

# NEWSLETTER

Long School of Medicine  
OFFICE FOR RESEARCH



## MESSAGE FROM THE VICE DEAN FOR RESEARCH

As we settle into 2026, I want to recognize the continued momentum and outstanding accomplishments of our research community. The work highlighted in this newsletter reflects not only our scientific excellence but also the strength of collaborations across disciplines, programs, and people who share a singular commitment to improving human health.

Since our last newsletter, we have begun a new chapter with the integration of The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and The University of Texas at San Antonio. This merger is creating numerous opportunities to connect expertise across campuses building a more unified academic and research-intensive university. Our office has leveraged this opportunity and created the Scientific Collaborations for Programmatic Excellence (SCOPE) Initiative. The SCOPE Initiative has aligned over 57 high-performing investigators into well-coordinated teams to increase competitiveness for large-scale federal and non-federal multi-PI and Program Project grants across the UT San Antonio ecosystem. This newsletter provides a glimpse of the SCOPE initiative and the leadership of the individual Programs. Equally important is our continued focus on mentorship and training of students, residents, and fellows in interdisciplinary research, which remains central to our mission and to preparing the next generation of physician-scientists and research leaders.

We are grateful for all that you do to advance our collective research mission and to make lives better. On behalf of the Long School of Medicine Office for Research, I thank you for your dedication, collaboration, and commitment to excellence. We look forward to continuing to support all investigators, as we build a future of excellence together at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

- Manzoor Bhat, MS, PhD

## IN THIS ISSUE

SCOPE INITIATIVE

2026 RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

BREAKTHROUGH PUBLICATIONS

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARDS

RESEARCH AWARDS  
NIH PPG  
STATE OF TEXAS

SYMPOSIA AND CONFERENCES

MEDICAL STUDENT RESEARCH TRAINING

RESIDENT RESEARCH TRAINING

Scan here to view previous issues



# SCOPE INITIATIVE

Strategic **C**ollaborations for **P**rogrammatic Excellence

The Scientific Collaborations for Programmatic Excellence (SCOPE) Initiative promotes high-level multidisciplinary and collaborative research across basic, translational, and clinical sciences. It unites over 60 faculty investigators from across the University of Texas at San Antonio, spanning more than 20 academic Departments and Centers. The goals of the SCOPE initiative are to organize researchers into well-coordinated teams led by distinguished investigators who are subject matter experts to strengthen our competitiveness for large multi-PI and program project grant (PPG) applications. This concerted effort will expand the research impact, increase our extramural funding, and sustain excellence at UT at San Antonio.



Our goal is to develop large-scale, collaborative multi-PI and program project grants that significantly expand extramural funding and research influence.

## Neuroscience and Mental Health

### Program Leaders:



**David Morilak, PhD**  
UT Health Science Center



**Jenny Hsieh, PhD**  
UT San Antonio



**Daniel Lodge, PhD**  
UT Health Science Center



**Peter Fox, MD**  
UT Health Science Center

### Program Members:

#### UT Health Science Center Campus

Flavia Carreno, PhD  
Jannine Cody, PhD  
Jonathan Gelfond, MD, PhD  
Robin Hilsabeck, PhD  
Noboru Hiroi, PhD  
Megan Iammarino, PT, DPT  
Alan Peterson, PhD  
Larry Price, PhD  
Jason Pugh, PhD  
Felipe Salinas, PhD  
Jeremy Tanner, MD  
Hye Young Lee, PhD  
Stacey Young-McCaughan, PhD, RN

#### UT San Antonio Campus

Melanie Carless, PhD  
Leslie Neely, PhD  
Marina Silveira, PhD  
Casey Straud, PsyD  
Matthew Wanat, PhD



**UT San Antonio™**



**UT Health**  
San Antonio  
Long School of Medicine

# Infections and Immunity

## Program Leaders:



**Laurence Morel, PhD**  
UT Health Science Center



**Astrid Cardona, PhD**  
UT San Antonio



**Barbara Taylor, MD, MS**  
UT Health Science Center

## Program Members:

### UT Health Science Center Campus

Evelien Bunnik, PhD  
Divya Chandramohan, MD  
Anthony Febres Aldana, MD  
Yong Ge, PhD  
David Kadosh, PhD  
Elizabeth Leadbetter, PhD  
Brian Wickes, PhD  
Zhenming Xu, PhD  
Nu Zhang, PhD

### UT San Antonio Campus

Kirsten Hanson, PhD  
Megan Kempfer, PhD  
Jesús Romo, PhD  
Janakiram Seshu, PhD  
Luan Vu, PhD  
Chiung-Yu Hung, PhD  
Guoquan Zhang, DVM, PhD

# Metabolic Health and Precision Medicine

## Program Leaders:



**Blake Rasmussen, PhD**  
UT Health Science Center



**Kumar Sharma, MD**  
UT Health Science Center



**Luke Norton, PhD**  
UT Health Science Center

## Program Members:

### UT Health Science Center Campus

Geoffrey Clarke, PhD  
Patricia Dahia, MD, PhD  
Ralph DeFronzo, MD  
Kevin Koronowski, PhD  
James Lechleiter, PhD  
Jihoon Lee, PhD  
Laurence Morel, PhD  
Masahiro Morita, PhD

Vasan Ramachandran, MD  
Elena Volpi, MD, PhD  
Guanshi Zhang, PhD  
Shangang Zhao, PhD

### UT San Antonio Campus

Amina Qutub, PhD  
Christopher Rathbone, PhD

# Cancer Biology and Therapeutics



**Patrick Sung, DPhil**  
UT Health



**Simon Gayther, PhD**  
UT Health



**Lei Zheng, MD, PhD**  
UT Health



**Daohong Zhou, MD**  
UT Health

**COMING  
SOON**

...details to follow



# 2026 RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

Wednesday, April 1  
9:30 AM – 4:00 PM  
3.102B | Holly Foyer

Register to Attend



Submit a Poster



Trainees



Staff/Faculty

## 24 Opportunities to Win Awards!

This year's symposium features 24 presentation awards for: MD Students, MD/PHD Students, Graduate Students, Residents, Clinical Fellows, and Postdoctoral Fellows

## Lucky Draw

At every Poster session, one randomly selected Poster presentation will win an award!

# 2026 RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

Wednesday, April 1

9:30 AM – 4:00 PM | Lecture Room 3.102 B | Holly Foyer

## Keynote Speaker

Time: 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM



### DAVID A. WILLIAMS, MD

Chief, Division of Hematology/Oncology,  
Boston Children's Hospital

President,  
Dana-Farber/Boston Children's Cancer Care

Associate Chair of Pediatric Oncology,  
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

Leland Fikes Professor of Pediatrics,  
Harvard Medical School

**ABOUT THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER:** Dr. Williams is an internationally recognized leader in gene therapy and hematopoiesis research. His group carried out groundbreaking research in stem cell biology and genetic therapies, leading to FDA-approved treatments and numerous clinical trials. He is a member of the National Academy of Medicine and former Investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. He has authored more than 350 peer-reviewed publications and continues to shape the future of pediatric hematology and oncology. He is an outstanding mentor who has trained physicians and scientists who run independent research programs across the globe.

## Trainee Presentations

- › Medical Student
- › Graduate Student
- › Resident
- › MD/PhD Student
- › Clinical Fellow
- › Post-doctoral Fellow

## Symposium Agenda

9:30–11:00 AM	Trainee Podium Presentations
11:00–12:00 PM	Keynote Presentation
12:00–2:00 PM	Lunch
12:10–1:00 PM	Poster Session 1
1:10–2:00 PM	Poster Session 2
2:10–3:00 PM	Poster Session 3
3:10–4:00 PM	Poster Session 4

# MAJOR SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGHS



**Xianlin Han, PhD**  
Medicine



**Anna Malkova, PhD**  
BSB/ GCCRI



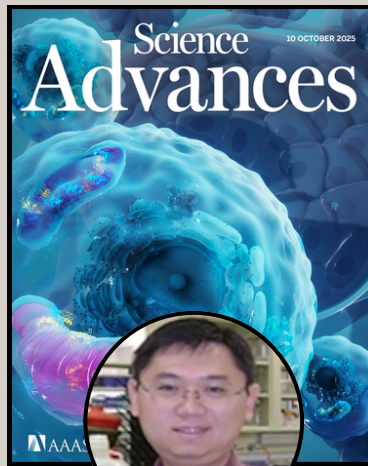
**James Nelson, PhD**  
CIP/ Barshop



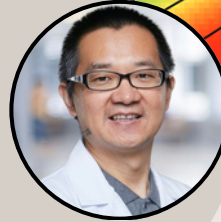
**David Gius, MD, PhD**  
Radiation Oncology/  
Barshop/ Mays Cancer  
Center



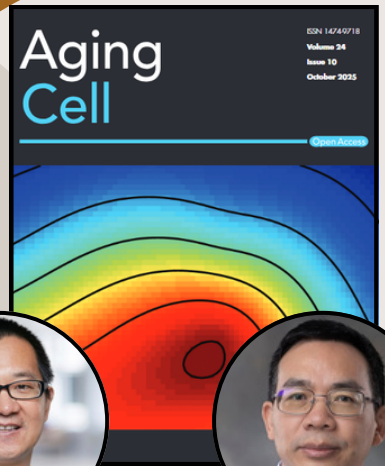
**Pei Wang, PhD**  
CSA/ Mays Cancer  
Center



**Zhenming Xu, PhD**  
MIMG



**Shangang Zhao, PhD**  
Medicine/ Barshop



**Qitao Ran, PhD**  
CSA/Biggs



**Daruka Mahadevan, MD, PhD**  
Medicine/ Mays Cancer Center



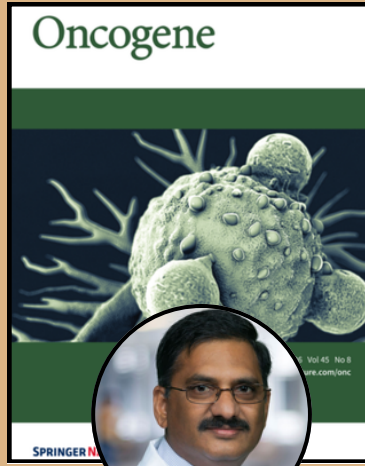
**Ricardo Aguiar, MD, PhD**  
Medicine/ Mays Cancer Center



# MAJOR SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGHS



**Laurence Morel, PhD**  
MIMG



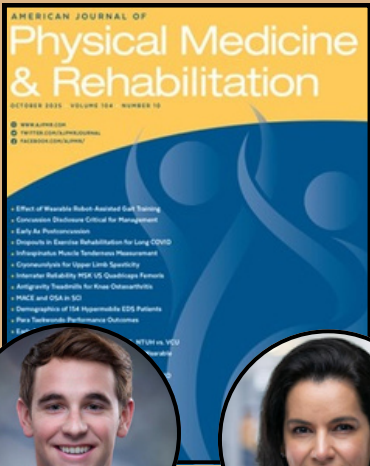
**Ratna Vadlamudi, PhD**  
OBGYN



**John Cunningham, MD, FHM, FACP**  
Medicine



**Enya Vroom, PhD, MS**  
Medicine/ ReACh



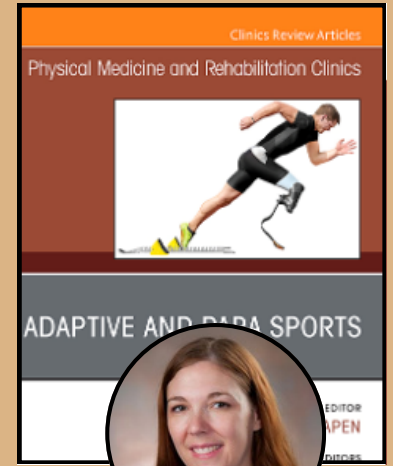
**T. Tyler Patterson, MD**  
Neurosurgery



