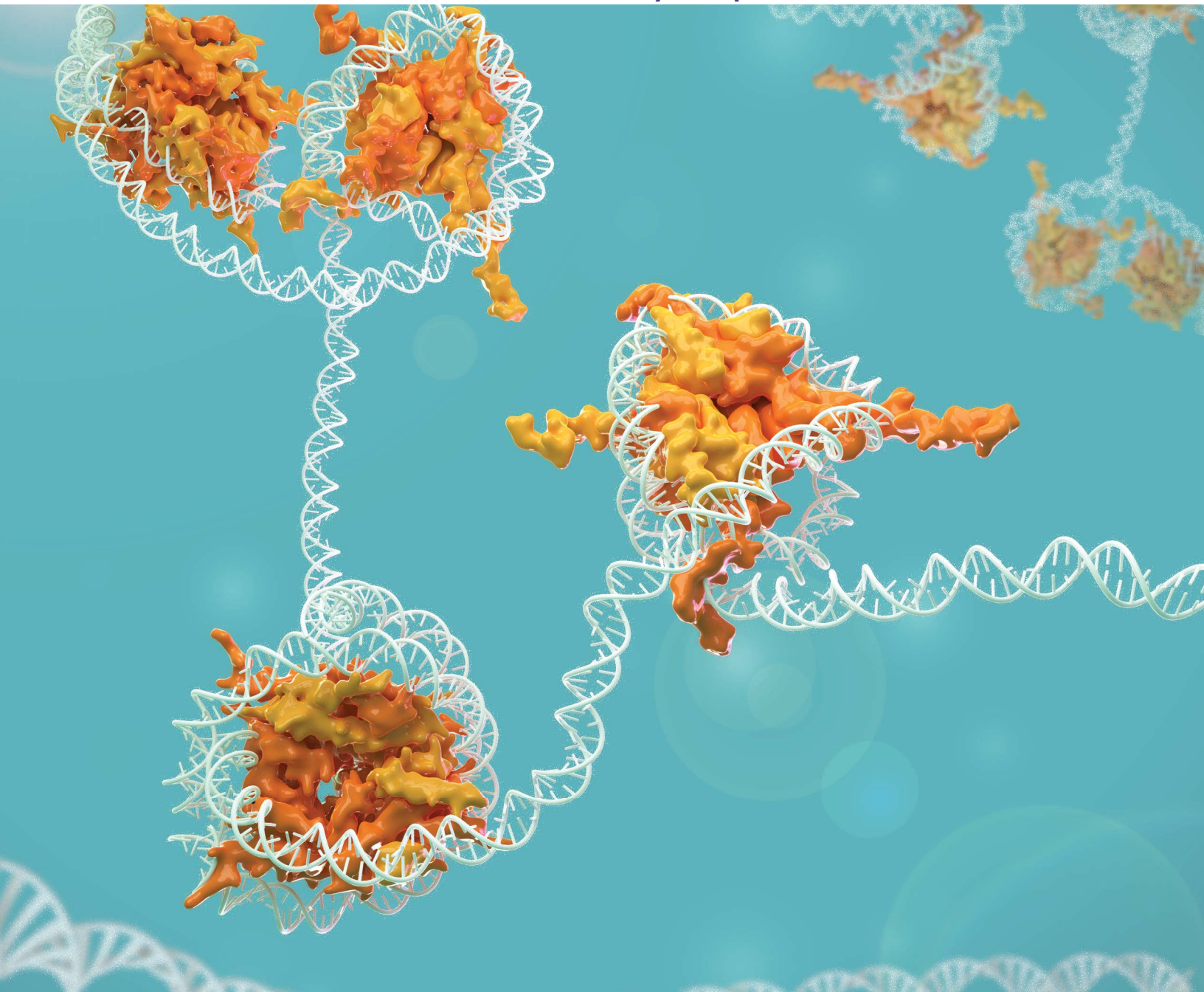


NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY FEINBERG SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
**DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY
AND MOLECULAR GENETICS**

Chair Newsletter January-September 2026



Newsletter 2026

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ON THE COVER.

Cover design by Brianna Monroe, MS.



