

## FY 2020 Awards and Prestigious Appointments

- On September 17, 2019, the National Cancer Institute announced that **CPRIT Scholar Patrick Sung, D.Phil.**, received its highly competitive “Outstanding Investigator Award.” Dr. Sung, a professor in the Department of Biochemistry at The University of Texas Health Sciences Center at San Antonio and Structural Biology and associate dean for research in the Long School of Medicine, is a leading expert on BRCA1 and BRCA2 cancer biology. He is the first UT Health San Antonio faculty member to receive this prestigious NCI award. The grant provides \$6.1 million in funding through 2026 and recognizes researchers with august track records, elite-level scientific impact, and ascending career trajectories and research goals. UT Health San Antonio recruited Dr. Sung from Yale in 2019 with the support of a \$6 million CPRIT Established Investigator Award (RR180029).
- The Susan G. Komen Foundation presented Baylor College of Medicine **CPRIT Scholar Matthew Ellis, B.Sc., M.B., B.Chir., Ph.D.**, with the “2019 Brinker Award for Scientific Distinction in Clinical Research” on October 3, 2019. Komen honored Dr. Ellis, professor of medicine and cellular and molecular biology, director of the Lester and Sue Smith Breast Center, and associate director for translational research at the Dan L. Duncan Cancer Center, for his seminal contributions in understanding the genomics of breast cancer and translating this knowledge to the clinic to improve the efficacy of breast cancer treatment. His work to define the genomic landscape of breast cancer, drug resistance mechanisms and biomarkers for breast cancer prognosis, coupled with his pioneering research in the pre-surgical treatment of breast cancer, has resulted in significant advances that are paving the way for more personalized treatments for breast cancer.

When Komen’s Chief Scientific Advisor, Dr. George Sledge, Jr., announced the award, he remarked, “Dr. Ellis is one of the great translational researchers of our time in breast cancer. His studies of the biology of breast cancer performed in the neoadjuvant setting have changed our understanding of the hormonal therapy of breast cancer.” Baylor College of Medicine brought Dr. Ellis to Texas from Washington University in 2014 with the help of a CPRIT Established Investigators recruitment award.

- **CPRIT grantee James Brugarolas, M.D., Ph.D.**, (RP101075, RP130603, RP130172, RP160440) and The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center Kidney Cancer Program received the “Leaders in Clinical Excellence Program Development” award. When announcing the award on October 24, 2019, UT Southwestern President Dr. Daniel Podolsky explained that it “celebrates the innovation and collaboration that

are foundational to the success of UT Southwestern Medical Center. It recognizes a group of clinical faculty and staff who have partnered to create, develop, and sustain an innovative program that significantly advances our ability to improve the care received by our patients.” Dr. Brugarolas leads the NCI Kidney Cancer SPORE Program at UT Southwestern.

- The American Association of Cancer Institutes (AACI) elected **CPRIT Scholars Carlos Arteaga, M.D., (RR170061) and Gail Eckhardt, M.D., (RR160093)** to serve on AACI’s Board of Directors for three-year terms beginning October 2019. The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center appointed Dr. Arteaga director of the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center in 2017. Dr. Eckhardt is the inaugural director of the LIVESTRONG Cancer Institutes of the Dell Medical School at The University of Texas at Austin, also appointed in 2017. AACI represents 98 premier academic and freestanding cancer research centers in the U.S. and Canada dedicated to reducing the burden of cancer.
- The National Cancer Institute’s Biden Moonshot Initiative awarded a \$5.7 million grant in October 2019 to four CPRIT-supported researchers at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center - **Zhijian ‘James’ Chen, Ph.D., Yang-Xin Fu, Ph.D., Baran Sumer, M.D., and Jinming Gao, Ph.D.** The NCI award funds further development of a unique therapeutic strategy to tackle the immune refractory challenges in solid tumors. The project links the ultra-pH sensitive nanoparticles platform developed with CPRIT support by Dr. Gao and Dr. Sumer (RP140140, RP180343) with Dr. Chen’s CPRIT-funded studies (RP150498) to harness the innate immune response to attack cancer and CPRIT Scholar Dr. Fu’s expertise on targeting the tumor microenvironment.
- The American Association for the Advancement of Science named **The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston’s Dr. Zhiqiang An** as a 2019 Fellow. The honor, announced November 26, 2019, recognizes diverse accomplishments in contributions to science and technology. Dr. An, professor of molecular medicine, the Robert A. Welch Distinguished University Chair in Chemistry, and Director of the Texas Therapeutics Institute at UTHealth, directs the “Therapeutic Monoclonal Antibody Lead Optimization and Development Core Facility” funded by CPRIT (RP150551, RP190561).
- Rice University’s **CPRIT Scholar Rosa Uribe, Ph.D.**, wins a prestigious, five-year CAREER Award from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The \$915,475 in funding, announced in February 2020, will further her research using zebrafish to study the changes of neural crest cells that cause neuroblastoma, the third most

prevalent form of pediatric cancer in the United States. CAREER awards support the research of young scholars expected to become leaders in their fields. The grants are among NSF's most competitive, given to fewer than 400 scholars each year across all disciplines. Rice recruited Dr. Uribe from the California Institute of Technology in 2017 with a CPRIT First-Time Tenure-Track award (RR170062).

