

Closing plenary:**Biographies of keynote speakers**

Dr Sylvie Briand

Dr Sylvie Briand (MD, MPH, PhD) is the director of the Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness (GIH), WHO Emergency Preparedness (WPE) at the World Health Organization (WHO/WHE), HQ Geneva.

The Department of Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness (GIH) advances global efforts to prevent and control existing and emerging infectious diseases by increasing access to evidence-based interventions; fostering impactful innovation; and leveraging technical, operational and strategic partnerships. The scope of GIH includes COVID-19 but also other dangerous pathogens such as pandemic influenza, plague, Nipa, smallpox and other pox viruses, haemorrhagic fevers (Ebola, Lassa), and several arboviruses (Chikungunya, Dengue, Yellow fever and Zika virus).

Since 2001, Dr Briand has been actively involved in the detection, preparedness and response to global threats, leading the scientific and strategic component of the WHO response (avian and pandemic influenza, Ebola, Zika, plague, Yellow fever, cholera, MERS). Before joining WHO, Dr Briand worked as public health project director for different global health agencies in various geographic regions.

Dr Charles Ebikeme

Dr Charles Ebikeme is a Policy Officer in the Department of Health Policy. Charles is currently part of the London School of Economics team working on the African Health Observatory Platform on Health Systems & Policies (AHOP). Hosted by the WHO Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO), AHOP leverages existing national and regional collaborations to form a network of National Centres that currently include leading research institutions in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal. AHOP draws on support from a technical consortium including the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, London School of Economics and national, regional and global partners.

Mirjam Jenny

Mirjam Jenny is a cognitive decision scientist, science communicator, and networker. Her goal is to empower individuals and organizations to make evidence-informed, risk savvy, and sustainable decisions in our globalized and increasingly digitalized world. Her areas of focus are health, crisis communication, transparent and accountable artificial intelligence, and research and education. Before founding the Science Communication Unit at the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin (Germany's National Public Health Institute), she served as executive director at the Harding Center for Risk Literacy (directed by Gerd Gigerenzer) at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and the University of Potsdam.

Dr Malia Jones

Dr Malia Jones is an interdisciplinary researcher working at the intersection of infectious disease and social epidemiology, demography, and geography. She is an Associate Scientist in Health Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Applied Population Laboratory, where her work focuses on how the places we spend time affect our health, especially spatial clustering of infectious disease and vaccines. She is also the co-founder and contributing writer at Dear Pandemic. Over the past year, Dr. Jones has emerged as a national leader in pandemic-related science communications. She is developing a research program that aims to understand how social media, trust, and science communication intersect. Her current research work is funded by the National Institutes for Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. She received an MPH and a PhD in Public Health at UCLA and completed postdoctoral training at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, Department of Preventive Medicine. Her work has been published in leading scientific journals such as the American Journal of Public Health, Health Affairs, and Demography.

Dr Fahmy Hanna


Dr Fahmy Hanna (MD), a psychiatrist by training, has more than 18 years of experience in mental health services and its development in low and middle-income settings. He served mainly at WHO duty stations in countries affected by complex emergencies including in WHO Libya and Syria. In 2014, he moved to WHO in Geneva, where his main areas of work include providing technical assistance to countries on mental health during emergencies and supporting governments and WHO partners in scaling up mental health care. Since July 2017, Dr Hanna is representing WHO as the co-chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies. Dr Hanna is WHO HQ technical focal point for mental health and psychosocial support and COVID-19.

Francesca Hartley


Francesca Hartley is an intensive care nurse in the trauma centre at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust in England. She has been at the frontline of the NHS response to the COVID-19 pandemic working with critically ill patients.

She became involved with the World Health Organisation by taking part in the Design Lab project to develop a communications and content strategy to reduce the global transmission of COVID-19.

She qualified as a nurse after working as a programme executive in healthcare communications as part of a team delivering multichannel communications solutions for pharmaceutical companies.

She has a BSc in Biology at the University of Plymouth, followed by a postgraduate degree in nursing at the University of York.

Dr Lindsey Leininger


Dr Lindsey Leininger is a public health scientist with expertise in data-driven health policy. A dedicated educator, her primary professional passion is teaching health care leaders how to make intelligent use of medical and public health data. As part of an all-female team of “Nerdy Girl” scientists, Lindsey has co-led the @DearPandemic science communication campaign, garnering over 125k social media followers, hundreds of media appearances, and dozens of invited speaking engagements ranging from middle school classrooms to global institutions. Prior to joining Dartmouth, she spent a decade leading research and technical assistance projects for health care safety net programs, both in academic and think-tank settings. Lindsey earned her PhD in health policy from the University of Chicago’s Harris School of Public Policy.

