Specialty clinics are operating once again

Through the challenges of the pandemic, Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences maintained operations in order to continue to facilitate patient care.

Starting on March 16, we quickly transitioned our clinical services to offer care in the comfort of our patient's homes through telemedicine. In order to mitigate risk, converting to telemedicine was imperative and allowed us to continue to provide the best quality of care to our patient population.

Many decisions needed to be made in order resume operation. Would doctors resume their normal shifts? If treatment was interrupted, would the process start all over or would it be resumed where left off? What sort of safety measures would need to be taken?
We are happy to announce on May 4, clinics at the department officially resumed full operations, allowing those patients who require on-site treatment to begin attending their appointments in-person.

With the help of our clinical leadership, we were able to create a plan of action to move forward with full operations and allow our patients to come back to us.

In order to ensure both patients and caregivers safety, the following measures are in effect:

- A mask must be worn at all times. If you do not have a mask, one will be issued to you at the security desk.

- Mandatory screening will take place. You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire as well as have your temperature taken.

- Hand sanitizer and wipes will be available upon request.

- Any equipment that is used will be wiped down between patients.

- Social distancing measures will be observed at all times.

We want to thank everyone for their patience in this uncertain time. To make an appointment or for additional information, please call 713-486-2500.

Faculty spotlight: Hamilton's journey: Working with vulnerable populations

Jane Hamilton, PhD, MPH, LCSW-S, is an assistant professor and director of the Mental Health Services Outcome Research Program for the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

Hamilton’s background is in public health, including working in environmental health and working with children and youth from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds as a psychotherapist.

Working as a therapist for seven years in the Texas foster care system, she was exposed to the many difficulties experienced by children and youth in foster care. Hamilton returned to school to pursue doctoral studies in mental health services research and policy, specifically focusing on vulnerable populations.

While studying, Hamilton became well-versed in population health and outcomes research, learning how social determinants impact a person’s overall health (e.g., being homeless). She started to analyze electronic health record data while conducting postdoctoral research at UTHealth Harris County Psychiatric Center where she examined factors associated with psychiatric readmissions and high patient utilization. In 2018, she was awarded a $2.5 million, five-year behavioral health treatment grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to develop the UTHealth Homeless Outpatient Mental Health Expansion Services (UTHealth HOMES) Program. To date, UTHealth HOMES has enrolled
152 patients with serious mental illness experiencing homelessness in integrated, trauma-informed behavioral health treatment and recovery support services.

Hamilton’s most recent project comes from a housing policy grant funded through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services that allows her to convene housing policy summits across the state of Texas. The goal of the summits is to work with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to identify effective strategies and innovative regional solutions for expanding the availability and accessibility of affordable housing for medically underserved populations, including seriously mentally ill, veterans, aging, and disabled populations, as well as children aging out of foster care. She’s has worked with community leaders and a diverse group of stakeholders across Texas on this project.

Hamilton has learned from local communities and feels her public health background prepared her to lead the summits.

“I think what’s been really rewarding is the response of the community groups,” Hamilton said. “I’ve learned a lot about housing and how much it affects health. It’s really about the people we’re bringing together to convene an all-day event that is well-received.”

When away from the office, Hamilton’s projects include restoring her century house with her family. She also likes to garden, growing organic fruits and vegetables in her garden and learning health benefits. She also enjoys walking and riding bikes with her children.

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**Shahani named new CMO**

On May 15, 2020, Lokesh Shahani, MD, MPH, FACP, was named the chief medical officer (CMO) at UTHealth Harris County Psychiatric Center (HCPC), taking over for Melissa Allen, DO.

As CMO, Shahani will serve as a physician leader at the hospital. The goals include optimizing physician performance and ensuring that quality care is being given to patients. He will focus on promoting positive morale and well-being to the staff.

Shahani is the director of the Geriatric Psychiatry Program at UTHealth HCPC and joined the department in 2015. He has worked and learned alongside Allen all this time, admiring the results she got from the department. He knows that her energy, ability to get the best from her colleagues, and attention to details will be missed.

Shahani is ready to take on the challenge and is honored to have been chosen as CMO.

