

2023 UNCG/NCCE Engaged Scholarship Prize



The Engaged Scholarship Prize – given by NCCE in partnership with UNC Greensboro – recognizes scholars whose academic work seeks to address public issues and engage communities in collaborative processes that produce or apply knowledge. These scholars – one faculty member and one graduate student – advance service-learning and civic engagement in higher education and disseminate their work to a broader public.

Graduate Student Prize Awarded \$500 Elana Jaffe, UNC-Chapel Hill

Elana Jaffe, MPH, is a medical student at UNC-Chapel Hill. As a medical student pursuing a career in women's health, Jaffe is committed to the development and implementation of evidence-based care for women's health across the life span, especially for women in carceral settings recognizing the increasing numbers of middle-aged women incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails, and the complete absence of scholarship on this issue. Since 2019, Jaffe has pursued engaged scholarship that centers women's experiences of menopause and access to resources for menopause management in carceral settings.

With support of a Community Engagement Fellowship from the Carolina Center for Public Service and her mentor, Dr. Andrea Knittel, the Medical Director for Incarcerated Women's Health at UNC, Jaffe partnered with community organizations serving justice-involved individuals in North Carolina to conduct a pilot study of women who had experienced the menopause transition while incarcerated. Although women make up only 7% of the overall incarcerated population in the United States, the number of women who are incarcerated is steadily rising, with a documented 750% increase since 1980. In 2020, almost 30,000 women between the ages of 40 and 64 were incarcerated in state or federal prisons. Aside from this pilot study, no studies examine the in-depth experiences of menopausal symptoms or management in carceral settings. By conducting qualitative interviews with women experiencing incarceration this study amplifies the voices of marginalized women who have been otherwise silenced.

This project, which Jaffe conceptualized with her faculty mentor in response to an unmet need that was voiced by patients incarcerated in North Carolina, was co-developed with a wide range of community partners and is designed to surface and document community needs and values, and has involved community stakeholder input at all stages.

Interviewees reported concerning and disruptive symptoms, inadequate resources to manage symptoms, multiple barriers to accessing care for menopause-related symptoms, a lack of social and informational support, and receiving extra punishment for attempts to manage symptoms. These findings won the 2020 Master's Research Award in the Aging & Public Health Section at the American Public Health Association annual conference, and were subsequently published in the journal *Menopause*. Jaffe also conducted an analysis of menopause related medication use among women experiencing incarceration in North Carolina, which was presented at the Academic Consortium on Criminal Justice Health in Raleigh and subsequently published in the *International Journal of Prisoner Health*.

While future research is needed given the urgent evidence gaps and the growing population, Jaffe and her partners believe that these findings will inform future correctional health programming at carceral institutions within North Carolina and beyond. "Research, especially in the field of medicine, is too often conducted in isolation from the contexts in which findings will be implemented. My goal is for this interdisciplinary scholarship to serve as one example of how student research in academic medicine can listen to and elevate stories of diverse communities and advocate for change that is responsive to their needs and values," writes Jaffe.