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## July 2014 ACTS Connection


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### ACTS Trainee Profile: Megha Ramaswamy, PhD, MPH

Megha Ramaswamy, PhD, MPH  
Assistant Professor of Preventive Medicine and Public Health University of Kansas School of Medicine



At the end of my KL2 award (funded by our institution's Clinical and Translational Science Award), I received \$1.5 million from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to implement a cervical cancer prevention program among women in jail and study the long-term determinants of cancer risk. This new project extends the work from my KL2, which was concerned with the social context in which women leaving jails seek out sexual health care.

I have worked with women and men in jails for almost a decade studying the forces that structure social and health risk. I started working with young men in jails during my PhD training in Sociology at City University of New York, The Graduate Center. While a PhD student, I sought out teaching opportunities in public health, since I had already received an MPH at University of Kansas (KU) School of Medicine. The faculty member who hired me to teach, now my long-time mentor, said that in order to make up for the low graduate student teaching pay, he'd be happy to take me onto one of his research projects. I picked an HIV risk reduction intervention he was conducting with Black and Latino young men at Rikers, New York City's main jail. I've been doing that work ever since.

Since finishing my PhD and joining the faculty at KU in 2009, I've conducted research in conjunction with the KL2, and two separate studies funded by an institutional American Cancer Society grant and an NCI R03. The latter two studies paved the way directly for the current NCI R01, starting with a needs assessment of cervical cancer risk, and then an exploration of women's experiences with cancer screening and follow-up. The new project attempts to actually intervene and help build the women's knowledge, beliefs, and self-efficacy around cervical cancer prevention, given the challenges of their ongoing criminal justice involvement and difficult life circumstances.

In the next phase of my career, I hope to use my research to drive policy changes that really impact the lives of women and men who move through the justice system – always recognizing the complex social, policy, and structural forces that predict health.

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## Grant Opportunities

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## News from ACTS

### New Section – Trainee Profiles

We would like to profile notable achievements of trainees and mentors of member institutions for a new regular feature in our newsletter. If you have suggestions for individuals you wish us to feature, please let us know by contacting Tristan Wood at [twood@acts-science.org](mailto:twood@acts-science.org) with information including name, institution, and email address of the trainee or mentor. We will seek permission from the individual and ask for a photograph to accompany the profile, which should be limited to 250 words.

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### Washington Update

Much of the goodwill and cooperation stemming from the two-year budget deal struck by Congress last year has evaporated into the 2014 mid-term election atmosphere. Appropriators thought they were on a roll, but are losing hope to complete action on many fiscal year 2015 appropriations measures before the October 1st beginning of the fiscal year.

Earlier this spring, the House cranked out several of the 12 annual appropriations bills, and it seemed the Senate would be equally productive. A series of recent skirmishes in both chambers has slowed progress on these bills considerably. It appears that the appropriations bills have become such fertile ground for politically-motivated amendments ahead of the November election, leaders in both the House and Senate have become very guarded about moving forward on most of the bills.

The House Labor-HHS-Education (LHHS) funding bill has yet to be considered. Subcommittee Chairman Jack Kingston (R-GA) is engaged in a prolonged Senate primary/runoff and has not been able to dedicate much time to his House duties. In the Senate, the LHHS Subcommittee marked-up a draft bill in early June, but full committee action scheduled for later that week was abruptly postponed with no notice about further consideration. Other appropriations bills are in similar circumstances, with no clear path forward.

This slow progress on appropriations bills, paired with politics and a dwindling number of congressional workdays ahead of the election, increases the likelihood of Congress passing a continuing resolution (CR) for most federal agencies from October 1st until after the election. Such a short-term CR would put agencies on hold until mid-November and allow lawmakers to deal with the funding bills after the election in a lame-duck session; or if the election results in a dramatically different composition of the House or Senate, the CR could be extended that would allow the incoming 114th Congress to finish off the bills early next calendar year.

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### The ACTS Connection Editors Want Your Feedback

ACTS Connection Editor, Dr. Satish R. Raj, MD, MSCI, and Associate Editor, Dr. Quinn Wells, MD, PharmD, MSCI, are interested in hearing about ways that *ACTS Connection* could provide even more value to our readers.

Please feel free to email Dr. Raj or Dr. Wells with your comments or suggestions.

