



Alzheimer's and Cognition Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

“Healthy Brain Aging Starts Here”

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Welcome to the Team

We are excited to welcome Dustin Foster, MA to the CU Alzheimer's and Cognition Center (CUACC) team as a research services professional. In this role, Dustin will be the lead coordinator for a research study for adults with Down Syndrome.

Dustin completed a BA in psychology at Texas Tech University in 2001, and an MA in psychology at Wake Forest University in 2003. His research interests are broad but generally connect to human development across the lifespan. In his free time, he enjoys skiing and gardening. We are excited to have him on our team!

World Down Syndrome Day

This past month on March 21st we celebrated World Down Syndrome Day, a worldwide recognition of individuals with Down Syndrome. On this day, Chancellor Don Elliman highlighted in his newsletter the work being done by researchers and providers at the University of Colorado as leaders in research and care for people with Down Syndrome. This included research and care being conducted by faculty and staff at the CU Alzheimer's and Cognition Center. To read the full piece from the Chancellor's newsletter, visit <http://bit.ly/3KiwqmC>. To learn more about the connection between Alzheimer's and Down Syndrome, visit <http://bit.ly/40PZV4Z>.



New Brain Health Clinic Available for Patients

The **Brain Health Clinic** is a special annual clinic visit for our existing **Memory Disorders Clinic** patients. Once a year, we will check overall brain health using measures of cognition, lifestyle, mood, sleep, and walking and balance.

At these visits, we will give feedback and personalized recommendations for optimizing brain health, as well as track results over time.

This visit will also be a time to discuss and consider participation in research with the University of Colorado Alzheimer's and Cognition Center, as well as answer any additional questions

about brain health overall.

The **Brain Health Clinic** will only be available to patients who are already working with us in the **Memory Disorders Clinic** for cognitive and memory changes, but we have plans to expand in the future.

Our long-term goal is to offer these preventative brain check-ups to people in mid-life, before they start experiencing any cognitive changes.

If you are currently a patient, there is no need to call the clinic to schedule this appointment. At your next visit, your provider will discuss the scheduling with you.

Memory Disorders Clinic Expands to Boulder

The Memory Disorders Clinic has recently expanded to the UHealth Boulder Health Clinic. The clinic at this location is open on Thursdays to see providers Kelly Finch FNP-C and Lindsay Schulz, PA-C, and they are accepting appointments for both new and returning patients.

The expansion of our clinic to Boulder is an important step towards making the Memory Disorders Clinic more accessible to patients who live farther away from the Denver-Metro Area. Interested patients can schedule at the Boulder location with our scheduling team. To schedule, please call 720-848-2080.



Investigator Spotlight: Victoria Pelak, MD



Victoria Pelak, MD is a professor of Neurology and Ophthalmology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. She is a dual specialist in Behavioral Neurology and Neuro-ophthalmology. As a result, she is our Center's specialist in neurodegenerative diseases that affect vision.

She specializes in assessing and treating patients with visual problems related to neurological diseases, with clinical expertise in vision symptoms related to Alzheimer's disease, Posterior Cortical Atrophy, Lewy Body Dementia and Parkinson's disease, and other similar disorders.

Dr. Pelak completed her medical degree at Wayne State University School of Medicine and her residency in Neurology and fellowship training at the University of Pennsylvania. During her

undergraduate thesis at the National Institute of Mental Health, Dr. Pelak had the opportunity to work with one of the giants in the field of visual cognitive science, Leslie Ungerleider, PhD.

Since that time, she was hooked and knew that after residency in neurology, she would continue to train and ultimately dedicate herself to helping those with visual brain dysfunction. In 1999, Dr. Pelak began working at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, where she built and founded the Brain and Vision Laboratory, and began her research program.

Her research interests focus on the identification of unique challenges that occur to visual processing as a result of aging and neurodegeneration. She also has interests in Alzheimer's disease and Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). Because of these interests, her research program is housed within the CU Alzheimer's and Cognition Center (CUACC).

Dr. Pelak oversees multiple research studies related to visual processing and Posterior Cortical Atrophy (PCA), a form of neurodegeneration that affects the person's vision. One of these studies is the Colorado PCA BioRegistry study, which gathers clinical data, brain and retina imaging data, and biological specimens that will help to better characterize the PCA syndrome. She also oversees a clinical trial for people

with MCI and mild dementia due to Alzheimer's disease.

Her research goals stem from her mission to bring discoveries from visual neuroscience directly to patient care, education, and medical investigation to advance treatments and understanding of how vision is impacted in neurodegeneration.

These goals currently include establishment of visual measures that can be used for early recognition of age-related neurodegenerative disease and to examine the visual system as a model for understanding why and how age-related neurodegenerative disease spreads throughout the brain over time. She believes that the research she conducts will contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms of Alzheimer's disease.

In addition to her research program, Dr. Pelak also founded the Colorado Posterior Cortical Atrophy Support Group and is the principal investigator for the University of Colorado Lewy Body Dementia Association Research Center of Excellence. She is a vital component of the CUACC, helping to bring understanding and awareness to atypical forms of Alzheimer's disease and dementia such as PCA and Lewy Body Dementia.

To learn more about Dr. Pelak and her research program, visit her faculty page on our website at <https://bit.ly/V-Pelak>.

Colorado PCA Support Group's next meeting is coming up soon!

Date: April 5

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (MT)

Location: Virtual

Topic: Living Well with Dementia - The Nature of Nature is Change

Guest Speaker: Todd Ballantine, Environmental Scientist, Musician living with Alzheimer's

Learn more and register: <https://bit.ly/PCA-group>



Ins and Outs: Research Study Visit

Every research study is different. However, the majority of research visits at the CU Alzheimer's and Cognition Center (CUACC) follow a similar pattern. If someone participates in an initial study visit, the first thing they will do is go through an informed consent form with the study coordinator. Depending on the study, this may be done virtually or in person.

The informed consent form will describe many things about the study, including but not limited to the purpose of the study, the risks and benefits associated with the study, who will have access to the information collected during the research study, and who to contact if you have more questions. If the study is a clinical drug trial, this discussion may also include a medical doctor to discuss the drug that is being tested.

After reviewing the informed consent form, it is up to the potential participant to decide if they would like to sign. This process is completely voluntary. If they choose to sign and participate in the study, the visit will begin.

Most of the studies at the CUACC include brief cognitive screenings, conversations with the participant and sometimes a study partner about their

thinking and memory, and a review of their medical history and medications to determine eligibility.

Some other things one may encounter in a study visit are an extended cognitive testing period, health questionnaires asking questions about things such as your thinking, mood, sleeping patterns, etc., a neurological and physical exam with the study doctor, blood work, and vital signs such as blood pressure, weight, and temperature. Many of our studies also include MRI or PET scans, or a lumbar puncture (spinal tap).

A research study visit can take anywhere from one hour to six to seven hours, depending on the procedures involved. Sometimes, visits can be broken up into multiple days or breaks can be scheduled in for the longer visits.

Depending on the study, some procedures may be able to be completed virtually. Other studies may require multiple visits over multiple weeks or years. These studies are called longitudinal studies because they follow someone over time.

If you would like to learn more about research visits at our Center, please visit our Research Question and Answer page at <https://bit.ly/CUACC-visit-FAQ>.

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Give to Research

If you are interested in making a donation to the CUACC, please contact Carrie Radant Flynn at 303-724-9146.



Interested in a Research Study?

Contact Neurology Research Partners at 303-724-4644 or fill out a research inquiry form at www.cumemoryresearch.org to learn more about our ongoing research studies!

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