



GHUCCTS announces 2020-2021 pilot awardees

After a competitive application cycle, GHUCCTS has selected 6 new pilot projects to be funded for 2020-2021. The [Pilot Translational and Clinical Studies program \(PTCS\)](#) has been a critical and effective stimulus for collaboration that has inspired the development and implementation of new clinical and translational research projects. The PTCS program is designed to bring about further advances that will improve the process of research throughout our CTSA hub and the national CTSA consortium. These contributions will draw upon a range of GHUCCTS capacities from community-based recruitment of underserved populations to the use of high-performance computing in the development of therapeutic agents.

Four of the six selected pilot projects will focus on COVID-19 and the current pandemic.

Below are descriptions of the principal investigators and their pilot projects.

Simina Boca, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Oncology and Biostatistics, Bioinformatics, and Biomathematics at the Georgetown University Medical Center. She is also a faculty member at the Innovation Center for Biomedical Informatics. Dr. Boca's project is titled "*The impact of COVID-19 on Latina and African-American breast cancer survivors in the Washington DC area*". In her study, Dr. Boca and her team will use surveys and interviews to understand the impact of COVID-19 relating to physical, psychological, social, and financial well-being. The results will be used to develop insightful online resources for breast cancer survivors during this pandemic.

Sonia de Assis, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Oncology at Georgetown University with several years of experience in animal studies of epigenetic inheritance and molecular biology techniques, including epigenetic analysis. Dr. de Assis' project is titled "*Epigenetic Inheritance: The placenta as a mediator of paternal obesity effects on offspring's health*". Building on her initial studies of mice that link paternal obesity with alterations in placenta formation, her pilot project will help progress the learning of the mechanisms behind paternally-induced epigenetic inheritance.

Jeseth Delgado Vela, PhD, is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, College of Engineering and Architecture at Howard University. Her pilot project is titled "*Evaluating disparities in COVID-19 diagnoses using a wastewater-based epidemiology approach*". Dr. Delgado Vela's project will evaluate disparities among African Americans by comparing SARS-CoV-2 infection rates with viral particle measurements in wastewater. This project will feature multidisciplinary collaborations between public health departments, researchers, and local communities.

Mary Ann Dutton, PhD, is a Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University. Her pilot project is titled “*The Role of Stress and Resilience in the Link Between Social Connectedness and Health-Related Quality of Life for Low-Income, Predominately Minority Men and Women with Chronic Health Conditions*”. While social distancing is encouraged by public health officials to help curb the spread of COVID-19, the practice itself can create other stressors that may harm vulnerable communities, such as social isolation, loneliness, and physical and mental-health related outcomes. Dr. Dutton’s pilot will involve 140 chronically medically-ill, predominately African American men and women who are receiving services from [Food and Friends, Inc.](#) and who volunteer to participate in a one-time telehealth study visit from their homes. Dr. Dutton is a member of GHUCCTS, serving as Co-PI for our [Community Engagement team](#).

Victoria Lai, MD, is an Assistant Professor of Clinical Surgery at Georgetown University. Dr. Lai’s pilot project is titled “*Quality of life of endocrine surgery patients: a prospective study across time by ethnicity/race and social determinants of health*”. She is planning to use her pilot project to assess the health-related quality of life outcomes in a large and diverse endocrine surgery patient population, including minorities, immigrants, and non-English speaking patients who may be more likely to experience negative outcomes.

Jason Umans, MD, PhD, is the Scientific Director of the Biomarker, Biochemistry, and Biorepository Core and of the Field Studies Division and Phoenix Field Office at MedStar Health Research Institute. His pilot project is titled “*Comparative impacts of COVID-19 on urban and reservation-dwelling American Indian communities*”. Dr. Umans seeks to address the gap in the lack of tribal or US national data to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clinical and psychosocial well-being, health care access, chronic disease management, and economic burden. His team will survey American Indians living on both tribal reservations as well as in a large city to explore these outcomes and design better COVID-19 interventions. Dr. Umans is a member of GHUCCTS, currently serving on our [Executive Committee](#) and as Co-PI for our [KL2 Scholars Program](#), [Translational Workforce Development team](#), and our [TL1 Translational Biomedical Sciences Training Program](#).

Congratulations to our 2020-2021 GHUCCTS pilot award recipients!