VOL. 11 SPRING 2026

DREXEL UNIVERSITY

College of Medicine

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

STATE OF THE SCIENCE:

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MEDICAL EDUCATION

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You've spent your career caring for others — and now, thoughtful estate planning allows you to extend that care to your loved ones and the causes that matter most to you. If you haven't recently, now is a good time to check your will and update it as needed, review the beneficiaries of your life insurance and retirement accounts, assign powers of attorney and organize important documents.

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DREXEL UNIVERSITY
College of Medicine
ALUMNI MAGAZINE

SPRING 2026
Vol. 11

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The *Drexel University College of Medicine Alumni Magazine* is published for the alumni and friends of the College by the Office of Institutional Advancement, 3141 Chestnut Street, Suite 310, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

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FEATURED

THE FIGHT AGAINST A RARE RETROVIRUS

HTLV-1 research at the College of Medicine aims to treat and raise awareness for a deadly virus.

ARTICLES

DEPARTMENTS

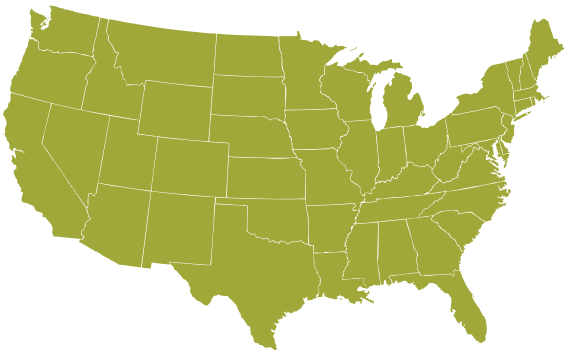
Susan Carleton Benes, MD, MCP '75, is part of a long family tradition of practicing medicine in areas of greatest need around the world.

Matches Made in Medical School

The class of 2025 had a triumphant Match Day, with a success rate of 94.4% in the National Residency Matching Program.

2025 Residency Match

Match by State



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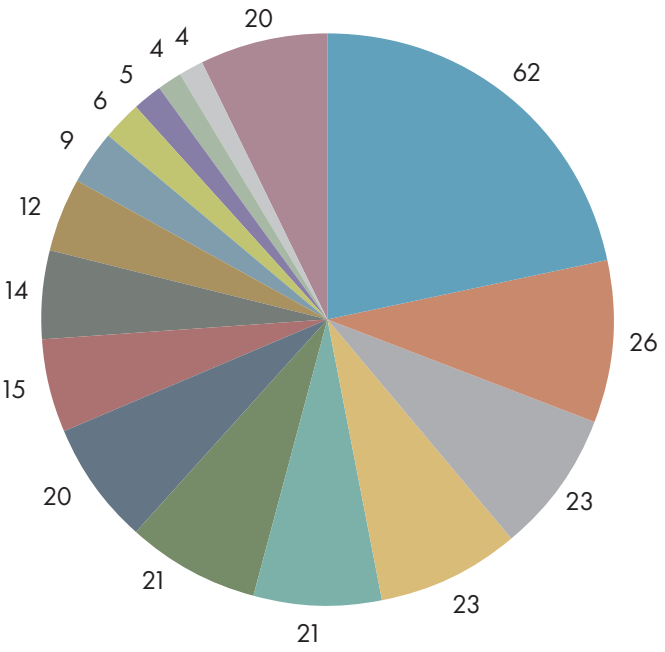
Match by Specialty

One-third of the class entered primary care specialties.



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Dear Alumni,

As we reflect on an extraordinary year for Drexel University College of Medicine, I am filled with gratitude for the strength and dedication of our community, including our tens of thousands of alumni making a difference around the globe. Together, we have celebrated historic milestones, welcomed new programs and students, and advanced initiatives that will shape our future.

2025 marked the 175th anniversary of the founding of Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, the 150th anniversary of St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, and the 30th anniversary of our Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine program. These legacies remind us of the resilience and innovation that define our College. Thank you to the alumni who attended Founders Day and other events celebrating these milestones.

We also celebrated the bright futures of our largest-ever MD class of more than 300 students at Match Day — held for the first time at both our Philadelphia campus and the College of Medicine at Tower Health in West Reading — and a joyous Commencement at the Kimmel Center in May.

As we've reflected on our past, our commitment to progress remains evident in the College Forward and Strategic Plan 2030 initiative. With input from hundreds of faculty and professional staff, we have completed implementation planning for a five-year roadmap focused on four pillars: medical and graduate education, research and innovation, clinical care, and faculty development. This collaborative effort ensures we remain agile and future-ready.

We also welcomed esteemed new faculty, professional staff and students to our community through Drexel's merger with Salus University, bringing exceptional Physician Assistant Studies and Biomedicine programs. This merger expands opportunities for interprofessional education and collaboration, strengthening our position as a national leader in health sciences.

Our research enterprise continues to thrive under new leadership. Sandhya Kortagere, PhD, now serves as vice dean for research and innovation, and Ramesh Raghupathi, PhD, as associate dean for health equity research and innovation. Their vision will enhance infrastructure and foster impactful investigation. We also express deep appreciation to Kenny Simansky, PhD, emeritus professor and former senior vice dean of research, for his decades of contributions to our College of Medicine. Discovery Day, held in November, highlighted the excellent research endeavors of our trainees, with over 400 poster and platform presentations. Our gratitude goes out to the many alumni who served as judges for the event. We are also excited that the University has committed to moving us to a new medical research building in University City adjacent to the main Drexel University campus in 2027.

Supporting students remains central to our mission. Seema Baranwal, MD, has held the William Maul Measey Chair in Medical Education for over a year, with support from Bisan A. Salhi, MD, PhD, who has assumed the role of senior associate dean for medical student affairs, and Mary Lynn Sealey, MD, who joins the Office of Educational Affairs team as assistant dean.

As we look ahead to all the future holds, I am reminded that times of transition bring challenges, but they also spark growth and innovation. Thank you for being part of this journey. Your continued engagement and support help us honor our past while building a bold, inspiring future.

Warm regards,

Charles B. Cairns, MD
Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Dean
Senior Vice President of Medical Affairs
Senior Vice President, Drexel Health Operations

A Legacy of Global
SUSAN CARLETON BENES,

From a young age, Susan Carleton Benes, MD, MCP '75, felt a vocation to provide medical care in areas of critical need across the world. For over 40 years, she has used her training as a neuro-ophthalmologist to benefit people in remote and often conflict-ridden areas. Her journey, however, revealed the earlier presence of another Woman's Medical College alumna — a "lady doctor" from her own family. It is uncanny, although perhaps not surprising, that Benes' calling to use her medical expertise in the service of others has such deep family roots and connections to the College of Medicine.

As a child in Cleveland, Ohio, Benes loved listening to her paternal grandparents' stories of growing up overseas. Her grandmother had been born and raised in Japan, since her parents served as medical missionaries there. Her grandfather, born and raised in India, was the third generation of medical missionaries serving in that country. "I was always interested in missionary work because of them," Benes says.

After graduating from the University of Michigan, Benes spent a year teaching in England while her soon-to-be husband, James David Benes, completed the fifth year of his engineering degree. They married right after the moon landing in 1969, an endeavor toward which her engineer husband contributed. "We got married after his graphite casket helped give the power for the lunar module," Benes says. "So that was a very exciting time."

Benes always knew she wanted to become a doctor and volunteer overseas, but she and James also wanted to live in the same city. After they married, he sought an engineering position and she applied to medical schools. "We matched in Philadelphia," she says. "He got an engineering job at Westinghouse in Lester, Pennsylvania, and I got into Woman's Med, even though technically they were changing the name to MCP at the time."

Walking into the medical college's main building for her interview, Benes came face to face with a brass plaque that had a familiar name. The plaque read, "Dedicated in memory of Jessica Royce Carleton, MD, Missionary to India." Carleton was her great-great-aunt, part of that second generation serving in India.

Benes recognized her name from having done a family tree, but she didn't know Carleton was a doctor, let alone an 1886 graduate of Woman's Medical, the school to which she was now applying. Benes' grandfather "always talked about his dad and his granddad," when speaking of medical missionary work, but he hadn't mentioned Jessica. He passed away before Benes applied to medical school, so he couldn't enlighten her about the family connection to WMC when she was applying. When she saw the plaque, though, she realized, "Holy cow. This is where I belong."

In the ensuing years, Benes learned more about her great-great-aunt from talking with members of her extended family. Born in 1862, Jessica was one of six children living in the northern Punjab region of India with her Vermont schoolteacher mother (Celestina Bradford) and medical missionary father (Marcus Maynard Carleton). When the summers became too hot, the family removed to the neighboring mountain region of Ambala, which was primarily inhabited by Sikhs and Muslims. Benes explains that at that time, the Muslims "wouldn't allow women or children to be touched by a man. So all the doctors in [Jessica's] family couldn't take care of the sick people. It affirmed her decision to get back to America, go to medical school, and come back to India and start a hospital for women and children, which is what she did."

Just one year after graduating from Woman's Medical, Carleton returned to Ambala and founded the Philadelphia Hospital for Women in 1887. In the 1930s, the hospital opened to male patients. Still in operation, it is now known as Philadelphia Hospital. For her public service to India, which at the time was part of the British Empire, Carleton received the Kaiser-i-Hind medal from King George V in 1927.

With such a family legacy, and her own determination to serve a broader community, Benes knew she was bound for medical

An archival image of Benes' great-great-aunt Jessica Royce Carleton, WMC class of 1886

Benes teaching surgical technique at Tumutumu Hospital in Kenya in 1980

Residents at Addis Ababa University learning orbital surgery during Benes' 2020 trip to Ethiopia

Service:
MD, MCP ’75

By Kate McCorkle

From the 1975 Iatrian, Benes (right) with husband Jim and their first child, Jennifer.

service overseas. She recalls informing her husband before their marriage, “I’m not going to be a stay-at-home mom driving a station wagon and never leaving America. I’m going to be a doctor, and I’m going to go overseas whenever there’s an opportunity.” Following her graduation from MCP, internship at Lankenau Hospital, and residency and fellowship at Wills Eye Hospital, she was one of a couple hundred neuro-ophthalmologists in the county.

Benes’ first experience overseas was in 1980 teaching the inaugural class of ophthalmology residents at Tumutumu Hospital in Kenya. Realizing that this particular group of residents “did not seem service-oriented,” Benes and her American colleague, Randy Whitfield, MD, decided to teach locals “the easiest thing we could teach them.” The pair then traveled to the 49 tribes in Kenya to assess the prevalence of blindness and eye disease.

As they traveled from village to village, they recognized a prevalence of blindness in people over 30. “They already had cataracts,” she says. At this particular place and time, once people lost their vision, they could not contribute to community life. “So we would have a vote,” Benes explains. “The tribe would nominate who they trusted for me to teach. Randy and I would teach that clinical worker how to take cataracts out.” In this unconventional way, the young adults with cataracts were able to contribute to their tribes as they had in the past. Of this challenging experience, Benes reveals, “Of course it was addictive. I wanted to do more.”

Benes returned to the States, and for most of her professional career was a professor at The Ohio State University. She’s a national expert in neuro-ophthalmology, orbital diseases and orbital surgery. A mother of three and grandmother to five, Benes relocated to Colorado in 2017, where she practices with the Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center.

Yet alongside the professional and family growth, Benes continued to volunteer overseas. In the resulting decades of medical service, she’s traveled to Ecuador, Peru, the Galapagos, the Marshall Islands, Turkey, the Republic of Georgia, Mongolia and Ethiopia. “All the places I went, I learned so much. And I loved working there so much,” she says.

A few experiences stand out: The United States government invited Benes to travel to the Marshall Islands to assess the prevalence of disease in the aftermath of nuclear testing in that area. Thyroid cancer was rampant. Benes and her colleagues discerned a heartbreaking chain: Nuclear radiation had been absorbed by the sand, which in turn was taken up by palm trees. The inside of the palm fruits was radioactive, which was then consumed by palm crabs. The crab’s iodine-rich exoskeleton became radioactive as well, and when people consumed the crabs, the radioactive iodine attacked their thyroid, leading to the prevalence of thyroid cancer.

In 1995, Benes traveled to the Republic of Georgia, where medical care was still crippled after the collapse and withdrawal of the Soviet Union a few years prior. When the Russians left, they took the fresh water, electricity, equipment, medicine — everything. Hospital doors were locked since “the doctors in the Republic of Georgia couldn’t take care of their patients. The Russians had even taken the mattresses off the cots. It was stunning,” Benes recalls. She and her colleagues arrived with medicine and surgical supplies, with the goal of teaching refresher courses to the local physicians.

Most recently in 2019 and 2020, Benes traveled to both Mongolia and Ethiopia with the Denver Lions Club. In Mongolia, where there is a strong nomadic tradition, she was able to teach students and perform much-needed surgeries in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Then, in Ethiopia, she visited many villages, screening hundreds of children and adults. In collaboration with the five teaching hospitals and the Lions Club, Benes instructed residents in ophthalmology and orbital surgery before her service was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since graduating from MCP in 1975, Benes has been a loyal and supportive alumna. Yet her gratitude extends beyond herself. She donates in honor of her great-great-aunt, the first woman physician in her family, Jessica Royce Carleton. She has also contributed to the College Archives — as well as the Presbyterian Historical Society — donating funds and gifting items and photos from Carleton’s life. Carleton’s actual diploma from Woman’s Medical, however, resides with Benes.

