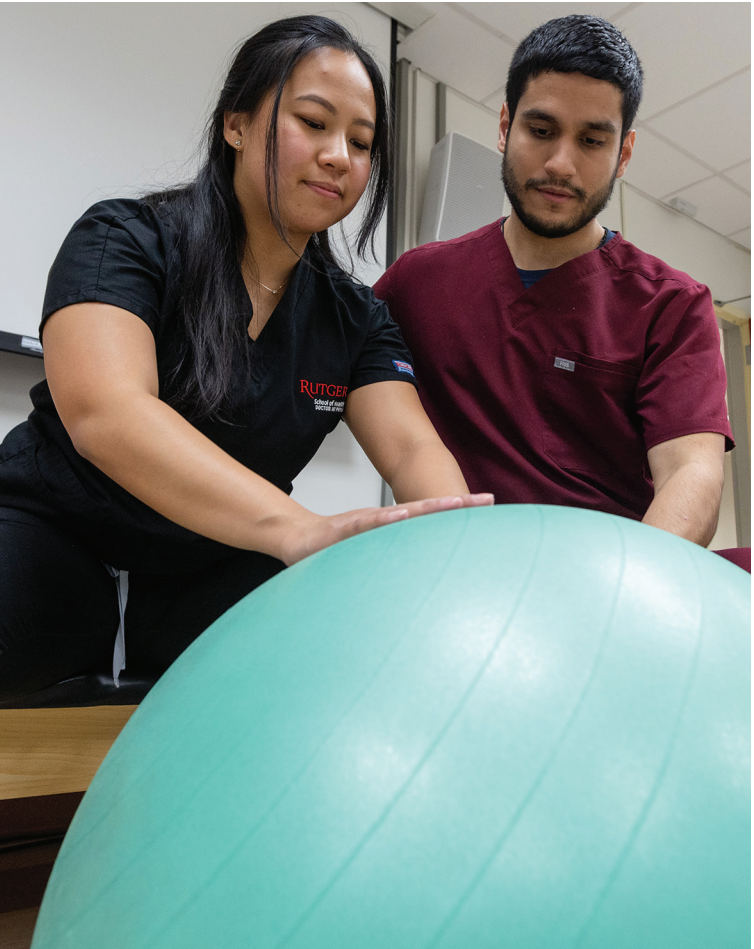




Rutgers School of Health Professions



TRANSFORMATION THROUGH TEAMS
ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022



contents

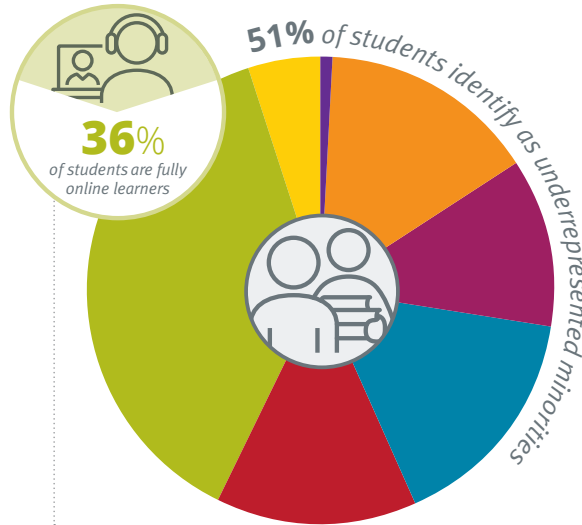
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1402 students enrolled



142 faculty

- <1% American Indian
- 15% Asian
- 12% Black
- 16% Hispanic
- 14% Two or More Races
- 38% White
- 5% Unknown



85 staff



3 locations



24 graduate and undergraduate degree programs



8 graduate and undergraduate certificate programs

444

Graduates in 2022



13,000+ alumni



Gwendolyn M. Mahon, MS.C., Ph.D.

DEAN
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Message From the Dean

As I reflect upon the past year, I am so proud of the faculty, staff, and students at School of Health Professions (SHP) and all that has been accomplished. COVID-19 challenged us and required us to become even more agile, adaptive, and innovative. I am happy to say we met that challenge. As an integrated and collaborative team, we have truly transformed the way we work and think. We know regardless of the challenges that we face, we can overcome them together.

The pandemic made it clear that the health care landscape is changing. SHP has responded to this and is preparing students for a future health care model where interdisciplinary, team-based care is key to the best patient outcomes. At our 2022 Convocation, the first in-person celebration in two years, I was inspired by student speaker Lauren Boggs, PA'22, who so accurately said, "Health care is a multidisciplinary art." Nowhere is this powerful statement more evident than in the SHP community, where multiple disciplines work together daily to improve health services and patient outcomes for New Jersey and beyond.

In the clinical space, SHP's transformational teamwork has widened access to primary and specialty care in urban, historically underrepresented communities across New Jersey. We accomplished this in partnership with faculty, students, staff, nonprofits and community groups, and through generous philanthropic contributions. Through this work, our students are immersed in clinical experiences serving the most vulnerable populations from day-one of their programs.

In the 2021–2022 academic year, our faculty secured more than \$6.9 million in grant funding, including five prestigious National Institutes of Health R01 project grants. We look forward to continued expansion of our research program under newly appointed associate dean for research Antonina Mitrofanova. In this past year, SHP faculty have also produced an incredible portfolio of scholarly work, with more than 200 peer-reviewed publications. This level of academic productivity is a result of collaboration and support from colleagues throughout SHP, Rutgers, and the nation.

After 24 years at Rutgers, including 12 years at SHP, it is with mixed feelings that I leave Rutgers for a leadership position at University of New England in Maine. Professor Alma Merians, chair of the Department of Rehabilitation and Movement Sciences, will assume the role of interim dean while a national search is conducted for a new dean. I am confident SHP will continue a trajectory of success for years to come.



Brian L. Strom, M.D., M.P.H.

