



“UConn’s medical school is proud of its steadfast excellence in educating and training the next generation of doctors, specialists, and surgeons, and of being an engine for research and scientific training. This is why we remain No. 1.”

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

**AMONG
THE BEST
MEDICAL
SCHOOLS
IN THE
NATION**

U.S. News & World Report

NO. 1

producer of the state’s
healthcare workforce

SINCE 1972,
WE’VE TRAINED:

4,400+

physicians

8,000+

residents

2,000+

scientists and public
health experts

NEARLY

40%

of graduates serve as
resident physicians in
Connecticut

OVER

25%

of Connecticut’s
practicing physicians
were trained at
UConn



Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang,
2026 commencement
speaker Dr. Gerald Chan,
and UConn President
Radenka Maric

Dear Friends,

As we celebrate our country upon its 250th anniversary, 2026 also marks an amazing year filled with our steadfast love of UConn, our Husky pride, and the excellent work of our people across medical education, medicine, research, and service. We touch so many lives throughout the state of Connecticut.

Our 55th commencement was celebrated this May in a beautiful ceremony with a prestigious speaker. Healthcare changemaker Dr. Gerald Chan inspired our hundreds of graduating doctors, scientists, and public health experts as they embarked on their careers.

This scientist and venture capitalist has transformed healthcare with new therapeutics for diseases through his founding of over two dozen successful biotech companies. He is a strong example that what one dreams is possible can become real. He encouraged our graduates to reframe healthcare to be proactive rather than reactive, emphasizing prevention at the population level. “It is to you that we look for leadership to truly make America healthy again,” he said.

As an honorary doctoral degree recipient, Chan already knows what it’s like to be part of our University: “I learned that once you are a Husky, you are always a Husky!” Whether you are a faculty member, learner, resident, staff member, patient, alum, or supporter of UConn, you are part of this community. Our shared connection to UConn drives our work — from the classroom to groundbreaking advances in academic medicine and research.

We are UConn and, because of you, we are filled with love for our work and pride in the impact we are making every day.

Here in this 2026 annual report you will find a glimpse of the love we experience every day at the UConn School of Medicine, whether we are inspiring the youth of Connecticut to become doctors or caring for the most vulnerable patients. Our UConn family is stronger than ever — and the UConn difference is why we remain No. 1 not only in production of the state’s healthcare workforce but also in the hearts of our learners, patients, and staff.

Sincerely,

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

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

HATS OFF, CLASS OF 2026



105

new medical
graduates

106

Ph.D. and MPH
graduates

40%

are staying in
Connecticut for
residency, a
record high

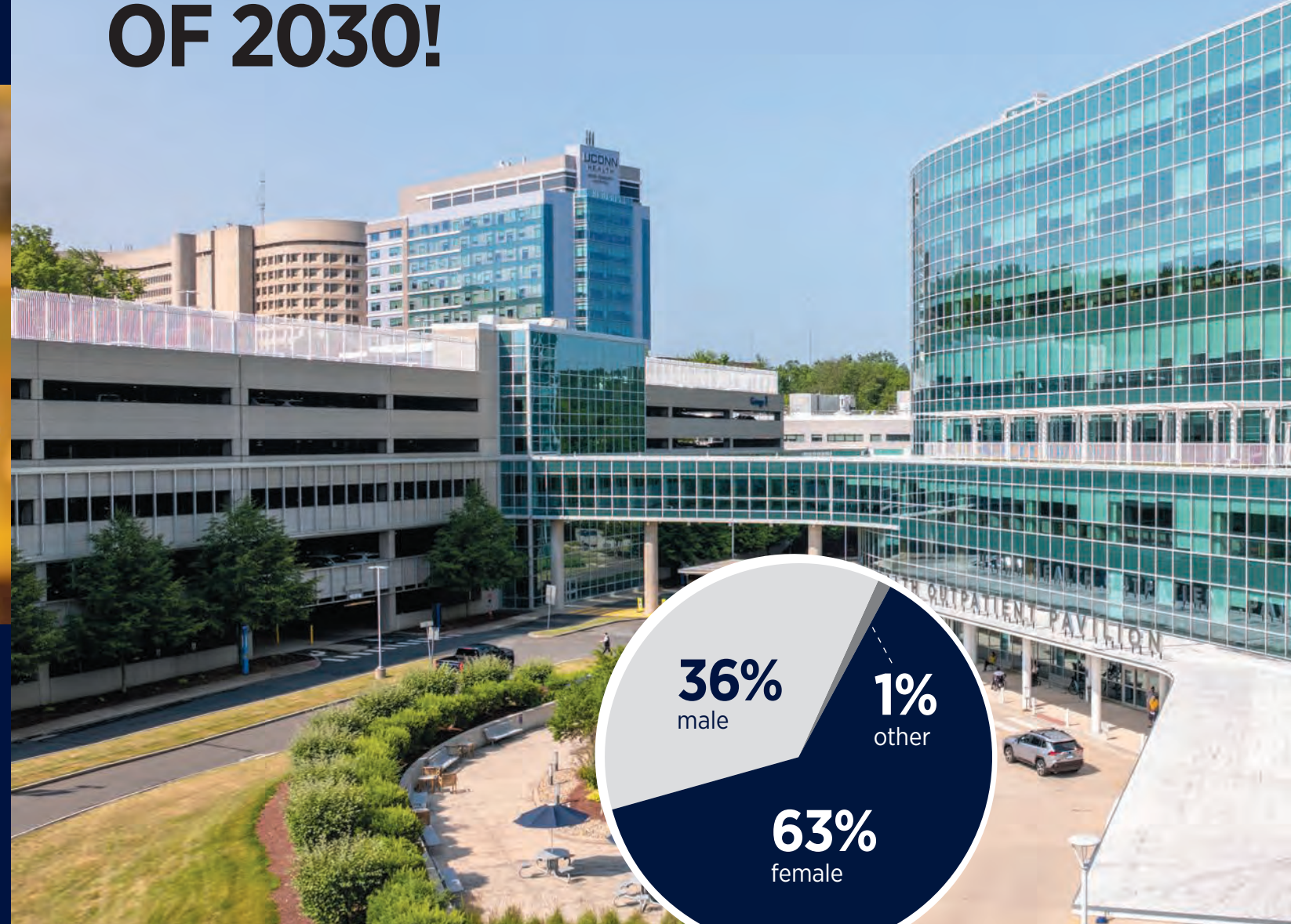
57%

are staying in
New England

36%

are entering
primary care

WELCOME, CLASS OF 2030!