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

“Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.”

—Pelé (Soccer’s first worldwide superstar, inspiring fans across races and nations and even prompting a brief civil war ceasefire in Nigeria so rival troops could watch him play.)

I recently shared with you the news of our Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics department ranking #27 in funding among the top 100 biochemistry departments in the United States by the National Institute of Health. This ranks us ahead of the biochemistry departments at Duke, Harvard, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins. When I came to Northwestern in 2014 to start the department, it was not even in the top 100. This progress was made by recruiting each of our notable and outstanding faculty here to the department; it is defined by each of their labs consisting of each of you, the committed lab members. Our department’s progress stands on the foundation of each of you showing up to pursue the studies being carried out in the department; learning, working, creating, and doing it together. Congratulations!

There is so much more to do so I hope that each of you continue to be good stewards of the resources trusted to us to do great science and build great programs at Northwestern...research that is making a difference. Thank you.

Ali Shilatifard

Professor and Chairman



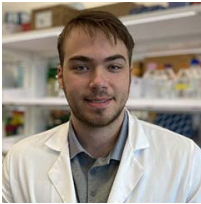
Below please find many of the great accomplishments of our BMG colleagues from the past 9 months.



Shannon Lauberth, PhD- *Lauberth Lab*

Pat & Shirley Ryan Family Research Acceleration Fund award highlighted in Northwestern's news

[Read More](#)



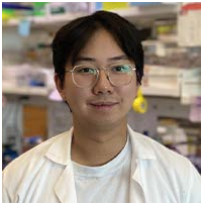
Ben Howard- *Shilatifard Lab*

Accepted into Van Andel Institute Graduate Program



Rukia Liaqat- *Shilatifard Lab*

Accepted into Medical School



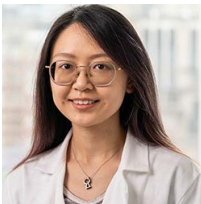
Lawrence Lin- *Shilatifard Lab*

Accepted into Medical School



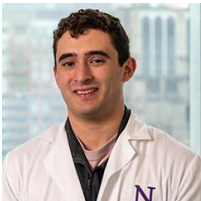
Isabella Mroczek- *Shilatifard Lab*

Accepted into Northwestern Medical school



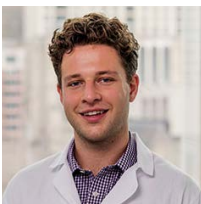
Ruxuan Qiu- *Shilatifard Lab*

Accepted into University of Pittsburgh Program



Luke St. John- *Shilatifard Lab*

Accepted into University of Wisconsin Madison Graduate Program

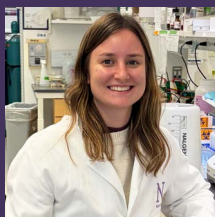


Jacob Zeidner- *Shilatifard Lab*

Accepted into Northwestern Graduate School

NEW HIRES

Ben-Sahra Lab



Vera Skafar Amen, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow

Eichner Lab



Angel Aponte
Research Technologist



Simon Botbol
Research Technologist

Lauberth Lab



Connie Lin
Master's Student



Ava Neuman
Master's Student

Lauberth Lab Cont.



Camellia Qiang
Master's Student



Hannah Rieder
Master's Student



Tae Seong, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow



Isabel Stickney
Undergraduate Researcher



Lauren Wilson
Undergraduate Researcher



Shuoying Zhang
Master's Student

Li Lab



Brian Pallares
Research Technologist

Mendillo Lab



Alexandra Morse
Graduate Student



Charlotte Shi
High School Student

Peek Lab



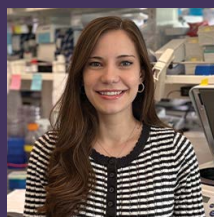
Shashank Pinnamaneni
Research Technologist

NEW HIRES CONT.

