

UAMS News Bureau

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**Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas
Awards UAMS 3 Grants To Improve Mental Health Treatment**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) recently received three grants from Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield’s Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas aimed at strengthening programs treating Arkansans with mental illness.

Jessica Coker, M.D., an associate professor in the UAMS College of Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry and the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, is the principal investigator in MAPS (Mental Health and Addiction Peer Support), a peer-support model for co-occurring substance use disorders within acute psychiatric units.

Supported by a \$122,389 grant from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, Coker, along with Abigail Richison, M.D., will integrate a peer navigator assigned to the inpatient units at the UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute (PRI). The peer navigator will work specifically with patients dealing with substance use disorders.

“We’re hoping this will support our overall goal in creating a dual diagnosis unit at PRI that treats patients with both mental health and addiction problems,” said Coker.

A grant worth \$149,984 was awarded to Nikki Edge, Ph.D., a professor in the College of Medicine’s Department of Family and Preventive Medicine. Edge is project director of a program designed to test a new depression intervention for the parents of young children.

Working with physicians in UAMS’ family medicine clinics, Edge and her team will help the medical professionals treating women with children between the ages of 18 months and 6 years of age to recognize how symptoms of depression can impact the whole family.

“We want them to think about both the parents and the kids, because symptoms of depression can make it harder for parents to do the things they might normally do with their children, like reading, playing or having consistent routines,” said Edge.

A mother who screens positive for depression will be invited to participate in Edge's program, receiving parenting tips and support from a mental health professional as well as care from their family medicine physicians.

"Most physicians understand and carefully watch for postpartum depression, but after that it can fall off people's radar. We're trying to pick up where typical health care sometimes falls off," Edge said.

A grant worth \$90,230 was awarded to Tisha Deen, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and the director of Behavioral Health Integration for primary care and population health services, to implement psychiatric consulting using a collaborative care model in UAMS' primary care clinics. The program will allow patients to receive psychiatric care through their primary care team in collaboration with a UAMS mental health care provider.

A lack of mental health care in rural areas in Arkansas, which ranks 40th in the nation in terms of prevalence of mental health problems and access to mental health treatment, led to Deen's concept of providing support to primary care physicians.

"We're going to work with behavioral health care managers to help them identify patients who need help with anxiety and depression," said Deen, who will be training the behavioral health care managers and primary care teams how to work effectively with a UAMS psychiatrist and provide care to patients with psychiatric needs.

"We're trying to help physicians treat patients who do not need necessarily need intensive psychiatric care, but are also cases that more complex than traditional primary care providers would be comfortable treating on their own," said Deen, adding that the program fills a gap in care that exists in rural Arkansas.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a 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. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,240 students, 913 medical residents and fellows, and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).