**Monica Verduzco-Gutierrez, MD**  
Rehabilitation  
Medicine



**Jason Kempenich, MD FACS**  
Surgery



**Cindy McGeary, PhD**  
ABPP  
Psychiatry and Behavioral  
Sciences

Scan here to view  
more publications



Our LSOM faculty have published significant scientific breakthroughs in high-impact journals. Congratulations to their departments and research teams.



Somresearch@uthscsa.edu



(210) 567-0611



uthscsa.edu/office-research

Congratulations

to our

2025

## Distinguished Award Recipients!

These awards recognize the exceptional contributions that strengthen the LSOM research community.

We thank all faculty, staff, and trainees who, every day, contribute to the advancement of science. Your achievements inspire and strengthen our entire LSOM community.



# DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARDS

## Distinguished Researcher

“For over two decades, Dr. Zhou has been at the forefront of defining the signaling pathways in programmed cell death and cellular senescence to develop novel therapeutics to treat cancer and age-related diseases.”

**-Reuben Harris, PhD**  
Professor and Chair,  
Biochemistry and Structural  
Biology



**DAOHONG ZHOU, MD**  
Mays Cancer Center

## Distinguished Mentor



“Dr. Rao exemplifies what it means to be a mentor: scientifically rigorous and relentlessly supportive. His mentorship has propelled not only my career trajectory but also those of all his trainees.”

**-Trong Phat Do**  
MD/PhD Student

**MANJEET RAO, PHD**  
Cell Systems and Anatomy

## Advancing Endometriosis Care Through Innovative Inflammation Research

A new collaboration between **Kate Lawrenson**, Associate Professor at UT Health San Antonio, and **Anne Porter**, Assistant Professor and minimally invasive gynecologic surgeon, aims to advance care for endometriosis. Affecting 1 in 10 women—over 600,000 in Texas alone

This project will map inflammatory drivers of the disease in diverse patients at University Health, identifying new therapeutic targets and laying the groundwork for future clinical trials using immune-modulating treatments.

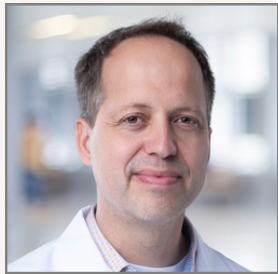


**KATE LAWRENSON, PHD**  
Associate Professor  
Director, OB/GYN Tissue  
Repository and Database  
Assoc. Dir., Office of Postdoc  
Scientist Program



**ANNE PORTER, MD, MPH**  
Assistant Professor  
Division Director, General  
Obstetrics and Gynecology

# Congratulations to Reuben Harris on receiving the NIH Program Project Grant (PPG) Award



Congratulations to Reuben Harris on receiving the NIH Program Project Grant (PPG) Award. Reuben Harris, PhD, Chair of the Department of Biochemistry and Structural Biology and Investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at UT Health San Antonio and Douglas Yee, MD, Professor of Medicine and Pharmacology and Director of the Masonic Cancer Center at the University of Minnesota, received a Program Project Grant award from the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health. This PPG awarded to study APOBEC Mutagenesis in Cancer and was initially awarded in 2019 and successfully renewed in 2025 for another 5 years. This award brings a total of \$9,609,621 in funding to study mutagenesis in cancer.

As is now well-established, mutations accumulate continuously in cancer cells after the disease is first diagnosed and treated, leading to poor outcomes including treatment resistance, cancer recurrence, and metastasis. A protein named APOBEC contributes to this mutagenesis in many cancers and thus inhibition of APOBEC provides an opportunity to slow or prevent cancer recurrence and progression. The PPG research program takes a multidisciplinary approach to better understand the molecular mechanisms of APOBEC mutagenesis, with the overarching long-term goal of stopping this mutation process and thereby making current and future treatments more effective.



**\$2.1M**  
in funding

## STATE OF TEXAS RESEARCH AWARDS

We are pleased to recognize two outstanding faculty members – Drs. Sun and Lawrenson—whose innovative research has earned highly competitive awards from the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT). Their work advances scientific discovery, improves patient outcomes, and expands access to life-saving prevention and early-detection strategies.

We congratulate them on these remarkable achievements and their ongoing contributions to cancer research and prevention.

**XIAOLI SUN, MD, PHD**  
Pharmacology  
Assistant Professor

**\$900,000**

“Deciphering the role of oxidized phospholipids in MASH-associated HCC”

Dr. Sun’s work explores how oxidized phospholipids contribute to hepatocellular carcinoma associated with metabolic dysfunction—associated steatohepatitis, paving the way for new insights into liver cancer prevention and treatment.



**KATE LAWRENSON, PHD**

Obstetrics and Gynecology  
Associate Professor  
Director, OB/GYN Tissue Repository and Database  
Associate Director, Postdoctoral Scientist Program

**\$1,199,646**

“Improving access to risk-reducing opportunistic salpingectomy in South Texas”

Dr. Lawrenson’s impactful project focuses on expanding access to preventive surgical strategies that significantly reduce ovarian cancer risk, particularly in underserved communities across South Texas.



# Symposia and Conferences

## 2025 La Frontera Symposium



### Immunological Advances in Tumor Microenvironment

September 26, 2025

The LSOM Office for Research, in partnership with Drs. Laurence Morel, Nu Zhang, Lei Zheng, and Tim Huang from Microbiology, Immunology and Molecular Genetics, Molecular Medicine, and the Mays Cancer Center, co-hosted the annual La Frontera Symposium on Immunological Advances in the Tumor Microenvironment. The event brought together faculty, staff, and trainees for an afternoon of cutting-edge science and collaboration.

Keynote speaker Drew Pardoll, MD, PhD, Distinguished Professor at Johns Hopkins Medicine, highlighted major advances in tumor immunology and immunotherapy. Additional presentations by Josephine Taverna, MD (Associate Professor, Department of Medicine), Chia-Nung Hung, PhD (Assistant Professor, Molecular Medicine), Gang Huang, PhD (Professor, Cell Systems and Anatomy), and Manjeet Rao, PhD (Professor, GCCRI, Cell Systems and Anatomy) showcased emerging research in the tumor microenvironment. The symposium concluded with a lively panel discussion emphasizing collaboration and innovation in cancer research.

### 2026 Practical Applications of New Agents in Oncology (PANA0)

#### – Conference Highlights

February 12-13, 2025



The 2026 Practical Applications of New Agents in Oncology (PANA0) conference was held at the Embassy Suites from February 12-13, 2026. This premier national forum brought together oncologists, hematologists, researchers, and multidisciplinary care teams to review the latest advances in cancer therapeutics and translate emerging science into clinical practice.

Expert faculty delivered in-depth sessions on therapeutic innovations in gastrointestinal and hematologic cancers, antibody-drug conjugates, bispecific antibodies, AI-driven drug discovery, immune and cellular therapies, and new strategies for targeting challenging mutations such as RAS. Attendees also participated in engaging discussions on clinical trial enrollment and evolving treatment paradigms.

The conference featured the inaugural Dan Von Hoff Lectureship and offered valuable networking and educational opportunities for cancer care professionals committed to advancing patient-centered oncology care. Plans are already underway for the next PANA0 gathering as this signature event continues to drive progress in oncology practice and research.

