

CTSI Names Four New KL2 Scholars and Awards Pilot Grants to 10 UM Faculty

To kick off the renewal of its prestigious five-year award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Miami Clinical & Translational Science Institute (CTSI) at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine has named four new mentored translational research scholars (KL2) and awarded pilot grants to a diverse group of 10 faculty from disciplines across the university.



From top row, left to right: **KL2 Scholars** Lunthita Duthely, Ed.D., Tali Elfassy, Ph.D., Joyce Gomes-Osman, Ph.D., and Mario Saporta, M.D., Ph.D. **Pilot Grant Recipients** Nicholas Carcioppolo, Ph.D., Lynn Perry, Ph.D., Daniel Messinger, Ph.D., Eric Mellon, M.D., Ph.D., Ranjith Ramasamy, M.D., Sandra Rieger, Ph.D., Natalia Rodriguez, Ph.D., Robert Starke, M.D., Claes Wahlestedt,

M.D., Ph.D., and Brian Marples, Ph.D.

“We are pleased to announce our new round of KL2 scholars and pilot grant recipients,” said Ralph L. Sacco, M.D., MS, Miami CTSI PI and director, professor and chair of neurology and the Olemberg Family Chair of Neurological Disorders at the Miller School. “These team science projects are a great way to launch our new NIH cycle, and we look forward to supporting these translational investigators and many more over the coming months.”

KL2 SCHOLARS PROGRAM AWARDS

CTSI’s KL2 Scholars program provides a structured research training environment that allows junior faculty to acquire the skills and experience needed to become outstanding independent clinical and translational investigators.

Each scholar receives mentorship, an individualized research and career development plan, experiential training with established faculty, and access to educational programs and supportive resources through CTSI’s various programs.

Funding is awarded to those who demonstrate a commitment to a career in clinical and/or translational research and whose proposals are translational and have the highest potential for success. Each scholar receives 75 percent salary support, as well as \$32,500 for research support and travel expenses.

Four KL2 scholars were selected for funding, from a group of 10 applicants:

Lunthita Duthely, Ed.D., research assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, will develop a multilingual,

culturally competent health intervention delivered via mobile phones that seeks to keep women living with HIV engaged in their treatment. Her primary mentor is Steven A. Safren, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Miami.

Tali Elfassy, Ph.D., research assistant professor of public health sciences, will analyze population data to estimate rates of incident hypertension across Hispanic backgrounds and determine the causes of hypertension disparities. Her primary mentor is Neil Schneiderman, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Miami.

Joyce Gomes-Osman, Ph.D., assistant professor of physical therapy and neurology, will investigate the mechanisms underlying cognitive benefits in sedentary adults over 55 after an eight-week exercise intervention. Her primary mentor is Tatjana Rundek, M.D., Ph.D., professor of neurology and public health sciences at the Miller School.

Mario Saporta, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of neurology, seeks to develop drug treatments for patients with CMT2E, a severe, early-onset neuropathy that causes significant functional impairment and reduced quality of life. His primary mentor is Claes Wahlestedt, M.D., Ph.D., professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Miller School.

PILOT GRANTS

CTSI's Pilot Awards support research that is translational, innovative, and interdisciplinary. These awards of \$40,000 each allow investigators to generate preliminary data for a federal grant submission.

Of 22 applications received, CTSI funded eight – three from the College of Arts and Sciences, one from the School of Communication, and four from the Miller School. Some of the winning proposals address community and health disparities, an important part of CTSI's mission.

Nicholas Carcioppolo, Ph.D., assistant professor of communication studies, will study the effectiveness of an entertainment-education intervention using a short film to increase HIV status disclosure among black intimate partners.

Lynn Perry, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology, and **Daniel Messinger, Ph.D.**, professor of psychology, pediatrics, electrical and computer engineering, and music engineering, will measure social communication behaviors like smiles and vocalizations of Latino and non-Latino children in different settings to predict clinician and parent perceptions of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) symptoms. They aim to shed light on the sources of health disparities in ASD diagnosis.

Eric Mellon, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of radiation oncology, will study the use of gadolinium-enhanced MRI on an integrated MRI and radiotherapy device to distinguish true tumor progression versus an inflammatory reaction in glioblastoma, an aggressive brain cancer.

Ranjith Ramasamy, M.D., assistant professor of urology, will look at the therapeutic role of nitric oxide in regulating the tumor microenvironment of castrate-resistant prostate cancer.

Sandra Rieger, Ph.D., associate professor of biology, will assess treatment regimens of chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy in rats and analyze the underlying molecular

changes using genomic analysis.

Natalia Rodriguez, Ph.D., assistant professor of anthropology, will adapt innovative materials to train community health workers who work with the South Florida farmworker community to educate women on breast cancer and direct them to low-cost health services for early detection.

Robert Starke, M.D., assistant professor of clinical neurosurgery, will study endothelial cell dysfunction and differentiation in brain aneurysm progression to better understand why aneurysms grow and how their growth might be stopped or reversed.

Claes Wahlestedt, M.D., Ph.D., professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, associate dean for therapeutic innovation, and director of the Center for Therapeutic Innovation, and **Brian Marples, Ph.D.**, director of radiobiology and professor of radiation oncology, will investigate whether low-dose radiation therapy and the use of a drug inhibitor can be combined to mitigate and prevent accumulation of radiation in patients with Alzheimer's disease.

The Pilot Translational and Clinical Studies program is overseen by W. Dalton Dietrich, Ph.D., who is also CTSI's co-investigator and associate director. Dr. Dietrich is professor of neurological surgery, neurology, and cell biology, scientific director at The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis, the Kinetic Concepts Distinguished Chair in Neurosurgery, and senior associate dean for discovery science at the Miller School.

The KL2 Scholars program is led by CTSI's Institutional Career

Development Core Principal Investigator Gwendolyn Scott, M.D., professor of pediatrics and director of the Division of Pediatric Infectious Disease and Immunology, and co-directed by Tatjana Rundek, M.D., Ph.D., and Alessia Fornoni, M.D., Ph.D.

Dr. Rundek is professor of neurology and public health sciences, executive vice chair for research and faculty affairs in the Department of Neurology, scientific director of the Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute, and Evelyn F. McKnight Chair for Learning and Memory in Aging at the Miller School. She is also the director of CTSI's Master's of Science in Clinical and Translational Investigation program. Dr. Fornoni is professor of medicine and molecular and cellular pharmacology at the Miller School and chief of the Katz Family Division of Nephrology and Hypertension.

Patricia Avissar is CTSI's program administrator for both the KL2 Scholars and Pilot Grant programs. To receive notifications on future awards and all CTSI activities, subscribe to CTSI's [listserv](#).

CTSI is accepting applications for a new round of Pilot Program Awards. Support is available for up to four scientifically meritorious pilot projects that are highly innovative, translational (T1 – T4), interdisciplinary, and/or promote research oriented toward community and health disparities. The deadline to submit a letter of intent is January 9, 2019. To apply, visit www.miamictsi.org/awards.

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