- The National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable (NCCR) recognized **Baylor College of Medicine's Dan L. Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center** in March 2020 as a "80% in Every Community National Achievement" honoree. The award commends individuals and organizations dedicating their time, talent and expertise to advancing initiatives to achieve colorectal cancer screening rates of 80% and higher in communities across the nation. In recognizing Baylor College of Medicine, the NCCR highlighted the CPRIT funded project directed by Drs. Maria Jibaja-Weiss and Jane Montealegre, "Expanding a Community Network for Cancer Prevention to Improve Cervical and Colorectal Screening and Follow-up among an Urban Medically Underserved Population" (PP 170094).
- On April 27, 2020, the National Academy of Sciences elected four scientists from The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center into its membership, one of the highest honors for American scientists. Three of the scientists from UT Southwestern – **CPRIT Scholar Sean Morrison, Ph.D. (R1109), Kim Orth, Ph.D. (RP140449), and Sandra Schmid, Ph.D. (RP150573)**, are CPRIT grantees. The National Academy of Science selects new members in recognition of their distinguished and continuing achievements in original research.
- In April 2020, the Texas Department of Health and Human Services recognized **Bay Colony Pediatrics, one of the participating clinics in Dr. Abbey Berenson's CPRIT-funded project** "Partnering with Schools and Clinics to Expand a Highly Successful HPV Vaccination Program for 9 - 17-year-olds from Medically Underserved Areas" (PP190004), as Number 1 in Galveston County for 2019 vaccination rates, putting that clinic in the Top 10% statewide. The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston's Dr. Berenson explained, "This achievement is due primarily to our CPRIT funded project at that clinic."
- The American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) honored **Baylor College of Medicine's CPRIT Scholar Christopher I. Amos, Ph.D.**, with its "2020 AACR-American Cancer Society Award for Research Excellence in Cancer Epidemiology and Prevention." The award, announced June 11, 2020, recognizes Dr. Amos, director of Baylor College of Medicine's Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, for his seminal contributions to the understanding of how genetic and environmental

factors can cause complex diseases such as cancer. Baylor College of Medicine recruited Dr. Amos to Texas from Dartmouth in 2017 with a \$6 million Recruitment of Established Investigators award (RR170048).

- The Pew Charitable Trusts announced June 15, 2020, that it selected **CPRIT Scholar Jeffery Woodruff, Ph.D.**, as a Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences. With this honor, Dr. Woodruff, assistant professor of cell biology at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, will also receive four years of research funding. He is one of 22 early career scientists selected this year from 191 talented applicants. UT Southwestern recruited Dr. Woodruff to Texas in 2017 with a CPRIT First Time Tenure Track award (RR170063) after his graduate work at the University of California Berkeley and post-doctoral work at the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden, Germany.
- **CPRIT Scholar Todd Aguilera, M.D.**, assistant professor of radiation oncology at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, received a Damon Runyon Clinical Investigator Award on July 7, 2020, for his work in immunotherapy. The \$600,000 award supports his research investigating patients' immune response to the combination of an immunotherapy drug with chemotherapy and radiation for advanced rectal cancer. Damon Runyon will also repay up to \$100,000 of his medical school debt. Dr. Aguilera came to UT Southwestern from Stanford University in 2017 with a CPRIT First Time Tenure Track award (RR170051).
- For the first time, the *U.S. News & World Report* recognizes four different Texas hospitals as among the nation's top cancer hospitals. Its annual "Best Hospitals" survey, announced July 28, 2020, ranked **The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center** first for cancer care. M.D. Anderson has topped this list 14 times in the last 17 years. Also listed among the top fifty hospitals for cancer care in the survey are the **Houston Methodist Hospital (#17)**, the **Dan Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center** affiliated with Baylor College of Medicine (#27), and **The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center (#32)**.
- On July 29, 2020, the members of the CDC Foundation elected **The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio's Amelie Ramirez, Dr.P.H.**, professor and Department of Population Health Sciences chair, associate director of Cancer Outreach and Engagement at the Mays Cancer Center, to a five-year term on the CDC Foundation's Board of Directors. The CDC Foundation facilitates more than 1,700 partnerships, launched 1,000+ programs, and raised over \$900 million to help the CDC improve health around the world. CPRIT has awarded multiple grants to Dr. Ramirez, an internationally recognized health disparities researcher, supporting

projects such as breast cancer disparities research on quality of life and survivorship issues and a bilingual tobacco-cessation service, Quitxt, for young adult Latinos using mobile-phone text messages (PP170099, PP180092).

