

The UHAND Program is a long-term, collaborative partnership between the University of Houston and The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center funded by the National Cancer Institute that supports and stimulates excellence in educational programming and innovation in research designed to affect health equity among racial/ethnic groups disproportionately affected by cancer disparities.

## UHAND General Updates

In August, the [Internal Advisory Committee](#) (IAC) convened and discussed progress made during Year 3 of UHAND, as well as how COVID-19 challenges were mitigated. UHAND is grateful for the work that the IAC does to fuel the growth and success of UHAND, as its members are all institutional leaders and established researchers with many competing demands on their time. We are looking forward to our continued consultation with the IAC during this final year of NCI funding.

UHAND's [Professional Development Series](#) for its [Pilot and Supplement Investigators](#) and [HEALTH Research Institute](#) affiliates continues. The most recent presenter, [Dr. Ezemenari Obasi](#) (Professor & College of Education Associate Dean for Research at the University of Houston, UHAND Mentor, IAC co-chair), presented on "Developing an Innovative & Sustainable Program of Research that Addresses Current Health Challenges," where he offered insight and advice on different challenges that can arise in the conduct of research within various settings.

The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting interface. The main window displays a presentation slide titled "Developing an Innovative & sustainable program of research that addresses current health challenges". The slide features a background image of a person in a lab coat and safety glasses working with laboratory equipment. Below the title, the text reads: "Dr. Ezemenari M. Obasi, Professor, Department of Psychological, Health, & Learning Sciences, Founder & Director, HEALTH Research Institute". At the bottom of the slide, there is a Twitter handle "@EzemenariObasi" and the "HEALTH Research Institute" logo. On the right side of the Zoom window, a gallery view shows several participants, including Dr. Lorraine Reitzel (top), Litty K. (second from top), Dr. Ezemenari Obasi (center), Daphne Hernan... (bottom), and khescoto (bottom right). The Zoom interface includes standard controls like "You are viewing Ezemenari Obasi's screen", "View Options", "Speaker View", and "Exit Full Screen".

Dr. Ezemenari Obasi (University of Houston College of Education Associate Dean for Research, center) presents his Professional Development seminar on "Developing an Innovative and Sustainable Program of Research that Addresses Current Health Challenges" to attendees, including Dr. Lorraine Reitzel (University of Houston Principal Investigator, top), Litty Koshy (UHAND Staff, second from the top), Dr.

Daphne Hernandez (UHAND Supplement Investigator, second from the bottom), and Dr. Kamisha Escoto (UHAND Education Program team member, bottom). Not all attendees are pictured here.

## Our Scholars

### Scholar Achievements

Former UHAND graduate Scholar [Sahar Eshtehardi](#) was recently selected for a competitive position on the [Journal of Pediatric Psychology's \(JPP\) Student Journal Club](#) for the 2020-2021 academic year. This club has members evaluate published work and write commentaries to enhance their understanding of the research literature.

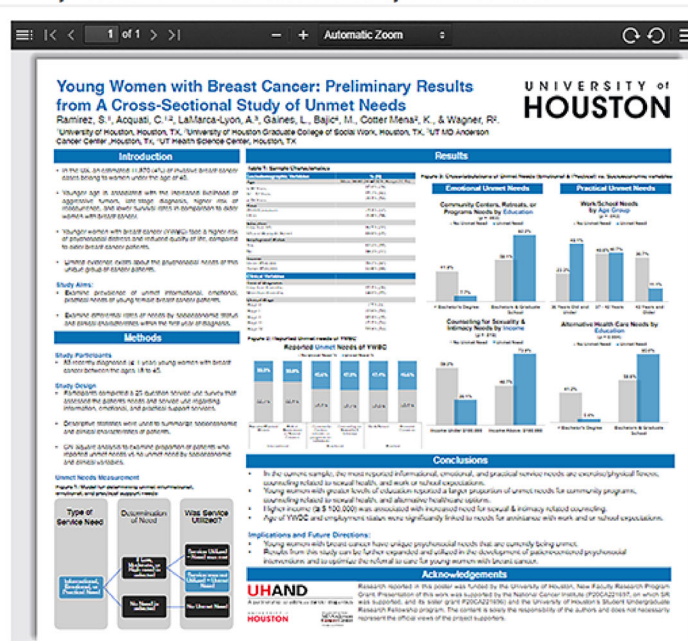
UHAND graduate Scholars [Niloofer Tavakoli](#) and [Danielle Llaneza](#) were recently given the opportunity to deliver a guest lecture concurrently to a group of undergraduate and graduate students at [Rice University](#) for a colleague of their UHAND mentor, [Dr. Virmarie Correa-Fernandez](#). The students were enrolled in a course titled "Disparities in Health in America," and the scholars focused their lecture on tobacco-related disparities. They spoke about the work they are doing as part of Dr. Correa-Fernandez's Latino and Behavioral Health Research team, along with steps they are taking in their work to reduce disparities.

