

The Pharmacologist

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BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Good Citizens



ASPET Members Impacting the Greater Good

We chat with three ASPET members about their careers and the future of pharmacology.



A Publication by The American Society for
Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics

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THE PHARMACOLOGIST

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Contributing Writers

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On the Cover: Dr. Dionna Williams, Dr. Jayne Reuben, Dr. Karen Akinsanya

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Message from the President

I would like to thank the ASPET Washington Fellows for inspiring me.

Share this!

Like many people, I've been feeling a little cynical about politics recently, and discouraged about the current state of the union in the USA.

When the political climate feels dispiriting, the only meaningful response is engagement. That's exactly what the [ASPET Washington Fellows](#) demonstrated on Thursday, February 12, as they fanned out across Capitol Hill and talked with U.S. senators and representatives (or their legislative staff) about the importance of funding biomedical research.

In my role as the current ASPET President, I had the pleasure of joining all these brilliant young ASPET Washington Fellows in their mission. Shown below, from left to right, are Fellows alum [Chloe Kirk](#); Chelsey Murphy, a legislative advisor for Senator Jon Ossoff from Georgia; myself; and current Washington Fellows Rodnie Colón Ortiz and Drew Theobald.

We discussed the recent budget bill, which holds biomedical research funding flat. While that is certainly preferable to a cut, it still fails to keep pace with inflation and will limit our ability to move forward in the fights against cancer, Alzheimer's, and other diseases now within reach.

Admittedly, a series of 30-minute meetings with government officials on Capitol Hill is not going to change the world overnight. But these meetings *do* raise the awareness of key government officials about the urgency of supporting biomedical research. And I can tell you it is inspiring to hear the ASPET Washington Fellows eloquently describe their research and speak truth to their government leaders about why increased funding for research is so crucial.

The ASPET Washington Fellows is an incredible program that provides young scientists the opportunity to learn about science advocacy, and then immediately put those lessons to use in promoting biomedical research. I'd like to thank the outstanding organizers of this program, Carter Alleman and Marah Wahbeh, as well as the current group of ASPET Washington Fellows for inspiring me so much on the recent Hill Day with their unbridled enthusiasm and passion for research.



Sincerely,

Randy Hall, PhD
President, ASPET

WE ARE SEARCHING FOR

AN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ASPET's Publications Committee is seeking the next Editor-in-Chief of *Drug Metabolism and Disposition* (DMD). The deadline for nominations is **5:00 PM ET on June 1, 2026**. Self-nominations are welcome.

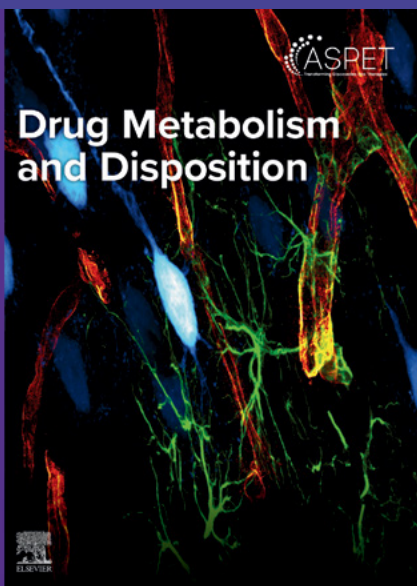
ASPET Editors-in-Chief serve for a three-year term that can be renewed for one additional three-year term. The position includes an honorarium. The peer-review process is managed jointly by ASPET and Elsevier using Editorial Manager, an online manuscript submission and peer review system. Editors-in-Chief also serve as members of ASPET's Publications Committee.

Nominees must be an ASPET member in good standing and should have served on an editorial board. Before nominating a candidate, please make sure the person is willing to serve. All nominations should include a CV and a brief letter from the nominator (on their own behalf if self-nominating) expressing why this person would be a good candidate. A lengthier vision statement will be requested from candidates advancing to the interview stage.

The selection process will include online interviews with the top candidates and is expected to be completed no later than mid-September 2026. The incoming Editor-

in-Chief will begin working with the outgoing Editor-in-Chief and ASPET staff during the fall and will assume all responsibilities of the Editor-in-Chief effective January 1, 2027.

Nominations, including a brief supporting statement and the candidate's CV, should be sent to **Maria Pasho, ASPET Director of Publications**, at mpasho@aspet.org. Receipt of confirmation will be forthcoming.





A Note from Dave's Desk

ASPET Executive Officer Dave Jackson reflects on the impact of the passage of the FY2026 appropriations bill on scientific research, and how that funding decision was influenced by advocacy. He also emphasizes that the fight to support scientific research continues and encourages members to continue being a part of ASPET's advocacy efforts.

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ASPET.ORG

**February 2026:
The Impact of Advocacy**

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thepharmacologist.org





ASPET Members Impacting the Greater Good

We chat with three ASPET members about their careers and the future of pharmacology.

Good

Citizens



Dr. Dionna
Williams



Dr. Jayne
Reuben



Dr. Karen
Akinsanya

Read and share this story online
thepharmacologist.org

By Ed Aymar, Marketing and Communications Manager, ASPET

In honor of Black History Month, we had the wonderful opportunity to chat with three ASPET members about their distinguished careers, their thoughts on the recent changes in funding and its effects on the future of pharmacology, and the impact of the scientific community on their lives.

Dr. Dionna Williams earned a master's degree with distinction and a doctorate in biomedical science from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. As a doctoral candidate, they received the UNCF/Merck Graduate Science Research Dissertation Fellowship and pursued a postdoctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins to perform immunology, pharmacology, and health disparities research. Dr. Williams was awarded the K99/R00 Pathway to Independence Award from the National Institutes of Health and the Johns Hopkins Provost's Postdoctoral Fellowship. Dr. Williams has been an ASPET member since 2022.

A member since 1998, **Dr. Jayne Reuben** has been a tireless contributor to ASPET. She has served as a reviewer for educational awards, a member of various task forces and committees, Chair of the Division for Pharmacology Education, an ASPET Fellow, and a Fellow of the ASPET Academy of Pharmacology Educators. She was recently named the inaugural Senior Associate Provost / Senior Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs and Community Engagement at Texas Southern University. Dr. Reuben earned her doctorate in Pharmaceutical Sciences, specializing in Pharmacology and Toxicology, from Florida A&M University's College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, followed by a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Pathology at the University of Michigan Medical School. As a founding faculty member of the University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville, Dr. Reuben played a key role in designing its integrated medical curriculum.

Dr. Karen Akinsanya, Ph.D., leads Schrödinger, Inc.'s therapeutics research and development organization. She is also responsible for therapeutics business development, ventures strategy, and outreach; as well as growth initiatives that leverage synergies between the company's therapeutics and software businesses. She has more than 30 years of experience spanning academia, pharmaceutical R&D, and business development. Dr. Akinsanya joined Merck Research Labs in 2005 and held positions of increasing responsibility in clinical pharmacology, development team leadership in early clinical development, a role as a therapeutic area head and a search and evaluation lead in business development. She received her Ph.D. from the Royal Postgraduate Medical School at Imperial College in London, in endocrine physiology. After post-doctoral training at Imperial and the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research (UCL), Dr. Akinsanya held several R&D roles at Ferring Pharmaceuticals in the UK and US. She will be a keynote speaker at [ASPET 2026](#).

The Pharmacologist:

What led you to science? Was it an interest you discovered early in your education?