Elizabeth Ntonjira

Lizz is a strategic communications, media, advocacy and policy facilitation expert with extensive experience gained within a number of roles in the public, private and international development sectors spanning over 15 years. Lizz is currently the Global Communication Director at Amref Health Africa where she leads and mentors a capable communications team responsible for program communications, institutional messaging, thought leadership and provides strategic guidance for the organizations' communication teams. In August 2020, Lizz self-published and released her first book about youth and leadership, titled #YouthCan; an anthology of powerful, inspiring, and challenging stories from youths breaking barriers across 22 African countries. The book has seen her gain global acknowledgement and recognition, recently being featured by Elle Magazine as a key youth influencer in Africa. For her work, she has received various international and national awards and accolades. Lizz holds a bachelor's degree in law from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, a post graduate Professional Diploma in Public Relations from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the UK, and a master's degree in Public Policy and Management from Strathmore Business School. She is also a Public Policy Management Fellow from Virginia Commonwealth University in the US, and a recipient of former US President Barack Obama's Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders (2015).

Dr Radhika Patnala

Dr Radhika Patnala is the Founder and Director of Sci-Illustrate. A valedictorian, Dr Patnala received her doctorate from National University of Singapore specializing in Neuroscience and Epigenetics, before which she conducted Cancer Biology research during her Masters (Hons) at The Australian National University. As Director of Sci-illustrate, she leads teams to solve design and communication problems for biotech and pharma, while striving to bridge the line between science, art and design.

Sci-Illustrate, based in Munich, Germany, provides life science companies, universities and organizations with a reliable and scientifically informed platform for their design, business development, science communication & marketing needs.

Mohamed Elsonbaty Ramadan



Mohamed Elsonbaty is an Egyptian Award-winning Science Journalist, Science Communication Consultant, and Science Journalism and Communication Trainer. He is the Founder of the Arab Science-Media Hub and the Co-founder of the Arab Forum of Science Media and Communication.

Mohamed has published 650 scientific pieces in reputable outlets including Scientific American and SciDev.Net among others. He has developed and delivered many science communications projects and events to engage the public with science. He has delivered training sessions and workshops for journalists, media professionals, researchers and scientists in science journalism and communication.

Mohamed holds a master's degree in science communication from the University of Edinburgh, through Chevening scholarship. He obtained his bachelor's degree in pharmacy from Alexandria University.

Mohamed is a member of the Professional Development Committee at World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ), the Scientific Committee at Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) network, and the Association of British Science Writers (ABSW).

Dr Mikhail Varshavski



With over 15 million social media followers, Dr Mikhail Varshavski, commonly known as "Doctor Mike," is a multifaceted board-certified family medicine physician, media personality, educator, writer and philanthropist. During his residency, Doctor Mike decided to document his journey and share his medical learnings with the internet. Over the next few years, he garnered 651+ million views, making his platform one of the largest in health education. Leveraging his media presence and impact in the medical community, he covers the importance of health literacy while simultaneously battling misinformation in a practical, yet entertaining approach.

Doctor Mike has made appearances and consulted on many mainstream news channels such as CNN, ABC and Fox News, alongside interviewing some of the United States' most notable health professionals, Dr Anthony Fauci and the head of Google Health, Dr David Feinberg. He continues to regularly contribute to esteemed publications including New York Daily News, Women's Health, Men's Health, Reader's Digest, American Academy of Family Physicians Blog, and MedPageToday. He has further established himself in the field of digital healthcare & medicine, presenting seminars and lectures for the TEDx Conference, Mayo Clinic, and many more.

Today, Doctor Mike is one of the most influential medical educators of the digital era.



Ann Willhoite is the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) Specialist/Lead in the Child Protection team at UNICEF, New York City. She has more than 15 years of experience working with MHPSS in global development and humanitarian emergencies. Previously, she served as Senior Mental Health Advisor to USAID, where she coordinated and advised USAID's mental health work across the Agency and advised the 12M USD Victims of Torture fund. Previously, she served as International Clinical Advisor for Mental Health with The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) where she oversaw mental health and psychosocial support services in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, provided clinical supervision, and worked on global mental health advocacy. Ms Willhoite also worked as a technical consultant advisor to The World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO). Previously, Ms Willhoite worked as CVT's mental health Clinician/Trainer for client care and training projects in Freetown, Sierra Leone and Dadaab, Kenya where she trained and supervised local and refugee psychosocial staff in providing mental health services to survivors of torture, war, gender-based violence and trafficking in persons in emergency settings. Ms Willhoite started work in this field with Harvard University's Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human rights in Sierra Leone on the Youth Readiness Intervention, and with Jesuit Refugee Services in Malawi. Ann holds a MA in Counseling Psychology from Northwestern University (Chicago USA).