

UAMS News Bureau

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News Release
Sept. 9, 2020

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UAMS Researcher Earns National Recognition, Grant Funding for Reproductive Health Study

LITTLE ROCK – A University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) researcher studying how biological changes in the ovary due to aging can influence reproduction has been awarded a two-year, \$200,000 grant from the Global Consortium for Reproductive Longevity and Equality.

Zijing Zhang, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow working under Michael Birrer, M.D., Ph.D., vice chancellor and director of the UAMS Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, received the Consortium's Postdoctoral Scholar Award. It recognizes imaginative junior scientists leading the way for the upcoming generation of reproductive aging researchers.

She was one of eight such Postdoctoral Scholar Award recipients and one of 22 researchers nationally to receive a portion of a \$7.4 million grant, announced in August.

In addition to Birrer, co-mentor is Lynae Brayboy, M.D., recently named chief medical officer of Berlin-based digital health company Clue and a specialist in reproductive endocrinology and fertility.

"I'm very grateful for the support of my proposed project, which seeks to better understand how immune cells might influence the biological processes in the ovary and the ovarian tissue environment during aging," said Zhang.

Previous research by Zhang demonstrated differences in a population of immune cells, called macrophages, as ovaries age. Low-grade chronic inflammation in the ovaries has also been associated with aging. Because macrophages play a role in inflammatory reactions, Zhang hopes to explore what role they play in reproductive health as ovaries start to deteriorate and ultimately cease to function during aging.

The mission of the consortium is to support breakthrough research on reproductive aging through funding, training, infrastructure, programs to support women in science, and a collaborative intellectual network. The network will enable grantees and all consortium members to pursue support and collaboration across multidisciplinary approaches and

institutions, thereby establishing a foundation on which to grow a diverse and sustainable research ecosystem.

“The consortium unites two disciplines – reproductive science and geroscience – in an unprecedented way to investigate an area of biology that has tangible societal and clinical implications,” said Jennifer Garrison, Ph.D., consortium faculty director and an assistant professor at the Buck Institute for Research on Aging. “Our goal is to foster truly bold, innovative scientists with the potential to transform the field.”

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 or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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