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Questions, comments or story ideas for Pathways? Call 309-680-8613 or email adv-peoria@listserv.uic.edu

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Academic Medical Centers have an extraordinary economic impact on their communities, according to a report released this year by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). UICOMP and its major academic affiliate hospitals similarly have a significant impact on the Peoria area economy.

According to the AAMC study, Illinois medical schools and teaching hospitals contribute 231,834 jobs and about $20.4 billion to the state’s economy! At the national level, medical schools and teaching hospitals support over 6.3 million jobs and contribute a staggering $562 billion or about 3 percent of the national gross domestic product, according to study. At the local level, UICOMP’s economic impact is estimated at about $167 million based on previously used AAMC methodologies. Of course, our partner hospitals have a much larger impact.

How does UICOMP contribute to this economic impact? We are a vibrant campus. I am continually amazed at the discoveries, the innovations, and the individual commitment I see. We have more students than ever and a growing family of faculty. We have new educational programs and a single shared curriculum across three campuses. We are creating new knowledge in our research laboratories. We are expanding our connections with our community. We are not talking about what we are going to do, we are executing on our commitments.

UICOMP is the only campus across the entire College of Medicine where first-year medical students are embedded in ambulatory care clinics. We are giving our students early clinical experiences to complement what they are learning in the classroom.

Our faculty are publishing their findings in top tier medical journals impacting medical care across the U.S. One recent example is a New England Journal of Medicine article about the contamination of synthetic cannabinoids with an anticoagulant. This article describes the outcome of this poisoning epidemic and describes how it was managed locally so that other communities could use us as a model.

Our collaboration with Jump is generating not just ideas and entrepreneurial businesses but also changing the way our students learn anatomy and how future students and residents learn dermatology.

Innovative ideas are spawning discoveries in our basic science laboratories, leading to additional NIH funded research on campus. For example, Dr. Krishna Veeravalli, a junior member of the UICOMP faculty, recently received $1.8 million for a NIH supported grant for his research in stroke. His success is a result of his perseverance and determination coupled with strong local clinical programs in stroke.

We are strengthening existing ties and creating new connections to our community. A first-ever community service forum was held on the UICOMP campus linking students and residents with volunteer and service opportunities at several local not-for-profits and social service agencies.

We should all be proud of the healthcare in Peoria. I am certainly proud of the faculty and staff at UICOMP. We are making a difference in the lives of our patients, our students and residents, and our community. I have great hopes for the future.

When the University of Illinois College of Medicine adopted a new curriculum that integrated the basic and clinical sciences across all its campuses, Peoria took that approach one step further.

Unique to Peoria, students participate in the Early Longitudinal Immersion Interprofessional Team Experience, or ELI²TE. Now into its second year, this year-long, longitudinal program imbeds students into a clinic where they experience team-based, patient-centered care first-hand from various members of the care team.

“I feel as though I’ve seen a lot and gotten to do some cool things. I liked being able to see some of what we were learning about in class, especially with drugs. It helped to reinforce side effects and use. The experience was valuable because it allowed me to get in the clinic early on in medical school. This early clinical exposure was a reason why I chose to come to the U of I.” – a UICOMP M2 student

While most of the clinical sites are in Peoria, all are within an hour’s drive of UICOMP. Students begin the program just two months into the start of medical school and spend half a day every other week in the clinic. As students move into their second year of medical school, they provide guidance to the new M1 students as they come into the program.

Interested in being an ELI²TE physician preceptor?

ELI²TE is only possible because of the dozens of amazing physician faculty and the hard-working health care teams in their offices. If you are interested in participating in the ELI²TE program, contact Angela O’Bryant, Clinical Associate and Director of Academic Programs at UICOMP, 309-671-8495 or aobryant@uic.edu.
UICOMP Holds First-ever Donor Memorial Service

UICOMP held its first-ever Donor Memorial Service on November 14, 2018, to honor and pay respect to those who have donated their bodies in the benefit of medical student education at UICOMP.

Students paid homage to their cadavers by writing cards to the donors’ family members. The program included performances by the medical student groups, Docapella and Musicians in Medicine. And information about the donors, provided by their respective family members, were on display.

“We walk the line between a person and their disease and frequently fail to think about the patient in their larger realm,” said UICOMP student Lauren Kennedy in retelling her own experience after her grandparents, Jack and Carol Kennedy, previously had donated their bodies to medical schools. “For every ‘cool case’ we see, there is a story. Each case was unpleasant news for a family, each case was a challenge of love, faith and a test of fortitude. These cadavers, these people are our first example to that. While we know very little about them, we respect them and thank them for the selflessness that will help us become doctors. Hopefully, their spirit will remain with us always and help us to remember that behind each case is a person, a story and a family.”

A gross anatomy lab was built on the UICOMP campus in 2017 to accommodate expansion with the addition of first-year medical students. After the completion of the gross anatomy course, UICOMP students will now hold an annual memorial service to honor that gift.

“Gross anatomy and the dissection of a human cadaver is a longstanding tradition in medical education and would not be possible without the donation made by these individuals,” said Dr. Meenakshy Aiyer, UICOMP Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. “Medical students often never forget the experience and consider the cadaver to be their first patient.”

Cadaveric dissection at UICOMP is possible only through the generous, whole body donations made by those individual donors to the Anatomical Gift Association of Illinois (AGA). While UICOMP does not directly take bodies for donation, the AGA does accept donor requests to be directed to a specific institution, such as UICOMP.
The newest class of medical students at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria is the largest ever. The 67 students in the Class of 2022 is an increase of nine compared to 2017. All of the students also are from Illinois.

The new students were welcomed to campus and into the medical profession on Friday, August 10 during the UICOMP annual White Coat ceremony held at the Jump Trading Simulation & Education Center, where students recited an oath and received their white medical coat.

Total enrollment at UICOMP is currently 244 students, the largest in UICOMP history. That’s compared to 163 students in 2013 and 235 students last year. While UICOMP is experiencing growth, including the addition of first-year students in 2017, class sizes remain relatively small compared to most medical schools across the U.S., a point of pride for UICOMP and celebrated by students.

The ceremony was live streamed via Facebook Live and can be seen from UICOMP’s Facebook page, www.facebook.com/UICOMPPeoria.
UICOMP hosted its first annual Community Service Fair on November 8. More than 20 Peoria-area organizations met with medical students, residents, faculty and staff to share the volunteer opportunities available for community service.

"As many medical students and residents are new to the Peoria area, they desire to learn more about the community they are serving. Volunteer opportunities are a great way for these future physicians to learn how social determinants of health affect their patients which ultimately helps to care for them in a more comprehensive way," said Angela O’Bryant, Clinical Associate and Director of Academic Programs in the Department of Health Sciences Education at UICOMP.

The Fair was a joint effort with UICOMP and the U of I Extension Service to build partnerships with medical students, residents, and Peoria organizations.

Stats from the event:
- 44 medical students
- 6 residents
- 13 faculty
- 21 organizations

Among some of the organizations present included Habitat for Humanity, the Center for Prevention of Abuse, Peoria Public Schools Wraparound Center, Cordoba Healthcare, Hult Center for Healthy Living, Central Illinois Friends, and the University of Illinois Extension.

Comments from students included several expressing gratitude at the variety. "Now, I have to decide which organization to engage with … that will work best with the time I have available," said one student. Another noted: "I found a place to volunteer that will foster my own wellness."

### Alpha Omega Alpha

Congratulations to the UICOMP students selected for admission to the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society. To qualify for membership, students must place in the top 16 percent of the 300-plus students across the four campuses of the College of Medicine.
Renovations continue on the UICOMP campus this year with a new, technology-rich active learning classroom for medical students.

Located on the first floor, the 1,540 square-foot room is a slightly smaller version of the OSF HealthCare Learning Studio just above it. The new classroom is designed for students to work together in teams. The space includes 10 tables, each with seven chairs, 55-inch monitors, microphones, charging stations, and glass boards to write information. The room also features a mobile podium, a 98-inch touch screen monitor, and an 82-inch monitor.

"It’s a beautiful classroom and a welcomed addition to the learning environment for students as we continue into the second year of rolling out the new curriculum," said Leslie Hammersmith, UICOMP’s Assistant Dean for Technology Enhanced Education.

Helping to make the renovation work possible were two key philanthropic gifts. Stu and Nancy Levenick continued their commitment to the University of Illinois with a generous $250,000 donation to UICOMP. A Washington High School graduate and former Illinois football team captain, Stu Levenick retired from Caterpillar, Inc. in 2014 after 37 years with the earth-moving manufacturer.

The Gilmore Foundation generously donated more than $260,000 toward the UICOMP campus expansion campaign. Born and raised in Peoria, Bob Gilmore worked his way up from an apprentice on the shop floor at Caterpillar to ascend the company’s management ranks. The World War II B-17 Air Force navigator later served as vice president of Cat’s U.S. manufacturing operations, and went on to become president and Chief Operating Officer of the company from 1977 to 1985.

“We are grateful for the support we have received to help carry out our mission, which is important for Peoria, the region, and the University of Illinois,” said Dr. Meenakshy Aiyer, UICOMP Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. “The gifts provide our students with the technology and learning spaces needed to prepare them for becoming future physicians for Illinois and the nation.”

Improvements are on the drawing board for future improvement to the on-campus clinic, the Donald Rager Clinical Skills Laboratory. Renovations would provide a much-needed facelift on the ambulatory clinic space, including adding modern technology and audio/visual equipment to monitor the teaching and learning.

A philanthropic drive, IGNITE: The Campaign for Peoria Medicine, is raising funds for the additional upgrades.
UICOMP and UnityPoint Health – Methodist have expanded their existing partnership to include Proctor and Pekin hospitals.

The revised affiliation agreement, which governs the relationship between the two entities, reflects the recent growth in enrollment at UICOMP and the greater need for additional clinical experiences and physician mentors for medical students in Peoria. The expanded partnership also reflects the growth of UnityPoint Health among three Peoria-area hospitals, Methodist, Proctor, and Pekin.

“UICOMP and Methodist have a long history of collaboration going back to the formation of the medical school in Peoria,” said UICOMP Regional Dean Dr. Sara Rusch. “This revised affiliation agreement expands the clinical opportunities medical students have in Peoria, and in turn adds to our ability to attract and retain future physicians in central Illinois. It also provides teaching and academic opportunities for interested physicians at Proctor and Pekin hospitals.”

UnityPoint Health – Methodist merged with Proctor Hospital to form one health system in September 2013. Pekin Hospital joined the UnityPoint Health affiliation in January 2017.

“UnityPoint Health is proud of our long history with the University of Illinois College of Medicine - Peoria. We are excited to grow our affiliation and provide more opportunities for future physicians,” said Debbie Simon, President and CEO of UnityPoint Health – Methodist.
Innovative App to Help Medical Students Identify Skin Lesions

By Scott Barrows, MA, FAMI
Medical Visualization
Jump Simulation

Dr. Thomas Golemon has spent decades treating patients and educating medical students and residents.

The former UIUCOMP Chair of Family and Community Medicine and now Professor Emeritus, has long held an interest in identifying, diagnosing and treating skin lesions, skin masses and other dermatologic abnormalities – a skill he has passed on to many.

But how do you train someone to identify rare lesions or rashes that may be seen in a clinic perhaps only once every few years? Clinical photographs are helpful but not enough.

“The question became ‘how can we design a realistic lesion or rash that looks and feels like the real thing?’” Dr. Golemon asked.

Dr. Golemon turned to Jump Simulation and the Applied Research for Community Health through Engineering and Simulation program.

Called ARCHES for short, the endowment program is a partnership between OSF HealthCare and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In March 2018, ARCHES funding was granted to Dr. Golemon, Dr. Stephen Boppart, a professor of electrical and computer engineering who heads the Biophotonics Imaging Laboratory at the Beckman Institute on the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign campus, and me (Scott Barrows), the Director of Medical Visualization at Jump Simulation/OSF Innovation.
Creating Life-Like Skin

Housed in the Biophotonics Imaging Lab at the Beckman Institute, the UIUC portion of the team is creating an interactive mobile application – an app for smartphones – with an expansive skin lesion photo database. More than just a library of images, however, the application will work in combination with a semi-transparent layer of synthetic skin that will enhance the images projected through it to simulate the look of the real thing.

The vision for the next generation of the model will include electro-activated skin models where the surface topography and material stiffness can be controlled electronically by the mobile application, depending on the skin lesion or rash being simulated.

“This project has the potential to significantly advance medical simulations, education and training not only in dermatology, but also in all general medical specialties that examine the skin,” said Dr. Boppart. “Currently, most training occurs through viewing photographs of skin lesions or examining patients. This project advances this educational experience by giving students the ability to see, touch and feel realistic skin lesions.”

The Peoria team at Jump is working to create and catalogue the skin lesion image library and coordinate the integration of those images with mobile technology. The new learning platform will be made available for both Android and Apple iOS mobile devices. Testing and evaluation will take place at UICOMP and in clinical settings.
The University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria was awarded $1.8 million by the National Institutes of Health to expand a series of preclinical research studies over the next five years involving ischemic stroke.

Researchers at the UICOMP campus have identified a specific enzyme typically not found in healthy brains but that becomes prevalent following an ischemic stroke. Called MMP-12, or matrix metalloproteinase-12, preventing the production of this molecule after ischemic stroke in laboratory animals has shown to prevent continued brain damage.

“What we’ve seen is remarkable and promising in terms of providing a new line of treatment for ischemic stroke,” said Dr. Krishna Kumar Veeravalli, a UICOMP assistant professor in the departments of cancer biology and pharmacology, neurosurgery, and neurology.

Stroke is the leading cause of serious, long-term disability, affecting nearly 800,000 people annually. About 85 percent of strokes are categorized as ischemic. An ischemic stroke occurs when a clot blocks a blood vessel, cutting off blood flow to a part of the brain.

The NIH funding award will assist the stroke research team at UICOMP to test the effect of new therapy on brain damage and neurological recovery in stroke models. Initial studies at UICOMP were supported in part by funding from the OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute.

“This project illustrates the collaborative work by clinicians at OSF HealthCare and research scientists here at the College of Medicine,” UICOMP Regional Dean Dr. Sara Rusch said.

Dr. Veeravalli said the new therapy could be used in conjunction with FDA-approved conventional clot-busting treatment for ischemic stroke. Study results also could see a potential fast-track to patient use. While scientific discoveries often take 12 to 15 years to get to and through approved clinical trials, MMP-12 regulation is already the focus of current clinical trials involving treatment related to respiratory diseases.

Learn more about Dr. Veeravalli and his lab online by visiting peoria.medicine.uic.edudepartments/cbp/faculty/ and clicking on his name.
The same receptors that tell your brain when something is hot may provide new answers to addressing chronic pain, researchers at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria say.

UICOMP was awarded $235,000 by the National Institutes of Health to expand a series of studies over the next five years that focus on two “heat sensitive channels” or pathways. The research is a collaboration between UICOMP and Rutgers New Jersey Medical School in New Jersey, and Temple University in Pennsylvania.

“When we experience pain, especially through inflammation and thermal stimuli, that’s the pain receptor telling the brain there’s a problem. We’re looking at how we can control or adjust the body’s communication to safely and effectively eliminate pain,” said Dr. Eleonora Zakharian, a lead researcher in the study at UICOMP.

The pain receptors, called TRPV1 and TRPM3, also offer a means of addressing pain without the use of addictive opiates, Dr. Zakharian said.

The research conducted in Peoria includes a state-of-the-art technique called planar lipid bilayers, a method that focuses in on a single molecule at a time using artificial membranes and induction. The process allows researcher to dissect among drugs that directly act on the channel and affect its function. The prominent benefit of this method is that it establishes direct actions of the modulator-molecule on the channel activity at the single molecular level.

Chronic pain is an unmet medical need with associated costs in the U.S. estimated at between $150 billion and $600 billion annually. Current treatment options either have limited effectiveness against severe pain, or if effective, often addictive.
Research at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria employs dozens of people in its laboratories, attracts physicians and scientists from around the world, leads to new discoveries, new partnerships and collaborations, and is an economic asset to the community.

The type of research conducted at UICOMP centers on four distinct areas: cancer, neuroscience (such as Alzheimer’s Disease, stroke, and toxicology), health outcomes, and medical education particularly as it relates to simulation.

By far the largest area of focus is cancer.

Since the College of Medicine completed construction of the Cancer Research Center in December 2011 – a $13 million public-private investment – cancer research and development continues to be the primary focus at UICOMP. The research aims to improve cancer therapies and eliminate the disease around the globe. Led by Dr. Bento Soares, world renowned for his contributions in genomics, genetics, and cancer biology, including to the Human Genome Project, here is a glimpse at the innovative cancer research underway.

Brain tumor-initiating cells

Dr. Bento Soares and Dr. Sergey Malchenko are studying brain tumor-initiating cells. These are cells responsible for tumor growth and drug resistance.

Despite the significance of these types of cells, little was known until more recently because of the difficulty in obtaining sufficient quantities to study. The group developed a model of tumors, a family of malignant childhood brain tumors resistant to current treatments, and used it to isolate large quantities of the tumor-initiating cells. With this, they were able to characterize these cells, how they function, and identify leads for developing new drugs. The group is currently conducting studies using existing drugs in new ways to as a targeted therapy for this very aggressive childhood cancer.

Glioblastoma

Dr. Kiran Velpula, and neurosurgeon-scientist Dr. Andrew Tsung are studying novel treatments for glioblastoma, the most common and deadly form of brain cancer. This is the type of cancer Arizona Senator John McCain is battling and that Senator Ted Kennedy died from in 2009.

Working in the young field of metabolic oncology, they are targeting key molecules necessary for cancer cells to live and grow. By robbing cancer of energy (and leaving healthy brain cells intact), the hope is that glioblastoma can be treated more effectively. Employing burgeoning young medical student researchers, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate research assistants, the laboratory at UICOMP is diverse and spans multiple areas. The laboratory also is actively supported by the local community with special recognition to the Mark Linder Walk for the Mind, an annual event raising awareness and funds to support local brain tumor research to advance cancer treatment.
The Gut Microbiome and Leukemia

Dr. Peter Gyarmati leads a group whose goal is to increase survival rate and quality of life for leukemic patients. Bloodstream infections are the major cause of death in leukemia.

Dr. Gyarmati and his team have found that the gut microbiota is a main source of pathogens in bloodstream infection in leukemia. They are studying the structure of the intestinal environment in patients with leukemia by looking at massive amounts of DNA through an automated process. The aim is to develop new treatment options to prevent bacteria from entering the bloodstream from the gut. This would reduce the risk of infectious complications and increase the survival rate of patients with leukemia.

Dr. Yajing Song, a researcher in the group, developed an inexpensive, rapid technique using ordinary filter paper, which allows bedside pathogen detection. Early detection can reduce infection-related death in leukemia.

Medulloblastoma

Dr. Swapna Asuthkar and her team conducts research on medulloblastoma, the most common type of malignant pediatric brain cancer. Specifically, her lab is interested in immune checkpoints and epigenetics. Immune checkpoints involves analyzing points in healthy cells that contribute to proper immune system function but that also are used by cancers to develop and progress. Recent findings in their lab show how cancer cells can “hide” from the immune system. They believe this process will provide clues for the development of more effective treatments for this aggressive disease.

The other focus of the lab involves epigenetics. Recently, epigenetics has become a large part of cancer research. Epigenetics is the study of factors that influence gene expression – what causes genes to switch “on” or “off”. Their team is focused on one molecule in particular that increases transcription of genes that lead to medulloblastoma development and progression. If this process is halted, the cancer is more likely to respond to treatment.
Pancreatic Cancer

Pancreatic cancer often is so deadly because by the time it is diagnosed it usually is too late to successfully treat. This is the type of cancer Steve Jobs died from in 2015. Pancreatic cancer at an early stage shows almost no symptoms.

Tumors need nutrients to grow, and for this growth, they attract blood vessels. Successful suppression of these tumor-induced blood vessels can “starve” tumor growth. Dr. Christopher Gondi and his team use genetically modified zebrafish, which possess blood vessels that glow green under special lighting. With these special zebrafish as a model, they are able to study and develop methods to suppress tumor-induced blood vessel growth.

The pancreatic cancer research at UICOMP is supported with help locally by the Springfield-based McElroy Foundation and also by the Theresa Tracy Strive to Survive Foundation by way of their annual Theresa Tracy Trot.

Cell Channels and Receptors

Dr. Eleonora Zakharian and her team of researchers are focused on studying temperature and pain receptors and their relationship to tumor development among various cancers. In one of her current projects, they are focusing on unique high-energy polymers produced by cell mitochondria. They have found these polymers play immense roles in energy metabolism and calcium homeostasis – key to the life and death of a cell and crucial for cell renewal, which can be impaired in cancers.

Recently, Dr. Zakharian’s group discovered a previously unknown function for a specific pain receptor in the nervous system and spinal cord. The finding sheds light on how the body manages inflammatory pain and it could offer new ways to address pain in patients with cancer.

Other important discoveries in her lab include finding a new testosterone receptor. This particular protein is found in abundance in the prostate and in prostate cancers. The discovery may lead to new methods for treating prostate cancer by limiting its growth or shrinking tumors.

Cancer Immunology

Dr. Sang-Oh Yoon has spent more than 15 years studying various aspects of tumor biology at Harvard Medical School, the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, Cornell University’s Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Center, and the last two at UICOMP.

His research spans various cancers, including skin cancer, cervical cancer, gastric cancer, thyroid and lymphoma cancer with dozens of publications. Dr. Yoon’s expertise is in cell signaling. He decodes cancer cell signals biochemically and molecularly that cancer cells use to grow and become resistant to treatment. His goal is to develop new ways to overcome cancer’s resistance to improve successful treatment.

Health Outcomes

Not all of the research at UICOMP is done under a microscope.

Dr. Carl Asche and his team in the Center for Outcomes Research (COR) perform economic evaluation and statistical analysis on a range of health care topics and activities. Included is multiple sclerosis, low back pain therapies, respiratory disorders, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disorders as well as cancer.

COR has published several scholarly articles and provided more than 40 presentations on oncology-related findings alone. Among them is a look at the medical costs associated with therapy in adults with colorectal cancer and evaluating treatments and corresponding costs of prostate cancer of patients treated within an inpatient and hospital-based outpatient setting. An upcoming study funded by OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurologic Institute will look at caregivers of patients with cancer. The aim will be developing an effective intervention program to reduce caregiver’s stress and improve their psychological well-being.
A research article detailing a central Illinois poison outbreak involving synthetic cannabinoids earlier this year and the therapy provided is featured in the latest issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

A study involving 34 patients at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center between March and April of 2018 were identified as having synthetic cannabinoid-associated bleeding disorders. Of those patients tested, superwarfarin, a lethal class of toxins, and more specifically, brodifacoum, commonly used to kill rats, was confirmed present in all. Symptoms were controlled with vitamin K replacement therapy. One patient in the series report died from complications of spontaneous brain hemorrhage. While the study reported on 34 patients, over 100 cases were reported in the Peoria/Pekin area.

“Our hope is that health care providers who read this will be better prepared to identify symptoms of superwarfarin poisoning and be able to appropriately manage it,” said Dr. Michael Tarantino, a Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria, the Director of the Bleeding and Clotting Disorders Institute, and a co-author of the series case study.

At least four people died and more than 150 people reportedly were sickened across Illinois after using synthetic cannabinoids believed to be laced with rat poison. Synthetic cannabinoids, commonly referred to or sold under names such as “spice” or “K2” is a class of drug created in a lab and designed to induce calm while stimulating euphoria.

Of the 34 patients in the Peoria study, 75 percent had multiple bleeding symptoms and more than half had blood present in their urine. Most also complained of having abdominal or flank pain.

Read the research article in its entirety at by going to peoria.medicine.uic.edu and clicking on the News tab.
The robotic general surgery training program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria was designated a “premier residency training program” by Intuitive Surgical, the maker of the da Vinci® robotic surgical platform.

The designation, one of only two nationwide in general surgery, recognized Peoria as being at the forefront of advanced medical technology in robotic general surgery.

“This is a milestone achievement of 16 years of work,” said Dr. David Crawford, Professor of Clinical Surgery at UICOMP and Director of Robotic Surgery at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center. “This status is indicative of what we’ve built in Peoria, which is a model for teaching and learning robotic surgical procedures and will aide in our ability to recruit general surgeons to central Illinois.”

Peoria is the first robotic general surgery Epicenter in Illinois and the second in the nation. An Epicenter is a network of experienced robotic surgeons and includes a comprehensive training program with excellent outcomes and innovative research.

The UICOMP general surgery program trains 20 physician residents annually in the 5-year program. To date, about 78 percent of resident graduates have incorporated robotic general surgery into their practice. The program uses five robotic surgical platforms – three at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center and two at UnityPoint Health – Methodist.

Currently, five general surgeons are actively teaching robotics and more than 2,000 robotic surgeries are performed annually in the areas of urology, gynecologic surgery, and general surgery. Common general surgery procedures include hernia repair, colon and rectal resection, and kidney and spleen removal.
Whether apparent or not, unconscious biases are pervasive – an unintentional favoring of certain groups, often ones that are similar to us, versus others. To help identify and address potential unconscious biases in the course of delivering healthcare is the focus of a new educational, pilot program at UICOMP.

Called “Speak up! Educate,” the program is designed to encourage caregivers to speak up when they hear comments that may reflect bias from other caregivers so concerns may be discussed and clarified openly. The program is being piloted inter-professionally within labor and delivery units.

“We want to create a safe environment in which we could have these otherwise uncomfortable conversations,” says Dr. Elsa Vazquez-Melendez, a hospitalist and Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion at UICOMP, who has spearheaded in delivering the Speak Up! Educate program. “It’s about trying to make us more aware of the assumptions we make and how what we say or do could be perceived by others and cause misunderstandings.”

The steps of the program are simple. Speak up if you hear something that makes you or others feel uncomfortable by asking that person to clarify what was said. Often, the process of restating a comment may bring awareness of how a comment may have been perceived, and would help provide resolution. A person may also need to explain how what was said created unease.

“Everyone in health care should be treated with respect. We want to make it easier to address potentially biased comments and urge people to speak up and educate others when a comment may reflect unconscious bias,” says UIICOMP Regional Dean Dr. Sara Rusch. “If you hear a comment from someone on a healthcare team you think may reflect a bias, just the process of asking that person to clarify what they meant often may resolve an otherwise unintentional impression.”

About 250 people have participated in educational sessions from UICOMP, UnityPoint Health, and OSF HealthCare. Assessment and “booster” sessions are still being devised to gauge effectiveness and to determine possible expansion.
More than 100 faculty and physicians throughout the community were honored for their service and dedication to UICOMP at the Tenth Annual Celebration of Excellence held on October 30.

Among those recognized were the recipients of the 2018 Community Health Awards: the Goodwill Stand Down for Homeless Veterans, an annual program targeting area homeless veterans, and Peoria’s first neonatologist, Dr. Tim Miller.

The evening honored a dozen faculty who earned academic promotions over the past year. Both Dr. Pushpa Joseph, the former Chair of Pathology, and Dr. Allan Campbell, the former Chair of Dermatology, were given special recognition for their many years of contribution to and in support of medical education.

Among the 2018 UICOMP Faculty Award Recipients

**Faculty of the Year**
Elsa Vazquez-Melendez, MD

**UICOMP Outstanding Research**
Amy Christison, MD
Ken-ichiro Fukuchi, MD, PhD
Christopher Gondi, PhD

**UICOMP Outstanding Service**
Jessica Hanks, MD
Asim Jaffer, MD
Kiran Velpula, PhD

**UICOMP Outstanding Teaching**
Robin Alley, MD
Jonathan Fisher, PhD
Krishna Veeravalli, PhD

**UICOMP Outstanding Clinical, Technological, or Scholarly Achievements Applied to Medical Research**
David Dominguese, PhD

**UICOMP Outstanding Teaching and Service for Community-Based Faculty**
Jeffrey DeSanto, MD
Zohra Moenuddin, MD
James Nesselroad III, MD

**Outstanding Senior Scholar**
Martha Willi, MD

**Golden Apple**
Jolene Harris, MS
Pushpa Joseph, MD
Elsa Vazquez-Melendez, MD
Top-left: Dr. Sidney Palmer Hill and Dr. Sara Rusch  
Top-center: Dr. Amira Alfi and Dr. Rusch  
Top-right: Dr. Jessica Hanks and Dr. Amy Christison  
Middle-left: Jolene Harris and Dr. Rusch  
Center: Dr. Elsa Vazquez Melendez and Dr. Meenakshy Aiyer  
Middle-right: Dr. Swapna Asuthkar and Dr. Eleonora Zakharian  
Lower-left: Dr. Sandeep Tripathi and Dr. Meenakshy Aiyer  
Lower-right: Dr. Greg Tudor and Mary Beth Tudor  
Below: Dr. Allan Campbell and Dr. Martha Willi
Eileen P. Doherty, PhD

Dr. Eileen Doherty was named UICOMP’s Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. She brings over 20 years’ experience in student affairs having served as the Vice President for Student Development at Saint Joseph’s College in Rensselaer, Indiana and the Dean of Students at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, IL. Dr. Doherty’s expertise includes student leadership development, student conduct, student affairs policy, team facilitation, Title IX issues, and crisis management. She earned a Ph.D. in higher education and a master’s in divinity, both from Loyola University in Chicago. She earned her bachelor of art’s degree in psychology and theology from the University of Notre Dame.

Joshua Kentosh, MD

Dr. Joshua Kentosh was appointed the new Chair of Dermatology at UICOMP. Board certified in dermatology by the American Board of Dermatology, he is a practicing dermatologist at Soderstrom Dermatology in Peoria and a member of the UICOMP faculty. Dr. Kentosh received his medical degree from the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine in 2007, and completed his dermatology residency program at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and served for 10 years in the United States Navy as a diving medical officer, staff dermatologist at WRNMMC, and assistant professor of dermatology at the Uniformed Services University (USU). He has authored numerous publications in dermatology journals and has presented at several regional and national conferences. In addition to his duties in private practice, he serves as Chief of Dermatology at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center, where he often lectures to the various residency programs and manages the dermatology hospital consult service.

Steven Tsoraides, MD

Dr. Steven Tsoraides, Associate Professor of Clinical Surgery at UICOMP and an attending surgeon at Peoria Surgical Group, was named one of Peoria’s 40 Leaders Under 40 in the Peoria area by InterBusiness Issues. Dr. Tsoraides, is the Director the UICOMP General Surgery Residency Program and the M4 Surgery Subinternship Director. A 2005 UICOMP graduate, he is the director of operations for Peoria Surgical Group General Surgery Division, the medical director of the Rectal Cancer Center at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center and also chairs the Illinois Chapter of the American College of Surgeons’ Commission on Cancer.
Celebrating 50 Years

UICOMP will mark 50 years in Peoria in 2020 and the Peoria Medical Alumni Council is looking to help celebrate this historic milestone. We want to hear from you. What would you like to see in a 50-year celebration? Drop us a note at adv-peoria@uic.edu.

Distinguished UICOMP Alum

Do you know a UICOMP graduate who has attained success and distinction in their field? Nominate them for the 2019 Distinguished Alumni Award. The deadline to submit a nomination is Dec. 31, 2018.

A letter of support and CV is required. For criteria and a nomination form, email adv-peoria@uic.edu.

Past Distinguished Alumni Award Recipients

2018 – Carl Strauch, MD (class of 1979)
2017 – Sally Rigler, MD (class of 1989)
2016 – C. Christopher Hook, MD (class of 1984)
2015 – Williams Edwards, MD (class of 1990)
2014 – Thomas Witzig, MD (class of 1979)
2013 – N. Kent Wise, MD (class of 1973)
2012 – Larry Lindahl, MD (class of 1979)
2011 – Joyce Wise, MD (class of 1973)
2010 – Ronald Bude, MD (class of 1977)
Without the College of Medicine, physicians in the state of Illinois would be considerably fewer and farther between. The University of Illinois College of Medicine and its four campuses train and retain physicians across the state who serve nearly 90 percent of the counties in Illinois. Our mission is to produce new knowledge in the medical sciences, develop best practices in health care delivery and educate the next generation of physicians and biomedical scientists committed to serving the needs of Illinois and the nation.

1 of 6 physicians in Illinois have received their MD or resident training from the College of Medicine.

**upcoming UICOMP events**

**March 7, 2019**  
Residency Recruitment Fair  
Jump Simulation • 5-8 pm

**March 15, 2019**  
Residency Match Day  
Peoria Gateway Building • 10 am

**May 1, 2019**  
UICOMP Research Day  
Featuring student, resident, and faculty research  
UICOMP Campus

**May 4, 2019**  
UICOMP Graduation  
Peoria Civic Center • 2 pm