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Pathways Through *Pharmacology*

ASPET
Transforming Discoveries into Therapies

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On the Cover: *Joan Heller Brown, PhD and Lori Isom, PhD.*

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Message from the President

In this US electoral season, I find myself musing about resilience and how central it is to biology and human health. We are on the cusp of yet another cycle of change, which can lend hope but also induce anxiety. Those of us who have undergone multiple decades of change know something about how these cycles go… never exactly as we predict, but often circling back to familiar themes.

Pharmacology research gives us additional perspectives into biological resilience. As we unraveled cellular signaling pathways, we came to understand that ligands that we thought to be disparate (neurotransmitters, cytokines, growth factors, metabolic peptides, etc.) share common mechanisms for changing cell behavior, arranged in combinations that provide nuance to their effects. We also learned that a single ligand often interacts with multiple types of receptors, which are constructed of modules of sequence that are similar to, but unique from, those in other proteins. The signaling resiliency of cancer cells is legendary, and challenges us to outsmart nature. Together, these findings have led us to appreciate how drugs exert side effects, and how cells can adapt to long-term therapy with a given drug. In other words, cells are more resilient and complex than we ever dreamed possible, and our best-laid plans for drug therapy can lead to unexpected results… both negative and positive.

Resilience is also central to mentor-trainee relationships. Our trainees experience change in ways complementary to those of their mentors. Trainees are not as restricted by previous experience, which can lead them to suggest new solutions. They can also be more sensitive to change, since they have not yet built all the strategies to deal with it. Mentors need the energy and creativity of their trainees, and trainees need the long-term vision and perspective of their mentors. Together, they support each other as they move science forward. The scientific enterprise relies on these relationships, and this is why funding agencies have historically supported training grants and fellowships. ASPET provides multiple resources for scientists at all career levels to engage with mentors who can assist them in their journey. These resources include:

1. MentorMatch, a platform that facilitates one-on-one mentoring relationships,
2. Mentoring Network, a year-long program providing group coaching to graduate students and postdoctoral scientists,
3. The SURF program, which matches undergraduates with mentors for a summer research experience, and
4. The ASPET Conference Buddy Program, a peer-mentoring opportunity for first-time attendees that takes place during the ASPET Annual Meeting.

Pharmacology serves as a great example of the resilience of the human scientific endeavor. To relieve suffering, we have boldly moved forward with treatments for disease before we understood all aspects of either the disease or the treatment. We learn from our mistakes, dive deeper into the mechanisms, and strive to come up with better treatments. A drug that is abandoned due to adverse effects in one situation can be useful in another… once we understand its limitations. Patients who enroll in clinical trials do so in the belief that scientists will develop better treatments over time. Their confidence is based on the “social contract” that we will test drugs responsibly, that we will

provide opportunities for patients to be part of the conversation, and that government will oversee our efforts in a responsible manner. It is our collective responsibility as pharmacologists to be part of this contract.

As change inevitably comes our way, we can draw on our belief in the value of scientific discovery to persist in our endeavors. Working together, we can be resilient and can improve the lives of others. Please take advantage of the avenues that ASPET provides for you to take your work in new directions, mentor the next generation of pharmacologists, and identify new ways to make a difference to the world.



Sincerely,

Kay Meier, PhD
President, ASPET

FOCUS ON PHARMACOLOGY
ASPET Virtual Series

Join us for these FREE webinars

DMDD Quarterly Series:
Career Panel for Industry-Focused Trainees in the DMD Field

Friday, December 11
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm ET

Are you finishing your PhD or postdoctoral research? Will you be on the job market and want to pursue a career in academia or industry? Then join our Drug Metabolism and Disposition Industry-Focused Career Panel for Trainees!

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Emerging Trends in Translational Pharmacology: From Drug Discovery to Precision Therapeutics

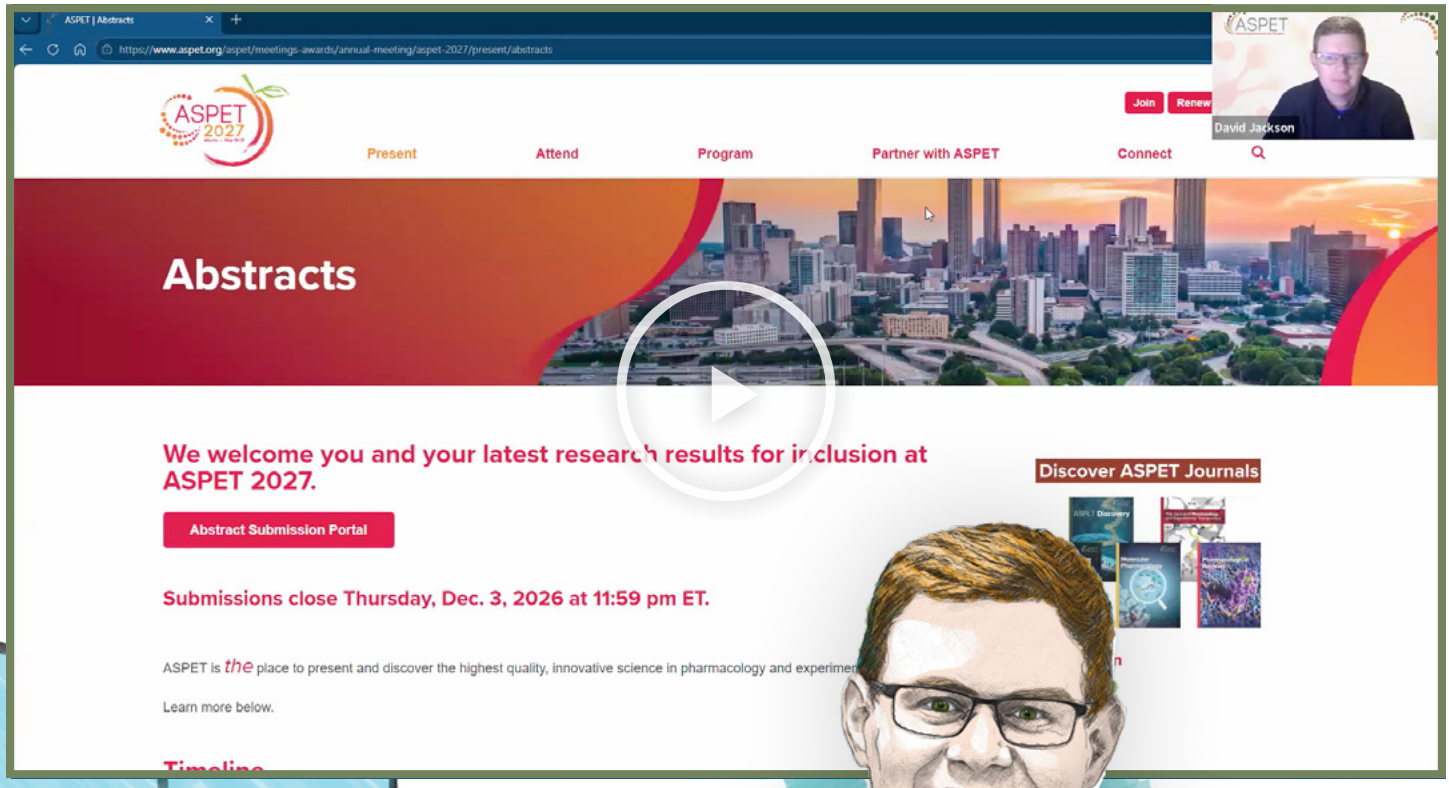
Wednesday, December 16
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm ET

Join ASPET and the Indian Pharmacological Society (IPS) for a joint webinar on emerging trends in translational pharmacology, from drug discovery to precision therapeutics.

REGISTER NOW

A Note from Dave's Desk

ASPET Executive Officer Dave Jackson discusses ASPET's next annual meeting, and encourages attendees to submit abstracts for their opportunity to be part of the poster hall. The deadline to submit abstracts for consideration is December 3, which also offers submitters the possibility to be considered for oral presentations and awards.





