

# THE TRIBUNE

FEBRUARY 2021

## Filling the Gaps Implementation Science Scholars Finding Ways to Improve Care, Outcomes

In just one year, five UAMS clinicians have identified patient care gaps and have already begun implementing strategies for improving practice and outcomes.

The clinicians, who make up the inaugural class of the UAMS Implementation Science Scholars Program, have impressed their mentors, program leaders and an outside evaluator,



Elvin Geng,  
M.D., M.P.H.,

Elvin Geng, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Center for Dissemination and Implementation Science at Washington University in St. Louis.

They presented status reports in December.

“This program and work here illustrates the virtuous cycle between implementing science and implementation

(Continued on page 2)



This pre-COVID-19 file photo shows Implementation Science Scholars (front row, l-r) Kapil Arya, M.D., Debopam Samanta, M.D., Megha Sharma, M.D., Emily Kocurek, M.D., and Johnathan Goree, M.D.; and members of the core faculty team (back row) Jeremy Thomas, Pharm.D.; Sara Landes, Ph.D., Benjamin Teeter, Ph.D., and Geoffrey Curran, Ph.D.



### Implementation Science Scholars Program Begins to Bloom

Dear Colleagues,

As we look forward to spring, at TRI we are already seeing the buds and blooms of programs we started shortly after we received the Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) in 2019.

We think the Implementation Science Scholars Program is one to keep your eye on. Led by Dr. Geoffrey Curran at the

Center for Implementation Research, this two-year program and its five inaugural scholars generated some excitement in presentations outlining their progress after one year. Each scholar has overcome the limitations imposed by COVID-19 to conduct extraordinary work toward implementing and testing their strategies. As you will read, the group's efforts were applauded by our external evaluator, Dr. Elvin Geng from Washington University, as well as from Dr. JoAnn Kirchner, a member of the core faculty scholars team.

Recently we announced five recipients of our second cohort of implementation science scholars, as well as four pilot awards to support implementation science projects (page 3). Three of the four pilot recipients are also implementation science scholars: Drs. Emily Kocurek, Debopam Samanta, and Aravindhan Veerapandiyan.

We congratulate these awardees and are excited to see all of our scholars' projects bloom into meaningful health outcomes. We are also excited about their future leadership and the sustained strength of this program under Dr. Curran's direction.

Sincerely,

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

## Filling the Gaps (continued from page 1)

science,” Geng, a professor of medicine, said after hearing the project reports. “That’s exciting to see.”

The promise of the scholars’ work could mean:

- **Early treatment will spare disability for Arkansans born with spinal muscular atrophy, a rare genetic condition.**

**Scholar: Kapil Arya, M.D.**, assistant professor, Division of Pediatric Neurology, Department of Pediatrics

**Project title:** “Implementation of Newborn Screening for Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Operationalizing Appropriate Patient Management”

- **Fewer Arkansans will become addicted to opioids.**

**Scholar: Johnathan Goree, M.D.**, assistant professor, Department of Anesthesiology; director, Chronic Pain Division, chair, Opioid Stewardship Committee

**Project title:** “Implementation of Safe Post-Operative Opioid Prescribing at University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences with a New Post-Operative Opioid Prescribing Protocol”

- **More Arkansans will survive and have improved quality of life after leaving the ICU.**

**Scholar: Emily Kocurek, M.D.**, assistant professor, Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine.

**Project title:** “Improving Implementation of the ICU Liberation Bundle at UAMS”

- **More Arkansas children with intractable epilepsy seizures will receive needed surgical intervention.**

**Scholar: Debopam Samanta, M.D.**, associate professor, Department of Pediatrics, medical director for Epilepsy/Neurophysiology/MEG

**Project title:** “Optimization of the Presurgical Evaluation in Intractable Epilepsy”

- **New protocols will help prevent excess blood draws and reduce medical complications for very low birth weight babies.**

**Scholar: Megha Sharma, M.D.**, assistant professor, Division of Neonatology, Department of Pediatrics.

**Project title:** “NICU Choose Wisely Initiative: Minimizing Iatrogenic Blood Losses in Very Low Birth Weight Infants by Promoting Provider Awareness and Optimal Use of EMR”

The scholars recently entered their second year of the two-year program, a collaboration between TRI and the Center for Implementation Research, directed by Geoffrey Curran, Ph.D., a professor in the UAMS College of Pharmacy. In addition to presenting their work, the scholars reflected on the program’s significant value to their efforts.

“This is the best mentored research project I have ever done,” Kocurek said.

Her primary mentor, Sara Landes, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Core Faculty in the Center for Implementation Research, has been especially helpful with a vantage point from outside Kocurek’s clinical field.

“She looks at my work and gives me such a different perspective and it constantly gives me fresh ideas,” Kocurek told the group. “She is wonderful, Geoffrey is wonderful, the program is wonderful.”



JoAnn Kirchner, M.D.

JoAnn Kirchner, M.D., a Core Faculty member in the Center for Implementation Research, praised the scholars’ work, noting the significant challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I am blown away by each one of these presentations,” said Kirchner, a professor in the Department of Psychiatry and former director of the Behavioral Health Quality

Enhancement Research Initiative (BH QUERI), at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS). She cited their knowledge, passion and dedication to addressing the care gaps they had identified.

Curran also agreed with her assessment that the scholars will become leaders in their field, and an evaluation of the program should include the long-term impact of the scholars’ work on other quality improvement and implementation science initiatives.

Frederick (Rick) E. Barr, M.D., MBA, executive vice president and chief clinical and academic officer at Arkansas Children’s, has been a strong supporter of the program from the beginning. He helped promote it to pediatrics faculty and provided funding to a fifth scholar in the latest cohort.

