

MIND Matters



Moore than a Diagnosis: One Local Woman's Heroic Pursuit to End Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is a difficult diagnosis for anyone. But for those who are diagnosed under the age of 65 years, it can bring unique challenges. Many people are still working, raising children and even caring for parents when symptoms of dementia emerge. Managing these activities while navigating memory loss can be understandably difficult. One woman has turned her young-onset diagnosis into purpose.

Julie Moore is a 55-year-old mother, toastmaster, literacy tutor,

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Visit mind.uci.edu/blog 

Dear Friends of **UCI MIND**,

At its heart, UCI MIND is about people. As a research organization, every element of our work is undertaken with the millions of people living with or at risk for dementia as our driving force.

This issue of MIND Matters celebrates the people doing this work, including some new members of our team (p 7), the trainees who are acquiring skills and knowledge to lead this work (p 6), the progress being made by investigators (p 5), and an

amazing research participant and advocate, Julie Moore (p 1 and 3) who has been recognized for her remarkable leadership.

Julie and her husband Ron have participated in studies, have begun to organize resources for families in similar positions, have participated in numerous training programs sharing their story, and have effectively moved elected officials to recognize the urgency of UCI MIND's mission. For these reasons and more, Julie was recognized by

Senator Steven Choi, himself a staunch advocate for Alzheimer's research here in California, as District 37's *Woman of the Year*. We are so proud of Julie for this recognition and so grateful for her, Ron, and all of the people who drive our progress forward.




Joshua D. Grill, PhD
Director, UCI MIND

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Advocate's Heroic Pursuit

continued from front page



Julie Moore and her husband Ron

avid outdoors person, and animal lover. She also happens to have mild cognitive impairment (MCI) due to Alzheimer's disease, but she doesn't let that slow her down. Julie is a passionate and energetic advocate for Alzheimer's disease awareness and research. Her mission is to increase funding for Alzheimer's research and to increase the quality of life for other people experiencing MCI and dementia. She regularly advocates for the Alzheimer's Association, is a board member for the Dementia Action Alliance, often speaks at meetings and conferences, and has participated in multiple research studies, including a clinical trial at UCI MIND.

Julie was recognized as an unstoppable force for our cause on March 16, 2026, when Senator Steven Choi, PhD (R-Irvine), presented her with the District 37's 2026 *Woman of the Year Award*. Julie, with her husband Ron, traveled to Sacramento to meet with Senator Choi and accept the much-deserved honor. Founded in 1987 by the California Legislative Women's Caucus, the Woman of the Year Award

honors "remarkable" women from every district in California who have made significant contributions to their community. Senator Choi is quoted as saying, "Julie Moore's courage and determination in the face of an Alzheimer's diagnosis are truly inspiring." Everyone at UCI MIND agrees and offers our heartfelt congratulations to Julie.

Source: Office of Sen. Steven Choi, March 16, 2026.



Ron Moore, Julie Moore, and Dr. Joshua Grill

Could GLP-1 Medications Protect Against Dementia?

| By Valerie Tung



[In a new video](#) UCI MIND Director, Joshua Grill, PhD, discusses growing scientific interest in a class of medications known as GLP-1 receptor agonists and their potential role in Alzheimer’s disease and dementia.

GLP-1 medications, originally developed to treat Type 2 diabetes and now widely used for weight management, have recently drawn attention from researchers studying neurodegenerative diseases. These drugs work by helping regulate blood sugar and metabolism, but scientists are discovering they may also affect the brain in potentially important ways.

In the video, Dr. Grill explains that conditions such as diabetes and obesity are known risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia. Because GLP-1 medications improve metabolic health, researchers are exploring whether they might also help reduce processes linked to neurodegeneration including inflammation in the brain, insulin resistance, and damage to brain cells.

Early studies in laboratory models suggest that GLP-1 drugs may have protective effects on neurons, the cells responsible for communication in the brain. Some research has also shown that these medications may improve learning and memory in animal models of

Alzheimer’s disease. Early studies exploring electronic health records have even suggested that people taking these drugs may less often develop dementia, compared to similar patients who do not take them. These findings, collectively, have led to increasing interest in studying the drugs in human clinical trials.

Unfortunately, two large Phase 3 trials, EVOKE and EVOKE+, were recently completed and did not support the use of the GLP-1 drug — semaglutide — as a treatment for mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia associated with Alzheimer’s disease. The trials included more than 3800 patients who were randomly assigned to semaglutide or placebo and followed for 2-years. There was no evidence that patients receiving semaglutide benefited clinically from the treatment.

Dr. Grill emphasizes that the science is still evolving. While the EVOKE and EVOKE+ findings did not yield positive results, it remains possible that any benefits of this or other GLP-1 drugs would require different approach to testing, such as prevention rather than treatment trials.

To learn more about this emerging area of research, watch the full video and explore more topics on the UCI MIND YouTube channel, UCI MINDCast.

