

# THE TRIBUNE

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2023

## Rural Connections

### Eight CTSA's Meet to Address Toughest Health Challenges



Representing TRI at the annual Consortium of Rural States meeting were (l-r): Jessica Presley, MPP, Laura James, M.D., Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, and Paul Duguid, MPH.

The quest to improve health in rural populations recently took representatives from TRI to Solitude, Utah, where they joined seven other Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) institutions for the Consortium of Rural States (CORES) Fall 2023 Meeting.

The two-day CORES meeting was the group's largest annual meeting since the consortium was established in 2018. New members Dartmouth College and Penn State were welcomed by UAMS, the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center, University of Kansas Medical Center, University of Kentucky, University of Iowa, and the University of Utah Health.

TRI representatives Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, and Jessica Presley, MPP, were among the oral presenters.

"It is always inspiring to collaborate with our colleagues in the Consortium of Rural States," said McElfish, TRI director of Integrating Special Populations, founding director of the UAMS Office of Community Health and Research, and co-director of the UAMS Rural Research Network. "We are able to share and learn and ultimately walk away with actionable plans on how to improve health in Arkansas and other rural states."

*Continued on page 2*



Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of The TRIBune, we highlight our collaborative efforts and opportunities available through the Consortium of Rural States (CORES). TRI, along with the consortium's seven other Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) institutions, has made it a priority to improve health in rural populations.

The consortium's annual fall meeting in Utah gave us a chance to share our multifaceted rural research efforts and to hear about innovative programs at the other CTSA's. We were all inspired by the two-day gathering, and I was especially gratified to hear that TRI's Jessica Presley, MPP, and her fellow CTSA evaluators have started meeting monthly as a result. I greatly appreciate TRI's Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, and Jessica for delivering excellent oral presentations at the meeting.

An important component of CORES is its annual commitment to support collaborative pilot studies involving two or more of

the consortium members. CORES recently announced its request for applications (RFA) for the 2024 cycle. The purpose of the pilot awards is to promote multi-institutional collaborations across the CTSA consortium by funding innovative translational science research projects.

We hope to capitalize on the excitement from the CORES annual meeting with strong applications for the pilot awards. The RFA calls for applications from faculty members at all career levels for translational science pilot projects.

Learn more on page 2, and please help spread the word about this exciting opportunity!

Sincerely,

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

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

## Rural Connections (continued from page 1)

Presley, TRI senior director of Evaluation, said the meeting made it possible for her and the other rural-serving CTSA evaluators to share successes and inspire plans for tackling shared challenges.

"We found our time together so beneficial that we have begun to meet monthly," she said. "We have identified a number of areas for collaboration and resources to share."

Evaluators for a CTSA institution play a critical role in assessing and enhancing the effectiveness of the institution's research, infrastructure and translational efforts. Their work helps optimize the impact of the CTSA program and advance the field of clinical and translational science.

Also attending were TRI Director Laura James, M.D., and Paul Duguid, MPH, TRI associate director of Funding and Educational Programs.

"It was a great meeting," James said. "The primary benefit of this meeting every year is learning how other rural CTSA sites are doing different things and adopting and integrating what we learn into what we are doing. This year I was especially interested to hear how Utah is incorporating translational science into their pilot grant reviews."

Duguid said the CORES consortium has established a powerful collaborative environment to help meet the challenges for institutions serving large, diverse rural populations in medically underserved areas.

"The strength of the annual CORES conference is in sharing generalizable innovations and approaches," he said. "We not only take this knowledge back home to improve health, access, and engagement, we also keep working with our CORES partners to make improvements as part of our ongoing collaborative efforts. The end result is bold translational science approaches working to improve health in Arkansas and across our CTSA network."

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## TRI Issues RFA for CTSA Interinstitutional Pilot Project Awards

The Consortium of Rural States (CORES) Research Collaborative, which includes UAMS, recently released its interinstitutional pilot award request for applications (RFA), with up to \$25,000 available per award per participating institution.

All UAMS-affiliated faculty are invited to apply, including those based at Arkansas Children's Research Institute and the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System.

**Letters of intent are due Jan. 19, 2024.**

**The application deadline is March 8, 2024.**

The interinstitutional pilot awards involve eight institutions with Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA). In addition to UAMS, the collaborative includes Dartmouth College, Penn State University, the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center, University of Kansas Medical Center, University of Kentucky, University of Iowa, and the University of Utah Health.

The RFA requires the participation of at least two of the CORES institutions on each pilot application.

Funding emphasis for this RFA will be given to proposals that address one of the following: Climate change and environmental health; health equity for underrepresented populations; rural health; and maternal health.

If you have any questions, please contact **Crystal Sparks**, [CSparks@uams.edu](mailto:CSparks@uams.edu).

*Read the Request for Applications*



# KL2 Scholar Secures \$1.4M for Violence Prevention



*Nakita Lovelady, Ph.D.*



*Nick Zaller, Ph.D.*

UAMS TRI KL2 Scholar Nakita Lovelady, Ph.D., MPH, and her mentor, Nickolas Zaller, Ph.D., have received a \$1.42 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support a community-engaged violence prevention program.

Over the next two years, the multiple principal investigators will be developing, implementing and evaluating their multi-level intervention. The project's primary focus is on secondary violence prevention through hospital-community partnerships to prevent escalation and/or revictimization from firearm violence among African Americans in central Arkansas, where violent assault is greatest.

Zaller is a professor in the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health. Lovelady, an assistant professor in the college, is in her final year of the two-year KL2 Mentored Research Career Development Award program.

"The NIH grant expands our current local research portfolio on Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs) – building upon the preliminary findings from both my KL2 and the City of Little Rock grants," Lovelady said.

The overall death rate by firearms was up 21 percent and the rate of homicides by firearms was up 35 percent from 2019-2022. Lovelady noted that Arkansas ranks sixth nationally in firearm homicide rates, and disparities persist as the rate is significantly higher for Black males in Arkansas and nationally.

The project, titled, "The HVIP+ Community Model: A Community Violence Prevention Program in a Southern State," is a collaboration with the team's local community partner, Center for Healing Hearts and Spirits, led by Joyce Mosley Raynor.

UAMS is one of six sites to receive NIH funding as part of the Community Firearm Violence Prevention Network to conduct research on firearm injury and mortality prevention.

## TRI Study of the Month

**UAMS Principal Investigator:** Whit Hall, M.D., professor, neonatologist, UAMS College of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics

**Summary:** A phase 3 multi-site clinical trial comparing a symptoms-based drug treatment approach for neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NOWS) with a scheduled tapering treatment.

**Significance:** Called OPTimize NOW, the study should determine the optimal treatment approach for newborns.

**TRI Services:** Regulatory and research coordinator services

**Sponsor:** HELP for NOWS Consortium



*TRI's Allyson Cheatham, B.S.N., RN, lead study coordinator, consults with Whit Hall, M.D., the study's UAMS principal investigator.*

*A phase 3  
multi-site  
clinical trial*



**NOWS Treatment Study**



## Networking Dinner Draws Community Partners

The ongoing effort to expand TRI's network of academic-community partnerships recently included the Community Partner Dinner, which drew more than 30 community groups, UAMS researchers and staff.

"Our goal was to identify new partners and reconnect with our current partners in this post-COVID era," said Keneshia Bryant-Moore, Ph.D., APRN, FNP-BC, associate director of the TRI Community Engagement Program, director of the Arkansas FAITH Network, and a professor in the College of Public Health.



**Shameka Simmons**

Among the attendees interested in partnering with UAMS was Shameka Simmons, who established Cassandra Cares Cancer Foundation. The nonprofit is dedicated to addressing colon cancer in underserved Black communities, primarily through early detection and prevention. Named for her mother, who died of colon cancer in 2021, the foundation is looking for partnership opportunities with TRI.

"The Community Partner Dinner was a great way to learn more about the work they are doing in the Community Engagement Program," Simmons said. "I want to work closely with a researcher so we can put our heads together to figure out how we can accomplish our goals on both ends."

TRI's Community Engagement Program has trained nearly 250 community partners through its various programs.

Learn more about the Community Engagement Program at [TRI.uams.edu/community](https://TRI.uams.edu/community).



*UAMS-TRI community partners Rev. William Givens (left) and Kelvin Parker with Keneshia Bryant-Moore, Ph.D., APRN, FNP-BC at the Community Partner Dinner.*

## Early-Career Researchers Invited to Apply for K12

TRI is seeking applications for its K12 (formerly KL2) Mentored Research Career Development Scholar Award Program.

K12 scholars receive two years of didactic and mentored research training, including 75% salary support (up to \$100,000) and \$25,000 each year for research related expenses such as supplies, travel, etc.

The overall goal of the program is to increase the number and quality of independently funded clinical and translational science investigators.

Letters of Intent are due Feb. 1, 2024.

**Scan the QR code to read the request for applications.**

**Contact: Nik Berardi, [NDBerardi@uams.edu](mailto:NDBerardi@uams.edu)**

*Scan Here*

