

2023 Annual Report

Made at UConn



UConn
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

► **Welcome**



Each year doctors are made at UConn, with childhood dreams of being a physician coming true.

This May at Commencement one of those many dreams was made reality for future primary care physician Dr. Johanna Gleason-Vergados, pictured on the cover. The Class of 2023 was our largest-ever class of enrolled students. This proud UConn grad has chosen to remain in Connecticut for her residency training, as have nearly a third of her classmates. Nearly a quarter of them are staying right here at UConn.

This year the School of Medicine, the largest medical school in the state, reached a historic milestone: we have produced more than 4,000 new doctors for the state since 1972. We have also trained nearly 7,000 new primary care and specialty physicians in our robust and growing residency programs.

UConn's contributions to the state's health care workforce are unparalleled. Our medical school is proud to be the state's primary source of new physicians and surgeons, while producing a significant number of trained scientists and public health experts. In fact, 70% of UConn School of Medicine graduates are practicing medicine or serving as resident physicians in Connecticut, 60% of all the state's pediatricians are our graduates or trainees, and 31% of Connecticut's practicing physicians and 22% of its local public health directors are UConn-trained.

In addition to creating tomorrow's health care workforce, every day our talented medical school faculty and researchers make extraordinary and innovative breakthroughs in patient care and basic and translational research.

The tireless academic, clinical, research, and public service pursuits of our medical students, trainees, faculty, researchers, and staff make an everlasting difference and impact upon Connecticut, our communities, and people around the globe, improving care for the most vulnerable and underserved populations whether in nearby Hartford or faraway Africa.

A special thank you to University President Radenka Maric, our Provost Anne D'Alleva, Gov. Ned Lamont, the General Assembly, and our entire medical school community, including our alumni and generous philanthropic donors. We thank you all for your ongoing support of and belief in the amazing, powerful work of our School of Medicine and its people.

Please enjoy reading our inspiring 2023 Annual Report to learn more about what UConn's medical school is made of, and what we are making possible — from fulfilling doctors' dreams to saving lives from deadly diseases.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce T. Liang".

Bruce T. Liang, MD
Interim Chief Executive Officer, UConn Health
Dean, UConn School of Medicine
Ray Neag Distinguished Professor of Cardiovascular Biology and Medicine

UConn School of Medicine

FAST FACTS



Educated Since 1972

4,000+
physicians

6,750+
medical residents

2,000+
scientists and
public health experts

Rankings

#1
producer of Connecticut's
medical professionals
Largest source of state's new physicians and surgeons and a significant source of trained scientists and public health experts.

#27
in research and

#49
in primary care
among public medical schools nationally, as ranked by U.S. News & World Report.

Funding

\$117M+
in research funding including
\$67.2 million from the National
Institutes of Health

Students

24%
of students are from groups
underrepresented in medicine (URiM)

19,000+
state residents, especially the
underserved and vulnerable,
are cared for by student
volunteers annually



Patients

UConn Health provides access
to care for ALL Connecticut
citizens with patients from
every one of the state's

169 towns

Faculty

600
UConn School of Medicine
faculty serve Connecticut at
UConn Health, with:

1.5M+
patient encounters

14,500+
hospital discharges

13,000+
surgeries performed

51,000+
emergency department visits

Undergraduate Medical Education & Graduate Medical Education

UConn School of Medicine is Connecticut's largest producer of medical professionals including new doctors and surgeons. It also produces many scientists and public health experts. Every year, the School graduates 110 new medical doctors and trains 790 residents to be primary care physicians or medical specialists across more than 75 residency and fellowship programs.

The annual White Coat Ceremony on Aug. 18, 2023 celebrated 112 incoming first-year medical students, our largest enrolling class yet. Every year, this tradition serves as the official launch of the medical school journey, with students donning their new white doctor coats for the first time and pledging the Hippocratic Oath to do no harm.



Class of 2027

Total applications

4,336

Incoming class size

112

Connecticut residents

76%

UConn undergraduates

35%

Average age

23

Female

57%

Male

43%

Underrepresented in medicine

17%

Goodbye and Good Luck!

The class of 2023 entered the UConn School of Medicine as the largest incoming class in school history and earned its degrees on May 8, 2023, after training throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This unstoppable class is prepared for just about anything as its members join the ranks of the health care workforce as residents in training.

Class of 2023

Residency match rate

99%

Entering primary care

38%

Staying in Connecticut

30%

Staying at UConn Health

22%

Remaining in New England

57%



Set Up for Success

Students at UConn School of Medicine prepare for residency through our advanced MDelta curriculum, which employs team-based learning instruction and is focused on shaping and refining students' problem-solving, diagnostic, and treatment skills. Humanism in medicine and the health systems sciences are integral components of MDelta. Several special programs support these future MDs in pursuing their careers. For more than two decades the successful Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP), founded and directed by Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor Dr. Marja Hurley, have built a continuous pathway for Connecticut's youth of all backgrounds to realize their dream of becoming future doctors and health professionals. HCOP includes 14 programs that are part of the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (HPPI), such as Doctors Academy.

Still other students prepare for their unique futures through offerings including the combined MD/Master of Public Health and MD/Master of Business Administration programs, as well as our Ph.D. programs.

“There’s a shared sense of pride among UConn students, faculty, and graduates and an unwavering commitment to serving Connecticut communities. Clinical training at UConn is exceptional. UConn has prepared me well to navigate my next steps in my career as a physician.”

Eric Beltrami '19, '23 MD, Wolcott, Connecticut
Residency: Boston University Medical Center, Dermatology



“It is amazing that at UConn, you do not have to look far to see alums, like Dr. Marja Hurley, who embody what it means to live this incredible UConn legacy and continue to inspire former, current, and future students.”

Ezibobiara Umejiego '23 MD, Atlanta, Georgia
Health Career Opportunity Programs graduate
Residency: Howard University, Ophthalmology



“My motto is ‘the best physicians are the best humans first.’ I want to help people and learn from everyone around me. UConn generates an elite group of knowledgeable physicians motivated to always give back to the community.”

Celina Marie Lopes Caetano '19, '23 MD, Waterbury, Connecticut
Class of 2023 Student Speaker
Residency: Yale New Haven Hospital, Internal Medicine



“I have wanted to be a physician since I was 5 years old. For those dreaming of medical school or a career in health care, I encourage them to be brave and follow those dreams. UConn School of Medicine is synonymous with excellence.”

Edesiri Igbuya '23 MD, Naugatuck, Connecticut
Health Career Opportunity Programs graduate
Residency: University of Massachusetts, OB/GYN



“There is not a more welcoming place to become a doctor than UConn! One of my favorite things about the curriculum is the early exposure to the clinical setting where you start seeing patients just a couple of months into school.”

