

# Stars of Stanford Medicine: Improving cardiovascular health in Africa and beyond

As the son of academics, [Andrew Chang](#), MD, an instructor of medicine, moved around a lot as a child. “I think that left me unafraid of new experiences and new environments,” Chang reflected recently.

With a new master’s degree in epidemiology and clinical research, Chang has an ambitious goal, one sure to involve many new experiences and environments: He hopes to improve cardiovascular health in disadvantaged populations in Africa and elsewhere. I spoke with him recently to learn more.

## **How long have you been at Stanford?**

*A long time, since 2008. I came for medical school and stayed for the [Design for Extreme Affordability](#) program and for residency. Then, I received funding to do the master’s program. This is the longest I’ve ever lived in one place so I think that’s telling of how special it is.*

## **How did you get interested in science and medicine?**

*As an undergrad, I wasn’t sure I’d be a science major – I did a lot of writing, liberal arts and political science and thought I wanted to be a lawyer.*

*But I was really lucky at Yale to take a seminar with the late surgeon [Sherwin Nuland](#), MD. By focusing on ethics, philosophy and history, we learned how science and medicine are really a reflection of society and our society’s ideas. I became really enamored with this thought.*

*I then began volunteering at a free clinic and I realized that one patient, who had tuberculosis, was working in the same building where I was doing research. That was eye-opening to me that while we were conducting multi-million dollar research on basic biology, some people in our communities were suffering from diseases we thought were largely eradicated.*

### **What are you working on today?**

*I'm very interested in cardiovascular disease. Even within global health it is the [number one](#) cause of death. We've done a good job treating epidemic diseases like malaria, but now many developing countries are being hit with this demographic transition to sedentary lifestyles and poor diets.*

*With colleagues, I recently looked at the [impact of rheumatic heart disease](#) in Uganda among women of reproductive age.*

### **What is one thing that you've done the hard way?**

*I didn't initially think I was going to be a researcher, and as I've progressed, I found I was lacking in the hard quantitative skills. So my advice is, regardless of what you do, learning math never hurts. It's a powerful tool to apply to anything even if you choose not to go into research.*

### **How do you unwind?**

*I love to travel. I think everything is a learning opportunity. Wherever I travel I throw in some cultural exploration or history.*

*I also love cooking. I started with French cuisine basics and now I'm doing more south and southeast Asian dishes. Every time I go to the grocery store I try to buy one weird fruit or vegetable for a challenge.*

## **What are you reading now?**

*I'm chugging through a biography of Teddy Roosevelt. He is someone I don't politically agree with, but I really enjoy seeing how other people have made difficult decisions.*

## **What do you like to watch?**

*My favorite show of all time is still "[The Wire](#)." It has an unbelievably strong sense of place. I like "[Westworld](#)" and I watch a fair amount of cooking shows, including "[The Mind of a Chef](#)."*

## **Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

*I've been very privileged to have the chance to go to these wonderful schools, not due to anything I had done, but how lucky I was winning the lottery of birth. I'd love to be able to pay it forward with my work and research.*

*Stars of Stanford Medicine features standout scholars in the School of Medicine. Certain details in this Q&A have been changed to protect patient identity.*

Photo by Becky Bach