Ashtari appointed vice chair for diversity and inclusion

Elaheh Ashtari, PsyD, has been appointed the inaugural vice chair for diversity and inclusion in the Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. She will be working with the McGovern Medical School Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Diversity is defined broadly to include race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural orientation, disability, military service, religious or spiritual beliefs, national origin, and other distinctive characteristics.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion is committed to fostering a diverse, culturally rich, and inclusive environment for learners, staff, and faculty. This commitment is rooted in the foundation that celebrating and promoting diversity and inclusion reflects the Houston populace and promotes belonging, creativity, and innovation.

To accomplish this, the office has initiatives that include a speaker series, inclusion learning training, social events, ally trainings, and the use of preferred pronouns to address transgender and gender-nonconforming people.

Ashtari hopes to bring the department together to get everyone’s unique perspectives on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, bringing all ideas to the table. She also has a vision to create a strategic plan for the department to implement impactful objectives with accountability and sustainability.

Ashtari is excited for the opportunity to lead the department and is looking to explore new ways to promote diversity and inclusion.

“I want to sincerely thank my fellow colleagues for the overwhelming congratulatory messages of support and encouragement,” Ashtari said. “As health care providers, I believe we must do our part to overcome health disparities and social injustices, as well as engage in socially responsible practices in leadership, management, recruitment, retention, patient care, education, and research.”
Faculty spotlight:
Welcome Jason Yu

Please join the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in welcoming Jason Yu, PhD, to our team.

He comes to us after practicing independently as a licensed psychologist for the last five years. Yu received his Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from The University of Texas at Austin. He then got into counseling, getting a Master of Arts in counseling from St. Edward’s University in Austin, TX. He finished his Doctorate in Philosophy at Texas A&M University in College Station.

Yu is a licensed psychologist at UTHealth Student Counseling Services. As a clinician, Yu values developing enduring therapeutic relationships and building upon patients’ strength while deepening their self-compassion and sense of connection. His goal is to help patients clarify essential questions and search for answers through guided expository dialogues and structured interactive work.

In his work with patients, Yu seeks to pragmatically attain functional improvement and strive for lasting transformation while accounting for the larger context of life circumstances and cultural considerations.

Yu’s clinical interests include transition adjustment, anxiety and mood disorders, ADHD behavioral management, career exploration, and learning and other academic skills and concerns, such as time management, procrastination, and motivation.

Yu will be an asset to our department for many years to come!

Warner gets ABPP certified

Alia Warner, PhD, recently became the first psychologist at UTHealth to get certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) in clinical psychology.

Warner’s primary clinical interest is the assessment and delivery of evidence-based treatments for adults with severe mental illnesses, specifically schizophrenia spectrum disorders. Warner provides psychological services at UTHealth Harris County Psychiatry Center (HCPC) and also directs an inpatient early intervention program for young adults with these disorders at UTHealth HCPC.

ABPP aims to serve the public by promoting quality psychological services that go above and beyond the status quo...
beyond the minimum requirements set forth by the state licensure bodies. ABPP certification in clinical psychology also entails a commitment to the promotion of high standards for competent practice and active participation in the growth and improvement of the field.

The process to get certified took Warner more than a year to complete. There were three key components to certification, including a credential review, clinical work sample submission and review, and a peer-reviewed, performance-based examination. After all her materials were reviewed, including credential review documents, video samples of work, and various documents, she participated in an oral defense of her materials.

Warner sought out the certification to challenge herself personally but also to grow professionally and better serve her patients. Additionally, this board certification facilitates identification of providers that meet specialization standards in a manner similar to other medical specialty board certification.

Warner is excited to be a pioneer for certification in clinical psychology. She hopes others will consider looking into the certification process.

“Going through board certification was helpful in both identifying my weaknesses and how to improve them, while also reinforcing my strengths,” Warner said. “I believe these insights have enhanced my practice, improved my confidence, and are of downstream benefit to both my patients and supervisees. I received tremendous support from my department, and in particular my psychology colleagues, which I greatly appreciate.”

Click here to see Warner’s professional bio.

2020 Houston Mood Disorders Conference review

The Houston 2020 Mood Disorders Conference, titled "Bipolar Disorder: Advances in Diagnosis and Management," was the most unique conference in its history.

The conference was held virtually, with 110 attendees joining for this two-day conference. The conference featured four renowned keynote speakers, faculty from UTHealth, and faculty from Baylor College of Medicine.

Bipolar disorder is among the most common and potentially disabling mental disorders. The
Despite COVID-19 preventing an in-person conference this year, attendees provided positive feedback regarding the conference. Attendees interacted with the speakers via Webex.

We want to thank everyone involved who made the 2020 Houston Mood Disorders Conference a success. A special thanks goes to our speakers for being so flexible in the process. Thank you to everyone who attended and continue to support our program.

We hope to see everyone, in person this time, for the 2021 Houston Mood Disorders Conference, which will be held on Oct. 1-2, 2021.

---

**MST trial offers alternative to ECT**

Salih Selek, MD, is leading a study to compare Magnetic Seizure Therapy (MST) as a treatment for severe depression patients to Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT). This study is part of the Refractory Mood Disorders Program conducted at UTHealth Center of Excellence on Mood Disorders.

