

September 2025
UCSF Surgery Newsletter

Special interview with
Dr. April Mendoza

in the loupē

chair's message



Pictured above: faculty and trainees at the 22nd Annual Loupes Ceremony & Honoree Presentations on September 17, 2025, with special guest Dr. Kelli Bullard Dunn, President of the Naffziger Surgical Society.

As we enter the fall, I want to recognize the extraordinary work happening across our Department of Surgery. This month brings many reasons to celebrate: faculty, trainees, and staff have received national and institutional awards, recognition for their scientific contributions, and support for their innovative ideas. Together, NIH awards alone in the last several months to investigators in Surgery amount to nearly \$22 million — a remarkable testament to the creativity and commitment of our community. You will see many of these achievements highlighted later in this newsletter, and I encourage you to take a moment to celebrate our colleagues. It is equally inspiring to see the breadth of presentations from UCSF Surgery represented at the **American College of Surgeons' Clinical Congress** in Chicago this year. This visibility reflects the national (and international!) impact of our work and the pride we take in advancing the field together.

At the heart of these successes is our research mission. My message is simple: **please keep doing what you are doing. Keep submitting grants. If paylines go down, submit better grants. Diversify your research portfolios to buffer risk.** The Department remains steadfast in supporting science and our scientists as best we can. But we also need to be strategic: **if federal funding becomes less secure, we must be prepared to rethink priorities and chart new paths to ensure that discovery continues.**

Here is where our clinical mission is essential. Our clinicians are the backbone of sustainability and champions of service to our patients. Clinical strength and growth not only provide world-class care but also

With Dr. Matthew Ringel



generate the resources that sustain our academic missions. Should federal research funding become more vulnerable, it will be our clinical excellence that protects and propels our ability to innovate, educate, and discover. This fall also marks an important moment in the academic life cycle. We are thrilled to welcome a new class of **interns and fellows**, as well as several new faculty colleagues, including **Dr. Balan, Dr. Berger,**

Dr. Bromberger, Dr. Braun, Dr. Grisotti, Dr. Mascharak, Dr. Mulder, Dr. Naiem, Dr. Skovgard, and Dr. Starr. Their arrival brings fresh energy and ideas, and I know you will extend a warm UCSF welcome. At the same time, we are already preparing for the next cycle, with intern candidate interviews beginning soon for our residency training programs. Our still-new, state-of-the-art skills lab is just one example of the significant investments we are making in our education mission. Thank you for the science you pursue, the patients you care for, the learners you teach, and the colleagues you support. Our Department is committed to standing with you as we face the challenges and opportunities ahead together.



julie ann



UCSF has been ranked #6 on the 2025 Thoracic Surgery Foundation (TSF) Top 20 Honor Roll, a recognition that highlights decades of leadership in thoracic surgery research and training. The Honor Roll celebrates institutions with the strongest record of innovation, discovery, and mentorship supported through TSF grants.

For UCSF, this distinction reflects the combined efforts of our surgeons, researchers, and trainees who continue to push the boundaries of thoracic surgery and set new standards of excellence in patient care. It also underscores the department's long-standing commitment to fostering future leaders in the field, ensuring that the next generation of thoracic surgeons is equipped to drive progress in science and clinical care.

research



\$7.2 Million

Dr. Sandy Feng, Vice Chair of Research and Transplant Surgeon, has been awarded a **\$7,212,729** grant from the **National Institutes of Health**. Her project, *"Early Signals of the Transition from Immune Quiescence to Activation in the Liver Allograft Microenvironment and in the Circulation,"* aims to uncover critical pathways that shape transplant outcomes. This work has the potential to transform how clinicians predict and manage immune responses in liver transplantation.



\$62.6k

Dr. Nazsa Baker, Research Director and Program Manager of The Wraparound Project at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital, has been awarded **\$62,694** from the **State of New Jersey – Office of the Secretary of Higher Education**. Her project, *"Day by Day: Examining the Lives of Black and Latinx Men with Firearm-Acquired Disabilities in Newark, NJ, and San Francisco,"* will shed light on the long-term impacts of gun violence and help inform more equitable, community-centered interventions.



\$2.3 Million

Dr. Hirotake Komatsu has received a **\$2,390,830 R01** award from the **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases**. His project, *"Scalable and Transplantable Pancreatic Islet Organoids with Engineered Oxygenation,"* seeks to develop innovative solutions for improving cell-based therapies in diabetes treatment. This work could pave the way toward more effective, transplantable organoid systems for patients worldwide.



\$75k

Dr. Rong Wang has been awarded **\$75,000** from the **UCSF Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI)** for her project, *"Brain Arteriovenous Malformation Revealed by Whole Organ Vascular Mapping at Capillary Resolution."* This research leverages advanced imaging to uncover the complex architecture of brain arteriovenous malformations, aiming to improve diagnosis and treatment strategies for patients facing these high-risk vascular conditions.



\$254k

Dr. Tippi MacKenzie has been awarded **\$254,061** through **UCLA** from the **California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM)**. Her project, *"Hematopoietic Stem Cell Gene Therapy for Alpha Thalassemia,"* is focused on developing innovative treatments to correct genetic defects before birth, offering hope for families affected by this severe blood disorder.



\$3.38 Million

Dr. Valerie Weaver has received a **\$3,388,140 U01** award from the **National Cancer Institute**. Her project, *"Antidepressant Regulation of PDAC,"* will explore how commonly used antidepressants influence pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma biology. This research could open new avenues for therapeutic strategies in one of the most lethal cancers.



\$160k

Dr. Holger Willenbring has been awarded **\$160,000** from the **Polycystic Kidney Disease Foundation**. His project, *"Development of Gene Therapy for Polycystic Liver Disease,"* aims to create novel genetic treatments to address this chronic condition, offering new hope for patients facing limited therapeutic options.