UHAND partners with the University of Houston's [Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship \(SURF\) Program](#) to provide additional research-related educational opportunities and experiences for its undergraduate Scholars. At the end of September, UHAND undergraduate Scholars [Stephanie Ramirez](#), [Karina Serrano](#), and [Matthew Taing](#) were able to participate in SURF's [Undergraduate Research Day](#) – held virtually this year – where they presented posters on research projects they undertook during the summer under the guidance and direction of their respective UHAND Mentors. The following are brief overviews of the hard work they undertook this past summer and the culmination of their efforts!

#### Young Women with Breast Cancer: Preliminary Results from A Cross-Sectional Study of Unmet Needs

**Presenter(s)**  
Stephanie Ramirez  
**Abstract**  
2020 UHAND Scholar


Although women below the age of 40 represent only 4% of annual breast cancer cases, they experience elevated levels of psychosocial distress and lower quality of life compared to older patients. However, limited evidence is available about the ability to address psychosocial needs of young women with breast cancer (YWBC). This study identifies self-reported unmet needs of young breast cancer patients within the first year of diagnosis and examines differential rates of unmet needs by socioeconomic and clinical characteristics. A sample of 83 women recently diagnosed (within 1 year) with breast cancer between the ages of 18 to 45 completed an online 25-item questionnaire adapted from earlier studies of AYA patients and survivors. The survey assessed felt needs and service utilization of informational, emotional, and practical support services. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were used to illustrate differential rates of unmet needs. Exercise/physical fitness, counseling related to sexual health, and work/school expectations were the most common service needs. Significant differences



With the support of her UHAND mentor, Dr. Chiara Acquati, Stephanie Ramirez (UHAND undergraduate

## Understanding How to Address Cervical Cancer Disparities in African American and Hispanic Populations

by Karina Serrano, Dr. Chakema Carmack, faculty mentor  
The University of Houston, Department of Psychological, Health, and Learning Sciences College of Education



JHAPD  
University of Houston  
Hispanic and African American cancer disparities

### Introduction

#### Background

- African American and Hispanic women face larger cervical cancer mortality rates than their non-Hispanic White counterparts in the Metro Statistical Area of Houston.
- African American women often get diagnosed in later stages that are irreversible
- Financial and cultural barriers stand in the way of completing the 3 stage HPV series which is effective in cervical cancer prevention.
- Increasing prevention efforts can treat early HPV symptoms and defer from long lasting effects of cervical cancer.

#### Objective

- To graphically represent the incidence and mortality from the Texas Cancer Registry to analyze the health disparity gap
- To examine evidence based interventions to understand successful intervention elements that increase the uptake of the HPV vaccine and other cervical cancer prevention behaviors.
- To understand what interventions positively influence the health beliefs of a population

### Findings

- In examination of 2017 data from the Texas Cancer Registry there are disproportionate ratios between incidence and mortality among the three groups.
- From 2012-2017 Hispanic women had more cases of mortality than non-Hispanic White women.
- Multi-method interventions carried the ability to provide focus groups and various education routes.
- FuCoE project in North Carolina: 14% increase in Pap smear screenings.
- Becken Support Church Intervention: 85% of women were satisfied with the educational materials and counseling.
- Text Message Intervention: Intentions to take HPV vaccine increased from 52.3% to 76.7%

### 2017 METRO STATISTICAL AREA OF HOUSTON

Incidence    Mortality    Stages

Group	Incidence	Mortality	Stages
Non-Hispanic White	309	105	10
Hispanic	99	41	10
African American	105	41	10

### 2012-2017 METRO STATISTICAL AREA OF HOUSTON

Incidence    Mortality    Stages

Group	Incidence	Mortality	Stages
Non-Hispanic White	712	235	10
Hispanic	230	115	10
African American	230	115	10

### Fast Facts

- HPV 16 and HPV 18 cause most pre-cancer lesions that can turn into cervical cancer.
- In 2019 the Texas Cancer Registry showed that Hispanic women had highest incidence rate of cervical cancer.
- 21.3 cases per 100,000
- Data from the same year and source showed that Non Blacks had highest mortality rate (21.8 deaths per 100,000)

### Acknowledgements

- Research reported in this project was supported by the National Institutes of Health under award number P20CA22087 and P20CA22088. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.
- Cancer data have been provided by the Texas Cancer Registry, Cancer Epidemiology and Surveillance Branch, Texas Department of State Health Services, 1100 West 40th Street, Austin, TX 78756, <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/genr/>

### Methods

- Data taken from the Texas Cancer Registry was used to show disproportionate incidence and mortality.
- Interventions were reviewed based on the inclusion criteria: Minority population, Cervical Cancer Prevention Evidence Based
- Three multi-method evidence based interventions studied and were examined in depth.

### Summary and Future Directions

- The comparison among the three racial groups indicates a disproportionate surveillance of cervical cancer.
- Multi-method interventions that include personal behaviors and educational training were more promising to increase cervical cancer prevention behaviors.
- Culturally tailored interventions with the use of lay health workers and partnerships with local organizations were successful in increasing health literacy and addressing health beliefs in African American and Hispanic populations.
- Mobile interventions with educational materials sent via text message were successful in Hispanic populations and it is encouraged to be implemented in African American communities to increase the uptake of the HPV vaccine.

### References

Allen, J. S., Hays, R. D., Yen, J., Davis, K., Bane, R. E., & Bellizzi, K. M. (2016). A review of a community-based cancer screening program for African American women living in a rural area. *Journal of cancer research and clinical oncology*, 142(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00430-016-0440-9>

Chen, Y., & Hays, R. D. (2017). The effect of the cancer screening intervention on African American women. *Journal of cancer research and clinical oncology*, 143(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00430-017-0440-9>

Chen, Y., & Hays, R. D. (2017). The effect of the cancer screening intervention on African American women. *Journal of cancer research and clinical oncology*, 143(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00430-017-0440-9>

## Implementation of a Comprehensive Tobacco Free Workplace Program in Agencies Serving the Homeless and Vulnerably Housed

[illegible]

[Danielle Llana](#) (UHAND graduate Scholar) has recently been accepted into the [New York Academy of Medicine](#) as a student member. This opportunity will expose her to topical issues affecting public health. Danielle's research interests lie within the biological and psychological mechanisms that contribute to chronic diseases, including cancer, in minority adults; this opportunity will enhance her education in this area!



With the support of his UHAND Mentor and [Taking Texas Tobacco Free](#) (TTTF) Project Director, [Dr. Lorraine Reitzel](#), as well as the rest of the TTTF team, UHAND undergraduate Scholar [Matthew Taing](#) had his article titled “Clinician Training in the Adaptation of a Comprehensive Tobacco-Free Workplace Program in Agencies Serving the Homeless and Vulnerably Housed” published in the [International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health](#). Matthew has volunteered with agencies serving individuals experiencing homelessness during his undergraduate career, so the ability to capitalize on his experience to evaluate a tobacco-related cancer prevention intervention within similar settings was a perfect fit for his interests. The full article can be accessed on TTTF’s website under [Insights](#).

### **Scholar Spotlight**

This quarter, we spoke with [Niloofer Tavakoli](#) (UHAND graduate Scholar) and [Karina Serrano](#) (UHAND undergraduate Scholar) to learn more about their backgrounds and their experiences in UHAND so far, as well as about what milestones they hope to achieve by the end of their time with us.



### **What have you enjoyed the most about your time here at UHAND?**

I’ve really enjoyed the learning opportunities that complement the research component, such as the P.O.W.E.R. Writing Workshop with [Dr. Kayce Solari Williams](#) and our assigned reading “What Color is Your Parachute.” I think that having didactic and hands-on experience has been really helpful for me.

### **Name one thing you’ve learned from working with your mentor thus far.**

I’ve learned from my mentor, [Dr. Virmarie Correa-Fernandez](#), to be committed and disciplined in my pursuits – she’s really helped me navigate the idea that not everyone is an exceptional researcher/writer right off the bat – but if you’re disciplined, committed to your work, and show up for yourself every day, you can grow in whatever skill or accomplishment you’re trying to reach. I’ve really valued that because it reminds me that it’s all in the process and not the destination, which helps me take it day-by-day and prevents me from getting discouraged.

**What do you hope to get out of UHAND by the end of your time with us?**

Something I really hope is to learn more about different cancer prevention strategies – in one of the community presentations I attended they talked about the importance of being a minority researcher/clinician who works with minority patients/clients. It made me realize how I can use my minority status to give back to my community and other minority communities. I also hope to grow in my research skills and get closer to my goal of working in research in a medical setting, as well as networking with other professionals in research and attending conferences.

**What is a quote that you especially like and often come back to?**

A healthy outside starts with a healthy inside. [Original quote from Robert Ulrich.]

**What have you enjoyed the most about your time here at UHAND?**

The community outreach events we get to attend as part of UHAND are a favorite of mine because I get to find out more in-depth aspects about different community health focused nonprofit organizations that exist in Houston. Also, I always look forward to getting to hear and learn more about the founder's or CEO's goals and reasons behind starting up their nonprofit organizations. I feel that the virtual settings we've transitioned into due to COVID-19 simulates "face to face" interactions with these leaders that lends to a more intimate environment where they are more able to go into personal stories and motivations.

**Name one thing you've learned from working with your mentor thus far.**

I've learned a lot from my UHAND Mentor, [Dr. Chakema Carmack](#), especially considering that I come from a background involving little research experience. Dr. Carmack has taught me a lot about different technical aspects of research, such as systematic reviews, how to synthesize information from articles, and general know-how like research timelines and grant processes. One important skill I've picked up from her is learning how to collaborate with other researchers in the field, which I'm grateful I learned because it's setting up the foundations of my professional career, and how I'll interact with people in graduate school.

**What do you hope to get out of UHAND by the end of your time with us?**

Since I'm planning on applying to Policy and Management in Public Health for graduate

school, I hope to further explore and learn about how exactly research affects policy decision making. Being a part of UHAND exposes us to all these amazing components of research like education and outreach and I'm learning a lot related to these different aspects of research, but I most enjoy opportunities, like the [American Association for Cancer Research](#) (AACR) conference we just attended, where I get more insight on how policy and research tie together, and I hope that continues during the rest of my time as part of UHAND.

### **How do you unwind after a particularly stressful day?**

I love to go running and be outdoors, especially to get away from computer screens – COVID-19 has made it to where we're just constantly in front of our computers. I also like to unwind by treating myself to takeout from a favorite restaurant. Lately my go-to has been Korny Vibes, a vegan restaurant that has amazing food.