CHANCELLOR
RUTGERS BIOMEDICAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES

Message From the Chancellor

As the largest health professions school in the nation, and one of the very best, SHP is a key component in the interprofessional health care educational program of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS).

The theme of this report, “Transformation through Teams,” is a tribute to the remarkable work by Dean Gwendolyn Mahon and the SHP faculty and staff to prepare students for a landscape where interdisciplinary care is key to optimal health care. In 2021–22, for example, SHP brought students from three programs—speech-language pathology, physical therapy, and occupational therapy—together to operate a clinic for those with brain trauma, understanding that best outcomes require a full spectrum of interrelated care.

Teamwork between SHP and RBHS led to the establishment in the fall of 2021 of a food pantry on our Newark campus to meet chronic food insecurity needs. This grew out of a study by an SHP professor demonstrating that food insecurity intensified during the pandemic. All of us at RBHS are proud of how our community came together to open and stock the pantry, which already has provided thousands of meals to ease hunger.

As you know, after 24 years at Rutgers, Dean Mahon will be taking on a new leadership role as university provost and senior vice president of academic affairs at the University of New England in Maine. I want to thank Dean Mahon for her leadership in enhancing the reputation of SHP as one of the preeminent institutions of its kind in the nation. While we will miss her leadership, I am delighted that Alma Merians, Ph.D., P.T., will be taking on the role of interim dean as we conduct a national search.

Dr. Merians is a tenured professor and chair of the Department of Rehabilitation and Movement Sciences. During her 18 years as department chair, she has overseen the growth of the faculty from five to 36 members. I look forward to working with Interim Dean Merians through the transition and during the search process and have tremendous confidence in her leadership.

The growth and development of SHP over the past seven years has been a point of pride for Rutgers University. The school's rising national reputation, expanding clinical enterprise, enhanced opportunities for faculty development and fulfillment, and a growing body of research point to an even brighter future.



DEANNA GAROFALO, student
Occupational therapy doctorate program

“I feel like we are going to be very prepared when we get to call ourselves clinicians. I believe I’m going to graduate with more confidence knowing that I am providing a higher quality of care than most entry-level practitioners.”



Transformative Learning



With more than 30 programs across the health care spectrum, Rutgers School of Health Professions strives to provide students with transformative opportunities to engage in multidisciplinary clinical, service, and research experiences beyond their didactic learning.

Over the past year, we focused on widening opportunities for interprofessional learning and team-based care in community settings.

In fall 2021, our school became a community partner in providing needed diagnostic and clinical speech-language services to children and adults in our hometown of Newark. The clinic, located in the Bergen Building, was staffed by students in our master's in speech-language pathology program, who assessed and treated people with speech, language, communication, and swallowing disorders.

Seeing an urgent need, we also opened a five-week summer clinic that brought students from three disciplines together to provide supervised, team-based care to people with brain injuries. Physical therapy, speech-language pathology and occupational therapy students together addressed speech-language cognition,

balance, mobility and the challenges of everyday living.

Partnerships have been formed with other schools at Rutgers and across the globe that deepen our students' understanding of team-based care.

Our global affairs department is collaborating with Rutgers School of Communications and Information (SC&I) on an initiative sponsored through the Institute of International Education in Greece. In May and June, SHP and SC&I offered their first joint summer school program in Greece—which included students from both schools, Rutgers School of Social Work and the Hellenic Mediterranean University in Crete.



“Our interprofessional teams gained insights into the many factors impacting health-related inequalities in Greece. Together, they developed proposals to help mitigate these inequalities,” said Riva Touger-Decker, professor and associate dean of global affairs at SHP.

Meanwhile, we continue to offer innovative education.

A flourishing program in laboratory science recognizes the reality that diagnostics is better when team-based: The Doctorate in Clinical Laboratory Science prepares certified medical laboratory scientists to be clinically trained, advanced health care practitioners who can vault beyond the traditional role of diagnosis into clinical consultation as members of an interprofessional team.

The first program of its kind, it began with one graduate in 2018 and now has 28 students.

They are sought-after partners in hospital and clinical settings. Through practice and research, they contribute to improved patient outcomes and effective use of clinical laboratory services.

“Our graduates are meeting the needs of health care providers and answering the call,” said Nadine A. Fydryszewski, program director.

Our Students

One of the most diverse health professions schools in the nation, SHP seeks out multifaceted students who are passionate, dedicated and caring. They are online learners, first-generation college graduates, and working health care professionals.

Many have persevered through challenges to pursue their education and further their careers.

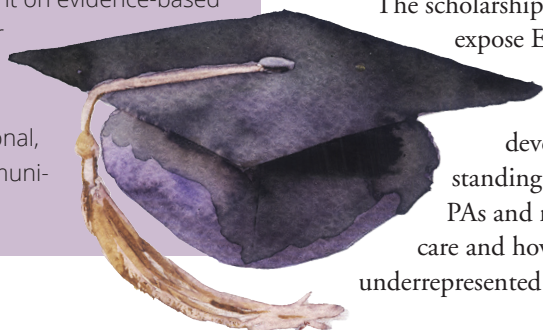
They are students like Jennifer Chalhoub, who was torn over leaving her family in the midst of civil unrest in Lebanon. But she was committed to enrolling in the entry-level master of science in clinical nutrition program, a program far more advanced than any in Lebanon.

She excelled in studies and clinical work, pursued professional association opportunities and extracurricular activities, and was nominated by faculty to be the class of 2022 student speaker.

They are also students like Amanda Nunes, a bachelor of science in psychiatric rehabilitation and psychology student, who worked with people with serious mental illness in a Newark housing program. She taught them to cook meals and crafted recovery plans for people considered at very high risk for homelessness.

Her work earned her a SHP 2022 Clinical Award of Excellence.

The first-class education and unique experiences of our students have prepared them to deliver interprofessional, team-based preventive health care reliant on evidence-based approaches. Our graduates leave SHP ready to make local, national, and global communities healthier.



Scholars to Work with Underserved Populations in Interprofessional Education Setting

Two students in the physician assistant program were awarded scholarships that provide mentorship, full tuition, and a chance to work in an interdisciplinary setting with nursing students through a foundation that aims to close a health care disparity gap for underrepresented populations.

The inaugural scholarship program, sponsored by the Axiom Reach Foundation, pairs Eva Frimpong and John Ogando with two Rutgers nursing students to work in collaborative teams with underserved patients at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey. The students were chosen as 2022 Axiom REACH Graduate Oncology Scholars.

Ogando and Frimpong began the three-year PA program in August of 2022.

“The scholarship experience will expose Eva and John to cancer care as well as help them develop a better understanding of the roles of both PAs and nurses in cancer care and how that may impact underrepresented communities,” said

Matt McQuillan, chair, Department of Physician Assistant Studies and Practice.

“The foundation is starting with these two professions, given the potential impact they can make in providing care to the underserved. It’s an opportunity to learn from each other in an interdisciplinary setting.”

The student scholars come from underserved backgrounds, and have impressive academics with track records of determination.

“Each scholar will impact hundreds of underserved patients in their careers,” said SHP Dean Gwendolyn Mahon.

Frimpong, who grew up in Boston with parents who emigrated from Ghana, wants to one day open an affordable clinic with partners in an underserved area.

Ogando, from Waterbury, CT, is bilingual, with parents who emigrated from the Dominican Republic. Since high school, he has volunteered in emergency rooms and said he has seen the difference when patients feel comfortable with a provider who understands them culturally.

“It never gets old to see the relief when I walk in,” he said.

Riddhi Vyas 2022 Excellence in Education Awardee



*“I want to see the satisfaction
of learning on their faces.”*

Riddhi Vyas teaches programming and analytics-related courses that help students learn the basics of analytics and project planning and improve their ability to logically think through real-world data science problems.

Her teaching philosophy can be boiled down to this: “I want to see the satisfaction of learning on their faces.”

In 2016, Vyas graduated with a doctorate in biomedical informatics, and then joined the school as a lecturer, and later, as an assistant professor in health informatics whose teaching style won accolades from students. She was named the 2022 winner

of the Excellence in Education award.

In addition to an undergraduate degree in biochemistry and computer science, and a master’s degree in chemical biology, bioinformatics, she has experience as an analyst at Johnson & Johnson and Eli Lilly, which enhanced her teaching.

“She not only taught us content but showed how what we were learning applied to the real world, making it very easy to connect the dots,” said one of the students who nominated her for the award.

At one of the most diverse schools in the country, Vyas is keenly aware that students

come with different backgrounds and experiences.

She uses a straightforward presentation of material, giving each student personal attention to ensure they are at the same level of understanding. She tells motivational stories, shares personal experiences, and invites them to take full advantage of her office hours.

Students from science backgrounds with little programming knowledge said they left her courses confident they could take on any complex data analytics challenge with ease. “Quite simply, she is the best!” summed up another student.

Students Meet Community’s Speech-Language Pathology Needs

A boy of three in a blue track suit sits in front of a colorful tower of alphabet boxes and shouts out letters he recognizes — Q, B, U, and V.

Dima Karim, a student in SHP’s speech-language pathology program, points to pictures on the blocks and encourages him to name the objects.

He struggles with K, but says “lollipop” when they reach the letter L.

“Yum,” says Karim. “Do you like lollipops?”

Twice a week for six months, she has been helping Davion, a bright child who struggles to communicate, improve his speech. They name objects and string words together to form simple sentences such as “I want.”

Davion’s father said that he’s seen a difference since bringing his son to the pro-bono speech-language pathology clinic, which opened a year ago in the Bergen Building to provide Newark and other underserved communities with diagnostic and therapeutic services.

Established as part of SHP’s new diversity-focused speech-language pathology master’s program, the clinic emphasizes service for multiethnic, socially diverse populations. It gives students hands-on experience while opening doors to people who need therapy for speech, language, communication, and swallowing disorders.

“We have partnerships with schools, community agencies, and health care centers to refer both pediatric and adult patients from our local multiethnic communities,” said Jose Centeno, program director.

Karim and other students who work with clients at the clinic said the experience has shown them the realities of trying to obtain health care services in communities like Newark, where nearly 30 percent of residents live below poverty levels. Many are uninsured and lack transportation.

“It has been humbling and rewarding to help people in the community who otherwise might not have access to services,” said student Camila Fermin.





A Diverse Group of Students Learn from Each Other and Through Partnerships

Lori Palfreyman, program director in the physician assistant program, had a transformative experience during PA school. While in East Africa, Palfreyman spent weeks living with a Tanzanian family whose home had no running water and who cooked meals outside over a fire. She shared a bedroom with four of the daughters and attended the wedding of one, Mary.

A year later, Mary died during childbirth from eclampsia, a pregnancy-related seizure disorder that is treatable with adequate medical care.

“The opportunity to live with a Tanzanian family and Mary’s tragic death highlighted a massive disparity in health care and began my dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives,” said Palfreyman.

Holistic admissions—which takes into account not only GPA but background, life experiences, evidence of resilience, and passion for service—is one DEI initiative that Palfreyman, who was named program director in November, has ushered in.

She credits the PA faculty and staff’s

commitment to inclusivity for the program’s success in increasing student enrollment from medically underserved communities. The class of 2025 includes more than 50 percent of students of color.

Along with encouraging student dialogue so they can learn from one another, the physician assistant program has partnered across SHP to create unique collaborations to enhance learning experiences.

The physician assistant and psychiatric rehabilitation and counseling professions programs are collaborating on an initiative to improve student confidence and skill in working with people with serious mental illness.

The physician assistant and clinical and preventive nutrition science programs created a dietetic curriculum where physician assistant students provide physical exam training workshops while health informatics supports research.

