11th Annual Psychiatry Update takes place in one week!

The Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences is proud to present the 11th Annual Psychiatry Update titled “Substance Use Disorders: Opioids and Beyond,” on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2020.

The opioid epidemic is well-established, and the number of overdose deaths related to opioids continues to grow at a rapid pace. The conference takes a closer look at the origins of opioids, what caused the epidemic to start, how the situation is affecting Houston specifically, and examining the latest research in current trends, treatments, and recovery in substance use disorders.

Comprehensive lectures will focus on important topics that have received national attention and are causing significant concern in the Houston area. These include an examination of electronic cigarettes’ safety and what long-term effects they have on your body, as well as a look at who is using Kush. The conference also features a panel discussion on medication-assisted treatments, a look at co-occurring disorders, and an ethics lecture on drugs, prescriptions, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

The conference will be held at the Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center conference room located at 6411 Fannin Street. Doctors, psychologists, licensed counselors and therapists, nurses, social workers, students, residents, and non-health care professionals are invited to attend. Up to 7.00 CME/Psychology CE credits are available for those who attend.

Early bird registration is open until Saturday, Feb. 1. Online registration closes on Wednesday, Feb. 5. Registration will also be available the day of the conference.

A full list of speakers, topics, and registration information is also available online.
**Faculty spotlight:**
**Yammine joins UTHealth faculty**

Though Luba Yammine, PhD, APRN, FNP-C, is new to the faculty at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, she has a long history at UTHealth in many different roles.

She was a student at the Cizik School of Nursing at UTHealth where she completed her master’s and PhD degrees before joining the nursing faculty as an assistant professor.

Over the last two years Yammine has led a clinical trial evaluating exenatide as a potential treatment for smoking cessation. The study is funded by the UTHealth Center for Clinical and Translational Sciences Scholar Award and being conducted at the Center for Neurobehavioral Research on Addictions. The results of the study will be soon analyzed and will provide preliminary data for a larger study.

Yammine’s research and clinical interests focus on pharmacological and behavioral therapies for drug addiction. She is currently a primary and co-investigator on several Department of Defense-funded projects that focus on treatments for veterans with substance use disorders. These studies are being conducted at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

Yammine will assume duties at the outpatient addiction clinic alongside Angela Heads, PhD, and Michael Weaver, MD, seeing patients with various substance use disorders. In her spare time, Yammine enjoys spending time with her daughter, cooking, and traveling.

---

**Telemedicine is making strides**

Have you ever dreaded going to the doctor’s office with the impending hassle of traffic, travel time, and all the other issues that go along with crossing town in the middle of the day? Telemedicine, which is becoming more popular among institutions and patients, may be the answer to these problems.

Telemedicine is using technology in the form of a televideo device and peripherals to have face-to-face communication across any distance. In psychiatry, telemedicine is centrally focused on the audio and visual signals as part of the treatment. Nonverbal facial expressions and communication is very important in therapy, and telemedicine allows the provider and patient to both communicate verbally and nonverbally. This involves using HIPAA software and any video capable device, like a desktop, laptop, tablet, or even smartphone.
How does this style of treatment compare to face-to-face treatment?

Ron Acierno, PhD, professor and vice chair for Veterans Affairs at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, conducted three studies that focused on three different veteran groups to compare the same treatment delivered in person vs. telemedicine: one older adult group of depressed veterans, one mixed-age group of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and one group of female veterans with PTSD related to military sexual trauma. In addition to clinical outcomes, he also wanted to determine if the therapeutic relationship would suffer. The results showed no difference in treatment quality, and importantly, no difference in the quality of the therapeutic relationship.

Telemedicine provides many positive aspects. No longer will a patient run late due to traffic problems or bad weather. Canceled appointments will go down, thus, treatment will not be interrupted due to patients not showing up. This is particularly the case for psychiatric appointments, which can easily shift between in-person appointments and telemedicine appointments.

Acierno is also the executive director of the UTHealth Trauma and Resilience Center, which is cross-training all providers in telemedicine.

He says telemedicine will only become more prevalent in the future.

“What we’re seeing is as convenience increases, attendance in sessions is increasing,” Acierno said. “We’re able to offer care to people without the travel time, and get to those in remote areas.”

---

Research: Congratulations to our seed grant winners!
The Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences is proud to announce seven recipients of the seed grant award. This grant award encourages researchers to explore their research projects while offering them funds to get started and, hopefully, secure other funds to finish their studies.

Below are the details for those who won the award.

**Giselli Scaini, PhD - Elucidating the role of mitochondrial function at the cognitive impairment in bipolar disorder**

This study will investigate the mediating effect of the impaired mitochondrial dynamic and autophagy in the association between bipolar disorder and cognitive dysfunction. The goal is to find useful predictive cognitive biosignatures of bipolar disorder by identifying neurocognitive patterns associated with peripheral mitochondrial.

**Laura Stertz, PhD - The use of dorsal forebrain organoids to study substance abuse disorder**

Drug addictions have a major impact on an individual's health. Research suggests localized changes in brain cells function and organization, impairment in neuronal networks and the cells that comprise them. Through 3D imaging, the hypothesis that the cerebral organoids generated from patients with substance use disorder present aberrant cortical neurogenesis will be tested.

**Robert Suchting, PhD - Suvorexant to reduce symptoms of nicotine use: A double-blind, placebo-controlled study**

Cigarette smoking has a high relapse rate. Though many FDA medications are available, this remains a problem. A randomized, double-blind, parallel group, placebo-controlled design to assess an orexin receptor antagonist on relapse risk following overnight smoking abstinence among non-treatment-seeking cigarette smokers will be tested.

**Nicola Polizzotto, MD - Switching off psychosis: dissection of psychosis by entrainment with transcranial alternating current stimulation (tACS)**

A hypothesis that brain rhythm alterations are causally involved in hallucinations and delusions by entrainment of frontotemporal alpha and gamma rhythms with transcranial alternating current stimulation (tACS) will be tested. This is the first study addressing only tACS effects on psychiatric symptoms and the first neurostimulation study tackling delusions.

**Melba Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA - Management of Chronic Pain and PTSD in Gulf War**
Veterans with Yoga+Prolonged Exposure

Gulf War veterans, especially those who present with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are particularly likely to experience chronic pain. Yogic breathing may be an effective treatment for pain, and components of yoga have proven helpful in treating PTSD.

Marsal Sanches, MD, PhD - A pilot, proof of concept, placebo-controlled trial of losartan as an adjunctive treatment for bipolar depression

Pharmacological options for the treatment of bipolar disorder are limited. It has been hypothesized that dysfunctions in the renin-angiotensin system (RAS) may be involved in the pathophysiology of bipolar depression. A double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial investigates the effects of losartan, an angiotensin-II receptor antagonist capable of crossing the blood-brain barrier, as a treatment to bipolar disorder.

Heather Soder, PhD - The effects of abstinence on EEG power and attention in cocaine use disorder

Cocaine use disorder is a persistent, relapsing condition with severe public health impacts. It has lasting effects on cognition, including attention and working memory deficits. These deficits are accompanied by measureable changes in the brain's electroencephalogram (EEG). The current study aims to establish EEG targets for future treatment studies for cocaine use disorder.

Education:
More spots open up for residents/fellows

Continuing education in the residency and fellowship programs is a focus as well as a strong point at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

Building a strong relationship with the UTHealth HCPC and various Veteran's Affairs centers around Houston, resident and fellow programs offer many avenues for those residents and fellows to get involved, both inpatient and outpatient. There are diverse clinical settings with units for bipolar disorder, child and adolescent, forensic psychiatry, and more.

Four additional spots have been created for residents and fellows to meet a growing demand for psychiatrists. Expansion is made possible by funds from the state.

The UTHealth Continuum of Care Campus for Behavioral Health is slated to open in early 2022. More residency and fellowship positions will be needed to staff this facility.

Vineeth John, MD, MBA, professor and vice chair for education in the department, is the director of the psychiatry residency training program. His hope is that residents and fellows will consider staying on at UTHealth after their training program is completed.

“If we could retain some residents as faculty, then we’ll have a wonderful group of people committed to a cause of clinical care,” John said. “They’ll be used to a system and thrive.”
Join us for World Day of Social Justice!

To commemorate World Day of Social Justice on Thursday, Feb. 20, a day recognizing the need to promote efforts to tackle issues such as poverty, exclusion, and unemployment, we will have a conference on social justice and minority issues.

Come listen to various speakers talk about issues such as incarcerated populations, women's health, and social justice work.

For conference details and to register, visit https://www.eventbrite.com/e/social-justice-day-tickets-90184810195

Register now

Publications

**Cigarette smoking, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists as a potential treatment for smokers with diabetes: An integrative review.**

**A non-inferiority trial of Prolonged Exposure for posttraumatic stress disorder: In person versus home-based telehealth.**

In the media

Austin Lin, MD, was quoted in an AARP magazine story about healthy alcohol consumption for older people.

Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD, was interviewed by Well+Good about post-traumatic stress following miscarriage. In observance of Dry January, Amitava Dasgupta, PhD, was interviewed by Healthline about what happens to your body when you quit drinking for an extended period of time, and Jin H. Yoon, PhD, was interviewed by Outside, a site covering news
related to active lifestyles, about how to handle alcohol cravings.

Glenn Belz, MD, told Univision Houston Channel 45 viewers what to do if they get seasonal affective disorder.

TMC News Top Online Stories of 2019 included an interview with Rodrigo Machado-Vieira, MD, PhD, about a new medication, esketamine, for treatment-resistant depression.

Jennifer Hughes, PhD, was quoted in a Reader’s Digest story about decluttering your mind to lower anxiety.

### Upcoming Grand Round speakers

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

- **February 5:** Alan F. Schatzberg, MD, Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University (Cooper Lectureship)
- **February 12:** Erin E. Furr-Stimming, MD, Associate Professor, Director, Neurology Clerkship Program, McGovern Medical School-UTHealth
- **February 19:** TBD
- **February 26:** Guang Chang, PhD, Professor of Statistics, Purdue University

Registration is now open!
Save the date

The Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at McGovern Medical School at UT Health presents

11th Annual Psychiatry Update

Substance Use Disorders: Opioids and Beyond

Saturday, February 8, 2020
7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center Conference Room

Register now

We appreciate your donation!

Contact us

Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth
713-486-2500