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# F<sub>ood</sub> A<sub>llergy</sub> C<sub>ure</sub> T<sub>alk</sub>

**SUMMER 2018**

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## Message From The Director

I am pleased to welcome you to this year's edition of the Michigan Medicine Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center (MHWFAC) newsletter. We have had a remarkable year at the MHWFAC and I hope that you enjoy this look into the exciting work and important events that have occurred on our watch.

We have recruited two outstanding, internationally recognized scientists to the Center. Chang Kim, Ph.D. joins us from Purdue University, where he was the head of the immunology program. He is the Kenneth and Judy Betz Family Research Professor for Food Allergy Research and will be profiled in this newsletter. Simon Hogan, Ph.D., who joins us from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center will hold the Askwith Research Professorship of Food Allergy at the MHWFAC and will be profiled in our next issue. These two new scientists add to the already outstanding group that we have assembled at the Center.

In addition, in our Research Roundup we acknowledge a number of recognitions that reinforce the quality of research being performed at the MHWFAC. Jessica O'Konek, Ph.D. and I published a paper in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology documenting the successful results on our food allergy vaccine. In addition, Nick Lukacs, Ph.D., Gary Huffnagle, Ph.D. and Catherine Ptaschinski, Ph.D. are being awarded an NIH grant to examine the gut biome on the development of food allergy.

We also are initiating an undergraduate course in food allergy. This course will address all of the lifestyle, medical and scientific issues that young people with food allergy face. Given the incredible number of food allergic students at the University of Michigan we believe that this course will be a welcome resource for young people managing this vexing illness.

Finally, we include an article about the steps that the University of Michigan is taking to make the campus safe for food allergic students. Michigan will be the first university to have epinephrine autoinjectors in all of their dining halls and public safety vehicles. The University also will train all of their security staff and residential advisors in the use of these devices. We feel that these steps make Michigan a safe and welcoming environment for food allergic students.

Best wishes,

Jim Baker

Director, Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center



## Faculty Profile:

### Chang H. Kim, Ph.D.

When Chang. H. Kim, Ph.D. arrived in Ann Arbor this past December, the world-renown researcher was ready for a new challenge. As the first Kenneth and Judy Betz Family Research Professor for Food Allergy

Research at the Michigan Medicine Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center (MHWFAC) his mission is to tackle the growing food allergy epidemic.

Kim was born in South Korea and raised in Anseong, a city one hour south of Seoul. The son of a rural police chief he was an endlessly curious child. "I wanted to know the inner-working mechanisms of everything," says Kim recounting how he would take apart the radio to undersand why sound came out or a lamp to find the source of the light. Soon his explorations turned to the natural world, wondering how creatures moved or why plants grew.

The chance to pursue his interest in biology came in high school, where students had to choose between liberal arts, or Kim's choice, science and engineering. For college he attended the prestigious state-sponsored Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. Instead of required military service, Kim spent three years working for LG developing an EPO to boost blood cell production for anemia patients. To earn his doctorate, Kim left his home country for Indiana University where his confidence, and opportunities to publish, grew under the mentorship of

Hal Broxmeyer, Ph.D. To cap off his education it was off to California for a Postdoctoral Fellowship at Stanford University School of Medicine.

Kim comes to U-M after 16 rewarding years of research and teaching as a Professor of Immunology at Purdue University. There he enjoyed diverse support working on a variety of medical mysteries with funding that included the likes of the NIH, the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, the Michael J. Fox Foundation, as well as the Broad Foundation for IBD and colitis research which focused his attention on inflammation in the intestines. He cites these investigations into intestinal inflammation as leading to his current allergy work.

Now as faculty in the U-M Department of Pathology he has been busy establishing his new [Immunology and Hematopoiesis Lab](#). There his work for the MHWFAC will include continuing his landmark investigations into the role of Vitamin A in boosting immunity and suppressing inflammation as well as studying the underlying mechanisms of allergy response and how metabolites can regulate allergy response in order to identify targets for intervention.

With his kids grown and his wife still commuting from her pharmacy position at the St. Vincent Hospital System in Kokomo, Indiana, Kim is getting acclimated to Ann Arbor life and hopes to become better acquainted with the local golf courses. He traces his enthusiasm about the U-M move to the quality of his new colleagues working in the area of mucosal immune system and microbiology. Explains Kim, "It's a good opportunity to get out of your comfort zone, to find a cure in food allergy. It's exciting to be a part of that."



## Research Roundup

So far 2018 has been an exciting year at the Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center (MHWFAC) marked by innovative research progress. Not only have we successfully recruited two new endowed professors, Chang Kim, Ph.D. and Simon Hogan, Ph.D., both internationally recognized for their research, our existing MHWFAC laboratories have produced cutting edge findings in their tireless pursuit of new therapies for those coping with food allergies.

Jessica O'Konek, Ph.D. and James Baker, M.D. published their work on a food allergy vaccine in the [Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology](#), the world's foremost allergy journal. The findings identify a treatment for changing the immune response in food allergy to a non-allergic phenotype that blocks the development of anaphylactic responses. The next steps will be to verify the treatment efficacy allowing the treatment to move into the all-important phase of clinical testing.

Several local, national and international news organizations reported on the study's encouraging results, demonstrating how Dr. O'Konek and Dr. Baker are making an impact on treatment of Food Allergy.

The MHWFAC is pleased to be the recipient of a NIH grant totaling \$2.48 million to examine early life development of food allergies linked to the developing gut microbiome and its influence on metabolism and immune responses. A collaboration is afoot between MHWFAC faculty, Nicholas Lukacs, Ph.D., Gary Huffnagle, Ph.D. and Catherine Ptaschinski, Ph.D. to identify how microbes impact the development of food allergies and how early virus infection alters those responses. In addition, the studies will determine whether specific intervention of metabolic pathways early in life might mitigate the development of allergic responses. Adding promise are these latter studies - they have identified drugs that might interrupt the development of food allergies. The best part is those drugs are already FDA approved.

Dr. Kim and Dr. Hogan have already published their first papers as members of the MHWFAC. Dr. Kim's work published in the [European Journal of Immunology](#) demonstrates how gut metabolites, called short chain fatty acids (SCFA), can control pathologic inflammation and regulate the severity of the response. Dr. Hogan's [recent work](#) published in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology demonstrated a novel gene pathway that appears to be involved in the severity of eosinophilic esophagitis using cells from patients with the disease. Both of these new investigators bring significant and novel research contributing to the robust collaborations already underway at the MHWFAC to identify new and innovative food allergy treatment discoveries.



## First U-M Food Allergy Course Offered Winter 2019

Strides are being made toward the Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center's goal of expanding food allergy education and

awareness. The MHWFAC received approval this past spring to begin developing courses under the program name of Immunology, Health and Society (IHS). Since then, plans have been set to teach the first food allergy course on the University of Michigan's campus. The course, which will be offered for credit to U-M students, is titled IHS 340: "Germ Wars, Asthma and the Food Allergy Epidemic," and will be taught in the Winter 2019 semester by Gary B. Huffnagle, Ph.D., the Nina and Jerry D. Luptak Research Professor in the MHWFAC. The goal of this course is to introduce students to the growing epidemic of severe allergic diseases, with an

ultimate focus on food allergies. The course lectures and discussions will focus on the advances in immunology and public health that have led to a decrease in infectious diseases but have been associated with an increase in hypersensitivity diseases, such as asthma and food allergies. The launch of this course, along with other campus initiatives (see “U-M Joins the MHWFAC in Support for Food Allergic Students” below) marks just the beginning of how the MHWFAC is increasing food allergy education on the U-M campus. Also in discussion are plans to offer courses for both science majors and non-majors, as well as a course for future teachers. The MHWFAC’s educational efforts have the potential to impact tomorrow’s scientists and educators, building food allergy awareness now that will be carried forward to the next generation.



## **U-M Joins The MHWFAC In Support For Food Allergic Students**

In an exciting and unprecedented action, the University of Michigan’s Office of the President has joined forces with the Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center (MHWFAC) in its quest to improve the lives of food-allergic individuals. Under the direction of James Baker, M.D., Director of the MHWFAC, and Royster Harper, Vice President for Student Life, the U-M will initiate a program to help students with food allergies. Two areas of Student Life, Michigan Dining and University Housing, are taking a number of specific steps to assure safety and improve the daily life of food-allergic students.

Michigan Dining will be placing epinephrine auto-injectors into all dining facilities as well as on all public safety vehicles. In addition, training on the use of these devices will be initiated for dining room personnel and for all public safety officers.

Michigan Dining has already taken remarkable actions to improve food labeling and content for individuals with food allergies. The Michigan Dining website has full food content and menus from all the dining halls across campus. This facilitates meal choices by students with specific dietary needs, including food allergies.

Changes are also being made by University Housing. All students who have a food allergy that they identify on their housing request will be assured that they have a roommate who understands the need to avoid specific foods in the presence of an individual with food allergy. In addition, all resident advisors in dorms will be trained in food allergy response and the use of epinephrine auto injectors. Together, these new steps will make the University of Michigan the true leader across the nation in the support provided for students with food allergy.

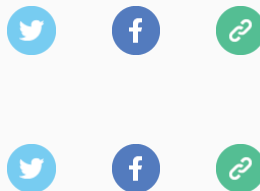




## The Support That Makes Progress Possible: Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Spring Luncheon 2018

Solidarity for Food Allergy support and research was on full display April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018 as nearly 300 guests gathered for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center Spring Luncheon at Knollwood Country Club in West Bloomfield, Michigan. The event chaired by Adriane Perakis and Kim Prodan raised over \$260,000 to support the Michigan Medicine Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center (MHWFAC) in its mission to conduct comprehensive food allergy-related research that will significantly improve patient care and expand education and awareness. A panel discussion moderated by Sandra Ali, Local 4 News Anchor, featured experts from the food allergy community included James Baker, M.D., Nicholas Lukacs, Ph.D., from the MHWFAC, and Kate Fitzgerald, M.D. from the U-M Department of Psychiatry. Also on the panel was U-M alum Daniel Kadden who served as a student advisor to the MHWFAC during his years at the university. The afternoon generated essential funds for food allergy research as well as an enthusiasm on the part of guests who left with increased awareness of the cause and the great strides MHWFAC is making in the race to end the food allergy epidemic.

To join these contributors in the important work of funding food allergy research go to our [giving page](#).



### *About US:*

The University of Michigan Mary H. Weiser Food Allergy Center (MHWFAC) has been established to investigate novel areas of research to better understand the causes and to help develop new cures for food allergies.

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