Watch the video

Visit *The Pharmacologist* website for digital-only features and extras. thepharmacologist.org





Pathways Through *Pharmacology*

By Ed Aymar, Marketing and Communications Manager, ASPET

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For this issue of *The Pharmacologist*, we're excited to share the stories of two prominent ASPET members and leaders in the field. In an autobiographical essay, Joan Brown, PhD, and ASPET member since 1978, writes openly about the guidance she received throughout her education, and how it informed her award-winning career. And Lori Isom, PhD, a society member since 1998, shares in an interview how community and collaboration have been crucially important in her groundbreaking research.

There is no one certain path to becoming a successful scientist, but as the journeys of Drs. Brown and Isom illustrate, each path often shares similarities—an early interest in science, education at strong and supportive programs, and inspired mentorship.

Finding a Home in Pharmacology: The Evolution of a Career

By Joan Heller Brown, PhD



Early Days

We all likely recollect, when musing about our life's trajectory, certain curious aspects of our childhood behavior. For me such a recollection was triggered by finding compositions, stashed in my mother's closet, from my K–12 school days in Beachwood, Ohio. One paper was entitled "Witchcraft" and another "Mental Illness in America." Perhaps these early interests presaged my choice of the newly developed "Neurobiology and Behavior" major which I selected in my first year of college at Cornell University. One of my most inspiring courses was given by the psychologist Urie Brofenbrenner, and revealed that scientific research could be applied to explain things like why diseases developed in specific parts of the world, or why babies don't crawl off a platform. Science, I realized, might well explain the curious aspects of behavior that had intrigued me.

In my senior year I found a path to doing laboratory research with a professor named Frank Rosenblatt. As a total novice, I was tasked with making solutions and learned, to my mortification, that no course had ever taught me what a "molar solution" was. I struggled through, but stuck with it because the lab's research really piqued my interest. They were doing experiments to understand the biochemical basis of learning and memory. More specifically, they were using "memory transfer" experiments, in which they trained mice, ground up their brains, and fed them to naïve mice. They hypothesized that memory of a learned task (turning right or left in a maze for a reward) could be transferred to recipient mice. The most instructive moment came when, while attending their lab meeting, I learned that scientists generate new hypotheses based on observation. In this case, it was a particularly surprising observation: mice receiving the brain extract from donor mice that had been trained to turn left, actually turned right at a higher-than-expected frequency!

It seemed to me that this disproved the hypothesis but, unfazed, one of the lab members suggested an explanation, i.e., that the chemical signal to turn left was fully saturated in the brain of the donor, leading to a propensity to turn right, rather than make the normal random choice, in the recipient. I was thrilled by the notion that one could generate findings and interpret them to fit the data, and grew hooked on the idea of doing hypothesis-driven (or hypothesis-generating) research.

Falling Into Pharmacology

As my senior year was coming to an end it became evident that I had no idea how to advance my education through a graduate training program.

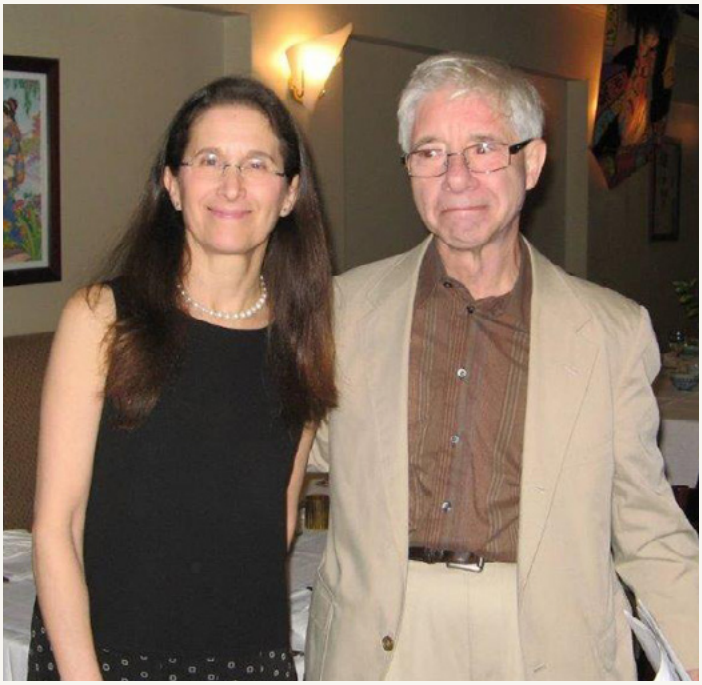
I wanted a biological focus on the brain, and neither the GRE exam in Psychology nor the offerings in Physiological Psychology graduate programs fit my interests. At the time, neuroscience graduate programs simply didn't exist. A fellow student I met in the midst of

my dilemma told me about research-focused graduate programs in certain medical schools; in particular, at Albert Einstein College of Medicine (AECOM). There I found a graduate program in Pharmacology, with several faculty members studying drug and neurohormone action on the brain. While I knew nothing about the discipline of Pharmacology, I realized that the actions of drugs could provide a window into understanding the molecular mechanisms underlying the behavioral systems they affected. I applied to the Department of Pharmacology at AECOM, was accepted, and matriculated into what turned out to be a loosely defined program with only 2 other students in my class, no graduate courses, and no research rotations.

On the other hand, while the curriculum given to us was largely designed for the medical students, it included advanced courses and labs in biochemistry, physiology, neuroanatomy and pharmacology... all of which I loved. The textbook for the Pharmacology course was Goodman and Gilman's *Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*; while initially unknown to me, the chair of the Pharmacology Department was the editor of this leading scholarly work. Alfred Gilman Sr. was, additionally, a former President of ASPET, and the faculty teaching the Pharmacology course were all authors of various chapters in the book. These professors, as well as those in Biochemistry and Neuroanatomy, were superb. There was also an unusually large number of women faculty at AECOM, and I barely recognized how unique this was because they seemed to be seamlessly integrated into the mix.

Research Findings

Many of the Pharmacology faculty who had interested me initially moved to other institutions during my first year, so finding a lab for my thesis research was a challenge. I was directed to Maynard Makman, an MD/PhD who trained at Case Western Reserve with the early group who discovered the role of cyclic AMP. While he had never trained a graduate student, his lack of mentoring experience was compensated by his total engagement and excitement over my research. It also turned out that Ora Rosen, one of the extraordinary women faculty members at AECOM, gave a graduate-level course focused on various aspects of what we now think of as "cell signaling," the only course I was offered that was intended for graduate students, and one in which we read scientific papers!



Joan Heller Brown with her thesis advisor, Maynard H. Makman, PhD, MD.

My research in the Makman Lab used the retina as a model brain slice and led to the discovery that adenylate cyclase activity could be regulated not only by epinephrine and norepinephrine, as originally determined, but also by dopamine. Intriguingly, my studies showed that dopamine stimulated cyclic AMP formation through a pathway that was not blocked by adrenergic receptor antagonists, but rather by phenothiazines and other antipsychotic drugs. This provided strong

evidence regarding the developing concept that psychosis, a hallmark of schizophrenia, was mediated through changes in the properties of the (as yet undiscovered) receptor for dopamine.

Fortuitously, this observation brought me into an area of neurochemistry clearly related to brain and behavior. Moreover, it led to my first direct contact with Dr. Gilman, because Dr. Makman encouraged me to ask him to communicate our manuscript to the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. Dr. Gilman, a rather taciturn individual, did not manifest much interest but agreed to help, perhaps because his son, the junior Alfred Gilman (Nobel Laureate, UT Southwestern) was himself working in this area, developing early in his career what became a widely used assay for cyclic AMP.

In my time at AECOM I had the privilege of also getting to know two other major figures in pharmacology, Arthur Grollman and his research associate Susan Horwitz. Susan served on my thesis committee and, although my work was far outside her area of expertise, complimented me on my thesis and has been a role model, friend, and supporter of my career ever since.



Joan Heller Brown with Susan Horowitz outside the New York Metropolitan Opera House.

