31st Annual Midwest Stress Response and Molecular Chaperone Conference

Saturday, January 17, 2026
Hosted by Northwestern University
Northwestern University
Pancoe Abbott Auditorium & Cafe
2200 Campus Drive
Evanston, Illinois 60208

Program Chairs
Randal Halfmann, *Stowers Institute for Medical Research*

Emily Sontag, *Department of Biological Sciences, Marquette University*

Meeting Organizers
Rick Morimoto, *Department of Molecular Biosciences, Northwestern University*

Rebecca Phend, *Department of Molecular Biosciences, Northwestern University*

PROGRAM

All times in CST

8:00 - 9:00 AM	**Continental Breakfast**
9:00 - 9:05 AM	**Opening remarks- Rick Morimoto, Northwestern University**
Session I-	**Chaperone Networks**
Session Chair:	**Danish Khan, Virginia Tech and Thomas Stoeger, Northwestern University**
9:05 - 9:20 AM	J-domain proteins' distinct interactions with Hsp70 impact condensate dispersal **Estefania Cuevas-Zepeda** *University of Chicago*
9:20 - 9:35 AM	Elucidating Hsp90's Role in Buffering Mutations in Client Proteins Which Function in rRNA Synthesis and Processing **Isabel Hunsberger** *University of Idaho*
9:35 - 9:50 AM	Chaperone regulation of orphan ribosomal protein condensates **Maya Igarashi** *University of Chicago*

9:50 - 10:05 AM Mechanosensor-mediated Hsp70 phosphorylation orchestrates the landscape of the heat shock response

Siddhi Omkar
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Session II- **Regulation of Proteostasis**

Session Chair: **Stephanie Moon, University of Michigan and Tony Pedley, University of Iowa**

10:05 - 10:20 AM Epigenetic control of proteostasis dynamics by RBBP5–mediated H3K4 trimethylation

Bokai Zhu
The University of Pittsburg

10:20 - 10:35 AM Predictive gene expression connects environmental sensing to cell-fate determination

Leah Chaney Winner
University of Chicago

10:35 - 10:50 AM Defective TRAP1 chaperone-mediated Complex II assembly underlies the pathogenesis of SDHAF2-mutant disease

Gianna Mochi
SUNY Upstate Medical University

10:50 - 11:05 AM Heat shock factor 1 maintains mitochondrial proteostasis during copper-induced stress in pancreatic cancer cells

Rejina Shrestha
University of Toledo

11:05 - 11:20 AM **Coffee Break**

Session III- **When Proteostasis Fails**

Session Chair: **Caitlin Wong Hickernell, North Park University and Jian Li, New York Medical College**

11:20 - 11:35 AM Interindividual variation in proteostasis shapes phenotypic traits and stress resilience

Laura Bott
Northwestern University

11:35 - 11:50 PM TPR domain chaperone Sgt2 alters spatial sequestration of mutant huntingtin

Chloe Langridge
Marquette University

11:50 - 12:05 PM A multi-omic approach to HSF1 in the mammalian central nervous system reveals non-canonical roles in synaptic development, maintenance, and integrity

Nicholas Rozema
University of Minnesota

12:05 - 12:20 PM Flash talks: Lexie Berkowicz, Martin Duennwald, Stephanie Gates, Deepika Gaur, Rachael Halby, Joshua Mitchell, Stephanie Moon, Akshata Moorthy, Audrey Peng, Rocio Gomez-Pastor, Tulika Sharan, Shriram Venkatesan

12:20 – 12:30 PM **Group picture**

12:30 – 2:00 PM **Lunch**

1:00 – 2:45 PM **Poster Session**

Session IV- **Protein Degradation**

Session Chair: **Stephanie Gates, University of Missouri and Kuo-Hui Su, University of Toledo**

2:45 - 3:00 PM Deletion of the STI1 domain of yeast Dsk2 causes accumulation of proteasome substrates and enhances assembly of proteasome condensates

Emily Daniel
University of Kansas Medical Center

3:00 - 3:15 PM Proteasomal decline activates HRI kinase and triggers ISR through oxidative stress

Arya Menon
University of Michigan

3:15 - 3:30 PM E3 ligase recruitment by UBQLN2 protects substrates from proteasomal degradation

Sachini Thanthirige
University of Pittsburgh

3:30 - 3:45 PM Reexamining Translation as a Convergent Regulator of Amyloid Nucleation

Alex Von Schulze
Stowers Institute for Medical Research

Plenary session

3:45 - 3:50 PM **Introduction of Plenary Speaker by Randal Halfmann**

3:50 - 4:35 PM **Endoplasmic Reticulum Quality Control and Protein Conformational Diseases**

Jeffrey L. Brodsky
Director, Center for Protein Conformational Diseases
University of Pittsburgh

4:35 - 4:50 PM Q&A

4:50 - 5:00 PM **Closing Remarks by Emily Sontag**

5:00 - 6:30 PM **Reception w/food & beverages in the Pancoe Cafe**

This annual meeting is generously supported by The Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Institute for Biomedical Research.

We thank Sue Fox of Northwestern University for her assistance in planning and organizing this conference.