

SUMMER 2024 | NEWSLETTER

UVA SURGERY





UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

SCHOOL *of* MEDICINE

Department of Surgery

The image features two white classical columns with detailed capitals and bases, set against a solid orange background. The columns are positioned on the left and right sides of the frame, supporting a horizontal structure at the top. The drawing style is a simple line sketch with some shading on the columns.

MISSION

Transforming
health and
inspiring hope for
all Virginians and
beyond.

VISION

To be the nation's
leading academic
department of surgery
and a best place to
work while transforming
care, research,
education, and
engagement with the
diverse communities
we serve.



Message from the Chair

As we look back on the past few months, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the remarkable accomplishments within the UVA Department of Surgery. Our Summer newsletter highlights key milestones, including numerous community outreach events, local and national awards, groundbreaking research findings, and leadership shown by our faculty, staff, and trainees. We have also had the pleasure of welcoming 15 new faculty and staff members, as well as a new class of interns and fellows, each bringing unique expertise and enthusiasm to our department.

Beyond the clinical and academic achievements, I am particularly grateful for the events and moments that have brought us closer together as a department. These gatherings remind us that our strength lies not only in our professional expertise but also in our shared commitment to each other as colleagues and friends.

As you read through this newsletter, I hope you share in the pride I feel for all we have accomplished together. Thank you for your continued dedication to our patients, our students, and each other.

Allan Tsung, MD, FACS
S. Hurt Watts Professor
Chair, Department of Surgery





UNIVERSITY
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SCHOOL of MEDICINE
Department of Surgery

**UVA DEPARTMENT OF
SURGERY**

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PO Box 801442
Charlottesville, VA 22908

ON THE COVER

AI Generated Artwork:
UVA Rotunda on a
Sunny Summer Day



@uvasurgery



@uvagensurg



@uvasurgerydepartment

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FEATURED STORIES

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RESIDENTS LEAD DIVERSITY & INCLUSION CONFERENCE

Over 70 participants came together to explore the impact of housing insecurity on health outcomes through keynote speeches, panel discussions, and community engagement.



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CITY OF PROMISE CVILLE

UVA Surgery partnered with City of Promise to host day of hands-on learning and career exploration at UVA Medical Center, where students engaged with various health professionals and explored potential career paths in medicine.



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WELCOME TO THE TEAM

Get to know our 15 new faculty and staff members! We are thrilled to welcome them to UVA Surgery, and we look forward to the expertise they will bring to our team.



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DEVELOPING AN ENHANCED MELANOMA VACCINE

A second-generation melanoma vaccine developed at UVA Cancer Center significantly improves long-term survival in melanoma patients, highlighting the potential of targeted immune therapies.

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OUR PEOPLE

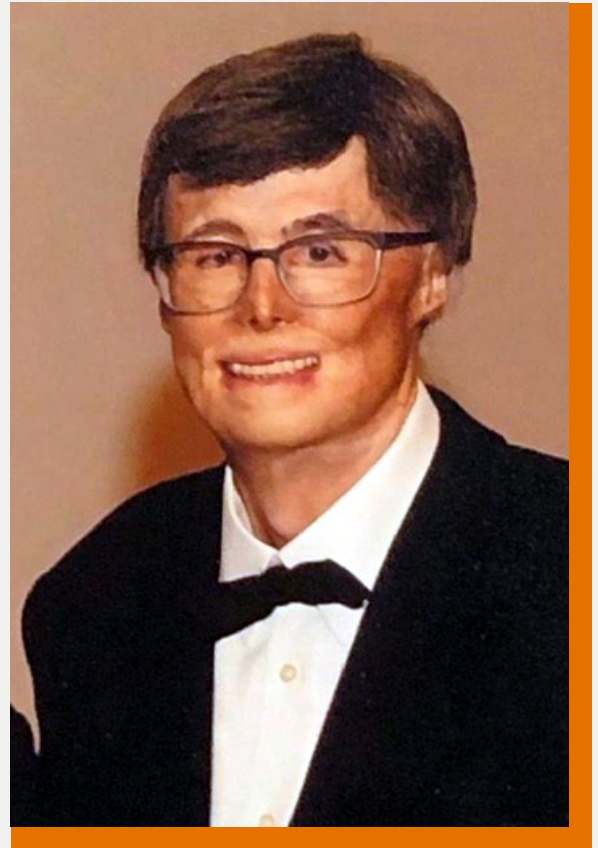


In Memoriam: Celebrating the Life of Worthington George “Sandy” Schenk III, MD

We are deeply saddened to share that Worthington George “Sandy” Schenk III, MD passed away in February 2024 after a battle with cancer. Dr. Schenk was a general surgeon who specialized in procedures to help patients with renal failure and diagnostic ultrasound for parathyroid disease. He was also skilled in dialysis access surgery, surgical critical care, and vascular surgery.

A native of upstate New York, Dr. Schenk initially aspired to become an analytical chemist. However, wanting to directly serve others, he followed in the footsteps of his father, who also was a surgeon. He earned his medical degree from Duke University School of Medicine before joining the University of Virginia as a trauma surgeon in 1982. Dr. Schenk considered each patient to be an important member of their own healthcare team. He endeavored to offer patients a sense of hope that the right diagnosis and treatment could offer a high quality of life.

Please join us in extending our condolences to Dr. Schenk’s family, friends, and colleagues. His obituary may be found [here](#).







IN THE NEWS



TODD BAUER, MD FEATURED ON WCHV RADIO INTERVIEW

On January 24th, Dr. Todd Bauer was featured on a WCHV radio interview with Joe Thomas. Dr. Bauer was featured as part of a program, called "Caring Beyond Cancer," to discuss "Cholangiocarcinoma."

Research
in Motion

UVAHealth
School of Medicine



HONGJI ZHANG, PHD FEATURED IN RESEARCH IN MOTION INTERVIEW

Dr. Hongji Zhang discusses his research, which involves understanding the role of the tumor microenvironment in various oncologic disease processes, such as colorectal and liver cancer. In addition, he discusses novel strategies for prevention and the role of inflammatory responses in treatments such as immune therapy. [Click here to watch.](#)

Research
in Motion

UVAHealth
School of Medicine



JIANJIE MA, PHD FEATURED IN RESEARCH IN MOTION INTERVIEW

Professor Jianjie Ma, PhD appears in a Research in Motion interview with the UVA SOM where he discusses his collaboration with surgeons and scientists to research regenerative medicine, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, and more. [Click here to watch.](#)



INNOVATION

UVA Health Performs First Extravascular Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator Procedure in Virginia

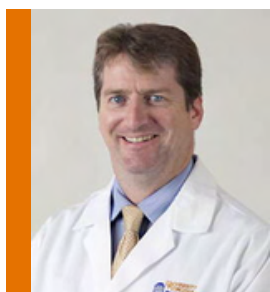
UVA Electrophysiology, Cardiac Surgery, and Cardiac Anesthesia teamed up to perform the first Extravascular Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator procedure in the state of Virginia. The Medtronic Extravascular ICD is a novel implantable defibrillator that treats fast heart rhythms. The defibrillator lead is implanted beneath the sternum in the anterior mediastinal space, and this location prevents vascular complications that are caused by the traditional transvenous ICD lead. [Learn More](#)



OURANIA PREVENTZA, MD FEATURED ON WVIR 29 NEWS

Dr. Ourania Preventza was recently featured on WVIR 29 News to discuss cardiovascular disease and aortic dissection in women. Dr. Preventza was featured as part of a series called "Community Conversations" which aims to increase awareness of various health topics within the local community. [Click to watch.](#)

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS



Shawn Pelletier, MD Elected to Endowed Professorship in Transplant Surgery

Congratulations to Dr. Shawn Pelletier for his appointment to the Charles O. and Judith S. Strickler Endowed Professorship in Transplant Surgery in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the transplant program at UVA!



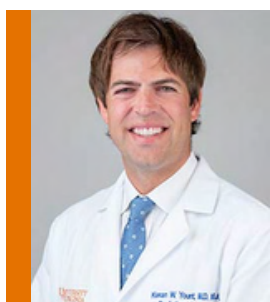
Todd Bauer, MD Inducted Into the American Surgical Association

We are proud to announce that Dr. Todd Bauer has been selected for membership in the prestigious American Surgical Association (ASA). This esteemed honor recognizes Dr. Bauer's outstanding contributions to the field of surgery and his commitment to advancing surgical science. Congratulations, Dr. Bauer, on this well-deserved achievement!



Ourania Preventza, MD Selected as New Chair of the VCSQI Research & Writing Committee

Congratulations to Dr. Ourania Preventza for her appointment as Chair of the Research & Writing Committee for the Virginia Cardiac Services Quality Initiative. As Chair, she will guide critical efforts to improve patient care and develop best practices within the field. We are excited to see the impact of her leadership in this important role!



Kenan Yount, MD Accepted into STS Leadership Institute

Dr. Kenan Yount was selected for the 2024-2025 Society of Thoracic Surgeons Leadership Institute. The Leadership Institute includes five events: three virtual sessions and two in-person meetings. The capstone event will take place in Los Angeles, California, adjacent to STS 2025.

VA BUSINESS “TOP DOCTORS”

Congratulations to nine UVA Surgery faculty members, who were named Virginia's "Top Doctors" of 2024 by Virginia Business. Selections were based on peer surveys of more than 10,000 medical professionals.



Behzad Farivar, MD
Vascular



Traci Hedrick, MD
General



Jeffrey Gander, MD
Pediatric



Eugene McGahren, MD
Pediatric



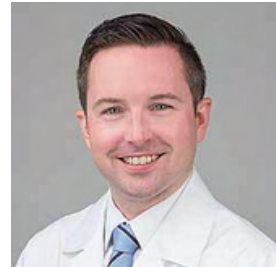
John Kern, MD
Cardiothoracic



Linda Martin, MD, MPH
Cardiothoracic



Ourania Preventza, MD
Cardiothoracic



Nicholas Teman, MD
Cardiothoracic

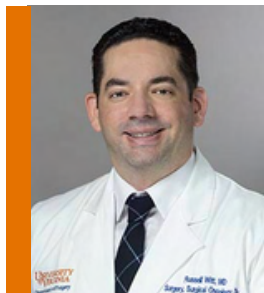


Leora Yarboro, MD
Cardiothoracic



Megan Tracci, MD Makes History as First Woman President-Elect of the Southern Association for Vascular Surgery

Congratulations to Dr. Megan Tracci on her recent appointment as the President-Elect of the Southern Association for Vascular Surgery. This remarkable achievement is not only well-deserved but also historic, as Dr. Tracci becomes the first woman to hold this title in the organization's 48-year history. Her accomplishment is truly inspiring, and we eagerly anticipate the positive impact she will bring. Dr. Tracci was inducted during the 2024 annual meeting of the Southern Association for Vascular Surgery, held from January 24th to 27th. She will serve as president throughout the 2025-2026 term.



Dr. Russell Witt Selected for 2024 iTHRIV Scholars Program

Congratulations to Dr. Russell Witt, who was among 4 individuals selected for the 2024 iTHRIV Scholars Program. The iTHRIV Scholars Program is a two-year, cohort-based, mentored career development award for dedicated early career clinical and translational researchers.



Dr. Yazan Al-Adwan Graduates from UVA SOM Junior Faculty Development Program

Congratulations to Dr. Al-Adwan for completing the Junior Faculty Development Program through the UVA School of Medicine. This cohort-based program prepares early career faculty to flourish as academic physicians and scientists through education, skill-building, mentored research, and networking.



Dr. Jeffrey Gander Named Bloomberg American Health Initiative Fellow & Awarded Full Scholarship to Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

Jeffrey Gander, MD was named a Bloomberg American Health Initiative Fellow and awarded a full scholarship to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health program. The American Health Initiative aims to identify people who have the potential to reshape how our nation approaches some of the most complex challenges facing public health. Dr. Gander was selected from an international pool of applicants. His work will focus on Food Systems for Health.

Publication by Jeff Gander, MD Nominated for "Best of the Best" Award by the American Pediatric Surgical Association

Dr. Jeff Gander was senior author on the paper, "Post-Operative Opioid Reduction Protocol Reduces Racial Disparity of Clinical Outcome in Children," which was recently nominated to compete for the Best of the Best award for presentations from all Pediatric Surgical Societies. His paper is one of two presentations that were nominated by the American Pediatric Surgical Association.

A background image showing surgical instruments, including forceps and scissors, laid out on a blue surgical drape. The image is partially obscured by a dark blue diagonal overlay on the left side, which contains the text.

UVA Congenital Heart Program Achieves Top 5% in Transplant Volume Nationwide

In 2023, UVA's congenital heart program performed 18 pediatric heart transplants, the most ever performed in a year at UVA (13 was the previous best in 2018). Of the 18 transplants, 6 of the patients were transplanted off of Ventricular Assist Devices. This number of transplants puts UVA in the top 5% in the country in terms of volume. This accomplishment is a direct reflection of an amazing team working together on a very complex patient population to achieve phenomenal results!



Linda Martin, MD Appointed as SC Co-Chair on National Cancer Institute Thoracic Malignancy Steering Committee

Dr. Linda Martin was selected to serve as a Special Expert on the Thoracic Malignancy Steering Committee for the National Cancer Institute. This committee is akin to a study section for clinical trials related to thoracic malignancies and is the final clearing house for any NCI funding for lung, thymus, and mesothelial cancer clinical trials. Dr. Martin will serve a three-year term as one of two surgeons on the panel.

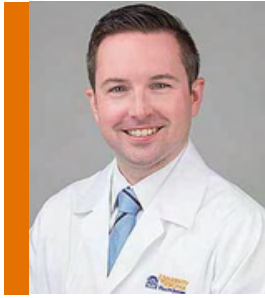
Linda Martin, MD Appointed Vice-Chair/President-Elect of General Thoracic Surgical Club

Congratulations to Dr. Linda Martin for her appointment as Vice-Chair of the General Thoracic Surgical Club. She will become Chair in Spring 2026 and serve a two-year term. This appointment marks Dr. Martin as the first non-Mayo Chair and the first female officer in the club. The General Thoracic Surgery Club is the only organization in North America strictly for General Thoracic Surgeons.

APP Aimee Strong Selected to Co-Chair the Virginia Lung Cancer Roundtable

Congratulations to Aimee Strong, DNP, ACNP, AGACNP-BC who recently accepted an offer to serve as co-chair of the Virginia Lung Cancer Roundtable, part of the Cancer Action Coalition of Virginia. Aimee will co-chair with Amit Mahajan, MD of the Inova Schar Cancer Institute. The Virginia Lung Cancer Roundtable is focused on increasing lung cancer screening rates in Virginia by promoting education, removing barriers, and supporting health systems across the state.





Nick Teman, MD Inducted Into AATS

Congratulations to Dr. Nick Teman, who was inducted into the American Association for Thoracic Surgery at the 104th annual meeting in April.

Nick Teman, MD Selected for Membership in the American Association for Thoracic Surgery; Named Perioperative Lead for the Society of Thoracic Surgeons Meeting

Congratulations to Dr. Nick Teman, who will be inducted into the American Association for Thoracic Surgery this year and has been named perioperative lead for the Society of Thoracic Surgeons Meeting!



Newsweek Names Darrin Clouse, MD Among America's Best Vascular Surgeons

Congratulations to Dr. Darrin Clouse for his selection as one of the “Best Vascular Surgeons in the US” in 2024. Published by Newsweek, the list was compiled using physician performance data from Medicare, as well as an online survey of medical experts, a quality-of-care score from peers, and consideration of American Board of Surgery certifications. Thank you, Dr. Clouse, for your outstanding work!



Leora Yarboro, MD Named Secretary of the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association (STSA)

We are thrilled to announce that Dr. Leora Yarboro has been appointed as Secretary of the prestigious Southern Thoracic Surgical Association (STSA). We look forward to her invaluable contributions in this role as we continue to promote excellence in thoracic surgery throughout the Southern region.



Sook Hoang, MD Earns UVA Master's in Clinical Research

Dr. Sook Hoang graduated with her Master's in Clinical Research during Spring 2024 commencement, following 6 years of study with UVA's Department of Public Health Sciences.



UVA Earns 3-Star Rating in the VQI Participation Awards

UVA received 3/3 Stars from the Vascular Quality Initiative Participation Awards which emphasizes the importance of Long-Term Follow Up, Regional Meeting Attendance, Quality Improvement Projects, and Registry Subscriptions. The highest weighted category for this award is the Long Term Follow-Up score, for which UVA achieved all available points with an amazing 92%! This is due to the hours of chart auditing and dedication by Mary Baldwin and the great efforts of Cindy Kennedy and others to schedule and provide great patient follow up.

2024 PROMOTIONS & ADVANCEMENTS

Congratulations to our newly promoted faculty members! This achievement is a testament to their dedication, hard work, and exceptional contributions to our academic community. We look forward to celebrating their continued success!

Promoted to Professor



James Gangemi, MD
Professor
Cardiothoracic
Surgery

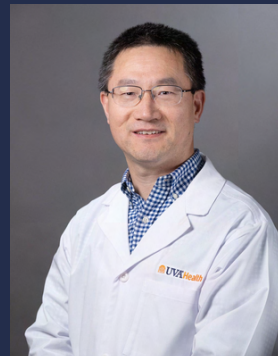


Beth Turrentine, PhD
Professor
Surgical Sciences



Shayna Showalter, MD
Professor
Surgical Oncology

Awarded Tenure



Chuanxi Cai, PhD
Associate Professor
Surgical Sciences

Promoted to Associate Professor



Sook Hoang, MD
Associate Professor
General Surgery



Molly Flannagan, MD
Associate Professor
General Surgery

CELEBRATING A YEAR OF EXCELLENCE

AWARDS DAY '24



R. SCOTT JONES AWARD

Anirudha Chandrabhatla, MD

This award, established in 2002, is presented in honor of our former chair of the Department of Surgery, Dr. R. Scott Jones. We present this award each year to a graduating medical student in recognition of his/her academic excellence in the surgical disciplines and demonstrated humanity in patient care.

INTERN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Andrew "Chase" Phillips, MD

This award was originally established in 1996 by colleagues and friends to honor the memory of surgery intern, Dr. William (Bill) Dion, following a tragic automobile accident. On remembering him, the Department of Surgery wishes to continue to honor an outstanding intern, as determined by the senior surgical residents at UVA.



CURTIS G. TRIBBLE AWARD

Kaelyn Cummins, MD

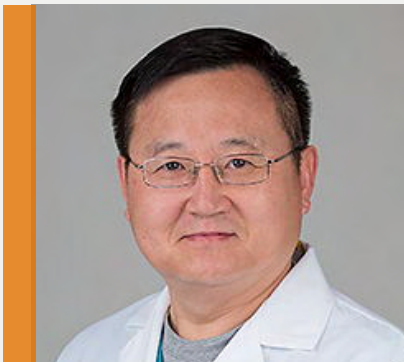
This award was established by the Chief Residents of 2006 in honor of Dr. Curt Tribble, a current faculty member and former Vice Chair of our department. This award recognizes residents demonstrating a significant commitment to medical student learning.



BRUCE SCHIRMER MASTER EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Michael Williams, MD

Established in 2023 by Dr. Bruce Schirmer, this award is presented by the Chief Resident class and recognizes a faculty member who has had a profound positive impact on their education throughout their residency.



FACULTY ABOVE & BEYOND CITIZENSHIP AWARD

Zequan Yang, MD

This award recognizes a faculty member who leads by example, strives for excellence, and demonstrates service and professionalism to the highest degree.



FELLOWSHIP EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

Matt Byler, MD

Selected by current Department of Surgery residents, and recognizing the Fellow who has contributed the most to the education of other training staff.



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Raymond Strobel, MD

This award was established in 1977. We present this award each year to a resident no more senior than a PGY-3 who typifies scholastic excellence and the application of scientific scholarship to patient care.



STAFF MEMBER ABOVE & BEYOND CITIZENSHIP AWARD

Robin Kelly

This award recognizes a staff member who leads by example, strives for excellence, and demonstrates service and professionalism to the highest degree.



SERVICE AWARDS

10 Years

Amanda Graves
Senior Certified Medical Coder Analyst

20 Years

Linda Viar
Medical Office Supervisor

30 Years

Shelia Arrington
Senior Certified Medical Coder Analyst

35 Years

Della Winstead
Administrative Office Specialist to Faculty

40 Years

Debbie McDaniel
Grants and Contracts Specialist

HUGH SKIP WARREN AWARD

William Kane, MD

In honor of Dr. Skip Warren, who died in 1975 in a tragic accident before completing his general surgery residency, this award is given annually to the Chief Resident of the Department of Surgery who, in the opinion of the Junior House Staff, has contributed most to their education.



JOHN HORSLEY MEMORIAL PRIZE COMPETITION

Ashley Bolte, PhD

“The Meningeal Transcriptional Response to Traumatic Brain Injury and Aging”

This prize was established in 1925 by the late Dr. J. Shelton Horsely, in memory of his father, Mr. John Horsely. The competition is offered biennially to alumni of the UVA School of Medicine, as well as current and former members of the house staff of the UVA Health System.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM



Cullen Carter, MD **UVA Surgery, Division of General Surgery**

Cullen Carter, MD joined the General Surgery team in May. He was a UVA medical student, and then completed residency at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, followed by a Minimally Invasive and Bariatric Surgery fellowship at Wake Forest. He was on the faculty at Boston University/Boston Medical Center for 7 years, where he served as the surgery clerkship director and was awarded several teaching awards from the medical students and surgical residents. For the last year, he has been on staff at Augusta Health. His clinical interests are in bariatric surgery, foregut surgery, as well as general surgery, with a strong interest in abdominal wall reconstruction. His academic interests focus on surgical education as well as innovation.



Jared Beller, MD **UVA Surgery, Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery**

Dr. Jared Beller joined the UVA Cardiac Surgery team in January 2024. Dr. Beller earned his medical degree from New York University and then moved to Charlottesville in 2015 to complete his cardiothoracic surgery training. Following his formal surgical training at UVA, he completed an advanced fellowship in adult congenital cardiac surgery at the Royal Brompton Hospital in London, England. In addition to treating acquired heart disease, Dr. Beller will be focused on expanding the adult congenital surgical practice at UVA and providing care for this complex patient population.



Thomas Shin, MD, PhD **UVA Surgery, Division of General Surgery**

We are delighted to welcome Thomas Shin, MD, PhD, to our General Surgery team. As a surgeon-scientist, Dr. Shin is particularly interested in translational research exploring how bariatric surgery induces immunometabolic changes in different cancer microenvironments. His clinical interests beyond metabolic/bariatric surgery and endoscopy include application of artificial intelligence and large language models in surgical education and quality improvement. Dr. Shin completed his undergraduate education in Economics and Japanese at Dartmouth College 2008. He then earned his MD and PhD in Molecular and Translation Medicine from Boston University in 2018. Following that, he completed his General Surgery Residency at the Cleveland Clinic in 2023 and his Advanced Minimally Invasive and Bariatric Surgery Fellowship at Brigham and Women's Hospital in 2024.



