Remember that no other career offers so many opportunities to change another person's life for the better...

– Dr. Sara Rusch
Those of us privileged to practice medicine share in common the rigors of medical school, residency programs, testing and board exams designed to not only prepare us for our profession but to also validate our core competencies and skills. Following the rigors of training, we all continue to learn and grow in our workplaces and in the career paths we take. In our journey we have undertaken, there is one key component that has impacted us in a profound way that is difficult to measure. This is the impact of our mentors. Mentors advocate, challenge, influence, and care. Literature will highlight that physicians who have mentors and advisors during their career tend to be more satisfied with their career and more accomplished than their peers who do not have mentors.

In May we celebrated the career and legacy of an influential mentor to me and many others here at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria – Dr. Sara Rusch, regional dean. Her roles as program director, educator, and clinician have forever shaped medical education in Peoria, and throughout her career, Dr. Rusch has been a model mentor.

Dean Rusch often talked about the “ripple effect” of medical education. By teaching one medical student and nurturing a passion for medicine, one can have far reaching impact within our communities. Better education leads to better patient care. Educating and training gifted physicians creates better patient care in our communities and overall better healthcare in our region.

We pay tribute to Dean Rusch’s legacy on page 2 of this issue where you can also learn of the Sarah L. Rusch Endowment for Medical Education. Please join me in building this endowment in her honor.

Recognizing the importance of mentorship and advising, we are actively engaged in establishing a robust mentoring and advising program for our medical students. Faculty are giving of their time and effort in helping make a difference in careers of these future physicians. Collin Labak, MD, Class of 2019, says of his UICOMP mentors, “Any success I will (hopefully) have in my career will have their footprint all over it, and I will be forever grateful for having the doors...opened by these two standout people.” Read more of Collin’s perspective on mentorship on page 12 of this issue.

Plans are underway for our 50th Anniversary we will celebrate in 2020, and we invite your participation now by sharing your UICOMP story online. Details on how you can do that can be found on the back cover of this issue.

Sincerely,

Meenakshy Aiyer, MD
Interim Regional Dean
Fifty medical students from the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria joined thousands of others from across the country on Friday, March 15, as they learned which residency they “matched” into and where they would spend the next three to seven years of residency training. These fourth-year students are approaching their graduation in May. The next step is completing a residency in their choice of specialty.

UICOMP students matched to 11 different specialties in 20 states. Of those, 28 are headed into primary care, and 12 students will remain in Illinois with six matching to residency programs in Peoria.

The top three specialties medical students chose to pursue this year were Internal Medicine (19), surgical fields (10), and Emergency Medicine (7). Students learned of their matching program at 11 a.m. Friday, March 15, at the Gateway Building in downtown Peoria.

Classmates Gus Demanes, Peoria, and Abriella Stone, Las Vegas, faced a unique situation on Match Day. The engaged couple compiled their match lists for their locations and specialties of choice. Demanes entered orthopedics, and Stone’s choice was internal medicine. As a couple, they sought matches that would allow them to be together in the same city if the same hospital was not an option. After compiling all possible options, their list included 275 different match combinations.

They were elated to both receive their first choice – Harbor UCLA Medical Center in Torrance, California.

Classmates Gus Demanes, Peoria, and Abriella Stone, Las Vegas, were matched to residencies together. As the couple prepared to graduate from University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria in May, they were also finalizing details for their May 18 wedding.

“Adding couples matching adds a whole other level of stress,” Stone said. But on Friday, the stress subsided after they opened the envelopes. “I was just so impressed and proud of the whole class,” Stone said. “A lot of us ended up in a top choice program, and it was incredible to see that many people so happy with their family and supporters.”

Classmate Nick Lara got his first choice as well. “When they called us up and I got the envelope, that’s when my heart really started racing,” Lara said. “I was so relieved, so astonished to get my first choice.”

That choice was MacNeal Hospital in Berwyn, Illinois, where he will be in a one-year residency in transitional medicine before returning to the United States Air Force to continue his training in flight medicine. As a second lieutenant with the U.S. Air Force, Lara’s match was unique. Following his one-year transitional residency, he will serve four years on a flight team with the U.S. Air Force before completing his residency in anesthesiology.

Lara’s parents immigrated to the U.S. from Colombia, and he is the first member of his family to attend college. Lara credits a friend’s father who was a military physician with giving him the inspiration to enter the military and combine it with a career in medicine. “I’ve always felt a call to duty to serve,” Lara said. Thanks to the Air Force Health Profession Scholarship Program, Lara’s medical school tuition was paid in return for serving four years in the Air Force.

In Peoria, 74 residency positions were filled. UICOMP educates 244 medical students and has nearly 300 resident and fellowship physicians in 21 graduate medical training programs affiliated with UnityPoint Health – Methodist, OSF Saint Francis Medical Center, and Children’s Hospital of Illinois.
“Medicine is a challenge. The weight of decision-making and the extensive time commitment may make you wonder why you decided to become a doctor. On those challenging days, remember the patient who smiled and thanked you for your care, the interesting or puzzling case you solved, the difficult diagnosis you made, and occasionally, the life you saved. Remember that no other career offers so many opportunities to change another person’s life for the better…”

“Medical education is expensive and our students are rightly concerned about their debt. However, please remember that time, not money, is the most limited quantity in life. Unlike money, time spent can never be recovered. We wish that you use your time wisely. It is a challenge to integrate a medical career with a spouse and children. Doing this successfully requires that your home life receive the same focus, problem-solving and empathy that you display at your work. Don’t let being a doctor be the single defining role in your life – instead, remember to also be a mother, a father, a spouse, a friend, or a supporter of your parents.”

