



Center For Women's Health Research

Quarterly Highlights

SUMMER 2019 QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS



Hello! *From Dr. Judy Regensteiner, CWHR Director*

I hope that everyone's summer is going well! I am writing to you from my annual sojourn in western Canada with my family. I have been reflecting on how the Center for Women's Health Research (CWHR) has affected the field of women's health and sex/gender differences research. At CWHR, we strive to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this critical area and know that it takes a combination of funding, mentoring, training and support to cultivate the next generation of scientists who will advance women's health and the health of the family.

As we prepare to award the 2019 seed grants in August, we are thrilled to share that we received the highest number of applicants to date. Through our competitive, peer reviewed grant process, 11 researchers will be awarded grants on September 23rd at the Annual Community Luncheon and highlighted in our next newsletter, so be sure to keep an eye out for our next issue.

As always, we're proud to share the work and accomplishments of our researchers. In this issue, you will gain insight into the work of Dr. Viral Shah, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine at the Barbara Davis Center for Diabetes. Dr. Shah shares his journey, including his inspiration for studying type 1 diabetes, the impact of the support from the CWHR, and plans for his recently awarded Career Development Grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The support (financial and in-kind) that we have received for our signature event, the Annual Community Luncheon, is beyond inspiring. It's encouraging to see that so many people share our commitment to closing the gap in women's health research and have joined us to change the future of health care.

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to outgoing Advisory Board Chair, Nan Eklund, who has worked tirelessly over the past two years to increase support and awareness of the CWHR, and to Jan Meck, who we enthusiastically welcome to this leadership position. We could not do what we do without our amazing board and I am so grateful to work with them!

We hope that you enjoy reading this edition of the newsletter and that we will see you soon at one of our future events!

Judy Regensteiner, PhD

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Upcoming Events

- August 15** Host Committee Lunch and Research Talk
- August 26** CWHR Researcher Networking Event
- August 27** Let's Talk: Pivotal Life Transitions
- August 28** Research Talk at Arrow Electronics
- September 22** Annual Community Luncheon – VIP Reception
- September 23** Annual Community Luncheon featuring **Siddhartha Mukherjee, MD**
- October 3-4** CWHR hosts LEADERS (Leaders Empowering the Advancement of Diversity, Education, Research, and Science) Women's Health Summit
- November 5** Women's Health Symposium, featuring **Dr. Carolyn Mazure** from Yale University

CWHR Scientific Council Convenes

The CWHR Scientific Council provides expertise and guidance to the CWHR on our research agenda, including valuable feedback to our junior researchers. It is comprised of nationally known scientists from institutions around the country including Cedars-Sinai, Massachusetts General Hospital, Stanford University, Vanderbilt University, University of Southern California, Magee-Womens Research Institute, Emory University, and several faculty members from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. The Scientific Council provides a national and international mentoring network for CWHR researchers and supports our senior faculty in developing and implementing the CWHR's research agenda.

The 2019 annual meeting kicked off with talks from five CWHR researchers. Their work covered a variety of topics, including early diabetic kidney disease, fetal growth restriction, early origins of neurological dysfunction, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and circadian rhythm and metabolism. Later in the day, discussions focused on opportunities, challenges, and programs in women's health research at other institutions and also included a very productive planning session for the CWHR's 2020 National Conference.

Research Presentations

Petter Bjornstad, MD – “Early Diabetic Kidney Disease: A Metabolic Disorder. Important Differences in Young Men and Women”

Emily Su, MD – “Mediators of Impaired Fetoplacental Angiogenesis in Severe Fetal Growth Restriction”

Clare Paterson, PhD – “A Multi-level Approach to Investigating the Effects of Antenatal Angiogenic Imbalance on Offspring Neurobiology”

Melanie Cree-Green, MD, PhD – “Towards Treating Metabolic Disease in Adolescent PCOS”

Corey Rynders, PhD – “Timing of Daily Behaviors as a Determinant of Body Weight Change”