\$913k

Dr. Laura Esserman has been awarded two grants totaling **\$913,838** to advance breast cancer prevention and care. Funding from the **Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation** will support the **RISE UP** for Breast Cancer Conference, while support from the **Breast Cancer Research Foundation** will expand **WISDOM 2.0**, enhancing risk models and precision prevention strategies across diverse populations.



\$4.7 Million

Transplant surgeon **Dr. James Gardner** and the Gardner Lab have been awarded an **NCI R37 MERIT Award**, providing up to **\$4.7 million** in funding. Their research will investigate novel immune cells, known as **eTACs**, and their role in cancer immune evasion. This work will advance the field of cancer immunology in collaboration with key partners.



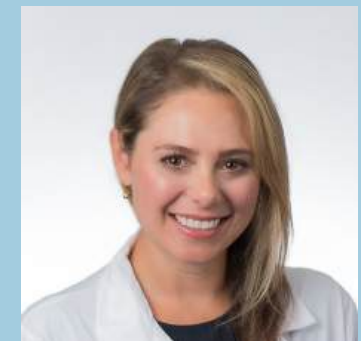
\$951k

Dr. Peter Stock has received a **\$951,360 R01** award from the **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases**. His project, *"Parathyroid Allotransplant for Treatment of Hypoparathyroidism,"* investigates innovative transplantation strategies to restore parathyroid function.



\$33k

Dr. Sowmya Mangipudi, a General Surgery Resident, has been awarded **\$33,440** from the **NIH John F. Fogarty International Center** through the **GloCal** Fellowship program. Her project will advance global health research training and foster international collaboration, preparing her to address complex surgical challenges across diverse healthcare settings.



\$30k

Dr. Alison Baskin, a General Surgery Resident, has received a **\$30,000** award from the **Association for Academic Surgery Foundation**. Her project, *"Surgical Quality in Lung Cancer: The Role of the Commission on Cancer (CoC) Operative Standards,"* will evaluate how standardized practices can improve outcomes for patients undergoing lung cancer surgery.

education



On **September 17th, 2025**, the Department of Surgery came together for our **22nd Annual Loupes Ceremony & Honoree Presentations**, which was moderated by **Dr. Kelli Bullard Dunn, Naffziger Surgical Society President**.



This season also marks an exciting new chapter for surgical education at UCSF. Our medical students are the very first to train in the newly launched Skills Lab, bringing fresh energy and innovation to the Surgery Clerkship Curriculum. We also welcome new leadership to guide this next era of clerkship training: **Dr. Jessica Gosnell** as **Clerkship Director**, alongside **Dr. Lara Senekjian** and **Dr. Mark Zhao** as **Associate Directors**. Their vision and dedication will shape the experience of our future surgeons. And as we celebrate beginnings, we also recognize milestones: congratulations to our newest interns on completing their first two months of training — a strong start to their surgical careers. - **Dr. Matthew Lin, Interim Vice-Chair for Education**



Dr. Kara Faktor, Research Resident in General Surgery, has been selected for the **Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program** for the 2025–2026 cycle. Through the Africa Regional Research Program, she will advance global surgical research in collaboration with international partners — a recognition that highlights her commitment to equity and innovation in surgical care worldwide.



Dr. Israel Falade, PGY-1 in Plastic Surgery, is a **co-author** on a new study examining outcomes in facial feminization surgery. The article, "*Characterizing facial feminization surgery revisions and complications in a large and diverse cohort*," appears in the **Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery** (August 2025) and highlights revision patterns and complication rates across a broad patient population.



Dr. Ali Abbasi, PGY-4 in General Surgery, authored a perspective in the **New England Journal of Medicine** titled "*The Promise of Real-World Data for Research — What Are We Missing?*" The article examines why routinely generated health data continues to fall short of its potential, and what changes are needed to unlock its true value for research and clinical care.



Dr. Maria Castro, Research Resident in General Surgery, has been accepted to the **UC Berkeley Master's in Education** program, where she will focus on Health Professions Education. This next step builds on her ongoing commitment to advancing surgical education and strengthening the training experience for future physicians.



Research Resident in General Surgery Dr. Lucia Calthorpe has been awarded a **2025–2027 American College of Surgeons Resident Research Scholarship**. With mentorship from **Dr. Adnan Alseidi** and **Dr. Jennifer Lai**, she will dedicate the next two years to funded research advancing surgical science.



General Surgery Resident **Dr. Juan C. Reyna** has been awarded an **NIH F32 Fellowship** to support his research on a novel bioreactor for biomanufacturing and cryopreservation. He is pursuing this work under the mentorship of General Surgeon **Dr. Tammy T. Chang**.



Dr. Alexandra Highet, along with mentors **Drs. Sandy Feng, Sharad Wadhvani**, and **Jennifer Lai**, has been awarded a **\$170,000 NIH/NIDDK F32 fellowship**. Her research will focus on improving access to care and outcomes for newborns and children living with biliary atresia.



Dr. Jonathan Li, PGY-2 in General Surgery, recently published findings from his **year-long funded research** project in **Liver Transplantation**. During his time in the UCSF lab, he developed a state-of-the-art machine learning decision support tool that outperforms current practice in predicting recurrence after liver transplant.



Dr. Kirithiga Ramalingam, PGY-5 in General Surgery, is advancing cancer research on two important fronts. In collaboration with the **UCSF Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics**, her work has uncovered a major gap in awareness and use of genetic testing among U.S. cancer survivors — a finding that underscores the urgent need for broader outreach to ensure equitable access to this critical tool.



At the same time, she is pursuing molecular research in breast cancer under the mentorship of **Dr. Laura Esserman** and **Dr. Michael Campbell**.

Recently, she presented at the **Annual Meeting of the American Society of Breast Surgeons**; her project explores the pathways that drive Ductal Carcinoma In Situ (DCIS) toward invasive disease. By identifying key molecular targets, her work aims to create new opportunities to prevent invasive breast cancer before it starts.



