

2026 Women's Health Webinar

**Presentations on :
Sleep and Cardiometabolic Health**

**Panel Discussion :
The Active Female: Health Issues Across the Lifespan**

Monday, March 9th, 2026, 11:00 AM – 01:15 PM



**CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN OBESITY
& CARDIOMETABOLIC RESEARCH**

TEXAS TECH
Research & Innovation
Institute for One Health Innovation



TEXAS TECH



**TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER.**



Agenda

11:00-11:10 AM – Welcome by COCR and IOHI Directors

Naïma Moustaid-Moussa, Ph.D., DFASN, FAHA, FTOS, FNAI

Executive Director of the Institute for One Health Innovation | Founding director of Obesity Research Institute (ORI) | Horn Distinguished Professor, TTU School of Veterinary Medicine | Professor, Department of Cell Biology & Biochemistry, School of Medicine, TTUHSC

Kembra Albracht-Schulte, Ph.D.

Director, COCR | Assistant Professor, Department of Kinesiology & Sport Management; Director of the Nutrition, Exercise, & Translational (NEX) Medicine Laboratory, TTU

Jannette M. Dufour, Ph.D.

Co-Director, COCR | University Distinguished Professor and Chair, Department of Cell Biology & Biochemistry, School of Medicine, TTUHSC

11:10-12:00 PM Presentations on Sleep and Cardiometabolic Health

11:10-11:25 AM Beyond Sleep Duration: Multidimensional Sleep Health and Cardiometabolic Risk in Women

Brooke Aggarwal, EdD, MS, FAHA, Associate Professor of Medical Sciences, Division of Cardiology, Columbia University Medical Center

11:25-11:40 AM The Importance of Sleep Quality When Trying to Sleep More for Optimal Vascular Health

Joaquin U. Gonzales, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management, Texas Tech University

11:40-12:00 PM Q & A session | Moderated by Rachel Babcock and Hushyar Azari

12:00-1:05 PM Panel Discussion: The Active Female: Issues Throughout the Lifespan

Panel Chair: Kembra Albracht-Schulte, Ph.D

Panelists

- **Jacalyn J. Robert-McComb, Ph.D., FACSM, Professor Emeritus, TTU**
- **Latha Ramalingam Ph.D., Assistant Professor**, Department of Nutrition Science and Dietetics, Syracuse University
- **Nadeeja Wijayatunga, MD (MBBS), MPhil, Ph.D., RDN, LD, Associate Professor**, School of Applied Sciences, University of Mississippi

12:45-1:05 PM Panel Q&A

1:05-1:15 PM Closing Remarks by COCR and IOHI Directors



Naima Moustaid-Moussa, Ph.D., FTOS, FAHA, DFASN

Founding Director, Obesity Research Institute
Executive Director, Institute for One Health Innovation
Paul W. Horn Distinguished Professor, TTU School of Veterinary Medicine
Professor, Department of Cell Biology & Biochemistry, TTUHSC
Member, National Academies' Board on Agriculture & Natural Resources (BANR)
President, American Society for Nutrition

Prof. Naima Moustaid-Moussa is the Inaugural Executive Director for the system-wide Institute for One Health Innovation (IOHI) and Founding Director of the Obesity Research Institute at TTU and TTUHSC. She is a Paul W. Horn Distinguished Professor of Nutrition and One Health at the TTU School of Veterinary Medicine, and Professor of Cell Biology and Biochemistry at the TTUHSC School of Medicine. She directs Nutrigenomics, Inflammation and One Health Research (NIOR) Lab conducting basic and integrated nutrition and obesity research, with emphasis on nutrient-gene interactions, and the role of the adipose endocrine function (renin angiotensin system, RAS), and heat shock proteins in metabolic diseases. Her lab was among the first to identify RAS components in human adipose tissue and harness molecular tools to advance nutrition research. Current research focuses on effects of environmental factors (microplastics, contaminants) on inflammation, oxidative stress, metabolic and brain health and potential use of dietary bioactive compounds to counteract these effects. Her lab has been characterizing mechanisms by which bioactives (including fish oil, tart cherry anthocyanins, curcumin, and other polyphenols) reduce obesity-associated white fat inflammation, activate brown fat, reduce systemic, adipose- and neuroinflammation and aging-related metabolic dysfunctions, using cells, rodents, and model organisms (*C. elegans*). She published over 200 peer-reviewed papers from research primarily funded by federal agencies, national and international foundations. Her h-index is 64 with 30,483 citations (Google scholar, accessed 02/25/26).

