Soares and colleagues launch stem cell study

Jair Soares, MD, PhD, Professor and Chair for the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, is leading a clinical trial to assess the safety and efficacy of stem cell therapy to battle treatment-resistant bipolar depression in conjunction with the UTHealth Center of Excellence on Mood Disorders.

Bipolar disorder causes dramatic high and low moods that can change an individual’s sleep patterns, energy, thinking, and behavior. Those with bipolar disorder can feel happy and energized but just as quickly can fall into a period of feeling very sad, hopeless, and sluggish. Some with severe cases have a hard time completing daily tasks such as waking up or even taking a shower.

Soares and his team will conduct a double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled study, utilizing allogenic mesenchymal stem cells as an infusion in bipolar patients, aimed at reducing inflammation – which has been linked to a decreased likelihood of effective treatment for bipolar disorder.

Mesenchymal stem cells are multipotent stem cells found in bone marrow that are important for making and repairing skeletal tissues, such as cartilage, bone, and the fat found in bone marrow. These cells show the ability to have a dampening effect on inflammation.

Thirty patients will be enrolled in the trial. Half will be given the cells; the other half will receive a placebo.

“Since mesenchymal stem cells are known to counteract inflammation and promote neurogenesis, we’re hopeful they provide an innovative therapy for patients with treatment-resistant bipolar depression,” Soares said. “Depending on the results, these stem cells could reduce mortality associated with the disease.”

Contact Liz Vinson at 713-486-2623 for more information or to enroll in the study.
Faculty Spotlight:
Zahn leads student counseling services

Marion Zahn, PhD, clinical assistant professor in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, is the Director of Student Counseling Services. She became the director in September of 2020.

Zahn has a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology, a Master of Science degree in educational psychology, and a doctoral degree in counseling psychology from Texas A&M University. She conducted most of her training at various university counseling centers, including Sam Houston State University, the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Appalachian State University, and Texas A&M University.

Zahn’s area of expertise is psychotherapy with adults who function in high-pressured, stressful environments who are experiencing concerns with heightened stress. She focuses on issues, such as burnout, anxiety, relationship issues, work/life balance, grief, and mood disorders.

Prior to starting at UTHealth, Zahn provided psychotherapy and biofeedback training in private practice to teach clients how to self-regulate in order to improve symptom distress and functioning. As a graduate student, she became interested in biofeedback, the technique of controlling physiological responses, such as heart rate, reduce stress, anxiety, and even pain. Zahn is a past president of the Biofeedback Society of Texas.

Zahn served as associate director of Student Counseling Services under Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD. As she became the director, several life-changing events occurred, including the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing the stress level for the student she serves.

Zahn understands the privilege and responsibility that comes with her position to provide the highest quality mental health care to students at McGovern Medical School and the university as a whole.

In March of 2020, Student Counseling Services began offering telemedicine appointments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their wellness program offers access to resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The counseling services staff also created a wellness blog in collaboration with McGovern Medical School Director of Student Wellness to give helpful tips to faculty and students.

Working with students in the psychotherapeutic context is Zahn’s favorite part of her job. She feels honored and grateful to serve as the Director of Student Counseling Services.

“I’m proud to be a part the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, our psychology internship committee, and the work that our department is doing,” Zahn said. “I hope to continue to collaborate with other faculty in the department.”

Read more about Student Counseling Services here.
McCool joins APA/APAF program

Caroline McCool, MD, a third-year resident in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, was recently accepted into the American Psychiatry Association Leadership Fellowship (APA/APAF) Program.

The APA/APAF Leadership Fellowship aims to develop national leaders in organized psychiatry by offering psychiatry trainees opportunities to interact with national thought leaders in the field and to develop their professional leadership skills, networks, and psychiatric experiences.

This is a two-year program specifically for psychiatry residents. Each residency program can nominate one applicant. The application includes nomination and letter of recommendation from the training director, a personal statement, and a CV.

Selection to the fellowship program is based off five categories of competencies: clinical skills, leadership, involvement, research/publications, and teaching.