Regional Dean Dr. Sara Rusch Retires

The College celebrated the career and legacy of Sara Rusch, MD, who retired as Regional Dean of UICOMP in May 2019. In addition to her role as regional dean, she served as program director, department chair, educator, mentor and clinician, and her influence has forever shaped medical education in Peoria. Dr. Rusch provided compassionate medical care to her patients and helped hone the knowledge and skills of students who were transformed into caring physicians. That transformation impacts, not only our students, but also our communities by preparing skilled and caring physicians to deliver outstanding healthcare.

In her 2019 commencement address, her last as regional dean, Dr. Rusch shared this sentiment with the graduating class:

While her words reflect on her advice for them, her comments also mirror her career and life. Her retirement celebration at the college was attended by her family, including her husband Dr. Tom Cusack, her children and grandchildren. During the formal program honoring her retirement, granddaughter Lily found a comfortable spot on her grandma’s lap which made for a fitting tribute to the honoree who values finding balance among family and career.

Among highlights of Dr. Rusch’s career as regional dean include the transition into a four-year medical school, growth of graduate medical education, and expansion of research infrastructure and support. She oversaw a $13 million expansion of the Cancer Research Center and led the collaboration with OSF HealthCare in the partnership for the development, construction and opening of the Jump Trading Simulation and Education Center, a state-of-the-art virtual hospital and medical simulation facility.

Leading Medical Education, Leaving a Legacy

Notes of Tribute to Dr. Sara Rusch from Faculty, Physicians, Alumni, and Friends...

“Thank you, Dr. Rusch, for your hard work, dedication, and compassion. You have been a great leader, pillar of stability, and outstanding role model.”

“Thank you for the years of leadership, hardwork, mentorship and coaching. You have especially been a role model for women. You will be missed.”

“Congratulations! Your career has made a great impact in our community. Thank you and best wishes!”

“Your quality, integrity, compassion, and enthusiasm have contributed to UICOMP’s continued growth and success. Thank you, for improving healthcare and medical education in our community.”

“What a fantastic career – the best of patient care, research, teaching, AND administration. Your leadership will not be forgotten!! Congratulations!”

“Thank you for all that you have done for medicine in Peoria; both for patients and our medical community.”

“Your Motherhood care for UICOMP has brought unity, solidarity, and love to our school!”

To honor her leadership and vision for the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria and to recognize her commitment to excellence in training future physicians, providing compassionate patient care, and advancing research and discovery, the Dr. Sara L. Rusch Endowment for Medical Education was established. This endowment and its initial $20,000 lead gift were announced during Dr. Rusch’s Retirement Reception in May.

The goal is to establish a $250,000 endowment. Colleagues, alumni, and others influenced by Rusch are encouraged to honor her legacy.

Gifts made in Dr. Rusch’s honor will support the creation of novel, innovative, project-based curriculum that will enhance the education of medical students, residents and faculty.

This endowment will continue the transformative work that Dr. Rusch has done over the course of her career and honors her leadership and legacy at UICOMP.

To contribute to the Dr. Sara L. Rusch Endowment for Medical Education fund go online to peoria.medicine.uic.edu and click on “Giving,” select “Gift Funds” and “Rusch.” You may also simply complete and mail the envelope enclosed in this publication or phone the Advancement Office at (309) 680-8613.
Many professionals today report feeling burned out or overwhelmed. They share concerns about job satisfaction and finding balance in their lives. Employers are concerned about mounting sick days, reduced productivity, and a lack of engagement. The good news is that empirical evidence shows that resilience and wellbeing training can address these and similar concerns. “Wellbeing” has become a catchy pervasive buzzword, often equating wellness with balancing the number of hours spent at home against the number of hours spent at work or school. But, as any busy person knows, achieving this goal can be incredibly daunting and often unsuccessful. Persons seeking only a time-related balance may find the process unsatisfactory – and the target nearly impossible to achieve.

Center for Wellbeing Director Debra Disney promotes wellbeing as a more comprehensive achievement. She views wellbeing as the pursuit of life-balance, finding a satisfactory level of psychological wellbeing, engagement, safety, and emotional fortitude, both at home and in other contexts, encompassing every aspect of life. Her role is to help individuals achieve this kind of wellbeing. The Center offers a wide array of services including educational symposiums, workshops, group-based training and skill development, and confidential, individual counseling. Disney reports the Center has already provided numerous short presentations for teams, half-day wellness retreats for residency programs, and individual counseling for professionals, pre-professionals, and students who are seeking greater life balance.

“Every workplace could benefit from a culture in which employees understand emotions and know how to regulate them.”

– Dr. Bento Soares
Center for Wellbeing Advisory Council Member
The Center also provides educational programs for the entire professional workforce. One such program, CBCT® (Cognitively-Based Compassion Training), introduces skills and abilities that benefit the individual and those around them (the people they serve, co-workers, patients, students, and clients). Disney says it is a common misconception that people are born with only a certain degree of compassion. In reality, compassion is a trainable skill. She says, “We can all learn to offer compassion naturally and spontaneously to others.”

CBCT is an intentional, systematic way to train the mind to respond with compassion. It teaches skills to develop a sense of closeness and connectedness with others to strengthen compassionate concern.

Another educational program offered by the Center, Cultivating Emotional Balance, combats the widely held belief that the workplace is no place for emotions. According to Dr. Bento Soares, a member of the Center’s Advisory Council: “Probably every workplace could benefit from a culture in which employees understand emotions and know how to regulate them. Emotional regulation enhances interpersonal effectiveness which, in turn, leads to better teamwork and better job satisfaction.”

Today’s employees face frequent change and juggle multiple priorities within a workforce that represents more diversity than ever before in terms of age, backgrounds and beliefs. In this workplace environment, understanding our emotions and how they affect our actions and the actions of others are helpful in handling changes and challenges on the job.

Cultivating Emotional Balance training teaches practical skills for better understanding of our emotional life. This leads to awareness of our own and other’s emotional behaviors and experiences.

