

The Center for Psychedelic Psychotherapy and Trauma Research



Team Profiles

Clinical Researchers



Fizaah Ahmed, BA

Clinical Trials Manager

fizaahmed@mssm.edu

Fizaah Ahmed is the Clinical Trial Manager at CPPTR at Mount Sinai. Ms. Fizaah attended the University of California, Davis, where she studied psychology and biology. She joined the CPPTR with 15 years of clinical research experience, previously overseeing and growing the Advanced Lung Disease Research Unit at the University of California, San Francisco, and, prior to this, managing studies in Nuclear Medicine and

Interventional Radiology at Stanford University.



Bobby Barsic, BA

Clinical Research Coordinator

Robert.Barsic@va.gov

Robert “Bobby” Barsic received a BA in psychology from the College of the Holy Cross. While at Holy Cross, he was a research assistant in the Obsessive-Compulsive Processes and Experimentation Lab, which sought to explore and develop a deeper understanding of emotion regulation processes, particularly in response to abnormal or taboo stimuli. Additionally, he worked as a research assistant in the Weiss Summer Research Program, where he assisted in the recruitment, screening, and running of participants through protocol measures in a

study that compared life satisfaction levels between combat veterans and ex-professional contact sport athletes. Mr. Barsic completed a post-baccalaureate, pre-medical program at Cleveland State University and has clinical experience working as a medical scribe for two years at the Cleveland Clinic. Mr. Barsic is interested in psychedelic research, trauma, and exploring novel therapeutic treatments in the field of psychiatry.



Linda M. Bierer, MD

Medical Advisor, Study Therapist, Associate Professor of Psychiatry
Linda.Bierer@va.gov

Dr. Bierer received a medical degree and completed a psychiatry residency at the Yale University School of Medicine. She joined the Psychiatry Department in 1986 after completing a research fellowship in the Biological Psychiatry Branch at the U.S. National Institutes of Mental Health. Dr. Bierer received a K award from the National Institute of Aging to pursue work in Alzheimer's disease, and joined the Yehuda Lab in 1999. She is currently Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Icahn Mount Sinai and a staff psychiatrist at JJP VAMC, where her clinical focus is treatment of trauma-related disorders. Research efforts have included studies of trauma and PTSD that have sought to identify neuroendocrine and molecular biomarkers associated with illness and symptom recovery. Her work has included studies of glucocorticoid metabolism in Holocaust survivors, World Trade Center survivors, and Holocaust offspring, with more recent examination of FKBP5 methylation in relation to intergenerational effects of trauma. She is now positioned to join efforts to explore mechanisms involved in the therapeutic response to MDMA and psychedelics.



Faye Chao, MD

Study Therapist, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
Faye.Chao@va.gov

Dr. Chao attended Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia and completed her general psychiatry residency training at Harvard Longwood. She went on to an addiction psychiatry fellowship at New York University and was the unit chief of the inpatient addiction service at the Addiction Institute of Mount Sinai before joining the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. She is involved in teaching residents and fellows addiction psychiatry through Mount Sinai's training programs. She is board certified in both general and addiction psychiatry.



Jun Hong Chen, PsyD

Postdoctoral Clinical Psychology Research Fellow

junhong.chen@va.gov

Dr. Chen graduated from the Clinical PsyD program at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University and completed his predoctoral internship at JJP VAMC. Dr. Chen's clinical interests include trauma-informed care and behavioral health. His research interests include improving access to mental health care through the implementation and dissemination of novel treatments, delivery modalities, and provider training models.



Jamil Davis, LCSW

Study Therapist, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Jamil.Davis@va.gov

Mr. Davis is a licensed clinical social worker at JJP VAMC. Mr. Davis graduated from Smith College in 2009 with a degree in social work and completed a three-year postgraduate training at the Metropolitan Institute for Training in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. Mr. Davis joined the Yehuda Lab in 2015 and currently conducts individual, couple, and group treatments for PTSD, including the use of trauma-focused treatments such as prolonged exposure, cognitive processing therapy, and cognitive-behavioral conjoint therapy for PTSD. He finds the therapeutic work rewarding, especially after learning of the growth and positive changes individuals report in their lives after sometimes very

long periods of suffering.



Janine Flory, PhD

Study Therapist, Associate Professor of Psychiatry

Janine.Flory@va.gov

[Dr. Flory](#) is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Icahn Mount Sinai and Director of the Trauma and Readjustment Services clinic at JJP VAMC. She received a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Kansas and completed postdoctoral training in behavioral medicine at the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic at the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Flory has received research funding from

U.S. National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and has published more than 100 scientific papers on diverse aspects of psychopathology, including personality disorders, suicide, and PTSD. An abiding interest in her work is a focus on how methodological advances and scientific practices can help answer critical questions about adult psychopathology. This includes work to understand how normal and abnormal personality factors are related and to identify explanations for the co-occurrence of psychiatric disorders and symptoms. A current area of research is an examination of comorbidity between PTSD and other conditions common in military veterans, including depression and mild traumatic brain injury.

