

Mentor Program Leadership

Steven A. Safren, Ph.D., ABPP

Co-leader, CFAR Mentoring Program, Professor of Psychology. Dr. Safren is an internationally known behavioral scientist in the areas of HIV prevention and treatment with expertise in the areas of adherence, secondary prevention / treatment-as-prevention (TasP), HIV prevention with men who have sex with men (MSM), and mental health and substance use aspects of HIV prevention and care. Prior to coming to UM (2015) he initiated and directed the Harvard University CFAR's Social and Behavioral Sciences Core, and has involvement with HPTN and ACTG. He is a member of the Behavioral Science Consulting Group for the HIV/AIDS Network Coordination (HANC) and has led domestic and international studies with a particular focus in India and Africa. Dr. Safren has a strong history of mentoring and was a recipient of an NIMH K24 for mentoring.

Maria L Alcaide, MD

Dr. Alcaide is an Infectious Diseases specialist, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at the University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine. Her research interest is in the field of HIV and women. She is the recipient of a NIH K23 Award and a CFAR developmental award to study vaginal practices and bacterial vaginosis in the HIV infected female population in Zambia and in Miami. She has also completed a CFAR developmental award with focus on immune activation in aging women. She is actively involved in the Miami CFAR developmental core, the Miami CFAR HIV and women program, and the Miami Women Interagency HIV Study (WIHS). Dr. Alcaide's goal is to enhance peer mentoring at the Miami CFAR with the goal of fostering junior investigators' ability to identify their mentoring skills and develop a peer support network.

Ronald C. Desrosiers, PhD

Dr. Desrosiers served as director of a research institute at Harvard Medical School for 12 years prior to his arrival at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine in 2013. Dr. Desrosiers serves as Director of Research Faculty Development and Professor in the Department of Pathology here at the Miller School of Medicine. Dr. Desrosiers was the leader of the team that discovered the simian immunodeficiency virus in 1984 and was senior author of its publication in Science in 1985. Since that time, he has made numerous seminal contributions using the SIV/macaque model to better understand the mechanisms by which HIV-1 and SIV cause disease and for vaccine development efforts. In 1990, he described the first-ever infectious, pathogenic molecular clone of this group of viruses and to this day it remains the clone of choice for controlled experiments in monkeys. Its 10,279 base-pair sequence can be manipulated in any way such that the effects on viral tropism, replicative capacity, immune avoidance, and disease propensity can be examined. Dr. Desrosiers has used this system to better understand the relative importance and functional contribution of the so-called nonessential genes and to better understand the evolution of antigenic escape variants. He has shown that live attenuated SIV deletion mutants can serve effectively as vaccines. To this day, live attenuated SIV remains the gold standard for vaccine protection against SIV in monkeys to which all other vaccine approaches are compared. This work provides hope that a vaccine against HIV will be possible. While he has previously tried a number of novel vaccine concepts using the SIV/macaque model, he is currently focused on two approaches: use of AAV vector to deliver antibodies with potent, broad neutralizing activity and the use of recombinant persistent herpesviruses as vaccine vectors. He is the discoverer of the KSHV-related gamma-2 herpesvirus of rhesus monkeys called rhesus monkey rhadinovirus that is being used for the latter efforts. He has been a strong advocate for basic and discovery research in the world's AIDS vaccine efforts.