“At UICOMP, residents learn side-by-side with faculty mentors and have outstanding training opportunities.”

– Robert Sparrow, MD (UICOMP Class of 1979)
Chief Medical Officer
OSF HealthCare
Saint Francis Medical Center
As we prepare to turn the calendar to a New Year and the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, the important work of UICOMP continues. Our students are fully engaged on campus in classroom and clinical experiences as they continue their medical school journeys. Our research enterprise forges on with basic science, clinical and outcomes research. Our community outreach is as broad as ever while we have strengthened existing partnerships and forged new collaborations through the pandemic.

In this issue, we highlight Graduate Medical Education and what it means for not only UICOMP but also the quality and scope of healthcare in central Illinois. With more than 20 residency and fellowship programs, UICOMP brings more than 300 physicians here to train each year. These residents and fellows are a major force in quality patient care while also contributing to robust research, supporting the education and clinical skills training of our medical students, and also being a part of our communities and neighborhoods.

We partner with both OSF Saint Francis Medical Center and UnityPoint Health Methodist in providing GME programs collaboratively with their institutions. The Chief Medical Officers of these organizations (Samer Sader, MD, and Robert Sparrow, MD) both weigh in on the impact of GME (page 2). Four alumni of our residency programs share their perspectives about training in Peoria (page 3), and we highlight UICOMP’s first fellowship (cardiology) on page 6.

It's no secret that UICOMP students achieve great things both inside and outside the classroom. Read how Keila Magafas (MD Candidate, Class of 2023) was all in for her clinical experience in Gibson City and how she gave back to the community following an August flood (page 8). We also highlight Cordoba Clinic, how it provides care to the underserved and the role of UICOMP students in meeting this community need (at right).

I shared this quote during our annual Celebration of Excellence faculty recognition event in November 2021—

“When you can’t change the direction of the wind... adjust your sails.”

I certainly feel like this is a reflection of how our alumni, faculty, staff and learners have improvised, adapted, and made the most of opportunities during this time. Let us continue to take advantage of every opportunity to move forward and advance the education, health and lives of our learners, patients and communities.

Sincerely,

Meenakshy Aiyer, MD

Interim Regional Dean
Cordoba Healthcare Clinic: Students Give Back, Gain Experience

UICOMP medical students gain valuable experience while assisting at a free clinic to serve the uninsured or under-insured. The Cordoba Healthcare clinic provides specialty healthcare to residents in the greater Peoria area with a dedicated team of physicians, students and volunteers from throughout central Illinois.

Cordoba’s medical student leadership board, comprised of UICOMP students, coordinates the daily operations of the clinic that is open most Sundays, 1 - 4 pm. The student board also provides educational and training opportunities for student volunteers at the clinic. One example might be demonstrating physical exam maneuvers.

The UICOMP student volunteers take patient histories and vitals and perform some physical exam maneuvers under the watch of a fully licensed physician. After patient examinations, the medical student documents the patient encounter for the physician.

UICOMP student Katherine Floess recalls her first experience as an M1 at Cordoba. Floess (MD Candidate, Class of 2023) observed a patient population that reflects those most marginalized by the healthcare system. “We serve any patient regardless of insurance status or legal status, and many of our patients are immigrants,” she says. As an M3, Floess is one of four UICOMP students who serve on the clinic’s student leadership team.

Floess says Cordoba provides a great setting to learn and practice clinical skills and fosters mentorship between upper-classmen and preclinical students. “As a preclinical student, Cordoba allowed me to practice my clinical exam skills and my presentations to attendings prior to entering clinicals. When I began my first rotation, I realized how much my time at Cordoba had increased my clinical skills and my clinical confidence,” she says. “Now, I am in the position to mentor the preclinical students myself. This kind of experience in med school is unique to Cordoba, and I believe provides a valuable connection between classes.”

Rahmat Na’Allah, MD, UICOMP professor of clinical family medicine, is a physician volunteer at Cordoba who underscores the value of connections the students form and nurture at Cordoba. “Service, advocacy, networking and mentorship – these four cannot be underestimated. The personal and professional satisfaction that come from caring for others and making a difference in the community are key. The upper-level students get to mentor the junior students, and together, they are improving their leadership and organizational skills,” Na’Allah says. “The students gain valuable experience as they care for the underserved and go about navigating the logistical challenges that come with taking care of the uninsured population including the social determinants of health.”

Volunteering at Cordoba allows students to work closely with nurses and other staff as well as become involved in a wide array of clinical needs. “I’ve worked with my fellow students in all aspects of running a clinic, from obtaining equipment for the clinic such as EKGs, helping produce patient education materials, organizing outreach to local organizations about Cordoba, and fundraising to help offset cost of patient care,” Floess says.

For more information on Cordoba Healthcare, visit www.cordobahc.org.

Volunteering at Cordoba Clinic gives me a great opportunity to provide quality medical care for the underserved population here in Peoria while applying knowledge learned in the classroom by working alongside local clinicians. Being able to provide care for patients and see the impact it has on their lives at this early stage in my career is a continual reminder of why I chose this profession.”

- Justin Porter
UICOMP MD Candidate, Class of 2024
Graduate Medical Education, or GME, is a clinical education and training program for physicians who have completed their medical school requirements and been awarded an MD, or equivalent, degree. Part of UICOMP’s educational mission is its GME program. In Peoria, UICOMP is the sponsoring institution of 13 residency and nine fellowship training programs approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education as well as four additional non-accredited fellowships. The GME programs are offered in collaboration with OSF Saint Francis Medical Center and UnityPoint Health Methodist. Both healthcare affiliates serve as clinical sites for the GME programs.

