In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at McGovern Medical School at UTHouston has embraced telemedicine, the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients by means of telecommunications technology.

Though the idea of telemedicine treatment isn't necessarily new, we now have the technology to make it more widespread than ever before.

Some of the advantages that come along with telemedicine include increasing access to care, reaching those who live in remote areas, improving quality of care delivery, reducing health care costs, enhancing traditional face-to-face medicine, improving patient engagement satisfaction, and improving provider satisfaction.

Even more important than these benefits has been the ability to have no interruption in patient care, despite this pandemic that's hit the world. Patients are still able to get the same care while practicing the social distancing measures that are recommended right now.

Nearly all patients at the department have converted over to telemedicine. Much work went on behind the scenes, including getting systems in place for the audio and visual platform,
obtaining licensing for all of our providers, launching an operational workflow, and creating and implementing step-by-step instructions to patients, providers, and clinical staff. It was well worth the effort to be able to continue to offer the best quality of care possible to all of our patients.

Melba Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA, believes this is just the start for telemedicine.

“Sometimes, it takes events like the current pandemic to catapult us forward,” Hernandez said. “It seems, fortunately, we think, that we are living a historic time where our methods of communicating with our patients, delivering our services, and offering care are going to change permanently.”

Faculty spotlight:
Bahrman goes from tennis pro to mentor

Jennifer Bahrman, PhD, recently joined the faculty at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences as an assistant professor, specializing in providing psychological services to students at UTHealth Student Health and Counseling Services Clinic.

Prior to pursuing her current career, Bahrman played semi-professional tennis in Europe. She had the opportunity to train and learn with some of the best players in the world. In 2006, she was forced to end her competitive tennis career and made the decision to go back to school.

Playing tennis internationally sparked her passion for multicultural counseling. Initially, she stayed in Europe, completing her first year in the Netherlands before transferring back to the United States. After receiving her master’s degree in counseling and guidance and a second master’s in criminal justice, Bahrman enrolled at the University of Houston to complete her PhD in counseling psychology.

Starting out at Harris County Psychiatry Center (HCPC) in 2014, Bahrman joined the department as a clinical research assistant under Katherine Loveland, PhD, in 2016. She matched in the department for her APA-accredited predoctoral internship and completed her postdoctoral fellowship at HCPC.

In November 2019, she officially became a faculty member for the department and is proud to now serve the department that has played such an imperative role in shaping her professional development. After experiencing the journey from student to faculty, Bahrman is passionate about guiding other psychology residents and trainees, offering advice from her experiences. She is currently in the process of establishing a testing clinic within the UTHealth Student Health and Counseling Services Clinic to better serve students, and also establishing an externship for psychology doctoral students within the clinic.

Bahrman’s passion for guiding students comes from the great support she received while in the department’s post-education programs.

“Having been a trainee at UTHealth, I have had many great mentors that inspire me, and role models demonstrating how I aspire to be as a faculty member,” Bahrman said. “I am so
Bahrman, though retired competitively, still likes to play tennis in her spare time. She also enjoys hiking, walks with her dog, interior decorating, event planning, and spending time with those close to her.

Prossin and NIH look to solve pain problem

A faculty member within the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences is teaming up with the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This joint venture will discover biomarkers that will increase medical precision and help to create new, nonaddictive treatments for pain after surgery.

Alan Prossin, MBBS, has received a five-year grant through the NIH Helping to End Addiction Long-term Initiative (HEAL) to discover which proteins in a patient's blood can be a predictor of pain after surgery.

Currently, there is no way of knowing how much or how little an individual patient will experience pain following surgery. This lack of available testing makes it particularly problematic when deciding which pain-relieving medications to give a patient before, during, or following routine surgeries.

Some patients receive medications and do well after surgery with little to no complaints of pain. Others can feel an overwhelming amount of pain that may not respond to available medications. These patients are often prescribed more potent medications including those drugs that are highly addictive (e.g., opioids).

Prossin's longer-term goal is to develop individualized treatment strategies for each patient. He believes this personalized approach will be more effective at relieving pain and thereby reduce the exposure to highly addictive opioid drugs.