Prof Naima is a Distinguished Fellow of ASN (DFASN), Fellow of the AHA (FAHA), a Fellow of The Obesity Society (FTOS), and a Fellow of the National Academy of Inventors (FNAI). She received several awards sponsored by ASN [2012 Outstanding Investigator award, 2015 Pfizer Consumer Healthcare Nutritional Sciences award, 2020 Korean Nutrition Society Award). She has been very dedicated to mentoring early career investigators and was awarded mentoring and scholarship awards by TTU (2018 Nancy J Bell Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award, 2019 Outstanding Faculty Mentor for Undergraduate Research, 2021 Bernie E. Rushing J. Distinguished Faculty Research Award in STEM, and the 2023 Wolfe International Scholars Award). She provided significant outreach and professional services including as member of several NIH study sections and as regular member of the clinical obesity and diabetes study section (CIDO/HSDO). Since 2022, she has been member of the National Academies' Board on Agriculture & Natural Resources (BANR). Currently, she serves as the 2025-26 President of the American Society for Nutrition (ASN).



Kembra Albracht-Schulte, Ph.D.

**Director, COCR | Assistant Professor, Kinesiology & Sport Management, TTU
Director of the Nutrition, Exercise, & Translational (NExT) Medicine Laboratory, TTU**

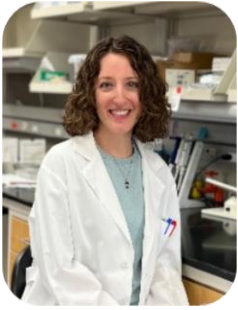
Dr. Kembra Albracht-Schulte is an Assistant Professor and Director of the Nutrition, Exercise, & Translational (NExT) Medicine Lab in the Kinesiology & Sport Management Department. She earned her B.S. in Exercise Science at Lubbock Christian University, M.S. in Exercise Science at Texas Tech University, and Ph.D. in Nutritional Sciences at Texas Tech University. Dr. Albracht-Schulte's research efforts aim to understand the mechanistic and potentially synergistic effects of exercise and nutrition interventions by conducting basic, clinical, and translational research.



Jannette M. Dufour, Ph.D.

**Co-Director, COCR | University Distinguished Professor and Chair in the Cell
Biology & Biochemistry Department, School of Medicine, TTUHSC**

Dr. Jannette M. Dufour is a University Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Cell Biology & Biochemistry in the School of Medicine at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center and Co-Director of the Center of Excellence in Obesity and Cardiometabolic Research (COCR). She received her PhD in Genetics and Cell Biology from Washington State University and trained as a postdoctoral fellow with the Islet Transplantation Group in the Surgical Medical Research Institute, Department of Surgery at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. Her research explores the therapeutic potential of immune-privileged Sertoli cells as a means to improve outcomes of transplantation. Specifically, her lab tests the feasibility of using immune privileged Sertoli cells for cell-based gene therapy and examining the mechanism(s) of Sertoli cell immune protection to improve the survival of insulin-expressing cells as a treatment for diabetes. Her research has been funded by several national and local agencies, including the NIH, American Diabetes Association, and Texas ARP, and has been selected for the cover photo for Cell Transplantation (2008). Spermatogenesis (2012) and DNA and Cell Biology (2018) and highlighted in Biology of Reproduction (2014) and Nature Medicine (2018). She has been invited to give seminars at several universities as well as at national and international meetings, including the American Society for Reproductive Immunology (2022, 2024), American Society of Andrology (ASA; 2007, 2016, 2023), Society for the Study of Reproduction; 2012, 2016), NIAID (2017) and NIEHS (2017). She has received the TTUHSC President's Young Investigator Award (2011), the Outstanding Women Leader (OWL) Award from the West Texas Association for Women in Science (2013), the Harry M. Weitlauf Anatomy Teaching Award (2013), the Dean's Basic Science Teaching Award (2017, 2024) and the President's Team Teaching Award (2019, 2020), the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Dean's Teaching Award (2023) and the President's Teaching Award (2025).



