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12-16-2019

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### Recommended Citation

Stewart, Shea, "Researchers Raising Awareness, Understanding of Concussions in Youth" (2019).  
*University of Mississippi News*. 4365.  
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/umnews/4365>

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## Researchers Raising Awareness, Understanding of Concussions in Youth

Flagship Constellations-funded grant focuses on sports-related head trauma

DECEMBER 16, 2019 BY SHEA STEWART



Heather Shirley

OXFORD, Miss. – **University of Mississippi** researchers are examining the knowledge and attitudes of Mississippians on sports-related concussions, thanks to a recent **Flagship Constellations** grant.

Funded through the **Community Wellbeing Flagship Constellation**, the grant will help design a sports-related concussions lesson to influence the health behaviors of high school student-athletes regarding concussion prevention, identification and management. The research also will provide baseline neurocognitive testing to be completed by participating student-athletes to improve post-injury concussion management.

Nationwide, 15.1 percent of high school students surveyed had a concussion one or more times during a 12-month period from playing a sport or being physically active, according to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance 2017**.

But it is still unclear whether an appropriate understanding of this type of injury has reached the masses.

"Having been a certified athletic trainer for 16-plus years, I have managed numerous concussion cases and have witnessed the severity of this type of injury," said Heather Shirley, UM assistant athletic director of sports medicine. "It is one of the more challenging injuries to treat because it can be so subjective in nature.

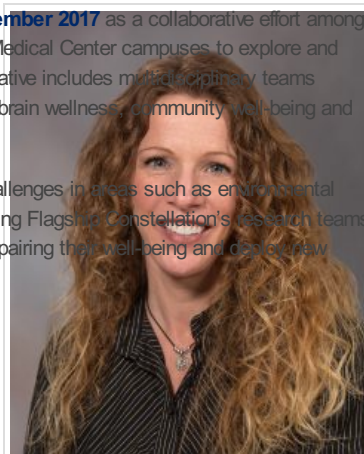
"I am a firm believer that education and awareness are key to the proper management of these types of injuries and have witnessed that in many of my student-athletes over the years."

Shirley; Melinda Valliant, a professor of nutrition and hospitality management at Ole Miss; and Jennifer Reneker, associate professor and coordinator of research in the **School of Health Related Professions at the University of Mississippi Medical Center**, are co-principal investigators for the project.

The Flagship Constellations initiative **was unveiled in November 2017** as a collaborative effort among faculty, staff and students from the university's Oxford and Medical Center campuses to explore and solve complex issues through the diversity of ideas. The initiative includes multidisciplinary teams working to find solutions to grand challenges in the areas of brain wellness, community well-being and disaster resilience.

With both rural and urban communities facing increasing challenges in areas such as environmental health, personal health and housing, the Community Wellbeing Flagship Constellation's research teams and programs work within communities to identify factors impairing their well-being and deploy new programs and practices to build stronger, more vibrant communities.

"This project is another excellent example of how researchers from different disciplines coming together with community members can create equitable partnerships to address important issues to ultimately improve the health and success of the children of our state," said Meagen Rosenthal, constellation co-team leader and assistant professor of pharmacy administration in the UM School of



Jennifer Reneker

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OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

Pharmacy.

The university's **Center for Health and Sports Performance** and UMMC are working together on the grant through the Medical Center's Community Health Advocate program to improve overall knowledge, attitudes and accountability among peers toward recognizing and reporting concussions.

"We chose the Community Health Advocate program model as a means to disseminate the educational component for this study because we felt as though it would be an ideal model to reach our overarching goals," Shirley said.

Those goals are to deliver basic education on concussions to future licensed health care professionals, provide tools and opportunities to increase community awareness and recognition of concussions, and apply population health principles to address a specific community health need, she said.



Melinda Valliant

"Hopefully, by continuing this project, the raised awareness will lead to an increased awareness of the need for more trained health care professionals, such as athletic trainers, to be placed within school systems across the state," Shirley said.

"My goal one day is to see that it becomes mandatory for every high school in our state to have a full-time certified athletic trainer on its staff to address not only these injuries but any injuries that the student-athletes incur while participating in sports."

The project began this fall and will continue through June 2020.

Shannon Singletary, Ole Miss senior associate athletics director of health and sports performance; and Tammy Dempsey, director of community engagement and service learning in the Office of Academic Affairs at UMMC, serve

as co-investigators for the project. Valliant and Singletary also serve as co-directors of the Center for Health and Sports Performance.

Flagship Constellation grants are supported by a **\$1 million donation to the Flagship Constellations initiative by Thomas and Jim Duff**, who created the Ernest R. Duff Flagship Constellation Fund in honor of their father.

Besides Rosenthal, the Community Wellbeing Flagship Constellation team leaders include Annie Cafer, an assistant professor of sociology, and Seena L. Haines, professor and chair of the Department of Pharmacy Practice in the School of Pharmacy.

For additional information about the Community Wellbeing Flagship Constellation, visit <http://flagshipconstellations.olemiss.edu/community-wellbeing/>.

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