

# **UCLA** College | Life Sciences **Center for Reproductive Science, Health & Education**

## **Newsletter | Fall 2024**

The UCLA Center for Reproductive Science, Health and Education envisions a future in which reproductive policies and care are based on rigorous science, and access to this care is more equitable.

### **Director's Message**



Fall has seen a nationwide interest in reproductive health, fertility and in vitro fertilization (IVF). At the Center, one of our major activities involves the science of fertility and new reproductive technologies. This has kept us on our toes as we expand our reach to deliver science-based content through our social media channels and in person on the UCLA campus.

In October, we hosted Magdalene Zernicka-Goetz as our Distinguished Speaker. Dr Zernicka-Goetz is the Bren Professor of Biology and Biological Engineering at Caltech and professor of mammalian development and stem cells at the University of Cambridge. Spanning the last 25 years, Dr Zernicka-Goetz's lab made seminal contributions to the study of human embryos and is a pioneer in the field of stem cell-based embryo models. Highlighting the intense interest in the topic, Professor Zernicka-Goetz's lecture was standing-room-only with more than 200 people in attendance. Thank you to our co-sponsors - the UCLA Broad Stem Cell Research Center, the UCLA Barbara Streisand Center for the Study of Women and the UCLA Department of Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology for their support.

At the end of October, I was delighted to travel to Geneva, Switzerland with UCLA CRSHE's co-director, Hannah Landecker, for a meeting at the Brocher Foundation. This meeting was co-organized by Robbin Jeffries, Anne Le Goff and Noémie Merleau-Ponty, who expertly led and guided two days of discussions around the science and social science of new reproductive technologies. This was the first international event showcasing the interdisciplinary work of the UCLA CRSHE, with the workshop hosting representatives from six different countries. A highlight for me was CRSHE Fellow and graduate student, Isaias Roberson, who discussed the importance of emerging reproductive technologies for visibility and choice of LGBTQ+ persons in their reproductive futures.

In this newsletter, you will also find Stephanie Kiesow-Edoh's interview with Professor Patrick Allard on how the environment affects reproductive health and the health of future generations, as well as a discussion with CRSHE Fellow Sisi Peng, whose important work

looking at menstrual stigma on social media is teaching us about current social attitudes toward aspects of reproductive health for women and girls.

As we move toward the close of 2024, I would like to thank all our supporters and partners who worked with us in 2024 to bring reproductive, maternal and sexual health into the spotlight through research, education and public engagement.

Warm regards,

Amander Clark, Ph.D.  
Director, Center for Reproductive Science, Health and Education  
Professor, Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology  
UCLA College of Letters and Science

## Recent News

### **CRSHE hosted its Fall 2024 Distinguished Speaker Series Event with world-renowned scientist and author, Dr. Magdalena Zernicka-Goetz**

We were honored to bring in Professor Magdalena Zernicka-Goetz to discuss her groundbreaking work in embryo models and human embryos. It was a packed room with over 200 people in attendance! Please find the video recording of the talk [here](#).

Watch some of the crowd participants' thoughts on this talk [here](#).



### **Making eggs and sperm in the lab: 21st century bioethics and the rise of new reproductive futures (Brocher Foundation, Switzerland)**

Organized by CRSHE Directors Hannah Landecker and Amander Clark, CRSHE member Robbin Jeffries Hein, and French collaborators Anne Le Goff and Noémie Merleau-Ponty, this workshop explored the science and ethics of in vitro gametogenesis (IVG), which is the production of eggs and sperm from stem cells in a laboratory.

This workshop was the result of an NIH-funded CRSHE interdisciplinary project on IVG. It was made possible by a grant from the Swiss Brocher Foundation. Learn more [here](#).



## CRSHE Associate Director Spotlight

### UCLA Health Equity and Translational Social Science Feature

We are thrilled that UCLA's Health Equity and Translational Social Science Research Theme featured our associate director, Stephanie Kiesow-Edoh, and her work in maternal and child health. Read the [compelling interview](#) where Stephanie discusses her commitment and motivation to the lives of women and children.





**HETSS DGSOM SPOTLIGHT**

Stephanie Kiesow-Edoh is the inaugural Associate Director of UCLA's new Center for Reproductive Science, Health and Education here on campus. She has received both her MA in Developmental Psychology and Masters in Public Health here at UCLA. Stephanie has worked domestically and abroad in the field of maternal and child health, designed and lectured courses in reproductive health at UCLA, and has served as a birth and postpartum doula within the community.