Stephanie Silpe, MD

UVA Surgery, Division of Transplant Surgery

We are pleased to announce that Stephanie Silpe, MD joined our transplant surgery team on September 19, 2024. Dr. Silpe graduated from the University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine in 2017 and completed her residency at Orlando Health in 2022. She then went on to complete an abdominal transplant fellowship at Baylor University Medical Center, graduating in June of 2024. Her clinical interests include robotic transplant, as well as normothermic regional perfusion use in donation after circulatory death, a novel technique that helps preserve organs for transplant.

Dr. Silpe is moving to Charlottesville with her husband, Shane, two sons, Carter and Cooper, and two goldendoodles. They love exploring new places on the weekends, and they are excited to start exploring Charlottesville!



Matt Noorbakhsh, MD

UVA Surgery, Division of General Surgery

We are excited to welcome Dr. Matthew Noorbakhsh to UVA Surgery! Prior to joining UVA, Dr. Noorbakhsh spent 10 years at Allegheny Health Network and most recently served as medical director of the Trauma Surgical Intensive Care Unit and associate trauma medical director at Allegheny General Hospital. He was also associate program director of the AHN General Surgery Residency Program. Dr. Noorbakhsh received his medical degree from Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, Virginia, and went on to complete his general surgery residency there as well. He also completed a Trauma/Critical Care Fellowship at the University of Maryland R. Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center in Baltimore. Dr. Noorbakhsh is certified by the American Board of Surgery, with added certification in Surgical Critical Care. He is also a fellow of the American College of Surgeons.



Samantha Ruff, MD

UVA Surgery, Division of Surgical Oncology

We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Samantha Ruff to the UVA Department of Surgery (Surgical Oncology Division) beginning in September 2024. Dr. Ruff obtained her undergraduate degree with honors from Johns Hopkins University. She earned her medical degree as part of the inaugural class at the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra University. After graduation, she completed a general surgery residency at Northwell Health where she was inducted into the Alpha Omega Honor Society and awarded the Intern of the Year Award, Excellence in Surgical Oncology Award, and Senior Resident Award for Professionalism. During residency, she spent two years at the National Institutes of Health developing pre-clinical models that utilized resected, tumor-bearing tissue from the operating room to investigate the in-situ tumor, microenvironment, and immune ecosystem. While at the NIH, she was awarded a Clinical Excellence Award and served as the Administrative Chief Research Fellow. Most recently, she worked at Ohio State University, completing her fellowship in both complex general surgical oncology and hepatopancreatobiliary (HPB) surgery. Throughout fellowship, she has continued her research efforts to define the underlying genetic and molecular landscape of different metastatic sites in colorectal cancer. As a surgical oncologist, she is committed to providing the highest level of innovative oncologic care, teaching trainees, and establishing herself as a surgeon-scientist through basic science and translational work.

Adanna Akujuo, MD

Surgical Director of the UVA Health Structural Heart Program

We are pleased to announce that Adanna Akujuo, MD will be joining UVA Health as Professor of Surgery and the Surgical Director of the UVA Health Structural Heart Program. She also will be the Vice Chair for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the Department of Surgery. Dr. Akujuo is a Board Certified adult cardiothoracic surgeon with expertise in minimally invasive valvular surgery and complex mitral valve repair.



She has performed over 1000 surgical valvular procedures, 650 mitral procedures, 200 minimally invasive valvular procedures and 400 structural heart procedures. She was a co-creator of the university-based structural heart program at Albany Medical Center. Dr. Akujuo was one of the earliest performers and publishers of trans-catheter mitral valve in native valve procedures and simultaneous transcatheter aortic and mitral valve procedures. Dr. Akujuo has lectured nationally on mitral valvular disease and has been an invited moderator at several national and international meetings including the AATS Mitral Conclave, AATS national meeting, American Heart Association Scientific Sessions, APACVS, and STSA national meeting. She has multiple industry certifications in structural heart procedures. Dr. Akujuo was the first female cardiothoracic surgeon employed by Albany Medical Center. She has a strong passion for education and mentorship and served as Associate Program Director of the Cardiothoracic Surgery Fellowship. She was the creator and Director of the Thoracic Surgery surgical simulation and training and served as a mentor for residents and medical students, receiving the Albany Medical Center Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award, as well as the Albany Medical Center Urban Student Association's Impact Award. She serves as faculty for the Society of Thoracic Surgeons Boot Camp which helps accelerate training for cardiothoracic surgery fellows. Dr. Akujuo also serves on the board and is the Vice Chair of the board of directors and immediate former Medical Director of Missions for the VOOM Foundation, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to assist populations in distress and build heart surgery programs in societies without access to cardiac care. She was the President of the Capital District American Heart Association (2018-2020) working on initiatives to advance women's heart health and decrease disparities in healthcare in the community. Dr. Akujuo completed her general surgery residency at Saint Vincent's Medical Center in New York City and underwent her fellowship training at Albert Einstein College of Medicine at Montefiore. She then began her early career at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, where she honed her skills in complex mitral valve repair undergoing advanced fellowship training in complex mitral valve surgery under pioneer Dr. David Adams.



Michael Watson, MD

UVA Community Health

Michael Watson, M.D. is a colon and rectal surgeon joining the UVA Community Health Team in the fall of 2024. Dr. Watson was born in Pennsylvania and grew up in southern Delaware. He attended the University of Pittsburgh where he studied bioengineering/chemistry and graduated summa cum laude. Dr. Watson attended the University of Virginia School of Medicine where he was a member of Alpha Omega Alpha medical honor society. He completed a general surgery residency at Carolinas Medical Center (Atrium Health) in Charlotte, North Carolina. During his surgical residency, he served as Chief Resident and completed an additional one-year research fellowship focusing on surgical oncology and surgical education.

Kim de la Cruz, MD

Co-Director of UVA Health Aortic Disease Program

We are pleased to announce that Kim de la Cruz, MD will be joining UVA Health as Associate Professor of Surgery and the Co-Director of the UVA Health Aortic Disease Program. Dr. de la Cruz will lead our Aortic Disease Program in partnership with Behzad Farivar, MD from Vascular Surgery. Together, they will continue to expand the multi-disciplinary clinical, research, and educational programs focused on complex aortic disease.



Dr. de la Cruz comes to UVA Health from Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) where he served as Section Chief of Aortic Surgery with the Division of Cardiac Surgery. Dr. de la Cruz also held the title of Co-Director of the Aortic Disease Center at Brigham and Women's Heart and Vascular Center. As a member of the Research Oversight Committee of the Department of Surgery and the Center for Surgery and Public Health at the Brigham and Women's Hospital, Dr. de la Cruz was a strong proponent of research and innovation dedicated to improvement in patient care and care utilization. As an early career excellence in patient care awardee at Baylor College of Medicine, Dr. de la Cruz showed excellence in the practice of cardiac surgery. He was part of the team that published a record 3,309 open thoracoabdominal aortic aneurysm repairs, the most in the world. Performing close to 500 of those cases in a 10-year period, Dr. de la Cruz is one of a handful of dedicated surgeons who can treat the aortic organ from root to bifurcation both open and endovascular. In addition, he was recognized as one of the top 10 Konect implanters in the country, celebrating him as one of the busiest aortic root surgeons among those who practice cardiac surgery. Prior to the role at Baylor College of Medicine, Dr. de la Cruz accepted a leadership role at Methodist Healthcare System/HCA San Antonio Division and was instrumental in the growth of the TAVR Program which performed their 2000th case in 2022. Similarly, Dr. de la Cruz was instrumental in the success of BWH's heart valve program, participating in more than 200 TAVR procedures over the course of two years. Dr. de la Cruz completed his general surgery residency at the Brooklyn Hospital Center in New York and went on to the Texas Heart Institute/Baylor College of Medicine to complete a cardiothoracic surgery residency and an aortic surgery fellowship. Dr. de la Cruz is an outstanding addition to our Heart and Vascular team and UVA Department of Surgery, bringing his leadership experience to help carry forth our mission of transforming health and inspiring hope for all Virginians and beyond. Please join us in welcoming Dr. de la Cruz to our Department of Surgery and UVA Health!

Dr. Watson recently completed a colon and rectal surgery fellowship at Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans, Louisiana. Dr. Watson is certified by the American Board of Surgery and is a member of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons. He is interested in and treats all aspects of colon and rectal diseases, including colon and rectal cancer, diverticulitis, inflammatory bowel disease, anorectal disorders, and lower GI endoscopy. His research interests include improving postoperative care such as enhanced recovery protocols, social determinants of health in rectal cancer treatment, and evaluating surgical dexterity in training programs. He brings experience with minimally invasive surgery including surgical robotics to provide comprehensive care to benefit the community with specialty surgical care close to home. He is excited to join and become a part of the Manassas community. Outside of the hospital, Dr. Watson enjoys spending time with his wife, Benita, and their fur babies (one dog and two cats). His nonclinical interests include hiking, distance running, traveling, amateur woodworking, and spending time with his family.



Ian Greenwalt, MD

UVA Community Health

Ian T. Greenwalt, MD, is a board-certified breast surgeon and Fellow of the American College of Surgeons (FACS). A graduate of Boston College, Dr. Greenwalt received his medical degree from Drexel University College of Medicine. He completed his general surgery residency at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center/Case Western Reserve University. Dr. Greenwalt then completed a fellowship in breast surgical oncology at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital and Medstar Washington Hospital Center.

Dr. Greenwalt specializes in management of both malignant and benign breast disease as well as caring for patients at high risk for breast cancer. Through the combination of minimally invasive surgical techniques and advanced oncoplastic skills, he strives to provide his patients with high-quality, comprehensive, multidisciplinary care.

Dr. Greenwalt has published papers and book chapters focusing on safety and efficacy of outpatient mastectomy with reconstruction, disparities in breast cancer care, and the development of personalized breast cancer care. His research has also focused on improving post-operative pain management through multi-modality pain control, lymphedema reduction and employing nerve-sparing operative techniques.

Dr. Greenwalt is committed to a multidisciplinary, patient-centered approach to treating breast disease. He strongly believes in the importance of helping his patients understand their disease processes in order to make thoughtful, informed decisions in their care. He is an active member of the American College of Surgeons, the American Society of Breast Surgeons, and the Society of Surgical Oncology.



Simon H. Telian, MD, FACS

UVA Prince William/Haymarket Hospitals

Simon H. Telian, MD, FACS is a fellowship-trained surgical oncologist specializing in the treatment of a broad range of cancers including breast, melanoma, endocrine and gastrointestinal malignancies. He received his undergraduate degree at the University of California, San Diego and his medical degree from Boston University School of Medicine. After completing his general surgery training at Tripler Army Medical Center, Dr. Telian served on active duty overseas in Germany, with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. He subsequently attended the John Wayne Cancer Institute in Santa Monica, California for his surgical oncology fellowship. He spent time at William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas practicing surgical oncology and training residents before moving to Womack Army Medical Center at Fort Liberty in North Carolina. There, he served as Chief of Surgical Oncology and started a multidisciplinary surgical oncology practice to meet the needs of the community. After serving a distinguished 26 years on active duty in the US Army, Dr. Telian joined the UVA team to help expand surgical oncology services to our community health partnership programs in Northern Virginia. He is dedicated to providing comprehensive, compassionate, multidisciplinary cancer care to his patients and their families.