Akinsanya: My journey into science was a blend of early curiosity and academic inspiration from my parents who were both professors in the health sciences. Growing up, I was always fascinated by how technology and science worked and am a fangirl of David Attenborough's, but it was during my education in Professor Sir Steve Bream's translational lab at Imperial College in the UK (the scientist behind the Metsera deal last year) that my interest in the intersect between science and medicine crystallized. An unexplained illness in my family for which a medicine did not exist led me more towards science and drug discovery than medicine. The idea that a breakthrough in the lab could eventually become a life-saving medicine for a patient was a powerful motivator that has stayed with me from those early days to the executive suite today.

Williams: I went to Korea through a foreign exchange program in high school, and it was my first time going out of the country. That trip was pivotal for me because the culture was so different than the one I grew up in, but at the same time it was warm and inviting and just so transformative. It let me see how other folks in the world were doing science, and how everyone had this shared interest.

Other cultures are beautiful, and travel is essential. Everyone who has the opportunity needs to go somewhere else and meet other people. It helps you realize the core tenets of humanity, and shows you how much more we have in common than we think. There's no one right way to live.

Reuben: I had planned to be a musician (I'm classically trained on both piano and flute, and I also sing), but I had an explosion in a high school chemistry class.



Dr. Dionna Williams



Dr. Jayne Reuben



Dr. Karen Akinsanya

The Pharmacologist:

Do you mean a metaphorical explosion?

Reuben: I mean one that comes from mixing pure sodium metal and water. I ran out of the class, but then I reflected on what had happened and thought, "That was really cool!"

When I was deciding on college, I had a choice between a music or academic scholarship, and I took the academic scholarship to a small women's college in South Carolina called Converse College (now Converse University). It was in a chemistry class that I learned about pharmacology, and the impact that it could have on people's lives. And I wanted to be in a field where the work I did made an impact, where I

could see myself helping people. I was also very good at organic chemistry, and pharmacology was a way for me to marry my love of biology and applied science with chemistry.

The Pharmacologist:

We've often heard scientists discuss the importance of flexibility. Can you each touch on that?

Williams: It's a little different in academia, but flexibility is important. A friend and I were postdocs together, and she ended up working on fundamentally different topics—one time it would be pain, and then neurologic disease or infectious disease. She enjoyed that. I don't want that wide of a scope, but I do need flexibility in my work.

In academia, a lot of our research depends upon funding and, given how funding priorities change, there has to be some flexibility. For me personally, I found it's hard for me to want to work on things that I'm not really passionate about, or interested in. So while I can adapt, especially given funding shifts, there still needs to be some root foundational interest for me. That said, I can always find my niche within the project, and discover how my work and interests fit into this new landscape.

Akinsanya: Flexibility, adaptability and resilience are not just "soft skills" in science from my perspective; they are survival mechanisms in our ever changing and uncertain world of biology, drug development and life. My career has spanned academia, large pharma (Ferring and Merck), to the cutting edge of computational physics-based molecule invention and translation to disease treatments at Schrödinger. I've had to pivot from traditional laboratory, clinical and business roles to leading digital transformations. In industry, the data rarely tells the story you initially predict (translation of science and

now the impact of technology to human impact is one of our greatest challenges), and projects you champion at first may need to be deprioritized for strategic reasons beyond data-driven No-Gos. You must be willing to unlearn old methodologies and workflows, adapt, embrace and validate new approaches and technologies—even if they challenge the traditional ways of working.

Being "flexible" and agile means being open to the idea that the best way to solve a problem might be a path you haven't walked yet.

Reuben: I'd say it depends on what you mean by flexibility. I worked in industry as well, and I remember having core hours when everyone had to be at work. That's not necessarily the case in academia, but most academicians work more than forty hours per week. We go home, have dinner, and do some more work. And if you're teaching, you're probably using that time to respond to student emails.

In COVID, we had the opportunity to work remotely, and are still seeing the impact of that. But if you were, for instance, in private practice as a clinician and your practice shuts down, you don't generate funds. The flexibility that we saw in academia is that, largely, we could still do the work from home. It showed us the importance of work-life balance, and that's not a flexibility everyone can enjoy.

Continued on page 24



Leadership Profile

Share this!

The Results are In!

Congratulations to the following ASPET members who have been elected to serve as officers and division chairs, and will start their terms on July 1, 2026. And thank you to everyone who used this opportunity to cast a ballot for the future of the Society.

2026 Council Members



**Kathryn A. Cunningham,
PhD, FASPET**

President-Elect



**Allyn Howlett, PhD,
FASPET**

Secretary/Treasurer-Elect



Aiming Yu, PhD

Councilor

2026 Division Elected Committee Officers

Division for Cancer Pharmacology



**April Risinger,
PhD**

Chair-Elect



Dawn Duval, PhD

*Secretary/
Treasurer-Elect*

Division for Drug Discovery and Development



**Thota Ganesh,
PhD**

Chair-Elect



**Leslie Dickmann,
PhD, MPH**

*Secretary/
Treasurer-Elect*

2026 Division Elected Committee Officers

Division for Drug Metabolism and Disposition



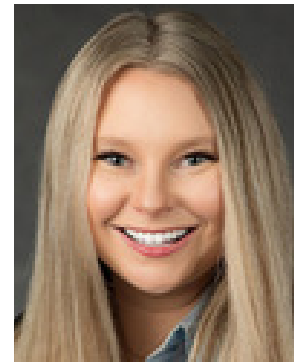
John Clarke, PhD
Chair-Elect



**Simone Brixius-
Anderko, PhD**
*Secretary/
Treasurer-Elect*



**Adriano
Marchese, PhD**
Chair-Elect



**Lauren
Slosky, PhD**
*Secretary/
Treasurer-Elect*

Division for Neuropharmacology

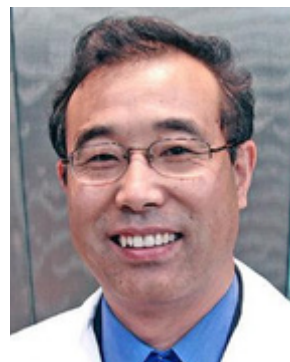


**Qin Wang, MD,
PhD**
Chair-Elect



**Rheaclare Fraser-
Spears, PhD**
*Secretary/
Treasurer-Elect*

Division for Toxicology



**Wenke Feng, PhD,
FAASLD**
Chair-Elect



**Dinesh
Bhattarai, PhD**
*Secretary/
Treasurer-Elect*

Contribute to *The* **Pharmacologist**

ASPET's award-winning flagship magazine *The Pharmacologist* seeks writers interested in contributing human interest and science stories focused on pharmacology. Contact us at thepharmacologist@aspet.org. Please include links to writing samples.



Dr. Reuben Named Inaugural Senior Associate Provost at Texas Southern University



Jayne S. Reuben, PhD, a member of ASPET since 1998, [was recently named](#) Inaugural Senior Associate Provost/Senior Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs and Community Engagement at Texas Southern University. In this

role, Dr. Reuben's responsibilities will include faculty recruitment, professional development, governance, and more. She will also serve on the faculty of the Joan M. Lafleur College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences.

A founding faculty member of the University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville, Dr. Reuben earned her doctorate in Pharmaceutical Sciences, specializing in Pharmacology and Toxicology, from Florida A&M University's College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. She has served as ASPET's Past Chair and Program Representative for the Division of Pharmacology Education, was a 2021 Fellow of the ASPET Academy of Pharmacology Educators, and an ASPET Fellow, Class of 2022.

ASPET Welcomes New Members

Each month, ASPET welcomes new members to our home for pharmacology. This month, we recognize 68 individuals from 50 universities, colleges, and companies who have joined 4,000 other members in the pharmacology community. Learn more about [ASPET membership](#).

[Albert Einstein College of Medicine](#)

Gracelyn Richmond

[Arcus Biosciences](#)

Matthew Wright

[Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine](#)

Katelyn Carnevale
Shobini Jayaraman
Marizol Lopes

[California Northstate University](#)

Shymaa Bilasy

[Case Western Reserve University](#)

Mary Nantongo

[Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#)

Thomas Prevot

[Cogent Biosciences](#)

Macedonio Mejia

[East Carolina University, Brody School of Medicine](#)

Madison Crane
Cate Duncan
Patrick Garrett
Dylan Marshall
Joshua-Emmanuel McLaurin
Hannah Pankey

Faculty of Pharmacy, Cairo University

Ahmed Mohamed

Florida A&M University Library

Fidara Fidudusola

Government Medical College and Hospital

Jasmine Kaur

Shubhkarman Jit Dhillon

Hygia College of Pharmacy

Neeraj Verma

Indian Council of Medical Research

Saibal Das

International Islamic University Malaysia

Syamsul Ahmad Arifin

Labcorp Drug Development

Nathan Thomas

Mayo Clinic Graduate School of
Biomedical Sciences

Anh Cong

Northeastern University

Samuel Jurek

Olabisi Onabanjo University

Olusola Joseph

PhRMA

Weiqun Cao

Purdue University Library TSS

Ismaila Adams

Rayat Bahra Professional University

Abhinav Anand

Rutgers University

Masuda Akther

Ryan Fink

Sarah Huang

Fiz O'Connell

Xia Qiu

Adam Robinson

St John's University

Kirpa Kaur

Sumy State University

Petro Myronov

Tecnológico de Monterrey

Ricardo Negrete Sosa

Tel Aviv University

Itai Benhar

University of Alabama at Birmingham

Abigail Schwarz

University of California, San Diego

Tony Yaksh

University of California, Davis

Annabella Lynch Lynch

University of Chicago

Mark Applebaum

Alyssa Kim

University of Iowa

Sarah Preston

University of Maryland School of Medicine

Kijung Kwak

University of Michigan

David Jones

Damilola Olukorede

University of Minnesota

Brady Atwood

Oanh Nguyen

University of Mississippi

Kenneth Hulugalla

University of Pennsylvania

Ujjalkumar Subhash Das

Sahily Reyes-Esteves

University of Rochester

Adam Tolbert

University of South Alabama

Marcy Cage

University of South Alabama College
of Medicine

Abu-Bakr Al-Mehdi

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Loza Solomon

University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy

Catherine Van Doorn

University of Liverpool

Shakir Atoyebi

University of South Carolina School of Medicine

Arianna Bastian
Mansi Upadhyay

University of South Florida

Ololade Ogunsina

University of Southern California

Jiwoo Lee

Vanderbilt University

Prashant Donthamsetti

Virginia Commonwealth University

Melissa Lewis

Washington University in St. Louis

Bojing Jiang

Western University of Health Sciences

Denee Easy

Xylo Bio

Samuel Banister

CALL FOR PAPERS

Gene and Cell-Based Therapeutics for Disorders of Maladaptive Neuroplasticity

A special collection of *The Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics* is accepting original research in all areas associated with gene and cell-based therapeutics for neurological disorders driven by maladaptive neuroplasticity. The scope includes basic, translational, preclinical, as well as clinical research that focus on mechanistic understanding and therapeutic development of gene and cell-based strategies to target maladaptive neuroplasticity-associated neurological disorders.

- Discovery of novel strategies and/or therapeutics agents to treat neuroplasticity-related conditions such as (but not limited to): chronic pain, addiction, traumatic brain injury, epilepsy, neurodegenerative disorders, psychiatric disorders
- Development of therapeutics targeting one or multiple genes
- Delivery and optimization of current gene or cell-based delivery therapies
- Biodistribution studies of either gene or cell-based delivery vector or gene product
- Investigation of gene or cell-based therapeutic mechanisms

Authors are encouraged to submit an article proposal to JPET@aspet.org. All submissions must refer to *JPET's* [Guide for Authors](#).

Submission deadline: March 1, 2026



[Learn more](#)

IDEA Faculty Scholars: One Year Later

Share this!

The IDEA Faculty Scholars program concluded in February 2025, so we are taking this opportunity to check back in with the participants. This program, launched by Dr. Ashim Malhotra in coordination with ASPET's Director of Education Catherine Fry, PhD, was created as a multi-module program to incorporate the principles of IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) into pharmacology education and training. Thirteen ASPET members were selected through a competitive application process and began their training in the fall of 2024. The program consisted of a series of four workshops.

IDEA Program Workshops

1. **Designing Your Course Syllabus Using Principles of Psychological Safety and Competency-Based Tools to Promote Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Belonging (IDEAB)**
2. **Universal Design for Learning and the Ability Spectrum: Strategies to Diversify Your Teaching for Neurodiverse Learners and Learners with Differential Abilities**
3. **Strategies to Augment IDEAB Principles in Laboratory Settings**
4. **Incorporating Evidence-Based IDEAB Principles: The Data and Learning Theories That Support Them**

The concept of the IDEA Faculty Scholars was to bridge the disconnect between the benefits of an IDEA-enabled education in professional organizations and job sectors with the difficulty of designing, implementing, and assessing IDEA principles in pharmacology education. Those who completed the program were recognized at the ASPET annual meeting in 2025.

These sessions provided a valuable lesson for participants and, as the comments below reflect, immeasurably helped both the Fellows

and their students. We asked Dr. Ashim Malhotra, Chair of the ASPET REACH Committee and Vice President of California Northstate University, about his work to design, implement, and assess this new program:



In 2024, working with the ASPET REACH Committee and Dr. Fry, I envisioned and launched the ASPET IDEA Scholars Program. The primary intent of this program was to provide a step-by-step blueprint that faculty could adopt

locally to strengthen pharmacology classrooms and laboratories as environments where all trainees and scholars can thrive.

This national faculty workforce readiness program engaged prominent pharmacologists from across the country. It focused on applied strategies, including competency-based education, universal design for learning, and enhancing access to laboratories and research for differently abled researchers and technicians.

Members of the cohort of IDEA Faculty Scholars similarly shared their feedback on the program and their projects:



Dr. Gurnit Kaur

My participation in the ASPET IDEA Program coincided rather nicely with where I was in my career. As a junior faculty member, I was in the process of developing and

restructuring several courses. As I look back over my notes to write this reflection piece, I am struck by how much I have gained from

For me, it was especially gratifying to see the immediate transition of these strategies at the Scholars' home institutions. I am proud that the ASPET's Faculty Scholars program supported faculty advancement through promotion and contributed to scholarship of teaching and learning publications in ASPET journals centered on curricular restructuring to enhance student access, engagement, and success. – Dr. Ashim Malhotra, PhD, IDEA Program Director

the program, and more importantly, how much of what I learned has been integrated into my current courses.

At the outset, the integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into both course content and teaching practices can feel overwhelming. For me, the goal has always been to move beyond surface-level gestures towards thoughtful integration of DEI. This is not, and cannot, be reduced to a checkbox exercise, but rather an ongoing self-reflective practice of holding space for a diverse learner population. Some changes may be small, such as incorporating reflection assignments that

connect course content to students' lived experiences. Others may be more ambitious; we are developing an AI-based personalized learning tool to meet learners where they are. The key thing is that DEI integration remains consistent, ongoing, and meaningful.