36%
male

1%
other

63%
female

5,243

applicants

117

total incoming
medical
students, the
largest class yet

6

pursuing dual
MD/Ph.D. degrees

70%

are Connecticut
residents

FACULTY IMPACT IN 2026

ACCREDITATION WITH COMMENDATION

The Office of Community and Continuing Medical Education received the highest national award for the next six years by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), placing UConn among the nation's top tier of CME providers.

1.5 MILLION+
patient encounters

61,500+
emergency department
visits

19,300+
hospital discharges

15,000+
surgeries performed

5,000+
community members
statewide received free
healthcare screenings and
education by CT AHEC
Urban Service Track/AHEC
Scholars

\$82 MILLION+
in research funding annually,
with most from federal
sources such as the NIH

80+
clinical trials supported by
our Clinical Research Center

TOP 10 REASONS STUDENTS LOVE OUR MEDICAL SCHOOL



1.

Outstanding clinical training that prepares students to graduate as confident, capable physicians.

2.

Early and continuous clinical experience, beginning in the first year, that strengthens clinical reasoning and decision-making skills over time.

3.

Diverse, high-quality clinical rotations across hospitals, outpatient settings, and community environments that build adaptability and cultural competence.

4.

Dedicated and highly engaged educators, including faculty and residents, who are deeply invested in student learning and success.

5.

A supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and part of the team.

6.

A “learn by doing” approach that gives students meaningful responsibility and hands-on participation in patient care.

7.

Integrated teaching and learning, where didactic sessions complement and enhance clinical experiences.

8.

Flexible and personalized educational pathways, with opportunities for electives, specialty exploration, and career development.

9.

Real-world experience in a collaborative academic medical center, emphasizing team-based care and interprofessional learning.

10.

A strong and lasting alumni community, reflecting a deep sense of connection and pride in being part of the UConn family.



Source: AAMC Graduation Questionnaire



LOVING THE EARLY PATIENT CARE EXPERIENCE

For rising third-year medical students, a year of clerkships kicks off each spring, with four-to-six-week training rotations across the clinical care spectrum at UConn Health and across Connecticut.

“My classmates and I are finally met with the privilege of having the role of doctor-in-training,” says Josie Ford ’28 MD of Vermont, whose first rotations were in family medicine and psychiatry. Ford says she chose UConn medical school primarily because alums spoke highly of the clinical training experiences offered. “I think I speak for most of my class when I say that we have been looking forward to this moment, to starting rotations, since applying to medical school,” she says.

Ford most enjoys speaking with her patients. “Every patient has a story, and having the space to hear their story and contextualize their health and goals is what I love most. This year, across multiple sites, I am also learning from my attendings, residents, nurses, and other clinical team members. The little pearls of wisdom from all these sources help to shape the physicians we will grow to be.”



A UCONN LOVE MATCH

Lucky members of the Class of 2026 had their medical school and National Match Day experiences filled with extra UConn love. The newly minted Dr. Deanna Rivas, of Putnam Valley, New York, and Dr. Cesar Rubio Ramos, of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, are among three sets of partners having the added joy of couples-matching into residency training. Rivas and Rubio Ramos love UConn so much they are both staying in Farmington. Rivas’ UConn residency training in general surgery is underway, while Rubio Ramos is in internal medicine. “Sharing this milestone makes the journey ahead even more meaningful,” says Rivas. “We are very excited to take on the challenges of residency and the adventure of life together!”

A LASTING GIFT OF LOVE FOR LEARNERS

The high-tech Human Anatomy Lab plays an integral role in the hands-on, early learning experience of UConn’s medical students. It’s all made possible thanks to those who donate their bodies to UConn’s Anatomical Donation Program, such as Dr. Achilles “Oggie” Pappano, a beloved, longtime faculty member of the UConn School of Medicine.

“This was Oggie’s wish. He always joked, ‘Before you put me in the dirt, I’m going back to the UConn School of Medicine.’ What a gift! He knew what he was doing,” says his wife of 61 years, Mary Ann Pappano. “The phenomenal UConn medical students have him now.

“Oggie’s anatomical donation gave him the opportunity to be an open textbook and his students the opportunity to write his last chapter.

If somehow my husband could know what is happening now, he’d get up and cheer them on.”

“UConn was home for him,” she says about the NIH-funded, world-class scientist and pharmacologist, a founding UConn Health faculty member who served the medical school for four decades, also teaching generations of medical and graduate students cardiovascular science and medicine.

Oggie, who died in 2024 at age 84, “loved UConn and what he did. Oggie never said he was going to work, he always said, ‘I’m going to school or the lab.’ He thought UConn was the best place in the world.”

Each spring, UConn medical and dental students hold a memorial service in honor of the generous anatomical program donors.



“Your loved ones were our first patients, and from them, we learned the importance of reverence and respect for science, the human body, and the incredible opportunity we’ve been given to impact the lives of our future patients,” said rising second-year medical student Kara Moran in a speech at the 2026 event. “Thank you so much for trusting us and giving us an experience we will carry with us throughout our lives.”

“The memorial service was beautiful, and beyond imagination,” says Mary Ann. “If Oggie was alive he would say to the UConn medical students full of all his love, curiosity, and energy: ‘You are our future, keep going!’”

Oggie’s mentee and friend, Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang, adds, “Oggie’s legacy lives on here at UConn Health and beyond.”

FOR THE LOVE OF UCONN (AND A MENTOR)

When 2026 dual MD/MPH degree recipient Dr. Lucia Duenas-Bianchi and her longtime mentor, physician-scientist Dr. Marja Hurley, are together, you can really feel the love.

They met when Duenas-Bianchi, now 30, was just 13 and a middle schooler participating in the Doctors' Academy of the Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP), led by Hurley. HCOP welcomes youth of all backgrounds and socioeconomic levels for in-depth health science education and career-path mentorship.

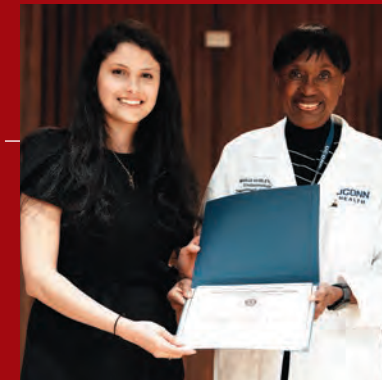
"I have dreamed of becoming a doctor since I was a little girl," says Duenas-Bianchi, who immigrated to the U.S. at age 4 from Peru and now lives in Glastonbury, Connecticut. "I even have a Fisher-Price doctor's bag to prove it."

Duenas-Bianchi is thrilled to remain at UConn for her top-choice residency in internal medicine. "I'm excited," she says. "UConn is family, I can't leave my family behind. I'm here to stay."

Throughout medical school, Duenas-Bianchi volunteered as an HCOP mentor. She looks forward to following in Hurley's footsteps, mentoring the next generation of healthcare professionals in her career.

