

The Friedman Brain Institute

2025 FBI Research Scholars

On behalf of the Philanthropic Leadership Council of The Friedman Brain Institute, we are pleased to announce the 2025 recipients of The FBI Research Scholars Awards.

Ram Sundaram and Preethi Krishna Research Scholar Award



Abha K Rajbhandari, PhD
Assistant Professor, Psychiatry
and Neuroscience



Filip Swirski, PhD
Professor, Medicine, Cardiology, Diagnostic,
Molecular & Interventional Radiology and
Immunology & Immunotherapy

Delineating the role of a brain to heart pathway in stress-related behavioral and cardiac function.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, affecting both mental well-being and heart health. This connection is linked to an imbalance in the autonomic nervous system, where the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) raises heart rate, while the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), through the brainstem's nucleus ambiguus (NAmb), lowers it. PTSD patients often have heightened SNS activity and reduced PNS activity, leading to elevated resting heart rate and lower heart rate variability. Our research focuses on a key neuropeptide in the NAmb-to-heart pathway to understand how it regulates stress-related cardiac and behavioral responses, informing potential new therapeutic avenues for PTSD-related cardiac dysfunctions.



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