

CREPHS Newsletter

Quarters 2 & 3
FY 2025

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues,

This newsletter is reporting on six months of significant strides that our division has achieved—from securing competitive research funding to publishing impactful findings that shape the future of reproductive health.

You'll see within these pages that our faculty and staff are enriching academic programs and helping mentor the next generation of scientists and clinicians with exceptional dedication.

As always, I look forward to sharing the news of our team's achievements and continued collaborative mindset.

Sarah



Sarah K. England, PhD

*Alan A. and Edith L. Wolff Professor of Medicine
Vice Chair of Research and Professor,
Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology*

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Next issue: August 2025

PERSONNEL UPDATE

NEW TEAM MEMBERS

JENNY CHANG

Research Technician I, Gomez-Lopez Lab



Chang



Della Valle



Eyestone



Fisher

EVIA DELLA VALLE

Undergraduate Researcher, Garr Barry Lab

ELLE EYESTONE

Research Technician I, Gomez-Lopez Lab

SAVANNAH FISHER

Clinical Research Study Assistant II,
DCR/GynOnc



Ghosh



Huang



Kareus

PUJA GHOSH

Graduate Student, Wang Lab

YANG HUANG

Bioinformatics Research Assistant,
Wang Lab



Lee



Potuckova



Ramirez



Wang

EVA KAREUS

DBBS Pre Doc Trainee, Gomez-Lopez Lab

SEUNGBAEK LEE, PHD

Postdoctoral Research Associate,
Gomez-Lopez Lab

LUCIE POTUCKOVA, PHD

Senior Scientist, Gomez-Lopez Lab

EDDY RAMIREZ

Undergraduate Researcher,
Gomez-Lopez Lab

PRESTON WANG

Research Assistant, Zhao Lab

RESEARCH ROTATIONS

Sarah Speck, PhD

NEW from
Oct. '24 to
March '25.

FUNDING



View funding opportunities
relevant to researchers in
OBGYN by [clicking here](#).

PERSONNEL Spotlight

With 15 years of dedication to Washington University, Kellie Thompson brings a wealth of experience and a unique perspective to her role as Senior Grants Specialist in CRepHS. For the past 3.5 years, she's supported the Department of Ob/Gyn, after spending more than a decade in the Brown School of Social Work.

Kellie holds a Master's in Social Work from WashU and a BA in Psychology and Gender Studies from the University of Notre Dame. Her academic and professional journey reflects a deep commitment to social justice, research, and community support.

In her current role, Kellie supports CRepHS research faculty with grant proposals, budget planning, submissions, and reporting. Her previous experience as Director of the Buder Center for American Indian Studies continues to shape her work today. "I wrote and received multiple research and program grants that supported Indigenous people and communities in social work," she shares. This background equips her to navigate complex questions around policies and procedures with a nuanced and insightful approach.

Part of her daily work involves managing grants through Workday and the Research Management System (RMS). Though she didn't start out in the world of basic research, Kellie was drawn to it by a love for grants, financial reporting, and planning. But what does she enjoy most? "The people I get to work with! I find them to be compassionate about their work and empathetic," she says.

When she's not running numbers at her desk or meeting with other grant administrators, Kellie has ambitious personal goals. She's working on running a half marathon in every U.S. state—a challenge that may take her another 10 years to complete. Kellie also fundraises for the National MS Society during races when she can. Locally, she recommends Grant's Trail for a relatively flat, runner-friendly path.

As for other sporting events, Kellie's husband Travis is a baseball enthusiast. She's along for the ride as he aims to visit all the MLB stadiums—just nine left after this season! Kellie is also a step-mom to Kalie, and fondly recalls her time as Kalie's volleyball coach.

A proud citizen of the Seneca Nation of Indians, Kellie hails from Western New York. "My Seneca ID is as good as a passport when I travel into Canada," she notes.

When asked about her happy place, Kellie doesn't hesitate: "Any place where my family is, whether it's New York, Missouri, or Virginia." Kellie's commitment to her family is admirable, and so is the thoughtful energy she brings to the WashU community each day. ■

Kellie Thompson, MSW

Senior Grants Specialist



Kellie at a recent half-marathon in Arkansas (left); and with Kalie and Travis on a family vacation.

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN REPRODUCTIVE SCIENCES

World-class training for research or clinical embryology careers

Washington University School of Medicine offers a variety of master's degree programs, but only one focuses on affecting the greater reproductive health of our society. The [Master of Science in Reproductive Sciences](#) (MSRS) is a full-time degree program that takes 21 or 24 months to complete.

There are two concentration options ("Research" and "Clinical Embryology") that will be open to applicants on September 1st. MSRS "Research" concentration students perform mentored thesis research in a state-of-the-art lab to prepare for a research or consulting career; and "Clinical Embryology" concentration students gain the hands-on skills and experience needed for the highly in-demand career of clinical embryologist.

Students in the MSRS program will learn from both basic science and clinician experts working at the cutting edge of research and practice in key areas including reproductive aging, fertilization/contraception, gynecologic cancers, maternal-fetal immunobiology, pregnancy, and preterm birth.



Erin Reinl, PhD
Program Director



Ali Ahmady, PhD
Associate Program Director

Visit msrs.washu.edu to see the program overview, curriculum elements, application details, and more.

CRepHS SUMMER JOURNAL CLUB

The CRepHS Summer Journal Club will be held on Fridays from 9-10 a.m. in the BJCIIH building, 10th floor. This is a reproduction-focused, informal meeting in which all are welcome to attend.

Presentations will include: senior/junior trainee, cross-disciplinary, practice talks, traditional data discussion and article review.

The upcoming journal club dates are: June 20, 27; July 11, 18, 25; August 1, 8, 15, 22.

Learn more at reproductivesciences.wustl.edu/resources/reproductive-sciences-journal-club.



SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

AWARDS, PRESENTATIONS, & SPECIAL EVENTS

- In October, through an installment of BlackDoctor.org's video series, **Dr. Dineo Khabele** laid out the facts about ovarian cancer, including the importance of risk awareness and prevention, and the disparities in outcomes that disproportionately affect Black women. The video series is in partnership with [Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance \(OCRA\)](#) of which Dr. Khabele is a Scientific Advisory Committee member. The video, titled "Dr. Dineo Khabele on Ovarian Cancer Disparities & What Black Women Need to Know" can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwXeG_ubHwo.
- At the [Upper Midwest Summit for Reproductive Science \(UMSRS\)](#) in October: **Shweta Bhagwat, PhD**, postdoc in the **Santi Lab**, presented "Modulation of Sperm Function by Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) Toxins: Lipopolysaccharide and Vaginolysin" in the Sperm and Fertility oral session. **Juan Ferreira, PhD**, postdoc in the **Santi Lab**, had a poster abstract: "SLO2.1/NALCN Functional Complex Activity in Mouse Myometrial Smooth Muscle Cells During Pregnancy." The lab of **Dr. Farmers Amargant i Riera** presented four posters on ovarian biomechanics: "Piezo1 and Piezo2 Might Mediate Theca Cells Mechanosensitivity," "Biomechanics as a Novel Non-Invasive Biomarker of Oocyte Meiotic Potential," "Increased Age-Related Ovarian Stiffness Impairs Follicle Development and Oocyte Quality by Modulating Follicles' Transcriptome," and "The Mechano-transducer YAP1 is Highly Expressed in Growing Follicles and its Activity is Regulated by the Age-Associated Increase in Ovarian Stiffness."
- **Dr. Bisiayo Fashemi (Khabele Lab)** gave a research talk at the National Black Postdoctoral Association Leadership Symposium on October 25th. Her talk was titled "Single-Cell Transcriptomic Comparison of Ovarian Cancer Organoids and Primary Tumor Signatures."
- In October, **Kaci Martin** (DBBS pre doc trainee in the **Frolova Lab**) won 1st place in a special adaptation of the Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) competition at the ["She Leads Symposium @ WashU."](#) Kaci also won a "Best Talk" award for "Glycosylation of the Oxytocin Receptor." Her talk was given at the WashU Medicine Molecular Genetics and Genomics, Bioinformatics and Data Science, Computational and Systems Biology, and Human Statistical Genetics programs joint retreat.

