THE ARIZONA GWEP MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026

ABOUT

The mission of the Arizona Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (AZ-GWEP) is to provide the best possible care through an interprofessional approach to individual, system, community and population level education, training and models of care innovations.

The AZ-GWEP Newsletter is an important forum to share AZ-GWEP activities and highlight your valuable work. Please use this form by the 10th of each month to be featured in the next issue:

SUBMIT INFO FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE

"What Matters Most"— the cornerstone of the 4Ms Age-friendly Framework—is reshaping how we think about clinical trials for older adults. Despite carrying 60% of the national disease burden, older adults represent only 32% of clinical trial participants, creating a critical gap between research and real-world treatment needs. The National Institute on Aging now requires NIH-funded trials to include older adults across the lifespan unless scientifically justified otherwise. By centering trials around older adults' unique health priorities — whether maintaining independence, reducing medication burden, or preserving cognitive function — researchers can generate evidence that truly matters to the patients who will benefit from new treatments.

On January 12th, our Advances in Aging Lecture Series will focus on Clinical Trials and Older Adults. See page 2 for the link to the livestream event. Page 3 contains an NIH infographic illustrating the benefits of joining a clinical trial. On pages 4-6 we highlight some of the recent aging-related research being conducted by University of Arizona undergraduate students. Page 7 has information about a current study that aims to understand how care partners prevent falls for people with memory issues.

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PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

MEET MARGARET FROM THE AZ-GWEP LEAD TEAM

Margaret Proffitt is an instructional designer specializing in adult learning, curriculum development, and multimedia design for online and face-to-face environments. With a background in both design and education, she holds a Master's degree in Educational Technology and applies this knowledge to create effective educational programs.

Since 2021, Margaret has worked for the University of Arizona Center on Aging, developing curriculum that educates and trains students, healthcare professionals, and supportive care workers in the care of older adults. Through her work on various grant-funded projects, Margaret has developed specialized curriculum that trains geriatric workforces to provide age-friendly and dementia-friendly care. Her approach combines instructional design principles with practical application, creating training materials that serve diverse learning needs across multiple formats.

In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her husband and four children. She loves to read, hike, and complete 1000 piece puzzles.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

ADVANCES IN AGING LECTURE SERIES

January 12th
12 - 1 pm (MST)

Clinical Trials and Older Adults
Mindy Fain, MD

VIEW PRESENTATION

View archived presentations here

Download the event flyer

Connect with our AZ-GWEP Community Group Page on LinkedIn

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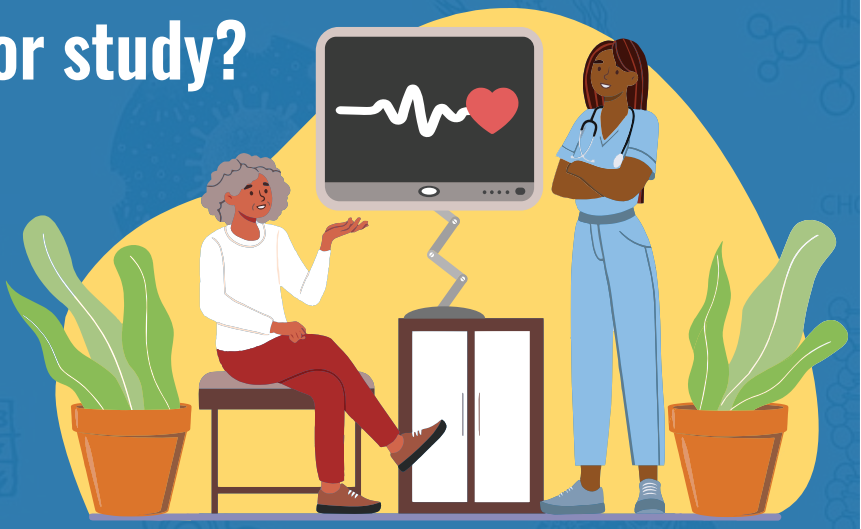
Why join a clinical trial or study?

By participating, you can:

- Learn more about your disease or condition
- Feel like you're playing an active role in your health
- Help researchers find new ways to prevent or treat disease
- Benefit future generations through scientific advances



Major medical breakthroughs could not happen without the generosity of volunteers like you.

To learn more about participating in clinical research, visit www.nia.nih.gov/clinical-trials-and-studies.

NIH National Institute on Aging

You may also be interested in:

- Reading more about clinical trials and studies
- Learning about the benefits, risks, and safety of clinical research
- Finding clinical trials for Alzheimer's and related dementias

REMINDER

PLEASE SUBMIT ANY INFORMATION (FLYERS, CONFERENCES, UPCOMING EVENTS, ETC.) FOR THE 2026 CALENDAR YEAR TO BE INCLUDED IN OUR MONTHLY NEWSLETTERS.

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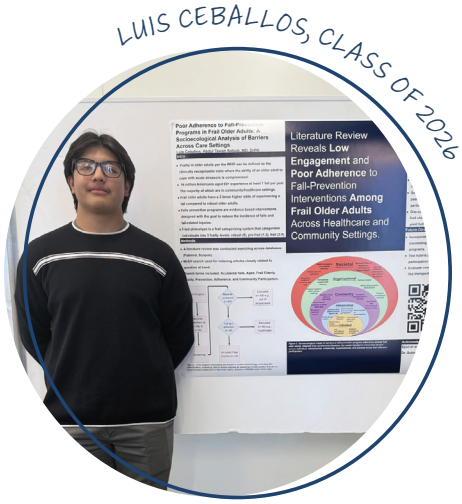
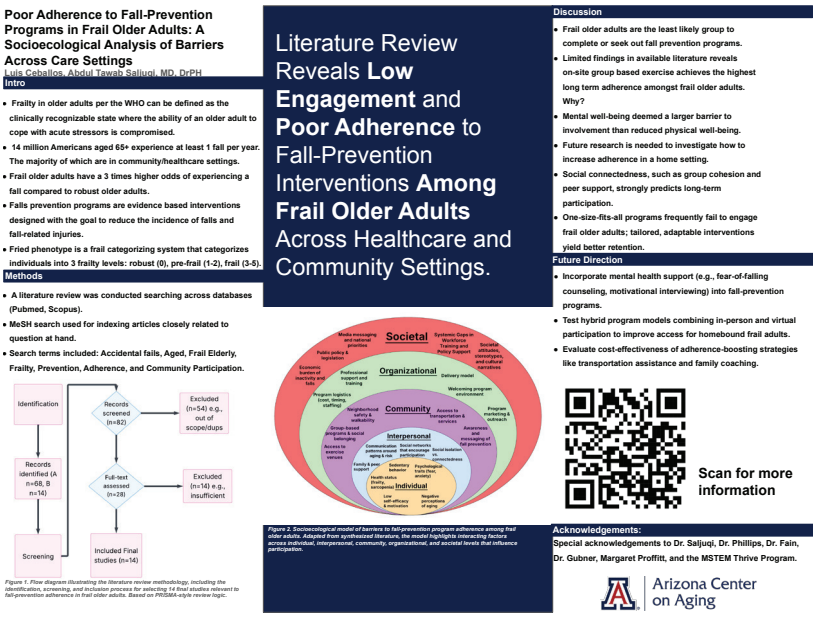
SPOTLIGHT ON AGING-RELATED RESEARCH FROM UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA STUDENTS

FALL PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS AMONG FRAIL OLDER ADULTS



