

# THE TRIBUNE

**UAMS**  
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

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ACCELERATING DISCOVERIES TOWARD BETTER HEALTH

## Promise Keepers

TRI, CTSA's Take Collaboration to Heart



TRI and other UAMS research leaders recently hosted the University of Alabama, Birmingham, Emory University, University of Kentucky and Medical University of South Carolina to discuss the Southeastern Shared Health Research Informatics Network (SE-SHRINE)

This spring, the national Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) Consortium delivered on a key innovation with the adoption of SMART IRB, which simplifies IRB review for large-scale, multisite trials.

The NIH National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) announced in March that all of its CTSA program sites – including UAMS - had signed on to the NCATS Streamlined, Multisite, Accelerated Resources for Trials (SMART) IRB authorization agreement.

“This is a monumental achievement that will help stimulate inter-institutional collaborations for multisite clinical trials,” said Laura James, M.D., TRI director and associate vice chancellor for clinical and translational research.

Delays getting multisite studies off the ground have occurred because each

site typically relies on its own IRB to provide reviews of the risks and benefits of proposed research. James, who led the effort for UAMS’ SMART IRB participation, and other research leaders expect it will significantly speed the pace of multisite studies.

“Smart IRB is an extremely important initiative that will accelerate the initiation and completion of clinical trials that have the potential to improve human health,” said Lawrence Cornett, Ph.D., UAMS vice chancellor for research. “I am pleased that UAMS is a partner. Our participation will increase opportunities for both our investigators, our patients and the community at large.”

The SMART IRB authorization agreement will also provide the foundation for NCATS’ Trial Innovation Network central IRBs. The Trial

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## Message from Dr. James



Dear Colleagues,

As reported in this issue, the adoption of SMART IRB is a great achievement for the Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) Consortium. For many, the idea of a single IRB for multisite clinical trials seemed implausible just 10 years ago.

Not only was SMART IRB established, it was adopted by all 62 members of the CTSA Consortium, including UAMS. This new model will improve the quality of clinical trials and lead to faster cures without increasing risks to patients. It also represents the accelerating evolution of research within the consortium.

I am proud that TRI is playing a vital role with numerous cross-CTSA collaborations (summarized in this issue) and network activities that accrue to our researchers’ and patients’ benefit.

TRI has also been actively working on collaborations that involve researchers across UAMS, Arkansas Children’s Research Institute and the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System. You’ll read on page three how our efforts, led by Kate Stewart, M.D., M.P.H., resulted in a productive retreat in which about 30 attendees learned more about potential research opportunities with the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement’s (ACHI) All-Payer Claims Database.

We are thankful for the insight provided by ACHI Director Joe Thompson, M.D., M.P.H., and the data experts who accompanied him at the retreat.

Sincerely,

Laura James, M.D.  
Director, UAMS Associate Vice Chancellor  
for Clinical and Translational Research

## Promise Keepers (Continued from page 1)

Innovation Network is a collaborative CTSA program to address roadblocks in clinical research and to streamline the clinical trial and study processes.

“Fostering research collaboration is a cornerstone of TRI’s mission, whether among UAMS faculty, with other institutions or with communities and stakeholders,” James said.

TRI is part of numerous cross-CTSA collaborations and network activities, such as:

- CTSA Consortium Scientific Review Committee. Five UAMS researchers were selected this spring to participate as scientific quality reviewers for pilot studies: Ellen P. Fischer, Ph.D., Joshua Kennedy, M.D., Jeannette Y. Lee, Ph.D., Page C. Moore, Ph.D., and Lori Fischbach, Ph.D.
- NCATS Accrual to Clinical Trials (ACT) project. TRI is among 13 new CTSA sites invited this year to participate in this project, which will enable cohort discovery on millions of patients from across the country.
- UAMS Profiles. Now connecting researchers globally, the web-based research collaboration tool was adopted in 2015 from the groundbreaking, open-source research networking software developed at Harvard.
- CTSA External Reviewer Exchange Consortium (CEREC). Includes nine CTSA hubs that share pilot study reviewers.
- Southeastern Shared Health Research Informatics NEtwork (SE-SHRINE). A regional data-sharing collaborative, it held its second face-to-face meeting hosted by TRI on April 7. Topics included projects such as sickle cell disease, a living biobank and acute kidney injury.
- Western States Consortium (five CTSA institutions). It recently issued a fourth request for applications for pilot awards that require inter-institutional collaboration.
- Our Community, Our Health. Forum brings researchers and the public together to discuss health research topics important to communities. TRI hosted one of the nationally live-streamed events last year, called Women’s Heart Health National Town Hall.
- Health Sciences Entrepreneurship Seminar Series. Started at UAMS in 2016, it has expanded this spring to include three other CTSA institutions with the seminars offered via interactive video.
- Child Health Research Acceleration through Multisite Planning (CHAMP). Through the CHAMP initiative, TRI will help leverage UAMS’ pediatric research expertise to expand research in child health and support cross-CTSA initiatives.

For the past two years, TRI pilot award applications and KL2 Award applications have benefited from cross-collaborations with the University of Alabama, Birmingham. The University of California, Irvine, and Harvard Catalyst have also reviewed TRI pilot award applications. In May, TRI will review pilot applications for Virginia Commonwealth University. TRI also facilitated reviews of applications for two Arkansas Children’s Research Institute (ACRI) pilots.

Other TRI-supported activities often have collaboration as a component. TRI partnered with the NIGMS-funded T32 Training Program in Systems Pharmacology and Toxicology at UAMS to launch the campus’ first Health Sciences Entrepreneurship Boot Camp in 2016, which included a strong collaboration with the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, as well as business and innovation leaders. TRI is also co-sponsor with the Department of Biomedical Informatics of the Research and Application Seminar Series. This weekly seminar features biomedical informatics experts from UAMS, the U.S. and internationally.

In addition, TRI has sponsored seminars on implementation science, mentorship, and health literacy, bringing in leading experts from across the U.S. The Health Literacy Research Seminar Series resulted in an NIH-funded study at UAMS after two of the visitors established a collaborative relationship with Kristie Hadden, Ph.D., director of the UAMS Center for Health Literacy.

“TRI will continue to emphasize collaboration across our research enterprise,” James said. “The payoff is a stronger TRI and a stronger research community.”

## TRI Awards Four Pilot Research Studies

TRI recently approved four research pilot study awards totaling about \$166,000. Nine applicants sought awards of up to \$50,000 for translational biomedical informatics approaches to improve health and solve health care issues of rural and underserved populations.

### The pilot awardees are:

- Kristie Hadden, Ph.D., “Patient health literacy screening: An informatics approach.”
- Se-Ran Jun, Ph.D., “Genomic surveillance of mumps outbreak in Arkansas using third generation sequencing technology.”
- Atul Kothari, M.D., “Molecular epidemiology and transmission of *Clostridium difficile* infections (CDI) in nosocomial settings.”
- Bradley Martin, Ph.D., Pharm.D., “Development, validation, and implementation of an opioid risk prediction tool.”

Applications were reviewed and scored by a study section of 23 faculty and community representatives. The study section included independent scientists from various disciplines across the country.

# TRIBUTARY

## Researcher Retreat Reveals Potential for Insurance Database



Joe Thompson, M.D., provided an overview of ACHI's data resources. (File Photo)



Stewart

Stewart, M.D., M.P.H., led discussions that explored areas of common interest and barriers to research at UAMS, Arkansas Children's Research Institute, the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS) and the Arkansas Department of Health.

"Several people raised the issue of accessing the data within the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI)," Stewart said. "The idea was that TRI could possibly play a role in facilitating access."

TRI hosted a Feb. 28 retreat that featured ACHI Director Joe Thompson, M.D., M.P.H., and four other ACHI data experts. Thompson provided an overview of the available data and encouraged the roughly 30 attendees to focus on ACHI's

Looking for new ways to add value to UAMS' research enterprise, TRI last year brought research leaders together to talk. TRI Community Engagement Director Kate

All-Payer Claims Database, which has records of publicly and privately insured people who seek medical service.

Later, in small-group discussions on health policy, mental health, pediatrics and chronic conditions, attendees brainstormed ways to use the database. Each group was advised by an ACHI data expert.

Numerous ideas were considered, including one to study insurance claims related to the specific conditions identified for treatment under Arkansas' new marijuana law.

TRI Director Laura James, M.D., said the database will be used by the TRI-funded pilot study program in the future. Such pilots could establish baseline data and then evaluate changes that occur as a result of policy changes.

Joann Kirchner, M.D., a leading UAMS researcher based at CAVHS, said the retreat brought a diverse group of stakeholders and she is excited about the prospects for using the database.

"It is an extraordinary resource for researchers, clinical managers and policymakers," she said. "I look forward to using the database in future research studies."

An evaluation survey showed that 100 percent of attendees felt the retreat increased their understanding of how the database could be used for research and provided an effective opportunity to explore collaborative projects.

# TRI & me

"As a clinical and basic researcher and director of TRI's Pilot Studies Program, I am excited about the future of TRI sponsored research. We continue to build for the future by supporting new initiatives that emphasize early career investigators, inter-disciplinary projects and inter-institutional collaboration. In the current granting cycle, we involved



Donald Mock, M.D., Ph.D., Director, TRI Pilot Studies Program, Professor, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and Pediatrics

community representatives fully in our review of the UAMS pilot applications that will move in bold new directions and employ cutting-edge methods. Likewise, we have issued a solicitation for applications for the Western States Consortium that incorporate collaboration among investigators from at least two of the four member institutions."

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**The following UAMS researchers cited the Translational Research Institute (TRI) in publications after utilizing TRI resources or funding:**

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