

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 8, 2024

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Abbruscato, Kang Receive First Stocco Research Chair Endowment Appointments

In a July 9 ceremony, Thomas Abbruscato, Ph.D., and Min Kang, Pharm.D., became the first recipients of the Douglas Stocco Research Chair, an endowment formerly known as the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center's (TTUHSC) Research Endowment. The Texas Tech University System Board of Regents officially renamed the endowed chair in late November 2023 and made two appointments available.

Abbruscato, professor and chair in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the TTUHSC Jerry H. Hodge School of Pharmacy, said it is an honor to receive the endowment.

“Personally, I am humbled to have this associated with Dr. Douglas Stocco, who has left a lasting legacy of research and service to TTUHSC,” Abbruscato said. “I am excited to utilize these resources to move our NIH (National Institutes of Health) and FDA (Food and Drug Administration) projects forward.”

Abbruscato's lab is currently investigating the effects of mixed tobacco product exposure on the blood-brain barrier, advancing their stroke-brain drug discovery project related to testing small molecule activators of brain neurolysin and evaluating the effects of nicotine on the blood-brain barrier and cognition, memory and motor coordination. He thanked Texas Tech University System Chancellor Tedd L. Mitchell, M.D., TTUHSC President Lori Rice-Spearman, Ph.D., TTUHSC Provost Darrin D'Agostino, D.O., Sr. Vice President for Research and Innovation Lance McMahan, Ph.D., Jerry H. Hodge School of Pharmacy Dean Grace Kuo, Pharm.D., Ph.D., and Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Dean Brandt Schneider, Ph.D., for their strong leadership and support.

“I am honored to work at an institution that values collaboration and advancing knowledge through innovative research,” Abbruscato said. “My research program would not have reached where it is today without the collaboration of so many students, staff and faculty. I especially want to thank many of the past and current Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences and School of Medicine faculty I have collaborated with for their continued collegiality and support. It is a privilege to work in this type of research environment, and our Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences research support staff — Desmon Dunn, Stacy Schaffler and Matthew White — are phenomenal and always keep us moving forward.”

Kang, a professor of pediatrics in the TTUHSC School of Medicine and associate vice president for research, said it is an honor to be nominated for the endowment, and she is grateful to TTUHSC for providing the precious resources needed to establish her laboratory.

“Their support resulted in consistent governmental funding for my research during the past 15-plus years, maintaining a status as one of the well-funded investigators,” Kang said. “I take this honor of the endowment

to acknowledge my efforts in the past 15-plus years as a researcher and administrator, and to encourage me to conduct high-quality research.”

With the endowment, Kang said she will continue to aid TTUHSC’s effort to increase the visibility of the excellent research conducted at its schools and to sustain the administrative support she provides to colleagues as associate vice president for research.

“I also intend to conduct cutting-edge research in the pediatric cancer area, and the endowment will help me maintain my research as well as my administrative expertise in assisting colleagues and our university,” Kang added.

During his 40-year tenure at TTUHSC, Douglas Stocco, Ph.D., served in many leadership roles including executive vice president for research and dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. In addition to the many awards he received from state and national organizations, Stocco’s TTUHSC accolades include the Grover E. Murray Distinguished Professorship Chair, the School of Medicine Dean’s Research Award, the TTUHSC President’s Research Award, the Chancellor’s Council Distinguished Research Award and the TTUHSC University Distinguished Professor Award.

Nearly 30 years ago, in September 1994, the Journal of Biological Chemistry published a paper that, for the first time, described the cloning, sequencing and naming of the Steroidogenic Acute Regulatory (StAR) protein. That research was conducted in Stocco’s TTUHSC lab, and the paper (“The Purification, Cloning, and Expression of a Novel Luteinizing Hormone-induced Mitochondrial Protein in MA-10 Mouse Leydig Tumor Cells: Characterization of the Steroidogenic Acute Regulatory Protein”) has been cited more than 1,400 times since that initial publication.

The UK Journal of Endocrinology and Journal of Molecular Endocrinology are publishing a special edition in the fall noting the 30th anniversary of the StAR discovery and to highlight the contributions StAR has made to the understanding of controlling steroid hormone production in steroidogenic cells.