

News Release
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UAMS Researcher Awarded \$350,000 Fellowship for Behavioral Health Telemedicine Pilot Study

LITTLE ROCK — UAMS researcher Nickolas Zaller, Ph.D., recently was awarded a three-year, \$350,000 research fellowship for a new telehealth counseling pilot study in the West Memphis area for individuals on probation or parole who have behavioral health disorders.

The purpose of the study is to determine if providing counseling services through telemedicine to people on probation or parole can improve their behavioral health outcomes and reduce the frequency at which they commit new offenses and return to prison or jail.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recently awarded Zaller an Interdisciplinary Research Leader fellowship. His other two team members are Femina Varghese, Ph.D., a University of Central Arkansas associate professor of counseling psychology, and Ben Udoch, assistant director of Substance Use Treatment with Arkansas Community Corrections (ACC).

“We are developing and plan to implement a new telehealth counseling pilot project in the ACC West Memphis area office for individuals on probation or parole who have behavioral health disorders,” Zaller said. “The project will be the first of its kind to deliver telehealth-based counseling directly to probation or parole offices for folks who have very limited access to behavioral health services in their communities.”

Arkansas has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the country, Zaller said. One in 44 adults in Arkansas is under some form of correctional supervision, and many of them have become involved in the criminal justice system because of behavioral health problems.

UAMS Researcher Awarded \$350,000 Fellowship for Pilot Study

Page 2

“If we can find an effective way to deliver telemedicine services in conjunction with community corrections, and we can eventually do that across the state, we will have improved access to counseling, which is a crucial component of comprehensive behavioral health treatment,” Zaller said. “If they don’t get that support, the chances they will go back to prison are much higher.”

Zaller said leaving people on probation or parole with behavioral health issues untreated not only is a detriment to them but comes with significant risks to public safety as well as high social and financial costs.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; northwest Arkansas regional campus; statewide network of regional centers; and six institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging and Translational Research Institute. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses throughout the state, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).



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