

HOPE THROUGH RESEARCH



SPRING 2022

CLINICAL TRIAL FOR POTENTIAL NEW CLASS OF MEDICATION SHOWS PROMISE



The Trial Points to a New Era of Precision Treatments for Depression

In fall 2020, the Hope for Depression Research Foundation began a clinical trial of tianeptine, which represents a brand-new category of antidepressant. The trial is underway at Columbia University and Mount Sinai Medical Center, and as of this writing shows early promising results.

The trial is focused on patients who are treatment-resistant – they have not responded to the conventional medications available today. The scientists in our Depression Task Force (DTF) are testing the hypothesis that a certain profile of these patients will respond dramatically to tianeptine because of their specific brain chemistry. These patients will have two evident symptoms: 1) they have a behavioral symptom known as rejection sensitivity, or a blunted ability to cope with

the psychosocial stress of rejection (i.e., losing a job or promotion, ending a relationship) and 2) they have disrupted activity in a specific rejection and pain circuit in the brain, as detected by a brain scan.

The subjects are being given tianeptine because this compound has a unique ability – **discovered by DTF scientists** – to repair deficits in the rejection and pain circuit through targeted molecular action. The DTF believes that depression will remit as the physical circuit is repaired, and it's also possible that the behavioral symptom of hyper-sensitivity to rejection will be alleviated.

By repairing circuit deficits at a fine-tuned location, tianeptine may finally help patients where other medications have failed. If the trial is successful, it will lead

to a new precision medicine approach to depression that will greatly increase response rates by pairing patients with the right treatment for their underlying biology.

Clinical trials began October 2020 and patient recruitment has been extended to 2023 to reach a study goal of 75 patients. Early results are extremely encouraging, and the teams are actively recruiting patients to continue the work. The study seeks men and women ages 21-60 who have not responded to standard antidepressant medication.

If you are interested in learning more or volunteering as a subject, please contact Nicolas Cimino at nicolas.cimino@nyspi.columbia.edu or Amelia Karim at amelia.karim@mssm.edu.

♦ LOUISA BENTON

FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

Dear Friend,

In this newsletter, we pay tribute to the next generation of advocates and scientists on the front lines of mental health.

First, we write about our new Junior Committee in Palm Beach (see opposite page). This group of young professionals are open to talking about depression and willing to give their time and energy to advance research and understanding. They inspire us daily.

Secondly, we celebrate the young



scientists in our Depression Task Force labs with a new column (see below). The Depression Task Force is more than nine top researchers working together; it is an extended family of the

dozens of young scientists in their labs.

They have built lasting bonds of trust with one another, sharing data seamlessly across the consortium.

These young advocates and scientists are the future. Their work opens doors to clinical trials for the next generation of

depression treatments. One of those clinical trials is now in process and, as you will also read in this newsletter (see front page), showing great reason for hope.

Thank you, as always, for supporting hope through research.

Sincerely,

Audrey Gruss
Founder & Chair

MEET CORTNEY TURNER

A Young Scientist in Our Depression Task Force (DTF) Labs

This column regularly features one of the many young DTF scientists dedicating their lives to the future of mental health in America.

I became interested in depression research because of my own personal experience. At age 14, my freshmen year of high school, I was hospitalized with severe depression. It was 1991, and the psychiatrists didn't really know how to help me. I was put on Prozac and other antidepressants, none of which helped me. I decided to dedicate my life to research



Cortney is Associate Research Scientist in the lab of DTF member Dr. Huda Akil, University of Michigan.

and finding better predictors and treatments for depression, so that others don't have to go through what I went through.

I grew up an only child in a trailer park in rural Ohio. My mother was a Type I diabetic, and my father is a Vietnam Veteran from Kentucky. I graduated Salutatorian and went on to attend Bowling Green State University, where I graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a dual-degree B.S. in biology and psychology. I earned a Ph.D. in Medical Sciences with a concentration in Neuroscience at the University of Florida.

For postdoctoral work, I happily ended up in the lab of Dr. Huda Akil at the University of Michigan. My research with

Hope for Depression Research Foundation directly addresses the mental health crisis we see in youth, worsened by the pandemic. I focus on stress vulnerability and resilience in college freshmen; we've now collected data on three cohorts of students who have experienced the pandemic during their freshman year.