“I appreciate the support and encouragement provided by the leadership team and the department,” Shahani said. “This keeps me motivated and encourages me to provide my best to the department, HCPC, and the medical school.”

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**Faculty and staff adjust to new work life during pandemic**
Faculty and staff at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences saw a dramatic change in how work is done during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sudden office closures forced measures to be made from an administrative standpoint to decide who could still come into the office and when.

As many begin the process of returning to work, faculty and staff reflect on the changes that had to be made, how they adjusted to them, and advice on how we continue going forward during this pandemic.

In order to encourage social distancing, many were asked to either work exclusively from home or the majority of days from home. For many, this meant adjusting to a new way of working. For some, it even meant adjusting to being alone for long periods of time.

Carmen Wallace, senior grants and contract specialist, lives alone and felt higher anxiety and loneliness due to isolation. To combat this, she takes walks around her neighborhood to see other people. In this time, she also rediscovered her love for gardening and has put together quite the impressive plant collection.

Omar Pinjari, MD, associate professor, has felt some of the same emotions many of us have felt: fear, anxiety, stress, and sleepless nights. While he is concerned for his family, he’s also discovered some hidden talents, such as cooking. He also found that writing helps to relax him, though he says he has a way to go to get to a Shakespearian level.

Jennifer Bahrman, PhD, associate professor, has used the pandemic as a way to support both educational and wellness missions. In collaboration with the department’s director of residency training and the wellness committee, she has developed a COVID-19 peer virtual support group program currently being offered to department residents, fellows, and interns.

These groups have addressed topics such as adapting and adjusting to the pandemic, adapting to changes in productivity, thriving professionally in isolation, and avoiding burnout, all while fostering social support among peers.

“Co-facilitating these groups has been a pleasure to me and has been something I look forward to weekly,” Bahrman said. “I have enjoyed witnessing the camaraderie, support, and mutual wisdom exchanged during these group sessions.”

Thank you to all our faculty and staff for your continuing hard work and flexibility during these last two months.
The electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) clinic recently celebrated its five-year anniversary. Led by Salih Selek, MD, director of the Refractory Mood Disorders Program, ECT is performed at the UTHealth HCPC.

ECT is used in patients with severe depression cases who may have been resistant to other treatments. The treatment has also shown to be successful in treating bipolar disorder, refractory schizophrenia, and depressed pregnant women wanting to avoid medications.

ECT treatment is carried out by sending a finely controlled electric current into the brain while the patient is under anesthesia. Per some previous studies, this creates a brief seizure in the brain, allowing brain cells to have a neuronal discharge, helping new brain cells form, or increasing the amount of “good chemicals” in the brain that naturally reduce depression.

Estimates show that despite wide geographic availability, ECT volume in Texas is only one-fifth compared to the rest of the country. Also, less than 1% of residents in Texas receive this golden standard treatment.

In 2015, Prashant Gajwani, MD, led an initiative with support from current Chair, Jair Soares, MD, PhD, to bring ECT to a designated suite at UTHealth HCPC. The first ECT procedure was performed on April 22, 2015.

Since then, the ECT clinic has steadily grown to the point where it has the highest treatment volume in the entire Texas Medical Center.

Ongoing studies at UTHealth Refractory Mood Disorders Program include Magnetic Seizure Therapy (MST), a novel device to treat mood disorders. Currently, MST’s effectiveness is being tested and compared with ECT to offer another treatment option for patients.

Selek is proud of how far the ECT clinic has come since its creation five years ago.

“Our services have consistently been growing,” Selek said. “We have educated all third-year
Clinical trials are back in operation

COVID-19 unfortunately interrupted a research study being conducted by the Center for Neurobehavioral Research on Addiction (CRNA) titled Developing Adaptive Interventions for Cocaine Cessation and Relapse. This study involves the use of various treatment interventions in an outpatient setting for individuals seeking help for cocaine addiction. During the study participants receive urine drug testing, motivational incentives, individual therapy and possibly medication.

Upon the outbreak, trials were not allowed to recruit individuals due to required social distancing measures and the “stay home work safe” order. CRNA is excited to announce that the study is resuming. Individuals meeting the following guidelines can be screened for study participation:

- Between the ages of 18 and 60
- Not pregnant
- Using cocaine

Appropriate safety measures will be taken such as masks to be worn at all times, screening before entering the clinic, recommended social distancing measures observed, and limited number of patients being admitted to the waiting room.

