Five faculty promoted

We would like to congratulate five outstanding Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences faculty members on recent promotions they’ve received. Angela Heads, PhD; J. Chase Findley, MD; Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD; and Cristian Zeni, MD, PhD, have all been promoted up from assistant professor to associate professor. Salih Selek, MD, has promoted from associate professor to professor.

The department wishes to thank each faculty member for his/her hard work and dedication to the department. Each of them shared a few words on their recent promotions.

Salih Selek, MD

"The career advancement here has been wonderful to me. I truly enjoy learning and growing in my department"

Angela Heads, PhD

"I believe this promotion to associate professor is recognition of my success with this important work and"
J. Chase Findley, MD

"It seems like it wasn't long ago at all that I was first interviewing for a position in our department. It is a great honor to now be promoted to a mid-career faculty member, and I am extremely grateful to the people and culture of our department and medical school in supporting my continued career growth."

Sudhakar Selvaraj, MD, PhD.

"I thank the chair, Department of Psychiatry, and UTHealth committee for the promotion. The promotion is a significant recognition of my work that would also help build and advance my research and clinical program in depression and mood disorders. Further, I would also focus on mentorship activities to facilitate research trainees and psychiatry residents to reach their goals."
“These last five years have been extremely fulfilling. Taking care of our children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral needs, helping train our fellows, residents, and students are difficult tasks, especially when adapting to a new culture and environment. Having success in those is only possible in a supportive workplace. I appreciate all the opportunities that were presented to me. I feel thankful and proud for my trajectory in UTHealth, and I look forward to new developments and challenges!”

Faculty spotlight: Scaini furthers research at UTHealth

Giselli Scaini, PhD, recently joined the faculty at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences upon completion of her training with the department, adding on to a long list of trainees that have transitioned to faculty recently.

Scaini is a Brazilian native, receiving a PharmD and PhD in 2010 and 2014 respectively in health sciences at the University of Southern Santa Catarina in Brazil. She brings with her a range of expertise, including biochemistry, molecular biology, mitochondrial physiology, psychiatry, and mitochondrial-related diseases.

Scaini’s research focuses on understanding the complex interactions between molecular and cellular mechanisms and cognitive impairment, as well as behavioral and neuroanatomical changes in psychiatry disorders, especially in mood disorders.

One word sums up the fire that fuels Scaini’s passion in her research: curiosity. She is fascinated in understanding how biology works and how cells work in healthy and diseased states.

Scaini credits becoming a more critical thinker with better analytical skills growing in the UTHealth system. She has also developed collaborations and networking, opening up many doors and help her with career advancement and personal growth.
“I was looking for an opportunity for professional and personal growth,” Scaini said. “At UTHealth, I could approach all my research interests in one place and work with some of the best scientists in the field.”

When not working on her research projects, Scaini likes to spend time with her friends and family. She also enjoys cooking, traveling, and watching movies.

Read Scaini’s bio [here](#).

HEARTS@UTHealth aims to provide service

Adrienne Gilmore-Thomas, PhD

The HEARTS@UTHealth program strives to support individuals on their journey to recovery and educate them about risky behaviors that may place them at risk for HIV or Hepatitis C (HCV). HEARTS@UTHealth stands for HIV Education, Awareness, Referral, and Treatment for Substance use disorders.

The HEARTS@UTHealth program was developed by Angela Heads, PhD, associate professor at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. She recognized a need for substance use and HIV prevention services in minority communities.

HEARTS@UTHealth program is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). SAMHSA estimates that 90% of individuals who need specialized treatment don’t receive it.

HEARTS@UTHealth aims to bring awareness and relief to clients, with free counseling to address substance use, which is client-centered, and may address trauma and other mental health conditions, if necessary.

When a patient comes to HEARTS@UTHealth, an initial intake appointment determines the course of action to be taken. The patient is matched up with a health care provider who will exclusively work with the patient. This is done to build trust between the health care provider and patient. All patients are offered counseling sessions and testing for HIV and HCV at no cost to them.

The program’s main treatment uses motivational interviewing, setting goals for individuals and addressing difficulties associated with behavioral change.
Additional interventions include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Seeking Safety, evidence-based treatments to help individuals recognize situations where they are tempted to substance use, develop better coping and stress management skills, and increase resilience as they work toward their goals.

For those suffering from opioid or alcohol use disorders, Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) offers FDA-approved medications for treatment to reduce cravings.

Adrienne Gilmore-Thomas, PhD, is the HEARTS@UTHealth program manager. She feels honored, privileged, and excited to be a part of this team and is passionate about their work.

“We have assisted many individuals with their journey to recovery,” Gilmore-Thomas said. “I am impressed by the counselors who go above and beyond to meet the needs of their patients. They have helped patients acquire self-efficacy, housing, and employment, as well as their sobriety.”

HEARTS@UTHealth is currently expanding to offer services to young adults who are experiencing homelessness by partnering with community-based organizations at Open Gate and Tony’s Place. To learn more about HEARTS@UTHealth visit their website.

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**Research: Diaz receives research grant**

Alexandre Paim Diaz, MD, PhD, postdoctoral research fellow with the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, recently received a two-year grant from the Brain & Behavioral Research Foundation (BBRF), the 2020 BBRF Young Investigator Grant.

