

UAMS News Bureau

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**UAMS Cancer Institute Awards 4 Researchers
with Grants for Breast Cancer Research**

LITTLE ROCK — The Arkansas Breast Cancer Research Program (ABCRP), a statewide fund administered by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, has awarded \$400,000 in grants to support research focused on improving prevention, detection, and treatment options to ultimately alleviate the burden of breast cancer.

Established through the Arkansas Breast Cancer Act of 1997, this marks the 29th year of funding innovative research. Each year, the program funds several, two-year \$50,000 pilot awards and one, two-year \$250,000 investigator award. The program is open to faculty from all institutions of higher learning in Arkansas.

“Research is critical for improving the quality of cancer care and reducing the cancer burden for the state,” said Michael Birrer, M.D., Ph.D., vice chancellor of UAMS and director of the Cancer Institute. “Through the Arkansas Breast Cancer Research Program, we are able to support promising studies that could lead to better outcomes for patients.”

Amit K. Tiwari, Ph.D., professor of pharmaceutical sciences, associate dean of research and graduate studies, and director of graduate programs with the UAMS College of Pharmacy, has been awarded the two-year Principal Investigator Award of \$250,000. A board-certified toxicologist, Tiwari leads the Cancer and Systems Therapeutics program, focusing on clinical strategies for therapy-resistant cancers. This award will help fund his project, entitled “Drp1-Targeted Immunogenic Cell Death to Overcome Chemoresistant TNBC.”

Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) is the hardest form of breast cancer to treat, accounting for about 25% of breast cancer deaths. Because it does not respond to hormone therapy or HER2-targeted drugs, chemotherapy and immunotherapy are often used. However, advanced TNBC tumors frequently become resistant to both treatments, leaving patients with very few options.

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Tiwari's study aims to overcome these barriers by testing the drug TPH104, a compound developed and patented by his laboratory. Chemotherapy relies on a process that many advanced tumors have learned to evade, leaving them undetected. TPH104 kills cancer cells in a different way that may help the immune system recognize these tumors, so they can be targeted.

The work under this grant will confirm how TPH104 works in living tumors and activates the immune system and will hopefully be used as preliminary data for larger funding opportunities.

"Patients with advanced triple-negative breast cancer often have very few options if standard treatments stop working," said Tiwari. "Our goal is to test an approach that will still work when chemotherapy fails and potentially help patients who don't currently benefit from immunotherapy."

Three additional UAMS researchers were awarded \$50,000 pilot awards. They are:

Donald J. Johann Jr., M.D., M.Sc., professor in the College of Medicine Department of Biomedical Informatics, and scientific director in the UAMS Genomics Facility. Funding will support his project entitled "Approaching Virtual Clinical Trials by Unlocking Archival FFPE Breast Cancer Specimens: Demonstration of Analytical Validity."

Zhiqiang Qin, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor in the College of Medicine Department of Pathology. Funding will support his project entitled "Identification of SPG21 as a New Oncogene in Triple Negative Breast Cancer."

Shelbie D. Stahr, Ph.D., MPH, assistant professor in the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health Department of Environmental Health Sciences. Funding will support her project entitled "Environmental Metal Exposure and Breast Cancer Risk: Integrating Geospatial and Biomarker-Based Assessment in Arkansas Women."

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 the Institute for Community 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 3,553 students and 1,030 medical residents and fellows, and two dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with about 12,000 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](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).