

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE // SUMMER // 2025

FSUMED



*Celebrating 25 years,
the College of Medicine
Grows in Scope and Impact*

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FSUMED

THE MAGAZINE FOR FSU'S
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

SUMMER 2025

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FSU
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



We are not ones to shy away from big ideas. On June 15, 2000, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush signed the legislation to create the Florida State University College of Medicine. This was a “big idea” back then and remains one today. This year, we celebrate 25 years of accomplishments by our alumni, students, faculty and staff and look with promise toward the next 25 years.

What does our future hold? A lot. FSU Health, another “big idea,” is beginning to take shape. This bold university initiative will build a medical ecosystem that will truly transform medical education and health care delivery in North Florida. Already, ground has been broken for an FSU Health Academic Health Center on the campus of Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH), set to open next year. The 140,000-square-foot building will house clinical research and education space, residency programs, laboratory facilities and other resources designed to bridge the gaps among education, academic research and patient care. It will be home to approximately 30 principal investigators and is expected to attract \$40 million annually in grant funding.

In March, the FSU Board of Trustees and the Florida Board of Governors — the 17-member board that oversees Florida’s state universities — approved \$414 million in bond financing for the construction of an FSU Health hospital in Panama City Beach. The university will partner with an operator to handle day-to-day operations of the new medical facility. Once final approval is given by the state, construction will begin on the first phase of the hospital, which can accommodate up to 180 beds and will offer a broad range of health care services including emergency medicine, general medicine and surgery, and diagnostic imaging. In addition, specialized service lines will be added, which will include cardiac care, neurology and orthopedics. To make this project a reality, The St. Joe Company donated more than 16 acres of land to FSU. A medical office building is already on site and accepting patients. The College of Medicine is developing additional partnerships to support the growth of FSU Health.

We also have big ideas for expanding our Graduate Medical Education (GME) program. In July, the FSU College of Medicine assumed sponsorship of four residency programs with Ascension Sacred Heart Hospitals, three — Internal Medicine, OB/GYN and Pediatrics — in Pensacola and the fourth, Family Medicine, in Miramar Beach. Also in July, at

TMH, the college assumed sponsorship of the Family Medicine residency program. We have exciting plans to expand GME throughout the state — adding more slots to train more physicians that are so badly needed in Florida.

Everything we do — and all the big ideas we have — are centered on improving patient care and providing our students the best education and training possible to meet the health care needs of Floridians. We do this in many ways, including through our School of Physician Assistant Practice (now with more than 300 alumni); the Bridge to Clinical Medicine program, which leads to a master’s degree in a health-related field; our doctoral program, which trains the next generation of scientists to answer important questions of medical relevance; and our pathway programs that serve as an entry point for students interested in pursuing a rewarding career in health care.

This year, we celebrate the college’s 25th anniversary — and the 20th anniversary of the graduation of our first class of medical students, the Class of 2005. And, this year, our Sarasota Regional Campus celebrates its 20th anniversary.

Although we have many successes and institutional milestones to celebrate — from anniversaries to the expansion and growth of programs — we have not lost sight of the most important and personal milestones of all. These include the admission of new cohorts of eager students, White Coat ceremonies, Match Day, commencements and all the personal victories and sacrifices experienced by our students along the way. We are very proud of each and every one of them — and remain committed to their success. I hope you share the same sense of pride and feeling of accomplishment for all we have done over the past 25 years, and for all that is yet to come.

With Warm Regards,

Alma B. Littles, M.D.
Dean, FSU College of Medicine



At the 2003 FSU College of Medicine groundbreaking are (from left) Durell Peaden, Sandy D'Alemberte, Myra Hurt and John Thrasher.

REMEMBERING JOHN THRASHER

DEC. 18, 1943 – MAY 30, 2025

Florida State University President Emeritus John Thrasher was an ardent and dedicated champion whose love for all things Nole was matched only by his love for his family and his fellow human beings from all walks of life.

Here at the College of Medicine, we feel that loss deeply, because we also lost a beloved and loyal friend who played a key role in getting our college and its mission codified into state statute.

John was an FSU double alumnus, earning a business degree in 1965. He returned as a combat-decorated U.S. Army veteran in 1972 to earn a law degree and embark on a journey of public service. Through it all, he never forgot his roots.

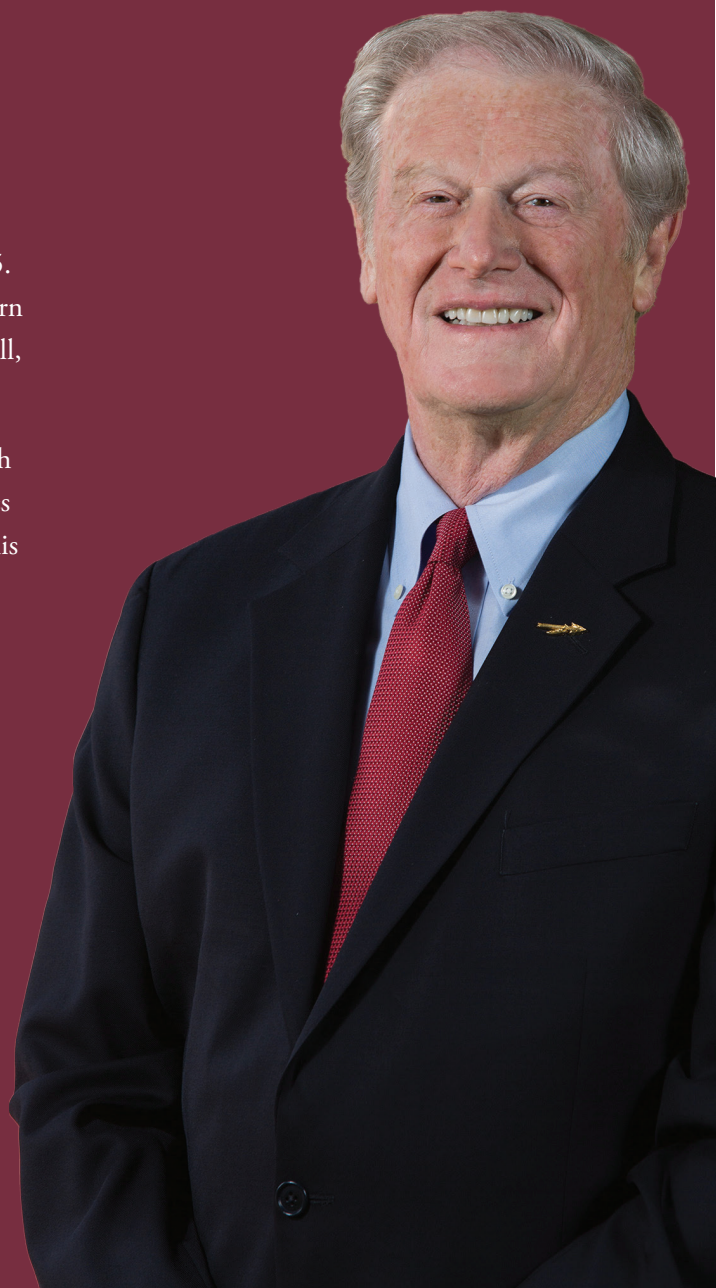
As a successful attorney and lobbyist, he was a consensus-builder with a blend of charm and humility, treating people with respect regardless of circumstances or station. He exemplified servant leadership, and his faith guided his every decision.

As the child of parents who graduated from eighth grade and had no opportunity to go farther in school, he was keenly aware of the difference an education could make. A key part of his FSU legacy is his expansion of recruitment and retention programs for students from underserved populations.

As speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, he worked tirelessly to see the Legislature approve and then-Gov. Jeb Bush sign the legislation in 2000 that created us. Our mission to serve the underserved touched his heart.

Funeral services were private, but FSU will celebrate his life on Aug. 16 in a ceremony at Ruby Diamond Concert Hall.

John Thrasher was one of the good guys. May he rest in peace.



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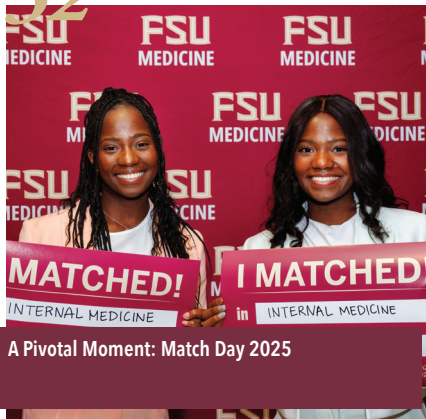
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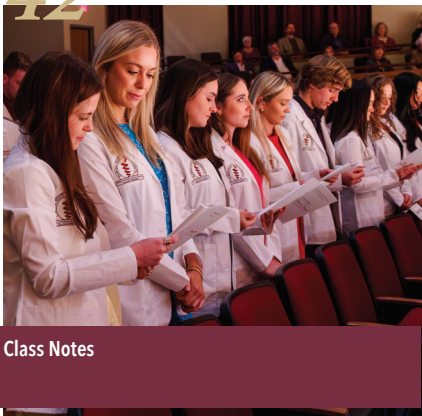
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Class Notes

This Act, which originated in the House of Representatives and was passed by the House of Representatives on May 1, 2000, has been examined and found to be correctly enrolled.

John Thrasher
Speaker of the House of Representatives

[Signature]
Clerk of the House of Representatives

Passes the Senate on May 5, 2000

[Signature]
President of the Senate

[Signature]
Secretary of the Senate

Approved this 15th day of June, 2000

[Signature]
Governor

Filed in Office of the Secretary of State on June 15, 2000



Katherine Harris
Secretary of State

Signatures from the House and Senate leadership, the governor and the secretary of state on Chapter 2000-303, establishing the FSU College of Medicine in June 2000.



Groundbreaking ceremony for Florida State University's Thrasher Building



Joda Lynn, the first student admitted to the College of Medicine, poses with Myra Hurt outside Westcott Hall



From its origin to its future: Silver suits the College of Medicine, for now

By **Bob Thomas**
FSU College of Medicine


With a stroke of his pen at the bottom of a five-page document – Chapter 2000-303, House Bill No. 1211 – Gov. Jeb Bush signed into law the creation of the Florida State University College of Medicine as the nation's first allopathic medical school of the 21st century and first since 1982.

The date was June 15, 2000.

As a historical reference point using Tallahassee connections, the signature date was bracketed by coach Bobby Bowden and his FSU football team's Sugar Bowl national title win over Virginia Tech (Jan. 4) and the disputed presidential election (Nov. 7), which led to a Florida recount and ultimately George W. Bush's victory over Al Gore.

Bowden is arguably FSU's most recognizable figure, as one of the winningest coaches in college history.

Continued on next page >>



Myra Hurt, Ph.D., stacked up victories of a different kind and earned the moniker, “Mother of the College of Medicine,” with her visionary leadership that swayed powerbrokers and public opinion. She relentlessly championed the need for a new medical school to provide physicians to serve the underserved populations of Florida and provided the blueprint for its community-based medical education model to get it done.

Most importantly, she brought together the collective and disparate talents of a brilliant legal mind (FSU President Sandy D’Alemberte), a country doctor and legislator (Rep. Durell Peaden), and a gifted consensus-builder and passionate FSU graduate (Florida Speaker of the House John Thrasher) to get it done.

A quarter-century later, the College of Medicine continues to follow the letter of the law, which specifically identified the mission for which it was created: To train health care providers – with a focus on primary care – to meet the medical needs of the elderly and underserved, especially those in Health Professional Shortage Areas, which included a majority of the rural counties in North Florida.



Myra Hurt and Helen Livingston celebrate the college's provisional accreditation in 2002.

Littles' early involvement

College of Medicine Dean Dr. Alma Littles has held that title since July 2024, but her involvement with the college pre-dates its creation and her employment by the university. Littles had left her private family medicine practice in her hometown of Quincy, Florida, to join Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare's (TMH) family medicine residency program, which she would later direct.

“I didn’t leave TMH to become employed at the medical school until August 2002,” said Littles, who remembers well the skepticism surrounding the college’s start-up. “I was already working with the medical school, including chairing the curriculum committee. I was the acting regional campus dean for the Tallahassee Regional Campus, and the acting chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health.

“So those three really significant roles for the college, I was doing while I was full-time employed at TMH.”

Littles’ interest in the development of the college was piqued by her relationship with Hurt, director of the FSU-based Program in

Medical Sciences (PIMS), which provided instruction at FSU to 30 first-year medical students as a part of the University of Florida College of Medicine. Littles helped train those PIMS students at TMH. She also learned more from the university’s consulting group, MGT of America, which hosted community focus groups to address the need for a new medical school and how it would serve the area.

“When they started talking about focusing on rural communities and training physicians from rural communities and potentially having those students go back to them and practice ... serving the needs of those individuals who didn’t have access to health care, it was like they were speaking my language,” Littles said.

Littles resigned her TMH post, joined the College of Medicine in 2002 and has had a front row seat as the college delivered on those promises. Since its inception, the college has produced 2,066 M.D. graduates through its first 21 classes, and an additional 314 School of Physician Assistant Practice graduates in its first six classes.

Legislation with the future in mind

The addition of medical providers to address shortages in Florida was not the only objective of the legislation. It also included language intended to address the college’s long-range future.

Peaden, author of the original House bill, wanted to make sure rural areas like his hometown of Crestview would benefit long-term from the college’s success. He included language that would increase participation by underrepresented groups through the continuation of the SSTRIDE outreach established by the PIMS program. Designed in 1994 for middle and high school students interested in science and medical programs, SSTRIDE has served more than 4,000 students, many of whom have gone on to successful careers in chosen fields.

In addition to SSTRIDE and its college component, Undergraduate or USSTRIDE, the College of Medicine developed and implemented additional outreach or pathway programs, which were also outlined – in broad terms – under the initial legislation. Those include the Bridge to Clinical Medicine, now a master’s degree program, and the undergraduate Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences (IMS) program. IMS, which includes the cooperation of six other FSU colleges, provides a rigorous science curriculum for students who may choose from three interdisciplinary majors aligned with their goals.

“The outreach aspect of the College of Medicine has been instrumental in helping us meet those expectations and I don’t think it gets quite enough emphasis, because it’s long-term,” said Helen Livingston, whose many duties included directing PIMS admissions, overseeing the transfer of PIMS graduates to the University of Florida for their final three years of medical school, and creating and overseeing the Bridge program. She was lured out of retirement to establish IMS. “It takes decades to fulfill the promise of that program, whether it’s the high school level [SSTRIDE], the Bridge program, IMS – you have to look long-term. There’s no quick turnaround for those kinds of programs.