"Hello, my name is Luis Ceballos. I am a 4th year undergraduate student majoring in Medicine and minoring in Biochemistry. This semester I had the opportunity and privilege to work under Dr. Tawab Saljuqi on a project he and I synthesized personally for the topic of my honors thesis. We created a literature review to look at the engagement and adherence of frail older adults to falls prevention interventions. This topic brings a unique approach to aging research that I have not encountered yet. Much of the current literature looks at chronological age as the primary determinant in the research, yet frailty is independent of chronological age, and manifests across a spectrum of severity. My goal is to look at how different social determinants of health can either impede or help facilitate the meaningful engagement and adherence of frail older adults into current falls prevention interventions. From this work, I synthesized a socioecological model that does not exist in literature yet. This model maps out different key relationships and recurring themes influencing adherence at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels. My plans for next semester are to continue with the literature review identifying what methods/ practices can be applied to increase adherence, while also contributing to additional projects with Dr. Saljuqi. After completing my undergraduate education, I intend to apply to medical schools with strong commitments to geriatrics as that is where I intend to build my career."



Read more about Luis' research here.

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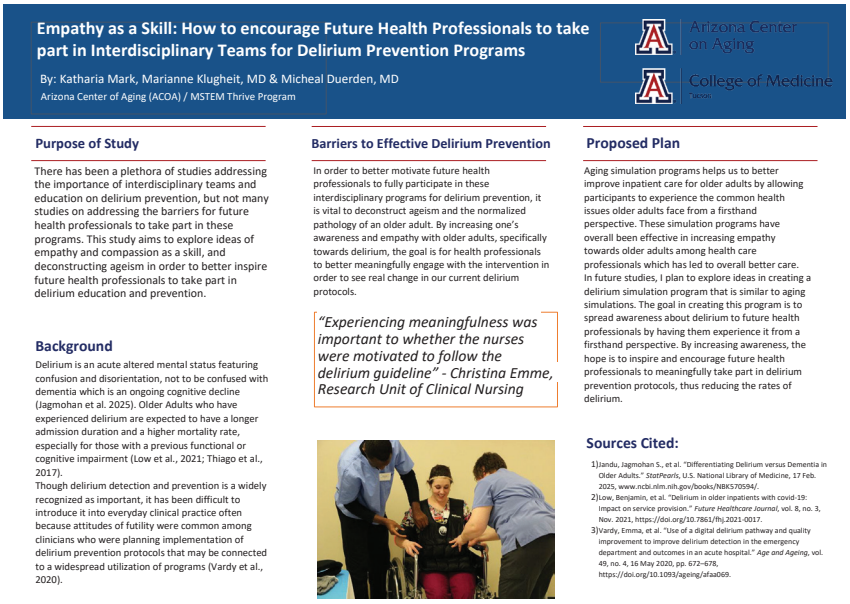
SPOTLIGHT ON AGING-RELATED RESEARCH FROM UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA STUDENTS

EMPATHY AS A SKILL IN DELIRIUM PREVENTION PROGRAMS

"My name is Katharia Mark and I am a senior majoring in Anthropology and Medicine with a minor in East Asian Studies. My research aims to explore ideas of empathy and compassion as a skill, while also deconstructing ageism in order to better inspire future health professionals to take part in delirium education and prevention. There have been many studies assessing the importance of delirium prevention and a need for better assessment in place, however, there have also been studies that health care professionals felt feelings of futility or avoidance when a delirium protocol has been newly introduced. My proposed plan is to create a program to spread awareness about delirium for future health professionals by having them experience it from a firsthand perspective. By increasing awareness, the hope is to inspire and encourage future health professionals to meaningfully take part in delirium prevention protocols, thus reducing the rates of delirium. During this time I will also be studying for the MCAT and applying my knowledge gained from the Arizona Center on Aging MSTEM Thrive program into medical school and beyond!



Empathy as a Skill: How to encourage Future Health Professionals to take part in Interdisciplinary Teams for Delirium Prevention Programs

By: Katharia Mark, Marianne Klugheit, MD & Micheal Duerden, MD

Arizona Center of Aging (ACOA) / MSTEM Thrive Program

Arizona Center on Aging

College of Medicine Tucson

Purpose of Study

There has been a plethora of studies addressing the importance of interdisciplinary teams and education on delirium prevention, but not many studies on addressing the barriers for future health professionals to take part in these programs. This study aims to explore ideas of empathy and compassion as a skill, and deconstructing ageism in order to better inspire future health professionals to take part in delirium education and prevention.

