

UC San Diego

# Department of Surgery News

## August 2025



## Letter from the Chair

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Department,

It is hard to believe that Labor Day and the transition into the fall are right around the corner. It has been a busy summer with the sustained demand for our exceptional clinical services, arrival of new trainees, and uninterrupted research efforts in the midst of federal funding uncertainties and state budget challenges.

Securing the funding necessary to conduct impactful research is one of the biggest challenges for academic surgical departments. The bulk of this funding comes from the National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense and a myriad of private philanthropic foundations. The competition for these funds is fierce, and success is dependent on a number of other factors, not the least of which is the ability to navigate the complex regulatory and application processes. While bold and creative ideas and the commitment of our faculty are the cornerstone of conducting impactful research, their success is facilitated by a team of individuals who often work under the radar. In this month's newsletter, we take the time to introduce you to

critical members of this team, including Eastern Kang, Ph.D., Terence Doherty and Jessica Johnston, who provide statistical, administrative and other support to our faculty and research trainees.

In addition, we are happy to highlight the accomplishments of Aleah Brubaker, M.D., Ph.D., and Peter Than, M.D., who received the Pearl-Hannah Scholar Award to fund critically important work in the optimization of organs for transplantation, and also Mahmoud Malas, M.D., M.H.S., and Mohammed Hamouda, M.D., who were recently highlighted in the Vascular Specialist newspaper for their research on carotid operations. These teams are examples of the extraordinary work that is occurring every day in the department, and a reflection of our efforts to make tomorrow better for patients.

Additionally, we hosted our Resident Research Boot Camp and welcomed our new fellows in cardiotoracic surgery, minimally invasive surgery, pediatric surgery, acute care surgery, pediatric surgical critical care, surgical critical care and vascular surgery. In our alumni spot light, Sohini Khan, M.D., a recent general surgery residency graduate, spoke on the vigor of our training programs. Our training programs continue to set the standard for academic surgical excellence, preparing the next generation of surgeons to lead, innovate and advance patient care.

May you have a restful end to your summer. And, as always, thank you for your continued support and engagement with the department.



**Bryan Clary, M.D., M.B.A.**

Marshall J. Orloff Family Endowed Chair  
Professor and Chair, Department of Surgery  
UC San Diego Health Sciences  
Surgeon-in-Chief, UC San Diego Health

**SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF SURGERY**

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The Department of Surgery relies on the financial support of our alumni and friends to conduct groundbreaking research and train the next generation of surgeons. We invite you to partner with us by contributing to the Department of Surgery Excellence Fund. Every gift, no matter the size, is crucial in advancing our vital missions.

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**Feature Article: Q&A with Eastern Kang, Terence Doherty and Jessica Johnston**

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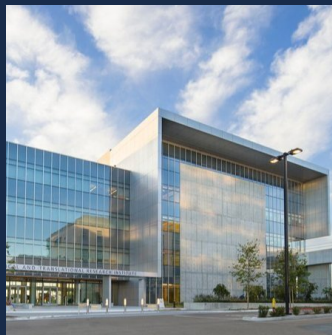
Photo from left: Eastern Kang and Jessica Johnst  
Terence Doherty not pictured

Eastern Kang, Ph.D., Terence Doherty and Jessica Johnst all support research in the Department of Surgery. Kang is a biostatistician; Doherty is a senior grant writer; and Johnst organizes research events to encourage collaboration. Together, they help the department drive impactful surgical research.

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## Featured News

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The Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute (ACTRI) received a seven-year, \$80 million Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) from the NIH National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). The award will provide resources, training and collaboration opportunities for ACTRI scientists, health care providers and the community.

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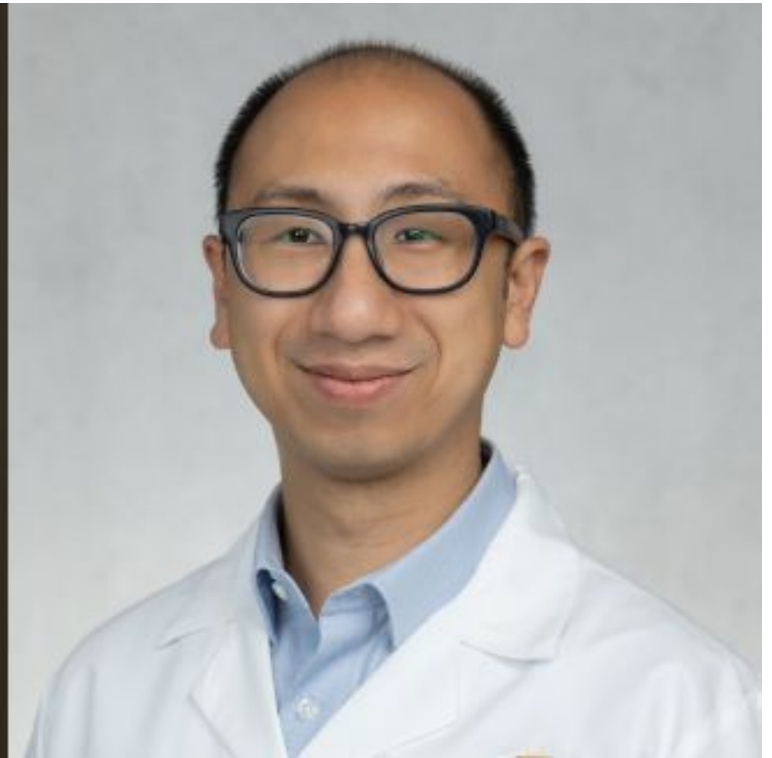


Mahmoud Malas, M.D., M.H.S., and Mohammed Hamouda, M.D., from the Division of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery, were featured in the Vascular Specialist newspaper for their research on stroke-related disability after different carotid operations.

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## Faculty News

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### **Aleah Brubaker and Peter Than Receive Pearl-Hannah Scholar Award**

This award, administered by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences, recognizes early-career physician-scientists who advance impactful biomedical research and provides \$100,000 over five years to fund innovative projects. Brubaker and Than will research advanced machine perfusion therapy at the Transplant Revitalization Laboratory at UC San Diego, which they founded and direct. The lab will also offer immersive, hands-on mentorship opportunities to undergraduate, graduate and medical students, as well as residents and fellows.



### **Sadia Ilyas Joins the Division of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery**

Sadia Ilyas, M.D., joins the division as an assistant professor. Ilyas completed her general surgery residency at Wright State University, surgical critical care fellowship at Ohio State University and vascular surgery fellowship at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. She was most recently an assistant professor of surgery at Georgetown University. Her research interests include patient safety and quality, health delivery and systems improvement, health economics and surgical education.



### **Sophie Wang Joins the Division of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery**

Sophie Wang, M.D., joins the division as an assistant professor. Wang received her medical degree from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and completed her vascular surgery residency at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical

Center. During her residency, she also completed a two-year NIH T32-supported research fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she studied soft robotic applications for cardiovascular diseases. Her research interests include hemodynamic models of aortic dissection, medical device development and chronic-limb threatening ischemia.

## Staff News

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### Division of Breast Surgery Participates in Curebound Cancer Challenge

The breast team participated in the 2025 Curebound Cancer Challenge (formerly Padres Pedal the Cause), which invites participants to a variety of events along the San Diego coast to raise money for local cancer research organizations.



## Training News

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### Department Resident Research Boot Camp

The Department of Surgery held a research boot camp for general surgery residents in their research year. Trainees were introduced to academic surgery topics, such as building clinical databases, designing translational research, using AI in surgical research and scientific writing.



### Division of Plastic Surgery Meet and Greet

The Division of Plastic Surgery hosted the American Council of Educators in Plastic Surgery 2025 Meet and Greet, where residency applicants learned more about our plastic surgery residency program. The event included an overview of the program by Program Director and Division Chief Amanda Gosman, M.D., and a Jeopardy-style Q&A.

