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## Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center Research Consortium: Committed to Changing the Cancer Landscape in Philadelphia

Drexel University and Thomas Jefferson University are longtime allies in the fight against cancer. That partnership was formalized in 2013 as the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center (SKCC) Research Consortium, a relationship that was reinvigorated in 2021, in preparation for the center's application to be named a National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center.

The SKCC, which is already an NCI-designated cancer center, has proved a powerful driver for resource allocation, research collaboration and community outreach over the past 10 years. It was in recognition of their achievements across those fronts that the SKCC applied for comprehensive status with the NCI when they renewed their

consortium grant. A site visit was held in August 2023 and the review process is now underway, with an announcement expected in the spring.

The comprehensive designation would be a mark of prestige that promises to attract new opportunities when it comes to funding, faculty and collaboration, underscoring the level of quality the SKCC has maintained for years. Kenny J. Simansky, PhD, serves as senior vice dean for research at Drexel University College of Medicine, where he oversees the consortium partnership with Noreen Robertson, DMD, senior associate vice dean for research.

"There aren't all that many cancer centers in the United States that are NCI-designated. It's an important status symbol that reflects quality, because you have to earn that," Simansky says.

The SKCC honored both Robertson and Simansky with Lifetime Achievement Awards in February in recognition of their longtime dedication to the consortium and to reducing the burdens of cancer, a mission that involves a growing network of partners.

Under a new agreement, the consortium with the SKCC now explicitly involves seven Drexel schools — a way of saying, in Simansky's words, "If we're going to be transformational as a consortium, then we need to take advantage of all the less typical things at the consortium that Drexel has to offer," from insight into aging and caregiving in cancer from the College of Nursing and Health Professions to population science data analysis from the Dornsife School of Public Health.



Dean Charles B. Cairns, MD, (left) and President John Fry (right) were present to honor Noreen Robertson, DMD, and Kenny Simansky, PhD, with Lifetime Achievement Awards at the SKCC Research Consortium retreat in February.



7  
Pediatrics AIDS Benefit celebrates talent, supports HIV care



10  
Drexel community brings medical education to SLAMS



12  
MD students expand horizons through global health efforts

• continued on page 4

# Contents

SKCC Research Consortium . . . . . 1  
Destination Excellence. . . . . 3  
Reach Out and Read Basketball Event. . . . . 6  
Pediatric AIDS Benefit Concert . . . . . 7  
Drexel Mini-Courses at SLAMS . . . . . 10  
Global Health Student Experiences . . . . . 12

## NEWS & EVENTS

New leadership roles, thesis defenses,  
Faculty Launch program graduation. . . . . 6-11

## WHAT WE'RE DOING

Activities and accomplishments. . . . . 14-18

**Calendar** . . . . . 17

**Get to Know** . . . . . 19

# pulse

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# Leaping Into 2024

As I write this, 2024 is well underway and we are off to an exciting start. Our first- and second-year medical students, and many of our pre-med/pre-health and interdisciplinary/career-oriented graduate students are enjoying the academic experience in the new Health Sciences Building, while the biomedical graduate students continue their training at Queen Lane and the New College Building. In West

Reading, our third-year medical students are having great success in their clinical rotations at Reading Hospital.



Charles B. Cairns, MD

I am pleased and honored that Leon McCrea II, MD, MPH, has accepted the role of Deborah J. Tuttle, MD, and John P. Piper, MD, Vice Dean for Educational Affairs. Dr. McCrea's dedicated service to the College of Medicine, most recently as senior associate dean of diversity, equity and inclusion, has been invaluable, and he brings to his new role a wealth of experience and expertise.

We also recently welcomed Erum Ilyas, MD '01, MBE, to a new role as interim

academic chair of our provisional Department of Dermatology. Dr. Ilyas has an impressive record as a clinical dermatologist and an educator, and under her leadership, dermatology education and research will surely flourish at the College.

Mauricio Reginato, PhD, who has served as interim chair of the Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology since 2021, has accepted the role of chair of the department. Dr. Reginato has a long history of service to the College of Medicine. He is a proven mentor and leader who will continue to foster outstanding educational programs for both PhD and MS candidates, and conduct renowned research on the molecular basis of disease.

Finally, it is with mixed emotions that I thank Donna M. Russo, PhD, HU '89, for her decades of service to the College of Medicine, as she embarks on a new role as the assistant secretary of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education at the Association of American Medical Colleges. Dr. Russo has been a driving force for MD education and curricular development, leading us through accreditation cycles and playing an instrumental role in the creation of the Foundations and Frontiers MD program curriculum.

As I am writing this, Match Day is just over a month away. I am certain our MD class of 2024 will make us proud with successful residency matches. Shortly thereafter, our 2024 Commencement ceremony will be upon us. I look forward to celebrating the achievements of our students with our esteemed faculty and professional staff who have worked so tirelessly to teach and mentor them.

I could not be prouder of our College of Medicine community. The beginning of each new year is an opportune time to recall what first motivated you, and what now inspires you. I am optimistic about the rest of this year and all that we continue to achieve together.

## Charles B. Cairns, MD

Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Dean  
Senior Vice President of Medical Affairs

## Meet Vanessa K. Ferrel, MD, MPH, AAHIVS Chair of the Committee for Diversity & Inclusive Excellence

I am a clinician at Drexel's Partnership Comprehensive Care Practice. Our patient population is primarily people living with HIV, although the bulk of what I do for them is management of other conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, since most of our patients' HIV is well-managed and their viral load is undetectable. We also see people who are on PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV) and people undergoing curative treatment for hepatitis C mono-infection (i.e., not co-infected with HIV).

The College of Medicine's Committee for Diversity & Inclusive Excellence is charged with a number of goals related to diversity, equity and inclusion. In addition to recommending processes for a more diverse and inclusive academic community, we monitor and recommend policies and procedures, as well as programming for faculty, professional staff and students who are underrepresented in medicine and science. I was nominated as chair after the previous chair transitioned out of the institution earlier this year. Because of the highly distributed educational model at Drexel, a big goal is figuring out how to foster connections across campuses and hospitals, since networking and support are big drivers of success, especially among folks from underrepresented and historically excluded backgrounds. We also want to make sure that the College of Medicine community knows that the committee exists, so we will be working toward visibility in addition to recruitment, retention and expansion this year.

I got into medicine because I was very into science as a kid, and it seemed like a field where science and service intersect. That was a naïve perspective. I was unclear about the realities of the world and what a harmful and oppressive system health care is. Throughout my training, it became clear that the people who were most rewarded and celebrated by those in power were those who upheld the status quo. It seemed as I was going through medical school and then residency that the message was often "It will get better when..." — when you're in your third or fourth year, when you get to residency, when you're an attending. All that mindset does is suppress any attempts at meaningful change.

Throughout my medical career, I've become more interested in incorporating abolition and liberation frameworks into medicine. I am heartened by some changes I've seen recently. For example, doctors have historically been deeply anti-union, and during the pandemic, that started to change. Instead of division and hierarchy between physicians and other health care workers like nurses and physician assistants, we recognized that we were being gaslighted in the same way: being told we were valued and that our safety mattered while being expected to work endless shifts with inadequate protective equipment, or having administrators telling us that patient care was the

number one priority when we didn't have enough ventilators and other equipment to care for people, while hospital leadership got hefty bonuses.

I also feel energized by my work with patients. I had a mentor in medical school who described the exam room as a "sacred space," and I try to foster that. Patient care provides the opportunity for a physician and patient to share both vulnerabilities and strengths to improve health outcomes. When patients share their lives with me — their fears, their wins, their strengths — my job is to respond in a way that is not paternalistic or judgmental. On a more practical level, if a patient needs something like medical documentation for time off from work, for example, I will provide it, no questions asked. My job does not require me to gate-keep care, nor is it my duty to police my patients. No health care worker should comply with calling law enforcement on patients who are undocumented, using drugs, undergoing abortions or getting gender-affirming care.

