UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
CENTER FOR
Behavioral Health,
Media, and Technology

Jaime Sidani is an Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh and the Assistant Director of the Center for Research on Media, Technology, and Health (MTH). Prior to joining MTH, Dr. Sidani was a Health Educator at the University of Pittsburgh's Student Health Service. Her research focuses on adolescent health behavior and tobacco use prevention, particularly relating to social media and technology. The Center's Program Administrator, Sarah Crowe, spoke with Dr. Sidani about her current work and her path to MTH.

How did you become interested in health education, and what was your role at Pitt's Student Health Service?

When I was an undergraduate student at the University of Rochester, I started as pre-med with a public health major. One of the classes that I took focused on health education and it became clear that it was a good fit, so I started to shadow the university Health Educator when she went to local high schools to conduct programming in tobacco prevention. I love teaching and I love health and wellness, so it was a perfect direction for me. After finishing my MPH in Health Education and Promotion at the Northwest Ohio Consortium for Public Health and PhD in Health Education at the University of Toledo, I moved to Pittsburgh and became a University Health Educator at Pitt's Student Health Service. I was the first Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) there in quite some time, and I started several programs for undergraduate students. One of these programs was a peer health education program called PantherWELL, which is still quite active and excelling today. I taught undergraduates who were interested in health and communication about topics such as health behavior theory and program evaluation, and then they created health programs and delivered them to their peers.

I know that MTH really values mentorship. Who are your mentors and how have they influenced you?

I've had a bunch of mentors that have helped shape my career. My first was Dr. James Price at the University of Toledo. I had originally planned to finish my MPH and go into practice as a health educator, but Dr. Price convinced me to go on for a PhD and introduced me to research in public health, specifically in the area of tobacco. I met Dr. Brian Primack when I was working as a Health

Educator at the University of Pittsburgh, and we collaborated on implementing the National College Health Assessment at Pitt, with a specific focus on hookah tobacco smoking. I had been out of research for a few years, but this sparked my interest again and I joined Dr. Primack's team in 2011. I really can't thank Dr. Primack enough—he taught me a lot of what I know about research and he is the one who encouraged me to seek a junior faculty position. Finally, when Dr. Primack left the University of Pittsburgh as I was embarking on a career as an independent investigator, Dr. Esa Davis graciously embraced the role of my current mentor. She has been amazing—she is so dedicated to supporting the careers of junior faculty—and I look forward to her expertise in the future.

Esa Davis, MD, MPH
Associate Professor of Medicine
Director, UPMC Tobacco
Treatment Service

What inspired you to focus on media and technology in your research?
During my five years as a University Health Educator, I started to see how social media could be used effectively as a tool for health education and communication among young people. However, I also saw some of the drawbacks. A great deal of the misinformation my students believed about certain health topics came from the internet or social media. It became clear to me during this practical experience that we needed to learn how to harness the positive aspects of social media while attempting to mitigate the more negative aspects. For example, one of my studies focused on the association between social media use and eating concerns among young adults.

Can you tell me more about your recent study on the association between negative social media experiences and sleep disturbance in young adults?
We conducted a national survey of young adults to assess associations between social media use and myriad health outcomes. I was the Practicum Advisor for an MPH student at the time, and he was interested in looking at how social media use is associated with negative sleep outcomes. We decided to look at how having negative experiences on social media—such as arguments or heated political discussions—and having positive experiences on social media—having a great discussion or getting positive feedback about a post—were associated with sleep. Interestingly, we found that negative experiences are significantly associated with disturbed sleep, whereas positive experiences have no association. This suggests that negative experiences on social media might be more potent.

What has been the most rewarding part of your work at MTH, and how do you hope that your Center will evolve in the next five years?
The most rewarding experience for me has been being part of building such a great team. Each person serves a different important purpose, but ultimately we work together to ensure that we are putting forth good science. I think we've been very successful in that regard and I'm proud of all that we've accomplished together.

As we merge with the Center for Behavioral Health & Smart Technology, I look forward to attracting new members to the group. Part of our strength has been supporting students as they explore research paths, and I would like to see that continue. I also look forward to delving more into designing, testing, and implementing interventions to help people use media and technologies in ways that will improve their health and quality of life.