### Welcome new UC San Diego Department of Surgery fellows!



**Jerome Manson**  
Cardiothoracic Surgery



**Erika Baird**  
Minimally Invasive  
Surgery



**Rebeca Dominguez  
Profeta**  
Minimally Invasive  
Surgery



**Jay Meisner**  
Pediatric Surgery



**Michelle Lippincott**  
Acute Care Surgery



**Lara Spence**  
Acute Care Surgery



**Fereshteh Salimi  
Jazi**  
Pediatric Surgical  
Critical Care



**Mariam Astarabadi**  
Surgical Critical Care



**Briana DiGiore**  
Surgical Critical Care



**Matthew Hatch**  
Surgical Critical Care



**Rohini Patel**  
Vascular Surgery

## Alumni Spotlight

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*Sohini Khan, M.D., graduated from her general surgery residency at UC San Diego in 2025. As a resident, Khan gained surgical experience and performed research in the fields of trauma surgery and surgical oncology. Next, Khan will complete her surgical oncology fellowship at UT Southwestern Medical Center.*

“I just graduated residency, so it feels weird thinking of myself as an alumna already. When I started medical school, I would have thought there was no way I would be here right now, having survived the gruel of surgical residency. There were times that I struggled with my confidence, skills and imposter syndrome. However, some of my favorite memories, especially during chief year, have been seeing my own progress in the operating room.

Surgical training has helped me learn skills to be a doctor in the fullest sense. I’m grateful for the experience and the mentorship I’ve received here at UC San Diego.”

## As Seen on Social Media

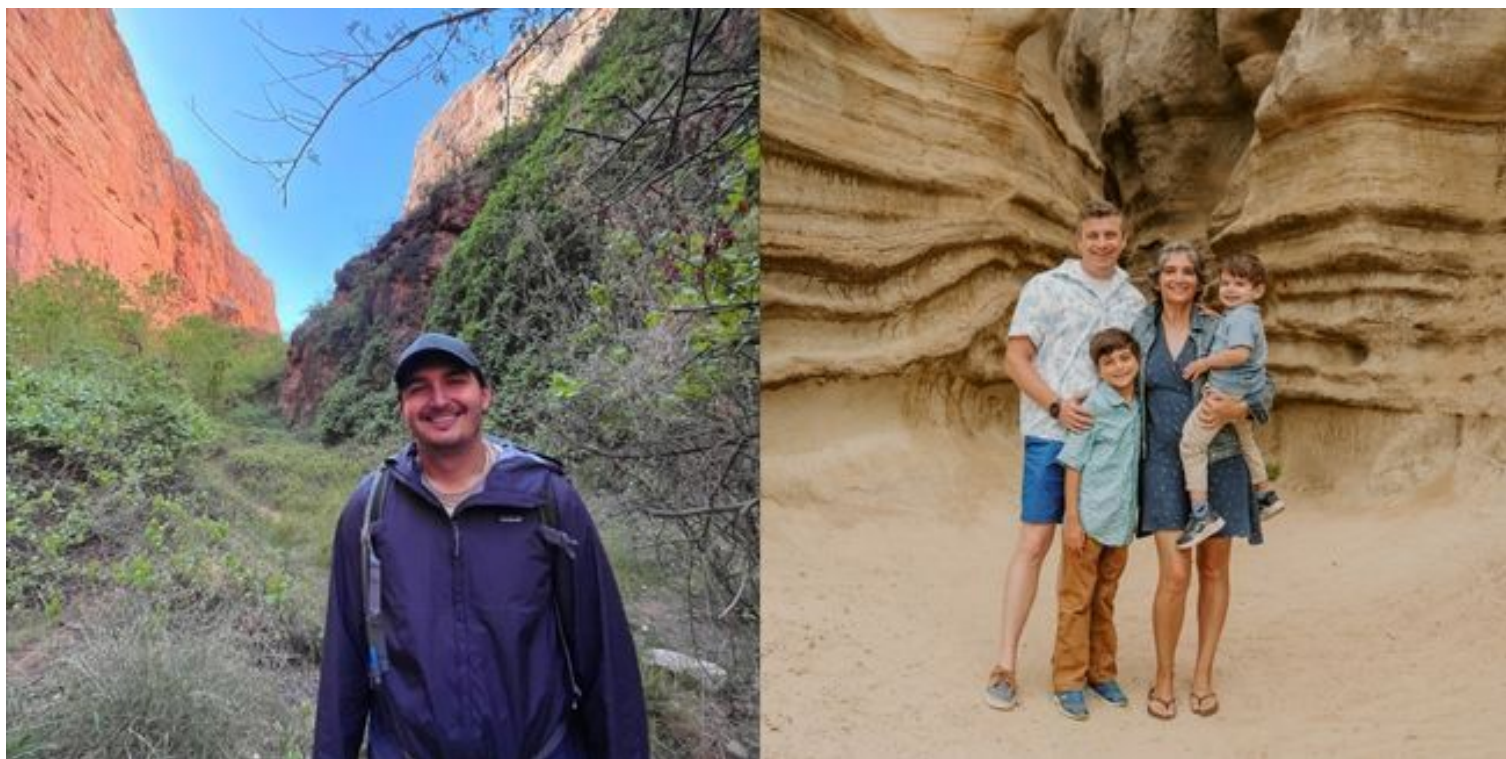
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### World Lung Cancer Day

In honor of World Lung Cancer Day, Mark Onaitis, M.D., professor in the Division of Cardiovascular and Thoracic

Surgery, shared important information about the risks, symptoms and latest advances in lung cancer care.



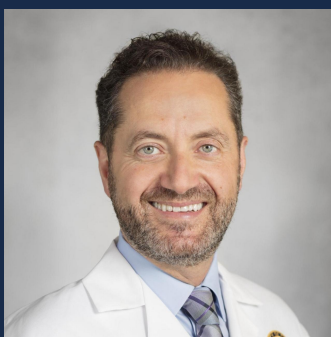
## Humans of Surgery

This month, we highlighted Alexander Todd, data analyst in the Department of Surgery, and Leila Adler, M.A., managing director of the Center for Research, Education, Innovation and Transformation in Organ Donation (REIMAGINE).

## Science Discoveries and Recent Publications

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Our diverse faculty are highly productive and actively disseminate new discoveries relevant to understanding and improving the management and treatment of surgical disease.



Division Chief Mahmoud Malas, M.D., M.H.S., from the Division of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery and colleagues found that mannitol, a protective solution known to benefit chronic kidney disease patients during vascular surgery, can improve the survival rate of patients undergoing abdominal aortic aneurysm repair surgery. [Read More](#)

## Events

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### UC San Diego Center for Research, Education, Innovation and Transformation in Organ Donation (REIMAGINE) Annual Symposium

When: October 12 - 14, 2025

Where: The Estancia La Jolla

[Details and registration](#)

## Recent Job Listings

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- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clin, Clin X, In-Res, Adjunct\) Thoracic Organ Procurement and First Assistant Surgeon](#)
- [Philanthropic Officer - Surgery - 135682](#)
- [JPF04316 Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X\) Transplant Surgery](#)
- [JPF04307 Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Vascular and Endovascular Surgery](#)
- [JPF04317 Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Breast Surgery](#)
- [JPF04318 Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Minimally Invasive Surgery](#)



[UC San Diego](#)

### **About the Department of Surgery**

The Department of Surgery at UC San Diego prides itself on delivering state-of-the-art, nation-leading clinical care to the diverse communities of Southern California and beyond. We are dedicated to transforming the lives of future patients through groundbreaking research and shaping the next generation of surgeons and leaders through our exceptional training programs. These training programs are a key reason UC San Diego Health hospitals rank among the top twenty nationwide and why our School of Medicine is recognized as a leader in research and medical education.

9500 Gilman Dr.  
La Jolla, CA 92093

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