It's an honor to care for so many Black patients, since Black people have been so brutalized by the medical profession. Many of my patients have experienced various forms of oppression in addition to anti-Black racism — misogyny, transphobia, homophobia — and many have been involved in the carceral system, experienced housing instability or substance use disorder. Black and non-Black people of color are significantly more likely to be outright harmed by medicine, so it feels good to be providing folks with care that is respectful and affords them autonomy as much as possible.



**Vanessa K. Ferrel, MD, MPH, AAHIVS**  
Assistant Professor of Medicine

# SKCC Research Consortium

• *continued from the cover*

"There's lots of educational and intellectual endeavors that people can participate in across the consortium," Robertson notes.

Andrew E. Chapman, DO, director of the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center and executive vice president of cancer research and oncology services at Jefferson, adds, "Harnessing the depth and breadth of resources and expertise in these two powerhouse universities is the key to the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center Research Consortium's ability to meet the charge from the National Cancer Institute to lower the cancer burden in all the communities that we serve. The consortium's success is a huge win for the City of Philadelphia, Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey."

## Reaching the Community

NCI-designated cancer centers are tasked with focusing on the specific cancers within their catchment area, which for the SKCC is a multi-county region of over 6 million people in Pennsylvania and New Jersey with higher incidences of breast, colorectal, lung and prostate cancers.

"The NCI wants to know, 'Who are our patients coming in the door? And what kind of cancers are they presenting?'" Robertson says.

Focusing on clinical needs of the community facilitates research in what Mauricio Reginato, PhD, describes as a process of reverse translation.

"A major part of the cancer center is to move things from the basic science labs into the clinic and vice versa," says Reginato, who directs the translational and cellular oncology program at the SKCC and serves as chair of biochemistry and molecular biology at Drexel. "Clinicians will tell us, 'Hey, we see this in the clinic. Can you model it in mice? Can you look at this pathway in your model systems?' So there's a lot of back and forth."

As the center continues to develop research and treatments, it also works to ameliorate problems of access, education and confidence in the region's different communities. Alongside mobile breast cancer screening vans and Spanish-language outreach programs, one step toward engaging the catchment's distinct populations and minoritized groups was a community leader retreat the center hosted last year.

"We actually invited our community leaders to tell us about their communities, and what's important to them, and what they are seeing, and what they want us to focus on. We have this kind of conversation with them: 'Okay, we're seeing a lot of people that are not getting screened for colon cancer, they're not getting screened for breast cancer, so how can we help them?'" Reginato says. "That's what comprehensive means. It's not just about what we do

in the lab and how we turn it into a drug to treat a patient. It's also about communicating with the catchment area and the community."

Simansky notes, "Certainly biomedical discovery and development to the market to prevent and treat cancer is central to NCI-designated cancer centers. However, engagement with the people and communities we serve is also critical if we are to fight cancer in a manner that equitably benefits all of our citizens. Drexel's faculty will bring transformational contributions across the continuum of research that will lead to improved quality of life of patients and their families in many novel ways."

Annette Gadegbeku, MD, associate professor of family, community and preventive medicine and associate dean for community health in the College of Medicine, was recently appointed assistant director for belonging, justice, diversity, equity and inclusion at SKCC. Her expertise in research and community engagement, and her lengthy clinical experience, will inform new strategies for eliminating health disparities in Philadelphia and beyond.

## Core Facilities and Shared Resources

A major way the SKCC facilitates research is through sharing resources and instruments in its core facilities. By sharing core instruments and even human resources, the center is able to significantly defray capital costs and

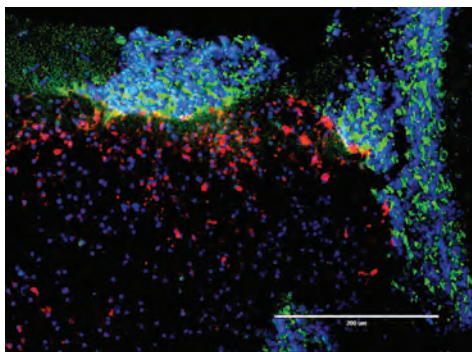
enable consortium researchers to receive quicker and cheaper results. Brian Wigdahl, PhD, chair of microbiology and immunology at Drexel, describes the opportunities within the cancer genomics core, which provides single cell analysis, ultra-long-read sequencing and more for DNA samples.

"The thing that's sort of unique to the cancer genomics shared resource is that it involves laboratories both at Jefferson and Drexel University College of Medicine," Wigdahl says. "Sequencing equipment comes in all different flavors and colors, and each type of equipment has its strengths and its weaknesses. In order to run a broadly based genomic sequencing core, you

usually need five or six different instruments to be able to serve all the needs with the most effective cost and the most effective throughput for any particular type of sequencing project. By combining Jefferson's and Drexel's efforts, we get a lot more bang for our buck and more cost-effective provision of services to the research investigators in the community."

Considering that some sequencing instruments cost nearly a million dollars, and that a single long-read genome sample can cost thousands more dollars when run through a third party, the savings add up quickly for researchers.

Additionally, genomic sequencers and other core facilities instruments require increasingly specialized expertise to operate. Joshua Chang Mell, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Microbiology



Mauricio Reginato, PhD, is working with SKCC radiation oncologist Nicole Simone, MD, to uncover novel pathways to target brain metastasis. Pictured here are breast cancer brain metastatic cells (green) and astrocytes (red) in the brain parenchyma following treatment with radiation using an ex vivo tumor model.



Members of the Drexel leadership team involved in the NCI site visit in August, Drs. Brian Wigdahl, Noreen Robertson, Kenny Simansky, Mauricio Reginato and Alessandro Fatatis.

& Immunology who works with Drexel's Center for Genomic Sciences and Genomics Core Facility. For Mell and Wigdahl, the efficiency of sharing resources across campuses can mean the difference between a million-dollar machine sitting empty or providing key data for research projects. Both recall times when staff turnover at Jefferson would have left core instruments without anyone to operate them, were it not for Drexel's ability to share staff and training through the consortium.

Collaboration in core facilities means not only producing more data, but also receiving better insights from the data available. "One of the things that's still in its fledgling stages is building the consortium up with respect to data analysis, because labs themselves only have some levels of expertise, and they need help getting their data analyzed and getting biological insights from it," Mell says. "It's not just that our users can go over to Jefferson to run their single-cell experiment. It's that our users will have a stronger ability to analyze the data from any single-cell experiment."

"You discover synergy through the consortium," Mell says. "So even though the consortium was born from sharing resources" — expensive sequencers and the like — "that means that a bunch of scientists who do a bunch of cool things end up in the same rooms with each other, and then they discover, 'Oh wait a minute, we have this HIV population that's aging and getting cancer at higher rates than other people. Why is that?' And there's this natural synergy in expertise that arises."

### New Collaborations

Tasked with arranging those collaborations is Alessandro Fatatis, MD, PhD, professor of pharmacology and physiology, who serves as associate director for basic science and the primary contact for some 140 basic science researchers at the consortium. The first concern of most principal investigators, according to Fatatis, is funding: "There is no research team if you don't have resources to hire them and to maintain and retain them, and there is no research if there is not enough money to buy animals, reagents and so forth." Given the need for constant funding, research collaborations can raise conflicts of priority and concerns about dilution of resources. An added challenge, Fatatis says, is routinely arranging

strategic collaborations, given that "scientists tend to start collaborations spontaneously."

Yet the consortium provides a space for just that kind of work. Collaborations such as the SKCC's initiative on HIV and cancer are a key strength the NCI recognizes in the center, which is currently planning a unique Specialized Program of Research Excellence, or SPOR, to extend that research into the study of cancers that correlate strongly with viruses. For Reginato, the ability to involve researchers from different treatment modalities has opened the pathway to identifying drugs that synergize with radiation therapy, which might allow clinicians to lower patients' doses of radiation and thus the associated physical and cognitive side effects.