McCool's ultimate goal is to pursue a career in academic psychiatry, specifically in the child and adolescent field. She is drawn to this pursuit because of the diverse roles that academic psychiatry offers, including being clinicians, educators, and leaders. She is hoping to enhance her skills in these different roles through the APA Leadership Fellowship to become the best physician she can be.

McCool is starting her child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship this fall at McGovern Medical School.

“I was very honored and excited to have been chosen for this fellowship,” McCool said. “There are a lot of incredible trainees in psychiatry so I feel very lucky to have this opportunity. I am very grateful to Dr. John for nominating me and helping me with my application.”

Read more about the APA/APAF program here.

Giridharan presents research at Neuroscience Symposium
Research Fellow, Vijayasree V. Giridharan, Pharm, PhD, recently shared first place for a presentation she conducted at the Neuroscience Symposium.

Giridharan’s study investigated whether the microbiota-gut-brain axis, a network of connections involving multiple biological systems that allows bidirectional communication between the gut and brain, acts as an exacerbator or accelerator of Alzheimer’s disease (AD) dementia. Over the last decade, infection and inflammation has been associated with neuropsychiatric disorders, such as seizures, cognitive deficit disorders, migraine headaches, and others. Survivors from peripheral and systemic infection often suffer from neuropsychiatric symptoms associated with cognitive disorders later in life.

The study involved transgenic AD mice for a cecal ligation and puncture procedure to mimic a patient’s condition after an infection or surgery. At three different points during and after the infection, the gut microbiome was tested for sequencing and short-chain fatty acids evaluation. Brain inflammatory markers were also evaluated in the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, the brain regions specifically important for cognitive function.

The results showed that increased enteric dysbiosis after peripheral infection/inflammation may play a role in impaired cognitive-behavioral outcomes and acceleration of AD pathology observed in the mice. Giridharan strongly believes that this study’s outcome will pave the way to identify targets to decrease cognitive decline after infection. Giridharan’s mentors, Tatiana Barichello, PhD, and Joao De Quevedo, MD, PhD, encouraged her to submit the study’s results to the UTHealth Neuroscience Symposium. “I’m delighted my presentation was selected to share first place in the symposium,”
Giridharan said. “I feel these kinds of platforms are vital to share our research outcomes, and they are also encouraging the participants and helping to move their careers forward.”

Hamilton, Buck record podcast to discuss recent schizophrenia research

Jane Hamilton, PhD, MPH, and David S. Buck, MD, MPH, associate dean of Community Health at the University of Houston College of Medicine, recently recorded a podcast facilitated by the UTHealth media relations team.

In this podcast, Hamilton and Buck discuss their recent research that found having schizophrenia and dropping out of high school are among the factors that increase the likelihood of becoming a “high utilizer” of inpatient psychiatric hospital services. They go on to discuss the framework developed through the study for analyzing electronic health record data. The duo hopes to develop collaborations with colleagues in other safety net hospitals and psychiatric hospitals to find ways to leverage electronic health record data to discover other predictors and tailor treatment.

Listen to the podcast here.

Introducing the 2021 Psychiatry Residents

Join us in welcoming our 2021-22 resident class! As we continue to see significantly increased interest in psychiatry as a future career choice, 2020 provided a few obstacles. All interviews were done via zoom, with no travel for the candidates. Vineeth John, MD, MBA, vice chair for education, shared his thoughts on the challenges 2020 presented.

"This year was full of interesting challenges and we are so delighted to welcome a new class of interns," John said. "I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for the hard work and ingenuity of my colleagues Drs. Amanda Helminiak and Marsal Sanches and the highest level of commitment demonstrated by Catherine March and Verenise Alvarado, from the Residency Training Office. Also, my gratitude to our chief residents, Drs. Haitham Ahmed, Brandi Karnes, Morgan Deal, Sarah Beasley and Kimberly Grayson, for creating a warm,
enriching and engaging interview experience for all our applicants.