Both MST and ECT are treatments that send wave or electric currents into the brain to treat certain types of major depressive disorder or other treatment-resistant mood disorders. Many variations of this type treatment has been used for more than 80 years to suppress mood disorders.

ECT, the more traditionally used therapy, involves using finely controlled electric current that causes a brief seizure in the brain. By contract, MST uses magnetic waves instead of electric currents.

ECT does come with a slight risk of the patient suffering from memory loss. But with its use of magnetic waves rather than electric currents, Selek and his team have hypothesized that MST will be just as effective as ECT without the risk of memory loss.

The double blind study will compare patients receiving ECT to those getting MST to see if Selek’s team is correct. Thirty total patients will participate over four years. Study participants are required to be at least 22 years old, have been diagnosed with bipolar depression, and have been unable to find a treatment or medication that relieves their symptoms.

Selek hopes to provide an alternative to the traditional ECT therapy in the form of MST.

“I’m personally excited to bring this novel trial to Houston,” Selek said. “We are the second center nationwide conducting such a study.”

To read more about MST, click [here](#).

---

**Treatment-resistant depression clinic offers VNS**
The treatment-resistant depression clinic, a part of UTHealth Center of Excellence on Mood Disorders, is now offering vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) as a treatment for patients with cases of severe depression.

In many treatment-resistant depression cases, patients, along with their families, become noncompliant or discontinue their antidepressant treatment when they’re not seeing better results. The clinic provides cutting-edge technology and resources in a single location to improve personalized treatment, enhance care coordination, and expand accessibility.

VNS involves a small surgical procedure that places a pulse generator in the patient’s chest area. The generator is connected to the left vagus nerve by a wire threaded underneath the skin. The device is programmed to give an electric current in a continuous cycle for a set amount of time. After that time frame has passed, the process will repeat itself.

The patient will come back for a follow-up appointment, where the physician will monitor the results of each treatment that’s administered.

VNS is a recommended treatment for patients who:

- Have chronic, hard-to-treat depression (treatment-resistant depression)
- Haven’t improved after trying four or more medications or electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), or both
- Continue standard depression treatments along with vagus nerve stimulation

For more information about VNS or to make an appointment, call 713-486-2700.

---

Research:

Cuellar win best poster award

Valeria Cuellar, MD, recently won the best poster award at the National Network of Depression Centers’ 12th annual conference, which was held virtually.

Attendees at the conference could enter their poster into three categories: basic science, clinical programs, or COVID-19. At the end of the conference each day, posters were presented to everyone. A total of 41 posters were entered over this two-day event.
Cuellar entered in the basic science category. For this, all areas of research are encouraged, but posters detailing approaches to understanding mood disorders, new or repurposed treatments, or monitoring strategies with the potential to improve patient outcomes are greatly encouraged.

The poster, “Deep brain stimulation in the medial forebrain bundle for treatment resistant depression: an open-label, long-term study,” highlighted early results from a study Jair Soares, MD, PhD, and a team of investigators have been working on. The results came from treatment-resistant depression clinical trial.

Cuellar was glad to be able to share one of the great projects going on at the UTHealth Center of Excellence on Mood Disorders and knows there were several hands in making this project happen.

“This project requires a lot of effort to produce the data presented,” Cuellar said. “I was very grateful to be able to present research results. Learning how to present outcomes of clinical trials has been one of my goals and I am very happy to do this as part of my job.”

Read more about the UTHealth Center of Excellence on Mood Disorders.

Watch: UTHealth recruitment video

Recruitment for UTHealth’s residency and fellowship programs will be underway soon. Click here to see a video put together for prospective candidates.

Take the COVID-19 survey

Scott Lane, PhD, and Salih Selek, MD

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.

---

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 (InVitro 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.

---

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  
8 am – 5pm
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

Extra Supplement for provider to see life span

To find out more information about these unique 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

Receptor for Advanced Glycation End Products (RAGE) Mediates Cognitive Impairment Triggered by Pneumococcal Meningitis
Vijayasree V Giridharan, Jaqueline S Generoso, Allan Collodel, Diogo Dominguini, Cristiano Julio Faller, Flavio Tardin, Gursimrat S Bhatti, Fabricia Petronilho, Felipe Dal-Pizzol, Tatiana Barichello

Re-engaging Dropouts of Prolonged Exposure for PTSD Delivered via Home-Based Telemedicine or In Person: Satisfaction with Veteran-to-Veteran Support
Melba A. Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA; Ron Acienro, PhD; David Sánchez-Carracedo, PhD

Association of polychlorinated biphenyls and organochlorine pesticides with autism spectrum disorder in Jamaican children
MacKinsey A. Bach, Maureen Samms-Vaughan, Manouchehr Hessabi, Jan Bressler, Min Jae Lee, Jing Zhang, Sydonnie Shakespeare-Pellington, Megan L. Grove, Katherine A. Loveland, Mohammad H. Rahbar

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

Melissa Goldberg, PsyD, spoke to KTRK-TV Channel 13 about anxiety during the pandemic and how practicing “box breathing” exercises can help. The story aired during the 5 and 6 a.m. newscasts.

Melissa Goldberg, PsyD, spoke to FOX 26 News about how UTHealth mental health specialists are helping children through the Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT) program.

Segundo Robert-Ibarra, MD, addressed the same topic on Telemundo Houston Channel 47. Read more in UTHealth News.
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

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

Connect with us: