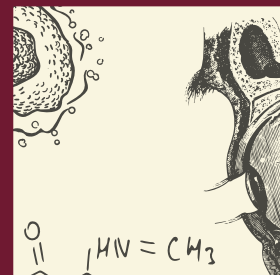
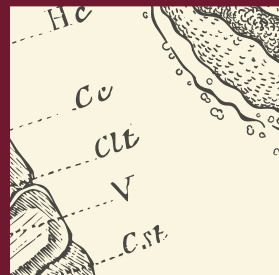
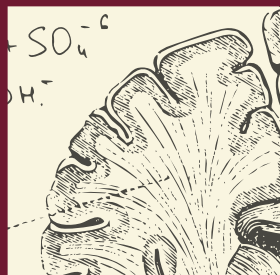
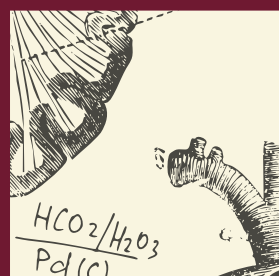
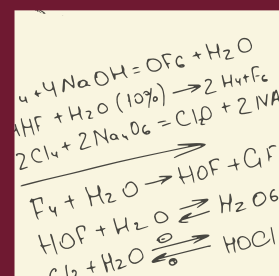
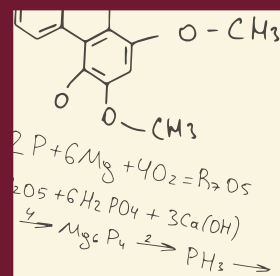
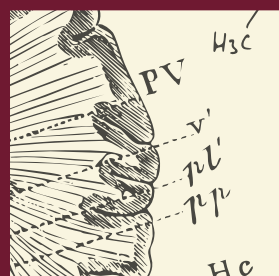


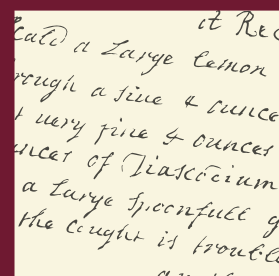
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JOIN FORCES
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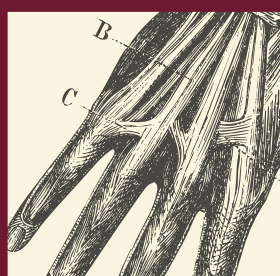
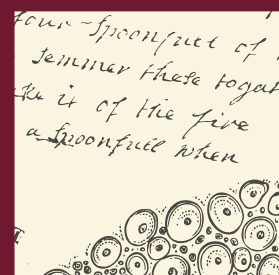


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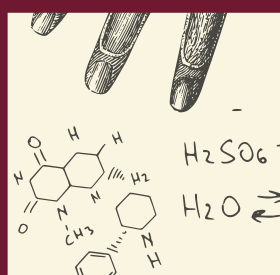
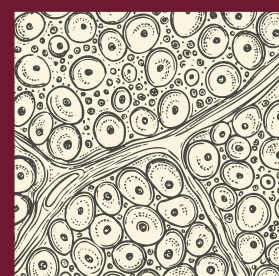


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FSUMED

THE MAGAZINE FOR FSU'S
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

FALL 2025

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FSU

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE





As we continue to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our College of Medicine, we welcome this new academic year with great excitement. We have many plans, some of which are shared in this issue of our magazine.

First and foremost, we remain focused on providing an outstanding education program for our future physicians, physician assistants and scientists. To do so, we continually reinvigorate and, at times, reinvent what we do to meet the fast-paced environment of our profession and the health care needs of Florida's growing population.

To best serve our students, community faculty and researchers, the college – in partnership with FSU Health – is expanding research opportunities for our students. We're doing this by building the research infrastructure to support community faculty interested in working with our students on research projects.

Our clerkship faculty are busy clinicians. Many would love to participate in, or have their practices be a part of, research projects, but time and resources are a barrier. We aim to change that. Through the Office of the Vice President for Research, centralized support services are offered for all types of clinical research. Navigators will be hired to help clinical researchers shepherd projects from conception to publication. A newly designed website serves as a one-stop shop to link clinical researchers with a variety of services to tackle issues such as proposal development, grants and contracts, biostatistics and informatics, and participant recruitment. You can read more about our initiative in this magazine.

In August, we welcomed the first-year medical students who arrived in May officially to the profession during the annual White Coat Ceremony, and we will welcome our newest members to the Hall of Fame during the annual College of Medicine Alumni Weekend, Nov. 7-9. We have a big class of inductees this year, and you can learn more about them beginning on page 50.

Looking ahead to our next 25 years and beyond, we see significant growth on the horizon — both programmatic and physical. We have plans to expand Graduate Medical Education to meet the workforce demands of Florida's growing population. By 2030 — which is not that far away — we plan to grow from our existing 27 GME programs to 50 and from 395 physician residents and fellows to nearly 1,000 across the state.

FSU Health, with the college as a major player, will expand health care services and research opportunities across Florida. The FSU Health Academic Health Center on the campus of Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare is on track to open in the summer of 2026, and ground has been broken on our new hospital in Panama City Beach — a first for Florida State. These initiatives, and many yet to come, are truly transformational.

I hope you share the pride I have in our College of Medicine and are equally excited about what the future holds.

With Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Alma B. Littles, M.D.".

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



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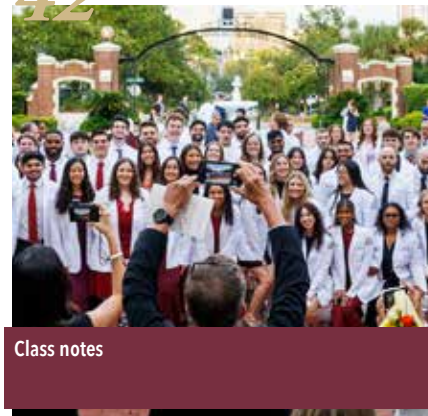
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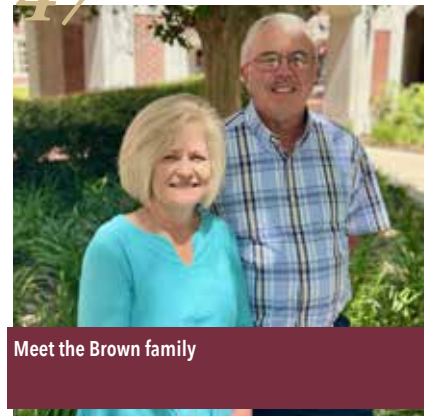
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Alumni weekend, milestone celebrations ahead



Artist's rendering of the FSU Health Academic Health Center on the Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare campus

FSU and Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare join forces to establish academic health center

Florida State University and Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare have approved the structure for a historic partnership agreement to create an academic health center in Tallahassee, a development that will transform health care in North Florida and expand FSU's mission in education and research.



Richard McCullough, FSU President

In a joint statement, FSU President Richard McCullough and TMH CEO Mark O'Bryant said the partnership will "provide the opportunity to establish the hospital as a true quaternary center — expanding services, extending our reach, generating jobs and fueling regional growth, all while preserving TMH as a community-focused hospital.

"By uniting TMH's longstanding commitment to community care with FSU's mission of academic excellence and service, we are seizing an extraordinary opportunity to shape the long-term future of health care in North Florida and beyond," they said. "This partnership will elevate the quality of health care for our community, create dynamic educational pathways for students and foster groundbreaking research."

The TMH Board of Directors voted unanimously Sept. 15 to proceed with the framework for the partnership, marking a pivotal moment for health care, research and education in North Florida. Additional definitive agreements must be finalized in the coming months.

The idea of transforming TMH into an academic health center has been discussed for more than a decade. The TMH Board first outlined the vision in its 2008 strategic plan, and the hospital has since added multiple residency programs. At TMH, the FSU College of Medicine sponsors residencies in family medicine, general surgery and internal medicine, as well as in psychiatry in partnership with the Apalachee Center.



Mark O'Bryant, TMH CEO

In addition, it sponsors the Alexander D. Brickler, M.D., Fellowship in Obstetrics for interested graduates of family medicine residency programs. There are currently 106 physicians in training in the residency and fellowship programs.

Alma Littles, M.D., dean of the College of Medicine, knows first-hand the deep and longstanding partnership between FSU and TMH.

After graduating from medical school in 1986, she continued her training in the TMH Family Medicine Residency Program, eventually serving as chief resident and later being hired by TMH to serve as director of the program. Even though she was a TMH employee, she was intimately involved in the early stages of the college's development, serving as acting dean of the Tallahassee Regional Campus, acting chair of the college's Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, and chair of the curriculum committee. A year after the first students entered the newly created College of Medicine, she was hired full-time as the inaugural chair of the college's Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health. She also served on the TMH Board of Trustees and is a past chair of that group.

"I am delighted that we have taken the next step in this partnership because, ultimately, our patients will benefit, as will the next generation of health care professionals," Littles said. "This is an extraordinary step forward for our community, medical education, patient care, and research."

In 2021, the TMH and FSU boards jointly approved the FSU/TMH Academic Health Center Strategic Alignment Plan, which laid out a blueprint for an academic health partnership.

The new agreement further builds on the momentum of the FSU Health Academic Health Center, launched in 2022 with a \$125 million appropriation from the Florida Legislature and Gov. Ron DeSantis. Construction is underway on the TMH campus. The 140,000-square-foot building, expected to open in 2026, will house the FSU Family Medicine Residency Program in TMH's outpatient clinical and educational space, a simulation center, clinical research space, laboratories and other facilities designed to connect patient care, education and research.

FSU and TMH have now advanced that vision through this Memorandum

of Understanding that formally establishes the framework for a fully encompassing academic health center. Under the agreement, FSU and TMH will work with the city of Tallahassee on the transfer of the hospital assets to FSU, including the 75-acre property, 2 million-square-foot hospital building and related assets. It is anticipated that FSU will then lease the assets to TMH under a new 40-year lease and operating agreement.

TMH will remain the licensed operator of the hospital, preserving its independent, tax-exempt status, and collaborate with FSU through research, branding, academic and clinical agreements.

The hospital will transition its brand to FSU Health. The hospital's board will continue to set strategy, approve the budget and make decisions, though the board composition will now have FSU representation. The hospital will continue to operate under its existing management, and employees will remain TMH employees.

"This is an extraordinary step forward for our community, medical education, patient care, and research."

Alma Littles, M.D.

Dean, FSU College of Medicine



Maria C. Andrews, M.D., at left, program director of the FSU-TMH Family Medicine Residency Program, instructs second-year resident Christian Cunningham (M.D. '24) as he examines a mock patient.

Expanding GME program provides direct response to Florida's physician shortage, legislation

By Patrick Crowley
FSU College of Medicine

Deepening its investment in advanced medical training and patient care, the FSU College of Medicine continues to grow its Graduate Medical Education program to meet the growing health care needs of Florida's population and to address a shortage of physicians.

This past summer, the GME program grew substantially by taking on sponsorship of various programs and now offers 27 residencies and fellowships with its nine health care partners. In July, the College of Medicine welcomed its newest class of 131 physician residents and fellows in hospitals and clinics across the state. They join more than 264 physicians already enrolled.

"The Florida Legislature created this College of Medicine with a clear mission, and that is to improve access to outstanding health care," said Alma Littles, M.D., dean of the college. "One way we do this is by strategically growing our GME program to directly address Florida's growing physician shortage and to improve access to care, particularly in rural and underserved communities."



“None of this would be possible without the strong partnerships we have with hospitals, clinics and physicians across the state, the support of the Florida Legislature, and the hard work of our 325 faculty who, even as busy practitioners themselves, are dedicated to medical education and training the next generation of physicians.”

The FSU GME program has been on a fast-track for growth. Since July, the program assumed sponsorship of two fellowships through the Andrews Research & Education Foundation, which supports the Andrews Institute for Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine in Gulf Breeze, and four physician residency programs at Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals, also in Northwest Florida. It has also added the family medicine residency program and family medicine OB/GYN fellowship at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, and most recently an OB/GYN residency in Cape Coral.

“Many people think we just train residents, and fellows. We have a bigger mission. A bigger obligation,” said Bill Boyer, DHSc, associate dean for Graduate Medical Education and the Designated Institutional Official for all sponsored GME programs at the College of Medicine. “Our GME program not only addresses workforce development, but we also focus on recruiting high-quality academic physicians into the community who want to teach and take care of patients.

“We also assist our partners in identifying and expanding service lines and care — both tertiary and quaternary — all for the benefit of the residents of our state.”

The population of Florida and the physician shortage are growing at such a fast pace that they’ve drawn the attention of the Florida Legislature. In March 2024, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law the “Live Healthy” legislative package. One key component of the legislation calls for the expansion of medical residency slots.

“Our GME programs fill all available slots each year,” Boyer said, noting that additional GME growth is anticipated as FSU Health continues to expand statewide. FSU Health is a transformational initiative launched by the university to improve health in Florida by leveraging FSU’s cutting-edge research capabilities and educational programs to forge new partnerships with clinical care providers.”

Statistics show that physicians tend to stay in the region where they completed their residencies and fellowships, which is why FSU is focused on expanding its program in the state of Florida.

“We are very proud that 72% of our GME graduates this year stayed in the state,” Boyer said, “with many choosing to continue to work with our health care partners.”

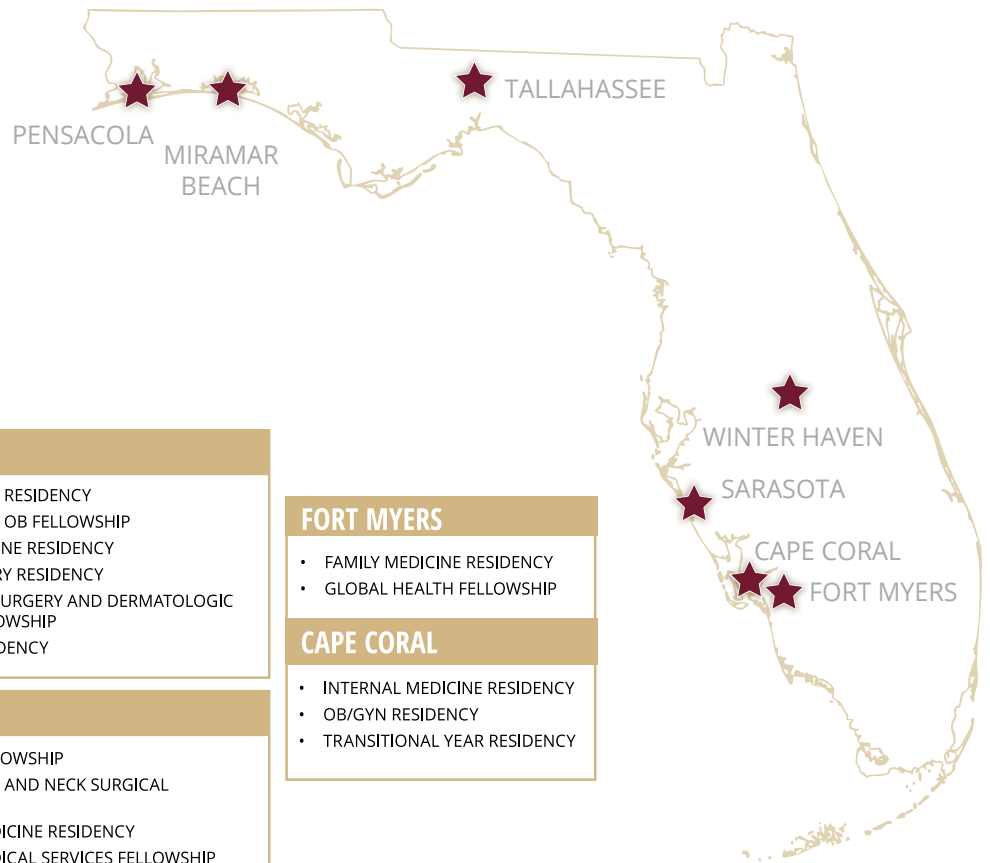
Each year, the College of Medicine graduates approximately 120 new physicians, many of whom enter residency programs within the state. With its latest graduating class, the college has more than 2,000 physician alumni, with more than 600 practicing or completing residencies within Florida, providing critical health care services.

All practicing physicians in the United States must successfully complete a residency program after graduating from medical school. Residencies, lasting three to seven years depending on specialty, are a crucial phase in the training of new physicians as they gain hands-on experience under the supervision of senior physicians. A fellowship is an optional, advanced and specialized training program that doctors pursue after residency.



Bill Boyer, DHSc

Partners & Locations



PENSACOLA

- ORTHOPAEDIC SPORTS MEDICINE FELLOWSHIP
- PRIMARY CARE SPORTS MEDICINE FELLOWSHIP
- FORENSIC PATHOLOGY FELLOWSHIP
- INTERNAL MEDICINE RESIDENCY
- OB/GYN RESIDENCY
- PEDIATRICS RESIDENCY
- EMERGENCY MEDICINE RESIDENCY

MIRAMAR BEACH

- FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY

WINTER HAVEN

- FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY
- TRANSITIONAL YEAR RESIDENCY

TALLAHASSEE

- FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY
- FAMILY MEDICINE OB FELLOWSHIP
- INTERNAL MEDICINE RESIDENCY
- GENERAL SURGERY RESIDENCY
- MICROGRAPHIC SURGERY AND DERMATOLOGIC ONCOLOGY FELLOWSHIP
- PSYCHIATRY RESIDENCY

SARASOTA

- COMPLEX GI FELLOWSHIP
- ADVANCED HEAD AND NECK SURGICAL FELLOWSHIP
- EMERGENCY MEDICINE RESIDENCY
- EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES FELLOWSHIP
- HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE MEDICINE FELLOWSHIP
- INTERNAL MEDICINE RESIDENCY

FORT MYERS

- FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY
- GLOBAL HEALTH FELLOWSHIP

CAPE CORAL

- INTERNAL MEDICINE RESIDENCY
- OB/GYN RESIDENCY
- TRANSITIONAL YEAR RESIDENCY



27
PROGRAMS

395
RESIDENTS/FELLOWS

300+
FACULTY

Future GME growth on the horizon

The FSU College of Medicine is laser-focused on strategically growing its GME program. Not only will this improve access to high-quality care, but it will also help FSU's health care partners retain well-trained physicians who are needed to meet the growing health care needs of Florida.

2025-26

- 7 new programs expected to be added

By 2030

- Grow from 27 programs to 50
- Grow from more than 395 residents and fellows to nearly 1,000



Senior Associate Dean for Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences Anthony Speights, M.D. (left) and IMS Associate Dean Elizabeth Foster, Ph.D. (far right), proudly bracket the members of the Bridge to Clinical Medicine Class of 2025, who two weeks later became first-year medical students in the M.D. Class of 2029.

Bridge students' research presentations celebrate success

By Audrey Post
FSU College of Medicine

Students in every program at the College of Medicine have an opportunity to conduct research as part of their curriculum. For some, including students in the Bridge to Clinical Medicine master's degree program, it is required. And working on the research projects in the second half of the year can be akin to stepping through a magic portal.

As part of the Research Project and Writing courses, students are immersed in a health-related research lab, develop a research prospectus and carry out their investigation for a minimum of six weeks, all under the supervision of a faculty mentor. Students write detailed research reports of their findings and deliver an oral summary, complete with a presentation, detailing not only what the findings were, but also what they learned about health research in the process and how their research could be built upon.

Their presentations, evaluated by a team from the College of Medicine faculty, are vital for successful completion of the master's degree in biomedical sciences and admission into the next M.D. class, which starts just a couple of weeks after graduation from Bridge.

"For many of these students, this is their introduction to scientific research," said Anthony Speights, M.D., senior associate dean for Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences and director of the Bridge program. "Luckily, they don't have to navigate the process alone. Leading researchers from throughout the College of Medicine and from across the Florida State University campus volunteer as mentors year after year."

Among the College of Medicine faculty who repeatedly mentor are Professor Angelina Sutin, Ph.D., and Professor

Jeffrey Harman, Ph.D., both prolific researchers in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine, and Professor Antonio Terracciano, Ph.D., Department of Geriatrics.

Younger and mid-career faculty are also eager to serve as mentors, including Assistant Professors Martina Luchetti, Ph.D., and Julia Sheffler, Ph.D., Associate Professor Tyra Dark, Ph.D., and Research Faculty Karen Geletko, MPH, all from Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine.

Among the repeat mentors from outside the College of Medicine are Associate Professor Sabrina Dickey, Ph.D., from the College of Nursing, and Penny Ralston, Ph.D., professor and dean emeritus of what was once called the College of Human Sciences, now part of the Anne Spencer Daves College of Education, Health and Human Sciences, locally called Anne's College.

"Coming to the Bridge Research Presentations is one of the most fun things I do," Ralston said after all eight 2025 Bridge students had presented May 13. "They've all worked so hard, and opening up the world of health research for young scholars and future physicians is its own reward."

The Bridge Research requirement sparks such an interest in some students that after their first year of medical school, during the last summer vacation they'll have until they graduate, they opt instead to pursue one of the funded research opportunities available. At least Bridge one graduate is accepted most years, and often more than one.

This past summer, 2024 Bridge graduate Whitney Anestal (M.D. Class of 2028) was accepted into the College of Medicine Division of Research's Summer Research Fellowship program, working with Associate Professor Gregg Stanwood, Ph.D., of the Department of Biomedical Sciences on "Environmental Impacts on Health in Farmworker Children."

Projects from all the M.D. Class of 2028 summer research projects will be showcased Oct. 20 at the College of Medicine Annual Medical Student Poster Session.

Bridge leaders, including Senior Administrative Specialist and Bridge Program Coordinator Linda Netherton, make the annual Bridge presentation ceremony a festive event that begins with a brunch, includes a question-and-answer

session afterward, and ends with a collective sigh of relief.

Here's a list of this year's Bridge graduates, their research projects and their mentors:

1. Michelle Arroyo, "The Relationship Between Anxiety, Depression, and Number of Prenatal Care Visits, supervised by Professor Jeffrey Harman, Ph.D., College of Medicine.
2. Elliot J. Bodre Jr., "Assessing Delivery Formats of an Adapted Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Intervention for Chronic Pain," supervised by Research Faculty Kevin Johnson, Ph.D., and Professor F. Andrew Kozel, M.D., College of Medicine.
3. Brittany Chang, "Association of Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1) Related Disease Factors on Cognition in Middle-Aged and Older Adults," supervised by Assistant Professor Yang Hou, Ph.D., College of Medicine
4. Malik Richardson, "The Association Between Physical Activity and Depressive Symptomatology in African Americans," supervised by Associate Professor Tyra Dark, Ph.D., College of Medicine.
5. Gabriella Santana, "Influence of E-Cigarette Device Type on Adolescent Vaping Behaviors," supervised by Research Faculty Karen Geletko, MPH, and Research Faculty Jon Mills, Ph.D., College of Medicine.
6. Daija Smith, "Social Support and Family Communication Influence on Colorectal Cancer Screening in Federally Qualified Health Center Patients," supervised by Associate Professor Sabrina L. Dickey, Ph.D., College of Nursing.
7. Stessie Elvariste, "The Effectiveness of Health for Hearts United in Improving Calcium Intake in Middle-Aged and Older African American Adults," supervised by Professor Penny Ralston, Ph.D., Anne Spencer Daves College of Education, Health and Human Sciences.
8. Tamarique C.S. Jones, "Loneliness and Subjective Cognitive Decline among Middle-Aged and Older Adults in the United States: Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Associations," supervised by Assistant Professor Martina Luchetti, College of Medicine.



Confusione's published research stands out among graduating PA classmates

By Bob Thomas

FSU College of Medicine

Saejin Confusione stands out among her College of Medicine School of Physician Assistant classmates on multiple fronts. The only classically trained violinist in the PA Class of 2025, having taken up the instrument as a 5-year-old, she is also the only one who was born in China.

What also sets apart the Jacksonville-raised Confusione — she was adopted at 13 months old — is her name alongside College of Medicine clerkship faculty member Tristan Hasbargen, MMS, PA-C, in a research article published in the February/March 2025 issue of *Journal of Dermatology for NPs & PAs*.

Confusione co-authored the cover article, “Overview of Atopic Dermatitis in East Asian Cultures.”

Their work explores the high incidence of atopic dermatitis among East Asian cultures, despite the lack of case studies and meta-analyses. The collaborative research examines the statistical correlation of increased risk among that population and aims to raise awareness regarding treatment and management of the disease holistically.

Perhaps most remarkably, Confusione completed her research work in the spring of 2023 during a gap year, as part of the DRAPS (Dermatology Research & Practice Scholars) Program at Dermatology Associates of Tallahassee. That program was designed to provide clinical and research experiences that would increase the likelihood of gaining admission to medical or PA school.

She started FSU's PA program in August 2023 and will graduate Dec. 13.

“It is unique that Saejin would participate in an article like this,” said Ben Smith, DMSc, PA-C, director of the PA program. “We have had fewer than five students who have done so before beginning the program, which is similar to other PA programs.”

It was Hasbargen who approached Confusione.

“She picked up learning on the job very quickly and was interested in other ways that she could help,” Hasbargen said. “I had just started working on an article and asked that she help research and write this article. I also thought that this would be a great thing to add to her CV.”



Confusione admitted that her existing research experience was limited to shadowing a doctoral student in an exercise physiology lab as an FSU undergraduate. Still, she was intrigued by the opportunity.

“I thought it would be an interesting article to write and research, and I also thought it would challenge me,” she said. “I really had no experience with academia and writing, especially with something like a specific disease.

“It was kind of handed to me and like, ‘Write something and I’ll look at it and edit it.’ We wrote it together and he was super encouraging; very helpful and supportive throughout the whole experience.”

Confusione said her clinical exposure at Dermatology Associates, in an office with College of Medicine assistant professor and dermatologist W. Harris Green, M.D., and accompanying Hasbargen and Jennie Merchant, PA-C, to Marianna where they would treat patients, was especially beneficial. She said watching them work together and interact with patients was “one of the most beneficial and impactful things that happened during my year there.”

Those interactions further strengthened her desire to become a PA, which was piqued as an undergrad. The appeal of the fast-track to a medical career with less debt, the lateral mobility the field offers and the opportunity to spend more time with patients and have a work-life balance were equally enticing.

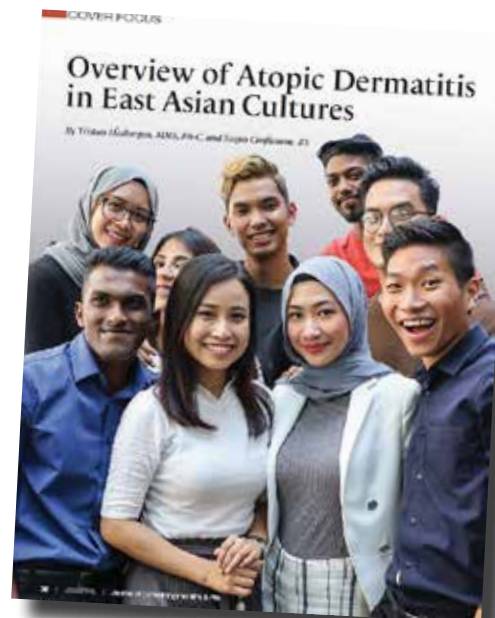
Those weekly trips to Marianna also influenced her research into atopic dermatitis.

“I felt like I had a lot to learn about the subject,” Confusione said. “Working with [Hasbargen and Merchant], seeing different patients, helped me see it clinically.”

“Through it all, it really opened my eyes to the multi-bacterial disease that atopic dermatitis really is. There are so many factors in someone having it.”

The published article addresses both the genetic and environmental factors of the disease.

“It really affects a person’s life, especially in the Asian population,” she said. “In the article, I talk about a certain gene that has been found to have a high prevalence in these populations that might predispose these individuals to have atopic dermatitis. It just opened my eyes to how a chronic condition can have an overall impact on the quality of a person’s life. It was a very enlightening experience.”



Saejin Confusione collaborated with College of Medicine clerkship faculty member Tristan Hasbargen, MMS, PA-C on a research article published in the *Journal of Dermatology for NPs & PAs*.

Hasbargen had high praise for Confusione’s written work.

“Her dedication and craft to writing really stood out to me,” he said. “I was very impressed with her articulation and understanding of the topic. She is the first student I have worked with on a publication, but to be honest, her work was a lot better than other practicing PAs and nurse practitioners whom I have helped get published in the past.”

Both Hasbargen and Confusione acknowledge the professional benefits associated with research.

“We are pushing for more and more PAs and nurse practitioners to get published in order to advance our profession,” Hasbargen said. “I believe that they can be overlooked due to their lack of experience in publications, clinical trials and research. This only adds value to our profession and gives more credibility to our areas of expertise.”

“Medicine is constantly evolving and changing,” Confusione added. “We’re going to have to be up to date on the latest technology and innovations, that I think specifically with this research project – looking at different articles and picking out the findings, conclusions and results – was really helpful for me to see.

“It’s important to have a well-versed perspective on articles that come out and be able to transfer that to the patient for diagnosing and implementing.”



Akash Gunjan, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the FSU College of Medicine, works with medical student, Hal Bryant VanLandingham (Class of 2028), in his lab on Tallahassee's main campus.

FSU Health: Building the infrastructure needed to support practicing physicians interested in research

By Patrick Crowley
FSU College of Medicine

Through their daily interaction with patients, physicians routinely generate questions they know would be great research topics and lend themselves to improved patient care. Time and lack of resources generally get in the way.

Physicians are busy. And their private practices, clinics and many hospitals are generally not set up to support research — they are focused on providing direct patient care.

Enter FSU Health, a transformational initiative launched by Florida State University to improve health in Florida by leveraging the university's cutting-edge research capabilities and educational programs to forge new partnerships with clinical care providers. As part of the FSU Health initiative, university leaders are marshalling resources to support faculty, students and staff in the university's 17 colleges who are pursuing health-related work, including the College of Medicine's clerkship faculty interested in supporting student research.

“This partnership with the Office of Research, coupled with the vision and resources of FSU Health, is truly a win-win for our students and clerkship faculty,” said Alma Littles, M.D., dean of the College of Medicine. “It is incumbent upon us to provide the best education possible for our students so that they can become outstanding health care professionals, providing care for the people of Florida and beyond. Working with practicing physicians — in real-world settings — will have a significant and positive impact on patient care and outcomes.”

Resources run the gamut from proposal development, grants and contracts, biostatistics and informatics, to compliance and Institutional Review Board requirements, and everything in between.

“One of the key aspects to being a great clinical provider and physician is to be able to take basic science and information, which includes research, understand how to read the research, and translate it to patient care, because ultimately we're all patient educators,” said Matthew Lee (M.D., '06), an early adopter of student research and a surgery clerkship faculty member through the Tallahassee Regional Campus. “A physician is a patient educator, and if we can take the information from research and be able to relate it directly to patient care, that really helps the students' medical education.”

Lee is fortunate. Tallahassee Orthopedic Clinic, where he practices, has a close relationship with FSU and actively supports student research through its TOC Foundation. TOC physicians are currently mentoring 10 students on 12 projects. Further cementing the partnership, TOC has hired Emilie Miley, Ph.D., as its director of research. She also holds a research faculty position in the Anne Spencer Daves College of Education, Health and Human Sciences, where she also serves as the assistant director of Orthopedics and Sports Medicine Research in the college's Institute of Sports Sciences and Medicine.

“The TOC partnership with FSU is instrumental,” Miley said. “There are so many things that a researcher needs access to. You need access to articles, because not everything is open-source text. Having the connection to the academic institution really helps with that and it helps with things like RED-



Matthew Lee, M.D., and Emilie Miley, Ph.D., TOC's director of research, review data compiled by one of their student researchers.

Cap,” which is short for Research Electronic Data Capture, a secure web-based application used to build and manage online surveys and databases for research studies.

“As practicing physicians, we have the clinical data. We have the patient databases, but we don't have the time. We have ideas,” Lee said, adding that TOC has, on average, more than 280,000 office visits each year. “It really comes down to finances, time and resources as to why private-practice physicians cannot produce research at the level that's required today without assistance. The patient ultimately benefits, as well as the students, if there is collaboration.”

Lee added that the “link between the private practice and academic institution is something I think needs to be created or replicated in a greater fashion.”

Working behind the scenes to help strengthen those partnerships and infrastructure is a core group of researchers, faculty and administrators, including Xian Jin Xie, Ph.D., the College of Medicine's senior associate dean for Research and Graduate Programs. He and

Suzanne Baker, assistant dean for Graduate Programs and Medical Student Research, are finding ways to build those resources to improve the student research experience and engage more faculty.

“Clerkship faculty have told me they are interested in research, but they likely need assistance on where to start,” Xie said. “We are building the infrastructure needed for them to be successful and have an opportunity to grow. The FSU College of Medicine brings great opportunity and value. Rather than focusing on just one teaching hospital, we can aggregate data from our clinical partners statewide.”

A crucial part of the FSU infrastructure, according to Xie, was the strategic establishment of 10 “hubs,” the result of a needs assessment done in partnership with Guidehouse Consultation and extensive focus groups.

“The College of Medicine cannot do this alone,” Baker said. “We need the university community and Florida State’s Office of Research is making this happen.”

Xie added, “Participation in and a better understanding of research creates better physicians in many ways. Evidence-based care can be enhanced by a better understanding of the research process. It expands problem-solving and differential diagnosis skills. Researchers are answering the questions we don’t have answers to yet.”

Ashley Mays, M.D., who is currently mentoring two FSU medical students, agrees. She’s an otolaryngologist focused on head and neck cancer surgery and reconstructive plastic surgery at Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital in Vero Beach, as well as an FSU clerkship faculty member at the college’s Fort Pierce Regional Campus. Both she and TOC’s Lee had one thing in common as medical school students: an interest in research.

“Medical schools would be doing students a disservice by not teaching them the research process and helping them find avenues to perform research,” Mays said. “I can tell you in my own training, if you didn’t come with an application listing a robust research background, you weren’t going anywhere. There was no way you were going to match into these very competitive residencies and fellowships. I do truly believe it is on the medical schools to plan for that and provide those opportunities.”

Mays has had medical students, including FSU’s Mikalin Huckeba, working on a variety of research projects, including thyroid cancer management and diagnoses. And, just

like Lee, she helps students prepare for poster presentations and publishing their work.

“I’ve always had an interest in research, though it initially felt daunting and hard to navigate,” said Huckeba, a second-year medical student from Eastpoint, Florida. “This experience has deepened my respect for research and its role in advancing health care and improving communities. At the moment, I’m particularly drawn to topics related to head and neck conditions. This project has broadened my understanding of the patient’s journey during thyroid cancer treatment, both the positive experiences and the challenges. That insight will help me better support and guide patients as a future physician.”



Ashley Mays, M.D.

As a busy surgeon with her own practice, Mays says one key to her research success — and working with students — is personal interest.

“I come from a very, very robust research background,” she said. “You have to start with personal inter-

est. I would have never matched at MD Anderson Cancer Center for my fellowships if I didn’t come with a long, robust history of research myself. So, I think it starts with a personal interest and continuing to grow research programs. I think to make it work and also being a very busy surgeon, you just have to be efficient. You have to understand what it takes to get a student signed up for research, how do you get them through the project and how to manage that. It’s just a time-efficiency thing. But it has to start with personal interest.”

Mays admits she is not aware of all the resources the university offers to researchers but is glad there is a concerted effort to help clinicians.

“I’m certainly happy to hear that there’s more of a push in that direction,” she said.

If you are a clerkship faculty member interested in serving as a faculty mentor on a research project or want more information, contact research@med.fsu.edu.



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- Research Development
- Research Integrity, Security, and Ethics
- Strategic Partnerships and Innovation

Information about FSU Health can be found online: fsuhealth.fsu.edu
Additional support is offered by UF-FSU Clinical and Translational Science Award: ctsa.research.fsu.edu



Bonnie Spring, left, director of the Florida Blue Center for Rural Health Research and Policy, and Keri Gladhill, the center's program manager, pose in the College of Medicine's Chapman Wellness Garden.

Improving health behaviors and stopping bad habits is tough, but Florida Blue Center aims to help people do just that

By Audrey Post
FSU College of Medicine

Professor Bonnie Spring, Ph.D., had her pick of the four counties on the 2025 Rural Learning Experience trip and chose Gadsden County.

A health psychologist by training and a prolific researcher into health-risk behaviors, Spring is Krafft Professor of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine and director of the Florida Blue

Center for Rural Health Research and Policy, which is housed in the FSU College of Medicine.

“Gadsden County consistently ranks among the half-dozen poorest counties in Florida. State data show a quarter of its residents live at or below the poverty level. Access to health care is constrained. Employment opportunities are limited,” Spring



But the RuLE trip also revealed something else about the county and its people – resilience. Like so many rural communities across the country, Gadsden has layers of interconnecting social networks that form a framework for getting things done despite a paucity of resources.

“The demand for health care is always going to outstrip availability. You have to use what resources you have – navigators, community workers, civic organizations and churches – and engage the communities whose needs you’re trying to meet,” she said. “We have to meet people where they are and accept them as they are, so they will accept us as partners in improving their health.”

Spring came to Florida State University in late 2024 from Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine in downtown Chicago. Although most of her research has focused on urban populations, she spent the past five years also collaborating with Professor Nancy Schoenberg, Ph.D., a University of Kentucky behavioral health researcher who focuses on Appalachia.

Schoenberg adapted one of Spring’s urban research models for use in a rural population. With Spring as co-principal investigator, Schoenberg was awarded a \$2.5 million grant from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health, for a clinical trial on stress and sleep in which participants logged their daily food intake and physical activity.

The Appalachian experience changed Spring’s career trajectory.

“It was amazing,” she said. “Rural people tend to rely on social media more because they are spread out. Clinical trial participants were using Facebook to share which Dollar Stores had fresh vegetables on any given day.”

One woman who participated initially reported that she had no stress, but she came to realize that she had a very high level of stress because of chronic health problems including kidney disease, hypertension and obesity. She not only changed her diet and added daily walks, but her success also influenced people around her to do the same.

“It’s that network of relationships that builds trust and brings about change,” Spring said. “Her family and friends were skeptical at first, but as they saw her health improve, they took notice. When she took a healthier version of potato salad, one with a lot more vegetables in it, to a family reunion, it set off a chain reaction.”

Professor George Rust, M.D., a colleague and a public health expert at the College of Medicine, captured the difference between urban and rural health communication when he said, “In rural areas, it’s a very relational culture.”

“In urban areas, it’s a very informational culture. If people want to find out about a new doctor, they go to his office, pick up a brochure and leave,” Spring said. “In rural areas, you ask friends and family, and if the pastor’s wife says she had a nice conversation with him, it carries weight.”

Given the FSU College of Medicine’s mission, in part, to serve the underserved, with particular emphasis on rural communities, joining the team was a perfect fit for Spring.

She hired Keri Gladhill, Ph.D., last December to be the center’s program manager. Gladhill had just completed a post-doctoral fellowship in FSU’s Department of Psychology, and she brings two key strengths to the team. Her doctoral studies focused on cognitive neuroscience, which can help give insight to what maintains risky behaviors and why people continue to engage in them. She also grew up in a rural area of Pennsylvania and has what Spring calls “lived experience” with rural health issues.

“Community engagement is so important for the work we’re doing,” Gladhill said. “We’re participating in a community health fair in Wakulla County in October so we can start getting the word out about the Center and what resources we can offer.”

That event, under the umbrella of FSU Health, has become the lead-off event of Discovery Days, FSU’s third annual showcase of research, creativity and discovery to be held Oct. 18-25.

“We are fortunate to have attracted such a highly regarded and well-funded researcher as Dr. Bonnie Spring,” College of Medicine Dean Alma Littles, M.D., said. “Her knowledge of rural health issues

will help lead the Florida Blue Center for Rural Health Research and Policy to a new level of achievement, positioning it to influence legislation in Florida and across the country that improves the health of our rural communities.”

Professor Heather Flynn, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine, is excited to have Spring rebooting the Florida Blue Center. It was initially created in 2002 through a gift from the Florida Blue Foundation, Florida Blue Cross Blue Shield’s philanthropic arm.

“Bonnie really brings a multi-faceted and fresh vision for the center and its future that incorporates innovations in digital health research, as well as training the next generation of researchers,” Flynn said. “She’s already had several meetings with Florida Blue to understand their vision, the things that they care

about in terms of rolling out health improvement interventions to the community, so there’ll be some strong alignment with Florida Blue.”

Spring has been successful in integrating different digital health tools and technology – such as wearables, apps and electronic medical records – with telehealth coaching to deal with multiple-risk behaviors. These behaviors include tobacco use, lack of exercise, poor nutrition and mental health-related issues. She has applied those interventions in previous research to prevent cancer recurrence and mitigate outcomes from diabetes.

“With Bonnie using integrated digital health technology to help people with multiple risk behaviors and chronic health conditions in rural areas,” Flynn said, “the sky’s the limit.”

JEFFERSON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Students arrive at the Jefferson County Health Department in Monticello, the first stop of the day. The facility provides a wide array of services for a county that has just one full-time family physician and no specialists.



Farm Manager Dale Aldridge, from Florida Georgia Citrus, discusses the satsuma farm that produces juice, jellies and much more. The facility’s packing plant was one of the stops on the RuLE Trip and included a panel discussion and tabling from Jefferson County health care providers.



College of Medicine students had an opportunity to stroll the streets of Monticello, visiting the county seat’s coffee shop and stores. The Jefferson County Courthouse in the background sits in the center of town.



Students from the first-year M.D., PA and Bridge classes participating in the July 1 Rural Learning Experience board the charter bus bound for Monticello in Jefferson County.

Rural Learning Experience trip opens eyes to challenges and opportunities

By Bob Thomas
FSU College of Medicine

Piling into four charter buses staged in the FSU College of Medicine parking lot, 192 first-year students from across the M.D., PA and Bridge to Clinical Medicine programs embarked on the daylong July 1 Rural Learning Experience.

Back for a second consecutive year following a four-year, COVID-imposed hiatus, the RuLE Trip is designed to expose the newest students to rural communities in the surrounding counties and the health care challenges they face.

The inaugural trip, originally called the Rural Educational Orientation Program, took place in 2010. It was renamed in 2014 when it was incorporated into the first-year medical school curriculum. The Florida Blue Foundation continues to provide funding support.

“The trip’s value has only grown in recent years,” said Kerwyn Flowers, D.O., the college’s director of Rural Medical Education who is now dean of the Tallahassee Regional Campus. “With the

addition of a mini-community health assessment component, students now have the opportunity not only to observe but also to engage meaningfully with the unique challenges and assets of rural communities.”

The 2025 version carried groups to four destinations: Monticello (Jefferson County), Quincy (Gadsden County), Marianna (Jackson County) and a combination of Bristol and Blountstown (Liberty and Calhoun counties).

“Given the national and statewide trends – such as the declining number of students pursuing family medicine and the persistent shortage of rural health providers – this trip takes on even greater significance,” Flowers said. “It serves as a rare and powerful tool for early exposure, which is known to influence specialty choice and practice location.”

Those points were driven home on the first stop of the Monticello leg at the Jefferson County Health Department. The

Continued on next page >>

students are split into three groups as they toured the sprawling, single-story building with white siding along U.S. 90 on the west side of town. The county of 13,000 residents has just one full-time family medicine physician – and no specialists – which requires the Florida Department of Health facility to offer a wide range of services.

Those include prenatal care, family planning and immunizations, wellness programs, infectious disease services, emergency preparedness and response resources, and public health.

A food bank stands just outside the building, ready to assist those who otherwise may not have, or be able to afford, nourishment for their families.

Students encounter similar experiences on each of the other legs. In addition, they have the opportunity to get a feel for what living in a small town is like, whether it's visiting popular sites, strolling through the quaint downtown areas, or engaging in panel discussions with providers and residents.

With two traffic lights, Monticello has one more than first-year medical student Judd Smith's Panhandle hometown of Jay, located north of Pensacola and virtually bordering the Alabama state line.

"It's been incredibly important just to be exposed to just how different everything is here," Smith said. "A lot of my classmates are from larger cities across the state ... so, for them to be able to have this experience, to be able to just see how different things operate, to be able to be in a town with only one provider, no specialist even around, I think it's really important."

Smith has a different perspective than most of his classmates. His father and grandfather represent two generations of primary care physicians in Jay. He plans to extend that lineage to a third generation, returning to serve the Jay community following residency.

"The relationships with the patients are just so incredibly important," he said. "I've been able to have a lot of experiences within the clinic and in the hospital, see the way that they interact with their patients. It's incredibly personal, and I really like that a lot. It goes beyond just the medicine itself. It's a strong personal connection."

"Knowing the patient, the patient's parents, the patient's children – I really like that aspect of it."

Walking around downtown Monticello provided the students opportunities to visit the historic theater, grab a latte in the local coffee shop and check out stores. Those encounters left impressions, as well.

Going into the health department was cool to see the kind of resources that they have available," said PA student Kathryn Zelsman, who made a coffee shop stop before wandering across the street and into a business. "There is a thrift store that's operated by volunteers, and those proceeds go back to an animal shelter. That just speaks a lot to their character as a town."

"And every interaction that you have is really friendly and personable. I don't think you get that in larger cities. Like, every time a door is open for you, it's a small-town feel. It makes a lot of us students more interested in serving communities like that because you know you're needed, and the people are so grateful for it."

The students weren't the only first-time participants in RuLE.

Ransome Eke, M.D., Ph.D, MBA, an associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, joined the faculty in November 2024 from the Mercer University School of Medicine in Macon, Georgia. There, he was an associate professor of Community Medicine and principal investigator for the CDC-funded Health Equity Navigators program, a project dedicated to reducing health disparities in Georgia's rural and underserved communities.

This, however, was a unique experience for the Nigerian-born and trained Eke, who had a fellowship in Greenville, South Carolina, and received advanced degrees from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the University of Memphis School of Public Health in Tennessee.

"We don't take [students] on orientation the way we saw it here, which was very impressive," Eke said. "We sent them to their preceptors ... but we don't go with them as a group to learn about the place, the locality, the facilities – all the opportunities right there. I was really blown away by this."

While the needs are apparent in these rural communities, challenges exist, both in terms of funding resources and the complexity that comes with being the 24-7 family doctor.

During the health department visit, Zelsman asked one of the providers what kind of value would a PA bring to the community.

"She said, honestly, we would have to do more lobbying to get them to have positions available just because they don't have the resources and the funding to employ more people," Zelsman said. "That tells you a lot right there."

Limited resources, financial and otherwise, are an obstacle all rural areas face. Then there's the matter of responsibility that comes with those positions.



First-year M.D. student Judd Smith (center), holding daughter Chloe, is from Jay, Florida, and wants to become a third-generation family physician in his rural hometown. From the left, father Michael Smith, M.D., mother Rebecca Smith, wife Kaitlyn Smith and mother-in-law Kristi Kreitlow gather for a White Coat Ceremony celebration.



Nita Mitchell, the community health program manager at the health department, discusses the Food Pantry and how it serves those most in need. It sits alongside the Jefferson County Health Department.



