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UC San Diego

DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY NEWS

July/August 2024



Letter from the Chair

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Department,

I hope that you find yourself in the midst of a restful and pleasant summer. Summertime is typically a period of reflection, and we certainly have much to reflect on in the Department. In the summer edition of our newsletter, we are excited to share that UC San Diego Health has once again secured the No. 1 ranking in San Diego in *U.S. News & World Report's* annual "Best Hospitals" survey. For the second year, we are also on the coveted "Honor Roll"—a distinction awarded to only 20 hospitals in the nation for

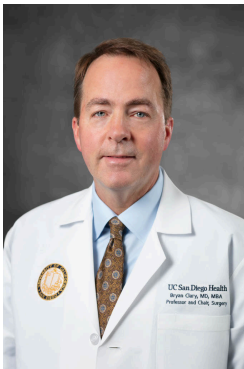
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clinical outcomes, the processes, and resources necessary to deliver state-of-the-art care and reputation.

Programs in the Department of Surgery (Cancer, Lung Surgery & Pulmonology, GI Surgery & Gastroenterology, Heart & Vascular) are central to this achievement, and we cannot be more excited about this recognition. Congratulations to our skilled surgeons, advanced practitioners, nurses, researchers, and many others on our teams who have made such outcomes possible. Together, we are committed to delivering the highest quality care, advancing medical research, and making a significant impact on the lives of our patients and the broader community.

For our Q&A this month, we sat down with the new Director of Moores Cancer Center, Diane Simeone, M.D. Simeone is an internationally recognized surgeon-scientist who has a long record of delivering exceptional care and transforming our understanding of pancreatic cancer. The Moores Cancer Center is the only Comprehensive Cancer Center in San Diego and a critical resource for communities throughout the broader region. Simeone has hit the ground running with coordinating the clinical, research, education, and outreach missions of the Center. We hope you enjoy this glimpse into her role and life at UC San Diego Health.

These and other announcements highlight that summer in the Department of Surgery remains busy. Every day, we toil for our patients, present and future. We cannot do this without your interest and support.



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

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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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Q&A with Diane Simeone, M.D.



Diane Simeone, M.D., is the new director of Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health and a pancreatic surgeon scientist in the Division of Surgical Oncology in the Department of Surgery. The Moores Cancer Center is the region's only NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, which brings together top physicians and scientists from

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Featured News

UC San Diego Health

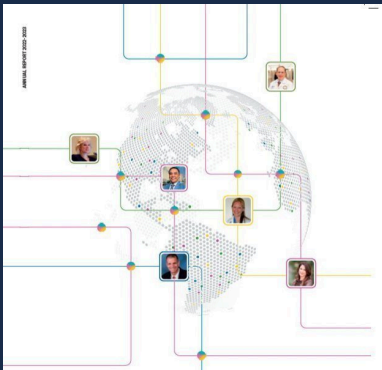


#1 in San Diego
and **Top 20** in the Nation

UC San Diego Health has once again secured the No. 1 ranking in San Diego according to the 2024-2025 *U.S. News & World Report* “Best Hospitals” survey and has also received “Honor Roll” designation, a distinction awarded to only 20 hospitals in the nation for exceptional patient care.

The survey evaluated more than 4,500 hospitals across 15 specialties and 20 procedures and conditions, with only 3% earning top-50 rankings. Among these, UC San Diego Health achieved national recognition in 11 specialties.

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2023 Annual Report

The latest annual report is now available! The theme is “Healing Beyond Borders” as our mission is to positively impact our world. This world extends beyond our geographical region as we deliver exceptional, nation-leading surgical care to patients and communities distant to our facilities.

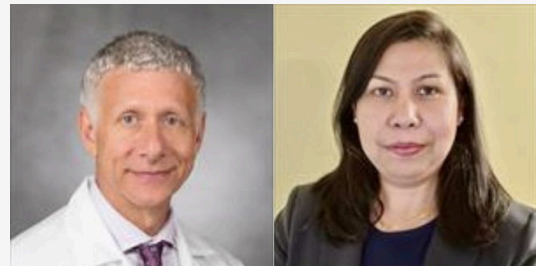
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Research News



Patricia Thistlethwaite Receives \$2.48 Million from NIH's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Patricia Thistlethwaite, M.D., Ph.D., will examine the small protein, NOTCH3-



Andrew Lowy and Shweta Joshi Receive Additional \$1.2 Million to Advance Pancreatic Cancer Research

The \$1.2 million award from the Lustgarten Foundation will build on an

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pulmonary arterial hypertension. She hopes this study will advance our understanding of the molecular signals that lead to vascular smooth muscle cell growth in the lung. The new biomarker test could lead to more patient-friendly, less invasive, and less costly diagnostics for pulmonary arterial hypertension and serve as a useful adjunct to current testing methods.



Aleah Brubaker and Peter Than Receive \$200,000 American Society of Transplant Surgeons Grant

Portable normothermic machine perfusion (NMP) offers the ability to rehabilitate organs and assess suitability for transplant, helping to solve the persistent organ shortage in liver transplantation. Aleah Brubaker, M.D., Ph.D., and Peter Than, M.D., will investigate how NMP impacts cellular pathways that may prevent bile duct injury. Their goal is to identify therapeutic targets to reduce or treat bile duct injury and increase organ availability for waitlisted patients.

CureBound to allow Andrew Lowy, M.D., and Shweta Joshi, Ph.D., to conduct a clinical trial to explore the activity of the medication Fostamatinib, in combination with chemotherapy, in patients with removable pancreatic cancer. The additional funding will speed the duration of the study and allow for more translational science.



Elsie Ross and Tom Alsaigh Receive \$200,000 Martha P. Mack Foundation Grant

The grant will support the research of Elsie Ross, M.D., M.S., and Tom Alsaigh, M.D., on the use of artificial intelligence and genomics to personalize treatment recommendations for diabetics with peripheral vascular disease, a progressive circulatory disorder characterized by blood vessel blockages.



Stephen Bickler Receives \$200,000 American Heart Association Grant to Study Cardiovascular Disease in Africa

The grant will fund a pilot study on the relationship between nitric oxide, the intestinal microbiome, and vascular function. Nitric oxide is produced by intestinal microbes and controls blood pressure. Stephen Bickler, M.D., hopes this investigation will advance our understanding of the biological basis of cardiovascular disease in middle- to low-income countries.



Winta Mehtsun Receives Funding From Conquer Cancer and Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health

Winta Mehtsun, M.D., M.P.H., received the Robert A. Winn Diversity in Clinical Trials Career Development Award from Conquer Cancer. The \$120,000/ year two-year award supports early-stage physician-investigators working to advance health equity in clinical research in the areas of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and immunologic disorders.

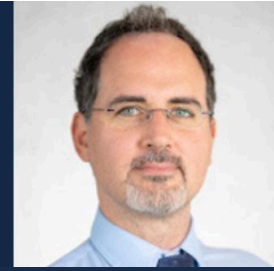
California's large population of patients with limited English proficiency face unique disparities in cancer care access. To better understand these disparities, as part of a \$50,000 Grant from Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health, Mehtsun and team will examine the quality of care and survival rates of patients with limited English proficiency across six UC health systems and explore the barriers and facilitators of such care.

Faculty News



Tatiana Kisseleva Appointed Director of the Sanford Stem Cell Fitness and Space Medicine Center

In this new role, Tatiana Kisseleva, M.D., Ph.D., will recruit exemplary stem cell physicians, commence a fellowship program, and lead space fitness and orbital medicine research that can benefit both astronauts and people living on Earth.



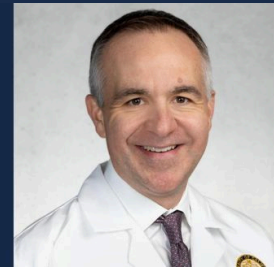
Geoffroy Noel Recognized with UC San Diego School of Medicine Educational Scholarship Award

The award recognizes the especially active role of Geoffroy Noel, Ph.D., in the generation and dissemination of evidence-based teaching and learning practices to impact student learning outcomes in the health sciences.



The Department of Surgery Welcomes Jay Xue

Jay Xue, M.D., joins the Division of Plastic Surgery after completing his fellowship in craniofacial and pediatric plastic surgery earlier this year at UC San Diego. He attended the University of Texas in Houston for medical school and completed his residency at UC Davis. He has a strong research interest in congenital craniofacial anomalies and general facial reconstruction.



