Message from the Director

In this issue of In Translation, I’m excited to share with you a feature on our Young Innovative Investigator Program, a review of our successful Health Disparities Science Café, a tour of Hartford’s North End with the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health coalition and an overview of our recently awarded NIH funding aimed at increasing diversity in the biomedical workplace.

In addition, I would like to announce the appointment of Wai Hong Lo, Ph.D., CICATS new Investigator Advocate and share notice of the relocation of the CICATS office. Have a happy and healthy New Year.

– Cato T. Laurencin, M.D., Ph.D.

Featured In This Issue

CICATS Young Innovative Investigator Program
An innovative program aimed at the development of a sustainable academic pipeline that increases diversity among the pool of academic scientists. – Page 2

CICATS Health Disparities Science Café
A look into our innovative Science Café featuring a lively open forum discussion of the current state of racial and ethnic health disparities. – Page 4

Hartford’s North End Community Tour
CICATS staff join a tour of Hartford’s North End with the REACH Coalition to discuss health disparities in healthy food and lifestyles in the community. – Page 6

NIH BUILD Award Overview
In partnership with the University of Texas at El Paso, CICATS created a summer research enrichment and mentoring program at UConn geared toward underrepresented minority students in the southwest region. – Page 7

Also Included:
CICATS at UConn Membership & Kudos – Page 8
In October of 2013, Dr. Linda Barry, Assistant Director and Chief Operating Officer of CICATS, established the Young Innovative Investigator Program (YIIP) Advisory Committee. Creating a framework for an exciting new program at UConn Health aimed at expanding opportunities for underrepresented minority students with interest in entering the biomedical science workforce. The YIIP program was launched in August 2014 with the next generation of biomedical scientists learning and developing their skills in and out of the classroom.

The YIIP is a one to two year full-time program at the UConn Health Graduate School that aims to develop a sustainable academic pipeline that increases diversity among the pool of academic scientists. Eligible candidates are required to have completed a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university with a minimum GPA of 3.0 and demonstrate an academic potential to become a research scientist with a goal of attaining a M.D., M.D-Ph.D. or Ph.D. Following a nationwide search and preliminary review of 30 applications, 12 applicants were granted a personal interview, and the following 6 YIIP scholars were selected from a pool of highly qualified candidates.

Melissa Carr-Reynolds  
Spelman College  

Nilse Dos Santos  
University of Rhode Island  

La Shondra Ellis  
Oakwood College  

Trisha Kwarko  
University of Connecticut  

Sandra Lopez  
University of Connecticut  

Akilah Plair  
Southern Connecticut State University

In year one, the YIIP scholars’ curriculum consists of a minimum of 6 course credits per semester and practical laboratory research training experience as a graduate assistant. Upon successful completion of coursework in year one, students will obtain a Graduate Certificate of Research Experience in Biomedical Science. In year two, students will have the opportunity to enter the Master of Science degree program in Clinical and Translational Research offered to individuals who plan to pursue a M.D. or Ph.D.

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Through the duration of the YIIP program, scholars are supported with a comprehensive network of mentorship. The recipients of the CICATS M1 Mentoring award, Anne Delany, Ph.D., Elaine Lee, Ph.D. and Syam Nukavarupu, Ph.D., will mentor two of the YIIP scholars, respectively. CICATS M1 mentors provide academic support and guidance, information on professional and career development, and lead monthly seminars in areas such as Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) exam preparation and grant writing.

Each YIIP scholar will also work in an established research lab at UConn Health, gaining valuable skills and experience in hands-on research. Hosting the YIIP scholars and serving as lab mentors are Andrew Arnold, M.D., Stormy Chamberlain, Ph.D., Caroline Dealy, Ph.D., Kimberly Dodge-Kafka, Ph.D., Christopher Heinen, Ph.D., and Carol Pilbeam, M.D., Ph.D. Each lab mentor and YIIP scholar will work together to develop an extensive plan of professional and educational goals; and meet regularly to discuss lab work, projects, poster presentations and future academic and career goals.

The YIIP program was developed with input from a variety of UConn faculty members led by Linda Barry, M.D., FACS. The Advisory Committee included Barbara Kream, Ph.D., Lori Bastian, M.D., M.P.H., Caroline Dealy, Ph. D., Kimberly Dodge-Kafka, Ph.D., Marja Hurley, M.D., Anne Kenny, M.D., Cato Laurencin, M.D., Ph.D., Carol Pilbeam, M.D., Ph.D., and Granville Wrensford, Ph.D.

CICATS thanks all those who have contributed to the successful launch of this innovative program. For additional program information, please contact Lana T. Angelo, Administrative Program Coordinator.

CICATS WELCOMES A NEW INVESTIGATOR ADVOCATE

CICATS is excited to announce the appointment of Wai Hong (Kevin) Lo, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, as an Investigator Advocate. Dr. Lo joins current Investigator Advocate, Tao Jiang, Ph.D., to provide services and consultation to investigators.

