Study Examines Research Translation Perceptions and Training Needs Among Environmental Health Scientists

Members of the Center for Oceans and Human Health and Climate Change Interactions, based at the University of South Carolina’s Arnold School of Public Health, have completed a study about science communication and research translation. Published in the Journal of Health Communication, the paper was co-authored by members of the Center’s community engagement core and led by environmental health sciences doctoral student Katya Altman.

“Scientists are trained to communicate research in a technical manner but often lack the skills to communicate scientific findings to the general public,” Ms. Altman says. “Effective communication and research translation are increasingly important competencies for researchers and have broader benefits to scientists and society.”

With this study, the researchers assessed perceptions, experiences and training needs relative to science communication and research translation of project investigators associated with the Center. They utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews and then coded the interview transcripts, analyzing them for emergent themes related to science communication and research translation.

Investigator descriptions of their research varied in length, and researchers mentioned multiple target audiences. Most investigators preferred in-person and written communication channels and felt "comfortable" communicating uncertain findings to the public despite no formal science communication training. Investigators suggested training focused on plain language development for target communities, assessment of audience needs, and formatting research findings for various groups.

“Working with multiple target audiences that have preferred communication channels necessitates a comprehensive approach to science communication training to enhance two-way communication between scientists and stakeholders,” say Ms. Altman. As a result of this study, the authors collaborated to create a communication training for Center members.