

Department of Surgery News

January 2026



Letter from the Chair

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Department,

Wishing you a happy belated New Year! This is always an exciting time of year, with college football, time spent with family and friends, and the anticipation of what lies ahead. For the department, each New Year brings new faces, fresh ideas, new achievements, and an opportunity to make a lasting, meaningful impact on the lives of patients who entrust their care to us. For many of our faculty, the New Year also brings anticipation of how their research will change understanding of the diseases they treat and how it will impact patients' lives well beyond the borders of UC San Diego. In this month's newsletter, I am excited to highlight numerous impactful research accomplishments and initiatives.

First, I want to congratulate faculty members Jason Sicklick, MD, and Patricia Thistlethwaite, MD, PhD, for their high-impact research publications. Sicklick and colleagues reported in this month's Journal of Clinical Oncology the results of an innovative clinical trial applying personalized cancer treatments to patients with aggressive, advanced cancer. Thistlethwaite and colleagues published a manuscript in Nature Medicine on the role of the blood biomarker Notch3 in patients with idiopathic pulmonary arterial hypertension (IPAH). An accompanying Q&A with one of Thistlethwaite's research fellows, Cristian Puerta, MD, also highlights the importance of pursuing academic research. Notably, these investigations, led by Sicklick and Thistlethwaite, were published in two leading scientific journals in cancer and human disease biology. They serve as a testament to the capabilities of surgeon-scientists, the importance of multidisciplinary research teams, and the ongoing need for research on surgically oriented diseases. You will also find additional impactful research by Gabriel Schnickel, MD, MPH, on 3-D printing patient-specific livers, and Sean Perez, MD, on reducing waste in the operating room.

We are happy to report important quality and patient-volume milestones in our solid-organ transplant programs, as well as competitive research awards for Amanda Gosman, MD, and medical student Alvin Nguyen. Last but not least, we are excited to share that the UC San Diego Center for the Future of Surgery was once again named a Comprehensive Accreditation Education Institute by the American College of Surgeons.

Clearly, our expectations for impact in the New Year are already coming to life, and we are excited about the remaining eleven months of the year...

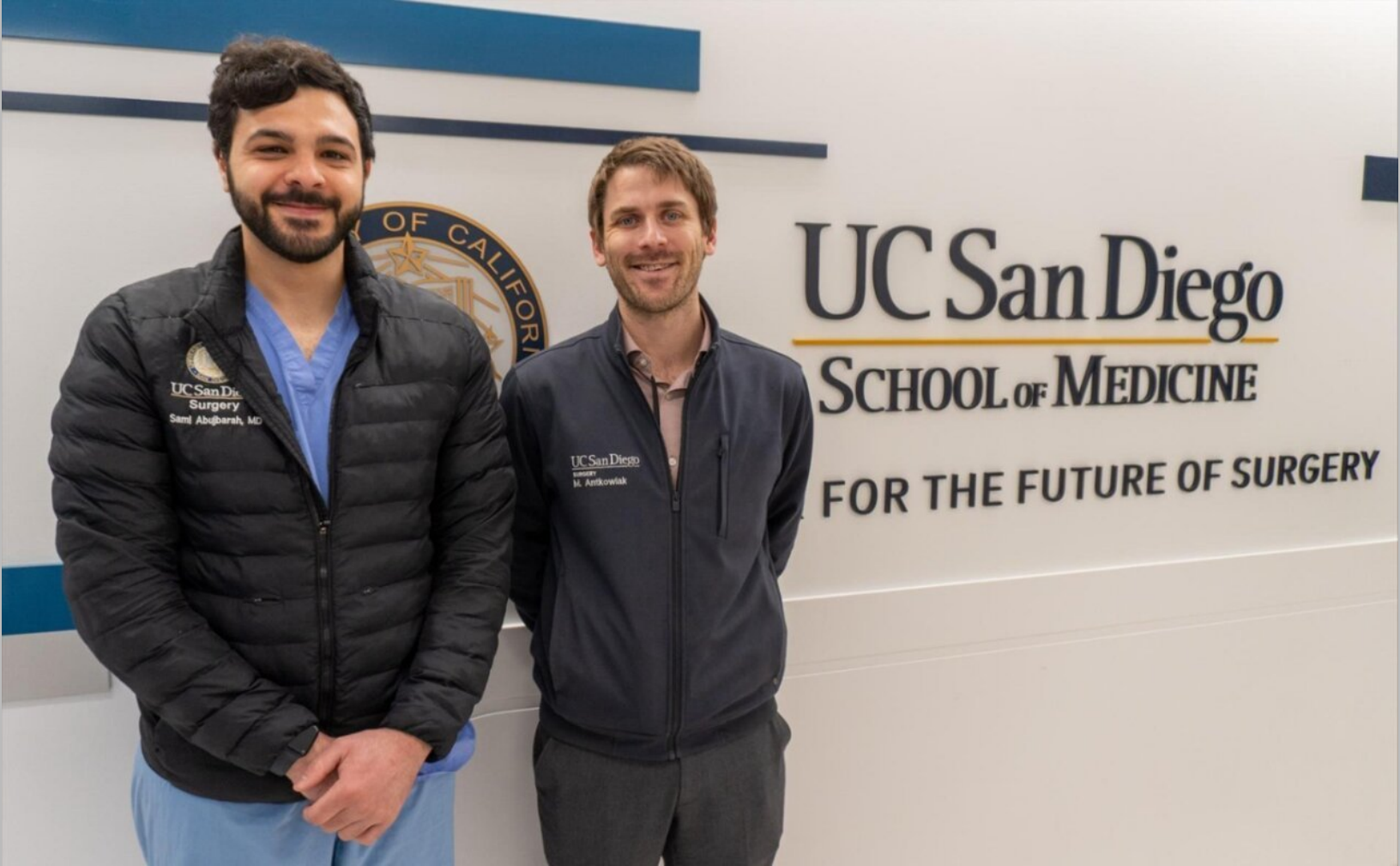
Again, I thank you for your support of the department!



Bryan Clary, MD, MBA

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



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](#)

Feature Article: Personalizing Cancer Treatments Significantly Improve Outcome Success



A clinical trial led by Jason Sicklick, MD, was the first in the world to demonstrate that cancer drug treatments can be safely and effectively personalized based on the patients' tumor DNA. This new individualized treatment can significantly improve treatment success.

[Read the Press Release](#)

[Watch the Interview](#)

Featured News



Patricia Thistlethwaite, MD, PhD, was interviewed by FOX 5 News for her team's recent publication on blood biomarkers for idiopathic pulmonary arterial hypertension (IPAH).

[Watch the Interview](#)



Gabriel Schnickel, MD, MPH, is helping lead a team to develop functional, patient-specific livers using 3D bioprinting and stem cell technology. Their goal is to eliminate the need for donor organs.

[Read the Press Release](#)



Sean Perez, MD, general surgery resident, was interviewed for the JAMA Surgery Author Interviews Podcast for his publication on "Data and the Art of Surgical Preference Card Maintenance."

[Listen to the Interview](#)

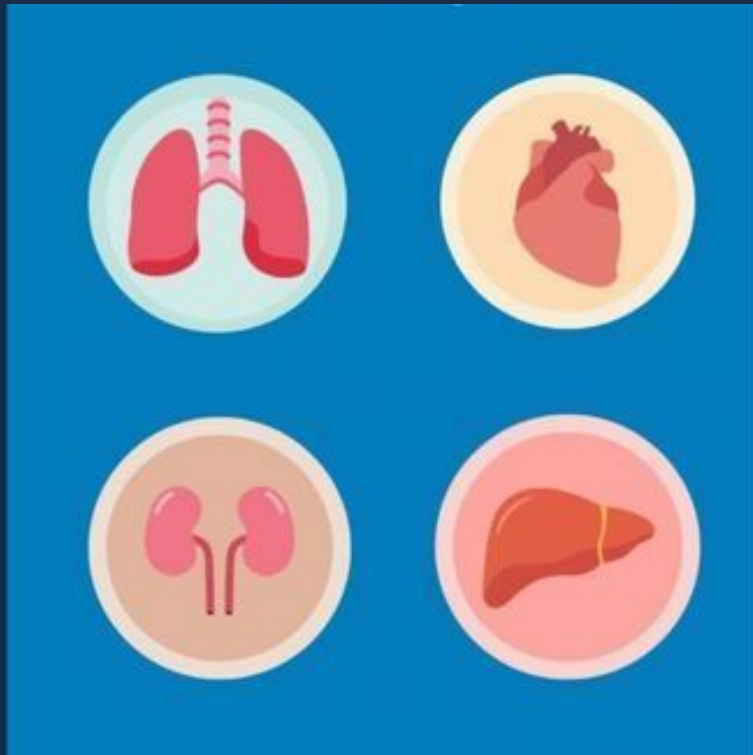
Q&A: Cristian Puerta

Cristian Puerta, MD, is a first-year general surgery resident and co-first author on the Thistlethwaite lab's publication on idiopathic pulmonary arterial hypertension (IPAH) biomarkers. In this Q&A, Puerta discusses the study, his path to UC San Diego and his commitment to research.