"UConn and HCOP is a big part of how I got to where I am. HCOP came into my life and it changed everything," she says. "It gave me mentors and role models who looked like me, who came from backgrounds like mine, who had walked this path before me. Because when you can see it, you can start to believe it is possible."

To youth interested in health science careers, Duenas-Bianchi says: "You belong here. I am standing in front of you as proof that this path is real and it is yours if you want it."



"UConn is family, I can't leave my family behind. I'm here to stay."

—Dr. Lucia Duenas-Bianchi



MEET FUTURE ANESTHESIOLOGIST JACK WOLF

Jack Wolf '26 MD of Wethersfield, Connecticut, is in training through UConn's anesthesiology residency program. "I feel like I fit in best with the anesthesiology folks. I love learning about physiology and the tools we have for influencing it," Wolf says. "I am fascinated by the idea of consciousness and recognize there are so many questions to be investigated and explored." Wolf also loves being at home in Connecticut for both his UConn medical school and residency journey. "I really share this experience with my family each step of the way. It's truly an honor to become a doctor at UConn," he says. "I feel prepared to always do right by my future patients. UConn has prepared me to deliver compassionate and professional care." Plus, "Husky Pride is no joke. I've heard 'Go Huskies' all the way across the country."



RECORD-BREAKING HIGHS FOR UCONN RESIDENCIES

850

residents and fellows in training

85+

UConn GME-sponsored programs

AMONG THE TOP

10%

of U.S. residency programs, ranked by size

\$175 MILLION+

in federal funding annually trains UConn residents and supports their critical healthcare workforce contributions to UConn Health and other central Connecticut hospitals

40%

of UConn medical school 2026 graduates chose to stay in Connecticut for residency, a record high

27%

of 2026 graduates chose to stay for UConn GME-sponsored residency training programs, the most to date

12

students matched into the field of anesthesiology for residency, another record

MOHS SURGERY FELLOWSHIP RELAUNCHES

UConn is again home to a micrographic surgery and dermatologic oncology fellowship training program after previously hosting one from 2013 to 2019. The program, which trains one fellow per year, is directed by Dr. Hao Feng, associate professor of dermatology and director of laser surgery and cosmetic dermatology.

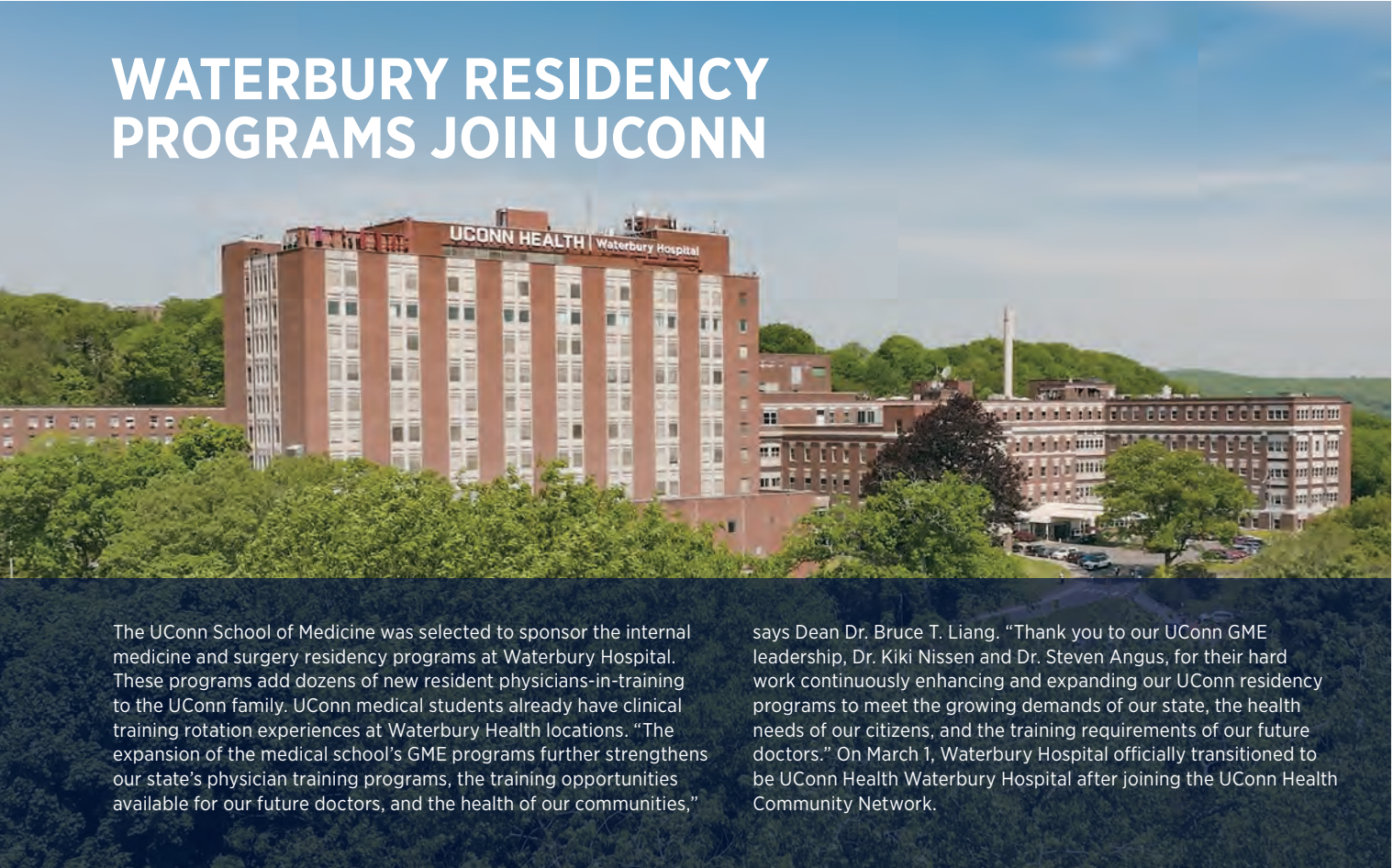
Fellows receive comprehensive training in Mohs surgery, reconstructive surgery, cutaneous oncology, and laser and cosmetic dermatology at UConn Health's skin cancer practice, which performs over 2,600 Mohs surgery cases and 1,000 skin excisions per year.

The first fellow to arrive this August was board-certified dermatologist Dr. Shane McTighe, who joins from Lane Dermatology in Georgia and trained as a resident in the U.S. Army. "We are very excited to relaunch the Mohs surgery fellowship program," says Feng. "With an increase of skin cancers every single year, and a very high volume of Connecticut patients in need, the Mohs surgery fellowship serves the medical school's dedicated mission of always training the next generation of providers."

