Melba Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA, associate professor in the UTHealth Trauma and Resilience Center in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, has received funding through the Victims of Crime Act grant fund managed by the Office of the Governor of Texas that will allow her team to apply evidence-based interventions and research outcomes in tangible ways to serve the older adult community.

This service grant, which uses 100% of the funds to serve the community, will address a need of older adults with evidence-based mental health treatments combined with community-based support to treat negative psychological outcomes of abuse.

Isolation is one of the major risk factors for elder abuse. Social isolation is a great concern for elder abuse, particularly during a pandemic as perpetrators often live with, or near, the older adult, and are sometimes even the gatekeepers to access their health care.

Hernandez-Tejada and her team will work with these older adult survivors and community members via telemedicine to deliver mental health treatment using evidence-based treatments to treat common negative psychological outcomes of victimization such as depression, PTSD, and substance use. These treatments will be used in combination with peer support to help older adults to reengage in activities that they used to do before the abuse, and may have stopped doing because of their current mental health status.

With elders more likely to be isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Hernandez-Tejada believes this funding is timely, and will help older adult survivors need to recover and reengage with themselves and their communities.

“We will apply our experience delivering mental health treatment via telehealth,” Hernandez-Tejada said. “Pandemic restrictions have caused more isolation, creating
Hernandez-Tejada encourages those who work with elderly patients and suspect or know their patients have been challenged by victimization, including elder domestic violence, to refer their patients to the UTHealth Trauma and Resilience Center where this specialized service is housed.

Faculty spotlight:
Shukla comes home to Houston

Anuj Shukla, MD, recently joined the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences as an assistant professor. He specializes in child and adolescent psychiatry and will be providing outpatient treatment at UT Physicians Multispecialty - Jensen.

Shukla has a strong interest in ADHD and autism. He’s conducted several research projects involving Alzheimer’s disease, autism, and chronic traumatic encephalopathy. He also has a passion for academics and has been extensively involved in teaching medical students, interns, residents, and fellows.

Shukla received his Doctor of Medicine from the American University of Antigua College of Medicine. He completed his general residency and fellowship training in child and adolescent psychiatry at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Shukla is no stranger to the UTHealth system. Born and raised in Houston, He watched his mother, Pramila, start her career in research at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences from 1976-1981 and returned in 1986. One of his goals was to make back to his hometown and follow in his mom’s footsteps while furthering his career.

“I would love to be able to deliver great patient care to underserved communities,” Shukla said. “Also, I would like to provide treatment to children and adolescents who do not have access to proper health care.”

When not conducting research, Shukla likes to travel and explore other cultures. He also enjoys staying active by working out and playing a variety of sports. He recently began outdoor landscaping and home renovation projects.

Bhering Martins looks to treat headaches with nutrition

Lais Bhering Martins, PhD, recently won the Frontiers in Headache Research award, offered by the American Headache Society (AHS).

Bhering Martins, a post-doctoral researcher in the department, conducted a research project to evaluate the potential of ginger as an add-on strategy to improve acute migraine and prevent migraine attacks.
The consumption of ginger, as demonstrated in previous clinical trials, has shown a positive effect on pain relief in different conditions, such as dysmenorrhea and muscle pain. Bhering Martins hypothesized that the association of ginger with a conventional treatment would promote faster pain relief during a migraine attack and the regular use of ginger would decrease the frequency of attacks.

For winning this award, Bhering Martins presented her study at the 2020 Scottsdale Headache Symposium virtual meeting, on Saturday, November 21. She will also receive a one-year AHS Trainee membership.

Working with her mentors, Adaliene Versiani Matos Ferreira, PhD, and Antonio Teixeira, MD, PhD, this study covered two independent double-blind, placebo-controlled randomized clinical trials. The first study observed 60 migraine patients randomly put in two groups, where half received the ginger and the other half received a placebo, in addition to ketoprofen, a medication used to treat headaches.

The second study involved 107 patients with episodic migraines, experiencing up to 14 headaches per month. Patients receive either the ginger or placebo three times per day over three months. In both trials, patients were asked to keep a daily headache diary, recording their experiences.

After the study concluded, Bhering Martins discovered that while consumption of ginger does help relieve acute migraine pain, it doesn't prevent the migraine.

