



UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON
COLLEGE OF PHARMACY

Report to the
Texas Pharmacy Congress
Feb. 7-8, 2022

Thornton Appointed Regional Representative on Texas Opioid Council

Douglas Thornton, Ph.D., Pharm.D., assistant professor and director of the Prescription Drug Misuse Education and Research (PREMIER) Center, has been appointed to Texas Opioid Abatement Fund Council.

The council is responsible crafting the process for organizations to apply for funding of opioid abatement programs from opioid lawsuit settlements. It was established in response to Senate Bill 1827, which was passed by the 87th Texas Legislature, “to ensure that money recovered by this state through a statewide opioid settlement

agreement is allocated fairly and spent to remediate the opioid crisis in this state by using efficient and cost-effective methods that are directed to regions of this state experiencing opioid-related harms.”

Thornton is one of six regional members appointed by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (THHSC). He represents Region 3, which covers Austin, Calhoun, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Harris, Matagorda, Waller, and Wharton counties. An additional eight council members are appointed by the Texas governor and other elected officials as specified in the legislation.

College Bids Farewell to Alkadhi, Lokhandwala After Combined 86 Years

UHCOP recently bid a fond farewell to two of its longest serving faculty members – Karim A. Alkadhi, Ph.D., and Mustafa F. Lokhandwala, Ph.D., FASN, FAHA – who provided a combined 86 years of teaching, research and service to the college.

During his career, Alkadhi published over 150 peer-reviewed journal articles, trained a dozen graduate students, taught hundreds of pharmacy students, and was regarded as an expert on the effects of stress, sleep deprivation and exercise on memory.



UT Austin College of Pharmacy Professor and Dean Emeritus James Doluisio was among the well-wishers at Lokhandwala's retirement luncheon.

Lokhandwala served as dean, executive

vice dean for research, department chair, and director of the Heart & Kidney Institute during his nearly 50-year career. He also wrote over 200 journal articles/reviews and two dozen book chapters; published/presented over 200 abstracts; trained nearly 30 graduate students/postdoctoral fellows; and received nearly \$7 million in NIH grants.

Among his greatest achievements was helping establish the Pharm.D. degree as the new standard for entry-level pharmacists in Texas.

Abstract Submissions Open for Geriatric Medication Symposium

Abstracts are now being accepted for the National Institute on Aging-funded Geriatric Medication Safety Symposium April 7-8 in the Texas Medical Center.

Abstracts in the areas of medication safety and medication use, with an emphasis on the geriatric patient population, will be accepted for consideration as poster or podium presentations and awards through Feb. 28. Co-hosted by UHCOP and UTHHealth McGovern Medical School, the symposium is open to researchers and practitioners, students, residents and fellows in pharmacy, medicine, nursing and dentistry. For more information, visit tinyurl.com/gmss-houston

Student News

Pharm.D. students **Crystal Bussey** and **Monica Nguyen** each have been awarded a 2021 Scholarship for Underrepresented Minorities in Pharmacy Leadership from The Leadership Insert. The Houston Program graduate **Amanda R. Grego**, Pharm.D., M.S., 340B ACE, is founder and president of The Leadership Insert Inc., which provides scholarships to underrepresented minority pharmacy students that are pursuing a role in pharmacy leadership.

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Ph.D. students **Jieni Li** (Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy Concentration) and **Zuoxu Xie** (Pharmaceutics Concentration) were named finalists in the 2021 UH Graduate School 3 Minute Thesis® Competition in December.

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Pharm.D. student **Jeffery Mezzone** was recognized as a national Student College of Clinical Pharmacy 2021 Outstanding Student Chapter Member Award recipient.

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The **UHCOP Delta Delta Chapter** has received a second consecutive \$1,000 Service Grant from the **Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical Fraternity** in support of its project to assemble basic necessities care packages, as well as donated coats, jackets and blankets, for up to 100 individuals in Houston's homeless population.