Prossin is currently recruiting volunteers who will undergo tests to measure their sensitivity to pain. He will use a PET scanner, an imaging machine capable of measuring activity in the brain. The patient will lie down with their head in the scanner. Next, a needle will be inserted near the jaw and a saline solution will slowly be distributed over 20 minutes. During this time, every 20 seconds the patient will push a button, indicating how much pain they feel. This process will then be repeated on the other side of the jaw. Throughout this process, Prossin will take a blood sample every 10 minutes. Specifically, he will look at a group of proteins called interleukin-1 family cytokines, which the body uses to respond to infections, injuries, and other forms of stress.

Though in the early stages, Prossin is hopeful this study will produce positive results for patients.

"I don't want to say that I have the holy grail," Prossin said. "I'm a realist. But I believe the work we are doing will contribute to the science. I hope it will bring us to a point where we can make treatment more personalized."
Research: 
Scaini wins fellowship award

Giselli Scaini, PharmD, MSc, PhD, recently won a travel fellowship award from the Society of Biological Psychiatry (SOBP). Recognizing the importance of training a new generation of psychiatric academics, the SOBP awards the travel fellowship to an early career investigator annually.

Through her hard work as a scientist, Scaini was awarded the travel fellowship award, enabling her to concentrate on professional growth, as well as giving her the opportunity to network.

SOBP believes attending meetings where new information is shared and contacts can be made is a vital for young psychiatrists in developing their careers. By winning the award, Scaini will have her registration fees for the next three conferences waived, allowing her to have her work and ideas evaluated by other researchers and receive valuable feedback. In addition, she will be assigned to a mentor while actively participating in a study.

This year's SOBP conference, where Scaini was to be recognized, was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the 2021 conference in San Diego, California, she will receive a plaque, be assigned to her mentor, and receive a stipend check.

Scaini understands winning this award is a huge step in her career and is grateful. It’s allowed her to reflect on her current skills, career progression, and what some of her long-term goals are.

“I feel honored that my work and capacities had been recognized,” Scaini said. “This unique experience will be of high importance in my path to become an independent investigator in the field of mood disorders.”

Thomas continues UTHHealth dominance in competition

Psychiatry residents from the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences have won the annual Journal of Psychiatric Practice residence paper competition for the third consecutive year.

Third-year psychiatry resident Tina Thomas, MD, wanted, wanted to maintain a growing tradition of winning first place at the competition. With the aid of several mentors from UTHHealth Harris County Psychiatric Center, Thomas’ passion for investigating disparities in psychiatric health care and
Her paper, titled “Race, History of Abuse, and Homelessness are Associated with Forced Medication Administration during Psychiatric Inpatient Care,” explores themes such as cultural competency, trauma-informed care, and the balance of autonomy and paternalism in shared decision-making with patients.

Some of the criteria used to judge the papers are originality, clinical relevance, scholarship readability, and overall value to the field of psychiatry. Thomas is honored to have won first place and hopes to use the experience to continue to promote health care equity in her ongoing clinical and research endeavors.

“It speaks to the importance of these issues in reducing health care disparities among the diverse population we serve in psychiatry,” Thomas said. “I personally have developed in my understanding of the complexities we face every day as clinicians, and some of the barriers to care that our patients face.”

A special congratulations goes to

Giselli Scaini, PharmD, MSc, PhD, was recently promoted to instructor in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

Jonika Tannous, a student at MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, successfully defended her dissertation on April 16. She completed her research at the UTHealth Center of Excellence on Mood Disorders imaging lab under the supervision of Jair Soares, MD, PhD.

Take the COVID-19 survey
Please take a few moments to take a survey on how you've been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was put together by Scott Lane, PhD, and Salih Selek, MD, to explore how the pandemic has affected the UTHealth community's mental health. All results will remain anonymous. To start the survey click [here](#).

More information about the survey

Clinical trials currently recruiting

The following clinical trials are currently recruiting. If you're interested, contact the appropriate study.

