

# THE **TRIBUNE**

March 2025

## **K12 Changes**

### **Early-Career Research Program Enters New Era with Translational Science Focus**



*Mario Schootman, Ph.D., has been named director and principal investigator of the K12 scholar program.*

TRI's K12 Mentored Research Career Development Scholars Program is entering an exciting phase under new leadership with the goal of boosting scholar competitiveness with more intensive translational science training.

New K12 program director Mario Schootman, Ph.D., formerly co-director, expressed enthusiasm about stepping into the role for John Arthur, M.D., Ph.D., who is widely respected for his leadership of the program during TRI's previous grant cycle.

"Dr. Arthur laid a remarkable foundation for our program, and we're committed to building on his legacy as we transition to meet the mandates of our new grant and the recent recommendations of our External Advisory Board," Schootman said.

*Continued on page 2*



Dear Colleagues,

As you will read in this *TRiBune*, our K12 Mentored Research Career Development Scholars Program is entering an exciting new phase marked by changes in leadership and key changes to the curriculum.

Dr. Mario Schootman, an outstanding leader, mentor and advocate for our trainees, has taken the role of director and contact principal investigator. He is joined by co-directors Dr. Josh Kennedy, a 2015 graduate of the program, and Dr. Jason Farrar, who became a co-director last fall.

This transition builds on the strong foundation established by Dr. John Arthur, whose extraordinary leadership has ensured that our scholars have the skills to advance their research and translate their findings into meaningful real-world impact.

The updated K12 curriculum will integrate new educational programs into our standing meetings of

K12 leaders and scholars, enhancing training in translational science, a new emphasis of our funder, the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. While translational research focuses on a specific research question and moving research discoveries from the lab to human health, translational science focuses on the key principles of translational research that produce generalizable solutions that expedite research and have application for future research questions.

Additional new educational offerings for our K12 program include community engagement and communication training, both critically important in translational science.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "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

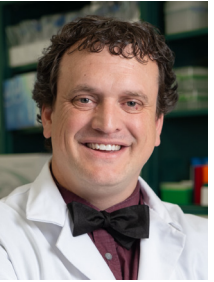
## K12 Changes (continued from page 1)

Joining Schootman as co-director are Jason Farrar, M.D., and Josh Kennedy, M.D., a 2015 alumnus of TRI's then-KL2 scholar program.

Schootman is a professor and vice chair for Mentoring and Innovation in the Department of Internal Medicine and director of Research at the Institute for Community Health Innovation.



Jason Farrar, M.D.



Josh Kennedy, M.D.

Farrar is an associate professor of pediatric hematology/oncology and director of the Arkansas Children's Research Institute Genomic Core Laboratory. He is also co-director of the Arkansas Children's Hospital Leukemia and Lymphoma Program.

Kennedy is an associate professor of pediatrics and internal medicine, Division of Allergy and Immunology; associate vice chair for Basic and Translational Research, Department of Pediatrics; director of the Lung Cell Biology Laboratory; medical director of the Adult Allergy and Immunology Clinic; and director of Allergy and Immunology Fellowship Research.

Schootman, also the contact principal investigator on the K12 grant, said the team aims to rigorously apply translational science principles to ensure that K12 scholars understand how their work can have real-world impact.

"We're reshaping our approach to ensure that we are following the seven principles of translational science as outlined by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS)," Schootman said. NCATS, a program of the NIH, funds TRI's Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA).

The program changes will include:

**More Intensive Didactics:** Aligning with the recommendations of TRI's External Advisory Board, the team will increase the frequency of scholar meetings and embed ongoing educational programs into the K12 programmatic structure.

**Communications Training:** TRI plans to continue a communications training program that it began piloting in 2024. Led by Julien Mirivel, Ph.D., at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, the program teaches early-career faculty how to explain their science to a community audience.

**Community Engagement Training:** All applicants will complete a "Community Engagement 101" session, learning principles and strategies of community engagement, a core component of translational science.

**Plain Language Training:** The UAMS Center for Health Literacy will work with scholars to develop plain-language materials for disseminating research findings to the public.

**Near-Peer Mentoring:** Still being developed, it will likely pair new scholars with those who are one year ahead and possibly recent graduates of the K12 program.

**Developing New Metrics:** The leadership team will continue to work with the TRI Evaluation Core to firm up the program's metrics and goals to assess the program's effectiveness.

TRI Director Laura James, M.D., highlighted the community engagement training and communications training as key elements of translational science.

"By honing clear communication skills and engaging with communities impacted by our research, we ensure our trainees appreciate the community's role—even if their research isn't directly community based," she said.

Kennedy said he is most excited about shaping the next generation of scientists, and his experience as a former KL2 scholar gives him a unique perspective.

"I am the product of great mentors who looked out for me over the years," he said. "I am excited about being able to give back part of what I learned to those in the K12 program now."

K12 scholars receive dedicated mentoring, salary support for protected time to conduct their research, and funding of \$25,000 per year to support their research.

"I know the K12 funding can help springboard the research of young faculty to new heights that were not previously possible—at least it did for me," said Kennedy, who has received numerous grants since completing the program 10 years ago.

Farrar will lead TRI's Research Fundamentals Seminar Series, which will be integrated into the K12 training program.

"By incorporating practical training and hands-on workshops, we're positioning our scholars to become the next generation of innovative translational scientists by enhancing their competitiveness and ability to secure external funding," Farrar said.

# RESEARCH DAY!

## Register Now for TRI Research Day 2025, April 10-11

We're thrilled to invite all UAMS-affiliated faculty and staff to join us for two inspiring days celebrating innovation in translational research!

Location: Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute Conference Center, 10th floor.

This year's expanded TRI Research Day will feature:

- Dynamic keynote speakers
- Oral presentations from TRI-supported investigators
- A poster session highlighting research from TRI's funding and training programs
- Community-engaged programming
- Great opportunities for networking!

### Meet Our Keynote Speakers



**Elizabeth A. Shenkman, Ph.D.**  
Co-Director, University of Florida Clinical and Translational Science Institute; Chair, Department of Health Outcomes and Biomedical Informatics



**Sharla Smith, Ph.D., MPH**  
Associate Professor, Population Health, University of Kansas Medical Center

Please use the QR code to register.

Contact: Christi Madden,  
cmadden2@uams.edu.



## TRI Study of the Month

**UAMS Principal Investigator:** Sisira Yadala, M.D., Director, Level 4 Comprehensive Epilepsy center, Associate Professor, UAMS College of Medicine Department of Neurology.

**Summary:** This first-in-human multi-site study is testing the safety and efficacy of NRTX-1001 cell therapy in participants with drug resistant mesial temporal lobe epilepsy. In Phase 1, participants will have surgical treatment with NRTX-1001, in which inhibitory neurons are injected into the brain near the site of the seizures. In Phase 2, participants will be randomized to either surgical treatment with NRTX-1001 or to a sham surgery.

**Significance:** Drug-resistant mesial temporal lobe epilepsy affects an estimated 143,000 to 191,000 people in the U.S., while approximately 400,000 Americans live with drug-resistant epilepsy overall.

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

**Sponsor/Funder:** Neurona Therapeutics



*Sisira Yadala, M.D., is assisted on the study by TRI Clinical Research Coordinator Shellah Rogers, B.S.N., RN.*



## Implementation Science Scholar Receives Grant to Address Overprescribing of Thyroid Rx

Spyridoula Maraka, M.D., a graduate of TRI's Implementation Science Scholar Program, has been awarded a Veterans Affairs (VA) Merit Award of \$830,000 over four years to address the widespread overprescribing of levothyroxine (LT4), one of the most prescribed drugs in the United States.

Maraka gathered the preliminary data for the VA Merit Award application as a recent participant in the TRI's two-year Implementation Science Scholar Program.

LT4 is used to treat hypothyroidism, a condition where the thyroid produces too few hormones. However, many patients are prescribed LT4 based solely on a single abnormal test, even when thyroid function is normal, Maraka said, which can lead to unnecessary treatment and financial burden, disruptive lifestyle changes, cardiovascular risks and even death.

Maraka is an associate professor in the UAMS College of Medicine Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism and director of the Endocrinology Fellowship Program. She is also chief of the Section of Endocrinology at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS).



*Spyridoula Maraka, M.D.*

Maraka's project, "Minimizing Levothyroxine Overuse," will use machine learning to determine the factors driving LT4 overuse and develop evidence-based prescribing strategies.

## Faculty, Fellows Invited to Apply for MS-CTS Program

UAMS-affiliated clinical faculty and fellows in their final year of fellowship interested in advancing their research careers may apply to receive protected time and a 90% tuition discount for the UAMS Master of Science Program in Clinical and Translational Sciences (MS-CTS).

TRI, through its collaboration with UAMS Colleges and Departments, offers scholarships to MS-CTS students. Successful applicants receive 30% full-time equivalent (FTE) support to allow scholars time to dedicate to the UAMS Graduate School program.

Qualified MS-CTS scholar candidates are current full-time UAMS faculty, those who will be full-time faculty as of July 1, 2025, and clinical fellows who will complete their fellowships by July 1, 2026.

Applications are due by **May 5, 2025**.

Questions? Contact Shelley Crary, M.D., [SECrary@uams.edu](mailto:SECrary@uams.edu), or Mario Schootman, Ph.D., [MSchootman@uams.edu](mailto:MSchootman@uams.edu).

Please use the QR code to apply.