Background

Delirium is an acute altered mental status featuring confusion and disorientation, not to be confused with dementia which is an ongoing cognitive decline (Jagmohan et al. 2025). Older Adults who have experienced delirium are expected to have a longer admission duration and a higher mortality rate, especially for those with a previous functional or cognitive impairment (Low et al., 2021; Thiago et al., 2017).

Though delirium detection and prevention is a widely recognized as important, it has been difficult to introduce it into everyday clinical practice often because attitudes of futility were common among clinicians who were planning implementation of delirium prevention protocols that may be connected to a widespread utilization of programs (Vardy et al., 2020).

Barriers to Effective Delirium Prevention

In order to better motivate future health professionals to fully participate in these interdisciplinary programs for delirium prevention, it is vital to deconstruct ageism and the normalized pathology of an older adult. By increasing one's awareness and empathy with older adults, specifically towards delirium, the goal is for health professionals to better meaningfully engage with the intervention in order to see real change in our current delirium protocols.

"Experiencing meaningfulness was important to whether the nurses were motivated to follow the delirium guideline" - Christina Emme, Research Unit of Clinical Nursing

Proposed Plan

Aging simulation programs helps us to better improve inpatient care for older adults by allowing participants to experience the common health issues older adults face from a firsthand perspective. These simulation programs have overall been effective in increasing empathy towards older adults among health care professionals which has led to overall better care. In future studies, I plan to explore ideas in creating a delirium simulation program that is similar to aging simulations. The goal in creating this program is to spread awareness about delirium to future health professionals by having them experience it from a firsthand perspective. By increasing awareness, the hope is to inspire and encourage future health professionals to meaningfully take part in delirium prevention protocols, thus reducing the rates of delirium.

Sources Cited:

1) Jandu, Jagmohan S., et al. "Differentiating Delirium versus Dementia in Older Adults." *StatPearls*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 17 Feb. 2025, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK570594/.
2) Low, Benjamin, et al. "Delirium in older inpatients with covid-19: Impact on service provision." *Future Healthcare Journal*, vol. 8, no. 3, Nov. 2021, https://doi.org/10.7861/fhj.2021-0017.
3) Vardy, Emma, et al. "Use of a digital delirium pathway and quality improvement to improve delirium detection in the emergency department and outcomes in an acute hospital." *Age and Ageing*, vol. 49, no. 4, 16 May 2020, pp. 672–678, https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afaa069.

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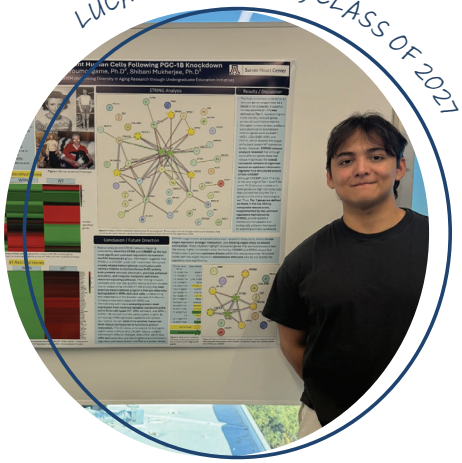
SPOTLIGHT ON AGING-RELATED RESEARCH FROM UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA STUDENTS

