

# BTC Mentored Career Development Awards announced

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Jason Muhitch, PhD (left) and Umesh Sharma, MD (right)

The Buffalo Translational Consortium (BTC) Mentored Career Development Program announced the presentation of two Mentored Career Development Awards in October. Umesh Sharma, MD, an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and Jason Muhitch, PhD, an assistant professor in the Department of Urology and Department of Immunology at Roswell Park Cancer Institute, were the recipients.

Said Margarita L. Dubocovich, PhD, SUNY Distinguished Professor and chair of the department of pharmacology and toxicology: "The Mentored Career Development Program provides a unique opportunity to junior faculty to acquire skills and excel in clinical and translational research while navigating their way to successful careers in biomedicine."

Sharma will be working on his translational research project, "Risk Prediction of Ischemia-Induced Sudden Cardiac Arrest," in collaboration with research mentor John Canty, Jr., MD, a SUNY Distinguished Professor of Medicine who is chief of the Division of Cardiovascular Medicine, director of the CTSA Translational Imaging Center and deputy director of the Clinical and Translational Research Center.

The project hypothesizes that, in repetitive myocardial ischemia, upregulation of galectin-3-induced cardiac fibrosis provides substrate for the development of lethal cardiac arrhythmias. Advanced MRI imaging techniques used to spot that kind of fibrosis will help identify patients who are at higher risk of developing cardiac arrest, and early detection will help physicians employ successful therapeutic strategies for these high-risk patients. With promising preliminary results that demonstrate the feasibility of such an approach in pre-clinical models, Sharma's research project has potentially far-reaching impact among high-risk patients in the Buffalo-Niagara community.

Sharma earned his medical degree at Tribhuvan University in Nepal, and his PhD at the University of Maastricht. He completed his residency at Chicago Medical School and his fellowship at the University of Louisville and Massachusetts General Hospital before joining the Department of Urology as faculty.

Muhitch's BTC research project, "Capitalizing on Elevated Non-Classical Monocytes in African

American Cancer Patients to Improve Responses to Immunotherapy,” tests the idea that African American renal cell carcinoma patients with high circulating levels of non-classical monocytes are more likely to respond to immunotherapy protocols. In collaboration with research mentor James Mohler, MD, Muhitch will also evaluate whether classical monocytes from African Americans are more sensitive to cytokine stimulation. These findings could have an immediate impact on African American renal cell carcinoma patients who could benefit from immunotherapy if a reliable biomarker is elucidated.

Mohler is the associate director and senior vice president for Translational Research, chair of the Department of Urology and a professor of Oncology at Roswell Park Cancer Institute, a professor of Urology in UB’s Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and an adjunct professor of surgery and member of the Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Muhitch earned his PhD in immunology at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and completed post-doctoral training in Urologic Oncology at Roswell Park before joining as faculty in the Department of Urology.

The goal of the BTC Mentored Career Development Awards is to help postdoctoral trainees and junior faculty become independently funded clinical and translational investigators under the guidance of an experienced mentor. BTC scholars receive support to cover partial salary and research, tuition and travel costs for up to two years. The funding is provided through the BTC.

Preference for funding awards is given to research that brings novel approaches towards reducing health disparities in clinical populations and applicants with experiences or attributes which increase diversity in the clinical and translational workforce. Those goals align with the overall aims of the Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA), which serves as the hub of the BTC.

More information about the BTC Mentored Career Development Awards, including directions for applying, can be found on [the CTSA website](#).