Rafael Olivieri-Ortiz '23 MD, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Health Career Opportunity Programs graduate
Residency: UConn, Internal Medicine followed by The University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School, Diagnostic Radiology

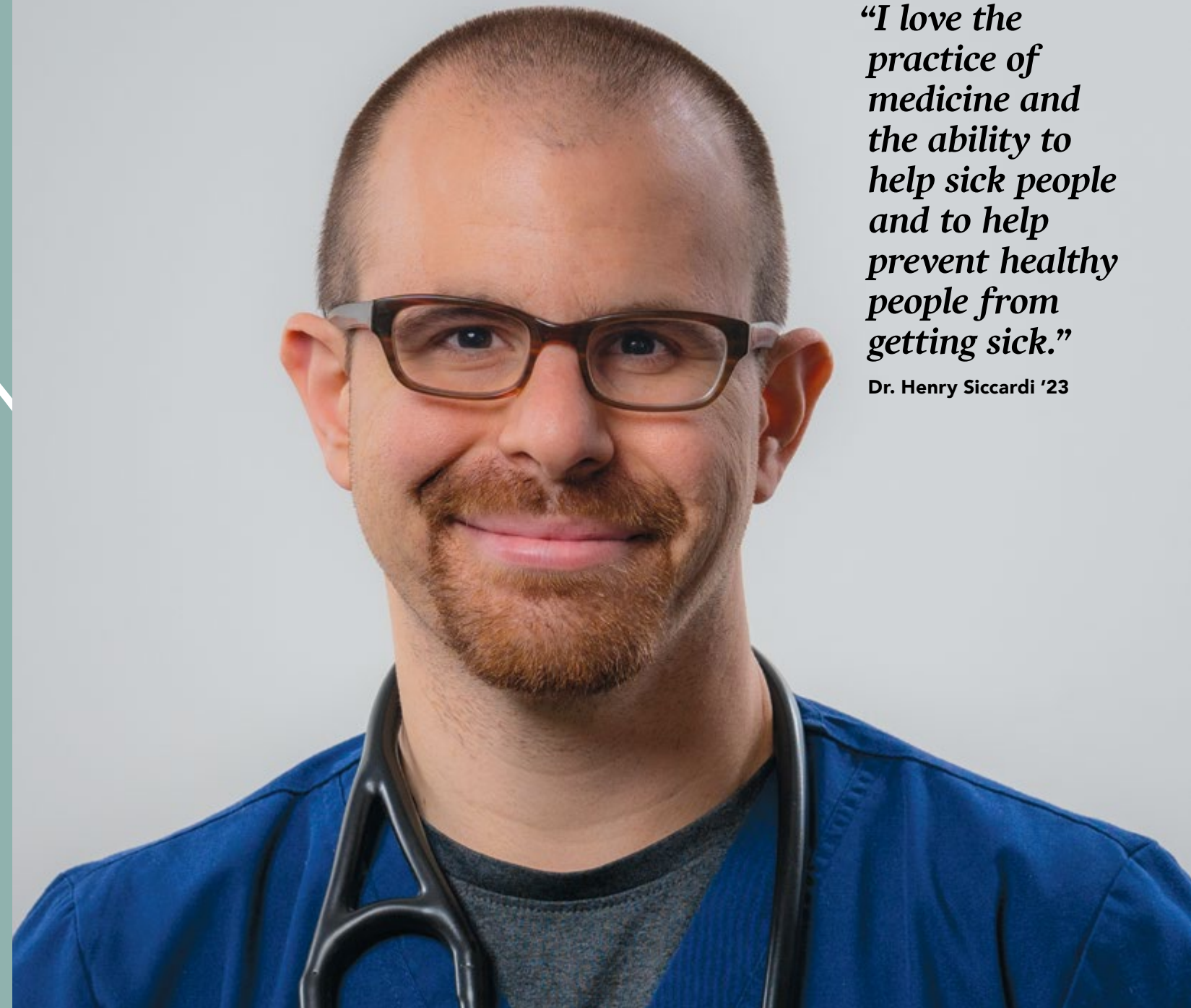


“UConn is a place where people matter. It focuses on providing care for all people, including the most vulnerable among us. For me, as a Black trainee, it was essential to provide support for those who had never had someone who looked like them treating them before. At UConn, I had the opportunity to do that and more.”

Jonathan Harrell '23 MD, '23 MBA, Altamonte Springs, Florida
Health Care Opportunity Programs graduate
Residency: McGovern Medical School, University of Texas at Houston, Emergency Medicine



SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF DOCTORS



“I love the practice of medicine and the ability to help sick people and to help prevent healthy people from getting sick.”

Dr. Henry Siccardi '23

Agents of Change

Dr. Henry Siccardi '23, who earned a dual MD/MPH, is staying at UConn for his internal medicine residency training to grow the successful UConn Health Leaders program (UHL) he co-founded in 2019. The program aims to curb patient health inequities by screening patients with iPads in UConn Health outpatient care waiting rooms to uncover social determinants of health — non-medical factors that can influence health outcomes, such as unemployment — in real time. If the patient screens positive for a social determinant of health, student advocates connect the patient with necessary social resources.

“I love the practice of medicine and the ability to help sick people and to help prevent healthy people from getting sick,” says Siccardi, co-chair of UConn Health’s Patient and Family Advisory Council. Student volunteers in UHL are taught what health disparities may exist, how to identify them, and how to help fix them. “We have been successful at impacting the health and lives of the patients we meet in a positive way,” he says. During the last three years, UHL has trained more than 300 students, screened 8,994 people, identified 5,945 patients with unmet social factors, and addressed 2,115 unmet social needs.



“The University of Connecticut is an outstanding public research institution. They set up trainees for success.”

Dr. Vanessa Scanlon '15 Ph.D.

From Student to Faculty

UConn Graduate School's biomedical sciences Ph.D. program is dedicated to quality education tailored to the needs of the individual student. Vanessa Scanlon '15 Ph.D. returned to join the UConn faculty in 2022 after completing her six-year postdoctoral training at Yale. She is assistant professor in the Center for Regenerative Medicine and Skeletal Biology, studying the cells inside bone marrow that give rise to circulatory blood cells. Scanlon credits the

outstanding resources UConn has to offer along with the extremely supportive alumni network for her success — and her desire to be at UConn. “The University of Connecticut is an outstanding public research institution. They set up trainees for success,” she says. “It’s really a family and a collegial environment, and Connecticut is an amazing state to live in. I am happy to find that all here.”



“I am going to be the first doctor in my family, I am so excited.”

Mark Manson

The Future Dr. Mark Manson

The doctors and nurses Mark Manson encountered as a young child suffering from neutropenia, a condition marked by abnormally low counts of a type of white blood cell, inspired the 2023 Bloomfield High School grad to one day become a doctor himself.

“All the doctors and nurses always tried to keep my hopes up,” he says. “I remember the small gestures they did, and I want to give back.”

Each summer since he was in ninth grade, Manson has participated in UConn's Doctors Academy, one of 14 Health Career Opportunity Programs that are part of the

Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (HPPI). The program's strong mentorship is helping him work toward his dream of becoming a doctor.