College of Medicine Dean J. Ocie Harris, at microphone, announces the college's full accreditation on Feb. 3, 2005. FSU President T.K. Wetherell, Ed.D. (left), Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Alma Littles, M.D., (second from right) and Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs Myra Hurt, Ph.D., who served as acting dean when the college was first created, complete the front row. Littles is now the dean; Wetherell died in 2018 and Hurt in 2023; and Harris was recently voted into the college's Medical Alumni Hall of Fame and will be inducted at the Alumni Reunion in November.

"I will say that Myra's vision, and her ability to think beyond the reality of the present, were instrumental in us reaching those unseeable goals out there."

The production of those programs through the 2023-2024 academic year sheds numeric light on their success. The Bridge program has produced 214 graduates, all of whom entered the College of Medicine M.D. program; many became leaders of their respective classes.

Of the 626 IMS graduates, 43 have entered FSU's M.D. program, 18 have entered the PA program and five have begun their post-baccalaureate medical education in Bridge.

SSTRIDE participants, not including those from its offshoot Summer Institute program, have included 20 who entered either the M.D. or PA programs, while 227 USSTRIDE alumni have moved on to those programs. Those numbers continue to rise.

Research with a purpose

In addition to the pathway programs, the legislation specifically called for the college to advance knowledge in applied biomedical and behavioral sciences and train future scientists to assume leadership in health care delivery and academic medicine.

To that end, the college has produced 80 biomedical sciences Ph.D. graduates, in addition to 17 neuroscience Ph.D. graduates, who were educated and trained in faculty-led laboratories – alongside postdoctoral researchers – immersed in a broad range of funded discovery.

Research at the college reached a five-year high in fiscal year 2024

for proposals (152), awards (112) and award funding (\$37.7 million), numbers that were unfathomable at the time of its creation. The influx of acclaimed faculty in the past year alone indicates the upward trend continues.

Today, a dozen College of Medicine-affiliated centers and institutes continue to advance research and engage the community in autism, child stress and health, brain repair, behavioral health, translational behavioral science and more. Launched in July 2023, the Institute for Pediatric Rare Diseases includes research, education, diagnostic and clinical components – a bench to bedside model – aimed to transform the lives of children and families affected by rare diseases.

Mission remains at forefront

Growth also continues beyond the walls of the college in response to the state's growing need for more physicians. The college's menu of Graduate Medical Education (GME) sponsorships of residency and fellowship programs will nearly double this summer, providing additional opportunities for students in-state. Studies show that a majority – 77% based on one University of California Health study – of physicians remain in the state where they completed residency.

That speaks directly to both the College of Medicine's mission to "educate and develop exemplary physicians who practice patient-centered health care ... especially through service to underserved populations," which includes Florida's substantial geriatric and rural populations.

Since its inception, the college has not wavered on its commitment to that mission.

Dr. Christie Alexander, a member of the inaugural 2005 graduating class, was trained as a family physician and became the college's first graduate to join the full-time faculty.

"Being able to come back as faculty helped me to see that the mission was constantly reiterated," Alexander said. "It was ever-present in what we were doing. Whether it was explicitly stated or in the back of our minds when we were creating the course work or giving a lecture, it's just ingrained in who we are and what we're going to do. If we're going to be serving underserved populations, we should demonstrate that and show what that looks like."

Alexander specifically cited the Rural Learning Experience that incoming medical students experience during their first semester, when they are bused out to rural medical sites in nearby counties, as a key component.

"The eyes that open when they go to a community that is underserved or rural, they're like, 'Whoa. I had no idea,'" Alexander said. "It becomes part of who you are as a physician as you go through the College of Medicine."

Little, who was raised in one of those neighboring rural and underserved communities, is committed to upholding that part of the mission. It's the reason she attended medical school and returned home to open a private practice.

A mission with a future

Little has embraced the idea of a partnership with TMH in an academic medical center, which would potentially provide a huge lift to the FSU Health enterprise that is still in its infancy.

She doesn't believe the introduction of an academic medical center to the college's community-based medical education program will deter the mission that has defined it from the start, despite critics of the idea.

"When I think back to where we started, why we started, how we started ... and what's happening now, there are a lot of comparisons and analogies that I make to the process," Little said. "Starting a new medical school, there was a lot of resistance from multiple corners of the universe. Being able to get beyond that demonstrated a vision that many didn't have."

"I see what's happening now as actually a necessary step to ensure that we are able to maintain what we started in the beginning and not lose that."

She said expanded opportunities for research and discovery through an academic medical center can improve the health of the patients that our graduates care for and allow the medical school to provide additional direct care.

"I actually see what's happening now as literally that next stage, but I do see some similarities as we're starting to grow and move into that future. It's exciting; for some, it's even more, or at least, as exciting as it was launching the new medical school."

Livingston shares long view

Livingston was there when the college began and through its initial growth spurt. She saw class enrollment climb from 30 to 120 students, the expansion from three to six regional campuses and the addition of the Bridge and IMS pathway programs.

She was also on hand when Little left TMH "temporarily" to chair the college's Department of Family Medicine and assist with the school's ongoing accreditation battle with the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). A change in the college's leadership led to the appointment of Ocie Harris as dean, who asked Little to become associate dean of medical education in August 2003. She moved into the administrative suite and hasn't left.



Helen Livingston, Ed.D.

"When I got here it was 'all hands on deck,' push forward and get through [accreditation]," said Little, whose long-term professional aspirations at the time did not include her current position. "I really started loving what I was doing here and now, nearly 23 years later, I'm still here. As far as the dean's job in 2002, it was nowhere on my brain."

Livingston believes Little is the right person to lead the College of Medicine forward.

"She's amazing because she has kept her feet in her world that she came from and has achieved more than anyone expected," Livingston said. "She's probably one of the smartest women I ever knew. She keeps her own counsel, but she's meticulous when it comes to getting things done the right way. I admire her very much."

"Her being the face of this institution is the culmination of the mission and I think may be the saving grace of the future."

When asked how the college's acknowledged founders — Hurt, D'Alemberte, Peadar and Thrasher — would view the college today, with its success meeting those first legislative initiatives and continued growth, Livingston didn't hesitate with a response.

"I think they would be proud of it," she said. "I know that Myra never felt like it was enough, so she probably would want to see what's on the next horizon; what else are you going to do?"



(From left to right): FSU President Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte, J.D., founding acting Dean Myra Hurt, Ph.D., and state legislator Durell Peaden, M.D., J.D.



Former FSU President Sandy D'Alamberte (front center) poses with the D'Alemberte Statue alongside Myra Hurt. They are joined in the back by (left to right) Mollie Hill, John P. Fogarty and Alma Littles.

Former FSU President Sandy D'Alemberte delivered the commencement address at the request of the College of Medicine's inaugural M.D. Class of 2005.



Inaugural M.D. Class of 2005 laid the groundwork for future success

By Bob Thomas
FSU College of Medicine

Thirteen months.

That's all the time Florida State University College of Medicine administrators had between the day Gov. Jeb Bush signed the bill creating the college and the May 7, 2001, arrival of the 30-member inaugural class of future physicians.

Myra Hurt, the college's founding dean and universally recognized as the "mother" of the college, appointed Helen Livingston, Ed.D., assistant dean for admissions and outreach. It was a logical move for the former director of admissions for the Program in Medical Sciences (PIMS). Livingston would ensure the transfer of the last PIMS class to the University of Florida and turn her full attention to building the foundational College of Medicine class.

"My philosophy had always been, as had Myra's, that you looked for the right kind of student," Livingston said in a recent interview. "You looked for the service-oriented students interested in people, able to interact with people. You admit those students and they will fulfill the mission. It's always about admissions, who you let in the door."

Getting that first class enrolled had its challenges. The program did not have a permanent facility, was not fully staffed and lacked accreditation from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). It did have 30 years of experience educating first-year medical students through PIMS, before sending them off to Gainesville for the final three years.

What it didn't have was time.



(From left to right) John Thrasher, former Speaker of the House and later FSU president, and state legislator Durell Peaden, M.D., played key roles in the establishment of the FSU College of Medicine. Seated in the front row at the inaugural commencement ceremony, they salute the M.D. Class of 2005 (center) with the ubiquitous "Chop." Thrasher and Peaden, along with Myra Hurt and Sandy D'Alemberte, are recognized as the college's four founding figures.

"The law had been passed, and we had no choice," Livingston said. "It stated that we had to admit a class. We couldn't wait three years. We had to admit a class that year. It was either break Florida's law or beg for forgiveness from the LCME."

In addition to looking for service-minded candidates, Livingston and the selection committee would take other factors into account, all the while knowing that the class would be closely scrutinized by the LCME.

"They had to be adventuresome in their outlook and they had to have the academic prowess to make it through," she said. "The bond that they formed with each other was just as important as what we were trying to offer here, because it was a rough road for them. The LCME was bound and determined this was not going to get off the ground."

The inaugural class – which celebrates the 20th anniversary of its graduation at the Alumni Reunion in Tallahassee Nov. 7-9 – brought a wide range of strengths and experiences into that first day of class in the School of Nursing's Duxbury Building. They ranged in age from 19 to 32, came from a wide array of backgrounds, but also possessed the qualities Livingston deemed essential for success.

Christie Alexander, whose initial application to the PIMS program had been denied, ended up with a seat in that



first class — unbeknownst to her.

Alexander had met with Livingston to find out how to better her application for the next PIMS admission cycle. She was already fulfilling the service element, working as a medical assistant in Tallahassee, volunteering at a local clinic one night a week and going on mission trips.

“She [Livingston] said, ‘Keep doing those things. It really is just your grades, and we’ll work on getting those things bolstered. You’re going to take these classes with these medical students ... If you can show you can succeed in these classes, along with everything else that you’re doing, then reapply and that will really help.’

“I was basically doing the Bridge program without a master’s degree.”

The Bridge to Clinical Medicine program was a post-baccalaureate endeavor until 2009.

Alexander followed Livingston’s advice and interviewed with the committee in January of 2001.

“[Livingston] called me the following Tuesday and said, ‘It’s my pleasure to let you know that you’ve been accepted into next class of students.’ I did not remember a conversation about a new medical school. In my mind it was, ‘Great, now I’m part of this medical school class,’ thinking still it was PIMS.

“I don’t know if it was my own naivete. I didn’t quite understand what was happening, and it didn’t matter to me. All that mattered was I was getting into the program I wanted

to be in and was going to be able to realize my dream of becoming a physician.”

It was a dream the inaugural students would realize together, through the rigors of medical school and the ongoing battle with LCME for accreditation, leading to some very uneasy times among the class. But there was bond among the 30 that would not be broken.

Certainly it helped that Hurt and Livingston employed the PIMS support model: “If one is successful, they’re all successful.”

“Myra’s big thing was, ‘All of your focus has to be on your studies and preparing to be the best doctors that you can be,’” Alexander said, adding that the college’s administration, with the help of FSU President Sandy D’Alemberte, would handle the LCME battle. “For me, I had the sense that things were being handled. When you have people like Dr. Livingston, Director of Community Clinical Relations Mollie Hill and Dr. Hurt ... I felt very sure that we were in good hands and were going to get the job done. And they did.”

They also had confidence in classmates Julie Gladden Barré and Javier Miller, steadying voices throughout the four years, who presented to the LCME before full accreditation was granted in February of 2005, just three months before graduation.

“It’s a very interesting thing to have 30 students that care about each other as much as we do and did,” said Alexander.

“There are only a few of us that I don’t really know what’s going on in their lives. I know a lot about a lot of us.

“You go through something like that together that’s so intense for so long, you almost can’t help but have a bond that can’t be broken.”

College of Medicine Dean Alma Littles remembers those early years well.

She was involved with the College of Medicine in a variety of roles, including chairing the curriculum committee, serving as the acting Tallahassee Regional Campus dean and the acting chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health.

“Everybody was rowing in the same direction,” Littles said. “By golly, we’re going to get that accreditation, working day-and-night, weekends and holidays, and whatever it took we were going to show them that, ‘This is going to happen.’”

And members of the first class were doing their part as well, despite their detractors.

“We were seeing results,” Littles added. “They said our students wouldn’t pass the boards, and they did. They said our students wouldn’t match, and they did. And then they got to that first graduation and things just took off.”

The resolve and bond among that first class, hand-picked to blaze the trail, played no small role in the process. Twenty-seven of the original 30 members of the inaugural class (the other three would graduate a year later) gathered for commencement in the courtyard of the spanking-new, 60,000-square-foot College of Medicine building, just a stone’s throw away from where they spent their first two years in portable units.

Invited by the class to deliver the keynote commencement address, D’Alemberte called the day a “magical convergence” where the destinies of individuals aligned with the destiny of an institution.

Twenty years later, members of the inaugural class are flourishing in their careers as physician leaders and have maintained the bond that served them – and the College of Medicine – so well in those formative years and beyond.

Seven – Garrett Chumney, Alexander, Kerry Bachista, Fawn Harrison, Barré, Sachin Parikh and class president Nari Heshmati – have already been selected as members of the College of Medicine Alumni Hall of Fame.

“It was not an easy matter at all, but they’ve acquitted themselves well,” said Livingston, who retired for the second time from the College of Medicine in the summer of 2019, after shepherding the start-up Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences undergraduate pathway program. “And they helped the classes coming behind them.”



M.D. Class of 2005 members celebrate milestones after receiving their white coats (top) and tossing their mortarboards following commencement.



Students high step it through 30 years of Dance Marathon at FSU

Dance Marathon volunteers reveal the total FSU and the Tallahassee area raised in 2025: \$1,334,457.78.

By Audrey Post
FSU College of Medicine

Dance Marathon at Florida State University (DM at FSU) was destined to achieve milestones in 2025, as it was the 30th year the university and the greater Tallahassee community came together to raise money to support pediatric health care.

A second milestone was achieved when “the reveal” showed this year’s dance-fest raised \$1,334,457, surpassing last year’s \$1.24 million to support Children’s Miracle Network programs in the Gainesville area and pediatric outreach programs of the FSU College of Medicine.

The total includes \$258,985 raised by middle school and high school partner events in Leon and Wakulla counties.