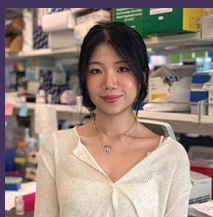
Shilatifard Lab



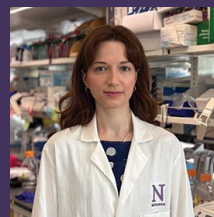
Grant Anderson
Graduate
Student



Emma Feltz
Research
Technologist



Alexa Jang
Research
Technologist



**Aleksandra
Janowska, PhD**
Postdoctoral
Fellow



Ashley Johnson
Administrative
Assistant



Erin Mannion
Research
Technologist

Shilatifard Lab Cont.



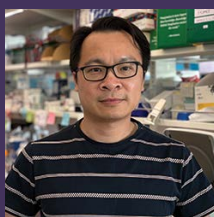
**Libi Marchenkov-
Flam, PhD**
Postdoctoral
Fellow



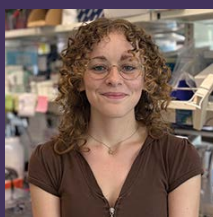
Ozlem Neyisci
Graduate
Student



Shahin Sharif,
PhD
Postdoctoral
Fellow



**Cheng-Kai
Shiau, PhD**
Research
Associate

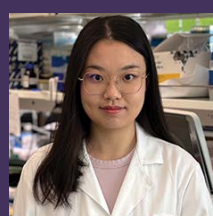


Nina Smith
Research
Technologist



Tania Tao
Undergraduate
Researcher

Shilatifard Lab Cont.

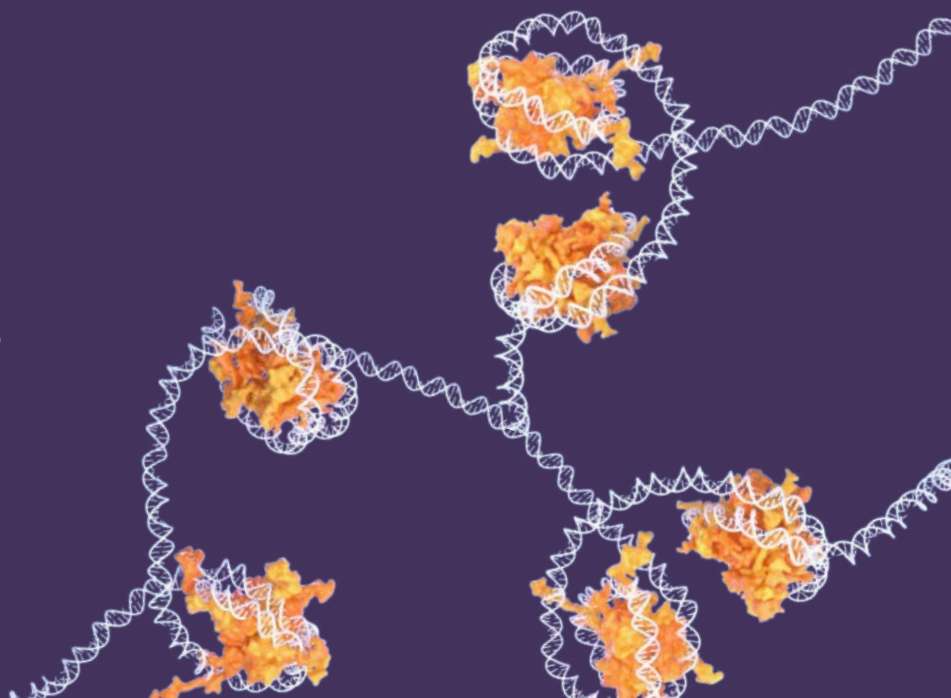


Xinyue Tina Li
Graduate
Student

Titos Vivancos Lab



Emily Wessel, PhD
Postdoctoral
Fellow





GRANTS AND AWARDS

Mushtaq Nengroo, Postdoctoral Fellow- Ben-Sahra Lab
Received NCI K99 award (with Marc Mendillo Lab)

Lillian Eichner, Assistant Professor- Eichner Lab
NCI R01 Principal Investigator
Title: Defining determinants of the lineage identity program in lung cancer and therapeutic resistance

Lillian Eichner, Assistant Professor- Eichner Lab
Cancer Research Foundation Young Investigator Award

