



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Colleagues and Partners,

While summertime is typically associated with slowing down, this month's newsletter presents a very different reality in the Department with many exciting new developments, accomplishments and activities.

Firstly, I am thrilled to acknowledge and congratulate our pediatric surgical faculty and Rady Children's Hospital for their outstanding achievement of being named the nation's 9th best children's hospital by U.S. News & World Report. Department of Surgery faculty were instrumental to this recognition, as they provide services in many areas including heart surgery, general pediatric surgery, plastic and reconstructive surgery, ENT, and solid organ transplant. Notably, the Heart Surgery and Cardiology program at Rady ranked no. 3 in the country. This well-deserved recognition is a testament to the exceptional care provided by the Department's dedicated pediatric surgeons, their multidisciplinary partners, staff, and our trainees.

This month's Q&A is with Drs. Jason Sicklick and Yuan Chen, who have successfully secured NIH funding for a new postdoctoral research training grant (T32). This grant will provide resources desperately needed to produce the next generation of scientists, who will be dedicated to further improving outcomes in patients with surgically oriented illnesses. T32 grants are exceptionally competitive, with funding being directed to applications that address prioritized gaps in research pipelines (such as surgical sciences) and that assemble a panel of talented faculty researchers with proven track records of successful mentorship. This is an extraordinary accomplishment by Drs. Chen and Sicklick and the panel of faculty research mentors, and will be a transformative resource for the Department's journey to become one of the very top surgical research departments in the country.

Additionally, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the UC San Diego Division of Vascular Surgery for their nation-leading presence and contributions at the 2023 Society of Vascular Surgery

Annual Meeting. Led by Chief Dr. Mahmoud Malas, our team of vascular surgeons possess an unwavering dedication to advancing the field of vascular surgery and patient care – qualities that were truly evident throughout the conference. Their robust presence and active participation in this important conference further solidify UC San Diego's position as a leading institution in vascular surgery research, education, and clinical practice.

These features and many more round out this month's newsletter. As always, I am grateful for your interest in, and efforts on behalf of the Department, its team members and most importantly, the patients we serve.

Warmest regards,

Bryan M. Clary
Chair, UC San Diego Department of Surgery

SUPPORT THE WORK OF UC SAN DIEGO'S DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY

With your help, the Department of Surgery at UC San Diego School of Medicine is changing lives. Financial support from our community is critical to providing leading-edge surgical care to thousands of people every year. Your partnership enables UC San Diego's Department of Surgery to continue to serve our region's patients with the most expert care available.

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Q&A: JASON SICKLICK, MD, FACS, AND YUAN CHEN, PHD



Surgical Oncologists as Scientists (SOAS) T32 Training Grant Aims to Move the Needle on Translational Cancer Research

The UC San Diego Department of Surgery was awarded T32 funding this month from the National Institutes for Health for a Surgical Oncologists as Scientists (SOAS) Training Program, which centers on the idea that patient health is a team sport.

Translational cancer research moves innovative discoveries from basic research to preclinical validation (often utilizing bio-banked tissue) and then on to clinical implementation via entrepreneurship and commercialization. SOAS will train two new surgeon-scientists annually in three topics: 1) the tumor microenvironment (TME); 2) tissue biobanking via our College of American Pathologists (CAP)-certified biorepository; and 3) innovation & entrepreneurial skills.

The SOAS Training Program is dedicated to training a diverse group of surgeon-scientists, including individuals from various backgrounds such as women, underrepresented minorities, and LGBTQ+ individuals. The program aims to nurture these trainees into future leaders in academic surgery and oncology, equipping them with the necessary skills to contribute to the translation of innovative discoveries into improved clinical cancer care.

Jason Sicklick, MD, FACS, and Yuan Chen, PhD, will oversee the SOAS program. For this month's Q&A, Drs. Sicklick and Chen elaborate on the purpose of the grant, discuss the types of trainees they are looking for and describe what a successful outcome will look like.

Q: What is the larger purpose of the T32 grant from the department's perspective?

