

Sepideh Dolatshahi PhD  
University of Virginia

Research Award

## Uncovering Immune Inflammatory Axes of Racial Disparities Linked with Gestational Weight Gain in Pregnant Women

### IMPACT OF JEFFRESS TRUST AWARD

“The Jeffress Trust Award has enabled our highly interdisciplinary research to uncover the root causes and molecular underpinnings of racial disparities in immunity during pregnancy and their link to vast disparities in pregnancy outcomes. Our team is excited to contribute by generating data and insights to alleviate underrepresentation of African American women in immunological studies and to improve medical practices. This award makes it possible for us to build and maintain collaborations spanning systems immunology, engineering, fetal medicine, public health and community engagement. The call for the Jeffress Trust Awards Program proposal encouraged us to focus on the root causes and frame our research goals effectively. The tree analogy guides our thinking about research advancing health equity.”

(Top: S. Dolatshahi Above Dolatshahi in lab with student Remziye)

### AWARD PROJECT SUMMARY

Obesity is more prevalent in Hispanic Black (NHB) women of Virginia. Although weight gain tracks inversely

**Matthew Loos MD, FACS, MBA**

**Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award**

Ballad Health

in partnership with Appalachian School of Law Virginia Tech

STRONG Accountable Care Community

## Impact of Medical Legal Partnership (MLP) Collaborative Upon Social Determinants of Health of Low Income Individuals in Rural Southwest Virginia

### IMPACT OF JEFFRESS TRUST AWARD

“Ballad Health is thrilled to partner with the Jeffress Trust to expand access to the social and legal resources of the Medical Legal Partnership (MLP). During the first three years of the MLP we have had a profound impact on low income individuals working to resolve legal obstacles impacting health such as quality housing, income supports, education, and personal stability. Through this grant, we will be able to work at the community level to better understand the current needs and develop best practices to expand this impact of the MLP.

- Matthew Loos, Ballad Health

“The research project awarded a Jeffress Trust grant will establish an Advisory Council to collectively study and develop MLP best practices for programmatic and coordinated community response. The creation of an Advisory Council of internal and external community partners will ensure a diverse arena in which to collect data and develop a robust research program. We anticipate the data will illuminate how healthing legal needs are impacted through MLP intervention with free legal services to address social determinants of health (SDOH) for low income patients.

The grant was awarded to support research activities to analyze the impact of the IHELP MLP model (Income/Insurance, Housing, Education, Legal status, Personal family stability) on participants' SDOH. This program will leverage established partnerships and engage new partnerships to expand our research and best







Shuntay Z. Tarver, PhD, MSW

Partnership/Collaborative Establishment Award

Old Dominion University

in partnership with African American Creative Community Series

James Barry Robinson Institute Hampton-Newport News

Community Services Board

## Advancing Health Equity through a Regional Coalition for reducing Opioid and Substance Use

(Above: S. Tarver; Below: Tamika Lett, Latiesha Handle, Chaniece Winfield, Jason Sawyer)

### IMPACT OF JEFFRESS TRUST AWARD

“Black families are increasingly dying from opioid addiction with little to no collective understanding of the pervasiveness of the issue. Despite the availability of resources to

combat the issue, the impact of the epidemic on Black and low communities continues to increase, leading to a rise in fatalities among these groups. Consequently, raising public awareness of available resources is critical to destigmatize help-seeking behaviors and achieving health equity within Black and low communities. Funding from the Jeffress Trust Award has a significant impact on advancing health equity for Black and low families within targeted Hampton Roads communities.

### AWARD PROJECT SUMMARY

There is a critical need in Hampton Roads Virginia to reduce opioid and substance use (O/SU) and overdose related deaths. Current trends reveal health disparities exacerbated systemically by racism and poverty. There has been a 140% increase in Black people dying from opioid overdose since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gupta, 2021). Yet, Black families are less likely to have access to care, and face systemic barriers such as cultural stigma, threat of family separation, and economic issues that deter help seeking behaviors (Roberts et al., 2018; Tarver, et al., 2021). Resource disintegration between service providers, researchers, and community stakeholders across neighboring cities impede adaptation of strategies to engage populations, which is highly transient across cities; although service providers are uniquely positioned with resources to engage diverse populations. Integrating culturally informed approaches with data-informed approaches