Diaz will lead a study to investigate the feasibility and acceptability of home-based transcranial direct-current stimulation (tDCS) to reduce the risk of suicidal ideation relapse in adult patients after psychiatric hospitalization. tDCS is a safe, noninvasive, nonpharmacologic intervention with the potential to modulate brain circuits whose dysfunction has been related to suicidal ideation.

According to Diaz, a critical period for suicide-related behavior is just after psychiatric hospitalization, especially within 30 days of discharge, when nearly 25% of suicide and suicide attempts occur. Considering the high rates of dropout from an outpatient service of patients after hospital discharge, safe interventions aiming at overcoming this barrier are needed.

Diaz hopes to find that the study is feasible, that it shows a preliminary proof of tolerability, safety, and signal of efficacy. He says this will allow him to take further steps to answer other important questions, whether the intervention is effective, through what mechanism of action, and for which patients it would be more appropriate.

For this project to become a reality, Diaz worked with several researchers in the department. He says he has learned a lot from the discussions leading up to the study and that the knowledge acquired conducting the research will certainly impact his career positively.
I feel grateful as the grant will allow me to work in a very urgent research field,” Diaz said. “I’m hopeful that this is the beginning of a long journey involving learning and scientific contribution.”

Cruz celebrates 30 years at department

Join us in recognizing Hilda Cruz, senior patient access representative at the Behavioral and Biomedical Sciences Building (BBSB), for her 30-year anniversary with the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

Cruz started in the department on August 20, 1990. When she started, department building was called the Mental Sciences Institute, located at 1300 Moursund St., across the street from TIRR Memorial Hermann.

Cruz started out as a medical records technician. She’s seen technology advance from paper records to everything being electronic. In 2007, she began working in a clinical setting, which allowed her to work directly with doctors and patients.

Through the years, she’s seen the department grow and flourish. She’s even been a part of a new location opening up, as well as a department name change.

For all the changes she’s seen, one aspect remains the same: the department’s commitment to a patient’s well-being.

“I’ve learned that the first person a patient talks to can make all the difference in the world to them,” Cruz said. “The most important part of my job is to be a good listener. Recently, a 95 year old patient told me, I saved her life. I will always remember that. Helping patients is my goal for each day.”

You can find Cruz checking in patients on the second floor at BBSB.

Registration is now open!
The 2020 Houston Mood Disorders Conference, put on annually by the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, will be held virtually this year. This conference traditionally draws more than 200 attendees, and we expect an even large audience for the 2020 edition!

The presenters are from various departments at UTHealth as well as international keynote speakers. Also, local companies as well as those from out of town come to exhibit their products and services to attendees.

This year’s conference is titled “Bipolar Disorder: Advances in Diagnosis and Management.” An in-depth look at various aspects of bipolar disorder and the latest research on treatment, causes, and how to manage will be presented.

We’d like to extend an invitation to join us for the conference from the comfort of your own home. Come be a part of the first ever virtual Mood Disorders Conference. We have great speakers and topics lined up, giving you the latest developments in bipolar disorder.

For registration information, please visit https://cpd.education.bcm.edu/content/1673
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](#).

## Clinical trials

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

**The effects of abstinence on EEG power and attention in cocaine use disorder**  
Contact: 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**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

**Candesartan as an Adjunctive Treatment for Bipolar Depression**  
Contact: [Valeria Cuellar](#), 713-486-2523

To see all open studies, visit our [website](#).

## We're hiring!

The following positions are open at our department:

- **Harris Health Clinic – Location: Acres – North East Houston**
- **Harris Health Clinic – Location: Baytown – South East Houston**
- **Harris Health Clinic – Location: Settegast – North Houston**
- **UTHealth-HCPC Part-time Forensic Psychologist**
- **Faculty – Clinical Psychologists**
- **Outpatient Psychiatrist – Adult Services at Rosenberg location**
- **Associate or Full Professor**

## Publications

**Receptor for Advanced Glycation End Products (RAGE) Mediates Cognitive Impairment Triggered by Pneumococcal Meningitis**

## In the news

Melissa Goldberg, PsyD, was interviewed by [FOX 26 News](#) about how parents can help their children navigate through separation anxiety as they head back to school for in-
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

‘Meeting Kids Where They’re At’: Usability and Acceptability of a Substance Use and Sexual Risk Prevention Program via Telemedicine for African American Girls
Cristina Lopez; Amanda Gilmore; Angela Moreland; Carla Danielson; Ron Acierno

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

Upcoming events

Vineeth John, MD, MBA, was interviewed by Psychiatric News about how residency training has changed during the pandemic.

Segundo Robert-Ibarra, MD, spoke to Univision Houston Channel 45 and Telemundo Houston Channel 47 about how parents can tell if their child is experiencing separation anxiety as they head back to school.

Segundo Robert-Ibarra, MD, spoke to Telemundo Houston Channel 47 about how to recognize the signs of someone contemplating suicide as part of National Suicide Prevention Week.

Melissa Goldberg, PsyD, spoke to KTRK-TV Channel 13 viewers at 4 and 6 p.m. about how to recognize stress in children as they start school this year.

Andrea Taylor, PhD, was interviewed by Elemental, the health publication of Medium, about COVID-19 fatigue and how it could spell disaster during flu season. The article was also shared on the journalist’s Twitter, and retweeted by Elemental.
Save the Date

April 10, 2021

12th Annual Psychiatry Update

Treatment Innovation for Veterans and First Responders

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We appreciate your donation!

Contact us

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