

Health Economics and Outcomes Research (HEOR) leadership team biographies



Stacey DaCosta Byfield, PhD, MPH
Vice President of Research for HEOR

Dr. Stacey DaCosta Byfield specializes in oncology health outcomes and health economics with a particular interest in retrospective claims-based research. Prior to joining Optum, she worked in the Department of Drug Use Policy and Pharmacoeconomics at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center as a pharmacoeconomics research specialist. In this capacity, her main responsibilities included developing research designs to evaluate clinical, economic and humanistic outcomes of pharmaceutical products and services.

Dr. DaCosta Byfield holds a PhD in tumor biology from Georgetown University and completed a basic science fellowship at the National Cancer Institute where her work focused on identifying targets of pharmaceutical intervention in breast cancer. Dr. DaCosta Byfield also received her Master of Public Health with a concentration in clinical effectiveness from the Harvard School of Public Health. She has also completed the Program in Cancer Outcomes Research Training Fellowship, a jointly sponsored program by Massachusetts General Hospital and the Dana-Farber Harvard Cancer Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. DaCosta Byfield has published in numerous peer-reviewed journals, including *American Journal of Clinical Oncology*, *American Journal of Gastroenterology*, *Archives of Dermatology Research*, *BJU International*, *Journal of Cancer Therapy*, *Journal of Cell Science*, *Journal of Neuro Oncology*, *Cancer Research*, *Melanoma Research* and *Molecular Pharmacology*.



Paul Buzinec, MS
Vice President of Operations for HEOR

As vice president of operations for HEOR, Paul Buzinec is responsible for the management, training and development of the programmers, statisticians and data managers on staff. He also provides project leadership for administrative claims-based and prospective research studies, specializing in survey methodologies and statistical analyses. Prior to joining Optum in 2005, Buzinec worked with the Health Economics Program of the Minnesota Department of Health where he was responsible for statistical analyses and data verification.

Buzinec earned his Master of Science in statistics from Iowa State University (ISU) and a Bachelor of Science in both mathematics and statistics from the University of Minnesota, Morris. While on assistantship at ISU, he taught several undergraduate courses in statistics, varying from introductory statistics courses to methodological courses for graduate-level researchers. His research has been published in numerous peer-reviewed journals, including *Therapeutic Advances in Cardiovascular Disease*, *Current Medical Research and Opinion* and *Journal of Clinical and Translational Research*.



Ami Buikema, MPH
**Senior Director, Respiratory
and Infectious Diseases**

Ami Buikema is the therapeutic lead for respiratory and infectious disease (RID) studies. She provides oversight of RID project development, study design, analysis and dissemination of results to professional meetings and peer-reviewed journals. Buikema has expertise designing and conducting epidemiologic studies, in addition to collecting, managing and analyzing data from a variety of sources, including health care claims, hospital discharge, laboratory, public health surveillance and survey data. She has conducted research in a number of disease areas, including asthma, COPD, hepatitis, cystic fibrosis, obstructive sleep apnea, immunizations, and vaccine-preventable diseases, including influenza, pneumonia and pertussis.

Prior to joining Optum, Buikema led the development of a Tennessee-based regional epidemiology program, worked as an STD-epidemiologist focused on syphilis prevention, and served as a fellow with the National Immunization Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She earned her Master of Public Health in epidemiology from the University of Minnesota and is currently working toward her doctorate. Ms. Buikema has authored or co-authored publications appearing in *JAMA*, *Journal of Managed Care Pharmacy*, *Respiratory Medicine*, *American Journal of Managed Care*, *Current Medical Research and Opinion*, *Vaccine* and *Population Health Management*, among others.



Susan Brenneman, PT, PhD
**Principal Consultant, Primary Data
Collection**

Specializing in health outcomes and survey research methods, Dr. Susan Brenneman coordinates and conducts studies involving primary data collection and serves as principal consultant for the primary data collection team. Prior to joining Optum in 2008, Dr. Brenneman's experience included various health care and research settings, such as assistant vice president of decision support at St. Luke's Hospital and Health System (Bethlehem, PA), senior manager of the Outcomes Research and Management group at Merck and Co., Inc., assistant professor of physical therapy at Arcadia University, and physical therapy clinician in several health care settings.

Dr. Brenneman earned her doctorate in policy research, evaluation and measurement at the University of Pennsylvania and her physical therapy degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Brenneman has published in numerous peer-reviewed journals, including *Journal of Bone and Mineral Research*, *Pediatrics*, *Medical Care*, *Osteoporosis International*, *Archives of Internal Medicine*, *Journal of American Geriatrics Society*, *General Hospital Psychiatry*, *Journal of Diabetes and its Complications*, and *Disease Management*.