Dr. Sicklick: The overall purpose is to provide grant support to train the next generation of academic surgical oncologist-scientists. Our rationale for training in TME is that increasingly, the oncologic surgeon-scientist needs to thoroughly understand details of the major role the TME plays in cancer initiation, progression, metastasis, response to therapies, and how it may help identify novel targets for anti-cancer drugs.

Dr Chen: The rationale for training in biobanking is that academic surgeons are frequently asked to collaborate in research because of their unparalleled access to human specimens, which must be properly banked in a dedicated biorepository. We're also emphasizing training in innovation and entrepreneurship due to the critical need to ensure that research training has real-world translational relevance—that is, we need to demonstrably improve cancer care, not merely improve understanding.

Q: What type of surgeon-scientists are you hoping to train with this grant?

Dr. Sicklick: Surgical residents who will become future leaders in academic surgery. We're leveraging the metropolitan San Diego area as the third largest assembly of components necessary to successfully translate (i.e., commercialize) innovations into Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved clinical realities. San Diego includes a plethora of biotech startups (hundreds spun out of UC San Diego), Angel investors, private equity and venture capital firms, contract research organizations, and local networking activities.

Q: What makes Moores Cancer Center the ideal place to conduct this training?

Dr. Chen: We have more than 17 NIH-funded scientists, including surgeon-scientists, studying different aspects of the tumor microenvironment in various cancers. These individuals will serve as mentors for the program. Moreover, we have one of the only a handful of College of American Pathologist certified biobanks in California. Thus, they will be trained in state-of-the-art biobanking that is crucial to the success of any translational research laboratory. Finally, moving discoveries from the bench to the bedside requires entrepreneurship and innovation. As Dr. Sicklick said, UC San Diego is a hotbed for this kind of activity and a great place to expose trainees to the process of translating their work to the care of patients.

Q: How will you know this program is successful?

Dr. Chen: Success will be measured by training surgeon-scientists that ultimately become independent NIH-funded investigators when they complete their surgical oncology fellowship training.



It is again our privilege and pleasure to share with you the [Department of Surgery Annual Report](#), the culmination of a year in which COVID began to subside, and our faculty, staff and trainees could begin to reckon with all we had been through collectively. Viewed in the context of prior years' reports, you will see the continuation of a transformation in the fabric of the Department as witnessed in new faces, new programs, new partnerships, and new ideas. The lessons of COVID have reinforced how important our human relationships are, which is why we have chosen "our people" as a theme for this year's report. In its pages, you will see familiar faces and some faces new to our Department's roster of faculty, staff and trainees. Our surgical family hails from all walks of life and all corners of the globe, and we are committed to ensuring they are able to thrive not just as clinicians, researchers or those supporting care, but also as co-workers and valued human beings.

CLINICAL NEWS



Rady Children's Ranked #9 in the Nation

For the first time in history, Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego has been named to the 2023-24 U.S. News & World Report Best Children's Hospitals Honor Roll -- a distinction awarded to only 10 children's hospitals nationwide.

We are sharing this impressive news as these enviable rankings are, in great part, due to the extraordinary faculty of UC San Diego School of Medicine who also serve at Rady Children's Hospital.

In addition to the #9 overall national ranking, Rady Children's has five specialties ranked in the top 10 (up from four last year), including Cardiology & Heart Surgery at #3, Orthopedics at #6, Neonatology at #7, Neurology &



UC San Diego Health Celebrates Inaugural Improvement Excellence Awards

The ceremony recognized the work of individuals and teams whose improvement projects made a positive impact for providers, staff and patients at UC San Diego Health

Leaders at UC San Diego Health recently celebrated the institution's inaugural Improvement Excellence Awards ceremony. The event recognized and celebrated the work of individuals and teams whose improvement projects made a positive impact on UC San Diego Health's strategic goals and patient care.

"UC San Diego Health team members are caring, creative problem solvers who maintain and continually improve our culture of high reliability," said Patty Maysent, CEO at UC San Diego Health. "More than 10,000-strong, our employees regularly find ways to positively impact the care

Neurosurgery at #8, and Diabetes & Endocrinology also at #8.

