

BCM SOAR

RESEARCH NEWS



Dear readers,

Welcome to the inaugural SOAR newsletter!

In a world where news delivery and print media have the power to shape mindsets and alter perspectives, we recognize the responsibility we hold in delivering meaningful and truthful content to you, our audience.

The SOAR Newsletter is designed and managed by medical students with one goal in mind: making science accessible and engaging while also providing students with a creative outlet. We aim to offer a wide array of informative stories, from research events and groundbreaking news to student spotlights and practical research advice.

We envisioned the newsletter as a platform to showcase the stories and achievements of our fellow BCM students in academic research fields and beyond. In each issue, we aspire to bring you insightful content, thought-provoking perspectives, and updates that truly matter. We are committed to fostering a sense of community, curiosity, and collaboration.

Thank you for joining us as we embark on this exciting journey. Enjoy the February release and stay tuned for more!

With gratitude and anticipation,
Mawada Al Faisal
MS 1
SOAR Newsletter Editor-in-Chief

Edited by Maheen Kara

What's new with SOAR?

The Student Opportunities for Advancement in Research program, or SOAR, at BCM is designed to support medical students in their research endeavors. With the start of the new semester, it continues to innovate, offering exciting new initiatives and events that students should take advantage of.

"SOAR's mission is to make research more accessible," said the director of the SOAR Office Dr. Mabel Perez-Oquendo. "By fostering access to research, SOAR equips students with tools to enhance their academic development, excel in research, and advance their careers."

This semester's calendar is packed with engaging opportunities, including monthly medical student research presentation sessions, where students can present their work and receive constructive feedback.

Signature events like the Writing Bootcamp in April and the Residency Research Panel in May are designed to enhance research writing skills and prepare students for integrating research into residency applications.

Workshops such as the abstract and poster sessions in February and the SOAR Travel Awardees Panel in March further expand research competencies at every skill level.

“These events address essential student needs, from presenting research to preparing for career advancement,” Dr. Perez-Oquendo said.

Dr. Perez-Oquendo notes that SOAR offers a comprehensive database connecting students with projects and mentors, along with personalized one-on-one advising sessions.

Students can also take on leadership roles as SOAR ambassadors, assisting with event organization, newsletter contributions, and fostering a vibrant research community.

Through these initiatives, SOAR aims to build student confidence in research, develop critical skills, and provide mentorship opportunities.

Success is evident in the increasing number of students presenting at conferences, publishing research, and achieving career milestones with SOAR’s support.

Whether you’re a first-year medical student or a seasoned researcher, SOAR has something to offer this semester. Don’t miss out on these valuable opportunities to advance your research and career!

Written by Austin Hien Tran
Edited by Annika Jyothi

BCM Research Symposium 2025

The Henry J.N. Taub & James K. Alexander Medical Student Research Symposium will take place on Thursday, Mar. 6, 2025, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in the Rayzor Lounge. While the abstract submission deadline has passed, there is still plenty to look forward to, whether you are presenting your work or eager to learn about the innovative research your peers are involved in.

From 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., the top 40 submissions will be showcased through in-person poster presentations. During this time, they will be formally judged, and attendees will have the option to vote for their favorite presentation. Submissions not selected for in-person presentations will undergo virtual judging via VoiceThreads.

A keynote address will be delivered at 12:15 p.m. in Cullen Auditorium by Dr. Wayne Goodman, the D. C. and Irene Ellwood Chair in Psychiatry at BCM.

Dr. Goodman is globally recognized for his extensive research on Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and deep brain stimulation, among other topics.

Following the keynote address, an awards ceremony will take place. Top-scoring presentations will receive the Henry J.N. Taub Young Investigator Award, and one presentation will win the Most Popular Poster Award based on attendee voting. Both awards include a monetary prize.

For those presenting their research, the deadline to upload presentations to VoiceThread is currently Feb. 17. This includes those selected for in-person presentations; however, for in-person presenters, only the poster itself needs to be uploaded.

To help with this part of the process, Student Opportunities for Advancement in Research (SOAR) is hosting a Poster Design and Presentation workshop on Feb. 12, 2025, at 5:30 p.m.

Led by previous student award winners, the workshop will cover topics such as effective poster design and delivering confident, engaging presentations. These valuable skills will not only benefit participants for this symposium but also for future conferences.

Attending the symposium is a great opportunity to see the diversity of research being done at BCM and network with faculty

and fellow students who may share your research interests.

Good luck to all presenters, and if you're not presenting, don't forget to stop by, support your peers, and cast your vote for your favorite poster!



Scan to sign up for the Poster Design and Presentation workshop

Written by Adrian Boehnke
Edited by Laasya Achanta

BCM Discovery: Trials for Glioblastoma Promising

William Decker, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Pathology & Immunology at BCM, who studies the usage of dendritic cell (DC) vaccination against cancer. DCs connect the innate and adaptive immune systems, making them an effective potential weapon against cancer.

A recent project from the Decker Lab targeted glioblastoma (GBM), one of the most aggressive and deadly brain cancers.

The treatment landscape of this condition has not significantly changed in the past 20 years, and median survival remains at 14 to 18 months.

To address this, the lab completed a phase I trial using advanced DC vaccination

techniques to improve the immune system's ability to identify and target GBM cells.

The results of this trial were promising, with a one-year survival of 87.5% in newly diagnosed GBM patients. Patients displayed evidence of an immune response, including increased memory T-cells, and transcriptional alterations in the vaccine cells that could be correlated with better outcomes.

Notably, the side effects of this vaccine included mild flu-like symptoms and injection site reactions. These findings highlight the potential of DC vaccines and personalized immunotherapy in GBM treatment.

"Now is a good time to put together all of the research that has been conducted, tie it all together, and make an impact," Dr. Decker said.

He encourages medical students to take advantage of their time in medical school and residency to get involved in research if they are interested in research careers. He also emphasized the importance of clinical experience for physician-scientists conducting clinical trials.



Written by Malay Shah
Edited by Matthew Darmadi

Student Spotlight: Carl Suerte



Carl Suerte, a first-year medical student at BCM, recently joined Dr. Laising Yen's lab. Yen, who holds a Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Pathology and Immunology at Baylor.

Suerte connected with Dr. Yen during his interview for the M.D. Ph.D. program at BCM and decided to reach out to him post-interview via email for a potential position in his lab.

Since then, he has been engaged in wet lab research to engineer RNA structures for new gene therapies.

Suerte explained that finding a research project that fits you is incredibly important in medical school.

"It is essential to hone in on your interests, not jump in too quickly, and find labs that fit your personal goals in research," Suerte said.

Suerte was first drawn to the field of molecular therapy during his undergraduate years and was incredibly excited to continue his experience in this field at BCM.

He hopes to apply his research in biology training to benefit patients' outcomes through molecular therapy and ingrain it into his future practice as a physician.

"Balancing research has been tough," Suerte said, "but I find that it helps that I am passionate about my work and am able to try on different hats."

Suerte finds that his research provides an aspect of medicine that supplements the BCM curriculum well. He is allowed more creativity through projects and has built his independence within the lab. He values Dr. Yen's guidance in building his experiments and future projects. "Having a research mentor was key to my success," Suerte said.

In the future, Suerte is eager to contribute to advancing molecular therapies and looks forward to translating his research discoveries into meaningful clinical applications.

Written by Avishi Singh
Edited by Laura Valderrábano

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