Todd Costantini Accepts New Roles at University of Minnesota

Todd Costantini, M.D., will serve as chief of the Division of Critical Care and Acute Care Surgery and vice-chair for Clinical Quality in the Department of Surgery. He spent 20 years at UC San Diego where he led a research program focused on sepsis and clinical trials that informed trauma care nationally; authored more than 180 research publications; and served as the UC San Diego trauma medical director.



The Department of Surgery Welcomes John Vossler

John Vossler, M.D., M.B.A., M.S., joins the Division of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery after completing fellowships in cardiothoracic surgery at the University of Utah and pediatric cardiovascular surgery at the University of Michigan. He attended Wake Forest University for medical school and completed his residency at the University of Hawaii. His research focuses on clinical outcomes and large databases.



The Department of Surgery Welcomes Theodore H. Welling

Theodore H. Welling, M.D., is a hepato-pancreato-biliary (HPB) surgeon who is nationally recognized for his surgical expertise and outcomes in liver, biliary, and pancreatic cancers. His research focus is the tumor immunology of HPB malignancies; he has authored over 70 articles and book chapters. Additionally, he has led or was co-investigator in several novel immune therapy clinical trials in HPB malignancies.

Training News

We are pleased to announce the creation of the Cardiothoracic Surgery Integrated Residency Program, designed to train future leaders in the discipline of cardiothoracic surgery. The program combines a fundamental education in general surgery with adult and congenital cardiac and general thoracic surgery, with a rich exposure to clinical material. The first class, consisting of one resident, will start July 1, 2025.

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Alumni Spotlight



Vijay Menon, M.D., is an assistant professor of surgery at the University of Drexel and attending transplant surgeon at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. He is a member of the Society of Surgical Oncology, American College of Surgeons, American Society of Transplant Surgeons, Americas Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association, and International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association.

"The faculty in the Department are peerless. I fondly look back at the kidney transplants and procurements I performed with all the faculty in transplant surgery, and in particular, Dr. Mekeel. I enjoyed my time at the VA, cherishing the conversations in and out of the operating room with the attendings, especially with Drs. Ardill and Owens. Dr. Clary arrived during my second year and he made his mark on the program with his strong style of leadership and with his weekly Chairman Rounds. I vividly recall doing a hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy procedure (a cancer treatment that involves filling the abdominal cavity with chemotherapy drugs that have been heated) with Dr. Veerapong. Halfway through I asked him 'What do you think?' He peered up and said, 'I think we can get it all'—the case lasted sixteen hours!

There is a sense of pride and empowerment that only the best educators can provide, and they were plentiful at UC San Diego. Dr. Jacobsen, who became program director when I started as an intern, crafted a program with diverse and happy residents, and the camaraderie was wonderful. I made lifelong friends, with two of my seniors being co-best men at my wedding. Overall, I had a wonderful time from 2013-2018 at UC San Diego and it prepared me well for fellowship and a career in surgery."

As seen on social media



Sonia Ramamoorthy Elected President of ASCRS

Sonia Ramamoorthy, M.D., elected President of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons. Ramamoorthy is the fourth female



Welcome New Residents!

The UC San Diego Department of Surgery is thrilled to welcome our 2024 residents—in General Surgery, Plastic Surgery, and Vascular Surgery—and

president of the 125-year-old surgical society.

begin another year educating the best and brightest in academic surgery.

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.

[READ OUR LATEST PUBLICATIONS BY DIVISION](#)

Job Listings

- [Post-Doctoral Fellow - Surgical Oncology](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Project Scientist - Surgical Oncology](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Minimally Invasive Surgery](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Plastic Surgery](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Pediatric Cardiothoracic Surgery](#)
- [Assistant Professor \(Ladder Rank/In-Residence\) Surgical Scientists](#)
- [Associate or Full Professor \(Ladder Rank/In-Residence\) Surgical Scientists](#)
- [Assistant, Associate or Full Professor \(HS Clinical, Clinical X, In-Residence, Adjunct\) Surgical Scientists](#)
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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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