“The world is attuned to the need for an interprofessional health care workforce which reflects the overall population,” says Palfreyman. “Our students are prepared to work collaboratively across disciplines.”

Innovative Course Uses Gaming to Teach Interprofessional Education

SHP students will soon be taking an innovative new online course that uses gaming to train them how to work effectively as part of an interprofessional health care team.

Developed by the IPE Faculty Advisory Committee at SHP, the course uses avatars to represent a patient with a problem and asks students to determine an appropriate care team to diagnose and treat that patient.

“Health care today is extremely complex and there are many, many professionals, each with their own particular knowledge and scope of practice,” said Alma Merians, associate dean for interprofessional education.

“To optimize care and to facilitate the best outcomes for patients, health professionals need to work in a team and learn to communicate effectively and efficiently with each other. The purpose of this is to introduce students to IPE competencies, education and practice.”



So the last time I saw my doc was 8 months ago. I have my pill bottles with me here. I am running out of metformin and wanted to get a new R_x.

The course is modeled on TeamSTEPP, a program which uses an evidence-based set of tools and strategies to integrate teamwork into practice.

At SHP, the course will help students understand the different roles health care professionals play in treatment and recovery. It is set to be beta-tested in the Department of Rehabilitation and Movement Sciences in fall 2023 and incorporated into curriculums the following year.

“Online courses can sometimes be tedious. We wanted to do something different, and we had the idea of using gaming,” Merians said.



Newly Tenured Faculty Given Prestigious President’s Award

Antonina Mitrofanova, associate professor of health informatics, was awarded the Presidential Fellowship for Teaching Excellence by Rutgers President Jonathan Holloway.

This coveted award honors the university’s most distinguished young faculty members for the work they do guiding the intellectual development of students.

Mitrofanova, who gained tenure in July 2022, is a pioneer in the emerging field of biomedical and health informatics.

She runs a highly successful lab which develops mathematical and computational algorithms identifying genetic markers to predict patients’ risk of treatment resistance across various cancer types, with special emphasis on prostate cancer.

Her philosophy is to actively mentor students, identifying their strengths, and assisting them with individual development plans to achieve their goals. Under Mitrofanova’s mentorship, many of her students and postdocs received prestigious extramural grants, including numerous predoctoral fellowships.





GRANT FUNDING 2021-22

\$6.9 Million

*from the federal government, New Jersey and New York states, industry, and nonprofit organizations to pursue evidence-based research. They include **five prestigious National Institutes of Health R01 project grants.***



Team Science

Our research leads to improved public health. Whether they are discovering a biomarker that predicts success in cancer treatment, developing toolkits to help people with serious mental illnesses succeed at work, or studying novel approaches to rehabilitation, our faculty are world-class researchers.

But they don't do it alone. They seek out partnerships with other SHP departments, schools within Rutgers, outside universities, and government entities, leading to unique opportunities for innovation and collaboration and opening new avenues of research.

A commitment to grow our research led to the appointment this past year of associate professor Antonina Mitrofanova as associate dean for research.

Mitrofanova, who has an interdisciplinary lab at SHP and holds multiple patents for breakthrough algorithmic cancer discoveries, hopes to expand the extramurally funded research programs at SHP by investing in faculty research-related mentoring, building programs to support peer mentoring, and strengthening SHP's internal and external collaborations.

"With all the disciplines offered at SHP, we are uniquely positioned inside Rutgers to collaborate and build," she said.

She said the school is at the forefront of interdisciplinary collaborative research into digital health and rehabilitation, including developing mobile apps to manage chronic illness, discovering innovative ways to monitor movement disorders, and creating toolkits to aid patients with PTSD, all

to support clinical decision-making and improve health outcomes.

In the Department of Rehabilitation, Movement and Science, assistant professor Jean-Francois Daneault is partnering with Rutgers Department of Computer Sciences to use artificial intelligence to record symptoms, disease progression and response to medication for people with chronic disorders such as kidney disease, Parkinson's disease, and long COVID. Their aim is to develop a wearable sensor to collect data in a home setting. This sensor would transmit this valuable information to health care providers.

"At the moment, clinicians are not using this information, either because it's not available to them, or because they don't know what to do with it. That is something we are trying to change," said Daneault.

An alliance across the globe is helping women in Nepal manage gestational diabetes. Shristi Rawal, assistant professor in clinical and preventive nutritional sciences, is working with Dhulikhel Hospital-Kathmandu University Hospital to develop a culturally appropriate app to combat gestational diabetes, which is prevalent in low- and middle-income countries such as Nepal.

The app tracks blood glucose levels, carbohydrate intake, physical activity, and gestational weight gain, and makes data available to health care providers who can evaluate patient progress and provide appropriate treatment and counseling.

"A pilot clinical trial is currently underway to explore the impact of the app on clinical outcomes such as birthweight and postpartum glycemic control," said Rawal.

In the Department of Health Informatics, Suril Gohel, an assistant professor whose expertise is studying brain disruptions through neuroimaging, has formed collaborations within the university and with other New Jersey schools that allow him to use data to inform a broad swath of studies. One study looks at lessening cravings for those with alcohol use disorder and another investigates vision therapies for concussion patients with persistent visual disturbances.

He has also teamed up with Laura Byham-Gray, professor in clinical and preventive nutritional sciences, to study the feasibility of using machine learning techniques to predict protein energy expenditure in patients with chronic kidney disease.

"Since my research focuses on understanding brain changes for various neuroclinical populations, collaborations help me expand the application of neuroimaging to various populations," he said. "Team science enhances my ability to do research."



The VA is looking at 23 conditions and rare respiratory cancers it said may be linked to exposure to airborne hazards. Department officials have asked Parrott to help synthesize the scientific research.

VA Taps Professor for Database on Exposure to Burn Pits

Scott Parrott, a professor with more than 30 years of experience in methodology and statistics, will work with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to create a database of evidence linking exposure to burn pits to diseases such as cancer.

