UTHealth partners with local schools to provide virtual mental health care

The TCHATT program is leveraging telemedicine to connect students experiencing emotional or behavioral crisis with sustainable care. (Photo credit: Getty Images and Lauren Mathews/UTHealth)

The State of Texas is leading the way to improve access to child mental health care through innovative programming and collaborative partnerships. The 86th Texas Legislature created the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium, partnering with health-related institutions to establish and improve access to care for children throughout the state.

The Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT) program was established and UTHealth is now partnering with local school districts to provide telemedicine services to more than 200 school campuses in Harris and Fort Bend counties.

Research indicates that 1-in-5 children experience a diagnosable psychiatric condition in their lifetime. For children who need care, the average delay to see a child psychiatrist is
approximately eight weeks. In that time, a pressing child mental health need can easily develop into a full-blown crisis.

TCHATT can help bridge that gap and connect students with a much needed and highly valued resource. By working with school counselors and parents, UTHealth is able to schedule meetings with licensed therapists and prescribers from our academic institution in less than one day. This quick response helps to keep children healthy and safe, while allowing them to focus on their schoolwork.

“When children have experienced a traumatic event or are experiencing depression or an anxiety disorder, it can interfere significantly with learning and increase disruptive behaviors,” Elizabeth Newlin, MD, vice chair for child and adolescent psychiatry at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences said. Newlin also leads the TCHATT program at UTHealth. “Improving access to mental health services for children can have a number of positive downstream effects.”

Through telemedicine, UTHealth’s TCHATT program delivers psychological and psychiatric care to students enrolled in area public schools whether at school or learning remotely from home. TCHATT provides assessment, access to direct care for up to eight weeks, and links the student and their family to follow-up care in their local community when longer-term care is required. Parental consent and participation is required.

School counselors are vital to the program’s success. They screen and refer students to the TCHATT program. TCHATT is not appropriate for every young person.

“We are not an emergency service, we are an access to care program,” Newlin said. “For true emergencies, schools are still required to follow their district protocols. However, by identifying children earlier and providing access to needed care sooner, we are certain that we are averting many such emergencies.”

Learn more about the TCHATT program [here](#).

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**Faculty spotlight:**

**Pillai continues research at UTHealth**

**Anilkumar Pillai, PhD,** is a professor and the newest faculty at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. He is the Louis A. Faillace Chair in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences is the director of the Pathophysiology of Neuropsychiatric Disorders Program.

Pillai comes to UTHealth from the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University. He completed his PhD in Biochemistry from the M.S. University of Baroda, India. He had postdoctoral fellowships at the Population Council’s Center for Biomedical Research at Rockefeller University in New York and then at the Medical College of Georgia.

Pillai's areas of interest are inflammation and immune dysregulation, a part of many disease conditions, and he studies how these inflammatory pathways communicate with the brain and how disturbances in these communications lead to mood disorders.
Pillai’s work focuses on understanding the neurobiology of psychiatric disorders. His current research explores the role of immune mechanisms in depression and other chronic stress conditions, including suicidal behavior.

Pillai knew UTHealth would be the perfect setting to continue his research due to the many institutions and opportunities for collaboration within the Texas Medical Center. He feels UTHealth is the ideal place to perform translational neuroscience studies.

“The goal is to establish a research program on the neuropathophysiology of psychiatric disorders,” Pillai said. “We want to build a team of basic, clinical and translational scientists working together to investigate the pathophysiology of psychiatric disorders and to develop novel treatment opportunities.”

When he’s not researching, Pillai enjoys spending time with his family. He also enjoys traveling, watching movies, and watching basketball games with his son.

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**Hamilton accepted into Health Systems Science Scholars Program**

Jane Hamilton, PhD, MPH, a researcher and assistant professor at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, was one of only 40 faculty admitted to the 2020-2021 American Medical Association (AMA) Health Systems Science (HSS) Scholars program.

The AMA HSS Scholars program is creating a national community of medical educators and health care leaders, aimed to achieve the Institute for Healthcare Improvement Triple Aim: improving the experience of care, improving the health of populations, and reducing per capita costs of health care.

Health systems science, the third pillar of medical education, is the study of how health care is delivered, how health care professionals work together to deliver that care, and how the health system can improve patient care and health care delivery.

In addition to providing faculty development and curricular resources, the program serves as a community that advances the field through curricular implementation and research development.

As part of the program, Hamilton will develop, implement, and evaluate undergraduate and graduate medical school curriculum at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth. Her curriculum will incorporate interprofessional education and team-based learned to address mental health needs and social determinants of health.

The training curriculum aims to expand learner knowledge and competencies in patient-centered and collaborative care to reduce health care disparities among vulnerable and underserved populations. Students will train at either UTHealth Harris County Psychiatric Center or the UTHealth Homeless Outpatient Mental Health Expansion Services Program.

Vineeth John, MD, MBA, recommended Hamilton to the program after he became familiar...
with her research. He knew she would a great fit in the HSS Scholars Program.

“I am extremely honored that Dr. John and Dr. Soares recommended me for this program and that I was accepted.” Hamilton said.

Read more about the program here.

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**Soares named to 2021 AHA council**

Jair Soares, MD, PhD, professor and chair of the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, was recently named to the 2021 American Hospital Association (AHA) Behavioral Health Services Council.

The council works to be the voice of behavioral health providers and patients for AHA member hospitals and health systems. Additionally, the council helps shape the AHA’s behavioral health advocacy, policy, and resource development, with a particular focus on strategic opportunities.

Soares joins a distinguished group of medical professionals in the group. Please join us in congratulating him on being named to the council.

Read more about the AHA Behavioral Health Services Council here.

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**Fries, Selvaraj become ACNP associate members**

Gabriel Fries, PhD, and Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD

Join us in congratulating Gabriel Fries, PhD, and Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD, researchers and faculty at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, for their acceptance into the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) as associate members.

The ACNP, founded in 1961, is an international professional organization of leading brain scientists. Members of the college are researchers in various areas in neuroscience, including behavioral pharmacology, epidemiology, genetics, molecular biology, and neurochemistry.
In order to become an associate member of the ACNP, a researcher must have a career interest in neuropsychopharmacology, and have demonstrated potential to become a superior investigator in this field.

ACNP membership is extremely competitive. Selection is based on the originality of the scientists’ research contributions, as well as evidence of high achievement in scientific productivity, scientific and generative leadership, distinctions and organizations, mentorship, and commitment to ACNP.

As members, Fries and Selvaraj will have opportunities to network with some of the most innovative, top-notch researchers.

“It’s an honor to be accepted as an associate member,” Fries said. “I’m excited with the many scientific and networking opportunities this will allow.”

Learn more about the ACNP program here.

Congratulations to our child and adolescent fellows on passing their board exams!

Gregory Larimer, MD  Taha Ali, MD  Travis Barton, MD

Introducing the 2021-22 child and adolescent psychiatry program - first-year fellows

Jeffrey Abass, MD  Karen Ding, MD
Jane Hamilton, PhD, MPH, invites you to participate in a large international survey project called “Collaborative Outcomes study on Health and Functioning during Infection Times (COH-FIT).”

The COH-FIT project aims to identify risk and protective factors that will inform prevention and intervention programs for the COVID-19 pandemic and future pandemics in the future. The project involves almost 200 investigators in more than 35 countries.

Take the survey.

Clinical trials

The following clinical trials are also 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: Valeria Cuellar, 713-486-2841

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.
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.

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**Publications**

Convergent evidence for the antiviral effects of several FDA-approved phenothiazine antipsychotics against SARS-CoV-2 and other coronaviruses
Rodrigo Machado-Vieira, João Quevedo, Lokesh Shahani, Jair C Soares

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

From QAAPAPLE 1 to QAAPAPLE 2: how do we move from one algorithm to another one with Long Acting Antipsychotics (LAIs)
Sylvain Grignon, Marc André Roy, David Bloom, Ossama Osman, Leena Amiri, Karim Abdel Aziz, Syed Fahad Javaid, & Danilo Arnone

Utility of a brief assessment of opioid demand among post-discharge trauma care patients
Yoon JH, Suchting R, Kessler D, Soder HE, Kapoor S, Stotts AL, Heads AM, Harvin JA, Green CE, Lane SD, Schmitz JM

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**In the news**

Vineeth John, MD, MBA, and Andrea Taylor, PhD, were quoted in a KPRC-TV Channel 2 story about the psychological benefits of holiday decorating. News Medical Life Sciences also ran the story.

Salih Selek, MD, and Jair Soares, MD, PhD, were quoted in a News Medical Life Sciences story about their clinical trial assessing the benefits of magnetic seizure therapy to treat depression in bipolar patients. Read more in UTHealth News.

Segundo Robert-Ibarra, MD, was interviewed by Telemundo Houston Channel 47 about how to handle situations when family members gathered for the holidays don't want to follow COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Lokesh Shahani, MD, MPH, was interviewed by Texas Highways about how Texans have grown in their love for the outdoors during the pandemic. The story also ran on click2houston.com

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**Registration is now open!**
Save the Date

April 10, 2021

12th Annual Psychiatry Update

Treatment Innovation for Veterans and First Responders

Register now

Join our mail list

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
Email
Website

Connect with us: