

UAMS News Bureau

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UAMS Establishes Center for Dietary Supplements Research

LITTLE ROCK — A new center to provide regulatory agencies, industry and the public with credible information and assessments related to the safety of dietary supplements has been established by the colleges of Public Health and Pharmacy at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

The Center for Dietary Supplements Research is co-directed by Bill Gurley, Ph.D., and Igor Koturbash, M.D., Ph.D., and will provide expert opinions, risk communication, and professional and educational services related to the safety of dietary supplements.

Gurley is a professor and vice chair of the Department of Pharmaceutical Services in the College of Pharmacy and chairs the UAMS Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Gurley has been conducting research into the safety of dietary supplements for more than 20 years.

Koturbash is an associate professor and vice chair of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health in the College of Public Health.

About 70 percent of adults in the United States consume dietary supplements and 20 percent of those include herbal dietary supplements.

“Unlike conventional medications, dietary supplements are not required to undergo pre-market approval testing for safety or efficacy,” said Koturbash, “Thus, the potential for harm from such products is not evident until the public has consumed them.”

In recent years, there has been an increase in adverse effects from these supplements. Over the last decade alone, there’s been a significant increase— 7% -20% —in liver injury from herbal dietary supplements.

Dietary supplements marketed for weight loss and exercise performance enhancement are of particular concern as many of these products have been linked to severe heart and liver damage. A number of these products have already been taken off the market. One

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of them, OxyELITE Pro – New Formula (OEP-NF), a dietary supplement linked to a series of severe liver injuries, was the subject of research recently conducted by Gurley and Koturbash.

“These facts make it evident that more regulatory oversight is needed for these products,” said Gurley. “It is likely that the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act will soon undergo revisions to address the need for pre-market safety assessments of these products.”

This center will be a resource for information and technical expertise on these products, while at the same time working with industry experts, regulatory agencies, researchers and the public to deliver evidence-based, accurate information.

“The center specializes in various critical issues regarding single- and multi-component dietary supplements, from conducting pre-clinical toxicological safety assessments to generating expert reports and scientific publications” Gurley said.

The center will be housed in the College of Public Health and will maintain three core units – a Pharmacological Core, a Toxicological Core, and an Administrative Support Core.

Gurley will lead the Pharmacological Core and Koturbash will lead the Toxicological Core. Others involved in the center include:

- Mitch McGill, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health in the College of Public Health, will provide expertise on hepatotoxicity, or drug-induced liver injury.
- Marjan Boerma, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences in the College of Pharmacy, will provide expertise on cardiotoxicity, or drug-induced damage to the heart muscle.
- Joseph Su, Ph.D., professor in the Epidemiology Department in the College of Public Health and co-leader of the Cancer Prevention and Population Sciences Program in the UAMS Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, will provide expertise on the epidemiology of dietary supplements.

For more information about the center, visit <https://publichealth.uams.edu/cdsr/>.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven 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, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. 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, 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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