



# New NIH R21 grant at UPR School of Medicine!



The Department of Anatomy & Neurobiology and the Department of Microbiology of the School of Medicine of the Medical Sciences Campus of the University of Puerto Rico are proud to announce that Associate Professors **Dr. Demetrio Sierra Mercado** and **Dr. Filipa Godoy Vitorino**, have been awarded an R21 research grant by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a new collaborative project.

The award comes from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) for their project titled “*Effects of environmental contaminants on anxiety-like and fear behaviors, and gut-microbiota in rodents*”. The grant is for \$275,000 direct costs + \$134,750 indirect costs totaling \$409,750 and runs from September 2022 through August 2024. This pioneer project aims to study the effects of a common herbicide on activity in anxiety and fear promoting regions of the brain. It will also detangle changes associated to the gut microbiome, as microbes have been deemed essential to the function of the emotional and cognitive centers of the brain.

This award reveals the great organizational and collaborative capacity at the UPR School of Medicine and its basic science Departments to research the fundamental pathways in the biomedical sciences. The achievement also stems as the result of the creativity and commitment of students, especially Dr. Mauricio Cáceres Chacón and Dr. Osmarie Martínez Guzmán, members of Dr. Sierra’s research team to whom Dr. Sierra dedicates much attention as an excellent mentor.

Congratulations to Dr. Sierra and his research team on this important and significant achievement, and to the Institute of Neurobiology’s COBRE Program, the Puerto Rico Center for Environmental Neuroscience (PRCEN from NSF), the RCMI Program, the Deanship of Medicine and Chancellor’s Office for providing resources and needed support!

