

Early Career Award Winner

Dr. Gilla Shapiro



by *Maija Kiviharju (Regina)*

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Gilla Shapiro is our section's most recent Early Career Award winner! A Clinical Health Psychologist and Assistant Professor at the University Toronto and Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, her work broadly centers on health behaviours, vaccine hesitancy and psycho-oncology. She graduated from McGill University in 2018 with a PhD in Clinical Psychology and started at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre as a postdoctoral fellow before becoming a faculty member. Despite her early career stage, she is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Alice Wilson Award from the Royal Society of Canada, and a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship. I certainly look forward to hearing about Dr. Shapiro's work at the annual Convention on Saturday June 24th at 16:00! In the meantime, enjoy my interview with the rising star!



Dr. Gilla Shapiro
Assistant Professor
Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

What are you working on at the moment? What do you anticipate you'll be working on over the next five years?

I have two programs of research within psycho-oncology and health decision making. The first focuses on cancer prevention through human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination, and the second focuses on treatment decisions. I am currently working on a couple of projects such as investigating the drivers of HPV vaccine uptake in Canada, understanding the access barriers to participating in cancer clinical trials, developing an online educational intervention to promote inclusive healthcare provider communication with sexual and gender minority groups, and examining the psychological concerns of patients with cancer who request medical assistance in dying. Over the next five years, I anticipate continuing with this work while moving in the direction of evaluating clinical and behavioural health interventions.

What do you love most and least about your job?

I really appreciate how much I learn every day in this job. Working with my colleagues at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre and University of Toronto has expanded the way I think about pressing health issues like vaccine hesitancy or medical assistance in dying. Being able to collaborate and hear different perspectives on shared research interests is very enjoyable.

Some administrative tasks, like budgeting, are my least favourite aspects about my job. I've advocated for PhD students to receive training in financial and managerial skills so that future researchers will have the skills to do this part of the job with ease.

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What project, output, or achievement are you most proud of?

A recent manuscript, "The impact of publicly funded immunization programs on human papilloma-virus vaccination in Canada" (published in *Lancet Regional Health Americas* with colleagues O. Tatar, B. Knäuper, G. Griffin-Mathieu, and Z. Rosberger) examined the impact of publicly funded school-based HPV immunization programs on vaccine uptake, while concurrently examining key sociodemographic and psychosocial factors. A lot of hard work went into this manuscript, which was the culmination of a national, longitudinal survey of Canadian parents.

As a member of the World Health Organization's Behavioural and Social Drivers (BeSD) of Vaccination Reference Group (since 2019), I have assisted in developing and validating quantitative surveys and in-depth qualitative guides for immunization programs to systematically assess the drivers of low vaccination in a range of settings. It is challenging to develop a set of standardized tools that can be used anywhere in the world. These tools were rigorously developed, and the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) has since recommended the systematic gathering and use of data on BeSD.

What do you ultimately hope to achieve in your career?

I hope that my research will enhance cancer prevention efforts and support patients with cancer in receiving equitable and whole-person care. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has highlighted the unique role of health psychology and behavioural medicine. I hope that my research can help improve our understanding of what goes into making decisions about our health and guide the development of effective and tailored interventions at the patient and population level.

What advice would you give to someone starting a career in health psychology?

Work hard and have fun. Research quality, impact, and professional growth will certainly follow if you do!