“Thank you for bringing our community together for a cause,” DM at FSU Executive Director Darcy Sullivan told the crowd shortly before the reveal. “This has been the best year of my life.”

An estimated 1,500 students participated in the Feb. 28-March 2 event at the Donald L. Tucker Civic Center. Including this year’s total, DM at FSU – FSU’s largest stu-

dent-led organization and the fifth-largest Dance Marathon in the United States – has raised more than \$22 million for the cause.

“When we all believe in miracles, anything is possible,” said Elizabeth West, marathon director.

Alma B. Littles, M.D., dean of the College of Medicine, noted that FSU had no medical school when DM at FSU began, and all proceeds supported UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital in Gainesville.

“This year, we are celebrating both the 25th anniversary of the legislation that created the College of Medicine, and the 20th anniversary of the graduation of our inaugural class,” Littles said. “Dance Marathon plays a role in our coming full circle as we grew.”

In 2003, DM at FSU and Children’s Miracle Network made the College of Medicine a beneficiary, evenly splitting the proceeds after expenses between Shands and the College of Medicine’s pediatric outreach programs.

Continued on next page >>

“I remember – vividly – dancing with members of our first two classes at Tully Gym in 2003, along with our faculty and our then-dean, Ocie Harris,” Littles shared during closing ceremonies. “The moves were a little bit simpler than the ones I just witnessed ... but we all had a blast!”

This year, for the first time in more than a decade, the college fielded a dance team in addition to fundraising events for DM. Six dancers joined many of the college’s community partner-providers on stage during the closing ceremonies.

“It is so fitting that the College of Medicine Dance Marathon team is back in action during this year of anniversaries,” Littles told the crowd. “The hard work and dedication of each and every one of you will have a positive and significant impact on the lives of children who need help the most. Thank you, and congratulations on all you have accomplished!”

A third milestone is expected in September at the annual Dance Marathon check presentation ceremony in the College of Medicine atrium. This year’s amount is expected to tip the College of Medicine over the \$10 million mark in DM contributions.



Members of the College of Medicine Dance Marathon 2025 dance team: front row, co-chairs Kaitlyn Barnes, left, and Canna Liu; back row, from left, Alexandra Bush, David Hartsfield, Kieu Tran and Victoria Vida. All six are first-year medical students. Barnes participated in DM at FSU as an undergraduate student; Liu and Bush participated as undergraduates at the University of Florida.



Bryan Seaquist and Travis Ferguson, co-founders of DM at FSU, pose with the College of Medicine’s 2025 Dance Team: From left, Seaquist, Alexandra Bush, Kaitlyn Barnes, David Hartsfield, Victoria Vida, Canna Liu and Ferguson (not pictured, Kieu Tran). They established DM at FSU in 1995 and organized the first event in 1996. Seaquist said they wanted to create a philanthropic event to bring “town and gown,” the community and the university, closer together. That first marathon raised \$25,521. The pair attends closing ceremonies every year.



Love, appreciation in the air at College of Medicine Commencement

By Bob Thomas

FSU College of Medicine

Families were front-and-center May 17, both inside and outside Ruby Diamond Concert Hall, as the Florida State University College of Medicine celebrated by sending 113 new physicians out into world. It also welcomed eight new members to the incoming medical school class of 2029 with the graduation of the Bridge to Clinical Medicine master's degree class.

Following the 21st commencement ceremony, the College of Medicine now counts 2,069 alumni physicians caring for patients throughout Florida and the nation. Twelve of those newly-minted physicians are among the 222 graduates of the Bridge pathway program, precisely following the legislation that created the school, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

"If there are four words within the mission statement of this medical school that sum up what the FSU College of Medicine stands for, they are these: Responsive to community needs," College of Medicine Dean Dr. Alma Littles said in her opening address.

"That's what brought so many of us to this school. It's what brought many of you here as students. It's what guided our decisions during the admission process: our

belief that you identify with our mission and will go out into the world, no matter your specialty, and be responsive to community needs ... providing competent and compassionate care for your patients. Your lives will be enriched as you improve the lives of others."



Joedrecka Brown Speights, M.D.

FSU's M.D. Class of 2025 will have an opportunity to enrich those lives in many ways, matching in no fewer than 14 different residency specialties, with 51% of the class committing to a primary care specialty – family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics or obstetrics-gynecology. Those specialties cover the full cycle of life and were central to the college's creation when it was signed into law June 15, 2000.

Dr. Joedrecka Brown Speights, chair of the college's Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, took a deep look beyond the opening line of the Physician's Oath in her commencement address.

First, I will do no harm.

She walked the students down a memory lane of big moments along the way to the day's event – MCATs, medical school interviews, board examinations, rotations and Match Day.

"Beyond all of that, and doing no harm, is making sure that at any moment we are with a patient, we are fully present, listening for underlying concerns, motives and fears; remembering their humanity," she said. "And that our most transformative patient care is an act of love ... Beyond doing no harm is love."

Brown Speights' self-titled address "Through the lens of Love" seemed to resonate throughout a day of celebration among students, families and friends at various locations.

- In the rehearsal hall, one floor below the Ruby Diamond stage, where students became reacquainted after two years apart at six regional campuses while completing clinical studies;
- On the north steps of Westcott Hall, where each of the regional campus classes gathered before graduation for regalia photos, and afterward;
- On the grounds surrounding the Westcott Fountain, where graduates and families reunited for photos to commemorate the day.

Early Saturday morning, in a corner of the Ruby Diamond stage, Dean Emeritus John P. Fogarty, M.D., hosted the four military graduates from the class and their families in a pinning ceremony he instituted shortly after beginning his 14-year run as the College of Medicine dean. Fogarty is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and spent 20 years as an Army physician.

"My grandfather [Carson Peacock] was a 26-year military veteran, command sergeant major," said Ryan Peacock, who is following the Army path laid before him. "My father [Roman Peacock] did the reserves after doing ROTC at Virginia Tech.

"When I was doing my gap years, in between undergraduate and medical school, I decided if I didn't get in [to medical school], I was probably going to try out for Ranger team or something military-related to continue that trend. But I got in that year and said, 'let's go ahead and combine the two.'"

An FSU undergraduate from the inaugural class of Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences students, Peacock matched in emergency medicine and will begin residency at the University of North Carolina Hospitals.

Erika Balazs, one of three physicians from the class who chose the Air Force, joining Mike Llerena and Nathan Steineck, has a very special family connection as well.

"My dad was my inspiration," Balazs said. "He was in the military for 22 years and I was raised in a military community. I liked the camaraderie that I saw, and I always wanted to serve."

George Balazs was a master sergeant in the Air Force. Erika grew up in Crestview, Florida, and graduated from Niceville High School, right down the road from Eglin AFB where she was born.



From left, Ryan Peacock, Erika Balazs, Mike Llerena and Nathan Steineck

"I decided I wanted to do medicine in middle school and actually shadowed general surgeons back at Eglin in high school," said Balazs, who will be in general surgery residency at Keesler Medical Center Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Following the hooding ceremony for the class, the four military students marched onto the stage to hear their promotion orders read aloud. Fogarty led the new Graduate Medical Officers in reaffirmation of their oath.

It's a moving moment on an emotional day – Armed Forces Day – that concludes with the playing of the Armed Forces Medley, where current and former members of each branch in attendance stand at attention as their service branch song is played.

Misty-eyed among them were Roman Peacock and George Balazs.

Shortly after the recessional, two other Niceville High graduates with familial military connections reunited with family in the shade outside of Westcott Hall.

Siblings Braden Cathey and Rachel Cervera celebrated their completion of medical school together, hooded in that order. Rachel was visibly beaming in the background as Tallahassee Regional Campus Dean Dr. Sandeep Rahangdale placed the hood over Braden's head.



Rachel and Luis Cervera

"I don't think anyone else can say that they got to go to school with their sibling, but they also met their husband and got married when they were there," said Rachel, who married classmate Luis Cervera in April. "It's been really special. I'm very lucky that I got to do this with my family. I felt very supported."

Luis Cervera, who was hooded with his Fort Pierce Regional Campus class, blew a kiss to Rachel as he walked on stage. She stood to watch campus dean Dr. Juliette Lomax-Homer place the hood over his head.

"I didn't have to stand for Braden because I was right behind him in line," Rachel said.

Later, the siblings were seen posing for a photo with their wheelchair-bound maternal grandfather, U.S. Army veteran Brantley Clark, and other family members.

"We weren't sure he was going to be able to make it today," Rachel said. "Getting him to be able to come today was so important. I saw him standing up when they played the Army song. I was very impressed."

The Cerveras couples-matched at the University of Tennessee Graduate Medical School in Knoxville. The Lambas – Nikhil and Jasmin – also wed this year and are headed to the Tampa area for residency.

"It's a very special moment, to not only share with her – my new wife – but my family, as well," Luis said. "Graduation is great, but to me, she is and the family we will create and life together is my greatest achievement. This is just the cherry on top."

There was seemingly no shortage of love and appreciation in the air. Class President Sean Wimberley set the tone in the program as he addressed his classmates:

"This speech is not mine alone – it belongs to all of us. Each voice, each story, and each step in this journey has contributed to the collective experience we now celebrate."

Wimberley closed with this:

"May we move forward as physicians who lead with heart, guided by knowledge, grounded in compassion, and inspired by the strength we have found in each other."





PA White Coat Ceremony

Allison Burke, left, and Riha Momin pose for a selfie after the PA Class of 2026 White Coat Ceremony on Jan. 17 at Opperman Music Hall. This is the eighth PA class at Florida State University and members will graduate in December 2026. More than 300 graduates have completed the rigorous 27-month curriculum that culminates in a master's degree, and 70% of alumni are practicing in Florida.



Institute for Pediatric Rare Diseases' Momentum Continues to Accelerate

By **Bob Thomas**

FSU College of Medicine

Rare Disease Day, recognized globally on the last day of February since 2008, is intended to raise awareness of the approximately 7,000 known rare diseases affecting 300 million people worldwide.

Rare Disease Day 2025 provided a forum for Florida State University and state leaders to lay out the plans for one of the College of Medicine's newest centers, the Institute for Pediatric Rare Diseases (IPRD).

"The burden of rare diseases is enormous, not just on the children who are facing challenges every day but also on their families and our society as a whole," Pradeep Bhide, Ph.D., IPRD director, told a standing-room-only crowd gathered in the college atrium Friday, Feb. 28. "We are committed to changing the narrative."

More importantly, Rare Disease Day was a platform to show the work already underway at the institute, which sprang from a meeting between state Rep. Adam Anderson and FSU President Richard McCullough less than two years ago.

"I am completely blown away with the rapid pace and the progress that has been made," Anderson said as he stood

near a display of posters showcasing 13 of the 23 then-current IPRD research projects, thanks to legislative and university funding. "It has completely exceeded any expectations that I had."

Those research projects represent the interdisciplinary collaboration of 20 scientists from seven departments across three FSU colleges.

"At FSU, we believe in the power of science, education and collaboration to solve humanity's most pressing challenges," McCullough said at the opening news conference. "Through the work of the institute, we are paving the way for a brighter, healthier future for all children."

Members of the FSU Board of Trustees were on hand, along with several families affected by rare diseases, some accompanied by their children.

Moriah and Nic George made the drive to Tallahassee from Palm Coast, Florida, with their 3-year-old son Luca, who is one of 60 children worldwide diagnosed with SPATA5L1 Disorder. The disorder includes a wide spectrum of symptoms – including hearing loss, lack of muscle development and control, and seizures.

“It’s real important for us to come to things like this where people do care, because he’s not just SPATA5L1, he’s Luca,” Moriah said. “Being able to meet not only researchers but other families that understand, it is really important. Having a child with a rare disease is really isolating, from the diagnosis to having other parent friends with typical kids is hard, because I get to watch other kids run around and play and Luca doesn’t do that.”

“Meeting other families and the researchers is helping us feel less alone, knowing there are people who are out there that are researching and advocating for children.”

The momentum for IPRD continues to accelerate.

“Rep. Anderson has proposed new legislation codifying the institute in statute and seeking funding for the Sunshine Genetics Act, which proposes to build a consortium of Florida academic and health care institutions to perform whole genome sequencing of 10,000 newborns in Florida,” Bhide said. “The sequencing will be performed here at the IPRD. The goal is not only to offer diagnoses but also promote genomic research in Florida.”

The Sunshine Genetics Act, unanimously approved by the Florida House and Senate, was signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis, effective July 1.

In February, Anderson described the then-proposed legislation as “the next big step” to make Florida a leader in rare disease research.

The Sunshine Genetics Act advances that cause with the establishment of a five-year, state-funded pilot program that allows Florida families to opt-in and have their newborns undergo genetic screening by way of a simple blood sample at birth. Through whole genome sequencing, scientists will be able to identify hundreds of potentially serious genetic conditions, often before symptoms appear, so doctors can begin care.

The Act also creates a consortium which brings together the resources of Florida’s medical colleges, hospitals, biotech industry and others, and it establishes an oversight board of leaders in those fields. FSU will also receive funding for IPRD’s research efforts for a third consecutive year.

In short, it’s a direct response to the needs of children and families impacted by rare diseases, including those in attendance that Anderson addressed at the February Rare Disease Day event.



State Rep. Adam Anderson

“What we saw today, having so many families here, gives the folks doing the work – the boots on the ground – the opportunity to interact and see the impact they are having on families,” Anderson said. “I hope that inspires them and it motivates them.”

Anderson’s push into pediatric rare disease research remains driven by the 2019 loss of his son, Andrew, to Tay-Sachs disease.

“That’s my favorite part of working in this field, getting to know these families,” he said. “I can relate to what they’re going through and understand firsthand. Every time I see them, it’s a reminder of why we’re doing this.”

February’s event also included a symposium featuring three ongoing IPRD research presentations, comments from Leah Barber from the National Organization of Rare Disorders, and a keynote address from IPRD Associate Director for Precision Medicine David Ledbetter, Ph.D.

A renowned clinical geneticist, Ledbetter was drawn to IPRD after attending the university’s October 2024 Discovery Days kickoff event – a Pediatric Rare Disease Symposium – at the College of Medicine. There, Anderson

ceremonially presented a check for \$5 million in additional funding for IPRD from the state of Florida – a follow-up to the \$1 million funding in 2023 to launch the institute – and researchers from UMass Chan Medical School, Harvard, the National Institutes of Health, Stanford University, the University of Miami and the University of Florida made presentations.

His enthusiasm for joining IPRD was piqued by the support from university and legislative leaders.

“With a shared mission and commitment to improving and increasing clinical care, research and education for pediatric rare disease ... every medical geneticist in the United States and the world, both the physicians trained as clinical geneticists, the clinical laboratory geneticists like myself and the genetic counselors, all would love to be part of that comprehensive mission,” Ledbetter said.

He went on to add that over the course of his 40-year career, transformational advances in genomics have moved rare disease diagnosis from “science fiction to possible treatments and cures.”

The search for diagnostic answers to the rarest of diseases has not slowed.

In April, Bhide issued a campus-wide Call for Research Proposals, which will be funded by IPRD money set aside from

the initial state funds. The institute will entertain proposals that address an aspect of pediatric rare disease, including but not limited to etiology and disease progression, pathology, and technologies for prevention, diagnosis or treatment.

“We expect responses from multiple FSU colleges,” said Bhide, who has heard from – beyond the College of Medicine – the colleges of nursing, arts and sciences, engineering and others. “We anticipate receiving 30-35 applications requesting support for new projects, as well as the continuation of some currently funded projects.”

College of Medicine Dean Alma Littles, M.D., was equal parts grateful for the opportunity to bring awareness to rare diseases and excited about what the future holds for the IPRD.

“Let us remember that awareness is just the beginning. The real impact comes from action,” Littles told the Rare Disease Day crowd in February. “Together, we have the ability to transform the future of rare disease diagnosis, treatment and care.

“Together, we can ensure that families no longer feel isolated and forgotten. And together, we can build a future where every child – no matter how rare their condition – has access to the best possible care and the brightest possible future.”

Unlocking the Secrets to Healthy Aging



People are living longer and may spend as much as a third of their lifetime identified as an older adult, someone 65 years of age and older.

Growing old can bring many gifts, including finding more meaning in life and for most older people, the happiest years of their lives. However, a decline in health can reduce our ability to enjoy this important phase of life, threatening our ability to maintain independence in our daily activities.

At the Florida State University College of Medicine, a community of researchers, physicians, physician assistants and others works together to find solutions to some of aging's most pressing problems. The ultimate goal: Help older adults stay healthy, independent and, when needed, receive high quality and appropriate care.

For instance, researchers study the links among loneliness, sense of purpose, mental health and dementia risk. In addition, researchers are identifying ways to evaluate disease changes over time. They have also developed programs that are helping families caring for loved ones with dementia, including strategies that reduce stress and improve dementia-related behaviors. Finally, they are studying ways that brain exercises can help older adults stay engaged, think more clearly and feel less lonely.

Helping people remain in the community as long as possible, even if their health begins to decline, is another research priority. Investigators are studying ways that physical health, medical care and illness affect our emotions and relationships as we age. They are also identifying home-care supports and services that make it possible to live independently in the homes of our choosing for as long as possible, and which services reduce costs and prevent unnecessary moves to nursing homes.

"People are living longer and may spend as much as a third of their lifetime identified as an older adult, someone 65 years of age and older," said Lisa Granville, M.D., chair of the College of Medicine's Department of Geriatrics. "Our perceptions of what aging means influences how we are treated in society and our individual health. Research has shown that positive perceptions of aging can increase a person's lifespan by more than seven and a half years."

But an important challenge related to care of older adults is the limited number of health care professionals trained in geriatrics, she said.

"As we age, multiple health conditions, cognitive decline and other complex health care needs may arise. The grow-

ing shortage of specialists for older adults demands that all health care members achieve a minimum competence in geriatrics to assist the delivery of individualized, safe and effective care."

The college's Geriatrics Department is committed to training future health care workers in multiple professions to support a rapidly aging population. The department partners with faculty in other FSU colleges and staff at facilities and clinics across the region to expand geriatrics training. The clinical training focuses on four key areas: brain health, mobility, medicine safety and person-centered care, honoring individuals' personal values. Faculty and staff study which skills and supports health care workers need in nursing homes and assisted living facilities to ensure that high-quality care is provided.

Florida is home to the highest proportion of adults 65 and older of any state in the country. College of Medicine researchers are working to help older adults stay healthy and get better care. The research and clinical training being done directly improves the lives of older adults and their families, and, according to Granville, "We will continue to work to improve health care, make homecare better, support family caregivers and help our older residents live healthier, happier lives."

Researchers in the Department of Geriatrics identify risk factors that contribute to Alzheimer's and other types of dementia, including ways to:

- Prevent dementia
- Reduce symptoms
- Improve the lives of those living with dementia and the lives of their families.

A photograph of Professor Sanjay Kumar, a middle-aged man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a blue and white checkered button-down shirt. He is smiling and holding a small, colorful model of the amino acid D-serine in his hands. The model consists of several small spheres (red, white, and blue) connected by thin rods. In the background, there is a laboratory setting with various pieces of equipment, including a large microscope and some electronic devices on a stand.

Patent yields hope for those with traumatic brain injuries

Professor Sanjay Kumar, Ph.D., displays a model of the amino acid D-serine in his laboratory at the College of Medicine's Department of Biomedical Sciences.

By Audrey Post
FSU College of Medicine

Sanjay Kumar, Ph.D., whose decades of research into Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE) have helped scientists better understand many aspects of neuroinflammation and how it leads to neuronal death, has been awarded a patent for using D-serine to prevent neuroinflammation caused by traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The introduction of D-serine reduces the onset and severity of seizures. Additionally, it may have application in non-TBI neurodegenerative disorders.

“The brain is a sacrosanct organ and, as such, it does not tolerate well the introduction of foreign substances that might be used as therapeutic intervention,” said Kumar, a professor in the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the Florida State University College of Medicine. “But D-ser-

ine is an amino acid produced in the brain, and thus not a foreign substance at all, so it works very well.”

Several years ago, Kumar and his associates discovered a special class of glutamate receptors, lovingly dubbed “FSU receptors,” in the entorhinal cortex of the brain that allow about five times more calcium to enter neurons than conventional receptors do. The overstimulated neurons were triggering seizures in animal models with TLE. The overstimulation, known as hyperexcitability, causes neurons to die in a process called excitotoxicity. D-serine blocks the receptors to keep excess levels of calcium from entering the neurons, preventing seizures and neuronal death.

Glutamate is the most abundant excitatory neurotransmitter released by nerve cells in the brain and central nervous

system, maintaining proper brain function and playing a significant role in shaping learning and memory.

Kumar and Stephen Beesley, Ph.D., a College of Medicine research faculty member at the time whose name is also on the patent, made a fortuitous discovery: D-serine also prevents the proliferation, aggregation and sequestration of microglia, the brain's immune cells, to sites of neuron loss triggered by injury.

"The microglia are the scavenger cells," Kumar said. "They come in and cause further neurodegeneration and further loss of neurons. D-serine can block them and their damage, as well."

FSU College of Medicine Dean Alma Littles, M.D., said this latest discovery by the Kumar Lab offers hope that people who suffer traumatic brain injury might not go on to develop epilepsy.

"Whether they are athletes on the playing field, the courageous members of our armed forces, or the growing number of senior citizens in Florida and elsewhere in the country who worry about the consequences of falling, all will benefit from the work of Professor Kumar and his team," she said.

"When you factor in the potential benefits for non-traumatic brain injuries such as Alzheimer's and stroke, this is a real game-changer. Once again, FSU's commitment to research that changes lives pays off. I am so proud that our College of Medicine researchers are helping lead the way."

Beesley is now a senior scientist working in the private sector on gene therapies for Huntington's disease, another neurodegenerative disease. In addition to noticing the vastly reduced neurodegeneration in the area in the entorhinal cortex where D-serine was administered, Beesley said the team noted reduced inflammation "was also the case within the hippocampus, an area not directly treated with D-serine, hinting at the long-range, secondary effects of D-serine."

Richard Nowakowski, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences, said the discovery of D-serine's ability opens the door to other possibilities.

"This is important because D-serine naturally occurs in the brain and thus it could be blended with other therapeutic molecules to enhance their effect," he said. "Also, the D-serine can be administered to a patient by a variety of routes, including injection into the brain or bloodstream or even by inhalation."

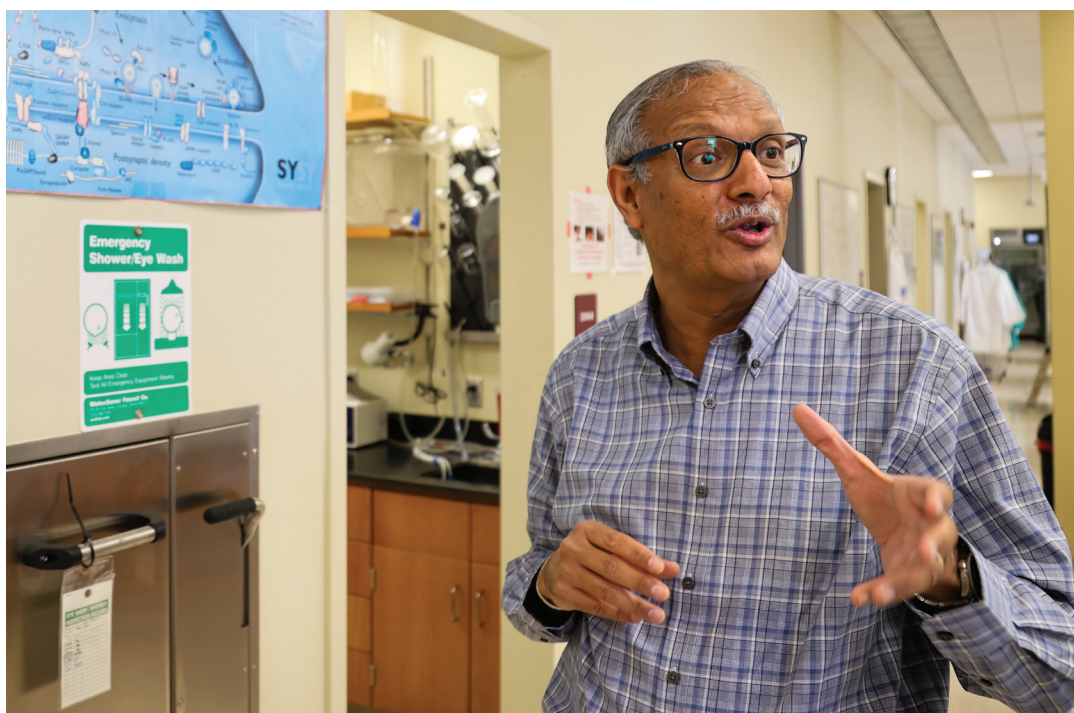
"The old saying that 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is thus true, even for brain injury," Nowakowski added.

This is the sixth patent the Kumar Lab has been issued for its work; a seventh patent application is pending.

"This discovery has tremendous potential to be developed into therapeutic interventions for brain-related ailments other than epilepsy," Kumar said. "But by reducing the neurotoxic immune response of glial cells after brain injury, it may be possible to get an upper hand in mitigating neuron loss and their cognitive effects associated with traumatic brain injuries like concussions, as well as with non-traumatic brain injuries like stroke, tumor, hypoxia, infection and/or encephalitis."

The next big challenge, he noted, is translating his basic research findings to clinical therapeutics and figuring out how to derivatize D-serine to make it breach the blood brain barrier to get to specific brain regions.

"And that's a hard problem to solve," he said, "but once we do, the next step is clinical trials."





Professor Jarrod Mousa, Ph.D.

Mousa Lab makes breakthrough toward PIV treatment and prevention

By Audrey Post

FSU College of Medicine

Human parainfluenza viruses (PIVs) are among the most prevalent and dangerous viruses you may never have heard of.

Four types of PIVs circulate worldwide each year, and although infections occur in people of all ages, PIVs primarily cause severe respiratory disease in infants, young children, the elderly, immunocompromised and those with preexisting respiratory conditions, such as lung transplants or asthma, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC). PIV infections can develop into bronchitis and pneumonia, leading to hospitalization and death in high-risk populations.

The risk is particularly great for young children. PIV Type 3 (PIV3) causes 18 million cases of acute lower respiratory infection globally each year, leading to 700,000 hospital admissions and 34,000 deaths in children younger than 5, according to research published in peer-reviewed virology journals – including the *Journal of Clinical Virology*, *Virology*

ogy Journal and the Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal – as well as data compiled by the CDC. It is the second leading cause of bronchitis and pneumonia in children, right behind respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and it typically affects young children during their first two years of life. Research has shown that infection can recur throughout the child's life.

Currently, there is no vaccine and no monoclonal treatment.

Associate Professor Jarrod Mousa, Ph.D., and his team in the FSU College of Medicine's Department of Biomedical Sciences are about to change that situation. They published an article in the journal *Nature Communications* that identified a couple of monoclonal antibodies that are effective against two of the four PIVs.

"One of the antibodies was particularly effective against Type 3, but we showed it was also effective against Type 1," Mousa said. "So a single monoclonal antibody can combat two different but related viruses."

Florida State University has staked a claim to the discovery by filing for a provisional patent in Mousa's name, giving the team a year to do more testing and prepare an official patent application.

Parainfluenza viruses are members of Paramyxoviridae, a family of single-stranded RNA viruses known to cause different types of infections in vertebrates. Examples of these infections in humans include the measles, mumps, parainfluenza and RSV. Measles and mumps vaccines have been around for decades; a vaccine to protect against RSV has been available since 2023.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, PIV3 was the strain detected in 60% of children who presented with PIV infection. During the pandemic, that figure rose to 99%, Mousa said, evidence of the pervasiveness and increased risk for vulnerable populations. And the need for both prevention and treatment.

"Older people who get a severe infection can lose years of good life," Mousa said. "They may never quite recover to the point where they were before."

Mousa's team studied how the human body reacts to these viruses. Antibodies were isolated from humans who previously had exposure to parainfluenza viruses – "which is basically all of us," he said – and tested in animal models. They were basically able to reduce the virus' ability to replicate.

"We want to take our best candidate antibody and optimize it to make it more potent and hope to progress to clinical trials," Mousa said. "Now that we see how the virus responds to this antibody, we also want to look at how to design a vaccine against it."

The research was funded by a \$682,000 grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, a part of the National Institutes of Health.

"We had applied for five-year grant and were just shy of getting it, but they gave us a one-year grant to do a little more work, and it paid off," Mousa said.