### **Education**

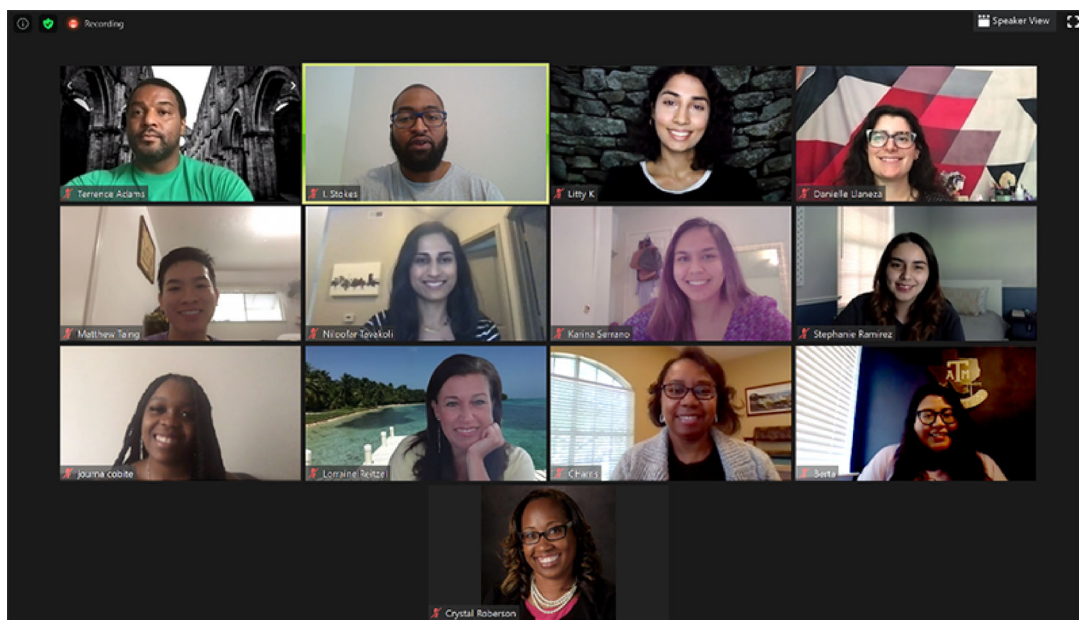
The UHAND scholars participated in a social media training delivered by [Imarogbe Stokes](#) (UHAND Community Outreach Team Member) where they learned about the basics of social media and different strategies to use in order to leverage their achievements via various social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Participants of this interactive training also discussed different ways to incorporate more recent social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, to publicize their work.

To learn more about UHAND and to interact with us through our social media channels and website, please see below:

Twitter: [@UHANDPartners](#)

Facebook: [UHAND Facebook](#)

Website: [uhandpartnership.com](#)



*Imarogbe Stokes (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, top row second from the left) leads the discussion on the importance of maintaining a social media presence and various techniques in advancing public health research among different audiences with Terrence Adams (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, top row far left), Litty Koshy (UHAND staff, top row second from the right), Danielle Llanaeza (UHAND Scholar, top row far right), Matthew Taing (UHAND Scholar, second row far left), Niloofer Tavakoli (UHAND Scholar, second row second from the left), Karina Serrano (UHAND Scholar, second row second from the right), Stephanie Ramirez (UHAND Scholar, second row far right), Journa Cobite*



(UHAND Scholar, third row far left), Dr. Lorraine Reitzel (University of Houston Principal Investigator, third row second from the left), Cassandra Harris (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, third row second from the right), Berta Salazar (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, third row far right), and Crystal Roberson (UHAND staff, bottom row).

In August, the UHAND scholars attended their final P.O.W.E.R. Writing Workshop session, in which they focused on honing their writing skills, as well as discussing different writing styles, ways to conceptualize writing prompts effectively and strategies to make writing a habit, which are essential when working in an academic research field. They also discussed their summer reading titled [“What Color is your Parachute?”](#) – a book authored by Richard Nelson Bolles that discusses the art of transitioning into a career, advocating for yourself, and focusing on your growth to guide future career choices.

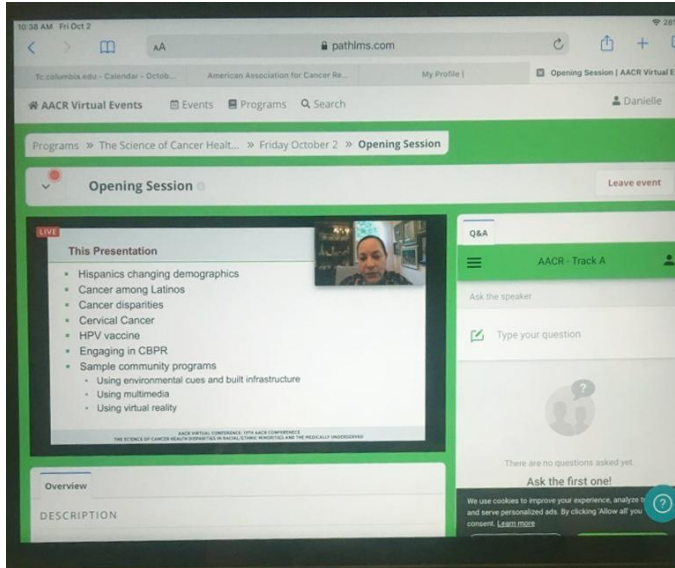


Dr. Kayce Solari Williams (UHAND Education Program co-director, top row middle) and Dr. Shine Chang (UHAND Education Program co-director, middle row right) lead the final P.O.W.E.R. Writing Workshop session and summer reading discussion along with the assistance of Dr. Kamisha Escoto (UHAND Education Program Team member, bottom row right) for UHAND Scholars Niloofar Tavakoli (top row, left), Danielle Llaneza (top row, right), Journa Cobite (middle row, left), Karina Serrano (middle row, center), Matthew Taing (bottom row, left), and Stephanie Ramirez (bottom row, center).