Lillian Eichner, Assistant Professor- Eichner Lab
Respiratory Health Association Lung Cancer Grant

Allegra Minor, Graduate Student- Eichner Lab
T32 NCI Carcinogenesis predoctoral fellowship

Allegra Minor, Graduate Student- Eichner Lab
Inducted into the Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society

Shannon Lauberth, Associate Professor- Lauberth Lab
2026 Pat & Shirley Ryan Family Research Acceleration Fund award to develop a first-in-class small molecule that selectively inhibits the RNA-binding function of topoisomerase I (TOP1)

Shannon Lauberth, Associate Professor- Lauberth Lab
Renewed support for NIGMS Maximizing Investigators' Research Award (MIRA/R35). This award supports the laboratory's research into fundamental mechanisms connecting transcription, RNA biology, genome regulation, and disease

Shannon Lauberth, Associate Professor- Lauberth Lab
Invited to serve as a standing member of the NIH Molecular Cancer Therapeutics B Study Section

Shannon Lauberth, Associate Professor- Lauberth Lab
Invited to present the laboratory's research at the Wistar Institute, the 2026 AAPS PharmSci 360 meeting, and the H Foundation Basic Science Symposium

Yaping Liu, Assistant Professor- Liu Lab
Liz and Eric Lefkofsky Innovation Research Awards. Principal Investigator



GRANTS AND AWARDS, CONT.

Yaping Liu, Assistant Professor- Liu Lab

Department of War. Triapine in Combination with Temozolomide and Radiation for the Treatment of Patients With Newly Diagnosed Glioblastoma. co-I: Liu. 2026-2030

Yoga Haribabu, Graduate Student- Mendillo Lab

Appointed to the Carcinogenesis Training Program (associated with the Carcinogenesis T32)

Mushtaq Nengroo, Postdoctoral Fellow- Mendillo Lab

Received NCI K99 award (with Issam Ben-Sahra Lab)

Marc Mendillo, Associate Professor- Mendillo Lab

Received the Liz and Eric Lefkofsky Innovation Research Award

Clara Peek, Assistant Professor- Peek Lab

R01 renewal award from the NIDDK to study the role of circadian rhythms in muscle during obesity

Marta Iwanaszko, Research Associate Professor- Shilatifard Lab

NIH 5R50CA265372-05

Title: Computational Approaches for Studying Transcription Elongation Control in Cancer

David Lowe, Postdoctoral Fellow- Shilatifard Lab

NRSA T32 Epigenetics, Metabolism and Cancer Training Grant

Julian Segert, Postdoctoral Fellow- Shilatifard Lab

NRSA T32 Epigenetics, Metabolism and Cancer Training Grant

Ali Shilatifard, Chair, Director, and Professor- Shilatifard Lab

NIH 5P30CA060553-32 Principal Investigator

Cancer Epigenetics and Nuclear Dynamics

Ali Shilatifard, Chair, Director, and Professor- Shilatifard Lab

NIH 5R35CA197569-11 Principal Investigator

Mutations of Chromatin and its Modifying Machineries in Malignancies

Ali Shilatifard, Chair, Director, and Professor- Shilatifard Lab

NIH 1R01CA298333-01A1 Principal Investigator

Somatic Truncation Mutations of the Histone Methyltransferase MLL4 Alter Its Subcellular Localization in Bladder Cancer: Mechanistic Insight and Targeted Therapeutic Approach

BEN-SAHRA LABORATORY

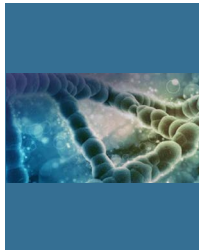


Kahi M, Mazza A, Batistic L, Pujalte-Martin M, Tiroille V, Vincent A, Murdaca J, Trapani L, Kousteridou P, Benaceur O, Belaid A, Irondelle M, Thomas E, Boscagli C, Bertrand P, Carr HS, Larbret F, Baudalet E, Audebert S, Pisani DF, Baron S, Camoin L, Carlier M, Durand M, Ambrosetti D, Chen Y, Diaz JJ, Jacquel A, **Ben-Sahra I**, Mazure NM, Peraldi P, Bost F.