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## Translational Science News

### NCATS Researchers Propose Innovative Approach to Test Drugs in Rare Diseases

A recent study from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) examined treatments targeting common molecular mechanisms across multiple rare diseases. Researchers note it is more efficient to group patients whose rare diseases are caused by the same type of genetic abnormality and treat them all with a drug that is designed to address that problem. For instance, several rare diseases are caused by a type of genetic change called a nonsense mutation, while another type of mutation called a missense mutation can cause abnormal protein folding. Either type of mutation can result in cystic fibrosis, Gaucher disease, or Tay-Sachs disease. These diseases differ in their characteristics and affected genes, but many people with the conditions have one of the two types of genetic mutations. As a result, drugs that correct missense or nonsense mutations could be tested in all three diseases. This means that each candidate drug for a specific type of mutation could be tested in a single clinical trial for all three diseases. To demonstrate the feasibility of this approach, scientists at 26 U.S. hospitals are conducting a treatment study of four pediatric cancers to test a drug targeting the ALK gene product, which is being undertaken as part of the Children's Oncology Group supported by the National Cancer Institute. The NCATS study is published in *Nature Biotechnology*.

From "NCATS Researchers Propose Innovative Approach to Test Drugs in Rare Diseases"

NCATS e-Newsletter (06/26/14)

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#### **NCATS: Cooperative Research and Development Agreement and Licensing Opportunity for Small Molecule Inhibitors of the Human USP1/UAF1 Complex(1) ...**

The National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) and the University of Delaware are seeking Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) partners to collaborate in the final stages of lead optimization, evaluation, and preclinical development of a novel series of selective and potent small-molecule inhibitors of the human USP1/UAF1 complex(1) for the treatment of cancer. Interested potential CRADA partners will receive detailed information about the project after signing a confidential disclosure agreement (CDA) with NCATS and University of Delaware. Interested candidate partners must submit a statement of interest and capability to the NCATS point of contact before July 24, 2014, for consideration.

From "NCATS: Cooperative Research and Development Agreement and Licensing Opportunity for Small Molecule Inhibitors of the Human USP1/UAF1 Complex(1) ..."  
*Federal Register* (06/24/14)

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#### **Science Translational Medicine Focuses on Emergence of Consortia in Medical Research**

A study published in *Science Translational Medicine* found that in the past decade, there has been a rapid appearance of consortia in biomedical research. The study pointed out that this trend is a result of the rising need for broad-based partnerships to address shared scientific, regulatory, and reimbursement hurdles. Mark Lim, associate director of medical innovation at FasterCures and author of the study, assessed characteristics of 369 consortia in various countries. He discovered that these efforts provide a safe harbor for participants because they ensure transparency and equitable access to any outputs. Lim found that this type of collaboration is uniquely formed to allow for careful monitoring, course correction, and cross-sector validation in the development of new research tools and resources. This study builds upon FasterCures' Consortia-pedia program focused on the model of research collaboration-by-consortium and its effect on medical research and development.

From "Science Translational Medicine Focuses on Emergence of Consortia in Medical Research"

*Marketwired* (06/26/14)

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#### **NIH and NSF Collaborate to Accelerate Biomedical Research Innovations Into the Marketplace**

The National Science Foundation's Innovation Corps (I-Corps) program is working with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to help NIH-funded researchers evaluate their scientific discoveries for commercial potential. The overall goal is accelerating biomedical innovations into applied health technologies. A pilot called I-Corps at NIH has been customized for biomedical research. Academic researchers and entrepreneurs with Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Phase I awards will be eligible to apply to the program. The nine-week I-Corps Teams curriculum features instructors who work closely with teams of researchers to help them explore potential markets for their federally funded innovations. The I-Corps at NIH program will be taught by instructors who have biomedical business knowledge. "I-Corps will help teach NIH-funded start-ups how to build scalable business models around new technologies they're developing for the detection and treatment of disease," says Michael Weingarten, director, NCI SBIR Development Center. The NIH institutes taking part in the pilot program are the National Cancer Institute; the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke; and the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences.