### True Integration

All of this is a part of what Reginato calls "true integration" in cancer research, and he anticipates ongoing advantages in staffing and training as a result. "I'm trying to recruit

new faculty, new scientists, especially cancer researchers. This relationship with SKCC allows me to attract better candidates. Our affiliation with SKCC allows us to have increased access to clinical samples and core facilities, and to develop new collaborations," Reginato says. "That's also helpful to us, because we can now try to recruit really top-notch cancer researchers that are interested in being associated with the cancer center."

The center's application for comprehensive designation has signaled a moment of gratitude for researchers and administration, several of whom remarked upon President John Fry's support for the consortium's application process, in which he took an active part during the daylong site visit.

"President Fry has been a tireless advocate for this collaboration, and truly of all collaborations in Philadelphia and beyond. He is a champion of these relationships — those that will lead to greater success at Drexel, and more importantly to improving the lives of those affected by cancer and other diseases," notes Charles B. Cairns, MD, the Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Dean of the College of Medicine and senior vice president of health affairs at Drexel. "We are fortunate to have this high-level support behind the SKCC's critical efforts to improve the health of our communities."

Just as the center is producing the next wave of cancer research and treatments, it's also forming the next generation of researcher trainees. Because the research labs are integrated with the cancer center, Fatatis says, trainees have consistent contact with the larger mission of their work.

"They understand the impact of the entire mission, and they feel that they are small but important parts of a much better, much bigger instrument to affect the community," Fatatis says. "Science is difficult. It requires long hours. So you need a significant amount of resilience and grit when you are in the research lab. But if you know that the reason for this is not because you are just building your career but that you also contributed to something that's bigger than you, I think it gives that extra push. You really want to do it for more than just yourself."

— G.K. Schatzman

## Erum Ilyas Appointed Interim Chair of Dermatology

Erum N. Ilyas, MD '01, MBE, has been appointed interim academic chair of Drexel University College of Medicine's provisional Department of Dermatology.

Ilyas earned a Bachelor of Science in biochemistry and molecular biology and a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy, *cum laude*, from the University of Maryland Baltimore County, and then matriculated at MCP-Hahnemann University, where she also completed an internship in internal medicine. She completed a dermatology residency at Cooper Hospital/University Medical Center-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, where she was chief resident. She earned a master's degree in bioethics from the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine in 2017.

Ilyas has held clinical dermatologist positions at Philadelphia Institute of Dermatology, Mystic Valley Dermatology and Bryn Mawr Dermatology, and she was CEO of Montgomery Dermatology LLC for more than a decade. She currently practices at Schweiger Dermatology and is the founder and CEO of AmberNoon, a sun protective clothing company. She has consistently been named to Top Doctors lists since 2011 and earned



the Best Dermatologist Readers' Choice Award from *Philadelphia Style Magazine* in 2022.

Ilyas has been a College of Medicine faculty member since 2016 and served as the Dermatology Pathway director since 2021. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology and the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, and a member of the Skin Cancer Foundation, the Society for Pediatric Dermatology, the Pennsylvania Academy of Dermatology and the Philadelphia Dermatological Society. She has presented on the topics of sun protective clothing, age-related changes of the skin, skin conditions in women, acne, rosacea and nail disorders. She has published papers regarding sunscreen choice, UV protection in children's clothing, and sunscreen for skin of color.

Ilyas will focus on building the pre-clinical and clinical dermatology curriculum for medical students, while expanding research opportunities and community outreach. She will recruit faculty to support the student experience and is charged with growing the number of engaged faculty who represent all the dermatologic subspecialties. Ilyas will develop research opportunities for medical students in the dermatologic sciences, leveraging her current research background in cutaneous interactions with textiles.

## 10th Annual Reach Out and Read Basketball Tournament



On October 28, 2023, more than 200 people gathered at Germantown Friends School for an event that combined passions for basketball and literacy promotion. St. Christopher's Hospital for Children's 10th annual Reach Out and Read Basketball Tournament was the largest fundraising event to date, raising more than \$226,000 to purchase about 60,000 books for children in North Philadelphia. The tournament included 16 teams with 160 players who ranged in age from 21 to 72 years old; St. Chris had two teams and Drexel University College of Medicine had one.

Teams participated in five-on-five games in a round-robin format in NBA (younger) and ABA (older) divisions. The games were spirited as everyone vied for the championship. Ultimately the "Dell" team was crowned champions of the NBA division, and the "Philadelphia Youth Basketball" team won the ABA division.

Community partners providing services this year

included Drexel's Department of Family, Community & Preventive Medicine offering biometric screenings, Simon's Heart with a mobile CPR training station, Yellow Mirror offering a photo booth, and sports trainers from NovaCare. The Joker served as DJ, and food was provided by Traveling J's and Slices Pizza. There were also more than 30 corporate sponsors, including MGMT, Dell Technologies, the Goldenberg Group, F5, Fox Rothschild LLP, 3 Springs Water, DispenseDoc, Deke's BBQ and Yards Brewing Company, in addition to more than 120 individual donors.

The Reach Out and Read Basketball Tournament would not be possible without this support and the efforts of the Planning Committee: Drs. Hans Kersten and Dan Taylor, both Department of Pediatrics faculty members at Drexel, and Mark Tucker, Eric and Megan Marshall, Michael Cohen, Bria Butler, David Mercuris and Thomas Hammonds.



## A Night of Song and Dance for a Great Cause

The Pediatric AIDS Benefit Concert was held on January 27, 2024. The annual event, now in its 31st year, raises funds for the Dorothy Mann Center for Pediatric and Adolescent HIV at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children.



## Mauricio Reginato Named Chair of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

Mauricio J. Reginato, PhD, professor, has been appointed chair of the Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology. Reginato was appointed interim chair of biochemistry and molecular biology in the summer of 2021, and has been a faculty member of the College of Medicine since 2004.

As interim chair, Reginato recruited teaching faculty to create and launch a first-in-the-U.S. online MS program in Cancer Biology in the fall of 2023, increased the department's Master of Science program revenue to over \$1 million, and hired a new tenure-track research faculty member with National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding.

Reginato co-created and is the current director of the Cancer Biology MS program in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Professional Studies. He is also director of Drexel's In Vivo Animal Imaging Facility, where he provides training and oversight on IVIS animal imaging equipment to over 20 labs. Reginato serves as the program leader of the Translational Cellular Oncology program at the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center (SKCC) Research Consortium — an NCI-designated cancer center.

Reginato's lab is focused on understanding how signaling pathways regulate metabolic reprogramming in cancer cells, particularly breast cancer, with the goal of developing novel treatment therapies. His research interests include the molecular mechanisms underlying breast cancer growth, survival and spread to distinct organs, in particular how cancer genes alter metabolic

pathways and how these pathways may be exploited to target cancers. His research is currently funded by several NIH awards, and grants from the Pennsylvania Breast Cancer Coalition and the Coulter-Drexel Translational Research Partnership.

He is the recipient of the Drexel University Pennoni Honors College's 2022-2023 STAR Scholar Outstanding Mentor of the Year Award. He has also received College of Medicine honors including the Julian Marsh Faculty Scholar Award; the Elias Abrutyn Mentoring Award; the Faculty Mentoring Award, MS Research Intensive Programs, Graduate Student Association; and the Young Investigator Award.



Reginato earned his PhD in pharmacology from the University of Pennsylvania and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in cancer biology at Harvard Medical School. He has published extensively, including articles in high-impact journals such as *Nature*, *Cell* and the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*. He is a member of the American Association of Cancer Research, the American Society of Cell Biology and the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. He

currently serves on the Membership Committee, the Internal Advisory Committee and the Education and Training Advisory Committee at SKCC, and the Educational Coordinating Committee at the College of Medicine. He is a Liberty Scholar Mentor at Drexel University and associate editor of *Breast Cancer Research*. Reginato also contributes as an ad-hoc grant reviewer for several NIH entities and a number of international organizations.

Under Reginato's leadership, the collaborative nature of the department and the wide array of scientific approaches — from structural biology and biophysical methods to drug development, cell biology and animal studies — have fostered an innovative and prolific research and training environment.