As a dear mentor of mine always says: "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." We build equitable and inclusive learning spaces the same way—one step at a time, where every thoughtful revision to the syllabus or an inclusive lab practice, contributes to a larger culture of belonging where every student feels seen and supported.

Dr. Simone Brixius-Anderko



The ASPET IDEA Fellow Program was extremely valuable and educational for me, and gave hands-on advice to create an inclusive academic environment from teaching in the classroom to leading a research laboratory.

A particularly helpful session was on improving mentoring and teaching neurodivergent trainees. As a person on the autism spectrum, I found the provided guidance and diving into the different types of neurodivergence extremely helpful. The real-life examples and presented tools made it much easier to create a more inclusive and welcoming classroom and laboratory for neurodivergent students. In addition, one of

my highlights was a session on competency-based learning and assessment. As a fairly new assistant professor, I didn't have much experience in instructing in classroom settings and all the different ways to assess student learning other than traditional exams. The session helped me to adjust and tailor my teaching more to the students' needs. I could implement what I have learned into the design and coordination of a new course for graduate students at my school with an emphasis on different competency-based assessment methods.

Overall, the IDEA Fellows Program contributed to my growth as scientific educator, my increased awareness for my trainees, and equipped me with sustainable and easy-to-implement tools which had a great impact on my approach to classroom instruction.

Drs. Hamid Akbarali and Margarita Dubocovich



Drs. Hamid I. Akbarali (Haag Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology, Virginia Commonwealth University) and Margarita L. Dubocovich (SUNY Distinguished Professor, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, SUNY at Buffalo) collaborated on a project to “Enhance Neurodivergence in Pharmacology Programs.” This initiative was to address the need for more diverse biomedical workforce

by focusing on individuals with disabilities, specifically those who are neurodivergent. The major goals of the project were:

1. Develop methods to attract and recruit neurodivergent students
2. Establish mentorship and curriculum that facilitate learning
3. Enhance retention of neurodivergent graduate students by creating inclusive and supportive academic and research environments

The strategies to address these goals include accessible admission processes, training faculty mentors to support students with various neurodivergent conditions, and creating an environment where students can fully develop their potential benefiting the scientific community.

Championing Neurodiversity in Pharmacology Graduate Programs

THE CHALLENGE: A GAP IN BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE

27%



27% OF THE U.S. POPULATION REPORTS HAVING A DISABILITY. This represents a vast, untapped talent pool for biomedical research fields.



FEAR OF STIGMATIZATION IS A MAJOR BARRIER.

This fear often prevents students from accessing available resources designed to help them succeed.



12%

ONLY 12% OF BIOMEDICAL DOCTORATE RECIPIENTS IN 2021 HAD A DISABILITY. Limited data makes it difficult to track how many trainees enroll in graduate programs.

“Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general.” – Harvey Blume, *The Atlantic*

THE SOLUTION: A 3-PART STRATEGIC PROGRAM



GOAL 1: ATTRACT & RECRUIT

Develop welcoming webpages, accessible admissions processes, and materials emphasizing program commitment.



GOAL 2: SUPPORT & EDUCATE

Establish faculty mentorship programs and design curricula with tools to facilitate learning.



GOAL 3: RETAIN & FOSTER INCLUSION

Create a supportive environment through academic support, career counseling, and networking events.

Congratulations to 2026 ASPET Award Winners

It is our honor to announce this distinguished group for the [2026 Scientific Achievement Award, Division-Sponsored Awards, and Journal Award winners](#) who are being recognized for their excellence in the pharmacology field.

Scientific Achievement Awardees



**Erica Levitt,
PhD, PharmD**

*John Jacob Abel Award
in Pharmacology*



**Jürgen
Wess, PhD**

*Julius Axelrod Award in
Pharmacology*



**Michael
Iadarola, PhD**

*Pharmacia-ASPET
Award for Experimental
Therapeutics*



**Alan
Smrcka, PhD**

*Robert R. Ruffolo
Career Achievement
Award in Pharmacology*



**Thomas P.
Burris, PhD**

*Louis S. Goodman and Alfred
Gilman Award in Receptor
Pharmacology*



**Joseph
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*E. Leong Way
Emeritus Travel Award*

Division-Sponsored Awardees

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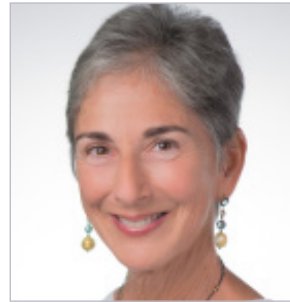
**Katherine
Serafine, PhD**