Meeting ASPET Leaders

Finding a postdoctoral position was also a fortuitous experience.

My husband and I were living in Riverdale, in the basement apartment of Eric Kandel's home. We were supposed to be (and were) largely invisible occupants, but I did occasionally run into Dr. Kandel and took the opportunity to discuss my interests and gather his ideas about postdoctoral possibilities.

The most exciting postdoctoral interview I had was with Perry Molinoff, a new assistant professor in the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Colorado, with whom I instantly bonded. Luckily, the University of Colorado also had an excellent fellowship program in Child Psychiatry, which fit with my husband's career plans. We were both accepted into our chosen programs, and once again, I joined a lab where my mentor did not have significant previous training experience. While I was his first postdoctoral (or other) trainee, he subsequently hired Ken Harden and Barry Wolfe and we formed an amazing gang, enjoying every minute of our time in the lab and spending our time off together, often with Perry and his wife Marlene. When my project on catecholamine metabolism led me to follow an assay developed in the laboratory of Norman Weiner, the Department Chair, I met with him and he became the second ASPET president who knew my name! Another faculty member in the Department at the University of Colorado was Chip Rutledge, the third ASPET president I had the fortune to know.

My Penultimate, and Most Opportune, Move

My husband completed his fellowship in Colorado in two years and needed to move on. I learned of a research faculty position in the division of Pharmacology at the University of California San Diego (UCSD). We had visited the

city previously since our friend Larry Squire, whom I had worked with at AECOM in the lab of Sam Barondes, had moved with him to UCSD.

I joined the lab of Dr. Stephen Mayer, the fourth ASPET president on whose radar screen I appeared, as a research assistant professor in 1975. Once again, for a time I was the only research fellow in the lab, until the following year, when Larry Brunton joined as a postdoctoral fellow. While the project to which I was assigned held limited interest for me, I took on a side project related to my earlier experiences, using isolated mouse atria to study cyclic AMP signaling. Guided by Joanne Ingwall, and given total independence and flexibility by Dr. Mayer, I discovered that acetylcholine inhibited cyclic AMP formation in the heart, an explanation for parasympathetic antagonism of the sympathetic control of heart rate. I published a sole-authored paper in *Molecular Pharmacology* (PMID: 231196) on this topic and went on to do considerably more work on muscarinic cholinergic receptor signaling in the heart and other tissues.

On the basis of this research, I was awarded a Faculty Development Award from the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) which put me in a position to be competitive for a faculty position at UCSD. Here Palmer Taylor became highly instrumental in my success. Palmer succeeded Steve Mayer as Pharmacology chair at UCSD, and subsequently managed to turn the Division into the Department of Pharmacology. He inspired me to teach in the medical school and graduate Pharmacology courses, attended my lectures, and encouraged me to apply for a tenure track faculty position that had become available. Then, when he became founding Dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at UCSD, he asked me to serve as the Interim chair of the Department. Additionally, I took over for him as Director of our longstanding T32 in Pharmaceutical Sciences, which I successfully helped renew for many cycles. And, continuing the theme, Palmer was still another president of ASPET who became involved in my career.



Joan Heller Brown receives the Otto Krayer Award (with David R. Sibley and Palmer Taylor).

The only thing Palmer requested that I declined was to run for president of ASPET. My focus was on my lab's research and, subsequent to being appointed as Pharmacology chair in 2004, on expanding the Department. My goal was to maintain Pharmacology as a distinct department, avoiding the mergers with other departments and concomitant loss of identity of the discipline of Pharmacology so common at the time. I was able to obtain four more FTEs, hire 15 more faculty, and grow the department's research funding, making the Department of Pharmacology at UCSD one of the top 3 (*US News and World Reports*) departments in the country during my tenure. This was my tribute to the "Make Pharmacology Great" venture that Palmer was so engaged in, and which he entrusted to me.

A Sphere of Influence

There can be no question that the Pharmacology leaders I met during my journey were responsible for my success. My first grant, which made me credible as a candidate for a tenure track faculty position was, as mentioned above, from PhRMA, and recommendations from ASPET leaders were critical in my selection for this award. Likewise, when I was recommended as Editor in Chief of *Molecular Pharmacology*, these leaders encouraged and supported my nomination. My association with leaders and educators in Pharmacology enabled me to take on authorship of a chapter in Goodman and Gilman, and to serve as Director of UCSD's longstanding NIH T32 in Pharmacological Sciences. Awards from ASPET (Lucchesi, Krayer, Ruffolo, Axelrod) as well as early selection as an ASPET Fellow were most certainly accomplished, not only through my research achievements, but also with help from my friends, the ASPET leaders whom I encountered in my career, and the colleagues I met through participation in the society. Being part of this society, and the larger scientific community, provided the foundation upon which my career was built.

Those who have trained in my laboratory, as well as the trainees on our Cell and Molecular Pharmacology T32, are strongly incentivized to join ASPET and attend the annual meetings. Indeed, for many years we hosted a UCSD Pharmacology Alumni reunion at the Experimental Biology Meeting. My faculty colleagues and our training grant faculty strive to ensure that our mentees appreciate the power that understanding drug action affords them for discovering disease mechanisms and developing new therapeutics. Moreover, we want them to feel, as my story has illustrated, that association with the discipline of Pharmacology provides them with a unique and supportive scientific family. Our current cadre of pharmacology colleagues truly value this, as depicted in the photo of a dinner for Kay Meier (who was a postdoctoral fellow at UCSD) as the new ASPET chair, along with ASPET Friends and Fellows. Hopefully the next generation will feel the same degree of collegiality in their association with Pharmacology.



Friends and Fellows Celebration at ASPET 2026.

An Interview with Lori Isom, PhD



My interest in science started with my father, who was a surgeon. I made rounds with him when I was eight and saw my first surgery at nine. Obviously, this was before HIPAA.

But it wasn't until I went to college at Washington University that I saw how far science reached. I had my first opportunity to conduct research under Dr. Al Holzer in the Department of Chemistry, an incredible but demanding mentor. Under his guidance, and because of the work we were doing, I decided that I wanted to go into research full-time but was unsure of which specialty. This was before there were umbrella programs, like PIBS at Michigan, and it was luck that I saw an advertisement on a bulletin board about pharmacology at Vanderbilt University. Pharmacology, I learned, was translational before translational was even a word. It was the synthesis of all the basic sciences to make something happen in medicine. I thought that was a fantastic approach and decided to study at Vanderbilt.

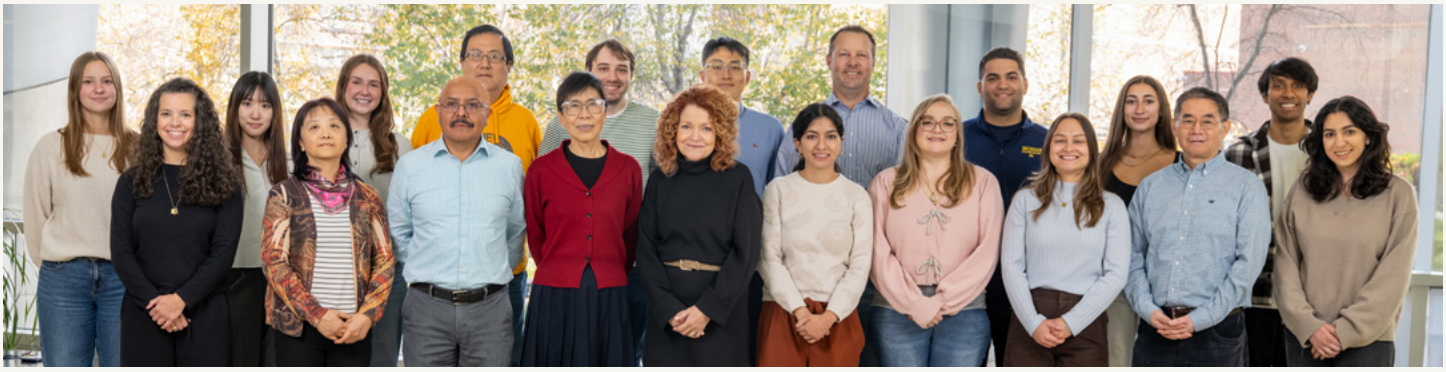
While I was a student at Vanderbilt, Dr. Bill Catterall, then the newly appointed chair of Pharmacology at the University of Washington, came to give a guest lecture in our receptors course. Bill's lab was celebrated for its work with ion channels. I found his presentation fascinating, and applied to work in his lab as a postdoc.