Hypusination of the translation factor eIF5A regulates mitochondrial tRNA processing to promote prostate cancer aggressiveness.

Nature Communications, 03/2026

 [Read more](#)

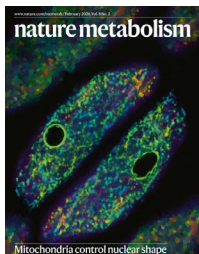


Vidal-Cruchez O, **Ben-Sahra I**.

The oncogenic control of nucleotide synthesis.

Oncogenesis, 03/2026

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Vidal-Cruchez O, **Ben-Sahra I**.

DHODH turns cytosolic, yet cells keep growing.

Nature Metabolism, 02/2026

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EICHNER LABORATORY



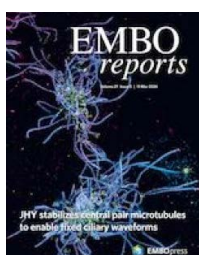
Van Bree BA, **Eichner LJ**.

The impactful role of the HDACs in the regulation of gene expression and as targets for disease therapy.

Science Advances, 06/2026

 [Read more](#)

FOLTZ LABORATORY



Bodner J, Vadlamani P, Lee AS, Helmin KA, Liu Q, Pratasenia AE, Horst MMA, Ravisankar S, Khurana S, Mendillo ML, Singer BD, Srivastava S, **Foltz DR**.

Human CRAMP1 specifically promotes the expression of histone H1 genes.

EMBO Reports, 02/2026

 [Read more](#)

LAUBERTH LABORATORY



Selvam K, Lu S, Messmer C, Pang Y, Biswas S, Khalil M, Zhang P, Tulaiha R, Zhou M-M, Kitamura T, **Laubert SM**, Blanco MA, Yang F-C, Affar EB, Zhao Z, Zeng L, Wang L, Kutateladze TG.

Recruitment of BRD4 to the ASXL1 genomic targets depends on the extra-terminal domain of BRD4.

Nature Communications, 02/2026

 [Read more](#)



Nitsch S, Coraor AE, Schauer T, Wu Y, Sun J, Möritz N, Funke J, Nagpal H, Chua GNL, Battistini F, **Laubert SM**, Richard E, Orozco M, Liu S, Desviat LR, Fierz B, Dietz H, Roeder RG, de Pablo JJ, Schneider R.

H4K16 acylations destabilize chromatin architecture and facilitate transcriptional response during metabolic perturbations.

Molecular Cell, 01/2026

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LI LABORATORY



Du Z, Alasady MJ, Mendillo ML, **Li L**.

Transcriptomic analysis of Rnq1 loss and prionization reveals alterations in translation pathways and energy metabolism.

Scientific Reports, 04/2026

 [Read more](#)

LIU LABORATORY



Li TT, Chen X, Wang F, Tang YA, Sim M, Xiao L, Jin WB, Shi H, Ma JY, Yang X, **Liu Y**, Sorbara MT, Guo CJ.

Transferable genetic toolsets for nonmodel gut Clostridia enable in vivo reversible control of metabolite production.

Nature Biotechnology, 08/2026

 [Read more](#)



Fu H, Liang J, Huang K, Zhu W, Zhang L, Bandaru R, Venkatesh S, Walker E, Wang L, **Liu Y**, Xia Z.

Circulating cell-free DNA methylation profiles as candidate noninvasive multiple sclerosis biomarkers.

Communications Medicine, 08/2026

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LIU LABORATORY CONT.

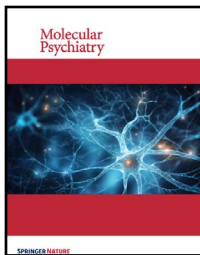


Bandaru R, Fu H, Zheng H, Liang J, Wang L, Gulati S, Hinrichs BH, Teng M, Zhang B, Kocherginsky M, Lin D-C, Hildeman DA, Worden FP, Old M, Dunlap NE, Kaczmar JM, Gillison ML, El-Gamal D, Wise Draper T, **Liu Y**.

Genome-wide variation in cell-free DNA end-motif entropy predicts immunotherapy response in head and neck cancer.