Bhering Martins became interested in studying how nutrition can battle diseases after receiving her master's degree and PhD in food sciences. She is happy in working to find a way to prevent migraines with nutrition.

“I felt very happy to win this award,” Bhering Martins said. “I also felt proud of my work because the results of these studies have broadened the knowledge about a new alternative therapeutic strategy for migraine attacks, which is a highly debilitating condition.”

Nguyen wins AAAP award

Van Khue Nguyen, MD, third-year psychiatry resident, was recently awarded the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry (AAAP) John Renner Award given to medical students, residents, and fellows, focused on learning about substance use disorders and co-occurring mental disorders.

Those who win this award will be given one year of free registration to annual meetings hosted by AAAP as well as a two-year complimentary AAAP membership. As part of the program, Nguyen will attend all scheduled AAAP events. She will also assist with trainee-targeted activities during these meetings. Additionally, she will participate in an AAAP committee or special interest group, providing her with many learning opportunities.

Nguyen became inspired to apply for the AAAP award during the second year of her
To apply for this award, Nguyen submitted an online application, a letter of support from a faculty member, a short statement about her interest in addiction psychiatry, and how receiving the award will impact her educational goals.

Nguyen’s focus is in child and adolescent psychiatry. In exploring addiction psychiatry, Nguyen found that addiction isn’t a problem exclusively for adults. Many adolescents struggle with this as well. This prompted her to explore how addiction psychiatry applies to children and adolescents as well as adults.

“As I started my PGY-3 year, I was looking for opportunities to further explore this field,” Nguyen said. “I believe that having exposure to and knowledge of addiction psychiatry will further enrich my clinical training and future practice. I’m grateful for the support I’ve received from our program and faculty in applying for the award and am beyond excited to have won.”

Nguyen is currently on the child and adolescent combined track in her residency training. She will start her child and adolescent fellowship in the department next year.

Congratulations - two CNRA post-doctoral students win awards

Constanza de Dios, PhD

Heather Soder, PhD

Join us in congratulating Constanza de Dios, PhD, and Heather Soder, PhD, for winning awards at the MD Anderson Annual Postdoctoral Science Symposium.

De Dios won first place in an oral presentation titled "Identifying predictors of opioid misuse in adult trauma patients using a Bayesian data science approach."

Soder took second place in a poster she presented titled "Brain reactivity and attentional bias to drug cues in cocaine users."

Participate in the following COVID-19 surveys
Please take a few moments to participate in 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. Take the survey here.

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 trails 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
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

**Alterations in plasma kynurenine pathway metabolites in children and adolescents with bipolar disorder and unaffected offspring of bipolar parents: A preliminary study**
Deborah Benevenuto, Kirti Saxena, Gabriel R Fries, Samira S Valvassori, Ramandeep Kahlon, Johanna Saxena, Sherin Kurian, Cristian P Zeni, Iram F Kazimi, Giselli Scaini, Jair C Soares, João Quevedo

**Re-engaging Dropouts of Prolonged Exposure for PTSD Delivered via Home-Based Telemedicine or In Person:**
Melba A. Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA; Ron Acierno, PhD; David Sánchez-Carracedo, PhD

**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

In the news

**Andrea Taylor, PhD,** spoke to **KPRC-TV Channel 2** about how to handle stress about the holiday season this year during the pandemic. The story was also posted on click2houston.com.

**Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD,** was interviewed by Healthline about a new study showing that patients have some relief from their depression when treated with psilocybin, a psychedelic medication made from mushrooms.

**Elizabeth Newlin, MD,** and a patient were featured on the front page of the Houston Chronicle about UTHealth’s partnership with Houston school districts to offer students virtual mental health services through the Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine program.

**Segundo Robert-Ibarra, MD,** spoke to Univision Channel 45 Houston viewers about the same topic.

**Andrea Taylor, PhD,** answered questions from the community about how to prioritize mental health during the holidays as part of a Q&A hosted by KPRC-TV Channel 2. About 70 people attended the virtual event.

Upcoming events
Save the Date

April 10, 2021

12th Annual Psychiatry Update

Treatment Innovation for Veterans and First Responders

Join our mail list

We appreciate your donation!

Contact us

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