. Augustine



Gebremedhin Gebretekle  
PhD Student  
Addis Ababa University  
Ethiopia



Richard Sregonja  
PhD Student  
Uppsala University  
Sweden



Leticia Leonart  
PhD Student  
Universidade Federal do Paraná  
Brazil

## Giving Back

Last holiday season, THETA participated in [The Shoebox Project for Women](#). This initiative, supported by Dream, collects and distributes gift-filled shoeboxes to women impacted by homelessness in communities across Canada and the US. Each thoughtfully created and decorated shoebox is filled with items valued at \$50.

Shoeboxes are filled with items that would help any woman feel special: gift cards, skin care products, good quality soaps and shampoos, make-up, chocolates, and warm socks and mittens, to name a few. In each box we included a warm greeting or a message of support. THETA staff had a great time creating their shoebox and participating in the spirit of giving.



From L-R (standing): Alex Haines, Troy Francis, Yeva Sahakyan, Murray Krahn, Joanna Bielecki, Valeria Rac, Beena Vyas, Teresa Tsui  
L-R (seated/kneeling): Nida Shahid, Karen Liu, Raphael Ximenes, Suzanne Chung

This holiday season, THETA contributed to the Food Bank for the [105 Gibson Centre](#). This community centre has been serving all members of the community regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender and background. During the winter month they open their doors to the homeless and provide them with safe refuge and warm hospitality. 13% of Canadians live in a state of food insecurity, which means they do not have reliable access to adequate amounts of safe nutritious food. We collected food items such as canned meats and vegetables, cereal, baby formula and dried grains. We hope that our small contribution made a difference in the community.



From L-R (standing): Rafael Miranda, Raphael Ximenes, Joanna Bielecki, Alex Haines. L-R (kneeling): Karen Liu, Suzanne Chung, Yeva Sahakyan

# THETA's Global outreach extends to Armenia & Ethiopia

In September-October 2018, Drs. Lusine Abrahamyan and Yeva Sahakyan were invited to Armenia to lead graduate courses at the American University of Armenia (AUA) for the Master of Public Health program.



Dr. Lusine Abrahamyan

Dr. Lusine Abrahamyan, an Assistant Professor at IHPME, University of Toronto and a Clinical Epidemiologist at THETA, led a 3-week course on "Survey Research Methods". The course taught the fundamentals of survey research methods and gave students the opportunity to apply the knowledge in the field. During the course, the students designed a survey study, selected and translated a survey tool, received an ethics approval for the project, and conducted a survey of general public. Students worked in small groups to complete this class project.

Dr. Yeva Sahakyan, a Research Associate at THETA and MSc candidate in Biostatistics, University of Toronto, was co-teaching a graduate course on Inferential Biostatistics. The course introduced the major concepts of modern statistics as applied to problems in public health and medicine. Students had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the concepts of probability and distributions, hypothesis testing including t-test, ANOVA, correlation, and regression.



Dr. Yeva Sahakyan

## HTAi 2018

The HTAi 2018 Annual Meeting took place in Vancouver June 1-5, where THETA faculty members Drs. Murray Krahn, Valeria Rac and Lusine Abrahamyan, as well as THETA investigator Dr. Petros Pechlivanoglou taught the following half day workshops:

### Complex Interventions for HTA – Real World Experience: Let's Make Them Simple Together

This was an introductory-level course about complex interventions and their increasing role in HTA. The course offered an introduction to core concepts of complex interventions – their design, implementation, and evaluation.

### Early HTA: A Case Study of Pre-Market Evaluation

Early evaluation of health technologies is collaboratively implemented by policymakers, industry, and academia to select and expedite the development of emerging technologies that may address the needs of patients and health systems. This course provided theoretical and practical knowledge on early HTA using a case study of a Canadian-grown technology.



Dr. Sahakyan with AUA, Master of Public Health students.



## Dr. Beate Sander Teaches 2-week Economic Evaluation Course at Addis Ababa University

### Week 1

- During my first week at Addis Ababa University I spent the majority of my time teaching Economic Evaluation (lecture and tutorial daily) to 32 Masters students.
- The students were amazing, very keen and engaged. We completed our first cost-effectiveness analysis together - they all selected great topics to work on over the next month (A huge thank you to all Toronto students who volunteered to tutor!!!).
- I spent the remainder of my time sampling local food and coffee (all great). Shadowed UofT anesthesia resident in the OR and ICU teaching residents here - amazing opportunity to experience healthcare. Learned a ton about the healthcare system from the students.



### Week 2

- Two intense weeks of teaching incredibly determined students.
- Students presented their project outlines on the last day (problem, methods, draft model structure in TreeAge, key data).
- It was so great to see all the presentations and many students asking questions to their fellow students; and could confidently discuss pros and cons of Markov models vs. simple decision trees, appropriate time horizons etc.
- Lots of plans for next year (and the coming years). Loved Addis - such a bustling vibrant city. Hope to be back next year!

## 3's a Charm!

Congratulations to Dr. Murray Krahn on being awarded a prestigious **Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Health Technology Assessment**. The Canadian Government invests approximately \$265 million per year to attract and retain some of the world's most accomplished and promising minds.

The Canada Research Chair in HTA has just been established in 2018 in recognition of a novel approach that Dr. Krahn is developing for HTA process. "Krahn and his research team are evaluating the effectiveness, safety, acceptability and cost of medical devices, services and drugs. By integrating health modelling, qualitative research and health services research, they are developing a new model of health technology assessment." (from Government of Canada website)

"I want to congratulate all of the new and renewed Canada Research Chairs at the University of Toronto and thank the government for supporting their important work," says Vivek Goel, U of T's vice-president of research and innovation.

"We are grateful to the Government of Canada for its ongoing investments in the Canada Research Chairs program and for the additional funding for this program announced in Budget 2018. Such investments not only yield



Photo: Murray receiving the SMDM Award for Distinguished Service from Awards Committee Chair Karen Sepucha. Photo courtesy of SMDM, Robert Hamm.

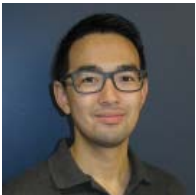
new knowledge but set the stage for important innovations ranging from new cancer therapies to sustainable transportation technologies that will improve lives in Canada and around the world." (from University of Toronto website)

Murray has also been named the recipient of the **2018 Eaton Clinical Researcher of the Year Award**. The award was presented to Dr. Krahn at the Department of Medicine Annual Day event on June 18, 2018. This award recognizes a member of the Department of Medicine who has demonstrated sustained excellence as a scientist and role model over several years.

Finally, in October 2018, Murray received the **SMDM Award for Distinguished Service**. This award recognizes service to SMDM in terms of leadership, role in the operations of the Society, and contributions to the scientific and educational activities of the Society.

## Congrats to Stephen Mac, Andrew Mendlowitz & Nida Shahid

Stephen was awarded a **CIHR Frederick Banting and Charles Best Canada Graduate Scholarships**



**Doctoral Award**, which will sustain his research for the next three years. Stephen Mac is a PhD Student in Health Services Research

(HTA stream), Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation, University of Toronto.

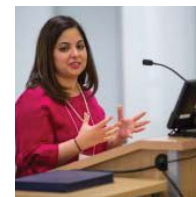
Andrew won the **Ted Goldberg Award** at the Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation (IHPME),



University of Toronto Research Day. Ted Goldberg Award is the award for academic

excellence and promise for doctoral candidates in Health Services Research. Students receiving the award must have successfully defended their dissertation research proposal within the last 12 months.

On January 17, IHPME student and THETA Research Associate Nida Shahid won the U of T Libraries inaugural **Graduate Student Exhibit**



**competition, Showcase Your Work** for her creative display and use of the University's library resources in her

literature review on artificial neural networks (ANN) in health care settings. Read more about her work [here](#).

Photo courtesy: Paul Terefenko



# New Grants

## The Prevention of Group B Streptococcal (GBS) Disease in Infants

CIHR Project Grant  
Apr 2019 - Mar 2022  
\$409,276

PIs: Crowcroft N, Natasha S, Fell D, Sander B  
Co-Applicants: Barrett J, Bolotin S, Brown K, Fittipaldi N, Mcgeer A, Murti M, Sadarangani M, Schwartz K, Wilson K

## Research Program in HTA and Network Analytics

CIHR SPOR Diabetes Network -  
Diabetes Action Canada  
Oct 2018 - Dec 2020  
\$450,000

PI: Rac V  
Co-Applicants: Oumet M, Bowen J, Trbovich P, Tarride J, Martin J

## The Evolution of the CIHR SPOR Diabetes Action Canada Network - A Social Network Analysis

CIHR SPOR Diabetes Network -  
Diabetes Action Canada  
Sep 2018 - Mar 2021  
\$243,437

PIs: Rac V, Oumet M  
Co-Applicants: Dogba M, Lawarée J, Stanimirovic A

## Screening for DR among at Risk Populations: A Pilot Evaluation Study

SPOR Diabetes Network - Diabetes  
Action Canada  
Apr 2017 - Dec 2018  
\$114,953

PI: Rac V  
Co-Applicants: Brent M, Sutakovic O, Stanimirovic A

## Developmental Evaluation of Hospital at Home Intervention - Pilot Study

Academic Health Sciences Centre  
(AHSC) Alternate Funding Plans (AFP)  
Innovation Fund  
Dec 2017 - Apr 2020  
\$99,953

PIs: Bell C, Abrams H, Rac V

## A National Research Network on Lyme Disease

Canadian Institutes of Health Research  
(CIHR) Team Grant  
Jun 2018 - May 2022  
\$4,000,000

PIs: Aenishaenslin C, Chaconas G, Egan R, Hatchette T, Kulkarni M, Leighton P, Moore K, Moriarty T, Morshed M, Parsons J, Patel S, Sander B  
Co-Applicants: ~ 80

## Achieving Hepatitis C Elimination in Canada: Addressing the Needs of the Diverse Groups at Risk

Canadian Institutes of Health Research  
(CIHR) Project Grant  
Apr 2018 - Mar 2021  
\$1,197,225

PIs: Greenaway C, Janjua N, Kwong J, Sander B  
Co-Applicants: Azoulay L, Blouin K, Bruneau J, Dickie M, Feld J, Krahn M, Krajden M, Lapointe-Shaw L, Murphy D, Otterstatter M, Platt R, Pullenayegum E, Samji H, Tyndall M, Warshawsky B, Wong W

## Precision Phenotyping and Monitoring of Exercise Cardiovascular Performance to enable Activity for all Ontarians

Ontario Ministry of Research,  
Innovation and Science Ontario  
Research Fund - Research  
Infrastructure

Apr 2018 - Mar 2023  
\$3,000,000

PI: Mak S  
Co-Applicants: Rac V, Billia P, Rao V, Granton J, Overgaard C, Udell J, Fisher J, Yadollahi A

## Novel Clinical, Molecular, and -omics Approaches to Prediction of Heart Failure Readmission

Ted Rogers Centre for Heart Research  
Strategic Innovation Grant  
Feb 2018 - Jan 2022  
\$998,804

PIs: Lee D, Ross H, Gramolini A, Epelman S, Lawlor P  
Co-Applicants: Rac V, Seto E, Manlhiot C, MacIver J, Alba C

## The Cost-Utility of Active Surveillance Compared with Initial Treatment for Low Risk Prostate Cancer in the "Real World": A Population-Based Study from the Canadian Healthcare Payer Perspective

University of Toronto, Astellas Grant  
2018  
Mar 2018 - Feb 2019  
\$50,000

PI: Alibhai S  
Co-Applicants: Finelli A, Sander B, Tomlinson G, Timilshina N



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## The Canadian F.I.G.H.T. (Fluorescence Image-Guided Help in Treating) Breast Cancer Surgical Trial

CIHR Cluster 3 - Large Scale Grants

Sep 2017 – Mar 2022

\$2,922,300

PI: DaCosta R

Co-Applicants: Krahn M, Rac V, Abrahamyan L, Panzarella T, Rosen C, Deobald R, Groot G, Holloway C, Hong N, Nofech-Mozes S, Wright F, Helyer L

## Transformation of Indigenous Primary Healthcare Delivery (FORGE AHEAD): Enhancement and Adaptation of Community-Driven Innovations and Scale-up Toolkits

CIHR Team Grant: Pathways Implementation  
Research Team - Component 2 - Diabetes/ Obesity  
Pool

Oct 2017 – Sep 2019

\$652,110

PI: Harris S

Co-Applicants: Rac V, Webster-Bogaert S, Barre D, Thind A, Tobe S, Walsh A, Zwarenstein M, Te Hiwi B, Lavallee B, Parry M, Reichert S, Salsberg J, Rose A, McDonald H, Dannenbaum D, Hux J, LaPlante J, MacDonald P, Dawson K, Dyck R, Green M, Musgrave S, Johnson W, Hanley A, Wylie L, Bhattacharyya O, Picard A, Banasiak K, Joudry M, Bowser P

## Comprehensive Ontario Microbiology laBoratory Administrative daTa for AntiMicrobial Resistance (COMBAT- AMR)

Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)  
Project Grant

Oct 2018 - Sep 2021

\$608,176

PIs: Brown K, Daneman N

Co-Applicants: Allen V, Garber G, Johnstone J, Langford B, MacFadden D, Patel S, Rudzicz F, Sander B, Schwartz K, Stukel T, Yann M

## In Memoriam

In sadness, we would like to inform you about the news of the passing of former THETA and University of Toronto, Faculty of Pharmacy student, Dr. Amy Tawfik.



Amy, who was supervised by Dr. Krahn, is remembered as bright, cheery and ambitious soul. After defending her PhD in 2015, she went on to work in the Pharmaceutical and Banking Industries. Some of you had been informed that she had been ill over the past year, but the news of her passing still came as a great shock to the THETA community.

"I was shocked and really saddened to hear of Amy's death. Like children, students should not predecease you. Amy was full of light, intellectually curious, sparky in her interactions with people, fun loving, ambitious; one of those people who always brightens your day. It was a very, very sad day for all of us here when that light went out." – Dr. Murray Krahn

"We were all heartbroken when Amy passed away. She was smart, ambitious, but also very compassionate, kind and humble. Amy had a sunny personality; she would always lighten up the room with her contagious laugh and boundless energy. She will be hugely missed." – Dr. Valeria Rac

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(vi) Student numbers keep growing fast, from undergrads to visiting scholars. Our students are becoming the lifeblood of the place - helping to plan our present (Student Engagement Committee) and future, helping to teach short courses, mentor other students including mentoring Ethiopian students remotely, and generally imbuing the place with optimism and energy;

(vii) International focus - we are increasingly hosting visiting students from around the world (e.g. Ethiopia, Sweden, Uganda, Brazil, Mexico) and building international collaborations in Ethiopia, Uzbekistan, and China;

(viii) Finally, we are thinking seriously about our future...with the help of The Potential Group, we have struck a THETA 2023 task force and have developed three areas of focus for the next five years. These include: (i) Advancing innovations in methodology and guidelines in HTA; (ii) Growing our role as a Centre for Excellence, key partner and capacity builder for HTA in Canada; and (iii) Creating Novel Ways of Communicating our Brand, Value and Impact.

We have many things to be thankful for - new days, and some amazing things in them. Happy 2019 to us all, the THETA community!

## UHN Clin-Epi Rounds

February 15, 2019, Title: TBA  
Dr. Ewan Goligher  
Assistant Professor of Medicine, U of T; Physician-Scientist,  
UHN

March 1, 2019, Title: TBA  
Maria Cusimano  
Master's Student, IHPME

May 17, 2019, Title: TBA  
Dr. Brian Feldman  
Professor of Pediatrics, Medicine, IHPME & Dalla Lana School  
of Public Health; Division Head of Rheumatology, SickKids

May 31, 2019, Title: TBA  
Dr. Prakeshkumar (Prakesh) Shah  
Associate Staff Physician, Neonatology, SickKids; Adjunct  
Faculty and Professor, IHPME

## THETA Rounds

February 22, 2019, Title: TBA  
Dr. Bart Ferket  
Department of Population Health Science & Policy, Mt Sinai  
Hospital, NY

March 8, 2019, Title: TBA  
Dr. Ankur Pandya  
Assistant Professor of Health Decision Science in the  
Department of Health Policy and Management at the Harvard  
T.H. Chan School of Public Health

THETA Rounds are recorded and posted on the  
[THETA website](#)

HTA Institute 2019

## Health Technology Assessment for Decision Making

Dates TBD  
Ottawa, Ontario

THETA Collaborative has been offering the Health  
Technology Assessment for Decision Making course  
since 2011.

The 2019 Health Technology Assessment for  
Decision Making workshop is a product of  
collaboration between THETA, the Institute of Health,  
Policy, Management and Evaluation (IHPME), and the  
Department of Medicine, University of Toronto.

The workshop will bring together experts from  
a range of disciplines to provide attendees with  
pragmatic tools for HTA. This three-day intensive  
workshop will be useful to individuals who use  
HTA to make real-world decisions relating to drugs,  
devices, and programs.

For more information visit:  
<http://theta.utoronto.ca/HomePage/HTAworkshop>

THANK YOU FOR READING OUR NEWSLETTER!

We welcome your comments.

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