New Study Maps Cell-Type

Specific Gene Networks in Alzheimer's Disease

By Valerie Tung



Min Zhang, MD, PhD, MS, PhD

UCI MIND faculty member Min Zhang, MD, PhD, MS, PhD, and collaborators at Purdue University have developed a powerful approach to better understand how genes interact within different brain cell types in Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease is complex and involves many biological changes occurring across multiple types of cells in the brain. While scientists have identified several genes associated with Alzheimer's risk, understanding how these genes interact with one another and how those interactions differ across brain cell types remains a major challenge. The new research aims to address this gap by creating a more detailed picture of gene activity in the brain.

For the study, the researchers analyzed brain tissue from more than 270 individuals with Alzheimer's disease using advanced genomic technologies. By combining

single-nucleus RNA sequencing, which measures gene activity in individual cells, with whole-genome sequencing data, the team was able to examine how genes influence one another within specific brain cell populations.

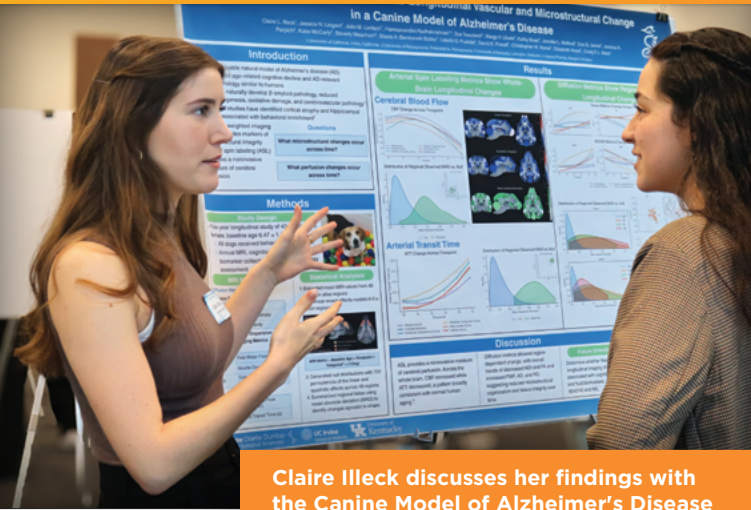
The researchers built what are known as gene regulatory networks, or maps that show how certain genes can control or influence the activity of other genes. This new method allows scientists to infer relationships, which helps them better understand which genes may be actively driving biological changes in disease.

The study examined six major types of brain cells including neurons and several types of support cells, such as astrocytes and microglia. Among these, excitatory neurons showed the largest and most complex network of gene interactions. The findings suggest that these neurons may play an especially important role in the

molecular changes that occur in Alzheimer's disease.

The researchers also identified hundreds of "hub genes," or genes that influence many other genes within these networks. Because hub genes play such central roles in cellular activity, they may be particularly important for understanding how Alzheimer's disease develops. The study found both previously known Alzheimer's-related genes and newly identified genes that could represent promising directions for future research.

The results suggest that gene regulation in Alzheimer's disease is more complex than previously understood. While many studies focus primarily on transcription factors — proteins that help control the activity of genes — this research found that many non-transcription factor genes also serve as major regulators, highlighting additional biological pathways that may contribute to disease processes. ■



Claire Illeck discusses her findings with the Canine Model of Alzheimer's Disease

REMIND Emerging Scientists/Cotman Scholar Award

Celebrating Emerging Scientists

Each year, Research and Education in Memory Impairments and Neurological Disorders (REMIND), a trainee-led group within UCI MIND, hosts the Emerging Scientists Symposium to highlight the work of early-career researchers studying neurodegenerative diseases. Held on March 6, 2026, this year's symposium brought together undergraduate, graduate, medical students, as well as postdoctoral scholars to share their research and connect with others in the field.

This year's keynote speaker was Chi Udeh-Momoh, PhD, Professor of Epidemiology and Prevention & Gerontology and Geriatrics at Wake Forest University. Her talk, "Advancing Dementia Risk Prediction and Prevention for Global Populations through Community-Grounded Precision Health Approaches," focused on how working closely with communities can improve how we understand and reduce dementia risk around the world.

Throughout the afternoon, trainees presented research that spanned from basic science to clinical and population health. The symposium featured two sessions of invited trainee presentations.

In the first session, Zoe Treadwell (Head Lab) presented a treatment approach in a canine model of aging and Alzheimer's disease; Sima Chokr, PhD (Thompson Lab), discussed how brain immune cells may influence disease processes in Huntington's disease; and Casey Vanderlip (Stark Lab) shared work using digital tools to detect early signs of Alzheimer's disease.

The second session highlighted a range of research approaches. Mikaela Nishida (Gillen Lab) presented methods to better study health outcomes in underrepresented populations; Tiffany Petrisko, PhD (Tenner Lab), explored how changes in the immune system may affect brain function in Alzheimer's disease models; and Bryan Orozco (Brewer Lab) shared research on improving energy function in brain cells affected by aging and Alzheimer's disease.

Poster sessions held throughout the day gave trainees the opportunity to present their work and receive feedback from faculty and peers. The event concluded with an awards ceremony recognizing Claire Illeck and Katherine Colcord, PhD for their outstanding poster presentations.

The event also included the presentation of this year's Carl W. Cotman Award to recipient Elizabeth Andrews for her research on sex and gender differences in Alzheimer's disease, particularly in individuals with Down syndrome. Her work highlights the importance of understanding how different factors can shape disease risk and outcomes.

The REMIND Emerging Scientists Symposium continues to showcase the strong and diverse work of trainees at UCI MIND and beyond. Together, these early-career scientists are helping move the field forward toward better understanding, prevention, and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases.



Dr. Chi Udeh-Momoh

WELCOME OUR NEW UCI MIND MEMBERS



Colette Aguirre, MA

Clinical Research Coordinator

Colette Aguirre is a Clinical Research Coordinator at UCI MIND, where she coordinates participant visits and serves as the primary coordinator for the TRC LATE Study at UCI. Her work focuses on limbic-predominant age-related TDP-43 encephalopathy (LATE) dementia, contributing to ongoing efforts to better understand and treat age-related neurodegenerative conditions. Prior to her current role, she worked as a neuropsychological tester and research coordinator for UCI's 90+ Study. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Cognitive Sciences from UCI, and her Master of Public Health from the University of Washington. With over 20 years dedicated to Alzheimer's and dementia research at UCI, she has maintained a deep interest in longevity and is passionate about applying her knowledge to help others live longer, healthier lives.

Fellowship Program. She recently joined the Clinical Core Faculty of UCI MIND, where she works with longitudinal cohort participants to examine cognitive and neuropsychiatric trajectories over time and contribute to advancing research in Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD). Her research interests include cognitive and neuropsychiatric outcomes in patients treated with anti-amyloid therapies for Alzheimer's disease, clinical trials in ADRD, and interventions to support ADRD caregivers. She is also a caregiver support group facilitator for Alzheimer's OC. She is passionate about community outreach and is the Chair of the Neurology Department's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism and Social Justice (IDEAS) committee.



Therese Kim, MD, PhD

Research Physician

Therese earned her MD from Pusan National University College of Medicine and her PhD in neuroscience from Sungkyunkwan University in South Korea. She completed her psychiatry residency and a fellowship in geriatric psychiatry at Samsung Medical Center in Seoul. In South Korea, her work integrated clinical care and research, with a focus on late-life depression and early-stage Alzheimer's disease. After moving to the United States, she completed the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Steps 1 and 2 and obtained certification from the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). Since joining UCI MIND, her work has involved both research assessment at the ADRC longitudinal cohort and research on late-life neuropsychiatric symptoms and early cognitive decline.



Christina Ryder, EdS

Psychometrist

Christina Ryder is the newest addition to the UCI MIND psychometrist team. She graduated with a BS in Cognitive Science with an emphasis in Neuroscience from UC San Diego. She then obtained her EdS degree from CSU San Bernardino. Before transitioning to research, Christina built her career in education as a school psychologist and later in a private clinical setting, where she conducted assessments for individuals with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following motor vehicle accidents and other significant life events. Her professional interests include cognitive aging, the impact of neurological injury on daily functioning, and improving early detection of neurodegenerative diseases. Christina is enthusiastic about collaborating with such a dedicated team and contributing to efforts that advance the understanding and care of Alzheimer's disease and other neurological conditions through her work at UCI MIND.



Hayley Kristinsson, PsyD

Neuropsychologist

Hayley B. Kristinsson, PsyD, ABPP-CN is a board-certified neuropsychologist and Health Sciences Assistant Clinical Professor in the UCI Department of Neurology. She serves as the Associate Director of Neuropsychology and Co-Director of the Neuropsychology Postdoctoral



Jesus Salinas

Clinical Research Coordinator

Jesus Salinas is a Clinical Research Coordinator at UCI MIND, where he applies his experience and knowledge in public health to support the team's clinical research efforts. Before joining UCI MIND, Jesus spent time as a Research Associate at Kaiser Permanente. He is currently working toward his master's in public health. Jesus is driven by a commitment to high-quality research and is excited to contribute to the impactful work being done at UCI MIND.



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The Energy Behind Metabolism in ADRD Research

September 25, 2026

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conference.mind.uci.edu



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A resource for people interested in learning more about Alzheimer's disease research at UCI MIND (mind.uci.edu/mindcast/)

Truth or Myth



Are GLP-1 Medications Good for Alzheimer's Disease
Joshua Grill, PhD

Spotlight on Care



Role Changes in Caregiving
Martin J. Schreiber

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The Final Word: Autopsy Research
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Ask the Doc



Where is Down Syndrome Research Heading?
Mark Mapstone, PhD