Leaders at both OSF HealthCare and UnityPoint Health say GME is critical to their mission.

Samer Sader, MD, (UICOMP Class of 2000) chief medical officer at UnityPoint Health Methodist, says providing health care requires training the next generation of physicians. “We know the odds of retaining physicians increases significantly when they have connections to our region,” Sader says. “Clinicians and physicians are teachers at heart. Our fondness to teach can be expressed in many ways, and education of patients and the community is the one that our neighbors see on a daily basis. The part that our neighbors don’t see as often is the education provided to trainees. The option to educate the next generation is attractive to many physicians within our system, and it helps us recruit and retain quality individuals in our system.”

Robert Sparrow, MD, (UICOMP Class of 1979) chief medical officer at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center agrees, “Graduate Medical Education raises the level of care we’re able to provide and allows us to bring in faculty members who are highly educated, highly trained, and highly motivated,” Sparrow says. “GME is a pipeline to providers who bring quality healthcare to our community.”

Physician faculty are committed to current knowledge and trends, and Sader says that creates an inherent need to stay up-to-date. “Teaching also tends to improve communication skills,” he says. “The result for patients is improved care. GME ultimately allows for the training of physicians that will likely care for current and future patients. As a community, we are blessed to have UICOMP leading a strong commitment to education. At the end of the day, this will be critical to the healthcare needs in central Illinois.”

GME training equates to good healthcare for Peoria, but the relationship is symbiotic in that Peoria is an ideal location for future physicians to train, Sparrow says. “Coming to Peoria for training is an opportunity to have outstanding clinical training based on the volume and breadth of cases,” he says. “Residents receive dedicated, one-on-one training with faculty mentors and have access to research projects that they may not have at a large scale academic medical center. Here, residents learn side-by-side with faculty mentors and have outstanding training opportunities.”

Francis McBee Orzulak, associate dean for Graduate Medical Education, sees opportunity for expansion of GME programs. “We continue to explore opportunities for expansion of GME programs in partnership with our clinical affiliates,” he says. “When assessing a possible new program, we look at a variety of factors including the healthcare needs of the community we serve, need for practitioners of the specialty, and ensuring that we have the faculty and clinical experiences necessary to train in the specialty, just to name a few.”
UICOMP is the sponsoring institution of 13 residency and nine fellowship training programs approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education as well as four additional non-accredited fellowships.

Resident Enrollment . . 286
Emergency Medicine . . . 40
Family Medicine . . . . 31
Internal Medicine . . . . 42
Interventional Radiology –
Integrated . . . . . . . . . 2
Medicine-Pediatrics . . . 34
Neurology . . . . . . . . . 17
Neurosurgery . . . . . . 11
Obstetrics/Gynecology . . 12
Pediatrics . . . . . . . . . 34
Psychiatry . . . . . . . . . 15
Radiology . . . . . . . . . 16
Surgery . . . . . . . . . . . 20
Transitional . . . . . . . . 12

Fellowship Enrollment . . 35
Breast Imaging . . . . . . 1
Cardiovascular Disease . . 9
Family Medicine Obstetrics . 2
Gastroenterology . . . . . 9
Hospice & Palliative Care . 1
Pulmonary Critical Care . . 8
Simulation . . . . . . . . . 1
Pediatric Hospital Medicine . 2
Neonatal Perinatal . . . . . 2

Residency Retrospective
Pathways talked with four physicians who completed UICOMP residency programs. They share their perceptions and training experience.

Morgyn Beckman, MD
Medical School: University of Iowa
Carver College of Medicine, Class of 2011
GME: Psychiatry Residency, UICOMP;
Fellowship – Forensic Psychiatry;
Oregon Health and Science University
Current role: Assistant Professor, Department
of Psychiatry – Oregon Health and Science
University; Psychiatrist, Forensic Assertive
Community Treatment Program – Cascadia
Behavioral Healthcare

Q A
What were your thoughts as you started your residency in Peoria?
I was nervous about starting residency in general, as I think most new
physicians are, coupled with the fact that it was a brand-new program. I knew that
I liked the faculty members, and upon my arrival, I found that my resident cohort
was also excellent. I was familiar with Peoria as some of my family lives nearby,
which helped to ease some of the nervousness associated with moving away from where I had completed
medical school.

Q A
How would you describe your training experience?
My training experience, especially considering that I was in the first
class in the program, was wonderful. The faculty were supportive and allowed us
room to grow as physicians while also making sure we were going in the right
direction. I was given the opportunity to do rotations that I would not have been
able to do at other programs and learned things that have specifically helped me
to provide better care in my current roles. While the transition from resident to
attending is a large one, I felt fairly comfortable and was better prepared
than some others.

Q A
What advice do you have for others preparing for residency and considering Peoria?
I would encourage students to do a few things. First, schedule some
time with current residents to get an idea
of the program. Faculty may not always
know the ins and outs of the
daily professional lives of the
residents such as schedules,
types of cases, or the gen-
eral morale of the residents.
Second, really look into what
is available in Peoria. I was surprised to
find a wide variety of things to do in the
community. While it may seem like you
would be missing out compared to a
larger city, I found there were very few
things that I needed to go elsewhere for.
And as everyone will tell you, you are only
a couple of hours from St. Louis and
Chicago! Third, do an elective rotation if
you can. I was not able to as the program
did not exist prior to my class but doing
elective rotations with other programs
allowed me to understand the inner
workings of the program more fully and
led to ruling out a couple of places I had
previously thought I would apply to.

Q A
Is there a particular attribute that
set your training experience apart?
Having the ability to do both a
general and advanced rotation in
dialectical behavior therapy was hands-
down one of the best features of the
program. I use the skills that I learned
from Dr. Clore and by working with Dr.
Simangan on a daily basis, even though
I am not specifically providing dialectical
behavior therapy most of the time. Dr.
Simangan and I were able to work with
Dr. Clore to set up an advanced therapy
group that I do not think we would have
been able to do at another program,
and we were very well supported in our
endeavor. I also benefitted greatly from
the forensic rotation and the guidance
of Drs. Finkenbine and Clore. I entered
my fellowship in forensic psychiatry with
significantly more experience than others
and was able to apply new skills more
quickly on top of the foundation they had
already helped me to build.

continued
What were your thoughts as you started your residency in Peoria?

I was very impressed by the depth and breadth of pathology that residents saw here, the teaching program, the camaraderie amongst the residents and the supportive environment. Having no family in the Peoria area, I felt warmly welcomed by my fellow residents and faculty, and felt like I wasn’t far from family.

How would you describe your training experience?

Here at OSF HealthCare Children’s Hospital of Illinois, I had a strong educational foundation. Being at a program that is community based with a University affiliation, I saw classic ‘bread and butter’ pediatric pathology, all the rarest of rare cases and all the zebras in between. Our extensive referral base enables us to serve over half a million children, and with this capacity, training here made me feel confident and competent stepping into the world as a pediatrician.

What advice do you have for others preparing for residency and considering Peoria?

I would advise students to look at the people. You don’t want to be lost in a sea of residents where you are just a number. You want your program director to know you and what you are all about, what you are passionate about, and what makes you ‘you’. Peoria is a hidden gem. You will get a wonderful experience in your training and will get to train with people that will become your best friends for life.

What is there a particular attribute that set your training experience apart?

Here at UICOMP Pediatrics, there are faculty amongst program leadership dedicated to various facets of being a pediatrician- education, advocacy, board preparation, research, quality and safety, QI, community service, simulation, and the list goes on.

What advice do you have for others preparing for residency and considering Peoria?

Residency can be very busy and demanding, so it is important to choose a program that is supportive and responsive. My program was that. There were many changes that occurred over the four-year span of my residency.
to benefit resident satisfaction. These changes were in response to real-time survey results and involved things like breaking up some of the more demanding rotations into shorter blocks, instituting a wellness curriculum, etc.

**Q** Is there a particular attribute that set your training experience apart?

**A** Many graduates of Peoria will concur that the people are the best part. The program members including the leadership, office staff, and co-residents are who you spend most of your time with, and they all value your success and well-being. They become family.

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**GME**

**Brad Stoecker, MD**

Medical School: UICOMP 2004  
GME: Family and Community Medicine – UICOMP 2007  
Current role: Chair of Dept of Family Medicine – OSF St Francis, Medical Director OSF APP Fellowship – OSF HealthCare

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**Q** What were your thoughts as you started your residency in Peoria?

**A** Being from the Peoria area, I know the area and was familiar with Methodist (currently UnityPoint) and OSF Saint Francis. But the thing that I was most impressed by was how welcoming the faculty was. They truly want you to become the best that you can become.

**Q** How would you describe your training experience?

**A** I was very impressed with the training that I received. The size of the healthcare systems in Peoria allows for patients with a wide range of complexity. I felt the faculty were very good about pushing you to become more independent which helps build your confidence, but was supportive when needed. I try to emulate this when teaching and being a mentor in my current role of Medical Director for the OSF APP Fellowship.

**Q** What advice do you have for others preparing for residency and considering Peoria?

**A** One piece of advice that was given to me when I was interviewing was that a person can read, learn, and become a good physician at any program. But to have a good experience, you must pick the right program. I believe UICOMP and Peoria have many great qualities that make it an excellent place to train. The range of complexity of patients to the knowledge (and even more important, the approachability) of all the faculty, make Peoria a great place to further your education.

**Q** Is there a particular attribute or feature that you think set your training experience apart?

**A** One of the features of the Family Medicine Residency that I believe was very beneficial was the noncompetitive program. Being based at Methodist, we covered the whole hospital from OB to general med/surg floor to ICU. We did not have to compete with other programs for patients or learning experiences. This forced you to learn how to handle different situations in different settings which has been very beneficial as a Family Medicine physician.

A lot of people don’t consider Peoria because of the smaller size. However, the Peoria area has an amazing amount of things to do. Cultural events, sporting events, and tons of outdoor activities are all available. And the larger cities are just a few hours away. The Peoria area’s cost of living is low which is attractive as a resident.

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“" We continue to explore opportunities for expansion of GME programs in partnership with our clinical affiliates.""  
– Francis McBee Orzulak, MD

GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION
Cardiology Fellowship Elevates Training, Care in Peoria

When UICOMP expanded its GME footprint by adding fellowships to the residency training opportunities, cardiology fellowship was the first. Fellowship program director Sudhir Mungee, MD, who came to Peoria in 2006, was among the few who envisioned the idea of offering a fellowship to expand the wings of GME and provide specialty training for cardiologists.

With a patient base of 1.2 million and OSF HealthCare’s reputation for excellence in cardiac care, it only made sense, Mungee says. Taking that step required a supporting institution with the volume and spectrum of patients to provide training and faculty to mentor fellows. With the support of UICOMP and OSF HealthCare, the vision of many came to fruition.

The Cardiology Fellowship started in 2013 and is a three-year clinical fellowship with three fellows accepted each year, making nine fellows at any given time. Fellows go through rigorous didactics in all aspects of cardiovascular disease and are trained on varied procedures. Since its inception, 24 fellows have graduated from the program. Following graduation, most fellows have accepted advanced fellowships at other prestigious institutions at other institutions throughout the nation in fields like interventional, electrophysiology, or heart failure. Some have joined the parent program as faculty.

“We receive an average of 500-plus applications for three position each year, and we bring in the most talented physicians with a goal on being all inclusive and diverse,” Mungee says. “Having a fellowship raises the bar and quality in residency training and throughout graduate medical education. From medical student to residents to fellows to faculty, there is a natural and seamless hierarchy of learning. The Cardiology Fellowship raises both the level of competitiveness and competence.”

Research is an important component of the fellowship as well. Cardiology fellows are involved in case studies, both prospective and retrospective studies, and population health studies. Mungee says the program’s fellows have represented UICOMP and OSF in every national cardiology conference since its inception and have published more than 50 research papers or articles.

The program boasts a 100 percent pass rate for board certification in Cardiology, Echo, Nuclear, CT and Vascular Boards, “but the greatest beneficiaries of the fellowship are the patients” Mungee says. “Not only is there 24/7 access to patient care, but a fellowship also brings the quality of patient care to a higher level.”

“Our faculty are up-to-date in medical literature and evidence-based practice of medicine and are committed to bring on the most recent advances in the field of cardiology,” he says. “This, not only is a need, but a must in an academic program.”

The fellowship is a draw to attract top level faculty as well. “While recruitment to Peoria has been a struggle in the past, the presence of a fellowship is the biggest draw to attract quality, skilled physicians into the program,” Mungee explains. “The fellowship also brings a sense of youthfulness to the program. The faculty/fellow interaction…in teaching we learn, and in learning, they teach us.”

“The sense of excitement is present all the time. We have two hours of academic sessions daily for our fellows. The comradery and sense of wellbeing is of the utmost importance as we mature our fellows to become future cardiologists. Our goal is not just to train a board certified cardiologist, but to bring about wholesome growth so that they develop into a compassionate and competent cardiologist.”

Mungee sees tremendous opportunities ahead. “The potential Peoria has in healthcare with its patient base and support of a robust university with OSF HealthCare is immense,” he says. “The future of healthcare must center around academic excellence and patient care; and with Jump Simulation and everything else, we should be the biggest draw to the most talented faculty and fellows to serve our patients. My vision is to create advanced cardiology fellowships – interventional, electrophysiology, heart failure and research… The privilege to provide excellent patient care, paired with the pride of being able to build careers and have fellows expand their horizons puts Peoria on the national map.”

“...The future of healthcare must center around academic excellence and patient care.”

– Sudhir Mungee, MD
The white coat means to me that I am finally making progress on my dream to help those who are vulnerable and who cannot help themselves, and to lift up everyone in the community through science and healthcare.

— Corina Perez (MD Candidate, Class of 2025)

The white coat to me is a symbol of opportunity. An opportunity to impact the lives of my patients, to really make a change within the community and to have an impact on healthcare as a whole.

— Caleb Powell (MD Candidate, Class of 2025)

Class of 2025 White Coat Ceremony

Members of the UICOMP Class of 2025 received their White Coats and official welcome during their White Coat Ceremony held in August 2021. The 64 first year medical students recited the Physician’s Oath and received their first white coat a gift from the UICOMP Alumni Council. Each student’s white coat pocket included a note card with words of inspiration or advice written by a UICOMP alumni.
Keila Magafas "All In" for Gibson City

I wanted to go ‘all in’ from the start,” Keila Magafas says of her intent to join the Rural Student Physician Program (RSPP) at UICOMP. The immersive clinical experience places third-year Peoria medical students in a rural community where they learn one-on-one with physician mentors. “I wanted to be a part of the community. I wanted to be trusted, not just by my patients but by the people who would be part of my life in this community.”

Magafas was placed in Gibson City, a small town located about 75 miles east of Peoria, for her 24-week integrated clerkship with Dr. Bernadette Ray as her primary preceptor. Dr. Ray is well respected and very involved in the Gibson City community, and Magafas says she frequently heard, “Oh, I love her!” from locals who learned of the physician with whom Magafas was working.

Hailing from the south side of Chicago, Magafas set out to make Gibson City home as part of her plan to go “all in” for her RSPP experience. “In a small town, everyone knows everyone,” she says. She attended church, joined a gym, and commonly heard “oh, you’re the med student!” when introducing herself.

She organized the community’s first health fair with 15 organizations coming together to showcase local resources available as children and families prepared for the back-to-school season. “Everyone was very welcoming and open to me being there,” she says. “The health fair was a total volunteer effort with lots of people pitching in,” she says. Her preceptor Dr. Ray provided the venue and use of tables and chairs. The organization Cultivadores donated backpacks, food pantry items and a bouncy house, and the Rotary Club donated $100 to support the event. Magafas made connections and coordinated the efforts to make it all happen.

James Barnett, MD, director for the RSPP program, says, “The student participation in the community influences opportunities for impact. In Keila’s situation, her community connections helped her establish a back-to-school health fair that brought together many sectors of the community. This provided beneficial networking.”

Barnett says the six-month experience with the patients, physicians, and community enhances the education for the student and care for the patients. “The student gains a deep appreciation for some of the health needs of the community. There’s enough time to allow the student to work to bring lasting impact to some of these needs. Patients also see the student as a part of the community and appreciate the work their physician is doing to mentor the student,” Barnett says. “I think there is an enhancement of the local physician relationship with their patients having a student present. And, there is the potential to develop apprenticeship like relationships with the students and their mentoring physicians. This may be valued for a lifetime.”

Then, on August 12, 2021, Gibson City was blasted with nine inches of rain in a six-hour period. This resulted in flash flooding that wreaked havoc on the town, a massive power outage, and evacuation of about 200 residents. Neighborhoods were devastated, and some lost their homes. Magafas and her belongings were okay.

Soon after the flooding, the American Red Cross set up to assist, and a local church coordinated volunteers to help clean houses touched by the flood. Even after the roads were clear, Magafas says the devastation was overwhelming.

Fluent in Spanish, Magafas helped the Red Cross translate for a family with five children who had no running water and no electricity. She went to the American Legion to pick up hot meals for the family. The volunteers there asked her to wait after learning she was helping a family in need. Soon, a volunteer returned and handed Magafas an envelope with $100 cash for the family. “This town is so great,” Magafas recalls. “It was just people helping people. A lot of people in bigger cities didn’t even hear about the flood. We sometimes forget that rural America often has to help itself.”

On September 19, the Edge CrossFit gym Magafas had been faithfully attending for months held a “Floodraiser” and raised over $1,200 to help the flood ravaged community. Magafas not only enjoyed the workout but was thrilled at the participation of so many of her UICOMP classmates and new friends throughout the community. She shared thanks to her med school peers who helped with the health fair and floodraiser events – Katherine Floess, Charles Cain, Melissa Dominguez and Maria Climaco.

Reflecting on her experience, she says, “It was a community effort. This RSPP experience is something I’ll carry with me forever. It’s important to go all in. Every place you are, you should consider it your community. I don’t want to be known as just a good doctor. I want to be much more than that.”
Community Causes Rally to Support UICOMP Cancer Research

Local fundraising groups continue to show their passion honoring their loved ones, support others who follow the fight after them, and organize their friends, neighbors and community around a common cause to make a difference. UICOMP is proud of its ongoing relationship with these three organizations who continue to work hard and raise funds through their events. Funds from these organizations support cancer research at UICOMP.

KB Strong

The KB Strong Foundation pays tribute to the legacy of Kevin Brown by supporting glioblastoma research and researchers at UICOMP. The KB Strong organization held its 3rd Annual BrownFest in September 2021 in Washington, Illinois, and it collaborates with The Kevin Brown Memorial Tournament of Champions held each November to further its cause of building awareness and continuing its fight against glioblastoma. Since its inception two years ago, KB Strong has given over $150,000 to supporting brain tumor research.

www.kbstrong-fightingthefight.com

Mark Linder Walk for the Mind

Mark Linder Walk for the Mind held its 19th annual event September 25, 2021, with its walk on the Peoria Riverfront to support brain tumor research at UICOMP. This annual event was organized by its namesake – Mark Linder, who organized the first race in 2003 before losing his battle in 2005. He created the walk after feeling alone following his brain cancer diagnosis. His mission was to create brain tumor awareness locally and to raise funds for research with a total of $586,000 given to date.

www.marklinderwalkforthemind.com

Theresa Tracy Strive to Thrive

The Theresa Tracy Strive to Survive continues its fight to increase the survivability of pancreatic cancer. Founded to honor Theresa Tracy, this group of dedicated volunteers has contributed more than $250,000 since it began nine years ago. They hold the annual Tracy Trot in November on the East Peoria Riverfront, and proceeds support pancreatic cancer research at UICOMP as well as Illinois Cancer Care. The volunteers who support this event hold numerous fundraisers throughout the year.

www.theresatracytrot.com
Ken Fukuchi, MD, PhD, professor with the Department of Cancer Biology and Pharmacology at UICOMP, was awarded a $2.4 million grant from the National Institute of Health (NIH) for his Alzheimer’s research project “Role of MyD88 signaling in systemic inflammation and Alzheimer Disease.”

More than 6 million Americans currently have Alzheimer’s disease (AD), and no satisfactory treatment is available. People with AD develop two types of deposits of abnormal protein aggregates in the brain – amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles. Both of these protein aggregates are posited to be toxic to brain cells (neurons). This leads to cognitive disability and dementia. Called the amyloid and tau hypothesis, this concept is currently driving Alzheimer’s research activity.

However, scientists do not know exactly how and why these abnormal protein aggregates form, particularly in the brains of AD patients. Under normal circumstances, brain immune cells, called microglia, can sense the abnormal protein aggregates and eliminate them to protect neurons from death.

Alzheimer’s researchers believe that multiple factors including genetics, lifestyle and environments are involved in the development of AD and identified factors that increase the risk of developing AD. Such AD risk factors are aging, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, high cholesterol and certain infections. Through his work studying AD, Fukuchi believes the strongest common denominator of these risk factors is chronic and systemic inflammation. He and his research team found that chronic and systemic inflammation induces abnormal activation of the microglia in the brain through a specific signaling pathway called MyD88.

With this NIH grant award, Fukuchi will test the hypothesis that chronic and systemic inflammation that accompanies AD risk factors induces microglial dysfunction, leading to accumulation of aggregated amyloid and tau proteins in the brain. The goals of this five-year project are to elucidate the molecular and cellular mechanisms underlying the AD risk factors associated with chronic and systemic inflammation and to develop new preventive and therapeutic strategies for AD.

NIH is the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world, investing more than $32 billion a year to enhance life and reduce illness and disability. NIH funded research has led to breakthroughs and new treatments, helping people live longer, healthier lives, and building the research foundation that drives discovery.

UICOMP presented its 2021 Community Health Awards during its annual Celebration of Excellence faculty recognition event November 4. The awards started in 1995 to honor individuals and organizations who promote community health in central Illinois. Annually, UICOMP presents two awards – one to an individual and another one to a group or organization.

Selected the winner in the individual category was Mary Stapel, MD, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at UICOMP. Dr. Stapel has been an advocate for health equity and has served the underserved, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. She provides care for the underserved through the local street medicine program as well as through the OSF Care-A-Van and shelter support. She was honored for her roles as an exemplary clinician, leader and educator who collectively promotes and improves the health of our community.

The group award was presented to Phoenix Community Development Services Homeless Outreach Program that is dedicated to helping those without homes find safe, affordable housing needed to improve health and wellbeing. Phoenix CDS operates the only homeless outreach program in the area focused on helping homeless families and individuals secure housing and eliminate barriers to homelessness through support services. Because of their service and dedication, over 80 percent of the unsheltered individuals served by the program have been able to secure housing to end their homelessness. In 2020 alone, the program placed 242 homeless persons into housing with 97 percent able to maintain their housing and not return to homelessness. The Community Health Awards Committee, in particular, noted the efforts of Phoenix CDS Homeless Outreach Program’s efforts to fill devastating gaps due to the pandemic, such as “HOWIE,” the Hygiene on Wheels mobile hygiene vehicle which offers restrooms with shower, toilet and laundry area.

Nominations are accepted each fall for the awards which are annually selected by the UICOMP Community Health Awards committee. The committee is comprised of previous winners of the award as well as a cross-section of representatives of community groups who have previously won the honor.

Pictured from left to right are: Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, UICOMP interim regional dean; Susan Bishop, DMD, UICOMP community health awards committee representative; 2021 Community Health Award individual winner Mary Stapel, MD; representatives of the organization winner (Phoenix Community Development Services) Christine Kahl, Molly Pilgreen, and Darcy Eberle; and Mark Rosenblatt, MD, executive dean University of Illinois College of Medicine.
Graham Health System Gives $500,000 to Support Rural Medicine

In September 2021, Graham Health System, Canton, IL, donated $500,000 to support the UICOMP Rural Student Physician Program.

“This generous scholarship is another demonstration of the commitment the Graham Health System and the Canton community have to advancing medical education of UICOMP students and promoting the virtues of practicing medicine in rural communities,” says Kelvin Wynn, MD, UICOMP chair of Family and Community Medicine.

The Rural Student Physician Program provides third-year medical students with an immersive clinical experience in rural communities. RSPP students benefit from one-on-one mentoring by physicians and gain knowledge, skills and understanding for rural primary care. The need for rural healthcare providers is great with 20 percent of the population living in rural areas, but only 10 percent of doctors serving in rural communities.

The gift from Graham will provide support for student scholarships for UICOMP students in the Rural Student Physician Program.

“The funding of this scholarship is an investment in the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria to be sure, but more so an investment in the healthcare delivery system we all want and deserve in rural Illinois,” says Graham Health System President and CEO Bob Senneff. “These dollars will be invested in the next generation of physicians who will care for our families and loved ones. My hope is that other healthcare organizations and major employers in rural Illinois understand the critical role the college plays and will make significant investments as well.”
Williams Serving as Quality Officer in Surgery

Keneeshia N. Williams, MD, (UICOMP Class of 2009), serves as the chief quality officer in the Department of Surgery and assistant professor of surgery and trauma/surgical critical care at Grady Memorial Hospital/Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia. She specializes in trauma surgery, emergency/elective general surgery, and surgical critical care. Williams completed her general surgery residency at the University of Illinois at Mount Sinai Hospital in 2015. Following a one-year research residency at the Burn and Shock Trauma Research Institute of Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Illinois, she completed a surgical critical care/acute care surgery fellowship at Banner – University Medical Center Tucson.

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.

Mulberry Selected 2021 Outstanding Women in Business

Beth Mulberry, MD, (UICOMP Class of 1990) was named the 2021 Outstanding Women in Business in the category of “health care” by Triad Business Journal. Mulberry is founder and medical director of Mustard Seed Community Health in Greensboro, North Carolina. Mulberry created Mustard Seed to provide high-quality care to people with limited income, no insurance, or who face barriers to healthcare, including child care and transportation.

McIntyre Authors Chapter

Brian McIntyre, EdD, LCP, associate professor of clinical psychology and clinical family medicine, recently authored the chapter on Blinders to Comprehensive Psychiatric Diagnosis in the just published book titled Public Health Behind Bars - From Prisons to Communities.

Jandura Joins Northwest Community Healthcare as Gastroenterologist

David Jandura, MD, recently joined Northwest Community Healthcare (NCH) Medical Group as a gastroenterologist. He completed his gastroenterology fellowship at UICOMP in June 2021. He received his MD degree from the University of Illinois College of Medicine Chicago and his internal medicine residency at University of Illinois Hospital/ Jesse Brown VA Center.

Yadav Named 2021 Laureate Award Winner

Manajyoti Yadav, MD, associate professor of clinical medicine, was named the 2021 Laureate Award Winner by the American College of Physicians Illinois Southern Region. An active member of ACP, Yadav chaired the early career physicians committee, served on the education committee, and is currently a member of the Illinois Governor’s Council. The Laureate Award is the highest award bestowed on the chapter level and is given to members who have demonstrated, by example and conduct, an abiding commitment to excellence in medical care, education, or research and in service to their community, ACP chapter, and the American College of Physicians.
Swain Joins Franciscan as Cardiothoracic Surgeon

Timothy Swain, MD, (UICOMP Class of 1999) joined the staff of Franciscan Physician Network Heart Center Michigan City (Indiana) as a board-certified cardiothoracic surgeon. He completed his residency in general surgery at Lankenau Hospital General Surgery Program in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania. He has fellowships in cardiothoracic surgery from Lankenau and University of Rochester, Strong Memorial Cardiac and Thoracic Surgery in Rochester, New York. His clinical interests are mitral valve repair, reconstruction and replacement; pulmonary valve replacement; aortic root work; and beating heart off- or on-pump coronary artery bypass grafting.

Beardsley Joins MercyOne in Iowa

Ryan Beardsley, MD, joined MercyOne Waterloo OB/GYN. He completed his residency at UICOMP and received his medical degree from University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford. His interests are robotic and other minimally invasive gynecological surgeries, such as minimally invasive hysterectomies, and reproductive endocrinology/infertility.

Oyer Joins OrthoIllinois

Mark Oyer, MD, (UICOMP Class of 2015) joined OrthoIllinois in Rockford as a hip and knee surgeon. Oyer completed his internship and residency training at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine Orthopedic Residency Program in Chicago. His advanced training was through an adult reconstruction hip and knee fellowship at the University of Wisconsin – Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.

Pediatrics Department Celebrates Halloween

The UICOMP Department of Pediatrics continued its established tradition of dressing in costume and competing in a friendly group competition. Patients and their families seemed to enjoy the characters and costumes as much as the faculty physicians, residents, fellows, students and staff who joined in the fun.

Faculty, Students Serve Neighbors in Need

UICOMP faculty and student volunteers supported a mobile drive-through food pantry October 30. They served 94 families with food and pantry items as well as offered health screenings for blood pressure and blood sugar. The event was in collaboration with Heartland Health Services and Peoria Area Food Bank.

Squillante Named Chair of Emergency Medicine

Marc Squillante, DO, clinical professor of Emergency Medicine, was named chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at UICOMP in July 2021. Dr. Squillante has been on the UICOMP faculty for 32 years and has served as program director for the Emergency Medicine residency program from 1996-2014. He is a former recipient of UICOMP Faculty Member of the Year and the Outstanding Teaching Award for the EM residency. During his tenure, he has provided extensive service to UICOMP committees, from service on the Executive Committee and the Committee on Graduate Medical Education to the Residency Recruitment Task Force, which he has chaired since 1994.

He graduated from the College of Osteopathic Medicine & Surgery in Des Moines, Iowa, and completed his residency training in Emergency Medicine at UICOMP, where he was chief resident.
Swapna Asuthkar, PhD, assistant professor with the Department of Cancer Biology and Pharmacology, received a two-year $55,000 grant from William E. McElroy Research Foundation in August 2021 for her lab team’s study on “Activation of TRPM8 channel suppresses Prostate Cancer Growth and Progression.”

Prostate cancer is one of the most common male malignancies and a leading cause of cancer-related death in men. While androgen-deprivation therapy is effective in the initial stages of prostate cancer, tumor cells eventually become unresponsive to androgen ablation. Thus, the transition to androgen-independent prostate cancer (AIPC) has a poor prognosis with a median survival of 18 months. Mechanisms underlying this transition remain to be elucidated; however, increasing evidence has implicated the loss of the transient receptor potential melastatin 8 (TRPM8) as a key contributing factor leading to therapy resistance. TRPM8 is an ionotropic receptor normally expressed in the prostate epithelium. Recently, the team in Asuthkar’s lab demonstrated that testosterone-induced TRPM8 activation increases Ca2+ uptake and promotes programmed cell death. This led Asuthkar and her team to hypothesize that enhanced activity of the TRPM8 on the plasma membrane is cytotoxic to cancer cells and loss of TRPM8 is a key event involved in prostate cancer pathogenesis. However, efforts to promote its expression and stabilization to reduce the burdens associated with late-stage prostate cancer require further research. This project proposal will further elucidate the tumor suppressor function of TRPM8.

In addition, it will encourage the development of TRPM8 targeted therapeutics for future clinical trials to provide effective treatment options for patients with late-stage prostate cancer.

Nominations Open: UICOMP Distinguished Alumni Award

More than 2,000 MDs comprise UICOMP’s alumni! Each year one is recognized with the Distinguished Alumni Award. Please consider nominating a classmate, colleague or yourself! Nominations may be made by any University of Illinois College of Medicine graduate, faculty member, retired faculty member, or current staff member of the College of Medicine at Peoria. Details and nomination form can be found on the UICOMP website, and enter “Alumni Award” in the search window. You may also request a copy of the form by contacting Kim Deets at kdeets@uic.edu or (309) 680-8613.

Nominations due March 1, 2022, for consideration for the 2022 award.
**Tiffany Abrego, PhD – Psychiatry**

Dr. Abrego has been a key faculty member in a broad range of activities for the department, university, and our community. In addition to her work as a leader in clinical service and education with autism, she directs our psychological assessments services, resident CBT clinic, and is an advisory member of the Center for Wellbeing. She was recently named the departmental scholarship director in which she oversees and coordinates all research activities for more than 25 individuals. Finally, as the director of faculty development, she organizes educational and skill-building activities for the faculty.

**Stephanie Kok, MD – Emergency Medicine**

Dr. Kok is a 2011 UICOMP graduate, completed her Emergency Medicine residency here, serving as chief resident, and has been an EM faculty member 2014. An enthusiastic and patient teacher, she consistently receives high praise from learners. She is also a highly regarded and trusted mentor who frequently takes time to meet with and advise residents. She was recently named assistant program director. She is a leader of the program, FemInEM, a group of women residents and attendings who meet regularly to discuss issues facing female physicians. She embodies everything you want in a faculty member, teacher, and supporter of women in medicine.