For Parrott, director of the Methodology and Statistics Support Team, his work is personal: His son-in-law was a service member for two tours in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan and was a military contractor in Kuwait. A decade later, his son-in-law has problems breathing and is part of the VA study on lung injury because of his exposure to burn pits.

“When he returned from Kuwait, I knew he had frequent respiratory infections, but he never complained,” Parrott said. “This spring, we were carrying boxes up and down stairs, and he was wheezing and stopped to rest. Suddenly my ‘family brain’ and ‘academic brain’ clicked and I realized what I was seeing.”



His contract with the VA allows for the hiring of a team to set up infrastructure that will provide continuous updates of scientific data related to ill veterans that can be easily accessed by scientists, researchers, policymakers, and military family members.

President Joe Biden recently signed a bill expanding health care benefits to veterans exposed to burn pits. When doctors first started to tie respiratory illnesses to burn pits used to dispose of medical waste, plastics and military vehicles during the Middle East wars, there was no conclusive data to link the ailments to airborne toxins from the pits.

The VA is looking at 23 conditions and rare respiratory cancers it said may be linked to exposure to airborne hazards. Department officials have asked Parrott to help synthesize the scientific research.

“The challenge is that this is all observational data,” Parrott said. “The goal here is not to reach certainty, but to determine whether the preponderance of evidence makes it reasonable to believe that what soldiers were exposed to in the Gulf wars is causing illness.”

He will develop a process for a “living review” so that, as research comes out, the data becomes quickly and continuously updated. “This is really cutting edge,” he said. “And as an Army dad, it is something I think is critically important.”

Study Examines Peer Evaluation Tool

While student feedback has weighed heavily in a faculty member's evaluation, research has shown that peer review of lessons and instruction is more effective in promoting quality teaching practices.

A Dean's Intramural Grant for Teaching Innovation allowed two faculty members and researchers to conduct a pilot study to validate a peer observation and evaluation tool for teaching.

Amy B. Spagnolo, assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions, and Yuane Jia, assistant professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, were the principal investigators on the study, conducted by a research team from both departments.

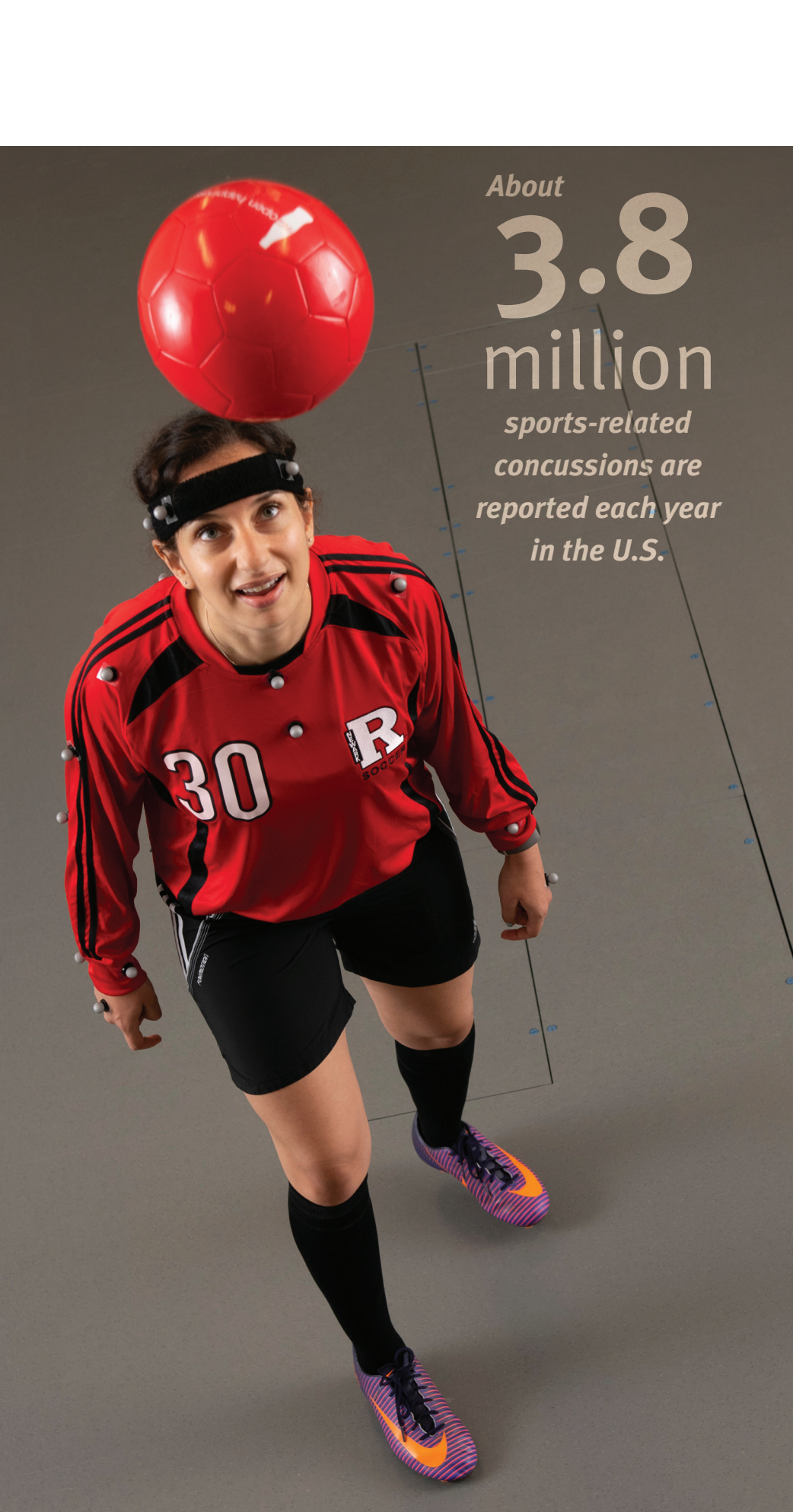
"We are educating a workforce that will go into communities to offer premier health care across populations," said Spagnolo. "The best way to ensure quality education is being provided to our students is through peer evaluation of our faculty."