Reflecting on a lifetime of global medical service, Benes is currently weighing the pros and cons of retiring from that aspect of her medical career. “It never occurred to me to quit,” she says. “I hate the thought of giving up going overseas and serving. What I loved about working overseas was just that everyone was not working for themselves,” she says. “They were working for the good of people. It was just completely different. I enjoy being with others who want to be of service.”

Through the generosity of the Benes family and other alumni, the Drexel University Legacy Center Archives & Special Collections is curating exhibits depicting the rich history associated with the pioneering faculty and students from our legacy institutions like Carleton. Fundraising for this project is ongoing, with design underway and the newest exhibit, planned for the second floor of the Health Sciences Building, slated for completion in March 2026.

ALUMNI HELP STUDENTS FIND A PATH

NEW CLERKSHIP HELPS STUDENTS FIND THEIR PLACE IN THE FIELD

By Elisa Ludwig

In medical school, so much happens during clinical rotations — the development of clinical skills, the chance to put theory into practice, the opportunity to forge meaningful professional relationships — that for many it is the defining moment of their education. Other students, however, finish their rotations with more questions than answers.

During the 2024-2025 school year, the College of Medicine implemented a Career Exploration Clerkship as an additional experience for third-year students, based on feedback that students wanted more information about additional specialties and career choices. Less formal and structured than traditional clinical rotations, the emphasis here is not just exposure to clinical practice across disciplines but insight into how professional journeys are forged and sustained.

FINDING A MATCH

To launch the program, co-course director Amy Fuchs, MD, associate professor of medicine and associate dean of student affairs for career advising at the College of Medicine, put out a request to potential volunteers willing to have students shadow them in their hospitals, offices, clinics and other care settings, for any duration of time.

Paul Yerkes, MD '16, co-owner of Core Family Practice, a direct primary care practice in Kennett Square, heeded the call. "I'm adamant about the direct primary care model and getting new doctors into primary care as well as private practice," he says. "So when I first heard about this new clerkship, it seemed like a perfect opportunity."

Participating students, meanwhile, were asked to rank specialties that interested them and were then matched with physicians to shadow.

"I ranked in primary care, so they connected me with Dr. Yerkes," says third-year student Basira Iginla, who spent several days at Core Family Practice.

Before officially starting medical school, Iginla was open to many specialties, and particularly interested in public health and advocacy. When it comes to primary care, it's the continuity of care that appeals to her, in addition to the opportunity for entrepreneurship, a topic she has examined in an independent research study about physician business owners.

"Often as medical students, as our education advances, we don't necessarily look at primary care because we're looking at more specializations, but primary care is a foundation of medicine, and it sets a standard for how we should treat patients — the more you know about a patient the more you can set a personalized plan of care," she says.

Fellow third-year student George Nolan, who plans to go into cardiology and who was also matched with Yerkes, was interested in exploring primary care during the experience.

"Continuity of care is similar in primary care and cardiology, so that was good to see, and reinforced for me the value of that," he says. "At the same time, the direct primary care practice is a different health care model than you typically would get exposure to as a medical student, and while I likely won't start my own direct primary care business, I thought it was pretty valuable to learn how it works."

A NEW MODEL FOR MENTORSHIP

During Yerkes' own medical education, clinical rotations were an important inflection point in finding his preferred specialty. He was not interested in family medicine or primary care initially, but as he got more experience on the floor with patients, he found himself drawn to OB/GYN and family medicine — not just for the continuity of care but for the general breadth of knowledge required, and the self-determined pace of private practice.

However, not all of his peers in medical school had an obvious pathway to their specialty. He sees a distinct advantage to the additional shadowing the new clerkship offers students — the more mentors, the better.

Paul Yerkes, MD '16, co-owner of Core Family Practice

Basira Iginla, MD '27

George Nolan, MD '27

"The Career Exploration Clerkship gives you more opportunities to find yourself," he says. "If you only have one exposure to family medicine, and it's with a burned-out family medicine doctor, then your perception of family medicine is going to be negative. But if you get exposed to somebody who's really passionate about that specialty, then you're going to be more likely to consider it."

The relative brevity and one-on-one structure of the clerkship affords the students and the physicians they shadow flexibility to shape it to their needs. Yerkes says he would gauge the student's level of interest and tailor their experience accordingly. When he met with students who were demonstrably interested in hands-on learning, he encouraged them to meet with patients. For students interested in the business of running a private practice, he would set aside time to show them profit and loss sheets and talk about marketing initiatives.

"Right away, Basira was asking really deep questions about how I manage team members, or how I handled maternity leave for staff," he says. "My hope is to really push med students to be that physician leader, whether it be in a private practice or in an institution. There's no reason we can't be business leaders and entrepreneurs."

At the same time, Iginla observed a particularly instructive case on one of her days in the clinic. An older male patient came in with shortness of breath and signs of weakness. When Yerkes and Iginla examined him, it became clear that he needed to go to the emergency room. He was transferred and underwent surgery that night.

"It's a spectrum of care — you get such a variety of diagnoses and different comorbidities during our day-to-day work," Yerkes says. "And I was able to follow up with the patient in the hospital and then share the notes with Basira, so she could get the whole story of what happened." He adds that the patient is stabilized and has improved greatly.

LEARNING IN THE MOMENT

For his part, Nolan came away with valuable lessons of his own. He observed that it's not just the continuity of care that distinguishes primary care but also, in the case of Core Family Practice, the ability to devote more time to each patient.

"One thing that I definitely took away was how important it is to spend extra time with patients. Dr. Yerkes was able to connect and listen, and really build a rapport," Nolan says. "This can be hard to do in other settings and with other models, when you have to meet a lot of patients in a day, but I could see up close what a difference it made to their care and to their relationship with him. He would often talk about mindfulness, and you could tell that he truly values the emotional health of his patients."

The inclusion of mindfulness inspired Nolan, who has employed it during his first two years of medical school in his work volunteering as clinic coordinator at a Drexel Health Outreach Project site for smoking cessation at Whosoever Gospel Mission, which provides housing for men recovering from drug and alcohol abuse.

Unlike a clinical rotation, there are no grades attached to the Career Exploration Clerkship, so students can focus on the immediate experience of learning without the pressure of being evaluated or critiqued by the attending physician. "This clerkship is designed for your own experience and edification, which makes it an enriching opportunity," Nolan says.

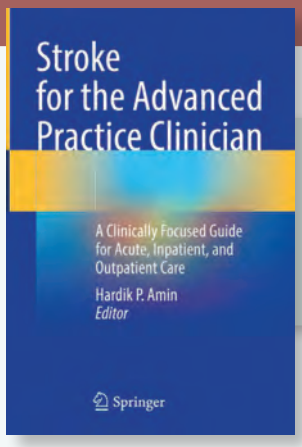
At the close of their clerkship, both students came away with lessons that will inform their career choices and potentially mold their approach to medicine.

"It's important as a med student to be open to anything and everything," Iginla says. "Every mentor you encounter can give you a different type of awareness."

"Building a relationship with a practicing physician can help you find new opportunities, whether that's in research or clinical work," Nolan says. He also recalls that Yerkes was open to his thoughts and ideas, which was empowering at an important point in his training. "In this stage of our education, it's still easy to feel imposter syndrome. But this person who is guiding you is where you want to be, and they believe that you can do what they're doing. It makes this process feel that much more achievable."

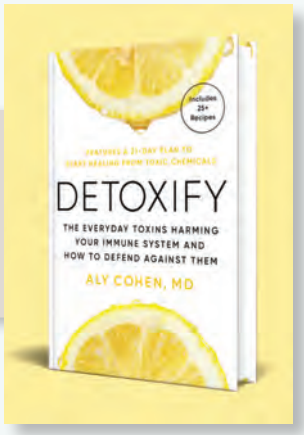
Alumni Author Roundup

Our talented alumni regularly author and edit books in a wide range of genres, including memoirs, mysteries, medical nonfiction and clinical textbooks. We encourage you to check them out. If you've authored or edited a book in the last 10 years and would like to be featured in an upcoming author roundup, please email akh33@drexel.edu.

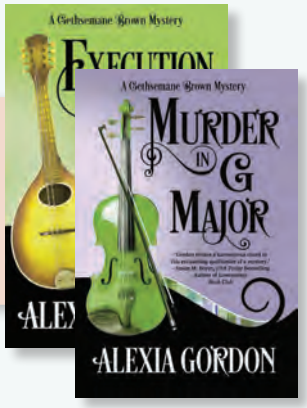


Hardik Prashant Amin, MD '09
Stroke for the Advanced Practice Clinician
Springer, 2024

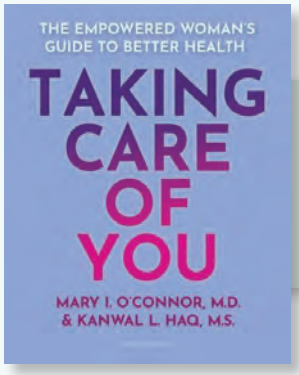
Aly Cohen, MD, MCPHU '99
Detoxify: The Everyday Toxins Harming Your Immune System and How to Defend Against Them
Simon & Schuster/Simon Element, 2025



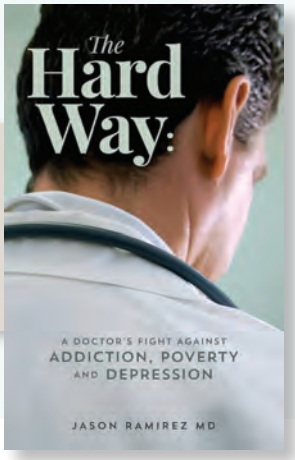
Britney M. Brown-Chamberlain, MS clinical research organization and management '19
Bake Until Golden Brown
83 Press/Hoffman Media LLC, 2024



Alexia Gordon, MD, MCP '95
Gethsemane Brown Mystery Series
Henery Press, 2016-2020

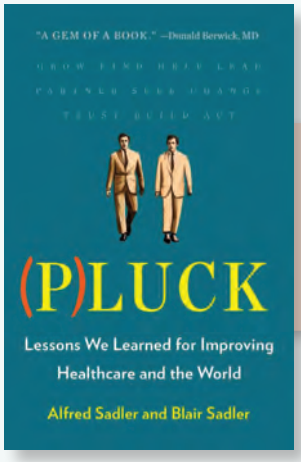


Mary I. O'Connor, MD, MCP '85
Taking Care of You, with Kanwal L. Haq, MS
Mayo Clinic Press, 2022

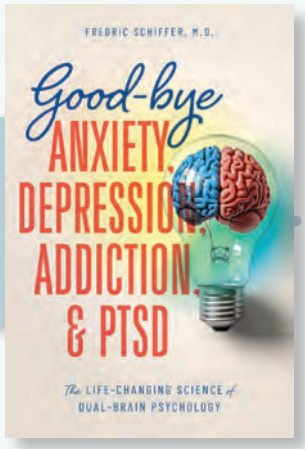


Jason Ramirez, MD, MCPHU '99
The Hard Way: A Doctor's Fight Against Addiction, Poverty and Depression
Createspace Independent Publishing, 2017

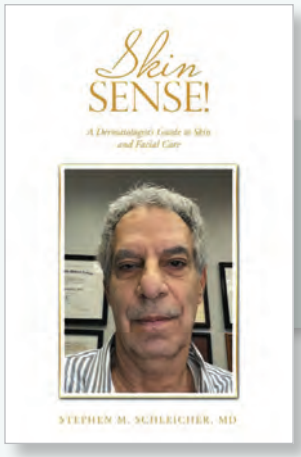
Veronica Ramirez, MD '09
Danni's Broken Bone, with Sarah J. Vega
Independently published, 2025



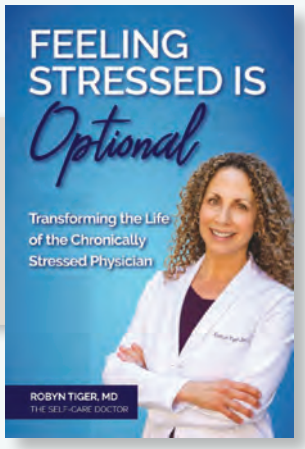
Alfred Sadler, MD, HU '66
(P)luck: Lessons We Learned for Improving Healthcare and the World, with Blair Sadler
Silicon Valley Press, 2022



Fredric H. Schiffer, MD, HU '71
Good-bye Anxiety, Depression, Addiction & PTSD: The Life-Changing Science of Dual-Brain Psychology
Stoneway Press, 2024

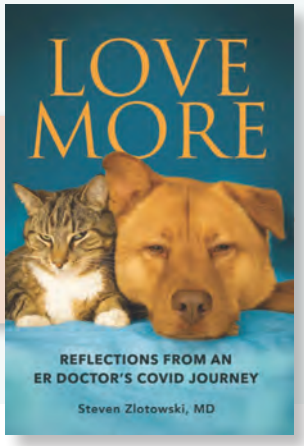


Stephen M. Schleicher, MD, HU '76
Skin Sense!: A Dermatologist's Guide to Skin and Facial Care
iUniverse, 2024



Robyn F. Tiger, MD, MCP '91, Diagnostic Radiology Residency, MCP '96
Feeling Stressed Is Optional: Transforming the Life of the Chronically Stressed Physician
Aloha Publishing, 2024

Mark Trombetta, MD, HU '85
Brachytherapy: An International Perspective, with Paolo Montemaggi and Luther Brady
Springer-Verlag, 2016
Altered Fractionation in Radiotherapy: Paradigm Change, with Jean-Philippe Pignol, Paolo Montemaggi and Luther Brady
Springer-Verlag, 2018.