To learn more about scheduling a presentation for your organization or confidential, individual counseling, call (309) 495-1683 or email CenterForWellbeing@uic.edu.

---

Foundations of Wellbeing:
A Five-session Resilience Training Program

Stress in modern life seems to be inevitable, but with resilience, stress does not have to be experienced as extreme suffering. Resilience helps a person to bounce back and thrive even during setbacks and hardships. Just as a rubber band can retain its original shape after the tension of being stretched, individuals can recover from challenges such as illness, loss, financial difficulty, and relationship issues.

Debra Disney completed an intensive 5-week Cultivating Emotional Balance teacher certification course in Switzerland and now offers this training locally through the Center. Participants learn simple tools to dance in the rain (thrive) in the midst of a storm (a stressful life), enhancing their ability to build resilience, improve compassion, and prevent burnout. In addition to didactic instruction, participants will engage in small group conversations and personal reflection to explore:

- 4 emotions: joy, anger, fear, and sadness
- 4 mental balances: intentional, attentional, cognitive, emotional
- 4 heart practices: loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, equanimity

Five Sessions – 90 minutes each

- **Lunch sessions** Noon to 1:30 p.m.
- **Evening sessions** 5:15 to 6:45 p.m.
- Mix & match to meet your scheduling needs.
- The introductory session (prerequisite) will be offered the first Thursday of every month followed by four rotating modules on the second Thursday of every month.

**Registration**

- Early registration opens in December for the 2020 courses.
  Email centerforwellbeing@uic.edu to be notified when registration is available.
- Cost: Individuals = $45 per class or $200 for the complete course (five sessions)

This course can be adapted for private groups. Contact the Center for Wellbeing (309) 495-1683 or centerforwellbeing@uic.edu for more information.
Drs. Hippler and Knepp Honored As 2019 Distinguished Alumni

The University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria honored two recipients with the 2019 Distinguished Alumni Award – Stephen Hippler, MD, and Keith Knepp, MD – during a reception May 8.

Dr. Stephen Hippler graduated from UICOMP in 1984. After completing his internal medicine residency at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, he returned to Peoria with a focus on clinical care and clinical research. He assumed increasing degrees of administrative responsibilities within OSF HealthCare from Vice President for Quality and Clinical Programs with OSF Medical Group to his current role as Chief Clinical Officer for OSF HealthCare. Dr. Hippler has authored or co-authored seven journal publications and while in full-time practice, he was actively engaged in clinical trials.

Dr. Keith Knepp graduated UICOMP in 1997. After completing his family medicine residency in Peoria, he entered a family medicine practice in Eureka before returning to Peoria as a faculty member in the Family Medicine Residency. In 2010, he joined Methodist Medical Center and progressed through leadership roles from Vice President of Systems Integration to Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer when Methodist and Proctor hospitals began their affiliation with UnityPoint Health. Today he serves as Regional CEO for UnityPoint Health Central Illinois.

“The College is proud of its role as part of the pipeline educating and training physicians for important work in their chosen disciplines and careers. This year we are honored to recognize two recipients with our Distinguished Alumni Award,” said Dr. Sara Rusch, UICOMP regional dean, during the event honoring the recipients. “Both have broadened their careers beyond the practice of medicine and advanced to become senior physician leaders within their respective healthcare organizations. With healthcare representing the largest sector of the Peoria-area economy, their leadership and talent are critically important not just to their respective organizations, but also to the health of patients in central Illinois and to the healthcare industry that is a core part of the economy of the greater Peoria area.”

UICOMP is proud of its role as part of the pipeline educating and training physicians for important work in their chosen disciplines and careers.
Graduation Day
The Class of 2019

Fifty-one students received their medical degrees on Saturday, May 4, 2019, at the Peoria Civic Center, raising the total number of doctors who have received their medical degrees in Peoria to 2,074.
First-Year Medical Students Receive White Coats

The University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria welcomed 64 new, incoming first-year medical students on August 9 by presenting them with a white coat.

Many of these students will become future central Illinois physicians since nearly 60 percent of the primary care physicians in the Peoria area attended the University of Illinois College of Medicine as a medical student or trained in a residency or fellowship program here.

The white coat presented to medical students symbolizes the responsibilities of the medical profession. “Presenting our students with their white coat is a symbolic and memorable way to welcome our newest members to the UICOMP family,” says Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, UICOMP interim regional dean. “Our Peoria Medical Alumni Council sponsors this event and provides the white coats for our students which makes it particularly meaningful as Peoria physicians welcome the next generation, not just to the College family but also into the noble profession of medicine.”

Robert Sparrow, MD, chair of the Peoria Medical Alumni Council, addressed the students and assisted with the white coat presentation and ceremony.

Dr. Lasley Reflects on 33 Years at UICOMP

Professor Stephen Lasley, PhD, retired from UICOMP in September 2019, after a 33-year career devoted to research and medical education. With neuroscience as his research focus, specifically neurotoxicity, he was recruited to Peoria from an osteopathic medical school in Fort Worth, Texas. One key attraction that Peoria offered was collaboration opportunities with other faculty in neuroscience. In the area of medical education, much of his focus has been pharmacology coursework.

Under the old curriculum, he was course director for 11 years and assisted with the curriculum prior to that. With the new curriculum, Dr. Lasley was the college-wide leader of Block 7, “Regulation and Reproduction.”

Reflecting on changes he has witnessed during his tenure at UICOMP, the biggest change he cites is the unified College of Medicine across all campuses of the University of Illinois at Chicago. “To produce an identical curriculum across the three College sites, we had to develop more unity of effort across the campuses, and I have had the privilege of working with some very dedicated people,” he shares.

Among his research findings that bring him the most satisfaction, there are two. In the early '90s, his lab was among the first to show how lead toxicity in live animals created the physiological basis leading to cognitive impairment in children. Second, his later research contributed to general progress showing how the vague amorphic disorder of Gulf War Illness was caused by combined exposure to an anticholinesterase (a drug given to troops to counter the potential effects of nerve gas exposure) and an insecticide in the presence of the stress of a war environment. His research with collaborators demonstrated that these exposures led to central nervous system inflammation in animal models.

Meenakshy Aiyer, UICOMP interim regional dean, expressed gratitude for Lasley’s commitment to excellence and service. “Dr. Lasley’s diligence and dedication to research as well as his contributions to educating future physicians are immeasurable.”

“Presenting our students with their white coat is a symbolic and memorable way to welcome our newest members to the UICOMP family.”

– Meenakshy Aiyer, MD
UICOMP Interim Regional Dean
Curing cancer isn’t cheap, and patients often have to decide whether to use their finances to live now or in the future.

In a new paper published in the August 2019 issue of the journal *Society of Behavioral Medicine*, researchers from the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria and the University of Illinois Cancer Center (Chicago) outlined several ways the financial burden associated with cancer treatment can be addressed. Lacking adequate health insurance or having an abundance of costs for medical care not covered by health insurance can cause financial problems and eventually lead to debt and bankruptcy. Known as financial toxicity, it can affect a patient’s quality of life and access to medical care. Financial toxicity can have direct impacts on clinical outcomes and patient experiences, said Carl Asche, PhD, University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria and lead author on the paper.

“Families often make substantial financial and other behavioral adjustments to economize following a cancer diagnosis,” Asche said. “These behaviors often include patients not taking their medications, opting out of more beneficial therapies because they’re too expensive, cutting back on necessities, depletion of retirement savings, and increased credit card debt.”

Cancer survivors who experience higher financial toxicity report greater levels of pain, have higher rates of depression, report greater levels of anxiety, and poorer overall quality of life, Asche said. The survivors also say they have more symptoms and are more likely to reduce their level of employment or stop working altogether.

There are several ways policymakers can assist cancer patients in reducing their financial toxicity.

Cancer survivors who experience higher financial toxicity report greater levels of pain, have higher rates of depression, report greater levels of anxiety, and poorer overall quality of life, Asche said. The survivors also say they have more symptoms and are more likely to reduce their level of employment or stop working altogether.

There are several ways policymakers can assist cancer patients in reducing their financial toxicity. The first, Asche said, is to create a Medicare cap for cancer treatment costs regardless of where the treatments occur. Medicare currently has no out-of-pocket maximum for cancer treatment. Annual out-of-pocket expenditures for a new cancer diagnoses can range from $2,116 to $8,115, said the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ). Following actuarial analysis, Medicare should implement a catastrophic coverage threshold for all Medicare beneficiaries, setting a cap on annual out-of-pocket expenses.

Transitions to a clinical pathway payment program is another avenue to pursue, Asche said. Using the End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) Prospective Payment System as a model can show how payments for drugs, laboratory services and support services can be packaged and applied to various other disease states. Patients with pre-existing conditions should also be protected because they may have to utilize other insurance plans due to a change in their employment status.

Another consideration is limiting non-Affordable Care Act (ACA) compliant short-term health plans, said Susan Hong, MD, director of survivorship at the UI Cancer Center and senior author. A new legislative rule extending and increasing access to these plans from three to 12 months are not required to meet all ACA requirements; however, including the essential health benefits has the potential to discriminate against cancer patients, Hong said.

“Their structure requires higher cost-sharing and lower coverage, which is not suitable to this population,” she said.

Expanding employer support of cancer treatment is the final recommendation, specifically through the endorsement of paid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Cancer patients would benefit significantly from the 12 weeks of financial support, providing both short- and potentially long-term protection from some aspects of financial toxicity, Hong said.

Read the entire paper at: https://www.sbm.org/UserFiles/FinancialToxicityofCancer.pdf
New Faculty Join UICOMP Fall 2019

Dr. James Crooks joined the Department of Pediatrics as an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics. Dr. Crooks received his doctoral degree from Chicago Medical School at Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science in 2016 and completed his residency at Phoenix Children’s Hospital/Maricopa Medical Center in 2019. Dr. Crooks’ expertise is in Hospital Medicine.

Dr. Kap Sum Foong joined the Department of Medicine as an assistant professor of clinical medicine. Dr. Foong received his doctoral degree from Universiti Sains Malaysia, School of Medical Sciences, Malaysia in 2013 and completed his residency at Crozer Chester Medical Center, Upland, PA, in 2017. Dr. Foong is board certified with the American Board of Internal Medicine. Dr. Foong’s expertise is in Infectious Disease.

Dr. Gretchen Kopec joined the Department of Pediatrics as an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics. Dr. Kopec received her doctoral degree from Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in 2013 and completed her residency at Saint Louis University School of Medicine, Cardinal Glennon Children’s Medical Center, Saint Louis, MO, in 2016. Dr. Kopec is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Dr. Kopec’s expertise is in Neonatology.

Dr. Nazia Kulsum-Mecci joined the Department of Pediatrics as an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics. Dr. Kulsum-Mecci received her doctoral degree from Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute in 2004 and completed her residency at State University of New York Downstate Medical Center in 2012. Dr. Kulsum-Mecci is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics and the American Board of Pediatric Nephrology. Dr. Kulsum-Mecci’s expertise is in Nephrology.

Dr. Andres Maldonado joined the Department of Neurosurgery as an assistant professor (CT). Dr. Maldonado received his doctoral degree from Central University of Ecuador in 2003 and completed his residency at Cleveland Clinic Foundation in 2019. Dr. Maldonado’s expertise is in Neurosurgery.