Thirty-three faculty from different disciplines took part in the pilot study. The study validated that the peer observation and evaluation tool can reliably be used to evaluate faculty in-person classes in any discipline and can be modified for online use.

The study has been submitted to a peer review journal for publication, and Spagnolo has received numerous requests from other schools within Rutgers about using it for peer evaluation. The team recommended that SHP use the study.



200
faculty
publications
in peer-reviewed journals



About
3.8
million
*sports-related
concussions are
reported each year
in the U.S.*

Diagnosing **Sports Concussions** May Be More Complex Than We Think

A tool being used to diagnose concussions might be overestimating the condition and wrongly identifying symptoms like fatigue and neck pain caused from intense exercise and not a brain injury, SHP researchers have found.

This research raises new questions about the Sport Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT), a questionnaire widely used along with other methods to diagnose concussions sustained during sports. Findings were presented at the American Physiological Society annual meeting April 5.

“Our findings highlight the importance of considering the effects of exercise and fatigue in assessing concussions in athletes on the field,” said the study’s first author, Stephanie Iring, a doctoral candidate in the laboratory of Jorge Serrador, an associate professor at SHP and New Jersey Medical School.

“While players with a head impact may report more symptoms generally, we have to be cautious in using all symptoms on the assessment, since some are common after intense exercise, even when there was no head impact.”

About 3.8 million sports-related concussions are reported each year in the U.S.

“Our data shows that exertion during a match increased the number and severity of self-reported symptoms in control players even though they had not experienced a head impact,” Iring said. “This could lead to difficulty differentiating these players from those who had experienced a head impact when using on-field assessments.”



Treating Co-Current Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorder Through **Integrated Care**

Tameika Minor, assistant professor of psychiatric rehabilitation and counseling professions, is leading a pioneering workforce training grant focused on students, counselors, nurses, social workers, and employers who treat those between the ages of 14 and 25 who are battling opioid use and mental illness.

People with mental illness die earlier than the general population and have more co-occurring health conditions, she said. Improved outcomes require new and innovative care strategies.

“The solution lies in integrated care—the coordination of mental health, substance use, and primary care services,” said Minor. “Integrated care produces the best outcomes and is the most effective approach to caring for people with complex health care needs.”

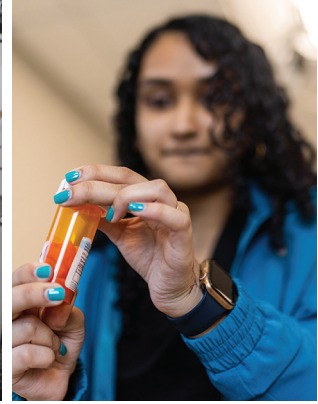
She is principal investigator of a four-year, \$1.3 million U.S. Health Resource and Services Administration Opioid Workforce Expansion Program grant awarded in partnership with the School of Nursing and the School of

Social Work. Since 2019, the grant has funded Community Integrated Services for Addiction Treatment and Recovery (CISATR)—an online interprofessional education competency and workforce training program for SHP, nursing, and social work students, faculty, and staff at agencies where students are placed.

Minor is also a co-primary investigator on two SHP Dean’s grants, one of which will redesign CISATR to train SHP faculty and students outside of the psychiatric rehabilitation and counseling department.

According to Minor, the initial results are promising. Students who are certified in interprofessional educational competency are securing placements and job offers with agencies such as a mid-security prison, she said. Clients are being hired and are successfully advancing in the workplace and in higher education. Minor worked with one client with visual impairment who advocated for the appropriate accommodations and assistive technology and was able to go to law school.

“Integrated care produces the best outcomes and is the most effective approach to caring for people with complex health care needs.”



ALEXANDER BEEKMAN, student
Doctor of physical therapy program

“Meeting, treating, and connecting with patients from the community is a huge part of a physical therapist’s education. Many of the patients I have worked with are grateful for the care we provide and on the flip side, I am grateful for the people in our community, who trust us enough to care for and help them through injury.”



Creating Change

Drawing on our expertise in physical therapy, speech-language pathology, primary care, occupational therapy, nutrition, and psychiatric rehabilitation, our school is creating an expanded network of care for underserved populations.

In the past year, we worked to strengthen the delivery of mental health services, widened access to a free primary care clinic, and brought a collaborative care approach to our physical rehabilitation services through the addition of a speech-language pathology clinic.

Ann Murphy, associate professor in the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions, is director of the Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC), which was established at SHP through a federal cooperative agreement in 2018 to bring evidence-based research and new approaches to mental health care.

In 2021–22, Murphy said, the center’s initiatives included educating the New Jersey judiciary on how to better serve those with mental illness, working with the state’s public schools on mental health support systems, and helping teenagers in Puerto Rico who suffered trauma from Hurricane Irma, earthquakes and the pandemic.

Over the past year, around 9,000 trial, appellate and municipal court judges and judiciary staff heard the personal stories of those living with mental illness who landed in the court and criminal justice system.

“These trainings combined the messages of people with lived experience and experts. The experts talked about the prevalence of mental illnesses, the true risk of violence, which is lower than you might expect, the role of medication and treatment, and the real possibility of recovery,” Murphy said.

“The most powerful message shared through the personal stories was that they wanted to be seen as people and treated with understanding and respect, not treated as a rap sheet or someone defined by their past experiences and behaviors,” she added.

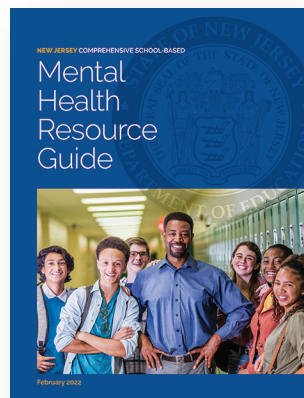
The MHTTC also has teamed up with the Department of Education to create a resource guide, which walks schools through how to create a comprehensive, school-based mental health support system. It offered webinars on building a framework to meet mental health needs.