Celebrating Dr. Elizabeth Barrett-Connor

It saddens us to share that CWHR colleague and valued Scientific Council member, Dr. Elizabeth Barrett-Connor, passed away on June 9, 2019. Dr. Barrett-Connor, a Distinguished Professor in the Departments of Family Medicine and Public Health and Medicine at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, was a prominent figure in the field of endocrine physiology and a respected leader in sex and gender differences research. As the founder of the Rancho Bernardo Heart and Chronic Disease Study*, and the Principal Investigator for many other monumental trials and studies, Dr. Barrett-Connor became an early proponent for sex and gender considerations in cardiovascular disease and diabetes research and published over 1,000 articles. Dr. Regensteiner was privileged to work with Dr. Barrett-Connor on a paper entitled, "Sex Differences in the Cardiovascular Consequences of Type 2 Diabetes" as well as several other important efforts.



Dr. Barrett-Connor served as the keynote speaker at the CWHR's 2012 Women's Health Research Day and shared valuable insights in her talk, "How does Diabetes Eradicate Women's Natural Cardioprotection? Clues from the Rancho Bernardo Study." She also participated in the CWHR's Inaugural 2016 National Conference on Women's Health and Sex Differences Research and was an original member of the CWHR Scientific Council.

Beyond her many accomplishments and tremendous contributions to science, we remember Dr. Barrett-Connor for her quick wit, curious mind, adventurous spirit, and zeal for life. She was an excellent mentor to many and enjoyed sharing her vast knowledge with all.

*To learn more about the Rancho Bernardo Heart and Chronic Disease Study, visit: <https://bit.ly/2Xf7CAn>.

We appreciate the feedback and have made some changes to our newsletter

- Greater frequency with shorter articles
- More "news you can use"
- Donor list provided twice a year

Support the Center for Women's Health Research

If you are interested in learning about ways you can support the Center for Women's Health Research please contact Elizabeth Hepworth, Senior Principal Gifts Officer, at 303.724.8197.

Thank you to the sponsors of the 2019 Annual Community Luncheon! To learn more about the event, visit CWHR.org.

Community Presentations

The CWHR is very proud to partner with Arrow Electronics to provide speakers for a quarterly lunch and learn series. This spring, Dr. Christine Swanson, a CWHR researcher and Assistant Professor in the Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism & Diabetes, led a talk on the impact, risk factors, and prevention of osteoporosis.

Highlights from the presentation:

- Osteoporosis is a bone disease that occurs when the body loses too much bone, makes too little bone, or both. As a result, bones become weak and are prone to fracture.
- 33-50% of women and 20-25% of men 50+ years old will break a bone due to osteoporosis. Breaking a bone can have more serious complications, such as loss of independence and even death. After a hip fracture, there is a 20-30% chance of mortality. Of survivors, 50% will never walk unassisted, and 25% will require long term care.
- You can protect your bones by getting adequate calcium, vitamin D, and protein. Physical activity and weight-bearing exercise (such as walking, jogging, and stair climbing, rather than biking or swimming) can also help.

To learn more or for helpful hints, visit CWHR.org > News You Can Use > Additional Resources.

Let's Talk: Triggers and Treatments

Food & Environmental Allergies, Asthma, and Sinusitis

As the trees and flowers blossom, many of us are adversely affected by sneezing, runny and stuffy noses, scratchy throats, and nasal inflammation. Our April program focused on answering the questions:

What do environmental and food allergies, chronic sinusitis, and asthma have in common? Do sex differences affect the onset of symptoms and responses to treatments?

Dr. Anjali Kalra spoke about risk factors and testing methods for environmental and food allergies; Dr. Sunita Sharma presented on sex differences in asthma; and Dr. Vijay Ramakrishnan discussed symptoms of and treatments for chronic rhinosinusitis. Watch the video of the event at CWHR.org > Education and Events > Let's Talk.

Did you know?