From "NIH and NSF Collaborate to Accelerate Biomedical Research Innovations Into the Marketplace"

*NIH News* (06/18/14)

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#### **View From Poland: Building Blocks for Translational Medicine Are in Place But the Disconnect Between Research and Industry Persists**

Although the basic elements for building translational medicine in Poland exist, there remains a deep disconnect between research and industry, and Helix BioPharma CEO Robert Verhagen discusses what must be done for collaboration to thrive. What is required is "this component of communications between industry and academia in order to understand what the [project] goals are," he says. Verhagen stresses that the academic researcher's job is to publish and innovate, while the company's job is to move forward after publication; he also says the company should always manage the intellectual property (IP) side of things. "I'd prefer to manage the IP and let the researchers do the work," he notes. Verhagen suggests Poland's relatively young biotech industry is a key factor in the academic-industrial disconnect, while a lack of access to substantial funding also plays a major role. He says Poland has already built up a significant body of experienced people and scientific research, but the money and the collaborative relationships are still wanting. "If the government can make academia and industry to work together through a flow of money or different types of regulation, or support in other ways, that would be great," Verhagen concludes.

From "View From Poland: Building Blocks for Translational Medicine Are in Place But the Disconnect Between Research and Industry Persists"

*Science Business* (06/25/14) Zubascu, Florin

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#### **Clinical Researchers Dip Their Toe Into Social Media**

Clinical researchers' use of social media has been evaluated by a study by the Tufts Center for the Study of Drug Development. In spite of patient privacy and similar concerns that have hounded pharmaceutical marketing initiatives, Tufts researchers determined that most of the surveyed companies have been using social media for clinical research over the past four years. In addition, one-fifth of the polled biotechs and pharmaceutical firms directly contacted patients via social media, while others

used third-parties or passive outreach like banner ads on social media sites to draw patients. Most of the surveyed groups recruited patients for clinical trials using Facebook, patient communities, YouTube, and Twitter, and they said approximately 11 percent of clinical trials included a social media recruitment element. None of the groups ask patients for feedback on trial design or input in general, even though most said they believe "input from social media communities would greatly improve the feedback they receive on program planning and protocol design feasibility." A companion poll indicated patients would be more than happy to share information, with 24 out of 27 surveyed patients thinking clinical research sponsors should use social media to ask patients about case report forms, and 22 saying they should be solicited for input about protocols and scheduling.

From "Clinical Researchers Dip Their Toe Into Social Media"  
*Medical Marketing & Media (06/19/14) Weinstein, Deborah*

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#### **Consortium Aims to Improve Drug Discovery**

A new organization, the Strategic Pharma-Academic Research Consortium for Translational Medicine (SPARC), has been established by the Indiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute (CTSI). SPARC is a \$60 million National Institutes of Health-funded collaboration involving Indiana University, Purdue University, and the University of Notre Dame, and inaugural members include the Indiana CTSI and several universities with academic medical centers supported by NIH Clinical and Translational Science Awards, as well as Eli Lilly and Takeda Pharmaceuticals International. SPARC will initially focus on advancing research on autoimmune diseases, but potential other projects could include identifying target mechanisms for new medicines or advancing the emerging field of personalized medicine. The consortium's industrial partners will provide financial sponsorship to the projects, which will be selected by an independent governance council that includes equal representation for each member. "SPARC will provide a platform for research projects that build upon the unique strengths of academia and industry," says Anantha Shekhar, director of the Indiana CTSI and associate vice president for university clinical affairs at Indiana University. "This new organization will combine the best aspects of both groups, in both basic discovery and compound development, to unlock a new model for innovation."

From "Consortium Aims to Improve Drug Discovery"  
*Inside Indiana Business (06/10/14) Ober, Andy*

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#### **PCORnet: An Update on Our Blueprint for Transforming Health Research**

At the recent Health Datapalooza in Washington, D.C., representatives of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) discussed their progress on PCORnet, the National Patient-Centered Clinical Research Network. More than \$100 million has been invested in PCORnet, which is being developed by PCORI and 29 research network partners to form the infrastructure needed to facilitate clinical outcomes research. When fully operational, PCORnet is expected to tap clinical data from more than 10 million individuals to enable a broad range of studies. To ensure a transparent process, PCORnet policies are being published on the network's Web site as they are approved. An initial version of a common data model has been developed to create frequently used variables that could be applicable to future studies. Stakeholders also are addressing the mechanisms required to ensure a patient-centered approach to governance, such as how health data can be used to advance critically needed research while ensuring patient privacy. Eleven task forces have been formed to address key areas of the research process, including ethical and regulatory considerations, clinical trial design, and embedding research into healthcare operations, as well as creating a venue for exchanging ideas and incubating solutions to be used across the network.

