



# IN NOVAT ORS

# FROM THE DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



Here at UConn School of Medicine there isn't just a sense of family, we are a family. Over the past year, our close-knit and diverse family of medical students, residents, fellows, faculty, and staff together have shined more greatly than ever before.

As I return to my full-time role as dean, after serving as UConn Health's Interim CEO for over two years, I couldn't be prouder of our innovations across academia, patient care, and research, and of course, our foundational mission of community service.

I am always inspired most by the way we train the next generation of health care providers and leaders. There is great pride and prestige in being a UConn doctor and also a UConn-trained doctor, as our physicians and alums bring cutting-edge medicine to communities throughout our state and country, always with the UConn touch of empathy, kindness, and compassion. That's what it means to be a UConn doctor.

We are proud to be the top producer of Connecticut's health care workforce of doctors and surgeons, while working hard to build tomorrow's primary care workforce to fill critical national and state shortages. We also train many researchers and public health experts, as our graduate medical education resident doctor trainees support the patient care needs at seven Connecticut hospitals.

Plus, we are always learning something new to find ways to help our Connecticut patients in need and even those around the world. Our robust, innovative research enterprise is fueling new discoveries and is home to many incubator startups seeking to find future cures.

We are committed to our inclusive, close-knit work and learning environment as we are one of the highly diverse medical schools in the country, as measured by the diversity of our students and resident doctors.

I hope you enjoy reading our 2024 Annual Report showcasing some of the many innovations happening across academic medicine here at UConn.

Go Huskies!

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bruce T. Liang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Bruce T. Liang, MD  
Dean, UConn School of Medicine  
somdean@uchc.edu



650+

School of Medicine faculty

800+

residents and fellows training in  
75+ residency programs

112

students in Class of 2028

450+

medical students

340+

graduate students  
(post-doctoral fellows,  
Ph.D., MPH, or dual-degree)

4,184

MDs produced since 1972



16,000+

hospital charges

13,000+

surgeries performed

56,000+

emergency department visits



\$112+ million

in research funding including

\$67.5 million

from the National Institutes of Health

38%

of graduates serve as  
resident physicians or  
practice medicine in  
Connecticut

30%

of Connecticut's  
practicing physicians  
are UConn-trained

#1

producer for  
Connecticut of doctors,  
surgeons, and many  
scientists and public  
health experts



35%

of residency  
graduates further  
train or practice in  
Connecticut

1.6 million

patient encounters from all 169  
Connecticut towns



First School of  
Medicine to:

eliminate lectures in favor  
of team-based learning.

mandate community service  
as a graduation requirement.

require a certificate in social  
determinants of health.

be home to one of the first virtual  
anatomy labs.



#33

most diverse medical school  
nationally and ranked among  
the top medical schools by  
U.S. News & World Report

100%

match to residency

20%+

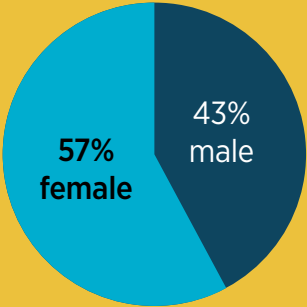
of students are from  
groups underrepresented in  
medicine (URiM)



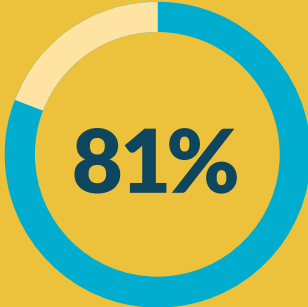


# CLASS OF 2028 STATS

**112**  
new medical  
students

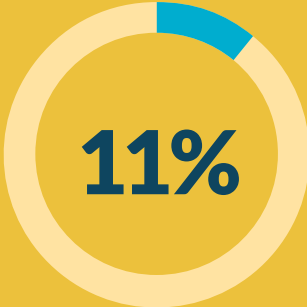


**24**  
average age

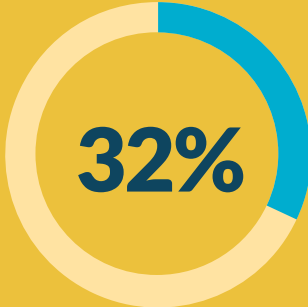


Connecticut residents

**4,600**  
total applications



underrepresented  
in medicine



UConn  
undergraduates





“Spinal deformity correction is a large undertaking, and this new designed implant approach addresses each patient’s spinal pathology in a more patient-specific way. They better fit the topography of the spine allowing for more stability and a natural correction.”

Dr. Hardeep Singh, Comprehensive Spine Center

# 3D-PRINTED SPINE SURGERY SOLUTION



## BRAIN AND SPINE INSTITUTE

For his last act as Interim CEO of UConn Health, on May 29, 2024, UConn School of Medicine Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang (center) happily cut the celebratory grand opening ribbon at the new, dedicated home of The Brain and Spine Institute at 5 Munson Road. The Institute provides comprehensive spine care, cranial neurosurgery, and neurology services, along with UConn Health Imaging, a free-standing, nonhospital outpatient imaging facility. Liang was joined by Chief Operating Officer of UConn Medical Group and VP of Ambulatory Operations Anne Horbatuck, RN (also center), and, from left, Dr. John Greenfield, Dr. Hilary Onyiuke, Dr. Isaac Moss, State Rep. Mike Demicco, Dr. Ketan Bulsara, State Rep. Francis Cooley, Dr. Leo Wolansky, and State Sen. Matt Lesser.