Because we didn't yet have a deep understanding of ion channel molecular biology, the work was far more complex than either of us had realized. My project focused on cloning sodium channel beta subunits from protein sequence, but this was before the Human Genome Project, and the work took years. Once, it was so disheartening that I went into Bill's office and announced, "You do it. I quit!" Fortunately for me, he didn't take that seriously.

I started applying for faculty jobs after I cloned *SCN1B* and *SCN2B*. Because there were three of us from Bill's lab (all postdocs) applying for faculty positions at the same time, Bill's thought was that we needed to divide and conquer so that we weren't competing for the same job. For me, he recommended an advertised position in the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Michigan.

I was six months pregnant when I interviewed at Michigan, and pregnancy turned out to be the perfect litmus test. Some places where I interviewed essentially told me, "You can be a mother, or you can have a brain. One or the other." At Ann Arbor, on the other hand, they couldn't have been kinder or more accommodating. It was there that I learned "The Michigan Way," which is salt-of-the-earth people doing state-of-the-art work, a fundamental trait that is still there today. Much of my success during my thirty years at the University of Michigan has been because of that culture, and it's one I've tried to extend to others—to pull others up instead of closing the door behind me.

When I came to Michigan, I was invited to join a group of senior women faculty that included giants in their field, e.g. Miriam H. Meisler, PhD, and Sally A. Camper, PhD. They took new women faculty under their wings by offering informal monthly mentoring meetings, which gave us the opportunity to learn from people who had been here a long time. Their advice and approach taught me so much about mentorship, which I still use in my own lab today.



Lori Isom's lab.

My lab director, Chunling Chen, MD, has been with me for more than 25 years. We have a philosophy that we choose graduate students whom we would consider adopting into our own families. While this philosophy has been very successful overall, occasionally it doesn't work, or it's not a good fit, and we encourage a student to pursue a different lab or even a different field. That can be a difficult conversation, but it's always one those students eventually come to appreciate. Dedicating one's life to science is not easy. Research is increasingly expensive, with narrowing opportunities. We as faculty commit our time and our funds, but students commit the most precious resource—their lives. If pharmacology isn't the right fit, then continuing to pursue it might be devastating.

To that point, we need students who are passionate. In my lab, we've moved beyond pursuing "knowledge for knowledge's sake" to "there are patients waiting." Patients are literally waiting for our results. This ties into my work with SUDEP and Dravet syndrome. Right about the time that the Nobel Prize was given to Dr. Shinya Yamanaka for his work on induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), Dr. Jack Parent, my long-term colleague in the Department of Neurology, told me that he was going to try and make iPSC neurons from patients with Dravet Syndrome. He asked if I wanted to collaborate.

My "yes" to Jack started a collaboration that has lasted years. We've been able to work on patient-derived iPSCs, and now we're working on organoids and assembloids. People often ask Jack and I about the magic behind our partnership, and the truth is that Jack and I are very like-minded. We've never let ego get in the way of progress. We are great friends.

In collaboration with Stoke Therapeutics, may lab has developed the first gene-modifying therapy for epilepsy (Zorevunersen) that's saving and changing patients' lives—not only stopping seizures but also reversing the intellectual disability inherent in Dravet syndrome.

This work has led to irreplaceable moments.

In 2020, Dr. Julie Ziobro (a pediatric neurologist colleague at Michigan, and PI of the clinical trial of Zorevunersen) asked me to meet a little boy, Zane, and his mom. He was the first patient we dosed with STK-001 (Zorevunersen). I met Zane, who had gone from an average of fifty seizures a month to approximately one. He was able to attend preschool for the first time, and their family was able to go on a vacation. Typically, children with this condition can't even dive into a pool without seizing.

But meeting that little boy... that was it. I could have retired that day. That was the greatest thing. And now when I go to Dravet syndrome patient and family meetings, and I meet the moms and dads with kids on our drug, I don't care what else we ever do. That's the best.

The PhRMA Foundation and *Drug Metabolism and Disposition* present...

THE 2027 CHALLENGE AWARDS

Trainees will be rewarded for outstanding papers in a special issue on “Advanced Modalities in Drug Development: Radiopharmaceuticals, ADCs, Delivery Systems and Biodistribution of NextGeneration Gene and Cell Therapies.”

The PhRMA Foundation will provide the Challenge Award — a prize of $5,000 — to the first author of up to five winning papers.

Submit your work by February 1, 2027

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Leadership Profile

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A Conversation with Daniela Salvemini, PhD, FASPET, FNAI
ASPET Councilor



How did you get started in pharmacology?

My interest in pharmacology began unexpectedly. As a young student, I thought I would pursue mathematics. That changed when I was hospitalized for appendicitis, and I became fascinated by how a simple tablet could relieve pain. I did not even know the word *analgesic*, but I wanted to understand how drugs worked.

I studied pharmacology at Chelsea College, where Dr. Jack Botting played an instrumental role in nurturing my passion for science. I asked endless questions, and his answers always made me think more deeply and ask even more. He was an exceptional teacher who challenged me intellectually, and we remained good friends until his passing.

During my undergraduate studies, I spent a year at Sandoz working with Drs. John Morley and Clive Page on drugs to prevent asthma. It was a fantastic experience that sparked my passion for inflammation research and showed me how exciting research in the pharmaceutical industry could be. I knew then that I wanted to pursue translational research.

Another defining influence was the late Nobel Laureate Sir John Vane, with whom I completed my PhD and postdoctoral training in London. Sir John shaped how I approach science and remained a mentor throughout my career.

I later spent two years at Monsanto in St. Louis working with Dr. Philip Needleman, further broadening my experience in drug discovery. Together, these experiences shaped my career at the intersection of fundamental pharmacology and the search for better treatments.

How did you first get involved with ASPET?

I joined ASPET around 1994 as a postdoctoral fellow, excited to become part of a community that shared my enthusiasm for pharmacology.

Over the years, ASPET has given me opportunities to exchange ideas, build friendships, and connect with scientists across academia and industry. I have encouraged my students and postdoctoral fellows to participate, organized scientific symposia, and served as an ASPET Councilor. Receiving the Pharmacia–ASPET Award in Experimental Therapeutics and becoming an ASPET Fellow were meaningful honors, but what I value most is belonging to a scientific community that has accompanied me throughout my career.

What do you want the ASPET membership to know about you and your ideas on how to move the organization forward during your term?

I believe good leadership starts with listening. People bring different experiences and ideas, and an organization is strongest when members feel they have a voice and can make a meaningful contribution. That is the kind of ASPET I want to help build.

One priority is to give students, postdoctoral fellows, and early-career investigators a greater role in shaping the Society's future. I want them not only to attend scientific sessions

but also to help organize them, share ideas, and participate in leadership. I also want to strengthen connections among academia, industry, and government. Having worked in both academic and pharmaceutical research, I know how much we can learn from one another and how important those relationships are in moving discoveries toward better treatments.

What has been your proudest accomplishment in your career so far?

I am proud of the discoveries from my laboratory that have opened new directions in pain research. Our work helped establish the importance of nitroxidative signaling in chronic pain and uncovered the therapeutic potential of the adenosine A3 receptor as a promising target for non-opioid pain treatments. More recently, we have contributed to the emerging concept of peripheral neuropathies as sphingolipid disorders, or *sphingopathies*.

Equally meaningful are the people behind these discoveries. Watching students and postdoctoral fellows grow into independent scientists has been one of my greatest rewards. To me, mentorship means recognizing potential, opening doors, and sometimes putting another person's success ahead of your own.