Dr. Nicole Rau joined the Department of Pediatrics as an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics. Dr. Rau received her doctoral degree from Medical College of Wisconsin in 2013 and completed her residency at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin in 2016. Dr. Rau is board certified with the American Academy of Pediatrics. Dr. Rau’s expertise is in Neonatology.

Dr. Kristopher Rosburg joined the Department of Pediatrics as an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics. Dr. Rosburg received his doctoral degree from University of Arizona College of Medicine in 2012 and completed his residency at Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital, Saint Louis University in 2015. Dr. Rosburg is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Dr. Rosburg’s expertise is in Neonatology.

Dr. Jacob Hopping joined the Department of Surgery as an assistant professor of clinical surgery. Dr. Hopping received his doctoral degree from University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford in 2010 and completed his residency at Saint Louis University in 2015. Dr. Hopping is board certified with the American Board of Surgery, and his expertise is in General Surgery.

Dr. Moustafa Aouthmany joined the Department of Pediatrics as a visiting associate professor of clinical pediatrics. Dr. Aouthmany received his doctoral degree from Damascus University, College of Medicine in 1975 and completed his residency at Syrian Army Hospital in 1978. Dr. Aouthmany is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics and the American Board of Pediatrics Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine. Dr. Aouthmany’s expertise is in Neonatology.

Dr. Tulika Chatterjee joined the Department of Pediatrics as an assistant professor of clinical medicine. Dr. Chatterjee received her doctoral degree from Kasturba Medical College in 2009, a Master’s in Public Health (MPH) from Lund University in 2013, and completed her residency at OSF St. Francis Medical Center in 2019. Dr. Chatterjee is board certified with the American Board of Internal Medicine. Dr. Chatterjee’s expertise is in Hospital Medicine.

Dr. Margarita Guarin joined the Department of Pediatrics as an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics. Dr. Guarin received her doctoral degree from Industrial University of Sanader in 1989 and completed her residency at The Medical College of Wisconsin in 1993. Dr. Guarin is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics and the American Board of Pediatric Pulmonology. Her expertise is in Pulmonology.
Dr. Meenakshy Aiyer was appointed by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois to serve as the interim regional dean for the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria. Her appointment to this leadership role follows the retirement of Dr. Sara Rusch, who served in that capacity for 11 years.

Dr. Aiyer is a long-time UICOMP faculty member who has held a number of professional appointments, most recently as associate dean for academic affairs where she was responsible for medical student education. She has also served as head of the Department of Health Sciences Education, director of the Caterpillar Faculty Scholars Fellowship, Internal Medicine clerkship director, and as faculty advisor to the Internal Medicine Student Special Interest Group. Dr. Aiyer received her medical degree from Madurai Kamaraj University in India and completed her residency at the UICOMP internal medicine residency at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center. Upon completing her residency, she chose to remain in Peoria and joined the faculty of the College of Medicine in 1996. She has authored and co-authored numerous peer reviewed journal articles and abstracts and is the recipient of multiple teaching awards, including five-time recipient of the Raymond B. Allen Golden Apple Award bestowed by UICOMP for outstanding contributions to teaching. She is board certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine and is a Fellow with the American College of Physicians (FACP).

This leadership transition also includes the appointment of Dr. Jessica Hanks as interim associate dean for Academic Affairs. Dr. Hanks’ previous role as assistant dean will be filled by Dr. Jim Graumlich.

McBee Orzulak Assumes Interim Role for General Medical Education

Dr. Francis McBee Orzulak was named interim associate dean for Graduate Medical Education at UICOMP in August 2019. He most recently served as program director of the Combined Internal Medicine-Pediatrics Residency and as associate professor of Med Peds. He is a Dean’s Scholar on Learning Environment and recipient of both the Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award and the UICOMP Curriculum Innovation Award. Since joining the faculty in 2011, he has numerous poster and extramural presentations, publications, and extensive committee work.

Dr. McBee Orzulak completed his medical education at the University of Kansas (Kansas City) where he graduated with honors and went on to complete his med peds residency at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Illinois, where he was chief resident for the Department of Pediatrics. He joined our UICOMP Med Peds faculty in 2011, and has served as Med Peds Program Director since 2013.

Mischler Named Interim Program Director Internal Medicine/Pediatrics

Dr. Matthew Mischler was named interim program director internal medicine/pediatrics. He is clinical associate professor and received his medical degree from UICOMP. Dr. Mischler completed his residency with the University of Michigan Health System and is a gifted educator who is the recipient of numerous teaching awards, including multiple Golden Apple Awards which are faculty awards that are selected by students themselves.
The Influence of Mentors on One UICOMP Grad

A key responsibility of a physician is to be a teacher and mentor. That sentiment was established by Hippocrates and is reflected in his well-known oath. Those who pursue a path in medicine learn from, are nurtured by, and supported by mentors. Mentoring involves more than teaching material and concepts, but also includes developing a relationship and focus on achieving goals.

“I want to help my students find their true potential, including their long-term goals, why they want to do research, and how their research might benefit their career,” says Kiran Velpula, PhD, assistant professor in Cancer Biology and Pharmacology. “I want to pick up their strengths and weaknesses and tailor their projects in a way that provides them the most benefit.”

Velpula’s lab, which focuses on the development of gene therapy strategies to target cancer cell metabolism, is comprised of medical students who work in the lab to build their skills and research portfolios as they launch their careers in medicine. Velpula takes time to work closely with the students, understand their career aspirations, and support and guide them with projects and opportunities that allow them to learn, contribute to the work of the lab, while also pursuing their own ideas and interests.

Hanging on the bulletin board in his office are a variety of notes and mementos, including one from UICOMP Class of 2019 graduate Collin Labak, MD, who wrote, “I think perhaps the most important lesson I’ve learned from you is the significance of helping those around you, which you do so tirelessly.”

