



# ALICIA & YAYA INITIATIVE IN GLOBAL AGING RESEARCH

## UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND BALTIMORE/UNIVERSITY OF COSTA RICA GERONTOLOGY CONFERENCE & SITE VISIT IN COSTA RICA JULY 2023

A delegation of eight gerontology researchers and practitioners from five University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) schools (Medicine, Social Work, Pharmacy, Nursing, and the Graduate School) traveled to Costa Rica from July 19-26, 2023, to participate in the VIII International Congress in Gerontology, hosted by the University of Costa Rica (UCR) in San José. Following the [International Congress](#), the UMB team participated in site visits in the Nicoya Peninsula region, noted as a “Blue Zone” that is home to an impressive number of centenarians.

The trip was organized by the UMB Graduate School’s [Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research](#) to create networks across UCR and UMB faculty members who engage in aging research with the express goal of stimulating collaborative research partnerships. During the visit, the Alicia and Yaya Initiative founder, Dr. Marco Chacón, announced the launch of a seed-funding program to support early collaborations between UMB and UCR.





## THE UMB DELEGATION

The UMB team traveled to Costa Rica at the invitation of leaders from the University of Costa Rica Master Program in Gerontology and the Institutional Program for the Elderly (PIAM) and supported by the Dean of the Medical Faculty at UCR. Participants included:



**Carlos A. Faerron Guzmán, MD, MSc**  
**UMB Graduate School**  
Associate Professor of Global Health  
Co-Director, Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research



**Denise Orwig, PhD**  
**UM School of Medicine**  
Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health  
Co-Director, Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research



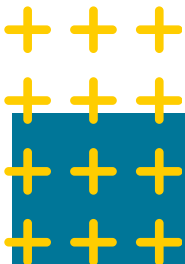
**Amanda Lehning, PhD, MSW**  
**UM School of Social Work**  
Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor



**Tamela McClam, MD**  
**UM School of Medicine**  
Assistant Professor, Division of Geriatric Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry



**Elizabeth Parker, PhD, RD**  
**UM School of Medicine**  
Assistant Professor, Physician Therapy and Rehabilitation Science





**Danya Qato, PhD, PharmD, MPH**

**UM School of Pharmacy**

Associate Professor of Practice, Sciences, and Health Outcomes Research  
Director, Pharmaceutical Health Services Research Graduate Program



**Alice Ryan, PhD**

**UM School of Medicine**

Associate Director for Translational Sciences, Center for Research on Aging



**Carolina Santamaría Ulloa, PhD**

**Universidad de Costa Rica's Health Research Institute**

Full Professor and Researcher  
2023 Alicia and Yaya Initiative Faculty Fellow



**Elias Snyder, PhD, FNP-C, ACHPN**

**UM School of Nursing**

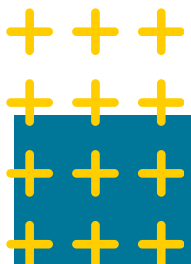
Director, Office of Global Global Health  
Program Director, Global Health Certificate



**Zafar Zafari, PhD, MSc**

**UM School of Pharmacy**

Assistant Professor of Practice, Sciences, and Health Outcomes Research





## VIII INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF GERONTOLOGY

As part of the visit, the UMB delegation participated in the VIII International Conference of Gerontology, organized by the University of Costa Rica, from July 20-21, with participants from five countries. Dr. Denise Orwig took center stage as a Keynote Speaker on July 20, presenting "Changes Across Multiple Domains of Recovery Post Hip Fracture and Key Sex Differences: Findings from the Baltimore Hip Studies." Additionally, Dr. Orwig contributed to the "Roundtable: Contributions of Gerontological Training to Society," further emphasizing her commitment to gerontology education in advancing the understanding of aging and its societal implications.

On the second day of the conference, UMB delegation members presented in two panel sessions highlighting significant contributions to their respective areas of research expertise and fostered new partnerships.

**Aging in Place in Changing Neighborhood Contexts** – Dr. Amanda Lehning

**Elucidating the Unintended Impact of National Policies on Use of High-Risk Medications in Older Adults** – Dr. Danya Qato

**La fragilidad como predictor de la mortalidad entre adultos mayores no institucionalizados: una comparación entre Costa Rica y Estados Unidos** – Dr. Carolina Santamaría Ulloa, Dr. Amanda Lehning, Licda. Mónica V. Cortés Ortiz, and M.Sc. Ericka Méndez-Chacón

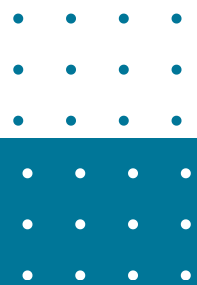
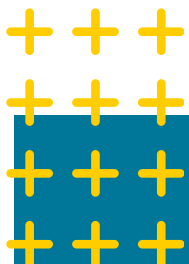
**Reclaiming Ancestral Wisdom: Decolonizing Approaches to Global Palliative Care** – Dr. Eli Snyder

**Aging Well with Exercise: Research in Obesity and Disability** – Dr. Alice Ryan

**Nutrition for Healthy Aging** – Dr. Elizabeth Parker

**Assessing Memory Loss: Normal Aging Versus Dementia: A Geriatric Psychiatrist’s Perspective** – Dr. Tamela McClam

**Health and Economic Burden of COPD in Older Adults** – Dr. Zafar Zafari





## NETWORKING EVENT RECEPTION

On July 20, UMB hosted an academic networking event at the Radisson Hotel in downtown San José. The event was attended by deans, researchers, and a diverse array of international professionals specializing in aging research and health sciences. The gathering showcased the global interest and commitment to understanding the complexities of aging and the pursuit of scientific advancements in the field

Dr. Fernando Morales stands as a cornerstone in the collaborative endeavors between UCR and UMB. His dedication and insights have been instrumental in fostering and strengthening ties between the two institutions. In October 2022, Dr. Morales further solidified this partnership by visiting UMB, emphasizing the mutual commitment to academic exchange and collaborative research. His active involvement underscores the importance of continuous dialogue and shared vision in international academic collaborations.



*Dr. Carlos Faerron Guzmán*



*Dr. Marco Chacón*



*Dr. Fernando Morales*

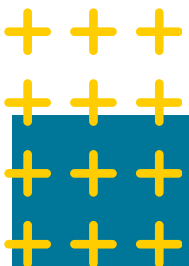
The event concluded with an outstanding presentation by Dr. Salvador Macip i Maresma, a professor at the University of Leicester, titled “Is Aging Inevitable: How Does Science Seek Eternal Youth?” which stimulated great conversation. Dr. Macip is a distinguished researcher in the field of medicine and molecular genetics and has devoted his career to exploring the molecular underpinnings of cancer and aging. Dr. Macip has written multiple books that tackle current health challenges, including the possibility of delaying the aging process and increasing health span.



*Dr. Salvador Macip i Maresma*

[Watch the Facebook Live recording of the event.](#)

[www.graduate.umaryland.edu/AliciaYaYa](http://www.graduate.umaryland.edu/AliciaYaYa)





## NICOYA PENINSULA BLUE ZONE

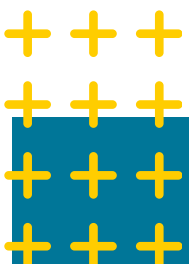
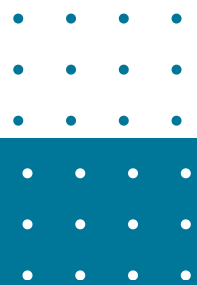
The UMB delegation visited the Nicoya Peninsula, one of five "Blue Zones" in the world, along with locations in Greece, Italy, Japan, and Loma Linda in the US. These zones are known for the remarkable longevity of their inhabitants, with many living beyond 100 years of age. Site visits were guided by Jorge Vindas, the President of the [Asociación Península de Nicoya Zona Azul](#).



The group had the privilege of interacting with several centenarians from Nicoya, including a stop at an elderly day care site in Hojanca, Nicoya where the group learned about community-based approaches towards aging and elderly populations. The centenarians and their families were very generous in allowing the group to visit them in their homes and learn pearls of wisdom for living a long life. The group also visited UCR's satellite campus in Liberia. The visit emphasized UCR's research initiatives in gerontology and dedication to serving older adults while tackling the issues critical to addressing the increase in the aging of the population.



The visit was transformative for the UMB delegation, laying the groundwork for forthcoming collaborations and sparking discussions for the 2024 seed grants under the Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research.





## PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

**“There is simply no substitute to in-person relationship building. As a result of connections made during this delegation, I have started meeting regularly with faculty at UCR to initiate a research project focused on improving the quality of pharmaceutical care in older adults.”**

*Dr. Danya Qato, UM School of Pharmacy*

**“UMB’s participation in the conference set the stage for reciprocal relationships and collaborative research that will surely enhance the work at both universities and within our communities.”**

*Dr. Eli Snyder, UM School of Nursing*

**“I realized that I was afforded a privilege very few geriatric psychiatrists have in terms of meeting healthy 100+-year-olds in their homes.”**

*Dr. Tamela McClam,  
UM School of Medicine*



The initiative thanks Dr. Marco and Debbie Chacón for their unwavering support and vision that enabled this initiative and acknowledges the InterAmerican Center for Global Health and the University of Costa Rica for their partnership and commitment to advancing global health and aging research. Of note, we acknowledge the support of:

- Dr. Fernando Morales, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at UCR
- Dr. Jaime José Fernández, Director of the UCR Master Program in Gerontology
- M.Sc. María José Víquez, Professor of the Master Program and the Institutional Program for the Elderly (PIAM)
- Dr. Carolina Santamaría Ulloa, Full Professor and Researcher at the UCR Health Research Institute and a 2023 Alicia and Yaya Initiative Faculty Fellow

These collaborations testify to the power of collective effort and its potential to improve aging populations worldwide.