“I’m not at all surprised at the initial success of this group,” Barr said. “I became a program proponent as soon as I heard about it because I knew we had a very strong pool of clinicians with an interest in quality improvement and implementation research.”

## Register Now to Learn the Basics of Biomedical Commercialization

Arkansas clinicians, researchers and postdoctoral students are invited to attend a free course teaching the fundamentals of biomedical commercialization **April 16 – May 14**.

The fastPACE course, offered by TRI and BioVentures, is designed for the busy medical academician with an early-stage project. It blends in-person and online courses to teach the basics of bringing scientific discoveries to market.

### The registration deadline is April 2.

Submit applications here: [bioventures.uams.edu/fastpace](https://bioventures.uams.edu/fastpace)  
Questions? Contact Nancy Gray, Ph.D., [nmgray@uams.edu](mailto:nmgray@uams.edu)

# Four Receive Implementation Science Pilot Awards

Four UAMS researchers have been awarded pilot grants of up to \$50,000 each to help improve health services through the implementation of evidence-based medical practices.

Implementation science is the study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice to improve the quality and effectiveness of health services.

The awardees and project titles are:



**Emily Kocurek, M.D.**, assistant professor, Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine

“Implementation of a UAMS Pulmonary Embolism Response Team (PERT) with Expansion to a Statewide Arkansas Pulmonary Embolism Response Tele-Network.”



**Taren Swindle, Ph.D.**, assistant professor, Research and Evaluation Division, Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, and Department of Pediatrics, Developmental Nutrition; and Department of Health Behavior and Health Education, College of Public Health

“Assessing the Feasibility and Acceptability of a Virtual Approach to De-implementation of Inappropriate Feeding Practices in Early Care and Education”



**Debopam Samanta, M.D.**, associate professor, Department of Pediatrics, medical director for Epilepsy/Neurophysiology/MEG

“Qualitative Assessment of Stigma Experience and Self-Management of Epilepsy in the African-American Population and Implementation of an Adapted Booster Telehealth Intervention.”



**Aravindhan Veerapandiyan, M.D.**, assistant professor, Pediatric Neurology, Department of Pediatrics

“Psychological Health in Children with Duchenne and Becker Muscular Dystrophy.”

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## TRI Study of the Month

- **UAMS Principal Investigator:** John Arthur, M.D., Ph.D., Professor, Chief, Division of Nephrology, Department of Internal Medicine, UAMS College of Medicine.
- **Summary:** A multicenter clinical trial of Ramipril, an angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor. The study was initiated through the Trial Innovation Network of the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS).
- **Significance:** Ramipril is potentially protective against lung damage caused by coronavirus and may prevent ICU admission, need for intubation, and death.
- **TRI Services:** Medicare coverage analysis, study budget development, IRB submission and regulatory startup, training for study staff/investigators, oversight of enrollment startup, and research nurse coordinator services.
- **Sponsor:** University of California, San Diego and Pfizer Inc.



*John Arthur, M.D., Ph.D., meets with TRI's Alicia DeAgüero, M.S., who is providing research coordination support for the study.*



## TRI Names Seven Community/Academic Partnerships for Training and Potential Research Funding



The TRI Community Engagement Program has selected seven teams of community members and researchers that have partnered to participate in training and jointly develop community-based participatory research projects.

The Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Scholars teams will work through learning modules and participate in online discussions and mentoring to develop health disparities research projects in competition for pilot grants up to \$50,000. The teams will learn to apply the principles of CBPR, a collaborative approach that works to involve all partners throughout the research process. Starting with a health-related research topic that is important to the community, the teams will use their new knowledge to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities.

“The CBPR Scholars program marks an exciting milestone for us,” said Kate Stewart, M.D., M.P.H., director of the TRI Community Engagement Program. “It is the next big step in our years-long efforts to engage Arkansans in the research we do at UAMS. We are very excited about the diversity of the seven partnerships that are participating in the program and we look forward to working with them to develop research-based, sustainable health improvements.”

The academic/community partnership teams are:

- **Academic:** Gerry Ezell, M.D., Jennifer Naylor, Ph.D.  
**Community:** River City Ministries: Paul Wilkerson and Steven Morris
- **Academic:** Brooke Montgomery, Ph.D.  
**Community:** Our House: Maureen Martin
- **Academic:** Sanjay Maraboyina, M.D., Analiz Rodriguez, M.D., Ph.D., Cynthia Dillport, LCSW, and Harriet Farley, LCSW  
**Community:** Home for Healing: Ronnie Fehrenbach and Goodness Village: Janet Webb
- **Academic:** Eva Woodward, Ph.D., Jennifer Gan, and Irenia Ball  
**Community:** AR Freedom Fund: Rae Brown, Anthony Smith and Heather Brown
- **Academic:** Melissa Zielinski, Ph.D., Katy Allison, Ph.D.  
**Community:** AR Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Susie Reece and Wendy Thompson
- **Academic:** Wendy Nembhard, Ph.D., Katie Brown, O.D., Kirk Leach, Ph.D. (UALR), Jennifer Gan, Leah Dawson, Ph.D., Joe Schaffner, Maria Ruvalcaba  
**Community:** Shepherd’s Hope: Sofia Dulanto, Amy Ford (Baptist Health)
- **Academic:** Deanna King, M.D., Ph.D., Charia Hall, Au.D., Rachel Glade, Ph.D. (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville)  
**Community:** AR Hands and Voices: Mandy Jay, Liana Robbins

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