Labak credits both Velpula as well as Andrew Tsung, MD, the Patrick W. Elwood Endowed Associate Professor in Neurosurgery, with Labak’s match into neurosurgery residency at Case Western University Hospitals in Cleveland, Ohio. “I knew I had an interest in neurosurgery, but the early involvement of these role model figures was a differentiating factor in getting me involved in the right research and doing the right things in my preclinical and clinical years,” he says. “These two provided me with a framework and path toward neurosurgery residency and neuro-oncology research and served as a key component of my support system during my time in Peoria.

“Any success I will (hopefully) have in my career will have their footprint all over it, and I will be forever grateful for having the doors into neurosurgery opened by these two standout people.”

Tsung champions the physician role as mentor for students like Labak. Tsung says, “Advances in science and medicine are so dependent not just on intellect, drive, and fortuitous circumstance, but also on a solid foundation of knowledge. Further, we cannot downplay the social importance of our roles navigating human interaction and ethics. It is thus our duty as clinicians and scientists to provide this so students have the best chance at helping patients and perhaps, with a little luck, even improving society as a whole.”

Andrew Tsung is one of two faculty members credited by 2019 graduate Collin Labak, MD, with helping him gain his match into neurosurgery.

Modern Version

I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant: I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

--Hippocratic Oath
Modern Version
Local Causes Support Cancer Research at UICOMP

Walk for the Mind
The Mark Linder Walk for the Mind held its 17th annual 1-mile walk in September 2019 on the Peoria Riverfront and raised $80,000 to support brain tumor research at UICOMP.

With the goal of providing a network for brain tumor and cancer survivors and to help raise funds for research, Mark Linder founded the Walk for the Mind in 2003. The first walk attracted about 150 participants. Today, the event annually draws about 1,000 participants. While Mark died in 2005 at age 31 from brain cancer, the Walk continues thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers, many of whom are brain tumor survivors. The Walk continues as a way to unite those individuals and their families as well as raise funds to support brain tumor research in hopes to find a cure. For more information, visit: marklinderwalkforthemind.org.

Theresa Tracy Trot
The 7th Annual Theresa Tracy Trot was held Saturday, November 2, along the Riverfront in East Peoria. This annual fundraiser supports the research and care of those with pancreatic cancer with funds going to both UICOMP and Illinois CancerCare.

The Tracy Trot is a 4-mile run and 2-mile walk held at the East Peoria Levee District and is the primary fundraiser of the Theresa Tracy Strive to Survive Charitable Organization, established in memory of Theresa Ann (Naramore) Tracy who after battling pancreatic cancer passed away in 2010 at age 44. The organization's mission is to increase survivability of pancreatic cancer through awareness and to support the advancement of a cure. For more information, visit theresatracytrot.com. (Editor’s Note: As of press deadline for this publication, total proceeds from this event were not determined.)

KB Strong
The memory of Kevin Brown, the beloved Washington, Illinois, basketball coach, will live on through the newly formed charitable organization, The KB Strong Foundation. KB Strong was established to honor the legacy of the Washington Community High School head basketball coach who lost his battle with glioblastoma (brain cancer) in June 2019. Members of the KB Strong board of directors recently visited the UICOMP research labs, and proceeds from their foundation will support glioblastoma research and researchers at UICOMP.
A Community Baby Shower held September 14 at the Carver Center in Peoria brought much needed supplies, information, and the chance to connect with local resources. The Graduate Medical Education program at UICOMP worked closely with a number of local agencies and groups to host the event for expectant parents as well as parents of newborns through 5-year-olds who are facing financial hardships. Resources covered included prenatal care, breastfeeding support, vaccination, information on sexually transmitted infections, and child safety information. Free supplies such as diapers, clothing, and other baby needs were available, and a raffle was held for select items, including a car seat, crib and stroller.

The event purposefully targeted the most socially disadvantaged neighborhoods in Peoria that face the greatest struggles with reproductive health outcomes. Specifically, data indicates higher than average rates for low birth weights, preterm births, teen births, and sexually transmitted diseases.

“The Community Baby Shower was one way we could come together as a community to reduce these disparities and support the parents-in-need,” says Dr. Gauri Shevatekar, clinical associate at UICOMP who chaired the event.

The event was well attended with 161 adults and 215 children registered. Thirteen community organizations were represented, and 45 volunteers, including the planning committee, UICOMP medical students and residents.

The Community Baby Shower was a collaboration between UICOMP and the Peoria City/County Health Department with sponsoring partners of the Community Foundation of Central Illinois, CEFCU, Central Illinois Breastfeeding Task Force, the Vineyard Church and UnityPoint Pediatrics Methodist North.
Dr. Elwood Publishes A Life in Neurosurgery

Dr. Patrick Elwood, professor emeritus of Neurosurgery, UICOMP, addresses the challenge and opportunity in neuroscience in the twenty-first century in his new book A Life in Neurosurgery. The book is a memoir of a half-century neurosurgery career and the development of neurology, neurosurgery, and the Illinois Neurological Institute. The trail from placing air in the ventricles of the brain to diagnose brain tumor to CRISPR genome editing to eliminate Duchene muscular dystrophy, a remarkable odyssey. With this book Dr. Elwood continues in his quest to attract talented, enthusiastic young people to neuroscience careers.

Share Your News

We love to follow the careers and successes of our graduates! Alumni of UICOMP (med school, residencies and fellowships) are invited to submit their news. Submit news of new positions, honors, awards, and publications to adv-peoria@listserv.uic.edu or send it to: Advancement & Community Relations, UICOMP, One Illini Drive, Peoria, IL 61605. Or, call us at (309) 680-8613.

Soares Named CBCT Senior Instructor

Marcelo Bento Soares, Ph.D., successfully completed the training and has been named a CBCT Senior Instructor through the Cognitively-Based Compassion Training Teacher Certification program at Emory University. Soares is senior associate dean for research and professor and department head of the Cancer Biology and Pharmacology Department at UICOMP.

Grebner Leads UICOMP Communications

Susan Grebner joins UICOMP as director of strategic communications and will develop and support marketing and public relations efforts to support university departments and programs, lead media relations efforts, and support the Dean’s Office in strategic communication. Grebner brings over 20 years of extensive writing, communication, and marketing experience.

$1.8 Million Awarded to UICOMP Cancer Research Project

Sang-Oh Yoon, Ph.D., UICOMP assistant professor, was recently awarded a $1.84 million grant by the National Institutes of Health. The five-year project, entitled “Feedback loop and crosstalk in the mTORC1/2 signaling network,” will help identify cancer’s resistance mechanism toward mTOR-targeting drugs and identify strategies to overcome this resistance and prevent tumor recurrence.

The recent advent of targeted cancer therapy has shed light on new therapy against metastatic and advanced cancer that is not conducive to conventional cancer treatments, such as surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy. mTOR (mechanistic Target Of Rapamycin) is considered a master regulator of cell growth. Drugs that target mTOR are FDA-approved and actively used in clinics to treat cancers. One major problem with this type of therapy is cancer’s resistance to drugs. Tumors in many patients eventually become resistant to these drugs and recur. Researchers now seek to determine why some cancers are resistant to targeted cancer drugs and how to overcome the resistance for successful treatment.

Yoon is a faculty member in the Cancer Biology and Pharmacology Department. His lab interest is the biochemical and molecular decoding of cancer cell signaling to form a strong basis for cancer therapeutics.

Psychiatry Residency Collaborates on ABPN Study

Ryan Finkenbine, MD, is a co-investigator of “Developing Practice-Based Research Networks in Psychiatry Education to Advance the Validity of Assessment Systems for Entrustable Professional Activities” which was recently funded through a grant with the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN). The UICOMP Psychiatry Program is one of six psychiatry residency programs participating in the study. The collaboration is to begin April 2020.

Aiyer Awarded Mastership in the ACP

Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, UICOMP interim regional dean, has been awarded Mastership by the American College of Physicians (ACP), the national organization of internists. Election to mastership recognizes outstanding and extraordinary career accomplishments. Masters must have made a notable contribution to medicine. This includes but is not limited to teaching, outstanding work in clinical medicine (research or practice), contributions to preventative medicine, improvements in the delivery of health care, and/or contributions to medical literature. She will be honored during the 2020 ACP annual conference in Los Angeles.
Emerging Innovator Award
Matthew Bramlet, MD, assistant professor of pediatrics, received the 2019 Emerging Innovator Award from the University of Illinois College of Medicine during a recent awards ceremony in Chicago. Dr. Bramlet was recognized for his innovative work creating exact replica models of children’s hearts which are used for surgical planning as well as to create and build the models as a library-style resource that could be shared with the world. The ability of a physician to hold a physical, 3D model in their hand creates vastly better understanding of a patient’s heart and how to treat it.

The Emerging Innovator Award recognizes early-career medical achievements and contributions of University of Illinois College of Medicine graduates (MS, MD, PhD, residents) who received their degree within the past 15 years or enrolled College of Medicine students.

Gibbs New Senior Director of Development
Jennifer Gibbs, a native of Canton, Illinois, serves as senior director of development for UICOMP. Gibbs is a veteran development officer with more than 16 years of experience in higher education.

She is responsible for major gifts and planned giving programs as well as collaborating with UICOMP leadership and faculty to identify fundraising opportunities, initiatives and strategies. Gibbs also supports and leads the Senior Scholars Program.

She is the daughter of Jack Gibbs, MD, who co-founded the Peoria Medical School (the original name of what is today’s UICOMP). Dr. Gibbs continues his affiliation with the college as a senior faculty volunteer.

National Science Foundation Awards $750,000 Grant for Research on Rapid Testosterone Signaling
UICOMP’s Eleonora Zakharian, PhD, was awarded a $750,000 grant from the National Science Foundation for a three-year project entitled “Rapid testosterone signaling receptor TRPM8 regulates sexual reward and satiety.”

Testosterone is an essential steroid hormone that regulates the development of the male reproductive system and the dimorphic sexual behaviors in all vertebrates. Testosterone stimulates protein synthesis by activating genomic pathways. The activation of these genomic pathways is a time dependent process that is completed within hours. Testosterone also causes rapid actions that occur within minutes. The rapid signaling induced by testosterone affects numerous behaviors of animals, including sexual behavior, aggression, and fear. However, the molecular mechanisms underlying rapid testosterone actions and how it affects reproductive behaviors are not clearly understood.

A recent discovery by Zakharian’s laboratory identified a unique testosterone receptor on the cell surface that is responsible for rapid testosterone actions. This research will investigate the intricate details of this rapid testosterone signaling mechanism and reveal its role in sexual and social behaviors in rodents. The project will assess how rapid signaling through testosterone receptor regulates steroid synthesis, sexually dimorphic behaviors, and regarding aspects of these behaviors. The research also aims to enhance the educational basis in understanding organismal differences during development.

Zakharian is associate professor in the Cancer Biology and Pharmacology Department.

Wombacher Hired as Assistant Dean
Kevin Wombacher, PhD, joins UICOMP as assistant dean for medical education and evaluation, and will be responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of the clinical undergraduate and graduate curriculum. He most recently served as research administrator at Orange Park Medical Center in Orange Park, Florida, and was assistant professor of biomedical affairs and research with Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Nature Communications Publishes Zakharian Collaboration
UICOMP researcher Eleonora Zakharian, PhD, associate professor in the Cancer Biology and Pharmacology Department, co-authored an article published in the September 13, 2019, issue of Nature Communications. The article entitled “Structure of the thermosensitive TRP channel TRP1 from the alga Chlamydomonas reinhardtii” was a collaborative effort with the team of Alexander Sobolevsky, PhD, at Columbia University in New York City.