*J.H. Woods Early Career
Award in Behavioral
Pharmacology*



**Galen R.
Wenger, PhD**

*P.B. Dews Lifetime
Achievement Award for
Research in Behavioral
Pharmacology*



**Jennifer Rubin
Grandis, MD**

*Susan Band Horwitz
Award Lecture in Cancer
Pharmacology*



**Hemal H.
Patel, MD**

*Paul M. Vanhoutte
Award in Vascular
Pharmacology*



**Mahmoud Salama
Ahmed, PhD**

*Division for Cardiovascular
Pharmacology Early
Career Award*



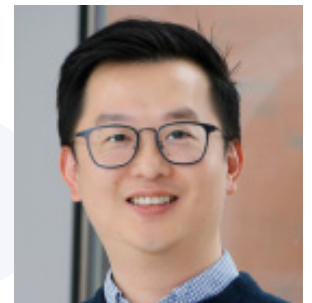
**Sandhya
Kortagere, PhD**

*Scientific Achievement
Award in Drug Discovery
and Development*



**Emily E.
Scott, PhD**

*B.B. Brodie Award in
Drug Metabolism and
Disposition*



Yang Li

*Division for Drug
Metabolism and
Disposition James R.
Gillette Award*



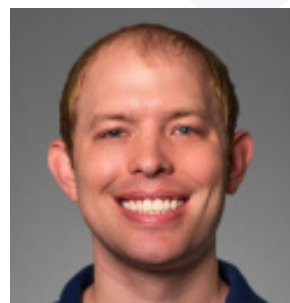
Joe Jongpyo Lim

*Division for Drug
Metabolism and Disposition
James R. Gillette Award*



Justin English, PhD

*Division for Molecular
Pharmacology Early
Career Award*



Ross Cheloha, PhD

*Division for Molecular
Pharmacology Early
Career Award*



Mark Moehle, PhD

*Division for
Neuropharmacology
Early Career Award*

2026 ASPET Award Winners

Division-Sponsored Awardees



**Matthew J.
Robson, PhD**

*Division for
Neuropharmacology
Early Career Award*



**Carolina Restini,
PharmD, PhD,
FAAPE**

*Pharmacology
Educators Award*



**Sandeep Bansal,
MBBS, MD, MBA**

*Pharmacology
Educators Award*



Tyler Bland, PhD

*Pharmacology
Educators Award*



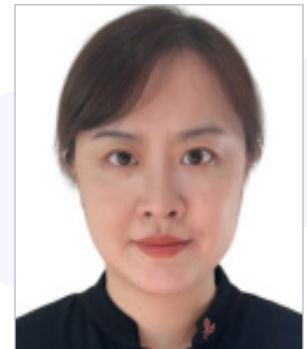
**Lauren Aleksunes,
PharmD, PhD**

*Division for Toxicology
Career Award*



Mayukh Banerjee, PhD

*Division for Toxicology
Early Career Award*



Jia Nong, PhD

*Division for Translational and
Clinical Pharmacology Early
Career Award*

2026 ASPET Award Winners

ASPET Journals Top Reviewer Awardees



Julie Lade, PhD

ASPET Discovery



Simone Brixius-Anderko, PhD

Drug Metabolism and Disposition



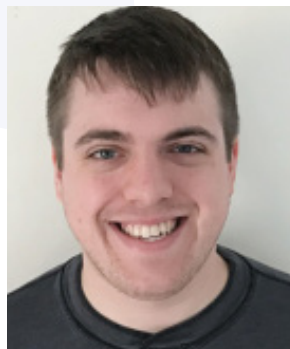
Huichang Bi, PhD

Drug Metabolism and Disposition



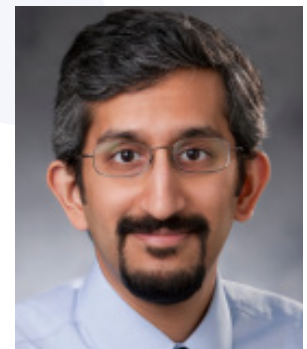
Kristan Cleveland, PhD

The Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics



Patrick Glassman, PhD

The Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics



Sudarshan Rajagopal, MD, PhD

Molecular Pharmacology



Advocacy Impact

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A “Dose” of Clarity

Misinformation surrounding medications can have serious consequences for patient care and individual well-being.¹ It perpetuates stigma and distrust around medication use, often delaying treatment initiation and reducing adherence for those who could benefit most.

The [ASPET Drug Research Policy Subcommittee](#), in collaboration with the [Policy and Advocacy Education Outreach Subcommittee](#), aims to address recent widespread misunderstandings about commonly used medications. To accomplish this, the subcommittee developed an educational campaign series, *A “Dose” of Clarity*. Each installment of *A “Dose” of Clarity* tackles common myths surrounding a medication by summarizing the current scientific evidence and highlighting key takeaways from the most relevant studies. These insights are translated into concise, one-page infographics designed for easy sharing across social media and within local communities.

For more than a century, ASPET has served as a trusted source of rigorously validated scientific information on drugs, drug use, and human biology, supporting informed decision-making among scientists, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public. We hope that *A “Dose” of Clarity* will help to spread this timely and vital information in an accessible way. We encourage scientists and advocates to use these resources in their personal outreach whether at the dinner table, in the classroom, or on Capitol Hill!

The first installment of *A “Dose” of Clarity* focuses on Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), a widely prescribed class of medications. SSRIs are surrounded by persistent misinformation, impacting the care of the approximately 11% of U.S. adults currently taking an antidepressant.²

1. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. 2024. [Addressing Misinformation About Medical Devices and Prescription Drugs: Questions and Answers | Guidance Portal](#); Accessed 1-24-2026.
2. Elgaddal N, Weeks JD, Mykyta L. Characteristics of Adults Age 18 and Older Who Took Prescription Medication for Depression: United States, 2023. 2025 Apr. In: NCHS Data Briefs [Internet]. Hyattsville (MD): National Center for Health Statistics (US); 2024 Jul-. No. 528. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK617971> doi: [10.15620/cdc/174589](https://doi.org/10.15620/cdc/174589)

A "Dose" of Clarity!

A series by  ASPET
Transforming Discoveries Into Therapies

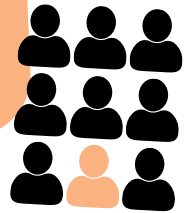
SSRIs Part 1

SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) treat depression and anxiety by increasing serotonin, a brain chemical that improves mood and emotion balance. SSRIs work by blocking serotonin reuptake, so more of it stays available between brain cells.

SSRIs are a widely used medication.

~ 21 million American adults experienced depression in 2021.

1 in 9 Americans are currently taking an SSRI.



Myth: SSRIs cause violent behavior.

However, many common SSRI myths negatively impact patient care.

A 2022 study of psychiatric patients on SSRIs found **no increased risk of aggression**.¹

There is no definitive evidence that SSRIs alone cause violence.

A 2020 study found a correlation between SSRI use and violence, but it was **rare** and mostly in young men with a history of aggression.²

Read more about previous studies on SSRIs and violence [here](#).

1. O'Donnell C, Demler TL, Trigoboff E. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) and Their Effect on Patient Aggression in Adult Patients in a State Psychiatric Facility: A Retrospective Analysis. *Innov Clin Neurosci*. 2022;19(1-3):33-38.

2. Lagerberg T, Fazel S, Molero Y, et al. Associations between selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and violent crime in adolescents, young, and older adults - a Swedish register-based study. *Eur Neuropsychopharmacol*. 2020;36:1-9. doi:10.1016/j.euroneuro.2020.03.024



In *Industry Insights*, members of ASPET's Industry Science Committee discuss the intersection of pharmacology and industry, private sector highlights, and how the industry and membership can support each other.

The Intricacies of Developing Therapeutics Targeting G Protein–Coupled Receptors

By **Alix Rouault, PhD**

G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs) are seven-transmembrane domain receptors that mediate signaling through G proteins and β -arrestins. They are major targets in modern drug discovery, with more than 30% of approved therapeutics acting on GPCRs. Many receptors display subtle structural modifications that allow them to adapt their signaling inputs. The melanocortin system illustrates this diversity, comprising five distinct receptors (MC1-5R). The high receptor homology complicates selective drug design, as closely related receptors have evolved in some cases to respond to the same ligand. In addition, some GPCRs form heterodimers with single-transmembrane accessory proteins, such as melanocortin receptor accessory proteins 1 and 2 (MRAPs). MRAP2 has also been shown to interact with non-melanocortin GPCRs, including the ghrelin receptor (GHSR1a). Extensive studies demonstrate that MRAP2 heterodimerization stabilizes GHSR1a in an inactive conformation, markedly reducing basal G protein–mediated cAMP production. While unbound GHSR1a exhibits balanced ghrelin-induced signaling, MRAP2-bound GHSR1a shows reduced β -arrestin recruitment and enhanced G-protein activity. This mechanism enables tissues to fine-tune ligand responses according to their proteomic environment.

While the orthosteric pocket of a GPCR is the preferred matrix of endogenous peptides, such as ghrelin is for GHSR1a or α -MSH is for MC4R, allosteric pockets can be occupied by smaller peptides or molecules. Various compounds interface differently with their pockets. The pull ensuing from the compound interactions changes the tertiary or quaternary structure of receptors. Some conformations will change the affinity of the receptor for its G proteins and/or β -arrestins. Consequentially, the phenotypic response can also be modified. Therefore, both proteome and circulatory environment will determine the effect of a ligand.

Synthetic compounds are being developed to directly activate receptors or allosterically tune their conformations, thereby modulating endogenous signaling to control specific phenotypic responses. This next generation of precision medicines is expected to substantially reduce side effects. Early examples such as tirzepatide, developed by Eli Lilly, exhibit preferential activity at GLP-1R and GIPR while sparing GCGR. Similarly, the orally available agent xanomeline, designed by Bristol Myers Squibb, selectively targets the M1 and M4 muscarinic receptors.

The membrane expression of GPCRs can also be a critical determinant of signaling output and can strongly influence a compound's pharmacological profile. Variations in receptor expression across tissues can lead to markedly different responses to the same compound, an effect that is far from benign and was elegantly described by Dr. Terry Kenakin, [recipient of this year's FASPET Award](#). The comparison of oxymetazoline and norepinephrine in tissues with variable adrenergic receptor expression illustrates the importance of reporting results as $\Delta\log(E_{max}/EC_{50})$ in cross-system analyses. While changes in receptor density had little impact on norepinephrine's potency and efficacy, oxymetazoline responses were highly sensitive to receptor expression levels. In tissues with high receptor expression, both ligands produced comparable responses; however, in lower-expression systems, norepinephrine activity remained largely unchanged, whereas oxymetazoline effect was markedly reduced. This differential sensitivity

can enable selective targeting of high-expression tissues while sparing those with lower receptor levels.

GPCR drug discovery is a highly competitive sector. Industry leaders from the field will address some of these fascinating topics at [ASPET 2026 in Minneapolis](#). The [Industry Science Committee \(ISC\)](#) is introducing a session titled, "[Accelerating Biopharmaceutical Drug Discovery: Strategies and Scientific Frontiers](#)," which will showcase experts such as Dr. Ajay Yekkirala, Chief Scientific Officer at Superluminal Medicine, who will share advances on their Melanocortin program, and Dr. Jim Trevaskis, Associate Vice President in the Diabetes, Obesity and Complications Early Discovery Research Group at Eli Lilly, who will talk about a program he led targeting the Amylin receptors (the name given to the calcitonin receptor heterodimerized with different RAMP accessory proteins). Aspiring and seasoned researchers are invited to attend this session on May 18th from 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm.



Upcoming Events

ASPET 2026 Annual Meeting

May 17–20, 2026 · Minneapolis, MN

20th World Congress of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology 2026

July 12–17, 2026 · Melbourne/Narrm, Australia



The Pharmacologist:

Can you discuss how a particular mentorship influenced you, either as a mentor or a mentee?

Williams: [Doctor Joan Berman](#) at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, my PhD mentor, laid the foundation for my entire career.

I came into grad school with a lot of experience and background in terms of experiments, but I lacked the ability to think like a scientist. I didn't even have the understanding of how to write a paper or apply for a grant. And it just seemed like she enjoyed mentoring me, and seeing me develop and pushing me gently... and sometimes not so gently. When I had hesitations or doubt, particularly when going against people more qualified, Dr. Berman would say, "You won't become qualified if you don't stretch yourself." I learned from her many of the principles that I still use to this day. And it showed me the importance of someone that was really invested in you.

All the folks that I've ever had in my lab shaped me because I adjusted to each of them as an individual person. Everyone's different, so I have to learn how to meet their unique needs, their means of communication. And the more folks I interact with, the more I learn how to be compassionate and caring. They all leave an impression on me, and I think that's probably one of the favorite parts of my job.

Reuben: I've been blessed. I come from a family of academics. My father was a college President, my mother an Academic Dean. I've got a lot of deans and provosts in my immediate and extended family, and their mentoring has been, and continues to be, very important.

I also have a mentoring group of women, some of whom are scientists, others who are faculty, staff, and administration. And we mentor each other as well. If one of us is looking for a job, we do the mock interviews and prepare each other, look over documents and CVs and things like that.

I've also been a part of the ASPET mentoring committee, and I've mentored at the [Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Students](#) as a peer mentor and faculty mentor.

Akinsanya: Mentorship has been the "north star" of my career. I often think back to the mentors who pushed me to see myself not just as a scientist, but as a leader and a strategist. My parents and Steve Bloom had a major impact on how I thought about challenges early in life. Ken Frazier was a key influence in my career at Merck. He encouraged me to expand my view from being a deep translation scientist role into a broader business development and pipeline strategist. Ken and Peter Kim saw a business-minded "translational strategist" capability in me that I hadn't yet recognized. This taught me that the best mentors don't just give advice; they provide sponsorship—putting your name forward in rooms you haven't entered yet. Today, I prioritize mentoring early career scientists and non-conventional talent with diverse perspectives and a thirst to grow and learn to ensure they have the same "seat at the table" that my mentors helped me secure.

The Pharmacologist:

One of the notable things with today's students is an interest in social issues, and how their work can introduce positive change. Is this something unique to this generation, or is it commonly found in scientists?

Williams: I can't say that I think it's unique to this generation, but I think this generation has the most opportunity to be outspoken and vocal about societal issues. It's a phenomenal opportunity, something that's always really been interesting to me. I've always wanted to work on something that would have a social impact. Even if I was many steps removed, I wanted to feel like I was contributing in a positive way through my work. And I don't think I'm alone in that. I think scientists of other generations felt similarly, but it wasn't something that was as much of a focus as it is now.

Akinsanya: While this generation of students is exceptionally vocal and organized, the desire to create positive change is a fundamental trait of the scientific spirit. Scientists have always been driven by the "why" and the hope that our work will help move the need and alleviate suffering.

However, what is unique today is the holistic view of impact.

Today's students don't just care about the molecule; they care about health equity, clinical trial diversity, and sustainable practices. They are holding the industry to a higher standard of accountability. It's not a new impulse, but it is a more "activated" one, and I believe it makes the scientific community more resilient and more connected to the patients we serve.

Reuben: I think it's unique in the aspect of how we've seen politics impact science in a very real way, such as stem cell research. What we've learned is that you can't really do science without being aware of outside politics and how they're going to impact you.

COVID showed us that we need to be more engaged with our community. We have to have trust there so people will believe us when we say, "Hey, the data changed, the evidence changed, this is what you've got to do now." It's imperative that young scientists pay attention to the political landscape and how it could

potentially impact the work they do. You can't put your head in the sand and just work hard and think that going to get you where you want to go.

It's also part of being a good citizen. As scientists, we are not exempt from being good citizens and thinking *not* just in the context of the work that we do, but also the impact of what we do in our field on the general public and on the general good.

The Pharmacologist:

This past year has seen marked changes in science—particularly funding cuts, attempts at redefining culture, and federal agencies dramatically altered. What advice would you give a young scientist today? Would it be significantly different than the advice you would have offered two or three years ago?

Akinsanya: My advice today is: "Build expertise that people can rely on, but sharpen your tools, proactively propose solutions and take on stretch assignments when you see problems." Several years ago, you might have focused more on specialization.

Today, I emphasize the importance of being "bilingual" in science and technology and cross-disciplinary know-how.

Regarding the external climate, I tell young scientists that excellence and persistence are your greatest advocates. Don't let political or fiscal cycles deter your passion. Science or drug development is a long game; the challenges we face today require the very innovation and diverse perspectives that have led to previous breakthroughs that are the foundation of future discoveries and inventions. Collaboration and raising the bar on data-driven decision-making and impact vs. hype is more necessary now than ever.

Williams: In some ways, my advice is completely different because we haven't seen this much interest in policy and how it impacts

science. It wasn't something I realized the full extent of when I was a student. And, because of that, my advice would be to not let yourself get disheartened, and instead to think about why you wanted to do this and boldly do the things you want to do in science. There's still a place for everyone that wants to do this work.

I always remember the advice I got from my grad school mentor when she was talking about the cyclical waves of funding. And that really kind of stayed with me because that philosophy applies not just to funding, but to the public perception of science, to the funding priorities that exist, and to the career opportunities that are available. They do come and go.

It was a hard year for science, in many ways, but I don't imagine that's going to persist. I do think there'll be some cyclical way where things will turn themselves around. Don't let fear of what's going to happen, or even the reality of where things are, dissuade you...although I know that's easier said than done. I know lots of groups have lost funding. People have lost grants they worked hard for, particularly early career investigators and trainees. And that's really disheartening. And so I have to acknowledge that pain, how it feels unfair and how they probably feel like, "How am I going to get to the next level? What else am I going to do? The path I needed to take no longer exists."

We have to honor that, as much as we encourage folks that this can't last forever.

Reuben: I've always talked about the importance of being engaged in your community. I think it's even more important now as we look at the issue of accountability, and of being a good steward of the resources given to us by the general public.

And, again, particularly in the past year, but I'd say even beyond, we've seen politics play a much bigger part of it. So I think the advice I

would give younger faculty students now is to really be attentive and understand how that can play out. It may make the difference in where you work. There may be a state with a policy that doesn't support the research that you do. Be mindful about the political landscape and how it can impact you. Always think about the public good and how you are impacting it.

And, finally, give back to your community by talking to the public, learning how to discuss your research in a way that people understand its impact and importance, because that's going to matter when funding decisions are made.

The Pharmacologist:

Do you think these recent changes will have long-lasting, or even irrevocable, effects in American science?

Reuben: Definitely.

We've cut people off in the middle of research that could be life changing. And so, as someone who looks at medications and how they impact people, I think it's going to take us a while to recover. And that's going to be very interesting to watch as we look at the impact of changes in funding on things like productivity in science, or research into health disparities.

I don't know what is actually "irrevocable." It just may take a much longer time for things to get done.

We've now seen a precedent set that politics is *always* going to be a part of science, and that's something that scientific societies have to be very intentional about addressing. And in thinking about how we engage people so that we can get the support to do the work that's going to help the general public.

Williams: I think some things will be long-lasting. There have been lots of changes that alter how young scientists think about their

career options, and the effects of that will last for quite some time.

Some people may choose to go in science policy and be emboldened and advocate for science. Or people may have been considering a job at the FDA, maybe the CDC. And now they're probably not. And I think the impact of that, of young people changing career outcomes, is going to have a profound effect on our federal agencies.

At the same time, as there's been loss, we've seen the kind of folks who want to make things better. I'm curious to see how things will be in three years, in five years, in ten.

Akinsanya: We are certainly at a crossroads. Funding shifts and changes can create "brain drain" or discourage brilliant minds from entering the field. This could have decade-long ripples. However, I don't believe these effects are irrevocable.

Science has an incredible capacity for self-correction because it is built on the global exchange of ideas. While policy changes create friction, the private sector and academic institutions often find ways to maintain and celebrate excellence and diversity of thought because they both are essential for innovation. During the pandemic, for-profit and not-for-profit organizations joined forces and solved many challenges in a move that I think can teach us what is possible when determined people get together.

The Pharmacologist:

How important has the scientific community been to you?

Akinsanya: Science is a team sport. No one discovers a drug alone. Community provides the support system needed to weather the failures that are so common in our field. ASPET and the associated publications are key instruments for learning. It's a place where you can step out

of your specific organizational silo and engage with the broader discipline of pharmacology. It provides a platform for cross-pollination between academia and industry, which is where the most exciting innovations happen. Having a community like ASPET ensures that you are part of a continuous learning loop.

Williams: Community is essential, and I think this year has highlighted how important it is, even more so just to have a place where you feel like you belong, where you have a group of folks that are like-minded, who support you, who believe in you, who you can call up and say, "I'm having a really hard time. I'm struggling right now." That kind of support has been something I've needed this last year, and ASPET has definitely been a place where I've found it. I've never felt so welcomed and there's no competition. Everyone is just so supportive of each other. It's really beautiful to experience.

Reuben: This is one of the great things I love about my primary division, the [Division of Pharmacology Education](#). We have a program in place where, if we have anyone who's coming from our division to present an abstract at [the national conference](#) (Editor's Note: [register now!](#)), we've assigned people to go and visit them. This is something I've pushed with other divisions, to build that sense of community and show people we're happy you're there.

The Pharmacologist:

Speaking of ASPET's annual meeting, can you describe your first or best experience at the conference?

Williams: I love going to the poster sessions. That's probably one of my favorite things to do because I get to see the new projects people are working on. Not their published work, but late-breaking research. I get to meet the trainees that I really enjoy and talk to them and hear what they're interested in.

As I'm walking through the posters, I catch up with colleagues, and that's really fun. I also enjoy all the impromptu networking. It's a new part of my community that's kind of extended.

I also really like the tables where I can go talk to like the editors of the different ASPET journals. I do that almost every year because it's helpful in reframing how I think about telling the story of my work. I'm working on a paper now for *DMD* because of an editor at their table last year who really helped me think about the way I told the story in a unique way. They said, "This part is really novel and interesting," and now I'm recrafting my paper. It's the same data, but their feedback changed how I think about presenting it.

Reuben: It's not just one time, but rather going every year and experiencing that sense of community, making people feel like we want you to be a part of our society. We want you to be active. Be part of leadership.

I love just walking around. If I see somebody who's alone, I'll go up and talk to them. I just want them to have a sense that we appreciate that they came. It's about making *everyone* feel appreciated, that their presence matters, that the work that they do matters. That's really important to me.

The Pharmacologist:

Can you each discuss a career highlight?

Akinsanya: A significant highlight has been witnessing the benefit patients derive from the medicines that have been invented by a team of colleagues over the years. Most recently, our MALT1 inhibitor discovery program transitioning into the clinic so rapidly and seeing patients who have limited treatment options respond and maintain response is the kind of impact we want to see.

Another highlight is the "people" milestones—watching a scientist I once mentored lead their own department or publish a breakthrough paper. Being at the intersection of predictive computational models and real-world clinical application during this specific era of medicine is something I find fascinating. Understanding how we will continue to co-evolve with the technology we humans have created will make for interesting years ahead in science and translational medicine.

Williams: [I received the PECASE Award](#), the Presidential Early Career Award for Young Scientists and Engineers, from President Biden, and that was just beyond my wildest imagination of what was even possible. I was just following things that I was interested in, and doing the work I'm passionate about, and to see that work recognized at a national level really helped me feel like I'm doing a good job. It confirmed the potential I have as a scientist. I still have the notification letter and I look at it often, especially when I'm feeling down, you know, or a paper gets rejected or a grant doesn't do well. It helps.

Reuben: Getting to be the inaugural Senior Associate Provost and Senior Vice President for Faculty Affairs and Community Engagement at Texas Southern University is certainly a career highlight.

But I've also had the opportunity to start a new medical school in South Carolina, which is the state I'm from, University of South Carolina School of Medicine in Greenville. Helping put that school together is another highlight. As was attending the first World Congress of Pharmacology, in Kyoto, Japan.

I love to see how different people live. We have different cultures and customs, but we all want the same thing. It's kind of interesting to me that we all want to have places where we're safe, where we thrive, where we have resources, where we can care for our families.

I also love watching students move from struggling to success. To watch the light come on. I just received an e-mail from a student at my former institution who wrote, “I didn’t get a chance to tell you this. I really love pharmacology. I’m now going into dental anesthesia, and part of that is because I enjoyed pharmacology with you so much and I wanted to do more in that field.” So that, to me, was a career highlight. That pretty much makes my month, my semester.

The Pharmacologist:

How do you relax in your free time?

