The Long View
Arkansas Lifespan Research Conference Reveals Opportunities

Rosalind Wright, M.D., MPH, speaks during a panel discussion with (l-r) Elisabet Borsheim, Ph.D., (standing), Amanda Dettmer, Ph.D., and Fred Prior, Ph.D.

Before the terms "life-course" and "lifespan" research became more commonplace, Rosalind Wright, M.D., MPH, began studying how early-life experiences were contributing to the conditions she was seeing in her adult pulmonary patients.

Wright, a research leader at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, was a keynote speaker for the inaugural Advancing Arkansas Lifespan Research Conference in September, sponsored by TRI, Arkansas Children's Research Institute (ACRI), and the Lifespan Cardiometabolic Health Creativity Hub in the College of Medicine.

To help make her case for lifespan research, she invoked the quote, "It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

"When I'm taking care of patients in their 40s, 50s and 60s and they've already got multiple comorbidities and their lungs are shot, there's only so much I can do," she told a diverse audience of UAMS-affiliated researchers at the Robinson Center in Little Rock. "But if we pursue this life-course perspective, we have a real opportunity to make a difference."

Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of *The TRIbune*, we highlight the inaugural Advancing Arkansas Lifespan Research Conference, which brought together researchers based at UAMS, Arkansas Children's Research Institute (ACRI) and the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

Lifespan research is a critical part of our efforts to prevent and treat diseases that may last a lifetime. It is also a priority for the NIH National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, which funds our Clinical and Translational Science Award at TRI.

Messages that came through loud and clear from our speakers were the ongoing need to break down barriers between academic and clinical functions, and to continue our groundbreaking work integrating and harmonizing vast amounts of patient data. By doing so, we have an opportunity to positively impact the trajectory of lifelong health.

All three of our keynote speakers, Rosalind Wright, M.D., MPH, Amanda Dettmer, Ph.D., and Fred Prior, Ph.D., knocked it out of the park.

I was excited to hear Dr. Prior present on the ongoing development of ARLife, a new data linking system that will provide investigators with de-identified electronic health records data from UAMS and Arkansas Children's, in combination with claims data from the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement. A new $100,000 lifespan research grant sponsored by ACRI provides the opportunity to pilot this new data source.

As our conference tagline states, we are charting a path to lifelong health and resilience!

Sincerely,

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

The Long View (continued from page 1)

Wright is dean for Translational Biomedical Sciences and holds the Horace W. Goldsmith Professorship in Children's Health Research at Mount Sinai Kravis Children's Hospital and principal investigator for the Institute for Clinical and Translational Sciences at the Icahn School of Medicine. She is a developmental epidemiologist with transdisciplinary training in environmental health and stress mechanisms.

Wright gave one of three keynote presentations during the Sept. 13, 14 conference.

Other keynote speakers were Fred Prior, Ph.D., distinguished professor and chair of the College of Medicine Department of Biomedical Informatics, and Amanda Dettmer, Ph.D., a research scientist at the Child Study Center, Yale School of Medicine.

Elisabet Borsheim, Ph.D., Laura James, M.D., and Peter Mourani, M.D., served as the event's moderators.

Borsheim, a professor in the College of Medicine departments of Pediatrics and Geriatrics, leads the Cardiometabolic Health Creativity Hub.

James is TRI director and UAMS associate vice chancellor for Clinical and Translational Research.

Mourani is president of ACRI and senior vice president and chief research officer for Arkansas Children's.

Peter Mourani, M.D.

Life-course research is a key part of ACRI's strategic plan and it is advocated by the NIH and its National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) to strategically promote health and combat diseases as they progress across the lifespan.

ARLife

Prior's presentation introduced an exciting new data integration system called ARLife that will be key to lifespan research for UAMS-affiliated researchers.

"ARLife is the first baby step toward building an informatics and data management resource that allows us to really do lifespan research effectively here in Arkansas, to be able to track all of our people across their lifespan," he said.

It will be pilot tested as part of a new life-course research grant opportunity announced during the conference. The one-year $100,000 award is being offered by ACRI with funds from the Arkansas Biosciences Institute.

Prior and his team have expertise in data integration having led development of similar tools and processes nationally and internationally.

"We're using what we've learned to crosslink databases in a privacy-preserving way," Prior said.

Laura James, M.D.

ARLife can link and harmonize electronic health records data from UAMS, Arkansas Children's Hospital, and the UAMS Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, which maintains the Arkansas All-Payer Claims Database.

Dettmer said the CTSA-funded Yale Center for Clinical Investigation (YCCI) is working to harmonize datasets and find collaborating institutions as part of the effort.

"We're really keen to foster collaborations with other CTSAs so that we can show NCATS that we're collaborating across CTSAs to really leverage existing resources to spawn and launch lifespan research," she said.

Primate Studies

The YCCI lifespan initiative emphasizes critical developmental periods and how early-life stress may impact typical biological development and lifelong health.

One of the challenges studying humans, Dettmer said, is that much of the work necessarily relies on retrospective accounts, and if the studies are prospective it takes decades to get age-related health outcomes.

Long-term research at Yale with rhesus monkeys, which have about a 30-year lifespan, can be an important complement to human lifespan studies, she said.

"Rhesus monkeys are an extremely valuable comparative and causal model for lifespan health," she said.

Conference attendee Andrew Brown, Ph.D., was excited to see UAMS and ACRI-based researchers come together with wide-ranging expertise for conducting lifespan research.

Andrew Brown, Ph.D.

"The conference was an inspiring collaboration between ACRI and TRI that really walked the talk of needing to work across disciplinary silos if we want to improve the lives of Arkansans," said Brown, associate professor in the Department of Biostatistics and a biostatistics core director for the Center for Childhood Obesity Prevention at ACRI.

He said the announcement of the $100,000 grant demonstrates the commitment to lifespan research.

The conference also included a poster session as well as oral presentations from Keshari Thakali, Ph.D., Steven Barger, Ph.D., Jamie I. Baum, Ph.D., Ashley Acheson, Ph.D., Tatiana Wolfe, Ph.D., and Craig Porter, Ph.D.

Invaluable Service: TRI Community Advisory Board

The TRI Community Advisory Board members are: front (l-r): Dr. Denise Donnell, Central Region; Lucy Capelle, Northwest Region; Esther Dixon, Central Region; Terra Patrom, North Central Region; Latosha Taylor, Northwest Region; Pastor Gregory Nettles, CAB co-chair, Southwest Region
Back (l-r): Kent Broughton, II, CAB co-chair, Central Region; Emmanuel Navarro, Central Region; Rev. Willie Wade, Central Region; Pastor Bryant Whitted, Northeast Region; Jacqueline Burton, North Region; Pastor Johnny Smith, Southeast Region; Heather Edwards, Northwest Region; and Rev. William Givens, Central Region
Members not pictured: Anna Huff- Davis, CAB co-chair, Southeast Region; Edward Payne, Central Region; Mireya Reith, Northwest Region; Pastor Ricky Lattimore, Southeast Region; Bishop Fred Harris, Central Region; and Pastor Lakeita Robinson, Central Region

If you are a researcher looking to involve the community in your research projects, an exceptional group of community members is available to help ensure your project succeeds.

TRI's Community Advisory Board (CAB) members bring a range of backgrounds and unique knowledge of Arkansas' diverse communities, especially those underrepresented in research.

"We have people across the state who are experienced in community-engaged research and are ready and willing to provide feedback that can help improve what you are doing," said Tiffany Haynes, Ph.D., director of TRI's Community Engagement Core. "This is an invaluable service that will help ensure your research is meaningful, respectful, and responsive to the needs of underrepresented populations."

The CAB meets quarterly and can advise on up to two research projects at each meeting. If you would like to present your project to the CAB, please contact the TRI Community Engagement team at **TRIceteam@uams.edu** or 501-686-6758.

You're Invited! Help Honor Our Research Community Partners

Anyone interested in helping recognize community partners for research at UAMS, ACRI and CAVHS is invited to attend the Community Partner Celebration set for Friday, Dec. 1, 6-8 p.m.

Sponsored by TRI and its Community Engagement team, this is the eighth year of the Community Partner Celebration and the first since COVID-19.

Seating is limited, so RSVP now by calling or texting 501-291-7301, and providing your name, organization and the number of people in your party. You may also RSVP by scanning the QR code.

The celebration will recognize grass-roots community based organizations and community advisory boards that advise institutional representatives on issues that affect the public. In addition, community-engage researchers, staff and students will be recognized.

This year, in addition to community groups, a researcher will be honored with the inaugural M. Kate Stewart Community Engaged Researcher of the Year Award.

Five STARs Program Scholars Named for 2023

The UAMS Translational Research Institute and UAMS Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DDEI) recently named five scholars for the 2023 Strategies for Training and Advancing underrepresented Researchers (STARs) Program.

The scholars and their project titles are:

Gina Drobena, M.D., associate professor, UAMS College of Medicine Department of Pathology
"Dietary Effect of Progression of Monoclonal Gammopathy of Undetermined Significance to Multiple Myeloma"

Bernard Muriithi, Ph.D., assistant professor, UAMS College of Health Professions Department of Occupational Therapy
"Occupational Resilience: Evaluating the Feasibility of Application of a Novel Theoretical Framework"

Pilar Murphy, Pharm.D., MPH, associate professor, UAMS College of Pharmacy Department of Pharmacy Practice
"Association of Health Literacy, Disease State Education and Type 2 Diabetes Control"

Latrina Prince, Ed.D., associate professor, UAMS Graduate School
"Assessing Heart Disease Knowledge and Awareness in Africans"

Brittany Wilkerson, PA-C (physician assistant-certified), assistant professor, UAMS College of Health Professions Department of Physician Assistant Studies
"Effects of Mindful Self-Compassion on the Mental Well-Being of Adults in Recovery for Substance Abuse"

The STARs program enables the scholars to build on their research skills and grantsmanship. Program participants receive $10,000 in Equity, Diversity, and Grantsmanship Expertise (EDGE) funding for a research project upon completion of the STARs didactics.

The office of the vice chancellor for UAMS Research & Innovation provided funding to support a fifth STARs scholar this year.

Visit **TRI.uams.edu** to learn more about the STARs program.