Waggoner Center Announces Leadership Changes and Exciting New Partnerships in Addiction Research

On September 1, 2017, the Waggoner Center’s former Associate Director Robert O. Messing became director, and former Director R. Adron Harris stepped into the associate director position.

A role-switch was a natural progression for both Harris and Messing. Harris will focus on his responsibility as coordinator of an National Institutes of Health-funded international consortium, the Integrative Neuroscience Initiative on Alcoholism-Neuroimmune (INIA-N), with multiple research sites in the U.S. and Canada. After helping establish the Dell Medical School, Messing returns to research administration as WCAAR director and will continue his own research in the neurobiology of addiction and pain management.

The two are planning significant partnerships for the Waggoner Center.

PLANS FOR DYNAMIC COLLABORATIONS

“Up until now, our research has been based on animal studies, as well as human laboratory studies that required coordination with investigators at medical schools across the country,” said Harris. Now, the proximity of Dell Med will allow more rapid advances in human addiction research—and foster the center’s integration with Dell Med’s research, clinical, and educational programs.

Finding the right people to champion addiction science programs at Dell Med is of utmost importance. “We need physicians who are eager to interweave addiction medicine into Dell Med’s clinical operations, including comprehensive care that follows patients longitudinally in the community and analyzes patient care outcomes over the long term,” said Messing. He has worked to recruit multiple department chairs at Dell Med, among them Psychiatry Chair Steve Strakowski, who plans to place addiction research among his first three build-out programs.

Further, the UT provost, the deans of Natural Sciences and Pharmacy, along with Dell Med’s Dean Johnston, will jointly recruit six tenure-track faculty members affiliated with the Waggoner Center, with two at Dell Med. There will be a concentrated development effort to endow the joint Dell Med/Waggoner Center positions, and Messing has high hopes for its success.

Harris and Messing also met with faculty members in the Steve Hicks School of Social Work whose work in alcoholism and addiction intervention and cultural adaptation aligns with Waggoner Center research. “If we coordinate our efforts,” said Messing, “the result could be more than additive.”
FUNDING NEWS

Principal Investigator: Dr. Johann Eberhart  
Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Scott Parnell, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Project Title: “Exploring the Genetics of FASD in Complementary Mouse and Fish Models”  
Award Total: $1,526,140 (five years), Sponsor: NIDA

Principal Investigator: Dr. Michela Marinelli  
Project Title: “Crossing an Electric Barrier to Obtain Cocaine: Age and Sex Differences”  
Award Total: $156,500 (two years), Sponsor: NIDA

Principal Investigator: Dr. Robert O. Messing  
Project Title: “CRF Neurons of the Extended Amygdala and Alcohol Drinking”  
Award Total: $1,732,295 (five years), Sponsor: NIAAA

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Duvauochelle  
Co-Principal Investigator: Mr. Kristopher Aber (Cornerstone Research Group)  
Project Title: Phase 1: “Enhanced WAAVES+: A Fast and Accurate Automated Ultrasonic Vocalization (USV) Scoring Program”  
STTR Phase 1 of 3 Award Total: $150,000 (6 months)  
Sponsor: DOD

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Duvauochelle  
Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Gang Mei (Intelligent Automation, Inc.)  
Project Title: Phase 1: “Deep Learning-Based Automated Ultrasonic Vocalizations Scoring: DLAS”  
STTR Phase 1 of 3 Award Total: $150,000 (6 months)  
Sponsor: DOD

NATIONAL RESEARCH

SERVICE AWARDS

Sponsor: NIAAA

Alfire Sidik, Eberhart Lab  
Project Title: “Ethanol-sensitive MicroRNAs Mediate Susceptibility to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders”  
Award Total: $119,391 (three years)

Anna Warden, Harris Lab  
Project Title: “Molecular Investigations of the Trif-Dependent Pathway in Alcohol Abuse”  
Award Total: $117,957 (three years)

Emma Erickson, Harris Lab  
Project Title: “Role of Astrocytes in Chronic Ethanol Drinking in Mice”  
Award Total: $119,361 (three years)

Christopher Tulisiak, Ponomarev Lab  
Project Title: “Role of DNA Modifications in Alcohol Use Disorders”  
Award Total: $79,870 (two years)

HONORS & AWARDS

Two Waggoner Center researchers were honored at the 40th Annual Research Society on Alcoholism Scientific Meeting held in Denver, Colorado, June 23-28, 2017.

Dr. R. Adron Harris, Waggoner Center associate director, received the 6th Annual Marlatt Mentorship Award given for exceptional mentoring of young scientists in the alcohol research field. Harris was chosen from fellow RSA-member nominees who are active in alcohol research.

Dr. Sean Farris, postdoctoral fellow (Harris/Mayfield Labs), received the 2017 Enoch Gordis Award. The annual award is based on “originality and quality of research, significance to the field, quality of abstract, and presentation of the work at the meeting as a poster and talk.” Awardees are chosen by RSA Education Committee Member vote. Farris was among two students and two postdocs who were honored with the award.
PUBLICATIONS


Renteria R, Maier EY, Buske TR, Morrisett RA (2017) Selective alterations of NMDAR function and plasticity in D1 and D2 medium spiny neurons in the nucleus accumbens shell following chronic intermittent ethanol exposure. *Neuropsychopharmacology* 112:164-171.

(Publications continued next page.)

BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP
Individual, foundation and corporate support is essential to the continued growth and success of this world-class research center. To support the Waggoner Center for Alcohol and Addiction Research, please visit: utdirect.utexas.edu/apps/utgiving/online/nlogon/?menu1=NSWCor contact: edu/apps/utgiving/online/nlogon/?menu1=NSWCor or call: 512-471-3299

College of Natural Sciences Dean’s Office The University of Texas at Austin 120 Inner Campus Drive Stop G2500 Austin, TX 78712

USEFUL WEBSITES
Addiction Science Research and Education Center, utexas.edu/research/asrec

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), niaaa.nih.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), nida.nih.gov

Research Society on Alcoholism (RSA), rsa.org

International Society for Biomedical Research on Alcoholism (ISBRA) isbrea.com

Integrative Neuroscience Initiative on Alcoholism-Neuroimmune (INIA-N), https://sites.cns.utexas.edu/inia-neuroimmune/about-inia-0