"It's really wonderful to have this fellowship back at UConn, for the benefit of our institution, dermatology department, our trainees — and, most importantly, for so many patients."



WATERBURY RESIDENCY PROGRAMS JOIN UCONN



The UConn School of Medicine was selected to sponsor the internal medicine and surgery residency programs at Waterbury Hospital. These programs add dozens of new resident physicians-in-training to the UConn family. UConn medical students already have clinical training rotation experiences at Waterbury Health locations. "The expansion of the medical school's GME programs further strengthens our state's physician training programs, the training opportunities available for our future doctors, and the health of our communities,"

says Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang. "Thank you to our UConn GME leadership, Dr. Kiki Nissen and Dr. Steven Angus, for their hard work continuously enhancing and expanding our UConn residency programs to meet the growing demands of our state, the health needs of our citizens, and the training requirements of our future doctors." On March 1, Waterbury Hospital officially transitioned to be UConn Health Waterbury Hospital after joining the UConn Health Community Network.

MEET UCONN HEALTH'S NEWEST PRIMARY CARE DOCTOR

"I made it!" says Henry Siccardi '23 MD, who ever since starting medical school at UConn wanted to become a UConn Health primary care doctor. His dream has now come true. After completing his three-year internal medicine residency here, Siccardi started practicing at UConn Health's Torrington office as a primary care physician.

"Residency was a lot of fun. I would do it here at UConn again," says Siccardi, who was among the residents honored by the Capital Area Health Consortium with a 2026 Community Service Award this spring. "I feel accomplished."

Dr. Christopher Steele remembers Siccardi's first year of medical school. "Henry's dream was to become a primary care physician here. It has been a joy to see that dream come true for him," says Steele, Siccardi's former faculty mentor and current colleague. "His impact as a UConn medical student and resident has been extraordinary. He has helped so many people get the care they deserve."

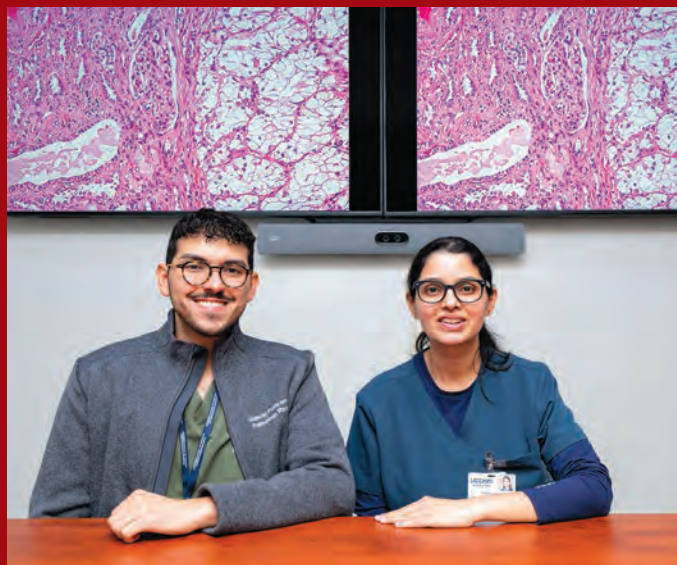
As a medical student, Siccardi founded the UConn Health Leaders (UHL) program, which identifies unmet social needs among the most vulnerable patients in the Hartford area and connects patients to essential resources. UHL has helped thousands of patients. "Henry's work has had a lasting impact on our institution and the community," says Steele.



"His impact as a UConn medical student and resident has been extraordinary. He has helped so many people get the care they deserve."

—Dr. Christopher Steele

PATHOLOGY RESIDENTS BACK AT UCONN



This July, the UConn School of Medicine's Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine began training two residents in its new, nationally accredited pathology residency program, its first in decades. The residency accepts two residents each year for training within the four-year Anatomic Pathology/Clinical Pathology program.

"It's an exciting time for a new residency training program to launch as the future of the field is rapidly evolving right now," says program lead Dr. Gahie Nam, medical director for surgical pathology and histology within the Division of Anatomic Pathology. "Pathology is going digital. Now, glass microscope slides can be scanned and easily accessed by faculty, trainees, and healthcare providers for use during patient consultations, education, and research."

The inaugural residents are Dr. Sonam Talreja, a prior

pathology research fellow at the University of Michigan, and Dr. Gabriel Pastrana, who has surgical pathology and cytopathology experience from various academic hospitals. "This is a chance not just to train within a UConn program but to help build one," says Pastrana.

The residents will train across clinical rotations in a variety of UConn Health specialties and will learn from external partners including pediatric pathology at Hartford Hospital, forensic pathology at the Office of the State Medical Examiner, and molecular pathology at The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine. They will also learn about donor blood bank services from the American Red Cross.

"UConn looks forward to once again training the next generation of pathologists to enter our state's healthcare workforce," says Nam.



"I have loved being at the UConn the School of Medicine for more than 40 years because of the extraordinary community that surrounds me."

—Dr. Jacqueline "Kiki" Nissen

THANK YOU, DR. NISSEN!

TRANSFORMING ZAMBIA'S FIRST RADIOLOGY RESIDENCY INTO A REGIONAL LEADER

UConn radiologist Dr. Jill Wruble founded GlobalRadZambia (GRadZ), a volunteer initiative that brings radiologists and trainees from around the world together to teach and mentor Zambia's future radiologists at the country's 1,600-bed University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka. GRadZ partners with Dr. Veronica Sunkutu Sichizya, who founded Zambia's first radiology residency in 2019, when the country had just seven radiologists — and no residency program — for a population of 19 million.

Since Wruble helped develop the residency curriculum in 2021,

15 radiologists have graduated, more than doubling Zambia's radiology workforce. The residency has expanded rapidly to 40 residents in training, including an incoming class of 24 first-year residents, and now trains physicians from three neighboring countries without radiology residency programs.

"Watching these physicians discover the potential of radiology to improve patient care — and reshape the region's future through hard-earned skill and determination — has enriched my life," Wruble says. "What began as a small

residency has become a thriving



community built on interactive education, mentorship, and the shared wonder of radiology."

During her visit this May, Wruble was joined by UConn

Health ultrasound technologists Susan Henson and Liz Merluzzo and class of 2027 UConn medical student Stephen Baker. Their two-week teaching mission was supported by the philanthropic foundation of former UConn radiologist and professor emeritus Dr. Harold Moskowitz.

Graduates now practice and teach throughout Zambia, emerging as regional leaders. GlobalRadZambia is expanding partnerships into neighboring African countries, with the long-term goal of creating a self-sustaining program increasingly led by Zambian radiologists.

UConn School of Medicine alum and award-winning physician, teacher, and leader Dr. Jacqueline "Kiki" Nissen is retiring from the medical school and UConn Health at the end of 2026.

"I have loved being at the UConn School of Medicine for more than 40 years because of the extraordinary community that surrounds me," says Nissen. "I have had the privilege of working alongside inspiring leaders, dedicated staff, and remarkable learners."

Nissen first joined the UConn family as a medical student. She graduated in 1989, then stayed at UConn for her internal medicine residency, serving as chief medical resident in 1994. In addition to being a beloved faculty member since 1995 and a "Top Doctor" in primary care, she has served in leadership roles in the School of Medicine since 2000, including as program director and senior associate dean for faculty affairs. As associate dean for graduate medical education since 2007, she has overseen the rise of GME to more than 85 sponsored programs and 850 residents and fellows.

"I have enjoyed most mentoring, supporting faculty success, and watching our community continue to grow and thrive. It is this shared commitment to excellence, growth, and one another that has made UConn such a deeply rewarding place for me," says Nissen, who also expresses love for her patients. "I've met and cared for so many wonderful patients. My patients have been a continuous source of connection, conversation, and learning, and have always reminded me of the true purpose behind our work."

A SMALL PATCH WITH BIG INSIGHTS

“For the first time we can sample a person’s immune cells through this skin micropatch. This skin patch is enabling us to quickly get greater understanding of immune events that are happening inside the human body.”

—Sasan Jalili, Ph.D.

As we age, our skin becomes more frail and prone to chronic inflammation. This makes it easier for bacteria from our microbiome to invade, leading to higher infection risk. An innovative UConn Center on Aging clinical study is testing the effectiveness of novel skin patches to capture microbiome bacteria on the skin’s surface along with immune system T-cells.

“For the first time we can sample a person’s immune cells through this skin micropatch. This skin patch is enabling us to quickly get greater understanding of immune events that are happening inside the human body,” says Sasan Jalili, Ph.D., a UConn Center on Aging Pepper Center Scholar awardee and assistant professor at The Jackson Laboratory and UConn’s Department of Immunology, who developed the patch. “This is a very exciting breakthrough — and it’s very cool!”

The NIH-funded research is a collaborative effort with principal investigator Julia Oh, Ph.D., of Duke University, formerly of The Jackson Laboratory.

“The skin may really be our largest window of opportunity to better understand our body’s immune response as we grow older,” says clinical study principal investigator Julie Robison, Ph.D., of the UConn Center on Aging.

NEW FRONTIER FOR PARKINSON'S DISEASE



A UConn Health DaTscan shows reduced dopamine levels in the brain of a Parkinson's disease patient.

UConn is testing an innovative pill for reducing inflammation to treat early Parkinson's disease. The clinical trial, sponsored by Biohaven Pharmaceuticals, Inc., is testing the ability of BHV-8000 to slow disease progression in early Parkinson's patients. The Clinical Research Center is coordinating the Brain and Spine Institute's trial, an important milestone for Parkinson's research in the state. "My hope is that this new medication slows my Parkinson's disease progression. But even if participating in the clinical trial doesn't help me, I hope it helps others now or down the road," says Bill, the study's first Connecticut participant.

"Through this novel clinical trial, Bill and other patients will be helping us find out if this new medication will change the world for Parkinson's disease patients — and we think it could," says principal investigator Dr. Bernardo Rodrigues, whose team treats over 300 Parkinson's patients annually at UConn Health. "If proven effective, this would be a first-of-its-kind Parkinson's disease medication. This clinical trial is big. We are super excited about its potential."

The experimental drug targets inflammation messengers to prevent and stifle two proteins, TYK2/JAK1, from transmitting inflammatory signals between cells and spreading throughout the brain and the rest of the body. "By inhibiting inflammation, the body's immune response calms, which allows for the body to begin to heal itself on the molecular level," says Rodrigues. "The hope is that we will be able to slow down Parkinson's disease progression. This could be revolutionary."



CURBING COMMON KIDNEY INFLAMMATION

IgA nephropathy (IgAN) is the most common type of primary kidney inflammation in the world. It occurs when the body makes too much of Gd-IgA1 (galactose-deficient IgA1), which can trigger the formation of autoantibodies. The immune system reacts by attacking the antibodies, forming clumps of abnormal antibodies that build up in the kidneys, causing scarring and inflammation that lead to permanent damage and even kidney failure.

Now, a promising new injectable medication being tested in a clinical trial at UConn is offering greater hope for patients living with the inflammatory kidney disease. The Clinical

Research Center is helping Connecticut-based Biohaven Pharmaceuticals, Inc., test BHV-1400 to help treat the root cause of IgAN. Phase 1 clinical trials have shown the medication targets and rapidly sustains removal of up to over 81% of Gd-IgA for weeks after just a single injectable dose under the skin.

"There is a lot of hope for our IgA nephropathy patient community that this new precision immunotherapy for kidney inflammation can help improve kidney health," says nephrology chief Dr. Yanlin Wang.

THE POWER OF A PROTEIN SHAKE



A UConn cross-campus research study is already improving the health of Parkinson's disease patients like Jose Figueroa, 66, of New Britain, Connecticut.

The UConn Health Brain and Spine Institute is helping UConn test the benefits of a targeted, amino-acid protein powder supplement created by the Department of Kinesiology and its dedicated Movement for Life Lab team Dr. Jacob Earp and Dr. C. Colon-Semenza. They are principal investigators for the FDA clinical study, which compares their shake to others offered over the counter.

"I felt really good while taking the shake. I definitely had more energy," reports Figueroa, who says he has also benefited from a weekly exercise program in Storrs. Figueroa said his Parkinson's symptoms have been reduced since starting the study.

"My shaking slowed and my imbalance is not as bad. I no longer need my cane to walk," he says. "I could only walk a quarter of a mile before; now I can do 7 miles every day."

The UConn-designed protein shake is easy to drink and works to encourage a healthy metabolism, reduce inflammation, and correct a select series of amino-acid deficiencies identified in Parkinson's patients to improve their long-term health.

"It's working! The shake may be just the protein boost our PD patients need," says Dr. Bernardo Rodrigues, director of UConn Health's Parkinson's disease clinic.



A BIG-HEARTED LIFETIME GIVER

Jean Martin of West Hartford, Connecticut, doesn't have sickle cell disease but, as a lifelong educator, knows how important it is to make time to help others. A carrier of the sickle cell trait, she's volunteering for a UConn Health study to help enhance the future care of patients with the painful, inherited red blood cell condition.

"People need to know about sickle cell. Most people don't know," says Martin, who saw a flyer in the hallway at UConn Health during a doctor's visit and called the number to offer her help.

The collaborative study builds upon the research findings of Dr. Marja Hurley to further explore the connections between sickle cell trait and early bone loss in diverse women with the New England Sickle Cell Institute (NESCI) and the UConn Center on Aging.

"Jean, your participation in this study is so very helpful," says Dr. Genice Nelson, NESCI nursing director. "Thank you for helping promote research advances."

GRATEFUL BRONCHIECTASIS PATIENT

"Dr. Metersky's care is magic. He changed my life," says Woody Exley, a patient of over 16 years about his longtime pulmonologist. Dr. Mark Metersky is director of the Center for Bronchiectasis Care at UConn Health. Exley is grateful for Metersky's global clinical trial research that led to the first FDA-approved drug Exley and other bronchiectasis patients need. "I owe him a good debt of gratitude."



PREDICTING GESTATIONAL DIABETES RISK BEFORE IT STRIKES



By the third trimester, 10% of pregnant women develop gestational diabetes. UConn maternal-fetal medicine expert Dr. Andrea Shields is testing the effectiveness of a novel, non-invasive tool to measure a pregnant woman's risk of developing gestational diabetes sooner, allowing for earlier interventions with personalized medicine, nutrition enhancements, and exercise regimens to prevent pregnancy complications. While the traditional oral glucose tolerance test typically occurs between pregnancy weeks 24 and 28, this new test works at less than 20 weeks of pregnancy by screening and analyzing two stool samples for a predictive microbiome biomarker.

For the UConn Health Women's Center study, Shields has teamed with Miora Health, a faculty-affiliated startup company in the UConn Technology Incubation Program (TIP), which makes the test. "After 15 years in microbiome research, I am eager to develop microbiome-based tools that can make a real clinical impact," says Miora Health co-founder Dr. Yanjiao Zhou, an associate professor of medicine and OB/GYN.

"Gut health is so important during pregnancy and beyond, and it's all linked to good nutrition," says Shields. "I'm hoping that if we can identify gestational diabetes risks early, we can not only improve a mother's health but also her entire family's by helping her introduce at home a healthier food pathway."

SUGAR-COATED RNA DISGUISE

Immunologist Dr. Vijay Rathinam and his laboratory have been awarded nearly \$4 million by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to further advance their research, which aims to understand the disguising role RNA glycosylation plays on the surface of our cells to deflect our immune system's attention and to reduce unnecessary inflammation. Rathinam and colleagues, including first study author and former Ph.D. graduate student Vincent Graziano and Dr. Ryan Flynn at Boston Children's Hospital, published in the journal Nature how our cells protectively clothe the surface of healthy RNA molecules in sugars to shield the RNA from being attacked by the immune system. All bacteria and viruses have RNA, which is why the immune system starts attacking when it finds RNA. "But recognizing RNA as a sign of infection is problematic, as every single cell in our body has RNA," Rathinam says. "The sugarcoating hides our own RNA from the immune system." The study findings and upcoming research could help fuel the future care of autoimmune diseases like lupus, which are associated with specific RNA immune responses, and provide insight on how such diseases might be fixed.



EXPLORING PRECISION MEDICINE FOR PANCREATIC CANCER

Imagine if prior to the start of cancer care, doctors could rapidly confirm the most effective chemotherapy or immunotherapy, or combination thereof, to personalize difficult-to-treat pancreatic cancer treatment to improve outcomes and life expectancy.

A collaborative UConn School of Medicine research study is exploring this possibility with Encapsulate, Inc., a precision medicine startup company at the UConn Technology Incubation Program (TIP). Here, inside

their Farmington laboratory, the researchers are testing the earthly effectiveness of the company's pioneering biochip system. Creators of the company and technology are UConn's own Leila Daneshmandi '20 Ph.D., '21 MA and Armin Tahmasbi Rad '19 Ph.D., '20 MA.

The hope is that Encapsulate's rapid, functional testing in the lab can quickly examine a tissue sample from a pancreatic cancer patient's individual tumor, replicate its cellular growth in the lab, and predict which agents will be the most effective to stop its progression.

"Pancreatic cancer patients don't have time to lose," says Daneshmandi, co-founder and COO of Encapsulate. "Our biochip system recreates a patient's own tumor in the lab and shows which therapies it responds to best, giving oncologists functional evidence to build the most effective treatment plan right from the start. Advancing this work alongside the team at UConn Health is a meaningful step toward making that a reality for patients."

"This clinical study with UConn Health represents an important step toward making cancer treatment more personalized and less reliant on trial and error. Through our rapid functional testing platform, we aim to revolutionize the cancer treatment selection paradigm, improve patient outcomes, and ultimately help save thousands of lives."

—Armin Tahmasbi Rad '19 Ph.D., '20 MA

Often, more than one drug needs to be tried at a time to determine which is effective, extending treatment time.

NASA- and NSF-funded testing carried out in microgravity aboard the International Space Station has already shown Encapsulate's biochip device can successfully predict future cancer clinical insights.

Now, UConn researchers are hoping to help confirm the same predictive results on Earth by sharing with Encapsulate small amounts of de-identified biopsy tissue samples garnered from UConn Health patients undergoing pancreatic cancer care. The anonymous tissue samples of each patient enrolled in the research study are being examined using the biochip system for research purposes only inside Encapsulate's laboratory. Researchers are then comparing the biochip's prediction to how a patient's tumor actually responds to prescribed chemotherapy clinically three to six months later.

Pancreatic cancer is one of the most common gastrointestinal malignancies, with incidence on the rise. According to Birk, it is critical for those who are high-risk for the disease due to family history or those with pancreatic cystic lesions to be followed in a preventive screening program for the disease, as early diagnosis is key.

Weight loss, abdominal pain, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) are common symptoms of pancreatic cancer, but they often only become apparent in advanced disease.

"The good news about pancreatic cancer tumors is that they don't tend to mutate much," says Birk. "If this innovative technology can help us pinpoint the right drug or drug combination to fight each pancreatic patient's cancer, that is our biggest hope for advancing the future of care."

Rad, co-founder and CEO of Encapsulate, agrees.

"This clinical study with UConn Health represents an important step toward making cancer treatment more personalized and less reliant on trial and error," he says. "Through our rapid functional testing platform, we aim to revolutionize the cancer treatment selection paradigm, improve patient outcomes, and ultimately help save thousands of lives."

CARING FOR OUR VETERANS



Thank you to dermatology professor and veteran Dr. Brett Sloan, who has long cared for his fellow veterans — during his military service, at UConn Health, and at the Connecticut Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Newington. The Air Force empowered him to attend medical school, train to become a flight surgeon, and later find his calling as a dermatologist.

“Part of my interest in advocating for veterans is my experience as a disabled vet, as I lost my right lower leg from a traumatic event while stationed overseas,” Sloan says. He stresses how instrumental the VA was during his rehabilitation.

