

# The Chronic Pain & Fatigue Research Center (CPFRC)

*presents*

Summer 2023

# The Health Equity Core Newsletter

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The latest news, views, and announcements

**Mission:**

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We aim to improve the quality of chronic pain care by elevating the voices of patient communities in research.



# Project Spotlight: Treatment for Chronic Low Back Pain



We are conducting many different types of research studies at the Chronic Pain & Fatigue Research Center to improve pain treatment and better understand chronic pain. Some of our studies focus on chronic low back pain, including the BACPAC study led by Dr. Afton Hassett.

The treatments that we are researching through the BACPAC study are (1) physical therapy, (2) mindfulness-based stress reduction through virtual group meetings, (3) self-administered acupuncture, and (4) an FDA-approved medication called duloxetine. In BACPAC, participants are randomized to a treatment group. Randomization helps ensure that the results of the study are not biased. If the first treatment is not effective, then participants will be randomized to a second treatment group.

So, how do you know if you have chronic low back pain? Chronic low back pain is best described as back pain that persists for 3 months or longer and can be felt even after an initial injury or cause of pain has previously been treated. It is estimated that approximately 70-85% of people experience chronic low back pain at some point in their lives.

To participate in the BACPAC study, participants must meet the following criteria:

- Participants must be between the ages 25-70
- Must have chronic low back pain
- Cannot have any disability related lawsuits within 1 year of study participation

To gain a better understanding of each person's pain journey, BACPAC collects data in multiple ways, including:

- Surveys
- Blood draws
- Saliva
- Measurements of physical function
- Brain imaging via MRI

To learn more about the BACPAC study, please visit the study webpage:

<https://umhealthresearch.org/#studies/HUM00180994>.

# Researcher Spotlight: Dr. Afton Hassett



This month, we would like to introduce you to Afton Hassett, PsyD. Afton is a licensed clinical psychologist and an Associate Professor in the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Michigan. She is also a valued member of our faculty team here at the Chronic Pain & Fatigue Research Center. Read below to find out more about Afton, and the wonderful research work and resources that she provides for those in the community.

## **1. Please describe your role at the CPFRC.**

I am a principal investigator and a Co-Director of Clinical Trials Research for the CPFRC. I am also the Director of Pain and Opioids Research. What that really means is that most of my research is focused on studies that evaluate treatments for people with chronic pain. A big outstanding question that my teams are trying to answer is “who benefits from what treatment and how does that treatment work?”

## **2. Please describe the types of chronic pain conditions that you study.**

We study conditions like chronic low back pain, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, and all sorts of other chronic pain conditions.

## **3. Some of your research focuses on resilience, how can resilience influence chronic pain management?**

Resilience is a critical factor to try to understand and build in people with chronic pain. Positive self-care like healthy diet, regular physical activity and good sleep all makes people more resilient and pain much better. What’s really fascinating though is that positive emotions, adaptive thoughts, and coping, and doing things that people value and love to do can also make pain much better!

## **4. What is the value of research for communities?**

Research is a powerful way to find new and more effective treatments so people with chronic pain can lead more rewarding lives.

# Staff Spotlight: Johari Summerville



This month, our staff spotlight focuses on one of CPFRC's Research Assistant's, Johari Summerville. We sat down with Johari to discuss her role here at the Chronic Pain & Fatigue Research Center, as well as her motivation behind her decision to pursue research. Read below to hear from Johari.

## **1. When did you start working at CPFRC?**

I started working at the CPFRC in May of 2022.

## **2. What is your role at CPFRC/what sorts of projects have you worked on through the CPFRC?**

I work as a research assistant in the CPFRC. I have helped out with various interview studies that include topics like lupus, cannabis for chronic pain among Veterans, and a study about post-surgical pain. I have also helped out by creating flyers and videos for the CPFRC to distribute on social media and on the CPFRC websites.

## **3. Why are you interested in studying chronic pain and chronic pain conditions?**

I first became interested in learning about chronic pain during my last semester of college when I took a class hosted by two of the CPFRC Faculty members (Dr. Steven Harte and Dr. Richard Harris). From the perspective of a future doctor, I wanted to learn more about treating pain (especially chronic pain) since I knew it would be a major concern my future patients would be faced with. After hearing that the medical school curriculum does not spend much time teaching students how to treat pain, I wanted to take it upon myself to learn more. Additionally, I was intrigued by the holistic and personalized approach to treating pain. I felt inspired to learn everything I could so I could be prepared to work alongside my patients to find what works best for them, regardless of their condition.

## **4. How would you describe what it's like to work at the CPFRC?**

I've loved working at the CPFRC; it is truly a very supportive environment. Most of my interaction has been with the HEC but every so often when I have visited Domino's Farms the staff and faculty have felt like an extended family to me. They often have checked in on me during my application to medical school over the past year and we just talk casually about our lives.

## 5. What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

During my free time, I love taking classes at CycleBar, reading, traveling, and going out to restaurants (however, I'm hoping to get better at cooking the foods I like since I will be on a medical student budget for the next four years).

## 6. What is the value of community engaged research?

I think the value of doing research for communities is that you can be more certain that the work you are doing will actually improve someone's life. I've felt that, at times, there is so much pressure within academic institutions to publish something to get promoted, but doing community work forces you to take time to step back and really make sure what you're doing is valuable. In community work, you can take a step back and really see what needs to be done before starting a project.

# Community Partner Spotlight: Diana Saraceno



This month's Community Member Spotlight is Diana, who is a Lupus Warrior.

Diana had her first experience with lupus in April of 1996, after giving birth to her first child at the age of 24. She says that soon after her daughter was born, she began to feel unwell, and although she initially summed it up to being a new mother and didn't really put too much thought into it. However, after explaining a few of her symptoms to her primary care physician, he decided to err on the side of caution and sent Diana to have some bloodwork done. As it turns out, her lab work came back positive for Lupus. Not only was this news to Diana; it turns out that this new diagnosis was one that she had never even heard of before.

According to her knowledge, no one in her family had ever lived with lupus, and the information that she was able to obtain, didn't really tell her much regarding treatment options, or what she was to expect from this auto-immune disorder.

While Diana was concerned about this new discovery, she continued raising her daughter and working as a preschool teacher. It was during this time that Diana says her symptoms went dormant, and she was able to continue living her life as close to normal as she was before the diagnosis. It wasn't until the birth of her third child, at the age of 40, that she began experiencing complications from her diagnosis.

Diana says that although she experienced many setbacks, hospitalizations, and health scares throughout the years, eventually, she was able to find a team of physicians and specialists who were able to help her find the proper medication and treatment plans to start managing her lupus symptoms. Although she has been living with lupus for many years, Diana says that she finds that there is still so much to learn about the disease. However, she is grateful that there is more awareness being raised as well as resources becoming available that will aid in educating not only those who have been diagnosed with lupus, but also the specialists and healthcare providers that treat them.

When asked if she's learned anything from her experience, Diana leaves us with this message; "Always keep a journal of symptoms, foods you eat, symptoms, and a calendar for appointments. You have to learn how to be your own best advocate. I also use a pill organizer and keep daily information on a notebook for reference. I would like people to know or understand how debilitating this disease can be. How pain can shift day to day. How the fatigue affects your body, brain, and life as a whole."

Diana says that through it all, her biggest accomplishments are her children.

## Upcoming Events

### **Friday, July 28, 2023**

FREE Yoga Class taught by Shakina Russel of the  
Detroit Yogi  
University of Michigan Detroit Center  
3663 Woodward Ave  
Detroit, MI 48201  
6:00 – 7:00 PM

### **Friday, August 11, 2023:**

HEC Presents: Medicinal Cannabis and Chronic Pain Management  
Ypsilanti District Library-Superior  
1900 N. Harris Rd.  
Ypsilanti, MI 48198  
11:00 AM-1:00 PM

### **Saturday, August 26, 2023:**

HEC Presents: Mindfulness and Chronic Pain  
University of Michigan Detroit Center  
3663 Woodward Ave  
Detroit, MI 48201  
11:00 AM-2:00 PM

**Saturday, September 23, 2023:**

HEC Presents: Cannabis Policy Event  
University of Michigan Detroit Center  
3663 Woodward Ave  
Detroit, MI 48201  
11:00 AM-2:00 PM

**For more information:**

If you're interested in learning more about our center or upcoming events, please contact us at [HEC-admin@umich.edu](mailto:HEC-admin@umich.edu).

## **Hear more from our CPFRC Faculty**

### **In the News: Why Americans Feel More Pain**

*CPFRC's Dr. Daniel Clauw and Dr. Kevin Boehnke were featured in the New York Times*

This is the first in the series "How America Heals," in which Nicholas Kristof will examine the interwoven crises devastating working-class America and explore paths to recovery.

Access the full article here (subscription may be required):

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/03/opinion/chronic-pain-america-workingclass.html>

### **In the News: Chronic Pain: The long road to discovery**

*CPFRC's Dr. Daniel Clauw was featured in Nature*

In the article, Dr. Daniel Clauw explains how studies suggest that if someone's pain improves dramatically, say with surgery, anxiety, depression, catastrophizing get dramatically better too. While chronic pain research has come a long way, this hasn't necessarily translated to better outcomes for people experiencing chronic pain.

Access the full article here: <https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-023-00869-6/index.html>

## **Additional Resources**

PainGuide: <https://painguide.com/>

PASCGuide: <https://www.pascguide.com/>

Lupus: <https://www.conquerlupus.com/>

Sickle Cell Disease: <https://abettermewithscd.com/>

The CPFRC Health Equity Core: <https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/cpfr/health-equity-core>