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For Immediate Release

MCHD’s new epidemiologist wants to help the community during the pandemic

MORGANTOWN, WV (Dec. 10, 2020) — Luke Moore, Ph.D., was most recently working as a statistician for the WVU Center for Excellence in Disabilities when the COVID-19 pandemic prompted him to make a career change.

“I wanted to help my community during the pandemic,” said Moore, who began working as an epidemiologist at Monongalia County Health Department in early November. “Accurate data and analysis of data is of utmost importance. It’s one way to apply my skill set to truly make a difference and help my community.”

In the position of Epidemiologist 2, Moore will work alongside Dr. Diane Gross, MCHD’s regional epidemiologist, as well as other staff members.

“I’ll handle county-level data for a variety of programs, with an emphasis on COVID-19 and the Quick Response Team,” Moore said.

The Monongalia County Quick Response Team (QRT) is a group of health department employees, first responders, peer recovery coaches (PRCs), law enforcement and other community members who work together to reduce opioid use and overdoses in Monongalia County. The Monongalia County QRT is funded by grants that have been awarded to MCHD.

A native of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Moore got his bachelor of science degree in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh in 2002. He was drawn to the major after taking a psychology course.

“I did well in it and I thought, ‘This is my path, I’m going to be a psychologist.’ But I learned along the way that I liked helping people but I didn’t want to be a direct practice person, and that I could do it through other avenues.”

In between getting his undergraduate degree and now, Moore also earned a Master of Science degree in rehabilitation counseling and a doctorate in educational psychology, both from West Virginia University. In 2016, he completed another master’s degree, in biostatistics, from the WVU School of Public Health.

“I kind of fell into public health right after I got my doctorate,” Moore said.

He took a job as a postdoctoral fellow at the Health Research Center, located at the Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center, with a primary focus on evaluating the 2005 West Virginia Healthy Lifestyles Act that was passed to address the obesity epidemic in the state.

“We did a variety of public health things and had a collaboration with the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health,” Moore said. “We were their go-to group for evaluation work.”

After Moore finished his postdoctoral work, he accepted a full-time position with the Health Research Center as a data manager and statistical associate. During this time, Moore honed his analytic skills by working closely with statisticians and epidemiologists, primarily in the area of childhood obesity.

Then Moore served as a research assistant professor at the WVU College of Education and Human Services’ Program and Evaluation Research Center, where he was co-director of the Tracking, Evaluation and Quality Improvement Program of the West Virginia Clinical & Translational Science Institute.

“During my time there, I eventually was named director of the Program Evaluation and Research Center, and I worked on a variety of federally-, state- and locally-funded projects,” he said. “I also supervised graduate research assistants and oversaw the Advanced Analysis Laboratory, which is a walk-in clinic for faculty and students to get statistical consultations.”

From there, Moore was at his most recent position, as statistician for the Center for Excellence in Disabilities, when the MCHD epidemiologist opportunity arose.

“I’ve always excelled in statistics courses and research methodology and that’s the path I went down,” Moore said. “I did a lot of different types of research: on substance use,

disabilitative research, obesity. I've done work with the (WVU Medicine) Department of Anesthesiology.

“That’s why I thought I could slide into a different environment with the numbers and make it work. I don’t have to be a content expert. I have to be a statistical method expert on the team.”

In addition to collecting and analyzing Monongalia County data on COVID-19 cases, Moore also has helped out with MCHD’s weekly community COVID-19 testing.

His previous work with substance use disorder also makes him a good addition to the Monongalia County QRT.

“The QRT is a fantastic idea, to bring together different parts of different pieces of the puzzle as a way to prevent overdoses and to get people into treatment,” he said. “I think it’s a unique way to go about it.”

Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer, noted that having a second epidemiologist on staff at the health department is very important, especially as the pandemic continues to surge.

“We’re delighted to have someone of Luke’s caliber with statistics on board to help out,” Dr. Smith said. “Keeping track of COVID-19 cases is vital and Luke’s background in statistics is playing an important role during the pandemic.”

Moore and his wife, Crystal live in Morgantown and have two daughters, Katie, 8, and Josie, 6, as well as two dogs, Biscuit-B and Muffin Belle. “I did not name the dogs,” he said of the two rescues, who got their monikers from Katie and Josie.

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out monchd.org and follow the health department on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd.