



ESHELMAN SCHOOL  
OF PHARMACY

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## **UAMS College of Pharmacy Professor a Principal Investigator on \$1.8 Million, NIH-Funded COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Project**

LITTLE ROCK — University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) College of Pharmacy professor Geoffrey M. Curran, Ph.D., is a principal investigator on a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded project aimed at addressing COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in rural areas.

The project, titled “Addressing COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy in Rural Community Pharmacies Reducing Disparities Through an Implementation Science Approach,” has received \$1.8 million in funding over three years from the NIH. Delesha Carpenter, Ph.D., MSPH, associate professor and interim chair of the Division of Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy at the University of North Carolina Eshelman School of Pharmacy, is the contact principal investigator.

Curran is a professor of pharmacy practice in the College of Pharmacy and director of the UAMS Center for Implementation Research. In April, UAMS invested him in the inaugural Endowed Chair in Pharmacy Practice. He has additional faculty appointments in the College of Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry and the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health’s Department of Health Policy and Management. He also is a research health scientist at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System.

Curran is an internationally recognized thought leader in implementation science, which is the study of how best to support adoption of evidence-based practices. His highly cited work on research design and methods has significantly influenced the field.

The project will examine sustainable ways to support rural pharmacists as they implement COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy counseling practices to mitigate the negative impact of the virus in underserved rural populations. Conversations about COVID-19 vaccines can be sensitive and politically charged, so the team is working with rural pharmacists to identify the methods that work best for addressing hesitancy in the pharmacy setting.

The team believes the grant will go a long way to help reduce vaccine hesitancy in rural communities.

“I see this grant as a culmination of an idea we have had for a number of years — build a network of rural community pharmacies and then leverage their ideas, talent and commitment to move pharmacy practice forward,” said Curran. “As researchers we can do this by conducting large implementation-focused studies in partnership with these pharmacists. With the funding of this first R01 capitalizing on the infrastructure of RURAL-CP (the first multi-state rural pharmacy network in the country), the idea is becoming a reality.”

Research shows that COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is higher among rural populations, who have some of the lowest vaccination rates in the nation. Community pharmacists, as trusted and accessible health care professionals in rural areas, are well-positioned to provide COVID-19 vaccinations and address vaccine hesitancy in their communities, Carpenter said.

“The communication intervention that we are developing is guided by the expertise of the pharmacists and patients who work in rural areas. They are the drivers of the intervention’s content,” Carpenter said. “For this reason, we believe the intervention will be salient to people living in rural areas and not sound like canned messaging that was developed by people who don’t understand the concerns of patients in these communities.”

A major goal of the project is to test how well virtual implementation helps pharmacists deliver vaccine counseling, and to what degree that enables more patients to receive the vaccine. The team will also perform a cost assessment and determine how sustainable these methods can be.

The UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy, based in Chapel Hill, N.C., with a campus in Asheville, N.C., is an internationally recognized leader in pharmacy practice, education, and research. They develop leaders in pharmacy education, pharmacy practice, and pharmaceutical sciences who make a difference on human health worldwide. The School is recognized as the No.1 school of pharmacy in the U.S by *U.S. News and World Report* and is ranked No.6 in the 2021 QS World University Rankings for the Best World Universities in Pharmacy and Pharmacology. For more information, visit [pharmacy.unc.edu](http://pharmacy.unc.edu) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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