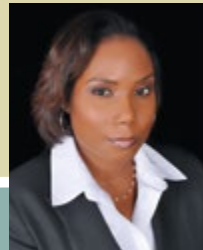
Now a first-year undergraduate student at UConn's main campus in Storrs, over the next eight years Manson will earn both his bachelor of science and a medical degree through UConn's Special Program in Medicine. “I am going to be the first doctor in my family. I am so excited,” Manson says. “This will allow me to become a doctor faster. The Health Career Opportunity Programs helped me with this amazing opportunity.”

Increasing Diversity in Medicine

Dr. Chioma Ogbejesi '12 (NUR), now in her last year of OB/GYN surgery training, was the first medical student in UConn's Visiting Externships for Students Underrepresented in Medicine (VESUM) program to match to a UConn residency. The program aims to increase diversity in academic medicine by offering fourth-year externships to med students from groups underrepresented in medicine.

"Medicine is not as diverse as it should be. Being a person of color in medicine, you can experience certain challenges," says Ogbejesi, a former UConn-trained nurse. "It was incredibly helpful to me to have mentors."

As a fourth-year medical student, Ogbejesi visited UConn for a four-week insider's view of the OB/GYN field and UConn before choosing her residency match. "I highly encourage others to participate in the VESUM externship program to see how good UConn residency programs really are," she says.



"Chioma's trajectory — from successfully matching after participating in our program as a medical student to preparing to practice OB/GYN in the community — is a testament to her accomplishments and the importance of such programs."

Dr. Linda Barry, associate dean, Office of Multicultural and Community Affairs, and director of VESUM



New Residency and Fellowships

75+
advanced GME training programs

Nearly
800 trainees

UConn launched three new residency and fellowship programs in 2023:

- Vascular surgery residency, led by Dr. Kwame Amankwah, Vascular Surgery Chief
- Sleep medicine fellowship, directed by Dr. Adrian Salmon, Assistant Professor of Medicine
- Musculoskeletal radiology fellowship, spearheaded by Dr. Daniel Marrero, Assistant Professor of Radiology and Section Head, Musculoskeletal Imaging and Intervention



"I highly encourage others to participate in the VESUM externship program."

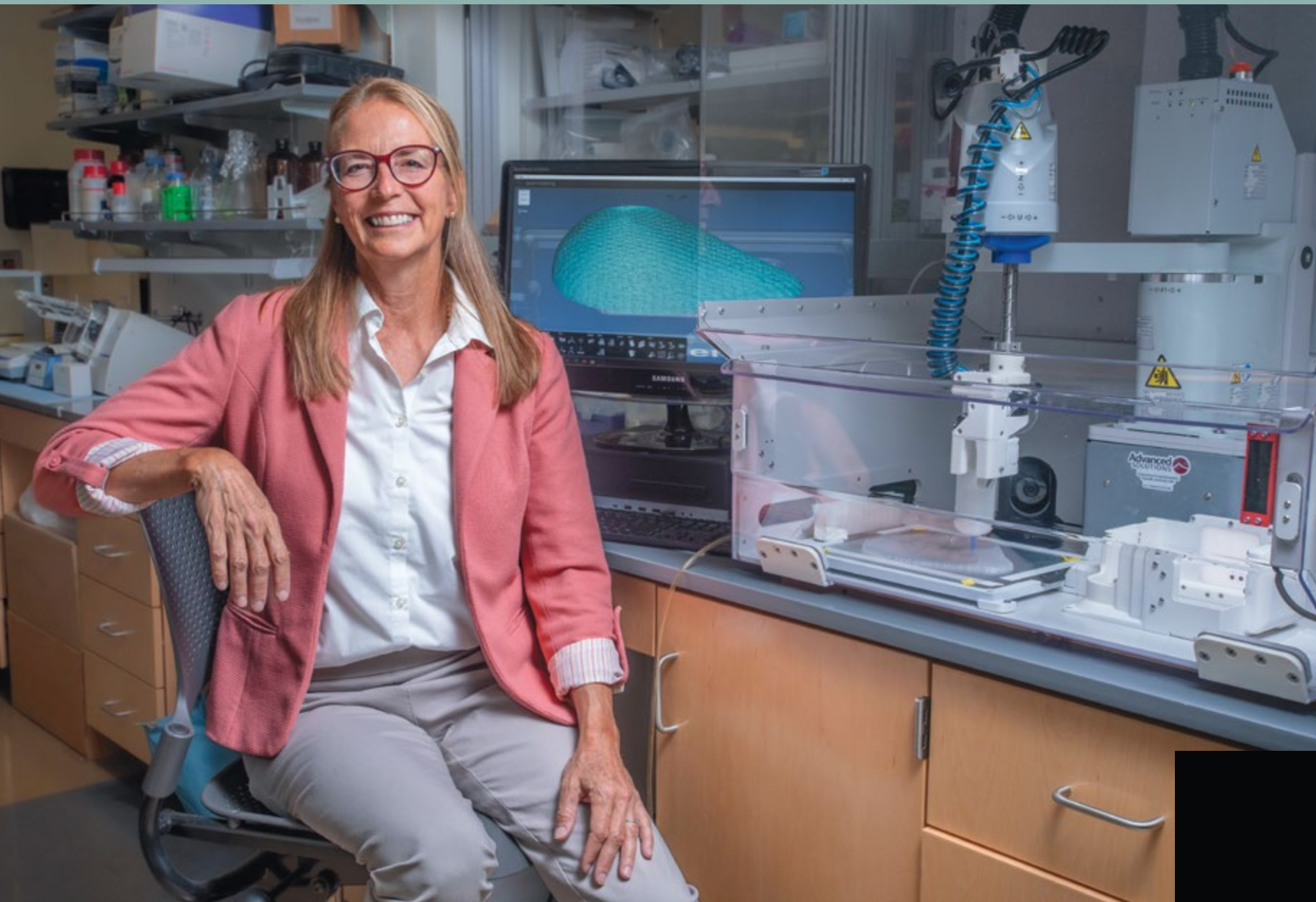
Dr. Chioma Ogbejesi '12 (NUR), OB/GYN Surgery Resident

What Makes a Good Doctor?

Dr. Jessica Mary '18 (CLAS), '22 MD, who completed UConn's Special Program in Medicine, earning her undergraduate and medical degrees from the University and staying at UConn for her residency, believes being a good doctor means thinking about patients as whole people with complex lives.

"As a hospitalist, you're the primary doctor while the patient is in the hospital. You're the one talking to the family. You're the one organizing the more social factors affecting the patient," she says. "As much as this is just another day for you, this may be the first time they've been in the hospital. Or the many-th time.

"I think that's what I love about medicine, and I think that's also what makes you a good doctor — not forgetting about those things. They're important," says Mary, who has completed rotations in the hospital, outpatient clinics, and the intensive care unit.