For more information about this study, contact Rolanda.johnson@uth.tmc.edu or call 713-500-DRUG (3784).

Additional clinical trials

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

**Developing Adaptive Interventions for Cocaine Cessation and Relapse Prevention**
Contact: 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**Targeting Stress-Induced Alcohol Relapse Risk with Doxazosin XL**
Contact: 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**Suvorexant to Reduce Symptoms of Nicotine Use: A Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled Study**
Contact: 713-500-DRUG (3784)
The Effects of Abstinence on EEG Power and Attention in Cocaine Use Disorder
Contact: 713-500-DRUG (3784)

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)

Building Resilience in Caregivers of Trauma Survivors
Contact: Deborah M Little, PhD, 713-486-2524

Assessment of Diverse Biological Indicators in Gulf War Illness: Are They Replicable? Are They related?
Contact: Deborah M Little, PhD, 713-486-2524

Assessment of MRI-Based Markers of Dopaminergic Integrity as a Biological Indicator of Gulf War Illness
Contact: Deborah M Little, PhD, 713-486-2524

Defining and Characterizing GWI Pathobiology Using Longitudinal Brain Imaging Biomarkers of White Matter Integrity and Hemodynamic Response
Contact: Deborah M Little, PhD, 713-486-2524

Management of Chronic Pain and PTSD in Veterans with tDCS + Prolonged Exposure
Melba A. Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA PI, 713-486-2729, or Daniel Murphy, Research Coordinator, 713-486-2841

The Safety and Efficacy of Psilocybin in Participants with Treatment Resistant Depression
Contact: Valeria Cuellar, 713-486-2523

Candesartan as an Adjunctive Treatment for Bipolar Depression
Contact: Valeria Cuellar, 713-486-2567

Genetics of Bipolar Disorder
Contact: Maria Di Pasquo, 713-486-2567

Effect of Systemic Inflammation Effect on Mood and Cognition
Contact: Taya Bockmann, 713-486-2625

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**

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**Publications**

- **Socioecological indicators of senior financial exploitation: an application of data science to 8,800 substantiated mistreatment cases**
  Burnett J, Suchting R, Green CE, Cannell MB, Dyer CB.

- **Peer support during in vivo exposure homework to reverse attrition from prolonged exposure therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): description of a randomized controlled trial**
  Melba A. Hernandez-Tejada, Wendy Muzzy, Matthew Price, Stephanie Hamski, Stephanie Hart, Edna Foa, Ron Acierno

- **ADHD management during the COVID-19 pandemic: guidance from the European ADHD Guidelines Group**
  Samuele Cortese, Philip Asherson, Edmund Sonuga-Barke, Tobias Banaschewski, Daniel Brandeis, Jan Buitelaar, David Coghil, David Daley, Marina Danckaerts, Ralf W Dittmann, Manfred Doepfner, Maite Ferrin, Chris Hollis, Martin Holtmann, Eric Konofal, Michel Lecendreux, Paramala Santosh, Aribert Rothenberger, César Soutullo, Hans-Christoph Steinhausen, Eric Taylor, Saskia Van der Oord, Ian Wong, Alessandro Zuddas, Emily Simonoff

- **Accelerated Aging in Bipolar Disorder: A Comprehensive Review of Molecular Findings and Their Clinical Implications**
  Gabriel R Fries, Madeline J Zamzow, Taylor Andrews, Omar Pink, Giselli Scaini, Joao Quevedo

- **On the Unique Utility of Digital Technology for Bipolar Disorder: Is There Still Room for Phenomenology?**
  Marsal Sanches
Upcoming Grand Rounds speakers

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

June 3: Johanna Bick, PhD, assistant professor, director of laboratory of early experience and development, University of Houston

June 10: Vineeth John, MD, MBA; Amanda Helminiak, MD; Marsal Sanches, MD, PhD, FAPA; residency program update, Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

June 17: J. Chase Findley, MD, assistant professor, director of medical student education, 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

Save the Date
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: