Laura Stertz, PhD, postdoctoral research fellow in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, created a brain image selected to be on the cover for the February and March edition of Neuropsychopharmacology (NPP).

Stertz created this image in conjunction with a study she’s working on involving a large family with many members suffering from schizophrenia. The family is a part of a genetically homogeneous population in Costa Rica.

Schizophrenia affects around 1% of the population worldwide. Much is still unknown about the biological mechanisms involved despite progress in the field over the last decade. Stertz says that with a better understanding of the disease, more effective treatments can be developed.

Stertz implemented human-induced pluripotent stem cell technology, a technique used to reprogram blood cells into stem cells to become neurons. These neurons were compared between siblings with and without schizophrenia.

She discovered there were several genes differentially present in those with schizophrenia. These differences were only present in neurons, confirming the importance of these cells when studying the disease. Further analysis pointed to a specific signaling pathway, called
phosphoinositide 3-kinase/glycogen synthase kinase 3 (PI3K/GSK3), which has been found to be present in schizophrenia.

This study strongly supports a role for PI3K/GSK3 pathway alterations on schizophrenia risk, opening up the possibility of targeting this pathway as a treatment.

“I am excited to follow up on our findings in neurons,” Stertz said. “I am now planning to generate brain organoids, or mini brains, derived from the same schizophrenia family, to better understand the biological mechanisms underlying schizophrenia, and to identify novel targets for development of new treatments.”

---

**Faculty Spotlight:**

**Arriola Vigo works with underserved populations**

Jose A. Arriola Vigo, MD, MPH, is an assistant professor in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. Currently working as an attending psychiatrist in the specialty clinic at Harris Health Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital, Arriola Vigo has experience both internationally and domestically.

Arriola Vigo got his medical degree from Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia in Lima, Peru. After his graduation, he spent a year working as a primary care physician in Peru in an underserved area. This initial job was one of the most rewarding experiences for Arriola Vigo and helped him discover his passion in psychiatry.

He moved to the United States to further his training in psychiatry, enrolling in a general psychiatry residency followed by a consultation-liaison psychiatry fellowship at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. While at Vanderbilt, he served as the outpatient chief resident and expanded his research skills by completing a the Master of Public Health program.

Arriola Vigo became a faculty member at the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Vanderbilt. His MPH training prepared him to work with and understand underserved communities, as he cared for those struggling with medical and mental health conditions as well as unstable housing.

All this led Arriola Vigo to McGovern Medical School at UTHealth, where he felt the environment provided a great opportunity to grow as a physician. He continues to work with underserved populations, hoping to improve their quality of life. He also conducts research to help develop new strategies to serve the community better.

A long-term goal Arriola Vigo has is to learn more about international psychiatry and global mental health. This would allow him to develop an international training program where ideas from physicians from different countries would be shared, making clinical practices stronger.

Arriola Vigo has embraced his calling to help underserved populations and knows he’s making an impact with his work.

“|I feel honored to be trusted by my patients,” Arriola Vigo said. “Words such as “I appreciate you being my doctor” or “I am glad that you speak my language,” really make all our efforts
worth it, as this really means that patients feel cared for. Witnessing dramatic changes in quality of life because of symptom resolution of their mental health condition is one of the most rewarding and enriching part of my job."

In his spare time, Arriola Vigo enjoys being active by playing tennis, running, and enjoying the outdoors. He also enjoys cooking and spending time with his family.

---

**Ugueto becomes board certified**

Ana Ugueto, PhD, ABPP, assistant professor in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, recently became board certified in Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology.

Throughout her education and training, Ugueto found the most inspiring and influential psychologists were those who were board certified. She believes board certification is the best way to convey to her colleagues, students, and patients her dedication to the field of clinical psychology, her commitment to utilizing evidence-based approaches in her clinical work, and her dedication to advancing research with vulnerable youth populations.

In order to become board certified, Ugueto had to submit her CV and professional credentials, 14 essays on a variety of topics, including evidence-based care, theoretical approach, participation in professional organizations and research, ethical dilemmas, and culture and diversity, and two recorded practice samples in clinical practice and teaching. The final step is a three-hour oral exam with three board certified examiners.

“I want to inspire and encourage psychology students and early career psychologists to seek board certification.” Ugueto said. “Board certification allows me to contribute to the national effort to maintain rigorous standards of competence for child psychologists and to demonstrate the valuable contributions psychologists make to public health.”

---

**Webber presents research at Neuroscience Symposium**

Heather Webber, PhD, a postdoctoral research fellow, recently shared first place for a presentation she conducted at the Neuroscience Symposium.

Webber’s study aimed to identify which specific post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms are related to reactivity to drug cues in a sample of trauma-exposed adults with cocaine use disorder (CUD).

According to Webber, PTSD and substance use disorders commonly occur in conjunction, making treatment more difficult. Some individuals who experience PTSD trauma will seek out substances to help alleviate their symptoms. Known as the “self-medication hypothesis,” an individual learns what substances
Webber’s study looks to identify what specific PTSD symptoms are related to increased brain activity to drug cues, or images of drugs and paraphernalia.

Webber worked with the UTHealth Center for Neurobehavioral Research on Addiction for this study. Study participants were in a clinical trial for CUD treatment. During their baseline visit, before patients began treatment, their brain activity was measured with an electroencephalogram for response to emotional and drug-related images.

Participants were asked to complete a PTSD checklist for four different PTSD symptoms being studied: intrusions, avoidance, negative alterations in mood and cognition, and arousal symptoms.

The results from the study concluded that higher negative alterations in mood and cognition, lack of motivation, and feeling depressed, were related to higher brain reactivity to cocaine images. Webber says the results were consistent with expectations and these findings could be useful in developing treatments for adults with CUD who are experiencing PTSD symptoms. They suggest that EEG activity could help indicate changes in drug cue reactivity over the course of a treatment.

Leslie Beckman, from the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, approached Webber to participate in the symposium. Webber’s current neuroscience research made her a great candidate to participate.

Webber is thankful for Beckman and the office for providing a great service with opportunities for postdoctoral researchers.

“Presenting in the symposium was a great experience,” Webber said. “Because of the pandemic, the symposium was all virtual this year, so it was a good opportunity to practice my virtual presentation skills. It was also a great chance to get to know what the other postdocs at UTHealth are working on. I was very impressed by the caliber of research that the postdocs were presenting.”

---

**Participate in an international COVID-19 survey**

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. The project involves almost 200 investigators in more than 35 countries.

Take the survey.

---

**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](#).

---

**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**

**Ouabain induces memory impairment and alter the BDNF signaling pathway in an animal model of bipolar disorder: Cognitive and neurochemical alterations in BD model**
Samira S Valvassori, Gustavo C Dal-Pont, Roger B Varela, Wilson R Resende, Fernanda F Gava, Franciele G Mina, Josiane Budni, João Quevedo

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

---

**In the news**

**Jennifer Hughes, PhD, and Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD**, were quoted in the Houston Chronicle about how to cope with isolation and crisis.

**Segundo Robert-Ibarra, MD**, spoke to Telemundo Houston Channel 47 about how parents can help children who may be dealing with anxiety following the state’s winter storm.

As many are dealing with stress after the statewide winter storms, **Jennifer Hughes, PhD**, spoke to FOX 26 News about grounding and breathing techniques to help bring you back to the present moment when you feel overwhelmed.

**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.
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

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

Connect with us: