

**O’Hara Rising Star: Trainee Award for Research in Gastroesophageal Disorders**  
**Katy O. and Paul M. Rady Esophageal and Gastric Center of Excellence**

**O’Hara Rising Star: Trainee Award for Gastroesophageal Research**  
***Call for Applications***

We are pleased to announce a funding opportunity for trainees. This grant award, ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000, is aimed at supporting research initiatives focused on gastroesophageal diseases.

**Eligibility**

Applicants include any of the following:

- Medical trainees (MD/DO or higher) at the University of Colorado
- Doctoral-level trainees (PhD, PsyD, DrPH) at the University of Colorado, including advanced graduate students (e.g., final-year candidates) and postdoctoral fellows in biomedical, behavioral, clinical, or population health–related fields (e.g., clinical/health psychology, public health, epidemiology, health services research, implementation science, biostatistics, or related disciplines).

Regardless of background, all candidates should be planning to pursue a career with a focus on gastroesophageal disorders.

- The initial appointment will require a 1-year commitment, which can be extended to a second year if productivity milestones are met
- Surgical trainees should be enrolled in a dedicated research year or planned to start the following academic year in order to be eligible for the award
- The Rady Center of Excellence is committed to funding up to two awards per year

**Background**

The Katy O. and Paul M. Rady Esophageal and Gastric Center of Excellence (“Rady Center”) was established in late 2022 in the hopes of advancing esophageal and gastric cancer research, clinical trials, screening, and treatments. This Center of Excellence was established through a generous gift from the Rady family in honor of their late family member, Paul R. O’Hara II, who was treated at the University of Colorado Anschutz Cancer Center.

The Rady Center hosts a range of clinical and research initiatives that provide advanced training opportunities focused on the prevention and treatment of esophageal and gastric disorders, and the integration of psychosocial, behavioral, and population health factors influencing cancer-related outcomes.

1) The Esophageal and Gastric Cancer Multidisciplinary Clinic (MDC) and Benign MDC brings together a team of expert surgeons, gastroenterologists, pathologists, oncologists, radiologists, and other advanced practice clinicians who focus on diseases of the esophagus and stomach. Together, the team analyzes a patient’s diagnosis and recommends a specific treatment plan for the individual. Not only does the clinic focus on patients with precancerous and cancerous lesions of the esophagus and stomach, but they have also established a benign clinic that has a specialized team who treats patients with non-cancerous

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conditions of the esophagus.

2) The Rady Center is also home to a dedicated basic and translational research program. The Esophagogastric Laboratory grows human organoids, which are miniature three-dimensional tissue models derived directly from patient biopsies that recreate the layered architecture and cell-type diversity of the native esophagus. These organoids are paired with advanced molecular technologies, including single-cell RNA sequencing and high-content imaging, to interrogate clinically important questions such as how individual genetic background shapes injury response, why disease burden differs across patient populations, and which biological pathways drive progression from Barrett's esophagus to cancer. At the Rady Center, we are working on expanding this platform and increasing biobank organoid collections, creating a living library of the upper gastrointestinal tract that enables study of disease progression across the full clinical spectrum. Working in close collaboration with the Rady Center's surgeons, gastroenterologists, and pathologists, the laboratory converts tissue collected during endoscopy and surgical resection into living models within days, ensuring that the questions driving patient care are the same questions being tested at the bench and that laboratory discoveries reflect the real-world diversity of our patient population.

3) The Rady Center also supports a growing program of psychosocial and behavioral research focused on understanding how psychological, interpersonal, and behavioral factors influence outcomes in esophageal and gastric diseases. Using mixed-methods and biobehavioral approaches, this work spans etiologic, intervention, and implementation science, with a focus on developing scalable, evidence-based strategies to reduce distress and improve patient- and population-level cancer outcomes. Opportunities to obtain supervised clinical hours toward licensure (e.g., for clinical psychology trainees) may be available depending on the mentoring team and training structure.

### **Scope of Research**

This grant is designed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration across multiple specialties within the Katy O. and Paul M. Rady Esophageal and Gastric Center of Excellence. All projects are embedded within the Rady Center's multidisciplinary and translational framework, integrating clinical care, laboratory science, and patient-centered research, depending on the candidate's background and mentorship.

Projects may range from retrospective studies to prospective research, including clinical trials, depending on the candidate's background and mentorship. Research fields include but are not limited to health sciences research, behavioral science, public health, implementation science, engineering, clinical psychology, health psychology, cellular, molecular, computational, translational, or clinical research approaches.

Grant recipients will be required to have a primary mentor (or co-mentoring team) from the Rady Center, who will support research efforts and foster collaborative approaches across specialties. The mentor(s) will also be responsible for making sure the trainee meets the milestones required to maintain and renew (when applicable) award funding.

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The trainee's research opportunities are flexible and can be tailored to each candidate's training, interests, and career objectives. Projects may range from retrospective and prospective clinical research (including surgical and medical outcomes studies, clinical trials, etc.) to basic and translational laboratory science, as well as psychosocial/behavioral and population health research. Areas of focus may include, but are not limited to, medical and surgical research; behavioral and psychosocial science; public and population health; implementation of science; engineering; and cellular, molecular, computational, and translational approaches.

Awardees are expected to attend the monthly Rady Center Research Interest Group meeting and to share updates on their research biannually.

This award is designed with the goal of increasing research output (i.e., publications, presentations, grants) and national and international visibility of the Rady Center.

Furthermore, the award is intended as a bridge to future federal funding to support the trainee's career.

For the MD/DO trainee to be eligible for renewal of funding for a second year, the candidate will be required to:

- Submit or publish at least 3 publications to peer reviewed journals in their first year
- Submit for presentation at a major national or international conference at least one project
- Regularly attend the monthly Rady Center - Research Interest Group meeting and to share updates on their research biannually
- Meet regularly with their designated research mentors to assure progress of research
- Write at least one intramural or extramural grant proposal per year

For the doctoral-level trainee to be eligible for renewal of funding for a second year, the candidate will be required to:

- Submit or publish at least 1 publication to peer reviewed journals in their first year
- Submit for presentation at a major national or international conference at least one project
- Regularly attend the monthly Rady Center - Research Interest Group meeting and to share updates on their research biannually
- Meet regularly with their designated research mentor(s) to assure progress of research
- Write at least one intramural or extramural grant proposal per year

The grant is intended to be used for one or more of the following:

- Salary support at the discretion of the division chief
- Graduate student fees
- Health insurance
- University mandated fringe or enrollment-related costs
- Conference travel support (as available)

## **Application Process**

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Please submit a

- CV
- NIH-format biosketch
- Letter of interest
- Letter of support from Mentor

All completed documents will get uploaded to [this form](#)  
<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/019d882ae9547036a2fd34144bd682b0>

The deadline for submission is [insert deadline]. Selected applicants will be notified of the next steps following an initial review.

**Available Mentors**

- Ben Mungo, MD – Surgical Oncology
- Daysha Ferrer Torres, PhD – Gastroenterology – Head of the Esophagogastric Laboratory
- Sachin Wani, MD – Gastroenterology
- Lauren Zimmaro, PhD – Behavioral Science and Psychosocial Oncology

For inquiries or further details, please contact:

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