Neel Sharma, MD

UVA Community Health-Culpeper Medical Center

Dr. Neel Sharma earned his undergraduate degree in Integrated Life Sciences from Kent State University. He completed Medical School at Northeast Ohio Medical University, followed by General Surgery Residency at West Virginia University, and Vascular Surgery Fellowship at Case Western University Hospital. He has a strong research background with a particular focus on regenerative medicine. We look forward to welcoming him to the UVA Surgery team!



Autumn Meadows

Senior Administrative Assistant

We are pleased to announce that Autumn Meadows joined the UVA Department of Surgery on July 15, 2024 as a Senior Administrative Assistant. Autumn started her career at UVA Medical Center with Patient Access and quickly moved to Specialist Administrator for Special Projects. Prior to coming to UVA, she spent 23 years in management with CW Investments, LLC. Autumn was recently nominated for the BEE Award and has an associate's degree in business management.

Autumn is married to her best friend and soul mate of 25 years; she is the proud mom of one child, who received his Bachelor of Science Degree from UVA in 2021 and recently graduated from CU Boulder with his master's degree. Autumn enjoys walking and feeding her newfound fuzzy friend, Rocky the Raccoon. In her free time, Autumn loves Amazon shopping and planning her future trips to Colorado.



Kimberly Rogers

Pre Award Grant Administrator

Kimberly Rogers lives in Bumpass, Virginia with her many rescue dogs! She grew up in Richmond, Virginia and moved to the Charlottesville area in 2005. Her passions include dog rescue and distance running. She is almost always training for a marathon, half marathon, or ultra relay! She also enjoys hiking and taking day trips to the beautiful Virginia wineries. While her degrees are in Accounting, she prefers working in Grants Administration. She was first introduced to the grants world right out of college at VCU before working in Corporate America for about 15 years. She also worked at UVA previously as a Grants Administrator, doing pre and post award for Infectious Diseases. She is very happy to be back!

KUDOS TO ERIN HAGGARD



"[Erin has] done an excellent job in our grant submission and management."

Chuanxi Cai, PhD



"Erin has been instrumental in getting all of our research teams together."

Jianjie Ma, PhD



"Erin went above and beyond to help with our grant submissions. Her help and support was invaluable. Couldn't have done it without her."

Preeti Chhabra, PhD



"I find [Erin] to be always helpful and efficient in managing new staff hires, grant preparation, and contracts. She is taking on administrative management of our surgical oncology T32 grant this year, and I deeply appreciate that she was proactive in organizing a planning meeting in advance of our next deadline and had done her homework in advance, knowing much of what needs to be done. She has been very efficient and effective with managing new staff hires and contracts, and this enhances all that we do."

Craig Slingluff, MD





KUDOS TO MARY SIMS

"Mary, thank you for all that you did for our faculty recruitment in surgical oncology. The Zoom interviews all went great and the 4 in-person interviews all went great as well! All of the candidates appreciated all that you did to make their visit and interview experience wonderful. We are lucky to have you in the division!"

Todd Bauer, MD

KUDOS TO DR. BRUCE SCHIRMER

"I would like to recognize Dr. Schirmer, a member of your team who is also a valued member of an ACGME Review Committee... As a not-for-profit organization, the ACGME relies heavily on the expertise of nationally renowned physician leaders who volunteer a significant amount of both time and energy in this peer review effort. These experts' insights and judgment are the basis for important recommendations and decisions affecting more than 150,000 residents and fellows who serve millions of patients each year... The workload for your faculty members in responding to this extraordinary three-year national [Covid-19] crisis, coupled with the challenges associated with the recovery was matched by their resolve and demonstrated by the time and expertise they dedicated to support the work of the ACGME in addition to their responsibilities at home. For that, all of us involved in GME across the nation are eternally grateful."

Thomas J. Nasca, MD

MACP President and Chief Executive Officer ACGME



EVENTS





TRAUMA SURVIVORS NETWORK ANNUAL 5K RACE TO REBUILD

The UVA Health Trauma Team recently supported and participated in the Trauma Survivors Network (TSN)'s Annual 5K Race to Rebuild to honor trauma survivors and the challenges they face every day. Gabriele Ford, FNP-C, AG-ACNP-BC, Trauma Surgery Service, organized the event to bring together trauma survivors and families to share information about the recovery process. (Pictured from left: Val Quick, Trauma Program Manager and Gabby Ford)

VASCULAR ANNUAL MEETING 2024

Vascular Surgery made a great showing at the Society for Vascular Surgery's VAM24 Conference. The event featured a plenary by Drs. Buchanan and Weaver and session talks with Drs. Farivar and Clouse. In addition, Bernie Ammons & Robbin Shiflett brought home a repeat SVN jeopardy title. Dr. Megan Tracci also served as the advocacy council chair overseeing many policy, legal, and financial presentations!



UVA DINNER AT THE ACADEMIC SURGICAL CONGRESS

The 19th annual Academic Surgical Congress was held this February in Washington DC. Day one concluded with a dinner with more than two dozen UVA Surgery team members! It was a wonderful time – thank you to all who attended!

YAZAN AL-ADWAN, MD INVITED TO PRESENT AT SATA REGIONAL MEETING

Transplant surgeon Yazan Al-Adwan, MD was recently invited to present at the Society for the Advancement of Transplant Anesthesia regional meeting, held in Charlottesville on February 24th. Dr. Al-Adwan acted as a surgical liaison, presenting on Normothermic Ex Vivo and In Vivo Perfusion.



ANNUAL INTERN PICNIC

We started off the year on a high note with our annual intern picnic. It was wonderful meeting all of our new residents, and we look forward to welcoming you to the UVA Surgery fam!



UVA SURGERY RESIDENTS HONOR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY WITH FOOD DRIVE

Earlier this year, our amazing residents celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day by organizing a local food drive. The items collected were donated to Charlottesville's Emergency Food Network, an organization which aims to provide a 3-day supply of meals to individuals and families in need within our community.



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR HEART & LUNG TRANSPLANTATION 44TH ANNUAL MEETING

The 44th Annual Meeting of the ISHLT was held from April 10-13 in Prague, Czech Republic. Pictured left is resident Alex Wisniewski, MD delivering a talk on early cardiac DCD use in the adult congenital heart disease population.

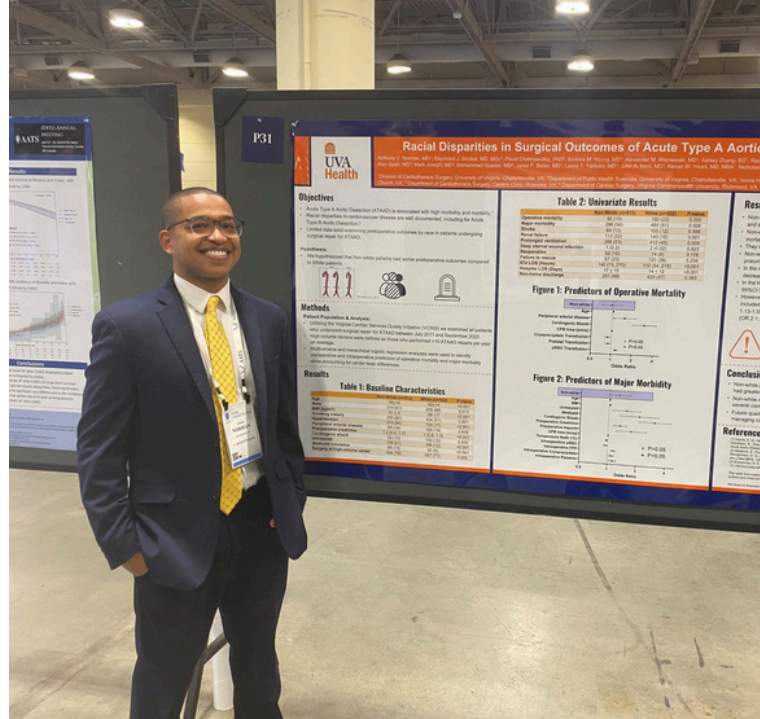


SOCIETY OF THORACIC SURGEONS ANNUAL MEETING

UVA made a very impressive showing at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, which took place from January 27-29 in San Antonio, Texas. A sampling of UVA speakers are included below:

- Ourania Preventza, MD presented on the future of endovascular arch and bentall aortic surgery, and novel devices providing options for patients with different aortic conditions.
- Resident Alexander Wisniewski, MD presented on ECMO as a bridge to lung transplant analyzing the ELSO registry, improving utilization over time with better survival after transplant.
- Resident Adishesh Narahari, MD, PhD presented on advanced fellowships following training.
- Resident Raymond Strobel, MD presented on OR extubation vs. fast track extubation.

Matthew Weber, Skylar Rogers, Anthony Norman, and Sean Noona also presented, and several department members received awards. Congratulations to all for such a successful conference!







CITY OF PROMISE CVILLE

On May 8th, 12 sixth-grade students with City of Promise visited UVA Medical Center for a day of hands-on learning and career exploration. City of Promise is a Charlottesville organization committed to eliminating generational poverty through coaching, mentoring, tutoring, and goal-setting for underserved children in the community. City of Promise supports students by connecting them to extracurricular activities and complementary resources.



“Diversity in all its forms is the path to greatness.”

James D. Wilson

As part of the organization’s annual “Tour of the Town” program, students visit various local institutions to learn about potential career options for the future. The event was hosted by the Housestaff Council for Diversity and Inclusion (HCDI), which is currently led by Surgery residents Chioma Moneme and Anthony Norman. Our residents collaborated with faculty from the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee to

organize the event and give the students a broad exposure to health careers. Volunteers from the Departments of Surgery, Anesthesiology, and Family Medicine, as well as Perioperative Services, all contributed to the day’s success.

The first part of the day was spent in the Simulation Center where the students got to interact with the OR simulation mannikin and learn how to prepare patients

for surgery. They got hands-on practice intubating and using ultrasound machines to identify organs. The second part of the day was spent touring the perioperative surgical home, interacting with the multi-disciplinary OR family, learning about the paths to different careers in Periop, and practicing “gowning up” for sterile procedures. They rounded out the day with a visit to an outpatient clinic.

Pictured here are students learning how to intubate, scrubbing in for surgery, and learning about echocardiography.

Note: All photos used with permission.



DONATE LIFE MONTH

April is Donate Life Month, and to kick off the event, UVA Health's transplant team created a pinwheel garden outside of the West Complex. This colorful display of pinwheels represents the many lives touched by organ donation and transplantation. This symbolic garden is a space for community to come together to honor those who made the compassionate decision to give the

gift of life and celebrate those who have received a second chance. Each pinwheel has four sails supported by one stem, symbolizing the power one person has to save lives as an organ, eye, tissue, and living donor. Pinwheels remind us that we all have the potential to capture and pass on life, comfort, and hope to others by registering as an organ donor.









ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS DAY

We celebrated Administrative Professionals Day on April 24th – this year's celebration was complete with lunch, prizes, games, and ice cream! Our administrative staff members play a crucial role in keeping our clinical practice running smoothly, and we could not accomplish our mission without them. On behalf of the UVA Department of Surgery, thank you for everything you do!



APPS AIMEE STRONG AND KATHLEEN HADEN INVITED TO PRESENT AT THE 2024 VCNP ANNUAL MEETING

Two of our Advanced Practice Providers were invited to speak on January 27, 2024 at the Annual Piedmont Region Virginia Council of Nurse Practitioners Pharmfest and Beyond Conference. As APPs, Aimee and Kathleen run autonomous screening clinics at UVA for the Department of Surgery within the Emily Couric Cancer Center. Their presentation topics are included below.

