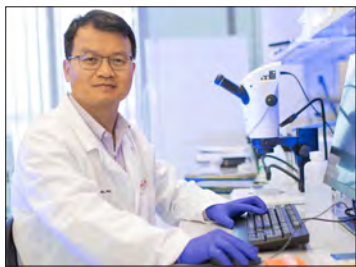




Report to the Texas Pharmacy Congress — May 19, 2021

Wu Receives \$2.5M NHLBI Grant to Study ‘Spongy Heart’ Disease, Treatments

UHCOP Associate Professor Mingfu Wu, Ph.D., has been awarded a seven-year, \$2.5 million National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute grant to explore the morphogenetic mechanisms of, and potential therapeutic treatments for, left ventricular non-compaction cardiomyopathy (LVNC).



UHCOP’s Mingfu Wu is investigating the mechanisms of, and potential therapeutic interventions for, left ventricular non-compaction cardiomyopathy.

Often referred to as a “spongy heart” disease due to the failure of the sheet-like heart muscle called trabeculae to compact and solidify in utero, LVNC has a mortality rate of about 47% and genetic

inheritance occurs in at least 30–50% of patients. Preliminary data from the Wu lab has established key roles of encoding integrins in heart development.

“Although many studies show that lack of trabeculation causes embryonic demise,

and excess trabeculation causes LVNC, the mechanisms underlying the diseases are still not fully known,” Wu said. “Studies from my lab demonstrated that cell orientation and direction contribute to trabecular initiation by forming a multiple layer myocardium.”



UH Extends TX Pass Rate Streak

UHCOP’s Pharm.D. Class of 2020 achieved a 96.26% first-time pass rate on the North American Pharmacy Licensure Examination® (NAPLEX®), which extends the college’s streak for the highest pass rate in Texas to a fourth consecutive year.

According to the latest results from the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP), UHCOP 2020 graduates’ first-time pass rate was the sixth highest in the nation among accredited pharmacy programs with at least 100 first-time test takers. The national average first-time pass rate for all 2020 graduates from the 140 programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) was 88.43%.

UH Crowns Chow Outstanding Grad Mentor

UHCOP’s Diana S-L. Chow, Ph.D., FNAI, Paula and John J. Lovoi Sr. Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery and Development and director of the Institute for Drug Education and Research, has been honored with the UH 2020-21 Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award.

Chow has trained 39 Ph.D. students, including two Pharm.D./Ph.D. dual degree students, seven M.S. students and 25 postdoctoral fellows/visiting scholars. Her students have excelled in producing award-winning research at major scientific conferences and, following graduation, secured highly productive and successful careers in academia, the pharmaceutical industry and regulatory setting, including the FDA.



UHCOP Celebrates Return of In-person Commencement, White Coat Ceremonies

UHCOP celebrated the return of in-person Commencement ceremonies on May 13, as the college bestowed degrees to 129 Pharm.D., seven Ph.D. and seven M.S. graduates in accordance with CDC/state guidelines. In addition, the White Coat Ceremony for the Pharm.D. Class of 2024’s 117 students was held in person May 17, with Texas Pharmacy Association President Michelle Beall, Pharm.D., Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists President Latresa Billings, Pharm.D., BCPS, and event sponsor CPMD Licensing LLC’s Ritchie Ray, R.Ph., of among the distinguished guests.

Student News

Nancy Aldape, Sakshi Argarwal, David Cooper, Kathryn Oliveira and **Jared Sheneman**, members of UHCOP's newly graduated Pharm.D. Class of 2021, were recognized as "DHRHealth Healthcare Heroes" for their efforts – including support operations and education and delivering vaccinations – during their P4 experiential rotations to help DHR vaccinate nearly 150,000 Rio Grande Valley residents against COVID-19.

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Lacey Gotcher, Petar Jordanov and **Tran (Wendy) Nguyen**, Pharm.D. students, were awarded 2021 West Texas Pharmacy Association scholarships.

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Seven students in the Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Sciences, Concentration in Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy program have accepted 2021 remote summer internships: **Yinan Huang** – AbbVie, HEOR-Oncology; **Sorocho Iloanus** – Janssen Pharmaceuticals Inc.; **Ning Lyu** – Guardant Health; **Zahra Majd** –

Amgen Inc., Global Health Economics (GHE); **Anjana Mohan** – BeiGene, HEOR; **Ashna Talwar** – Sunovion Pharmaceuticals Inc., HEOR; and **Soham Yande** – Merck & Co., Center for Observational and Real World Evidence (CORE) – Vaccine Outcomes.

