



Laboratory Leadership Service (LLS)

Laboratory Leaders Up Close

April Melinda Clayton, PhD

Ever since I was 16, I knew I wanted to be a scientist to serve on the front lines of public health. As a trained mosquito biologist, I have a long-standing interest and passion to understand how animals and insects, the pathogens they may harbor, humans, and the environment interact to identify means to curb disease. While completing my post-doctoral at the National Institutes of Health in mosquito-borne viruses, I decided to apply for the LLS to advance my career and develop into a leader purposed to support public health research focusing on human, animal, and environmental health.

In 2016, I became an LLS fellow in CDC's Comparative Medicine Branch, where I conduct research focusing on occupational health, safety, and risk management as well as quality management systems aimed to achieve excellence in animal welfare. I have had the opportunity to work with veterinarians, animal care staff, and scientists to perform risk assessments to minimize occupational hazards. An example of my cross-cutting work is a risk assessment I led. It involved working with veterinary staff to collect environmental samples during dental procedures with non-human primates to determine if there are any pathogens generated and to help inform appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements for the veterinary staff performing or assisting with this task. This collaborative effort also involved working with colleagues at the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), who provided equipment to allow us to collect air samples during the dentals. This research allows us to use scientific data to inform occupational safety practices. Another opportunity that I had involved training U.S. Public Health Service Officers at CDC the appropriate procedures for donning and doffing PPE that may be used in disease outbreak responses. Teaching public health responders how to properly put on and take off PPE is critically important to responder health and safety and to minimize spread of disease.



April Melinda Clayton, PhD, LLS fellow in the Comparative Medicine Branch, has pursued research focusing on occupational health, safety, and risk management as well as quality management systems to help achieve excellence in animal welfare.

Being an LLS fellow has afforded me opportunities to contribute to improving the quality and safety of CDC's labs. I have led in the development and implementation of a holistic, scientifically-driven occupational risk management program for our branch. I have also had the opportunity to be part of a CDC Epi-Aid team sent to South Carolina to investigate a Seoul Virus outbreak among owners and their pet rats, and provide technical assistance and perform boots-on-the-ground occupational risk assessments. As an LLS fellow in the Comparative Medicine Branch, I have had the opportunity to gain practical skills in animal biosafety and welfare as well occupational safety and health. The skills and experience I have obtained will allow me to flourish as a public health leader.



LLS fellow, Dr. Clayton, preparing environmental samples collected during non-human primate dentals as part of an occupational risk assessment to help inform personal protective equipment requirements for veterinary staff.

“Being an LLS fellow and contributing positively to the mission of occupational health and safety as well as animal welfare at CDC has truly been a transformative experience.”

—April Melinda Clayton, PhD,
LLS Class of 2016



LLS fellow, Dr. Clayton, training U.S. Public Health Service Officers on how to don and doff personal protective equipment that may be used when responding to disease outbreaks around the world.

Learn more about LLS at
www.cdc.gov/lls

Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services (CSELS)
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