Steven Zlotowski, MD, MCP '97
Love More: Reflections From an ER Doctor's COVID Journey
Independently published, 2025

STATE OF THE SCIENCE:
Artificial Intelligence

By G.K. Schatzman

in Medical Education

Since ChatGPT made its public debut in 2022, the exploding generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) industry has been driving headlines, markets, hopes and fears across sectors. On the floor of Congress, early testimonies about the potential dangers of a technology whose growth outpaces its guardrails have been largely supplanted by calls — even by the selfsame industry leaders — to secure America's dominance in the global tech race. Organizations are grappling with how to safely leverage new capabilities, and as usual, higher education is thoroughly in the mix.

Current and future physicians at Drexel University College of Medicine are managing the challenge through policy, research initiatives, inspiring student projects and even a proposal for an AI literacy curriculum. From matriculation to graduation and beyond, large language models (LLMs) are quietly shaping medical education in every corner.

Vanessa Pirrone, PhD, assistant dean of admissions; associate professor, Department of Microbiology & Immunology

Applications & Admissions: The Chatbot Tradeoff

Beginning in fall of 2025, incoming medical students have encountered AI in their journey to Drexel — and not just in getting their applications together. In fact, Assistant Dean of Admissions Vanessa Pirrone, PhD, says students who use AI in creating their applications may unwittingly put themselves at a disadvantage.

The Office of Admissions doesn't use an AI detector; application materials come through the centralized AMCAS platform, and the unreliability of current detection technology is well documented. Still, Pirrone says, students with computer-perfect applications risk "losing their authentic voice." For Pirrone, when polished text can be produced to spec in a click, imperfections become personal, even precious, like the tell-tale craft marks of a handmade good.

"They're not showing us who they are," Pirrone says of applicants who overuse AI. "Oftentimes, we see this really polished but flat application, and for us, it just kind of blends in. We get 16,000 applications every year. You have to find ways to make yourself stand out, and the way that you stand out is by being yourself."

Human touch is important for Pirrone, who makes a point of getting hands-on with applications and interviews to understand the unique talents and experiences of each incoming class.

"Every year when the students come in, I am so incredibly proud of all of them, because I see where they started," she says. "Then I get to watch them through all the years and see the amazing things that they do. They're serving the community. They're living our mission every day and pushing the envelope."

This fall, MD program admissions began using a new AI tool, AMP AI, integrated into its admissions management platform through ZAP Solutions. The tool offers mission-integrated insights like its competency analyzer, which ZAP claims "condenses and summarizes free text fields" into a customizable domain score. The tool provides admissions staff with extra metrics on how a candidate aligns with the school's values. For now, only staff from the Office of Admissions will be training on the technology so that they can coordinate the shift.

Pirrone says the goal isn't to spend less time on each application, but rather to "make us more consistent and ensure that we're not losing the reason to say yes. When you go through applications, it's not about finding the reason to say no. It's about finding that reason to say, 'Yes, this is a person that would enrich our university.'"

Human review and judgement still have priority, Pirrone says: "In the end, this is a tool, it's not a person." The office also remains committed to holistic review, understanding candidates in the context of their stories.

Emily Spengler, MD, assistant director, Foundations of Patient Care I; assistant professor, Department of Pediatrics

Learning Patient Care With Llama

Once they've arrived at Drexel, medical students spend their first two years focusing primarily on their didactic coursework, building the knowledge base necessary for their clinical work. Emily Spengler, MD, practices general outpatient pediatrics at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in North Philadelphia and is the assistant director of one of these early courses, Foundations of Patient Care I, where students learn the fundamentals of taking a patient's

Emily Feng, MD '27

Michael Jayasuriya, MD '27

history and physical in a relationship-centered, patient-focused manner.

Last year, two of her Foundations students, Emily Feng, MD '27, and Michael Jayasuriya, MD '27, approached her with a problem: Practice sessions with standardized patients (hired actors) felt too infrequent.

"The clinical skills portion of our curriculum is less emphasized in the first two years," Jayasuriya explains. "We'll get to talk to one standardized patient every month."

With Jayasuriya's background in software engineering and Feng's in computational biology, the two were able to devise a solution. "Emily and I had an idea: Could we make an AI chatbot for us that would serve as a standardized patient? Then, you could just log in whenever you want, chat with the chatbot with your voice and it would speak back to you."

Spengler's interest in clinical skills, feedback systems and health literacy made her a match as a mentor for the project. While observed structural clinical examinations, or OSCEs, are a longstanding way of providing feedback to medical students on their patient interactions, Spengler agreed with her students that there is room for more support. "I think one of the problems with health literacy education is that, from medical school on through residency and as doctors, we're not given much feedback on how clear we are when we talk to patients," she says. "Patients don't really tell you when they don't understand. And once you're no longer a med student, nobody's really observing you and telling you, 'Hey, I don't think the patient understood that word.'"

"What I thought would be cool is if we incorporated some of the objective, real-time skills that AI is capable of into giving real-time feedback on these skills to students," Spengler says. And the tool needn't be limited to students; physicians could opt in, too. "My hope is that by getting this feedback, clinicians are better able to improve their ability to communicate with patients."

With Spengler's support and guidance on metric and feedback domains, Feng and Jayasuriya set about designing the Patient Interaction Analysis Tool, or PIAT Learn. For the user, whether student or clinician, it's simple.

"You talk to the chatbot, it chats back to you," Feng explains. In this case, "talk" is literal: It both receives and outputs audio for real-time practice, as well as a transcript for later review. "We've built in a feature to calculate certain metrics and give feedback immediately after the encounter."

PIAT Learn provides a recap of the spoken grade level, how often you checked for understanding, and the number of questions asked, pauses offered and conversational "turns" taken — quantifiable ways of thinking about interaction dynamics. Perhaps more ambitiously, it also aims to provide feedback on when you used jargon and even when you showed empathy.

Speaking level was easy, Feng says; those kinds of metrics have already been validated in health literacy literature. The back-end work for coding empathy remains an ongoing challenge. But the progress they made on the jargon identification may provide a promising path.

"Jargon to me might be different from jargon to another person," Jayasuriya says, and the original algorithms that leveraged word-use frequency packages didn't always align with reality. "It would pick out words that are infrequently used in the English language but that I think are understandable, and it would miss words that are supposedly frequently used, but that might actually be unfamiliar to non-experts."

Now, however, they're approaching the problem through prompt fine-tuning: giving the bot, a version of Meta's open-source Llama model, a role or persona and having it calibrate its jargon judgments accordingly. Then it flags instances of jargon and suggests substitutions for next time.

Feng and Jayasuriya are continuing to improve PIAT Learn, but they already had a chance to test it with some of Spengler's residents at St. Christopher's. At this stage, the experiment was for quality improvement rather than a proper research study, but it has already yielded helpful feedback on the user interface and instruction. Perhaps more importantly, it raised big-picture questions about metrics, surveillance and GenAI technology in the workplace.

A quarter of the residents involved in the user test expressed concerns about the new metrics, Jayasuriya says. Having AI listen in on their patient conversations could make them feel scrutinized. "The biggest concern that they noted was that they thought this was a tool to test them, when our goal was mainly just to provide an educational tool for them," he says.

Like all of us grappling with increased AI integration, Spengler, Feng and Jayasuriya are working to discover the guardrails that support advances in medical practice while maintaining or even furthering its essential humanity.

"I don't want an AI system to be grading me and docking my pay," Jayasuriya says. "But I am still motivated by the idea that I want more ways to improve my clinical skills right now." The two designers have committed to making the software "copy-left," an open-source model that stipulates future branches of their work from other programmers also continue to be open-source.

Spengler imagines using a tool like PIAT Learn to create opportunities for side-by-side reflection between trainees and mentors, like watching film with a coach after a game. The potential draw to

"perform to a metric rather than keep in mind the humanity of that doctor-patient interaction" is a concern for her, too. "I want my students to be thinking about, 'Does my patient understand me? Am I communicating clearly?' But the very first thing I always want them to be thinking about is preserving that doctor-patient relationship and keeping that connection with the patient."

Creating metrics for the previously unquantifiable also presents an opportunity for soft skills — in Spengler's opinion, the biggest blind spot of many beginning physicians — to finally get the attention they need.

"I think if this tool is shown to be valid — and we're not there at all — this can just be one of the many other ways that we're assessing medical students, just the way that multiple choice tests are," Spengler says. "When we have valid evaluations of these softer skills, I think students will take them a little more seriously. And how do we know we're effectively teaching something if we're not assessing it? The more validity we can create in these assessments, the better."

Carolyn Giordano, PhD, associate dean of assessment and evaluation; professor, Department of Family, Community & Preventive Medicine

Sifting Surveys With ChatGPT

Multiple-choice questions are popular on tests and surveys for a reason: They take guesswork out of grading and provide instant, clear-cut datasets. Free-response questions allow for a wider variety of expression, but ensuring reliable analysis across hundreds or thousands of responses is a process unto itself. While there are established research methodologies for categorizing and tagging content, their costliness in both resources and time limit their application. Researchers like Carolyn Giordano, PhD, associate dean of assessment and evaluation, hope that might be changing.

In addition to overseeing the exams that students take throughout their time in medical school, and all the course evaluations, surveys and peer evaluations, Giordano works with students interested in researching medical education, which focuses on everything from how medical schools are educating students to how medical systems are educating the public. Over the years, she says, her own interests have made her a sort of "go-to" person for all kinds of social science research.

"I'm kind of a fiddler," Giordano says. "I naturally wonder about how you can analyze things more efficiently, and thought maybe we can look at AI."

Over the course of medical school, Drexel students provide a huge amount of feedback to the school itself, in both fixed- and free-response formats.

"We have over 300 students. We have 60 evaluations a year, or more. We get a ton of survey information from student feedback and course feedback, and a human reads that. We read every single word that students tell us," Giordano says. "Well, we started using Microsoft Copilot to read responses, to ask questions about where different themes showed up." Using AI, the survey reviewers can draw insights about specific faculty or classes, or what students liked about a certain textbook or set of learning materials.

The tool itself isn't trained in the methodology and nomenclature Giordano and her team use, she says, and is no replacement for human insight on surveys.

"We always read the results. But between the end of the semester and the first day of classes, there's not a lot of time to make changes. AI really helps with speed."

Now, a survey specialist reads the responses, leveraging AI to decrease turnaround time. In turn, Giordano receives the reports sooner, leaving more time for a secondary read before disseminating the results, which then leaves more time to implement changes.

Simran Shamith, MD '26

But what about surveys outside the purview of student experience, in medical research? Simran Shamith, MD '26, has worked with Giordano to leverage AI to create a survey validation tool that works in tandem with focus groups. Two years ago, they used the then-current free version of ChatGPT to validate a survey, examining it to see what made sense, what didn't, and how people were processing the questions. And while they found the tool couldn't replace focus groups, only complement them, its speed was on a different order of magnitude.

"We could do it in about six seconds versus one hour of hosting the focus group, hearing different feedback and synthesizing the findings," Giordano explains.

Shamith thinks the tool can accelerate the survey creation process, allowing for rapid iteration before incurring the time and expense of a focus group for final review. Once again, the large language model excelled at fine-tuning survey language. "It wasn't just giving

me another word for bias," Shamith explained in one example. "It was giving me ways to describe to students what I'm trying to get out of them when I'm saying 'bias.'"

Policies, Dilemmas and Taboos

Discerning what generative AI can do and what it can't, how it should be used and how it shouldn't, is essential as Drexel contemplates adoption strategies. In fact, it's a core element of the AI Fluency Framework[1] released last year by Anthropic, an industry-leading public benefit corporation noted for its commitment to more-responsible AI development. With a technology this disruptive and rapidly developing, policy struggles to keep up.

As of writing, Drexel's Academic Integrity Policy page[2] mentions use of generative AI in the final bullet points of its sections on cheating and plagiarism, instructing students to follow instructors' guidance on acceptable use. This follows a November 2023 policy[3] from the Office of the Provost, which was up for review in fall 2025, that grants instructors "broad discretion to define the suitable use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in the classroom," along with "the responsibility ... to include in the course syllabus a clearly written description of the permitted use of AI tools." In turn, the policy outlines students' responsibilities to adhere to instructors' policies, cite AI usage appropriately, and bear ultimate responsibility for the work they submit. AI detection tools are discouraged due to their documented unreliability. A separate Information Security page[4] directs faculty and staff to use only approved GenAI tools in order to ensure the privacy of sensitive data, a list of which can be found on the Provost's AI at Drexel home page[5] alongside a new Digital Commons space design for faculty and staff to share insights and practices.

For many instructors, though perhaps fewer today than two years ago, the "ch" in ChatGPT stands for "cheating." Plagiarism is a leading concern. As Giordano argues, though, it isn't one the College is unequipped to handle.

"The toothpaste is out of the tube, and we're not putting that back. The tool exists. But rules against plagiarism exist too, so we can talk about that in an open way. You were never able to plagiarize material and pretend it was your own."

Misinformation is another concern raised by students and faculty alike. Using generative AI is quicker — much quicker — than consulting traditional reference materials, even if we take "traditional" to mean PubMed instead of a library book.

"Students are humans, and humans do love shortcuts, don't we?" Giordano says. "One of my worries is that students use AI in place of other reliable materials. I think that they have to use this as one paintbrush in the whole artistic arsenal."

Unlike databases that require a degree of baseline knowledge to search and synthesize results, large language models are approachable from ignorance. A question asked in plain language will provide a response that will make sense to the user whether or not it is, in fact, accurate. What educators call "productive struggle" — incrementally building durable knowledge foundations by grappling with challenges just beyond your current understanding — can be diminished simply by virtue of the technology's ease.

For Giordano, a training opportunity can be found in the imperfections of large language models. "When you put a prompt into ChatGPT, it often gives you too much information, not enough information or inaccurate information," she says. "I think that students are learning that this is also what humans do. When they go to take a patient's history, the patient is going to talk too much, talk too little, forget information or just make things up. In that way, I think it's actually training them pretty well to be a future physician."

Shamith also identified misinformation, for both patients and physicians, as a concern. Still, as a student, she benefits from AI as a study tool. "Other students and I have started asking ChatGPT, 'I'm going into this case. What are some of the things that I might see? What are the steps that we're going to do? What are things that I could get quizzed on?' And honestly, that has been life changing."

As AI becomes increasingly integrated into our favorite software, we're all likely using it more often than we realize, from text-editing to suggested email replies. If GenAI is indeed becoming ubiquitous, what are the risks of not understanding it — and who is leading the charge in AI literacy?

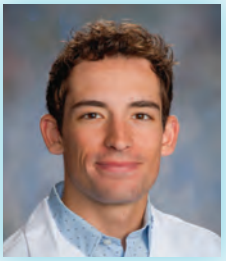
Currently at the College, students are pushing the envelope with ideas for new AI initiatives and integrations. Faculty instructors and mentors have guided those initiatives, helping locate them within the larger system of medical education.

"Dr. Giordano and Dr. Spangler are amazing in the sense that they're able and willing to adapt. The fact that they're willing to learn from their students is amazing. I don't think teachers have to know everything," Shamith says. "It's an evolving landscape for everyone."

Even so, it's paramount that students be prepared for the current state of science, and self-discovery may not always be sufficient.

"I'm not an educator yet, but I think it's our responsibility, or teachers' responsibilities, to teach students how to correctly use AI, just like our teachers taught us how to correctly use sources and how to research and use PubMed," Shamith says. "I think it's just the next version of all this. Before us, our parents were taught how to use books. Then we were taught how to use the internet. Now, we're going to be taught how to use AI."

A Charge to Be Led



Spencer Moavenzadeh, second-year MD/PhD student

Artificial intelligence curriculum is a current passion of Spencer Moavenzadeh, a second-year MD/PhD student with a background in computer science and biomedical engineering. Despite the buzz around generative AI models, and especially large language models like ChatGPT, he emphasizes that these aren't the only models being used in research.

For example, while Moavenzadeh was working as an ultrasound engineer, he had a project where they optimized three modalities of ultrasound into a single image using a neural network — a machine learning model that works sort of like our brains do, and that predates our current large language models. As he explains it, "They're all mechanisms by which the algorithm effectively learns to or works its way iteratively to a solution that is optimized." In AI research at large, machine learning [ML] is closely partnered, and AI/ML applications for research, including medical research, abound, from random forest decision algorithms to merging images for comprehensive analysis.

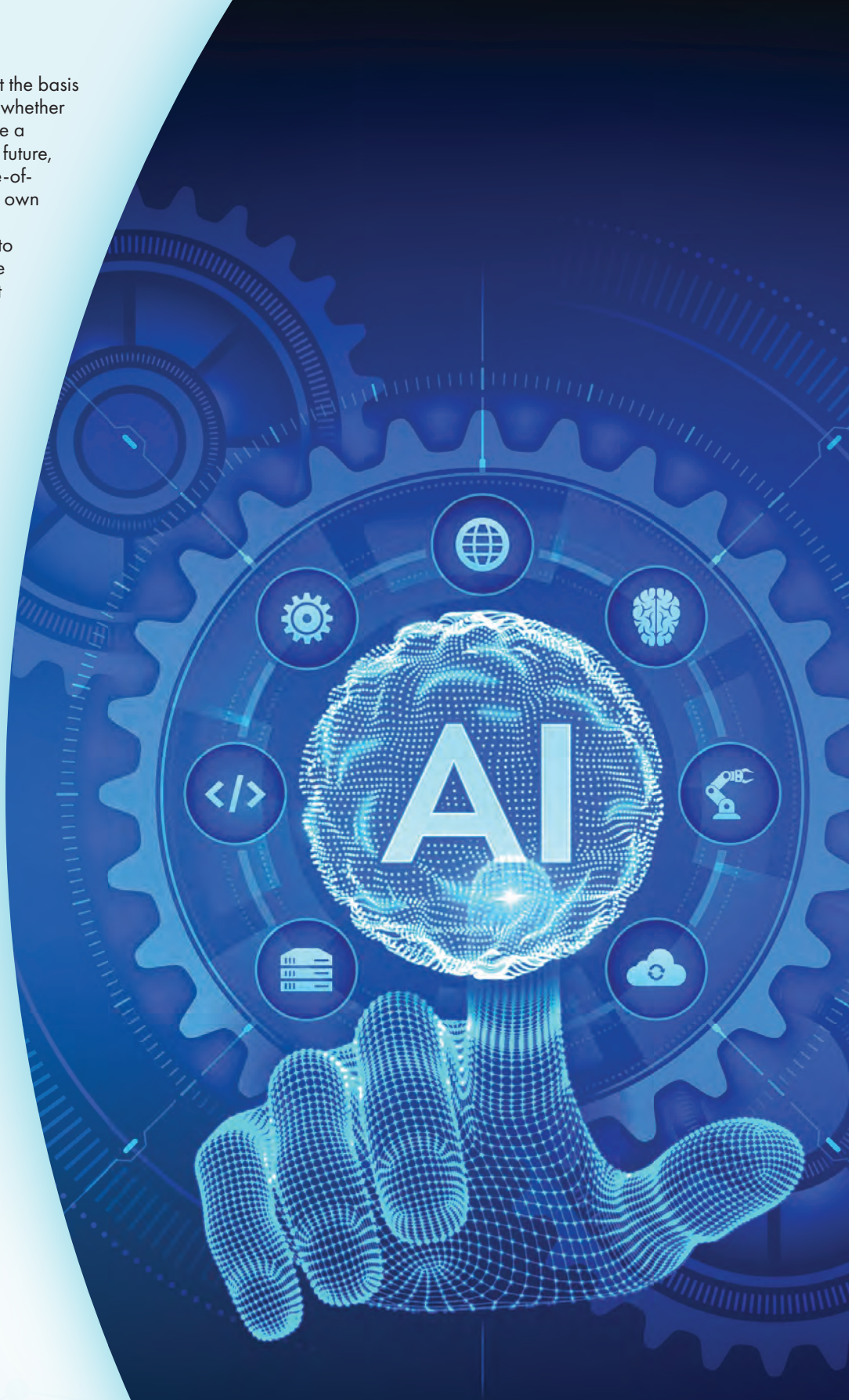
"As the physician reading this image, I think you would want to know that it is effectively an artificial creation. Yes, it is grounded in three images that are somewhat real, but they are merged together in a deep neural net," which affects what parts of the data are directly interpretable, Moavenzadeh says. "If there's an artifact in

there, it would help, in my opinion, to know what the basis of the model being used to design it was, to see whether or not you can trust that. I think that is going to be a challenge that a lot of physicians will face in the future, both while interpreting papers and the new state-of-the-art thing that comes out, or while doing their own research."

That's why Moavenzadeh is actively working to develop an AI literacy curriculum for the College of Medicine that covers not only the more recent rise of generative AI but also the widespread use of machine learning in all kinds of medical research, a project he also considers a way of fostering his own learning. His proposal is two-pronged: First, create a condensed Foundations of Machine Learning elective course focused on the principles of machine learning and the models currently in use, and second, provide concrete examples of current implementations in medicine. The latter, he imagines, might be a good opportunity for a speaker series.

The medical school curriculum is already busy, but it makes sense to look for time in intersession or elsewhere — because in Moavenzadeh's view, AI, from large language models like our favorite chatbots to neural networks for deep processing, really is everywhere. "I would say every researcher is probably using it. Almost in every field, and probably every single lab to at least some degree."

There's no shortage of big decisions on the horizon, and when it comes to AI itself, none of us control the pace of innovation. Drexel has pioneered programs in physician-patient communication, medical humanities and professional formation — an attitude toward innovation that, along with those who take the initiative, can serve the school well in the AI realm. Fortunately, there are excellent people on the task. As Assistant Dean Pirrone says with a smile full of pride, "Don't we just have the best group?"



Resources:

1. anthropic.skilljar.com/ai-fluency-framework-foundations
2. drexel.edu/studentlife/community-standards/code-of-conduct/academic-integrity-policy
3. bit.ly/47Sivyi
4. drexel.edu/it/security/policies-regulations/ai-guidance
5. drexel.edu/provost/ai

HTLV-1:

RAISING AWARENESS OF A DEADLY, HIDDEN VIRUS

By Nancy West

If you've never heard of human T lymphotropic viruses (HTLVs) or human T cell leukemia virus type 1 (HTLV-1), you aren't alone. This rare, cancer-causing retrovirus is an ancient cousin of HIV with the ability to transform human T cells. Because it is a retrovirus, it can integrate its genetic material into a person's DNA and live there forever. As a result, it can cause a chronic, lifelong viral infection, usually without any symptoms, that can lie dormant in the human body for 40 or more years.

During this time, it is estimated that 5% of people with HTLV infection will develop adult T cell leukemia or lymphoma (ATLL). By the time it causes symptoms and is diagnosed, the cancer is widespread and aggressive, and the infected person may only have six months to two years to live. That's why Pooja Jain, PhD, MS, a professor in the College of Medicine's Department of Microbiology & Immunology and Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, is on a mission to raise awareness of this insidious virus.

"Compared to other cancer-causing viruses — such as Epstein-Barr, herpes, and hepatitis B and C — HTLV-1 has the highest potential of causing cancer in the people it infects," says Jain. "Most oncoviruses have a 0.3 to 1% chance of causing cancer, while HTLV-1 has a 5% chance."

Pooja Jain, PhD, MS, professor, Department of Microbiology & Immunology and Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy

Experts estimate that 10 to 20 million people worldwide have an HTLV-1 infection, but infection rates vary widely. In North America, about 300,000 people are known to be infected. But in other parts of the world, one-third or more of the population is infected, including specific parts of Brazil, Japan, Africa, South America, Australia and the Caribbean.

HTLV-1 is transmitted most often through breastfeeding. In endemic regions, around 20 to 30% of HTLV-1-infected mothers transmit the virus to their infants in this way. The virus is also transmitted through sexual contact, needle sharing and unsafe blood transfusions.

In addition to cancer, HTLV-1 can also cause a progressive inflammatory disease of the nervous system called HTLV-associated myelopathy and tropical spastic paraparesis (HAM/TSP).

"This virus is able to cross the blood-brain barrier and enter the central nervous system," explains Jain, who has been conducting HTLV research for 23 years. "When it enters the nervous system, it attacks the myelin sheath of neurons, causing a disease that is very similar to multiple sclerosis. So the same virus in the blood that can cause lymphoma can also cause myelopathy in the brain."

Sharrón (Ronni) Manuel, MD, PhD '13

THE PHENOMENON OF IMMUNE EXHAUSTION

Jain was intrigued by the extensive immune response she saw in patients who have HAM disease. "These patients develop a very strong immune response that is incapable of killing the virally infected cells," she notes. "This leads to the phenomenon of immune exhaustion. Our immune system is constantly under attack by the virus antigen, but the dose of antigen is not powerful enough for our immune system to kill the infected cell. As a result, there is a low-grade inflammation that goes on and on. Eventually, the time comes when the immune system becomes so crippled that the patient will develop ATLL or HAM." She adds, "My lab was able to establish very early that this phenomenon of immune exhaustion does not only work in cancer, but also in neuroinflammation."

Key to this research was Sharrón (Ronni) Manuel, MD, PhD '13, one of the first Drexel Woman One Scholarship recipients, who worked in Jain's lab from 2006 to 2011. "Ronni was sampling patients with a high level of neuroinflammation," Jain notes. "We found that they had very high levels of the PD-1 molecule that acts like a brake on the immune system and can cause immune exhaustion."