Williams: I train in Muay Thai. Less than before, but it’s one of my favorite ways to de-stress and to find community that’s not in science. And it’s such a great way to feel connected to my body and to have time just for myself. I don’t have to show up as a scientist or a professor, I’m just pushing myself and taking care of my body. It’s a cherished part of my week.

Reuben: Spending time with my family. I remember going to a family reunion with my uncle, who has since passed away, and he said, “We’re really blessed because we actually enjoy being with each other.” And the older I get, the more I realize I’d taken that for granted. I assumed everybody’s family was like that!

Akinsanya: I have an interest in photography that “developed” through a love for perspective. In science, we are always trying to visualize the invisible—looking at molecular structures or data patterns. Photography is the artistic extension of that. It’s about finding the right light, the right angle, and capturing a moment of truth. Like my other passion, writing, it is a meditative process for me; it requires a different kind of focus than the lab or the boardroom. It teaches you to observe rather than just look, a skill that is just as valuable in clinical pharmacology as it is behind the lens.



Interested in Being a Guest Writer?

ASPET’s Pharmacology Corner blog seeks contributing writers on a rolling basis.

Pharmacology Corner is a dedicated space where pharmacology experts can discuss issues that affect them professionally and personally. The blog connects science and society through various pharmacology disciplines.

Contact us at pharmacocorner@aspet.org.

[Read the Blog](#)

On Their Way...

Share this!

Each month, the editors of three of the ASPET journals choose their Highlighted Trainee Authors. These early-career scientists are recognized for their innovative research published in *The Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics*, *Drug Metabolism and Disposition*, and *Molecular Pharmacology*. This feature showcases selected young scientists, demonstrates what drives them, and reveals why pharmacology is important to them. This month we are featuring the February 2026 Highlighted Trainee Authors.



Abiodun Wahab

*The Journal of
Pharmacology and
Experimental Therapeutics*

Abiodun Wahab is a fourth-year doctoral candidate at the University of Alabama, where she is pursuing her

PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on Advanced Drug Delivery. Early training in veterinary medicine sparked her interest in how diseases and treatments affect multiple organ systems. In addition to scientific training from advisors, direct exposure to chemotherapy-induced toxicity, and the limited treatment options available to prevent it, further strengthened her interest in translational pharmacology, as well as improving treatment safety while preserving therapeutic effectiveness.

Chemotherapy, although highly effective in killing cancer cells, often causes unintended damage to healthy tissues. Many of these toxicities, including acute kidney injury, currently have no FDA-approved pharmacotherapeutics. As a result, clinicians sometimes must reduce or pause chemotherapy treatment to allow patients time to recover from off-target effects.

Wahab's published research, "[Naringenin-functionalized polyester nanoparticles improve oral urolithin A delivery and protect against cisplatin-induced kidney injury via heme oxygenase-1 activation and mitochondrial quality control](#)," focuses on delivering urolithin A nanoparticles as an adjunct anti-inflammatory to standard chemotherapy to reduce unwanted off-target toxicities. This approach aims to allow cancer patients to continue therapy with no interruptions, while simultaneously alleviating side effects associated with these drugs. She hopes that her work will contribute to ongoing efforts to make pharmacological treatment safer and more tolerable for patients, especially in oncology.

Wahab plans to pursue a career in translational pharmacology focused on alleviating chemotherapy-induced toxicities. "In the future," she said, "I aim to continue working at the intersection of pharmacology, veterinary medicine, and disease biology to help advance safer and more patient-centered treatment approaches for both humans and animals."

For Wahab, having her research published in *The Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics* is a privilege and a strong source of motivation as she continues her training.



Illia Gelman

Molecular Pharmacology

Illia Gelman is a first-year PhD student in the Biomedical and Molecular department at Queen's University at Kingston in Canada. Ever since he was

a child, he's always had a fascination with nature, and gaining laboratory experience in high school was what cemented his passion for biomedical sciences. Learning about and trying patch-clamp increased his interest in electrophysiology. Gelman finds inspiration from his mentors Dr. Shetuan Zhang and Dr. Xiaolong Yang, who constantly share their expertise and help fuel his passion for research.

Drugs are developed to target a specific protein or function of the cell. Nonetheless, all these different drugs can have varying effects and/or mechanisms of action. Gelman's published article, "[Amiodarone irreversibly impairs the function of human ether-a-go-go-related gene \(hERG\) potassium channels](#)," focuses on Amiodarone, an antiarrhythmic drug that is oftentimes the first choice for the treatment of various arrhythmias. The research shows an entirely new mode of interaction between amiodarone and the hERG channel.

"I hope that my research will help better shape cardiovascular healthcare by expanding our understanding of the drugs being used and, perhaps, even guide further drug development," Gelman shared.

For Gelman, the most rewarding part of research has been the feeling he gets when he finally collects enough data to connect the dots, especially after long months of hard work and the occasional late night at the lab. Having experienced the highs and lows of research, Gelman's passion for it continues to grow. He

aims to stay within the biomedical field to pursue a research career.

In 2025, Gelman attended the [ASPET Annual Meeting](#) to present his research. "It was an amazing opportunity to meet the people behind the publications in ASPET's journals, and I am proud to have my first primary research manuscript published in *Molecular Pharmacology*."



Alessandra Pugliano

Drug Metabolism and Disposition

Alessandra Pugliano is a third-year PhD candidate in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at KU Leuven in collaboration

with F. Hoffmann-La Roche. Pugliano's career path has been a deliberate journey from understanding the chemical structure of matter to exploring the complex biological behavior of drugs. Her bachelor's research focused on the utilization of solid-state NMR to characterize Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients as co-crystals. Pursuing her Master's in Medicinal Chemistry gave her a deep appreciation for molecular construction. A second post-graduate internship shifted Pugliano's focus towards drug-drug interactions (DDI) and highlighted the clinical importance of evaluating the potential interactions between co-administered drugs.

The core of Pugliano's research, "[Combining the novel all-human co-cultured hepatocytes system with PBPK modeling to assess the translatability of CYP and UGT induction data](#)," focuses on improving DDI risk assessment through a combination of in vitro experiments and computational modeling, using human-derived models to measure these interactions and retrieve parameters defining the DDI

phenomenon in the lab. She then integrates this experimental data into mathematical models, like mechanistic static and physiologically based pharmacokinetic (PBPK) models, to simulate various clinical scenarios and predict how these interactions will manifest in humans, helping to identify potential safety risks before clinical trials.

“I hope my research serves as a meaningful puzzle piece that, when combined with the work of my peers, helps complete the bigger picture of DDI translatability and advances the field toward more reliable risk assessment frameworks,” Pugliano shared.

In terms of her future research, Pugliano plans to continue building her expertise in complex enzymatic DDIs, such as autoinhibition and autoinduction, while further developing her practical skills in PBPK modeling. She is also interested in expanding her focus to include transporter-mediated interactions and the complexities of translating drug clearance.

For Pugliano, seeing her research published in *Drug Metabolism and Disposition* is a deeply rewarding experience and an incredible honor. “Beyond the personal milestone, it is a recognition of the relevance of our research and validation of the effort we put forward as a scientific community in closing critical knowledge gaps.”

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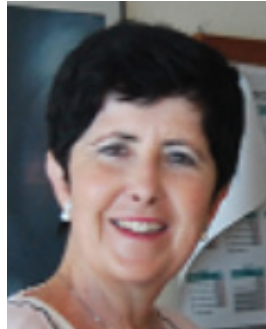
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