Dr. Simon Chu, PGY-4 in General Surgery, presented at the World Transplant Congress in San Francisco (August 2–6, 2025). His research, "*Real-World Experience with Extended Criteria Donation After Circulatory Death Livers Perfused with Normothermic Machine Perfusion*," showed that extended-criteria DCD liver allografts preserved with normothermic machine perfusion achieve superior post-transplant survival compared with standard-criteria DCD grafts, despite higher donor risk.



These findings suggest that normothermic machine perfusion can mitigate ischemic injury and safely expand the donor pool. The study was led in collaboration with **Dr. Garrett Roll**, **Dr. Shareef Syed**, and **Dr. Aleah Brubaker** of **UCSD**.



Dr. Alan Zambeli-Ljepović, PGY-4 in General Surgery, led a collaborative team of **CHESA faculty, international transplant experts, and health economists** in a global study on kidney disease. Their analysis revealed that more than **300,000** lives could be saved annually if countries with both dialysis and transplantation programs redirected more resources toward transplantation.



This finding stands in contrast to current global trends: while dialysis access continues to expand, the past five years have seen a decline in the proportion of patients receiving kidney transplants. The study has been published in **The Lancet Global Health** and will appear in the **October 2025** print edition.



We are proud to celebrate our former **Microsurgery Fellow, Dr. Minnie Park**, who has graduated and is now serving as a **Plastic Surgery Attending** at **Kaiser San Francisco**. Her achievement reflects the strong training and mentorship within our fellowship program and the continued impact of our alumni in advancing surgical care across the Bay Area.

skills lab



Over on the Embarcadero, our Skills Lab team alongside the residents they train with had the chance to talk about what's happening in the world of robotics. And no, it isn't the stuff of science fiction. It's the future of surgery, unfolding right here at UCSF, where medical students are no longer bystanders but certified members of the surgical team. Until recently, robotic procedures left most students standing at the edge of the operating room, watching sophisticated machines perform tasks they could only imagine doing themselves. That all changed when **UCSF became the first medical school in the country to certify students as robotic bedside assistants**. The program gives final-year medical students a structured pathway to move from observing to assisting — positioning the robot before surgery, swapping instruments mid-procedure, and safely guiding its multi-armed system alongside faculty and residents.

The training journey begins in the Skills Lab, where students complete online modules to learn the “anatomy” of the robot — its pedals, arms, and instruments before heading into hands-on simulations. In small-group settings, they practice exchanging tools and rehearsing how to respond when things don't go as planned. By the time they step into a live OR at Parnassus or Mission Bay, they carry a certification badge that signals to the entire team: this student is trained, trusted, and ready to contribute. For many, that first case is transformative. **“It used to feel like we were just on the sidelines,”** one student recalled. **“Now we're part of the operation.”** Faculty have noticed the difference as well, noting how the program gives learners confidence, improves the flow of cases, and prepares them for the increasing role robotics will play in their careers. With more than **2.6 million** robotic procedures performed in the U.S. in **2024** alone, exposure at this stage isn't just helpful — it's essential. What's happening in the Skills Lab is bigger than new technology; it's a shift in how surgical education is delivered. By opening the doors to robotic training early, UCSF ensures its students are not just watching the future of surgery unfold, but actively helping to shape it.



Dr. Hueylan Chern
Director, Surgical Skills Center



Dr. Shareef Syed
Associate Director,
Surgical Skills Center

This quarter brought stellar news for our Skills Lab leadership. Professor of Surgery **Dr. Hueylan Chern** and Transplant Surgeon **Dr. Shareef Syed** have both been admitted to the **American College of Surgeons Academy of Master Surgeon Educators** as **Associate Members**. They will be formally inducted this October in Chicago. These honors recognize the extraordinary contributions both faculty have made to advancing surgical education and underscore UCSF's leadership in shaping how the next generation of surgeons will learn.

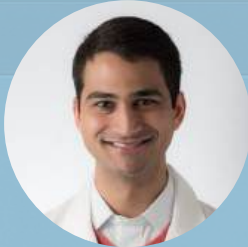
CURRENT clinical fellows

Dr. Audrey E. Brown



Abdominal Transplant
Surgery

Dr. Alexander Gupta



Abdominal
Transplant Surgery

Dr. Danny Orabi



Abdominal Transplant
Surgery

Dr. Mignote Yilma



Abdominal
Transplant Surgery

Dr. Sarah Hartman



Breast Surgical
Oncology

Dr. Hemi Thaker



Breast Surgical
Oncology

Dr. Katherine Sanders



Endocrine Surgery

Dr. Mahdi Malekpour



Microsurgery

Dr. Margaret Butchy



GI/Bariatric Surgery

Dr. Lauren Evans



Pediatric Surgery

Dr. Stas Amato



Surgical Critical
Care

Dr. Amandine
Godier-Furnemont



Surgical Critical
Care

Dr. Andrew Akcelik



Thoracic Surgery

Dr. Raghav Chandra



Thoracic Surgery

Dr. Daniel Kent



Thoracic Surgery

Dr. Brian M. Till



Thoracic Surgery

Dr. Pooja Neiman



Trauma and
Emergency Surgery

Dr. Denzel Woode



Trauma and
Emergency Surgery

Dr. Seth Sankary



Vascular Surgery

Dr. Timothy Harris



Cardiac Surgery
2026-27 Academic Year

Dr. John Farag



Cardiac Surgery
2026-27 Academic Year

Dr. David Jiang



Vascular Surgery
2026-27 Academic Year

Dr. Alexis Colley



Surgical Critical Care/Trauma/
Acute Care Surgery
2026-27 Academic Year

Dr. Schneider Rancy



Surgical Critical Care/Trauma/
Acute Care Surgery
2026-27 Academic Year

accomplishments



From left to right: Adeel Rehman, MD; Sylvie Baudart, RN; a member of our dedicated nursing team; Amy Fiedler, MD; Angel Rich, NP; Irina Yurkova, NP; and Melissa Vitasa, NP.

Congratulations to the UCSF Cardiac Surgery team on successfully completing its second Total Artificial Heart procedure. Our patient, Martell, is recovering well and already walking the halls at our Parnassus Heights hospital.

The Total Artificial Heart is a highly specialized device that temporarily supports both sides of the heart while patients with heart failure await transplant. Only a small number of centers worldwide perform this procedure, underscoring the expertise and innovation of our UCSF team.

Second Total Artificial Heart procedure

accomplishments

The Haile T. Debas Academy of Medical Educators Excellence in Teaching Award Recipients

Dr. Caitlin Collins
Trauma Surgeon



Nominated by: **Dr. Kenzo Hirose & Dr. Patricia O'Sullivan**

Dr. Joseph Cuschieri
Chief of Surgery, Zuckerberg
San Francisco General Hospital



Nominated by: **Dr. Adnan Alseidi & Dr. Andre Campbell**

Dr. April Mendoza
Trauma Surgeon



Nominated by: **Dr. Andre Campbell & Dr. Matthew Lin**

Dr. Shareef Syed
Transplant Surgeon



Nominated by: **Dr. Hueylan Chern & Dr. Adnan Alseidi**

Dr. Lucas Thornblade
Surgical Oncologist



Nominated by: **Dr. Matthew Lin & Dr. Jessica Gosnell**

Dr. Mark Zhao
Colorectal Surgeon



Nominated by: **Dr. Jessica Gosnell & Dr. Hueylan Chern**

Class of 2025

MEET your colleagues



Carrie Triplett

Program Manager

As Program Manager in the **Chair's Office**, I oversee faculty credentialing, privileging, and risk management while tracking strategic use of departmental space. My work extends beyond compliance, aligning operational systems with the Chair's academic and clinical vision. In close collaboration with senior staff, I help advance institutional priorities with clarity and precision.

Furthermore, I serve as Executive Assistant to **Mike Panion**, the **Associate Chair of Finance and Administration**, supporting decision-making at the highest levels of leadership.



Madison Cavallaro

Program Administrator

As Program Administrator, I help guide the daily life of a **residency program** with **22 residents**, its leadership, faculty, and the microsurgery fellowship. My work ensures smooth operations, from onboarding visiting students and affiliates to supporting residents in their educational and clinical paths.

Recent efforts included expanding the residency complement and preparing for a random site visit—moments that highlight the program's growth and the shared dedication of faculty, trainees, and staff I am proud to support.



Alli Veronello

Business Operations Analyst

As Business Operations Analyst, I help sustain the **Carol Franc Buck Breast Care Center's** mission through operational and administrative support that strengthens staff, faculty, and research programs.

My responsibilities span human resources coordination, IT support, financial administration, and daily operations. By weaving these functions together, I provide the structure and resources that allow our teams to focus on advancing research and delivering excellent care, ensuring the center remains a place of both innovation and patient trust.



Claudio Gamboa

Senior Clinical Research Coordinator

As Senior Clinical Research Coordinator in the **Division of Vascular & Endovascular Surgery**, I manage regulatory compliance and operations for observational studies and interventional trials focused on peripheral artery disease, critical limb-threatening ischemia, and diabetes. My role centers on optimizing data collection and reducing barriers to participation, ensuring patients can engage in research with minimal obstacles. I help keep enrollment, manuscript preparation, and data analysis on track, with deliverables met ahead of deadlines—contributing to studies that advance innovation and improve patient outcomes.

In an effort to strengthen our team's engagement and foster camaraderie, we have initiated a new project aimed at highlighting the contributions of eight staff members representing diverse divisions within the Department of Surgery. We are enthusiastic about launching this exciting endeavor, allowing you to become better acquainted with your colleagues. If you find something intriguing about one of your fellow team members, don't hesitate to email them.

We will be maintaining this page for the time being, and as we progress, we hope to eventually feature every member of our staff. To all the staff members currently reading this message, please know that you are making a significant impact and contributing to the collaborative spirit that defines our work environment. Thank you for being an integral part of our team.



Nathan Tran

CME Program Coordinator

As CME Program Coordinator, I oversee **two RSS programs**, the **Thoracic Tumor Board**, and **Grand Rounds**—comprised of **Thoracic Surgery**, **Cardiac Surgery & Lung Transplantation**, and **Morbidity & Mortality** series. These programs provide vital teaching opportunities for fellows and residents, exposing them to complex cases and best practices.

I also support four faculty members and collaborate with program leads and administrative staff to ensure seamless coordination, efficient workflows, and the continued strength of our educational mission.



Vicki Ver-Cerbatos

Administrative Assistant III

In the **Division of General Surgery**, I provide daily administrative support for three faculty members. My responsibilities include complex calendaring, meeting coordination, expense reports, quarterly time study submissions, and scheduling research interviews. I also help manage office operations, from ordering supplies to addressing workplace needs.

This role demands precision, efficiency, and collaboration across the department, and it has deepened my appreciation for contributing to a team and organization that values innovation, growth, and continuous improvement.



Akiko T. Searles

Research Assistant

As Research Assistant in the **Atherosclerosis Lab**, I lead projects investigating how extracellular vesicles (EVs) shape cardiometabolic and neuroinflammatory disease. My work explores EV-mediated changes in immunometabolism across immune and adipose cells, with implications for diabetes, atherosclerosis, and Alzheimer's disease. Additionally, I spearhead efforts to scale EV production for pre-clinical testing, contribute to an NIH-funded collaboration with **Harvard University** and the **Joslin Diabetes Center**, mentor new staff, and share findings through grant proposals, conferences, and research symposia.



Krislyn Malagum

Financial Analyst II

As a Financial Analyst II, I serve as finance lead for the **Divisions of Cardiac Surgery & Lung Transplantation** and **Thoracic Surgery**. My responsibilities span financial operations—ledger reconciliation, reimbursements, procurement workflows, and billing analyses—while also supporting audit readiness and capital accounting. Alongside this, I provide administrative and academic support, from faculty travel and expense coordination to meeting planning for **Drs. Tobias Deuse, Ramin Beygui, and Teng Lee** in addition to credentialing and onboarding. By integrating financial oversight with administrative precision, I ensure both divisions operate with clarity and efficiency.



SAVING LIVES - FINDING PURPOSE : A CONVERSATION WITH

Dr. April Mendoza

By Rashad Benton

Pictured left in the first photo, **Dr. April Mendoza** is a trauma surgeon whose career has carried her from **Loyola** to **LSU** to **UCSF** and now to the trauma bays of **Oakland**, where she leads as **Trauma Medical Director** and **Associate Professor of Surgery** at **UCSF-East Bay**. One of three daughters and a twin, she grew up in a household where higher education wasn't just encouraged but expected — a foundation that shaped her path into medicine. In this sit-down, she reflects on what it means to save lives, carry loss, and mentor the next generation.

What first inspired you to pursue a career in medicine—and what ultimately drew you to trauma surgery specifically? I actually thought I wanted to be a veterinarian until I shadowed a private vet. One day a client came in asking to have their dog's voice box removed, and the vet said, "no problem." I couldn't believe it. That moment made me realize veterinary medicine wasn't for me. Later, in college, I started volunteering at a children's hospital. At first, I only went because a friend needed a ride there, but while she stopped showing up, I kept going. I loved the kids, the energy, the sense of purpose. I knew then I wanted a career in science and medicine, caring for vulnerable people. At that point I imagined myself as a pediatrician.

In medical school, I was still determined to work with children, but I had experiences that pushed me to rethink that path. During rotations, I leaned toward internal medicine. On my surgery rotation, though, something clicked. I remember telling the professor, "I want to be an internal medicine doctor," and he said, "If you like internal medicine, you'll love surgery; it's the same thinking, but you can actually feel like you've done something at the end of the day." That stuck with me. Then came a turning point: I was in Chicago when an 18-year-old was shot and paralyzed. His father, devastated, told me he had moved his son to the suburbs so he wouldn't become a statistic. That weekend I couldn't stop thinking about the boy, his family, the grief. As much as I hated how it felt, I knew I couldn't turn away. If this is what was happening in our communities, I wanted to be on the front line with those families.

What do you carry with you—mentally or emotionally—after walking out of a trauma bay at the end of the day? There's always a weight after a 24-hour shift. "Depressed" isn't the right word, it's more that I carry the heaviness of the day. As I get older, I notice myself leaning more into the harder cases. But I want to be clear **we have far more saves than losses**. Our team is one of the best, and the truth is we save more people than we lose. That's the work that defines us. Still, when a patient doesn't make it despite everything we've done, those are the moments that stay with me. You're watching people endure the worst hours of their lives, and that makes me feel profoundly human. I find myself thinking: one day, this will be me. And I watch families, patients, the grace they carry into that moment and I wonder, how will I respond? Could I be that strong? Those experiences remind me that my work has purpose.

“Those Experiences Remind Me That My Work Has Purpose”

What part of your training did not prepare you for the realities of being a trauma surgeon—and how did you learn to adapt? Honestly, I can't say that medical training in the early 2000s really addressed this in depth. But my life did. I grew up surrounded by it: my father in law enforcement, my uncles as firefighters, my stepfather in the military. Conversations about injury, violence, and survival were a constant backdrop. So when I discovered trauma as a specialty in medical school, it felt familiar. I had already seen it, heard it, talked about it. That foundation gave me a resilience and perspective that no classroom could provide.

Do you think about how you deliver news to patients' families after or during surgery? It doesn't have to be fatal news, but just how you deliver what their new reality is or may be. Yes, I do think about this, and my colleagues and I talk about it often. There are times when I feel like I connect with a family and I'm able to soften the blow, but the truth is I never feel great about those conversations. We were always told not to 'cut around the cut' — just rip the band-aid off. It never feels easy, and I don't think it should. But those conversations are rare, because most of the time, we're saving lives.

What do you tell the next generation of surgeons about why trauma surgery is worth choosing? Honestly, this career has been more rewarding than I ever imagined. I had no idea it would fit me so well. The diversity of cases we take on means I'm never bored. I'm constantly learning and being challenged intellectually. I really think I hit the jackpot. So, I tell everyone: this is the best job ever. And yes, I'm always trying to get people to pick trauma as their specialty.

What's different about your time as a student of medicine compared to what fellows, interns, and residents are dealing with today? It's an exciting time to be a medical student. Innovation is at an all-time high. **Robotics** is exploding in surgery, and it's an understatement to say that's a good thing. It's going to transform how we manage emergency surgery. AI and machine learning will help physicians diagnose faster and free them to focus more on patients. The potential to enhance care over the next five to ten years is right on the horizon. At the same time, it raises real ethical challenges. As exciting as the technology is, it still needs humans to guide it. This new generation has to make sure it's always about preserving life and serving as many people as possible. We sit between extremely powerful forces and everybody else, so they'll need to course-correct to ensure technology meets the needs of the many—not just the select few.

What does 'success' look like to you now and has that definition changed since your first day in medicine? Success feels generational. In American culture, it's often measured by money, millions, or likes. I see that gap between myself and younger medical students. For me, success looks different. It's the sense of purpose my career gives me. It's still being challenged every day, being able to provide for my family, to build stability.

But more than that, success is knowing I've contributed to society through my hands, my training, my work. Trauma surgery forces you to reflect. For me, success is seeing the impact — **lives saved, families supported, futures restored**.

IN OUR COMMUNITY

Our **Muriel Steele Society** continues to build community, mentorship, and opportunity for aspiring surgeons through a series of programs that bring together learners, residents, and faculty. Earlier this year, **UCSF medical students** hosted a mentorship panel and mixer at Parnassus for undergraduate students in the **UC Berkeley Pre-Medical Honor Society**. The event provided Berkeley students with a chance to connect with their UCSF medical student mentors, offering insight into academic preparation, extracurricular involvement, and the realities of student life in medicine.



Conversations flowed easily as mentees asked questions about navigating the path to medical school, balancing commitments, and preparing for future careers.

This culture of mentorship extends into research as well. Students including **Manami Diaz Tsuzuki**, **Shraddha Pandey**, **Jessica Santhakumar**, **Zuivanna Rivas**, and **Sabrina Sedano** recently achieved important milestones in their scholarly work under the guidance of mentors: **Dr. Tasce Bongiovanni**, **Dr. Elizabeth Wick**, **Dr. Clara Gomez-Sanchez**, **Dr. John Rose**, and **Dr. Lan Vu**.



Their projects underscore the Department of Surgery's dedication to advancing research while cultivating the next generation of physician-scientists. The Society also fosters dialogue around leadership and career development. **On July 23, 2025**, UCSF students and residents gathered for a brunch with **Dr. Amanda Laird**, recipient of the prestigious **2025 Association of Women Surgeons–American Surgical Association Surgical Leaders Fellowship Grant**. Dr. Laird shared her experiences and reflections on the path to leadership in surgery, offering personal advice and professional perspective that resonated with attendees. Practical training remains another cornerstone of the Society's programming.

The Spring Gowning and Gloving Workshop gave first-year medical students an early introduction to the operating room. Guided by surgical residents, participants practiced sterile technique, learned to gown and glove, and discussed how to be effective, engaged members of surgical teams. For many **MS1s**, it was their first chance to step into the OR environment and experience the energy of surgical training. Together, these initiatives highlight the Muriel Steele Society's commitment to mentorship, scholarship, and skill-building. By creating spaces where students at all levels can connect with role models, pursue research, and gain hands-on experience, the Society continues to strengthen UCSF's community of future surgeons. Ultimately, the strength of our community lies not only in the knowledge we generate, but in the connections we build with one another. Just as the art of living draws attention to balance and harmony in physical spaces, the art of community in academic medicine depends on creating

environments where learners, faculty, and patients all feel supported, valued, and engaged.



The Muriel Steele Society's **mentorship panels**, **scholarly achievements**, **leadership conversations**, and **hands-on workshops** are not isolated events; they are touchpoints in a continuum of learning that reinforces the shared values of curiosity, inclusion, and excellence. Much like a well-designed space that reflects the identity of its occupants, our community thrives when the people who make it vibrant see themselves represented and heard. When undergraduate students from **UC Berkeley** meet **UCSF medical student mentors**, when residents guide **MS1s** through their first experiences in the OR, or when faculty invest time in nurturing the next generation of surgeon-scientists, they are shaping not only careers but the culture of surgery itself. These relationships provide structure and guidance, but they also leave room for personal expression, resilience, and discovery.

The process of becoming a surgeon is rigorous, often demanding resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to grow through challenge. Yet it is also deeply human. By creating opportunities to connect, celebrate scholarly milestones, and learn new skills, our community reminds us that the path is not meant to be walked alone. Just as light, shadow, and material bring warmth and meaning to a room, collaboration and mentorship infuse depth and purpose into the training experience. Looking ahead, we can take inspiration from the foundation already built. The students who presented their research will one day mentor others. The **MS1s** who learned to gown and glove will soon lead their own teams in the OR. The conversations shared over brunch with leaders in the field will ripple outward, shaping choices and careers for years to come. These cycles of mentorship and growth are what sustain the Department of Surgery and ensure that our impact extends far beyond the walls of UCSF.



Next

Drs. Jade Hiramoto, **Robert Chang**, and **Colleen Flanagan**, along with their research team, have been honored with the **2025 Frederick M. Binkley Research Award**. This recognition highlights their patient-centered vascular research and collaborative efforts to advance surgical care.



IN OUR COMMUNITY



Dr. Mohamed Adam recently participated in the **International Laparoscopic Liver Society (ILLS) 2025** meeting, the premier global forum for liver and minimally invasive liver surgery. Invited by **Professor Ho-Seong Han**, Dr. Adam served as faculty and chaired the Best Video session, contributing his expertise to a dynamic exchange of surgical innovation and practice.



Dr. Garrett Roll, a transplant surgeon and leader in quality improvement, was appointed **Associate Chair for Quality Improvement & Peer Review** in the Department of Surgery, effective **July 1st**. In this new role, he will help guide efforts to strengthen safety and accountability across all clinical services.



Trauma surgeon **Dr. Caitlin Collins** has been named **Co-Director of the Muriel Steele Society**, joining **Dr. Lucy Kornblith** in leading this community for the next generation of academic surgeons. We also extend our gratitude to **Dr. Mika Varma** for her *six years* of dedicated leadership and visionary contributions.



This fall, **Dr. Michelle Mulder** will return to UCSF as **Assistant Professor of Clinical Surgery in Endocrine Surgery**. A pioneer in minimally invasive adrenal surgery, she brings passion, precision, and a bold vision for the future of endocrine care.



The San Francisco Surgical Society, led by **President** and Bariatric surgeon **Dr. Jonathan Carter**, recently hosted its annual meeting in San Francisco. The program featured an engaging presentation on artificial intelligence in medicine and drew a strong turnout from across the surgical community.



Dr. Carlos Corvera has been named the **inaugural Associate Chair for Clinical Affairs, Allied and Affiliate Hospitals**, following an internal search. A longtime leader in liver and pancreas surgery, he will help shape and strengthen surgical care across the UCSF system.



Trauma Surgeon **Dr. Andre Campbell** will chair a panel at the **American College of Surgeons Clinical Congress 2025** in Chicago, October 4–7. The session, *“Humanitarian Crisis and Armed Conflict: Ethical Obligations Surrounding Healthcare,”* is sponsored by the Committee on Ethics with co-sponsorship from the Committee on Trauma.



Dr. Hannah Decker recently presented UCSF Surgery's early work on **Project REACH**, a collaboration with the **San Francisco Department of Public Health's Whole Person Integrated Care** and **Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital**. The initiative is focused on improving surgical care access for people experiencing homelessness.

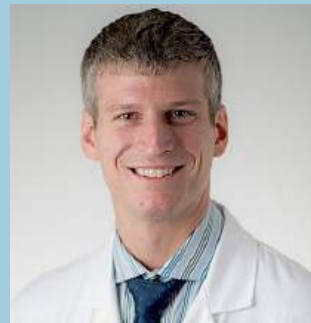
Our Chair, **Dr. Julie Ann Sosa**, co-chaired the newly published **2025 American Thyroid Association management guidelines** for adult patients with differentiated thyroid cancer, alongside **Dr. Matthew Ringel**, of **The Ohio State University**. Published in *Thyroid*, the guidelines emphasize patient-centered care, shared decision-making, and evidence-based strategies to improve outcomes.



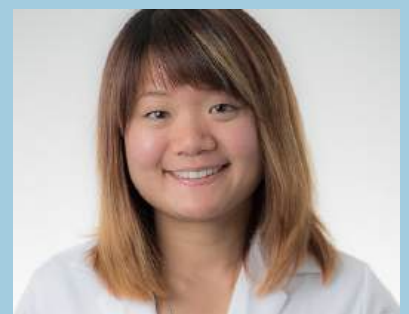
Dr. Laura Esserman recently visited UCLA and its Breast Surgery Program, using Grand Rounds as an opportunity to foster collaboration through the **UC Athena Network**. Among the many initiatives she highlighted was the **WISDOM study**, which is shaping the future of cancer screening.



Dr. Ajay Maker was awarded the **Distinguished Professor Medal** from the **Society of Surgical Oncology** at its recent annual meeting. The event provided an opportunity to celebrate achievements, foster new collaborations, and strengthen connections across the surgical oncology community.



Dr. Nathan Brand (Class of 2025) has been selected as the **2025 American College of Surgeons/Pfizer Surgical Volunteerism Award** recipient in the Resident category. Presented through the **ACS H.O.P.E. (Health Outreach Program for Equity in Global Surgery)**, the award honors his exemplary contributions to surgical volunteerism. He will be recognized at the **ACS Board of Governors Dinner and Award Ceremony** during **Clinical Congress** in Chicago this October.



Recent UCSF Surgery graduate **Dr. Ava C. Yap** has been named the recipient of the **Dr. Hilary Sanfey Outstanding Resident Award** by the Association of Women Surgeons. She will be honored at the **AWSF Gala** on October 5th in Chicago.



A groundbreaking study led by **Dr. Sonja Schrepfer** and her **Sana Biotechnology team**, in collaboration with investigators in **Uppsala**, was recently published in **The New England Journal of Medicine**. The study demonstrates that hypimmune (HIP) primary human islets can survive and produce c-peptide in an allogeneic patient with diabetes—without the need for immunosuppression.



Endocrine surgeon and Clerkship Director **Dr. Jessica Gosnell** has been selected for induction into UCSF's **Haile T. Debas Academy of Medical Educators**. This honor recognizes faculty who advance UCSF's education mission through excellence and innovation in teaching.





IN OUR COMMUNITY



We're pleased to share a recent ABC 7 News Bay Area story highlighting **Project REACH (Reducing barriers to Equitable surgical Access for people experiencing Homelessness)**, a pilot program at **Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital**. Project REACH offers a novel, low-barrier drop-in clinic, modeled on non-surgical clinics at ZSFG, to better meet patients where they are. The goal is to **reduce high-cost healthcare utilization** (such as ER visits) and prevent disease progression to more complex operations, including hernias and biliary disease, while maintaining safety and improving patient experience.

The story follows **Lonnie Pool**, who has experienced homelessness for most of his life and has been living with HIV for 37 years. When a hernia he had ignored began causing severe pain and mobility issues, **Project REACH** provided early assessment and surgery before his condition escalated. Some of you may perhaps remember Lonnie who also joined us for our **Gratitude and Good Outcomes Grand Rounds** in **December 2024**, where his story inspired our community.

The video includes insights from **Dr. Marissa Boeck, Assistant Professor of Surgery at UCSF and Trauma/Critical Care Surgeon at ZSFG**, who helped lead this groundbreaking effort. While not featured in the broadcast, surgery resident **Dr. Hannah Decker** is also a co-investigator on the study. The story additionally highlights **Dr. Sandhya Kumar, Associate Professor of Surgery**, who serves as the main operating surgeon for these patients alongside other outpatient surgeons at ZSFG.

Project REACH is funded by a **2024 San Francisco General Hospital Foundation Equity & Innovation Grant** and is a partnership between the **Department of Public Health Whole Person Integrated Care**, the **ZSFG Division of Surgery**, with technical support from **The Better Lab**. It combines surgical intervention with outreach, social services, housing support, and post-surgical care, helping patients like Lonnie heal safely while avoiding preventable health crises.