J Clin Invest., 07/2026

 [Read more](#)

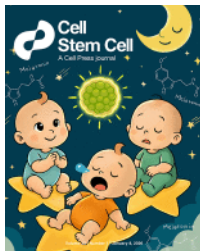


Lu L, Sarkar AK, Dao L, Liu Y, Ma C, Thwin PH, Chang X, Yoshida G, Li A, Wang C, Westerkamp C, Schmitt L, Chelsey M, Stephanie M, Zhao Y, **Liu Y**, Wang X, Zhu L-Q, Liu D, Tchieu J, Miyakoshi M, Zhu H, Gross C, Pedapati E, Salomonis N, Erickson C, Guo Z.

The m6A-mediated epi-transcriptomic dysregulation drives synaptic dysfunction in fragile X.

Mol Psychiatry, 07/2026

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Zhang Y, Tan C, Liu Z, Mao X, Jiang C, Mohammed AN, Li X, Lu R, Wang A, Maihemuti W, Pek N, Fu H, Milbes O, Pandrangi K, Johnson CP, Sekar V, **Liu Y**, Lai L, Pryhuber GS, Kalinichenko VV, Miao Y, Guo M, Gu M.

Rebalancing NTRK2 isoforms promotes vascular regeneration in bronchopulmonary dysplasia.

Cell Stem Cell, 01/2026

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MENDILLO LABORATORY

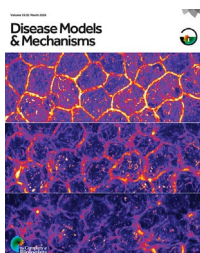


Du Z, Alasady MJ, Mendillo ML, **Li L**.

Transcriptomic analysis of Rnq1 loss and prionization reveals alterations in translation pathways and energy metabolism.

Scientific Reports, 04/2026

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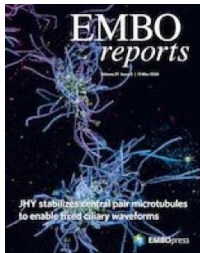
Smith RS, **Mendillo ML**.

Heat shock transcription factors in development and disease.

Dis Model Mechanisms, 03/2026

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MENDILLO LABORATORY CONT.

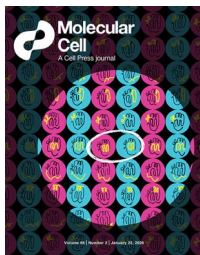


Bodner J, Vadlamani P, Lee AS, Helmin KA, Liu Q, Pratasenia AE, Horst MMA, Ravisankar S, Khurana S, **Mendillo ML**, Singer BD, Srivastava S, Foltz DR.

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EMBO Reports, 02/2026

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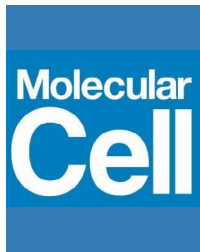
Halim S, Sebastian RM, Liivak KE, Patrick JE, Hui T, Amici DR, Giacomelli AO, Rios P, Butty VL, Hahn WC, Sánchez-Rivera FJ, **Mendillo ML**, Lin YS, Shoulders MD.

Dominant-negative TP53 mutations potentiated by the HSF1-regulated proteostasis network.

Molecular Cell, 01/2026

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SHILATIFARD LABORATORY



Lowe DD, **Shilatifard A.**

Transcriptional kinases drive gene expression network plasticity.

Molecular Cell, 08/2026

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Zhao Z, Karunanidhi M, Gold S, St John L, Liaqat R, Iwanaszko M, Bigas C, Uchida E, Mineji K, Watanabe J, Benitah SA, Hashizume R, Mishra RK, **Shilatifard A.**

FCD-11: A First-in-Class COMPASS Inhibitor in Cancer Therapeutics.

Preprint, 07/2026

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Parast S, Das M, He Y, Wang S, Gold S, Howard B, Zeidner J, Philips C, Ben-Sahra I, Ramani V, Iwanaszko M, **Shilatifard A.**

Diminished transcriptional activity and splicing changes drive gene length-biased rewiring in the aging transcriptome.

