

UC San Diego

Department of Surgery News

January 2025



Letter from the Chair

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Department,

It is hard for me to believe that another calendar year has passed and the first month of the new year is ending. I want to first relay our deepest sympathies to the victims of the numerous fires in Southern California. Many of us have friends and colleagues whose lives have been significantly disrupted by the fires, and our heart goes out to them. The holidays, recent elections and transitions and other world events have made it challenging to pause and reflect on the year's many accomplishments in the Department of Surgery.

As always, I am happy to share a sampling of the impactful work you help support with your resources and interest in this newsletter.

This month's Q&A and feature article highlight important and novel work undertaken to improve the lives of our residents. For those who may not know, training to become a surgeon is arduous. The knowledge base, technical skills and clinical experience required to be an effective surgeon take many years to acquire. These five to six years are filled with long workweeks that frequently stretch to 80 hours. While the health of our residents and patients is the primary concern, workweeks exceeding 80 hours violate regulatory guidelines and place the program at risk.

Efforts to minimize unnecessary time in the hospital have historically been quite difficult for surgical training programs. To address the root causes of excessive work hours and improve the wellness of our residents, our team utilized essential quality improvement tools that are standard in the business environment. In an article published in the premiere surgical journal JAMA Surgery, this team, led by Jeff Reeves, M.D., Garth Jacobsen, M.D., and myself, demonstrated that the novel use of these tools can lead to sustained improvements in hospital work environments.

In light of this new publication, we spoke to Jeff Reeves, M.D., an author on this paper and fellow in the Division of Minimally Invasive Surgery, for our monthly Q&A. Reeves describes how this project came to be, why this work is so valuable and his hopes for the future. We are also pleased to share a number of new awards and other announcements in the pages that follow.

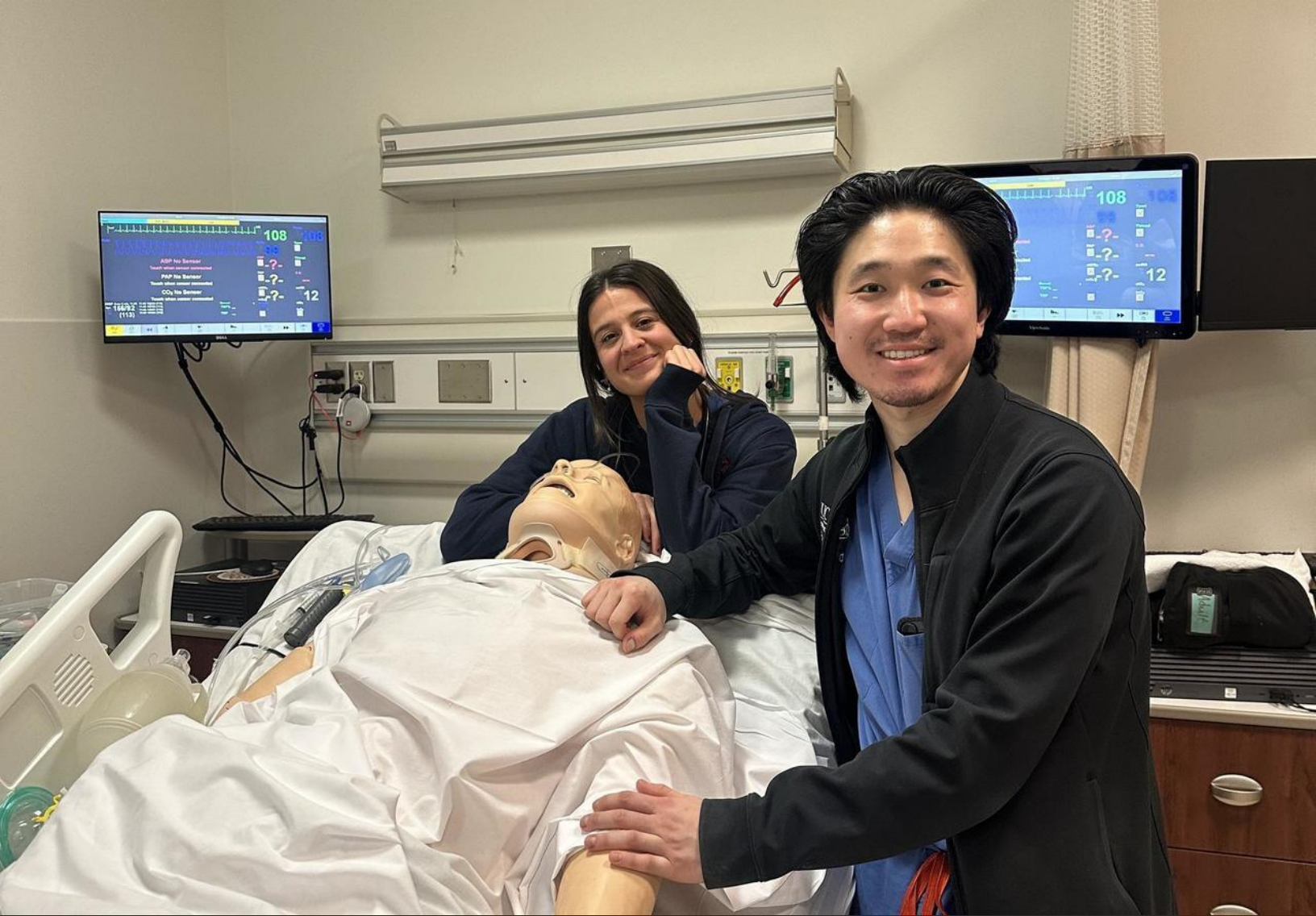
As always, we appreciate your interest and support, which facilitate our collective successes.



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



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: Improvement Initiative Increased Well-Being and Reduced Inefficiencies for Surgical Residents

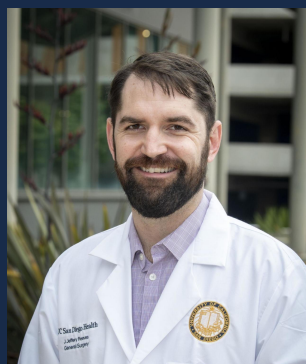


A new study led by Bryan Clary, M.D., M.B.A., Garth Jacobsen, M.D., and Jeff Reeves, M.D., found that using the Lean methodology, which works to reduce hospital inefficiencies through improvement workshops, also increased resident well-being at UC San Diego.

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Q&A with Jeffery Reeves, M.D.

Jeff Reeves, M.D., is a fellow in the Division of Minimally Invasive Surgery in the Department of Surgery. His research interests include making healthcare systems more efficient to lower patient costs, increasing healthcare access and improving provider well-being. Reeves, along with Bryan Clary, M.D., M.B.A., and Garth Jacobsen, M.D., recently released a study on how reducing inefficiencies can positively impact residents and hospitals.



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Featured News



Jay Doucet, M.D., chief of the Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care, Burns and Acute Care Surgery, speaks on violence against healthcare workers in an article from the American College of Surgeons.

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Katharine Hinchcliff, M.D., assistant professor in the Division of Plastic Surgery, spoke to UC San Diego Today about her amputation surgery on patient Christian Arreola, who now uses a bionic prosthetic.

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Research News



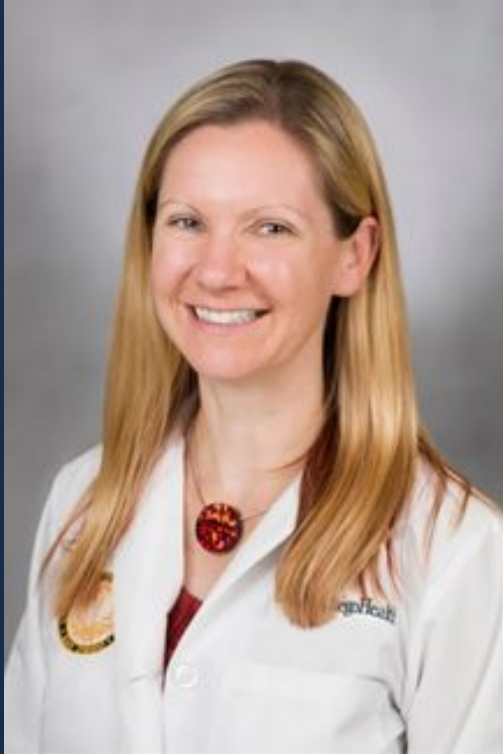
Aleah Brubaker Receives 2025 Vanguard Prize from the American Society of Transplant Surgeons

This award recognizes the best publication by a young researcher in the previous year. Aleah Brubaker, M.D., Ph.D., received this prize for her research in normothermic regional perfusion and liver transplant outcomes.



Jonathan Weitz Receives Career Development Award from the Tower Cancer Research Foundation

This one-year grant provides \$100,000 to fund cancer research in Southern California. Jonathan Weitz, Ph.D., under the mentorship of Andrew Lowy, M.D., researches treatment options for pancreatic cancers.



UC San Diego Department of Surgery Presents at the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma Annual Scientific Assembly

Allison Berndtson, M.D., Jessica Masch, M.D., M.A., and William Johnston, M.D., presented on their research in the Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care, Burns and Acute Care Surgery.



Division of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery Presents at 2025 Southern Association for Vascular Surgery Annual Meeting

Mahmoud Malas, M.D., M.H.S., Mohammed Hamouda, M.D., and Narek Veranyan, M.D., presented their research on renal failure, limb loss and aortic repair surgery outcomes.



Brian Eliceiri Named Secretary of Wound Healing Society 2024-2028

Brian Eliceiri, Ph.D., was recently appointed to a three-year term as the secretary of the Wound Healing Society, an international organization focused on the clinical and basic science of wound healing. Eliceiri is part of the executive leadership team, working with rotating leaders to guide the future of wound healing research and education.



Allison Berndtson Presents at 2025 National Association of EMS Physicians Meeting

This event involved professional collaboration, education and training workshops. Allison Berndtson, M.D., associate professor in the Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care, Burns and Acute Care Surgery, was the invited Grand Rounds speaker during the opening session and presented on injuries seen at the U.S.-Mexico border.



Garth Jacobsen Appointed Interim Chief of the Division of Minimally Invasive Surgery

Garth Jacobsen, M.D., is currently a professor in the Division of Minimally Invasive Surgery. He is also the program director of the department's general surgery residency program.

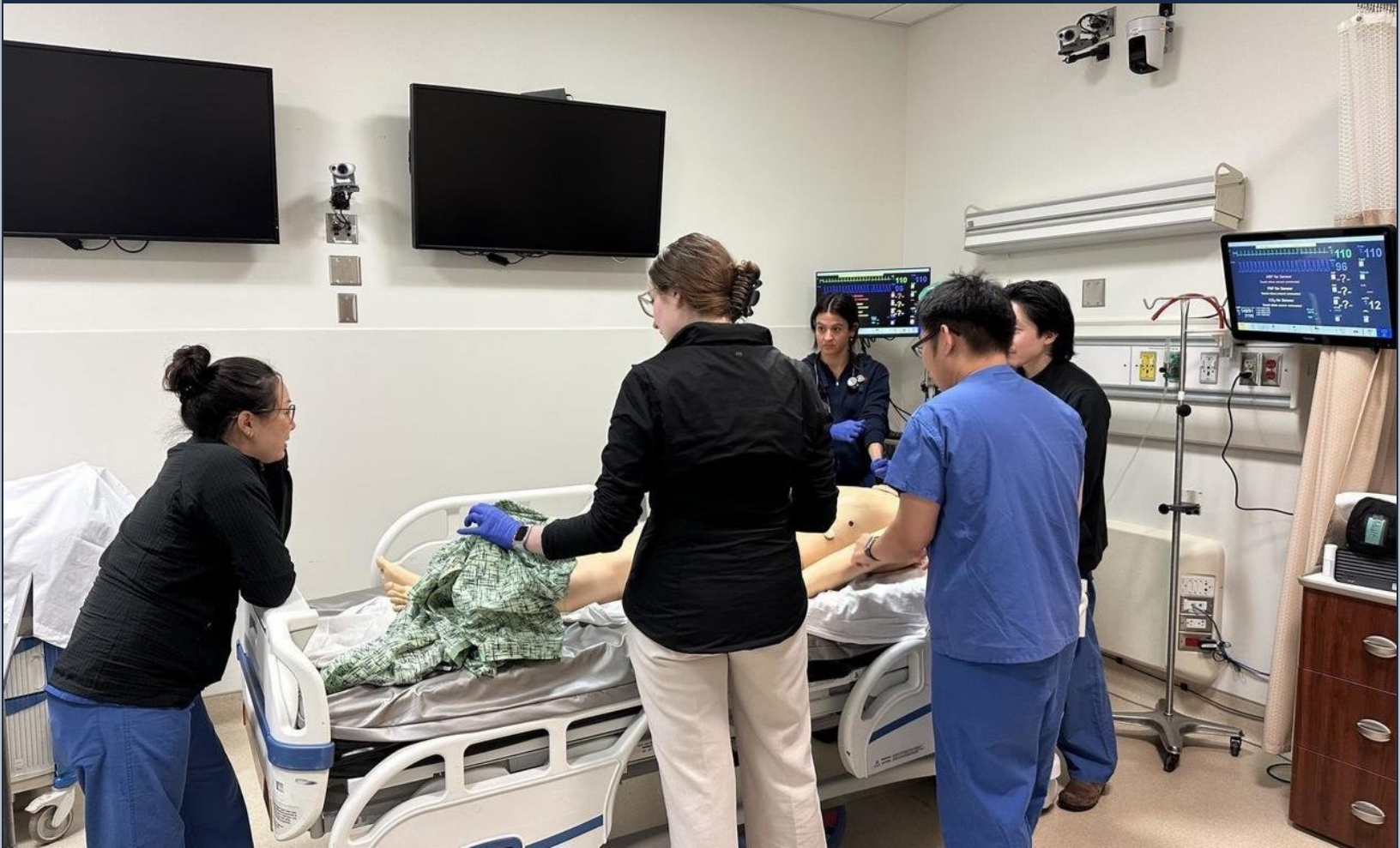
Training News



Residency Interviews Begin

This month, the department began interviewing many talented general surgery residency candidates. We are excited to get to know the future faces of the Department of Surgery.

This month, the Center for the Future of Surgery began hosting trainings for the UC San Diego Atkinson Physician Assistant Education Program. Here, students will practice critical surgical skills. Additionally, general surgery residents, alongside anesthesia residents, attended simulation labs at the Simulation Training Center.



Alumni Spotlight



Jonathan DeLong, M.D., graduated from UC San Diego's general surgery residency program in 2021. He went on to complete a hepatopancreatobiliary and robotic surgery fellowship at Stanford University in 2023. Now, he is an assistant professor of surgical oncology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

"My favorite part about training at UC San Diego was seeing the program grow and improve. When I was an intern, Jacobs Medical Center was still an idea, the Center for Transplantation was at Hillcrest, Rady Children's had a McDonald's and Garth Jacobsen, M.D., had just become the general surgery residency program

director. Seeing the transformative growth in such a short time period was as remarkable as it was inspiring, and, of course, it was the people who made it that way!"

As Seen on Social Media



Mark Onaitis Featured in Video for UC San Diego Health

Mark Onaitis, M.D., a professor in our Division of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery, spoke on the importance of lung cancer screenings.



National Mentorship Month

In honor of National Mentorship Month, the department spoke to Jennifer Berumen, M.D., about her full circle mentee to mentor experience.

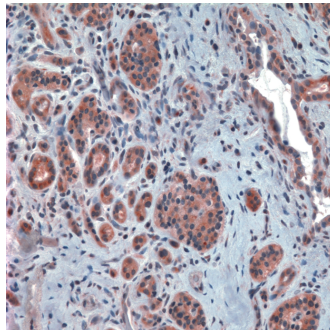


Humans of Surgery

The department continued its Humans of Surgery campaign, highlighting Ann Gaffey, M.D., M.S., Martin Lhuire, M.D. Ph.D., Javier Bravo, M.D., and Oluyemisi Bolonduro.

Science Discoveries and Recent Publications

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



A study led by Bharti Garg, Ph.D., and Andrew Lowy, M.D., found that the MICAL2 gene is a driver for pancreatic cancer,

meaning that early identification and targeting of this gene may limit cancer progression. [Read more](#)

READ OUR LATEST PUBLICATIONS BY DIVISION

Recent Job Listings

- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Surgical Sciences](#)
- [Associate or Full Professor \(Ladder Rank/In-Residence\) Surgical Sciences](#)
- [Assistant Professor \(Ladder Rank/In-Residence\) Surgical Sciences](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Breast Surgery](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X\) Transplant Surgery](#)



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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