Professor Richard Nowakowski, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences, said, "The work in the Mousa lab is groundbreaking, developing new antibodies and antibody targets that provide, for the first time, a route to a therapy for these infections. This work highlights the importance of basic science investigations of viral infection mechanisms.

"The parainfluenza viruses affect the vulnerable – children, the elderly and the immunocompromised, which alone comprise about 4% of the American population."

Mousa earned a B.S. in Chemistry and a B.A. in English from the University of North Florida in 2010 and a Ph.D. in Chemistry from the University of Florida in 2015, followed by two years as a post-doctoral fellow at the Vanderbilt University Vaccine Center. In 2017, he moved to the University of Georgia (UGA), where he was doing similar research at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Mousa joined the FSU College of Medicine faculty in December 2023.

One of his UGA colleagues, Mohamed Elbehairy, is now one of four post-doctoral fellows in the Mousa lab. Four graduate students, two undergraduate students and three research technicians comprise the rest of the team.

For Mousa, one of the takeaways of this research is raising awareness.

"We want to raise awareness of the pathogen, and we also want to raise awareness about the type of research our lab is doing and the work other people at the university are doing."



Promising PTSD research gets a boost with Department of Defense Grant

By Patrick Crowley
FSU College of Medicine

The U.S. Department of Defense awarded a four-year, \$3 million grant to a Florida State University College of Medicine research team to begin a clinical trial on a potential therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder — the second DoD grant for the FSU clinical neuroscience team led by F. Andrew Kozel, M.D., and co-director Kevin A. Johnson, Ph.D., R.N.

The therapy incorporates virtual reality into the team's already promising work with transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) treatments. TMS uses magnetic fields to stimulate nerve cells in specific areas of the brain. In the new

clinical trial, volunteers with PTSD will first undergo two weeks of virtual reality mindfulness training twice a day.

"If at that point their symptoms have not resolved, then they go into a protocol where they are randomized to active versus sham — or real versus fake — of accelerated TMS," Kozel said.

Those who go on to take part in the TMS portion of the study are randomized into three groups. Two groups will receive active TMS but on different sites of the brain, while the third receives a sham treatment. All participants are

subsequently treated with an active accelerated TMS protocol. Thus, all participants receive at least one active TMS treatment in this study.

The treatments are “accelerated” in the sense that instead of undergoing the current clinical protocol of one treatment each weekday for approximately six weeks, this new clinical trial will have volunteers come in for just five consecutive days in which they receive five treatments each day.

“Our goal is to be able to determine if accelerated TMS is an effective treatment for PTSD,” Kozel said. “This study will also give us important information as to which treatment parameter may be better and how long the effects last. That is one of the big issues with many treatments — that they may work initially but then they fade very quickly. TMS traditionally in depression has been shown to have a very prolonged effect — often years at a time. This still needs to be tested for accelerated TMS to see if that is the case with PTSD.”

To monitor longevity, researchers follow up with the volunteers at one, three and six months.

According to Kozel and Johnson, PTSD can arise from any traumatic experience.

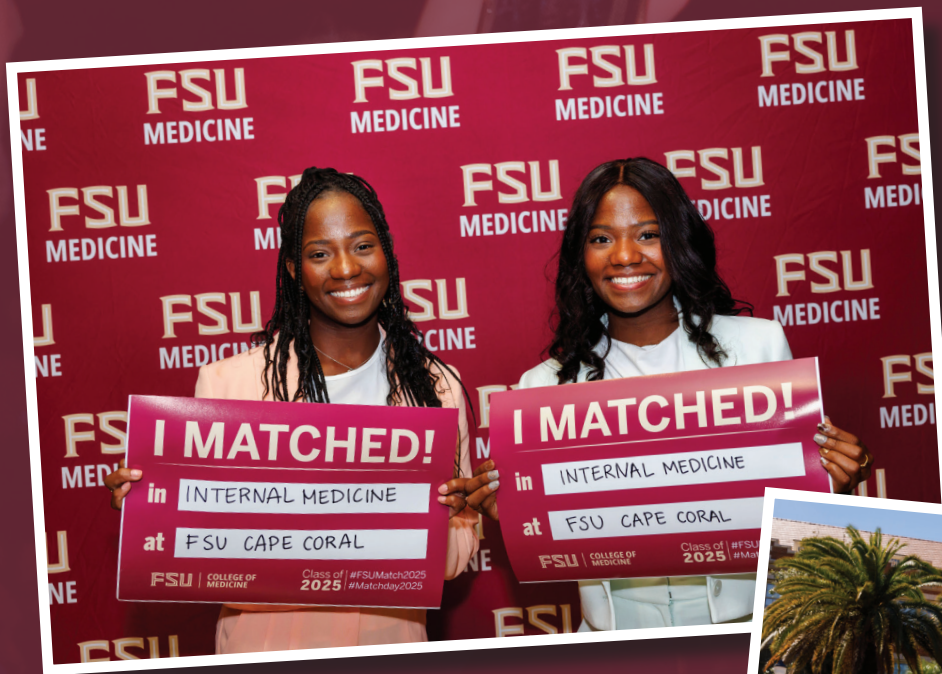
“PTSD comes in all shapes and sizes,” Johnson said. “It comes from military combat, auto accidents, violent crime, domestic abuse — there are many other examples.”

Although there is a small monetary stipend for qualified volunteers who complete the trial, Johnson said that is not the main reason why people decide to participate.

“Part of it is they may feel they have no other treatment options. Not everyone is going to get better with research treatments — we’ll get a certain percentage that do, but even the ones that don’t get better know that we are learning something in the process, and they are contributing to helping the broader community,” he said. “They know how much they’ve struggled with PTSD and even if this is not the right answer for them, they know they are helping us figure out the right answer for other people.”

Individuals interested in participating in research at FSU Neuromodulation can visit the lab website med.fsu.edu/kozellab/fsu-neuromodulation to complete a confidential contact survey.







Match Day highlights for the 113 students in the M.D. Class of 2025

Where they matched:

- 52 (46% of the class) matched in-state and will stay in Florida for residency
- 83 (73%) matched in the Southeastern United States (Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Virginia or the Carolinas)
- 8 (7%) matched in Texas
- 12 (11%) matched in one of FSU's 10 residency programs**

What they matched:

- 57 (51%) matched in a primary care specialty. Of those:
 - 11 (10%) matched in Family Medicine
 - 25 (22%) matched in Internal Medicine
 - 5 (4%) matched in Pediatrics
 - 13 (12%) matched in OB/GYN
 - 14 (12%) matched in Psychiatry
 - 9 (8%) matched in Emergency Medicine
 - 8 (7%) matched in Surgery
 - 6 matched in Anesthesiology

How they matched:

- 106 (94%) participated in the National Resident Matching Program
- 3 placed in residencies through the U.S. military match
- 2 matched through the San Francisco Match program in ophthalmology
- 2 matched through the American Urological Association match in urology
- 3 couples went through the couples' match

*** Includes 2 students who matched in programs FSU took over July 1, 2025.*



Once Bridge graduates have completed their medical training, many move on to underserved communities to provide vital patient care.

Commitment to community health leads to establishment of endowed fund

By Patrick Crowley
FSU College of Medicine

Capital Health Plan (CHP), consistently listed as one of the top health plans in Florida with high rankings from the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), is a major driver in the health insurance market, particularly in North Florida. What many people may not know is that it's also a major driver in supporting educational programs that address Florida's shortage of health care professionals, particularly in communities with inadequate access to care.

To help address this shortage, CHP recently made a \$200,000 charitable gift to establish an endowed fund at the Florida State University College of Medicine. This endowment will provide scholarships to students with financial need in the Bridge to Clinical Medicine major. This yearlong program, which culminates with a master's degree in biomedical sciences, focuses on students from communities with limited access to care and prepares them for a medical education. These students tend to return to their communities and provide vital health care services.

“For so many students, the biggest obstacle to becoming a doctor isn’t talent or dedication — it’s financial. We hope this fund changes that,” said Lynn Jones, M.D., chief medical officer at Capital Health Plan. “Alongside the FSU College of Medicine, we’re investing in students who have the heart for medicine. This is about building a healthier future for our communities.”

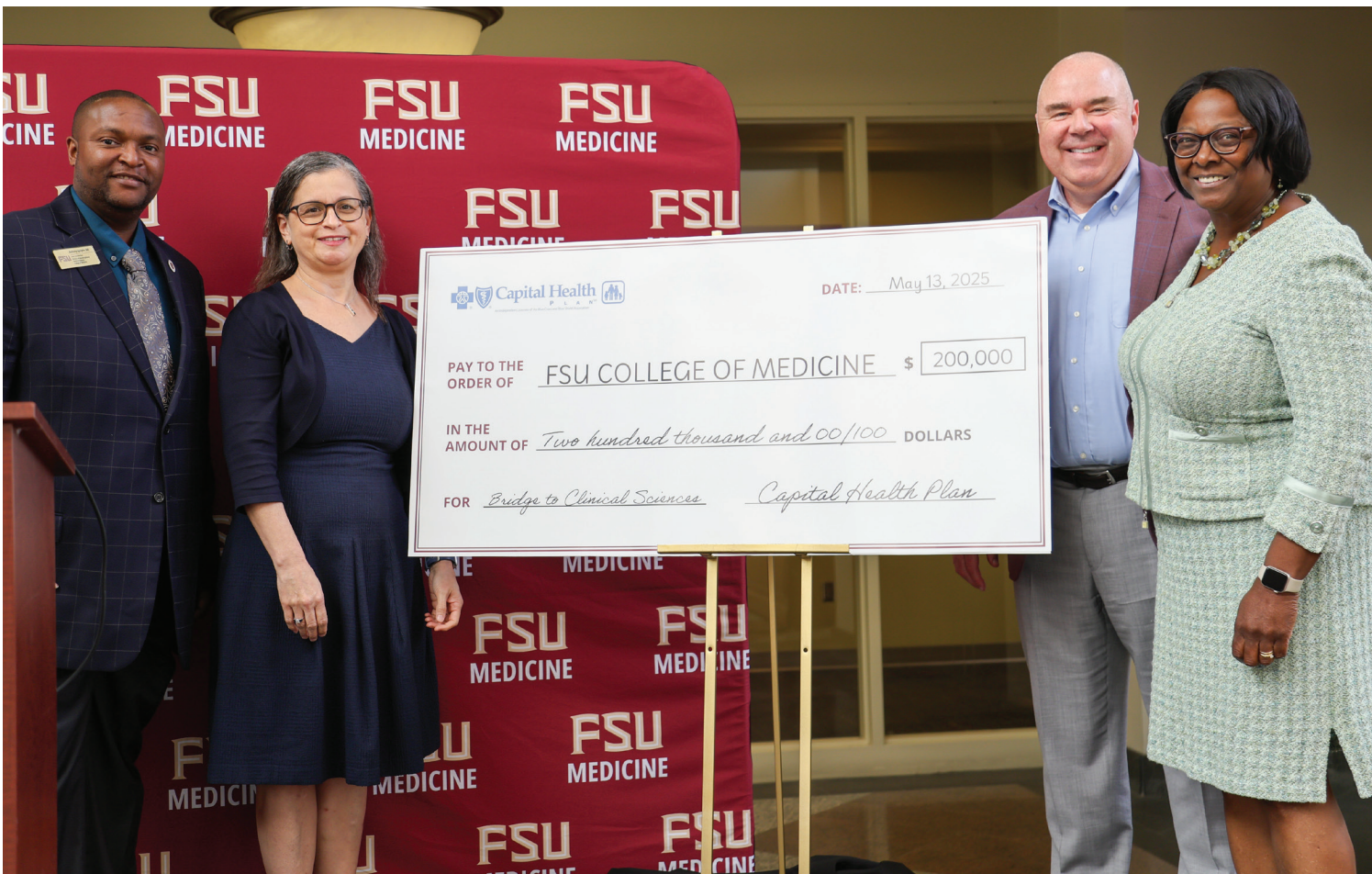
Since its inception in 2021, the Bridge program has supported hundreds of aspiring physicians. As of Summer 2025, 214 students had completed the Bridge program. Of the 220 former students tracked, 98% went on to medical school, with 97% graduating by Spring 2024, 66% entering residency in primary care and 55% practicing in Florida. Almost half, 49%, practice in medically underserved areas.

“We’re very proud of the success of our students,” said Anthony Speights, M.D., senior associate dean for Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences and director of the Bridge program. “The fact that CHP has given us this vote of confidence speaks volumes and, rest assured, we will be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us. This gift — which will continue in perpetuity — will help deserving students pursue a rewarding career in health care.”

CHP has a long history of supporting medical education at Florida State. In addition to this new fund, CHP made a charitable gift that created the Nancy Van Vessem, M.D., Memorial Scholarship Fund, which provides scholarships to medical students based on their desire and commitment to practice internal medicine or outpatient geriatrics in North Florida. Van Vessem was a valued faculty member at the College of Medicine and chief medical officer at CHP, where she had worked for more than 20 years, until her death in 2018.

“Support such as this has a direct and positive impact on the mission of the College of Medicine,” said Alma Littles, M.D., dean of the college. “CHP has been a great friend to the college and FSU, and we are eternally grateful not only for CHP’s support, but also for its commitment to medical education and the health of our communities. Because of CHP, we are more effectively meeting the health care needs of Floridians.”

The Bridge scholarship fund is expected to make its first award in the 2025-2026 academic year.



At left, Anthony Speights, M.D., director of the Bridge program, and, at right, Alma Littles, M.D., dean of the College of Medicine, accept a \$200,000 gift from Capital Health Plan representatives Lynn Jones, M.D., chief medical officer, and Tom Glennon, senior vice president of marketing and administration.

Regional Campus News



Daytona Beach

George Bernardo, M.D.

Dean, Daytona Beach
Regional Campus



Helping those in need

Daytona Beach Regional Campus students, such as Sophie Gorelov, provide vital community services as part of their three-week Community Medicine Course. For her experience, Gorelov spent time at Halifax Urban Ministries, helping those who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless.

A Teddy Bear to Ease Anxiety

The Daytona Beach Regional Campus held its third annual “Teddy Bear Clinic” at Spruce Creek Elementary School. The clinic helps young students learn what happens when they visit a doctor’s office or hospital. Students can hold the instruments and practice on each other and their teddy bear, which they keep. The medical students are passionate about helping the special needs students have fun in this setting, since so many have an increased number of medical visits. It is a very rewarding day for our students, the second graders and their teachers. Regional campus participants included the 18 seniors, Dean George Bernardo, M.D., Peggy Bernardo, Niki Wolcott and Andrea La Douceur.