Categorical Track

Leonardo Alexandre, MD
Universidade do Sul De Santa Catarina (UNISUL)

Alejandro Chapa, MD
McGovern Medical School

Karen Delgado, MD
McGovern Medical School

Joe Espinoza, MD
McGovern Medical School

Kira Gomez, MD
McGovern Medical School

Matthew Kelly, MD
McGovern Medical School

Daniel Liaou, MD
Baylor College of Medicine

Hallie Malone, MD
McGovern Medical School

Lindsay Pang, MD
Stony Brook University
Claudia Soto de la Cerda, PhD, MD
University of Texas Medical Branch

Zachary Tallackson, MD
McGovern Medical School

Research Track

Lauren Mordukhaev, MD
School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell

Brandi Quintanilla, DO
West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine

Categorical/Child Track

Margaret Garrett, MD
McGovern Medical School

Elizabeth Mays, MD
University of Texas Medical Branch
Clinical trials

The following clinical trials are back in operation, following all necessary safety guidelines. If you’re interested, contact the appropriate study.

**Neuroimaging and Brain Cell Structure and Function in Substance Abuse (In Vitro and In Vivo Evidence of Neurotoxicity in Substance Abuse)**
Contact: 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**Management of Chronic Pain and PTSD in Veterans with tDCS+Prolonged Exposure**
Contact: Melba A. Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA PI, 713-486-2524

**Candesartan as an Adjunctive Treatment for Bipolar Depression**
Contact: Liz Vinson, Program Manager, 713-486-2623

To see all open studies, visit our [website](#).

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**We're hiring!**

The following positions are open at our department:

**Adult Psychiatrist – Baytown – Outpatient**
*Telemed 80%, Onsite 20%*
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup
*Extra Supplement for location*

**Adult Psychiatrist – Settegast**
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup

**Adult Psychiatrist – Acres Homes**
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup

**Child and Adult Psychiatrist – Rosenberg – Outpatient**
*Telemed 80%, Onsite 20%*
Monday through Friday
8am – 5pm
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup
*Extra Supplement for provider to see life span*

**Child Psychiatrist (Bilingual Spanish/English) – Spring Branch – Outpatient**
Telemed 50%, Onsite 50%
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup

Research Assistant I
Translational Psychiatry Program
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
https://uth.referrals.selectminds.com/via/GabrielF-3QDBp/jobs/research-assistant-i-psychiatry-behavioral-sciences-9112

To find out more information about these academically driven positions or to apply, please forward a CV and letter of interest to Jair C. Soares, MD, PhD, Professor and Chair, 1941 East Road, Houston, TX 77054, email: Jair.C.Soares@uth.tmc.edu, phone 713-486-2507, fax 713-486-2553.

Publications

Type 1 interferon mediates chronic stress-induced neuroinflammation and behavioral deficits via complement component 3-dependent pathway
Ashutosh Tripathi, Carl Whitehead, Katelyn Surrao, Ananya Pillai, Amit Madeshiya, Yong Li, Hesam Khodadadi, Anthony O Ahmed, Gustavo Turecki, Babak Baban, Anilkumar Pillai

Addressing the psychological impact of elder mistreatment: Community-based training partnerships and telehealth-delivered interventions
Melba A. Hernandez-Tejada, Theresa Skojec, Gabrielle Frook, Mara Steedley, Tatiana M. Davidson

Systematic Review: Medication Effects on Brain Intrinsic Functional Connectivity in Patients With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Victor Pereira-Sanchez, Alexandre R Franco, Dorice Vieira, Pilar de Castro-Manglano, Cesar Soutullo, Michael P Milham, Francisco X Castellanos

Utility of a brief assessment of opioid demand among post-discharge trauma care patients
Yoon JH, Suchting R, Kessler D, Soder HE, Kapoor

In the news

Jennifer Bahrman, PhD, spoke to KTRK-TV Channel 13 about cognitive dulling due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and ways to combat it.

Luis A. Fernandez, MD, was interviewed by Univision Houston Channel 45 about resources available for those who might be using alcohol to cope with stress and uncertainty during the pandemic.

Segundo Robert-Ibarra, MD, spoke to Univision Houston Channel 45 about the signs of cognitive dulling related to the pandemic.

Ronald Acierno, PhD, was interviewed by ABC News about how the recent mass shootings will add to mental health issues already affected by COVID-19.