Rachel Babcock, Ph.D.

**Postdoctoral Research Associate
Department of Cell Biology & Biochemistry, TTUHSC**

Dr. Rachel Babcock is currently a postdoctoral research associate in the Department of Biology and Biochemistry at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. She received her BS in Cell & Molecular Biology from Texas Tech University in 2016, and her PhD in Immunology from UTHealth MD Anderson Cancer Center Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in 2022. Her current research is focused on studying the immune privilege properties of testicular Sertoli cells and changes within the male reproductive tract in the context of infection under the mentorship of Dr. Jannette M. Dufour. She is also studying triple negative breast cancer (TNBC), defining novel nuclear roles of a Wnt signaling member, Dishevelled, in TNBC, with collaborative projects testing the use of cryoablation as a potential treatment for TNBC



Hushyar Azari, M.D. | Ph.D. Candidate

Research Assistant, Kinesiology and Sport Management, TTU

Hushyar Azari is a PhD candidate in Exercise Physiology at Texas Tech University (TTU), holding an MD degree from Urmia University of Medical Sciences in Iran. Hushyar is currently a research assistant at the Nutrition, Exercise and Translational medicine lab (NExT med) under supervision of Dr. Kembra Albracht-Schulte. His research passion lies in clinical studies on the effects of combined interventions, integrating exercise and nutrition to combat obesity and its associated comorbidities with a specific focus on gut microbiota dysbiosis and Metabolic Dysfunction Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD).

Speakers



Brooke Aggarwal, EdD, MS, FAHA

**Associate Professor of Medical Sciences
Division of Cardiology
Columbia University Medical Center**

Dr. Brooke Aggarwal is an Associate Professor of Medical Sciences in the Division of Cardiology at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. She is a behavioral scientist whose research focuses on cardiovascular disease prevention, with particular expertise in sleep health, circadian rhythms, and psychosocial risk factors across the female life course. Dr. Aggarwal leads NIH- and American Heart Association–funded studies examining how sleep influences cardiometabolic risk, particularly among women and during key life transitions such as menopause. She is a Research Goes Red Clinical Leader for the American Heart Association and a co-author of the American Heart Association Scientific Statement on Multidimensional Sleep Health and Cardiometabolic Risk. Her work has contributed to the growing evidence base supporting the integration of sleep health into national cardiovascular disease prevention guidelines.

Speakers



Joaquin U. Gonzales, Ph.D.

**Associate Professor
Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management
TTU**

Dr. Gonzales is an Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in physiology. A native of West Texas, Dr. Gonzales earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology from the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, his Master of Science degree in Exercise & Sport Sciences from Texas Tech University, and his Ph.D. in Exercise Science from the University of Toledo (Ohio). Before joining Texas Tech, he completed a post-doctoral fellowship in physiology at the historic Noll Laboratory at Pennsylvania State University. During his 16 years as a researcher at Texas Tech University, Dr. Gonzales has studied lifestyle behaviors and their influence on peripheral vascular function in adults across the lifespan. His recent work has focused on how different parameters of sleep impact vascular health. His approaches have included short-term interventions to increase sleep duration or reduce sleep variability. He has published over 50 peer-reviewed research articles, and his research at Texas Tech has been funded by the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health and the American Heart Association. Dr. Gonzales serves as an editorial board member for the Journal of Applied Physiology and PLOS Aging and Health. He is also a professional member of the American Physiological Society and the American Heart Association.

Panel Discussion



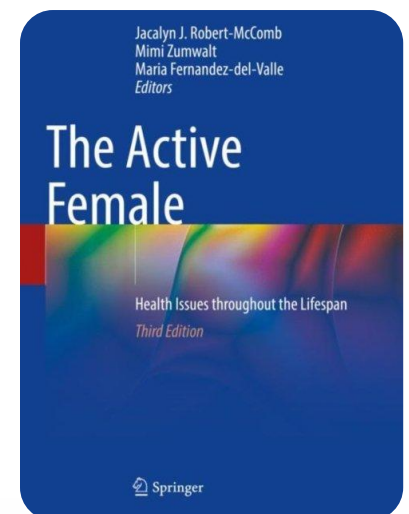
Panel Chair

Kembra Albracht-Schulte, Ph.D.

**Director, COCR | Assistant Professor, Kinesiology & Sport Management, TTU
Director of the Nutrition, Exercise, & Translational (NExT) Medicine Laboratory, TTU**

The Active Female: Health Issues Throughout the Lifespan

This is a comprehensive reference that examines the unique physiological, metabolic, and health challenges faced by physically active women across different stages of life. The book addresses topics such as the female reproductive cycle, body image, musculoskeletal health, injury prevention, nutrition, and the Female Athlete Triad, providing guidance for clinicians and health professionals working in women's health and sports medicine. Dr. Jacalyn J. Robert-McComb, who is the author and editor of three editions of the book will join our discussion as a panelist. Our panel chair Dr. Kembra Albracht-Schulte, along with panelists Dr. Nadeeja Wijayatunga and Dr. Latha Ramalingam, have also contributed chapters to the book, bringing additional expertise in women's metabolic health, nutrition, and exercise across the lifespan.



Panelists



Jacalyn Robert-McComb, PhD, FACSM

Professor Emeritus Texas Tech University (TTU)

ACSM Certified Clinical Exercise Physiologist (CEP)

Dr. Jacalyn Robert-McComb received her PhD at Ole Miss in Exercise Science in 1989. She taught in the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management from 1989 to 2022, or for 33 years in the Clinical Exercise Physiology track at TTU. She taught a variety of classes at TTU ranging from Exercise Physiology, Exercise Testing and Prescription, Cardiopulmonary Exercise Physiology and Electrocardiogram. She was also the Director of the Clinical Internship Program at TTU with Covenant Hospital and University Medical Center in Lubbock, TX. She was particularly interested in Women's Health and edited and authored three editions of the *Active Female: Health Issues throughout the Lifespan* by Springer ISBN 978—3-031-15484-3. She also edited and authored two editions of *Eating Disorders in Women and Children* by Humana Press DOI <https://doi.org/10.1201/b11381> (2012) and CRC Press ISBN 0-8493-2027-5 (2001). Upon her retirement, her husband and she moved to Tucson AZ where she began a personal training business called, 'Exercise Is Medicine for your Body, Heart, and Soul' ([www: jacalynmedicine.com](http://www.jacalynmedicine.com)). She now trains and ministers to the people in her community in Skyline Country Club Estates (<https://www.skylinecountryclubestates.net/>.) She also teaches fitness classes at Skyline Country Club (<https://www.skylinecountryclub.com/>.). She is very active in her church, St. Thomas, the Apostle Parish (<https://statucson.org/>). She hopes to form a strong Social Justice Committee in the near future at her parish working with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tucson.

Panelists



Latha Ramalingam, Ph.D.