When Sloan joined the UConn dermatology faculty in



2007, he started a collaboration with the VA for the new dermatology residency training program. “Ever since, our UConn dermatology resident trainees have been visiting the Connecticut VA three times a week to care for veterans,” he says. “Our trainees, along with UConn faculty, continue to offer a robust medical and surgical dermatology clinic to veterans.”

Grateful patient and U.S. Navy veteran Michael Puttin, 72, who has had more than 30 precancerous and cancerous skin lesions removed, says, “The residents are superb. I have had nothing but excellent care.”

Thank you, veterans!

CONNECTICUT LOVES PETRA CLARK-DUFNER



Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont formally proclaimed April 15, 2026, as Petra Clark-Dufner Day, in recognition of Clark-Dufner’s more than three decades of sustained leadership in education, health equity, and workforce development as the longtime director of the Connecticut Area Health Education Center (CT AHEC) based at UConn Health. Her state service has strengthened the health professions pipeline and expanded access to healthcare services in under-resourced communities.

Thanks to her leadership, CT AHEC has grown to four regional centers throughout the state, which connect local community groups and healthcare professionals with UConn’s health profession

training resources. The CT AHEC Network reaches approximately 18,000 learners annually. The interprofessional Urban Service Track/AHEC Scholars program, co-founded by Clark-Dufner, has graduated more than 1,000 students, including many from the UConn School of Medicine.

“Petra has fundamentally shaped how our institution prepares learners for service,” Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang says. “Her work ensures that students are not only clinically skilled, but socially responsive, ethically grounded, and prepared to lead in diverse communities across Connecticut.”

FACULTY TAKE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

DR. JANE M. GRANT-KELS

Jane M. Grant-Kels, MD, FAAD, is the next president-elect of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). She will be installed as AAD president-elect in March 2027 and then president of the AAD in March 2028 for a one-year term. “I am very excited to be able to contribute to this great organization and represent our members,” says Grant-Kels. AAD is the largest U.S. professional dermatology organization, counting more than 90% of board-certified dermatologists as members.

Grant-Kels is the first expert from Connecticut to be elected to the role, only the second from New England, and the seventh woman in nearly nine decades.

Grant-Kels is the vice chair of the Department of Dermatology; founder and co-director of the Cutaneous Oncology Center and Melanoma Program; a professor of dermatology, pathology, and pediatrics; and the associate dermatology residency program director at the UConn School of Medicine. She was founding chair of the Department of Dermatology, its residency program, and the Dermatopathology Lab.

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BLANKA ROGINA

Blanka Rogina, Ph.D., was elected vice president of the Gerontological Society of America (GSA). She begins her one-year term in January 2026 before assuming the role of president of the GSA in 2027 and chair of its board of directors in 2028. The GSA is the nation’s oldest and largest interdisciplinary organization focused on aging, with over 6,600 members from over 50 countries.

“I am honored to be selected for this prestigious leadership role,” shares Rogina. “I see interdisciplinary research and collaboration essential for our understanding of the basic biology of aging that may be applied to promote healthy aging and the development of therapies to delay the onset of age-associated decline.”

Rogina’s gerontology research as professor of genetics and genome sciences and an affiliated investigator of the UConn Center on Aging characterizes molecular mechanisms of aging to find key players that contribute to extended healthspan and longevity. She is instrumental in teaching and mentoring UConn graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.



UConn-made family medicine doctors Kathy Mueller, Sachin Parekh, Edmund Kim, and Kisha Davis, with chair of the Department of Family Medicine Dr. Thomas Agresta.

CREATING FAMILY MEDICINE'S LEADERS

It was a special moment in Connecticut when proud family medicine doctors trained at UConn took the stage together at the 2025 annual meeting of the Connecticut Academy of Family Physicians (CT AFP): Kisha Davis '04 MD, incoming president of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP); Edmund Kim '00 MD, CT AFP president; Dr. Sachin Parekh, the outgoing CT AFP president, who completed his family medicine residency at UConn; and Kathy Mueller '94 MD, a past two-term president of CT AFP who is now on the AAFP board of directors.

"It's awesome, and such an honor" to have Huskies serving as key leaders of the organization, which represents 128,300 physicians, residents, and medical students nationwide, says Kim.

"I'm a family doctor because of UConn," says Davis.

"Because of UConn, I stayed in Connecticut and practiced here for 28 years," adds Mueller.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR LOVE OF UCONN!

We are inspired by the innovative work of the UConn physician-scientists who are tirelessly pushing boundaries and changing lives every day through innovative research and care. Their work wouldn't be possible without the support of our generous donors and friends of the UConn School of Medicine.

Want to be a part of the University's historic \$1.5 billion Because of UConn campaign? Learn more at foundation.uconn.edu/get-involved.

LOVE FOR ALL WOMEN: MENOPAUSE EQUITY CARE

From the State Capitol building to campus, the UConn Health Disparities Institute (HDI) is accelerating a statewide movement to make menopause visible in policy, practice, and everyday conversations. HDI is breaking the silence, reducing stigma, and creating community-informed solutions to support midlife health. The Menopause Equity Initiative (MEI) aims to ensure that menopause care and policy reflect the realities of those most impacted by inequities. In addition to hosting free, community education events and expert panels, the MEI has been instrumental in shaping key menopause bills at the Connecticut General Assembly, in part through public testimony.

"UConn HDI is demonstrating what menopause equity looks like in action, from community members testifying at the State Capitol, to clinicians

sharing what they see in practice, to alums coming together to learn and speak openly about midlife health and well-being," says Linda Sprague Martinez, Ph.D., director of HDI. "We are intentional about centering the voices and experiences of those most impacted by inequities in decision-making. We partner with them, and with providers, to elevate community expertise, creating space for truth-telling and for joy, so people know they are not alone, can build community, and can push for the systems-level change they deserve."



ALUM IS INAUGURAL RISING SCHOLAR

Dr. Aida Roman is pursuing all her academic interests by staying right here at UConn after completing her internal medicine residency. She is the first trainee in the Rising Scholar Program of the Department of Medicine, a new, two-year program created by Chair of Medicine Dr. Francesco Celi that aims to train and retain the next generation of physician-scientists at UConn.

"It's great to be the first Rising Scholar," says Roman. "I loved my UConn residency experience. This was part of why I decided to stay at UConn to begin my professional career."

"The program allows me to maintain my clinical skills by caring for internal medicine patients while also exploring my research interests in preventive cardiology and women's health," continues Roman, who says she's driven daily by her goal to make a difference in people's lives.

