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Doctors of the Holbrook-Hill Clinic and SCARI in the 1960s. Donald Hill is leftmost, and Charles Stevens is fourth from left.

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Visionary Researchers Team with UA to Fight Arthritis through the Generations

Collaboration Persists through Endowment

Immunobiology Assistant Professor Hsin-Jung Joyce Wu studies bacteria’s effects on rheumatoid arthritis. Having identified links that could pave the way for new treatments, she is now focusing on the role of gut microorganisms in lung-related rheumatoid arthritis complications, which are common.

Little is known about how these pulmonary diseases develop, Wu said, and median survival after diagnosis is less than three years. With funding from Southwest Clinic and Research Institute, her current study will generate the data needed to apply for federal funding and continued investigation.

Though Wu’s research is cutting-edge, she is continuing a 65-year collaboration between SCARI and the University of Arizona. SCARI recently turned over its assets to the UA Arthritis Center as an endowed gift. The endowment will honor SCARI’s groundbreaking beginnings, ensure its UA support never ends and advance treatment of the nation’s leading cause of disability.

SCARI’s Roots

Drs. Donald Hill and Paul Holbrook set up an arthritis clinic in the 1930s in Tucson, which was a major treatment center because the climate brings some symptom relief. At the time, little was known about the disease. Patients with rheumatoid arthritis often became permanently bedfast, according to Dr. Steven Strong, former SCARI president.

The doctors created a research organization in an effort to improve treatment. They secured funding from well-known philanthropists such as J.D. Rockefeller and sources including the U.S. Public Health Service.

“This was a pioneering move,” said Strong.

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In 1950, 17 years before the College of Medicine opened, Holbrook and Hill decided to move their thriving research operations to the UA. In a basement laboratory in the agriculture building, their findings continued to clarify the mysteries of arthritis. Dr. Charles Stephens and others joined the clinic and published in top medical journals. Both founders served as presidents of the American College of Rheumatology.

The SCARI team was the first to study arthritis using cell cultures, which allowed researchers to view, outside the body, how arthritic cells reacted to potential treatments.

“The cell culture techniques became widely used and led to much greater understanding,” Strong said.

The clinic gained prominence for patient treatment as well. In 1951, famous French painter Raoul Dufy presented Hill and Holbrook with “Hoedown” as a token of gratitude for their care during his vacation to Tucson.



“Hoedown,” a painting given to Hill and Holbrook by a grateful Raoul Dufy.

An Evolving Partnership

As the UA's medical science capacity grew, the researchers moved upstairs in the agriculture building and later to the microbiology building. SCARI began making donations and grants to fund related University research and operations.

In 1977, the Holbrook-Hill Clinic dissolved. Not long after, SCARI donated its equipment to the UA, which was becoming a national leader in arthritis medicine.

Stephens and his wife Suzanne made a contribution to bolster the College of Medicine's resources in this area. They gave a total of more than \$6 million to create an endowed chair of rheumatology and a research fund. The Stephens' gifts were made in 1993 but remained anonymous until Suzanne passed away in 2004.

In 1995, ten years after the Arizona Arthritis Center was founded as a multidisciplinary research and education institute, the top two floors of University Medical Center were renovated to house the center. SCARI contributed to that effort and other needs.

“SCARI's major gifts allowed us to build the physical center and fund important programs and research,” said center co-founder Dr. Eric Gall.

Over the years, SCARI donated a total of \$2.2 million to the UA and the center. The endowment's approximate value is \$600,000.

Continuing the Impact

The endowment's ongoing research support could help attract more promising scientists like Wu to the field, said current University of Arizona Arthritis Center Director Dr. C. Kent Kwoh. SCARI has also allocated support for visiting lectureships in the name of the institute, its founders or long-time SCARI researcher Alice Stanfield.

“I'm grateful for SCARI's continued support. This endowment will ensure their legacy lives on,” said Kwoh.

About the UA Foundation

The University of Arizona Foundation is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to advancing the University of Arizona and managing Arizona NOW, the University's comprehensive \$1.5 billion fundraising

campaign. Stewarding an existing asset base of more than \$850 million, the UA Foundation has helped generate nearly \$3 billion in private funding to support the University. Learn more about the UA Foundation at uafoundation.org or arizonanow.org.

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