

Nancy Niemczyk

- Please describe your **Background** before coming to the University of Pittsburgh – why did you choose Pitt?

After a BA in religion, biology and women's studies from Swarthmore College and a BSN and MSN from the University of Pennsylvania, I spent 15 years practicing as a certified nurse-midwife. While helping individual families have healthy pregnancies and births is very satisfying, I wanted to do work which would improve the lives of more than just my individual clients. The thousandth time a pregnant patient asked me, "What causes preeclampsia?" I decided I needed to take some responsibility for finding the answer.

I had always thought I would return to school for a PhD in nursing, but on looking at my options I decided that an epidemiology degree would provide me with the strongest preparation for designing and carrying out my own research. As a site for studies such as the Women's Health Initiative and Study of Women across the Nation Pitt has long been a national leader in women's health research. The staff was very encouraging of my application and funding my education has not been a problem.

- **Areas of Interest and dissertation work** (OK to describe proposed work even if it is not finalized yet.)

My research has been focused on the effects of pregnancy on the vasculature and the effects of subclinical cardiovascular disease on pregnancy outcomes. I am particularly interested in racial disparities in the burden of subclinical cardiovascular disease and how that might explain disparities in birth outcomes.

- Remote training experience: Please describe your past and/or future remote training experience. How have you worked with non-Pitt investigators?

I have had the opportunity to attend national conferences every year, and look forward to presenting my work at them beginning next year.

- **Perspectives on the program** – What do you like about the program – what do you see as the advantages? (Note – if you would like to see anything changed, be sure to discuss this individually with KST).

Several things impress me about the program. One is that I was involved in doing real, substantial research, from my first week. While course-work is important, the best learning experiences have been hands-on research with mentoring from my advisor, faculty, and more advanced students.

I have enjoyed the diversity of backgrounds of the students in the program. I benefit greatly from the students with a more quantitative/statistical background, and I believe they benefit from my clinical experience. The CV trainees have a cooperative, collegial perspective that I really enjoy.

- **Advice to current and prospective students:** Speaking to either prospective students or students who are earlier in the program than you, what advice can you give them?

Research is collaborative – make use of the strengths of your classmates and share your talents with them. Start reading the journals in your field now! - to get a sense of the important areas of research and the perspectives of different journals.

- **Future Plans and opportunities:** What will you do after you graduate – how has Pitt opened opportunities for you?

I hope to find a position that combines teaching midwifery students, research, and some clinical practice. I think that there is often a gap between researchers and clinicians. Clinicians feel that researchers are ignoring important questions, and researchers are frustrated that their findings are not translated into practice. One of my goals is to be a person who can help bridge that gap.