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UTSA Today

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Sibling researchers on Huntington's disease to speak at UTSA Nov. 10-11



Huntington's disease experts Nancy Wexler (top) and Alice Wexler

By [Christi Fish](#)
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(Nov. 5, 2009)--The [UTSA Neurosciences Institute](#) will present two lectures Nov. 10-11 by sibling scholars [Alice Wexler](#) and [Nancy Wexler](#), who are researching different aspects of Huntington's disease, which also has directly affected their family. The evening lectures are free and open to the public.

UCLA historian **Alice Wexler** will speak on "Stigma, Secrecy and Medical History: What Can We Learn from Huntington's Disease?" at 5 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 10 in the University Center Retama Auditorium (2.02.02) on the Main Campus. Free and open to the public, a reception will precede the lecture at 4:30 p.m.

Columbia University Professor **Nancy Wexler** will speak on "Expansions on a Dream: From Cause to Cure of Huntington's Disease" at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Nov. 11 in the Main Building Auditorium (0.104) on the Main Campus. Free and open to the public, a 5:30 p.m. reception will precede the lecture.

The joint lectures highlight two academic perspectives on Huntington's disease from gifted scholars who have had excruciatingly personal experience with the malady. Sisters Nancy Wexler and Alice Wexler are at risk of Huntington's disease, a degenerative disorder of the nervous system that took their mother's life.

Subsequently, both women have committed their personal and professional lives to advocacy and study of the fatal disease. Alice's work pursues the disease from historical and sociological perspectives; Nancy's work focuses on its biological basis and developing a cure.

In a compelling twist, Nancy Wexler's scientific quest led her to a remote jungle region of Venezuela, where she had the opportunity to live among and study the genes of a large, isolated family with a high instance of Huntington's disease. This seminal work led to the 1983 discovery of a genetic marker for Huntington's disease and to the 1993 discovery of the gene that causes the disease.

Alice Wexler, who is a fellow at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women accompanied her sister on this mission and wrote about it in her memoir, "Mapping Fate: A Memoir of Family, Risk and Genetic Research." Her subsequent work has focused on detailing the history and lived experience of the disease in the context of expanding medical knowledge.

The lecture by Alice Wexler is sponsored by the UTSA Neurosciences Institute in the College of Sciences, the UTSA American Studies Program and the UTSA Honors College. The lecture by Nancy Wexler is part of the UTSA Neurosciences Institute Distinguished Public Lecture Series.

For more information, contact [Salma Quraishi](#) at (210) 458-7493.

About the speakers

Nancy Wexler, president of the Hereditary Disease Foundation, is the Higgins Professor of Neuropsychology in the Departments of Neurology and Psychology at Columbia University's School of Physicians and Surgeons. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Albert Lasker Public Service Award in 1993. Her research has led to the development of a pre-symptomatic test for Huntington's disease and ultimately to the identification of the gene that causes the disease.

Historian **Alice Wexler** is the author of "Mapping Fate: A Memoir of Family, Risk and Genetic Research" and "The Woman Who Walked into the Sea: Huntington's and the Making of a Genetic Disease," both historical texts about Huntington's disease. For the latter, she won the 2009 American Medical Writers Association Medical Book Award. She is a research scholar at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women.

About the UTSA Neurosciences Institute

The UTSA Neurosciences Institute is a multidisciplinary research organization for integrated brain studies. The institute's mission is to foster a collaborative community of scientists committed to studying the biological basis of human experience and behavior, and the origin and treatment of nervous system diseases. Its areas of focus include nervous system development; neuronal and network computation; sensory, motor and cognitive function; learning and memory and the disease processes that impact them; implementing mathematical and computational tools in experimental neurobiology; and mathematical theory of neurons and nervous systems. Learn more or make a gift at the [UTSA Neurosciences Institute](#) Web site.

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