Christine LaGrotta, MD

Study Therapist, Clinical Psychiatrist

Christine.Lagrotta@va.gov

Dr. LaGrotta is an addiction psychiatrist in the Supportive Recovery Services clinic at the James J Peters Bronx VA Hospital and an Assistant Clinical Professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. She completed residency training at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center/Case Western Reserve University and addiction fellowship at Mount Sinai St. Luke's Roosevelt.



Lauren Lepow, MD

Study Therapist, Psychiatry Resident, PhD Candidate

Lauren.Lepow@icahn.mssm.edu

Dr. Lepow is a Fellow at the CPPTR and a PGY-6, PhD candidate in The Mount Sinai Hospital's Psychiatry Residency Research Track (Residency + PhD Program). She received her MD from the University of Texas Health Sciences Center with a concentration in neuroscience and was inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society. Dr. Lepow is completing her PhD in neuroscience at the Charles Bronfman Institute for Personalized Medicine at Icahn Mount Sinai, where she leverages clinician notes to study the impact of trauma in a hospital-based biobank. At the CPPTR, she is helping to lead a study on psilocybin-assisted therapy for PTSD. To help further an understanding of the mechanisms of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, Dr. Lepow links neuroscience data with psychedelic-psychotherapy session recordings using natural language processing. Clinically, she works within a psychodynamic framework to provide trauma-informed individual therapy and medications.



Carolyn MacLeod, BA

Clinical Research Coordinator

carolyn.macleod@va.gov

Carolyn Macleod graduated from Duke University in 2020 with degrees in computer science and psychology, and joined the Yehuda Lab in 2021. Ms. Macleod became interested in the study of psychological trauma while working at a sexual violence clinic in Cape Town, South Africa. Her primary research interests include moral injury and psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy for treating PTSD.



Morgan Morrison, MA

Clinical Research Coordinator

morgan.morrison@va.gov

Morgan Morrison received her MA in clinical psychology with a global mental health and trauma specialization from Teachers College, Columbia University. Before joining Dr. Yehuda's lab in 2021, Ms. Morrison was dually appointed as a research assistant at Columbia in the Global Mental Health Lab of Helen Verdeli, PhD, MSc, and the Laboratory for Clinical and Developmental Studies of Christine Cha, PhD. Within these labs, she assisted with an interpersonal therapy intervention focused on student veterans and studied suicide and future thinking in adolescents, respectively. Ms. Morrison is specifically interested in psychedelics research, trauma, and mental health disparities in underserved populations.



Laura Pratchett, PsyD

Study Therapist, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry

Laura.Pratchett@va.gov

Dr. Pratchett is the team leader of the Transition Clinic for Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans at JJP VAMC and is a VA-certified provider of trauma-focused therapies, such as cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure, and interpersonal psychotherapy. Dr. Pratchett earned a PsyD in clinical psychology from the PGSP-Stanford University Consortium in 2009 and completed a postdoctoral clinical research fellowship with Dr. Yehuda at JJP VAMC. She serves as a study psychologist and co-investigator on several of Dr. Yehuda's research projects and has been acting as Psychology Training Director since

2017, responsible for overseeing the implementation of an American Psychological Association-accredited psychology internship program that trains eight psychologists annually. Dr. Pratchett's research interests include PTSD treatment innovation and the role of shame and identity in trauma. Her current research study is evaluating the relationship among moral injury, PTSD, and depression.



Corbett Schimming, MD

Study Therapist, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry

Corbett.Schimming@va.gov

Dr. Schimming is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Program Director of the Geriatric Psychiatry Fellowship at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. He is also a Geriatric Psychiatrist and the Outpatient Psychiatry Department (OPD) Medical Director at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center. Dr. Schimming received his medical degree from Penn State College of Medicine and completed his residency and fellowship training at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. His research focuses on investigating the underlying mechanisms of Alzheimer's disease and is currently a Principal Investigator on a study looking at cognitive and biological profiles of older adults with diabetes. Dr. Schimming recently joined Dr. Yehuda's lab with a specific clinical interest in exploring novel treatments for PTSD that promise greater efficacy. He will serve as a study psychiatrist on the MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD trial(s).



Carly Walter, LLMSW

Clinical Research Coordinator

Carly.Walter@va.gov

Carly Walter received a Master in Social Work with a concentration in trauma across the lifespan from Western Michigan University in 2022, and a BS in psychology with a minor in family studies from Central Michigan University in 2015. Ms. Walter joined Dr. Yehuda's lab in July 2016 and is currently analyzing data from prior cross-sectional studies on combat veterans and maintaining internal review board paperwork for clinical protocols. Ms. Walter became interested in traumatic stress in the military population after hearing war stories from her grandfather who was a World War II veteran.