So far, the program has improved the lives of **eight** individuals—and we are optimistic about expanding this model more broadly.

ucsf surgery presenters at ACS CLINICAL CONGRESS

October 4th-7th, 2025

Sunday, October 5th, 2025

- 9:45 AM - 11:15 AM**  **Carlos Covera, MD**
Video Based Education: Use of Fluorescent Visualization For Dissection For A Robotic Assisted Completion Cholecystectomy
- 10:00 AM - 10:05AM**  **Aditya L. Dwivedi, BS**
Surgical Aortic Valve Replacement Stratification by the Modified 5-item Frailty Index Post-Implementation of a Transcatheter Valve Replacement Program at a Veterans Affairs Health System
- 10:55 AM - 11:00 AM**  **Sciaska Ulysse, BA**
Barriers and Facilitators to Timely Surgical Care for Distal Radius Fractures: A Qualitative Analysis
- 11:05 AM - 11:10AM**  **Shraddha Pandey, BA**
Piloting a Patient-Centered Clinical Decision Support Tool in the Electronic Health Record for Post-Surgical Opioid Prescription at Discharge
- 11:51 AM - 11:56 AM**  **Andrea Gochi, MD, MS**
MRI for Trauma-Associated Neck Pain: Think Again
- 2:30 PM - 2:41PM**  **Lejla Pepic, BS**
Key Problems and Proposed Solutions Identified by Older Surgical Patients in Problem-Solving Therapy Sessions: A Qualitative Study
- 2:30 PM - 2:41 PM**  **Neal Mukherjee, BA, BS**
Bladder Exstrophy Iliac Osteotomies: 3D Modeling Comparative Analysis of Current Approaches' Impact on Intrapelvic Volume and Acetabular Version
- 9:45 AM - 3:30 PM**  **Saffanat Sumra, BA**
Coping with Crisis: The Resilience Of Dr. Mary Crawford In The Face of Wartime Challenges presenting at History of Surgery Poster Competition
- 3:10 PM - 3:25 PM**  **Julie A. Sosa, MD, MA, FACS, FSSO, MAMSE**
Updated American Thyroid Association Guidelines for Thyroid Nodules – What's New: Management of Low-Risk Thyroid Cancer
- 3:25 PM - 3:36 PM**  **Kara Faktor, MD, MS**
Exploring Levels of Intraoperative Supervision and Autonomy: What Do "Indirect Supervision" and "Practice Ready?" Mean in General Surgery Training?

Monday, October 6th, 2025

- 8:21 AM - 8:32 AM**  **Adrian Valderrama, MD**
Assessing the Evidence Behind Guidelines in Cardiothoracic Surgery: A Meta-Analysis
- 8:59 AM - 9:04 AM**  **Neal Mukherjee, BA, BS**
Effects of Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) Introduction on Surgical Aortic Valve Replacement (SAVR) Patient Risk Scores, Surgical Techniques, and Outcomes in a Veterans Affairs Healthcare System (VAHCS)
- 10:10 AM - 10:15 AM**  **Michael Choi, MS**
The Impact of Body Mass Index on Outcomes of Staged Breast Reduction Before Nipple-Sparing Mastectomy with Immediate Autologous Breast Reconstruction

- 1:01 PM - 1:16 PM**  **Kent Garber, MD, MPH**
Trauma Care in South Sudan
- 1:18 PM - 1:29 PM**  **Amir Ashraf Ganjouei, MD**
Prolonged Length of Stay in Elective Colectomy Patients: Insights from Artificial Intelligence-Based Medical Record Review
- 3:02 PM - 3:07 PM**  **Tomas Alamin, BA**
Differences in Surgical Resident Workload and Wellbeing
- 3:47 PM - 3:52 PM**  **Mandeep Kaur, BS, BA**
Exploring Team Dynamics and Motivations in the Operating Room: A Qualitative Study
- 4:37 PM - 4:42 PM**  **Caitlin Hendricks, BA**
Patient Factors Influence Patient Reported Outcome Measurement Collection Rates but Not Clinical Benefit Following Total Joint Arthroplasty
- ## Tuesday, October 7th, 2025
- 9:45 AM - 9:56 AM**  **Vasuda Dokiparthi, BS**
Hematopoietic Cytokines and the Platelet Axis in Thromboinflammatory Complications After Injury
- 9:45 AM - 11:15AM**  **Ajay Maker, MD, FACS**
Moderator: Updates in Colorectal Cancer Liver Metastases and Multidisciplinary Management Strategies for Colorectal Liver Metastases-Addressing the Disease Biology
- 10:27 AM - 10:32 AM**  **Allison Chang, BA**
Distant Pancreatic Cystic Lesions (PCLs) Are Associated with Fewer Positive Lymph Nodes in Patients with Solid Pancreatic Ductal Adenocarcinoma (PDAC)
- 10:45 AM - 10:50 AM**  **Sahil Patel, MD**
Machine Learning-Based Correlation of Venous Morphology with Hemorrhagic Shock Stage Using Volumetric M-Mode Ultrasound in a Swine Model
- 10:47 AM - 10:58 AM**  **Paul Wong, BS**
Trends in Cyst Size of Resected Intraductal Papillary Mucinous Neoplasms over Time — has the Evolution of the International Association of Pancreatology (IAP) Guidelines Impacted Surgical Thresholds?
- 11:04 AM - 11:09 AM**  **Yemi Lawrence, BS**
Landscape and Priorities for Simulation-Based Education in Global Children Surgery
- 1:01 PM - 1:06 PM**  **Devesh K. Sharma, MBBS**
Engineering a Synthetic Thrombopoietin Receptor to Enable Tunable Hematopoietic Stem and Progenitor Cell Expansion
- 1:50 PM - 1:55 PM**  **Han Yin, BA**
Leveraging Local Expertise to Expand Hepatopancreatobiliary (HPB) Surgery Subspecialty Care to the Community: Outcomes and Lessons Learned over Four Years
- 3:24 PM - 3:29 PM**  **Tripti Mathur, MBBS**
From Prevention to Intervention: A Quality Improvement Program for Peripheral Artery Disease at a Safety Net Hospital