"We saw that there were various immune cell markers, especially on dendritic cells, that were either up- or down-regulated depending on their role in the immune system," explains Manuel. "A lot of inflammatory markers were up-regulated in those patients with disease compared to the asymptomatic carriers, which told us that there was a heightened immune or inflammatory response in those patients."

She continues, "PD-1 is one of the most effective receptor targets to block in cancer therapy. When PD-1 binds to PDL-1 or PDL-2, it tells the T cells to slow down or stop their attack. If certain cancer cells up-regulate that, then the T cells are not going to attack, and those cancer cells continue to grow and attack the body. By therapeutically blocking the PD-1/PDL-1/2 interactions, the brakes from the immune system are removed, restoring normal T cell function, leading to antitumor responses. We saw that PDL-1 was up-regulated in the cells of the HTLV disease population compared to the asymptomatic carriers. If we could somehow block that response in a vaccine, we could control the disease progression, which was our ultimate goal."

A DUAL VACCINE APPROACH

Based upon Manuel's thesis observations, the Jain Lab proceeded to test a dual vaccine approach — blocking the PD-1 molecule but also combining with new epitopes for vaccine purposes. "This combination acts like a double-edged sword — when you take the brake off, the existing immune system works, and then when you put new epitopes on the T cell, you bring in fresh immunity, and the combination of the two helps to eradicate neuroinflammation in virus-infected cells," Jain explains.

"This is what I consider to be the major contribution from our lab — studying and establishing this phenomenon in neuroinflammation caused by HTLV-1 and also testing a new idea for immunotherapy or vaccine against HTLV-1," she says.

Manuel adds, "Through our research, we hoped to find a way to keep HTLV-1-infected patients asymptomatic as much as possible instead of progressing to disease."

At the same time, other researchers in Jain's lab were studying the HTLV-1 mechanism for oncogenesis, which involves T cell transformation. HTLV-1 has a very powerful oncoprotein capable of triggering the leukemia genesis process. Jain's lab discovered a new target called MEF-2 — myocyte enhancer factor 2.

"We found that MEF-2 cooperates with the viral factor and aids the process of T cell transformation," says Jain. "So, our lab was able to decipher immune mechanisms as well as devise a novel target for chemotherapy."

Currently, Jain's lab is testing a small molecule inhibitor that belongs to a proven group of anticancer molecules. She is hoping to take this to clinical trials, depending upon the availability of funding.

MANUEL CONTINUES IMMUNOLOGY RESEARCH

Inspired by her mentor, Pooja Jain, PhD, MS, Sharrón (Ronni) Manuel, MD, PhD '13, has continued her immunology research.

"Pooja was a terrific mentor," emphasizes Manuel. "Seeing her drive and enthusiasm really encouraged me to continue doing research. She provided me with a truly diverse, hands-on experience where I was able to learn the ins and outs of conducting research projects. I also traveled and presented at international conferences. It was an honor to receive the Young Investigators Award for my presentation at an HTLV conference in Japan. All these experiences were invaluable to me."

Now a reproductive endocrinology and infertility physician at HRC Fertility, and an assistant professor at the University of Southern California, she focuses on how the immune system affects reproduction, with interests in PCOS, endometriosis, ovarian aging, pregnancy loss and miscarriage.

RAISING AWARENESS: JUNE 2026 IRVA CONFERENCE

Outside the lab, Jain is working tirelessly to increase awareness of HTLV-1 to fulfill her role as the secretary of the International Retrovirology Association (IRVA, htlv.net) since 2023. Now she is also serving as chair of the 22nd Biennial International Conference on Human Retrovirology: HTLV and Related Viruses, to be held in Philadelphia on June 3-6, 2026 (htlv2026.org).

"People from around the world who are experts in HTLV-1 diagnosis, translation, clinical trials and basic science research will be invited to speak at this conference," says Jain. "We will also invite patients to share their experiences of living with HTLV-1."

She adds, "This conference will cover some of the most important advances in discovery research, molecular and immunological pathogenesis, pre-clinical models, epidemiology, diagnostics, prevention, vaccinology and therapeutics."

ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

In the Philadelphia area, Jain has been engaged in various community outreach activities. "We are finding many high-risk communities within Philadelphia and nearby areas where viral-infected patients could exist, but no one knows about them," she states. "I think there are many more cases of HTLV-1 in the U.S. than we're aware of. It's all about surveillance — and there is no real surveillance of HTLV-1 in this country. If we do more, I'm sure we're going to find a lot more cases that we can treat before the patients are in the advanced stages of ATLL. Because this cancer is considered a rare disease in the U.S., we haven't been making the progress we should be making," she emphasizes. "My hope is that this conference will help to change that."

Jain is also very engaged in working with African American communities living in Philadelphia who are represented by the African Cultural Alliance of North America (ACANA). "They are willing to work with us to educate their communities about the risk of the viruses being transmitted primarily through breast-feeding, but also by sexual intercourse and intravenous drug use," she says.

Jain notes that in some countries, such as Brazil, where the incidence of HTLV-1 is much higher, there is a government mandate to screen every pregnant patient for this virus. Those who are found to be infected are prohibited from breastfeeding and are given baby formula by the government.

"Brazil has become a superstar county in taking very strong measures to prevent the transmission of HTLV-1, and our hope is that this will spread to other places where the virus is present," says Jain.

She also notes that Japan has many immunotherapy vaccine trials in progress because they have more HTLV-1 patients, as well as government support.

DREXEL INITIATES HTLV-1 SCREENING IN PHILADELPHIA

In Philadelphia, Drexel University College of Medicine has recently begun collaborating with the Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center at Thomas Jefferson University and ACANA. More importantly, Jain's lab — in collaboration with the Jefferson community outreach unit, clinicians and ACANA — have earned a $100,000 pilot grant to conduct mobile screening in high-risk communities. Jain intends to expand this initiative to other cities within the U.S.

"If someone tests positive for HTLV-1 in the Philadelphia area, we refer them to our collaborators at Jefferson who have been treating HTLV-1 patients," says Jain. "If a patient is diagnosed with an HTLV-1-related myelopathy, we refer them to the University of Pennsylvania Neuroscience Unit."

She adds, "We need to educate health systems about who could potentially be at risk. Then it will be up to the health care professionals to educate these patients and ask them to undergo screening. This will be critical to our success in reaching more patients before it's too late to help them."

Internationally, interest in HTLV-1 and related viruses has increased significantly in the last six years, according to Jain. Researchers are making progress in vaccine development, and they are seeing the potential to repurpose some existing antiretroviral therapies.

"More — much more — needs to be done," says Jain. "There remains an urgent need to expedite research and its funding; spread awareness; engage patients, communities, policymakers, the World Health Organization and pharmaceutical industries; and make sure that the voice of people living with HTLV is heard."

For more information...
On HTLV-1, visit www.htlv.net
On the June 2026 IRVA Conference in Philadelphia, visit www.htlv2026.org

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE CELEBRATED KEY MILESTONES IN 2025 AND GATHERED ALUMNI TO CELEBRATE OUR RICH HISTORY AND PROUD TRADITIONS.

FOUNDERS DAY

Alumni and guests gathered to celebrate Founders Day at the Queen Lane Campus on March 11, kicking off the 175th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1850. The occasion included a luncheon, a presentation by the Legacy Center Archives and Special Collections, and a talk by author Janis Daly, whose work highlights pioneering female physicians and is inspired by her own genealogical link to Woman's Medical College.

ALUMNI WEEKEND

Held in May, Alumni Weekend welcomed graduates of the College of Medicine, Hahnemann University, Medical College of Pennsylvania and Woman's Medical College from all class years. Attendees enjoyed events including a tour of the Health Sciences Building, class receptions, Alumni Awards presentations, a 175th anniversary celebration for Woman's Medical College, and special recognition for the members of the Classes of 1975 in celebration of their 50th reunion.

BATTS DINNER

On May 14, the 2025 Batts Health Equity & Inclusive Excellence Dinner was held at The Study at University City to celebrate the achievements of graduating students whose lived experiences and perseverance through unique challenges have shaped their paths to medicine. This annual celebration, named in recognition of Dr. James A. Batts Jr., honors his legacy of mentorship and advocacy, and serves as a fundraiser for the Dr. James A. Batts Student Fund.

COMMENCEMENT

The 2025 Commencement ceremony welcomed the largest-ever graduating class in the College's history into the Alumni Association, including the inaugural cohort of MD program students from the College of Medicine at Tower Health. Held at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, the May 16 event included an address from honorary degree recipient Carl H. June, MD, Richard W. Vague Professor in Immunotherapy, Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Perelman School of Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania.

MEDICAL STUDENT LIFE & CULTURE EXHIBIT

On May 21, faculty, alumni, students and guests gathered at the Health Sciences Building to celebrate a new exhibit. The installation, titled "Medical Student Life & Culture: W/MCP, Hahnemann, Drexel," offers a vivid window into the lived experiences of medical students from the 1850s to the 2000s, featuring photos, artifacts and personal items displayed on a timeline, and a statue of Dr. June F. Klinghoffer, a 1945 graduate of Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania and longtime faculty member. In attendance was Klinghoffer's son, Robert K. Wenger, MD, MCP '83, whose family generously funded the exhibit.

'50s

Lewis B. Harned, MD, HU '51, celebrated his 100th birthday on August 17, 2024. On his 99th birthday, Harned began a journey to do 99 new things, ranging from eating his first watermelon-flavored ice cream to indoor skydiving. He retired in 1992 from the sports medicine clinic he established in Madison, Wisconsin. He previously founded an orthopedic practice in Waterloo, Iowa, where he also served as team physician for the University of Northern Iowa's football team.

'60s

Lionel Mailloux, MD, HU '62; Internal Medicine Residency, HU '66, clinical professor of medicine at the Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell, was quoted in an April 5, 2025, article in the *Long Island Press* about the importance of organ donation, particularly in New York state, which has some of the longest wait times for donor organs.

'70s

Mark Fisher, MD, HU '73, a rheumatologist with over four decades of experience, joined the Arthritis, Rheumatic & Bone Disease Associates at their new location in Haddon Heights, New Jersey. Fisher is board certified in internal medicine and rheumatology, and is a fellow of the American College of Rheumatology.

Dean E. Brenner, MD, HU '74, announced his retirement from the University of Michigan, where he had served as the Moshe Talpaz, MD Professor of Translational Oncology, professor of internal medicine and professor of pharmacology. He was also the inaugural chair of the NIH's Clinical Oncology Special Emphasis Panel and authored or co-authored more than 200 peer-reviewed journal articles. Over the course of his career, he received numerous honors for his leadership, mentorship and contributions to cancer prevention.

Maureen Lynch, MD, MCP '75, was profiled on the website of Caldwell University, where she received her undergraduate degree. The piece details her journey to pursuing a career in pediatrics, as well as her medical mission work, which included annual trips to Haiti to provide medical care for 14 consecutive years. Lynch also served for more than three decades as the head of pediatrics for the Harvard University Group Health Plan. She is currently an assistant clinical professor at Harvard Medical School and sees patients at Boston Children's Hospital.

Lawrence J. Goren, MD, HU '78; Surgery Residency, HUH '83, is the founder and chief medical officer of Pivot Onsite Innovations, which was recently acquired by Concentra Group Holdings Parent Inc., the nation's largest provider of occupational health services. Pivot Onsite Innovations is a leader in the onsite health industry with over 200 health clinics at employer locations in over 40 states.

William N. Hait, MD/PhD pharmacology, MCP '78, was named chief scientific advisor for the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR). He will also serve as chair of AACR's Scientific Advisory Council. Hait was recently honored with the 2025 AACR-Margaret Foti Award for leadership and extraordinary achievements in cancer research. The award recognizes his extensive contributions to cancer pharmacology, drug discovery and precision medicine. He developed Rutgers Cancer Institute, New Jersey's first and only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, and spearheaded the development of oncology drugs that have improved outcomes for millions of cancer patients. Hait has been a member of the AACR since 1986 and was elected a fellow of the AACR Academy in 2013. He previously served as the global head of Janssen Research and Development and was the executive vice president, chief of external innovation, and medical safety and global public health officer at Johnson & Johnson prior to his retirement in 2024.

Stephen K. Klasko, MD, HU '78, MBA, former CEO of Jefferson Health, was interviewed by the *Philadelphia Business Journal* about how various industries in the Greater Philadelphia area are adopting artificial intelligence.

'80s

Latisha Smith-Chase, MD, HU '83, was appointed medical director of the Wound & Edema Center at Fort HealthCare's clinic in Johnson Creek, Wisconsin. Smith-Chase is a board-certified internal medicine physician who received fellowship training in undersea and hyperbaric medicine at the University of Hawai'i.

Joseph G. Cacchione, MD, HU '85, CEO of Jefferson Health, was recognized in the *Philadelphia Business Journal* 2025 Power 100 list for his work as CEO of Thomas Jefferson University and Jefferson Health. Cacchione was also among a group of Philadelphia health care CEOs who visited officials in Washinton, D.C., to advocate for reversing research and Medicaid funding cuts that could affect the patients served by the CEO's health care facilities. Their efforts were covered in a March 13, 2025, *Philadelphia Business Journal* article.

