Donors Extend 16-year History of Support by Funding Critical New Research

A first-of-its-kind study is launching, thanks to a gift from Cindy Thomas and Bert Headden, to measure the effects of hormone replacement therapy on cognitive performance in women. The results could help unfold scientists’ understanding of why two out of three Alzheimer’s disease patients are women.

CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has been shown to alleviate many of the negative symptoms commonly experienced during menopause—improving cognitive function and sleep patterns and lifting anxiety and depression.

What remains to be understood is the impact of HRT on the brain’s executive functions, such as strategic thinking and innovation, and their relation to core factors of brain performance such as resilience (purpose and social connectedness), clarity (reasoning, optimism, problem-solving), and fortitude (emotional balance in the face of adversity, happiness).

EXPLORING CHANGE
Thirty post-menopausal women will participate in a sub-study of The BrainHealth Project. They will establish a baseline measure of their brain’s fitness by getting their online BrainHealth Index. They will then begin HRT in collaboration with Dr. Terri DeNeui, founder of EVEXIXS Health Solutions. They will repeat the BrainHealth Index after six months and one year, with an individualized coaching session at the one-year mark to discuss Index changes over time.

Cindy explained, “I use hormone replacement therapy and feel that it has made a big difference in my quality of life. A study of this kind hasn’t been done before, and I see it as a steppingstone that will be useful for women, and perhaps eventually men. Gender differences are a valuable part of looking at brain health, and we’re excited it’s happening.”

GENEROSITY THAT MATTERS
The concept of brain health fits right in with Cindy’s background as a physical therapist, including starting the equine physical therapy program at Equest. Bert’s interest in brain health dates back to his first wife’s passing away from a degenerative brain condition. When he and Cindy were first introduced to the Center for BrainHealth, he had just sold a business after a career working with venture capital firms and was looking to spend his retirement involved with nonprofits where he could make an impact.

That introduction launched an ongoing relationship and generous support that spans many pivotal milestones and initiatives, including the capital campaigns for BrainHealth’s research- and performance-focused buildings. In 2014, Bert established the Lt. James A. Gardner Warrior Scholarship Fund to provide BrainHealth’s SMART™ Brain Training to veterans, in memory of a high school friend who died in the Vietnam War. And for North Texas Giving Tuesday Now in 2020, Bert and Cindy offered a lead matching gift to fuel BrainHealth’s resilience programs for local front-line workers at the height of the pandemic. “The Center for BrainHealth produces results and is on the cutting edge of brain health universally,” Bert said. “This is an organization that’s ‘boots on the ground’ making a difference in people’s lives.”
BvB Dallas, a long-time BrainHealth supporter, will help launch a 2022 study benefitting care partners and people with a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s or mild cognitive impairment. Utilizing the BrainHealth Project platform, this study will measure and support brain health among care partners, a group at increased risk of cognitive decline.

The young professionals of BvB Dallas raise funds and awareness to honor loved ones with Alzheimer’s. BvB’s gifts to the Center for BrainHealth since 2014 have exceeded $780,000.

Members of BvB recently met for a special educational presentation about BrainHealth.

I am always impressed by the questions asked by BvB members,” said Audette Rackley, Assistant Director of Strength-Based Programs. “They realize we need to think about our brain before something goes wrong – decades before.”

BvB Co-president Holley Caldwell added, “BvB Dallas is in awe of the amazing work being done at the Center for BrainHealth and so honored to partner with you in our fight to #TackleAlz. We believe that the BrainHealth Project is integral to maintaining and improving our cognition, which will be of the utmost importance for generations to come. Thank you for all that you do!”

This is the energy we need to change the narrative around the brain for future generations.

Dr. Julie Fratantoni
Head of Operations for The BrainHealth® Project

I discovered UT Dallas’ Center for BrainHealth while seeking out local resources to assist with a family member’s diagnosis of Alzheimer’s in 2007. I was residing in Boston at the time, but was impressed with the research and passion I encountered, and how the Center was looking to improve our brains before disease strikes.

Now living in Dallas, I serve on BrainHealth’s advisory board and have included the Center in my estate plans, which ensures support of the research well into the future. Additionally, I support the Friends of BrainHealth program that funds emerging scientists that develop novel, transformational research.

In 2017, I was elated to be appointed to the Jane and Bud Smith Distinguished University Chair. Jane and the late Bud’s visionary support allows us to continue making discoveries in brain health. My research is exploring ways to analyze and integrate brain imaging data to identify healthy and disordered brain markers.

At the UT Dallas BrainHealth Imaging Center, we are developing software to establish a research network for leveraging and acting on multimodal imaging data from around the world. The equipment used to generate the data for this remarkable work can costs millions; however, Jane and Bud’s generosity allows these lines of research to flourish. I believe the ability to convert neuroimaging data quickly into useful information is a critical step in allowing it to impact the life of an individual.

I am beyond honored to be an endowed chair and researcher – it makes this type of work not only possible, but exciting!

Leveraging the Power of Imaging Data

Dr. Vince Calhoun
Jane and Bud Smith Distinguished University Chair, Center for BrainHealth

Mary Anne Sammons Cree 1930 – 2021
Mary Anne and her late husband, Dick, were introduced to the Center for BrainHealth after their then 48-year-old daughter suffered a brain aneurysm, followed by a coma and multiple strokes. Through this experience, they became champions of brain health awareness and generously donated to help establish BrainHealth’s dedicated research facility.