## 2023 Faculty Launch Graduates

The 2023 Faculty Launch cohort completed the program and celebrated with a graduation ceremony on December 15, 2023.



Dean Charles B. Cairns, MD, (left) and Associate Dean for Faculty Michele Kutzler, PhD, (third from right, back row) with Faculty Launch graduates (left to right) Zhabiz Kazeminezhad, MD, Janet Fitzpatrick, MD, Vanessa Pirrone, PhD, Ogechukwu Menkiti, MD, Nandini Madan, MD, Renee Kottenhahn, MD, Enitan Adegite, MD, MPH, Margaret Gilfillan, MD, Adrienne Willard, MD, Seema Baranwal, MD, Amy Althoff, MD, Todd Strohlic, VMD, PhD, Jessica Barson, PhD, Eduardo Espiridion, MD, and Max Cooper, MD



## Cheryl Hanau to Receive 2024 Marciano Award

Cheryl Hanau, MD, professor and Richard Shuman, MD, Chair of the Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine, will receive the 2024 WMC/MCP Phyllis Marciano, MD, WMC '60, Woman in Medicine Award. Hanau is being honored for her exemplary leadership, commitment to Drexel University College of Medicine and unwavering dedication to the education of Drexel medical students.

In addition to her leadership of the Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine, Hanau has been instrumental to the admissions process at the College of Medicine for many years, and she currently serves as senior associate dean of admissions. She is also a dedicated educator, having received 23 Golden



Apple Awards during her tenure at Drexel.

The Marciano Award, which is given annually to a woman physician, scientist or staff member to recognize her leadership, teaching of students, care of patients and status as a role model for women in medicine, is named after Phyllis Marciano, MD, a noted pediatrician, ardent proponent of women in medicine, and a former WMC/MCP Trust Fund trustee. At the time of Marciano's death in 2003, she was intended to be the recipient of the Woman in Medicine Award. The award was presented to her posthumously and renamed in her memory.

The award will be presented during the Women in Medicine and Science Committee's Leadership Summit, which will be held virtually on April 5. More information about the Summit is available at [bit.ly/WIMSCsummit](https://bit.ly/WIMSCsummit).

## Recent Thesis Defenses

We congratulate the following master's and PhD students from the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Professional Studies on the successful defense of their theses.



**Eric Brinckman**  
Biochemistry of Health & Disease  
MS Program  
**Title:** Septin Filament Assembly  
Conditions and Fluorescent  
Assay Development  
**Advisor:** Shae Padrick, PhD



**Jonathan Richards**  
Neuroscience PhD Program  
**Title:** Neuroimmune Contributions  
to Mouse Chronic Neuropathic Pain:  
Macrophages Play a Dual Role in  
Sensory Discriminative and Affective  
Components of Pain  
**Advisor:** Megan Detloff, PhD



**James Johnson**  
Microbiology & Immunology  
MS Program  
**Title:** Optimization of Human  
Organotypic Brain Slice Cultures for  
Use as a Novel Model of NeuroHIV  
**Advisor:** Olimpia Meucci, MD, PhD



**Candace Rizzi-Wise**  
Neuroscience PhD Program  
**Title:** Opposing Regulation of Fear  
and Other Contextual Responses  
by the Dorsal Versus Ventral  
Lateral Septum  
**Advisor:** Dong Wang, PhD



**Giang Le Minh**  
Biochemistry PhD Program  
**Title:** Understanding Mechanisms  
of OGT/O-GlcNAc Regulation  
of Breast Cancer Stem Cells  
**Advisor:** Mauricio Reginato, PhD



**Andrea L. Rosenkranz**  
Molecular & Cell Biology & Genetics  
PhD Program  
**Title:** Determining Secondary  
Structural Elements of Hepatitis B Virus  
Pregenomic RNA and Preliminary  
Analysis of the DDB1-HBx Interaction  
as a Therapeutic Target  
**Advisor:** Michael J. Bouchard, PhD



**Breanne Pirino**  
Neuroscience PhD Program  
**Title:** The Kappa-Opioid Receptor in  
Subregions of the Nucleus Accumbens  
Shell in Affective Behavior and  
Ethanol Drinking  
**Advisor:** Jessica R. Barson, PhD



**Nicholas Stachowski**  
Neuroscience PhD Program  
**Title:** Effects of BDNF and Epidural  
Stimulation on Locomotor Outcomes  
and Spinal ROR Interneurons  
After Complete SCI in Mouse  
**Advisor:** Kimberly Dougherty, PhD

## SLAMS Program Brings Together Health Professions Community and West Philly Neighbors

Middle school students can be a tough crowd to impress, but Drexel University College of Medicine community members leading educational courses at Science Leadership Academy Middle School (SLAMS) say the students are excited and engaged.

This fall, seventh and eighth graders watched as the College of Medicine's Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Dean and Drexel Senior Vice President of Medical Affairs Charles B. Cairns, MD, used his background in emergency medicine to teach CPR.

"He was right down on the floor doing CPR with them," says Annette Gadegbeku, MD, lead faculty overseeing the interprofessional collaborative SLAMS mini-courses. Gadegbeku is associate professor and chief, Division of Community Health in the Department of Family, Community & Preventive Medicine, and associate dean of Community Health in the Office of Community Health & Health Equity at the College of Medicine.

"We had a two-minute challenge as part of the CPR training, so Dean Cairns was there doing chest compressions with the students for two minutes straight."

After eight weeks of hands-on lessons in health topics from Drexel University health professions community members, the middle-schoolers said they did not want the fall cycle of mini-courses to end.

In a variety of different sessions throughout the fall, faculty, students and professional staff members from the College of Medicine and the College of Nursing and Health Professions taught educational sessions that fell under one of two core curriculums. "Science of Health," for fifth and sixth graders, incorporated lessons about health science topics including anatomy, physiology and personal health, and "Go Into Health," for seventh and eighth graders, included discussions and demonstrations on a wide variety of health care professions.

Part of the focus of the SLAMS mini-courses is to



introduce young Philadelphians to the breadth of health professions and opportunities. Having instructors from the diverse Drexel University community also helps give students who are from communities historically underrepresented in medicine the opportunity to see someone with a similar background succeeding in health professions fields.

"Our hope, our dream, our vision, our ultimate goal is that we can make an impression as we continue to meet them here at SLAMS and potentially follow them through their academic career," Gadegbeku says. "Then maybe one day some will matriculate into Drexel University's undergraduate schools and even end up at one of our health professions graduate programs. Over a decade, we would have made an impact and created a pathway that leads to increasing the diversity of the workforce in this area."

The program also allows for collaboration on several levels — between Drexel University programs housed in the new Health Sciences Building in University City and between their next-door neighbor, SLAMS.

"All of it just seemed like a great opportunity to be able to work with youth who are basically in our backyard, in our West Philly community, and to collaborate with our health professions schools," says Gadegbeku. "It was a better setup than I could even arrange."

Drexel community members began participating in SLAMS mini-courses shortly after the College of Medicine's MD program students joined their College of Nursing and Health Professions peers in the Health Sciences Building in fall 2023, when a colleague in Drexel's School of Education contacted Gadegbeku. The courses continued into the 2024 winter cycle, and the Dornsife School of Public Health has joined the collaboration.



“SLAMS sounded like something we would definitely want to participate in — particularly me, in the new Office of Community Health and Health Equity,” Gadegbeku says. “We’re always about community engagement and have always wanted to partner with Philadelphia schools to collaborate and do community outreach and activities with youth.”

Gadegbeku is also faculty director of Healing Hurt People within the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice at the Dornsife School of Public Health, and assistant director of diversity, equity and inclusion at the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center Research Consortium, in which Drexel is a partner.

As a professor and an advisor to community engagement-focused student programs, Gadegbeku knew both the middle school and health professions students would benefit from participating in the SLAMS mini-courses.

“We often hear from medical students that working at SLAMS is a great way to take a break from studying and

to do something fun, but that is still health related,” she says. “What’s cool is that as a student, they get to talk about the subjects and skills they have been developing. What better way to reinforce some of what they are learning and that they will be teaching in the future to patients?”