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Shrey Gohil, Soham Yande and **Prajakta Masurkar**, all students in the Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Sciences, Concentration in Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy program, have received appointments to the 2021-22 ISPOR Student Network Committees. Gohil will serve as chair of the Event Planning Committee, while Yande and Masurkar will serve as chair and member, respectively, of the Chapter Onboarding Committee.

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Sarah Zeidat, Pharm.D. student, was recognized with the One for All Award at the Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical Fraternity's Southwest Province Spring Assembly in April.

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Research News

Noor Abdulkareem, a Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Sciences, Concentration in Pharmacology program student, earned an American Society of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics Blue Ribbon Pick for her research abstract and virtual oral/poster presentation, "A novel role of ADGRF1 (GPR110) in promoting cellular quiescence and chemoresistance in human epidermal growth factor receptor 2-positive breast cancer," as part of the ASPET 2021 Annual Meeting during the Experimental Biology meeting. Leading up to the meeting, Abdulkareem had received an ASPET Travel Award to present her project.

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Rania El-Desoky, Pharm.D., BCPS, 2020-21 Academic Pharmacy Fellow, has been awarded a \$2,000 Promoting Active Learning and Mentoring (PALM) Network grant to implement active-learning activities into a course within the Pharm.D. degree program curriculum. The PALM program is funded by a National Science Foundation Research Coordination Network in Undergraduate Biology Education grant, with project support from Professional Societies Alliance for Life Science Education.

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Bradley K. McConnell, Ph.D., FAHA, FCVS, professor, received a three-year, \$165,000 grant from the American Heart Association to develop and implement a 10-week summer cardiovascular research and training program for Houston-area undergraduate students and recent graduates. The UH-Houston Houston Experience for Advancing Research and Training (HEART) program, aimed at encouraging pursuit of cardiovascular-focused graduate education, recruits up to six participants to work in the labs of faculty researchers from three UH colleges.

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Razia Sultana Mohammad, a Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Sciences, Concentration in Pharmacology program student, received an ASPET Travel Award for her research abstract and virtual oral/poster presentation, "Nrf2 Activation Improves Mitochondrial Function in Kidneys of Aged F344 Rats," as part of the ASPET 2021 Annual Meeting during the Experimental Biology meeting. In addition, Mohammad finished second in the semifinalist round of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools' regional 3MT Competition for her presentation, "Is Age Just a Number?" She was the overall winner in the UH competition in December.

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Four UHCOP collaborations recently received seed grant research funding from the UH Drug Discovery Institute:

- PI – **Meghna Trivedi**, Ph.D., Pharm.D., BCOP, associate professor, UHCOP, and Co-PI – **Tasneem Bawa-Khalife**, Ph.D., assistant professor, UH College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics (NSM), Co-PI, "ADGRF1 (GPR110) in HER2+ breast cancer," \$70,000;
- PI – **Bin Guo**, Ph.D., associate professor, UHCOP, and Co-PIs – **Gomika Udugamasooriya**, Ph.D., associate professor, and **Chandra Mohan**, Ph.D., professor, UHCOP/UH Cullen College of Engineering, "Discovery of a novel inhibitor of IL-15 receptor for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis," \$50,000;
- PI – **Navin Varadarajan**, Ph.D., professor, UH Cullen College of Engineering, and Co-PI – **Xinli Liu**, Ph.D., assistant professor, UHCOP, "Intranasal Vaccines," \$50,000; and
- PI – **Wei Wang**, M.D., Ph.D., research associate professor, UHCOP, and Co-PI – **Wa Xian**, Ph.D., research associate professor, UH NSM, "Novel Targeted Therapy for Hepatocellular Carcinoma," \$60,000.

College Welcomes Onye Ononogbu, Rashim Singh to Faculty

UHCOP recently welcomed two new faculty members to the college: Onye Ononogbu, Pharm.D., BCOP, research assistant professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Translational Research, and Pharmaceutics alumna Rashim Singh, Ph.D., research assistant professor in the Department of Pharmacological and Pharmaceutical Sciences.



ONONOGBU



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In addition to her faculty appointment, Ononogbu maintains a clinical practice site at Harris Health System, where she has been a hematology/oncology clinical pharmacy specialist and preceptor since 2018. She is a part of The University of Texas-MD Anderson Cancer Center's oncology and UTHealth hematology teams. Ononogbu is also a co-founder and chief program officer for Pharmacy Initiative Leaders (PILs), a nonprofit organization that seeks to establish quality connections within the pharmacy profession and serve as a premier resource for the success of aspiring pharmacists.

After earning her Pharm.D. from the University of the Incarnate Word – Feik School of Pharmacy in San Antonio, she completed a PGY-1 pharmacy practice residency at Howard University Hospital in Washington, D.C. She received a teaching certificate and developed a love for oncology during her residency year. Ononogbu also worked as an oncology clinical pharmacist at MedStar Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C., and CHI St. Luke's Health-Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center in Houston, where she was named 2018-19 Preceptor of the Year.

Ononogbu is a Board Certified Hematology/Oncology Clinical Pharmacy Specialist. She also earned a certificate in Biomedical Informatics at UTHealth and a certificate in Clinical Safety & Effectiveness at UT-MDACC. Her research interests include health

disparities in oncology patients, quality improvement and diversity and inclusion.

Prior to her faculty appointment, Singh had been working as a postdoctoral research fellow at the college since 2016. Her research areas include pharmacokinetics and drug metabolism and disposition, with a primary focus on the class of anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory plant metabolites called flavonoids.

Singh is the principal investigator on a project funded by the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health to develop a novel herbal product based on the traditional Chinese formula Xiao Chai Hu Tang (XCHT) for prevention of diarrheal toxicity and gut damage from the chemotherapy drug irinotecan. The project is part of a collaboration with her graduate advisor/mentor Ming Hu, Ph.D., Diana S-L. Chow Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery and Development and professor of pharmaceutics, whose current study of XCHT is funded by the National Cancer Institute.

As part of a separate collaboration with Hu, Singh is the co-investigator and study coordinator of a human pharmacokinetic study of the Chinese herbal mixture Antitumor B (or Zeng Sheng Ping) as an anticancer drug.

Singh is a past recipient of a NIH pre-doctoral training fellowship through the Gulf Coast Consortia's Keck Center and a NIH post-doctoral fellowship. Her research has been published in such peer-reviewed journals as *Molecular Pharmaceutics* and the *Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics*, as well as presented at meetings of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists and the International Society for the Study of Xenobiotics.

E. James Essien, M.D., Dr.P.H., professor, recently served as chair on a Scientific Review/Special Emphasis Panel on Promoting Viral Suppression Among Individuals from Health Disparity Populations Engaged in HIV Care for the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

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Kevin Garey, Pharm.D., M.S., FASHP, FIDSA, served as host of two American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' ASHP Advantage Engaging the Experts podcasts, "Microbiome 101: Healthy Bugs Make Healthy Bodies" and "C.diff Therapeutics."

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Mustafa F. Lokhandwala, Ph.D., FAHA, FASN, Robert L. Boblitt Endowed Professor and director of the Heart & Kidney Institute, and his wife, **Sanober**, recently established the Mustafa F. and Sanober Lokhandwala Endowed Professorship in Health Outcomes and Policy at the college. **Rajender R. Aparasu**, Ph.D., FAPhA, professor and chair of the college's Department of Pharmaceutical

Health Outcomes and Policy, has been appointed as the inaugural Lokhandwala professor.

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Matthew A. Wanat, Pharm.D., BCPS, BCCCP, FCCM, clinical associate professor, has been recognized with his second Excellence in Service Award for Education by the Society of Critical Care Medicine Texas Chapter.

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J. Douglas Thornton, Pharm.D., Ph.D., BCPS, assistant professor and director of The Prescription Drug Misuse Education and Research (PREMIER) Center, was an invited to make a keynote presentation, "Colleagues in Research: Pharmacy Practice and Research Implications of COVID-19," at the 2021 American Pharmacists Association Annual Meeting in March. Thornton also presented "Pharmacy-Level Access to Buprenorphine for Opioid Use Disorder" at the 2021 National Rx Drug Abuse and Heroin Summit in April.

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