

NEHA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**Kavita Dorai, MS, REHS**

California Department of Public Health

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is shining a spotlight on the people within our membership through this new feature in the *Journal*. This month we are pleased to introduce you to Kavita Dorai, an investigator at the California Department of Public Health for 12 years. She investigates complaints and reports of abuse, neglect, misappropriation, and other types of unprofessional conduct against certified healthcare professionals. Dorai has been in the environmental health profession for 16 years.

Why did you join NEHA and what aspects of membership have you found most valuable to your career?

As an environmental health practitioner, NEHA was a logical choice to learn, network, and stay current. I heard NEHA's workshops were terrific and attended a preconference workshop on foodborne illness investigations in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was put to good use right away in a foodborne illness investigation that involved a group of nine environmental lawyers who got food poisoning.

Over the years, I have returned to NEHA for its continuing education credits. The online education portal is amazing. It allows you to quickly access the latest information or take in a series of lessons on a particular topic.

Why did you choose the environmental health field?

I have always been a nature lover and after starting school, I volunteered with various nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations for environmental and social justice causes. I started writing a book that I researched for over 3 years, but I got sidetracked. Even then I made time for meaningful assignments such as being a docent at the Stebbins Cold Canyon Preserve and a volunteer at the Pine Hill Preserve. My volunteer work and the training I received were foundational in understanding how our built structure impacts the environment at many levels. During this journey, however, I realized I was still missing a good grasp of the interplay between environmental factors and human health. Preparation for the Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) examination addressed the problem. The courses, workshops, independent study, and on-the-job training gave me the solid foundation I sought.

If you were not an environmental health professional, what other profession would you like to work in?

Writing about environmental health to various audiences. My current focus is on taking the conversation on environmental health to the public. I believe that empowering the public to make better choices will be transformative.

Describe any hobbies, activities, or causes you are passionate about.

I am passionate about environmental health, compassionate toward animals, and love nature. I write, paint, garden, and travel. Before coming to the U.S., I worked for Indian Union Cabinet Minister Maneka Gandhi. She has a nonprofit organization called People For Animals and my work there instilled a deep commitment toward animal welfare and habitat protection.

What is the one thing most people do not know about you that you are willing to share.

I have written a book called *Keshu: Climate Change and a Brave Little Fish*. The story is about a little fish's adventure, survival, and coming of age with a focus on surviving adversity. It is uplifting and introduces concepts of environmental health and collective social responsibility. The book is available through Google Play and Amazon.

Whom do you look up to and why?

My mother Savita Sharma. She was a teacher by profession. Everyone fondly called her Painting Aunty and she ran an art school from home for over 40 years. I have seen her teach all types of students and nurture them unconditionally. She was awarded the prestigious Kala Ratna for her lifetime of service to art and for developing a new way of drawing using the English alphabet. She taught me to be resourceful, resilient, and compassionate, and how to grow a child's imagination.

Is there a resource you use frequently for your work that you would recommend for other environmental health professionals?

I have had to use multiple resources for my work to research and verify information quickly.

- Environmental health fundamentals: Salvato's *Environmental Engineering*
- Energy and climate change: Websites from the U.S. Department of Energy and California Energy Commission
- Environment: Websites from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Childhood lead poisoning prevention, remediation, and statute interpretation: Website from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

We thank Kavita Dorai for sharing with us! You can read a full version of this spotlight at www.neha.org/membership/spotlights. 🌿