The Investigator Advocates assist investigators in the design and development of research projects. They facilitate collaborative research with UConn's partner institutions as well as community and key stakeholders.

Drs. Jiang and Lo bring considerable knowledge of team science, research protocols, principles and the regulatory process of studies to their role as Investigator Advocates.

To schedule a consultation with an Investigator Advocate, please contact:

Tao Jiang, Ph.D.  
jiang@uchc.edu  
860-679-7161

Kevin Lo, Ph.D.  
wlo@uchc.edu  
860-679-2949
On September 17, CICATS held its first Health Disparities Science Café in the Academic Lobby of UConn Health. Over 100 individuals attended the event, representing faculty, researchers, public officials and community based organizations. Through engaging talks from our invited speakers and the networking of collaborators in an innovative open mic format, this informal event brought together stakeholders dedicated to eliminating health disparities and coming up with solutions. Dr. Linda Barry, Assistant Director and Chief Operating Officer of CICATS, moderated the event.

To begin the evening, Dr. Cato Laurencin, Chief Executive Director of CICATS, introduced the participants of two of CICATS newest programs - the M1 Mentoring Program (M1) and the Young Innovative Investigator Program (YIIP). Dr. Laurencin also welcomed members of the Connecticut Legislative Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and thanked them for their efforts in supporting CICATS programs that aim to address collaborative research and racial and ethnic disparities.

The CICATS Health Disparities Science Café included presentations covering various aspects of health disparities delivered by dedicated individuals in a fun, energetic and informative way. Presenters included:

Jean Schensul, Ph.D. - Founding Director, The Institute for Community Research  
& Grace Damio, M.S. - Director of Research and Service Initiatives, Hispanic Health Council  
Topic: Community Research Alliance Work

Biree Andemariam, M.D. - Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine, UConn Health  
Topic: Sickle Cell Disease Core Interest Group

Patricia Baker - President and Chief Executive Officer, Connecticut Health Foundation  
Topic: Connecticut Health Foundation: Funding Community Efforts to Create “System Change”

Amy Gorin, Ph.D. - Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, UConn Storrs  
Topic: The Impact of Health Disparities as Relates to Healthy Weight

James Morton - President and Chief Executive Officer, YMCA of Greater Hartford  
Topic: Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health Addressing Health Disparities in the North End of Hartford.

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Correcting the imbalance of healthcare and health outcomes will require advances in research, medicine, care, community outreach and changes to public policy. To address these issues, Dr. Barry announced the formation of the Health Disparities Core Interest Group: a collaborative network of researchers and service providers who will work toward scientific approaches to eliminating health disparities.

CICATS is excited that this Science Café was successful in bringing together so many of the necessary change makers and provided a platform for the exchange of ideas and collaborations across multiple disciplines. In the days and weeks that followed the Health Disparities Science Café, collaborations that began as conversations at the event have developed into partnerships and CICATS has welcomed an influx of new registrations for membership.

In 2015, CICATS will sponsor a series of Science Cafés that will highlight the work and interests of our 22 individual Core Interest Groups. To be notified of our upcoming CIG events, contact Lana Angelo, Administrative Program Coordinator or check for announcements at the CICATS website.

CICATS MOVES TO 195 FARMINGTON AVENUE

CICATS will begin the New Year in our new location in Suite 2080, 195 Farmington Avenue, less than a mile from our previous location in Dowling South. Our email addresses, phone numbers and fax will remain the same.

We appreciate your cooperation during this transition to our new location. Please note our new office address and mailing address:

Office/Physical Address:
Connecticut Institute for Clinical and Translational Science at UConn
195 Farmington Avenue, Suite 2080
Farmington, CT 06032
Phone: (860) 679-7039
Fax: (860) 679-2777
Email: cicats@uchc.edu
Web: http://cicats.uconn.edu

Mailing Address:
Connecticut Institute for Clinical and Translational Science at UConn
263 Farmington Avenue, MC 6022
Farmington, CT 06030-6022
HARTFORD NORTH END COMMUNITY TOUR

On October 15, Trisha Donaldson Pitter, Business Services Manager of CICATS, and Kate Hayden, Research Facilitator of CICATS, — both long-standing Hartford residents — joined community leaders and the Greater Hartford YMCA’s Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Coalition for their Hartford North End Community Tour. The tour included three North End neighborhoods: Clay Arsenal, Upper Albany, and Northeast. The tour was led by the REACH Community Partner Coach, Tevonne Ellis, M.P.A.

The tour highlighted community assets like Keney Park, the new sports field next to the Global Communication Academy, and KNOX gardens. The tour also addressed community challenges like the lack of a full-sized grocery store, accessibility of healthcare providers, and unkempt vacant lots. These problems are exacerbated by record high unemployment rates, crime, and by being geographically cut-off from the neighboring downtown area.