A Better Breast Prosthetic

Professor Liisa Kuhn, Ph.D., has created a 3D-printed breast prosthetic for breast cancer survivors who have undergone a mastectomy. The prosthetic is made of a breathable polymer lattice material, making it soft and lightweight. An imaging scan helps contour the design to each woman's chest wall for a customized, natural-looking, and symmetric fit. Kuhn's innovation was inspired by a colleague's experience with a traditional breast prosthetic, which can be uncomfortable, heavy, hot, and ill-fitting. "Dr. Kuhn is not just helping to make you look better; she is giving you back your self-esteem," say Jan Figueroa, the first to receive the pioneering prosthetic.

"Being a biomedical engineer with my primary lab at UConn Health allows me to hear patient concerns directly and translate them to new inventions in the engineering school," says Kuhn. "This prosthetic is unlike anything out there! Seeing smiles on patient faces after they get one makes it all worth it." The development of the prosthetic is supported by the Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center, Connecticut Breast Health Initiative, the School of Engineering, and The Beekley Family Foundation. Female engineering students are working with Kuhn to further enhance the prosthetics.



First in the Nation

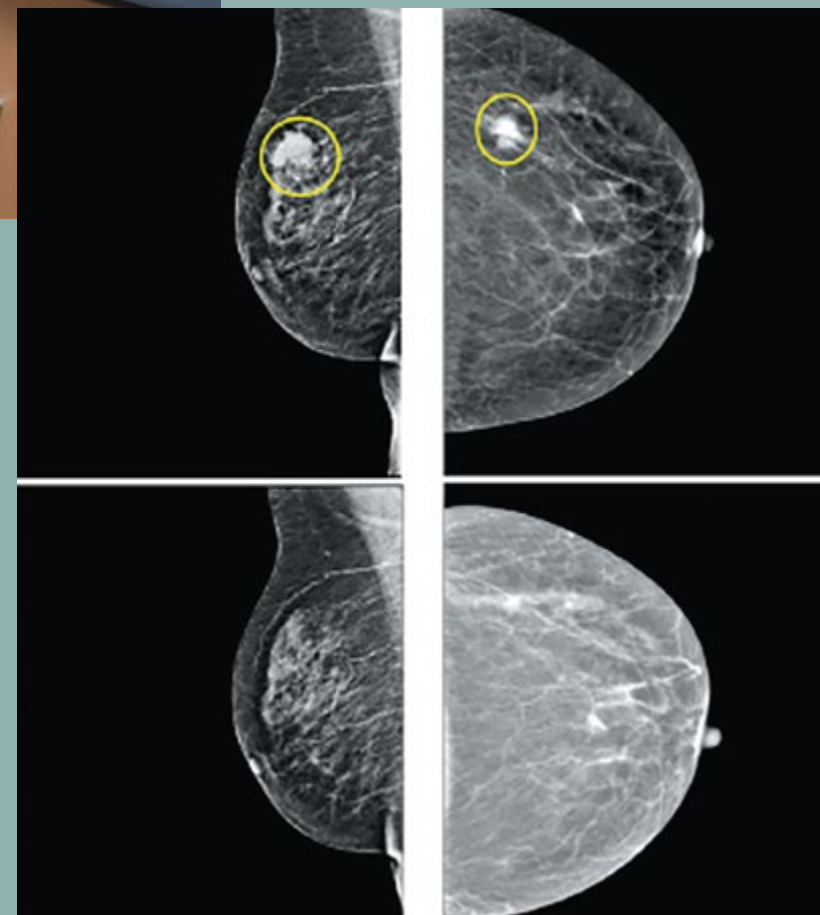
Dr. Swarup Kumar, who leads the Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center's plasma cell disorder program, was first in the U.S. to offer a newly FDA-approved drug for multiple myeloma called teclistamab. The chronic and often deadly blood cancer causes an overgrowth of plasma cells in the bone marrow that forms damaging bone tumors and harms organs. "The drug tricks the immune system into thinking that an infection is happening in the body. Immune cells are activated and recruited in large numbers to fight and kill myeloma cells," says Kumar. "At this time the medication is used to extend patients' lives and is very promising."

Kumar has treated over a dozen patients with teclistamab, including patients from other hospitals in the state. He says UConn was able to offer the drug first thanks to the Cancer Center's team effort and the speed at which the hospital's pharmacy secured the medication after it became available under the FDA's accelerated approval program.

Next, UConn is pursuing clinical trials of earlier teclistamab treatment and other immunotherapies to bring greater hope to patients for long-term disease control and remission.

AI for Breast Cancer

UConn's new artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm is reviewing patient mammograms to pinpoint potential breast cancers. The AI-enhanced technology solution, called Feature Fusion Siamese Network for Breast Cancer Detection, was co-created by radiologist Dr. Clifford Yang and Sheida Nabavi, Ph.D., of computer science and engineering, with a cross-campus research team. Their AI program compares two sets of mammogram films from two different time points for diagnosis, eliminating the need for a radiologist's manual comparison, saving time, increasing diagnostic accuracy, and decreasing the incidence of anxiety-provoking false positives that can happen with current computer-aided detection (CAD) technology. "Our hope is that this AI system can function like a radiologist to help more quickly read many more mammograms," says Yang. The program identifies new masses and calcifications, while ignoring stable benign findings. UConn's Technology Commercialization Services is testing the patent-pending technology to bring it to market. "If AI can save radiologists work, it could help make mammograms less expensive and more accessible to women," says Yang.



HELPING WOMEN ACROSS THE NATION

Last June, Connecticut's General Assembly unanimously passed legislation to create a first-of-its-kind, publicly funded endometriosis data and biorepository program at UConn Health and The Jackson Laboratory (JAX). The legislation aims to drive research breakthroughs to help women across the state and nation, advancing diagnostics, treatments, and cures for the highly invasive, underdiagnosed, and under-researched condition. Spearheaded by State Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, a UConn alumna, and the Connecticut Endometriosis Working Group, the program centers on a collection of surgical, clinical, and biological information from patients at UConn Health and statewide. "This initiative is an unprecedented opportunity to turn the tide toward improved research investment, awareness-building, and clinical impact in this disease and will position Connecticut as a trailblazer in endometriosis collaboration and research," says Dr. Danielle Luciano, director of the Center of Excellence in Minimally Invasive Gynecology, who is studying endometriosis tissue samples in partnership with Elise Courtois, Ph.D., of JAX.

What Is Endometriosis?

A chronic, debilitating disease where the uterine lining grows outside the uterus; the leading cause of hysterectomies among reproductive-age women.

Symptoms:

Pain and infertility

Impacts:

1 in 10
women in Connecticut

6.5M
women in the U.S.

