

**Student Spotlight!**  
Jonathan Feelemyer



**1. Tell us about yourself**

I have been a public health researcher for about 15 years; I first became interested after working on a very research-intensive project on HIV/AIDS in Africa with my mentor during my undergraduate studies at the University of Rochester.

**2. What do you like about public health?**

What I enjoy most about public health work is the opportunity to interact with people in the field, conduct interviews, and provide harm reduction services to people who need them. Being able to see a direct impact on the community after doing the work I do is one of the most satisfying aspects to being a public health researcher.

**3. Why are you interested in the field of emergency preparedness and response?**

I have always been interested in disaster event documentaries and after the recent events that took place that were closer to home, such as Hurricane Sandy, I became more interested in learning about the tools necessary to respond to these situations in the future, so that I will be able to assist should a disaster arise in the future. I also joined the Research Emergency Management and Enterprise Resilience Team at the NYU School of Medicine, so that I could get additional training and the opportunity to possibly work directly with the community here at NYULH if a disaster event were to occur.

**4. Can you describe a project or experience that helped you in making a decision to pursue a career in this particular field?**

A lot of the work I have done in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia where the infrastructure is very basic and there is a lot of need for public health interventions has been one of the biggest influences in working in public health and continuing the work that I do. Traveling outside of the USA and experiencing how others live everyday gives a unique perspective that has helped me to target my efforts and continue pursuing new research projects and locations for studies outside of the USA. I have always been fascinated by infectious diseases and zoonotic diseases, but never had a strong desire to spend my days in laboratories. As an Epidemiologist I get to be out in the field and interact with study participants and harm reduction workers, while at the

same time getting to work with infectious diseases and write papers about our study results, which is kind of a win-win for me.

**5. Who do you consider to be vulnerable populations and why?**

I consider vulnerable populations to be those that are in need of services that they cannot get access to, including substance users, sex workers, homeless individuals, sexual minorities, and those in developing countries whose basic needs are not met. This is just a small sample of vulnerable populations, as I know there are many many more.

**6. What is a current emergency or disaster that you believe is critical to address?**

The rising of pollution in the industrialized world and the lack of attention to the ramifications this constant expansion is having on the Earth and the environment. Just seeing time lapse photos of icecaps from 20 years ago to today and the enormous melt that has taken place is heartbreaking to see.

**7. How do you handle stress and pressure?**

The best way for me to handle stress is through exercise and watching my reef tank at home, since I know that no matter what is going on in the world, my fish are always stress free and only care about the next time they are going to have dinner!

**8. If you could cure a disease which would it be and why?**

I would want to cure HIV; I have spent over half of my life working to address HIV disparities and epidemics, and it would be a dream to one day see efforts being targeted only towards distributing a cure, without needing to address lifelong medications.

**9. Who is your favorite public health figure and why?**

Françoise Barré-Sinoussi, a French virologist who was pivotal in the early work of the HIV virus. I have met her personally and she had a wealth of knowledge on infectious diseases and disease outbreaks.

**10. What is next for you after you complete your MPH degree?**

I am currently working on my PhD and hope to be done within the next year. I plan on continuing my work as an Epidemiologist, and will hopefully have the ability to design more independent research projects and collaborate on new studies. I am also hoping to enter the CDC at some point in the near future, as I have a number of colleagues that work there that I would be happy to collaborate with!