

THE TRIBUNE

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Putting Research into Practice UAMS NW Researchers Deliver For Quarantined Residents

A mother and her three preschool-age children ran out of food as they self-isolated in rural Washington County, awaiting COVID-19 test results. They were far from a grocery store and had no transportation. The next day, on a hot July 2 afternoon, a volunteer pulled into their driveway to deliver emergency food aid.

As the last box of food was placed on the doorstep, one of the children shouted excitedly, "We can eat now!"

The emergency food distribution to at-risk residents in northwest Arkansas has been led by the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus and its Office of Community Health and Research. The team of investigators there has spent the last several years developing scalable, low-cost



Volunteers load emergency food aid at the Ozark Regional Transit in Springdale. A UAMS research team has leveraged existing partnerships to create a system for delivering emergency food aid to quarantined residents. (Photo by Preston Tolliver)

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Community Engagement Key to Translational Research

Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of *The TRIBUNE*, we highlight the remarkable translational research of the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus in addressing COVID-19-related food insecurity.

Their story reminds us of the critical role community-engagement plays in translational research. The research team, led by Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, has built and sustained a network of community partners and stakeholders, from grassroots organizations to private foundations, as it tests interventions to reduce diabetes.

Over the last several years, other talented researchers, such as Chris Long, Ph.D., now a key leader in food systems research, have joined Dr. McElfish, vice chancellor for the Northwest Regional Campus. With funding from the Walmart Foundation and others, Dr. Long, his colleagues and

community partners devised a plan to provide ongoing emergency food aid to food-insecure residents who must self-isolate due to COVID-19.

We are proud of their successes and that TRI has long played a supporting role. TRI's cumulative support, from community engagement to pilot awards, Dr. Long tells us, made it possible to address urgent, COVID-19-related food needs within a few days.

Effective community engagement is not easy; many institutions struggle to overcome barriers to sustaining community-academic partnerships. We applaud the work of Dr. McElfish, Dr. Long and their colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura P. James, M.D.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Laura P. James, M.D.

Director, Translational Research Institute

Associate Vice Chancellor for Clinical and Translational Research, UAMS

Putting Research into Practice

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Peter Cooper, outreach manager for the UAMS Office of Community Health and Research at the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus, coordinates preparations with volunteers for a day of emergency food deliveries. (Photo by Preston Tolliver)

interventions in the food system primarily to address the diabetes epidemic. Along the way, they have built strong relationships with grassroots community groups and corporations, resulting in dozens of collaborations and partnerships.



“We are translating the research that we have done and partnering with both retail and charitable food system partners in a high-pressure, real-life situation.”
- Chris Long, Ph.D.

When the coronavirus arrived, the UAMS team accepted a request from local philanthropic foundations to manage nearly \$800,000 to support regional food aid to low-income residents affected by COVID-19. The funding came from the Walmart Foundation, the Alice L. Walton Foundation and the Beacon Fund, and was disbursed by the Arkansas Community Foundation, said UAMS’ Chris Long, Ph.D., senior director of Research & Evaluation, Office of Community Health & Research.

“They thought of us as a reliable and trustworthy partner because of our history of work with food systems in Northwest Arkansas,” he said.

Long, UAMS’ Emily English, Dr.P.H., M.P.S., and other colleagues reviewed grant proposals almost daily and have directed nearly \$600,000 to 40 community organizations, including schools, to help feed low-income families affected by COVID-19.

“All the years of TRI’s support helping us build these enduring relationships has had a remarkable

payoff, especially during COVID-19,” Long said. “We are translating the research that we have done and partnering with both retail and charitable food system partners in a high-pressure, real-life situation.”

ACUTE CHALLENGE

Food insecurity became a more acute issue when Northwest Arkansas became a COVID-19 hotspot, forcing thousands of residents to quarantine at home. Most affected were Marshallese and Latinx communities - a focus of the team’s long-standing diabetes research collaborative.

The idea for home delivery of food aid came from Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, vice chancellor for the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus, as she was cooking for quarantined friends.

