

Encephalitis, infectious diseases and climate change

TUESDAY 29 APRIL 2025, 2.00-4.00PM (BST)

Meet the Chair and Speakers

CHAIR: Dr James Sejvar

University of Pittsburgh and, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center



Dr Sejvar obtained his medical degree from Dartmouth Medical School in Hanover, USA. He received his training in neurology at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, USA, completing his residency there. He then did a fellowship in applied field epidemiology through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Epidemic Intelligence Service. Following completion of the program, he remained at CDC, where he led the Neuroepidemiology Unit at CDC's Divisions of High-Consequence Pathogens and Pathology. He is board-certified in neurology, with an area of focus in infectious diseases. His current research focus centers on the epidemiology, pathogenesis, clinical features, and outcomes of infections of the nervous system, including encephalitis. He practices at University of Pittsburgh Physicians, Department of Neurology.

Assoc Professor Kiran Thakur

Columbia University Irving Medical Center - New York Presbyterian Hospital, USA



Dr Kiran Thakur is the Herbert Irving Associate Professor of Neurology at Columbia University Irving Medical Center – New York Presbyterian Hospital. She leads the Program in Neuroinfectious Diseases at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. After graduating from the Harvard Neurology Residency Training Program, Dr Thakur completed post-doctoral fellowship training in neuroinfectious diseases and neuroimmunology at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. She has a specialised interest in viral encephalitis, and emerging pathogens, and collaborates with scientists globally on the surveillance, diagnosis, and management of neuroinfectious diseases. In addition to her scientific efforts, Dr Thakur serves as a neurology consultant for the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control and the Pan American Health Organization.

Encephalitis International

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Professor M Netravathi

National Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (NIMHANS); Bangalore, India



Dr Netravathi research interest are demyelinating disorders –MS, NMO, MOG, autoimmune encephalitis, neuroinfections – TBM, NCC, encephalitis, HIV-related neurological disorders and adrenoleukodystrophy. She has several scientific publications in various journals (175), book chapters (21) and H-index= 24 and i10index= 47.

Dr Netravathi is task force member for WHO in Meningitis Guidelines and Indian Neuroinfection Guidelines; convener of Indian Autoimmune section (2023 onwards); part of the National MS (Multiple sclerosis) Task Force; founding member – MDSI (Movement Disorder Society of India) and part of NIHR Global health research group on Brain Infections.

Professor Saraji Wijesekara

University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJP)/Teaching Hospital Colombo South, Sri Lanka



Professor Wijesekara studied at the University of Colombo before becoming a Consultant in Paediatric Neurology at Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Saleha (RIPAS) Hospital in Brunei. She is currently a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Medical Sciences at USJP and a consultant paediatric neurologist at the Sri Lanka Ministry of Health.

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Assist Prof Natasha Tilston

Department of Microbiology and Immunology, Indiana University School of Medicine, USA



Dr Tilston is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at Indiana University School of Medicine. Her research focuses on understanding the mechanisms driving bunyavirus reassortment and its implications for viral pathogenicity. She earned her PhD in Molecular Virology from the University of St Andrews, Scotland, under the mentorship of the late Professor Richard M. Elliott, a pioneer in the bunyavirus field.

In 2016, she began her postdoctoral research in the lab of Professor Paul W. Duprex, initially at the NEIDL, Boston University, and later at the CVR, University of Pittsburgh. Dr Tilston was awarded a K99 grant in 2020 to investigate bunyavirus biology, leading to the establishment of her independent research program in late 2022.

Professor Lance Turtle

Clinical Infection, Microbiology and Immunology, University of Liverpool, UK



Professor Lance Turtle trained in medicine at University College London where he was an early student on the UCL MB PhD course, working on glycolipids from *M. tuberculosis*. He did higher specialist training in infectious diseases in London and Liverpool, and in 2009 was awarded a Wellcome fellowship to study T cell responses to [Japanese encephalitis virus \(JEV\)](#) in India. Since then, he has developed expertise in arbovirus infections, working on the immunological interactions between flaviviruses (e.g. JEV, dengue, yellow fever) with [Professor Tom Solomon](#) (Liverpool) and Professor Paul Klenerman (Oxford).

In 2017, Dr Turtle was awarded a Wellcome career development fellowship, again studying adaptive immunity to Japanese encephalitis. More recently, he has started working on other arboviruses, including [Zika](#) and Chikungunya viruses. Current research interests include pathogenesis of arboviral disease, neurological infections, immunity to infection, vaccines and immune cross reactivity between flaviviruses.

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