This is the seventh consecutive year that Rady Children's has been ranked among the nation's best children's hospitals in all 10 pediatric specialties surveyed. Only 23 hospitals nationwide were ranked in all 10. Also of note, eight of Rady Children's ranked specialties are among the top 20 in the nation.

"I'm so proud of our incredible nurses, doctors, researchers and team members from every department and division across Rady Children's and UC San Diego School of Medicine," said Dr. Patrick Frias, president and CEO of Rady Children's.

we deliver to our patients and their families in our hospitals and clinics each day."

In total, 11 projects were recognized as winners in their category at the ceremony out of 51 submissions received. The projects awarded represent the work of more than 500 employees.

"UC San Diego Health's unprecedented growth has pushed us to become better, more consistent and more agile," said Ashley Gambhir, executive director of transformation at UC San Diego Health. "Efforts like these projects demonstrate how UC San Diego Health relentlessly strives to be an incredible place to work and receive care."

To qualify for an award, the project submissions must align with at least one of UC San Diego Health's strategic goal categories of excellence, which include:

- Pursuit of Quality
- Patient Experience
- Improving Access
- Advancing Health Equity
- Fostering a Culture of Belonging
- Efficiency of Operations

[Read more](#)



Reaching New Heights at UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest

The final steel beam for the new outpatient pavilion was positioned while team members looked on in admiration and pride

A celebratory Topping Out ceremony at UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest has marked the approximate halfway point for construction of a new outpatient pavilion, part of the first phase of a comprehensive revitalization project for the medical campus.

The event — held June 23, 2023 — provided an opportunity for UC San Diego Health staff, as well as construction team members, to sign the final steel beam before it was raised 100 feet in the air and placed in the structural frame of the building, forever part of its lifespan.

“Now that the final steel beam for the outpatient pavilion has been placed, we are one step closer to opening this modern medical center as a regional destination for patients,” said UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “This facility will boost access to our top-quality medical education, drive development and delivery of innovative treatments and cures, and expand access to our exceptional patient care experience – improving health outcomes in our region and worldwide.”

[Read more](#)

RESEARCH NEWS

One-Two Punch: Novel Drug Pairing Could Beat Pancreatic Cancer

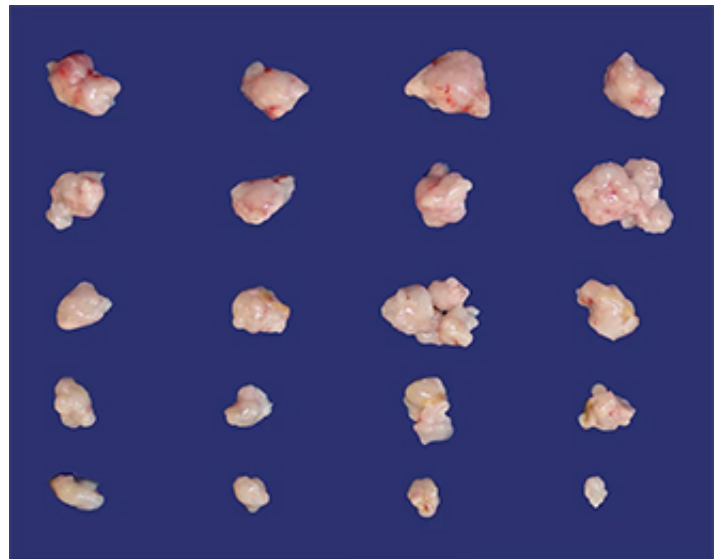
UC San Diego researchers find a combination of drugs outperformed other treatments in human and mouse models of pancreatic cancer; now urge clinical trial

Mutations in the KRAS gene are the major driver of pancreatic cancer. The resulting protein controls multiple signaling pathways involved in cell growth and survival. In cancer, the gene is mutated to be permanently “on,” driving cells to excessively multiply and form tumors.

New drugs have recently been developed to inhibit KRAS and appear to be therapeutically promising. However, pancreatic cancer is especially prone to drug resistance. Most drugs only work for a short period of time before the cancer finds its way around them.

Previous experiments revealed a potential reason why: a group of genes upstream of KRAS, called ERBB, appears to become upregulated in response to KRAS inhibition. In other words, when KRAS goes down, ERBB goes up and drives KRAS and other related genes back up again.

[Read more](#)





Dr. Farhoud Faraji Receives AHNS Funding

Congratulations to Farhoud Faraji, MD, PhD, for receiving notice of his AHNS Pilot Grant Award for his proposal entitled, “Targeting Novel YAP-Driven Oncogenic and Immune Evasive Networks in HNSC.”

This award provides \$20,000 in support for translational studies aimed at targeting the novel Hippo signaling pathway in head and neck squamous cell carcinoma.

2023 Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) Vascular Annual Meeting (VAM)

The SVS Vascular Annual meeting is an extremely competitive and premier educational meeting designated for the vascular surgery specialty. The meeting took place over four days in National Harbor, Maryland, where UC San Diego had a profound presence led by Dr. Mahmoud B. Malas. 20 total abstracts were accepted, and UC San Diego leads to be the number one institution in the world for total number of accepted scientific abstracts at the society meeting for three consecutive years.

[Read more](#)

FACULTY & STAFF NEWS



Drs. Reid and Gosman at Commencement

Dr. Christopher Reid and Dr. Amanda Gosman represented the Department of Surgery at the UCSD School of Medicine Commencement on June 4, 2023.

TRAINING NEWS



'I Am Forever Grateful'

Graduates thank their biggest cheerleaders

When we reached out to UC San Diego's graduating students, we posed many questions. One of the most important – who at the university made a difference in your life?

The result was an outpouring of love for students, postdoctoral researchers, faculty and staff who went above and beyond to support their success. There was appreciation for those who sincerely listened, invested extra time to ensure unfamiliar concepts were grasped, awakened new possibilities for future studies and careers and encouraged the pursuit of growth opportunities.

And more than that, these mentors and advocates were a source of light during times of darkness and self-doubt. They provided comfort when a loved one passed away; they gave permission to make mistakes in the pursuit of knowledge; and they shared their own successes and challenges as a way to demystify different pathways in research and learning.

Following is a selection of these words of gratitude from our graduates.

"I lost my grandpa to cancer the first week of Fall Quarter 2021 when I first transferred from community college, and I was not prepared to deal with the loss. Georgia Sadler, MD had some students of hers reach out and ask me to join the Cancer Outreach Team so that I could use my grief as a spark to educate others around me about cancer. She gave me an outlet to cope with the loss of a loved one and I used that feeling to help those in my local community learn more about cancer and how to prevent it through screenings and advocating for vaccines to prevent cancer later on in life."

Catalina Nguyen, BA in global health, on her mentor Georgia Sadler, BSN, MBA, PhD, professor emerita in the Department of Surgery. [Read more](#)

AS SEEN ON TWITTER

 **Laura Haines (Godat)**
@LNHaines

Our UCSD trauma team is proud to support gun violence prevention and [#WearOrange](#) [@traumadoctorsam](#) [@traumadoctors](#)



 **Dr. Kristin Mekeel** ✓
@DrKMekeel

Proud of our residents Dr. Nicole Goldhaber, Dr. Rohini Patel, and Dr. Tom Mou for their outstanding presentations at the UCSDH GME Quality and Patient Safety Symposium! Improving patient care for surgical patients and representing [@UCSDsurgery](#).