A Fun Tradition!

Each year, seniors at the Daytona Beach Regional Campus take a group “scrub” photo to commemorate their time there. This year was no different and the faculty and staff wish them much success as they progress in their careers. This year’s seniors include Jessica Browder, Renish Contractor, Brady Culpepper, Luke Farmer, Mike Filoramo, Phasin Gonzalez, David Gorelov, Matt Harris, Will Hixson, Catherine Maige, Jackson May, Liam McLoughlin, Jacob Myhre, Lauren Rafanan, McKenzie Seitz, Shwetha Shetty, Sally Stander, Vivian Tanios.





Pensacola

Paul A. McLeod M.D.

Dean for Regional Campuses,
Pensacola Regional Campus Dean



Long-time educator and physician retires

By Paul McLeod

Dennis Mayeaux, M.D., is retiring after 22 years of service to the College of Medicine. Mayeaux served in a clerkship director role (Family Medicine, informatics and Geriatrics) since we opened the doors to accept our first class in 2003.

Mayeaux always went far above and beyond as a mentor, teacher and friend. He gave his time, talent and money to our College of Medicine (despite the fact that he is a diehard Hurricane and Gator).

Many times over the years, he and I have shared our sense of gratitude and wonder that two family docs from rural Milton, Florida, could play a pivotal role in implementing this amazing model of medical education.

Every student who has walked through the doors of our college of medicine campus has benefited from the knowledge, skills and leadership of Dr. Mayeaux. We can't really thank him enough for the impact he had on our program and the people who were lucky enough to work with him.



Robert Wilson receives Hippocratic Award



Bob Wilson, M.D.

Robert "Dr. Bob" Wilson, M.D., longtime clerkship director for Pediatrics at the Pensacola Regional Campus, was selected to receive the Hippocratic Award.

Hippocrates II, considered the Father of Medicine, was born on the Greek Island of Kos in the fifth century BC and is remembered for his teaching and practice of medicine. The image of him teaching students under a tree has become a powerful symbol of Hippocratic Medicine, and students at many medical schools recite the Hippocratic Oath prior to graduation.

The Hippocratic Award has been established at the FSU College of Medicine to recognize an outstanding physician faculty member who embodies the attributes of the Hippocratic Oath.

The FSU College of Medicine has acquired a cutting of the original Hippocratic tree from the Island of Kos (from a cutting that was acquired in 1969 by the University of Florida College of Medicine in Gainesville). This cutting has been planted in the Chapman Wellness Garden at the FSU College of Medicine and will be the permanent site of the annual award ceremony.

"Dr. Bob' has been a great mentor for all his medical students," said Paul McLeod, M.D., dean of the Pensacola Regional Campus. "He cares deeply for his patients and has a passion for mentorship and furthering the profession of medicine. He is humble, respectful, and is a worthy recipient for the Hippocrates award."

Pensacola Regional Campus Campus Information

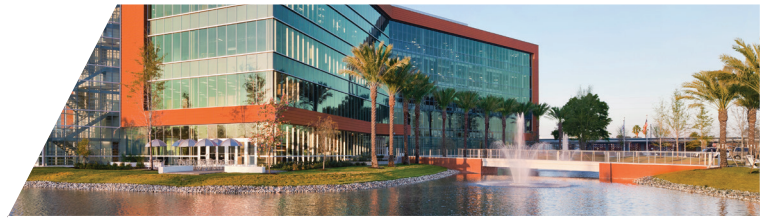
- Opened in 2003
- Paul A. McLeod, M.D., Sr. Associate Dean for Regional Campuses, Pensacola Regional Campus Dean
- Over 1,000 faculty and staff members
- 41 PA students
- 318 M.D. students



Orlando

Mark Chaet, M.D.

Dean, Orlando Regional Campus



Orlando Regional Campus Dean Mark Chaet, M.D., in the center, and Michael McBath, former president of the Retired NFL Players Association, are interviewed by Meredith McDonough on WESH2 in Orlando.

Students provide health screenings to former NFL players

Orlando Regional Campus third-year medical students, led by campus Dean Mark Chaet, M.D., and supported by faculty Melodie Mope, M.D., and Varesh Patel, M.D., had the opportunity to assist 60 former NFL players and their families receive complimentary executive health screenings, courtesy of the Professional Athletes Foundation and NFL Players Association (NFLPA) and the Living Heart Foundation.

The screenings included EKGs, carotid artery scans, bloodwork, body composition analysis and blood pressure checks and provided the players with essential health insights and education. The medical students supported the event by performing body composition assessments and recording vital signs, such as blood pressure. It was a valuable opportunity to encourage former players to take charge of their own health.

Approximately 140 NFL Player Alumni live in the Central Florida area. Orlando is one of five sites nationally that provides annual NFL player alumni executive physicals and wellness education and support.

Chaet and Retired NFL Players Association past-president, Michael McBath, had the opportunity to share information about this event on WESH 2 News and the CW 18.

Orlando Regional Campus Ultrasound Workshop

On Feb. 19, fourth-year medical student Cristina Sanchez-Benitez organized an ultrasound workshop for FSU medical students, led by Jesus Roa, M.D., FSU College of Medicine Orlando campus Emergency Medicine clerkship director, and emergency medicine faculty and fellows from Orlando Health.

Ultrasound fellows Tyler Moriarty, M.D., and Grace Brown, M.D., began with a brief presentation on ultrasound fundamentals. This was followed by small-group EFAST (Extended Focused Assessment with Sonography in Trauma) practice.

The hands-on portion was taught by Moriarty, Brown, William Waite and Roa, emergency medicine physicians at Orlando Health. Roa provided real-time feedback on technique, image interpretation and identification of abnormal findings. The workshop aimed to equip students with practical ultrasound skills for clinical rotations and encourage on-going practice at their regional campus.

The workshop was attended by approximately 20 participants, including third- and fourth-year medical students as well as Physician Assistant students. Student volunteers acted as patients. Overall, the program was a huge success. Students especially appreciated the hands-on format and real-time feedback.



Jesus Roa, M.D., shares ultrasound details with Cristina Sanchez-Benitez.



Taking part in the executive health screenings were, from left, Shahani Perera, Melodie Mope, M.D., Marina Zakhary, Mark Chaet, M.D., Maryselle Cabrera, Aziz Khan, Varesh Patel, M.D., and Neil Patel.



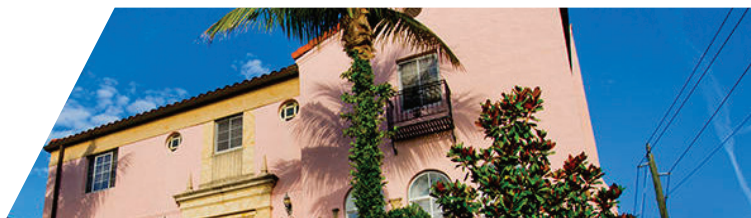
Nothing beats hands-on experience. Taking part in the ultrasound workshop were, in front, Jesus Roa, M.D., and volunteer patient Marina Zakhary; in back, Kimberly Keenan, Katelyn Cornelius, Aziz Khan, Sarah Blackburn and Nick Davis.



Sarasota

Nicole Bentze, D.O.

Dean, Sarasota Regional Campus



Student Nutrition in Medicine research is a winning effort

Students at the Sarasota Regional Campus are pursuing a variety of research projects in Nutrition in Medicine, and they are winning awards for their efforts.

Evidence-based research shows that plant-centered nutrition is an important way for individuals to improve their health and the environment. Doctors have an opportunity to reduce the morbidity and mortality from multiple chronic diseases in their patients, even with brief nutritional interventions.

"Medical students are in a powerful position to help large numbers of patients with thousands of patient and family interactions ahead in their careers," said Nicole Bentze, D.O., dean of the Sarasota Regional Campus.

Bentze and Allison Menezes, M.D., an ophthalmologist and Sarasota clinical faculty member, were mentors for the projects involving students from the Sarasota Regional Campus, as well as a student from the Tallahassee Regional Campus and a student from the FSU Central Campus.

Brittany Long (M.D. Class of '25, Sarasota) wrote an article titled "A Broader Approach to Diabetes: Take Two Minutes for Plants," which was published in *Retina Today*. Brittany also presented her research at the Florida Chapter of the American College of Physicians Conference in October 2023. Her poster won the best Medical Student Clinical Research Award. Brittany has matched into an ophthalmology residency program.

Amber Dudek (M.D. Class of '26, Tallahassee) and Paola Piascik (M.D. Class of '27, Central Campus) developed a poster promoting the benefits of plant-based diets. They are currently writing the paper for their research project involving 32 physicians and 10,000 patients: "Quantifying Patient Interest in Plant-Based Diets Across Multiple Specialties." Paola presented this research at the Florida Chapter of the American College of Physicians 2025 Annual Residents & Medical Students Meeting. They won the Medical Student Quality Improvement-Patient Safety Poster on March 15, 2025.

Gaby Chalela (M.D. Class of '26, Sarasota) worked with Dr. Dennis Imperio, a clinical faculty nephrologist, and Menezes to develop a Nephrologist Information Guide with highlights of research supporting plant-based diets in chronic kidney disease, along with Patient Nutrition Cards with attainable plant-based recommendations. Patient adoption and adherence to the nutrition recommendations will be evaluated. Seven other nephrologist practices were surveyed to evaluate nephrologist willingness to encourage plant-centered diets in their patients. Her poster was presented with Bentze ("Prescribing Plant-Predominant Diets in Chronic Kidney Disease: A Quality Improvement Initiative") at the annual meeting of the American Medical Women's Association earlier this year.

Aaliyah Bourne, Rushabh Shah and Mark Mirabueno (all three M.D. Class of '26, Sarasota) worked with clinical faculty orthopedic surgeon Adam Bright, M.D., and Menezes to develop a Surgeon Information Guide with highlights of research supporting plant-based diets for wound healing and good immune function. This study will evaluate patient adoption and adherence to the nutrition recommendations. Their abstract ("Promoting Plant-Centered Diets for Better Wound Healing in Surgical Patients") was accepted for the Florida Medical Association Annual Conference in July 2025.



Brittany Long



Amber Dudek



Paola Piascik



Gaby Chalela



Aaliyah Bourne



Rushabh Shah



Mark Mirabueno



Tallahassee

Sandeep Rahangdale, M.D.
Dean, Tallahassee Regional Campus



Dad plays role of 'devil's advocate' and 'senior resident' as his son follows in his FSU footsteps

An inquisitive mind and love of medicine, specifically neurology, run in the family for Evan Carrigan (M.D., '25) and his father, Casey Carrigan, (M.D., '09), who spent his third and fourth years of medical school at the Tallahassee Regional Campus.

As the Florida State University College of Medicine celebrates its 25th anniversary, and the Tallahassee Regional Campus its 22nd, it isn't surprising the college is beginning to see children of alumni come up through the ranks. And, for this father-and-son duo, there is a special bond, as both are dedicating their careers to neurology — adult neurology for Casey and pediatric neurology for Evan, who graduated in May and is entering his preliminary pediatrics training at the University of Florida College of Medicine in Jacksonville, followed by his child neurology residency at the Mayo Clinic and Nemours Children's Health, also in Jacksonville.

"Beyond the example he has set for me as a former medical student at FSU and a currently practicing physician, my dad has also been a steady source of moral support and insight," said Evan, who spent his final two years at the Sarasota Regional Campus. "My dad specifically enjoys playing devil's advocate and opening my eyes to the alternatives. This has ultimately brought me more security in the decisions I've made including career choice and specialty. For example, we both share a passion for neurologic medicine, and I know my decision to follow this path was made with abundant options in mind. We now get to have frequent conversations and discussions on interesting neurological cases, and he continues to mentor and teach me as my personal 'senior resident.'"

It's the "devil's advocate" role that both

Evan and Casey found to be invaluable as Casey progressed through his academic career.

"The role I have played from time to time has been to shake up his thinking," Casey said. "He knows that whatever he chooses, I am going to be right there asking, 'What about this other thing?' An example was his decision to study biomedical engineering (BME). I thought that was a wonderful choice, but then challenged him with, 'You know there are easier bachelor's degrees if you want to go to medical school afterward.' He responded confidently that BME was the alternate pathway for him if he chose to not go to medical school."

Few professions move as quickly as medicine — both clinically and academically. Recognizing the 16-year difference between their medical degrees, Casey said his personal experience was vastly different than his son's.

"Once in medical school, the only advice I could really give him was to study hard and constantly, be himself, take care of himself and seek wise counsel early and often," Casey said. "He did all of this by studying hard — there is no substitute — working on his golf game with classmates, joining a church, finding a wife in his med school class, and forming a bond with Dr. Robert Watson, who was also a mentor to me as his daughter, Mary, was my classmate. As he transitioned to third year, I advised him to enter each rotation as if he was truly considering practicing in that specialty. This served him well as he discovered many interests outside of neurology."

As for his decision to follow in his father's footsteps, Evan said it was the right decision to choose FSU.

"The mission, model and culture of FSU College of Medicine all made it a unique and favorable choice when compared to other medical schools around the country," Evan said. "From the beginning, the atmosphere was one of comradery and support."

Now that Evan is a medical school graduate, Casey can look on with pride, watch Evan grow in his profession — continue to play "devil's advocate" and "senior resident" — and feel confident that they have both chosen a rewarding career.

"It is most gratifying to see Evan happy. I know it seems intuitive that we all want our children to be happy," Casey said. "But it can become complicated when father and son have such a close relationship like Evan and I have. I have had to overtly challenge his decisions along the way to make sure he was choosing his path for his own reasons. In the end, it would make sense that he would go down the same path that I did because we are so similar. It is really cool that we both got an engineering degree from UF, a medical degree from FSU, and neurology training from Mayo. I can't wait for my former mentors at Mayo to get their hands on him and shape him into a super-neurologist; I know they are going to love him."



Dr. Casey Carrigan and his son, soon-to-be Dr. Evan Carrigan, celebrate 2025 Match Day in March at Ruby Diamond Concert Hall.



