Dr. Sanjay Bidichandani, Genetics Section Chief, was recently awarded a $300,000, three-year grant from the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) to investigate the use of histone deacetylase (HDAC) inhibitors to reverse the mutation defect in of Friedreich’s ataxia (FA). In FA, there is an epigenetic defect of the FXN gene that disrupts how it is expressed, thus causing an insufficient production of the key protein, frataxin. FA results in a loss of controlled body movements that initially affects individuals in their early teenage years, and often leads to individuals being dependent on a wheelchair by their late 20s. There is presently no approved therapy for FA, and the Bidichandani Lab is exploring the use of specific HDAC inhibitors to turn the silenced FXN gene back on. Dr. Yogesh Chutake (postdoctoral fellow) and Christina Lam (research assistant) are co-investigators of this project. The investigational HDAC inhibitors that are being tested were developed by collaborators at the Scripps Research Institute and the Broad Institute of MIT.

Of 350 applications that the MDA received in this grant cycle, only 36 were funded, with Dr. Bidichandani receiving the only award given in the state of Oklahoma. “We are very fortunate to be among this elite group,” said Bidichandani, “we are extremely pleased and proud to be part of the effort to help find a cure for FA.”

In recognition of his key discoveries, Dr. Yogesh Chutake was selected to participate in the competitive Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) Translational Research Workshop for Basic Scientists, and received a travel award to help cover the expenses of attending the four-day program. He was also sponsored to attend the Eighth Annual Friedreich’s Ataxia Symposium on Oct 12 in Philadelphia.
Spotlight:
Fellowship and Residency

Hui Pang, MD, is the new fellow in the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ABMGG) clinical molecular genetics training program in the Section of Genetics. Dr. Pang received her medical degree and completed her residency in China. She came to the United States in 2002 and worked in the Department of Immunology at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. In December 2006, she began postdoctoral training with Dr. Shibo Li in the Clinical Genetics Laboratory in the Section of Genetics. She enjoyed her experience focusing on cytogenetics and molecular genetics so much that when the opportunity arose to apply for the fellowship, she jumped at it. She particularly feels the interpretation of lab tests is an important bridge between the laboratory, the understanding of mechanisms underlying disease, and the delivery of appropriate clinical care. She will be mentored by Dr. Li, who is the Director of the newly accredited ABMGG clinical lab training program at OUHSC. We proudly welcome Dr. Pang as the first fellow in our program.

Dr. Klaas Wierenga and Dr. Hua Wang

Dr. Wang received her doctorate and medical degree in China. Upon graduation, she worked as an endocrinologist at Nanjing Medical University. She moved to the United States as a Research Assistant Professor in the Molecular Genetics laboratory at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock. She conducted research in the genetic etiology of type 2 diabetes, both as a principal investigator and co-investigator. She is researching lysosomal storage disorders (LSDs) and plans to investigate details of the molecular mechanisms of these conditions during her residency training. The Section of Genetics is glad to welcome Dr. Hua as our new medical genetics resident.

Hua Wang, MD, PhD, joined the section as our latest medical genetics resident in the Section of Genetics. She will train under Dr. Klaas Wierenga, Director of the Medical Genetics Residency Program.
Congratulations to Ashley Ethriedge, Dietician (pictured left) who has been selected as the Department of Pediatrics Employee of the Quarter!

Ashley Ethriedge has been selected at the Department of Pediatrics Employee of the Quarter. Ashley has been a member of the section of genetics for 10 years. As a dietician, she works closely with Dr. Susan Palmer with the metabolic program through the Oklahoma State Department of Health. She also works closely with Dr. Klaas Wierenga with the section’s PKU clinical trials sponsored by BioMarin Pharmaceuticals. The section of genetics is very proud of Ashley and exceedingly grateful for all that she does.

Congratulations to Matt Grim, Business Advisor (pictured right) who has been selected as member of the OUHSC inaugural Leadership Council class!

Matt Grim has been selected as a member of the OUHSC inaugural Leadership Council class. Those selected are non-faculty staff members who currently supervise at least one employee. Through a variety of activities, members will build close working relationships with one another and apply the lessons of leadership and professional development in their daily work. The section of genetics is very proud of Matt and the opportunities that participation in the Leadership Council will provide.

For more information about the Genetics Section visit: www.ouhsc.edu/genetics
On September 3, the section of genetics welcomed the new masters in genetic counseling students during the annual MSGC Potluck.

(Pictured left: MSGC Class 2017: (L-R): Rebekah Bressi, Anna Wright, Kimberly Branham, Tavanna Porter, Marissa Satern)

(Clockwise from left) Dr. Li, Dr. Bidichandani, Dr. Susan Hassed MSGC Program Director, and Dr. Sanghera; Everyone enjoying food from the potluck; Genetic counselors Alex Wadley, Melissa Hall, Jiani Chen, and Erin Youngs MSGC Assistant Program Director

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Publications:


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**Dharambir Sanghera, PhD, FAHA:** was promoted from Associate Professor to Full Professor starting July 2015.

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** was invited to make a presentation entitled “Therapeutic Pipelines for Friedreich ataxia” and moderate a session consisting of a panel of leaders from pharmaceutical & biotech companies currently developing therapies for Friedreich ataxia at the “FARA and USF Health Scientific Symposium on Friedreich ataxia, September 17, 2015 at the University of South Florida Marshall Center Ballroom, Tampa, FL. He was recognized as a special guest at the FARA Fire Energy Ball on September 19, 2015 where approximately $1.5 million was raised for FA research. Dr. Bidichandani serves on the Board of Directors of FARA, the largest funder of FA research.

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** was appointed to serve a 5-year term on the Muscular Dystrophy Association’s Research Advisory Committee (previously known as the Medical Advisory Committee).

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** was appointed to a 3-year term as a member of the programmatic panel of the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs' Neurofibromatosis Research Program.

**Yogesh Chutake, PhD:** was competitively selected as one of the young investigators to present at the 8th Annual Friedreich ataxia Symposium at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, attended by ~500 FA individuals and family members.

**Erin Youngs, MS, LCGC:** participated in the OU Medicine Live Chat on October 2. Her topic was, “What About Those Genes? Cancer genetics and the BRCA gene.”

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** reviewed applications for the Muscular Dystrophy Association’s Venture Philanthropy program (MVP).

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** was featured in an article on genetic testing, entitled “Decoding our DNA,” in the August 2015 issue of Distinctly Oklahoma magazine. A similar article, entitled “Genetic Testing: Window on the Future” was published in the August issue of OU Physicians’ Focus magazine.

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** served on the selection committee to identify new inductees into the Academy of Teaching Scholars of the OU College of Medicine.

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** was appointed to serve on the graduate program curriculum committee of the department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology.

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** was appointed to serve as Editor of the Friedreich Ataxia entry on the website of the National Organization of Rare Disorders [NORD] (http://rarediseases.org/rare-diseases/friedreichs-ataxia).

**Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD:** served on the committee to review the Immunology, Microbiology and Integument (IMI) and Gastrointestinal and Hepatobiliary (GH) courses of the OU College of Medicine.

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For more information about the Genetics Section visit: [www.ouhsc.edu/genetics](http://www.ouhsc.edu/genetics)