**HOW DID YOU DISCOVER YOUR PASSION FOR THIS FIELD?**

"I've always been drawn to women's health, child development, and family dynamics. A majority of my work and research has been in association with labs that focus on these topics. At one point when I was in graduate school, I joined Dr. Dunkel Schetter's Stress Processes and Pregnancy lab where I began working at Cedars Sinai interviewing pregnant people. It was during this experience interviewing mothers and hearing their stories that I realized that I wanted to focus specifically on maternal and child health. I love having the opportunity to teach students, work in the community as a doula, and create spaces and events as an Associate Director that revolve around reproductive health, science, and maternal and child health. There is so much interest in these topics from students - creating a hub like the Center for Reproductive Science, Health and Education feels so important in order to help foster the pipeline of students interested in these fields."

**WHAT ARE PRESSING ISSUES IN YOUR LINE OF WORK THAT HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS SHOULD FOCUS ON?**

"First on my mind would be the staggering disparities in maternal mortality rates. The poor outcomes of maternal and infant mortality in this country need to be urgently addressed. Fortunately, this seems to be getting more media press than ever before - which is so crucial as the nation has fallen behind compared to other developed countries. Two other major issues would be the lack of national paid maternity and paternity leave and child care challenges in this country. I would refer to Reshma Senjani, CEO and CO-Founder of Mama First, as a resource and the incredible work she is doing in this field toward creating equity for working women and families in America."

**WHY DO YOU FEEL SO COMMITTED TO THIS WORK? WHAT KEEPS YOU MOTIVATED?**

"I feel incredibly committed to this work and it feels so central to who I am - from being a mother myself, to having worked in the trenches of birthwork alongside many of my friends and clients. Birthwork is particularly rewarding in its own way - there is nothing quite like a birthing mother couple holding their baby after the often intensive feat of labor. Being witness to this and getting the rare opportunity to be on a birth team is a gift. I never take for granted. My own children keep me motivated day after day - they are the strongest driving force in my life and my greatest teachers."

**IF YOU COULD BROADCAST ONE MESSAGE TO THE WORLD WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

"Take care of mothers, and babies will thrive and flourish."



Edited by: Christina Phan Diep

## Student Fact Sheets

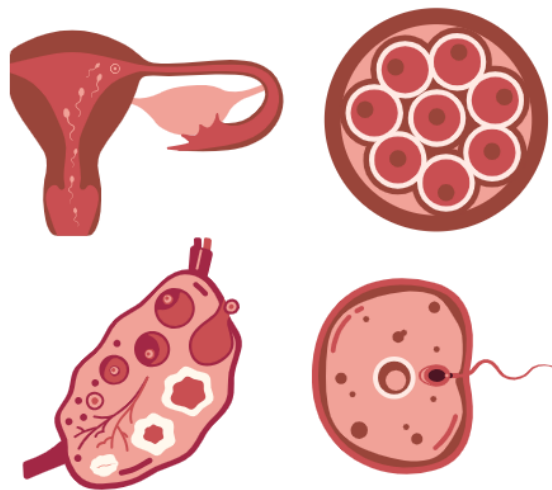
### Diving into PCOS by UCLA graduate, Megan Sparrow

Are you interested in learning more about what causes [Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome \(PCOS\)](#), the signs/symptoms, and additional resources on this topic?



### **What is an embryo? by UCLA student, Isabel Angres**

Do you know how many embryos are in storage in the United States? [Click here](#) to learn more.



Browse through our other [fact sheets](#) created by UCLA CRSHE students!

### **Did You Know?**

#### **Environmental toxins have a significant impact on reproductive health**

Our associate director, Stephanie Kiesow-Edoh, met with UCLA professor and scientist, Patrick Allard, to discuss his research and how the environment can affect maternal and reproductive health outcomes. Read the [interview here](#).



## Recent Event Recap!

### CRSHE Seminar Series featuring Sisi Peng

CRSHE's October Seminar featured Sisi Peng, Ph.D. candidate in the UCLA Department of Communication. Sisi's work is focused on the important topic of menstrual health and social media stigma. Her research is essential to normalizing conversations around female sexual health and wellbeing. Stephanie will be interviewing Sisi for our new CRSHE podcast which kicks off this Fall!



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## MONTHLY SEMINAR SERIES

Join us as we kick off our first seminar of the quarter!

“Perspectives on Periods: Joy, Stigma, and Disgust”

Sisi Peng will be sharing her current work with the Haselton lab studying attitudes toward periods in social media, surveys, and an in-lab experiment.

Date: Friday, October 4th  
Time: 11-12pm  
Location: BSRB Rm #483



Sisi Peng

## Donor News

### Good Hope Medical Foundation

The CRSHE would like to thank the Good Hope Medical Foundation Board for supporting the Mira Hershey STEM Student Fellowships. These fellowships are aimed at supporting early-career female scientists and will be administered by the CRSHE starting in 2025.

Follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [X](#) to keep up with our current news.