CHANGING THE LIVES THAT CHANGE THE WORLD

If you would like information on how to build your legacy at the **College of Medicine**, contact Susan Glenn, associate vice president of Advancement, at 850-644-0764, or sglenn@advance.fsu.edu

Class Notes

2024

PA

Kimberly Aguilar, PA-C, resides in Plant City.

Kathryn Boylan, PA-C, is practicing at Radiology Associates of Tallahassee in interventional radiology.

Nicolette DiGregorio, PA-C, resides in Palm Beach Gardens.

Elijah Dorneval, PA-C, is practicing at the Tallahassee Neurological Clinic. He is a member of Pi Alpha and the National Honor Society for Physician Assistants.

Amber Doyle, PA-C, resides in Gulf Breeze.

Julia England, PA-C, is practicing at Precision Dermatology in Jacksonville.

Justin Esteve, PA-C, is practicing at Tampa General Hospital in critical care.

Melanie Fernandez, PA-C, is practicing at Women's Care Florida in Orlando.

Alexandra Johnson, PA-C, is practicing at Women's Care Florida in Tampa. She is expected to wed in October 2025.

Sage Keckstein, PA-C, is an orthopedic surgery practitioner in Sarasota.

Teagan Kistler, PA-C, resides in Riverview.

Madelynn Lovelady, PA-C, is practicing at Tallahassee Medical Group.

Irene Maini, PA-C, resides in Tampa.

Samantha Mankus, PA-C, is a head and neck surgery practitioner in St. Johns.

Haley Michael, PA-C, is practicing in the emergency department at Halifax Health in Daytona Beach.

Hunter Morgan, PA-C, is practicing at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Urgent Care.

Allyson Orr, PA-C, resides in Jacksonville.

Kay Quint, PA-C, is practicing at Oviedo Woman's Health Center.

Scarlett Roy, PA-C, is completing an orthopedic surgery fellowship at Tallahassee Orthopedic Clinic.

Chlo Sprowl, PA-C, is a primary care practitioner at Walla Walla Clinic in Walla Walla, Washington.

Aviana Yeager, PA-C, resides in Lynn Haven.

Abigail Zamora, PA-C, resides in Lehigh Acres.

2023

PA

Fallon Browning, PA-C, is a family medicine practitioner in Winter Garden.

Montanna Jenkins, PA-C, is practicing at UF Health Women's Center in Gainesville.

Hannah Lipsch, PA-C, is practicing at Urbaniak Plastic Surgery in St. Petersburg.

Monica Rowe, PA-C, is practicing at Gateway Urgent Care in Nashville, Tennessee. She is expected to wed in 2025.

2022

M.D.

Christopher Pope, M.D., will complete a graduate residency from Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare

Family Medicine in 2025. Afterwards, he will begin working with Tallahassee Medical Group.

Abigail Schirmer, M.D., was selected as a member of the UF Chapman Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society. She is completing an anesthesiology residency at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

PA

Kelly Mueller, PA-C, is a primary care practitioner in Ellicott City, Maryland. She wed in May 2024.

Laken Tanner, PA-C, is an emergency medicine practitioner at Memorial Satilla Health in Waycross, Georgia.

2021

PA

Erica Gallup, PA-C, is practicing at a pediatric emergency department in Jacksonville. She is also practicing testosterone replacement therapy, pro re nata, at a men's clinic.

Heather McLean, PA-C, is practicing at Cleveland Clinic Florida-Port St. Lucie in general surgery.

Montana Puckett, PA-C, is a practitioner in robotic general surgery in St. Petersburg.

Monica Shevock Smith, PA-C, is practicing in Wendell, North Carolina with a focus on general and colorectal surgery. She wed in May 2024.

2020

M.D.

Scott Nelson, M.D., is in private practice at North Florida Pediatrics in Tallahassee.

Alyssa Steitz, M.D., is completing a nephrology fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee. In 2023, she married Bryan Steitz and served as chief resident in

Do you have an item to share for our next issue of Class Notes? If so, email it to alumni@med.fsu.edu. We'd love to hear from you!

internal medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

PA

Mason Fish, PA-C, is practicing at Concord Health in Clearwater.

Elleree Guy Hawkins, PA-C, is practicing at Neuroendovascular Surgery in Lincoln, Nebraska with an emphasis in cerebrovascular surgery. She is a recent contributor to the Journal of Operative Neurosurgery.

Cole Pomykacz, PA-C, is a medical oncology practitioner in Port St. Lucie.

Jose Yegres, PA-C, is practicing with the Southern Medical Group in Tallahassee in interventional cardiology and peripheral vascular disease.

2019

M.D.

Samuel Cook, M.D., is practicing full-spectrum family medicine in Mt. Shasta, California.

2017

M.D.

Avi Assidon, M.D., is a surgeon at Urologic Specialists in West Palm Beach.

2016

M.D.

James Cassiano, M.D., is a partner at The Surgery Group of North Florida Surgeons in Pensacola. He is also practicing at Baptist and Sacred Heart hospitals. His surgery specialties include bariatric, minimally invasive, metabolic, robotic and advanced foregut.

2007

M.D.

Roberto Gonzalez, M.D., is director of the Advanced Endoscopy Gastroenterology Digestive Diseases Institute at Tradition Hospital in Port St. Lucie.

Help Us Celebrate our Past and Invest in Our Future

A lot has happened in 25 years

- The FSU College of Medicine was established
- The university has made a steady and impressive rise in national rankings
- Our men's and women's athletic teams earned six national titles including soccer (2014, 2018, 2021 and 2023); softball (2018); and football (2013 – a third for the Noles)

Not one to rest on our laurels, the FSU College of Medicine has an eye on a bright future

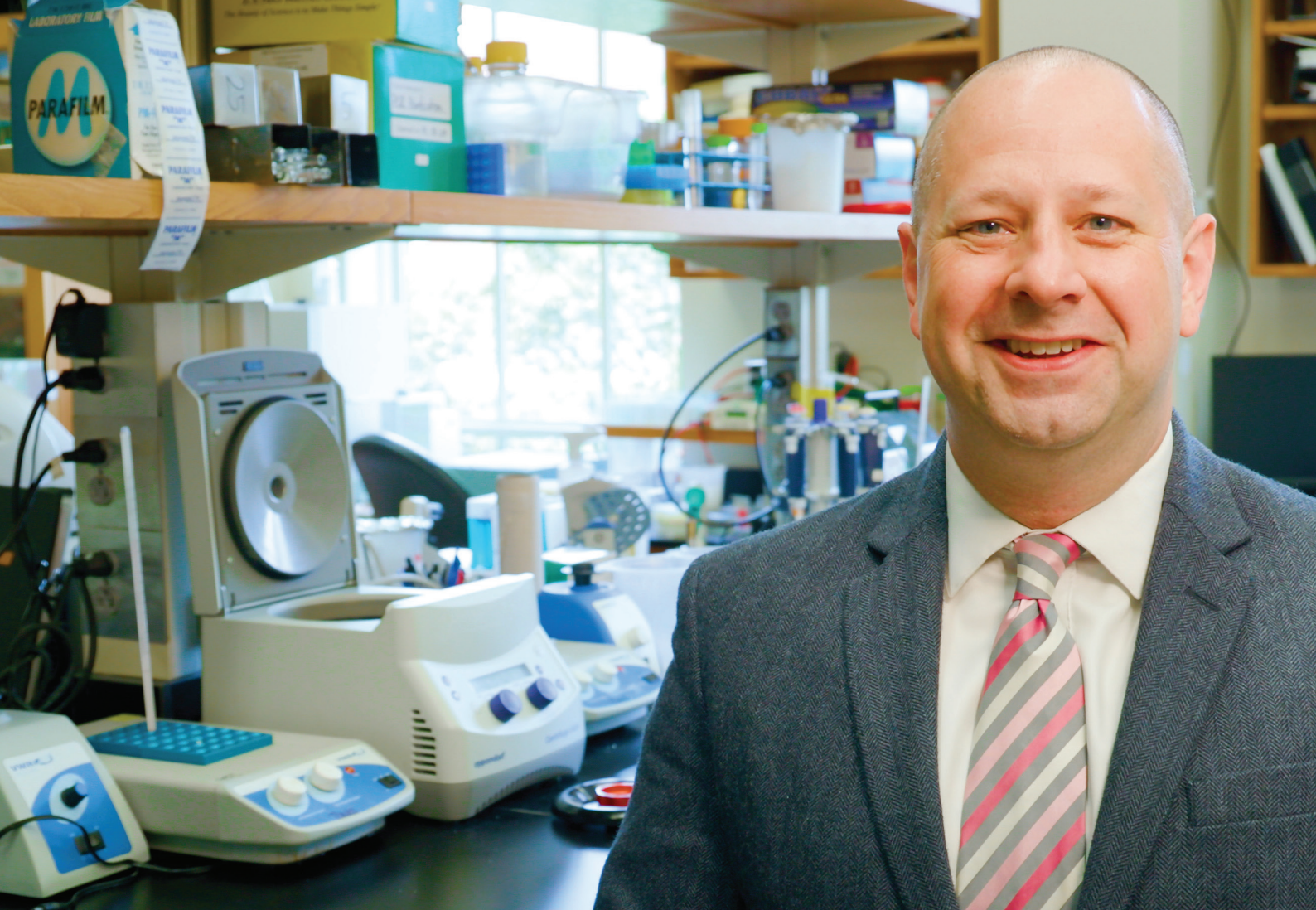
- A new FSU Health academic health center is being built on the campus of Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare
- Under the FSU Health banner, a new hospital is being built in Panama City Beach
- The School of Physician Assistant Practice recently earned Accreditation-Continued status through September 2032
- Our Graduate Medical Education program continues to grow and provide outstanding educational opportunities for medical residents.

Our success is due in large part to your support.

Join your fellow alumni, faculty, staff and friends in making a charitable gift to the FSU College of Medicine to commemorate its 25th anniversary.

Your gift is a great way to "pay it forward," and lend support to our future health care providers.

A gift remittance envelope is enclosed (no postage necessary!) or you can make your gift online at med.fsu.edu/giving.



‘Nothing worth doing is easy’: FSU biomedical sciences professor wins 2025 Distinguished Teacher Award

By Amy Farnum-Patronis
University Communications

Florida State University Associate Professor of Biomedical Sciences Robert Tomko Jr. has been recognized with the university’s most prestigious teaching award for his dedication to fostering strong relationships with his students and building a learning community based on support, encouragement, clarity and honesty.

Tomko, who joined the College of Medicine in 2015, received FSU’s 2024-2025 Distinguished Teacher Award during the annual Faculty Awards Celebration on Tuesday, April 22, at the Student Union ballrooms.

“Dr. Tomko brings a deep passion for teaching and mentoring,

especially in helping students understand complex science in clear, meaningful ways,” said FSU Provost Jim Clark. “He’s been recognized many times for his outstanding teaching and research, and he’s a role model for his students and colleagues alike.”

Faculty members who have won a University Teaching Award at least five years ago and can demonstrate ongoing outstanding teaching for the next five years are eligible for the award. Tomko, who won the University Teaching Award in 2019, will receive a \$7,500 prize from the university.

“I’m honored and humbled to be recognized,” Tomko said. “The College of Medicine and my department really appreciate the



importance of teaching budding scientists and clinicians, and I was fortunate enough to have outstanding mentors in my early days that helped me to develop my teaching skills and approach.”

Tomko, who teaches courses to medical, physician assistant and doctoral students, believes his job as an educator is to ensure that his students are prepared for the road ahead so that the College of Medicine produces “a cadre of talented and objective scientists and clinicians to carry academic discovery and medicine into the future.”

He expects students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, emulate professional behavior, and become proactive in their academic and professional lives. He models high standards of professionalism that will be expected of them and encourages respect and punctuality.

“I frequently remind students that they are the product of their own efforts, and that they must attack their goals and innovate ways to be successful at times,” Tomko wrote in his award application. “All students know my mantra: Nothing worth doing is easy.”

As an instructor of Clinical Pharmacology I in the Physician Assistant program, one of Tomko’s goals is to train future clinicians to be prepared for rare cases when the typical treatment may be ineffective by using a combination of logic, deep medical knowledge, and creativity to identify alternative causes or drugs for a given set of symptoms.

By employing a tiered system of knowledge development, Tomko compels students to make more distant logical connections that can help them identify and pharmacologically diagnose outlier conditions. He uses documented medical oddities to demonstrate that typical treatments may not always be effective and guides students to solutions through open-ended questions and gentle nudges.

“A given set of symptoms usually indicates a specific disease or condition ... until it doesn’t, and the prescribed treatment fails,” Tomko wrote. “When that happens, clinicians must be willing to second-guess their initial diagnoses and consider possible treatments that are less on the beaten path.”

Quill Thomas, a second-year graduate student in the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the College of Medicine, said Tomko always goes above and beyond for students.

“He goes out of his way to support students in any way that they need,” Thomas said. “He’s a great mentor to his students and to other students as well. I know that he’s had one-on-one meetings with other graduate students when they needed

help or guidance or advice with other things.”

Tomko said that one of his greatest joys as a teacher is seeing a student master complicated concepts.

“Seeing all the pieces sort of slot together and that moment of excitement when everything clicks and they can start to apply it to all the important things we’ll need to do with that is really great,” he said

Tomko leads the Tomko Lab, which investigates the structure and function of the ubiquitin-proteasome system to aid drug discovery efforts for treating cancer and infectious diseases. His strong record of accomplishment in teaching, service, and research also earned him a Developing Scholar Award this year. This award is given to mid-career faculty at the associate professor level to support their research programs.

Four other College of Medicine faculty or staff members, each from a different department, were also honored at the university-wide celebration, held at the Student Union ballrooms.

Department of Geriatrics Professor Antonio Terracciano, who joined the College of Medicine in 2012, received the Distinguished Research Professor Award for his work examining the interplay of psychological, cultural and genetic factors shaping physical and mental health across the lifespan. Much of his research is funded through the National Institute on Aging, a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Terracciano is one of the most widely published faculty members within the college.

Debra Cole, director of didactic education and assistant professor within the School of Physician Assistant Practice, and Yang Hou, assistant professor in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine, received the Inclusive Teaching & Mentoring Award.

