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Dr. Rita Valentino to lead NIDA's division of neuroscience and behavior
Brings expertise in neurobiological foundation of substance use behaviors

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) at the National Institutes of Health welcomed Dr. Rita Valentino today as the Director of the NIDA Division of Neuroscience and Behavior. Dr. Valentino's career spans 26 years of academic, research, and leadership experience in pharmacology, psychiatry, and neurobiology. She previously directed the Stress Neurobiology Division within the Department of Anesthesiology at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and was a professor of anesthesiology and critical care at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia.



Dr. Rita Valentino

Dr. Valentino is known for her research on the effects of social stress at different developmental stages, and the impact of coping style on behavioral and cognitive health, and how this can determine vulnerability to substance use. Her research in opioid neuropharmacology and neurobiological mechanisms has not only illuminated sex differences related to stress, but has also revealed links between stress and opioid systems that underlie co-morbidity between stress disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use.

"Dr. Valentino's experience in brain research, electrophysiology, pharmacology and neurocircuitry of behavior will enable her to expand NIDA's basic neuroscience program," said NIDA Director Nora D. Volkow. "She will also be able to take advantage of advances from the [BRAIN Initiative](#) while expanding collaborations within NIDA to advance translational opportunities for the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders."

"I am honored to be offered the position of Director of Neuroscience and Behavior at NIDA and thrilled to take it on. We are in a time when technological advances that ushered in the BRAIN Initiative can be directed towards elucidating the neurobiological underpinnings of the behaviors that define substance use," said Dr. Valentino. "I envision building research bridges between intramural and extramural research and between NIH institutes that share our scientific goals."

Dr. Valentino received her B.S. in pharmacy with highest distinction from the University of Rhode Island, Kingston, and her Ph.D. in Pharmacology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She completed her postdoctoral fellowship in neurobiology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, (1980-1981) and The Salk Institute, La Jolla, California (1981-1983). She has received academic appointments at some of the most prestigious research and education institutions in the United States, including George Washington University Medical School, Washington, D.C., and University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Valentino fills the position left by Dr. Joni Rutter, who recently joined the NIH Office of the Director last year. Dr. Roger Little has been serving as the DNB Acting Director since February 2016.

“I want to express my full-hearted appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Little, who has played an important role in promoting internal collaborations and in expanding NIDA’s interactions with NIH institutes and initiatives,” added Dr. Volkow.

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About the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world’s research on the health aspects of drug use and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy, improve practice, and advance addiction science. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found at www.drugabuse.gov, which is now compatible with your smartphone, iPad or tablet. To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA’s DrugPubs research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or email requests to drugpubs@nida.nih.gov. Online ordering is available at drugpubs.drugabuse.gov. NIDA’s media guide can be found at www.drugabuse.gov/publications/media-guide/dear-journalist, and its easy-to-read website can be found at www.easyread.drugabuse.gov. You can follow NIDA on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

About NIDA DNB: NIDA’s Division of Neuroscience and Behavior (DNB) applies state-of-the-art science and technologies to advance our understanding of the mechanisms mediating drug use and addiction. DNB identifies the behavioral processes, neural circuits and connections underlying drug addiction behaviors; and encourages cross-cutting priorities in the areas of HIV/AIDS, pain, sex differences, novel technologies, and Big Data in computational neuroscience. NIDA’s organizational chart can be seen here: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/organization>

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation’s medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

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