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Faculty @ Research News

Noor Abdulkareem, Ph.D. candidate, has been awarded an American Society of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET) travel award to present her poster and oral presentation of her project, "ADGRF1 promotes tumorigenesis via the activation of STAT3 pathway in HER2+ and triple-negative breast cancers."

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Fatin Atrooz, Ph.D., postdoctoral research fellow, was invited to discuss her research and experiences in the IBNSconnect - International Behavioral Neuroscience Society's inaugural "IBNS (is) Staying Connected" seminar aimed at engaging early career researchers. Atrooz discussed her research on "Early-life Sleep Deprivation and Alcohol Intake: Insights from a Rat Model."

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Kevin W. Garey, Pharm.D., M.S., FASHP, FIDSA, FCCP, professor, has been recognized as an "Expert in Sepsis" by online portal Expertscape, which identifies and ranks subject experts by the quality and quantity of their MEDLINE-indexed publications.

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Jodie Gee, Pharm.D., BCACP, CDCES, clinical assistant professor, has received a \$6,000 UH New Faculty Grant for her project, "Impact of short-term professional continuous glucose monitoring on glycemic control in patients with diabetes at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)."

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Anne Gonzales-Luna, Pharm.D., BCIDP, research assistant professor, has received a \$40,000 2021 American College of Clinical Pharmacy Foundation Futures Grant for her project, "Vancomycin Resistance in *Clostridioides difficile* infection," with Professor **Kevin W. Garey**, Pharm.D., M.S., FASHP, FIDSA, FCCP, serving as project mentor. Gonzales-Luna also has received a \$20,000 Early Career Investigator Award from the Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists for her project, "The impact of vancomycin resistance in *Clostridioides difficile* infection."

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Natalie Rosario, Pharm.D., MPH, BCACP, clinical assistant professor, has received a \$6,000 UH New Faculty Grant for her project,

"Hispanic obesity phenotypes: Comparison of microbiome signatures related to diet and physical activity."

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Samina Salim, Ph.D., has received a \$40,000 grant from the UH Office of the Provost for her project, "Incubator of Racial Equity in STEM Education (IRESE)," in which UH undergraduate students pursuing STEM majors will receive end-of-semester stipends for providing weekly mentoring and tutoring support to Houston-area high school Arab refugees/immigrants.

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Faculty members **Sujit Sangirya**, Ph.D., professor, **MariVi. Tejada-Simon**, Ph.D., associate professor, and **Joshua Wollen**, Pharm.D., clinical assistant professor, were recognized with the Rho Chi Society-Beta Omicron Chapter's 2020-21 Teaching Excellence Awards.

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Joshua Wollen, Pharm.D., clinical assistant professor, was selected for and completed the Social Justice Fellows Program of The Memorial Foundation (formerly The MLK Memorial Foundation).

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Gabriel Tao, Pharmaceutical Sciences-Pharmaceutics Concentration Ph.D. candidate, has been awarded a \$25,000 PhRMA Foundation 2022 Predoctoral Fellowship in Drug Discovery. The award will support Tao's continued work on his research project, "Targeting Intestinal UDP-glucuronosyltransferase (UGT)1A1 to Improve the Safety of Irinotecan."

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UH and Edinburg-based **DHR Health Institute for Research & Development** (IRD) have signed a master affiliation agreement. Under the agreement, faculty and students in various colleges at UH – including UH College of Pharmacy – will collaborate with investigators at DHR Health IRD to participate in translational and clinical research in such areas of cancer, liver diseases, infectious diseases, diabetes, obesity, neurological disorders, cardiovascular disorders, and trauma.

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College Welcomes Du, El-Desoky and Hunt to Faculty

UHCOP recently welcomed three new faculty members to the college: **Yi Du**, Ph.D., research assistant professor; **Rania El-Desoky**, Pharm.D., BCPS, clinical assistant professor; and **Courtney Hunt**, Ph.D., research assistant professor.

Du received his Ph.D. in cancer biology at UTHealth and The University of Texas-MD Anderson Cancer Center, where he earned the “Outstanding Research Publication” award, the Harold C. and Mary L. Daily Endowment Fund Fellowship award and a Graduate School of Biomedical Science travel award.

His previous research activities focused on investigation of mechanisms of tumorigenesis and drug resistance and development of mechanism-driven therapeutic strategies. Most recently, Du worked at UT Health in San Antonio, where his research focused on the mechanism by which DNA damage response and reprogramming of senescent cancer cells during cancer recurrence.

Du has published more than two dozen peer-reviewed articles in such journals as *Nature Medicine*, *Oncogene*, *Cancer Research*, *Nature*, *Molecular Cell*, *Molecular Cancer Therapeutics*, *Clinical Cancer Research*, *The Journal of Biological Chemistry*, *Gastroenterology* and *National Science Review*.

El-Desoky earned her Pharm.D. from Xavier University of Louisiana College of Pharmacy and completed an ambulatory care-focused PGY1 pharmacy practice resi-



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dency at Xavier. She then worked as an ambulatory care clinical pharmacist at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

After joining the UHCOP Academic Pharmacy Fellowship program, El-Desoky was awarded a Promoting Active Learning and Mentoring (PALM) Network grant; named as a 2021 American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Walmart Scholar; and received a Career Development Grant from the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education.

Her scholarship activities include a paper in *Clinical HIV and AIDS Journal* and presentations at meetings of the AACP, American College of Clinical Pharmacy, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists and the Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists. El-Desoky’s academic and research interests include the scholarship of teaching and learning, ambulatory care pharmacy, chronic disease state management, preventative care, and health disparities.

In addition to her new faculty post, Hunt also serves as the college’s director of Strategic Research Development.

Hunt earned a Ph.D. in Neuroscience from the University of Oklahoma and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at MD Anderson, supported by a PhRMA Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship in Pharmacology and Toxicology.

Hunt’s previous research focused on mechanisms of opioid receptor signaling, opioid tolerance and pain, with papers published in such journals as the *Journal of Neuroimmune Pharmacology*, *Journal of Neuropharmacology*, *Journal of Molecular Pharmacology*, and *eNeuro*.

Hunt has over 10 years’ experience developing and implementing transdisciplinary research programs, catalyzing transdisciplinary and multi-institutional research collaborations, and coordinating faculty and student development programs. She has given 20 invited seminars and presentations as well as co-authored micro-credentialing courses through the Society for Research Administrators International (SRAI).

Her previous honors include the 2011 O. Ray Kling Award for Outstanding Graduate Student Leadership at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC), the 2012 OUHSC Outstanding Graduate Student Award, the 2012 and 2013 OUHSC Outstanding Academic Achievement awards, eight travel awards, and the 2021 SRAI Mid-Career Excellence Award.

Rheumatology Foundation Awards \$400K to Study on Promising Compound

A trio of UHCOP researchers has been awarded a \$400,000 Innovative Research Award from the Rheumatology Research Foundation to investigate a compound with potentially far-reaching applications in the treatment of autoimmune and inflammation-based diseases and disorders.

The project team – UHCOP faculty members Bin Guo, Ph.D., and Gomika Udugamasooriya, Ph.D., and joint UHCOP/Cullen College of Engineering faculty member Chandra Mohan, M.D., Ph.D. – are investigating the anti-inflammatory/anti-arthritic properties of a

peptoid compound identified as IFRA3Q1. Specifically, the compound inhibits the cytokine protein interleukin-15 (IL-15), which induces the proliferation of T cells and natural killer cells that play key roles in inflammation. In early mouse model studies, IFRA3 inhibited collagen-induced arthritis.

Guo and Udugamasooriya have submitted an international patent application for the compound and derivatives as potential therapeutics for rheumatoid arthritis and other autoimmune/inflammatory diseases and disorders.

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