Overall levels of depression

are higher in these freshman classes, but we also note a subset of students who appear resilient to the stress hits. We are analyzing a combination of genetic, physiological, psychological and behavioral data so we can better understand this resilience and how to promote it.

We are also creating predictive algorithms based on the data that can tell us who is more vulnerable to developing anxiety or depression during this stressful time. The knowledge will be a catalyst for new ways to prevent and treat depression in these students, and in the population at large.



For more information, please contact:

New York HDRF

40 West 57th Street, Ste. 1440

New York, NY 10019

Phone: 212.676.3200

Fax: 212.676.3219

Email: hdrf@hopefordepression.org

Palm Beach HDRF

777 S. Flagler Drive, Ste. 801E

West Palm Beach, FL 33401

Phone: 561.515.6454

Fax: 561.514.3520

Email: hdrf@hopefordepression.org



HDRF Chair Audrey Gruss and Dr. Eric Nestler, Chair of the HDRF Depression Task Force, addressed the global scope of depression and the need for new treatments at the prestigious Four Arts Society in Palm Beach on January 4.

DEPRESSION TASK FORCE

Eric Nestler, M.D., Ph.D., *Chair*
Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Huda Akil, Ph.D.
University of Michigan

Elisabeth Binder, M.D., Ph.D.
Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry

Kafui Dzirasa, M.D., Ph.D.
Duke University

René Hen, Ph.D.
Columbia University

Jonathan Javitch, M.D., Ph.D.
Columbia University

Conor Liston, M.D., Ph.D.
Weill Cornell Medicine

Helen S. Mayberg, M.D.
Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Michael Meaney, Ph.D.
Douglas Institute & McGill University

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HDRF LAUNCHES JUNIOR COMMITTEE IN PALM BEACH



Members of the new Junior Committee gathered for a special lunch with HDRF Chair Audrey Gruss, Director Louisa Benton, and DTF Chair Dr. Eric Nestler in Palm Beach.

HDRF is excited to announce the official launch of Hope for Depression's Inaugural **Palm Beach Junior Committee** – an energetic group of young professionals dedicated to the future of mental health care in their communities.

P.J. Quick Pollack, 35, stepped up to be the Chair of the new Committee, which grew to more than 40 members in a matter of weeks. P.J. hosted a festive cocktail in January with his mother, Tricia Quick, at her stately Palm Beach home. The Committee also rallied behind the Fourth Annual Palm Beach Race of Hope in February, raising

\$75,000 and bringing scores of participants by building Race Teams.

Next, the Junior Committee will work with HDRF scientists and staff to create educational seminars about depression causes, symptoms and treatment to launch in Palm Beach area schools in the fall of 2022.

HDRF Executive Director Louisa Benton said: "Young people are much more open about mental health issues. As Palm Beach sees an influx of young families, we are grateful to benefit from their passion to find solutions to depression, one of the greatest public health issues of our day."

SUPPORT HDRF

100% of all donations go directly to research into the origins, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of depression and its related mood disorders including: postpartum depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, and suicide.

HDRF is a non profit 501(c)(3) public charitable organization. All donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Visit us at hopefordepression.org

THE FOURTH ANNUAL PALM BEACH RACE OF HOPE SETS NEW RECORDS



Kameron Ramirez and Aktion Art, Top Team Fundraiser, gathered 30 members and raised \$9,282

The Hope for Depression Research Foundation's (HDRF) Annual 5K Race of Hope to Defeat Depression gathered more than 400 men, women, and children in Palm Beach to raise funds for mental health research. HDRF founder Audrey Gruss and Board member Scott Snyder, both

Palm Beach residents, served as Co-Grand Marshals for the race. The festive event raised more than \$500,000 for critical research into new and better treatments for depression and anxiety. The event broke previous fundraising records and got front page coverage in the press.



Grand Marshals Audrey Gruss and Scott Snyder



P.J., Tom and Tricia Quick



Junior Committee Co-Chair Andrew Filauro with kids



Stephen Wilsman won the medal for first place male



Lilia Drew won the medal for first place female

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UPCOMING EVENTS

SOUTHAMPTON 5K RACE OF HOPE

Sunday, August 7, 2022
Southampton, NY

16TH ANNUAL HOPE LUNCHEON

Tuesday, November 8, 2022
The Plaza Hotel, NYC