

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 01/11/2022**

**WNCHA Presents: Vaccines and Public Health in WNC – Past and Present**

Join the Western North Carolina Historical Association (WNCHA) on Zoom on **Thursday, January 20 from 6:00-8:00PM** for a special panel entitled, “Vaccines and Public Health in Western North Carolina: Past and Present.” This program is free and open to the public.

Do you feel like you are living in a historical moment? For nearly two years, our region and the larger world have dealt with the public health crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) pandemic. But this is not the first time our region has faced similar challenges. During this special event, three historians will discuss past pandemics and public health crises—including smallpox, polio, and the 1918 flu— in Western North Carolina and Appalachia. They will be joined by two immunologists and professors of biology who will address Covid-19, vaccines, and our current pandemic response. All panelists will answer audience questions in a moderated session after the presentation.

**Tickets:** This event is free and open to the public – donations are accepted. Registration is required. Participants will receive a Zoom link via email to join. Register at <https://www.wnchistory.org/events/>

**Speakers:**

**David Cockrell** is an instructor of history at Guilford Technical Community College. He will discuss the similarities between the 1918 flu and the current Covid-19 pandemics.

**Patricia Bernard Ezzell** serves as a Senior Program Manager in Tennessee Valley Authority’s Human Resources & Communications organization and is an expert on the history of TVA. Her presentation is entitled: “A Shot in the Arm: TVA’s Investment in Disease Prevention.”

**Richard Eller** is an instructor of history at Catawba Valley Community College. His presentation will discuss “The Miracle of Hickory” in combating the 1944 polio epidemic.

**Dr. Maryam Ahmed** is a Professor of Biology at Appalachian State University. She received her Ph.D. in Microbiology and Immunology at Wake Forest School of Medicine in the area of Molecular Virology, and her postdoctoral training at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in Viral Pathogenesis. Dr. Ahmed's presentation will concentrate on concepts of viral variant emergence and what scientists expect for the evolution of SARS-CoV-2.

**Dr. Michael Opata** is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Biology at Appalachian State University. He trained as an immunologist at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine and did a postdoctoral fellowship in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. Dr. Opata’s presentation will focus on how vaccines work to protect people against infectious diseases. He will also include data on how the first batch of COVID-19 vaccination efforts averted high death rates between January to May 2020.

This event is brought to you with special support from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UNC-Asheville.

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(Images: Highland Hospital nurse and patient, 1940, and Dr. John Kerr making a house call in the 1950s, courtesy Buncombe County Special Collections; Modern vaccination, 2021, Photo courtesy of Western Carolina University)

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