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UMSRS attendees (from left): Farmers Amargant i Riera, PhD, Sara Pietroforte, PhD, Makenzie Plough, Courtney Murphy, MD.



Bisiayo Fashemi, PhD

SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

AWARDS, PRESENTATIONS, & SPECIAL EVENTS *...continued*

- In October and November, **Dr. Celia Santi** presented research from her lab at two venues: the University of Colorado Denver (“The sperm-specific K channel SLO3: Taking charge in fertility and contraception”) and the Gates Foundation headquarters in Seattle at the non-hormonal contraception discovery team meeting (“SLO3 as a target for female contraception”).
- On October 11th, **Dr. Sarah England** was a visiting scholar and presented “Maternal chronodisruption and adverse reproductive outcomes” at the Neena B. Schwartz Memorial Lectureship hosted by Northwestern University’s Center for Reproductive Science. “Dr. England’s pioneering work, her ease at fostering collaboration and discussion, and her devotion to trainee support showcases the continued spirit of Dr. Neena Schwartz that lives in the halls of Northwestern and CRS,” states [this news story on the event](#).
- **Sarah England, PhD**, was inducted into the National Academy of Medicine, a part of the National Academy of Sciences. Membership in the organization is one of the highest honors in the fields of health and medicine in the United States. [Read the press release here.](#)



Sarah England, PhD
- On October 31st, **Nardhy Gomez-Lopez, PhD**, presented “From Passion to Purpose: My Journey, Inspirations, and Current Endeavors” at the WashU Medicine Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Faculty Showcase event held in honor of Latiné/Hispanic Heritage Month.
- **Magdaleena Mbadhi, MBBS, MMed**, postdoctoral research associate in the **Frolova Lab**, is a recipient of the Department of OB/GYN’s [Lucy, Anarcha, and Betsey \(L.A.B.\) Award](#) for fall 2024. Dr. Mbadhi’s project is titled “Sphingosine-1-phosphate regulation in LPS-induced preterm labor mouse model.”
- CRepHS represented at the “Changing Landscapes: Reproductive Health—Past, Present, Future” seminar in October. **Dr. Sarah England** participated in the panel discussion and **Dr. Dineo Khabele** provided the keynote presentation. The event was hosted by [Becker Library](#).

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*Magdaleena Mbadhi,
MBBS, MMed*

SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

AWARDS, PRESENTATIONS, & SPECIAL EVENTS *...continued*

- **Celia Santi, MD, PhD**, received a 12-month grant from the [Gates Foundation](#). The \$250,000 award began in November 2024, and will support her lab's research project titled, "A new tool for high-throughput screens to identify potential contraceptives targeting sperm function." The project aims to advance contraceptive research and accelerate the development of novel contraceptive methods.
- **Kellie Thompson**, senior grants specialist, was presented the "Outstanding Job Performance" team member award at the OBGYN Department Party held in January at Energizer Park.
- **Dr. Nardhy Gomez-Lopez** appeared on the education podcast "Making Sense of Pregnancy," where she discussed how her lab is trying to decipher the Maternal-Fetal Crosstalk in the Human Placenta during parturition through the use of single-cell RNA sequencing. [Listen to the episode here.](#)
- WashU Medicine in collaboration with BJC Healthcare, installed a permanent exhibit that depicts the history of the desegregation of the medical campus. The official commemoration of the exhibit took place on January 22nd. **Dr. Sarah England** was a speaker at the event. Learn more at desegregationhistory.med.wustl.edu.



Celia Santi, MD, PhD



Dr. Khabele (left) presenting a team member award to Kellie Thompson.



Sarah England, PhD, (center) with OBGYN team members at the Commemoration of the Desegregation Wall at the Medical Campus.