Proc Natl Acad Sci USA, 06/2026

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SHILATIFARD LABORATORY CONT.

nature reviews
cancer

June 2026



Zhao Z, **Shilatifard A.**

Enhancer and metabolic rewiring by KMT2C-COMPASS or KMT2D-COMPASS family loss in cancer creates druggable vulnerabilities.

Nature Reviews Cancer, 06/2026

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Chakrabarty RP, Van Vranken JG, Aoi Y, Poor TA, McElroy GS, Vasan K, Soliman SHA, Iwanaszko M, Grant RA, Howard BC, Reczek CR, Chandel AD, Kahl M, Xu Z, Helmin KA, Jin Q, Wang D, Gao P, Blum JLE, Sebo ZL, Yue F, Ma YC, Davidson SM, Gygi SP, Weinberg SE, Singer BD, Han S, **Shilatifard A**, Chandel NS.

Mitochondrial L-2-hydroxyglutarate is a physiological signalling metabolite.

Nature, 05/2026

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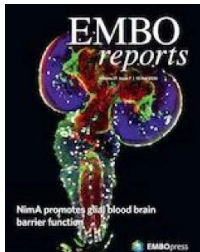


Soliman SHA, De Fabritiis S, Iwanaszko M, Lin LA, Das M, Gold S, Andersen GD, Chakrabarty RP, Chandel NS, **Shilatifard A.**

Hypoxia-responsive interaction between P-TEFb, BHLHE40, and Tim8-Tim13 regulates hypoxic gene transcription.

Science Advances, 05/2026

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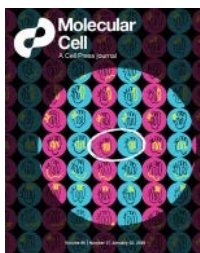


Nakayama C, Fang Q, Daigaku Y, Aoi Y, Ito S, Takahashi M, Shimatani R, Minamisawa T, Ozturk Y, Kimura H, **Shilatifard A**, Tellier M, Nojima T.

NELF prevents transcriptional readthrough into DNA replication zones in cancer cells.

EMBO Reports, 04/2026

 [Read more](#)



Zheng B, Qiu R, Gold S, Iwanaszko M, Aoi Y, Howard BC, Das M, **Shilatifard A.**

BRD2 bridges TFIID and MOF-H4K16ac-containing nucleosomes to promote transcriptional initiation.

Molecular Cell, 01/2026

 [Read more](#)

WANG LABORATORY



Josiah Hiu-yuen Wong, Shaojun Yu, Yang Cheng, Ping Wang, Hengqiang Zhao, Yihao Fu, Huijue Lyu, Xintong Chen, Alok Swaroop, Ji Peng, **Lu Wang***, Feng Yue*.

SUV39H1/2-mediated H3K9me3 restricts ERV-induced immune response in Acute Myeloid Leukemia.

Nature Communications. In Press



Luvisotto A, Tulaiha R, **Wang L.**

Subtype-specific dependencies and therapeutic opportunities in small cell lung cancer.

Science Advances, 03/2026

 [Read more](#)



Yi Y, Li Y, Wang R, Yu X, Liu Q, Yum C, Zhang Y, Qiao Y, Szczepanski A, Wu S, Li Q, Fazli L, Shen J, Wang X, Li X, Mu P, Schaeffer EM, Hundley HA, Niu H, Chinnaiyan AM, **Wang L**, Shi J, Jin J, Dong X, Zhao W, Chen K, Cao Q.

A dual role of EZH2 in regulating A-to-I RNA editing and mRNA stability through ADAR.

Nature Communications, 03/2026

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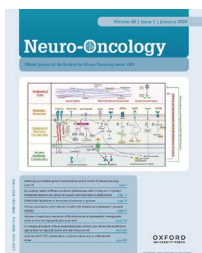


Selvam K, Lu S, Messmer C, Pang Y, Biswas S, Khalil M, Zhang P, Tulaiha R, Zhou M-M, Kitamura T, Lauberth SM, Blanco MA, Yang F-C, Affar EB, Zhao Z, Zeng L, **Wang L**, Kutateladze TG.

