

**UAMS News Bureau**

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**Blue & You Foundation Gives \$147,000 to UAMS AR-IMPACT to Help Physicians Fight Opioid Use Statewide**

LITTLE ROCK — A \$147,000 grant from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas will allow the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) to expand a program to fight opioid addiction around the state through use of its digital health network.

The announcement was made Feb. 20 at UAMS by the Blue & You Foundation, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield’s charitable arm. The money will help support UAMS AR-IMPACT, a program that connects physicians to a UAMS team by live video to discuss how to effectively manage their patients’ chronic pain and reduce dependency on opioids.

The grant will be used to expand the service to the UAMS Regional Campuses around the state using the live streaming network of the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation.

“The Blue & You Foundation is pleased to continue its support of the AR-IMPACT program,” said Patrick O’Sullivan, the foundation’s executive director. “AR-IMPACT has quickly established itself as an essential component to helping Arkansas physicians and others deal with a nationwide problem. We’re proud to have UAMS as a prominent partner in helping improve the health of Arkansans.”

The Arkansas Improving Multidisciplinary Pain Care Treatment (AR-IMPACT) program was launched in 2018 through a partnership between UAMS, the Arkansas Medical Society, the Arkansas Academy of Family Medicine, the Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas State Medical Board, Arkansas Blue Cross, and the state drug director.

“UAMS is tackling the opioid epidemic head-on, in a way that no one else in the country is doing that we’re aware of,” said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA. “This brings the combined experience of a multidisciplinary team of experts directly to UAMS

locations across the entire state. I want to thank the Blue & You Foundation for its continued support of this groundbreaking program.”

Corey Hayes, Pharm.D., Ph.D., program coordinator, also thanked the Blue & You Foundation.

“The overarching goal is to manage chronic pain using fewer opioids,” Hayes said. “Our multidisciplinary team will provide consultation on complex, chronic pain patients and provide concrete recommendations back to the attending provider.”

The AR-IMPACT team includes Hayes, a clinical pharmacist; Johnathan Goree, M.D., a pain management physician and assistant professor in the Department of Anesthesiology; Shona Ray-Griffith, M.D., an addiction psychiatrist and assistant professor in the Departments of Psychiatry and Obstetrics & Gynecology; Leah Tobey, D.P.T., a physical therapist; and Masil George, M.D., a primary care physician who specializes in geriatrics and palliative care.

The video conferences are helpful particularly for rural health care providers, who do not always have access to larger clinics and hospitals for consultations or referrals. Clinicians can attend live sessions or review recordings of the presentations and discussions online. The end goal is the same: to effectively manage chronic pain and reduce dependency on opioids.

Arkansas ranks second in the nation for its opioid prescribing rate with an average of 102.1 prescriptions per 100 people, according to an annual report released in 2018 by the Arkansas prescription drug monitoring program.

As of December, AR-IMPACT had issued 2,347 continuing medication education credits to 785 clinicians over nearly two years. Participating clinicians come from 65 Arkansas counties and 23 states. Of Arkansas counties with extremely high opioid prescription rates – more than three times the national average – nearly two-thirds have clinicians participating in AR-IMPACT.

Recent data from Arkansas’ prescription drug monitoring program has shown a measurable decline in opioid prescriptions, although there is more work to do.

Arkansas residents received more than 3.2 million opioid prescriptions in 2018, according to the program’s annual report. Between 2016 and 2018, the total number of opioid pills sold in Arkansas decreased by 21% -- from 236 million to 186 million.

Arkansas Blue Cross established the Blue & You Foundation in 2001. Since then, it has awarded more than \$36 million to nonprofits and governmental agencies for 1,922 health-improvement programs in 248 communities and in all 75 Arkansas counties. This grant is the 29<sup>th</sup> that Blue & You has presented to UAMS over the years, O’Sullivan said, for a combined total of \$3.2 million.

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. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. 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](http://www.uams.edu) or [www.uamshealth.com](http://www.uamshealth.com). Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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