

UC San Diego

Department of Surgery News

February 2026



Letter from the Chair

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Department,

I hope this February newsletter finds you well and out of the path of inclement weather that has gripped much of the nation. For the past two weeks, I watched Olympic athletes from across the world compete in a wide variety of winter sports. Two thrilling overtime hockey finals, ski jumps longer than a football field, knee-punishing moguls, and the intricate skills of sliding a 40 lbs stone on the ice were all very captivating. The skill, perseverance, determination and burning desire for excellence evident in these athletes was truly awe-inspiring. While engrossed in the Olympics, my mind repeatedly drifted to the affairs of the department and our team members who are equally inspiring and display a similar passion and dedication to their work.

In this month's newsletter, we are happy to present the 2024-2025 Department of Surgery Annual Report. Flipping through the annual report is one of my favorite activities as it gives me an opportunity to both review the accomplishments of the past year and reflect on the evolution of the department over time. Its contents are a tangible reflection of the extraordinary work of our teams and the partnership of friends and colleagues. The report chronicles the current state of every unit in the department and includes features on important and impactful events that shaped our year, including the opening of McGrah Outpatient Pavilion at the

Hillcrest Medical Campus which is transforming care for our patients from central, south and east San Diego County.

The new UC San Diego Center for Research, Education, Innovation and Transformation in Organ Donation (REIMAGINE) Podcast was also released in February. In this podcast, Gabriel Schnickel, MD, MPH, chief of the Division of Transplantation and Hepatobiliary Surgery, interviews members of the transplant community and explores the complexities of organ donation. The field is rife with compelling stories of patients, donors and team members that bring to light the very best of humanity.

I am also happy to announce the recent appointment of Jennifer Berumen, MD, to the role of program director for the general surgery residency. She succeeds Garth Jacobsen, MD, whose tenure in the role for 13 years was transformative and associated with a rise to national prominence of this signature training program. In our Q&A, Berumen, who is a former graduate of the residency, shares her insights, including her motivation for assuming the role and vision for bringing it to new heights. She is a surgeon of the highest caliber and truly inspiring role model for all of us.

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of attending the third annual Starry Starry Night Gala, alongside Division of Breast Surgery Chief Anne Wallace, MD, and her team, to raise funds for breast cancer research at UC San Diego. Notably, two members of our team, Michelle Milo and Robert Mallory, were presented with Angel of Life awards for their contributions to cancer care and patient advocacy. This important event is orchestrated and made possible by two wonderful patients, Daphne Barak and Erbil “Bill” Gunasti. We are deeply grateful for their generosity and commitment to helping others.

Last, and certainly not least, every February we pause and take time to celebrate our resident physicians and thank them for their dedication and service to our community. Our residents are the heart of patient care at UC San Diego Health, and we appreciate the impact they make on patients, families and our fellow colleagues. Outcomes for patients with complex surgical needs are well documented to be better when care is delivered in academic medical centers. The primary reason is the spirit of inquiry trainees bring and their consistent role in delivering care.

As always, I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished and am excited to share these successes with all of you.

Thank you for your support and engagement with the department.



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

2024-2025 Annual Report



Our 2024-2025 annual report features the inspiring patient stories, educational highlights and research breakthroughs in the Department of Surgery. Read all about our accomplishments and triumphs from the past year.

[Read Our Annual Report](#)

Feature Article: Giving Voice to the Human Experience of Organ Transplantation

The Center for Research, Education, Innovation and Transformation in Organ Donation (REIMAGINE) is launching the “REIMAGINE Podcast,” a new conversation series that explores what it means to care, give and be transformed by our connections with others in the transplant community.



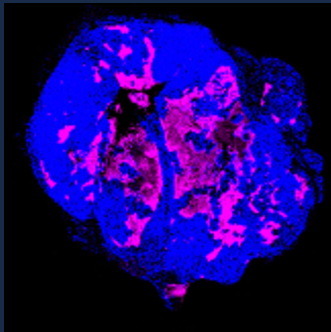
[Read the Press Release](#)

[Read Anh's Donor Story](#)

[Listen to the Podcast](#)

Science Discoveries and Recent Publications

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



Tatiana Hurtado De Mendoza, PhD, was the co-senior author on a study that examined a new immunotherapy approach to treat pancreatic cancer in mice. Partnered with the La Jolla Institute of Immunology, the team was able to harness cytomegalovirus (a common virus) immunity to significantly delay pancreatic tumor growth and extend mice survival.