Recruitment of BRD4 to the ASXL1 genomic targets depends on the extra-terminal domain of BRD4.

Nature Communications, 02/2026

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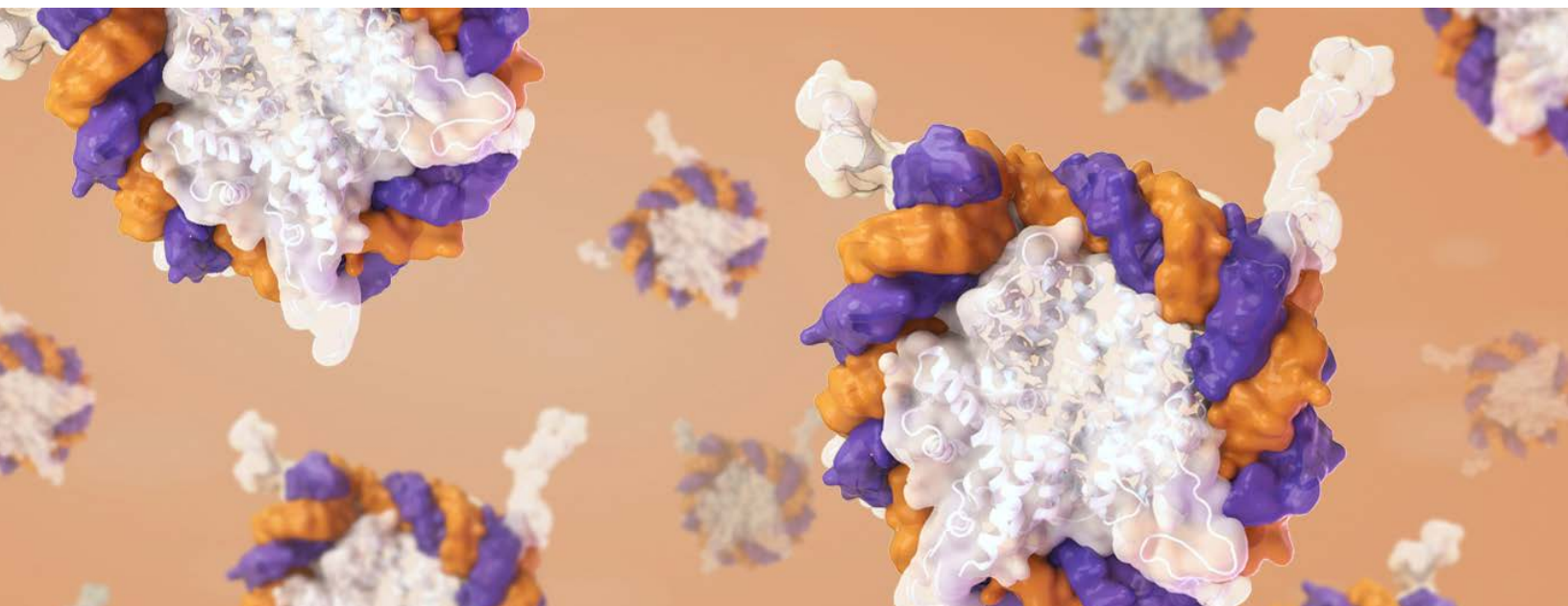
Heba Ali, Ningjia Zhou, Li Chen, Levi van Hijfte, Rima Tulaiha, Vivekanudeep Karri, Yalu Zhou, Karl Habashy, Victor A. Arrieta, Kwang-Soo Kim, Joseph Duffy, Ragini Yeeravalli, Deanna M. Tiek, Xiao Song, Snehasis Mishra, Catalina Lee-chang, Atique Ahmed, **Lu Wang**, Dieter Henrik Heiland, Adam M. Sonabend, Crismita Dmello.

YBX1&YBX3 as novel targets to potentiate immune checkpoint blockade response in gliomas.

Neuro-Oncology, 01/2026

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BMG RETREAT 2026



Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics
Simpson Querrey Biomedical Research Center
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Simpson Querrey, 7th Floor
Chicago, IL 60611

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Feinberg School of Medicine