From "PCORnet: An Update on Our Blueprint for Transforming Health Research"  
*Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (06/06/2014) Greene, Sarah*

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## **Grant Opportunities**

#### **Mentored Research Scientist Development Award (K01)**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has issued a funding opportunity announcement for Mentored Research Scientist Development Award (K01). The award aims to provide support and 75 percent "protected time" for an intensive, supervised (mentored) career development experience in occupational health and safety research leading to research independence. The goal of the award is to help ensure the availability of an adequate numbers of highly trained scientists and educators to address occupational safety and health critical issues. Applicants may request a budget for direct costs of up to \$100,000 per year, for up to three years of support. Applications for the next cycle are due by Oct. 12, 2014.

From "Mentored Research Scientist Development Award (K01)"  
*NIH Grants (06/26/14)*

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#### **Neurosurgery Research and Education Foundation Research Grants and Young Clinical Investigator Awards**

The Neurosurgery Research and Education Foundation (NREF) offers funding for studies in basic, translational, and patient-oriented clinical research for investigators in North America via two neurosurgical research grant programs annually. The NREF Research Fellowship, which provides \$40,000 for one year, offers training for neurosurgeons who are preparing for academic careers as clinician investigators. The NREF Young Clinician Investigator Award, which also provides \$40,000 for one year, supports junior faculty who are pursuing careers as clinical investigators. Applicants from all neurosurgical areas of focused practice are encouraged, and applications are due by Jan. 15, 2015.

From "Neurosurgery Research and Education Foundation Research Grants and Young Clinical Investigator Awards"  
*Neurosurgery Research & Education Foundation (06/26/14)*

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#### **Prader-Willi Syndrome Association Research Grant Program**

The Prader-Willi Syndrome Association (PWSA) is providing funding for scientific researchers working to help those with Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS). PWSA is offering up to \$75,000 per project for research aimed at discovering and developing treatments, cures, and technologies for those with PWS. The group, aiming to fast-track better treatment for the syndrome, will support research-based translational grants or those with high promise for translating basic biomedical knowledge to clinical application. PWSA's 2014 research priorities are obesity, behavioral/psychological issues, respiratory and gastrointestinal complications, and other complications of PWS. The grant application is due by Oct. 7, 2014.

From "Prader-Willi Syndrome Association Research Grant Program"  
*Prader-Willi Syndrome Association (06/26/14)*

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#### Children's Tumor Foundation Schwannomatosis Awards

The Children's Tumor Foundation is offering funding for research into Schwannomatosis, the rarest form of neurofibromatosis. The Schwannomatosis Awards will be for up to \$75,000 and may be requested for research in any area of relevance to advancing schwannomatosis research in the following priority areas: genetics, cell biology and translational research, and clinical research. Applications are due by Sept. 1, 2014.

From "Children's Tumor Foundation Schwannomatosis Awards"  
*Children's Tumor Foundation (06/26/14)*

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#### Angelman Syndrome Foundation Joseph E. Wagstaff Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant

The Angelman Syndrome Foundation is funding a grant for research on the clinical and basic science aspects of the Angelman syndrome (AS). The Joseph E. Wagstaff Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant aims to promote AS-related research in a young investigator, support novel or innovative research initiatives, and further support and encourage existing AS-related research. The grant is for \$55,000 annually for two years, including \$4,000 for educational and scientific expenses. Applications are due by Oct. 1, 2014.

From "Angelman Syndrome Foundation Joseph E. Wagstaff Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant"  
*Angelman Syndrome Foundation (06/26/14)*

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#### Amyloidosis Foundation Grant Program

The Amyloidosis Foundation (AF) is offering funding for two grant programs in an effort to promote interest in amyloid research. The 2014 Junior Research Grant Program supports basic scientific research and translational research. The AF will provide \$50,000 for the direct support of the recipient's work in the ward year, which begins Jan. 1, 2015. The 2014 Senior Research program also supports scientific research and translational research, and it will provide \$100,000 for the direct support of the recipient's work. Applications for both grant programs are due by Aug. 31, 2014.

From "Amyloidosis Foundation Grant Program"  
*Amyloidosis Foundation (06/26/14)*

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