Tamar Glatman Zaretsky, PsyD

Study Therapist, Research Psychologist

Tamar.GlatmanZaretsky2@va.gov

Dr. Glatman Zaretsky is a research psychologist at CPPTR. She graduated from the Clinical PsyD program at the Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology at Yeshiva University, and completed her predoctoral internship at JJP VAMC. Dr. Glatman Zaretsky has continued her work with veterans through a postdoctoral fellowship in the Yehuda Lab,

where she is involved in the assessment, treatment, and study of PTSD and trauma-related disorders, including through research trials on psychedelic-assisted therapy and moral injury.

Laboratory Scientists



Mitali Chattopadhyay, PhD

Cell Biologist, Associate Researcher

Mitali.Chattopadhyay@va.gov

Dr. Chattopadhyay received her PhD in life sciences and cancer biology from Jadavpur University in Kolkata, India. Dr. Chattopadhyay joined the Yehuda Lab in 2016 and brought extensive knowledge in applied cellular biology from her previous research experience. Dr.

Chattopadhyay is an expert in cell biology and is establishing assays in human lymphocyte and induced neuron primary cultures in the Yehuda Lab.

As a clinical research scientist, her pursuits include the connection between stress and brain function in health and disease. The major goal of her research at Dr. Yehuda's lab has been to identify novel mechanisms and treatments for stress-related mental disorders by conducting translational studies in, and focusing on, biomarkers of psychiatric disorders, especially PTSD.



Frank Desarnaud, PhD

Molecular Biologist, Associate Researcher

Frank.Desarnaud@mssm.edu

Frank Desarnaud earned his PhD in biochemistry, molecular, and cellular biology at University of Montpellier II in France. He joined Icahn Mount Sinai's Yehuda Lab in 2011 as an associate researcher after working in several leading molecular biology laboratories. He has acquired extensive experience in molecular

biology and biochemistry. As a molecular biology scientist in Dr. Yehuda's research group, Dr. Desarnaud has been directly involved in the development of molecular assays—mainly epigenetic assays that involve clone-based sequencing and next-generation sequencing—and data analyses to study GR exon1F promoter methylation status, GR and FKBP5 expression by real-time PCR and GR allelic discrimination.



Iouri Makotkine, MD

Bench Laboratory Director, Assistant Professor

Iouri.Makotkine@va.gov

Dr. Makotkine received his MD at Kemerovo State Medical Academy, Russia. He was employed at Icahn Mount Sinai in 1999 as research coordinator for the Yehuda Lab. In 2005, Dr. Makotkine became the laboratory director of Dr. Yehuda's bench laboratory and a research assistant professor. Dr. Makotkine has developed most of the cellular and neuroendocrine protocols over the last 20 years with Dr. Yehuda, including protocols for the examination of the influence of stress hormones in vitro in cultured mononuclear leukocytes. Dr.

Makotkine continues to oversee all neuroendocrine and molecular biology assays conducted in the laboratory, as well as to manage blood processing and bioassays for numerous collaborators within and outside of Mount Sinai.



Changxin Xu, PhD

Bioinformatician, Associate Researcher

Changxin.Xu@va.gov

Dr. Xu received his PhD from Xiamen University, China, in molecular immunology in zoology. He joined the Yehuda Lab in 2016 after working for many years with molecular biology techniques, such as RT-PCR, RNAseq, and SNP analysis. Dr. Xu has advanced experience with bioinformatics analyses such as R language for data analysis, including next-gen sequencing and microarray data analysis. Dr. Xu performs RNA-based molecular assays and bioinformatics analyses across projects in the Yehuda Lab.

Administrative Staff



Ksenia Cassidy, MA

Project Manager and Research Assistant at CPPTR

ksenia.cassidy@mssm.edu

Ksenia Cassidy is an interdisciplinary psychedelic researcher, co-founder of the Psychedelic Humanities Lab, and co-author of *Psychedelic Harm Reduction and Integration: A Transtheoretical Model for Clinical Practice*. They received a master's in psychology from The New School for Social Research. At CPPTR, Mx. Cassidy combines the responsibilities of a program manager for the psychedelic-assisted therapy education offered at the Center with the skills of a graduate research assistant on natural language processing in psychedelic-assisted therapy. Their research interests include interactions between psychedelics and trauma, attachment, and gender schemas.



OH Prema, BA

Executive Assistant, Program Manager

oh.prema@mssm.edu

OH Prema is executive assistant to Dr. Yehuda and a program manager for the Center. She collaborates cross-functionally with the Center team on multiple projects and operational procedures. Ms. Prema has worked extensively in administrative, managerial, and assistant capacities. She graduated from Columbia University in 2020 with a second bachelor's degree in neuroscience and behavior.