- In August 2020, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) named **Lindy McGee, M.D.**, assistant professor of pediatrics, Baylor College of Medicine a “Texas E-cigarette Chapter Champion.” Dr. McGee leads e-cigarette education on the CPRIT-funded prevention project “Expanding a Community Network for Cancer Prevention to Increase HPV Vaccine Uptake and Tobacco Prevention in a Medically Underserved Pediatric Population,” (PP190051). Together with the recognition, the AAP awarded Dr. McGee a grant to develop additional e-cigarette education sessions in 2021.
- The **Rice University-based Center for Theoretical Biological Physics (CTBP), which CPRIT Scholar Dr. José Onuchic co-leads**, won a five-year extension from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in August 2020 to pursue its investigation of mysteries at the intersection of biology and physics. The NSF grant provides \$12.9 million to continue sophisticated computational analysis showing how interactions at the atomic scale relate to the behavior of cells. CTBP scientists pursue answers to a number of big questions, including immune response mechanisms, the structural maintenance of DNA and other cancer-related studies. The center, founded in 2001 at the University of California San Diego, came to Rice in 2011 when Rice recruited Dr. Onuchic with a CPRIT Recruitment of Established Investigators award (R1110).
- The National Cancer Institute (NCI) renewed the **Mays Cancer Center at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio** as an NCI-designated cancer center for the next five years. The designation, announced September 11, 2020, recognizes the cancer center for its cutting-edge cancer research, clinical trials, patient-centered cancer care, and the training of biomedical cancer researchers and health care providers to decrease the burden of cancer in their communities, across the nation and the world. The NCI review concluded that *“A major strength of the [Mays Cancer Center] is the profound commitment shown to the needs of its catchment area, which has a predominantly Hispanic population...Increased investments in research infrastructure, strong program leadership and robust institutional support indicate a center on an upward trajectory.”*
- The Cancer Research Institute awarded **Dr. Zhijian “James” Chen**, professor of molecular biology and director of the Center for Inflammation Research at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, its 2020 William B. Coley Award for Distinguished Research in Basic and Tumor Immunology. Dr. Chen is one of five scientists receiving the Coley Award in September 2020 for their individual

contributions to the discovery and characterization of the cGAS-STING pathway, a key component of the innate immune system that scientists are using to develop novel immunotherapies against cancer. The Cancer Research Institute named the award in honor of Dr. Coley, widely regarded as the father of cancer immunology. Dr. Chen also received the 2019 Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences for his 2012 discovery of cGAS. CPRIT has awarded Dr. Chen numerous research grants (RP150498, RP120781-P3, RP120781-C2).

- The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center's Postdoctoral Association presented **CPRIT Scholar Dr. Sean Morrison**, director of Children's Medical Center Research Institute, with the 2020 Excellence in Postdoctoral Mentoring Award in September 2020. The award recognizes extraordinary mentorship and honors faculty members who have provided outstanding commitment, guidance, and support to postdoctoral researchers. Throughout his career, Dr. Morrison has mentored 38 Ph.D. students or postdoctoral fellows who have completed their training, nearly all of whom have stayed in science. Most have gone on to tenure-track faculty positions and many others have taken leadership positions in biotechnology companies or private research institutes. UT Southwestern recruited Dr. Morrison from the University of Michigan in 2011 with a \$10 million CPRIT Recruitment of Established Investigators award (R1109).
- The National Cancer Institute renewed the Specialized Programs of Research Excellence (SPORE) program in breast cancer at **Baylor College of Medicine** in September 2020, awarding more than \$11 million in support for the next five years. The SPORE, led by CPRIT Scholar Matthew Ellis, MB, BChir, Ph.D., focuses on projects addressing treatment barriers in advanced breast cancer with each project including a clinical trial. Dr. Ellis came to Baylor College of Medicine from Washington University in 2014 because of a \$6 million CPRIT Recruitment of Established Investigators award (RR140033).
- Pope Francis appointed Rice University physicist and **CPRIT Scholar José Onuchic, Ph.D.**, to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The academy has operated under its present name since 1936 but its roots are in the Academy of the Lynxes, founded in Rome in 1603. According to the Vatican, it was the first exclusively scientific academy in the world, with Galileo Galilei as an early member. This academy advises the church on major scientific issues and knowledge and their benefits to society. Topics include, health, climate change, energy, the impacts of poverty and genetic engineering. Rice recruited Dr. Onuchic to Rice from University of California, San Diego in 2011 with a CPRIT Established Investigators recruitment award (R1110).