

STRONGER Scholars Newsletter

September 2024



The Supporting Tobacco-Related Ongoing Education and Research (STRONGER) Scholar Program is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of physician/scientists in tobacco and nicotine addiction. STRONGER offers tailored research and educational experiences for medical and doctoral scholars to start or advance their career in health disparities research. Our goal is to ignite and cultivate a passion for research in tobacco addiction and associated use health inequities, equipping trainees with the skills and knowledge to excel in this critical field and pursue impactful, research-inclusive careers.



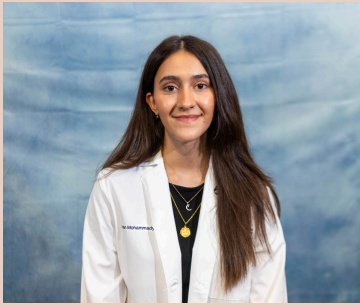
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The STRONGER Scholar Program is supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse through grant #R25DA059907

MEET OUR MEDICAL SCHOLARS



Arian Mohammadyar
Institution: Sam Houston State University
Academic Year: MS2
Mentor: Dr. Maher Karam-Hage

Ferdous Abdul Qudus
Institution: Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine
Academic Year: MS1
Mentor: Dr. Yong Cui



Janet Albarran
Institution: University of California, Riverside School of Medicine
Academic Year: MS2
Mentor: Dr. Maher Karam-Hage

Imani MacKenzie Toliver
Institution: Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine
Academic Year: MS2
Mentor: Dr. Jennifer Cofer



Neha Thippana
Institution: Sam Houston State University
Academic Year: MS2
Mentor: Dr. George Kyriotakis



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Nicholas Truong
Institution: Sam Houston State University
Academic Year: MS2
Mentor: Dr. Jennifer Cofer



Sriya Kakarla
Institution: McGovern Medical School
Academic Year: MS1
Mentor: Dr. Lorraine Reitzel

HEALTH PROMOTION CAMPAIGN BY DR. MONISHA ARYA

Under the guidance of Dr. Monisha Arya, scholars explored how strategic communication can shape health decisions. This initiative provided hands-on experience in applying health communication principles and analyzing public health campaigns. Collaborating with staff and program leaders, scholars worked in teams to develop their own campaigns, each addressing tobacco use in various demographic groups. For more information about Dr. Arya's workshop, click [here](#) to view the flyer.



Here are glimpses of scholars, staff members, and program leaders working together and showcasing their projects.



Left to right: **Dr. Lorraine Reitzel**
and **Dr. Isabel Martinez Leal**

Left to right: **Sriya Kakarla,**
MacKenzie Toliver, and
Neha Thippana



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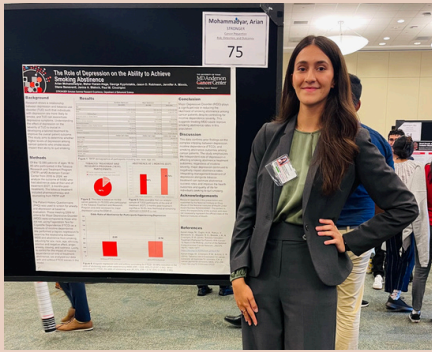


Left to right: Asfand Moosa and Hinal Patel



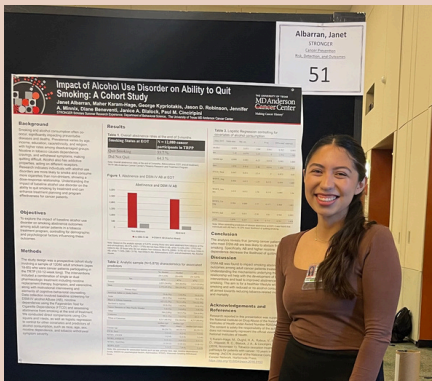
Left to right: Janet Albarran, Nicholas Truong, and Arian Mohammadyar

MEDICAL SCHOLARS SHOWCASING THEIR RESEARCH AT THE 2024 CATALYST POSTER SYMPOSIUM



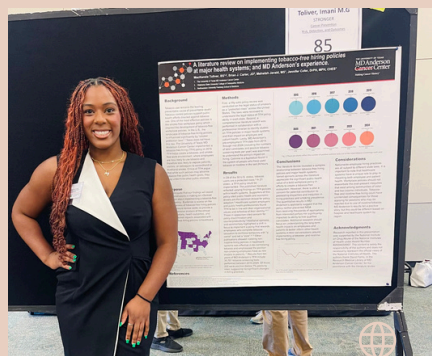
Arian presented her work entitled **“The Role of Depression on the Ability to Achieve Smoking Abstinence,”** concluding that Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) significantly reduced the likelihood of smoking abstinence among cancer patients, even after controlling for nicotine dependence severity.

Mentored by Dr. Maher Karam-Hage



Janet presented her work entitled **“Impact of Alcohol Use Disorder on Ability to Quit Smoking: A Cohort Study,”** revealing that cancer patients meeting diagnostic criteria for Alcohol Abuse are less likely to abstain from smoking. Specifically, both alcohol abuse and higher nicotine dependence decreased the likelihood of quitting.

Mentored by Dr. Maher Karam-Hage



MacKenzie presented her work entitled **“A Literature Review on Implementing Tobacco-Free Hiring Policies at Major Health Systems: MD Anderson’s Experience.”** The results indicated that the policy did not deter thousands of applicants nor significantly affect MDA’s ability to hire qualified candidates.

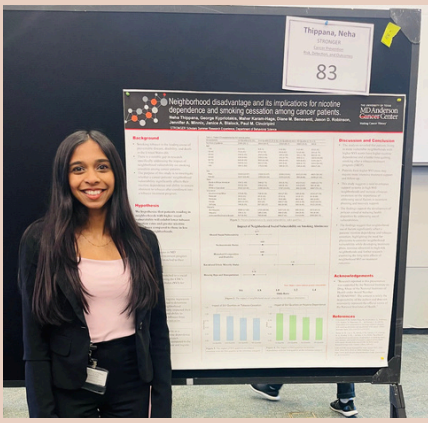
Mentored by Dr. Jennifer Cofer



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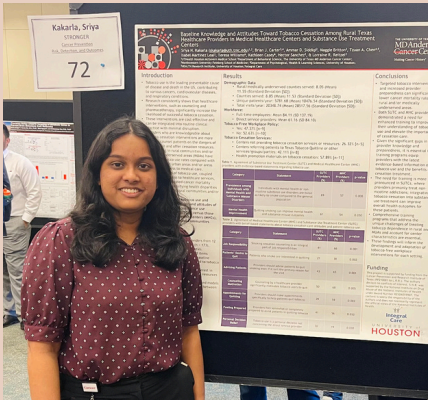
Neha presented her work entitled **“Neighborhood Disadvantage and its Implications for Nicotine Dependence and Smoking Cessation among Cancer Patients.”** The analysis revealed that patients in neighborhoods with higher social vulnerability index scores had greater nicotine dependence and faced more difficulty quitting smoking after a tobacco treatment program at MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Mentored by Dr. George Kypriotakis



Nicholas presented his work entitled **“A Literature Review of Cancer Risk associated with Tobacco and Cannabis co-use, including a Fifty-State Review of Cannabis Legalization and a Deep Dive into Co-use Prevalence among Young Adults in Texas.”** The systematic review revealed associations suggesting the need for more focused research attention in this area given the changing policy landscape in the US.

Mentored by Dr. Jennifer Cofer



Sriya presented her work entitled **“Baseline Knowledge and Attitudes Toward Tobacco Cessation Among Rural Texas Healthcare Providers in Medical Healthcare Centers and Substance Use Treatment Centers.”** The study concluded that there is a need for enhanced training to improve providers understanding of tobacco dependence and elevate the importance of cessation care in both settings, but particularly in substance use treatment centers, to reduce associated cancer mortality in rural and medically underserved areas of the state.

Mentored by Dr. Lorraine Reitzel



Special thanks to Dr. Brian Carter, J.D., a medical student at Northwestern University, for his invaluable contributions to the Tobacco Health Equity and Cancer Prevention Science Laboratory. Dr. Carter played a vital role in assisting Dr. Reitzel with the preparation of the STRONGER Scholar grant application last year. Throughout this summer, he provided exceptional guidance to medical scholars, helping them shape their research ideas and elevate their academic writing. Dr. Carter and Dr. Reitzel's collaboration has also led to the curation of a special issue in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, which will showcase the research of the STRONGER Scholars.



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