Gadegbeku says Drexel-based program participants gain as much from the students as the students do from them. In a session called “Food to Fuel,” Kirsten Larson, PhD, professor in the Department of Microbiology & Immunology, taught students about how food is broken down for nutrients and how those nutrients enter the bloodstream. Like Gadegbeku, Larson gave the middle school students a glowing review.

“The students were excited and engaged. It was fun teaching young people with so much energy and passion,” Larson says. “Working with these curious and knowledgeable young people who might be sitting in our classes in a few years was very motivating.”

## Leon McCrea to Lead Office of Educational Affairs

Leon McCrea II, MD, MPH, has been named the Deborah J. Tuttle, MD, and John P. Piper, MD, Vice Dean for Educational Affairs at the College of Medicine.

McCrea will be responsible for ensuring the success of all aspects of the MD program and oversight of the Office of Educational Affairs. His responsibilities include leading strategic planning and executing changes in the MD program to respond to evolving medical education and practice environments. He will have unique opportunities for collaboration across many disciplines within the University to create outstanding, innovative educational programs. He will also oversee and facilitate educational research and scholarship.

In 2019, McCrea was named the assistant dean for diversity, equity and inclusion and in 2021, he was appointed senior associate dean of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

He has expertly led the College’s efforts to develop policies and processes to bolster equity. He has worked closely with the Office of Faculty to implement best practices for the recruitment, retention and promotion of faculty from historically underrepresented groups in medicine. Similarly, he collaborates with the Offices of Admissions and Student Affairs to promote a diverse student body and sense of belonging among students.

McCrea also serves as the director of the Drexel Pathway to Medical School (DPMS), one of the preeminent postbaccalaureate programs focused on learners who have been personally impacted by health care disparities, socioeconomic or educational barriers. He has been responsible for unprecedented growth of the DPMS program and established novel methods for mentorship and academic support

through collaboration with colleges across the institution, alumni and community partners.

McCrea is an associate professor in the Department of Family, Community & Preventive Medicine and previously served as the program director for the Family Medicine Residency. Throughout his career, McCrea has been focused on improving methods for competency-based assessment for medical students and residents at all levels.

A nationally renowned speaker and educator, McCrea currently serves as distinguished faculty in the American Academy of Family Physicians Chief Resident Leadership Development Program. He also serves as the president of the Board of Trustees for the Family Medicine Education Consortium and as chair of the Consortium of DEI Health Educators. He is a member of the Review Committee for Family Medicine for the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

He has been widely honored for his work, receiving accolades such as the bronze Program Director Recognition Award from the Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors and the Tracy M. Walton Jr. Exemplary Service Award from Region II of the National Medical Association. At Drexel University College of Medicine, he was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society, and he received a Golden Apple Award in 2021.

McCrea earned his undergraduate degree in human biology from Brown University and his medical degree and Master of Public Health, respectively, from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. He completed his residency in family medicine at Crozer-Keystone Health System, where served as chief resident.



# Drexel Medical Students Embark on Transformative Global Health Journeys



One of the best decisions of my life was spending three weeks between my M1 and M2 year working at Pop Wuj Spanish School and Clinic in Quetzaltenango (Xela), Guatemala. As a first-generation Latina from Paraguay, I have firsthand experience with the burden of chronic diseases faced by many rural areas across Latino America. Witnessing the challenges posed by poorly structured health care systems and limited resources, I wanted to use this time to volunteer in a similar community and better prepare myself as a future physician.

**Tasha Garayo, MD '26**  
Xela, Guatemala  
Pop Wuj

The experience broadened my understanding of global health care practices and reinforced my commitment to exploring diverse medical landscapes to enhance my professional growth.

**Aman Singh Sandhu, MD '26**  
Amar Hospital, Patiala, Punjab, India

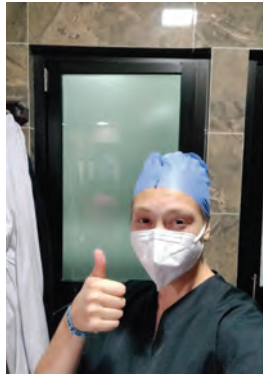
My time here is a most meaningful experience in medical school, and I am thankful to further my interests in global health and global neurology under a brilliant team of dedicated physicians.

**Samhita Nanduri, MD '25**  
University Teaching Hospital,  
Lusaka, Zambia  
EDGE Year

Pop Wuj ended up being an incredible opportunity to not only learn more about the health care practices and cultural identity of Guatemala but also to enhance my clinical skills and Spanish fluency.

**Olivia Vasey, MD '26**  
Xela, Guatemala  
Pop Wuj





I explored vibrant cities, remote rural villages and beautiful national parks, including the Serengeti! Moreover, I forged lasting friendships with locals, which added a fulfilling personal dimension to the experience. It was an exceptional and unforgettable program that I recommend to anyone with an interest in global health.

**Devneet Kainth, MD '26**  
Tanzania

World Vision WASH/Dornsife Global Scholars Program



The experience not only deepened my respect for global health but also forged lifelong connections with fellow students and mentors.

**Niket Patel, MD '26**  
Geneva, Switzerland  
Duke Global Policy Program



This experience allowed me to gain a better understanding of the internal structure of the hospital system and learn first hand the differences between the American and Mexican health care experience.

**Alexa Smith, MD '26**  
Oaxaca, Mexico  
Child Family Health International



This global health elective is something I will cherish and continue to learn from for the rest of my life. I am still unpacking the many encounters and lessons I was blessed enough to experience and look forward to applying them in my future as a culturally humble, open-minded physician with a keen sense of how best to treat the communities I serve.

**Sixtus Akinlosotu, MD '23**  
Northern India  
Child Family Health International



For more information about global health educational opportunities at Drexel, visit [drexel.edu/medicine/globalhealth](https://drexel.edu/medicine/globalhealth).

## WHAT WE'RE DOING



Baas

**Peter W. Baas, PhD**, professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, delivered a seminar on September 21, 2023, at Indiana University on "Treating SCI and TBI: Lessons from Neurodegenerative Diseases." He was also awarded a two-year, \$150,000



Qiang



Raghupathi

grant from the Spastic Paraplegia Foundation for "Antisense Oligonucleotide Therapy for SPG4-HSP."

Baas and Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy colleagues **Liang Oscar Qiang, MD, PhD**, assistant professor, and **Ramesh Raghupathi, PhD**, professor; Neuroscience PhD program students **Kendra Case**,



Case



Sun

**Xiaohuan (Beanie) Sun, MS**, and **Philip Yates**

(MD/PhD program); and colleagues from Boston University and Medical College of Georgia published an article, "Is Gulf War Illness a Prolonged Early Stage Tauopathy?"



Yates



Ogbolu

on September 13, 2023, in a special issue of *Cytoskeleton* called "Fifty Years of Tau." Baas also co-authored the introduction to the issue.

Sun, **Victor C. Ogbolu**, Neuroscience master's student, Baas and Qiang published a perspective paper, "Reevaluating Tau Reduction as a Therapeutic Approach for Tauopathies: Insights and Perspectives," in *Cytoskeleton (Hoboken)* on October 11, 2023. Sun, Ogbolu and Qiang were among the authors of "Vascularized Brain Assembloids With Enhanced Cellular Complexity Provide Insights Into the Cellular Deficits of Tauopathy" in *Stem Cells* on November 23, 2023. Ogbolu presented a poster of the same title at the New York Stem Cell Foundation conference 2023 (NYSCF2023) at the Rockefeller University in New York, N.Y., on October 23, 2023.