Other outstanding FSU faculty members recognized with faculty awards this year are:

- ***Outstanding Undergraduate Advising Award***, Ann DelRossi, College of Medicine
- ***Inclusive Teaching & Mentoring***, Debra Cole, College of Medicine, Yang Hou, College of Medicine
- ***Developing Scholar Award***, Robert Tomko, Jr., College of Medicine
- ***Distinguished Research Professor Award***, Antonio Terracciano, College of Medicine

College of Medicine claims five Leadership Awards Night honors

The Florida State University College of Medicine was well-represented among university-wide recipients at this year's Leadership Awards Night, held inside the FSU Student Union Ballrooms.

Hosted annually by the Office of Student Organizations and Involvement, the event recognizes FSU students, faculty, staff and organizations that have epitomized the definition of leadership by their exemplary contributions to the community through achievement, service or organizational leadership involvement.

The College of Medicine awards winners included three individuals and two student organizations.



Benjamin Smith and Allison Justice

Benjamin Smith, associate dean of the College of Medicine and program director of the School of Physician Assistant Practice, received one of three Faculty Leadership Awards for major contributions to the university community in areas of service and leadership. He was nominated by a colleague for his wide range of

leadership and communication skills, exemplary character and willingness to engage in all areas of the department.

Smith joined the College of Medicine faculty in 2016, as the PA program was being created, and has held multiple roles including teaching faculty, director of didactic education and associate program director. He served a year as interim director before his December 2022 promotion to program director and associate dean.

Heather Stitely, senior academic program specialist and community coordinator with the college's Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences (IMS) program, was one of three recipients of Staff Leadership Awards.

A committed mentor to IMS students since her 2018 arrival, Stitely has been instrumental in the development and implementation of the department's Experiential Learning (EL) Database, which tracks student activity hours that are a graduation requirement. As an advisor, she meets with each student – there are 500 in the program – regularly posts EL opportunities online, connects students with opportunities based on personal and career goals, and helps keep them on track throughout the rigorous four-year, pre-medical education program.



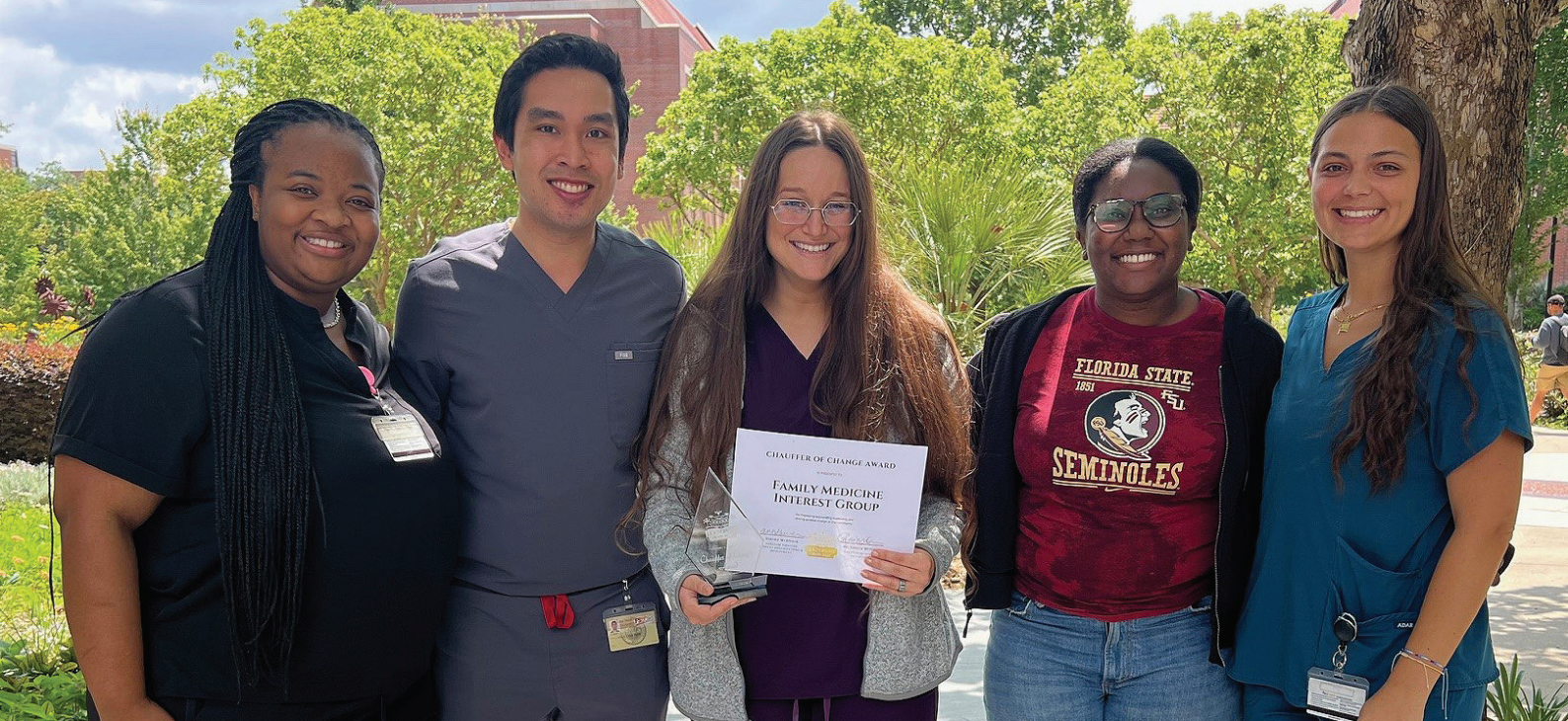
Heather Stitely

Matthew Stenberg, a junior in the IMS program, received the University Health Services (UHS) Award, recognizing a student or group dedicated to the promotion of health and wellness within the FSU community. Working with UHS, he helped launch and deliver a comprehensive student outreach drug abuse awareness program which included the distribution of Narcan kits within the university's Greek system.



Matthew Stenberg

Stenberg completed Overdose Lifeline Narcan training last spring and made his first presentation to a fraternity in the fall, leading to the program's expansion. In addition, he is



Family Medicine Interest Group members, from left, Cydney Granberry, Gabriel Ponce, Madison McCraney, Tamea Williams and Victoria Vida.

a member of FSU's Medical Response Unit, the Wellness Center's CHAW (Center for Health Advocacy and Wellness) and recently began working as an EMT for Gadsden County Emergency Services.

The honors kept coming for the IMS program as its Undergraduate American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) received the Purposeful Programming Award, which celebrates an organization promoting civic engagement and student development.



Undergraduate AMWA members, from left, Makenna Jenkins, Jasmine Max, Madeline Markham, Tia Reformato-Santoro and Angelica Moreno.

Over the past year, the chapter developed educational initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of health issues through events and social media programming that included its Menstrual and Mental Health Informational, Cervical Cancer Awareness Informational, Heart Health Informational, and a Current Events in Medicine Discussion. Additionally, it organized several impactful drives, collecting menstrual products, holiday toys and

books and participated in a creative collaboration to make handmade cards and origami for pediatric patients at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare.

One of a handful of undergraduate AMWA chapters nationally, it received the National AMWA Premedical Division's Humanitarian Branch Award earlier this year for its service to the Tallahassee community. Among its projects, the chapter revitalized outdoor spaces for Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Big Bend for a welcoming environment to host programs. It also maintained a two-year partnership with the Kearney Center, addressing food insecurity by providing consistent kitchen support for individuals in need.

The College of Medicine's Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG), composed primarily of first- and second-year medical students, received the Chauffeur of Change Award, presented to one student organization displaying outstanding leadership and promoting impactful change through advocacy, service and mission-driven programming.

FMIG was selected for its dedication to community service through programs like the Sabal Palm Health Education Project, where they made a difference in the lives of local elementary school children. It has also enhanced the academic experience for College of Medicine students through hands-on procedure nights to help prepare their future physician leader peers.

Congrats! College of Medicine faculty and staff recognized, receive awards

The following honors were awarded to Florida State University College of Medicine faculty and staff at the annual All Faculty Meeting on Dec. 9, 2024:



Shalon Buchs

Guardian of the Mission & Service:

Shalon Buchs, Ed.D., PA-C, associate professor and director of evaluation, School of Physician Assistant Practice.



Regina Scott

Exemplary Staff Member:

Regina Scott, MBA, administrative coordinator in the Department of Geriatrics.



Anthony Albaugh

Exemplary Staff Team or Group:

Building Operations Team: **Anthony Allbaugh**, assistant director of facilities and operations; **Christopher Kimbrel**, facilities manager; and **Jacen White**, business office/operations.



Christopher Kimbrel



Jacen White

Outstanding Educator Awards

These awards recognize faculty members who demonstrate outstanding teaching as evidenced by any or all of the following: consistent dedication to the six principles of the curriculum; commitment to continuous quality improvement in a course and/or his/her teaching; consistent efforts to incorporate education innovation; consistent dedication to identifying and meeting the educational demands of students; consistent enthusiasm for teaching; and willingness to work collaboratively with other course directors/faculty in delivering the curriculum to students.



Nicole Bentze

Regional Outstanding Faculty

Educator: Nicole Bentze, D.O., FAAFP, FAMWA, dean of the Sarasota Regional Campus.



Stephen Quintero

Outstanding Senior Faculty

Educator: Stephen Quintero, M.D., associate professor and medical director of the School of Physician Assistant Practice.



Elise Elegeert

Outstanding Junior Faculty

Educator: Elise Elegeert, DMSc, PA-C, assistant professor, School of Physician Assistant Practice.

Outstanding Researcher Awards

The Outstanding Senior Faculty Researcher Award recognizes the faculty member who demonstrates outstanding productivity as a researcher as evidenced by any or all of the following: consistently securing internal and/or external funding, consistently publishing research findings in the appropriate peer-reviewed journals that have impact on the field, consistently presenting research findings at national/international meetings of note, and other measures of outstanding research productivity.

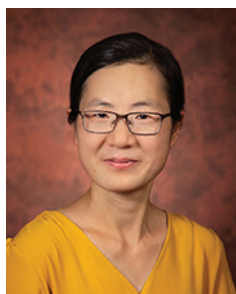


Robert Tomko

Outstanding Senior Faculty

Researcher: Robert Tomko Jr., Ph.D., Department of Biomedical Sciences, associate professor and director of the Tomko Lab.

The Outstanding Junior Faculty Researcher Award recognizes the faculty member who demonstrates promise to become an outstanding researcher evidenced by any or all of the following: securing initial external funding for research, publishing research findings in the appropriate peer-reviewed literature, presenting research findings at national/international meetings of note, and other measures of outstanding promise as a researcher.



Yang Hou

Outstanding Junior Faculty

Researcher: Yang Hou, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Behavioral Sciences & Social Medicine.

Longevity Awards:

Thank you to the following for their years of service to the College of Medicine!

10 years

Peggy Bernardo, Daytona Beach Regional Campus; Michael Collier, Sarasota Regional Campus; **Florian Duclot**, Biomedical Sciences; **Diana Jones**, Autism

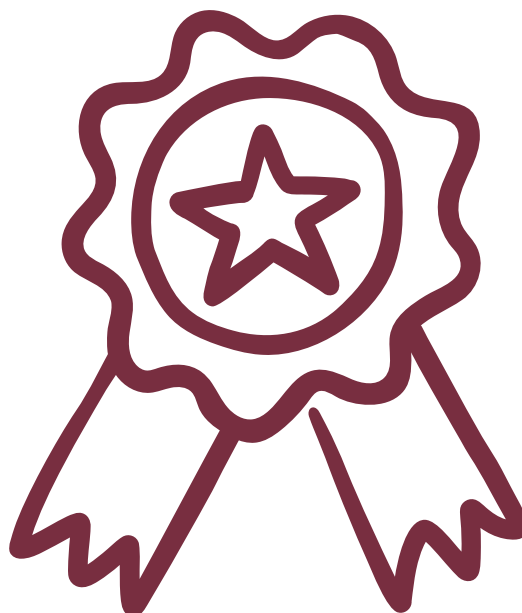
Institute; **Marie-Helene Kabbaj**, Biomedical Sciences; **Cara North**, Autism Institute; **Marc Nottke**, Autism Institute; **Linda Roske**, Daytona Beach Regional Campus; **Anthony Speights**, Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences; **Tana Welch**, Family Medicine and Rural Health.

15 years

Georgia Arnold, Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine; **Joshua Barber**, Biomedical Sciences; **Jason Gibson**, Research Admin-pre-award; **Jessee Graham**, GME; **Ling-Rong Kao**, Biomedical Sciences; **Charles Maitland**, Clinical Sciences; **Twila Marquer**, Pensacola Regional Campus; **Robert Watson**, Clinical Sciences; **Martin Wood**, Library; **Jian Wu**, IT.

20 years

Lisa Granville, Geriatrics; **Michelle Martin**, Geriatrics; **Stephen Quintero**, Family Medicine and Rural Health.





FSU College of Medicine Dean Alma Littles, M.D., and Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences program coordinator Ann DelRossi

Fifteen College of Medicine employees were recognized recently for 190 collective years of sustained service to Florida State University

The Sustained Service Awards ceremony was conducted by the Division of Academic Affairs and presided over by Executive Vice President and Provost Jim Clark.

Ann Del Rossi, program manager in the Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences (IMS) program, was honored for 30 years of service. Two employees – **Jean-Louise Caldwell**, clinical coordinator in the Office of Medical Education at the Sarasota Regional Campus, and **Elaine Geissinger**, campus administrator at the Tallahassee Regional Campus – were honored for 20 years of service.

The following 12 employees were honored for 10 years of service:

Rebecca Carter, Tobacco Program manager in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine's Area Health Education Center; **Nicolette Castagna**, community engagement lead for

the Geriatrics' Workforce Enhancement Program in the Department of Geriatrics; **Meredith Dozier**, program coordinator in the Department of Clinical Sciences; Inez Hudlow, clinical education coordinator in the School of Physician Assistant Practice; **Konnie Kruczek**, campus administrator at the Sarasota Regional Campus; **Yong Liu**, professional research assistant in the Department of Biomedical Sciences; **Derrick Myrick**, disbursement manager for the Florida Medical Practice Plan (FMPP); **Linda Netherton**, senior administrative specialist for the Bridge to Clinical Medicine and Honors Medical Scholars programs; **Aisha Qureshi**, accounting specialist in FMPP; **LaQuanta Rosier**, chief financial officer in FMPP; **Gwendolyn "Wendy" Rounds**, office administrator in the Department of Behavioral Science and Social Medicine; and **Sabrina Smith**, program director for medical student research in the Division of Research and Graduate programs.



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