THE “PERFECT STORM” FOR HEALTH DISPARITIES

All of these factors have created the perfect storm for health disparities. Without a full-sized grocery store, North End residents live in a “food desert”. Food deserts are defined as an urban area in which it is difficult to buy affordable or high-quality fresh food. To address this fresh produce shortage, KNOX has partnered with local organizations like the Wilson-Gray YMCA to work with residents to create community gardens. The YMCA also welcomes residents of all income levels to join their gym for physical fitness and to access other necessary and affordable services like child daycare.

“In order for us to really understand the needs of the North End of Hartford, it’s important for REACH Coalition members and invited guests to see first-hand the current resources and lack thereof that exists in community. The community tour was to start the process of understanding the need and determining the best ways the Coalition can make an impact on creating a healthier North End of Hartford.”

- REACH Community Partner Coach, Tevonne Ellis, M.P.A.

The group toured two KNOX community gardens, Winter Street Community Garden and the Earle Street Community Garden. This is a “grass roots” way to improve access to healthy food. In addition the Hartford Food System debuted their year-round farmer’s market on wheels. The mobile market will drive into the community so residents can purchase fresh produce in their neighborhood.

Although the North End community faces enormous health disparity challenges, due to lack of access to healthy eating options and unsafe areas for physical activity, they also have a strong social and community network; connecting residents to solution-building through community organizations.

The REACH Coalition has created an opportunity for community organizations, city offices and individuals to work collaboratively to make the “healthy choice the easy choice” by increasing access to healthy foods, safe and healthy environments, affordable healthcare, and healthy outcomes through changes in policies, systems and environment.

Article by Kate Hayden, M.P.H., CICATS Research Facilitator.
NIH BUILD GRANT OVERVIEW

CICATS will play an important role in the newly announced Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) initiative funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In partnership with the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), CICATS will serve as a research institution partner, hosting BUILD program participants through the UConn Summer Research Enrichment Program. CICATS will oversee the execution of the program at UConn and provide valuable research experience to students through this intensive summer research program.

CICATS was invited by UTEP to be part of their consortium’s $22.6 million awarded grant to develop programs geared toward underrepresented minority students in the southwest region due to CICATS’ successful track record in creating pipeline programs such as the Young Innovative Investigator Program and the M1 Mentorship Program.

CICATS RESEARCH COMPONENT

The BUILD initiative is designed to establish academic pipelines that attract students from diverse backgrounds into the biomedical research workforce and encourage them to become future contributors to research science. The program emphasizes research opportunities that engage students academically and may lead to sustained interest in biomedical research careers.

The UConn Summer Research Enrichment Program will be a unique and important component of the UTEP-UConn BUILD partnership. CICATS is one of three organizations outside of the Southwestern consortium to be invited to be a research institution, the other two institutions are Novartis Pharmaceutical and Clemson University.

“Our cadre of innovative programs enables CICATS to continue to lead in this area and ensure the success of the BUILD grant at UConn,” says Dr. Linda Barry, Chief Operating Officer and Assistant Director of CICATS.

By the time they graduate, students will have developed real-world experience conducting research in a lab setting, and networking with mentors who conduct their own research. This will prepare BUILD scholars to pursue doctoral degrees in the biomedical sciences and engineering.

“This is a great award for the University, and demonstrates CICATS’ national reputation in health disparities,” adds Dr. Cato Laurencin, Chief Executive Director of CICATS.

CICATS is excited to support the diversity initiatives of the NIH through the BUILD grant program and is a proud partner of UTEP.
Become a Member

Enjoy the Benefits of a CICATS Membership

Membership includes networking opportunities, newsletters, notification of conferences and seminars, CICATS member listserv, grant announcements, and access to research tools and services.

CICATS can also help you:

- Find researchers to collaborate with on a project
- Get statistical support grant proposal and technology development consultation
- Ensure that your research meets regulatory requirements for involving human subjects
- Find funding opportunities for your research project and
- Learn about advances in clinical and translational research from bench to the community

To inquire about becoming a CICATS member, please contact Luke Bacewicz, our Web & Marketing Associate.

Keep In Touch

Please let us know what events are happening within and around our fields so that we may help share them here and online. We welcome notice of the achievements of your institutions and partners for possible inclusion in our Kudos section. Any suggestions or inquiries regarding this newsletter may be directed to Luke Bacewicz, CICATS Web & Marketing Associate.

CICATS Director Dr. Cato Laurencin, who has won the 2014 National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director’s Pioneer Award for his work in Regenerative Engineering.

Biree Andemariam, M.D., who was selected by the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame (CWHF) to be recognized as a Design & Innovation Honoree for 2014.

Congratulations to The Urban League of Greater Hartford, Inc., a community based not-for-profit, for fifty years of providing programs and services to the community of greater Hartford.