“This is why we exist as the Office of Community Health and Research - to address these problems,” McElfish told Long.

The Walmart Foundation agreed to allow the team to use some of its existing funding to establish a rapid response food delivery system for suddenly food insecure families self-quarantining due to COVID-19.

Long, English, and their colleagues convened about a dozen key community partners, including local food pantries, Ozark Regional Transit, Community Clinic NWA, Tyson Foods, and the Northwest Arkansas Foodbank, to develop a plan. The UAMS team created an electronic form for referrals of food-insecure self-quarantining residents. The referral form was deployed to a network of local health clinics, including Federally Qualified Health Center clinics, and other community organizations.

The UAMS team and the community partners procured a refrigerated truck in less than a week and, with a strong group of volunteers, began making emergency food aid deliveries. To date the effort has made over 600 household deliveries.

“So even today, every Saturday at 6:30 a.m., a group of volunteers and a truck from the food bank meet at Ozark Regional Transit,” Long said. “We send the addresses to the transit office, which then enters them into their routing software to map the most efficient delivery routes.”

The Northwest Regional Campus’ research is supported by TRI through the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as other NIH grants, the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Office of Gov. Asa Hutchinson, and private foundations.

NCATS Re-Entry Grant

UAMS Researcher Restarts Career after Unplanned Hiatus



Chenghui Li, Ph.D.

A National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) Re-Entry Research Supplement grant came at an opportune time for UAMS' Chenghui Li, Ph.D.

The associate professor in the College of Pharmacy was ready to restart her research career after being sidelined for two years due to unplanned life events.

She secured a two-year, \$221,000 grant that will support her research into if and why many breast cancer patients in Arkansas are not receiving or adhering to potentially life-saving endocrine therapy. She notes that breast cancer mortality in Arkansas exceeds the national average (20.6 deaths per

100,000 compared to 19.9 nationally), especially among Black women, at 27.9 deaths per 100,000 compared to 19.5 for white women.

"I'm really happy for this research opportunity," Li said. "It's an important research question because there is a lot of literature showing this targeted hormonal therapy can reduce the mortality rate for breast cancer patients if taken consistently."

The study will use the Arkansas All Payer Claims Database and Arkansas Cancer Registry database to assess the disparity of endocrine therapy use in Arkansas women with stage 1-3 estrogen responsive tumors. Patients and providers will also be interviewed to determine barriers to endocrine therapy.

Her project includes six sub-investigators and mentors, including TRI Director Laura James, M.D., and Laura Hutchins, M.D., emeritus professor in the College of Medicine Department of Internal Medicine Hematology-Oncology.

Why Cite TRI?



Dr. Donald Mock

What is TRI's value to UAMS researchers? The answer is important to NCATS (National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences - the NIH agency that funds TRI) and comes from the researchers and communities that TRI serves. In 2019, NCATS awarded TRI a \$24.2 million Clinical and Translational Science Award

(CTSA) that will be considered for competitive renewal in four years.

Utilization of TRI research services will be a key consideration for renewal. "We rely on our investigators to cite the TRI and give attribution in their publications, presentations and grants," said Donald Mock, M.D., Ph.D., who directs TRI's Pilot Award Program. "This helps us demonstrate to NCATS our value, effectiveness and impact on the research community and Arkansas."

TRI is accelerating the research process by offering a large number of resources, including direct funding, training, and assistance in protocol development, grant writing, statistical design and analysis, IRB submissions and conduct of clinical trials.

As a way of documenting and preserving our support to the research community, TRI asks investigators to cite our CTSA grant for any service provided.

"We also urge researchers to cite the CTSA grant for consultations and mentoring, even if done more informally," said Mock, a professor in the College of Medicine Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. "There is no penalty for citing multiple support sources in publications; the NIH encourages a high level of institutional support for NIH funded research."

To learn how to cite the TRI, visit TRI.uams.edu/cite.



Learn how to cite the grant at TRI.uams.edu/cite

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