A visit to Florida Georgia Citrus on the outskirts of Monticello was one stop on the tour. With the packing machinery as a backdrop, students participated in a panel discussion with Jefferson County residents.

“For me, working in rural population has been very rewarding,” Eke said. “I tell my students that if you work in rural areas, you’re a doctor everywhere – on the streets, in the grocery shop, in church. People want to talk to you. So that familiarity, that bonding, you know, is something that can be very rewarding.”

For some, it can also be very demanding when it comes to work-life balance.

“Giving students that experience to know what it is like working with a rural population — the kind of personality, the kind of aura and all that — I think it’s worthwhile,” Eke added.

Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce President Amy McDonald recognizes those challenges.

“It takes a lot to entice a health care provider to move here,” she said. “They have to have a heart to serve.”

McDonald also acknowledges that it requires someone who is comfortable with a slower pace of life, which suited the family doctor who “delivered the last generation from a small-town storefront office” in downtown Monticello.

Then there’s the matter of the required time it takes to build trust within a community that is often reluctant to give it freely, a point that was driven home by a mother who addressed the students during a panel discussion held late in the day at Florida Georgia Citrus on the outskirts of town.

“Growing up in a rural community, if the patients don’t have a level of trust with you, I mean, they’re just not going to follow

through with anything,” said Smith, the medical student with firsthand knowledge on such matters.

In its totality, the RuLE participants had a lot absorb from a day in Monticello and the locations.

“One overriding impression that consistently stands out from students — especially those not from rural areas — is a sense of appreciation and respect for rural communities and the health care professionals who serve them,” Flowers said.

“Students frequently express how surprised and inspired they are by the strong sense of community, the dedication of rural providers, and the deep, trusting relationships between patients and health care teams. Many share that the trip challenged their assumptions and gave them a newfound understanding of the complexity and importance of rural health care.”

Eke shared his personal observations after taking in the day.

“I saw students that were very curious. They were very excited about the whole structure and learning about the Department of Health and seeing the Food Bank. That was very impressive for me. I’ve not seen that before.”

And that is exactly the objective.

“This rural trip is not only important – it is mission-critical,” Flowers said. “It reinforces the values at the heart of the College of Medicine’s educational philosophy while offering a strategic response to current health care workforce challenges.”



Powerhouse IMS program is delivering health care providers, leaders today and beyond

Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences faculty and staff are joined by the students from the 2023 graduating class for a group photo following their Senior Capstone presentations in the College of Medicine atrium.

By Bob Thomas
FSU College of Medicine

The origin story of Florida State University's Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences undergraduate program fittingly begins with a woman widely recognized as the “Mother of the College of Medicine.”

In 2012, Myra Hurt, Ph.D., was attending the Harvard Macy Institute, where a worldwide gathering of health care leaders goes for advanced faculty development, thought leadership and networking opportunities. Representing the College of Medicine as its Senior Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs, Hurt was tasked with leading a group in an “innovation exercise.” From that session sprung the idea of creating an interdisciplinary path to medical school; quite a deviation from the traditional degree paths of biology, chemistry and exercise science.

It planted a seed that would eventually bear fruit.

Fast forward to January 2015, when then-FSU Provost Sally McRorie, Ph.D., gave Hurt the green light to pull such a program together. She lured Helen Livingston, Ed.D., out of retirement to serve as the “mechanic,” developing the curriculum that would bring seven FSU colleges — Arts & Sciences, Anne Spencer Daves College of Education, Health and Human Sciences, Communication & Information, Nursing, Social Science and Public Policy, Social Work and the College of Medicine — together to offer three majors: Clinical Professions, Community Patient Care, and Health Management, Policy & Information.

The goal? To expose students who aspire to careers in health professions to a rigorous science curriculum, individualized advising, experiential service-learning, development seminars and capstone courses, which would help determine their best-suited career paths. Graduates from all three IMS majors receive a B.S. in Biomedical Sciences.

“We had to talk to a half-dozen other colleges around the campus and get them excited about what we were doing,” Livingston said. “We tried to do it in such a way where it was value-added for them. ‘This is going to help you because these things will happen.’”

By convincing deans and department chairs it would be a win-win and gaining approval from both the FSU Board of Trustees and the State University System of Florida Board of Governors, IMS welcomed its first students in the 2016 Fall semester, just 20 months after McRorie set the ball in motion.

And it’s been rolling along ever since

The numbers speak volumes

Of the 688 IMS graduates through the program’s first nine years, 54 have matriculated into the College of Medicine’s M.D. program and 30 into its School of Physician Assistant Practice.

Ryan Peacock (M.D., ’25), one of nine IMS graduates to graduate from FSU’s medical school this year — a single-class high to date — was a student in the first IMS class.

“The best thing that IMS afforded us was our freedom to cut out the fluff that a biology degree or exercise science would have,” said Peacock, who took two gap years before beginning the M.D. program. “It gave us the opportunity to just focus on what we needed, build up some networking, because they pretty much were pushing everything we wanted. It was a good guidance, especially to have a core faculty that knew that we want to get into medicine.”

Through 2025, 16 IMS alumni have graduated from the college’s M.D. program and 10 others from the PA program. Those numbers will grow significantly in the coming years based on the number of current M.D. and PA students who are IMS graduates and the program’s trending growth.

“Overall, we’re doing really well and we’re really happy with the progress that we’ve had,” said Anthony Speights, M.D., senior associate dean for Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences. “If we could get every one of those students into a

medical school, PA school or some sort of health profession school, we’d be elated.”

Turning out physicians and PAs practicing patient-centered medicine is essential to answering the ever-growing shortage of health care providers and central to the College of Medicine’s mission. So, too, is producing medical researchers, health care managers and policymakers, and those working in informatics, navigation and interpretation.

“That really is the untapped potential that [IMS] brings to the equation,” Speights said. “The number of pre-health students we have who want to go into medicine and PA stays pretty constant. Where we make a much bigger difference — and really the whole reason Helen and Myra did this — is to help students understand that only a small percentage of those folks are going to be successful getting into (medical or PA) school, but also helping them realize that there may actually be other things in health care that they want to do, that they hadn’t even thought about.”

There’s no shortage of IMS students exploring those options. There are currently 650 enrolled in the program, which includes 187 in the freshman class. In addition, IMS accepts transfers, primarily those who haven’t completed more than four semesters, due to the required experiential learning hours and seminar classes.

Experiential learning hours, which are tracked and monitored by community coordinator Heather Stitely through the EL database, allow the students to explore a variety of interests as they fulfill the degree-required 64 hours a year and 256 hours before graduation. Stitely succeeded Lilly Lewis, Hurt’s daughter, who was one of three original IMS



Ryan Peacock is flanked by his parents at the Military Pinning ahead of the 2025 M.D. Commencement Ceremony. Peacock was among the first students to enroll in the IMS program in the Fall of 2016.

ment as the program director, Lewis brings continuity with the day-to-day management of IMS, ensuring that student advising, enrollment, mapping, data management and experiential learning processes are performed at a high standard.

“Those really have to be based upon what the students' interests are because when they apply to medical or PA schools, or whatever it is, the first thing that their interviewers are going to ask them is why did you choose the things that you chose?” Speights said. “We don't want it to be that we are prescriptive in what they should do.”

On average, Speights said, IMS students are averaging roughly 600 experiential learning hours over the course of four years with some, like first-year FSU medical student Emelia LaCognata (see accompanying story) amassing 1,800 prior to her December 2024 graduation.

It's worth noting that LaCognata selected FSU as her undergraduate destination largely on the strength of IMS' preparation and success in matriculating its graduates into the College of Medicine's M.D. program.

There has been no change to the IMS core curriculum since the program was developed, according to Associate Dean Elizabeth Foster, Ph.D. Students are required to take a prescribed number of core credit hours, which include courses in psychology, algebra, pre-calculus, trigonometry, chemistry, biochemistry, organic chemistry and physics, to name a few. In addition, they must complete upper division elective hours offered by IMS partner colleges from both science and non-science offerings.

This is one area where the explorative component of the program is prominent.

“What we like the advisors to do is listen to a student, and based on what the student is interested in, they can identify a set of electives for the students to choose from,” Foster said.

“If you really like people and culture, here's a set of electives in anthropology that are on our approved list that might be of interest to you. If they like working with children and are very much into thinking about young people's development, we'll look at the elective list with family and child sciences, psychology and social work electives.”

Beyond the classroom requirements, Foster said the required seminars and capstone offerings are where the IMS curriculum has “evolved and strengthened.”

They “bring together their interests and their scholarship ... hopefully having them bring in prior knowledge from courses to apply how they're understanding an issue that they see in the

community.” Speights outlined some of the seminar topics over the course of the four years, where students begin by looking at the patient experience, what it's like to be underserved or be a mission-based patient. From there, they dive into the various roles of health care professionals. By the third and fourth years, he said, the students begin focusing on research, often reaching back to study those areas they've explored in earlier years.

“They're not getting a lot of that from the core science classes,” Speights said. “Where we expose those things is in the seminar curriculum that Helen and Liz [Foster] built.”

Foster shared an example for illustration.

“The wait times for patients to see a physician are long. ‘How does that factor into something they're seeing in a public policy elective that they took?’ It might be picking up pieces from a course that they took in the College of Social Sciences and Public Policy and applying it to what they're interested in.”

In short, the program has matured and evolved over nearly a decade of existence.

“We know our students better now after 10 years and what they're capable of,” Foster said. “So, we ask a lot of them. Our expectation was that they could be exposed to research and have that autonomy of selecting their own topic. Now they're immersed in research and really looking at publicly available data.

“We expect them to do a lot more and they rise to the occasion. It's just great.”

Looking to the future

By the time the 10th class of IMS students enrolls in the fall of 2026, the program will have expanded.

“We're going to be the first pre-health major at FSU-Panama City,” said Speights, who is excited about taking the program to a larger rural area. “We're starting that with Clinical Professions. It really is taking the program to where it's needed because there are a lot of students from that area who don't necessarily want to leave home, or are students from those rural areas who don't necessarily want to come all the way to Tallahassee to do a pre-health major when they can do it closer to home. I think that makes sense. From there, the sky's the limit.”

Speights said there have already been discussions with the College of Arts and Sciences and Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare about phlebotomy and other lab certificates. The potential for an IMS MBA pathway through the College of Business is also on “good footing.”



Sean Gabany, who completed his IMS – Clinical Professions degree in 2021 celebrates Match Day 2025 with girlfriend, Katie Allen. Gabany triple-matched for residency in pediatrics, psychiatry and adolescent psychiatry at Cincinnati Children's Hospital.



Brittney Chang (left) and Michelle Arroyo (right), members of the M.D. Class of 2029, join Bridge classmate Elliot Bodre in the staging area prior to graduation. Chang and Arroyo are among only a handful of students to graduate from both IMS and Bridge and matriculate into the college's M.D. program.



Senior Associate Dean for Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences, Anthony Speights, M.D.

"There's been a lot of focus on ways to impact workforce development," he added. "We are still working on ways to continually improve what we've got to make it better for the students; to give them more access and more exposure to make sure that they're ready for whatever the next step of their development is ... really figure out what is needed and fill those gaps."

One of those critical needs, in response to a nationwide shortage, is producing more primary care providers — an issue that was relevant when the FSU College of Medicine was founded a quarter-century ago and remains so today.

"We have to be very careful about who we admit, what kind of training we provide and what kind of support we provide the students that we do admit," Livingston said. "We can never lose sight of the service orientation that is necessary to produce the kind of physicians that we state in our mission that we want to produce."

"That's one of the reasons in the IMS program that we put so much emphasis on the clinical and volunteer experiences."

Speights, who learned under the guidance of Livingston and Hurt, is keenly aware.

"The only way that we're going to get more mission-fit students and people who are going into primary care is actually beat the bushes and find people who are meeting all of those criteria; that have the academics and also have that heart for service that indicates that they're more likely to go into primary care," he said.

Conversely, he doesn't want to "pigeonhole" College of Medi-

cine students who excel.

"How do I go back to them and say, 'You need to do family medicine instead of doing orthopedics or doing neurosurgery?' Can't do that," Speights said. "The flip side is that those students, even though they're going into specialties, also understand where they came from. They understand what the needs are."

"They may not necessarily be in rural America doing neurosurgery, but they are certainly going to be a whole lot more open to people who are disadvantaged, who are underserved, providing pro bono cases or more charity work than a lot of the folks who have never been exposed to those things. I think we win on either side, because we're ending up with many more mission-fit students who are in specialties that historically have not been dominated by mission-fits."

Through both the curriculum and exposure opportunities, the IMS program is an extension of the college's mission to educate and develop exemplary physicians and physician assistants who practice patient-centered health care and are responsive to community needs, especially through service to underserved populations.

With eyes toward the future, and the help of IMS' in-house advising, the program continues to look at how to train health care professionals — beyond solely physicians and PAs — who can "affect people's lives."

"This curriculum allows them a lot of exploration on a lot of different topics and a lot of different pathways ... to seek out those alternative paths," Speights said.



Emelia LaCognata is flanked by her parents, Jennifer and Joe LaCognata, following the M.D. Class of 2029 White Coat Ceremony on Aug. 8.

LaCognata turns IMS degree, experience into a seat in M.D. class

By Bob Thomas

FSU College of Medicine

Emelia LaCognata secured a seat in the College of Medicine's M.D. Class of 2029 through the "early decision" application program, but her path was planned out well in advance.

LaCognata's love of science was already established as a 16-year old at Clearwater's Countryside High School when her grandmother's battle with breast cancer provided confirmation that a career in medicine was in her future.

"She was in hospice at our house, so we helped take care of her," said the now 22-year-old, who recognized the emotional and physical toll it was taking on her parents, Jennifer and Joe LaCognata. "I would set an alarm in the middle of the night, and I would give her medication, and drain her nephrostomy bag."

"I've always known I've been interested in medicine, but that was my first time giving care to a person. I just knew that it's where I've got to be, what I've got to do."

She began her exploration of in-state, public college options by working in reverse order.

"I looked ahead at the med schools, and I picked the undergrad based off the med school that I liked," said LaCognata. "I was like, 'FSU has the mission I want, and it looks like they like to adopt their own undergrads more often [than the other schools].' And then I liked the area. The IMS degree was appealing as well, because it was like pre-med already and a good pipeline, I thought."

its pathway programs to medicine go, Florida State University's Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences (IMS) undergraduate program, housed within the College of Medicine, is one of the fastest-growing producers of medical and physician assistant students. IMS' curriculum is delivered by seven colleges at FSU and includes three majors — Clinical Professions, Community Patient Care, and Health Management, Policy & Information.

"It was good preparing me for the med side of things, because a lot of the prerequisites were all those classes I need for the MCAT," she said, specifically mentioning the importance of organic chemistry and biochemistry to the program's academic curriculum.

Beyond the classroom, each IMS student is required to complete 256 experiential learning hours; an area where LaCognata set herself apart. She completed her Clinical Professions major requirements in December 2024 with 1,800 experiential hours — more than seven times the requirement — for her B.S. in Biomedical Sciences and somehow found time to add a B.S. in Psychology.

She logged those hours at a variety of settings in Gadsden County. Her family relocated to Quincy from Safety Harbor following Emelia's graduation from high school.

"My parents were over the big city hustle and bustle, and so was I," LaCognata said. "That's why I kind of like FSU, because it's a big school, but a smaller town. They wanted to move closer to Georgia, but not over the border. They were looking at small towns and just fell in love with Quincy. My mom always wanted to open a restaurant, so when we saw Quincy Square, she was like, that's perfect."

Bantam Bay is open on the square Tuesday-Saturday 7 a.m.–3 p.m., serving all-day breakfasts and sandwiches.

"Quincy's treated us very, very good," said Emelia, who has worked at the family eatery throughout her undergraduate days while commuting to the FSU campus. That was no easy feat considering she spent a great deal of time serving the community in a variety of locations.

"It was already my goal to immerse myself in this town and community and do something," she said, adding that she felt anonymous living in Safety Harbor. She met that goal, and exceeded her IMS requirements, by volunteering

for two years at the TALLAHASSEE Regional Hospital Emergency Department. Her responsibilities included getting blankets for patients, responding to a call bell at the nurses' station when they were tied up, stocking the lounge for the responding EMTs pulling long shifts, and occasionally shadowing physicians and other providers.

"They didn't even know what to do with me because they never get volunteers," she said. "Now they really welcome me as part of their little team, even though I'm just a volunteer."

In addition, she volunteered with the Gadsden Horsemen's Association, the Gadsden County Arts Center and Museum with its summer arts camp for children, and the Quincy Farmer's Market.

Her "only" volunteer hours outside of Gadsden County were logged in a research lab within the FSU Psychology Department.

LaCognata's commitment to service led to her selection as the College of Medicine's undergraduate Humanitarian of the Year, where she was honored at a university-wide celebration in March.

"Growing up in Safety Harbor, that's a completely different demographic [than Quincy]," said Anthony Speights, M.D., the college's senior associate dean for IMS. "Moving up to this area and completely buying into what's needed in that community is a testament of not only her values, but also her whole family and their values."

And the perfect Mission-fit for acceptance into the College of Medicine's M.D. program.



First-year medical student and IMS graduate Emelia LaCognata is coated by Tallahassee Regional Campus Dean Kerwyn Flowers, D.O., at the M.D. Class of 2029 White Coat Ceremony.



With wide smiles and flowers in hand, four M.D. Class of 2029 members pose in front of the Westcott Fountain at the conclusion of the Aug. 8 White Coat Ceremony.

M.D. Class of 2029 receives white coats before packed crowd, Gold Humanism inductees

By Bob Thomas
FSU College of Medicine

Offset by a bright red shirt, Malik Richardson's crisp, medical white coat and beaming smile stood out in a sea of FSU College of Medicine classmates, families and friends who gathered around the Westcott Fountain on Aug. 8 in celebration of the White Coat Ceremony.

Asked to describe the meaning and emotions of the evening – a celebration of the successful completion of the first

semester of medical school and the ceremonial entry into the profession of medicine – he didn't hesitate.

"It feels amazing," said Richardson, who was selected by his classmates as the M.D. Class of 2029 president. "As the president, my responsibility here is service, so I serve all my classmates and, in the future, God willing, as a physician, I will serve my patients as well."

“This white coat not only represents the love and compassion I have for all the patients that I interact with, but it truly is the embodiment of what it means to be a competent physician. Hopefully, I will embody an exemplary physician.”

Even as its journey is just beginning, the Class of 2029 has special significance. It is the 25th College of Medicine cohort to begin the four-year Doctor of Medicine curriculum, which corresponds with this year’s 25th anniversary of the college’s creation.

To date, the college has produced 2,069 physicians, more than 1,100 of whom have completed residency and are in practice. Those numbers will exceed 2,500 and 1,500 by the time Richardson and his classmates graduate.

Selected from 6,700 applicants, the 120-member class was culled from 190 who received offers following 263 individual interviews. Its make-up, while unique, remains rooted in the college’s mission-driven principles.

- The College of Medicine’s featured pathway programs are represented by eight members from the Bridge to Clinical Medicine master’s program, including Richardson, and eight others who matriculated through the undergraduate Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences program.
- They are represented by students from 17 different undergrad majors, featuring traditional pre-med tracks (biology, biomedical science, neuroscience, microbi-

ology and biochemistry) as well academically diverse majors that include history, anthropology, music, economics, nursing, environmental science, computer science and political science.

- The class includes 26 first-generation college students and 52 non-traditional members; those who did not matriculate directly from an undergraduate education.
- In all, 118 of the 120 were either raised in Florida or attended a state university. They hail from 35 Florida counties, and yet speak 22 different languages.
- Collectively, they entered medical school with more than 67,000 cumulative hours of research experience and 71,000 cumulative hours in medical or non-medical service to communities.

“Wherever you come from, tonight’s ceremony will be something you will remember for the rest of your life,” FSU College of Medicine Dean Alma Littles, M.D., said in her opening remarks. “You’ll be transformed by what it means to don the white coat, and you will gain new appreciation for the responsibility that goes along with it.

“You have had the opportunity this summer to bond with your classmates and to grow closer in your shared pursuit. You will lean on each other a lot in the years to come, and tonight I hope you will look around at your classmates and feel the shared sense of pride in what this ceremony represents.”



As family and friends hoist phones and cameras to commemorate the moment, the M.D. Class of 2029 gathers for its informal White Coat class photo after exiting Westcott Hall.



Shahem AlQudah dons his White Coat with an assist from Orlando Regional Campus Dean Mark Chaet, M.D., while classmates, from left, Divya Arora, Michelle Arroyo and Sihini Atalugama await their moment. Behind them sit the recently pinned members of the Chapman Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society.

The evening ceremony at the Ruby Diamond Concert Hall centers around the celebration of the medical students' completion of the rigorous first semester of medical school, which began in late May. Not coincidentally, it also includes the induction of select fourth-year medical students into the Chapman Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society.

GHHS members are chosen by peers and faculty for best demonstrating humanism in their care for patients through compassion, respect, empathy, integrity and clinical excellence. They are role models for the future physicians who are just beginning their medical education.

Sixteen members of the M.D. Class of 2026 were selected for GHHS induction, with 11 participating in the pinning ceremony that preceded the featured event. One of those inducted, Katelyn Cornelius, shared an important message with those soon-to-be-coated first-year students seated in the audience.

"As I reflect on medical school, I've realized that the most impactful lessons often don't come from textbooks or lectures," said Cornelius, who anecdotally shared a few of her own clinical training experiences for illustration. "They come from people, patients, classmates and mentors who teach us compassion, vulnerability and trust."

Dean Littles followed with the introduction of alumnus Marlisha Edwards, M.D. as the keynote speaker:

"To say that Dr. Edwards is the personification of all the good things FSU has to offer and is the embodiment of its mission, vision and values, is an understatement."



Marlisha Edwards (M.D., '11) delivers a story-filled keynote address, continuing the College of Medicine tradition of an alumnus handling those duties at the annual White Coat Ceremony.

A College of Medicine graduate, Edwards practices family medicine in Tallahassee with the Southern Medical Group/TMH Physician Partners, instructs third-year medical students as a member of the college's clerkship faculty and is president of SMG's executive committee.

Her path to becoming a leader in the medical profession mirrors the vision the College of Medicine's founders had when developing multiple programs that would encourage and support

students who would address Florida's shortage of primary care physicians. As an FSU undergraduate, she served as a SSTRIDE mentor, was active in the Multicultural Association of Pre-Health Students, and following graduation, was admitted to FSU's then post-baccalaureate Bridge program to earn a seat in the M.D. Class of 2011.

She was selected for induction to both the Gold Humanism and Alpha Omega Alpha honor societies and received the college's Outstanding Graduate in Family Medicine Award.

Outgoing and engaging, Edwards carried the audience through the origin of the white coat ceremony, interjected with a handful of stories tinged with humor. She brought her message to a close on a more serious note.

"There was young woman caring for her father at his bedside after he had been in the ICU for three weeks. She noticed that her father's mental status had changed from the day prior. The ICU doctors were notified and they assured her that her father was fine, but she felt uneasy. After a few hours, she took his temperature. Alarmed at the 103-degree fever, she was certain

that he had bacterial meningitis. Bacterial meningitis that came from a drain in his brain. It was placed three weeks prior to drain blood. Blood that collected after an unknown brain aneurysm caused pressure. Pressure that caused bleeding from a nearby jumble of abnormal blood vessels called an arteriovenous malformation, or AVM. An AVM that led to a subarachnoid hemorrhage. A subarachnoid hemorrhage that caused a thunderclap headache. A thunderclap headache that resulted in a 911 call. A 911 call that was placed by the daughter. The daughter that was in town to care for her father after a knee replacement. The daughter that trained at the FSU College of Medicine. The daughter that is me.

"One year ago, this frightening event happened, and I was grateful for the medical knowledge that prepared me to help care for my father who is alive and well today.

"So, I implore you all: Strive to new heights. Study smart. Study hard. Study as if the life of a loved one depends on it, because that could very well be the case. Make us proud. Put on that white coat. Dress the part."



Casey Rust, M.D., faculty advisor for the Chapman Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society, introduces the 11 new inductees from the M.D. Class of 2026 in attendance. The GHHS pinning ceremony precedes the White Coat Ceremony annually and is intended to be aspirational for the first-year medical students seated in the audience.



Karen Haq, left; her mother, Najma Haq, center; and her father, Subhanul "Sam" Haq.

Karen Haq: Loving daughter's legacy supports ACTS2

By Audrey Post

FSU College of Medicine

All her life, Karen Haq knew exactly what being a caregiver for an ailing loved one entailed. She witnessed it in her own family, later living it herself for 16 years.

Her final act before her March 28, 2018, death from a rapidly spreading cancer was to create a foundation that would support respite care for caregivers as one of its primary missions.

Haq had no connection to Florida State University or to Alzheimer's disease, but both FSU and the College of Medicine's African American Alzheimer's Caregiver Training & Support Project (ACTS2) have benefitted from her legacy. So have the families it works with.

"One of the most difficult problems family caregivers of older adults with dementia face is obtaining effective respite care services," said College of Medicine Professor Rob Glueckauf, Ph.D., ACTS2 founder and director. "They typically have not been given information about such services from their health care providers and are left wondering whether they are eligible to obtain them from state-sponsored organizations or, alternatively, whether they can afford private payment."

With grant support from the Haq Family Foundation, in two separate gifts, ACTS2 has assisted family caregivers in identifying respite care opportunities in their communities, helped them in composing interview questions

for potential providers, and to review the pros and cons of each candidate or service they have on their short list. The foundation has made two separate gifts over the past couple of years.

"The Haq Foundation has allowed ACTS2 to take a more proactive role in providing support and spend the needed time to address the concerns of family caregivers," said Tomeka Norton-Brown, ACTS2 project coordinator. "Because of the foundation's generosity, we can continue to support family caregivers of older adults with dementia how, where, and when they need it."

Research has shown that African Americans are twice as likely to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia as Caucasians, Glueckauf said. They are also more likely to ask their faith leaders for guidance than their doctors.

"If you want to help people, you have to meet them where they are, not where you wish they were," Glueckauf said. "We realized we needed to provide support to caregivers through a faith-integrated approach, to help them tap further into networks they already had."

ACTS2 offers free skills-building and support services, with components such as relaxation training through prayer and meditation, creative problem-solving, and building in pleasant daily activities as a guard against emotional distress, such as brief chats with phone buddies

and listening to inspirational music. It also reinforces self-care for caregivers. (Read more about the ACTS2 project at ACTS2project.org)

Elizabeth Fields, president of the Haq Family Foundation's Board of Trustees, said it was "happenstance" that she learned about ACTS2 through a conversation with Glueckauf, not about the foundation, but related to her work as a non-profit fundraiser. Later, "it occurred to me, 'Wait a minute, I know an organization that I think could really use this money for a good cause.'"

A strong sense of family

Karen Haq watched her father, Subhanul "Sam" Haq, a gifted engineer who held several patents for biomedical devices, serve as primary caregiver for her mother, Najma Haq, who had multiple chronic health challenges. The couple emigrated from Pakistan when Sam was awarded a scholarship to the Indiana Institute of Technology, where he earned a bachelor's degree.

Karen, their only child, graduated from the University of Arizona with a biochemistry degree in 1993, and later earned a graduate degree in computer science from Loyola University in Chicago. She moved back to Arizona after her father was diagnosed with mouth cancer in the early 2000s.

"For about six years, she took care of both her parents, because her father was in no shape to take care of her mother," Fields said. "His cancer spread, but he survived as long as he did in part because of one of the biomedical devices he had patented."

After her father died, Fields said, "Karen felt obligated to continue the care he had given her mom."

For the next 10 years, she was her mother's primary caregiver.

Karen and Fields met in 1989 as freshmen, moving into the same dorm in Tucson.

"Her door was open and I walked in there and started chatting her up, and she was cool with it," Fields said. "She wasn't looking at me like, 'Why are you doing this?' It was an instant, 'Oh good, I have a friend.'"

The two began an endearing, and enduring, friendship, which included a in Chicago with another friend. Karen brought her mother along and arranged for a caregiver to stay at the hotel with her while the three college friends took in a Chicago Cubs baseball game.

"I'm a White Sox fan, but they'd never been to Wrigley Field, and I was happy to be with them," Fields said.

"Karen was very vivacious and a very positive light to be around. She wasn't a party girl, but she loved to laugh, and she loved to dance."

Following her mother's death, Karen was making plans to travel. Then she got sick.

"It was tragic. She called me and told me she had Stage 4 colon cancer that had spread to her ovary, and I was like 'What! What is going on?'" Fields recalled. "It spread so quickly throughout her body she didn't even have time to start treatment. Part of this, too, is that during the time she was taking care of her mother, she didn't really take care of herself."

Less than two weeks after that fateful phone call, Karen Haq was gone. But she had hired an attorney and created the foundation that bears her family's name and is dedicated to three causes. One supports scholarships for first-year graduate students in engineering, with preference given to international students, in honor of her father. Another supports animal welfare causes in honor of Karen's mother, who loved animals. For her own legacy, Karen wanted to support respite care for family caregivers.

"It was so important to her to help caregivers," Fields said, "and it was important to the board, because of the family's heritage, to help people of color. Supporting ACTS2 is more about respite care education than providing respite care, but we felt like it is still the kind of contribution that Karen would like to see."

By "we," Fields means she and the other five members of the Haq Family Foundation's board. Three of them met Karen in college; one met her as a schoolgirl and the other is a longtime family friend. All are volunteers and receive no compensation.

Glueckauf and Norton-Brown expressed profound gratitude for the Haq Family Foundation's support and "unswerving commitment to promoting the health and welfare of family caregivers of older adults with dementia," Glueckauf added.

"All of us on the board are honored that we have this opportunity to do right by the family," Fields said. "Obviously, we miss our friend Karen and her parents, but we're here to hopefully do some good. We are happy to support ACTS2."

Regional Campus News



Daytona Beach

George Bernardo, M.D.
Dean, Daytona Beach
Regional Campus



Our newest crop of students in Daytona Beach

On June 4, the Daytona Beach Regional Campus welcomed the M.D. Class of 2027 with a reception at Dunes Brewing along the Halifax River in Port Orange. The evening included mingling with the dean, the campus team, M4 and PA students and a German-themed buffet dinner.

Suturing, Biopsy and I&D Workshop



On June 11, new third-year medical students along with physician assistant students participated in a Suturing, Biopsy and Incision & Drainage workshop led by Wes Driggers, M.D., Ph.D., Family Medicine clerkship director. Volunteering to assist are, from left, Sharon Goldish, M.D.; Joanne Saxour, M.D., Family Medicine Education Director; Rob Daly, M.D.; Rebecca Mangali, PA-C; and Haley Michael, PA-C.



Taking a break during training are, from left, Shivani Patel, M3, Chris White, M3, Wes Driggers, M.D., Sheila Gupta, M.D., Internal Medicine Clerkship director, and Kami Klejc, M3.



Sharon Goldish, M.D., surgery clerkship faculty member, is shown instructing third-year medical student Giselle Nicolas.



Jake Guzzino, M3, and PA student Olivia Schulz working on tying different knots.



Third-year medical students Alexia Johnson and Khloe Dang work with faux cysts made of lotion.



Clerkship faculty Rob Daly, M.D., and Angie Crafton, PA-C, are shown working with students on assorted knot techniques.

Hitting the open road!

Steve Viel, M.D., from the Daytona Beach Regional Campus inaugural Class of 2009 with his partner and FSU faculty member Bridget Hight, M.D., and their two children set out July 1 to travel around the world for one year. They hung up their white coats, sold their cars and headed first to Marrakech, Morocco then onto El Gasto, Andalusia, and Valencia, Spain, with the latest being Paris. You can follow their adventures on Instagram at [justgofamily](#)





Fort Pierce

Juliette Lomax-Homier, M.D.
Dean, Fort Pierce Regional Campus



Welcome M.D. Class of 2027 to the Fort Pierce Regional Campus

Seventeen eager medical students arrived on the Treasure Coast in June to begin their third year of medical school. They participated in three days of orientation and skills training. They then started clinical rotations in pediatrics, surgery, obstetrics-gynecology, family medicine, psychiatry and internal medicine. In their fourth year, they will tackle emergency medicine, advanced internal medicine, geriatrics, advanced family medicine and electives. All our students work under the guidance of our dean, eight clerkship directors, an informatics curriculum director and more than 300 clerkship faculty physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants in our community.



Physician Assistant class of 2025

Our nine PA students are quickly approaching graduation in December 2025. They have been doing very well, and we are extremely proud of them. It is always sad to see them go, but it is rewarding to know they are able to apply their knowledge and skills to taking care of patients and making a difference in our communities.

Volunteering

This year, the Fort Pierce campus has five students from the Class of 2026 who have volunteered to be on the Admissions Committee!

- Yusuf Amawi
- Jade Bryant
- Shannon Hurley
- Nausheen Merchant
- Filip Ptak

We thank them ever so much for their commitment!



Emily Dolce

Kiana Reaves



Bonnie Wilt

Fourth-year students inducted into Gold Humanism Honor Society

The Gold Humanism Honor Society Selection Committee carefully reviewed the nominations of many students. Fort Pierce campus fourth-year students Emily Dolce, Kiana Reaves, and Bonnie Wilt were selected from the Class of 2026 as true exemplars of humanism, demonstrating clinical excellence, service to others and a patient-centered approach to care and compassion.

Congratulations to these scholarship recipients

Several Fort Pierce students have received scholarships from the main campus.

- Berling Joseph
- Chloe Douglas
- Emily Dolce
- Filip Ptak
- Isabella Bayramov
- Jade Bryant
- Kayla Clark

- Leana Pinas-Zade (2)
- Lisandra Vazquez Diaz
- Logan Bassoff
- Mohamed Naas
- Nausheen Merchant
- Rossana Sassarini Benvenuto

Congratulations to our wonderful students!



Emergency Medicine clerkship director promoted

Mark R. Gallagher, M.D., clerkship director in Emergency Medicine at the Fort Pierce Regional Campus for the past six years, has been named Cleveland Clinic Patient Experience Champion, a position created to assure a positive patient experience at Cleveland Clinic Martin Health.

An FSU College of Medicine alumnus (Class of '09), he also was recently appointed as Regional Patient Experience Officer for Team Health, a contracting company that provides physicians to hospitals.

And the honors seem to keep coming for Gallagher. Last December, he was recognized with a 5-star award from the College of Medicine's School of Physician Assistant Practice for having perfect scores from all student surveys from the PA Class of 2024.

After earning a B.A. in business administration at the University of Florida in 2003, Gallagher graduated from the FSU College of Medicine in 2009, completed a residency in Emergency Medicine at Michigan State University-Sparrow Hospital, and completed a fellowship in Emergency Ultrasound at the University of Massachusetts. He is a Fellow of the American College of Emergency Physicians. Congratulations!



Orlando

Mark Chaet, M.D.

Dean, Orlando Regional Campus



From left, Maria Martinez, Anna Parra, Catherine Yoo, Sarah Blackburn, Megan Vilaseca, Gabriella Nobile, Rachel Robbins and Sydney Woodside.

Orlando physician assistants supporting the community

On June 21 at Jones High School, PA faculty and students from the FSU College of Medicine Orlando Regional Campus, the Orlando Nova Southeastern PA Program, and the AdventHealth University PA Program volunteered to provide sports physicals to student athletes. Together they performed 1,137 physical exams and over 1,000 EKGs. The event was sponsored by Be a Player, Inc.



Leading the Way

Holly Vu (M.D. Class of '27), left, has been selected for the 2025 AAFP Family Medicine Leads Emerging Leader Institute, a national program of the American Academy of Family Physicians that supports leadership development among medical students and residents. As one of 30 participants, Holly will receive mentorship, attend workshops and work on a leadership project focused on advocacy, education and community health. We look forward to seeing the fruits of Holly's labor and seeing her continue the mission of the College.

Orlando alumni, students gaining experience and proudly representing FSU College of Medicine



Nicholas Davis (M.D. Class of '26) at his away anesthesia rotation at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY.



Shehani Perera (M.D., Class of '26) did an away anesthesia rotation at Mass General Brigham Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.



Nicole Batista, M.D. (Class of '25), on her first day of her Pediatric Residency at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg.



While on her surgery rotation at Emory School of Medicine, Alexandra Kata (M.D. Class of '26) worked alongside surgical resident and FSU College of Medicine alumnus Hongyu Zhang, M.D. (Class of '24).



Sarasota

Nicole Bentze, D.O.

Dean, Sarasota Regional Campus



Faculty Pin Recognition program piloted at Sarasota campus gaining steam

By Audrey Post

FSU College of Medicine

Imagine recognizing faculty members' individual contributions in areas such as service, attitude or knowledge without creating a sense of competition, but celebrating a sense of shared joy and gratitude.

The School of Physician Assistant Practice's Faculty Pin Recognition program was launched as a pilot in 2020 at the Sarasota Regional Campus. It was so successful that by 2022, all six College of Medicine regional campuses had adopted it.

In addition, Megan Verdoni, MPAS, PA-C, clinical education director of the PA program, and Nicole Bentze, D.O., dean of the Sarasota Regional Campus and an associate professor of Family Medicine and Rural Health, presented a program about it at the national Physician Assistant Education Association annual conference last October. Verdoni has already been contacted by another PA school about adopting the program.

"Faculty of the Year is a prestigious honor typically reserved for one person, but there is no reason that multiple qualified recipients cannot be recognized every year," Verdoni said. "The culture of the College of Medicine has always been one of shared successes, and this is an extension of that. Faculty learn they really touched a student's life in some way, and that's both humbling and invigorating."

PA students in each class are given a pin about six months before their December graduation and asked to select a favorite faculty member by the end of the year. It's totally up to the students why they make their choices. Each student is required to take a photo, documenting their selection and uploading the image to the PA Canvas site.

The Faculty Pin Recognition fits perfectly into the atmosphere at the Sarasota campus that Bentze was building. She wanted "to create a culture of gratitude to improve the well-being of students, staff, clerkship directors and faculty."

"After completing the American Academy of Family Physicians' Leading Wellness Certificate Program, I started teaching M.D. and PA students to reflect on their clinical experiences and recognize their personal and professional growth," Bentze said. "Then, I asked them to notice the specific characteristics of the faculty that reinforced that growth."

This was paired with the requirement they write a gratitude note, something more than a generic "thank you for teaching me," at the end of rotations. Participation in 2024 was almost 100%. Verdoni and Bentze's article, "The Impact of Faculty Pin Recognition," details how to create such a program and offers tips based on what they learned on their journey. It appears in the September issue of *The Journal of Faculty Development*.



Holly Garza-Shaw, PA-C (left, PA Class of '19), clerkship faculty specializing in Psychiatry at the Fort Pierce Regional Campus, proudly displays her Faculty Pin given to her by Kimberly Aguilar (Class of '24).



Andrew Gamenthaler, M.D. clerkship faculty in surgical oncology at the Daytona Beach Regional Campus, proudly wears the Faculty



David Green (left, PA Class of '22) congratulates Harold Kulman, M.D., clerkship faculty in Surgery at the Sarasota Regional Campus after presenting him with a Faculty Pin.



Logan Lipsch (right, PA Class of '23), poses for a celebratory photo after presenting a Faculty Pin to Mark Brus, M.D., clerkship faculty in Internal Medicine and Geriatrics at the Sarasota Regional Campus.



Sage Keckstein (left, PA Class of '24), poses with Steven Halbreich, M.D., clerkship director for Surgery at the Sarasota Regional Campus after presenting him with a Faculty Pin.



Tallahassee

Kerwyn Flowers, D.O.
Dean, Tallahassee Regional Campus



Flowers appointed dean of Tallahassee Regional Campus

By Bob Thomas
FSU College of Medicine

Kerwyn Flowers, D.O., who joined the Florida State University College of Medicine in 2017 and has served as director of Rural Medical Education since 2019, has been appointed dean of the Tallahassee Regional Campus.

College of Medicine Dean Alma Littles, M.D., shared the announcement in a July 18 message to students, faculty and staff.

“Having served as director of Rural Medical Education and chair of the curriculum committee, leading the third- and fourth-year medical education program, Dr. Flowers is well-positioned to take on this new role,” Littles said. “Throughout her tenure at the College of Medicine, she has gained the respect of students, patients and faculty.

“She has a track record of excellent patient care and outstanding evaluations from her students. I have no doubt she will continue to be an excellent leader and mentor for the students, staff and faculty at the Tallahassee Regional Campus.”

Flowers is no stranger to Tallahassee and the Big Bend. The Quincy, Florida, native earned her undergraduate degree in chemistry from Florida A&M University and is a graduate of the Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine. She completed her Family Medicine Residency at Akron City Hospital in Ohio and later returned to private practice in North Florida and South Georgia.

She was drawn to the position by her passion for regional education and the greater scope and impact that can be made through community engagement in her new role.

“This passion for regional education that lives inside of me started with a spark,



being a part of one of FSU’s programs,” said Flowers, who participated in an outreach program while in high school. “I appreciate our mission and how we’re deeply committed to be available and aware of community needs of the underserved and rural communities.”

Prior to her arrival at the College of Medicine in the Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, Flowers was a faculty member of the Floyd Medical Center in Rome, Georgia. There, she trained residents and medical students and served as director of Osteopathic Medical Education. In addition, Flowers has honed her leadership skills through fellowships in Academic Medicine at Northeast Ohio Medical University and Faculty Development at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In her clinical role at the College of Medicine, she practices general family medicine and teaches in the context of direct patient care. She has been the faculty advisor for the FSU Student Chapter of the Florida Rural Health Association and has led the College’s Rural Learning Experience trip the past two years.

“I’ve been in roles where I mentor students since I started in academia, and I love that dynamic of passing on knowledge to the next generation,” Flowers said. “I see this role not just being a mentor to students, but to faculty and staff as well...creating this collaborative culture between myself and the faculty to find ways to improve each other.”

One of the College of Medicine’s six regional campuses, where students gain clinical experience out in the community, the Tallahassee Regional Campus is home to approximately 40 third- or fourth-year medical students and 10 PA students each year.

Flowers succeeds Sandeep Rahangdale, M.D., who has led the Tallahassee Regional Campus for the past eight years and has taken a leave of absence from the College of Medicine to work in public health outside the area.



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Class Notes

2024

PA

Jackson Andraski, PA-C, is practicing at AdventHealth Medical Group in Lake Nona, Fla. He specializes in family medicine.

Karly Castro, PA-C, is a pediatric neurology practitioner at Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, Fla.

Elijah Dorneval, PA-C, is practicing at the Tallahassee Neurological Clinic.

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

Justin Esteve, PA-C, is a critical care practitioner, specializing in cardiac, burn and vascular ICUs at Tampa General Hospital.

Hannah Henry, PA-C, is practicing at Suncoast Skin Solutions in Jacksonville and St. Augustine, Fla. She specializes in dermatology and is expected to wed in May 2026.

Alex Johnson, PA-C, is practicing at Women's Care Florida in Tampa. She is expected to wed this fall.

Nazifa Khan, PA-C, resides in Plant City, Fla.

Irene Maini, PA-C, is an aesthetic medicine practitioner at TPSG in Tampa.

Samantha Mankus, PA-C, is a head and neck surgery practitioner in Celebration, Fla.

Christine Morgan, PA-C, resides in Arcadia, Fla.

Moises Pichardo, PA-C, is a family medicine practitioner at Professional Health Care of Pinellas in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Kamila Rosasco, PA-C, is an OB-GYN practitioner at Women's Care Orlando, Fla. She is expected to wed

David Labissiere (M.D. Class of '26) in June of next year.

Scarlett Roy, PA-C, is an urgent care practitioner in Winchester, Va.

Christy Shackelford, PA-C, is a gynecology practitioner at Elite Women's Health in Tallahassee.

Jennifer Sousa, PA-C, is a pediatric practitioner with UF Health.

Sydney Stoneback, PA-C, is an urgent care practitioner in Atlanta.

Chau-Vy Vu, PA-C, resides in Tampa.

2023

M.D.

Jessica Corners, M.D., is completing a pediatric residency at UAB in Birmingham, Ala.

Logan Reed, M.D., is completing an orthopedic surgery residency at Orlando Health.

PA

Kirsti Harris, PA-C, is a family medicine provider at Craven County Community Health Center. She resides in New Bern, N.C.

Catherine Hurley Maxwell, PA-C, is an urgent care contractor for the U.S. Army in Arlington, Va.

Riley Remer, PA-C, is practicing at South Florida Psychiatry. She resides in Lake Worth, Fla.

2022

M.D.

Miranda Ave, M.D., is practicing at WakeMed Raleigh in North Carolina. She specializes in primary care pediatrics.

William Taber, M.D., is completing a tactical and operational medicine fellowship at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

PA

Casey Coholan, PA-C, is a urology surgery practitioner at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Olivia Crocker, PA-C, is practicing at Parks Dermatology Center in New Smyrna Beach, Fla. She married in March 2024.

Brianna Elliott, PA-C, is practicing at Patients First Urgent Care in Tallahassee.

Michelle Le, PA-C, is practicing at CareSpot Urgent Care in affiliation with Orlando Health. She is expected to wed in March 2026.

Wonmi Lee, PA-C, is a family medicine practitioner in Perry, Fla.

Patricia Taylor, PA-C, is a general surgery practitioner, specializing in bariatric and plastic surgery. She resides in Pensacola.

2021

PA

Camilla Brito, PA-C, is specializing in primary care at a Federally Qualified Health Center. She resides in Clearwater, Fla., has a 1-year-old son and is expecting a daughter.

Angelica Diez, PA-C, is an emergency medicine practitioner at Halifax Health in Daytona Beach.

Josh McDaniel, PA-C, is specializing in clinical dermatology and cutaneous oncology in a surgical role. He resides in Jacksonville, Fla.

Thea Nobles, PA-C, is practicing at The Surgery Group in Pensacola. She specializes in bariatric and general surgery.

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!

Katelyn Schwartz, PA-C, is a gastrointestinal practitioner, residing in DeBary, Fla.

Kayla Tripoli, PA-C, is an OB-GYN practitioner, residing in Maitland, Fla.

2020

PA

Jennifer Quirindongo, PA-C, is practicing at Sarasota Memorial Health Care System. She specializes in gynecological oncology.

Marybeth Shields, PA-C, is a urology practitioner in Tampa.

2019

PA

Anne-Marie Doll, PA-C, is practicing at Ascension Sacred Heart, specializing in orthopedic surgery, adult reconstruction and joint replacement. She resides in Pensacola and is expecting her first child this summer.

2018

M.D.

Laura Morales, M.D., is completing a vascular surgery fellowship at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Ohio.

2017

M.D.

Jennica Riis, M.D., is practicing obstetrics and gynecology in Mobile, Ala.

2015

M.D.

Keniel Pierre, M.D., is practicing interventional and structural cardiology at AdventHealth in Daytona Beach and New Smyrna Beach, Fla.

2009

M.D.

Richard Rodriguez, M.D., is practicing emergency medicine at Excelis Medical Associates in Tampa, Fla. He is an associate medical director for St. Joseph's Hospital – South Emergency Department in Riverview, Fla. He is also the medical director of emergency transport services at St. Joseph's Hospitals in Tampa.

2007

M.D.

Stephen Patrick, M.D., is an attending neonatologist at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. The O. Wayne Rollins Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health; he also serves as professor of the pediatrics division of neonatology at Emory University School of Medicine.

2006

M.D.

Robert Allison, M.D., is a medical director and global safety physician at Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, supporting early clinical development for treatments targeting inflammatory and auto-immune disorders. He is in private practice in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., specializing in primary care. He also serves as a faculty associate in the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and as associate editor for *Springer Nature*.

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SSTRIDE staff members Elizabeth Foster, Thesla Berne-Anderson, Rashad Sullivan, Myra Hurt and Helen Livingston gather at the College of Medicine's 10th anniversary celebration in 2010.

Thesla Berne-Anderson leaves a legacy of endless possibilities upon retirement

By Audrey Post
FSU College of Medicine

Thesla Berne-Anderson's dream of becoming a physician was thwarted as an undergraduate at Florida A&M University when she didn't have the background for a rigorous pre-medical curriculum, so she changed her major and became a middle school science teacher.

"I sailed through my biology classes, but courses like organic chemistry and physics revealed a lack of preparation in analytical thinking — the very skills essential for success in a pre-medical curriculum," she said. "Plus, I didn't have the support, guidance and mentorship to successfully navigate a pre-medical track."

Although she never became a physician, Berne-Anderson ultimately helped countless students successfully navigate a pre-med track into medical school and beyond. When she announced her impending retirement earlier this year, her Facebook page was flooded with messages of gratitude and love. Her journey is a story of faith, hope, love and perseverance.

Expanding the applicant pool for PIMS

Berne-Anderson knew she would never be a physician but never lost her zeal for medicine, and teaching science wasn't nurturing her soul. In 1993, she applied for a job as a student advisor at Florida State University's Program

in medical sciences, a reader program for the University of Florida College of Medicine. PIMS students spent their first year of medical school at FSU, then transferred to UF's main campus in Gainesville for the final three years.

PIMS Director Myra Hurt, Ph.D., had started her career as a high school science teacher in Arkansas. She would eventually build the coalition that persuaded the Florida Legislature and then-Gov. Jeb Bush to create the FSU College of Medicine in 2000, but in '93, Hurt's focus was on expanding the pool of qualified PIMS applicants, particularly those from underserved areas.

"Myra hired me as outreach coordinator, and she was convinced that early intervention was the key to preparing students to be qualified medical school applicants," Berne-Anderson said. "We had both been classroom teachers and knew that college readiness skills were a factor, that many students lacked proficiency in math and science. But lack of support was also a factor, lack of mentoring and not having role models, resources and consistent support – the very gaps I once faced personally."

With Hurt's support, Berne-Anderson created SSTRIDE, building on her relationships with local principals established during her teaching days, conducting research and crediting what she calls "divine inspiration."

SSTRIDE is an outreach program that starts in junior high school and continues through high school. It was designed to offer holistic support, academic mentoring, and leadership development for students from rural, first-generation and underserved backgrounds. With partnerships across Florida school districts, hospitals and communities, the program grew to include both in-school and after-school components.

Currently, the pre-college component is open to students from designated middle and high schools in Collier, Gadsden, Okaloosa and Sarasota counties. In the past, there have been programs in schools in Leon, Madison, Orange and Walton counties.

"Myra had a knack for spotting talent and potential," said Helen Livingston, Ed.D., who joined the team as PIMS' director of admissions in 1996 and worked closely with both Hurt and Berne-Anderson. "She saw Tesla had the drive and the passion to create a pathway for students to achieve their dreams. Tesla has the same knack for spotting potential in students and nurturing it."

At Livingston's suggestion, Berne-Anderson created a college-level component – USSTRIDE or undergraduate

USSTRIDE – to continue the mentoring for pre-medical students at FAMU and FSU, including preparation for the MCAT exam required as part of medical school application. It also provided an opportunity to earn certification as a medical assistant. USSTRIDE students also mentor students in the pre-college component in neighboring Gadsden County.

In addition, SSTRIDE Connect continues the support as high school participants transition to college life. After their first year at FSU or FAMU, students may apply to be a part of USSTRIDE. The program is also open to pre-med students who didn't participate prior to college, as long as they meet the criteria and maintain a minimum 3.3 GPA.

More than 4,000 students throughout Florida have been served by one of the SSTRIDE outreach programs, including the weeklong residential Summer Institute to introduce high school students committed to a career in a medical field to a variety of clinical settings. Students can choose to attend one of three sessions held in June and July.

Despite all the anecdotal success, Berne-Anderson knew that to truly validate SSTRIDE's outcomes and give the model academic credibility, that success needed to be backed by research. She earned a doctorate in Education with an emphasis in Higher Education and Leadership Change at St. Edwards University. Her dissertation, a mixed methods study, explored the "why" and the "how" behind SSTRIDE's success.

"What was found reinforced everything we believed: that mentorship, early intervention, social engagement, and community truly shape the academic trajectories of students who are passionate about helping others," she said.

Angela Guzman, M.D., met Anderson as a pre-med freshman at FSU. Now practicing obstetrics and gynecology in Central Florida, she matriculated through the Bridge to Clinical Medicine post-baccalaureate program and graduated from the College of Medicine in 2014. Guzman said it's hard to summarize Anderson's influence on her life, calling her "the embodiment of hope."

"Through her guidance, encouragement and unwavering belief in me, she helped me see potential in myself that I often could not see on my own. More importantly, she gave this gift to many students," she said.

"Dr. Anderson transformed a dream into more than just a program — she built a movement that has changed countless lives. Her impact is vast and profound, shaping not only

tions. Her tenacity and dedication are extraordinary, and her fortitude is unmatched. The success of the pipeline program is a direct reflection of her vision and unwavering commitment to materialize what Dr. Myra Hurt envisioned.”

Guzman is one of 10 alumni named to the Medical Hall of Fame this year, along with Rashad J. Sullivan, M.D. (Class of '13), an orthopedic surgeon practicing in Alexandria, Louisiana. He was a pre-med student at FAMU when he got involved with USSTRIDE, and worked for the program for a couple of years as he prepared to apply to medical school.

“The support I got from Dr. Anderson, Dr. Hurt, Dr. Liz Foster was invaluable. They changed my life,” said Sullivan, who was one of the speakers at a celebration of Hurt’s life after she died in 2023. “I failed the MCAT the first time I took it, and I was really down about it. Dr. Anderson looked me in the eye and said, ‘You know you can do this, so how are you going to fix it?’ Her faith in me lifted me up and set me back on course when I was losing faith in myself.

“Now that she’s retiring, I know the program she built will continue, but I feel really bad for the SSTRIDE students of the future who will not know her and feel that love.”

Alma Littles, M.D., dean of the FSU College of Medicine, said Berne-Anderson leaves a lasting legacy.

“What Dr. Berne-Anderson and her team built through SSTRIDE and USSTRIDE didn’t just open doors, it changed the way we think about pathway programs entirely,” she said. “These initiatives have become models of what early intervention and long-term mentoring should look like.

“We’ve seen students who may have never imagined themselves in medicine become physicians, researchers and leaders in their communities.”

Berne-Anderson credits Myra Hurt.



Thesla Berne-Anderson received FSU’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Service Award in 2019. Pictured, from left, are Joedrecka Brown Speights, M.D., Helen Livingston, Ed.D., Berne-Anderson, now Ed.D., and then-College of Medicine Dean John Fogarty, M.D., now dean-emeritus.

“I have to first thank Myra for her vision because creating some sort of pathway was her vision, but I also have to thank her for her vision of me at the time she hired me,” she said. “She basically helped me shape a successful career, one that has been a pleasure, helped me develop professionally and personally, and built up my passion for student advocacy.”

Berne-Anderson also thanked Livingston, noting that while Hurt had the vision, Livingston was her role model and mentor.

Anthony Speights, M.D., senior associate dean for Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences who oversees the undergraduate IMS program, the Bridge to Clinical Medicine and the other pathway programs, agreed that Hurt and Livingston were key to developing the college’s programs, but he said, “Dr. Berne-Anderson was the driving force.”

“She dedicated 30 years to creating programs that have become synonymous with pathways for mission-focused students to reach FSU, the College of Medicine and top health care programs across the country,” Speights said.

“Beyond creating programs, she provided direct mentorship to any student who needed guidance, not just those at FSU or in the pre-college programs. Her dedication to the programs will be missed and she will be hard to replace, but her legacy will live on, both in the programs she created and in the thousands of lives she impacted, both directly and indirectly over her career.”



Eric Laywell, Ph.D., assistant dean for Admissions, second from left, visits with Ann Marie, Jimmy and Mary Beth Brown after Ann Marie's Match Day celebration in 2024.

From a rural town in Florida, three children from one family admitted to the College of Medicine

By Patrick Crowley
FSU College of Medicine

Hosford, Florida, population: 650

Liberty County population: 7,955

Liberty High School graduating classes: fewer than 100

Number of students from one Hosford family at the College of Medicine: 3

Getting into a graduate program to pursue a career in medicine is tough — and that applies to Florida State University's Doctor of Medicine degree program as well as its School of Physician Assistant Practice, both housed in the College of Medicine.

Meet the Brown family, whose roots run deep in rural Hosford. They skew all the odds when it comes to getting children admitted to College of Medicine — two, Jimmy and Ann Marie, graduated with their M.D. degrees, and Mary Beth is completing her Master of Science degree in Physician Assistant Practice.

All three were Liberty County High School class valedictorians, attended Chipola College in Marianna to earn their associate degrees and then matriculated to FSU for their undergraduate and professional degrees.

When you talk to each of them, as well as to their parents Doyle and Beth, you learn they attribute their accomplishments and work ethic to three things:

Faith. Family. Community.

“My parents were very diligent about taking us to church, instilling in us a good foundation as far as a love for the Lord, a love for education, a love for community,” said Ann Marie (M.D. '24), who is in the second year of her Family Medicine residency at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare. “And my hometown means very much to me. I would love to go back and live there one day.”

Like most children, Jimmy, Ann Marie and Mary Beth had different ideas of what they would be when they grew up. Ann Marie and Mary Beth thought they'd be teachers, like their mother.

But Jimmy, when he was in kindergarten, said he wanted to be a "septic tank fixer," just like his father.

"My brother-in-law was playing with him and looking at him and laughing about it," Doyle said. "And I said, 'I'll tell you what he's not going to be, and he's not going to be a septic tank fixer — I'll kill him if he does!' You knew it by then, even at that early age, you could tell that he was smart. And you don't preach it to him, you just, in the back of your mind, you expect better. But you just want to make sure they get a good foundation, and they apply themselves."

Applying themselves was a mantra that all the Brown children learned from their parents.

"They got advice whether they wanted it or not," Doyle said with a chuckle. "I don't care if you are a straight C student, as long as that is the best you can do. And if that's the best you can do, then I am happy with it. But, if it's not the best you can do, you need to try your best. I think that goes for any child."

That "C" message hit home for Ann Marie.

"Even if it was a high B or something, my dad would say, 'This wasn't your best.' He wasn't getting on me, he was just saying, 'I know that you can do better — know that you didn't try on this,'" Ann Marie said. "Biochemistry was rough, rough, rough. It was the hardest class I've ever taken in medical school." And it was in biochemistry that she received her very first C on a test in her entire life.

"But I remember my dad just saying, 'Baby, you're trying your best. I'm proud of you.' There's something about — and this makes me very emotional when I think about it, honestly — but there's something about being raised in an environment where they have the utmost belief in you — in your ability. But also, there's that safety of, if I don't make it, there's still the love. I mean, it's unconditional. And that is something I hope to emulate with my own children because something in the way my parents did it, it was just wonderful," said Ann Marie, who is planning to get married this fall.

That family support — as well as community support — was an important, ever-present force in the Brown children's childhood.

"This is the town where my grandparents met and married and where my paternal grandparents are buried," said Mary Beth,

who serves as her PA class president. "Thankfully, I still have my Nana and Pa. And, you know, all we need in life is our relationship with the Lord and our family.

"I remember my Nana and Pa coming to all of our awards days and our competitions. And then, Sunday, after church, you have third, fourth and fifth sets of grandparents who come and love on you and tell you how proud they are of you. And, you know, you don't want to disappoint your parents or your grandparents."

Grandparents played a key role in the lives of the Brown children, and Beth's parents still do.

"My mother kept them when they were young, and she would read to them and she said that was her job," Beth said. "She just took care of those kids and, you know, it takes a village, and we were blessed that one of our close family members was able to take care of them so I could work."

It's easy to stereotype life in a small town, particularly if you didn't grow up in one. However, a small town oftentimes hides a larger community of support and a depth of reassurance and belonging that is sometimes lacking in more urban areas.

"There are misconceptions of a small town, especially in the medical field related to health literacy and things like that," Ann Marie said. "There are no physicians who practice in the town itself. We have a clinic now, but when I was growing up, we didn't have a doctor's office, no clinic, no pain care. I think it just takes a village to raise a child. I mean, I think it worked wonderfully for raising us. Our church members, fellow people within the community, all helped. My granddad had me out there selling Lions Club and VFW tickets throughout my whole youth to raise money for those less fortunate."

Each of the Brown children remembers fondly some of their family traditions, whether it was fishing in their Aunt Jane's pond every weekend or spending time with their grandparents.

"One thing we did as kids with our grandpa on our father's side is spend time with him around Thanksgiving," Jimmy said. "He would always have a garden and a sugar cane crop. We would harvest it and process it through a mill and then boil the juice to make cane syrup. This was a thing he did with his family when he was a kid almost a hundred years ago.

"He was 97 when he died two years ago. That was a cool thing to be part of. A piece of history. Things we did like that, which just seemed fun at the time, carried some of the values with it that we utilize today in our careers. It's just a magical thing to be a part of — bringing all the family together like that."



Doyle and Beth Brown



Mary Beth Brown works with Danielle Brown (no relation), a standardized patient, as part of her PA curriculum.



Ann Marie and Jimmy passed each other in the hallway at TMH and shared this selfie with their mom.

Jimmy added that growing up, he and his father would go squirrel hunting, something he still enjoys.

“I got my wife into it — and she’s actually a better shot than me,” he said, adding she is currently a nurse at TMH and is pursuing her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree at FSU’s College of Nursing.

Fishing is another of Jimmy’s hobbies, one that has become legendary at the College of Medicine — and people are still talking about it.

“They told us this story when I took a tour of the college when I first got here and I said, ‘That was my brother!’ Mary Beth said. ‘I called him and said they were still talking about it.’”

What “they” were talking about was the time two medical students decided to go fishing and then fry up their catch in a Learning Center for all their classmates — driving some faculty and staff out of the building.

“We had just had an exam and had some downtime,” Jimmy said. “We went down to St. Mark’s National Wildlife Refuge and caught some mullet. My friend is the real fisherman, so he did most of the catching, and I just kind of helped him prepare them, and the plan was to cook for the classmates and whoever wanted some, and I think we forgot the rule about cooking in the LCs, and we were reminded when the frying fish stunk up the whole building.”

Although three of the Brown children have chosen medicine as a career, two have not and are successfully pursuing their own professions. The youngest, Sara Catherine, is enrolled at FSU-Panama City, pursuing a degree in Civil Engineering,

while the oldest, Bobby Lee Bulzer, works in the Florida House of Representatives in the IT Department as a network engineer.

Although they may not get together as frequently for family dinners — which Beth said was an important part of their family life — the Browns still enjoy gathering as frequently as possible. And, for Jimmy and Ann Marie, their odds of seeing each other frequently have increased, at least for the time being, as Ann Marie continues her residency at TMH.

“On Jimmy’s first week [at Southern Medical Group], I was on inpatient medicine,” Ann Marie said. “As I was finishing up my rounds around seven, he was coming through and we would walk down the halls. I could tell it was him. We were all the way across. I couldn’t see the face or anything. I could tell it was him by the way he was walking and the shape of his body. He’s skinny. And I did like this [gave him a little wave]. He didn’t see me. He got a little bit closer, and he saw me. He did the exact same thing. I thought it was so funny. We sent our mom a selfie on his first day of work when I saw him on rounds.”

In addition to serving as a county commissioner, Doyle runs his own septic tank business and works at Florida’s Department of Agriculture. Beth has been a teacher for 32 years in Liberty County. They may not have any other children entering medical careers, but they, and the community in which they live, will have a trio of excellent and compassionate health care professionals to turn to when needed.

“Our parents raised us with all of the love they could and raised us with God first, family second,” said Ann Marie. “Everything else will fall into place afterwards, and I think that was invaluable to instill in us. I mean, I love my family very much.”

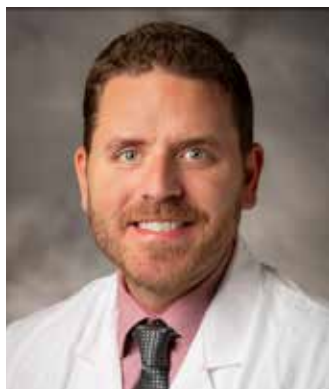
Medical Hall of Fame to induct 10, name first recipient of Mission Award

As the FSU College of Medicine celebrates its 25th anniversary, it's fitting that the 2025 inductees into the Medical Hall of Fame consist of outstanding health care professionals who span the history of the institution — ranging from a member of the PIMS class (the pre-cursor to the College of Medicine), a dean emeritus, and alumni who continue their good work and serve as the college's best ambassadors in their respective communities.

"Congratulations to each of these inductees," said Alma Littles, M.D., dean of the college. "Through their hard work, dedication to our profession and commitment to medical education, they uphold the values and the mission of our college. Without question, they will leave a positive legacy in their respective fields, and it gives me great pleasure to welcome them into the Hall of Fame — it's very well deserved!"

The 2025 Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony will be held Nov. 8 at 6 p.m. in the Champions Club at Florida State University's Doak Campbell Stadium. The ceremony is part of the annual College of Medicine Alumni Weekend, Nov. 7-9.

THE 2025 INDUCTEES



Thomas Beardsley (M.D., '14)

A two-time alumnus, receiving both his bachelor's degree and M.D. from FSU, Thomas Beardsley, M.D., currently practices emergency medicine at the University of Florida College of Medicine, Jacksonville, where he serves as an assistant professor.

Beardsley completed his Emergency Medicine residency in 2018 at Yale-New Haven Hospital, New Haven, Connecticut. In 2019, he completed a fellowship in Medical Simulation, also at Yale — a specialty he has pursued throughout his career. It has led him to hold assistant professor and medical director positions for the Center for Simulation Education and Safety Research in Jacksonville, where he continues to contribute to both medical education and patient safety initiatives.

In his role as center director, Beardsley leads the entire simulation curriculum for 46 emergency medicine residents, applying high level, simulation-based educational initiatives, allowing residents to learn high-stakes emergency medicine skills in a safe environment. As an assistant professor, Beardsley earned several awards, including:

- 2020 and 2022: Emergency Medicine Residency Teacher of the Year Award
- 2023 and 2024: UF College of Medicine Jacksonville Exemplary Teacher Award

Angela Guzman (M.D., '14)

To say that Angela Guzman, M.D., embodies FSU's mission,



vision and values is an understatement. She first got involved in the College of Medicine's pathway programs in 2005 as a freshman. With a strong interest in medicine and helping others, she was active in SSTRIDE's collegiate component, USSTRIDE or undergraduate SSTRIDE, as well as MAPS, the Multicultural Association of Pre-medical

Students, where she held several leadership roles. Guzman then successfully completed the college's yearlong post-baccalaureate Bridge to Clinical Medicine Program. From there, she was admitted to the College of Medicine and earned her M.D.

Today, she serves as an OB/GYN clerkship faculty member at the college's Orlando Regional Campus, associate program director for the University of Central Florida/HCA Osceola Regional OB/GYN Residency Program in Kissimmee, and as a hospitalist for Woman's Health Centers.

While at the College of Medicine, Guzman was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha and Gold Humanism honor societies. As chief resident at Orlando Health Winnie Palmer Hospital for Women & Babies, she earned numerous awards.



J. Ocie Harris, M.D.

Now bearing the title of dean emeritus, J. Ocie Harris, M.D., served as the second dean of the College of Medicine, a post he held from January 2003 through July 2008. During his tenure, he laid a foundation for growth and navigated the Liaison Committee on Medical Education process for

the college to achieve full accreditation.

After a 30-year career at the University of Florida College of Medicine, Harris came to FSU in November 2000 as associate dean for medical education and was the first physician to serve on the faculty. He was responsible for overseeing the development of the regional campuses in Orlando, Pensacola and Tallahassee, and for recruiting many of the college's clinical faculty. During his tenure, construction began on the building that now houses the college.

In July 2003, the college grew with the establishment of the Department of Geriatrics, becoming the first medical school in the state with a separate department devoted to geriatrics training for medical students. In October of that year, under Harris' leadership, the college was approved to begin its first doctoral program, a Ph.D. in Biomedical Sciences.

Since 2005, the graduating medical student or students showing the best all-around promise of becoming a physician of the highest caliber have been presented the J. Ocie Harris Outstanding Student Award in his honor.

Nariman Heshmati (M.D., '05)



As the president of the inaugural graduating class of 2005, Nari Heshmati, M.D., was instrumental in building the infrastructure students today still enjoy.

Heshmati worked with the FSU Student Government Association to secure funding for many College of Medicine student interest groups and served as its

first SGA student senator. He co-founded the Medical Student Council, which serves as the umbrella organization for groups within the college.

After completion of his OB/GYN residency, Heshmati moved to Washington state and joined The Everett Clinic. Ultimately, he oversaw all surgical and specialty operations and value-based care for both The Everett Clinic and The Polyclinic. He also oversaw the labor and delivery unit at Providence Everett.

Heshmati served as the chair of the Washington Section of the American College of OB/GYNs and as president of the Washington State Medical Association. He was appointed by Gov. Jay Inslee to the Pandemic Statewide After-Action Report Task Force to analyze the state's response to COVID-19.

In 2024, Heshmati returned to Florida to become the chief physician and operations executive for Lee Physician Group in Fort Myers. In that capacity, he oversees 1,250 clinicians at more than 100 sites in Southwest Florida. He also has oversight over two FSU College of Medicine residency programs, including Family Medicine and Internal Medicine, and supports his teams in establishing a new FSU OB/GYN residency program.

Amy Neal (M.D., '08)

By combining her ability to take on leadership roles, her thirst for knowledge, and her commitment to patient care and family and obesity medicine, Amy Neal, M.D., continues to make a positive impact on the medical profession, as well as on the lives of her patients and future physicians.



Neal earned three degrees from Florida State — an undergraduate degree, followed by her M.D.

and an MBA in 2021. As a capstone to her M.D. degree, she received the Outstanding Graduate in Family Medicine award.

After completing her Family Medicine Residency at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare in 2011, Neal began her career at Capital Health Plan in Tallahassee in urgent care and then transitioned to primary care in 2016. She was elected president of the medical staff at CHP in 2016.

Neal was promoted to associate medical director in 2019 and holds that position today. She currently supervises and hires physicians and actively participates in 20 committees within the CHP organization such as quality, credentialing, new employment, and CHP electronic health record Nex Gen's core team. Outside of CHP, Neal provides leadership on the Board of Directors of Capital Medical Society.

Continued on next page >>

She currently serves as a clerkship faculty member in the College of Medicine's Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, teaching medical students in her clinic.

Richard Rodriguez (M.D., '09)

Through his work as an emergency medicine physician, advocacy for the medical profession, commitment to medical education and community involvement, Richard Rodriguez, M.D.,



is an outstanding ambassador for the FSU College of Medicine.

Rodriguez is a full-time physician with Excels Medical Associates in Tampa, where he sees patients in the emergency departments of St. Joseph's Hospitals. His dedication to patient well-being

has been recognized with awards such as the "Physician of the Month" by the St. Joseph's Professional Practice Council and as an "Alumni Belen Hero" by his high school alma mater for his efforts on the frontlines during the COVID-19 pandemic. He was voted by his peers as a Top Doc in Emergency Medicine for three consecutive years (2021-2023) and has been recognized as such in *Tampa Magazine*.

Rodriguez is deeply involved in medical education and mentorship, serving as Volunteer/Collaborative Faculty in the University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine, where he holds the rank of affiliate assistant professor.

Beyond his clinical and educational endeavors, he serves on the Board of Directors of Excels Medical Associates. He is the associate medical director of Emergency Services at St. Joseph's Hospital South and medical director of Emergency Transport Services at St. Joseph's Hospitals.

A member of the Hillsborough County Emergency Medical Planning Council since 2016, Rodriguez has served as its vice chair since 2021. The EMPC is a governmental body that reports to and advises the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners. He has also been an active member of the Hillsborough County Trauma Agency and its audit committee, and in 2016, chaired the Spinal Immobilization Guidelines Subcommittee.



Rashad Sullivan (M.D., '13)

Service to the community, the medical profession and the College of Medicine have been career hallmarks of Rashad Sullivan, M.D.

Following his 2006 graduation from Florida A&M University with a degree in biological sciences pre-med, with a minor in

chemistry, Sullivan worked for the FSU College of Medicine's SSTRIDE program, a pathway program for students in designated middle and high schools. He has attended and spoken at every SSTRIDE reunion since his medical school days, forming mentoring relationships with students interested in STEM careers.

In 2007, he co-founded Youth Motivation & Empowerment, a movement that seeks to persuade inner-city and rural teenagers in Florida's Big Bend and South Georgia to make positive life-long decisions. He has remained active in Y.M.E. ever since.

After starting the Bridge to Clinical Medicine post-baccalaureate program in 2008, he was a guest speaker at Lincoln High School's Advanced Placement Summer Institute. Sullivan also volunteered with Neighborhood Health. Following his acceptance into medical school, he continued his outreach to youth and volunteered at the Family Worship and Praise Center Ministry for the Homeless.

Sullivan earned his M.D. in 2013, completed an internship in general surgery at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in 2014, a residency in orthopedics there in 2020, serving as chief resident, and a fellowship in adult total joint reconstruction at Florida Orthopaedic Institute in Tampa in 2021. Throughout his journey, he has regularly returned to the Tallahassee area to continue his outreach efforts.

Today, Sullivan is a surgeon at Mid State Orthopaedic & Sports Medicine Clinic in Alexandria, Louisiana, and also works as a consultant from home.



Richard Sheridan, M.D.
(PIMS, '76)

The love of medicine runs deep in the family of Richard Sheridan. As a proud undergraduate alumnus and a PIMS graduate, Sheridan watched with pride as his son, Stephen, graduated from the College of Medicine in 2015.

Long after his own graduation

from PIMS and the University of Florida College of Medicine, as well as a successful career as a neonatologist prior to retirement in Tampa, Sheridan has remained a staunch supporter and a great advocate for FSU and its College of Medicine.

At the college, he served on the FSU Medical Alumni Board and was the board's president from 2021 through 2023. He's also an active member of the Leadership Council of the College of Arts and Sciences, where he received his undergraduate degree.

Sheridan was a member of Phi Eta Sigma (1973) and Phi Beta Kappa (1976) honor societies, recognizing academic excellence. He completed his internship and residency at the Le Bonheur Children's Hospital at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis (1980-1982), specializing in pediatrics. From 1982 to 1984, he was a fellow in neonatal and perinatal medicine at E.H. Crump Women's Hospital and Perinatal Center, University of Tennessee in Memphis.

Sheridan is board-certified with the National Board of Medical Examiners and with the American Academy of Pediatrics, where he is a fellow. He is also a member of the Hillsborough County Pediatric Society, the Florida Society of Neonatologists, and the Irish American Pediatric Society.



Sanam Zahedi (M.D., '14)

Committed to her profession and alma mater, Sanam Zahedi, M.D., continues to take on leadership roles in both. A member of the FSU Medical Alumni Board since 2021, Zahedi also serves as a HOST volunteer, a College of Medicine program in which

people provide medical students with a place to stay when they need to travel as part of their education, whether for a specialty rotation offered at another campus or to interview for a residency or fellowship program.

Zahedi has made significant scholarly contributions to the field of plastic surgery. Her publications in leading journals, *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* and *Annals of Plastic Surgery*, showcase her research on the impact of social media on plastic surgery trends, breast augmentation and the implications of socioeconomic factors in breast reconstruction. Her research not only advances the field but also brings attention to important demographic and social issues that influence patient care.

Her leadership roles in the field are equally impressive. As a founding core host and marketing executive of The Loupe Podcast, she has contributed to global medical education by providing valuable resources and discussions for medical students, residents and surgeons. This podcast, which ranks in the top 2% of educational podcasts, serves as a crucial supplement for those preparing for plastic surgery exams and pursuing continuous learning. Additionally, Zahedi serves the American Society of Plastic Surgeons as a member of the Women Plastic Surgeons Steering Committee and the Annual Meeting Educational Program committee.

OUR 2024 INDUCTEES

Since last year's Alumni Weekend was canceled because of Hurricane Helene, the 2024 inductees will be officially welcomed to the Hall of Fame at this year's event. Their information appeared in the Winter 2025 issue of FSUMED magazine. The 2024 inductees:

- **Joseph Camps, M.D. (PIMS '79)**
- **Daniel Van Durme, M.D.**
(faculty member – inducted posthumously)
- **Geden Franck (M.D., '14)**
- **Shoshana Hallowell (M.D., '10)**
- **Myra Hurt, Ph.D.**
(First Acting Dean – inducted posthumously)

FSU Medical Alumni

HALL of FAME

Questions about the Hall of Fame?

Contact Lindsay Miller at lindsay.miller@med.fsu.edu

Class of '15 grad tapped for Hall of Fame is chosen as first recipient of Mission Award

Congratulations to Shermeeka Hogans-Mathews (M.D., '15) for being chosen as the first recipient of the Mission Award and for being selected for the Medical Hall of Fame in 2025.

In addition to being a proud alumna, Hogans-Mathews joined the College of Medicine faculty in 2018 and currently serves as an associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health. She is also a physician at FSU Primary-Health™ in Tallahassee.

“As a first-time faculty recipient of the Mission Award, this moment feels truly surreal,” Hogans-Mathews said. “In my opinion, this award is one of the highest honors, and to have received it both as a student and now as a faculty member is deeply humbling. This recognition affirms that students from underserved and underprivileged backgrounds can grow into exemplary, community-driven physicians who carry the mission full circle.”

The Mission Award is the latest in a string of awards for Hogans-Mathews. In 2023, she received the Exceptional Mentor Award, presented by the American Medical Women's Association. As a student, she was inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society and Family Medicine Scholars. Hogans-Mathews also received national attention twice as a student, first when she was awarded the Association of American Medical Colleges' Herbert W. Nickens Medical Student Award and later with the American Medical Association's Minority Scholars Award.

As for the Hall of Fame induction, Hogans-Mathews added, “It is truly uplifting. The College of Medicine has a tradition of honoring the best, brightest and most patient-centered physicians – those who exemplify excellence in patient care, medical education and service to our communities. I am deeply honored to be recognized for the fruits of my labor, and I remain committed to inspiring others to rise, lead and make a lasting difference in medicine and beyond.”



Shermeeka Hogans-Mathews, M.D.

Criteria for the Mission Award include demonstrated excellence in furthering the college's mission to practice patient-centered health care, discover and advance knowledge, and respond to community needs, especially through service to underserved populations.

Nominations for the Hall of Fame class of 2026

It's never too early to submit a nomination for the 2026 Hall of Fame!



Scan the QR code or visit fla.st/07WMNP8I to submit your



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