- In childhood, asthma is more prevalent in boys than girls. However, it is more prevalent in females after puberty and in adulthood. Female patients are more symptomatic and use more medications.
- Most children outgrow allergy to wheat, egg, soy, and milk. 20-25% of children outgrow allergy to peanut or tree nut.
- Chronic rhinosinusitis is an inflammatory disease of the nasal sinuses. It can significantly impair quality of life, particularly by impacting sleep, concentration, and productivity. Women experience a greater burden of symptoms, possibly because women have a more robust response to olfactory stimuli, although it is not entirely clear why.

5th Annual Girls' Career Day

On Tuesday, June 4, the School of Medicine's Center for Women's Health Research and UHealth jointly hosted 50 girls from high schools across the Front Range for the fifth annual Girls' Career Day. The program featured a full day of interactive activities, lectures, and discovery across the Anschutz Medical Campus. Each year, the CWHR and UHealth tailor a unique agenda to ensure that the girls gain exposure to an array of careers in health care.

This year, the girls were offered opportunities to learn from and interact with health care professionals and researchers across the campus in **surgery communications, endocrinology, psychiatry, dental medicine, and pharmacy**. They participated in many interactive activities and spoke with staff and leadership about programs at the School of Medicine, the Physician Assistant program, the Physical Therapy program, the School of Dental Medicine, and the Skaggs School of Pharmacy.

At the Center for Surgical Innovation, the girls had the opportunity to practice surgery techniques with a laparoscopic simulator and test their fine motor skills by suturing alongside surgical residents. Social media experts from the CU Anschutz Communications Team talked about careers in health care communication and emphasized the value of skills such as writing a compelling story, enhancing the story through effective photography, and using best practices for social media management.

At CWHR associate director Dr. Jane Reusch's lab, the students were given a taste of the day-to-day work being performed by researchers on the prevention and treatment of type 2 diabetes. They learned about how skeletal muscle cells are grown in a dish, and saw how the power center of the cell, or mitochondria, respond to environments that simulate type 2 diabetes. Finally, they were able to practice setting up their own western blotting experiments.

During a lunch and learn session, Dr. Neill Epperson, the School of Medicine's Chair of the Department of Psychiatry, shared fascinating stories about her upbringing in rural North Carolina, her determination to go to college, her early interest in medicine, and the role



that strong mentors played in leading her to follow her passion in psychiatry. The girls appreciated the opportunity to ask her questions about her career path and about behavioral health.

At the end of the day, the girls visited the School of Dental Medicine, where they learned about careers in oral health care. They used dental drill simulators, made dental impressions, and experimented with virtual reality (VR) practice simulators.

Finally, at the Skaggs School of Pharmacy, the students learned about the role of a pharmacist and worked through an exercise on medication dosing.

"Many careers became more interesting to me after today," said one student who found that the best part about exploring different health careers was that she was able to start "understanding some misconceptions" around them.

The CWHR is committed to introducing high school aged girls to careers in health and **we would like to thank the List Family Foundation for their support and to Delta Dental for their in-kind donation**. To learn more about Girls' Career Day, visit our website at www.cwhr.org.

A Serendipitous CWHR Collaboration

By Liz Wellberg, PhD

Becky Scalzo, PhD, and I met in 2016 when we were both seed grant recipients of the CWHR. I am a basic scientist who studies breast cancer, metabolism, and obesity, and Becky is a basic scientist who studies sex differences in muscle responses to exercise intervention in those who have diabetes. Each of us was growing our research into the preclinical arena, which lies between basic and clinical science. My specific project focused on obesity and the elevated risk for type 2 diabetes in breast cancer survivors. After my presentation at a CWHR meeting, Becky approached me and asked if we could collaborate to look at how obesity and breast cancer treatments impacted skeletal muscle function. We've worked together ever since, each bringing our unique expertise to a project that aims to globally define the metabolic effects of breast cancer therapies around the body and the mechanisms underlying these effects. Becky brings a clinical perspective and knowledge of physiology in the normal and diabetic setting, and I bring knowledge of breast cancer treatments, estrogen signaling, and basic mechanistic tools.



