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Creating space for the next generation of global health leaders takes technical skill, understanding of the industry and a passion for growth. But for individuals like Tonya Ross Walker, these qualities are in no short supply. As Deputy Branch Chief of the CDC's Division of Global HIV & TB's Epidemiology and Surveillance Branch (DGHT/ESB), Tonya works with the PHI/CDC Global Health Fellowship Program to provide early career professionals an opportunity to advance their careers through hands-on training and leadership development. Within the ESB Branch, Tonya interacts with fellows at both the CDC headquarters in Atlanta and in-country who work with the Branch's senior leadership and epidemiologists to plan and implement the global Population-based HIV Impact Assessments (PHIA).

As an established global health professional with over 28 years of public health experience at the local, state, federal, and international levels, Tonya serves as an example of how to successfully navigate the global health field to find roles that are engaging and offer growth.

Starting in health administration, she has transformed her career from frontline U.S.-based field positions to senior leadership roles at public health departments and CDC while gaining valuable leadership, programmatic, cooperative agreement management, budget, and administrative skills. Her professional and technical skills as well as her breadth of experiences make Tonya a key influencer for PHI/CDC Global Health Fellows.

Tonya's experience with the Fellows began in 2015, when she accepted her current position as DGHT/ESB Deputy Branch Chief and later began serving as Project Officer for the PHIA surveys. During her field visits to several of the PHIA country sites, Tonya was impressed by the fellows' capacity for leading efforts within the projects. While working with the PHIA effort,

fellows often fill critical roles that require involvement in each step of project deployment, including survey design, protocol development, training, data analysis, interpretation and dissemination. "With the fellows, they are our boots on the ground in the field, they know every part of the survey, and we couldn't do it without them," she says.

Although Tonya does not formally mentor any PHI/CDC Global Health Fellows, she often serves as an informal mentor and fellowship advocate. "I have mentored many fellows in my various positions at CDC, but this was my first time working with PHI/CDC Fellows," she shared. "I enjoy mentoring, motivating, and learning from the fellows on how to effectively work in leadership, management, operations and work through the various administrative processes within DGHT and ESB."

ABOUT THE POPULATION-BASED HIV IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Strong aggregate data gains against HIV have been achieved in eastern and southern Africa, a region that is home to more than half (53%) of the world's 36.9 million people living with HIV.

The Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (PHIA), implemented by leadership within countries, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and ICAP at Columbia University, is one of many global efforts to control HIV epidemics and inform actions and initiatives for future programs. PHIA are national surveys that specifically measure HIV incidence, prevalence, and viral load among those living with HIV. These indicators help to measure progress toward reaching the global targets to control the HIV epidemic and determine who still needs to be reached.

CDC mentors and supportive host office officials such as Tonya contribute greatly to each fellow's experience within the program. Going beyond the roles of providing day-to-day guidance on work activities, mentors and host office officials also help connect fellows to professional development and networking opportunities within and outside the agency and are actively involved in planning fellowship goals and objectives with the fellows. Additionally, they serve as champions for the fellows by highlighting their contributions and advocating for continued investment in developing global health's up-and-coming leaders.

However, as Tonya emphasizes, the mentor-mentee relationship is mutually beneficial, and that fellows also have ideas and perspectives that are valuable to CDC. Many fellows come to the fellowship with not only graduate degrees and the desired technical skills, but also with experience working in international settings and with a willingness to learn and share ideas for improvement. Their own personal experiences and collaborative work styles have taught Tonya more about collectively managing conflict and broadened her understanding of how to strategically work with younger professionals.

Her inspiration for mentoring comes from having had many great mentors throughout her public health career who have inspired her to continue sharing knowledge with the next generation of public health professionals. "There is daily joy in being around such a smart, intelligent team of fellows that are always willing to assist the branch with zest and utmost professionalism," she says. "This makes my daily commitment to public health 'worth it,' because it allows me to share my experience with our future public health leaders."



ABOUT THE POPULATION-BASED HIV IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Fourteen PEPFAR-supported countries were selected as part of the PHIA effort – Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

As part of the PHIA surveys, CDC lends its expertise in epidemiology, laboratory science, and data analysis to help country partners design and implement surveys and rapidly harness the results for program improvement.

Tonya's Advice to Future Fellows...

"Pursue a global public health career with the commitment to make a difference, stay engaged with all the various facets of your fellowship experience and become the ultimate professional to embrace the challenges and change the future. I love all of the fellows "CAN and WILL DO" attitudes. Stay humble, steadfast, compassionate and eager to learn."

And to Future PHI/CDC Mentors...

"Don't miss the opportunity to work with such amazing future public health professionals. My experience working with the PHI/CDC Global Health Fellows is that they are compassionate, earnest, and ready to take on the world."