PHILANTHROPY POWERS RESEARCH

Generous philanthropy through the UConn Foundation is now fueling transformative research by more medical school faculty. “Thank you to our generous donors for their transformational support, and congratulations to these accomplished faculty members who are nationally and internationally recognized for their contributions to science,” says Dean of the School of Medicine Dr. Bruce T. Liang, who is the Ray Neag Distinguished Professor of Cardiovascular Biology and Medicine and was recently appointed a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor.

MEET OUR RECENTLY ENDOWED CHAIRS AND PROFESSORS:

Danielle E. Luciano, MD

Health Net, Inc. Chair in Maternal-Fetal Medicine, professor and chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

Her work significantly advances minimally invasive gynecologic surgery and endometriosis research.



“What I love most about my job at UConn Health is the opportunity to do education, research, and patient care every day, which brings me joy and fulfillment while keeping me young at heart and mind.”

Pedro J. Mendes, Ph.D.

Boehringer Ingelheim Professor in Cell Sciences, professor of cell biology, and director of the Center for Cell Analysis and Modeling

He is an internationally acclaimed leader in computational biology and systems biology.



“I love to work with our UConn Health Ph.D. and MD/Ph.D. students who bring a refreshing view of biomedical science, lots of enthusiasm, and new ways of thinking about solving problems.”

Sarah Feldstein Ewing, Ph.D.

Health Net, Inc. Chair in Alcohol and Substance Abuse, professor and vice chair for research in the Department of Psychiatry

Her clinical expertise in adolescent substance use and its neural and behavioral mechanisms of change is advancing novel avenues of brain imaging research to evaluate how adolescents respond to different elements of behavioral treatment.



“I have had a total blast exploring the intersection between basic brain mechanisms and behavioral treatment outcomes for adolescents. It truly takes a village. I love my wonderful UConn colleagues, collaborators, students, and friends! I can’t wait to see where this field goes next.”

Guangfu Li, Ph.D., DVM, MS

Carole and Ray Neag Innovation Professor in the departments of Surgery and Immunology

Li’s research is tackling cancers with specific focus on liver and pancreas. By integrating cancer immunology, nanomedicine, microbiome science, and translational disease models, he has developed innovative therapeutic strategies that reprogram the tumor microenvironment and enhance anti-tumor immunity. His discoveries have generated patented technologies, secured sustained NIH and VA funding, and earned multiple prestigious research awards.



“Love inspires the perseverance that drives our pursuit of life-improving discoveries at UConn.”

Patrick A. Murphy, Ph.D.

Marlene L. Cohen and Jerome H. Fleisch Chair in Vascular Biology, Center for Vascular Biology and the Department of Cell Biology

His expertise is advancing research on endothelial cells lining the vasculature to better understand and target the contributions of these cells to heart attack, stroke, and neurodegenerative disease.



“I love participating in the exciting explosion of growth at the intersection of basic biology and human translation today. It is truly an exciting time to be in science. We can assess what is happening at the single cell level in human disease and then specifically restore dysfunctional pathways by direct gene editing. Things are moving so quickly, and UConn has placed us at the forefront of this effort.”

Xiaoyan Guo, Ph.D.

Guo’s philanthropically supported research efforts in the Department of Genetics and Genome Sciences uses CRISPR-based functional genomics to uncover how mitochondria communicate with the rest of the cell and to identify potential therapeutic targets for neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s.



“As a junior faculty member, I am deeply grateful for the support and encouragement I have received from my senior colleagues and the administrative staff. Their generosity and collaborative spirit make this a wonderful place to build a research program.”

LOVE IN LIFE AND THE LAB



Peter and Barbara Setlow are a longtime married couple and faculty labmates at UConn's medical school. The Setlows arrived as researchers in the summer of 1971 as UConn Health was still being built and before the medical school even graduated its first class. Peter, a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of molecular biology and biophysics, reigns as UConn Health's longest-serving employee.

Together, the couple have turned their shared life in research into a generous legacy that will jumpstart students' scientific careers. Now that Barbara has retired, Peter wanted to honor her enormous contributions to science, to students, and to his own life.

"For 45 years, Barbara was a constant in my lab," Peter says. She "allowed trainees to go further than they thought they could."

He worked with the UConn Foundation and his children, both academic leaders at the University of Florida, to make a generous \$3 million gift to provide stipends for student researchers, ensuring that financial barriers don't stand in the way of their career-shaping opportunities. The funding supports undergraduate students through the Barbara C. Setlow Health Research Program, renamed in her honor, as well as high school students through the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative. The Setlows' recent gift sustains their lasting legacy in perpetuity.



DONOR SUPPORT DRIVES MED STUDENT RESEARCH PROGRAM

Medical students in the Summer Research Program are training to be the next generation of physician-scientists advancing science across the health spectrum. The program invites UConn first-year medical students to identify a faculty mentor and pursue an innovative research project during the summer between their first and second years. The optional initiative is open to all, and thanks to generous Dean's Discovery Fellowship fund donations, all interested students have received stipends to fund their summer work in the ever-growing program year after year.

Over the last decade, student participation has increased by more than 55% to over 70 students.

"I am thankful to the donors and to UConn for allowing us the time and ample opportunity to pursue our research interests," says Niki Meka '27 MD. "My passion lies within helping improve care for the patients I will help serve so we can enhance outcomes and overall quality of life." Her published and Dean's Award-winning research project findings were on the benefits of using point-of-care ultrasound (PoCUS) in the emergency department, especially for identifying gastric distention.

MED SCHOOL TOPS FOR PLANETARY HEALTH

On Earth Day, the School of Medicine was awarded the highest mark among the 54 U.S. medical schools graded by the 2026 Planetary Health Report Card. UConn is one of seven U.S. medical schools with an overall grade of 'A,' up from an 'A-' last year and representing a new high. The international report card takes into account the school's curriculum, interdisciplinary outreach, community outreach, support for student-led initiatives, and campus sustainability. Sustainability is part of the curriculum's new Health Systems Science course and the internal medicine residency program.



COMING HOME TO UConn

The UConn School of Medicine welcomes back Dr. Rachel M. Stanley as the new chair of its Department of Pediatrics and as Physician-in-Chief at Connecticut Children's. Stanley is a nationally recognized pediatric physician leader, researcher, and academic mentor who was an award-winning UConn pediatric resident.

"We are thrilled to welcome our former standout pediatric resident trainee Dr. Rachel Stanley back home to the UConn School of Medicine and Connecticut," says Dean Dr. Bruce T. Liang. "Dr. Stanley's experienced leadership and vision will be transformational for further growing our state's pediatric physician expertise, research, clinical trials, and future pediatrician workforce."

Stanley says, "My vision is to build a department that integrates clinical excellence, education, and research to improve outcomes for children — regardless of their zip code."

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