**Assistant Professor, Department of Nutrition Science and Dietetics
Syracuse University.**

Dr. Latha Ramalingam's research examines how parental obesity in both mothers and fathers affects the metabolic health of the next generation through epigenetic changes. Dr. Ramalingam's American Heart Association-funded work reveals that omega-3 supplementation in obese parents before conception can protect their children from fatty liver disease and metabolic dysfunction. Using both laboratory and animal model approaches, her research investigates how parental nutrition reprograms genetic expression through epigenetic mechanisms, breaking the cycle of metabolic disease transmission. Her findings, published in top nutrition journals, demonstrate that simple nutritional interventions in both prospective mothers and fathers offer powerful strategies to improve metabolic health across generations.

Panelists



Nadeeja Wijayatunga MD(MBBS), MPhil, PhD, RDN, LD

**Associate Professor of Nutrition & Hospitality Management
Graduate Program Coordinator of MS in Food & Nutrition Services and PhD
in Nutrition Sciences
Director of the Nutrition Obesity Research Lab (NORA)
School of Applied Sciences
University of Mississippi**

Dr. Nadeeja N. Wijayatunga MD (MBBS), MPhil, PhD, RDN, LD is an Associate Professor and the graduate program coordinator of the Masters in Food and Nutrition Services and PhD in Nutrition Sciences in the Department of Nutrition and Hospitality Management at the University of Mississippi. She is a registered dietitian (US), nutrition scientist and a physician (Sri Lanka) by training. Her current main research areas include biobehavioral aspects of obesity including obesity phenotypes, weight bias, and time-restricted eating.

Dr. Wijayatunga obtained her PhD in Nutritional Sciences from Texas Tech University. She completed her postdoctoral training in the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management at Texas Tech University. During her PhD and postdoc periods, she gained experience in clinical, behavioral and basic science research in obesity. Dr. Wijayatunga completed her residency in Medicine and Surgery and worked as a physician in Anesthesia/ Intensive Care in Sri Lanka. Before coming to the United States, she also worked as a faculty in the Department of Biochemistry in the Medical School of University of Sri Jayewardenepura in Sri Lanka.

A Special Thank You to :

Webinar Speakers:

Dr. Brooke Aggarwal
Dr. Joaquin U. Gonzales

Webinar Panelists:

Dr. Jacalyn Robert-McComb
Dr. Latha Ramalingam
Dr. Nadeeja Wijayatunga

Panel Chair:

Dr. Kembra Albracht-Schulte

Moderators:

Dr. Rachel Babcock
Dr. Hushyar Azari

Organizing Committee:

Dr. Naima Moustaid-Moussa
Dr. Kembra Albracht-Schulte
Dr. Jannette M. Dufour
Dr. Rachel Babcock
Dr. Hushyar Azari
Sophia Peña
OR&I, ORDC, CBB, IOHI



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CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

— COCR 11th ANNUAL MEETING 2026 —

**Advancing Chronic Disease Prevention:
From Translational Solutions to
Community Impact**



**ABSTRACT SUBMISSION DEADLINE:
APRIL 7 BY 5:00 PM**

MEETING DATE: TBD (EARLY MAY)

Abstract Submission link : <https://www.research.net/r/COCRAbstract2026>

Or you can scan the QR code to submit



COCR Funding Opportunities Workshop

Hosted by:

- TTU Office of Research Development and Communications
- TTUHSC Office of Research, Innovation, Collaboration and Entrepreneurship
- Teams Meeting link:
<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/2700075718315?p=Znk3eIoaPb3oXa9jcJ>
- Meeting ID: 270 007 571 831 5
- Passcode: 9A8Eo6o3

*Email us for more information (cocr@ttu.edu)



COCR FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES WORKSHOP

- Strategies to increase competitiveness
- Overview of available and expected funding opportunities
- Breakout groups for next steps



VIRTUAL SESSION



Wednesday,
March 11th, 2026



12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

VIRTUAL BROWNBAG MEETING



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