Sheila Magoon, MD, HU '85, wrote an article, "Magoon: Call for Advocacy – STAR & CHIP Patient Choice," for the health care section of the *Rio Grande Guardian*. Magoon is executive director of the South Texas Physician Alliance.

Mary I. O'Connor, MD, MCP '85, was featured in an interview with *Authority Magazine* on medium.com as part of their series about telehealth best practices. O'Connor, co-founder and chief medical officer at Vori Health, leads an award-winning nationwide virtual specialty medical practice dedicated to treating musculoskeletal pain effectively. She has held leadership positions at Mayo Clinic and Yale School of Medicine, championing health equity and leading the Movement Is Life coalition to eliminate musculoskeletal health disparities. She is an orthopedic surgeon, health equity advocate, former U.S. Olympic athlete and co-author of *Taking Care of You*.

Rick Cohen, MD, HU '86, a physician and functional medicine expert with over 20 years of experience, developed the formula for Glycevia, a supplement designed to support balanced post-meal blood sugar responses. The company Bright Naturals launched the product in April 2025.

Niraj P. Pandit, MD, MCP '86; Internal Medicine Residency, MCP '89, was appointed vice chair of the HCA Florida Capital Hospital Board of Trustees, which he has been a member of since 2019. Pandit is a board-certified interventional cardiologist with HCA Florida Healthcare.

David J. Shulkin, MD, MCP '86, HD '19, joined the Board of Directors of PAR Excellence Systems, a leading end-to-end provider of automated inventory management systems solutions to the health care industry. He also currently serves on the Board of Trustees at Sanford Health, one of the country's largest rural health care systems, having previously served as executive vice president. Shulkin served as the ninth Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Stephen A. Chidyllo, MD, HU '87, DDS, retired from the clinical practice of plastic and reconstructive surgery. He was in practice in Monmouth County, New Jersey, for over 30 years. In addition to serving as an attending surgeon at Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch, New Jersey, he previously held an appointment as clinical associate professor of surgery at Hahnemann University and then Drexel University College of Medicine. Chidyllo is the founder of Central Jersey Plastic Surgery, and served as the chief of plastic and reconstructive surgery at Hackensack Meridian Health, Jersey Shore University Medical Center, in Neptune, New Jersey.

Patrick Hwu, MD, MCP '87, president and CEO of Moffitt Cancer Center, presented a keynote address, "Boosting Biotech Growth in the Sunshine State, Powered by Moffitt," at the Florida Innovation Conference. He was also named to the Life Sciences list of the Florida 500, a publication that highlights the 500 most influential executives in different economic sectors throughout the state. Hwu has led pioneering research and clinical efforts to better understand the interactions between tumors and the immune system. He helped launch the field of gene-modified T cells, publishing research on the first chimeric antigen receptor directed against cancer. His work focuses on vaccines, adoptive T cell therapies and immune resistance.

Christopher Bowden, MD, HU '88, was appointed to Bicara Therapeutics Board of Directors. Bowden is chief medical officer of Remix Therapeutics. He previously served as a strategic advisor and chief medical officer of Agios Pharmaceuticals. He was also vice president of product development in oncology and franchise lead of the signaling group at Genentech Inc.

Simon H. Chough, MD, HU '88, joined Independence Health System's team of cardiovascular specialists. Chough was most recently affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Heart and Vascular Institute in White Oak, Pennsylvania, and previously served as a peripheral vascular interventional specialist at UPMC Shadyside.

'90s

Alyssa Dweck, MD, HU '90, has partnered with D S Simon Media on a nationwide satellite media tour to discuss menopause, common misconceptions and new treatment options. Dweck is the chief medical officer at Bonafide Health LLC and is a practicing gynecologist in Westchester County, New York. She has served on the medical advisory board of Hope's Door, a shelter from domestic violence and as a medical consultant for stepup-speakout.org.

James M. Metz, MD; MS clinical immunology/ microbiology, HU '91, was the 2025 Commencement speaker and an honorary degree recipient at Juniata College on May 17. Metz is chair and Henry K. Pancoast Professor in the Department of Radiation Oncology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He serves as associate director for clinical services and programs at the Abramson Comprehensive Cancer Center and has overseen the department and operations of the Roberts Proton Therapy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the executive director of OncoLink, an award-winning resource founded in 1994 at the University of Pennsylvania.

Amy Murtha, MD, MCP '92, ELAM '15, was awarded the 2025 EJI Physician's Award by the New Jersey Health Foundation for her excellence, innovation and dedication to health care. She also received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Duke University School of Medicine, where she completed a residency in obstetrics and gynecology and a fellowship in maternal-fetal medicine. Murtha has served as dean of the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School since 2022.

Darshan Bhangdia, MD, HU '93, a board-certified urologist, joined the medical team at WellSpan Urology Care in Lewisberg, Pennsylvania. He completed his general surgery and urology residencies at Brookdale University Hospital and Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York.

Steven I. Levin, MD, HU '93, joined the staff of Aspirus St. Luke's Clinic Duluth Cardiothoracic Surgery and Vascular Surgery. Levin completed his residency in general surgery at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and he is fellowship trained in cardiothoracic surgery from the University of Massachusetts. In addition to working at Aspirus St. Luke's, Levin continues to serve in the U.S. Army Reserves and has deployed overseas as a surgeon in a forward surgical team.

Noah L. Rosenberg, MD, MCP '93, was appointed chief medical officer at Verrica Pharmaceuticals. Rosenberg previously led the clinical development and approval of Xepi, a topical antibiotic for the treatment of impetigo, at Medimetriks Pharmaceuticals.

John Whyte, MD, HU '93, was appointed CEO and executive vice president of the American Medical Association. Whyte is a board-certified internist with extensive experience at government agencies and private sector medical media outlets. Prior to his new role, he served as chief medical officer at WebMD.

Amy Crawford-Faucher, MD, MCP '94, was appointed chair of the Primary Care Institute at Allegheny Health Network (AHN). She had served as vice chair of the institute since 2020, and she has been vice chair of the Department of Family Medicine since 2018. She also served as residency director and medical director of AHN's Forbes Family Medicine Residency program, and director of medical care for UPMC's Western Psychiatric Hospital.

Fenton LeBon, MD, MCP '94, was appointed medical director of NAD+ IV Therapy and Wellness. With over 25 years of experience, LeBon brings a wealth of expertise in integrative psychiatry, addiction treatment and innovative wellness therapies to his role. He also has been a pioneer in wilderness programs in Georgia and Argentina, developing interventions for adolescents struggling with substance use and behavioral disorders. Beyond his clinical contributions, LeBon is the co-founder, co-chair and CEO of Molecular World Health, where he oversees all divisions and spearheads product development.

Stacy Lewin, MD, HU '94, was inducted into the Arthur L. Johnson Alumni Association class of 2025. Lewin completed her internship at Pennsylvania Hospital, a residency in anesthesiology at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, and a fellowship in obstetric anesthesiology at Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. After receiving a diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, she became a dedicated advocate, serving on the Community Review Team for the I AM ALS organization and the Patient Advisory Board for the ALS Hope Foundation. In addition, she is a patient advisor for various pharmaceutical companies, and she shares the invaluable knowledge she has gained with other patients and caregivers living with ALS.

Maureen C. McMahon-Narvaez, MD, MCP '95, was appointed board chair for Melmark, a not-for-profit organization providing special education, residential, vocational and therapeutic services for children and adults diagnosed with a range of intellectual and developmental disabilities, acquired brain disorders and other neurological and genetic disorders. The first elected female chair in 60 years, McMahon-Narvaez has served on Melmark's board since 2011, most recently in the role of vice chair. She is a medical director, medical consultant and review physician in infectious disease and vaccines for Merck.

Kiran Rajasenan, MD, HU '96, was inducted into the Ellwood City Area School District Hall of Fame in recognition of his significant accomplishments in the field of oncology. Rajasenan practices at the UPMC Hillman Cancer Center. He serves on the Executive Board of the 58-physician practice and is the former chair of oncology at UPMC Passavant.

Jason A. Damsker, MD, HU '97, was appointed professor in the Department of Hematology/Oncology at Fox Chase Cancer Center. Board certified in medical oncology, hematology and internal medicine, Damsker has spent more than 20 years caring for patients in private practice, most recently as an attending hematologist/oncologist for Abington Hematology Oncology Associates.

Madan N. Kandula, MD, HU '98, is the co-founder and CEO of Advent, a nationwide network of nose and throat treatment centers, which celebrated the opening of its new office location in the Dayton, Ohio, area. Kandula, who is a Dayton native, and his wife, Gwen, an audiologist, launched Advent in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2004. The company has since grown to 28 locations nationwide with approximately 400 employees.

Renee M. Turchi, MD, MCP '98; MPH; Pediatrics Residency, SCHC '01, professor and academic chair of pediatrics at the College of Medicine, was interviewed for an article on Healio.com, answering questions on a policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics about how to help youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities transition to adult care. Turchi, a member of the academy's Council on Children with Disabilities, is the lead author of the updated statement.

Jennifer A. Wargo, MD, MCP '98, holds the R. Lee Clark Endowed Professorship in the Department of Surgical Oncology and is a professor in the Department of Genomic Medicine at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. Wargo was featured on the podcast "People Behind the Science," where she discussed the impacts of the gut microbiome on immunotherapy cancer treatments.

John Langell, MD, MCPHU '99; PhD microbiology and immunology, MCPHU '98; MPH, president of Northeast Ohio Medical University, spoke about the institution's 2020-2025 strategic plan in a presentation for Ideastream Public Media. Positive change at the university has accelerated during his tenure, including an increase in underrepresented minorities matriculating at the school, staff and faculty development, and streamlined operations.

'00s

Jeffrey Egler, MD, MCPHU '00, a double board-certified physician in family and lifestyle medicine, offered advice and strategies to protect Los Angeles residents from the health impacts of wildfire smoke and environmental toxins in an interview on The Good Men Project website. Egler is chief medical officer for Noom.

Judette M. Louis, MD, MCPHU '00; MPH; ELH '24, was appointed dean of the Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences at Old Dominion University in September 2025. Louis previously served as the James M. Ingram Professor and Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Morsani College of Medicine at the University of South Florida Health, and as director of the USF Health Regional Perinatal Intensive Care Center obstetrical satellite programs. Her academic and clinical career has been devoted to improving outcomes for mothers and babies.

Ian B.K. Martin, MD, MCPHU '00; MBA, an eminent scholar, professor with tenure, and system chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine, interim associate provost and senior associate dean of faculty affairs at Medical College of Wisconsin, and emergency physician-in-chief at Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin Health System, was elected to serve as president of the Association of Academic Chairs of

Emergency Medicine. He has previously served as president-elect, secretary-treasurer and at-large member of the organization's board. Martin received the John Marx Leadership Award at the annual meeting of the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine. The award, the highest granted by the society, honors a member who has made exceptional contributions to the specialty of emergency medicine, through local, regional, national and international leadership.

Asif M. Ilyas, MD, MCPHU '01, who serves associate dean of clinical research, academic chair of orthopedic surgery, and adjunct professor of surgery and pediatrics at the College of Medicine, chaired "The Next Chapter of the Opioid Epidemic in Pennsylvania: The Xylazine Crisis" at the Rothman Orthopaedic Institute Symposium. Ilyas was also appointed to the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Hand & Microsurgery* and he was named to Avante-Garde Health's 2025 list of "Orthopedic Surgery Research All-Stars," which honors the best surgeons and hospitals based on the quantity and quality of their published orthopedic surgery research. In addition to his roles at Drexel, he serves as president of the Rothman Opioid Foundation and professor of orthopedic surgery at Thomas Jefferson University.

Erum N. Ilyas, MD, MCPHU '01, associate professor and interim academic chair of dermatology at Drexel University College of Medicine, and **Willow Pastard, MS Drexel Pathway to Medical School '21**, now a fourth-year medical student at the College, co-wrote an article for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "People of Color Are Getting Burned by Sunscreen Makers." The article shares that currently available sunscreen products in the United States provide inadequate protection for non-white skin.

Jeffrey Nau, PhD; MS medical science '02, has been appointed CEO of Aviceda Therapeutics, a private, clinical-stage biotech company focused on developing next-generation immunomodulators. Nau is an accomplished biopharma executive with over two decades of experience leading and expanding biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies, including as COO of Kalaris Therapeutics and CEO of Oyster Point Pharma. In addition to his Drexel degree, Nau holds a PhD in public health and epidemiology from Walden University. He is an inventor on multiple patents and has authored numerous peer-reviewed publications.

Partha Ray, MD, '02, is the founder and chair of Onconostic Technologies/3N Diagnostics Group (OT/3NDx), an oncology company that guides personalized treatment selection for breast cancer patients. Ray completed residency training in general surgery at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and surgical oncology fellowship training at the John Wayne Cancer Institute.