This year, the UHAND scholars had the opportunity to become members of [the American Association for Cancer Research](#) (AACR) and attended its annual [“AACR Science of Cancer Health Disparities Conference”](#) virtually this October. During this meeting, researchers from across the nation covered the latest findings on different aspects of cancer research, from population sciences and prevention to clinical studies to patient advocacy. The scholars used this opportunity to learn more about different research approaches. Read more below on a few of our scholar’s takeaways and experiences from the different sessions they attended throughout the course of the conference.

About the experience of attending the conference, [Danielle Llaneza](#) (UHAND graduate Scholar) wrote *“Overall, the AACR conference was a fantastic opportunity to explore what colleagues and researchers are working on to diminish health disparities in cancer care and research. This type of event is crucial as we continue to address social determinants of health and ultimately strive to improve the quality of life of populations we serve. I am excited to continue my work as a practitioner of social health and am motivated to continue in my area of focus to address cancer health disparities through research, information*

*dissemination and treatment care.”*



*UHAND graduate Scholar Danielle Llaneza shares her screen from her favorite lecture at the AACR Science of Cancer Health Disparities Conference.*

Stephanie Ramirez, UHAND undergraduate Scholar, took the opportunity to enjoy the view outdoors during Day 2 of the AACR conference, writing *“With such lovely weather in Houston this morning, I wanted to enjoy the second day of the AACR conference outside in my front yard! I attended a session on the needs, genetics risks, and survivorship rates of AYA’s [Adolescent & Young Adults] and Young Adult cancer patients. My favorite portion was by Dr. Kirchhoff where she addressed the low rates of health insurance literacy among AYA’s and YA’s and what she and her team at the Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake City, UT are doing to address this issue.”*

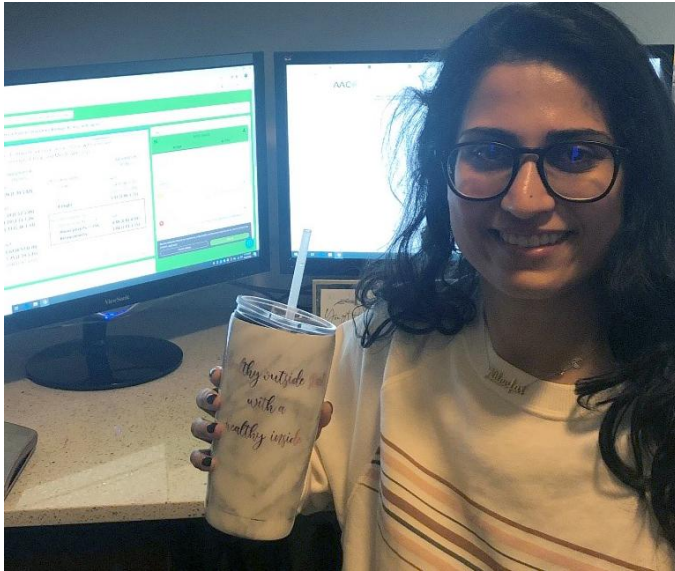


*UHAND undergraduate Scholar Stephanie Ramirez takes her learning outdoors while attending the AACR Science of Cancer Health Disparities Conference.*

UHAND graduate Scholar Niloofer Tavakoli was exposed to diverse topics over the course of the 3 day conference, writing, *“I appreciated the talk discussing the different countries’ perspectives in cancer disparities, especially in Jamaica. It was helpful to note the contributing factors to these disparities and ones we often overlook in the US including internet access and infrastructure limits. The different initiatives were helpful to keep in mind as it relates to global linkage and ways to maximize on strengths from different*



countries, researchers, and expertise to grow.” She also stated that “Communication as the key to cancer prevention with patients stood out to me as it seems like such an introductory step that is often overlooked to meet other demands and expedite the encounter to meet some sort of quota.”