# MEDICAL STUDENT RESEARCH TRAINING



KATE LATHROP, MD  
Assistant Dean for  
Medical Student Research

“The LSOM Office for Research is committed to creating accessible, engaging opportunities for medical students to explore research early and often and are designed to help you find mentors, build skills, and discover your academic interests.

I encourage every student to take advantage of these offerings as we continue to expand research training opportunities throughout the 2025–26 academic year.”

## Research Interest Groups Open House

September 3, 2025

Students explored interests and made new connections at the Research Interest Groups Open House hosted by the LSOM Office for Research. Attendees met with student-led groups spanning a wide range of specialties, learned about ongoing projects, and discovered ways to get involved in research early. The event helped students find their niche—and sparked new ideas to jumpstart their research journeys.



## Getting Started in Research

November 5, 2025

Medical students got a hands-on introduction to research at the Getting Started in Research Liaison-led Workshop. Participants learned how to pinpoint their interests, find opportunities, connect with mentors, and take the first steps toward launching a project. The interactive session left students energized, informed, and ready to dive into research at LSOM and beyond.



## Fall Research Social

October 1, 2025

Medical students kicked off the research year at Gear Up for Research, LSOM’s annual fall seminar and networking event. Faculty leaders from across UT Health San Antonio shared insights into their research, tips on finding the right mentor, and how to get started early. The afternoon wrapped up with a lively networking reception, giving students a chance to connect, explore research pathways, and meet peers with shared interests.



# RESIDENT RESEARCH TRAINING

“The NIH Clinical Trial Course gives residents essential research skills while offering a valuable opportunity to build critical thinking, strengthen academic credentials, and lay the foundation to advance patient care through discovery.”



JOSÉ E. CAVAZOS, MD, PHD  
Associate Dean for  
Resident Research Training

## NIH CLINICAL TRIAL COURSE:

Introduction to the Principles and Practice of Clinical Research

### WHAT TO EXPECT

- › 50 hrs of expert-led lectures
- › Fully virtual and asynchronous
- › Exam opens in May
- › Certificate of Completion awarded by NIH upon passing

### COVERS FOUNDATION TOPICS IN

- › Clinical Trial Design
- › Regulatory considerations
- › Data management
- › Biostatistics
- › Ethical and practical aspects of human subjects research

### WHY TAKE THE COURSE

- › Build critical research skills
- › Strengthen your CV for future academic or professional roles
- › Learn from NIH experts at your convenience
- › Join a national network of clinician-researchers

For questions or support during the course, contact Dr. José E. Cavazos at: [cavazosj@uthscsa.edu](mailto:cavazosj@uthscsa.edu).



**Register Now!**

Registration open through 6/26/2026  
Must use UTHSCSA.edu email to register

Long School of Medicine  
**OFFICE FOR RESEARCH**

# MEET THE TEAM



Manzoor Bhat, MS, PhD  
Vice Dean for Research



Patrick Sung, DPhil  
Assoc. Dean for Research



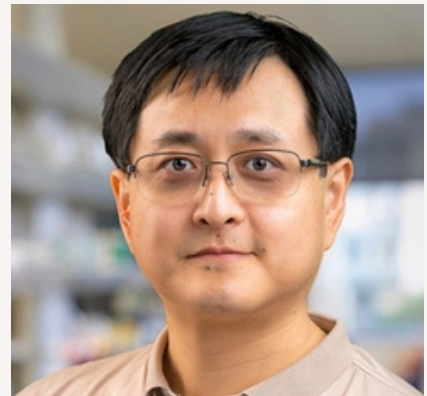
David Gius, MD, PhD  
Asst. Dean for Research



José Cavazos, MD, PhD  
Assoc. Dean- Resident Research



Kate Lathrop, MD  
Asst. Dean- Medical Student Research



Nu Zhang, PhD  
Director of Internal Review



Chris Valdez, PhD  
Assoc. Dir., Research Operations



Jennifer Maldonado  
Senior Program Coordinator