Barker



Bryant

**Jacqueline Barker, PhD**, associate professor of pharmacology and physiology, received an R21 award from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

for "Prelimbic Cortex Contribution to Ethanol Seeking in Chronic Neuropathic Pain." **Kathleen Bryant**, Neuroscience PhD candidate, **Binay Singh, BS biomedical/medical engineering '22**, former Barker Lab data analyst, and Barker authored "Sex and Individual Differences in the Effect of Chronic Low-Dose Ethanol on Behavioral Strategy Selection" in the January 2024 issue of the journal *Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

**Sushil Beriwal, MD**, clinical professor of radiologic sciences, was one of the authors of number of publications,

including: "Surveillance Imaging for Salvage Therapy in Endometrial Cancer" in the September 4, 2023, issue of *International Journal of Gynecological Cancer*; "Review of Cone Beam Computed Tomography Based Online Adaptive Radiotherapy: Current Trend and Future Direction" in *Radiation Oncology* on September 2, 2023; "Interplay Between Anatomic and Molecular Factors in the Current Management of Endometrial Cancer" in the *International Journal of Radiation Oncology, Biology and Physics* on October 1, 2023; and "Cs-131 Prostate Brachytherapy Boost and Effect of Hydrogel Rectal Spacer on Long-Term Patient-Reported Rectal Bleeding and Bowel Quality of Life" in the journal *Brachytherapy* on August 28, 2023.



in the *Intact and Injured Spinal Cord*."

**Tatiana Bezdudnaya, PhD**, research assistant professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, has been awarded a two-year, \$405,625 R21 grant from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke for the project "Respiratory Motor Control



PACAP in the Nucleus Accumbens During the Transition to Ethanol Dependence."

**Brody Carpenter, MS**, Neuroscience PhD student, was awarded a Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award (F31) from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism for "Receptor Variant-Based Changes in the Role of

**Colin Champ, MD, CSCS**, associate professor of radiologic sciences, and colleagues at Leopoldina Hospital in Germany authored "Feasibility and Metabolic Effects of a 5:2 Fasting Intervention in Women With Breast Cancer During Radiotherapy" in the October 2023 issue of *Holistic Integrative Oncology*. Champ, **Sushil Beriwal, MD**, clinical professor of radiologic sciences, **Christie Hilton, DO**, assistant professor of medicine, and colleagues at Allegheny Health Network, Duke University, Syracuse University and University of North Georgia published "EXERT-BC: A Prospective Study of an Exercise Regimen Designed to Improve Functional Mobility, Body Composition and Strength After Treatment for Breast Cancer" in the October 2023 issue of *Sports Medicine International Open*.

**Christina Curran-Alfaro**, Neuroscience PhD candidate, received an F31 award from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism for her project "The Effects of Low-Dose Ethanol on Reward-Value Decision Making and the Basolateral Amygdala."



Danner



Ausborn

**Simon Danner, PhD**, assistant professor of neurobiology and anatomy, and **Bartholomew Bacak, MD, PhD '18**, published "Hiccups Are a Manifestation of Central Respiratory Arrhythmias" in *Medical Hypotheses* on September 19, 2023. **Jessica Ausborn, PhD**, assistant professor of neurobiology and anatomy, Danner and collaborators

at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, published "Investigating the Roles of Reflexes and Central Pattern Generators in the Control and Modulation of Human Locomotion Using a Physiologically Plausible Neuromechanical Model" in the *Journal of Neural Engineering* on November 16, 2023.



Detloff

**Megan Ryan Detloff, PhD**, assistant professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, visited Clemson University's Department of Bioengineering to deliver the Page Morton Hunter Distinguished Seminar. Her seminar, "Rehab-Induced Neuroimmune Modulation of Functional Recovery After SCI," was followed by a reception. Detloff and a collaborator at the George and Ann Ryan Neuroscience Institute at the University of Rhode Island

were awarded a five-year H.E.A.L. (Helping to End Addiction Long-term) Initiative grant from the National Institutes of Health for their project "Validation of Prenatal Rabbit Hypoxia Ischemia as a Model of Cerebral Palsy-Induced Pain." In addition, Detloff's R01 funded



Richards

by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, "Regulation of SCI-Induced Pain by Macrophages and Exercise," was renewed for five years. **Jonathan Richards**, Neuroscience PhD student, **Daniel Freeman, MS biological sciences '23**, and Detloff published an article, "Myeloid Cell Association With Spinal Cord Injury-Induced Neuropathic Pain and Depressive-Like Behaviors in LysM-eGFP Mice," in the *Journal of Pain* on November 24, 2023.

## Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting

Numerous College of Medicine faculty, staff and students presented their research at the 2023 Society for Neuroscience annual meeting, held from November 11-15 in Washington, D.C.

Poster presentations:

**Brody Carpenter, MS**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "Sex Difference in the Relationship Between Binge Eating and Pituitary Adenylate Cyclase-Activating Polypeptide in the Paraventricular Nucleus of the Thalamus"

**Tylor Gray**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "Are Restorative Effects of Transcutaneous Spinal Cord Stimulation Retained?"

**Chun-Ta Ho**, Pharmacology & Physiology PhD candidate: "The Chemokine CXCL12 Tunes Cortical Dendritic Spine Dynamics"

**D. Leonardo Garcia-Ramirez, PhD**, postdoctoral fellow, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy: "Early, But Not Late, Epidural Stimulation Alters Spinal Cord Injury-Induced Plasticity of Serotonergic Modulation of Lumbar Shox2 Interneurons"

**Elena Irollo, PhD**, research assistant professor, Department of Pharmacology & Physiology: "Adult Human Brain Tissue Cultures to Study NeuroHIV"

**Geena John**, Pharmacology & Physiology PhD candidate: "Characterization of Calcium Clearance Dynamics in Hippocampal Ex-Vivo Cultures"

**Xuan Luo**, Pharmacology & Physiology PhD candidate: "Immune Regulation by Small Extracellular Vesicles in Attenuating Inflammatory Pain"

**Jenna McGrath**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "Molecularly Diverse Glycinergic Interneurons Within Medial Laminae V/VI Inhibit Shox2 Interneurons in the Lumbar Spinal Cord"

**Breanne Pirino, MS**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "The Kappa-Opioid Receptor in the Nucleus

Accumbens Shell: Subregional, Sex-Related and Intake-Dependent Effects on Ethanol Drinking"

**Shayna Singh**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "Postnatal Development of 'Rhythmogenic' Currents and Ion Channels in Spinal Shox2 Interneurons"

**Jeremy Weinberger, MS**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "Tailoring Epidural Stimulation for the Treatment of Spasticity Following Spinal Cord Injury in Rodents"

**Christopher West**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "Serotonergic Modulation of Spinal ROR-Beta Interneurons in the Medial Deep Dorsal Horn"

**Jason Wickman**, Pharmacology & Physiology PhD candidate: "Local and Systemic T Cell Dysfunction in the Tibia Fracture Model of Complex Regional Pain Syndrome"

**Nichole Yakas, MS**, Neuroscience PhD candidate: "Repeated Transcutaneous Spinal Cord Stimulation Improves Spasticity When Initiated in the Chronic Phase of Spinal Cord Injury"

**Jessica Barson, PhD**, associate professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, chaired a mini-symposium, "The Paraventricular Nucleus of the Thalamus (PVT) as a Mediator of Adaptations to Stress and Drug Use." Barson also hosted the event's Paraventricular Nucleus of the Thalamus (PVT) Social.

**Simon Danner, PhD**, assistant professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, presented "Spinal Circuits for Sensorimotor Integration During Locomotion at Different Speeds, Gaits and Environments: Insights From Computational Models," and **Kimberly Dougherty, PhD**, associate professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, delivered a talk, "Development and Spinal Cord Injury-Related Plasticity of Spinal Locomotor Rhythm Generating Circuits." Both talks were part of the mini-symposium "The Integrative Action of the Locomotor System: From Initiation to Execution."

## WHAT WE'RE DOING



**Kimberly Dougherty, PhD**, associate professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, published a review article, "Distinguishing Subtypes of Spinal Locomotor Neurons to Inform Circuit Function and Dysfunction," in the October 2023 issue of *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*.



**Wei Du, MD**, professor and academic chair, Department of Psychiatry, wrote a guest editorial, "The Future of GME in Expanding and Improving Health Care," for the Berks Medical Society's magazine, *Medical Record*.