*UHAND graduate Scholar Niloofar Tavakoli sits in on a lecture at the AACR Science of Cancer Health Disparities Conference.*

Karina Serrano, UHAND undergraduate Scholar, was able to reinforce certain key aspects of engaging the community in research during the conference – something she was initially exposed to since becoming a UHAND scholar – writing “*With the UHAND partnership, I have learned the importance of not only engaging with the community but immersing yourself in the environment which you will be in to cultivate relationships. By attending the AACR conference, I saw this concept throughout the different presentation topics. The biggest takeaway I learned from the conference is the importance of incorporating racial/ethnic minorities in clinical trials to diversify the data. In turn, clinical trials serve as an option to give racial/ethnic minorities a chance to receive access to the best treatment options that come with it. At the end of the conference, I understood more about the relationship between all sectors of public health and medicine to promote health equity. Lastly, I wanted to note that I enjoyed Dr. Christopher Lathan's description of this moment in history as a period in which collectively, "we are moving beyond just talking and moving towards accountability."*

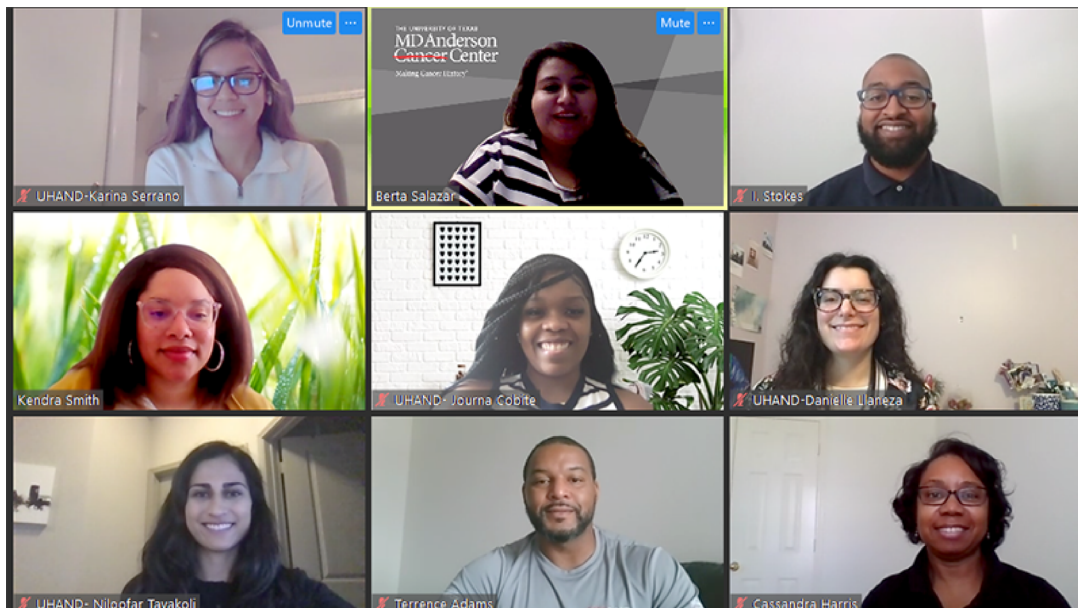


*UHAND undergraduate scholar Karina Serrano enjoying her time at the AACR Science of Cancer Health Disparities Conference.*

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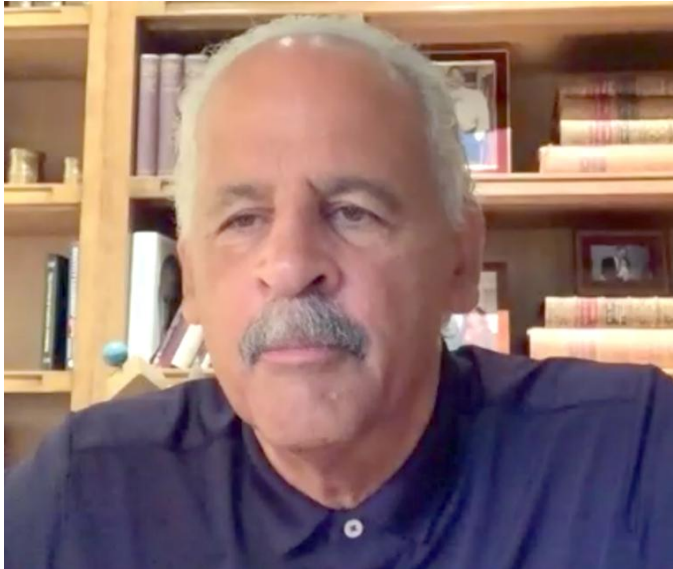
## Community