What makes me proudest is the science we have accomplished together, the careers we have helped nurture, and the possibility that our discoveries will ultimately benefit patients.

What advice would you give young scientists who are just starting out in their careers?

Stay curious and never lose the joy of discovery. Science is wonderful, but it is also hard. Be persistent, learn from setbacks, and remain open to unexpected directions.

Surround yourself with people who know things you do not, challenge your thinking, and help you grow. Never feel threatened by their expertise; learn from it. Teams bring together different personalities and ways of thinking. Be flexible, respect those differences, and learn to work together.

Do not be afraid to sit at the table. Speak up and share your ideas. Do not let the fear of being scooped silence you. If someone gets there first, you will have another idea.

Seek good mentors. We need different mentors at different stages of our careers as our challenges and aspirations evolve. Sometimes, if we are fortunate, one person remains a pillar of guidance and inspiration throughout our journey. Be generous with others, and always be collegial and kind. Science brings extraordinary people and friendships into our lives.

Finally, remember that life exists outside the laboratory. Nurture your relationships, and never neglect your family. They are your greatest supporters and cheerleaders. Enjoy the science, the people you meet, and your life along the way.



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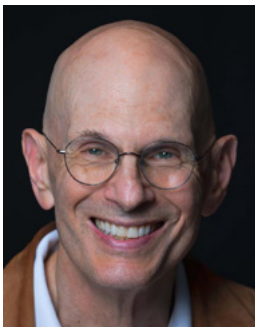
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Member Highlights

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ASPET Member's Research Leads to Development of Parkinsons' Drug



Tavapadon (brand name Juvmo), a new drug designed to mitigate the symptoms of Parkinsons' disease, was recently approved by the FDA. Juvmo was developed after decades of research by Richard B. Mailman, PhD, an ASPET member since 1979. He and his colleague, Xuemei Huang, MD, who joined his team in the late 1990s, "went on an odyssey to convince pharmaceutical companies of the promise of his approach." Ultimately, their research found a home at Pfizer, on a team led by David L. Gray, PhD.

Learn more about Dr. Mailman's research in this press release.

ASPET Welcomes New Members

Each month, ASPET welcomes new members to our home for pharmacology. This month, we recognize 55 individuals from 23 universities, colleges, and companies who have joined 4,000 other members in the pharmacology community. Learn more about ASPET membership.

Adesewa Adekola

Arab Academy for Science Technology & Maritime Transport
- Ahmed Shama

Central Luzon State University
- Hannah Meim

Emory University
- Julia Dietrich

Georgetown University
- Gabrielle Williams

LSU Health Shreveport
- Megan Ashworth

Mercer University
- India Breuer
- Mashmum Shahid

Monash University Malaysia
- Shatakshi Mishra

Northeast Ohio Medical University
- Erin Avram

Ohio State University
- Mohammad Alaee
- Lonnie Fleming
- Yirui Huang
- Juehui Mao
- Alexandra Partey

University Autónoma del Estado de Morelos
- Erick Ayala Calvillo

University of Arizona
- Sophie Elleman
- Ainsley Olvey
- Saruta Tantisirikulchorn

University of California San Diego
- Xinya Su
- Lennis Orduna-Castillo

University of Connecticut School of Pharmacy
Sidra Bashir
Angana De
Muthukuda Arachchige Kavinda Maduwantha
Mounika Pathuri
Girija Pawge
Michael Samulevich

University of Michigan
Yuesong Bai
Kate Bowman
Lauren Conrad
Andres Villegas Calderon
Kezhen Zhang

University of Minnesota
Kaitlin Beel
Olivia Kuckhahn
Tanvi Mathur
Austin Robertson

University of Oklahoma Health Sciences
Miranda Brown
Rajib Molla
Katie Smith
Neeraj Thakur
Sona Tiwari

University of Ottawa
Danylo Aloshyn

University of South Florida
Nidhi Perla

University of Texas Medical Branch
Nevon Dinh

University of Mississippi Medical Center
Megan Stempkovski

Vanderbilt University
Rachelle Larivee

Wake Forest University School of Medicine
Hailey Dryden
Logan Fickes
Lauren Ford
Ansley Inscore
Alyssa Kiel
Samantha McNabb
Luca Patten
Arunima Sareen

Western Michigan University
Landon Palmer

PHARMACO CORNER

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Read the Blog

In Memoriam

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ASPET mourns the loss and celebrates the lives of Martha Dávila-García, PhD, FASPET, and Charles Preuce, PhD, RPh.



Martha Dávila-García, PhD, FASPET

A member of ASPET since 1997, Dr. Dávila-Garcia received her BS in Biology from Slippery Rock University in 1982, and a Master's and PhD degree in Biology from New York University (NYU) in 1986 and 1989, respectively. She went on to do a Postdoctoral Fellowship on pharmacology at the University of California, Irvine, with Frances M. Leslie, and a second postdoc with Kenneth J. Kellar at Georgetown University. Dr. Dávila-García joined the faculty of the Pharmacology Department at Howard University (HU) College of Medicine in 1999.

At Georgetown, Dr. Dávila-Garcia developed several nicotinic receptor ligands for use in mapping and studying the pharmacological properties of nicotinic receptors in both animal models and human brains. Her work, and that of her colleagues, on mapping and quantifying nicotinic receptors in human smokers versus non-smokers, helped shape the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's 1996 ruling that reclassified nicotine as a neuroactive drug.

Dr. Dávila-García was passionate about teaching, mentoring, and advocacy. At Howard University, she taught and mentored graduate, medical, dental, allied health and pharmacy students, and served as the Director of Graduate Programs for the Pharmacology Department. She also served as an Executive leader of the World Women in Neuroscience (WWN), an advocacy group that aimed to improve career development, mentoring, and networking opportunities for female scientists around the world, with special attention to women in disadvantaged regions. She served on the Board of the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos, Latinos and Native Americans in STEM (SACNAS), and garnered funds from the National Institutes of Health to allow 650 marginalized students to attend the National Diversity in STEM (NDiSTEM) Conference for five years, where she judged pharmacology posters and mentored students in pharmacology and career development.

In collaboration with Dr. Robert P. Biney from Cape Coast University, Dr. Dávila-García began a short-term intense "School of Neuropharmacology Research and Drug Development" in Africa, with funds from the International Brain Research Organization and the African Research Council. The objective of the school was to provide non-pharmacology/pharmacy scientists with basic knowledge on pharmacological principles and practices relevant in studying natural compounds.

Dr. Dávila-García served as the Chair of ASPET's Committee on Diversity. She was also an active member of the Minority and Career Development Committee, the Executive Committee of the Neuropharmacology Division, the Membership task force, and the Awards Committee. Dr. Dávila-García had also served as a mentor for the Mentoring Network, organized several symposia, and presented or organized multiple webinars for the Focus on Pharmacology series.

Photo credit: IBRO.org



Charles (Chuck) Preuss, PhD, RPh

Dr. Preuss, an ASPET member since 2009, was a professor of Molecular Pharmacology and Physiology in the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine.

Dr. Preuss was a strong advocate for ensuring the strongest possible pharmacology curriculum at USF. He directed several pharmacology courses and contributed to the teaching of others, as well as authoring more than 100 scholarly publications. He joined USF in 2008 as an assistant professor, became an associate professor in 2012, and was promoted to professor in 2022. For his efforts, he was awarded the Dean's Platinum Recognition Award in 2010, and the Outstanding Pre-Clinical Science Course Award in 2015.

A Detroit native, Dr. Preuss earned his BS and PhD from Wayne State University and was a research fellow at the Mayo Clinic. Before joining USF, he held faculty positions at South Dakota State University in Brookings; Ferris State University in Michigan; Palm Beach Atlantic University in Florida and Sullivan University in Kentucky.

With thanks to Charles J. Lockwood, MD, MHCM for the biographical information.

Photo credit: Dignitymemorial.com

Want to learn how to best advocate for science with the new congress in 2027?

Bring the ASPET Government Affairs and Science Policy team to your organization, and learn how to advocate for science policy with elected officials, educational or industry decision-makers, or the general public.



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Advocacy Impact

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Inside the Office of Legislative Services

By Alyssa Juenke, PhD Student, Rutgers University



Last year, I was selected for the Eagleton Institute of Politics Graduate Fellowship Program in Politics and Government. As part of this fellowship, I completed an internship with the New Jersey Office of Legislative Services (OLS), the non-partisan staff for the legislature. Stepping into the political sphere after years focused largely on my own research was intimidating, but gave me insight into local government that I would never have thought to pursue. As a trainee, I had a limited view of the type of work available to scientists in government and how their skills could be utilized in a more policy-forward role. My experience working with OLS opened my eyes to career paths I hadn't considered, particularly in local government.

Despite walking into OLS armed only with the knowledge from my high school civics course, I found that I wasn't any less prepared for the work than the Fellows with law and political science backgrounds. Ultimately, whether addressing labor laws or environmental exposures, the fundamental approach to conducting background research remains largely the same. In fact, much of the research I did for OLS was unrelated to my background, but I welcomed the opportunity to learn new databases and apply my skills to a variety of policy issues.

Through my day-to-day work drafting bill language and conducting research, I worked closely with the professional staff at OLS. These professionals spanned a wide array of disciplines, including environmental science. At OLS, these scientists were able to use their expertise to translate complex research into easy-to-read memos that legislators could use to inform their position on proposed legislation

or answer constituent questions. Beyond OLS, I also had the pleasure of meeting other scientists working for the partisan staff, whose roles offered a different perspective on how scientific expertise can inform policymaking. In these positions, scientists serve in a more advisory capacity, helping legislators assess policy proposals and understand the scientific evidence relevant to their decisions. Prior to my internship, the legislative branch was not a place I would have considered for the next step in my career, but now that I understand the importance of having scientific experts on staff, I would urge trainees—and more seasoned scientists—to consider roles in this area.

In addition to my research tasks, I also attended committee meetings to gain a deeper understanding of the policymaking process. These meetings provided opportunities for members of the public, subject-matter experts, and representatives of various organizations to offer testimony on proposed legislation. I attended sessions on everything from affordable housing to PFAS regulations. Listening to hours of testimony illustrated how scientific evidence, professional expertise, and community perspectives can shape legislative discussions. During hearings focused on pollution regulation, I observed environmental experts speaking on proposed legislation and explaining the scientific considerations underlying their positions. These experiences highlighted another avenue for scientists to contribute to public policy: direct engagement in the legislative process through public testimony.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of these meetings was the participation of community members who came to voice their opinions on the various proposed bills. Their involvement reinforced the importance of public engagement in shaping policy and demonstrated that participation in government is not limited to elected officials, lobbyists, or policy professionals. Although unable to testify myself while on staff at OLS, listening in on these meetings inspired me to start tracking proposed legislation related to my field of expertise and consider giving testimony at these hearings. These sessions helped me recognize that scientists can play an important role in policy not only by providing expertise within government, but also by engaging with the legislative process as a community member affected by policy decisions.

This internship gave me a new appreciation for local and state government and the variety of ways scientists can get involved, as well as allowed me to immerse myself in government processes in a way I never had before. Before starting my fellowship, I often thought of “the government” as an institution, which made branching out into politics intimidating. My time at OLS challenged this perception. At its core, our government is just people passionate about their community, which makes governing a very human process. It’s shaped by the people who get involved and advocate for the change they want to see. Keeping this in mind as I continue engaging with state and federal government has strengthened my confidence in navigating these systems and my sense of belonging in these spaces.

For scientists interested in exploring careers beyond traditional research settings, state level government offers an opportunity to apply our training in new and meaningful ways. Whether working directly within a legislative office, advising policymakers, providing public testimony, or simply staying informed about legislation relevant to their field, scientists can help ensure that research and evidence contribute to public decision-making. My experience at OLS showed me that engaging in policy does not require a law or political science degree. Most importantly, it taught me that meaningful participation in government begins with a willingness to learn, engage, and contribute.

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- Discounts on Annual Meeting registration, abstract submission fees and awards
- Ten special-interest Divisions to interact with members with similar research interests
- Focus on Pharmacology virtual scientific sessions and sponsored webinars
- And so much more: Mentoring programs, advocacy for your interests, education opportunities and professional development

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Industry Insights

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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 Importance of Assay Development in Pharmacology

By R. Kyle Palmer, PhD and Harshini Neelakantan, PhD
ISC Founding Co-Chairs

Pharmacology advances through controlled experimentation and rigorous quantitative analysis. Pharmacologists know from practical experience that arriving at sound conclusions from experimental results is critically dependent on the quality and reliability of the assay used to examine the phenomenon of interest. An assay is a complete system of methods, reagents, instrumentation, and controls used together following a defined protocol to detect an analyte or establish a functional relationship. Pharmacologists routinely modify existing assays to meet research objectives and occasionally develop and validate entirely novel assays. But developing a reliable assay is a painstaking process, and there are key performance characteristics that mark a good assay.

Define What is Measured

Assay development begins by clearly defining independent and dependent variables and their units of measurement. Units of the variables can be relatively straightforward and standardized—concentration, time, and fluorescence or absorbance, for example. Defining units for dependent variables of pharmacodynamic assays, however, becomes increasingly challenging as the focus moves from the molecular level to complicated physiological systems and behavior. Regardless, the goal for functional assay development should be a dependent variable that is objectively verifiable with measurable dimensions, a task that could require the invention of new instruments for measurement. The invention of the operant chamber is a classic illustration of this principle: complex behavior was reduced to a quantifiable objective response—the lever press.

Establish Assay Validation and Reliability

Validation establishes whether an assay measures its intended biological process, under what conditions, and with what limitations. The assay must operate within a well-reasoned theoretical context, preferably one that is founded and described by quantitative laws. In this regard, pharmacological assays are advantaged by the foundational laws of mass-action, receptor occupancy, and the concept of efficacy. For example, a pharmacodynamic assay must demonstrate saturability, a property that arises from the finite numbers of receptors available for ligand binding. If the assay output faithfully reflects the underlying process, the assay has **construct validity**.

Reliability is the degree to which an assay produces consistent results when repeated

under the same conditions (**repeatability**) and by different investigators or laboratories (**reproducibility**). The repeatability for a pharmacodynamic assay can be statistically defined by the *limits of agreement test*, determined by the geometric average fold-difference in potency across two tests of a concentration-response relationship. Pharmacodynamic reproducibility can be quantified by the *minimum significant ratio* (MSR), the smallest potency ratio statistically detectable between two compounds. The ultimate test of assay reliability is **transferability**, an assay's ability to perform equivalently in a new lab. For potency assays, a lab-to-lab MSR is a common way to quantify transferability.

From Reliable Assays to Automated Screening

Once an assay is validated, miniaturization into multi-well formats can enable high-throughput screening (HTS) in drug discovery, but simply reducing reaction volume is not enough. Signal quality, reagent stability, edge effects, liquid-handling precision, and plate-to-plate variability must be re-evaluated before integrating automated dispensing, incubation, detection, and data analysis. For example, a noncoupled fluorescent assay that directly monitors an enzymatic product formation in real time, eliminating a secondary coupled reaction, provides a streamlined detection strategy that can support adaptation to screening workflows, subject to HTS-specific validation.

Patentability of Novel Assays

An assay may be patentable when it incorporates a novel, nonobvious, useful, and adequately described technical invention, such as for a new detection chemistry, engineered reagent, novel instrumentation, or inventive measurement method. In contrast, applying established assays to new targets, adjusting assay conditions, or using off-the-shelf reagents within existing conceptual frameworks to novel assays do not support patentability.

Conclusion and Further Reading

Reliable assays are indispensable tools for pharmacologists to translate scientific discoveries. This article has touched on only the basics of good assay development. For more in-depth discussion, the reader is referred to the guidelines published on the website for the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ich.org) and the National Institutes of Health Assay Guidance Manual (available through PubMed, NCBI Bookshelf).

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.

Partnerships Corner

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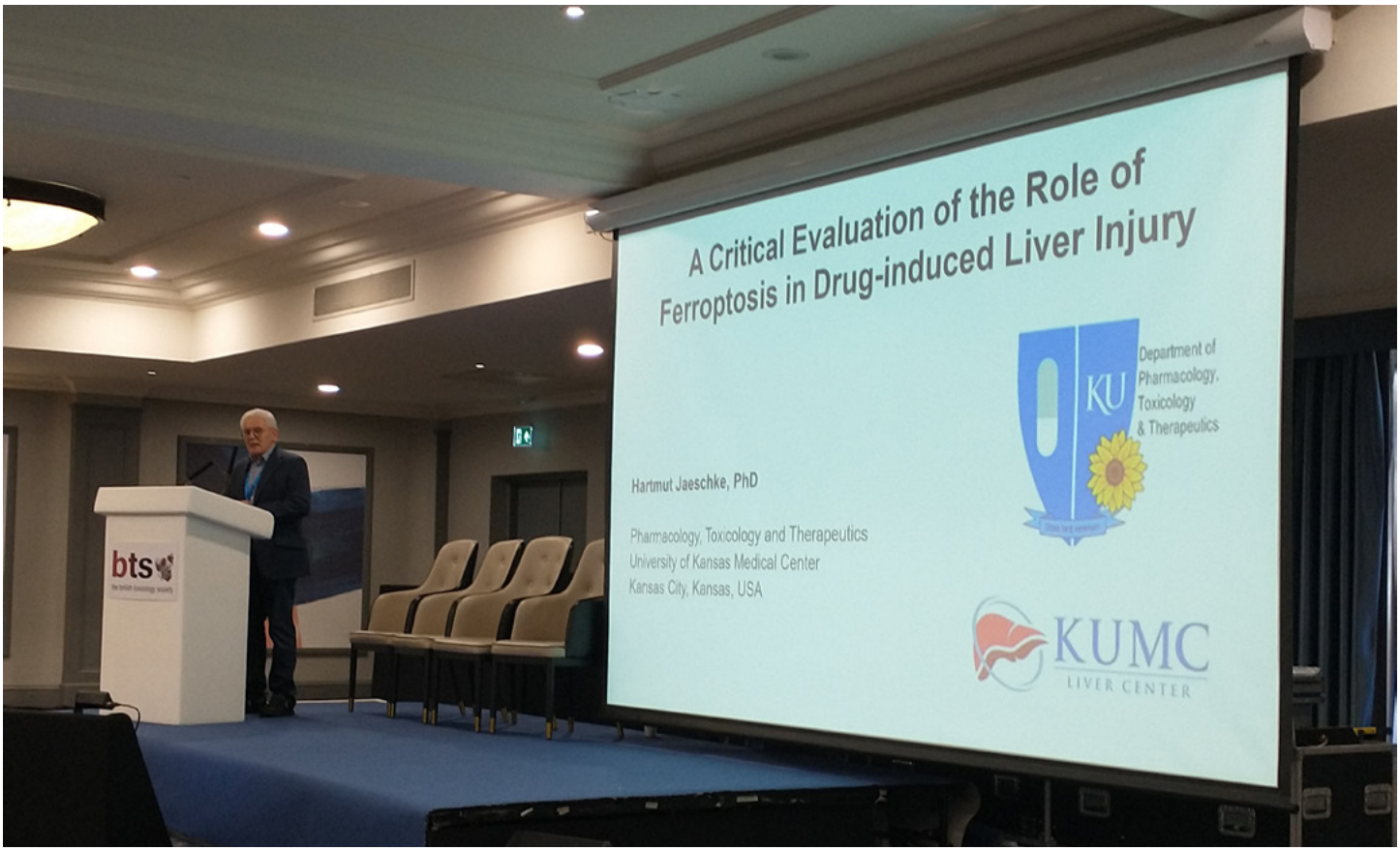
By Alicja Urbaniak, PhD

The Partnerships Committee recently launched a new partnership with the Indian Pharmacological Society (IPS). On behalf of the Partnerships Committee, a sub-committee consisting of Alicja Urbaniak, PhD, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences; Adam Lauver, PhD, Michigan State University; Fadi Khasawneh, PhD, Texas A&M University; and Yurong Lai, PhD, Gilead Sciences, worked on this partnership. The partnership will kick off with a joint Focus on Pharmacology webinar, "Emerging Trends in Translational Pharmacology: From Drug Discovery to Precision Therapeutics," on December 16, 2026, from 12 to 1 pm ET. The webinar will be chaired by Dr. Melissa Barker-Haliski, an associate professor at the University of Washington School of Pharmacy. Speakers from both societies will compare approaches to translating discoveries into patient-matched treatments. Representing ASPET, Dr. Lori Isom, Professor and Chair of Pharmacology at the University of Michigan, will present "ASO-Mediated Modulation of Poison Exons to Address Dravet Syndrome." Representing IPS, Dr. Mukesh Navarre, Associate Dean of Research and Head of the School of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Delhi Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research University (DPSRU) in New Delhi, India, will present "Translational Cardiometabolic Pharmacology: From Molecular Targets to Precision Therapeutics." This event is free and open to both members and non-members.

Additional activities under the broader IPS partnership are in development and will include collaborative symposia at society meetings; exchange initiatives for early-career researchers and young scientists; student mentoring and professional development programs; joint educational resources and pharmacology teaching initiatives; collaborative discussions on global health, drug discovery, and translational pharmacology; and opportunities for collaborative publications and scientific networking.

The Partnerships Committee is also pleased to co-sponsor the 2027 ASPET TOX–British Toxicology Society (BTS) Global Scholar Program. The exchange alternates annually: one year, a BTS member presents at ASPET's annual meeting; the following year, an ASPET member presents at the BTS meeting. Participants may also visit laboratories relevant to their interests and build connections that could lead to future collaborations. Since its launch in 2025, the program has had two ASPET members (John Clarke, PhD, Washington State University in 2025 and Hartmut Jaeschke, PhD, ATS, FAASLD, University of Kansas Medical Centre in 2026) and one BTS member (Joshua Gardner, PhD, University of Liverpool in 2025) selected as BTS-ASPET Scholars. Professor Ian Copple of the University of Liverpool has been selected as the 2027 BTS-ASPET Scholar and will present at the 2027 ASPET Annual Meeting. At the 2027 ASPET Annual Meeting, a BTS member (soon to be selected by the BTS) will present. The competition for the next ASPET member to serve as the ASPET-BTS Scholar will open in late summer/early Fall 2027 for attendance at the 2028 BTS annual meeting.

Thanks to Elaine Leslie, PhD, University of Alberta, for her help with this month's column.



Hartmut Jaeschke, PhD, ATS, FAASLD, presenting at the BTS meeting in April 2026, Solihull, England.



Dr. Jaeschke receiving his commendation as the ASPET-BTS Scholar at the 2026 BTS meeting.

On Their Way...

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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 October 2026 Highlighted Trainee Author for *Molecular Pharmacology*.



Hossein Batebi, PhD

Molecular Pharmacology

Hossein Batebi, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Physics Department at Freie Universität Berlin. He trained as a chemist and arrived at pharmacology through physics. "What moved me was a question chemistry could pose but not answer," he said. "I could describe a drug and its target in full detail and still not say what the cell would do about it." Throughout his journey within physics, his work often drifted to pharmacology—from receptor structures, to the dynamics that connect them, to the molecular kinetics underneath. Batebi credits Peter Hildebrand, Georgios Skiniotis, Brian Kobilka, and Roland Netz for their continued mentorship and collaboration.

Batebi's research, "Structurome-wide analysis reveals intracellular loop 2 folding as an activation-associated feature of class A G protein-coupled receptors," studies how signals travel through G protein-coupled receptors, the targets of roughly a third of approved medicines, and why two drugs binding the same receptor produce different cellular outcomes. His approach combines molecular simulation with theory for the parts that simulation cannot reach directly. Batebi developed a way to calculate how long a drug stays bound to its target, which could have timescales of minutes to hours.