**Bridie D. Eckel**, Neuroscience PhD candidate, presented a poster and five-minute talk on "Axonal Microtubule Polarity Flaws in SPG4 Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia" at the Temple University Lewis Katz School of Medicine Department of Neural Sciences Research Day on November 8, 2023.



Esquea

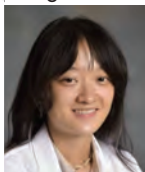


Young

**Emily Esquea**, a PhD candidate in the Molecular & Cell Biology & Genetics program, received first prize for best trainee short talk at the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center-Drexel University Trainee Retreat in December 2023. Esquea, along with **Riley Young**, Molecular & Cell Biology & Genetics PhD student, and **Mauricio Reginato, PhD**, professor and chair, Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, published a Spotlight Review in the December 2023



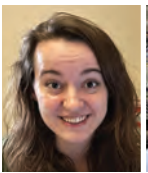
Minh



Huang

issue of *Trends in Endocrinology & Metabolism*, "Fructose Promotes Liver Cancer via Microbial Acetate-Induced O-GlcNAcylation."

**Giang Le Minh**, Biochemistry of Health & Disease PhD candidate, Esquea, Young, **Jessie Huang, MD '26**, and Reginato authored "On a Sugar High: Role of O-GlcNAcylation in Cancer," which was published in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* on October 12, 2023.



Flynn



Gao

**L. Taylor Flynn**, an MD/PhD student in the Neuroscience program, and **Wen-Jun Gao, MD, PhD**, professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, published a review paper, "DNA Methylation and the Opposing NMDAR Dysfunction in Schizophrenia and Major Depression Disorders: A Converging Model for Therapeutic Effects of Psychedelic Compounds in the Treatment of Psychiatric Illness" in *Molecular Psychiatry* on September 7, 2023.



**Patrick W. (Bill) Frank, DC**, associate professor of neurobiology and anatomy, co-authored a number of papers: "Hair Cell Morphological Patterns and Polarity Organization in the Sea Lamprey Vestibular Cristae" in the August 2023 issue of the *Anatomical Record (Hoboken)*; "Cardiac Corpuscles: A 'New' Morphofunctional Entity?" in the *International Journal of Morphology* in August 2023; "Acetone Recycling: Do Molecular Sieves Cause Acetone Breakdown to Acetaldehyde?" in the October 14, 2023, issue of *The Journal of Plastination*; "Giant Basal Cell Carcinoma of the Lateral Neck: A Case Study" in the August 31, 2023, issue of *Cureus*; and "Bilateral Gastrocnemius Tertius Muscles: Cadaveric Findings of a Rare Variant" in the September 15, 2023, issue of *Cureus*.



**Haviva M. Goldman, PhD**, professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, delivered an invited presentation on "Multiscale and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Bone Growth, Remodeling and Adaptation" as part of a symposium focused on multiscale assessment of bone remodeling and adaptation using novel experimental and computational methods at the 10th International Conference on Computational Bioengineering (ICCB 2023) in Vienna, Austria, on September 21, 2023.



**Ben Haslund-Gourley**, an MD/PhD student in the Microbiology & Immunology program, received the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society Neil Spector Award at the society's 2023 scientific conference. This award is given to the best scientific presentation at the conference. Haslund-Gourley presented two talks: "Immunoglobulin N-Glycans Role in Diagnosing Lyme Disease" and "Immunoglobulins N-Glycans Impair Host Response to Lyme Disease."

## Dean's Travel Awards

The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Professional Studies announced the recipients of the Dean's Travel Award for the Fall 2023 award cycle. The award partially defrays the cost of attending a scientific meeting where a graduate student is making a presentation related to their graduate study.

Fall 2023 Travel Awardees:

**Kendra Case**, PhD candidate, Neuroscience  
**Breana Channer**, MD/PhD candidate, Pharmacology & Physiology  
**Skandha Ramakrishnan**, PhD candidate, Molecular & Cell Biology & Genetics  
**Giaowei Xie**, PhD candidate, Pharmacology & Physiology





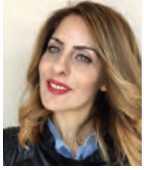
Howe



Rutkowski

**Caitlin Howe, PhD**, associate professor, Department of Neurobiology & Anatomy, and **William Rutkowski, MD '26**, published "Variation of the Brachial Artery Emerging

Through an Opening in the Median Nerve: A Case Report" in *Surgical Radiology & Anatomy* in August 2023.



Irollo



Nash

**Elena Irollo, PhD**, research assistant professor, **Brad Nash, PhD pharmacology and physiology '17**, director of scientific communications,

**Jared Luchetta, PhD pharmacology and physiology '23**, **Renato Brandimarti, PhD**, visiting research associate, and **Olimpia Meucci, MD, PhD**, professor and chair, all



Meucci

in the Department of Pharmacology & Physiology, were the authors of "The Endolysosomal Transporter DMT1 Is Required for Morphine Regulation of Neuronal Ferritin Heavy Chain," which appeared in the *Journal of Neuroimmune Pharmacology* in September 2023.



**Stanley Kania III, PhD, MBA**, assistant professor of family, community and preventive medicine, co-edited *A Comprehensive Guide to Graduate Enrollment Management: Advancing Research and Practice*. The book is the first comprehensive compendium in this field

and will lay the foundation for further scholarly inquiry on topics within graduate enrollment management.

**Alexander Kirichenko, MD, PhD**, professor of radiologic sciences, was one of the authors of "Defining Minimum Treatment Parameters of Ablative Radiotherapy in Patients With Hepatocellular Carcinoma: An Expert Consensus," which appeared in *Practical Radiation Oncology* on November 14, 2023.



**Leon McCrea II, MD, MPH**, senior associate dean of diversity, equity and inclusion, and Drexel Pathway to Medical School program director, and **Annette Gadegbeku, MD**, associate dean of community health and faculty director of Healing Hurt People, presented

a webinar, "Combating PCP Burnout With Emergent Infections," for George Washington University on November 1, 2023.



**Vandana Miller, MD**, associate professor, Department of Microbiology & Immunology, and her collaborators at Princeton University received a Department of Energy grant to investigate the reciprocal interactions between dielectric barrier discharges and different biological targets

in cell culture medium.

# Calendar

## April

2 **2nd Annual CDHE Health Equity Summit**  
"Transforming Medical Education: Recruitment in the Face of SCOTUS"  
National Constitution Center  
Contact: Dara Bright, [dnb66@dragons.drexel.edu](mailto:dnb66@dragons.drexel.edu)

5 **Women in Medicine and Science Committee Leadership Summit**  
12:30-5 p.m., Livestream via Zoom  
Learn more: [bit.ly/WIMSCsummit](http://bit.ly/WIMSCsummit)  
Contact: Andreia Mortensen, PhD, [acm83@drexel.edu](mailto:acm83@drexel.edu)

25 **General Faculty Meeting**  
12-1:30 p.m., Livestream via Zoom  
Contact: [COM.FAFD@drexel.edu](mailto:COM.FAFD@drexel.edu)

## May

9 **College of Medicine Commencement**  
The Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts  
300 S. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Contact: [DUCCOMMilestones@drexel.edu](mailto:DUCCOMMilestones@drexel.edu)

17 **34th Annual St. Chris Research Day**  
St. Christopher's Hospital for Children  
160 East Erie Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19134  
Contact: Alma Barberena, [alma.barberena@towerhealth.org](mailto:alma.barberena@towerhealth.org)

27 **Memorial Day**

30 **Drexel Graduate Student Day**  
4-6 p.m.  
Bossone Research Enterprise Center  
3126 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104  
Contact: [gradawards@drexel.edu](mailto:gradawards@drexel.edu)

## June

3-5 Navigating Ambiguity in Professionalism: Teaching, Assessment, Remediation and Clinical Care  
College of Medicine campus, location TBA  
Livestream via Zoom  
Contact: Barbara Lewis, [bal326@drexel.edu](mailto:bal326@drexel.edu)

6 **Faculty Professional Development Day and Faculty Awards**  
11 a.m.-5 p.m.  
Health Sciences Building  
60 N. 36th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104  
Livestream via Zoom  
Contact: [COM.FAFD@drexel.edu](mailto:COM.FAFD@drexel.edu)

11 **Doctoral Student Celebration**  
5-7:30 p.m.  
World Café Live  
3025 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104

19 **Juneteenth**

**Full calendar:** All College of Medicine events are available at [drexel.edu/medicine/news-events/events](http://drexel.edu/medicine/news-events/events).

