

Career Pathways Feature – Jenny Cao

Jenny joined Burnet as a master's student in 2020, conducting research into women's access to safe abortion services and experiences of unsafe abortion and post-abortion care in the Pacific region. She then transitioned into a role as International Health Project Officer within our Global Women's and Newborn's Health team. Find out more about her exciting career growth at Burnet below!



What attracted you to join Burnet as a master's student?

I joined Burnet as a master's student in the Global Women's and Newborn Health team. I came across the work Burnet was doing on abortion services in the Pacific which is an area that really aligned with my interest in sexual & reproductive health. I thought Burnet would be a great place to work and was drawn to it by the COVID-19-related work they had been doing and the strong profiles of the researchers within the organisation. The student community at Burnet is also really great. The Burnet Student Mentoring program was also fantastic – I had the opportunity to be connected with a mentor outside of my team who provided me with valuable guidance in navigating my career, and helped me to make strides towards achieving my goals and learning about other research areas.

What interested you in the International Health Project Officer role?

I knew that I would be stepping into a great working group, with great leadership from A/Prof Joshua Vogel and Prof. Caroline Homer. I was really interested in the work being done in the Global Women's and Newborn Health team. I was keen to develop my quantitative and evidence synthesis skills through the main project I would be working on to update the World Health Organization's recommendations on antenatal corticosteroids and tocolytics to improve preterm birth outcomes. The strategic direction the Burnet was moving towards was also attractive to me. It had been announced that Burnet would form part of the Australian Institute for Infectious Disease, and as an early-career researcher I felt that there would be potential opportunities for me to grow within the organisation.

What has been the highlight of working in this role?

The highlight of working in this role has been having the opportunity to work with such brilliant researchers within my team but also international stakeholders and experts in maternal and neonatal health from across the world including Switzerland, India, Kenya, Bangladesh, UK, Nigeria, Pakistan etc. Most recently, I had the opportunity to participate in a WHO Guideline Development Group series of meetings as part of the evidence synthesis team – this is something that my team and I had been working hard towards in the past eight months.

It has been great to develop my skills in conducting systematic literature reviews and apply my skills in epidemiology which I studied as part of my Masters of Public Health. What has been a really interesting challenge and what I have really enjoyed is the learning curve for me to apply what I learnt at university in a more practical basis. It's been really valuable and has taught me to think critically. I have learnt a lot really quickly in this role and have been given the opportunity to take on more responsibility and lead my own research project.

What has helped you expand your professional development at Burnet?

Working on my master's project, I received a lot of support from my supervisor as well as other senior leaders in our team.

When I started my International Health Project Officer role, Burnet sponsored me to undertake an external GRADE course at the Joanna Briggs Institute. This course was really important for the purpose of my project and it meant that I could dive straight into my work afterwards.

To me, Burnet is a supportive workplace when it comes to career and professional development. The People Development Framework used here forms an important structure for career development. It was really helpful for me to set career goals with my manager for the next few years and have the opportunities to attend conferences, take on projects, or relevant training to achieve these goals.

There are also a lot of regular seminars which provides exposure to other disciplines areas. The coffee and careers sessions that Burnet offers is great too because it allows you to gain a full contextual understanding of different people's career trajectories which has been helpful for me to scope out my own career path.

What's next for your career!?

My next goal that I am working towards is to start a PhD and this decision has definitely been informed by my past two years at Burnet. It has been really inspiring to be surrounded by researchers who are so dedicated, talented, and passionate about their work.