



Meet the Fellow

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Fatima Jafri

Host Laboratory: Maine State Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory

Degree of Study: B.S. Public Health and Psychology

Graduated: May 2024

School: University of Maryland



Tell us about your educational background?

I have bachelor’s degrees in Public Health and Psychology and a minor in History. I have a passion for health equity and focused my minor on learning about American social and civil rights movements. I took special interest in how the medical industry evolved alongside these movements, and how that contributes to both healthcare provider and patient attitudes, and in turn healthcare outcomes, today.

What brought you into laboratory science?

I was introduced to laboratory science by my fellowship. I am a first year APHL Quality Assurance fellow, so my project does not involve doing lab work and is more administrative. It has been really interesting deepening my knowledge of laboratory science through this lens, since I get to observe and learn about many different parts of the lab and different forms of testing. It has been really cool to see how every department and lab section works together to deliver the final product.

How did you hear about the Public Health Laboratory Fellowship Program?

I found out about the program through an online search for public health fellowships.

How did this fellowship match or exceed your expectations?

This fellowship has exceeded my expectations because of how many opportunities I have gotten to cross-train in other aspects of laboratory science and public health. I also appreciate how big of a responsibility my project is because I feel like I am getting as much out of this experience as possible. Even though my fellowship began in March, I feel like I have learned so much already and will be ending my fellowship with a lot of new skills that will serve me for the rest of my career.

Tell us what you learned from your mentor.

My mentors have taught me how to think from a quality assurance lens. I am learning how to approach a problem (or potential problem) from as many angles as

possible, and how to quickly estimate the best course of action for the laboratory. I am also learning about laboratory regulations and the specific way that our lab operates.

Tell us about your project assignments/laboratory roles.

My fellowship project is to set up and administrate an electronic quality management system for the laboratory. Our current system still relies heavily on paper, so it will be a big change. I also help with the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS),

How has your fellowship experience inspired you?

I feel much more confident in my abilities and organizational skills now, and I have also been inspired to take more interest in environmental health.

How would you describe the Fellowship to other students?

It is an experience that is as useful as you make it. It can be an important experience in building skills, connections, and knowledge if you try and get as much out of it as possible and take the opportunity to cross train whenever possible. The fellowship experience gives you access to so many connections that can help guide your career choices, so ask questions and listen to other people’s experiences in public health.

Aside from the laboratory and the science, did you gain any other beneficial life experiences?

I was able to move away from the state I grew up in for the first time in my life, and to go from having lived in cities my whole life to a much more rural area. It has been a wonderful experience broadening my horizons and discovering more about myself in a new place. I have loved being able to learn about new places and visit a different part of the country and see what life is like there.

Maine State Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory contingent participating at the APHL Annual Conference: from left to right are Nathaniel Meza, Alex McMullen, Samson Omole, Ashley O’Neill, Fatima Jafri, Lauren Jakub, and Amy Buckle.