The article highlights the structure-function relationship of a temperature-sensitive TRP channel TRP1 from a microorganism. This ion channel is an evolutionary predecessor of the mammalian temperature and pain receptors. This new knowledge about structure-function relationship of TRP1 will therefore help with better understanding of temperature sensation in humans and the development of future analgesics. For the published findings, Zakharian’s lab took the lead on researching function at the single molecule level while Sobolevsky’s lab led the efforts on structure.

Nature Communications is an international, peer-reviewed open access scientific journal that publishes high quality research in biology, health, physics, chemistry, Earth sciences and biology. Its parent company, Nature Research, has principal offices in London, New York, Berlin, Shanghai and Tokyo.
Honors and Recognition

Harley Moit, DO, resident in the Department of Surgery, received the Harrit H. Hasson Award for Best Presentation Promoting Education or Training at the 2019 Minimally Invasive Surgery Week hosted by the Society of Laparoscopic Surgeons (SLS) in September in New Orleans, Louisiana. Her scientific paper was titled “Standardized Robotic Training and Evaluation in a General Surgery Program”.

Sara Krzyzaniak, MD, assistant program director and clinical assistant professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine, received The American College of Emergency Physicians 2019 Junior Faculty Teaching Award. She was one of five recipients nationwide chosen for the award presented to an outstanding educator who demonstrates superior clinical teaching. The award is designed to support emergency medicine faculty in their efforts to achieve academic achievement. To be eligible, nominees must be less than seven years post-residency.

Faculty Present at ChangeMedEd Conference

UICOMP was well represented at the 2019 ChangeMedEd meeting sponsored by the American Medical Association in September in Chicago.

William Bond, MD, professor of clinical emergency medicine, and Teresa Lynch, MD, interim department chair of internal medicine, presented “Creation of Experiential Learning opportunities for High Value Cost Conscious Care Using Actor-based and Avatar-based Simulation.”

Scott Barrows, clinical associate in emergency medicine, presented on “Creating a Multi-modal Skin Lesion Identification Mobile App,” which combines tactile, 3D (augmented reality), and interactive mobile app engagement.

UICOMP M2 Named an NIH Scholar

UICOMP medical student Jeremy Huckleby was one of 50 students selected for the 2019-2020 Medical Research Scholars Program at the National Institutes of Health. The year-long research program allows medical, dental and veterinary students to pause their university studies to conduct research work while living on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland.

Huckleby began the fellowship in July 2019. A Chicago native, Huckleby was drawn to study medicine during his undergraduate years at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville as a biology/chemistry major. His research interest is social determinants of healthcare and their effect on medical care and outcomes.

Huckleby, who completed his second year of medical school, is the third UICOMP student selected for the NIH Medical Research Scholars Program since its inception in 2012. Other recipients include Dr. Tess Woodring (Class of 2019) and Jacqueline Boyle (MD candidate, Class of 2020).

UICOMP Research: EXPAREL Reduces Opioid Use

Research from the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria led by Carl V. Asche, PhD, director of Center for Outcomes Research, shows the use of EXPAREL contributes to reduction in opioid use and length of hospital stay for patients undergoing knee replacement surgery.

The results of the study were published in the Journal of Medical Economics and were based on a retrospective analysis from January 2011 through April 2017 using data from 10 hospitals in the United States with the highest number of total knee arthroplasty (TKA) procedures using EXPAREL.

EXPAREL (bupivacaine liposome injectable suspension) commercially launched in the United States in April 2012. It uses DepoFoam® product delivery technology that encapsulates drugs without altering their molecular structure and releases them over a desired period of time.

“TKA is a painful surgical procedure, and inadequate pain control can delay recovery and increase length of hospital stay, opioid consumption, and total hospitalization costs,” says Asche, lead author on the study publication. “Our analysis provides strong evidence that EXPAREL plays an essential role in not only reducing opioid consumption and recovery time, but also improving clinical and economic outcomes for hospitals conducting TKA procedures.”

Similar research on total hip arthroplasty (THA) found patients who received EXPAREL for THA had significant reduction in opioid use, length of hospital stay, and overall hospitalization costs as well. These findings were recently included in coverage by Bloomberg Government, Trends-In-Medicine, and in online content for Orthopedics Today.

Asuthkar Featured in American Cancer Society’s ResearchHERS Segment

Swapna Asuthkar, PhD, was interviewed by Jessica Cook with Heart of Illinois ABC for a local segment on women whose careers focus on cancer research. The initiative, called ResearchHERS, is a project of the American Cancer Society. Asuthkar, UICOMP assistant professor of the Cancer Biology and Pharmacology Department, specializes in pediatric brain tumor research.
Celebrating 50 in 2020!

Share Your Story…
As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the University of Illinois College of Medicine, we want to hear your story. Go online and share your UICOMP story…

• Your favorite class?
  Or faculty member?
• A special memory, experience or recollection?
• The story of a mentor or attending who influenced you?
• Ways UICOMP impacted your practice of medicine?

go.uic.edu/uicomp50
Share this link with others in the UICOMP family and invite them to share their story too!

Upcoming Events

January 11, 6-11 pm
Snowball
student hosted event for students, faculty, alumni and friends
The Warehouse on State, Peoria

March 20, 10 am
Match Day
The Gateway Building, Peoria

March 26, 6 pm
The Swain Lecture: Dr. Daniel Siegel presents “Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence”
Jump Simulation, Peoria

April 28
Research Day
featuring student, resident, and faculty research
UICOMP Campus, Peoria

April 30, 5 pm
Student Awards Ceremony
Jump Simulation, Peoria

May 2, 2 pm
Graduation
Peoria Civic Center