Further building on the success of past Community Outreach Team Lecture series, the [UHAND Community Outreach Team](#) was able to feature [Dr. Kendra Smith](#) of the University of Houston's [College of Medicine](#). Dr. Smith shared with our scholars the College of Medicine's unique approach to improving public health through community engagement, medical education, and addressing health in a manner that leverages community assets. The scholars were provided a glimpse into the college's vision to transform population health and health care in communities that have major health disparities.



*Dr. Kendra Smith (University of Houston Community Engagement Director, middle row left) provides insight into how the College of Medicine at the University of Houston approaches improving public health within the surrounding communities with Karina Serrano (UHAND scholar, top row left), Berta Salazar (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, top row middle), Imarogbe Stokes (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, top row right), Journa Cobite (UHAND scholar, middle row center), Danielle Llaneza (UHAND scholar, middle row right), Niloofar Tavakoli (UHAND scholar, bottom row left), Terrence Adams (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, bottom row center), and Cassandra Harris (UHAND Community Outreach Team member, bottom row right).*

Our UHAND scholars were able to attend quite a few virtual events this quarter including: [It's Time Texas](#) - Addressing COVID-19 Inequities by Empowering Community Health Workers to Prepare Texans for Public Health Emergencies, the 2020 [AACR](#) Science of Cancer Health Disparities Conference, and the 2nd Annual Summit on Improving Outcomes of African American and Latinx Male Youth hosted by [Prairie View A&M](#), just to name a few.



*Stedman Graham (Author and CEO of S. Graham & Associates) gives the keynote address during the 2nd Annual Summit on "Improving the Outcomes of African American and Latinx Male Youth."*

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## Research

[Dr. Lorraine Reitzel](#) and [Dr. Lorna McNeill](#) (UHAND Principal Investigators), are excited to announce that [Dr. Chiara Acquati](#) (a UHAND Mentor and Early Stage Investigator from the University of Houston), was recently awarded an administrative supplement to the UHAND grant. Her project is titled "The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Cancer Care and Health-Related Quality of Life of Racial and Ethnic Minority Women Diagnosed with Breast Cancer," and aims to examine health disparities related to the recent pandemic, specifically amongst Black and Hispanic women. Her work will be completed under the mentorship of Dr. Lorraine Reitzel and with the support of her team members, including [Dr. Shahnjaya K. Connors](#) (UHAND affiliate), [Dr. Isabel Martinez Leal](#), and [Dr. Tzu-An Chen](#). You can read more about [this supplement](#) on our website under [Research](#), as well as on our other 3 UHAND supplements.

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## Select UHAND Publications

Reuven, S. M. (former UHAND undergraduate Scholar), Chen, T-A., Zvolensky, M. J., Businelle, M. S., Kendzor, D. E., & Reitzel, L. R.\* (2021). Examining the Moderating Effect of Anxiety Sensitivity on Past-Month Pain Severity and Heaviness of Smoking among Adult Smokers Experiencing Homelessness. [\*Addictive Behaviors\*, 112, 106610.](#)

Taing, M. (current UHAND undergraduate Scholar), Kyburz, B., Leal, I. M., Le, K., Chen, T-A., Correa-Fernandez, V., Williams, T., O'Connor, D. P., Obasi, E.M., Casey, K., Koshy, L., Reitzel, L. R.\* (2020). Clinician Training in the Adaptation of a Comprehensive Tobacco



Free Workplace Program in Agencies Serving the Homeless and Vulnerably Housed.  
*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 6154.  
doi:10.3390/ijerph17176154

\*UHAND mentor and senior author

For the full list of UHAND-supported publications and presentations, please visit  
<https://www.uhandpartnership.com/publications>.



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# UHAND

A partnership to address cancer disparities

UNIVERSITY OF  
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