Benjamin Chastek, MS
Associate Director, Therapeutic Lead, Immunology

Benjamin Chastek joined Optum in 2004 and specializes in retrospective and prospective studies of health economics and outcomes. As therapeutic lead for studies involving immunology, he oversees research, data acquisitions and study execution. He leads the immunology research team in the design of research protocols, conduct of analyses, coordination of project development and implementation with clients. He specializes in health economics, econometrics and health outcomes, with a particular interest in retrospective claims-based research studies. Since 2008, he has focused on research related to rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis and other autoimmune disorders.

Chastek has a Master of Science degree in statistics from Minnesota State University, where he specialized in theoretical and computational statistics. Prior to becoming a therapeutic lead, Chastek was a researcher and statistician within Optum with a specific expertise in experimental design for, and statistical analysis of, large administrative claims datasets.

Some areas in which Chastek is well versed include survival analysis, longitudinal or panel datasets, and cost analysis, including the presence of right censoring. His research has been presented at a number of national and international conferences, including the American College of Rheumatology, American College of Gastroenterology, European League Against Rheumatism, American Society of Hematology, and the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research Annual International Meeting. Chastek has published in numerous journals, including *Current Medical Research and Opinion*, *American Journal of Pharmacy Benefits*, *Advances in Therapy*, and *Journal of Medical Economics*.



Rachel Halpern, PhD, MPH
Director, Therapeutic Lead, Central Nervous System and Behavioral Health, Endocrine/Metabolic

Dr. Rachel Halpern joined the Optum health economics and outcomes research team in 2005. As HEOR therapeutic lead for central nervous system and behavioral health (CNS/BH) studies, Dr. Halpern oversees research, data acquisition and study execution in CNS/BH, as well as executing studies with retrospective claims data and electronic health record data. Prior to joining Optum, Dr. Halpern worked on research pertaining to geographic variation in local Medicare review policies at the University of Minnesota. In addition, Dr. Halpern has eight years' health care-related research experience in such varied areas as military hospital market areas, managed care for persons with disabilities and implementation of risk adjustment methodologies. Dr. Halpern earned her Master of Public Health from the University of Michigan and her doctorate in health services research and policy at the University of Minnesota, where she wrote her dissertation on Medicare HMO decisions.

Dr. Halpern has authored or co-authored publications appearing in *Health Care Financing Review*, *Health Affairs*, *American Journal of Managed Care*, *American Journal of Pharmacy Benefits*, *Journal of Managed Care Pharmacy*, *Advances in Therapy*, *Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, *Current Medical Research and Opinion*, *Pain Practice*, *Journal of Clinical Outcomes and Management*, *Digestive Diseases and Sciences*, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, *Patient Preferences and Adherence* and *Respiratory Medicine*.



Lincy S. Lal, PhD, PharmD
Director, Therapeutic Lead, Oncology

Dr. Lincy Lal joined Optum in 2016. As therapeutic lead of oncology, Dr. Lal provides oversight of opportunities and studies in this area, including development of opportunities and coordination of clinical and scientific input. Dr. Lal has particular experience in leading the design, management and analysis of oncology-focused HEOR research studies utilizing data from administrative claims and electronic medical record (EMR) retrospective datasets. Prior to joining Optum, she worked at various organizations, including M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Texas Southern University, Cigna and most recently at Cardinal Health where she also conducted prospective studies, including patient reported outcome studies, survey-based studies and chart reviews in oncology and non-oncology patients. Dr. Lal is also an adjunct faculty at University of Texas School of Public Health and an instructor at Rice University, Houston, Texas, teaching and serving on dissertation committees on research projects in the HEOR space.

Dr. Lal earned her PhD from the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston, Texas, and her PharmD from University of Texas College of Pharmacy in Austin, Texas. She has over 50 publications and has published in various peer-reviewed journals, including *American Journal of Clinical Oncology*, *Value In Health*, *Journal of Managed Care Pharmacy* and *Journal of National Cancer Institute*.



Jason Swindle, PhD, MPH
Associate Director and Therapeutic Lead, Cardiovascular

Since joining Optum in 2009, Dr. Jason Swindle has been involved in several health economic projects for a variety of products in the areas of dyslipidemia, heart failure and atrial fibrillation, and has significant experience in cardiovascular diseases and diabetes mellitus. Prior to Optum, Dr. Swindle spent four years working at the Saint Louis University Center for Outcomes Research. He earned a Bachelor of Science in mathematics from Creighton University, his Master of Public Health in biostatistics and epidemiology, and a doctorate in public health from St. Louis University. Dr. Swindle is the author of several articles on the topics of heart failure and diabetes mellitus, and has published in numerous journals, including *JAMA*, *American Heart Journal* and *Transplantation*.



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