Dr. Becky Scalzo (left) and Dr. Liz Wellberg

Together, we have developed a timely, impactful, and exciting project focused comprehensively on women's health. And we've become great friends!

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Hear more from Dr. Wellberg at our [2019 Annual Community Luncheon](#), where she will be delivering the CWHR researcher presentation. Dr. Wellberg's research focuses on the vicious, cyclic relationship between obesity and breast cancer, whereby obesity increases breast cancer risk and cancer therapies subsequently increase obesity and diabetes risk. Her ultimate goal is for her research to help patients choose more personalized cancer therapies based on how their metabolism or obesity affect the tumor environment.

Basic vs. Translational vs. Clinical Science

- All scientific research conducted at medical schools and teaching hospitals ultimately aims to improve health. However, there are many different types of scientific endeavor. In this and future newsletter editions, we will seek to provide some definitions for the different types of science.
- Basic science research—often called bench research—provides the foundation of knowledge for the applied science that follows. This type of research encompasses scientific disciplines such as biochemistry, microbiology, physiology, and pharmacology, and their interplay, and involves laboratory studies with cell cultures, animal studies or physiological experiments. Basic research can address clinical issues from a very focused approach, including the discovery and analysis of single genes or genetic markers of diseases or take a broader approach. Typically, basic science research focuses on determining the causal mechanisms behind the functioning of the human body in health and illness, and utilizes hypothesis-driven experimental designs that can be specifically tested and revised. Once these fundamental principles of the biologic processes are understood, these discoveries can be applied or translated into direct application to patient care using clinical or translational scientific methods (discussed in a later newsletter). Basic research is also a source for new tools, models, and techniques (e.g. functional magnetic resonance imaging, etc.) that revolutionize research and development beyond the disciplines that give rise to them.

Source: Adapted from the AAMC.

Aspirin for Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease: Is it Right for Me?

Amy G. Huebschmann, MD and Judith G. Regensteiner, PhD

It is well-established that aspirin can prevent heart attacks and strokes for individuals at high-risk for these diseases. Past research has identified sex differences in the effects of aspirin on men and women, with aspirin reducing the occurrence of heart attacks more in men than women, and reducing the occurrence of strokes more in women than in men. However, most of these studies were conducted in middle-aged adults, and these factors were not fully considered in older adults.

The results of a recent large clinical trial in older adults, named the ASPREE trial, showed that aspirin did not lower the risk of heart attack or stroke among women or men, but it did increase the risk of serious bleeding. The ASPREE trial findings highlight the importance of a life course approach to clinical research questions, as a treatment may be useful in one age group and harmful in another age group. Accordingly, the new 2019 guidelines

from the American Heart Association/American College of Cardiology suggest limiting aspirin therapy to certain moderate-to high-risk adults (see table).

Of great importance, nearly all patients (of any age) with a personal history of cardiovascular disease, such as heart attack or stroke, should be taking aspirin therapy, or a similar type of medication that prevents clots in the arteries, such as clopidogrel (Plavix®). In contrast, patients with no prior cardiac history should avoid aspirin for cardiovascular prevention if they are younger than 40 years or older than 70 years. The only current “gray area” is whether high-risk patients aged 40-70 years should take aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke. Ultimately, it is critical to decide whether aspirin is “right for you” in consultation with your primary care doctor, after considering research data, your personal and family medical history, and your values and preferences.

Aspirin – is it right for me?	No – Aspirin is not generally recommended	Maybe – Aspirin may be appropriate, but it depends on your other risk factors – ask your doctor	Yes – Aspirin 81 mg daily is the typical dose recommended – ask your doctor to confirm
Prior history of heart attack, stroke, or other cardiovascular disease (all adults)			
Age 40-70 years with low risk of bleeding, high cardiovascular risk, but no prior history of heart attack/stroke			
Age 40-70 years with high risk of bleeding and high cardiovascular risk, but no prior history of heart attack/stroke			
Age younger than 40 years or older than 70 years and no prior history of heart attack/stroke			

Resources can be found on CWHR.org > News You Can Use > Additional Resources

- ASPREE clinical trial of aspirin in older adults
- American Heart Association 2019 Guidelines for cardiovascular prevention
- United Services Preventive Task Force Evidence Statement for use of Aspirin for primary prevention, 2016



Researcher Spotlight

Viral Shah, MD

"I knew that I needed to do something to improve diabetes care and prevent diabetes complications."