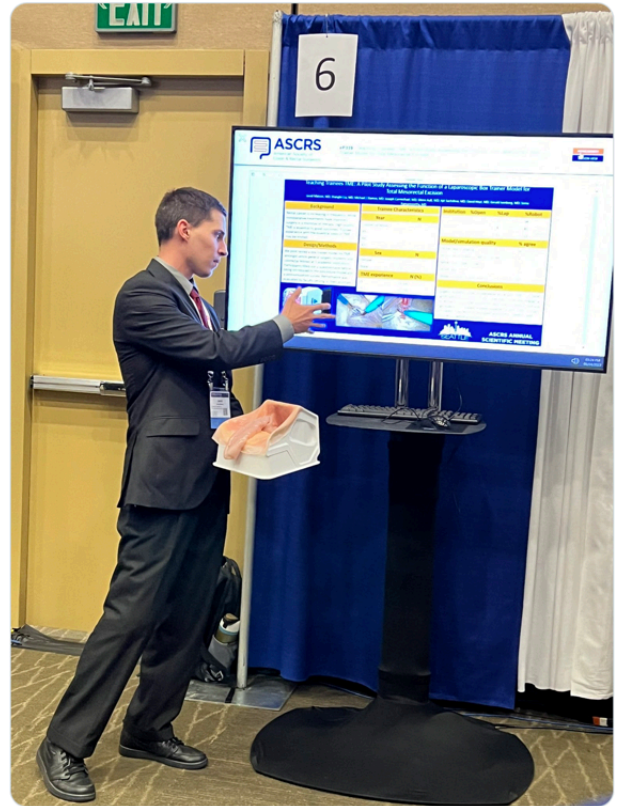
 **Bryan Clary**
@clary_bryan

Congratulations to Department of Surgery faculty member, Professor Geoffroy Noel, recipient today of a UCSD School of Medicine Kaiser Foundation Teaching Award



 **Sonia Ramamoorthy, MD FACS FASCRS**
@SoniaRamMD

Our very own [@UCSDsurgery](#) Jared Matson [@UCSD_Colorectal](#) presenting on simulating TME for rectal cancer [@ASCRS_1](#) [#ASCRS23](#). Way to go Jared!!!



THIS MONTH'S PUBLICATIONS

[Human papillomavirus E5 suppresses immunity via inhibition of the immunoproteasome and STING pathway.](#) Miyauchi S, Kim SS, Jones RN, Zhang L, Guram K, Sharma S, Schoenberger SP, Cohen EEW, Califano JA, Sharabi AB. *Cell Rep.* 2023 May 30;42(5):112508. doi: 10.1016/j.celrep.2023.112508. Epub 2023 May 11. PMID: 3717196

[Development of a medical complexity score for pediatric aerodigestive patients](#). Horita HM, Friesen TL, Cahill G, Brigger H, Rao A, Kumar S, Duong TE, Morris K, Horvay L, Floco V, Brigger MT. J Pediatr. 2023 Jun 8:113549. doi: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2023.113549. *Online ahead of print*. PMID: 37301281

[See full list of publications](#)

JOB LISTINGS

[Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Pediatric Otolaryngology](#)

[Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, Adjunct, In-Residence\) Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery](#)

[Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Transplant Surgery](#)

[Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clin, Clin X, In Residence, Adjunct\) - Plastic Surgery](#)

[Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clin, Clin X, Adj, In-Residence\) - Pediatric Cardiothoracic Surgery](#)

[Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clin, Clin X, Adjunct, In-Residence\) Vascular and Endovascular Surgery](#)

[Postdoctoral Research Fellowship](#)


ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: DR. DAVID HOYT, MD, FACS



“The values established for the department of surgery of excellence in patient care, responsibility for learning and teaching, and the importance of investigation and continuous improvement flourished at UCSD from its beginning and flourish today. Being stimulated by these values in a young department is an unforgettable experience that shapes my focus even today. It is hard to imagine a better time or place to have been to learn our profession. I am very proud to have trained at the University of California San Diego.”

Dr. Hoyt is currently an Emeritus Professor of Surgery at the University of California, Irvine. Previously, he also held roles as Executive Director of the American College of Surgeons, Executive Vice Dean for the University of California, Irvine, School of Medicine, and more. Dr. Hoyt completed his Surgical Residency and Research Fellowship at UC San Diego in 1984.



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ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Surgery at UC San Diego prides itself on maintaining a thriving clinical enterprise in 13 surgical divisions and providing exceptional care to patients; while educating future generations of surgeons and conducting ground-breaking research. Since 1968, our team of internationally recognized surgeons have performed cutting edge surgeries, which today include including awake brain surgery; heart-lung transplants; scarless appendectomies; and incisionless weight-loss surgery. We're proud of the research breakthroughs we make in surgical medicine and the quality rankings we achieve year after year. surgery.ucsd.edu