Robert A. Rissman, PhD neuroscience '02, received the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* Alzheimer Award. Rissman is lead author of the groundbreaking article "Evaluation of Blood-Based Plasma Biomarkers as Potential Markers of Amyloid Burden in Preclinical Alzheimer's Disease," a paper that presents insights into a possible blood test to screen for Alzheimer's disease. He is the W.M. Keck Endowed Chair in Medicine, and professor of physiology and neuroscience at the University of Southern California, as well as founding director of the Neuroscience Translational Research Division at the university's Alzheimer's Therapeutic Research Institute in San Diego, California.

Patrick Jeanmenne, MD '03, a board-certified diagnostic radiologist, joined the medical team at Penn Highlands Healthcare. Jeanmenne previously practiced at Mount Nittany Medical Center in State College. He completed his residency in diagnostic and interventional radiology at Brigham and Women's Hospital/Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts.

Heidi M. Harrington, MD '05, a board-certified plastic surgeon, will lead Beaufort Memorial Plastic Surgery & Aesthetics at their new practice location in Okatie, South Carolina. Harrington has two decades of experience in plastic, reconstructive and cosmetic surgery. She completed her residency in plastic and reconstructive surgery at Loma Linda University Medical Center in Southern California.

Phillip Koo, MD '05, was appointed chief medical officer by the Prostate Cancer Foundation. He previously served as the chief of diagnostic imaging and physician executive of oncology at the Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center. He has held leadership positions in organizations including the Radiological Society of North America, the American College of Radiology, the Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging, and the American Society of Clinical Oncology. Koo completed his residency at Pennsylvania Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania Health System and his fellowship at Harvard Medical School.

Patrick W. Whitlock, MD '05, PhD, was appointed director of hip preservation in the Department of Orthopaedics at Cedars-Sinai. Whitlock previously served as co-director of the hip preservation program at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. He is one of only a few specialists in the U.S. skilled at performing periacetabular osteotomy for the treatment of hip dysplasia.

Marcelo Malakooti, MD '08, MBA, was named to the Crown Family Professorship in Pediatrics at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, where he also serves as senior vice president and chief medical officer. Malakooti completed his pediatrics residency at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and his fellowship in pediatric critical care at Northwestern University McGaw Medical Center.

Amy Smagala, VMD; MLAS '08, and her sister Jenni opened Twin Tails Veterinary Hospital in Garnet Valley, Pennsylvania, on June 25, 2025. Smagala earned her veterinary degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine.

Andrew T. Healy, MD '09, a board-certified neurosurgeon, joined the staff at FryeCare Orthopedics & Neurosurgery in Hickory, North Carolina. Healy completed his residency and enfolded orthopedic and neurosurgical spine fellowship training at the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio.

'10s

Caroline Jouhourian, MD '10, director of the General GI program at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, led a webinar, "Gut Wrenchers: Understanding, Preventing and Treating Common Digestive Diseases." The presentation was part of Beacon Hill Village's "Living Well Ending Well" series in partnership with the Boston Public Library.

Candice Y. Lee, MD '10, was part of historic all-female heart surgery team that performed a coronary artery bypass graft operation at Allegheny General Hospital. The operation helped to draw attention to gender representation in medicine shortly after International Women's Day, on March 8. Lee has worked as a cardiothoracic surgeon at Allegheny since 2020.

Adam R. Leman, PhD molecular and cell biology and genetics '11, was a speaker at the 5th Fermentation-Enabled Alternative Protein Summit, held in San Francisco February 24-26, 2025. He co-presented a fireside chat on the topic of "Effectively Financing Scaled Up Manufacturing Sites," and presented "Conducting Techno-Economic Analyses & Life Cycle Assessments to Model Manufacturing Profitability." He also chaired a session on "Advancing Commercially Successful Strategic Partnerships." Leman is a principal fermentation scientist at The Good Food Institute.

Michael J. Wilkinson, MD '11, a board-certified cardiologist and lipidologist who directs UC San Diego Health's Advanced Lipid Treatment program, participated in a lecture series hosted by the Stein Institute for Research on Aging and Center for Healthy Aging on May 14, 2025. Wilkinson's lecture focused on how intermittent fasting can be a strategy to prevent cardiometabolic diseases and promote healthy aging. Wilkinson is a member of the National Lipid Association board, and the immediate past-president of the association's Pacific chapter. He is also an associate editor of the *American Journal of Preventive Cardiology*.

Amy Ott, PhD microbiology and immunology '13, served as a mentor for Bryn Mawr College STEMLA (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math in the Liberal Arts) program students with other members of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Association of Women in Science (AWIS-PHL) as part of an AWIS-STEMLA collaboration. AWIS-PHL's mentorship circles are designed to help students set professional and personal goals, and build competence and confidence in attaining those goals in a supportive group setting.

Austin D. Williams, MD '13, a surgeon and assistant professor in the Department of Surgical Oncology at Fox Chase Cancer Center, was named a fellow of the American College of Surgeons in recognition of his exceptional contributions to the field, commitment to ethical surgical practices and dedication to advancing patient care. Williams was also named a Society of Surgical Oncology presidential scholar. The scholars in the program are paired with distinguished surgical oncologists who serve as mentors. Prior to joining Fox Chase, Williams was a breast surgical oncology fellow at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where he was the Kroll Family Fellow. Over the course of his career, Williams has achieved multiple honors, including the Outstanding Scientific Presentation Award from the American Society of Breast Surgeons and the Owen H. Wangensteen Excellence in Research Award from the American College of Surgeons.

Kristina Carter Bartley, MLAS '14, presented a webinar, "Decoding Animal Behavior: Enhancing Welfare and Research in Laboratory Science," for Drexel University. Bartley is director of behavior management and an enrichment program quality assurance education specialist at the Center for Comparative Medicine and Surgery at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. She is also founder of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Enrichment.

Gabrielle Hawkins, MD '14, MS biological sciences '10, joined the Woman's Hospital GYN Oncology Clinic as a surgeon. Hawkins completed an obstetrics and gynecology residency and a fellowship in gynecologic oncology at the University of North Carolina Hospitals in Chapel Hill. She is board certified in gynecologic oncology, and obstetrics and gynecology.

Michael A. Mashura, MD '14, PBC interdepartmental medical sciences '10, joined the medical team at HCA Florida Biscayne Bay Orthopaedics as an orthopedic surgeon. Mashura previously served as a team physician for numerous other athletic organizations, including Florida International University and the Miami Heat. He also serves as the team physician for several local high schools and has been a sideline physician for sporting events, including New York Cosmos professional soccer, Merchant Marine Academy Division III NCAA football, Miami-Dade public high school football and Long Island high school football. Additionally, he has co-published and lectured on topics such as ACL injuries, cartilage degeneration and regeneration, shoulder instability and hip preservation.

Erica Baller, MD '15, assistant professor of psychiatry at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, was honored with the Leonard Berwick Memorial Teaching Award. This award recognizes a member of the medical faculty whose teaching effectively fuses basic science and clinical medicine, particularly among younger faculty. Baller's teaching materials have been used in 178 countries and are now incorporated into primary care training in Canada. In addition, she serves as director of neuroscience education for the University of Pennsylvania Psychiatry Residency program.

Benjamin F. Cocchiaro, MD '15, MPH '13, published two articles for TheConversation.com: "How Opioid Deaths Tripled in Philly Over a Decade – And What May Be Behind a Recent Downturn" and "Fewer Deaths, New Substances and Evolving Treatments in Philly's Opioid Epidemic – 4 Essential Reads." Cocchiaro serves as assistant professor of family, community and preventive medicine at Drexel University College of Medicine.

Allison Denman, MS forensic science '16, was recognized in this year's Celebrate Caring Campaign by Independence Blue Cross for her exceptional dedication and excellence in the nursing field. Denman is a clinical director and forensic nurse manager at Drexel's Philadelphia Sexual Assault Response Center. She provides round-the-clock care for victims of sexual assault and also serves as an expert witness for legal proceedings related to sexual assault nurse examiner care.

Jennifer Hope, PhD microbiology and immunology '17, an assistant professor in the College of Medicine's Department of Microbiology & Immunology, is the principal investigator for a Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center Research Consortium pilot funding grant, with College of Medicine colleagues serving as co-investigators. The project is "Development of a Novel Preclinical Model to Address Mechanisms of HIV- Mediated Enhancement of Pancreatic Cancer Incidence and Severity."

Sonya S. Shah, MD '17, a board-certified internist, has joined the medical staff of HMH Raritan Bay Medical Center in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Following her medical education, she completed a residency in internal medicine at Lenox Hill Hospital.

Michelle White, MD '17 , and her father participated in an interview for the *Meadville Tribune*, where they discussed the joy of working together at Meadville ENT, where White joined her father after completing her residency at Tufts Medical Center.

William P. Zickler, MD '17, joined the Northeast Georgia Physicians Group's Vascular Center as a vascular surgeon. Zickler completed a residency and internship in general surgery at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center before completing his fellowship training at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

Ryan M. Cox, MD '18, was appointed assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at Upstate Medical University. Cox previously served as a shoulder and elbow fellow at Rothman Orthopaedic Institute at Thomas Jefferson University.

Shaina N. Kumar, MD '19, joined OCLI Vision as a specialist in cataract and refractive surgery. Her research contributions have been recognized in prestigious journals such as *Oxford Medical Case Reports* and *Ophthalmic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery*.

Jennifer L. Prestipino, MS interdisciplinary health sciences '19, an applications scientist at Thermo Fisher Scientific, was interviewed by news-medical.net on the science of silk fibroin and chitosan, and techniques for biomaterials analysis. Prestipino specializes in the NanoDrop UV-Vis Spectrophotometer product line.

'20s

Mitch Nothem, PhD pharmacology and physiology '20, a postdoctoral scholar at the College of Medicine, has received a renewal of his Drexel Medical Cannabis Research Center Pilot Award. This will provide a second year of funding for his project "Investigating Cannabinoid Combinations in the Treatment of Chronic Neuropathic Pain and Alcohol Use Disorder."

Bhumiben Patel, MS drug discovery and development '20, see Reeb '25.

Sevak Keshishyan, MD; MS clinical research organization and management '21, was appointed director of interventional pulmonology and associate medical director of the Lung Cancer Program at Englewood Health. Keshishyan is an interventional pulmonologist and critical care medicine physician.

Stacia Lewandowski, PhD pharmacology and physiology '21, see Reeb '25.

Willow Pastard, MS Drexel pathway to medical school '21, see E. Ilyas '01.

Lorela Ciraku, PhD molecular and cell biology and genetics '22, see Esquea '24.

Genevieve Curtis, PhD neuroscience '22, **Breanne Pirino, PhD neuroscience '23**, and College of Medicine colleagues published "Pituitary Adenylate Cyclase-Activating Polypeptide (PACAP)+ Cells in the Paraventricular Nucleus of the Thalamus: Relationship With Binge-Type Eating in Male and Female Mice" in the February 2025 issue of the journal *Psychopharmacology*.

Zhucheng Lin, PhD pharmacology and physiology '22, **Xuan Luo, PhD pharmacology and physiology '24**, **Deepa Reddy, MS pharmacology and physiology '23**, **Jason Wickman, PhD pharmacology and physiology '25**, **Richa Pande, PhD microbiology and immunology '23**, and colleagues at the College of Medicine; Drexel School of Biomedical Engineering, Science and Health Systems; Nanostics Inc; and Wake Forest University School of Medicine authored "Inflammatory Pain Resolution by Mouse Serum-Derived Small Extracellular Vesicles," which was published online in *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* on September 29, 2024.

Richa Pande, PhD microbiology and immunology '23, see Lin '22.

Breanne Pirino, PhD neuroscience '23, see Curtis '22.

Deepa Reddy, MS pharmacology and physiology '23, see Lin '22.

Gabriel DePinho, MS Drexel Pathway to Medical School '23, now a member of the MD program class of 2027, received the first-place prize in the Nth Dimensions Summer Internship Research Poster Session, which was held during the National Medical Association's 2024 Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly in New York City.

Vershawn Hansen, MS Drexel pathway to medical school '24, was awarded the SignatureCare Emergency Center Fall Semester Medical and Health Scholarship. Hansen is now a member of the MD program class of 2028 at the College of Medicine.

Xuan Luo, PhD pharmacology and physiology '24, see Lin '22.

Lucie Bennett-Stein, MS pathologists' assistant '25, presented her research at the American Association of Pathologists' Assistants 49th annual conference. Bennett-Stein's poster, "Dissecting Ergonomics: Personalized Strategies at the Grossing Bench," included an assessment of pathologists' assistants' understanding of ergonomics and their current work stations, with the aim of safeguarding the long-term health of members of the profession.

Katelyn Reeb, PhD pharmacology and physiology '25, **Bhumiben Patel, MS drug discovery and development '20**, **Stacia Lewandowski, PhD pharmacology and physiology '21**, and colleagues at the College of Medicine, the Wistar Institute and the Lewis Katz School of Medicine of Temple University authored "Positive Allosteric Modulation of Glutamate Transporter Reduces Cocaine-Induced Locomotion and Expression of Cocaine Conditioned Place Preference in Rats," which was published in the *European Journal of Pharmacology* on December 5, 2024.