Dr. Shah is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine at the Adult Clinic of the Barbara Davis Center for Diabetes (BDC), and a former recipient of a CWHR Faculty Development Award. He recently received a K23 award, which is a National Institutes of Health Career Development grant. Over the next four years, this grant will allow him to study why post-menopausal women with type 1 diabetes have a high risk of bone fractures. Dr. Shah completed his residency in Internal Medicine and his fellowship in Endocrinology in India before joining the BDC, where he has cared for patients with type 1 diabetes for the past six years.

Dr. Shah, what inspired you to pursue a career in research?

Diabetes is a part of my family history, and my paternal grandmother passed away due to a hip fracture. She was initially misdiagnosed with type 2 diabetes. About 20% of adults with type 1 diabetes are misdiagnosed as type 2 diabetes resulting in delayed initiation of insulin therapies and other inappropriate health interventions.

After witnessing this firsthand, I knew that I needed to do something to improve diabetes care and prevent diabetes complications. I also began to focus on the connection between type 1 diabetes and fracture risk. In 2013, I published a meta-analysis which reported a 3-4 times higher bone fracture risk in people with type 1 diabetes compared to people without diabetes. In addition, we found that females with type 1 diabetes experience the highest risk of fracture.

How has the CWHR impacted your work?

For the first 3 years after moving from India, I was on an H1 visa, which does not allow you to qualify for an NIH grant. So during that time, I started developing a program and pursued smaller pilot grants to generate the data necessary for a future NIH grant. For any NIH grant, you need to have preliminary data to show why you're proposing this research and that you can do it — and that's where the seed grant funding from the Center for Women's Health Research was critical. With their grant, I was able to study bone density and quality among post-menopausal women with type 1 diabetes.

In April 2019, I was awarded an NIH Career Development grant (K23), which I will use over the next four years to expand on this research -- in particular looking at the differences in chemical composition, bone strength and collagen quality in patients with type 1 diabetes.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TYPE 1 & TYPE 2 DIABETES

In people with type 1 diabetes, the immune system mistakes the body's own healthy cells for foreign invaders. The immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas and after these beta cells are destroyed, the body is unable to produce insulin.

With type 2 diabetes, which is the most common form of diabetes and accounts for 95% of all cases, people struggle with insulin resistance, meaning that the body still produces insulin, but is unable to use it effectively. When you develop type 2 diabetes, your pancreas will try to compensate by producing more insulin. Because your body is unable to effectively use insulin, glucose will accumulate in your bloodstream.

Donor Spotlight

Nan Eklund

"We are on an upward trajectory, and I am excited to be part of it."



As an enthusiastic and highly effective leader, Nan Eklund has played a tremendous role in the growth of the Center for Women's Health Research (CWHR). Nan's strong voice, exuberance, and dedication to the mission of the CWHR has inspired many community leaders to become powerful advocates of women's health research. Nan commented, "Many people are not aware of the need for research in this area. It is important to them and their families."

Nan's interest in the CWHR stemmed from her own career and interests. "I've always been interested in the medical field," said Nan. Nan and her husband, Spike, both graduates and passionate supporters of the University of Colorado, have three children and seven grandchildren. Following the birth of their third child, Nan decided to attend the CU School of Medicine Child Health Associates-Physician Assistant's Program. In 1982, Nan graduated and served as a physician's assistant in Denver for 15 years. "I enjoyed working with families as they dealt with a variety of issues," said Nan.

