

September 25, 2019

Rita Hortenstine, Chair of the Council
Texas Council on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders

RE: UTRGV application for membership in the TARCC

Dear Dr. Hortenstine,

I am writing to request that UTRGV be considered for institutional membership in the Texas Alzheimer Research and Care Consortium (TARCC).

As a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) UTRGV serves the Rio Grande Valley population in which 92% identify as Hispanic, compared to 40% for the entire State of Texas. UTRGV offers the consortium a unique perspective on research that impacts a priority underserved population that disproportionately bears the burden of Alzheimer's Disease.

UTRGV leadership has an active strategy making neuroscience and neurodegenerative diseases a top institutional priority, with **over \$25 million** already committed to space and research. UTRGV has begun the strategic building of a Neuroscience Institute to address Alzheimer's disease, healthy aging, stroke, mental health and other brain diseases. We are currently working with UT System architects to break ground on the Phase I Neuroscience Institute Building, a 3,500 sq ft shared clinical and research space on our Harlingen, TX campus. Ground-breaking begins March 2020 with substantial completion of the first building planned for June 2021.

The Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation (VBLF) provided strong community support for the Neuroscience Institute with a founding gift of **\$15 million**. Gladys Maestre, MD, PhD, Professor of Neuroscience in the School of Medicine, is addressing health disparities of Hispanics with Alzheimer's Disease as PI of the *Rio Grande Valley Alzheimer's Resource Center for Minority Aging Research: Partnerships for Progress (AD-RCMAR)*. UTRGV is one of 8 Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research funded nationally by the NIH/NIA. One of the principal aims of this 5-year, **\$3.2 million** grant is to develop infrastructure to promote advances in Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases while simultaneously increasing the number of researchers focused on health disparities and the health and well-being of minority elders.

The UTRGV Neuroscience Institute is bolstered with collaborative research of the South Texas Diabetes and Obesity Institute (STDOI), directed by Sarah-Williams Blangero who also serves as Chair of the Department of Human Genetics. Key, innovative brain research of interest to TARCC from the STDOI research team is the Hispanic family cohort they have been following for decades and collecting extensive biospecimens as part of their mature biorepository: *Screening High Risk Families for Diabetes to Establish a Genomic Research Center in the Mid-Valley* (PI: Blangero, S., a **\$2 million** grant from the Knapp Community Foundation). Other relevant collaborative research from STDOI includes: *2/3: Pedigree-Based Whole Genome Sequencing of Affective and Psychotic Disorders* (PI: Blangero, J., **\$3.8 million**; NIH); *Gene Networks Influencing Psychotic Dysconnectivity in African Americans* (PI: Blangero, J., **\$1 million**; NIH); *Imaging Genomics of the Aging Brain* (PI: Blangero, J., \$800K; Boston Children's Hospital); *A Neurobehavioral Family Study of Schizophrenia* (PI: Curran, J., **\$210,000**; NIH).

The UTRGV Neuroscience Institute has now completed inaugural recruitment plans by hiring Chairs in three key departments that form the clinical and research backbone of the program: Psychiatry (Michael Escamilla, MD); Neurology (Michael Dobbs, MD); and a basic science Department of Neuroscience, Chaired by Ihsan Salloum, MD, PhD, who is board-certified in addiction Psychiatry.

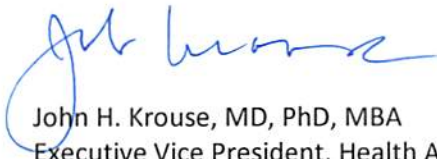
The UTRGV Neuroscience Institute's research program is poised to be an immediate and key collaborator to the TARCC on AD and related disorders. At this early stage in our development, efforts are now focused on further recruitment of neurologists, geriatricians, neuropsychologists, neuropathologists and basic scientists with the goal of promoting the development of multiple translational research programs. Collection and banking of valuable samples from enrolled patients is one of our top priorities of the Neuroscience Institute's clinical program.

In summary, I believe the Hispanic priority population we serve at UTRGV will provide the TARCC valuable insight into an underserved population experiencing health disparities in Alzheimer's disease. We have mature, highly collaborative research programs in neurodegenerative disease research working across the UT System, the nation, and internationally. I believe UTRGV is well positioned to become a contributing, vibrant member institution of the TARCC.

As EVP of Health Affairs and Dean of the UTRGV School of Medicine, I would like to designate Jay Morrow, DVM, MPH (jay.morrow@utrgv.edu) to be the institutional contact individual who will lead, promote and facilitate any initiative and activity related to TARCC membership, including serving as our representative to the Steering Committee. Jay is Associate Dean of Clinical & Translational Research, Chair of Population Health & Biostatistics and works intimately with UTRGV Neuroscience Institute researchers and clinicians. The broad scope of his work will help maximize our institution's contributions to the TARCC. Jay has experience working with TARCC leadership while serving on the UT System Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) working group, and also with David Paydarfar who provides TARCC site leadership at UT Austin Dell Medical School.

Thank you so much for this opportunity and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any additional details about the ongoing AD research and care at UTRGV and its future commitment to the goals of TARCC.

Sincerely,



John H. Krouse, MD, PhD, MBA
Executive Vice President, Health Affairs

cc: Alice Marcee, DVM, JD
AVP for Business and Program Development