- Aimee Strong, DNP, RN, AGACNP-BC: “Lung Cancer Screening in 2023 and Beyond”
- Kathleen Haden, MSN, RN ANP-C: “High Risk for Pancreatic Cancer; Who and How do we screen?”





MULLER-JONES-KRON SURGICAL SOCIETY ALUMNI SPEAKER SERIES

The Muller-Jones-Kron Surgical Society invites surgical residents to join alumni on a series of Zoom calls throughout the year. Below is the schedule for this year's series. Please let us know if you're interested in participating by emailing Katie Marsh at kmm9th@uvahealth.org.

- Wednesday, November 13, 2024 | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM ET
- Wednesday, March 12, 2025 | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM ET
- Wednesday, April 9, 2025 | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM ET

Thank you to the alumni who participated in last year's series, including: Jake Gillen, Bernadette Goudreau, Wilkes Hubbard, Michael Ishitani, Forrest Johnston, Turner Lisle, Allison Martin, Timothy Newhook, Rishi Roy, Rhett Willis & Creighton Wright!

28TH MULLER-JONES-KRON SURGICAL SOCIETY MEETING: MARCH 21-22, 2025

SAVE THE DATE for the 28th Muller-Jones-Kron Surgical Society Meeting in Charlottesville, scheduled for March 21-22, 2025. More information, including blocked hotel rooms, is available on the website [here](#). Registration and event agenda will be available in early 2025.

EDUCATION

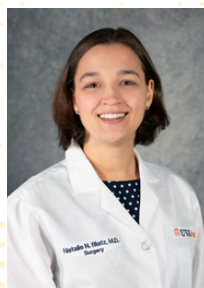


#MATCH2024

GENERAL SURGERY INTERNS

We are pleased to welcome six categorical residents, one I-6 resident, and six preliminary track residents to the UVA Surgery family! Special thanks to our education team, including Kristen Dudley, Breanna Rose, Heather Trainum, and Stephanie Kidd for all their hard work facilitating the match process!

CATEGORICAL TRACK



**Natalie
Blatz, MD**
University of
Virginia



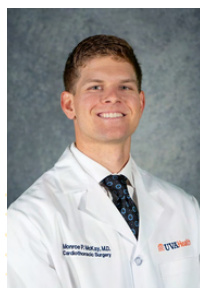
**Lauren
Carroll, MD**
Virginia
Commonwealth
University



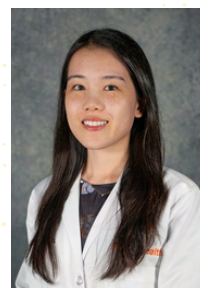
**Robert
Devich, MD**
Pennsylvania
State University



**Claire
Foley, MD**
Eastern Virginia
Medical School



**Monroe
McKay, MD**
University of
Arkansas
(I-6)



**Janet
Yan, MD**
University of
Virginia



**Hemasree
Yeluru, MD**
Eastern Virginia
Medical School

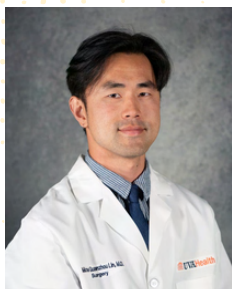
PRELIMINARY TRACK



**Janet
Arras, MD**
University of
Virginia



**Dallas
Hampton, MD**
Eastern Virginia
Medical School



**Michael
Lin, MD**
University of
Virginia



**Lydia
Lukowski, MD**
Eastern Virginia
Medical School



**Christian
Renwick, MD**
University of Virginia

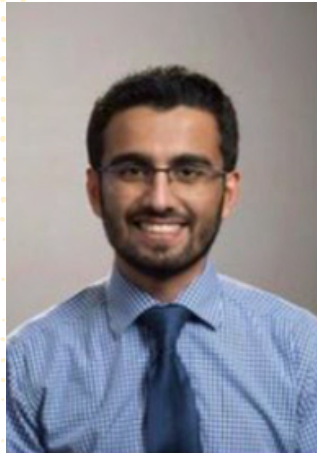


**Chanel
Rutledge, MD**
Ross University

2025-2026 FELLOWSHIPS

We are also excited to announce our 2025-2026 match results for the Traditional Thoracic and Vascular Fellowships. These stellar individuals will join UVA Surgery in 2025.

TRADITIONAL THORACIC FELLOW



Bakhtiar Chaudry, MD
University of Virginia

VASCULAR SURGERY FELLOWS



Christopher Levy, MD
University of South Carolina - Columbia



Christina Weitzel, MD
Baylor University

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS



RESIDENT MATTHEW WEBER, MD WINS PRESIDENTIAL ABSTRACT RECOGNITION AWARD AT ISHLT 2024

Congratulations to resident Matthew Weber, MD who recently won the Presidential Abstract Recognition Award at the International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation (ISHLT) Annual Meeting in April 2024. Fantastic work!



ABSTRACT BY RESIDENT MARKIE FLEMING II, MD SELECTED FOR PODIUM PRESENTATION AT THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF METABOLIC AND BARIATRIC SURGERY ANNUAL MEETING

Congratulations to Dr. Markie Fleming II, who was selected to present his abstract at the next American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS) Annual Meeting during the Presidential Grand Rounds. His research examines 10-year outcomes following laparoscopic adjustable gastric band insertion in adolescents, using data from the Teen-LABS study. In addition, an accompanying manuscript will be submitted to Surgery for Obesity and Related Diseases (SOARD).



ALEX WISNIEWSKI, MD SELECTED FOR MJKSS TRAVEL AWARD

Congratulations to Alex Wisniewski, MD, who received the Muller-Jones-Kron Surgical Society travel award for the International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation annual meeting in Prague.



RESIDENT ERIK SCOTT, MD INDUCTED INTO AOA

Congratulations to Dr. Erik Scott, who was recently inducted into the prestigious medical honor society, Alpha Omega Alpha.



RESIDENT COURTNEY LATTIMORE, MD RECEIVES ARNOLD P. GOLD HUMANISM AND EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

Congratulations to Courtney Lattimore who was once again lauded for her compassionate care and teaching as identified by medical students. She has received one of 6 Humanism and Excellence in Teaching Awards bestowed by the UVA Chapter of the Arnold P. Gold Humanism Foundation.

Resident Rick Vavolizza, MD, Awarded the 2024 American College of Surgeons Resident Award



Rick Vavolizza, MD, has been awarded the 2024 American College of Surgeons Resident Award for Exemplary Teaching. This prestigious accolade is a testament to Dr. Vavolizza's lifelong dedication to education and his exceptional contributions to teaching.

Dr. Vavolizza's commitment to education has been evident from an early age. Even during high school, he took on the role of tutor, demonstrating an early passion for helping others learn and succeed. Throughout his career at the University of Virginia, he has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to educational excellence. He has been honored with virtually every teaching award offered at UVA, including the distinguished James Kindred Award and an All-University Teaching Award, as well as numerous other accolades from both his department and the institution at large.

This national recognition by the American College of Surgeons is a significant achievement and reflects Dr. Vavolizza's profound impact on his students and the field of surgical education. It highlights his ability to inspire, mentor, and educate the next generation of surgeons, solidifying his reputation as an exceptional educator and mentor.

Resident Rick Vavolizza, MD Receives Two 1st Place ACS Research Awards

Congratulations to Dr. Rick Vavolizza, who received two 1st-place research awards from the American College of Surgeons Virginia Chapter. He was selected for the Commission on Cancer Award (best cancer-related manuscript), as well as the Bigger-Lehman Award (best overall research manuscript).



RESIDENT ADI NARAHARI, MD WINS 2ND PLACE ACS RESEARCH AWARD

Dr. Adi Narahari won the 2nd place Bigger-Lehman award for his paper, "Postdoctoral National Institutes of Health F32 Grants: Broken Pipeline in the Development of Surgeon-Scientist" from the American College of Surgeons Virginia Chapter.

ADI NARAHARI, MD SELECTED FOR MJKSS TRAVEL AWARD

Congratulations to Adi Narahari, MD, who received the Muller-Jones-Kron Surgical Society travel award for the Society of Thoracic Surgeons meeting in the amount of \$1,000.



MINGYANG MA SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDS PHD DISSERTATION

Congratulations to Mingyang Ma, a graduate student in Dr. Kenneth Brayman's lab, for successfully defending his dissertation titled, "Innovative Strategies for Type 1 Diabetes Treatment" and earning his PhD. He graduated alongside his wife this spring!



DR. YITAO HUANG SELECTED TO PRESENT AT 2024 VASCULAR RESEARCH INITIATIVES CONFERENCE (VRIC)

Congratulations to Dr. Yitao Huang in Lian-Wang Guo's lab, who was selected to give an oral presentation at the 2024 Vascular Research Initiatives Conference (VRIC) on May 15th in Chicago. His talk on the application of drug-nanoformulations to prevent bypass vein graft failure sparked considerable interest among the audience.

Heather Trainum Wins 2024 UVA Clerkship Coordinator Award

Congratulations to Heather Trainum who was recently recognized with the 2024 UVA Clerkship Coordinator of the Year Award. This award, given to just one individual in the School of Medicine, recognizes a Clerkship Coordinator who provides outstanding service to medical students as they rotate through departments across the hospital.





RESIDENTS COURTNEY LATTIMORE, MD AND CHIOMA MONEME, MD NOMINATED FOR WOMEN WHO INSPIRE INCLUSION AWARDS BY UVA HEALTH MEDICAL CENTER

Congratulations to Drs. Lattimore and Moneme for their nominations as Women Who Inspire Inclusion in healthcare in honor of Women's History Month in March. Both of them demonstrate an outstanding commitment to making UVA an equitable space for all people. Thank you for all you do!



Dr. Lattimore received a nomination for her continual pursuit of equitable patient care: "From fostering an inclusive learning environment for trainees and our previous House Staff Council President to advocating for equitable patient care, Dr. Lattimore leads by example. She actively seeks out opportunities to amplify underrepresented voices in medicine and ensure that all patients receive the highest standard of care, regardless of background."

Dr. Moneme, who serves as the GME House Staff Council for Diversity and Inclusion Co-President was nominated for her advocacy for diversity in medicine: "Chioma is a fierce advocate for equity issues, both for women and individuals historically underrepresented in Medicine. More importantly, Chioma is a mentor and a recognized leader possessed of high moral values and integrity, who, in all of her activities and interactions, seeks to identify structural barriers that contribute to inequity and works to dismantle those."



RESIDENT RAY STROBEL, MD WINS C. WALTON LILLEHEI RESIDENT FORUM

Congratulations are in order for Dr. Ray Strobel, who won the 2024 C. Walton Lillehei Resident Forum following a phenomenal talk regarding mitigating primary graft dysfunction in lung transplant. This is the most prestigious research award for trainees in cardiothoracic surgery. Fantastic work!

RAY STROBEL, MD SELECTED AS TRSA TREASURER & DEPUTY STATISTICAL EDITOR OF JTCVS

Dr. Ray Strobel was selected for numerous leadership roles this year, including Treasurer for the Thoracic Surgery Residents Association (TRSA) and Deputy Statistical Editor of the Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery (JTCVS).

RAY STROBEL, MD CO-AUTHORS AWARD WINNING ABSTRACT

Dr. Ray Strobel was the 2nd author of an abstract that won the Presidential Recognition Award at the 2024 AATS meeting. Congratulations!



GRADUATION

General Surgery Residency Graduates



Mark
Fleming II, MD



Nathan
Haywood, MD



William
Kane, MD



Kevin
Lynch, MD



Max
Meneveau, MD



Zeyad
Sahli, MD

TCV Surgery Residency Graduates



William
Chancellor, MD



Jolian
Dahl, MD



Kimberly
Shemanski, MD

Abdominal Transplant Fellowship Graduate



Renana
Yemini, MD



The Rotunda Graduation Dinner was held on Saturday, June 16, 2024.



[View all graduation photos here.](#)



General Surgery Graduates on the Helipad!



TCV Graduates in the OR Hallway!

2024 CHIEF FELLOWSHIP MATCHES

Bright futures ahead for this year's Chief Resident class. They will be heading onto fellowships in Vascular Surgery, Cardiothoracic Surgery, Breast Surgical Oncology, and Pediatric Surgery following graduation. Congratulations!!!



Vina Chhaya, MD
Vascular Surgery Fellowship
University of Maryland



Andrew Hawkins, MD
Cardiothoracic Surgery
Fellowship
University of Virginia



Courtney Lattimore, MD
Breast Surgical Oncology
MD Anderson



Katie Marsh, MD
Pediatric Surgery Fellowship
University of Pittsburgh
Medical Center



Rick Vavolizza, MD
Breast Surgical Oncology
MD Anderson

UVA SURGERY RESIDENTS LEAD 6TH ANNUAL HCDI TRAINEE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION CONFERENCE

The UVA School of Medicine's House Staff Council for Diversity & Inclusion (HCDI) and the Office of Graduate Medical Education hosted the Sixth Annual Trainee Diversity and Inclusion Conference on April 13, 2024. Over 70 participants from UVA and other institutions attended.

This year, the conference focused on a pressing issue — housing insecurity and its impact on health outcomes. Aligning with April's National Fair Housing Month, the theme for the conference was Bridging Home and Health: Mobilizing Healthcare in the Fight Against Housing Insecurity. Attendees examined the housing issue from various perspectives: community, health system, and the infrastructural.

The keynote speaker for the conference was Calvin Johnson, PhD, deputy assistant secretary for research, evaluation, and monitoring at the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and commissioner of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Dr. Johnson serves as one of the principal advisors to the Department's leadership on research, demonstration, and evaluation activities. He oversees projects exploring the impact of housing on non-housing outcomes, such as economic self-sufficiency, health and wellness, and educational achievement.

In addition to the keynote, UVA Health led an important discussion about ensuring quality care for all individuals inside and outside the hospital. Speakers included Matthew Allen, MD, from the Homelessness Consult Service; Emily Johnson, BSW, an ambulatory social worker with expertise with the homeless population; and Amy Schmidt-Morris, MHA, who has spearheaded the medical center patient-lodging program.

The day's events also included an engaging community panel with representatives from IMPACT Cville, PATH Charlottesville, and Liveable Cville. They discussed the important role community partners play in fighting housing inequality.

"The goal of the conference was to explore how trainees, faculty, and staff can be attuned to the challenges of housing insecurity when caring for patients as well as for their colleagues and how those challenges impact clinical outcomes."

Chioma Monema, MD, MBA, Co-President of HCDI





23-24 Chief Resident Mark Fleming II, MD Receiving the Inaugural Award Named in his Honor.

Brooke Lehmann, JD, from the UVA Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy and founder of Capitolworks LLC., and Tom Okuda Fitzgerald, JD, executive director of Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, moderated a healthy advocacy framework and the past and present housing policy landscape.

Mark Fleming, II, MD, chief resident in the Department of Surgery and co-founder of HCDI, was also honored with the inaugural Mark A. Fleming, II, MD Award, which recognizes advocacy and advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Graduate Medical Education.

HCDI Presidents Chioma Moneme, MD, MBA, and Anthony Norman, MD are grateful for

everyone who supported the event including their fellow trainees, incoming interns; Allan Tsung, MD, chair of the Department of Surgery; Tracy Downs, MD, chief diversity and community engagement officer; Monica Lawrence, MD, UVA designated institutional official (DIO); and Brad Kesser, MD, associate DIO.

The conference would not have been possible without the hard work and support of the HCDI executive board, faculty advisors, and medical student volunteers. A special thank you is also extended to the Office of Graduate Medical Education, which plays an integral part in the conference's success each year.

Photos by Tom Daly.





Now & Then

UVA SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Circa 2020



Circa 1920



UVA's iconic School of Medicine building was completed in 1929. Images found in the UVA Health Sciences Library Archives.

CLINICAL

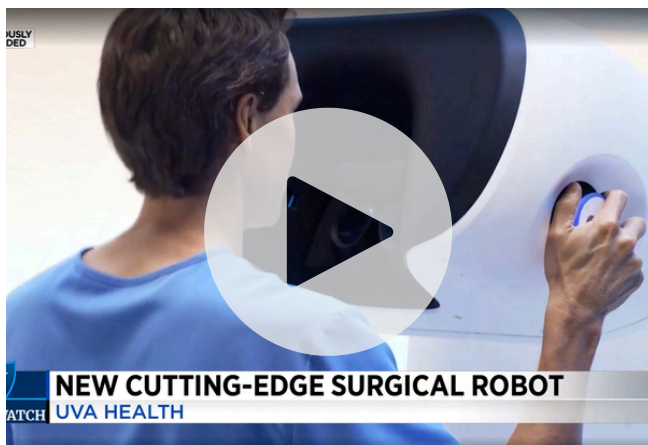


WHAT'S NEW IN ROBOTICS

DA VINCI 5 ROBOTIC SYSTEM

UVA Surgery recently acquired the newest surgical robotics system, the da Vinci X (DV5), placing UVA among the first in the nation to adopt this technology. It has been over a decade since the previous version of the robot (DV4) was introduced. The new system makes surgery easier and safer by offering greater control, consolidating necessary tools, and providing more information. Greater precision and less trauma to surrounding tissue can shorten recovery time and hospital stays for patients.

Surgical cases using the new system began the week of August 26th, 2024.



Dr. Chris Scott, Director of UVA's Surgical Robotics Program, was recently featured on CBS and WSLS News to speak about the new DV5 system.

ROBOTICS BOOTCAMP

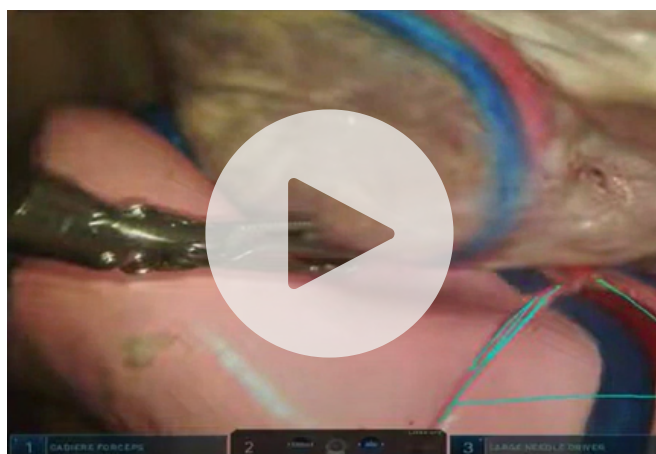
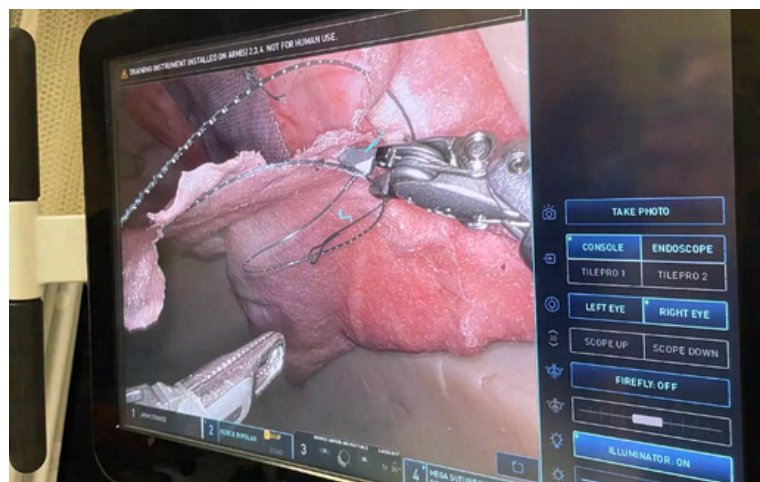
UVA Surgery's Robotics Bootcamp was held this year from July 15th to July 19th in the Education Resource Center. The event was organized in collaboration with Intuitive Surgical, as well as UVA Urology and OB-GYN.

This immersive course was designed to provide training in robotic-assisted surgery for residents at various levels of experience. The bootcamp focused on developing essential skills through hands-on practice with two full da Vinci Xi robotic consoles, providing residents the opportunity to learn and practice advanced techniques such as intracorporeal suturing, knot-tying, anastomosis, and dissection under the guidance of expert surgeons. Representatives from Intuitive Surgical were present to provide a comprehensive introduction to the basics of the da Vinci system for the incoming intern class, including hands-on training in docking the robot and bedside assisting, ensuring that interns gain a solid foundation in the fundamentals and are ready to start bedside assisting in the OR.

This year's bootcamp featured several notable expansions and improvements. In addition to a greater number of robotic consoles, the residents also had access to high fidelity simulations, including porcine models and state-of-the-art simulators using realistic tissue, offered through an educational grant from Intuitive Surgical (see video to the right).

The bootcamp also served as a platform for artificial intelligence research in collaboration with the UVA School of Engineering. Researchers from the UVA Link Lab and Dr. Homa Alemzadeh asked bootcamp participants to record video, audio, and kinematic data during the training sessions. The data collected will be used to analyze surgical performance, provide targeted feedback, and develop innovative solutions for robotic surgery training that integrate artificial intelligence and computer vision techniques.

Special thanks to Drs Byler, Yang, Hallowell, Carter, Tache, Tsung and Friel for volunteering to teach Masterclass sessions to our residents this year!



This video shows a KindHeart Inguinal Hernia tissue cassette being used with an Intuitive Surgical da Vinci Xi robot.





DR. PETE HALLOWELL COMPLETES 1000TH DA VINCI CASE!

Congratulations to Dr. Pete Hallowell for reaching the remarkable milestone of 1000 surgical cases using the DaVinci Robot! At the conclusion of the surgery, Dr. Hallowell was presented with an award from Intuitive Surgical.



CARDIAC SURGERY TEAM RECOGNIZED DURING UVA BASKETBALL HALFTIME SHOW

The outstanding care provided by our cardiac surgery team was recognized during halftime at the UVA vs UNC Basketball game on Saturday, February 24th. UVA Health leadership stood alongside one of our patients, who recently received emergency open heart surgery following a life-threatening aortic dissection. Her story was featured in an effort to raise awareness for heart disease during American Heart Month. Fantastic to see UVA Surgery in the spotlight!

RESEARCH





RESEARCH RESIDENT BOOT CAMP

EMPOWERING FUTURE SURGEON-SCIENTISTS

In an effort to equip residents in their research years with the necessary tools for success, the Department of Surgery organized a Research Resident Boot Camp, offering invaluable guidance, information, and networking connections for residents in their research years. This unique program, organized by Dr. Ileana Mauldin, Dr. Lily Cheng, Dr. Xinyu Zhou, and Michael Freeman, aims to provide residents with a head start in their research careers. This year's boot camp was held over three days,

from July 15 - July 17. The Resident Boot Camp had a jam-packed schedule, with each day featuring multiple sessions ranging from 30 to 60 minutes. The program utilized a variety of engaging formats, including seminar talks, panel discussions, and workshops. Distinguished speakers from the School of Medicine (SOM) leadership, esteemed surgeon-scientists, and accomplished basic researchers shared their expertise and insights.