In Plainfield, our physician assistant program has long been a community partner in a clinic offering free primary health care. Last summer, the program assumed full operation of the Health Outreach Practice Experience (HOPE) clinic, finding it a new, larger home with the help of an alumni donor after it closed during the pandemic.

In 2021–22, a team of physician assistant program faculty, staff and supervised students cared for 221 patients who made 400 visits. The experience gave students more than 1,200 hours of service-learning.

“This new model has allowed us to work closely with our community partners to create a program

that provides much needed primary care services in a community where nearly 30 percent of the population is uninsured,” said Frank Giannelli, assistant professor and director of the HOPE clinic.



COMMUNITY SERVICE

“It simultaneously provides an experiential learning environment for our students to learn how to navigate socioeconomic barriers to health care by creating treatment plans that are realistic and achievable for patients.”

In Newark, our faculty and students have provided therapy services in a community clinic for over a decade, but the addition last fall of a speech-language pathology clinic offered students first-hand opportunities to practice interprofessional education—and opened more pathways of care to those need it most.

Because a large cohort of patients seen in the speech-language clinic were those with brain trauma, a special clinic opened for the summer for people with traumatic brain injury who needed speech-language pathology, PT, and occupational therapy services.

“We have been able to share referrals to speech and OT, and vice versa. We are tapping into the resources in our department,” said Susan Pitzel, associate professor and director of the Physical Therapy Participatory Clinic.

Entering its 11th year in Newark, the PT clinic has made an impact on those who come for weekly therapy who might otherwise not have had access to health care, Pitzel said.

“Because of our teamwork with the community, we have established a presence here. Our community partners may change, but the community knows this team is here for them,” she said. “And we have a generation of professionals who want to serve and have an impact on the communities around them.”



Occupational Therapy Students are Poised to Bring Services to Those in Need

Their occupational therapy clinical experiences might include working with inmates, senior citizens, homeless people, adolescents at risk, or children with disabilities.

Under program director Sandra Rogers, students in the occupational therapy doctoral program, which opened in September 2022, will have fieldwork opportunities in both community-based and global health settings.

“What’s really distinctive is our focus on expanding our practice into areas where occupational therapy services should be, but aren’t,” said Rogers.

Rogers, who has researched and written extensively about the need for OT in the criminal justice system and who has traveled to China to work with children with disabilities, is using her own experiences to make community connections and widen opportunities for students to work with underserved populations.

“Very few organizations have the expertise or access to provide those services,” she said. “Our faculty will be supervising students in areas where they have extensive expertise.”

The first cohort of students worked with senior citizens in Newark, planning leisure activities and teaching adaptations for such things as dressing, gardening, taking care of pets, and managing their homes.

They also worked one-on-one creating individualized interventions that took into account a client’s psychosocial factors, physical deficits, and health and wellness concerns, said Breanne Grasso-Bouthot, the program’s academic fieldwork coordinator.

Since Rutgers holds contracts to provide behavioral health services in four prisons in New Jersey, Rogers hopes to establish opportunities for students to be trained to provide pre- and post-release support for people who are incarcerated.

“We will work on things like financial management, understanding how to do an interview, parenting skills, and conflict negotiations,” she said, “They need to think about how to construct their everyday life, have opportunities to practice these skills, and set goals for themselves.”

She also plans to create clinical experiences abroad for students. “While in China, I was invited to go to an orphanage by a nonprofit organization to train the caregivers,” she said. “It became an opportunity for my students to go with me and do some training. And I have every intention of continuing that work at Rutgers.”

New Food Pantry Eases Student Hunger

Nearly one-quarter of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) students are food insecure, a situation that only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a survey by a SHP researcher.

Joachim Sackey, assistant professor in the Department of Clinical and Preventive Nutrition Sciences, shared his findings with RBHS Chancellor Brian Strom, leading to the establishment of a food pantry for RBHS in fall 2021. In nearly a year, it has served more than 13,000 visitors and 3,000 households.

“Food insecurity has negative impacts on students. Hunger is associated with worse mental health and academic outcomes,” Sackey said, who has been studying food insecurity among health sciences students for several years and led the effort to open the pantry. “Studies have also shown that those with food insecurity are less likely to succeed in college.”

Located on the ground floor of the Bergen Building in Newark, the pantry shelves are stocked with such staples as canned goods, tuna packets, boxed cereal, and jars of peanut butter.

The pantry was a collaborative effort by six RBHS schools based in Newark. The School of Nursing, for example, donated iPads, used to register and check in those who visit. The School of Public Health helped with volunteer management, while the University Hospital Foundation supported the startup with hot meals and meal vouchers.

Open every Tuesday afternoon, the pantry is staffed by volunteers, including students, who help organize and distribute food.

SHP student Janelle Sy is a regular volunteer, but she started out by coming there for food. A California resident who is in the bachelor’s in clinical laboratory science program, she said she took out loans to pay for school and isn’t able to work due to the demands of the rigorous, full-time, 15-month program.

The food pantry supplemented what she could afford, providing her with rice, pasta, and vegetables, along with such items as toothbrushes supplied by Rutgers School of Dental Medicine.

“There is a need for the pantry. A student with



Open every Tuesday afternoon, the pantry is staffed by volunteers, including students, who help organize and distribute food.

financial problems does not have to worry about paying for food,” she said.

Anyone with a Rutgers ID can use the pantry, including faculty and staff.

Most of the food is contributed by the Community FoodBank of New Jersey. SHP dietetics students have also held drives for food and personal care items.

Sackey said the food pantry is looking for donors to fund the pantry so it can continue and expand. He would like to supplement offerings from the food bank with fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grain options. In addition, he hopes to organize mobile pantry events at other RBHS campuses to make it accessible to students who can’t come to Newark.

