

# OMRF receives \$2.1 million grant



**Sathish Srinivasan, Ph.D.**

The National Institutes of Health has awarded the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation \$2.1 million to investigate a potential genetic cause of degenerative heart valve disease.

"Like everything else in the body, heart valves degenerate as we age," said OMRF cardiovascular biologist Sathish Srinivasan, Ph.D., who received the four-year grant. "But some people experience it earlier than others."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart valve disease affects about 2.5% of the U.S. population and close to 13% of people aged 80 and older. Although medication can treat symptoms, no drugs exist to prevent the disease or repair damaged valves, Srinivasan said.

In the two most common forms of the condition, blood either leaks back into the heart or the valve becomes stiff and narrow, preventing blood from passing through.

Known genetic predisposition explains about 1 in 10 cases of heart valve disease, Srinivasan said. In those cases, researchers have identified the responsible genetic variants.

He believes that within the remaining 90%, a lifestyle factor such as smoking, poor diet or lack of exercise may flip a switch in people with unidentified genetic variants. "We suspect that reaction negatively affects a valve's ability to repair itself

and regenerate tissue during normal wear and tear," Srinivasan said.

Vascular valves, far smaller and more plentiful than heart valves, are found in blood vessels and lymphatic vessels. Srinivasan's lab was the first to observe that the genes that regulate the formation of vascular valves also are found in heart valves.

In his new study, his lab will use research models to determine what happens to heart valves when a gene known to be critical in vascular valves is turned off.

"We expect to find that the absence of this gene causes heart valves to age rapidly," Srinivasan said. "If our hypothesis is correct, we can focus on how the gene functions and eventually work toward therapies that prevent heart valves from aging prematurely."

OMRF scientist Lijun Xia, M.D., Ph.D., noted that degenerative heart valve disease can lead to heart failure or even death.

"Our current understanding of the various causes of this condition is incomplete," said Xia, who leads OMRF's Cardiovascular Biology Research Program. "Dr. Srinivasan and his team are making substantial headway on one particular cause, with a goal of someday identifying targets for new medications."

## Assessor's office notes fire damage

"The Wildfire damage in Oklahoma County on March 31st, 2023 is determined to be \$727,220 to the two properties impacted in Oklahoma County," Oklahoma County Assessor Larry Stein said.

Two property owners in the northern area of Oklahoma County lost their homes.

"Our crews and I were at the scene and it was a devastating loss. The fire destroyed two residences. There were volunteer cleanup crews working to remove debris including burned vehicles. A volunteer from the Baptist Convention said to me the metal was being recycled and he brought back \$600 for one of the victims and she explained how she can buy some clothes now because she lost everything," Stein said.

If you can, please reach out to your favorite charities who are responding to the tragedy.

"The Wildfires hit Logan County the hardest where 76 homes, manufactured homes and out buildings were affected. The Logan County Assessor's Office is still working to determine the total damage. The fires started in Logan County and thanks to area fire fighters and county emergency personnel by the time the fires crossed into Oklahoma County they were beginning to be contained. It was the hard work of the firefighting crews that may have helped prevent more damage in Oklahoma County," Stein said.

Our office documents the damage and will reduce the value which will reduce the property tax obligation of the property owners for the current year. The legislation allowing this authority was written and supported by assessors to address natural disasters at any time during the calendar year.



**Kari Hoffines**

## Lawyer named to panel

The shareholders of Crowe & Dunlevy have named Edmond attorney Kari Hoffines to serve on the firm's Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee is responsible for managing all aspects of the firm's day-to-day business operations.

Hoffines is a member of the firm's Real Estate and Banking & Financial Institutions Practice Groups. She is a graduate of Oklahoma City University School of Law and earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Central Oklahoma.

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