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SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

AWARDS, PRESENTATIONS, & SPECIAL EVENTS *...continued*

- **Dr. Yukihide Ota**, postdoc research associate in the **Khabele Lab**, presented at the [Society of Gynecologic Oncology's Annual Meeting on Women's Cancer](#), held March 14-17 in Seattle. “The Oral Featured Poster Presentation is an honor given to approximately 10% of poster presentations, which we see as a strong endorsement of the potential clinical impact of our findings,” states Dr. Ota. “Although the presentation was limited to just three minutes, it was a valuable experience.” The presentation was titled: RAD52 inhibition enhances olaparib efficacy in PARP inhibitor-resistant BRCA-deficient ovarian cancer.
- **Shweta Bhagwat** and **Juan Ferreira**, postdocs in the **Santi Lab**, received travel awards from NIH to attend the [American Society of Andrology's 50th annual meeting](#). The meeting took place in Washington, D.C. at the end of March. Both postdocs also were chosen for poster sessions, with Dr. Ferreira's titled “WHICH-A.R.T., A Clinical Assay to Assess Sperm Fertilization Capacity in Patients Undergoing Infertility Treatments” and Dr. Bhagwat's titled “Fertility Implications And Impact Of Bacterial Vaginosis On Sperm Function.” Additionally, **Dr. Celia Santi** was named chair of the Program of the 2026 American Society of Andrology meeting. She will co-chair this event with Dr. Scott Lundy of Cleveland Clinic.
- In March, **Dr. Sarah England** and collaborator Dr. Eric Herzog (WashU Professor of Biology and Neuroscience) were interviewed and featured on YouTube by the [National Sleep Research Resource](#) (NSRR). Drs. England and Herzog spoke about the Washington University March of Dimes Prematurity Research Study (WUMOD). This was a prospective, longitudinal cohort study performed between January 2017 and January 2020, aiming to assess the role of maternal sleep as a risk factor for adverse birth outcomes. The WUMOD dataset can be found at sleepdata.org/datasets/wumod. Watch the interview at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMnQIb9mG9w.
- CRepHS labs represented at the [annual meeting](#) of the Society for Reproductive Investigation (SRI) held March 25-29 in Charlotte, NC. **Kevin Prifti** and **Kaci Martin** (DBBS pre doc trainees in the **Frolova Lab**) each received a [CRepHS Travel Award](#) to attend the meeting. Oral and poster sessions included:
 - **Tsuyoshi Murata (England Lab)**: “Myometrial Smooth Muscle K_{ATP} Channel Activity is Attenuated in Diet-Induced Obesity Mouse Model of Pregnancy;” and “A Single Amino Acid Mutation, D100K, Increases Cell Surface Expression of the Oxytocin Receptor and Enhances Recovery from Desensitization.”



Yukihide Ota, MD

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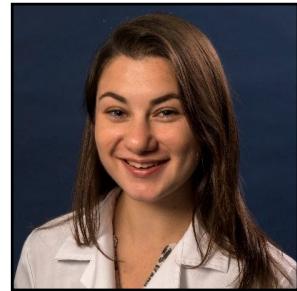
SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

AWARDS, PRESENTATIONS, & SPECIAL EVENTS

...continued

- **Kaci Martin (Frolova Lab):** “Functional Effects of Oxytocin Receptor Glycosylation.”
- **Kevin Prifti (Frolova Lab):** “Diet-Induced Obesity in Mice Disrupts Mitochondrial Dynamics and Ultrastructure in the Uterus at Term;” and “Substrate Preference in Myometrial Smooth Muscle Cells Following Oxytocin Exposure.”
- **Magdaleena Mbadhi (Frolova Lab):** “Inhibiting the Sphingolipid-1-Phosphate Receptor 1 Delays Lipopolysaccharide-Induced Preterm Labor in Mice.”
- **Dustyn Levenson (Gomez-Lopez Lab):** “Uncovering Immune Responses at the Maternal-Fetal Interface Triggered by IL-9, a T-cell Cytokine, during Preterm Labor.”
- **Hansong Gao (Wang Lab):** “Optimizing Electrode Placement for Uterine Peristalsis Imaging (UPI).”
- **Zichao Wen (Wang Lab):** “Enhancing Uterine EMG Signal Quality in Pregnancy Through Slow-Wave Signal Modulation.”
- PhD graduate student **Kevin Prifti** from the Frolova lab was recently awarded the CRepHS Biannual Best Paper Award, a friendly competition for first-author trainees within the Center. Kevin’s paper was also chosen as “Editor’s choice” by the journal in which he published, *Biology of Reproduction*. [Read the winning paper here.](#)