Sophia Valla, MS pathologists' assistant '25, presented her research at the American Association of Pathologists' Assistants 49th annual conference. Her poster shared a case study about a 66-year-old male patient with recurrent laryngeal squamous cell carcinoma.

Jason Wickman, PhD pharmacology and physiology '25, see Lin '22.

Residents and Fellows

Adam Sagot, DO, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellowship '19, was appointed chief medical officer of Preferred Behavioral Health Group. In this role, Sagot will lead the organization's medical strategy, oversee clinical quality and safety, and guide the integration of evidence-based practices across all service lines. Previously, he served as chief medical officer at Summit Oaks Hospital. Sagot is also an assistant professor of psychiatry at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School at Rutgers University, where he is a vocal advocate for transforming mental health systems to better serve individuals and families.

IN MEMORIAM

Mary Louise Coté, MD, WMC '59, died on March 1, 2025, at the age of 95. She earned bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Massachusetts prior to enrolling in medical school. After graduating from Woman's Medical College, she completed an internship at Episcopal Hospital in Philadelphia, specializing in pediatrics. She became one of three principal medical advisors to the kidney transplant surgeons at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children. She also served for many years on the Altar Guild for her church, Memorial Church of the Good Shepherd, and was a longtime trustee of the WMC-MCP Trust Endowed Fund.

Joan Emma Hurlock, MD, WMC '70, died on February 24, 2025. She was 92. Prior to attending medical school, she graduated from the University of Michigan Nursing School, subsequently caring for patients with polio in iron lungs. She later went back to school, earning an undergraduate degree from Beaver College, now Arcadia University in Glenside, Pennsylvania, before matriculating at Woman's. She went on to complete an internship at Lankenau Hospital in Philadelphia. Hurlock practiced medicine, specializing in family medicine, for over 40 years at Roxborough Memorial Hospital in Philadelphia, where she served as president of the medical staff.

Dorothea Johnson, MD, WMC '56, HD '86, died on March 4, 2025, at 94 years old. She earned a bachelor's degree from Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, before enrolling at Woman's. She had a decades-long career in occupational medicine with AT&T, ultimately serving as vice president and division executive for health affairs. An international authority on development and implementation of health care programs for industry, Johnson was the first female president of the American Occupational Medical Association, one of the first female vice presidents at AT&T, and the first American to be given honorary membership in the United Kingdom Society of Occupational Medicine.

Danielle Marie Noreika, MD '03, died on October 16, 2024, at age 45. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Pittsburgh before coming to Drexel. She completed an internal medicine residency at the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, then served as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy for nearly a decade, including a deployment to Kuwait. She subsequently completed fellowship training in hospice and palliative medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she then joined the faculty, ultimately serving as section chief of palliative medicine and director of the Palliative Medicine Fellowship program, as well as a professor of medicine in the Division of Hematology, Oncology and Palliative Care.

Stephen J. Adelson, MD, HU '59, September 24, 2024
Paul Charles Aita, MD, HU '66, July 12, 2025
Dean Arvan, MD, HU '59, January 14, 2025
Gregory M. Asnis, MD, HU '72, March 3, 2025
Walter E. Badenhausen Jr., MD, HU '56, August 29, 2025
Robert F. Barnes, MD, HU '76, February 22, 2025
Carolkay Barre, MD, WMC '64, July 18, 2025
Anne Bedrosian, MD, WMC '56, January 24, 2024
Morgana M. Benabe, MD, WMC '68, April 23, 2025
Douglas Robert Berson, MD, MCP '83, August 23, 2024
Dorothy McKnight Blasco, MD, WMC '54, September 8, 2024
Myron L. Blumberg, MD, HU '60, October 5, 2024
Maria E. Brabb, MD, WMC '58, September 1, 2024
Francis M. Bradley, MD, HU '86, November 26, 2024
Signe Astrid Brightman, MD, WMC '61, February 22, 2025
Barbara A. Burke, MD, WMC '53, February 27, 2024
Albert S. Callie, MD, HU '66, March 12, 2025
Graham R. Case, MD '04, August 12, 2024
Pauline Chusid, MD, MCP '80, October 13, 2024
Sara Ann Cifrese, MD, HU '67, December 24, 2024
Elsie Marie Colin, MD, HU '87, April 27, 2025
Martha Cottrell, MD, WMC '62, February 20, 2025
Antoinette Ripepi Cramer, MD, WMC '61, July 25, 2024
Thayalan Krishna Cumarasamy, MD, HU '93, May 2, 2025
Earl P. Detrick, MD, HU '56, October 31, 2024
Alisa Ann Devlin, MD, HU '93, December 30, 2024
Nicholas C. DiDomenico Jr., MD, MCP '76, February 20, 2024
Raymond H. Dominici, MD, HU '65, December 9, 2024
Joan Celebre Dragonetti, MD, WMC '60, February 18, 2024
Yvonne Thel Driscoll, MD, WMC '62, April 14, 2025
Frances Eileen Dwyer, MD, WMC '67, November 15, 2024
James Stuart Eakins, MD, HU '93, December 27, 2024
Edward C. Fetherolf, MD, MCP '73, August 25, 2025
Denis H. Franklin, MD, HU '64, September 22, 2024
Deborah L. Graham, MD, MCP '77, July 19, 2024
Gilbert R. Grimes, MD, HU '58, March 11, 2025
Sally Ruth Grimshaw, MD, WMC '57, August 7, 2025
Patricia Anne Gureghian, MD, WMC '63, September 9, 2025
Henry W. Hitner, PhD pharmacology, HU '72, August 20, 2025
James L. Hughes III, MD, HU '67, August 7, 2024
Loraine Simons Kelley, MD, WMC '64, December 30, 2024
Brent Duane Kennedy, MD, HU '81, July 27, 2024
William Lynch Knapp, MD, HU '47, September 8, 2024
Albert B. Knouse, MD, HU '58, September 10, 2024
Jeffry Ivan Komins, MD, HU '70, August 21, 2025
E. Gary Lamsback, MD, HU '80, November 2, 2024
Constance C. Lapointe, MD, WMC '59, March 9, 2025
Jacqueline J. Lloyd, MD, HU '77, April 28, 2025
Rosalia M. Lomeo, MD, MCP '84, October 21, 2024
Joni Lahr Magee, MD, WMC '68, November 7, 2024
Dennis M. Manning, MD, HU '76, October 29, 2024
Sheila Margolis, MD, WMC '69, July 29, 2025
Mary Lou Marsh, MD, MCP '73, August 26, 2024
Catherine A. Michon, MD, WMC '65, September 2, 2025
Bruce M. Milburn, MD, HU '80, December 27, 2024
Victoria E. Millet, MD, MCP '75, July 8, 2025
Stephen C. Nelson, MD, HU '75, July 18, 2024
James Philip Newman, MD, HU '81, January 7, 2025
Raymond R. Noble, MD, HU '65, December 2, 2024
Frederick J. Oddi, MD, HU '64, August 12, 2024
John J. O'Donnell, MD, HU '74, August 30, 2024
Heinz O. Osterholzer, MD, HU '68, February 11, 2025
Anthony J. Palmaccio Jr., MD, MCP '73, September 28, 2024
Pascal A. Pironti, MD, HU '59, February 9, 2025
Rosemary Rau-Levine, MD, WMC '63, September 21, 2024
Mary Anne Rorro, MD, HU '58, April 24, 2025
Charlotte Elnora Sanner, MD, WMC '64, February 22, 2024
Mark S. Schaffenburg, MD, MCP '88, October 28, 2024
Roberta L. Schneider, MD, MCP '81, June 18, 2025
Hillard C. Sharf, MD, HU '75, September 21, 2024
Jovitas G. Skucas, MD, HU '68, August 31, 2024
Mervyn Winston Smith, MD, HU '85, March 1, 2025
Alan R. Soltys, MD, HU '71, July 16, 2025
Arthur R. Spielvogel, MD, HU '59, January 30, 2025
Alan R. Swiecicki, MD, HU '65, March 6, 2025
Samuel Charles Thomas III, MD, HU '93, November 12, 2024
Rose Lou Tse, MD, WMC '60, October 3, 2024
Mark H. Wholey, MD, HU '53, February 25, 2025
Steven F. Wiegand, MD, HU '77, April 4, 2025
Paul R. Woolslayer, MD, HU '60, November 8, 2024
Dennis G. Youshaw, MD, HU '65, January 12, 2025

New and Notable Around Campus

As Drexel University College of Medicine continues to grow, evolve and chart bold new directions, 2025 brought several transformative milestones that have strengthened our community and expanded our impact. From welcoming new University leadership to advancing our College's long-term strategic vision and expanding our academic footprint, these developments reflect our shared commitment to excellence in medical and graduate education, research and clinical care

Welcoming Drexel President Antonio Merlo

Antonio Merlo, PhD, became Drexel University's 16th president on July 1, 2025. An accomplished higher education leader, scholar and professor, Merlo joined Drexel after serving since 2019 as the Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science at New York University. Merlo came to Drexel as the University embarked on Academic Transformation, a blueprint for reimagining the institution's future. Since his presidential appointment, he has emphasized his commitment to the initiative and his strong belief that it is giving Drexel an advantage, especially when combined with the University's long-established differentiators, including experiential education. In an interview with *Drexel Magazine*, Merlo expressed enthusiasm for the University and its continued success for years to come: "I want to meet everyone I possibly can, hear their concerns, understand what their pain points are, what their aspirations are, and really start putting all these pieces together with a strong team to continue moving Drexel forward."

College Forward and Strategic Plan

Launched in January 2025, the College of Medicine's College Forward and Strategic Plan 2030 initiative established a comprehensive roadmap for institutional growth and innovation for the next four years. The planning process was organized into phased activities, including an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; implementation planning; and the development of mission-aligned outcomes and timelines. Four College Forward Task Forces — focused on research and innovation, medical and graduate education, faculty affairs, and clinical strategy — were formed to identify short- and long-term goals, assess strengths and challenges, and propose actionable strategies. These groups gathered input from a wide range of constituents, ensuring that the Strategic Plan prioritizes the needs of faculty, researchers, students, clinicians and community partners. The resulting Strategic Plan 2030, which can be viewed at bit.ly/DUCOM2030, serves as a living document that provides clear, measurable objectives supported by data-driven evaluation, guiding the College through 2030. In reflecting on the importance of this initiative, Charles B. Cairns, MD, the Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Dean of the College of Medicine, and senior vice president of medical affairs and Drexel Health Operations at Drexel University, noted, "We are advancing a bold vision for medical and graduate education that fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, drives research and innovation, and prepares our students to lead in rapidly evolving fields."

Drexel–Salus Merger

On July 3, 2025, Drexel's merger with Salus University was finalized, resulting in the formation of Drexel University's Elkins Park Campus. This merger has expanded the College of Medicine's portfolio to include additional graduate programs in high-demand health sciences and rehabilitation professions. Salus University boasts a long and prestigious history dating back to 1919. Over the years, the school has grown and expanded its offerings, becoming a leader in the education of health professionals. Joining the College of Medicine are the Salus at Drexel Physician Assistant Studies program and the Biomedicine master's and PhD programs. "Salus University's reputation as an exceptional educational institution for health professionals is a testament to the quality of these programs and the students they attract," said Dean Cairns about the merger. "I look forward to collaborating with Salus leaders as we develop synergies across the outstanding programs that are part of our College of Medicine community."

ESTABLISH A CURRENT USE SCHOLARSHIP

TRANSFORM LIVES. SHAPE THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE.

Your generosity has the power to change everything for a future physician. Medical school tuition costs are skyrocketing. The average student debt load can exceed $275,000, creating barriers that prevent talented students from pursuing their calling, especially in critical fields like primary care and public health. With your support, students can choose careers based on passion and purpose, not financial pressure.

Drexel University College of Medicine admits only the most exceptional candidates, just 3% of applicants. Scholarships ensure these bright minds join our community, where they will learn, lead and innovate. Your gift doesn't just fund education; it opens doors, inspires dreams and strengthens health care for generations.

Scholarship recipients never forget the donors who believed in them. Many go on to become leaders, advocates and philanthropists themselves, creating a legacy of giving that endures. Your impact is immediate and lasting. By investing in scholarships, you empower the best and brightest to serve with compassion and excellence. Together, we can build a healthier future — one medical student at a time.

Receiving an alumni scholarship has helped provide the peace of mind I need to balance academics, research and Step prep without the constant weight of financial stress. By easing my debt load, the scholarship has helped me focus on becoming the best physician possible. Knowing that our alumni are invested in my success alleviates an immense mental load, letting me dedicate my full energy to my patients and my training.

– Diego J. Compte, MD '28

Give today. Change tomorrow.

Interested in discussing how you can make an impact?
Contact Jill Rall at **jhr53@drexel.edu** or **267.254.5470**.

DREXEL UNIVERSITY
College of
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ALUMNI WEEKEND

MAY 8-9, 2026

Learn more about the schedule of events and let your classmates know that you are planning to attend by visiting drexel.edu/alumni/weekend to register today!

Email medical.alumni@drexel.edu for more information on events throughout the weekend or ways to get involved with your class reunions.