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**News Release**  
**Oct. 11, 2016**

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**UAMS Team Gets \$325,000 to Develop App  
for Mentors to Help Reduce Infant Deaths**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) in partnership with the Arkansas Birthing Project make up one of 15 teams from across the nation selected for the inaugural class of Interdisciplinary Research Leaders. Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, it includes a research grant for the team of about \$325,000 over three years.

The Arkansas Birthing Project aims to reduce infant mortality, especially among African-American and Hispanic women, by pairing participants with a mentor who guides them through pregnancy and the baby's first year with in-person and virtual support. They are also able to help with high-risk pregnancies, lactation support, postpartum and neonatal social support.

The UAMS/Arkansas Birthing Project team has created a project called Enhancing the Arkansas Birthing Project through Technology, which aims to further these goals by developing an app that gives mentors on-demand access to interactive educational materials. In addition, the team plans to establish a web portal through which mentors can communicate with the women.

“We believe that increasing our use of technology to train the mentors is going to significantly enable us to spread our wings in Arkansas and reach more women who could benefit from our mentoring during their pregnancy and during the first year of life for their babies, so we're very excited about this opportunity,” said Arkansas Birthing Project state coordinator Zenobia Harris, D.N.P.

The grant co-authors are Harris; Sarah Rhoads, Ph.D., associate professor and director of education for the UAMS Center for Distance Health; and Hari Eswaran, Ph.D., professor and director of research in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology in the UAMS College of Medicine.

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“We believe we can provide the educational tools through technology – even smartphones – so the mentors have the right tools to communicate with women, especially with questions regarding pregnancy and birth,” Eswaran said. “Dr. Rhoads’ experience in education will help establish the best practices from an educational standpoint. The goal is to provide standardized education through technology to reach the community, especially underserved communities.”

Harris will provide practical knowledge about the program’s needs; Rhoads brings to the table educational expertise; and Eswaran will provide technological knowhow. All three will gain leadership training from the Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program, including professional coaching, mentoring, networking and an advanced leadership curriculum.

“Technology can be used to standardize the education for the peer-mentor pairs and give them the ability to connect with their health care provider while they’re having a mentoring visit,” Rhoads said.

The Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program – led by the University of Minnesota with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – unites two researchers with a community partner to carry out a project that would have a positive impact on urgent community health needs.

“This program gives our fellows the tools to make their work even more relevant and potent – and to bring new leadership skills and perspective back to their communities,” said J. Michael Oakes, Ph.D., director of Interdisciplinary Research Leaders and professor at the University of Minnesota. “We were overwhelmed by the commitment, diverse perspectives and innovative ideas in our applicant pool.”

Interdisciplinary Research Leaders is one of four new leadership development programs begun this year by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and represent an ongoing, multimillion dollar investment. The programs join four existing leadership programs in advancing the foundation’s legacy of supporting the development and diversity of leaders impacting health. The 2017 application period for the new programs will open in January. Additional information is available at [www.interdisciplinaryresearch-leaders.org](http://www.interdisciplinaryresearch-leaders.org).

UAMS is the state’s only comprehensive academic health center, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a northwest Arkansas regional campus; a statewide network of regional centers; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, the Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, the Myeloma Institute, the Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, the Psychiatric Research Institute, the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging and the Translational Research Institute. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,021 students, 789 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including about 1,000 physicians and other professionals who provide care to patients at UAMS, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and UAMS regional centers throughout the state. Visit [www.uams.edu](http://www.uams.edu) or [www.uamshealth.com](http://www.uamshealth.com). Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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