Pictured Above: Resident Mackenzie Mayhew, MD, winner of the Graphical Abstract Competition

Drawing on the expertise of surgeons and scientists from the University of Virginia (UVA) and beyond, the program covered a wide range of topics including bioinformatics, mentoring, grants, CVs, presentations, abstract-writing, peer review, data mining, and more. These sessions were thoughtfully designed to provide residents with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in their research years.

One of the key highlights of the Boot Camp was its interactive nature. Residents were actively encouraged to participate, ask

questions, and engage in hands-on workshops. This dynamic approach allowed them to not only absorb information but also put their newfound knowledge into practice. By the end of the program, residents had built a virtual toolbox that will serve them well during and after their research years.

The program concluded with a graphical abstract competition. A graphical abstract in surgical research is a visual summary that encapsulates the key and important findings of a study or research paper. It serves as a powerful tool to quickly communicate the



purpose, results, and significance of the research, facilitating engagement, and increasing the visibility of the study among researchers and healthcare professionals. The residents worked individually to produce an aesthetically pleasing and informative image (infographic) that clearly communicated the research in question. A small group of UVA SOM leaders served as judges for this small, informal, and friendly competition. Resident Mackenzie Mayhew, MD was named the winner of the competition, while Maria Reyes-Matos was named a close runner-up.

The Resident Boot Camp is a testament to the University of Virginia Department of Surgery's commitment to fostering the growth and development of future medical researchers and surgeon-scientists. Through this program, residents are empowered to navigate the intricacies of the research world and armed with the necessary skills and connections to make a lasting impact in their chosen fields. Thank you to all who took part in organizing and attending this fantastic event! We look forward to its continued success in the future!



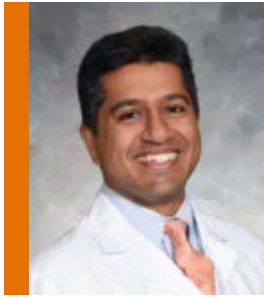


KIBBE-TSIHLIS LAB WINS UVA OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY FREEZER CHALLENGE

The UVA Office of Sustainability recently announced the Kibbe-Tsihlis Lab as the winner of the 2023 UVA Freezer Challenge. This challenge is a part of an international initiative designed to promote best care and maintenance practices for the management of cold storage units in laboratory spaces. Led by two nonprofits – My Green Lab and the International Institute for Sustainable Laboratories – the initiative encourages greater energy efficiency, sample storage safety, and cost savings.

Not only did the Kibbe-Tsihlis lab's collective actions during the Freezer Challenge save 47 kWh of energy per day, but this number also almost doubles any other lab's savings at UVA. From warming two ULT freezers from -80 °C to -70 °C to fully defrosting seven cold storage units, the entire Kibbe-Tsihlis team was invested in creating a high-performing yet sustainable research environment – proving that it's possible to run a sustainable lab without compromising the research.

GRANT RECIPIENTS



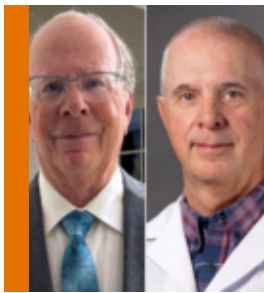
Resident Adishesh Narahari, MD Receives \$10,000 WVU Crisp Grant

Congratulations to Dr. Adi Narahari, who received a \$10,000 WVU Crisp Grant to study TRPM7 in alveolar macrophages after IR injury.



Resident Erik Scott, MD Awarded a \$15,000 ACGME Grant

Congratulations to Dr. Erik Scott, who was recently awarded a \$15,000 grant from the ACGME to encourage Spanish language acquisition within the perioperative space. This award is part of the ACGME's Back to Bedside Initiative, which supports resident-led projects that impact patient engagement and the learning environment in innovative ways. We are excited to see your project come to fruition!!



Irving Kron, MD & Victor Laubach, PhD Awarded \$3.1 Million to Study Novel Perfusion-Based Therapies for Severe ARDS

Irving Kron, MD, and Vic Laubach, PhD, professors in the Department of Surgery, were awarded a 4-year, \$3.1 million grant from the NIH to study groundbreaking, perfusion-based methods to treat severe acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) or ischemia-reperfusion injury (IRI) after lung transplant. Both ARDS and IRI remain major clinical issues associated with high morbidity and mortality, and currently no methods exist for targeted treatment of injured lungs. This research will build upon recent discoveries, which were featured last month on CBS 19 News, UVA Health Newsroom, and UVA Today. [Read the Full Story](#)



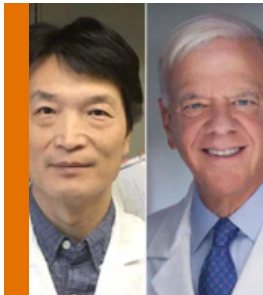
Shayna Showalter, MD Awarded \$100,000 UVA Cancer Center Grant

Congratulations to Dr. Shayna Showalter for receiving a \$100,000 grant from the UVA Cancer Center to support her project titled, "A Randomized, Phase III Trial of Pre-operative Window of Endocrine Therapy to Inform Radiation Therapy Decisions in Older Women with Early-stage Breast Cancer (POWER II)". Fantastic work!



Ileana Mauldin, PhD Awarded \$30,000 Grant from UVA Cancer Center

Congratulations to Dr. Ileana Mauldin, who was recently awarded a \$30,000 UVA Cancer Center IDEA-Cancer Pilot Award for her project, "Enhancing Tumor-infiltrating Lymphocytes and Vaccine Immunotherapy in Triple Negative Breast Cancer".



Lian-Wang Guo, PhD and Craig Kent, MD, Awarded \$2.8 Million to Study Vascular Stenotic Disease

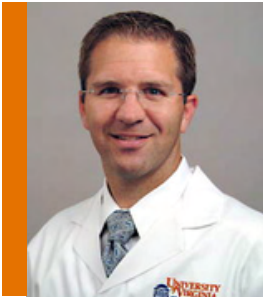
Lian-Wang Guo, PhD and Craig Kent, MD were recently awarded a R01 grant for \$2.8 million from the NIH to study the epigenetic "writer" DOT1L, an enzyme that marks histone proteins with methyl groups, in vascular stenotic disease. Each year, over a million Americans receive open vascular reconstructions to restore blood flow to vital organs, but the grafts fail at high rates, and there are currently no FDA-approved methods to prevent graft failure.

The team plans to develop an "epiNanopaint", which could limit the need for multiple surgeries in heart and dialysis patients. The technique involves "painting" nanoparticles on transplanted veins to prevent the veins from becoming clogged, a common cause for repeat surgeries. [Learn More](#)

Lian-Wang Guo, PhD and Team Awarded \$2.8 Million to Study New Approach for Treating Abdominal Aortic Aneurysms

New School of Medicine research led by Lian-Wang Guo, PhD, a professor of surgery; Craig Kent, MD, chief executive officer of UVA Health, executive vice president for health affairs, and professor of surgery; and Coleen McNamara, MD, a professor of medicine and director of the UVA Beirne B. Carter Center for Immunology Research, is focused on developing targeted approaches for treating abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA). The research is backed by a new \$2.8 million grant from the National Institutes of Health.

[Learn More](#)



Todd Bauer, MD Awarded \$110,000 to Study Pancreatic Cancer Metastasis

Todd Bauer, MD recently received a one year multi-PI grant (PIs: Drs. Dave Kashatus and Todd Bauer) from the Lustgarten Foundation. The team received \$110,000 for their study, "Elucidating the role of lipid droplets in pancreatic cancer metastasis."

Todd Bauer, MD Awarded \$100,000 UVA Cancer Center Collaborative Pilot Grant

Congratulations to Dr. Todd Bauer who received a \$100,000 UVA Cancer Center Collaborative Pilot grant to study, "Single-cell analysis of the relationship between mitochondrial structure and metabolic phenotype in pancreatic cancer". Dr. Bauer will be the PI along with Dave Kashatus, PhD and Mohammad Fallahi-Sichani, PhD.

Bauer Lab Receives \$450,000 Donation for Pancreatic Cancer Research

The Bauer lab received another gift from the Farrell Family Foundation Fund for \$450,000 over three years (bringing the total gift to \$600,000) for pancreatic cancer research. This is in honor of Thomas F. Farrell II, former rector and member of the UVA Board of Visitors, who passed away due to cancer in 2021.

Todd Bauer, MD Awarded \$100,000 Grant from the Wallace H. Coulter Center

We are thrilled to share that Dr. Todd Bauer was selected to receive \$101,669 from the UVA Wallace H. Coulter Center for Translational Research for his work on "Cancer Specific Plectin (CSP) targeted Antibody Drug Conjugates" for the period of July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025!

Todd Bauer, MD Awarded \$50,000 CRX Pilot Award

Congratulations to Todd Bauer, MD, whose application on "Engineering next-generation cancer suicide gene therapies stabilized by novel post-translational modifications" has been selected as an awardee for the Cancer Therapeutics (CRX) Research Program Pilot Awards FY2024 in the amount of \$50,000. Dr. Bauer is PI along with Matt Lazzara, PhD from UVA Engineering.



Russell Witt, MD Awarded \$40,000 Grant from UVA Cancer Center

Congratulations to Dr. Russell Witt, whose study, "Unraveling the Obesity Paradox: Adiponectin's Role in Modulating BRAF Targeted Therapy Efficacy in Melanoma" was selected for an IDEA-Cancer Translational Research Team Pilot Project Award in the amount of \$40,000!

Russell Witt, MD Selected to Participate in the NCI Early-Stage Surgeon Scientist Program

Congratulations to Dr. Russell Witt who was selected to participate in the National Cancer Institute's Early-Stage Surgeon Scientist Program. This program establishes cohorts and provides funding for early-career surgeon scientists to facilitate advanced cancer research skills and build professional connections across the country.



Jianjie Ma, PhD, Awarded \$3.4 Million to Research Novel Protein Therapeutic

Jianjie Ma, PhD was awarded a \$3.4 million NIH grant for his project titled "Targeting the Multicellular Process of Corneal Regeneration and Vascularization to Enhance Outcome of Corneal Transplantation."

[Learn More](#)

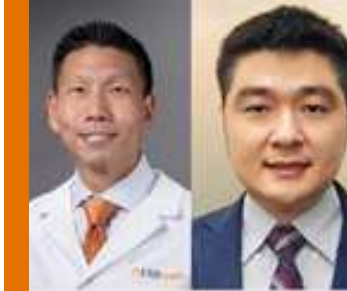
Jianjie Ma, PhD Awarded \$100,000 to Study Treatment for Sepsis-Induced Lung Injury

Dr. Jianjie Ma was awarded \$100,000 for his project, "Developing hCitH3-mAb to Treat Sepsis Induced Lung Injury" from the Commonwealth Commercialization Fund from the Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation. In collaboration with HTIC, Inc., this VIPC proposal seeks to establish a production protocol for hCitH3-mAb following FDA guidelines and to conduct proof-of-concept studies using hCitH3-mAb to treat sepsis-induced acute lung injury in animal models. By proactively targeting the CitH3 pathway and utilizing advanced technologies for early detection and intervention, the hCitH3-mAb-based therapeutics represent a potential paradigm shift for the management and treatment of sepsis-ALI.