[Read the Press Release](#)

[Our Publications](#)

Q&A: Jennifer Berumen

Jennifer Berumen, MD, associate professor in the Division of Transplantation and Hepatobiliary Surgery and surgical director of pediatric abdominal transplantation at Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego, is taking on a new role as the UC San Diego general surgery residency program director. Berumen completed the same residency program in 2012 and has served as associate program director since 2021.

The Department of Surgery spoke with her about her path from resident to director, her interest in resident education and why she chose to take on this role.



[Read the Q&A](#)

Faculty News



Benjamin Massenburg Named CPCJ Peer Reviewer of the Year

The Cleft Palate Craniofacial Journal (CPCJ) Peer Reviewer of the Year Award, given by the American Cleft Palate Craniofacial Association, celebrates a peer reviewer who exemplifies the core values and missions of the journal. Benjamin Massenburg, MD, was chosen by the journal's editorial board as the 2026 recipient.



Raeda Taj Joins the Division of Transplantation and Hepatobiliary Surgery

Raeda Taj, MD, joins the division as an assistant professor. Taj completed her general surgery residency at UC San Diego and abdominal transplant surgery fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include organ perfusion techniques and barriers to donation.

Training News



American Medical Association President Visits UC San Diego

Bobby Mukkamala, MD, is the president of the American Medical Association and a practicing otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon in Flint, MI. Mukkamala's visit included an address titled "Physician Leadership in Advocating for a Healthier Tomorrow."



Gregory Borschel Visits the Division of Plastic Surgery

Gregory Borschel, MD, is the chief of plastic surgery at Riley Hospital for Children and a professor at Indiana University. Borschel gave a talk on pushing the frontiers of nerve surgery with corneal neurotization and pediatric facial paralysis treatment, as well as led a lab for plastic surgery residents.

This month, the **Center for the Future of Surgery** hosted a tour for high school students to introduce them to different professions in healthcare. The center also held several labs for general and plastic surgery residents, minimally invasive surgery fellows and medical students.



Alumni Spotlight



Elliot Williams, MD, completed his general surgery residency at the UC San Diego Department of Surgery in 2021. He went on to complete a surgical critical care and acute care surgery fellowship at the University of Southern California and is now an assistant professor at UCSF Fresno.

“My training at UC San Diego stood out because I learned from experts across a wide range of surgeries. Now, working where there are fewer subspecialty surgeons, I frequently recall my UC San Diego mentors as I handle everything from complex biliary surgeries and vascular connections to advanced hernia repairs. When I face a tough pancreatic case or a late-night trauma case, I depend on the skills and judgment I gained at UC San Diego.

I am proud to share what I learned with the next generation. In the operating room with residents, I always mention which UC San Diego attending taught me a certain technique or tip. Even more important than the technical skills, the ties I formed at UC San Diego remain among my closest professional relationships. It is always a highlight to see so many from the UC San Diego community at national meetings, and those lasting ties are what I value most from my time in the program.”

As Seen on Social Media



Louis Perkins Day in the Life

We went behind the scenes with Louis Perkins, MD, for a look at life as a fourth-year general surgery resident. [Watch here](#)



Humans of Surgery

For this month's Humans of Surgery feature, we interviewed Shay Castro, the executive assistant to the chair of the Department of Surgery. [Read more Humans of Surgery.](#)



Thank a Resident Day

Our residents and fellows are a cornerstone of our department. They ensure the progression of our work, as well as the future of surgery as a whole. A huge thank you to these trainees — you make our department go round!

Events

2026 Starry Starry Night Gala

Bryan Clary, MD, MBA, Division of Breast Surgery Chief Anne Wallace, MD, and team attended the third annual Starry Starry Night Gala at the Chaparral Country Club in Palm Springs. The event, benefiting breast cancer research at UC San Diego, included a performance by country music singer-songwriter Alexis Wilkins. Michelle Milo, administrative specialist, and Robert Mallory, physician assistant, received Angel of Life awards for their contributions to cancer care and patient advocacy.





14th Annual Surgery Research Symposium with Keynote Speaker David Hackam, MD, PhD

Date: May 12, 2026

Time: 4 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Where: Scripps Seaside Forum

Support the Future of Surgery



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.

[Donate](#)

Recent Job Listings

- [JPF04432 Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Colorectal Surgery](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clin, Clin X, In-Res, Adjunct\) Trauma, Surgical Critical Care, Burns, and Acute Care Surgery](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Project Scientist - Surgery](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clin, Clin X, In-Res, Adjunct\) Thoracic Organ Procurement and First Assistant Surgeon](#)
- [Philanthropic Officer - Surgery - 135682](#)
- [Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Vascular and Endovascular Surgery](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clin, Clin X, In-Res, Adjunct\) Transplant Surgery/Surgical Oncology](#)



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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.

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