**Alumni:** For information about alumni events, please call toll-free 888.DUGRADS (888.384.7237), email [medical.alumni@drexel.edu](mailto:medical.alumni@drexel.edu) or visit [drexel.edu/medicine/alumni/events](http://drexel.edu/medicine/alumni/events).



**Mauricio Reginato, PhD**, professor and chair, Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, was recipient of the Pennoni Honors College 2022-2023 STAR Scholar Outstanding Mentor of the Year Award at Drexel University.



Reyes

**Beverly Reyes, DVM, PhD**, research associate professor of pharmacology and physiology, was awarded an R21 grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. This collaborative grant with co-investigators **Jacqueline**



Barson

**Barker, PhD**, associate professor of pharmacology and physiology, and **Jessica Barson, PhD**, associate professor of neurobiology and anatomy, will fund the project "Alcohol-Induced Changes in Stress-Related Neuropeptide Circuitry."

## MD Students Share Insights at SSRFC Conference

Nine MD students presented at the 2023 Society of Student-Run Free Clinics annual conference in Minneapolis October 21 and 22. The students covered topics including student preparedness at free clinics, student attitudes about patients with substance use disorder, the implementation of a free skin protection educational program for children, the effects of an expanded schedule on clinic utilization and the versatility of microgreens for nutrition education.



Presenting at the Society of Student-Run Free Clinics conference were MD students (back row) Matthew Klein '25, Dianna Grigorian '25, Rodaina Ahmed '26, Ifra Malik '26 and Brian Grodecki '26, and (front row) Amy Hsu '25, Lumnie Lika '26, Jay Desai '26 and Talmadge Gaither '26.



**Shayna Singh**, Neuroscience PhD student, was awarded an F31 predoctoral fellowship from the National Institutes of Health for her project "Mechanisms of Rhythm Generation and Recruitment in Mammalian Locomotor-Related Spinal Interneurons."

**Omobukola Solebo, MS microbiology and immunology '21, Liqin Ling, PhD**, former visiting graduate student, **Ikechukwu Nwankwo**, Microbiology & Immunology PhD student, **Hangjun Ke, PhD**, assistant professor of microbiology and immunology, and colleagues at Sichuan University and the Ohio State University College of Medicine authored "Plasmodium falciparum Utilizes Pyrophosphate to Fuel an Essential Proton Pump in the Ring Stage and the Transition to Trophozoite Stage," which appeared in *PLOS Pathogens* December 4, 2023.



**Nancy Spector, MD**, senior vice dean for faculty; executive director, ELAM and ELH programs and the Lynn Yeakel Institute for Women's Health and Leadership; and Betty A. Cohen Chair in Women's Health, co-authored a perspective in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, "Centering Women of Color to Promote Excellence in Academic Medicine," with colleagues from the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine and the University of California, Davis.



**Daniel R. Taylor, DO**, associate professor, Department of Pediatrics, authored an opinion article for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "Pediatricians Provide a Crucial Link in Postpartum Care." The article appeared online December 28, 2023. In the article, Taylor notes that only 40% of mothers attend their own postpartum follow-up visit, while most attend their new baby's first pediatric appointments, positioning pediatricians to fill a gap in care for postpartum women.



**Mark G. Trombetta, MD**, professor and interim academic chair of radiologic sciences, and colleagues at Allegheny Health Network and West Virginia University authored "Description of Multiparametric Targeting Techniques for Stereotactic Arrhythmia Radioablation (STAR) in Refractory Ventricular Tachycardia: A Quaternary Medical Center Experience," which appeared in the *Journal of Solid Tumors* online October 13, 2023. **Seungjong Oh, PhD**, assistant professor of radiologic sciences, Trombetta, **George C. Shaw, MD**, assistant professor of medicine, **Danny Lee, PhD**, professor of radiologic sciences, **Rodney E. Wegner, MD**, assistant professor of radiologic sciences, and **Athanasios Colonias, MD**, assistant professor of radiologic sciences, were among the authors of "A Target Definition Based on Electroanatomic Maps for Stereotactic Arrhythmia Radioablation," which appeared in *Physica Medica* in November 2023.

Trombetta

# Get to Know...

## What is your official title at Drexel?

Director of Admissions and Student Affairs at the West Reading Campus

## Have you ever wished you could make up a more accurate title for yourself? If so, what would it have been?

A more accurate title is "director of special projects." Everything that comes through West Reading is a special project for us and I have a hand in all of it.

## Explain what you do in under 50 words.

I am the operational lead for the West Reading Campus when it comes to the student life experience, and I support our recruitment efforts for each incoming class.

## Who do you interact with most on a daily basis?

On a daily basis I interact the most with Ariel Basch, my counterpart in Student Affairs in Philadelphia, as well as Caroline Bush, who is assistant director of student affairs. We work as a team, overseeing the student experience for all MD students. I also work closely with our admissions team, Vanessa Pirrone, PhD, Cheryl Hanau, MD, Allie Bausinger, Stanley Kania, PhD, and Kelli Kennedy.

## What is your typical day like?

If I'm not in meetings, a typical day for me is screening and reviewing applications for our incoming class and sitting in on meetings with our Admissions Committee. I'm also very involved in planning the details of our milestone events like Orientation, Match Day and Commencement.

## How do you see your work fitting into the big picture of the missions of the College?

My role is to help our students thrive in everything non-academic. A lot of the work that comes with being a physician is to have that rapport with and be trusted by the community. We make sure students have opportunities to do that outside of the curriculum. I think our role is crucial in helping our students find a voice and passion outside of class.

## What are your favorite and least favorite tasks?

My least favorite task is anything that has to do with nitty-gritty administrative work, like purchasing or contracts. I'm not a fan of those. My favorite is working on Orientation. It's one of the few times that we get to work with current student leaders in planning

a really fun week of events for the incoming students. I love seeing them being creative and really wanting to showcase Drexel in a good light, as well as giving back to the experience they had as first-year students.

## What is your educational and previous work background? How did those prepare you for what you do now?

After I did my master's at Penn, I started out in Housing and Residence Life at Drexel as a residence director, overseeing a building of freshman students. Then I went on to oversee Student Conduct for the University, so a lot of my background is in crisis management and personnel management. That has really helped me work with all of the nuances and issues that may come up with medical students. When working with students who are driven and have a purpose, it's important to make sure that they are balanced in the way that they're pursuing their degree. Having worked with Student Conduct, including having strategic oversight during the pandemic, has helped me navigate the newness of the West Reading Campus. The MD program's move from Queen Lane to the Health Sciences Building and the integration of the College of Medicine into University City is something I've been able to help with, having relationships with Drexel colleagues that we could rely on to help us navigate the transition.



**Orcel Kounga, MEd**  
Director of Admissions  
& Student Affairs

## What's one piece of Philly culture that you return to over and over again, and why?

I'm a big foodie. Food is my love language and my passion, and Philadelphia is a great city for that. The one place that I regularly return to is Reading Terminal Market. There are so many different things you can try. They're doing a good job of bringing in new vendors, so you don't see the same ones every single day, but it's also good to see the staples there. I love cheesecake and tiramisu, so I go to Termini Brothers at least once a month.





DREXEL UNIVERSITY

College of  
**Medicine**

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# Faculty Professional Development Day



The 2024 Faculty Professional Development Day and Faculty Award Ceremony will be held on Thursday, June 6, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event will be held in person at the Health Sciences Building and livestreamed via Zoom.



**SAVE THE DATE:  
JUNE 6, 2024**