Dustyn Levenson (above) presented her research at SRI in the President's New Investigator Plenary.



Kevin Prifti

PUBLICATIONS*

- Whitley J, Burd J, Doering M, Kelly J, **Frolova A**, Raghuraman N. [Reduced risk of cesarean delivery with oxytocin discontinuation in active labor: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#). Am J Obstet Gynecol. 2025 Mar 18:S0002-9378(25)00161-9. doi: 10.1016/j.ajog.2025.03.015. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 40113155.
- Devenport JM, Tran T, Harris BR, Fingerman D, DeWeerd RA, Elkhidir LH, LaVigne D, Fuh K, Sun L, Bednarski JJ, Drapkin R, **Mullen MM**, Green AM. [APOBEC3A drives ovarian cancer metastasis by altering epithelial-mesenchymal transition](#). JCI Insight. 2025 Mar 10;10(5):e186409. doi: 10.1172/jci.insight.186409. PMID: 40059825; PMCID: PMC11949045.
- Ross WT, Buday S, Yakel E, **Khabele D**, Balls-Berry J, As-Sanie S, Colditz G, Baumann AA. [Does interdisciplinary group care for the treatment of endometriosis improve pain interference: protocol for a pilot randomised controlled trial at an urban academic medical centre](#). BMJ Open. 2025 Mar 5;15(3):e097372. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2024-097372. PMID: 40044193; PMCID: PMC11883614.

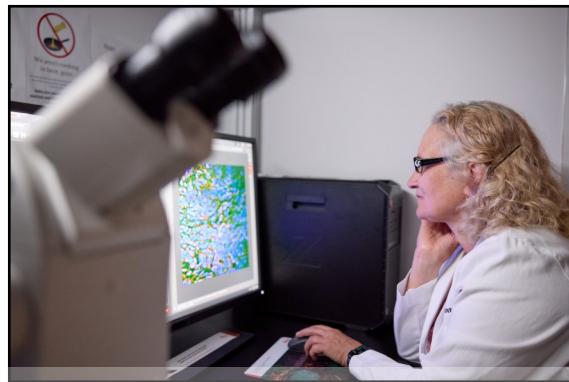
*CRepHS PIs & lab members in bold

SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

PUBLICATIONS* *...continued*

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Mullen Lab senior scientist Elena Lomonosova, PhD
Photo credit: Matt Miller/WashU Medicine

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*CRepHS PIs & lab members in bold

SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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PUBLICATIONS* *...continued*

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- Watkins VY, **Zhao P, Frolova AI**, Carter EB, Kelly JC, Odibo AO, **England SK**, Raghuraman N. [The association between first trimester physical activity levels and perinatal outcomes](#). Am J Obstet Gynecol MFM. 2024 Dec;6(12):101534. doi: 10.1016/j.ajogmf.2024.101534. Epub 2024 Oct 28. PMID: 39490897; PMCID: PMC11798543.
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- Carter EB, Thayer SM, Paul R, **Barry VG**, Iqbal SN, Ehrenberg S, Doering M, Mazzoni SE, **Frolova AI**, Kelly JC, Raghuraman N, Debbink MP. [Diabetes Group Prenatal Care: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis](#). Obstet Gynecol. 2024 Nov 1;144(5):621-632. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000005442. Epub 2023 Nov 9. PMID: 37944148; PMCID: PMC11078888.
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- Combs DJ, Moult EM, **England SK**, Cohen AE. [Mapping uterine calcium dynamics during the ovulatory cycle in live mice](#). PNAS Nexus. 2024 Oct 4;3(10):pgae446. doi: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae446. PMID: 39430221; PMCID: PMC11487293.