Dr. Hardeep Singh is the first spine surgeon in Connecticut to use a new, 3D-printed solution to create a perfect, personalized spinal implant to fit into a patient’s specific anatomy during a multilevel lumbar spinal fusion surgery. As a result, Edurne Heredia of Manchester now stands straight after successful surgical correction of her hemivertebrae spinal deformities that tilted her body to one side. This grateful patient calls the relief of her decades-long back pain and spinal curvature results “amazing.” Instead of standard spine implants, Singh customized a solution using four asymmetric implants designed specifically to fit Heredia’s anatomy. Singh worked with California-based Carlsmed to design the patient-specific implants. The process involved generating a 3D-model of the patient’s spine, which allowed surgeons to fully visualize her spinal deformity and each implant. Carlsmed’s 3D-printed titanium “aprevo” device has earned FDA Breakthrough Device designation.





## KEEPING WOMEN HEALTHY AND ACTIVE

The new Women's Center for Motion and Performance was unveiled this spring, with a thousand visits already seeking the coordinated services offered by its orthopedics and sports medicine doctors to keep women active and moving, whether they are athletes or not. The center is led by Director Dr. Katherine Coyner and Medical Director Dr. Allison Schafer, with specialty services focusing on helping a patient retain or regain her mobility ranging from orthopedic surgery, primary care sports medicine, psychology, lifestyle medicine and weight management, neurology, osteoporosis and bone health, and physical therapy. The center's nurse navigator guides each patient's care needs.



**“Dr. Schafer and I are privileged to care for incredible athletes at UConn as well as the broader community. At UConn Health, we have the expertise and resources to support women of all ages and activity levels, whether they are looking to maintain their activity or start a more active lifestyle.”**

Dr. Katherine Coyner, Director, Women's Center for Motion and Performance

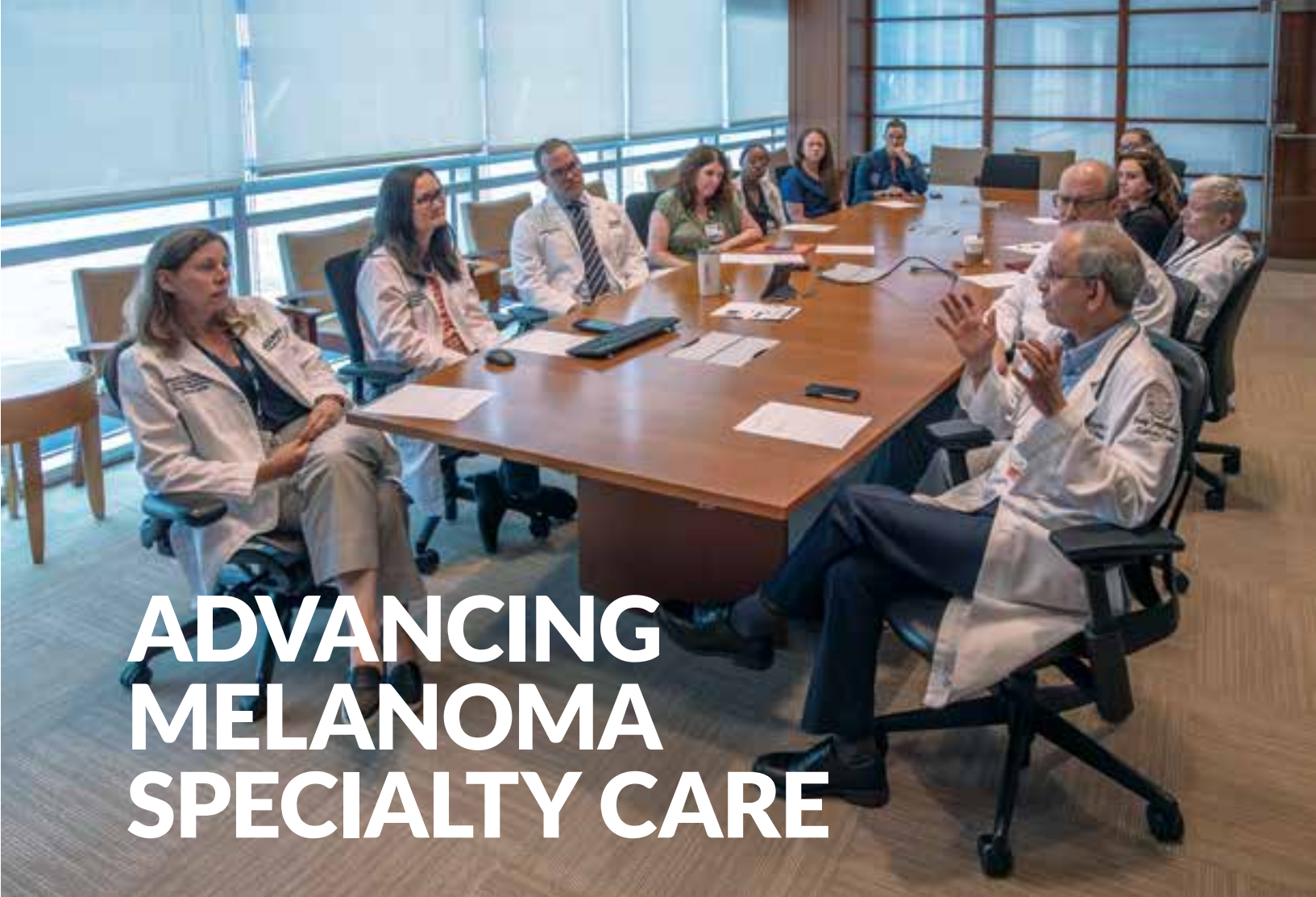


**“Rafael's care was a special opportunity to help someone with a very rare condition. It's what we do at UConn Health, we try to help.”**

Dr. Daniel Roberts, ENT Surgeon

## TEAMWORK CURES RARE DISEASE

Rafael Azevedo of Brazil is grateful for his kind-hearted anesthesiologist, Dr. Leonard E. Kulicki, gifting him anesthesia services free of cost. This generous gift made it possible for Azevedo to have innovative, successful brain surgery on December 1, 2023, with ear, nose, and throat (ENT) surgeon Dr. Daniel Roberts and Neurosurgery Chief Dr. Ketan Bulsara. The co-directors of the Cranial Nerve and Brainstem Disorder Program restored hope and provided relief by curing his severe pain condition with their multidisciplinary, surgical expertise. They performed the procedure in the state-of-the-art operating room at UConn John Dempsey Hospital using high-tech imaging and a surgical microscope with augmented reality (AR), computer-generated digital imaging. Now, Azevedo no longer suffers from glossopharyngeal neuralgia, which causes such intense facial and ear pain that it's known as “the suicide disease.”