200M
women worldwide



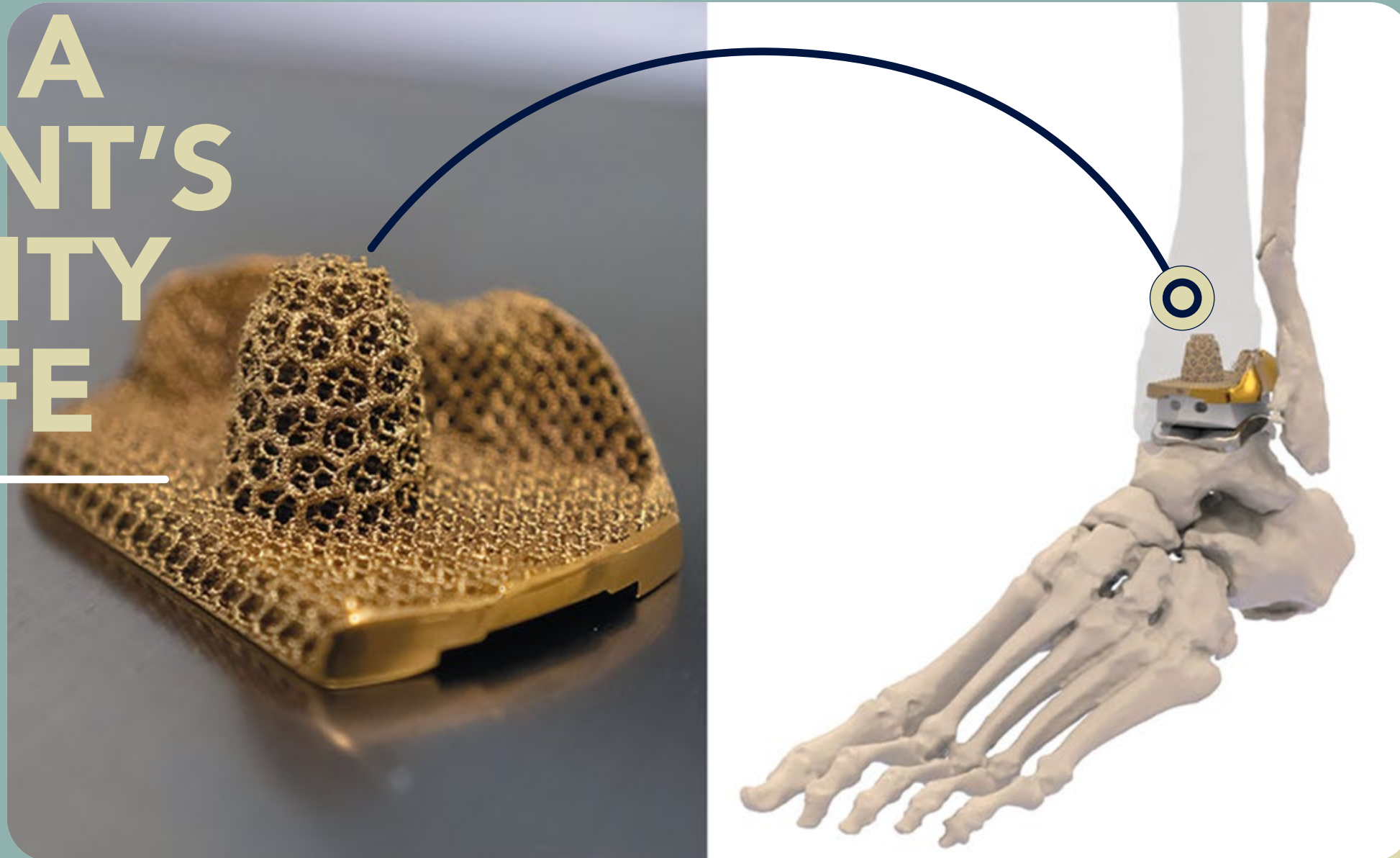
Advanced Genomics for Brain Cancer

UConn Health and JAX are uncovering the molecular signatures of specific brain cancers with a method of advanced diagnostic tumor analysis using precision genomics known as whole genome methylation array. DNA methylation gives doctors an unparalleled level of insight into how best to treat each patient's individual brain tumor.

"For the last year this innovative methylome profiling has allowed us to precisely grade and guide treatment for all tumor types ranging from meningiomas to gliomas," says Dr. Qian Wu, professor of pathology and laboratory medicine. "Precise diagnosis of a brain tumor's grading is critical, as it influences the aggressiveness of potentially lifesaving treatment."

"We are one of a handful centers in the country routinely doing a 550-gene panel analysis of brain tumors in almost real time to guide treatment and one of only five in the country using clinical methylation for real-time diagnosis and treatment," says Neurosurgery Chief Dr. Ketan Bulsara. "Our advanced genome methylation profiling of brain tumors is very unique, leading to our ability to identify tumors that may behave more aggressively than a histologic diagnosis typically provides and thus directing our targeted treatment strategy," adds collaborator Dr. Kevin Becker, director of medical neuro-oncology. JAX's Dr. Lei Li, clinical laboratory director, has been a key collaborator.

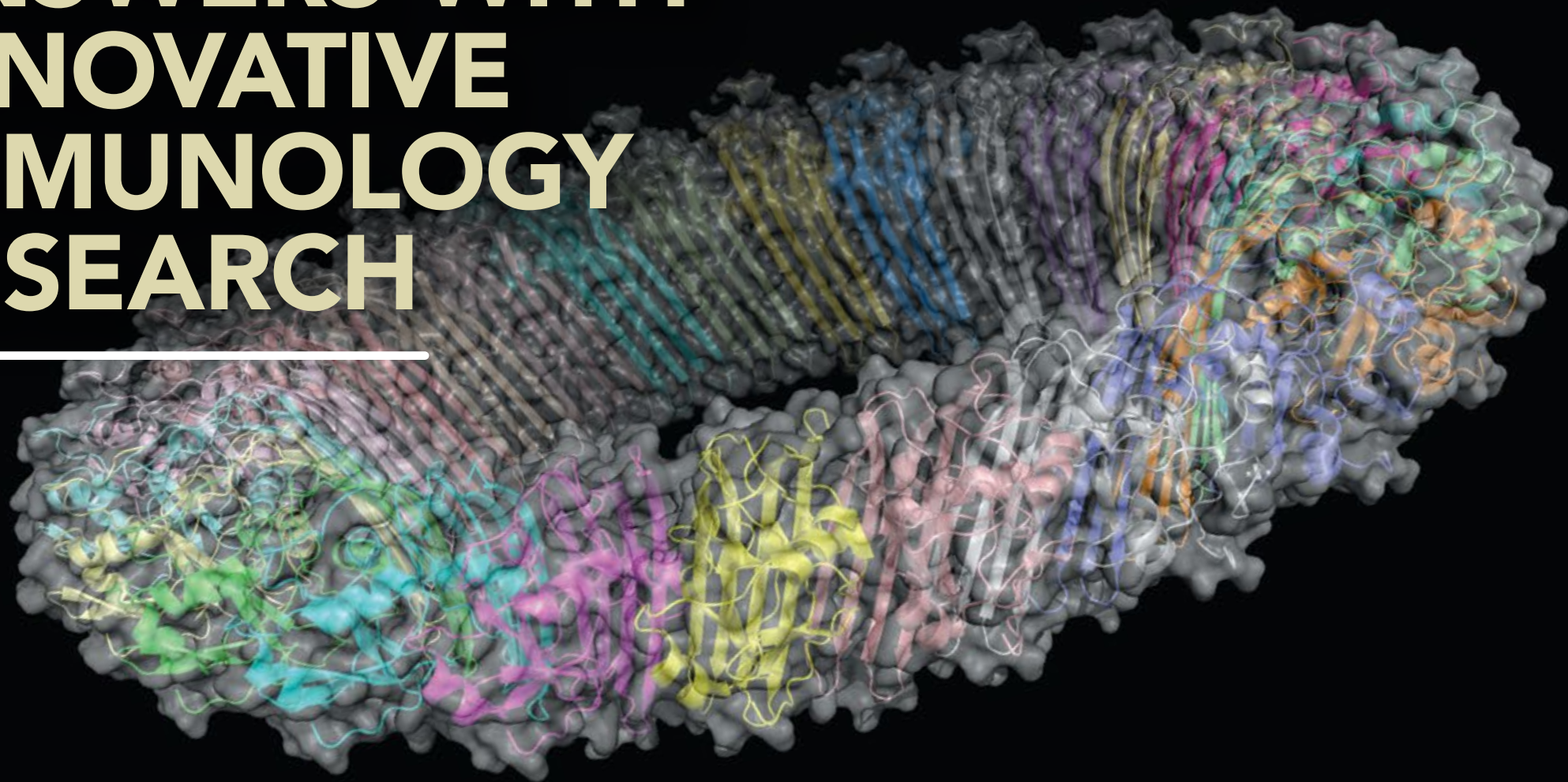
GIVING BACK A PATIENT'S QUALITY OF LIFE



3D-Printed Ankle Replacement

Innovative foot and ankle surgeon Dr. Lauren Geaney found a solution for a complex ankle injury that left a patient unable to walk on her left foot. Thanks to a 3D-printed, custom ankle replacement, the patient is walking, and even hiking, without pain. Geaney is among the first in the Northeast to successfully complete such a replacement with a custom-designed implant made from titanium and a type of plastic called ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene, coated in titanium nitride. The implant and surrounding supports were fabricated by Colorado-based device maker Paragon 28 with a personalized design based on the patient's CT scans. The procedure was "truly life-changing for me," the patient says. "This has given me back my quality of life." Geaney concurs: "It's a little bit of a long shot, but its working."

FINDING ANSWERS WITH INNOVATIVE IMMUNOLOGY RESEARCH



Food poisoning caused by Shigella bacteria sickens roughly 450,000 Americans each year. In the journal Nature, UConn researchers led by Jianbin Ruan, Ph.D., recruited from Harvard, reveal more about the critical immune system role the gasdermin-B protein plays in protecting against Shigella infection and disease. The team expressed, purified, and cooled the protein to very low temperatures with Cryo-EM technology to closely examine it with electron microscope imaging. Researchers built 3D models of the protein molecules at the atomic level with hundreds of thousands of images revealing 24

identical units linked together in a ring that control the body's inflammatory response. Through these 3D models researchers now understand what these powerful proteins look like and how they perform. "The protein structures that our team discovered have significant implications for drug development. They can inform the future design of small molecule drugs that modulate gasdermin-B activity," says Ruan. "These drugs could potentially treat a range of conditions, including cancer, inflammatory and autoimmune diseases, and infectious diseases by suppressing or enhancing the body's immune response."



How Long Are Your Telomeres?

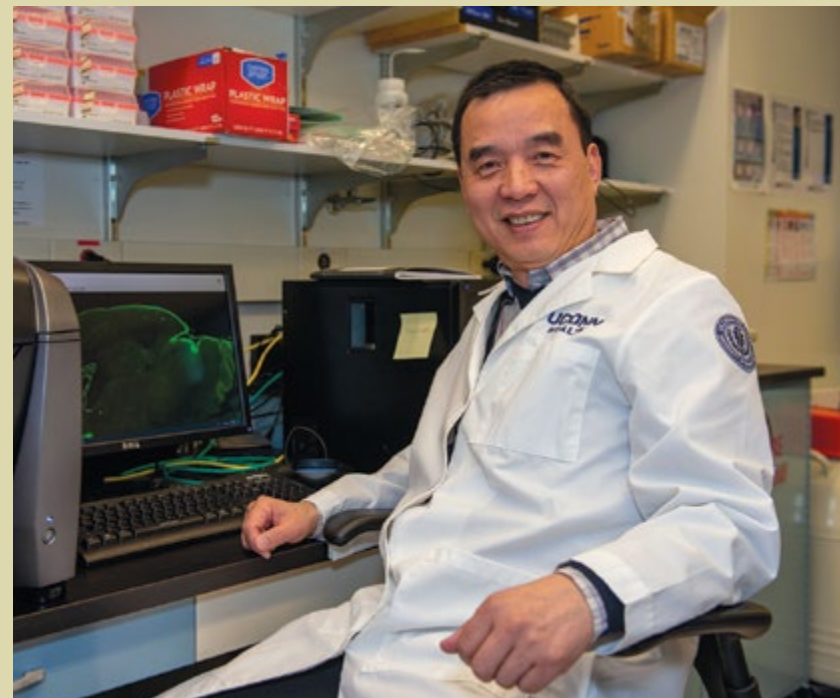
Telomeres are repetitive lengths of DNA that cap our chromosomes, protecting the rest of the DNA from damage. Telomeres start out long and gradually shorten with age and stress. But a study in Aging Cell shows that having shorter telomeres in mid-life points to an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease. It's one more reason to adopt a lifestyle of a healthy diet and exercise, say researchers led by biostatistician Chia-Ling Kuo, Ph.D., who analyzed data from more than 435,000 participants in the UK Biobank.



Tackling Alzheimer's With Big Data

A UConn cross-campus research collaboration is showing microglia cells — known as the brain's "garbage collectors" — may be to blame for Alzheimer's disease. In a healthy brain, microglia cells clear away the protein found in beta plaques, which are a hallmark of Alzheimer's. Researchers believe those with Alzheimer's may have microglia dysfunction and that fixing microglia could be the key to a cure.

Riqiang Yan, Ph.D., professor and chair of neuroscience (pictured below), and Dong-Guk Shin, Ph.D., professor of computer science and engineering, are using big data to understand how microglia in Alzheimer's brains may differ from microglia in healthy brains. They are visualizing and tracking the behavior patterns of the expressed genes of thousands of microglia as the cells shift between causing inflammation or repairing damage. Shin's lab developed a way to visualize the microglia to show where they are in the inflammation-repair cycle. The researchers are analyzing the data in hopes of fueling a cure or new therapy.



Small Molecule Healing Big Bones

The cross-campus Cato T. Laurencin Institute for Regenerative Engineering led by orthopaedic surgeon-engineer-scientist and University Professor Dr. Cato T. Laurencin discovered a new method for healing and regrowing long bones such as those in the arms and legs. The regenerative technique, published in PNAS, is more affordable and has fewer side effects or limitations compared to current methods such as bone grafts or using larger protein molecules such as recombinant human bone morphogenetic proteins (rhBMPs).

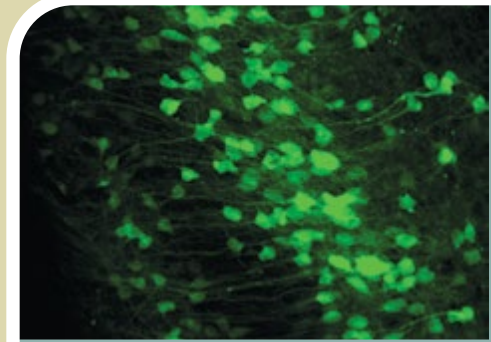
"I am delighted to see the outstanding progress of the field of regenerative engineering leveraging cutting-edge technology. The breakthrough offers new potential in tissue regeneration," says Laurencin. These findings advance his Institute's breakthrough work toward achieving limb regeneration by 2030 as part of the Hartford Engineering a Limb Project (HEAL).



Targeting Heart Disease

Kimberly Dodge-Kafka, Ph.D., cell biology professor in the Calhoun Cardiology Center, was awarded a multimillion-dollar NIH grant to develop and test new drugs that target the beta receptors inside cells to stop heart disease. "My big hope is to develop a new type of beta-blocker drug for humans that can block or reverse heart disease progression so patients can live a better, fuller, and longer life," says Dodge-Kafka, whose mouse model testing has shown promise for a few such drugs. "We hypothesize medications such as commonly used beta-blockers for heart disease patients may be primarily targeting the wrong subset of adrenaline receptors.

"These medications only target the plasma membranes on cells to slow down the heart's contractibility," she explains. "The receptors we should be treating for disease are intracellular, associated with the cell's nucleus, where the genes responsible for induction of disease are located."



Attention-Grabbing Brain Research

Your attention can be disrupted by psychiatric and neurological diseases like depression, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease, and multiple sclerosis. That's why neuroscientist Timothy Spellman, Ph.D., is focusing his attention on the brain's prefrontal cortex, which controls attention. His innovative research is mapping pathways in the brain to lay the groundwork for improving patient symptoms and development of new targeted drugs to tame attention disruptions. Spellman's lab uses new experimental techniques that he designed to study the activity of brain cells as they are making decisions, using 2-photon microscopy to visualize behavior with fluorescent light.



Clean Air for All

In early June, UConn Health gifted 150 free do-it-yourself indoor air filters to help vulnerable community members protect themselves from unhealthy wildfire smoke particles. The air filters were built by volunteering UConn faculty, students including some from the School of Engineering as part of their curriculum, and staff as part of the ongoing cross-campus UConn Indoor Air Quality Initiative launched during COVID-19 to help battle the virus inside public schools. The simple, inexpensive purifiers, known as Corsi-Rosenthal boxes, can be assembled from \$60 worth of hardware store supplies. "It is critical that we all know how to protect ourselves. Teaching our community how they can stay safe and prevent illness from exposure to bad air is critical," says initiative director Marina Creed, APRN, instructor of neurology. "This device can help everyone access free, clean indoor air." The U.S. EPA is testing the efficacy of the device using "Owl Force One," the box made by members of the Initiative with fifth graders at Commodore MacDonough STEM Academy, a public school in Middletown, Connecticut.

Caring for Refugees and Immigrants

UConn Immigrant Health has helped more than 1,000 people from over 40 countries, many from war-torn countries such as Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Honduras, Guatemala, Somalia, and Ukraine. Directed by Dr. Susan Levine, the program provides clinical care to refugees and immigrants arriving in Connecticut. It also provides educational and advocacy opportunities to medical students and residents, the future generation of primary care providers.

"We perform CDC-mandated refugee health assessments within 30 days of a refugee's arrival, green card exams, and primary care to an incredibly diverse population of patients. It is truly rewarding to provide health care for such a vulnerable and inspiring population."

"This is what UConn is all about," Levine says. "We are very grateful for the opportunity to help refugees and immigrants looking for a better life and safety in our country and state."



Photo Credit/Dr. Hellen Munaku

IMPROVING SICKLE CELL CARE WORLDWIDE

More than a half-million babies are born with sickle cell disease annually, and the global mortality rate from the illness may be nearly 11 times higher than recorded, according to a study recently published in *The Lancet Haematology* by a new sickle cell disease expert commission that includes Dr. Biree Andemariam. The global commission has called on the world to improve care for the painful inherited red blood cell disease.

"In the *Lancet Haematology* published report, we highlight the seriousness of the global burden of sickle

cell disease and the inequalities in diagnosis and basic clinical care," says Andemariam. The commission disseminated simple and effective methods to reduce the pain and suffering of millions of individuals. As founder and director of the New England Sickle Cell Institute at UConn Health, Andemariam and her staff have transformed the care of sickle cell patients in Connecticut and beyond since 2009, establishing the region's first and only dedicated outpatient center of its kind for managing the condition and advancing clinical trial research.

A Life-Saving Phone Call

Pellumb Medolli, 71, of East Hartford, Connecticut (pictured at right), says students in the UConn Health Leaders program are to thank for saving his life. Volunteer students in the program call high-risk patients who haven't followed up on obtaining lung cancer screening scans to assess whether they have unmet social determinants of health. After calling him, a student connected Medolli to financial support for a lung cancer screening test, which he was entitled to as a longtime smoker. His early-stage lung cancer was caught and then surgically removed.

"It's hard to know over the phone if you are really making an impact on patient lives," says Sarah Bellizzi '23, who made the call. "But now I know!"

Medolli's daughter, Ojeda Johnson, agrees: "Thank you to every single UConn student who has made a patient phone call. You really are making a difference."



New Equity Center

UConn was awarded a \$10 million federal grant by the U.S. Department of Education to help states increase equity in their delivery of early childhood intervention services to infants and young children from diverse backgrounds and who have disabilities or developmental delays. "At UConn, inclusion and belonging is woven into everything we do. Our new Equity Center will ensure the future workforce we train is better prepared to provide equitable early childhood intervention services to all children and families, and better reflects the diverse demographic background of our country and the children we serve," says grant recipient Mary Beth Bruder, Ph.D., professor in the School of Medicine and Neag School of Education.



Skin Checks for Firefighters

On the first Monday in May, designated as "Melanoma Monday," dermatology faculty, residents, and students performed free skin cancer screenings for 50 UConn and community firefighters, who are at elevated risk of melanoma due to occupational hazards. The screenings were a joint effort of the American Academy of Dermatology, the UConn Health Department of Dermatology, and the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.



'Men's Health is Community Health'

Volunteering UConn students and residents powered three free health care screening events for hundreds of men in Hartford, East Hartford, and Bloomfield. UConn Health's Connecticut Area Health Education Center (AHEC) collaborated with My People Community Services, the Urban League of Greater Hartford, and Trinity Health of New England on the "Men's Health is Community Health" events.

SNMA Comes to Hartford

Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang kicked off the 59th Annual Medical Education Conference of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) with opening remarks at the Connecticut Convention Center. The sold-out event was the largest U.S. gathering of underrepresented minority medical and premedical students. The School of Medicine, Graduate Medical Education, and Health Career Opportunities Programs sponsored the event and hosted on-campus tours for the 2,500 attendees.

First Health Equity Week

Dr. Linda Barry, interim director of the UConn Health Disparities Institute, joined the state comptroller and other health equity leaders to recognize Connecticut's inaugural recognition of Health Equity Week, designated as the first week of April. "We look forward to making health equity the reality for all of Connecticut," Barry says.



Supporting the Next Generation of Physicians

Alumnus David Gannon '80 MD has established a multimillion-dollar bequest to support enrolled UConn School of Medicine students and encourages his classmates to join him in giving back.

"The one thing that really stood out during my career was how the UConn School of Medicine impacted everything that I became," says Gannon (pictured above), chief medical officer of Madonna Rehabilitation Hospitals and a Nebraska Medicine critical care pulmonologist.

"Dr. Gannon's generosity will make a medical school education accessible for students who thought that dream was out of reach," says Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang. "We are hopeful this new endowment will support several students each year who would otherwise be unable to attend."



New Laser Center

Dr. Maritza Perez, professor of dermatology, specializes in Mohs surgery, cosmetic surgery, and using lasers to treat skin conditions. She has donated high-tech laser machines to the Department of Dermatology to broaden its residency training and patient treatment options at the new Laser Center.

"I live in the state, I'm training the residents, and this is going to be a legacy for the future," Perez says.

"We are tremendously grateful to Dr. Perez for this extraordinary gift of high-end lasers and other essential equipment," says Dr. Philip Kerr, dermatology chair. "Adding these devices to our already-strong roster of lasers means we can offer our patients the most cutting-edge technology of perhaps any laser center in the state. This is wonderful for our patients, our students, and trainees."

Advancing Cancer Vaccine Research

Glen Greenberg's parents both had cancer. Looking for a way to save lives in their honor, Greenberg connected with the Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center and Dr. Pramod Srivastava, who is developing a vaccine for triple-negative breast cancer, which is among the deadliest forms of cancer. In 2023 Greenberg established the UConn Health Cancer Immunotherapy Research Fund to move the promising

vaccine, which would be given to patients to prevent or delay the aggressive cancer's recurrence, toward clinical trials. "Research needs investment," says Greenberg.

"Philanthropic support makes a huge difference," says Srivastava (pictured). "We are recipients of NIH and federal funding, but more is needed." Greenberg, founder and CEO of Turbine Controls MRO in Bloomfield, Connecticut, has also invested in Dr. Ketan Bulsara's brain tumor research.

To learn more about giving a gift to the School of Medicine, email supportuchc@foundation.uconn.edu.



REMEMBERING CAROLE NEAG

1942-2023

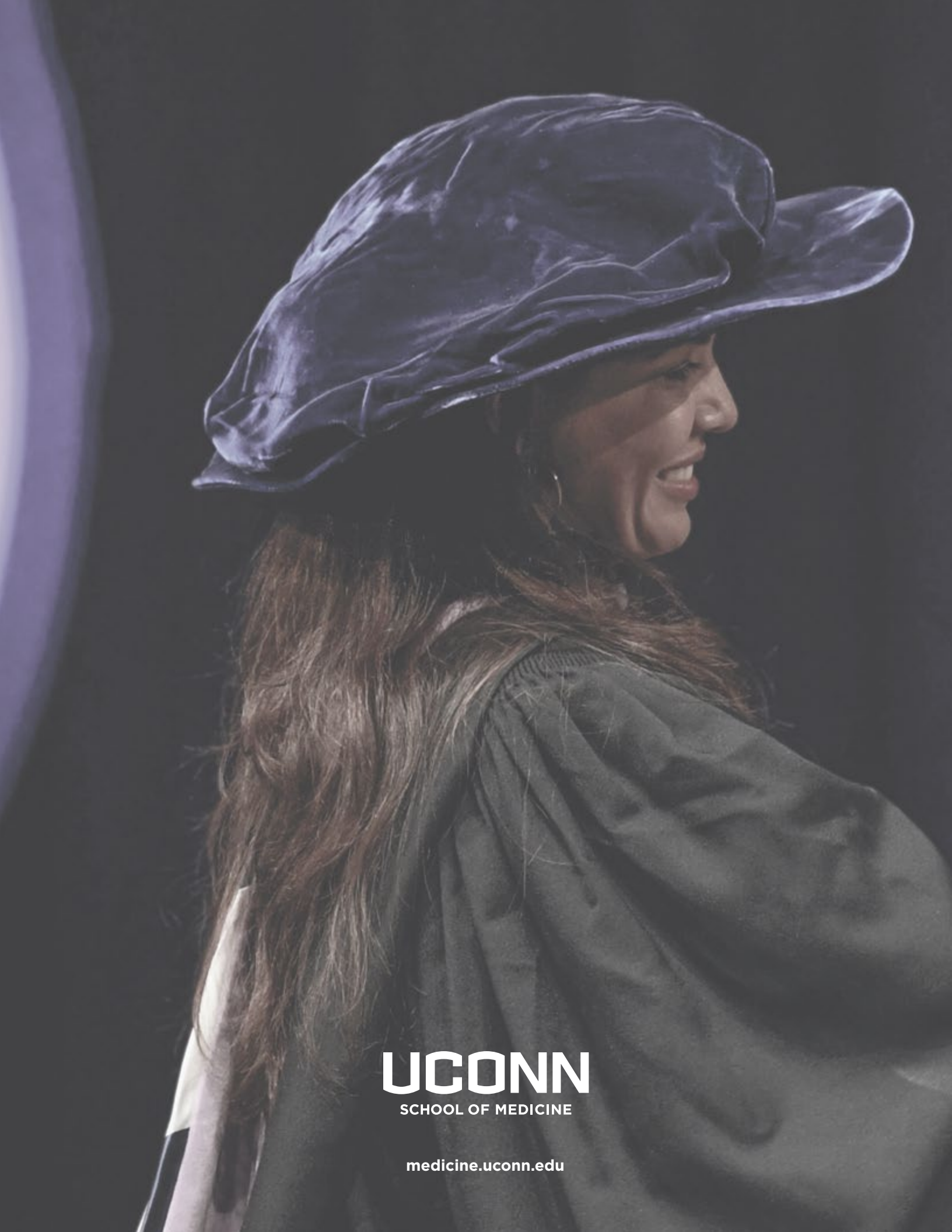
CAROLE AND RAY NEAG COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER



UConn's most generous benefactor will have a forever lasting impact on our medical school.

"Carole always inspired us with her humanity, compassion, and her vision of how her gifts would serve causes for the betterment of our world. We will never forget her humanism, words of wisdom, selflessness, dedication to helping others, and her unfailing love and support for her friends."

Dr. Bruce T. Liang, dean, UConn School of Medicine



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