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*CRepHS PIs & lab members in bold

SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

PUBLICATIONS*

...continued

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- Than NG, Romero R, Fitzgerald W, Gudicha DW, **Gomez-Lopez N**, Posta M, Zhou F, Bhatti G, Meyyazhagan A, Awonuga AO, Chaiworapongsa T, Matthies D, Bryant DR, Erez O, Margolis L, Tarca AL. [Proteomic Profiles of Maternal Plasma Extracellular Vesicles for Prediction of Preeclampsia](#). *Am J Reprod Immunol*. 2024 Oct;92(4):e13928. doi: 10.1111/ajr.13928. PMID: 39347565.
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- Bligard KH, Kelly JC, **Frolova AI**, Odibo AO, Raghuraman N. [Peripartum Prediction of Fetal Weight in Gravidas With Obesity](#). *J Ultrasound Med*. 2024 Oct;43(10):1903-1910. doi: 10.1002/jum.16523. Epub 2024 Jul 12. PMID: 38994809.
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*CRepHS PIs & lab members in bold

**IN CASE YOU
MISSED IT!**



COLLABORATIONS

(from fiscal quarters 2 & 3)

CRepHS COLLABORATION MEETINGS

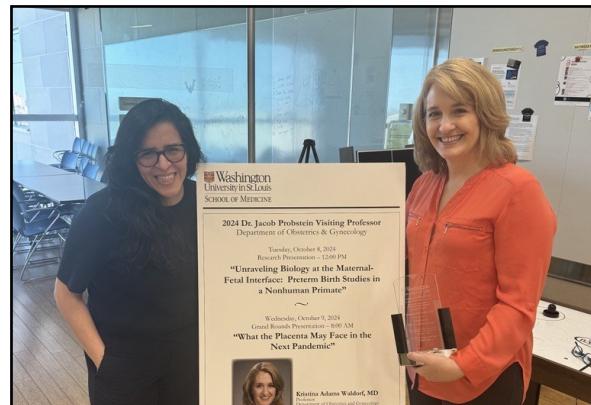


A costume contest made the CRepHS Collaboration meeting in October a fun time for faculty, staff and trainees! There were several other collaboration meetings over the past few months, including a holiday potluck, Valentines crafting, and clothing swaps.

We welcome new faces and collaborations! The next meeting takes place this summer. Contact Audrey Holland to learn more.

PROBSTEIN LECTURER EVENT

The WashU community was able to hear from visiting professor Kristina Adams Waldorf, MD, from the University of Washington School of Medicine, at the CRepHS hosted [Dr. Jacob Probstein lecture event](#) in October. Dr. Adams Waldorf (right) is pictured with Dr. Nardhy Gomez-Lopez.



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CRepHS is currently soliciting papers for our biannual **“BEST PAPER AWARD!”** Email audreyj@wustl.edu for more info.



SUBMIT YOUR NEWS

News for consideration is always welcome! Please submit it through this form.

CONTACT CRepHS

Visit our website at [reproductivesciences.wustl.edu](#) or email questions and feedback related to CRepHS to audreyj@wustl.edu.

About CRepHS

The [Center for Reproductive Health Sciences](#) (CRepHS) aims to improve the overall health of women and men by making reproductive health a priority in investigative and translational science. As the basic science division of Washington University School of Medicine's [Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology](#), CRepHS' research productivity is accomplished through highly collaborative interdisciplinary lab environments.

The Center's current research emphasis includes basic biology of reproductive health; multiple approaches to developmental biology with concentrations in cell biology, animal models, and genetics; studies of healthy human development; developmental endocrinology; neurosciences; translational imaging; medical device development; reproductive cancers; and population health research.