When Nan first heard about the CWHR, she thought it would be one avenue to continue expanding her interest in health care. In 2009, Nan joined the CWHR Advisory Board, and she recently served as Board Chair. "Being involved with the Center has been a gift to me. I have made life-long friends. The ability to hear from researchers, not only from CU but also from around the world,

has enriched my life. I have a passion to learn, to bring women's health research to practitioners, and to share what I learn from the amazing CWHR researchers. I am still helping families, just in a different way," said Nan

In the ten years since Nan first joined the CWHR Advisory Board, the Center has grown into a nationally-recognized authority on women's health and sex differences research. The CWHR Annual Community Luncheon has also grown exponentially and now reaches hundreds of supporters in the community. Nan and Spike have been major Annual Luncheon sponsors for over ten years and have encouraged many individuals and corporations to support this educational event. In reflecting on her decade serving on the Advisory Board, Nan says, "I've witnessed the incredible dedication of Dr. Judy Regensteiner since the founding of the Center. I think the team has grown to be more confident and the researchers are making an even larger impact on women's health and sex differences. We are on an upward trajectory, and I am excited to be part of it."

Nan is looking forward to continue progress at the CWHR as it expands in importance in the field of medicine. "I am so proud of the Center and excited for the future of women's health research. I hope more will join in to support this important work."

ACCOLADES of our CWHR Faculty Researchers



Petter Bjornstad, MD



Kristen Boyle, PhD



*Kristen Demoruelle,
MD, PhD*



Teri Hernandez, RN, PhD



Sean Iwamoto, MD



Stacey Simon, PhD

Petter Bjornstad, MD

Received both a Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute Novel Method Development Grant and a Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Strategic Research Award. Dr. Bjornstad was also awarded the ADA Diabetes Care Distinguished Reviewer Award 2019 and the European Diabetic Nephropathy Study Group Best Communication Prize for a Clinical Study 2019.

Kristen Boyle, PhD

Promoted to Associate Professor of Pediatrics.

Kristen Demoruelle, MD, PhD

Received the University of Colorado Department of Medicine Outstanding Early Career Scholars Award for her project titled, "Neutrophil Extracellular Traps in the Mucosal Generation of RA-Related Autoimmunity." The goals of the project are to understand how bacteria influence specific cells, called neutrophils, that are involved in rheumatoid

arthritis (RA). The study will specifically look at how bacteria affect neutrophils associated with RA-related proteins being generated at mucosal sites, including the lung and genitourinary tract in women.

Teri Hernandez, RN, PhD

Appointed to Associate Dean of Research for the School of Nursing.

Sean Iwamoto, MD

Appointed to Assistant Professor, and received a micro grant from the Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute Clinical & Translational Research Centers to support his CWHR-funded project. Dr. Iwamoto is Principal Investigator for the project, which is focused on studying the effects of gender-affirming estradiol treatment on vascular health and metabolic profiles in transgender women. In addition, the UHealth Integrated Transgender Program, co-founded by Dr. Iwamoto, will be receiving a One Colorado Ally Award in August.

Stacey Simon, PhD

Received the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Strategic Research Agreement Award for her project for her project titled, "Sleep, Glycemic Control, and Insulin Resistance in Youth with Type 1 Diabetes." The goal of the project is to examine associations between sleep and circadian rhythms with insulin resistance and glycemic control in adolescents with type 1 diabetes.

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For every \$1 CWHR invests in seed grants, CWHR researchers receive \$47 in other funding principally from the NIH and other national funders. Thank you for fueling discovery in women's health and sex differences.

Healthy women, healthy world.



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Let's Talk:

Conversations about Women's Health

Pivotal Life Transitions

Presented by the Center for Women's Health Research

We encounter many challenging physical and emotional transitions across the lifespan. Our complicated, fluctuating hormones trigger physiological changes that push us into the next life stage. Although often viewed as a source of stress and anxiety, transitions can also be a source of invigoration and can open us to many new possibilities.

Tuesday, August 27, 2019

Please register by August 23, 2019 at www.cwhr.org. For more information, please call 303-724-9179 or email cwhr@ucdenver.edu.