## ADVANCING MELANOMA SPECIALTY CARE

The Carole and Ray Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center with the Dermatology Department now offers specialized melanoma care. Newly recruited Dr. Margaret Callahan, chief of the Division of Hematology and Oncology, and surgical oncologist Dr. Giaio Phan, professor of surgery, have joined the expertise of medical oncologist Dr. Upendra Hegde and a well-established dermatology and dermatopathology team led by Dr. Philip Kerr and Dr. Campbell Stewart. Together they provide specialized and comprehensive care in treating melanoma at any stage, including advanced disease. This multidisciplinary team creates a hub for melanoma expertise and patient-focused

research in Connecticut. They meet weekly to discuss new patients and review their personalized care plans. Phan's surgical oncology expertise and full spectrum of surgical tools play a crucial role in the comprehensive care of melanoma patients ranging from lymph node mapping and intralesional treatments to clinical research in immunotherapies. Callahan, a medical oncologist and alum of UConn and its School of Medicine, brings over a decade of experience treating patients with advanced melanoma and leading novel immunotherapy clinical trials. Her translational research team is focused on improving immunotherapy treatment options for patients. The comprehensive melanoma team is growing UConn's immunotherapy research, innovative therapies, clinical trials, and translational research for patients.

**“Having a team of specialized melanoma experts within one organization allows for a comprehensive approach to the treatment and management of melanoma, with all team members working collaboratively for the most effective and personalized care for our patients.”**

Dr. Giaio Phan, Surgical Oncologist





“Stroke survivors can use this new outpatient treatment to immediately start improving their motor function and to return to their normal routine. There has been tremendous success already, and we’re happy to offer it here in Connecticut.”

Dr. Christopher Conner, Neurosurgeon

## FIRST IN CONNECTICUT: VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION FOR STROKE SURVIVORS

Stroke affects 14 million people worldwide per year and can frequently lead to loss of mobility. Patients can regain some function with intensive rehabilitation therapy for the first few months after stroke, but this recovery often plateaus. To enhance recovery, Dr. Christopher Conner, a newly recruited neurosurgeon at The Brain and Spine Institute, was the first in the state to use an FDA-approved, breakthrough technology to improve hand and arm impairment in stroke survivors. The innovative device, called MicroTransponder®, Inc.’s Vivistim® Paired VNS™ System, is implanted in a patient’s upper chest, delivering vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) during rehabilitation therapy. A therapist uses a wireless remote to activate the Vivistim device to deliver a gentle pulse to the vagus nerve while the stroke survivor performs tasks. The pairing of rehabilitation exercise with VNS creates or strengthens nerve connections in healthy areas of the brain, which increases therapy effectiveness and has been shown to improve upper limb function for stroke patients even after significant time has passed.

# CONNECTICUT'S ONLY PRIMARY CILIARY DYSKINESIA CENTER



UConn Health and affiliate Connecticut Children’s have jointly opened a certified Primary Ciliary Dyskinesia (PCD) Center for children and adults. PCD is a rare genetic condition characterized by chronic lung, ear, and sinus infections and other health problems such as newborn respiratory distress, situs inversus, and fertility issues. It affects individuals from all racial and ethnic groups. PCD is caused by mutations in genes that control cilia, tiny hair-like structures in the airways that help clear inhaled particles and bacteria. When cilia do not work properly, individuals are prone to infections in the ears, sinuses, and lungs, which can lead to bronchiectasis, a serious lung condition.

“Together, UConn Health and Connecticut Children’s are transforming PCD diagnosis, patient care, and research. The future is here. We will launch clinical trials to find a cure for PCD, including offering the first gene-based therapy for the disease.”

Dr. Mark Metersky, Co-director, PCD Center

Dr. Mark Metersky co-directs the PCD Foundation-designated Clinical Research and Care Network center with Dr. Melanie Collins of Connecticut Children’s. The center offers advanced genetic testing for accurate diagnoses and personalized treatment plans and is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, such as a nasal nitric oxide machine. Both pediatric and adult care teams are engaged in high-level pulmonary research to advance scientific knowledge. The unique collaboration is one of only a few centers nationally that is seamlessly transitioning pediatric patients into adult health care when they reach adult age.

# A NEW ENGLAND FIRST: DETOUR SAVES TOES, FEET, AND LEGS

Maureen Marchetti, 70, was the first patient in New England to have an alternative to major open leg artery bypass surgery with a new, innovative procedure called DETOUR to restore blood flow to her purple toes. The device is helping vascular surgeons bypass blood vessel blockages in patients’ legs, caused by severe peripheral arterial disease (PAD), through a minimally invasive procedure. Doctors are referring more and more patients to the Division of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery to receive alternate treatment with this brand-new tool. Vascular surgeon Dr. Justin D’Addario and team performed the first DETOUR procedure at UConn John Dempsey Hospital on January 25. Patients are thankful for the innovative treatment option they are receiving to avoid major open leg surgery. The DETOUR System, made by Endologix, won Breakthrough Device designation from the FDA in 2020 and won FDA approval in June 2023.

“We are thrilled to be able to minimally invasively help patients avoid losing toes and limbs. The new medical device system treatment option is a real game-changer.”

Dr. Justin D’Addario, Vascular Surgeon





# GROWING THORACIC SURGERY

Thoracic Surgery Section Chief Dr. Dustin Walters has joined the Department of Surgery to launch a new program for thoracic surgical care and grow it to world-class heights. He cares for patients at the Carole and Ray Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center with lung cancer and esophageal diseases, both cancerous and benign. He also cares for patients with other diseases of the mediastinum, trachea, chest wall, and diaphragm. He specializes in minimally invasive robotic surgery using the Da Vinci system for lung cancer treatment. He leverages multidisciplinary Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) pathways for all thoracic surgical patients with the latest pain management techniques to minimize narcotic usage and return each patient back to their baseline health as quickly as possible.



**“Minimally invasive robotic surgery and our experienced, multidisciplinary team gets our patients back home and to their normal life as soon as possible, often the day after surgery. At UConn we offer personalized, patient- and family-centered, compassionate care.”**

Dr. Dustin Walters, Section Chief, Thoracic Surgery





## LIVE LONGER ON A HEALTHY DIET AT ANY AGE

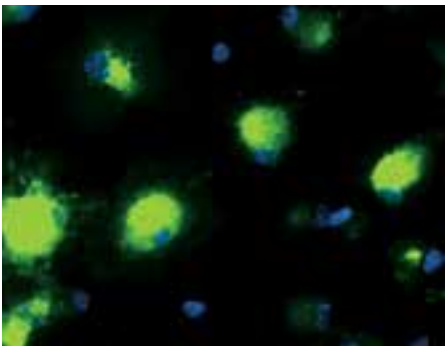
Fruit flies are sharing life lessons. Researchers report in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) that switching a fruit fly’s diet to a low-calorie one is a reliable way to extend lifespan, even for old flies in ill health. In fact, old, obese flies get healthier and live longer if put on a diet. If the effect holds true for humans, it would mean it’s never too late for obese people to improve their health with diet. For the fruit fly study, researchers mimicked the modern highly processed food diet of humans with a high-calorie, high-sugar, high-protein diet. Switching these obese flies to a low-calorie diet, even very late in life, dramatically changed their metabolisms and extended their lives. The research was led by geneticist Blanka Rogina in the Department of Genetics and Genome Sciences and the Institute for Systems Genomics.

**“The remarkable finding of this study is that even after living a significant portion of their lives on a high-calorie diet, flies can gain the benefits of life span extension by simply switching to a low-calorie diet.”**

Brenton Graveley, Ph.D., Co-researcher, Professor, and Chair, Genetics and Genome Sciences

## TRANSFORMATIVE CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE RESEARCH

Chronic kidney disease is a public health threat that strikes more than 37 million Americans and is a leading cause of death among civilians and veterans, with prevalence 34% higher in the veteran population. Currently, there is no cure for chronic kidney disease. Thus much more research is needed to address this progressive disease. Dr. Yanlin Wang, professor and chief of nephrology, investigates the mechanisms of chronic kidney disease. The culprit is injury to the kidney’s tubular epithelial cells, which causes chronic inflammation that can lead to atrophy, the wasting away of the organ, and fibrosis or scarring. He is now examining the role of exosomal DNA- cyclic GMP-AMP synthase (cGAS) signaling in the development of the inflammatory disorder and how DNA in exosomes activate macrophages leading to kidney inflammation and chronic kidney disease so he can find novel therapeutic targets. For the third consecutive time this decade, he has won renewed VA Merit Award funding to expand his laboratory’s nephrology advances. This year he was recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs with its Senior Clinician Scientist Investigator (SCSI) Award as an outstanding scientist for VA research for kidney disorders and for providing high quality and timely clinical care to veterans.



**“There is a critical knowledge gap in the molecular mechanisms of kidney inflammation. Results from our studies are providing new insights about this inflammation for the development of novel therapeutic strategies for chronic kidney disease.”**

Dr. Yanlin Wang, Chief of Nephrology

## HEALING HEAVY METAL POISONING FROM IMPLANTS



Cobalt was widely used for hip and knee joint replacements until cases of heavy metal poisoning appeared. Now, UConn and Carnegie Mellon researchers report in PNAS a way to protect people with these implants from cobalt toxicity, as the metal can be toxic if it accumulates in body tissues at high levels. After several years of wear and tear, metal particles can build up in the area surrounding the joint implant, causing pain, inflammation, and dark discoloration known as metallosis. University Professor Dr. Cato T. Laurencin’s lab and partners at Carnegie Mellon have shown that injecting a material made of a traditional chelator combined with a molecule naturally found in the fluid surrounding the joints makes an effective, less invasive therapy to clear out cobalt. The researchers used a chelator called British anti-Lewisite (BAL), a treatment originally invented to help soldiers poisoned with arsenic-containing Lewisite during World War II. In laboratory experiments they attached the BAL to hyaluronic acid, a molecule commonly found in fluid that helps lubricate joints, to inject it in animal model hip joints with cobalt metallosis. Within hours, the BAL-hyaluronic acid clears a great deal of cobalt into the bloodstream and then the kidneys so it can be excreted.

**“This unique approach offers a possible breakthrough treatment for metal ion disease after joint replacement. Now that it works in animals, our hope is to bring this type of therapy to humans.”**

Dr. Cato Laurencin, CEO, The Cato T. Laurencin Institute for Regenerative Engineering



2024 ELECTED  
FELLOWS TO AAAS,  
THE WORLD'S  
LARGEST GENERAL  
SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY



**Brenton Graveley, Ph.D.** for RNA Biology/Genomics Research  
Health Net, Inc. Chair in Genetics and Developmental Biology; Chair, Department of Genetics and Genome Sciences; Associate Director, Institute for Systems Genomics



**Dr. George Kuchel** for Aging Research  
Director, UConn Center on Aging and UConn Pepper Center; Travelers Chair in Geriatrics and Gerontology



GAINING HIGH  
RESOLUTION  
INSIGHTS INTO DISEASE

A new instrument advances Electron Microscopy at the School of Medicine. A cryogenically cooled electron microscope called Tundra was recently installed and is at the forefront of research capabilities. UConn has one of the first Tundra cryo-EM microscopes in the nation to be acquired with \$1.5 million in NIH-funding. The Tundra instrument, which was awarded to Wolfgang Peti, Ph.D., is an essential tool that will help him and many other New England researchers to produce 3D pictures of molecules using minute quantities of biological material. Cryo-EM is assisting Peti with his cell cycle regulation research looking at both the structure and functions of proteins within the cell. “If anything goes wrong in the cell cycle, it leads to cancer,” he explains. “That’s why we are interested in understanding how essential proteins regulate these essential steps.” The new instrument’s arrival to UConn has closed a critical gap in the New England research corridor and is making the exciting molecular imaging technology more accessible to scientists across UConn and the region, and UConn students too.

“Now we can use cryo-EM and can become experts. When you see something, it’s much easier to understand. Ultimately, we will use this technology for drug design and essential translational research problems.”

Wolfgang Peti, Ph.D., Molecular Biology and Biophysics



CONSORTIUM FOR  
THE CHILDREN

UConn Health, UConn Storrs, Connecticut Children’s, The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine, and Hartford HealthCare have launched an innovative pilot program designed to leverage genomics to identify undiagnosed, early onset diseases in newborns in the Greater Hartford area. Todd Arnold, Ph.D., is leading HART, the Health Analytics and Research Translations Initiative. The consortium is hoping to improve newborn

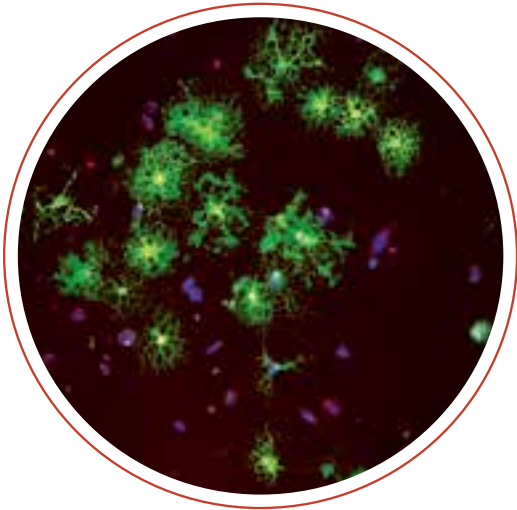
“We are asking parents to share their newborn’s genome sequence with us to potentially improve not only their child’s health, but also the future health of Connecticut’s children.”

Todd Arnold, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Genetics and Genome Sciences

health in real time, including for underserved populations, by providing families with access to whole genome sequencing. Plus, with the data, HART aspires to stay in front of future childhood diseases by collectively creating a genomics biorepository for childhood research into disease diagnosis and intervention. The pilot will recruit 10 families whose newborns have been admitted to the Connecticut Children’s NICU based in Farmington at UConn John Dempsey Hospital, and if successful hopes to expand statewide.

POTENTIAL BIOMARKER  
FOR MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

MS takes a long time to diagnose, and there are no genetic tests, nor early biomarkers yet identified for the disease. With a close family member living with MS, Stephen J. Crocker, Ph.D., has collaboratively researched MS for the past 15 years. “It has been a great team effort,” says Crocker, whose latest findings appear in PNAS. The team studies a gene called TIMP-1 known to regenerate the tissue in the brain and spinal cord that MS damages. They also research brain and spinal cord cells called astrocytes, which can make TIMP-1 whenever the brain is injured. But in MS patients the protective expression of TIMP-1 in the brain can be lost. Using advanced proteomics they are deciphering exactly what astrocytes do when this protein is missing to help develop a “blueprint.” They have also uncovered that a peptide called Anastellin is overabundant in the brain contributing to the toxic environment inside the brain of MS patients, limiting the brain’s ability to naturally repair itself. This peptide also blocks an important brain cell receptor, needed for a widely used MS drug Fingolimod to work. This breakthrough may lead to the peptide’s use as a potential biomarker in MS patients and drug development target.



“It’s a pretty big finding, and it could help ensure MS patients are more rapidly diagnosed and placed on the most effective drug for them and avoid ones that won’t ultimately work. My hope is that we will soon find a new treatment for MS so patients can live their fullest and most rewarding lives.”

Stephen J. Crocker, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Neuroscience and Immunology



# IT TAKES TWO



“We believe that these efforts have the potential to lead to the development of new treatments to combat a wide range of bone and muscle diseases as well as metabolic disorders, such as diabetes and obesity.”

Se-Jin Lee, MD, Ph.D., Professor, The Jackson Laboratory, and Presidential Distinguished Professor, UConn School of Medicine, and Emily Germain-Lee, MD, Professor of Pediatrics, UConn School of Medicine; Professor of Reconstructive Sciences, UConn School of Dental Medicine; and Head of Academic Affairs & Research, Division of Pediatric Endocrinology & Diabetes, Connecticut Children’s

Drs. Se-Jin Lee and Emily Germain-Lee are not only married but also are co-researchers at UConn, collaborating closely by joining forces on bone, muscle, and obesity research. Their work is all focused on modulating the signaling pathway regulated by certain hormones, specifically two related signaling molecules called myostatin and activin A. In 2019, they sent mice to the International Space Station, where studies showed blocking these molecules prevented bone and muscle loss in the mice. Fast forward, they are building upon their out-of-this-world research efforts together with the support of four recently-awarded grants:

## BONE RESEARCH

The work of a five-year, NIH R01 grant (Germain-Lee and Lee, PIs) awarded in 2022 involves genetically targeting key receptors for myostatin and activin A in bone and shows it can increase bone density by tenfold. The study’s goal is to develop new strategies to treat diseases leading to bone loss, such as osteoporosis.

## MUSCLE RESEARCH

A new, five-year, NIH R01 grant (Lee PI, Germain-Lee Co-investigator) is genetically targeting the same key receptors for myostatin and activin A, but in muscle. In mice, three-to-four times the normal muscle mass can be generated. In addition to understanding the underlying

molecular mechanisms, the study’s goal is to develop the agents to combat muscle loss in many diseases including neuromuscular disorders and aging.

## FSH RESEARCH

The team’s NIH R21 grant (Germain-Lee and Lee, PIs) is examining follicle stimulating hormone’s (FSH) regulation of bone density and obesity as FSH levels are normally regulated by activin A.

## OBESITY

With funding from a pharmaceutical company (Lee PI, Germain-Lee Co-investigator), the team is studying the role of myostatin and activin A signaling in obesity. They have shown that blocking this signaling pathway can significantly reduce total body fat mass. Their study goal is to identify the key tissues responsible for the regulation of obesity by myostatin and activin A. Also, there is an enormous interest in developing drugs to prevent muscle loss in people prescribed popular weight loss drugs, which have been shown to cause the undesired effect of substantial loss of muscle mass. Myostatin inhibitors have been shown by the team to cause fat loss, so the researchers are currently examining the possibility of developing them as future obesity drugs.



# BUILDING THE PRIMARY CARE PIPELINE

**Our medical school continues to innovate, finding new ways to train the next generation of primary care doctors and ease the state and nation’s physician shortages.**

## NEW PRIMARY CARE LEADERSHIP TRACK

UConn School of Medicine is now offering a Primary Care Leadership Track. The multi-year program, which will start in 2026, offers specialized training opportunities in undergraduate medical education, graduate medical education, and clinical practice. It is designed specifically for medical students committed to primary care fields of internal medicine, family medicine, and pediatrics sharing a solid foundation in education, research, leadership, and mentorship. Plus, participation in the program and completion of a primary care residency entitles students to the low-interest Primary Care Loan at UConn and offers the potential for loan forgiveness to offset their educational debt. The track’s ultimate goal is to develop each student’s skills as they progress from medical school to residency to ultimately practice primary care medicine in the state of Connecticut.

“It is imperative that we train more primary care doctors, expand access and the footprint of health care, and prepare these new physicians with the skills to allow them to flourish.”

Dr. Anton M. Alerte, Associate Dean for Primary Care







“I grew up wanting to become a primary care physician, and this program makes achieving that goal more financially attainable.”

Julia Levin, Class of 2026

# MAKING PRIMARY CARE CAREERS POSSIBLE

For the last decade, UConn has been home to the successful Primary Care Incentive and Scholarship Program and is working to expand the program to further help the state keep more of its talented trainees for its health care workforce. The program helps medical students like third-year Julia Levin achieve her childhood

dream of becoming a primary care physician. She’s been awarded 1%-interest loans for her medical school education to ameliorate the financial concerns that limit students’ pursuit of primary care careers by decreasing indebtedness. Like many other UConn medical students entering the primary care fields of medicine, general internal medicine, geriatrics, family medicine, and pediatrics, Levin says she simply wants to give back to the Connecticut community that has given her so much. She graduated from UConn’s main campus in Storrs in 2021 with a BS in physiology and neurobiology and is continuing with the eight-year Special Program in Medicine to earn her UConn medical degree too. She is also on the Urban Service Track and is an AHEC Scholar.

# SOLVING HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

On May 20 Gov. Ned Lamont announced his administration’s new Connecticut Student Loan Repayment Program for health care providers to address the state’s health professional shortage areas. The response has been tremendous with thousands of applications received. This fall the program began offering up to \$50,000 in student loan repayments to qualifying health care providers committed to practicing full-time in underserved Connecticut communities for at least two years or part-time for \$12,500 per year over two years, totaling \$25,000. Uniquely, the program allows both federal and private student loan debt to be repaid, making it a more comprehensive solution for health care providers with diverse educational debt. The program is overseen by the Connecticut Department of Public Health and administered by the UConn Health-based Connecticut Area Health Education Center (CT AHEC). The federally and state-funded CT AHEC works throughout Connecticut to improve access to basic health care by connecting community groups with the resources of health professionals, health professional groups, and health professional training programs.

“This program is a significant investment in our health care workforce and a step towards reducing health disparities across our state. We’re offering flexible options to attract a wider range of talent to our underserved communities.”

Gov. Ned Lamont

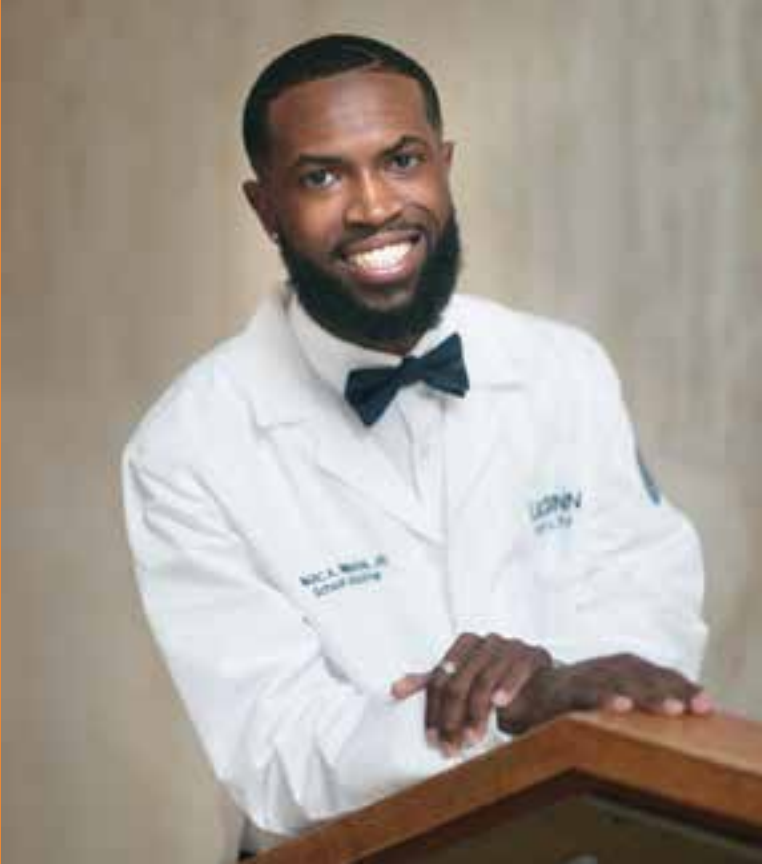


# DOCTORS ACADEMY SERVES AS CRITICAL PIPELINE FOR FUTURE PRACTITIONERS

UConn-bound Neha Shanavas, 17, of Bloomfield, Connecticut, is one of 14 talented high school seniors who graduated from the Doctors Academy this spring. The 2024 graduate of Hartford’s Sport and Medical Sciences Academy already knows she wants to be a UConn-trained physician committed to serving the underserved. The Doctors Academy has served as her inspiration since middle school. It is part of the longstanding Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP) founded over two decades ago by physician-scientist Dr. Marja Hurley, where the youth of Connecticut from all backgrounds receive in-depth education in the health sciences and career path mentorship on Saturdays and in the summer. HCOP’s Doctors Academy is one of 14 programs of the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (HPPI). Shanavas has started UConn’s Special Program in Medicine pursuing both her bachelor of science degree in molecular and cell biology and a UConn medical degree over the next eight years.

“HCOP has served as a beacon of hope, providing access and support to those who are underrepresented in the STEM and health care fields. I’m extremely grateful. I hope to become a physician committed to serving underserved communities.”

Neha Shanavas, UConn Undergraduate



# HUSKY FINDS HIS WAY HOME

The School of Medicine welcomes UConn sports surgeon Dr. Corey Dwyer to its faculty as an assistant professor of orthopedic surgery with expertise in complex shoulder cases. “It’s a dream come true. After doing my undergrad, medical school, business degree, and my residency training here at UConn, I wanted to come back. I am lucky enough to come back and work with the people who trained me. It’s a very rewarding experience to be back. It’s really special when my mentors refer their patients to me, I feel like I have earned their trust, and it’s an honor,” says Dwyer. Growing up he was passionate about two things: UConn basketball and becoming a physician. So, when it came time to choose a medical school, he stayed with UConn. It didn’t take him long to realize orthopedics would be his calling. After completing his UConn orthopedic residency, Dwyer was fellowship-trained in sports medicine surgery at Stanford University, where he was part of the medical staff for the NFL’s San Francisco 49ers. At UConn Health he cares for all levels of athlete and those who want to regain shoulder function.



“This is surreal. This is my dream job. UConn represents academic medicine, where educators put the patient and the trainee first.”

Dr. Corey Dwyer, Orthopedic Surgeon

# RESEARCH SCHOLAR TURNED MEDICAL STUDENT

For the last two years, Marc Merriman, 24, of New Orleans has served as a scholar in the Young Innovative Investigator Program (YIIP), a unique, intensive, two-year program of The Cato T. Laurencin Institute for Regenerative Engineering. “I like research,” says Merriman, who had the exciting opportunity to assist Laurencin and his lab in its major limb regeneration research underway for the Hartford Engineering a Limb project (HEAL). Merriman is now a first-year UConn medical student pursuing a dual MD/Ph.D. “My white coat feels amazing,” he exclaimed after his White Coat Ceremony. “I am looking forward to my first interactions with patients. UConn puts a lot of focus on the importance of medical students’ early exposure to patient care experiences.”





**“People in Connecticut clearly care about community health and health equity, and they are willing to get involved. We are excited to launch this research and action training program and to find more ways to support the involvement of residents in health equity research and action.”**

Dr. Linda Sprague Martinez, Director, Health Disparities Institute

# ADVANCING COMMUNITY CHANGE

The new leader of the Health Disparities Institute, Linda Sprague Martinez, Ph.D., is on a mission to learn more directly from community members, including young people, to better address pressing public health issues like health inequity. “As a land grant institution UConn has a public mission, and HDI has done wonderful work in the community over the years to advance health equity,” says Sprague Martinez, also a professor of medicine and public health sciences. Since people in communities know what they need to be healthy, she believes we need to listen better and learn from them, especially when it comes to developing interventions. That’s why HDI is working with the state Commission on Racial Equity for Public Health to launch a community-based research project recruiting citizens from across the state as community research advisors to advance health equity.



## \$1 MILLION IN FREE COMMUNITY CARE PROVIDED BY STUDENTS

It’s \$1 million and counting in free community care and education provided by the interprofessional students accepted into the Urban Service Track/AHEC Scholars training program at UConn. Since 2007 they have volunteered to provide critical health care access to underserved Connecticut citizens directly in their communities as the students train together to be the next generation of well-rounded primary care and health care professionals. One of the many impressive and proud Urban Service Track/AHEC Scholars is fourth-year UConn medical student Elizabeth “Lizzie” Suschana, 28, a member of the Class of 2025 from Somers, Connecticut. She loves having the opportunity to learn and volunteer with other health professional students in the program from across UConn’s schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine, Social Work, Pharmacy, and Nursing, as well as physician

assistant students, while providing free, community-based health care in Hartford and coordinating student-run health fairs and urban service events. “UConn and its students are the bridge connecting community members to the health care resources and social services they need from right inside their own community,” says Suschana, who was honored with a 2024 UST Leadership Award for her community service. Her experience has inspired her to apply for OB/GYN residency training to become an advocate for women and their health care needs.

**“Hitting the \$1 million milestone shows the powerful impact of the Urban Service Track program. It’s really rewarding to be on the front lines having immediate impact upon underserved people and groups.”**

Lizzie Suschana, Class of 2025





# ALL IN THE UConn FAMILY

“Our dad is dedicated to caring for the community through action. His actions have been a big driver for us all entering medicine. We are happy to be a part of our father’s legacy and of UConn’s. UConn doctors are well-trained.”

The Fuller Sisters

“I am so grateful to UConn. UConn School of Medicine was amazing and fully prepared me for residency.”

Dr. Sarah Fuller, Class of 2023

For Chair of Emergency Medicine Dr. Robert Fuller, father of three daughters, “happiness is always the goal” for his children as they follow in his medicine career footsteps. Ellen Fuller (pictured, center) is a brand-new UConn medical student, and Dr. Sarah Fuller ‘23 MD (pictured, right) is in residency training at the University of Miami to become an emergency medicine doctor like her dad. Like her father, Sarah wants to help the underserved populations more frequently seeking care inside emergency rooms. Julia (not pictured) does already as an emergency room charge nurse at Dartmouth Medical Center. All of these young, bright women raised in West Hartford attended UConn as undergrads. Fuller has served since 2016 as professor and chair of emergency medicine.

“I am really proud of UConn and our health system. We play a vital role of teaching and producing and preparing the next generation of physicians to take care of our citizens. My daughters are a strong example of exactly what we do at UConn,” says Fuller.

“I want to help people wherever I can just like my dad. UConn’s medical school is all about community service. I wanted to be a part of it.”

Ellen Fuller, First-Year Medical Student



FAMILY MEDICINE

Meet a new UConn-trained family medicine expert, Dr. Gian Grant-McGarvey, who is “UConn through and through.” This Chief Family Medicine Resident and Lifestyle Medicine Track-accomplished trainee finished her UConn residency and is practicing family medicine in Windsor. “As family medicine doctors we treat the family. There is an entire family behind each and every patient,” says Grant-McGarvey, who first entered academic medicine via the Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP) led by Dr. Marja Hurley, founder and director of the longstanding pipeline program. “It all started in my junior year of high school when I saw an HCOP flyer in my guidance counselor’s office. I applied and it really has all worked out! Dr. Hurley breaks down a lot of barriers for us students.” Grant-McGarvey, who attended both UConn and UConn’s medical school, is a first-generation college graduate and doctor. She is from Jamaica and migrated to

the Hartford area at age 5. “I knew at a young age that I wanted to be a doctor,” says Grant-McGarvey, who lost her father due to a lack of health care access. “This is why I want to help the underserved. I want to help people in the community find care and resources they need. I take his health care experience to work with me every single day.”

“It is awesome to see individuals who look like me grow up to be dentists and doctors at UConn Health. They have made my dream a reality. I am raised here in Connecticut. To be a part of UConn and bring community together even closer makes me very UConn proud! ”

Gian Grant-McGarvey '21 MD, GME residency '24



CALHOUN  
CARDIOLOGY  
CENTER  
CELEBRATES  
20 YEARS



The Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center is celebrating its 20th anniversary. It was founded in 2004 thanks to the generous philanthropic support of the Calhoun family. Coach Jim Calhoun and his wife Pat visited the Center on May 8 to applaud the cardiology faculty and staff for their longstanding contributions advancing cardiovascular care, research breakthroughs, and education of the next generation of heart specialists.

“As founding director of the Calhoun Cardiology Center, the last two decades have been quite an exciting ride. It’s been a wonderful and gratifying experience seeing the comprehensive center triple its growth in both patient volumes and providers and adding new specialties such as electrophysiology, vascular surgery, and cardiovascular surgery,” says Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang, the Ray Neag Distinguished Professor of Cardiovascular Biology and Medicine.

The Center is also on the forefront of cardiovascular research thanks to the endowment of the Calhoun family, and NIH funding to the Center has grown to millions of dollars annually for cutting-edge research. One of those innovative NIH-funded researchers is Dr. Travis Hinson, cardiovascular physician-scientist at UConn Health/JAX who serves as the Pat and Jim Calhoun Endowed Professor.

His Cardiovascular Genetics Program is translating innovative laboratory findings for the next generation of patient treatments. “Our translational cardiovascular medicine makes UConn very unique. Thanks to the Calhouns we have exponentially expanded genetic precision medicine and have tested over 1,000 heart patients and their families to help them get the best, personalized treatments possible. It’s really exciting. Coach Calhoun, Pat, and their family’s recognition of UConn’s excellence have helped us grow. The Calhouns have made a huge impact.”

Liang concludes, “Coach Calhoun is larger than life and is an inspiring figure on and off the court at UConn. He believes in the power of the Calhoun Cardiology Center and has put his heart and soul into it. We are extremely thankful to Coach. Thank you.”

To learn more about giving a gift to the School of Medicine, email [supportuchc@foundation.uconn.edu](mailto:supportuchc@foundation.uconn.edu)





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