"My work is about calculating those two timings on a computer before anyone does the experiment. If you can predict how long a drug will stay and how long the cell's response takes, you can say in advance what kind of effect a new medicine will have, instead of finding out afterwards." For painkillers in particular, that is the difference between the pain relief you want and the side effects you don't.

For Batebi, being published in *Molecular Pharmacology* means a great deal. "Computational predictions are only worth the experiments they survive, and the readers of an ASPET journal are the people who run those experiments. Reaching them is the point."

Journals Highlights

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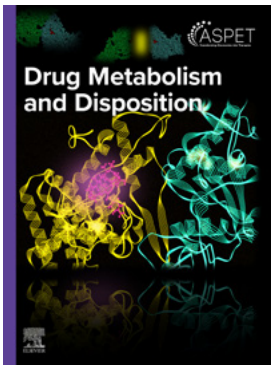
Check Out Our New Journal Covers

Earlier this year, ASPET held a contest to design the covers for our five journals. We sought original artwork, covering a broad range of pharmacology including, but not limited to, cardiovascular pharmacology, drug discovery and development, molecular pharmacology, neuropharmacology, toxicology, and cancer pharmacology. The selected covers will be used for all of 2027, and the winners received $250 for each winning entry.

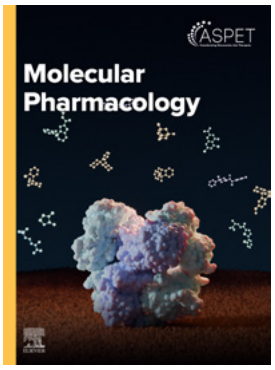
We're excited to share our new journal covers for 2027, and the winners who designed them!

ASPET Discovery – Yasmin Aydin
Drug Metabolism and Disposition – Ekta Gupta
The Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics – Sabika Ali
Molecular Pharmacology – Avery Benton
Pharmacological Reviews – Amy Cox











Challenge Awards Open!

The PhRMA Foundation and *Drug Metabolism and Disposition* are partnering on a Challenge Award competition that will award trainees for outstanding papers in a special issue on "Advanced Modalities in Drug Development: Radiopharmaceuticals, ADCs, Delivery Systems and Biodistribution of NextGeneration Gene and Cell Therapies."

The PhRMA Foundation will provide the Challenge Award—**a prize of $5,000**—to the first author of **up to five winning papers**.

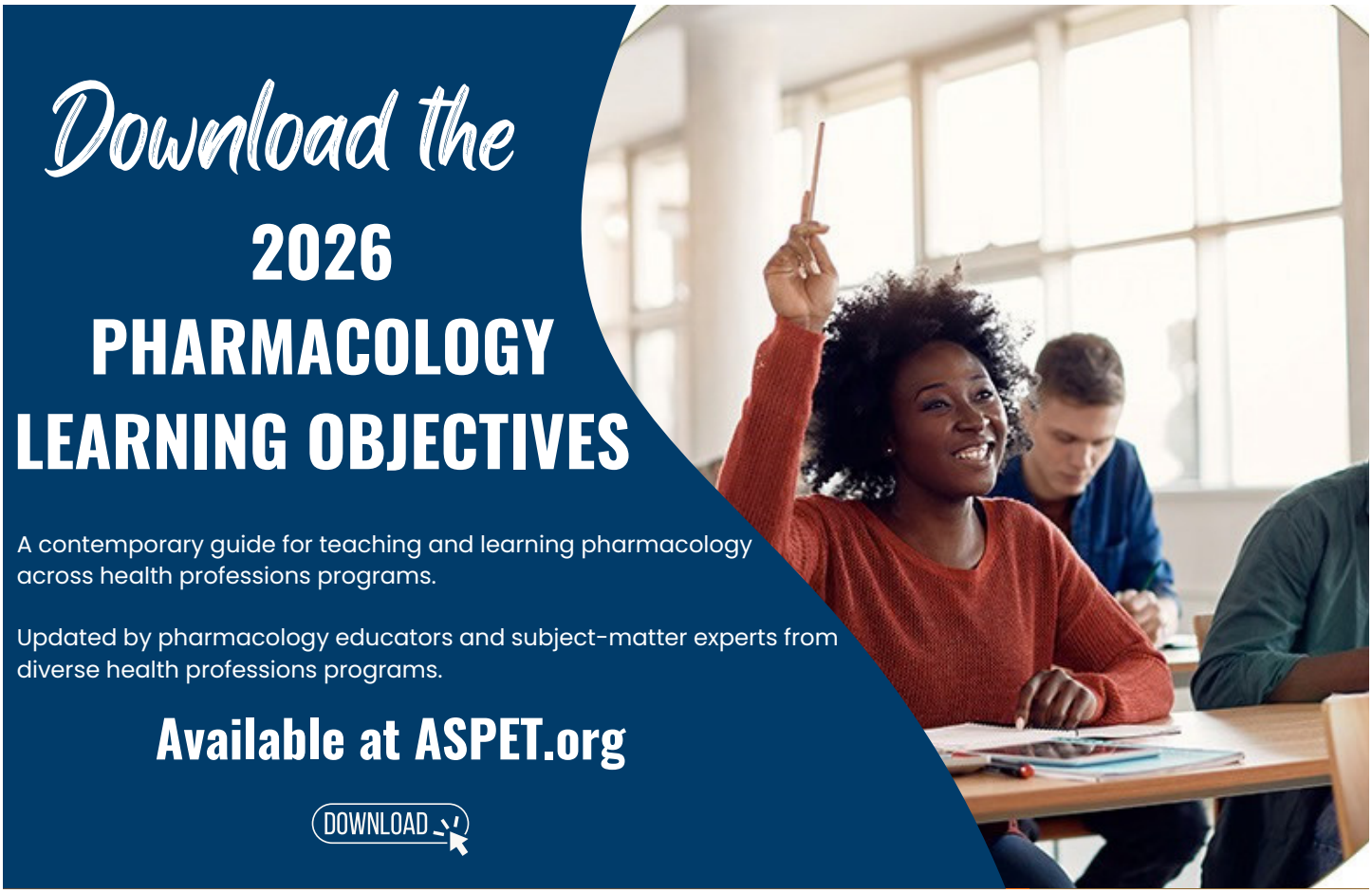
The deadline is February 1, 2027. Learn more and submit your work for consideration!

Time Running Out for Waived OA Fees with *ASPET Discovery*!

You have until December 31 to have your Open Access fees *waived* for any papers submitted to *ASPET Discovery*. Starting in 2027, those fees will be half-off.

Make sure to take advantage of this opportunity when submitting work to *ASPET Discovery's* new special collection, "Advancing Pharmacology Education: Innovations, Evidence, and Emerging Directions." This special collection seeks to highlight rigorous scholarship, innovative practices, and emerging perspectives that advance pharmacology education. Submissions addressing the teaching and learning of pharmacology across biomedical science, medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, veterinary medicine, physician assistant/associate education, and other health professions are encouraged, as are studies focused on graduate and postgraduate education. Original research articles and minireviews will be considered.

Learn more about this upcoming collection, including potential topics of focus and how to submit your work. Deadline: April 15, 2027.



GIVING TUESDAY

Support Young Scientists

This Giving Tuesday, support the Young Scientist Travel Fund and help give students and postdocs opportunities to share their science, make meaningful connections, and continue developing as researchers. At a time of increasing financial pressure on scientific research and training, every contribution is an investment in scientific discovery and the people who will carry it forward.

Make a tax-deductible donation to the Young Scientist Travel Fund and help advance the future of pharmacology.

Giving Tuesday is Dec. 1

Make your gift at aspet.org/donate



Your Donations Matter

"The ASPET travel award was essential in helping me attend last year's meeting, where I presented my research and placed first in the Dolores C. Shockley Poster Competition. I expanded my professional network by interacting with undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and other researchers. This experience has significantly helped me improve my ability to refine my experiments and present my work to a wide audience of pharmacologists."

-Taylor Quintana, California State University

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ASPET Discovery

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