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Denver Health Physician Receives NIH K23 Award to Study Ketamine Therapy for Alcohol Use Disorder

DENVER (Oct. 13, 2026) — Dale Terasaki, MD, an internal medicine physician and addiction medicine specialist at Denver Health, has received a five-year Mentored Patient-Oriented Research Career Development Award (K23) from the [National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) to study whether ketamine therapy added on to other support can help hospitalized patients with severe alcohol use disorder begin their recovery after discharge.

The project, "Ketamine Therapy for Alcohol Use Disorder: Real-World Insights and Hospital-Based Clinical Trial," will include a clinical trial at Denver Health expected to begin in 2027. Researchers will compare higher and lower doses of ketamine administered during hospitalization and follow participants for four weeks after discharge, examining alcohol use and alcohol-related hospital readmissions.

The research builds on a 2021 pilot study led by Terasaki at Denver Health that found promising signals that ketamine may reduce alcohol-related hospital readmissions.

"Patients with severe alcohol use disorder often leave the hospital highly motivated to make a change, but the period immediately after discharge can be incredibly difficult," Terasaki said. "We're interested in whether ketamine can help create an opportunity for addiction recovery during that particularly high-risk period. This study will help us better understand whether this approach works and whether it could become another tool in our treatment options."

The K23 award will provide Terasaki with dedicated research training and mentorship as he works toward an independent clinical research career.

"The K23 award is an important accomplishment for Terasaki and an exciting opportunity for Denver Health," said Yael Schenker, MD, MAS, chief academic officer at Denver Health. "His research addresses an important need for patients with severe alcohol use disorder while also strengthening Denver Health's capacity to conduct patient-centered clinical research and train



the next generation of clinical researchers. As an academic safety-net health system, Denver Health is committed to advancing research and education while fostering a learning environment that brings together clinicians, researchers, learners and public health professionals to improve health for all. "

Terasaki joined Denver Health's inpatient addiction consult service in 2019 following fellowship training in addiction medicine. The multidisciplinary service provides addiction treatment and support to hospitalized patients with severe substance use disorders.

"This is an opportunity to develop more research infrastructure at Denver Health and support others who may be interested in pursuing clinical research," Terasaki said.

The research is being conducted in collaboration with academic partners at the University of Colorado Anschutz and advances Denver Health's role as a leader in caring for patients with complex and high-risk health needs.

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About Denver Health

[Denver Health](#) is a comprehensive health and hospital system that provides high-quality care and proudly serves as the city's safety-net hospital. For more than 165 years, Denver Health has been guided by its mission to serve the people of Denver, to educate the next generation of healthcare professionals and to engage in research and community partnerships to better deliver the services that meet our patients' healthcare needs while strengthening our community.