TRANSCRIPTIONAL RESCUE IN WRN-DEFICIENT HUMAN CELLS

LUCAS HERNANDEZ, CLASS OF 2027



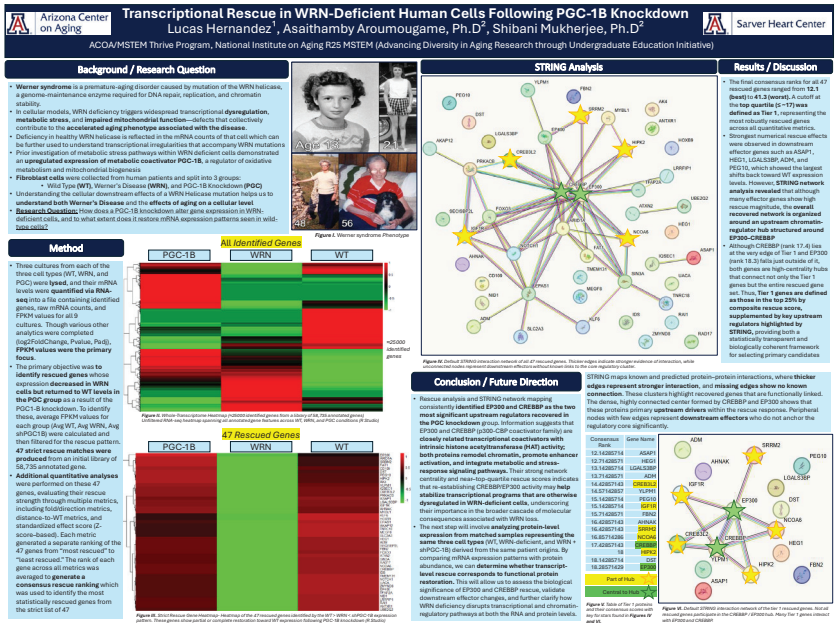
"My name is Lucas Hernandez, and I am a junior at the University of Arizona in the W.A. Franke Honors College. I am pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Medicine with minors in Molecular and Cellular Biology and Biochemistry.

During the fall of 2025, my research focused on understanding the cellular phenotype of Werner syndrome, a rare genetic disorder characterized by accelerated and premature aging. As a student in Dr. Asaithamby's laboratory, I analyzed quantified mRNA expression data from three fibroblast cell cultures: cells from a healthy individual (WT), cells from a Werner syndrome patient (WRN), and cells from the same patient after a PGC1B knockdown (PGC). PGC1B was previously identified as a highly upregulated gene in Werner patients and by reducing its expression, we sought to determine whether aspects of the Werner phenotype could be rescued toward a wild-type transcriptional profile.

Through the comparison of mRNA counts from WT, WRN, and PGC cell cultures, I was able to identify a large group of genes that were comparably restored to WT expression in the PGC group. I found that the PGC condition recovered key genetic regulatory protein hubs, including networks centered around CREBBP and EP300.

Moving forward, I hope to extend this work by analyzing protein expression from the same cell cultures to determine whether the transcriptional rescue observed at the mRNA level is also reflected at the proteomic level.

After my time as an undergraduate, I plan to apply to medical school with the goal of going into Internal Medicine. I am drawn to the field for its emphasis on an integrated, systems level understanding of human physiology. I hope to ultimately work with elderly patients and apply what I have learned in a way that can help this often underserved patient population.



Visit us at https://aging.arizona.edu/education-training/azgwep

Join Guiding Star Study

Understand How Care Partners Prevent Falls for People with Memory Issues

- Are you providing support to someone with memory issues?
- We invite you to share your experience and wisdom to help us better understand what can help care partners prevent falls for someone with memory issues.

You may be eligible if you

- Currently provide care or support for a **family member or friend** who lives with memory issues
- You have provided such support for **at least 3 months**

We especially welcome care partners of different genders and cultural backgrounds.

You will be asked to complete **a self-paced survey (30-40 minutes), online or in-person** with a study team member.

Compensation will be provided upon completion

Four easy ways to get started:

1. **Scan the QR code** on this flyer
2. **Type "redcap.link/cpstar"** in your internet browser
3. **Email:** care.equity.aging@austin.utexas.edu
4. **Call:** 512-471-1713

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NIH National Institute on Aging

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2025