[Read the Q&A](#)

Clinical News



Transplant Milestones

The UC San Diego Health Center for Transplantation completed 485 organ transplants, including 54 lung transplants, 74 heart transplants, 182 kidney transplants and 175 liver transplants. The milestone reflects exceptional clinical expertise, operational excellence, and an unwavering commitment to patient-centered care.



CTEPH Education Videos

In videos with UC San Diego Health, Michael Madani, MD, discusses what chronic thromboembolic pulmonary hypertension (CTEPH) is and how UC San Diego Health surgically treats it via pulmonary thromboendarterectomy (PTE) surgery.

[About CTEPH](#)

[About PTE Surgery](#)

Faculty News



Amanda Gosman Receives 2025 APEX Grand Award

The Annual Awards for Publication Excellence Competition, an independent organization, celebrates communicators in corporate, nonprofit and private settings. Amanda Gosman, MD, chief of the Division of Plastic Surgery, received this award for her Aesthetic Surgery Journal article on women in plastic surgery. Other winners included the American Heart Association, Duke-NUS Medical School and more.



Ozanan Meireles Grand Rounds

Ozanan Meireles, MD, is an associate professor and the inaugural Vice Chair of Innovation in the Duke University Department of Surgery, as well as the Surgical Director of Duke AI Health. He is also an alumnus of the UC San Diego Minimally Invasive Surgery Fellowship. During his presentation, Meireles spoke on "Survey, AI, and The Pursuit of Perfection."



Alvin Nguyen Receives American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) Best Presentation Award

Alvin Nguyen, a medical student researcher in the Division of Plastic Surgery mentored by Christopher Reid, MD, received this award for his presentation on breast reconstruction in the Big Easy Encore abstract session at Plastic Surgery The Meeting 2025 in New Orleans, LA. His name and abstract title will appear in the January/February issue of ASPS Plastic Surgery News.

This month, the **Center for the Future of Surgery** was once again named a comprehensive Accreditation Education Institute by the American College of Surgeons, one of 86 accredited comprehensive institutes in the world. Comprehensive AEIs educate at least four learner groups, develop original curricula, offer a broad spectrum of education programs and are dedicated to the advancement of the field through research and scholarly activities.



Alumni Spotlight



Jeffery Reeves, MD, completed his general surgery residency in 2024 and minimally invasive surgery fellowship in 2025, both in the UC San Diego Department of Surgery. He is now an assistant professor in the UC San Diego Division of Minimally Invasive Surgery, and also serves as the Associate Medical Director for Surgical Quality and Medical Director of Perioperative Informatics and Innovation at UC San Diego.

“Surgery is a team sport, and when you are surrounded by the right people, you can handle far more than you think. Looking back, my training was always about the people. My co-residents became family, mentors

shaped and supported my career path, and our shared patients reminded us every day why we do this work.

What made UC San Diego special was that it never stood still. A program that already had great clinical breadth, second-to-none simulation training and abundant research opportunities continued to grow, innovate and improve year after year. As a chief resident, I had witnessed so many tangible enhancements. When I shared career interests that didn't fit a traditional mold, the response wasn't 'we don't have that.' It was 'let's build it.' That mindset made all the difference.

Now, I have the privilege to keep working here, and I couldn't imagine being anywhere else."

As Seen on Social Media

To kick off **Humans of Surgery** in 2026, we featured Laura Haines, MD, chief of the Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care, Burns and Acute Care Surgery, Mahmoud Malas, MD, chief of the Division of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery, and Benjamin Keller, MD, assistant professor in the Division of Pediatric Surgery.



[Read More Humans of Surgery](#)

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.



Pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma is the deadliest major cancer. Prior studies have suggested a link with the biochemical process SUMOylation, in which a small protein called SUMO (small ubiquitin-like modifier) attaches to other proteins to impact cancer. Now, Professors Rebekah White, MD, and Yuan Chen, PhD, along with General Surgery Resident Jorge De La Torre, MD, and team have found that blocking a protein involved in SUMOylation, called the SUMO E1 enzyme, can modify the tumor environment to allow certain drugs to remove the "brakes" from the immune system. The process prolonged survival in mouse models of pancreatic cancer. [Read the publication](#)

Our Publications

Events



Save the Date: 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

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](#)



UC San Diego

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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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