Monday Colloquium
October 8
4 pm, Bunche 5288

Kirsten Moore-Sheeley will give the first talk in the colloquium series this year. Kirsten has a postdoctoral position in the new Cedars-Sinai Program in the History of Medicine, and she will be teaching a course on the history of global health (Hist 179A) in Winter 2019. The colloquium will be followed by a reception.

Title:
“From Kenyan Particulars to Global Universals: Making Insecticide-Treated Bed Nets into a Biomedical Technology”

Abstract:
Today, insecticide-treated bed nets are a primary malaria control intervention, understood to save lives anywhere malaria poses a risk. However, scientists and health officials did not always understand this mundane object as a universally-applicable, biomedical technology. This talk takes an in-depth look at the process by which insecticide-treated nets were consolidated as a biomedical technology through an historical ethnography of the last and largest bed net experiment ever conducted: a community randomized controlled trial in the Siaya district of western Kenya. In the mid-1990s, scientists from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Kenya Medical Research Institute sought to demonstrate insecticide-treated nets could reduce child mortality even in the most extreme conditions of malaria transmission. Rather than implement experimental protocols in a straightforward manner, scientists had to continually tailor their research practices to circumstances and populations in Siaya. While local health workers and residents from Siaya played a significant role in producing biomedical knowledge about insecticide-treated nets, recognition of their influence got lost as researchers generalized experimental findings into global health knowledge. Consequently, public health policy makers and programmers overlooked the work necessary to make bed nets function as biomedical tools, much to the detriment of early bed net distribution and malaria control efforts in Africa.