October 10, 2019

Dr. Ben Handel
National Bureau of Economic Research
1050 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138-5398

Dear Dr. Handel,

My name is Nianyi Hong and I have a 4th year Ph.D. student in the Health Policy program at the University of California, Berkeley. I am writing to apply to the Health Economics Research Boot Camp hosted by the NBER in Cambridge, MA from December 3 to 5, 2019.

I believe that the NBER Boot Camp would be strongly beneficial to my current and future research goals. Although I currently work with Professors Ben Handel and Jon Kolstad with my current work at Berkeley, I would be extremely interested in hearing from speakers beyond the UC Berkeley faculty. Professors such as Drs. Emily Oster and Joshua Schwartzstein last year have blended health economics research with insights from behavioral economics that have influenced my own research—I would love to hear from them, among many others. In addition, meeting other Ph.D. students in health economics from different universities across the U.S. would be a boon to my research goals as well. I have attached an essay further explaining how I might benefit from this experience.

I've also enclosed my C.V. in this file and you should receive a letter of recommendation from my Ph.D. advisor, Dr. Ben Handel. Please feel free to reach me either by email at nianyi@berkeley.edu or by phone at 860.941.0724 if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Best regards,

Nianyi Hong

I believe that attending the NBER Health Economics Boot Camp would be a huge benefit to my current and future research goals. The Boot Camp would accomplish three main things for me in my endeavors: (1) introduce me to the cutting edge in research in health economics through talks from many of the leading economists in the field such as (from last year) Amy Finkelstein, Jon Gruber, and Kate Ho; (2) connect me with some of the aforementioned professors to learn from their insights and experiences and from one-on-one chats with them; and lastly (3) introduce me to peers in the health economics sphere from other institutions that I can both learn from and teach from my own experiences.

My current research interests lie at the intersection of health economics, public finance, and behavioral economics. Most of my current projects relate to how consumers of health care make decisions which may lie outside the neoclassical economics framework. The first project of mine, which I am hoping to turn into dissertation work, revolves around false positive tests of breast cancer and long-term decision-making. I am hoping to use the shock of a false positive breast cancer test to look at two issues: (1) changes in health care consumption after the test and (2) changes in retirement decisions following the shock due to death anxiety and fears. For the first issue, my hypothesis is that the additional anxiety from the false positive test will outweigh any reduction in trust in the medical system, leading to a long-term rise in medical expenditures that fades over time. For the second scenario, the mechanism that I am looking at is death anxiety and how most individuals avoid thinking about death. My theory is that while the false positive test does not lead to any change in actual health, the change in perceived health and introduction of thoughts about death will change the expected lifespan of an agent. This will then induce earlier retirement for the individual if they have saved enough for retirement, potentially increasing lifetime utility. The classic anecdote here is a patient who hears that they have only months to live and then decides to travel the world. In my scenario, the patient does not get a life-changing diagnosis, but still the false positive shock updates his priors about life that may change his future decisions. I am hoping that this research can contribute in two ways: (1) to potentially change policy recommendations in testing due to greater long-term costs than expected and (2) how avoidance of anxiety and death may cloud patients' judgements.

My second project is a RCT involving advanced care planning and advanced directives in collaboration with Providence St. Joseph Health in Portland, OR. We are using six separate arms of information and physical written reminders to increase the rates of advance directive take-up. This is a second pilot of this experiment after an initial intervention of email and advanced care planning "drives" had small effects in this population.

These projects tie into my interest at the intersection of health, public finance, and behavioral economics and I believe that this camp would help hone in those skills for my current work and on the future, through the insights of both the speakers and participants. Based on the speakers from last year, I expect to learn significantly from their expertise: in their research methods, data set knowledge, and also in from their personal experience. It is the last that is most valuable to me; while I can mostly gather research methods and data from published papers, in person contact with researchers that I admire and respect greatly is invaluable. In

particular, I look forward to hearing about the nitty gritty in how they develop their research projects, learn from their setbacks over the years, and how they deal with success and failure. From my last few years, I have learned that the Ph.D. and research process is more than simply doing data analysis, teaching, and writing papers, but also there is a science to setting and managing expectations, dealing with setbacks, and other personal and emotional issues that are often unmentioned when the final result is published. I am sure that from the speakers at the workshop, I can develop these secondary skills that are as important as the main tasks of research.

Finally, I hope to meet and learn from my peers in other health economics programs across the country. In particular, I am interested in the different toolsets that my peers bring to the table. I am in a public health program at UC Berkeley, while others may be in Economics, ARE, Public Policy, or other programs at other institutions. I look forward to hearing from their experiences working in an interdisciplinary field and learn from their successes, failures, and lessons. This can come in the form of novel datasets that I might not know about, methods that may improve my current and future work, or just in recommending papers that I haven't read before. In addition, I hope that some of my peers may become future collaborators. I look forward to hearing from their research interests and how they might blend with my own; the best case scenario would be a strong mutual interest that results in a collaboration down the road. Even if that is not the case, I am sure that other students will provide valuable insights into my education and research.

If admitted to the NBER workshop, I believe it will add ideas and tools to my research background. Given what I know about previous speakers and what I have heard from previous students, it would be a great learning experience for me. I hope that I would be able to take away lessons for my current and future research and also share my own expertise and research with others as well.

Nianyi Hong

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Education

University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA — Expected 2021
Ph.D. in Health Policy (Health Economics track)

University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA — 2019
M.A. in Economics (concurrent degree)

Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH — 2013
B.A. in Economics; minor in Mathematics

Research Experience

Graduate Student Researcher, UC Berkeley, Berkeley, CA

Research Assistant for Professor Ben Handel — August 2018 – present

Research Assistant for Professor Jamie Robinson — January 2019 – present

Center for Healthcare Organizational Innovation Research (CHOIR) — January 2017 – January 2019

Teaching Experience

Graduate Student Instructor, UC Berkeley, Berkeley, CA

Health Economics (master's, instructor: Brent Fulton) — Fall 2018

Economics of Population Health (master's, instructor: William Dow) — Spring 2019, Spring 2020

Professional Experience

Epic Systems, Verona, WI — 2013-2015
Project Manager, Resolute Professional Billing

Pfizer Inc., Groton, CT — 2012
Intern, Drug Product Supply – Clinical Supply Sourcing group

United States Department of Treasury, Washington, D.C. — 2011
Intern, President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness

Publications

Fulton, B. D., **Hong, N.,** & Rodriguez, H. P. (2019). Early Impact of the State Innovation Models Initiative on Diagnosed Diabetes Prevalence Among Adults and Hospitalizations Among Diagnosed Adults. *Medical Care*, *57*(9), 710-717.

Classes

Probability and Statistics, Economic Theory (microeconomics sequence, A+B), Econometrics: Multiple Equation Estimation, Applied Econometrics, Economics of Population Health, Psychology and Economics (sequence, A+B), Industrial Organization, Epidemiologic Methods II, Public Economics (sequence, A+B), Health Policy Doctoral Seminar

Awards, Skills, & Interests

Awards: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) T32 Training Grant (2016/17, 2017/18)
Languages: English (native), Mandarin Chinese (proficient), French (basic)
Software and Programming: STATA (proficient), R (proficient), LaTeX (proficient)
Certifications: CITI Biomedical, Social, and Behavioral Research, Epic Resolute Professional Billing, Resolute Hospital Billing, Prelude, Cadence, Grand Central (ADT), HIM, Benefits Engine, Nurse Triage