

2007 UCSF MSTAR MENTORS

Sandra Moody-Ayers, MD

My research focuses on the determinants of race-ethnic differences in outcomes in the elderly. This includes understanding the causes of race differences in disability in the elderly. We are also interested in the factors that underlie race-ethnic differences in end of life decision making in the elderly.

Stephen Bonasera, MD

My laboratory studies the neurobiology of aging in a mouse model. I am particularly interested in understanding the behavioral and molecular changes that occur with "normal" aging, and how these differ in problems such as delirium and behavioral disturbances. Current approaches include using advanced instrumentation and mathematical modeling techniques to precisely quantify behavior, and correlating these behavioral measures with assays of regional CNS gene expression.

Ed Yelin, Ph.D

Our research group studies the social and psychological consequences of severe autoimmune diseases, especially systemic lupus erythematosus and rheumatoid arthritis. Studies include analyses of the impact of changes in the nature of the health care system on people with these conditions, quality of care, causes and consequences of work disability, cost of illness, and relationship between personal and community poverty and outcomes.

Louise Walter, MD

Title of Project: Impact of Health Status on Colorectal Cancer Screening in Older Adults

The goal of this project is to improve our ability to target colorectal cancer screening to healthy elderly veterans who may reasonably benefit and to avoid screening in unhealthy elderly veterans for whom the burdens outweigh the potential benefits. Because persons with limited life expectancies may be harmed by screening, and because life expectancy is better predicted by health status than by age alone, most colorectal cancer screening guidelines recommend screening decisions take into account an older person's health status. However, it is unclear to what extent colorectal cancer screening is actually targeted to healthy older persons and avoided in unhealthy older persons with limited life expectancies. This study describes how patterns of use and outcomes of colorectal cancer screening vary according to health status among older veterans. This project will provide information necessary to design guidelines, interventions, and quality indicators that encourage screening healthy elderly veterans who are often under-screened and discourage screening unhealthy elderly veterans who are more likely to be harmed than benefit. This is an ongoing study in which students may participate in a structured review of the literature, in analyses of existing data, and in potentially reviewing some medical charts to understand why some healthy elderly veterans are not screened while some unhealthy elderly veterans are screened.

Mike Steinman, MD

I am engaged in a number of research projects evaluating the use of medications in elderly patients with multiple illnesses. Most clinical Practice guidelines, which establish recommended treatment practices for diseases, tend to focus only on the specific disease in question and not consider how treatment of that disease affects all of the other conditions that may affect the same patient. I am conducting a series of studies evaluating this clinical conundrum. These studies include analysis of large existing databases, as well as projects collecting primary data from review of patient charts and surveys of physicians. I would be happy to talk with interested MSTAR students to find a good project and a match of interests.

Sara J. Knight, Ph.D

Project: Improving Assessment of Patient Preferences in Localized Prostate Cancer Care

This project aims to improve our ability to understand and measure the values, goals, and preferences that are important to older men in seeking treatment for localized prostate cancer. Our ultimate goal is to develop a measure of preferences that will enable clinicians and patients to identify and incorporate patient values and goals systematically into treatment decision-making, leading to improved patient quality of life and satisfaction with care. We are using qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys of 600 men diagnosed with prostate cancer to accomplish these goals. Students working on the project will have opportunities to interview patients about their expectations and preferences for prostate cancer treatment, to analyze qualitative data from focus groups and individual interviews, and to conduct quantitative analyses of data on preferences, treatment choices, and satisfaction with decision making. During the experience, students will work with a diverse team of investigators from disciplines including medicine, psychology, anthropology, and public health. Students will present the results of their analyses at a conference and will serve as a co-author on one or more other presentations and papers based on project findings.

Mary Margaret Chren, MD

I am part of a multidisciplinary research group of UCSF faculty that focuses on health services research, particularly research aimed at understanding, measuring, predicting, and improving complex aspects of health such as patients' experiences and preferences. I am particularly interested in the experiences of older patients with nonfatal cancers such as skin cancer, which is the most common malignancy in the elderly. For example, we have developed and tested a measure of skin cancer-specific quality of life, and are currently conducting a large cohort study following comprehensive outcomes of nonmelanoma cancer (including tumor recurrence and quality of life) in patients treated with different therapies. A student who spent time doing research in my group would work with

the tools of this kind of research, including psychometrics, clinimetrics, and statistical analysis. Depending on a student's interest, study topics could include aspects of the experiences of older patients with skin cancer, and studies could involve participating in both primary data collection and secondary data analysis.

Ken Covinsky, MD

Our research focuses on the determinants of outcomes in the elderly. We are particularly interested in the determinants of disability and the impact of disability on health outcomes. Most of our work use large epidemiologic databases. Some of our studies combine multiple risk factors to develop prognostic indices to risk stratify elders into groups at differential risk for various health outcomes. Other studies aim to inform etiology and test specific hypotheses about relationships between risk factors and outcomes. We are currently planning an analysis examining the relationship between back pain and the development of disability as people transition from midlife to late life. This project will be ready for analysis this summer. I would also be happy to discuss other potential projects with interested students.