

THE TRIBUNE

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Branching Out

Rural Research Network Tests Home Visits for Nutrition Program



Taren Swindle, Ph.D., and Lorraine McKelvey, Ph.D., pose with Windy Wise, the puppet owl used in their innovative nutrition education program.

After securing multiple federal grants in recent years to implement a novel nutrition education program in preschool settings, UAMS' Taren Swindle, Ph.D., and Lorraine McKelvey, Ph.D., are now testing the concept in the homes of rural Arkansans.

By leveraging the UAMS Rural Research Network, the multiple principal investigators are reaching populations underrepresented in research and with higher rates of obesity and chronic health conditions.

"I'm from rural northeast Arkansas, so it's exciting for me to get to do research in the rural parts of our state," said Swindle, an associate professor in the College of Medicine Department of Family and Preventive Medicine. "I really value that. It feels personal."

The Rural Research Network is a partnership with UAMS Regional Programs, which operates eight UAMS regional campuses around Arkansas. Other partners are the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute (WPRCI) and the Office of Community Health and Research. The Rural Research Network sites are staffed by research coordinators who live in the areas they serve.

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Dear Colleagues,

In this month's issue of The TRIBune, we share how one of our exceptional KL2 scholar graduates, Taren Swindle, Ph.D., and her collaborator, Lorraine McKelvey, Ph.D., are utilizing the UAMS Rural Research Network to test their innovative nutrition education program in the homes of rural Arkansans.

By leveraging the Rural Research Network, they have extended their reach to populations that are often underrepresented in research and face higher rates of obesity and chronic health conditions.

This story underscores the importance of the Rural Research Network as a resource for faculty, enabling the conduct of impactful studies that include underserved populations and address critical health disparities. It also highlights the dedication and passion of faculty members such as Drs. Swindle and McKelvey, and research coordinators such as Ashley Stone at the UAMS North Central Regional Campus in Batesville.

Research Expo

Please mark your calendars for Wednesday, Oct. 11, and drop by the annual Research Expo from 4 – 6 p.m., on the 12th floor of the Stephens Spine Building. All the information you could need about any UAMS research service will be in one room, with vendors representing more than 40 services and resources, including at Arkansas Children's Research Institute and the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System. It's always a great time, with games, prizes, hors d'oeuvres and beverages. We look forward to seeing you there!

Sincerely,

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

Branching Out (continued from page 1)

The nutrition education program is called Together, We Inspire Smart Eating (WISE) and includes a mascot that Swindle co-created – a puppet owl named Windy WISE. The concept, which engages children, preschool teachers, and now parents, was the focus of Swindle's research when she became a TRI Mentored Research Career Development Award scholar in 2014.

The in-home study, funded by a \$100,000 WPRCI pilot grant, is one of many ways that she and the WISE team hope to broaden WISE's impact.

The WISE team is also using a Vitamix Foundation grant to study adapting WISE to ages 0-3 years, an expansion of WISE's original age range of 3-5 years. In addition to her ongoing NIH R21 and R37 grants, Swindle's work has received USDA support to incorporate WISE with the We-Move research program serving children born to mothers with excess weight at the Arkansas Children's Nutrition Center.

"I'm most excited to see that we're now providing a continuum of care for children in a variety of settings so that we're able to meet programs and families where they are," Swindle said.



WISE

Testing Feasibility

Swindle's home-based study is using the UAMS North Central Regional Campus in Batesville with assistance from the UAMS Northeast Regional Campus in Jonesboro, as well as the Cancer Institute's patient navigator based at the Batesville campus. The team recruited 53 parent-child dyads from partnering home visiting agencies.

The study participants agreed to two in-person visits six months apart, providing their children's height and weight, and information about their consumption of fruits and vegetables.

"We want to determine what's possible in engagement with these communities and does this approach have an impact, or at least a signal of an impact," Swindle said.

Ashley Stone, the research coordinator in Batesville, was identified by TRI leadership as the top contributor to the WISE study's participant recruitment. She received help from colleagues Dennie Petronio, a research coordinator based at UAMS Northeast in Jonesboro, and Elizabeth Rodriguez, a Cancer Institute patient navigator and Spanish interpreter also based in Batesville. Other Spanish interpreters helping with the study were Anita Bucur and Daniela Ramirez-Aguilar. Makenzie Rone, a research coordinator based at UAMS in Little Rock, also assisted with enrollment.