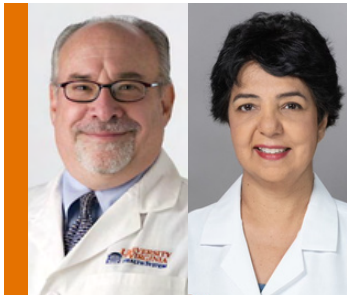
Post-Doctoral Fellow Susan Kim, MD Awarded \$25,000 UVA Cancer Center Grant

We are excited to share that Dr. Susan Kim has been awarded the Cancer Center Trainee Fellowship award of \$25,000. This funding will support her project titled, "Preoperative Exercise Therapy Attenuates Surgical-Stress Induced Liver Metastases and Preserves Anti-Tumor Immunity". Congratulations!



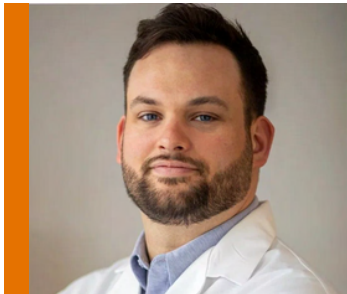
Hongji Zhang, PhD and Allan Tsung, MD Awarded \$50,000 CRX Pilot Award

Congratulations to Hongji Zhang, PhD and Allan Tsung, MD, whose application on "Targeting Neutrophil Extracellular Traps (NETs) to Improve Response to Immunotherapy" has been selected as an awardee for the Cancer Therapeutics (CRX) Research Program Pilot Awards FY2024 in the amount of \$50,000.



Kenneth Brayman, MD and Preeti Chhabra, PhD Awarded \$250,000 JDRF SRA Grant

Congratulations to Drs. Brayman and Chhabra who recently received a JDRF SRA award for \$250K to "address critical gaps and challenges and make breakthroughs in type 1 diabetes research".



Resident Matthew Weber, MD Selected for \$40,000 AATS Resident Investigator Award

Congratulations to Dr. Matthew Weber, who was selected for the American Association of Thoracic Surgery's Cardiac Surgery Resident Investigator Award. His project titled, "Targeting the Cardio-Splenic Axis to Limit Cardiac Ischemia-Reperfusion Injury in Cardiomyocytes" received unanimous approval from the Board of Directors. Many thanks to Drs. Zequan Yang and Irving Kron for their excellent mentorship.



Ray Strobel, MD Receives MJKSS Resident Research Grant

Congratulations to Dr. Ray Strobel who was recently awarded a Resident Research Grant from the Muller-Jones-Kron Surgical Society!

RESIDENT RESEARCH DAY

Each year, Resident Research Day provides an opportunity to showcase the innovative, forward-thinking work happening in our research labs. It is so rewarding to see our residents grow as surgeon-scientists. This year's program, which took place on April 30th, featured 12 oral presentations, two sessions of poster presentations, a lecture by Dr. Rachel Kelz of UPenn, and a dinner at Boar's Head Resort. Sincere thank you to everyone who took part in organizing this wonderful event! This year's winners are listed below!

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

1st Place

Ray Strobel (Vic Laubach)

"TRPV4 channel inhibition attenuates lung ischemia-reperfusion injury in a porcine lung transplant model"

2nd Place

Radhika Rastogi (Zequan Yang)

"Inhibition of IFN-I production improves post-MI cardiac function in murine model"

3rd Place

Evan Rotar (Chris Scott)

"Prophylactic endoluminal negative pressure vacuum therapy after minimally invasive esophagectomy: a pilot study"

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Senior

Max Meneveau (Shayna Showalter)

"Adoption of modern radiation therapy guidelines and techniques in older women with early-stage breast cancer"



Lab Years

Anthony Norman (Nick Teman)

"Ideal timing of coronary artery bypass grafting after non-ST elevation myocardial infarction"



Junior

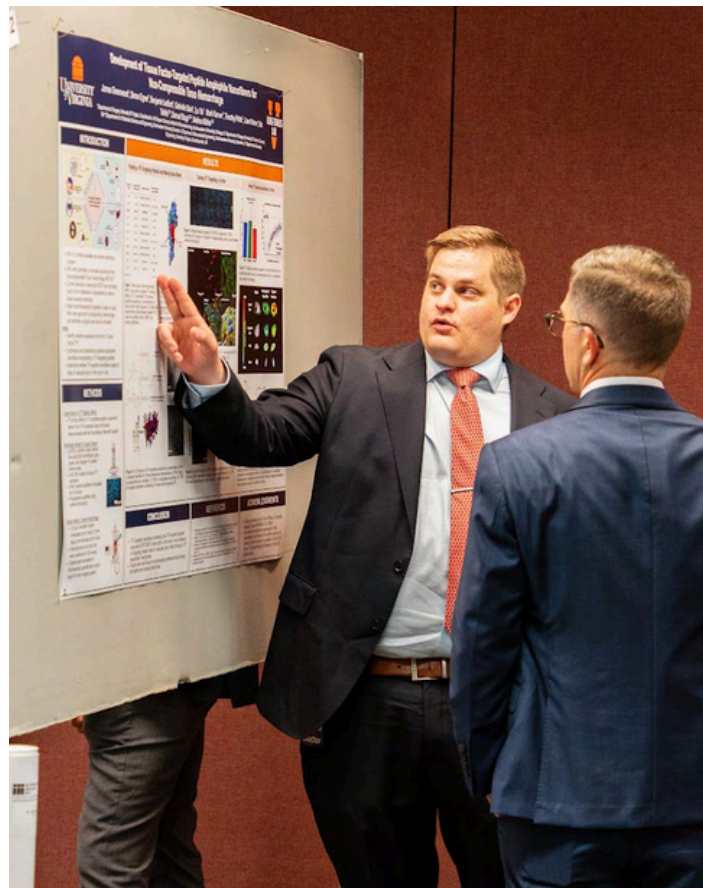
Emily Ninmer (Craig Slingluff)

"Long-term outcomes of a randomized trial of two multi-peptide melanoma vaccines (Mel39) suggests outcome differences based on participant sex"

Student

Chase Binion (Melina Kibbe)

"A novel endovascular enzymatic approach to plaque debulking in a swine model of atherosclerosis"





Enhanced Melanoma Vaccine Offers Improved Survival for Men

UVA Health Newsroom

A second-generation melanoma vaccine developed at UVA Cancer Center improves long-term survival for melanoma patients compared with the first-generation vaccine, new research shows. Interestingly, the benefit of the second-generation vaccine was greater for male patients than female patients. That finding could have important implications for other cancer vaccines, the researchers say.

The vaccine developers, led by Craig L. Slingluff Jr., MD, found that they could enhance the effectiveness of their melanoma vaccine by simultaneously stimulating important immune cells known as “helper T cells” to recognize melanoma proteins, in addition to stimulating killer T cells against melanoma. This boosted patient survival and helped prevent reoccurrences of the cancer.

The researchers are not sure why the approach was more effective in men, but biologic sex is emerging as an important factor in outcomes of patients with melanoma, in particular with immune therapies. The findings support the importance of understanding how best to benefit women as well as men with effective immunotherapies.

“These findings support the promise of this second-generation melanoma vaccine for prolonging survival of patients after surgery for high-risk melanoma,” said Slingluff, a surgical oncologist and translational immunologist at UVA Health and the University of Virginia School of Medicine. “We hope that we can make this available to patients in addition to other effective immune therapies so that they may have even greater benefit than either treatment alone.”

MORE EFFECTIVE MELANOMA VACCINE

People commonly think of vaccines as something you take to avoid getting sick from viruses. Most cancers do not have a known viral cause, but melanoma vaccines can induce immune responses against human melanoma cells, and Slingluff and others have been working to make them effective for treatment of melanoma. (There are cancers that are caused by viruses, and some vaccines against those viruses have been very effective at preventing cancers they cause — for example, there are vaccines against human papillomavirus and hepatitis B).

Slingluff's melanoma vaccine targets a form of skin cancer that kills thousands of Americans every year. In seeking to make the vaccine more effective, he and his team tested two different approaches to stimulating both CD4+ helper T cells and CD8+ killer T cells in patients with high-risk melanoma. More than 160 clinical trial volunteers were given, at random, one of two vaccine preparations of purified peptides to stimulate their helper T cells.

Fifteen years after the last participant was enrolled in the trial, overall survival rates were encouraging with both vaccine approaches, but overall survival was better for those with the second-generation vaccine. Those who benefitted most appeared to be younger men with earlier-stage melanoma. The researchers characterize the benefit as “meaningful and durable” in a new scientific paper outlining their findings.

“We were very excited by these findings and for the promise to improve survival with these vaccines,” Slingluff said. “Combination of the second-generation vaccine with other immune

therapies may further increase the benefit for patients.”

The multicenter trial's findings suggest that both age and sex may play important roles in determining immune therapy outcomes. That is important information for doctors and researchers developing these treatments, Slingluff says.

“The differences in benefit based on age and biologic sex highlight the need to understand reasons for those differences so that we can provide the same benefit for all patients,” Slingluff said. “We are excited to build on these exciting findings.”

Slingluff's pioneering research is part of UVA Cancer Center's ongoing mission to develop new ways to treat cancer and improve patients' cancer treatment options. In recognition of those efforts, the National Cancer Center has named UVA Cancer Center one of only 56 “comprehensive cancer centers” in the country. The designation recognizes elite cancer centers with the most outstanding patient care and research programs in the nation.

Advancing the field of immunotherapy is also a key pillar of UVA's upcoming [Paul and Diane Manning Institute of Biotechnology](#), now under construction at Fontaine Research Park. The institute is poised to fast track the development of new treatments and cures and transform how healthcare is delivered across the state and beyond.

FINDINGS PUBLISHED

Slingluff and his team have [published their findings in the scientific journal Nature Communications](#).

In addition to Slingluff, the multi-institutional team included Emily K. Ninmer, Hong Zhu, Kimberly A. Chianese-Bullock, Margaret von Mehren, Naomi B. Haas, Merrick I. Ross and Lynn T. Dengel.

The research was supported by the National Cancer Institute, grants R01CA118386 and P30CA044579; gifts from Alice and Bill Goodwin; and the Commonwealth Foundation for Cancer Research.

Slingluff disclosed that he receives licensing fees for patents for peptides used in cancer vaccines; his work has been supported by Celldex, Glaxo-Smith Kline, Merck, 3M and other companies. A full list of the authors' disclosures is included in the paper.

To keep up with the latest medical research news from UVA, subscribe to the [Making of Medicine blog](#).





VOTE UVA!

PLEASE SUPPORT UVA SURGERY BY VOTING IN THE DOXIMITY RESIDENCY NOMINATION AND SATISFACTION SURVEY IN 2025

The Doximity Residency Nomination and Residency Satisfaction Surveys allows users to nominate up to five programs that they feel provide the best clinical training. This annual survey is open to Doximity members who have completed at least one year of residency or have completed their program within the last 10 years.

Votes for the UVA Department of Surgery Residency Program have a substantial impact on residency rankings, which inform and empower future medical students in their residency decisions. Please vote UVA if you are eligible and encourage others to vote as well!

The survey typically opens in the springtime. Please stay tuned for more information and future announcements regarding Doximity!



**SUBMIT
NEWS**



SCHOOL of MEDICINE
Department of Surgery