“We know there is a need,” he said.

You can contribute funds for the pantry by visiting give.rutgers.edu/RBHSfoodpantry



OUR ALUMNI

Transform Lives

Recognized as leaders and role models, our alumni are accomplished health professionals. They are practitioners on the front lines of diagnostics and treatment, researchers, therapists, data analysts and health information managers who use their knowledge and skills to find innovative solutions that improve health and wellness in all communities. With our graduates now numbering more than 13,000, we are proud to say our alumni can be found working in and contributing to every aspect of health care.

Improving Maternal Health During the Pandemic

Dr. Daniel Martingano • Ph.D. in Biomedical Informatics '22

When the pandemic struck, Daniel Martingano, a practicing physician in the field of obstetrics and gynecology, quickly recognized that repurposing antibiotics to treat COVID-19 was leaving shortages for patients requiring cesarean deliveries.

While earning his doctoral degree in biomedical informatics, Martingano had published a study on the optimal choice of antibiotic treatment for pre-labor rupture of membranes, which disproportionately impacts underrepresented patient populations.

He then studied the emerging problem of antibiotic shortages during the pandemic and evaluated the use of antibiotics not previously given to caesarean delivery patients.

“His study offered a solution for patients ‘here and now’ and truly saved lives,” said Shankar Srinivasan, professor of

biomedical informatics, who nominated Martingano as the 2022 recipient of the Stanley S. Bergen Medal of Excellence, which is awarded to a prior year’s graduate.

Martingano, who received the award in May, practices at St.

John’s Episcopal Hospital in Queens, NY, as well as at Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth, which is part of RWJBarnabas Health.

His research connecting his medical practice and biomedical informatics directly affects clinical decision-making today. His studies on anti-

biotics received a great deal of attention from the medical community, including featured articles by the ObG Project and the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, which highlights a direct translation of his study into practice.



Helping Marginalized Populations

Lisa LaCon, M.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling '08 and Ph.D. in Psychiatric Rehabilitation '20

Lisa LaCon’s experience with depression led her into the field of rehabilitation counseling and psychiatric rehabilitation. She went on to co-found a successful nonprofit in Newark with her husband, Sean, that gives marginalized populations a pathway to employment and a better life.

“As a Black woman with a mohawk, I’m not what people think a scholar looks like. So, in many ways, I relate to the stigma and shame of my clients,” says LaCon. “I experienced severe depression when I exited the workforce to care for my children. Employment was part of my wellness and recovery process, and it allowed me to tap into my purpose. I want to do the same for each of my clients.”

LaCon was chosen to receive the 2022 Distinguished Alumni Award for her impressive work as co-founder of Newark-based Blessed Ministries, Inc., (BMI) a \$1.4 million nonprofit with a mission to work with businesses to hire individuals with barriers to employment. This includes people who were imprisoned, have disabilities and/or are on public assistance.

The nonprofit’s clients maintain a remarkable 180-day employment retention rate of at least 70 percent, said LaCon. One client who was incarcerated for many years earned 500 internship hours through BMI’s Pathways to Recovery program. He passed an exam to become a certified peer recovery specialist and 18 months later is still employed and supporting his family.



Nutrition Trailblazer

Melissa Prest

Doctorate in Clinical Nutrition '19

As a competitive swimmer, Melissa Prest couldn't help but make a connection between nutrition and health after noticing her higher level of energy from eating peanut butter sandwiches.

"I had a lightbulb moment," she said.

Realizing food had the power to fuel bodies, she was drawn to nutrition and dietetics. She went into long-term care consulting and nutrition counseling but decided that was not right for her. Although nervous that she lacked experience in renal nutrition, she applied for a position in dialysis.

"Little did I know that this move would lead to tremendous growth and that I would find my niche working with people with kidney disease," she said.

She flourished, serving as president of the Illinois Council on Renal Nutrition, and currently is a member of the Renal Dietitians' Dietetic Practice Group, the Council on Renal Nutrition, as well as a

national media spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

While working, she earned her doctor of clinical nutrition degree online. After graduation, she

applied for a newly created job with the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois to start a nutrition program funded by a state grant—and became the organization's first-ever dietitian.

"I took a chance and left my current job to create something that would serve a larger kidney community," she said.



PA Graduate Endows Memorial Scholarship

"It was about giving to someone who doesn't have the opportunity."

When a graduate of the physician assistant program learned that the Dr. Joseph A. Schwenkler Memorial Scholarship Fund was running out of funding, she stepped up with a gift for an endowment.

A 1997 graduate who wants to remain anonymous, the donor was motivated in part by the experience of her father, who grew up impoverished. His mother was determined to give him what he needed to succeed: an education.

"It was about giving someone else who doesn't have the opportunity or the resources the chance to do something they might not have been able to afford," said the donor, who used a portion of her inheritance from her father to endow the scholarship.

The scholarship was created in 2018 in memory of Dr. Schwenkler, a graduate and later, medical director of the physician assistant program for 10 years. He was an influential advocate for allowing physician assistants to practice in New Jersey, which was one of the last states to license them for practice in 1992.

He was also a mentor to the donor, who did an elective rotation at his practice and found him to be an inspiration. "I was impressed with the way he interacted with his patients and how he saw physician assistants as people he could collaborate with to provide the best possible care. That's the kind of connection I wanted to have as a practitioner," she said.

In addition to the endowment, which will enable the scholarship to continue in perpetuity, she contributed funds for this year's scholarship so there would be no gap. Eight students have received it so far.

"I see this as a way of paying it forward for the hard work my parents did," she said. "I know this is something they would feel happy about."

She added that her father was an avid Rutgers fan, counting two daughters, a son-in-law, and a granddaughter as alumni.

You can make an impact with a gift to SHP. Visit shp.rutgers.edu/givenow or email katie.mayfield@ruf.rutgers.edu





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