Other members of the research team include Alecia Hamilton, who has led the background research and adaptation of WISE materials for the home visiting setting, Danielle Thomas, who coordinated data collection with home visitors, and Dong Zhang, Ph.D., who is leading the database management and data analyses.

Enrolling participants required overcoming a number of challenges. In addition to the language barrier for Hispanic participants, finding and following up with potential participants for data collection meant working after hours, the only time parents and children are available. The team recruited at community events, local schools and churches, and follow-up appointments required finding free public spaces that would stay open after hours.

Knowing the Culture

Stone, who grew up in Charlotte about 15 miles east of Batesville, has used her local connections to benefit the study, such as securing the library at the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville for participant data collection.

"I know a lot of people because we're a small community, and that's been a big advantage when I needed to find a venue," Stone said.

Understanding the local culture also helped her connect with the people she was recruiting, but she frequently heard about a key barrier for the potential participants: time.

"Time was a big issue for them because they are busy with their families and working hard," she said. Ultimately, offering \$100 gift cards for full participation in the study seemed to be a motivating factor for those who joined the study, she said.

With the study wrapping up, Swindle said she hopes the hard work of the Rural Research Network staff and her team will help secure a PO1 award from the NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to fully test the WISE home visiting project.



Ashley Stone

Research Expo 2023!

Please join us for Research Expo 2023, set for Wednesday, Oct. 11, 4 – 6 p.m., in the Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute building, 12th floor.

Sponsored by TRI, the expo will feature more than 40 institutional research services and resources, including from TRI and other UAMS entities, Arkansas Children's Research Institute and the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System.

Drop by to talk to representatives of each of the service areas and have your questions answered. Join your colleagues for this special event and enjoy the food and beverages and a chance to win door prizes. You'll leave with helpful new contacts and information you need to succeed.



Please let us know if you plan to stop by. Just fill out this brief form via the QR code.

Scan here



TRI Study of the Month

UAMS Principal Investigator: Sanjeeva Onteddu, M.D., is an associate professor in the College of Medicine Department of Neurology.

Summary: The “Zeit Alert for Stroke at Home (ZASH)” study is a multi-center clinical trial evaluating the Halo Alert System to determine if the device can be used to detect strokes. The device, worn as a headband, is designed for patients who return home from hospitalization after stroke and are at high risk for future strokes.

Significance: If the current study determines the device can effectively and safely detect stroke, a future study would test its ability to provide alerts at the onset of a stroke, potentially life-saving warnings for patients and their families.

TRI Services: Medicare coverage analysis, study budget development, administration of Clinical Trial Management System, clinical research coordinator support, and post-award financial management.

Sponsor: Zeit Medical Inc.



Sanjeeva Onteddu, M.D. (left), consults on the study with TRI's Faryal Jalbani, M.D., MSPH, regulatory specialist II.

Researchers Recognized for Productive Summer of Writing

UAMS-affiliated researchers who have received TRI support submitted 67 research manuscripts as part of the Summer 2023 Writing Challenge. TRI Director Laura James, M.D., announced at an Ice Cream Social celebration to recognize the contributing researchers.

“The manuscript output this summer has been nothing short of prolific,” James said. “Their hard work is critical to our research mission, which includes the dissemination of study findings.” Eligible participants were UAMS-affiliated researchers who had received any TRI support since 2017.

Held jointly at UAMS campuses in Little Rock and Northwest Arkansas, the Thursday, Sept. 7 event featuring Loblolly Creamery ice cream included door prizes and the announcement of winners in four categories, based on academic rank.



Laura James, M.D., presented awards and prizes to Summer Writing Challenge participants including, (l-r) Tara Johnson, M.D., Nishank Jain, M.D., and Jeffrey Stambough, M.D.

The winners below were recognized with a certificate and a UAMS-branded cutting board:

Tara Johnson, M.D. (4 submissions)

Astounding Apprentice Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts for the Rank of Assistant Professor

Jeffrey Stambough, M.D. (14 submissions)

Wise Wordsmith Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts for the Rank of Associate Professor

David Ussery, Ph.D. (3 submissions)

Sage Scribe Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts for the Rank of Professor

Alicja Urbaniak, Ph.D. (2 submissions)

Stupendous Scholar Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts for the Rank of Instructor

Additional awards were given as door prizes and for a trivia competition. They are:

Nishank Jain, M.D., Delightful Dinner with the Director Award

Jeffrey Stambough, M.D., TRI assistance with a manuscript submission

Don Willis, Ph.D., poster development support from TRI



David Ussery



Alicja Urbaniak



Don Willis