Mary Anne remained a loyal annual BrainHealth supporter for 15 years, in addition to the many ways she was a philanthropic pillar of Dallas.

In 2013, I was named a board member of the Friends of BrainHealth Program. I am always involved in any and every way I can be.

Dr. Sandi Chapman
Chief Director, Center for BrainHealth
Fellowships Help Launch Careers in Science

One of the most impactful contributions BrainHealth makes to science is in shaping the next generation of scientists, and donors are critical to this endeavor. A prime example is the Dianne Cash Fellowship, which has been funding exemplary graduate students pursuing their doctoral degrees since 2012.

CURRENT AND PAST RECIPIENTS DISCUSS THEIR WORK:

“A study I received from Dianne Cash has been tremendous in preparing my dissertation project. My project focuses on the psychological underpinnings of confirmation bias – the reluctance to change one’s mind by over-emphasizing evidence that supports one’s beliefs while undervaluing contrary evidence. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation stemming from social media platforms has threatened to undermine public health advisories and safety guidelines aimed toward mitigating the pandemic, which can be linked back to confirmation bias. I am optimistic that the results of this work will inform how we can begin to ameliorate the effects of disinformation online.”

MICHAEL LUNDIE, MS

“I feel extremely fortunate to have been selected to receive the Dianne Cash Fellowship. It is an honor, and it allows me to grow as an independent scientist. I am excited to begin a behavioral study to understand the relationship between mindfulness levels of an individual and their cognitive abilities. Results from this work will inform our understanding of the mechanisms involved in cognitive well-being and how mindfulness contributes to it.”

GAYATHRI MARUTHY, MS

“I have always had a deep interest in understanding the basic questions of the human brain and aging. My current work is using cutting-edge brain imaging to study the effect of aging on cognition and brain physiology. This technology enables me to investigate how brain cells communicate their nutrient requirements to blood vessels when they are firing, one of the most crucial functions in our brain that has not been studied before in humans. Receiving the Dianne Cash Fellowship was critical for me at this juncture in my career.”

IRENE ZHAO, MS

“I use neuropsychological and advanced neuroimaging techniques to elucidate the cognitive processes and neural correlates of learning and memory. I am seeking to better understand how multiple sclerosis (MS) disease progression can affect cognition, and to aid in the development of effective treatments. Receiving the Dianne Cash Fellowship award has allowed me to present my research at national and even international conferences. I want to thank Dianne Cash for her generosity and dedication, to helping young scientists develop into independent researchers.”

MARK D. ZUPPICHINI, MA

“My dissertation project is measuring how first impressions of a person influence a participant’s decisions on how trustworthy or dishonest that person appears. My research interests also include face perception, deception, and artificial intelligence. Additionally, I am excited to pursue research to train artificial intelligence models to detect patterns of deception in behavioral and functional magnetic resonance imaging data. I want to thank Dianne Cash for supporting my development as a young researcher, allowing me to do work that I plan to publish in an academic journal.”

JELENA RAKIC, MS

“My research during my time as a doctoral student focused on speed of thought, brain changes in multiple sclerosis patients, and the support system that coordinated the delivery of nutrients to brain cells. The Dianne Cash Fellowship allowed me to integrate these three topics into a single project, and to present and publish this work – the first to show that a relationship exists between the health of this nutrient delivery system and the extent to which thinking was slowed in multiple sclerosis sufferers. I am extremely grateful to Dianne Cash for endowing me with this fellowship that was truly instrumental to advancing my career.”

MONROE TURNER, PHD

FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT EMERGING SCIENTISTS! CONTACT:
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Promoting an Informed Discussion on Addiction and Public Health

As the Bert Moore Chair in BrainHealth, my mission is to create an intersection between science and public health.

I direct Cognitive Neuroscience Research of Addictive Disorders at the Center for BrainHealth, where my lab investigates brain and behavioral dysfunction related to reward and motivation – exploring biomechanisms involved in disorders that stem from substance use.

I am passionate about providing evidence-based knowledge that could contribute to informed public health policies for prevention and intervention. One example is the need to address the critical gap between scientific knowledge, public opinion and legislation surrounding the impacts of cannabis on health and behavior.

By generating accessible information on the neuroscience of addiction, we empower people to make more informed decisions for the benefit of public health and safety.

Generous funding from the Bert Moore Chair, along with gifts from UT Dallas alumni and other supporters, allows my lab to continue ensuring that addiction science advances and forms part of the conversation.

Dr. Francesca Filbey
Bert Moore Chair in BrainHealth, Center for BrainHealth
Thanks to a gift from the Harold Simmons Foundation, local patron of large-scale change, The BrainHealth Project has begun leveraging community partnerships to develop and deliver enhanced, more inclusive training to under-resourced Texans. A key step has been to hire a new BrainHealth coach, Marco Lopez.

Lisa Simmons, President of the Harold Simmons Foundation, said, “We seek to improve the quality of life of all members of our community. We are proud to support The BrainHealth Project’s efforts in ensuring underserved individuals have the tools they need to improve their brain health and increase their capacity for thriving in all aspects of life.”

Lisa Simmons, President of the Harold Simmons Foundation, Jonathan Foster, developed this heat map showing The BrainHealth Project has participants in 48 states.