**ADAPT-2 Treatment Study for Methamphetamine Use Disorder**
- Adults, ages 18-65
- Use methamphetamines and want to quit or reduce their use
Contact information: ms.CNRAResearch@uth.tmc.edu, 713-486-2635

**Role of the Orexin Receptor System in Stress, Sleep, and Cocaine Use**
- We are currently recruiting research volunteers with cocaine dependence
Contact information: ms.CNRAResearch@uth.tmc.edu, 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**Developing Adaptive Interventions for Cocaine Cessation and Relapse Prevention**
- Adults, ages 18-60
- Suffer from cocaine addiction
Contact information: ms.CNRAResearch@uth.tmc.edu, 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**Targeting Anhedonia in Cocaine Use Disorder**
- Adults, ages 18-60
- Suffer from cocaine addiction
Contact information: ms.CNRAResearch@uth.tmc.edu, 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**E-cigarettes to Promote Smoking Reduction Among Individuals with Mental Illness**
Genetics of Bipolar Disorder
- Adults, ages 18-65
- Healthy control volunteers or participants diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder
Contact information: utmooddisorders@uth.tmc.edu, 713-486-2567

Effect of Systemic Inflammation Effect on Mood and Cognition
- Adults, ages 18-65
- Healthy control volunteers or Diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder and not currently experience symptoms of depression
Contact information: utmooddisorders@uth.tmc.edu, 713-486-2625

The Safety and Efficacy of Psilocybin in Participants with Treatment Resistant Depression
- Adults, ages 18 to 55
- Diagnosed with Treatment Resistant Depression
Contact information: utmooddisorders@uth.tmc.edu, 713-486-2523

Candesartan as an Adjunctive Treatment for Bipolar Depression
- Adults, age 18 to 65
- Diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder and currently on a depressive episode
Contact information: utmooddisorders@uth.tmc.edu, 713-486-2567

Welcome our 2020 – 2021 Adult Psychiatry Matched Residents

Amanda Actor
McGovern Medical School

Muhammad Akhtar
Dow Medical School of Health Sciences - Pakistan

Leyla Erguder
Alpert Medical School of Brown University
Publications

Clozapine Prevents Poly (I:C) Induced Inflammation by Modulating NLRP3 Pathway in Microglial Cells
Vijayasree V Giridharan, Giselli Scaini, Gabriela D Colpo, Tejaswini Doifode, Omar F Pinjari, Antônio L Teixeira, Fabricia Petronilho, Danielle Macêdo, João Quevedo, Tatiana Barichello

Managing Suicidality in Home-Based Telehealth
Daniel F Gros 1, Kimberly Veronee, Martha Strachan, Kenneth J Ruggiero, Ron Acierno

A meta-analysis of tract-based spatial statistics studies examining white matter integrity in cocaine use disorder
Robert Suchting, Charlotte L. Beard, Joy M. Schmitz, Heather E. Soder, Jin H. Yoon, Khader M. Hasan, Ponnada A. NarayanaScott D. Lane

In the media

Melissa Goldberg, PsyD, was quoted in a TMC News story about the importance of humor during stressful times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Upcoming Grand Rounds speakers

Join us for the Grand Rounds in May on Wednesdays at noon at UTHealth Harris County Psychiatric Center:

May 6: Marina Picciotto, PhD, Charles B. G. Murphy Professor of Psychiatry and Professor in the Child Study Center, of Neuroscience and of Pharmacology; Yale School of Medicine

May 13: J. Chase Findley, MD, assistant professor, director of medical student education, Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

May 20: David Hunter, MD, assistant professor, neurocognitive disorders, Department of Neurology, McGovern Medical School

May 27: Deborah Little, PhD, professor, director of research, UTHealth Trauma and Resilience Center, Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Upcoming events

Registration coming soon!
Mark your calendars
October 9 and 10
The Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences presents

2020 Houston Mood Disorders Conference
Bipolar Disorder: Advances in Diagnosis and Management

We appreciate your donation!

Feb. 6, 2021
12th Annual Psychiatry Update

Treatment Innovation for Veterans and First Responders

The Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences proudly invites you to the inaugural

2021 Houston Addiction Disorders Conference

April 9 and 10, 2021
Registration information coming soon

We appreciate your donation!

Contact us

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713-486-2500
Email
Website

Connect with us: