

PharmTox Fights COVID-19

Week of April 5-9, 2021

Julia Tobacyk Selected HSIE Scholar



Congratulations to graduate student Julia Tobacyk on being selected as a scholar in the Health Sciences Innovation and Entrepreneurship (HSIE) Postdoctoral Training Program. Julia was selected from a pool of qualified applicants on the strength of her proposed application on opioid abuse and her clear direction for the project. Julia, who is set to defend in May, stated “I am thankful for receiving the HSIE postdoctoral fellowship. I am very excited and looking forward to working under Dr. Brents’ mentorship and combining research and entrepreneurship in my science career.” Assistant professor, Lisa Brents, will serve as mentor.

The HSIE Postdoctoral Training Program is a component of the UAMS TRI’s Clinical and Translational Science Award. This two-year graduate certificate program is a partnership between the TRI and the Entrepreneurship Graduate Program in the Sam M. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. The goal of the program is to broaden a scholar’s vision of using entrepreneurship principles and team science to accelerate biomedical discoveries into improved health outcomes in academic settings, and also offer nontraditional training to enhance readiness for industry, government, and other nonacademic jobs. Professor and chair, Nancy Rusch co-directs the program with associate professor, Kevin Sexton (Surgery) and professor Nancy Gray (BioVentures).

Dr. Sung Rhee Awarded Chancellor’s Teaching Award

Associate professor Sung Rhee is the recipient of the 2021 Chancellor’s Teaching Award for teaching excellence. This award was established in 2004 to recognize outstanding teaching among UAMS faculty. Dr. Rhee, who directs the medical school cardiovascular module, was chosen for his improved student outcomes and flair for using props and technology to spur class engagement. During the pandemic, he adapted to online instruction in ways that encouraged student participation. He developed protocols for online exams that quickly became a standard. He assisted faculty members in adopting active learning techniques such as self-paced mobile polling. In 2019, he teamed up with Dr. Robert McGehee, Dean of the UAMS Graduate School, to co-direct the Honors in Research Program for medical students, and designed a new online system to match applicants with faculty mentors. Dr. Rhee also was the recipient of the sophomore Golden Apple Award from 2016-2020 and the senior Golden Apple Award in 2019. The Golden Apple award is selected annually by medical students. Way to go Dr. Rhee!



Alumni Spotlight: Dr. Swapnil Sonkusare Receives Fourth R01



Alumni Swapnil Sonkusare was recently awarded his fourth R01 to investigate the role of TRPV4 channel signaling in lung ischemia-reperfusion injury. Dr. Sonkusare was a PhD student in professor and chair, Nancy Rusch’s lab from 2005-2009. Currently, he is an assistant professor of molecular physiology and biophysics, and pharmacology, at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. The most recent R01 award is led by Dr. Sonkusare and professor Victor Laubach (University of Virginia). In addition to this R01, Dr. Sonkusare is the sole PI on two other R01 awards focused on endothelial calcium signaling in obesity and pulmonary hypertension, and he serves as PI on another multi-PI R01 grant (novel signaling mechanisms that control vascular contractility). Dr. Sonkusare has published >20 papers from his laboratory, including senior authored papers in *Circulation*, *PNAS* and other high profile journals. His *Circulation* paper on the mechanisms of obesity-induced hypertension was highlighted by several news reports (<https://www.nbc29.com/2020/03/10/researchers-uva-make-key-discovery-obesity-blood-pressure-study/>). All four of Dr. Sonkusare’s predoctoral and postdoctoral trainees have been awarded American Heart Association fellowships in the past two years. Dr. Sonkusare is grateful for his scientific upbringing in the Rusch laboratory and the Dept. of Pharmacology and Toxicology at UAMS! He is looking for ambitious and hardworking postdoctoral fellows to work on novel calcium signaling mechanisms in the vasculature (sks2n@virginia.edu).