**Jane Maksimovic, DO – Radiology**

Dr. Maksimovic is an inspiration for strong work ethic, positivity, a commitment to helping others, and a passion for medicine. Upon completion of her UICOMP radiology residency and neuroradiology fellowship, she joined Central Illinois Radiological Associates and the UICOMP faculty. She later accepted the role of residency associate program director. In 2021, she was awarded Faculty of the Year for her innovative teaching, taking education to the next level, and her expectation of radiology residents in delivering service excellence. She mentors residents not only about the field, but also about the clinical, interpersonal, and collaboration skills that women can uniquely bring to medicine.

**Denise Mammolito, MD – Surgery**

Leading by example and leaving a legacy of excellence, Dr. Mammolito has dedicated her career to the health and wellness of women within the UICOMP and broader Peoria communities. She has been on UICOMP faculty for 28 years and served as interim Chair of Surgery during an important transition year for the surgical residents from 2020 to 2021. She has taught and influenced countless years of OB-GYN and surgical residents as an academician and skilled surgeon. She chaired and participated in Peoria’s Annual Breast Cancer Symposium for 13 years and has served on the Susan G. Komen Board of Directors. Dr. Mammolito works across disciplines to deliver old school medicine: she cares about her patients personally, manages them comprehensively, and follows them longitudinally.

**Sidney Stewart, MD – Internal Medicine**

Dr. Stewart has been a long-standing member of the Internal Medicine program leadership and is now the program director for the transitional year. She has taught innumerable students across UME and GME courses including DOCS, core cases, clerkship lectures, morning reports, quality improvement sessions, and program curricula development and clinical teaching. She strives to develop the individual by learning about their skills and interests and tending to their individual needs for professional development. Recently, she has helped design a new rotation in wellness for the Internal Medicine residency program. She serves as a mentor and a quiet leader who is always at the ready and available for her learners and colleagues.

**Neelam Verma, MD – Obstetrics & Gynecology**

Dr. Verma is the epitome of a strong, female academic physician. As a teacher, she consistently goes out of her way to interact and teach the medical students and residents. Not only covering content specific information, but also going above and beyond to spend additional time imparting leadership skills and serving as an excellent role model for residents and medical students, especially women. She is also the kind of physician women look for, both as a doctor and as a role model - always advocating on their behalf. She is a natural leader and inspires others to become compassionate advocates for women’s health.
UICOMP Welcomes New Faculty

Dr. Sara C. Warfield joined the Department of Pediatrics as a Research Assistant Professor. Dr. Warfield received her doctoral degree from West Virginia University in 2019 and completed her post-doctoral fellowship at West Virginia University, School of Public Health in 2021. Dr. Warfield’s expertise is in epidemiology.

Dr. Denise Francisco joined the Department of Medicine as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine. Dr. Francisco received her doctoral degree from University of Santo Tomas in 2012 and completed her residency at University of Connecticut in 2018. Dr. Francisco is board certified with the American Board of Internal Medicine. Dr. Francisco’s expertise is in infectious disease.

Dr. Meghana Nadiger joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Nadiger received her doctoral degree from Ramaiah Medical College in 2008 and completed her residency at Flushing Hospital Medical Center in 2018. Dr. Nadiger is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Dr. Nadiger’s expertise is in pediatric critical care.

Dr. Michelle Rowland joined the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology as a Clinical Assistant Professor. Dr. Rowland received her doctoral degree from University of Illinois College of Medicine in 2010 and completed her residency at Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC in 2014. Dr. Rowland is board certified with the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Dr. Subhrajit Lahiri joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Lahiri received his doctoral degree from West Bengal University of Health Sciences in 2009 and completed his residency at Nicklaus Children’s Hospital in 2017. Dr. Lahiri is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Dr. Lahiri’s expertise is in pediatric cardiology.

Dr. Wendelin Burdo-Hartman joined the Department of Pediatrics as a Visiting Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Burdo-Hartman received her doctoral degree from Ohio State University in 1989 and completed her residency at Butterworth Hospital in 1992. Dr. Burdo-Hartman is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics with a Sub-Board Neurodevelopmental Disabilities. Dr. Burdo-Hartman’s expertise is in child development.

Dr. Billy Wang joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor. Dr. Wang received his doctoral degree from Loma Linda University School of Medicine in 2014 and completed his residency at Mattel Children’s Hospital at UCLA in 2017. Dr. Wang is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Dr. Wang’s expertise is in pediatric critical care.

Dr. Ennerio Alboliras joined the Department of Pediatrics as a Visiting Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Alboliras received his doctoral degree from University of the Philippines College of Medicine in 1976 and completed his residency at Children’s Hospital of New Jersey in 1983. Dr. Alboliras is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics and Pediatric Cardiology. Dr. Alboliras’ expertise is in pediatric cardiology.

MISSION

To advance health for everyone through outstanding education, research, clinical care, social responsibility and collaboration.
Dr. Shruti Chakravarthy joined the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology. Dr. Chakravarthy received her doctoral degree from St. George’s University School of Medicine and Northumbria University in 2017 and completed her residency at Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell, Staten Island University Hospital in 2021. Dr. Chakravarthy is board certified with the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists.

Dr. Kiran Choudhry joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Choudhry received her doctoral degree from Aga Khan University in 2001 and completed her residency at West Virginia University Hospital in 2006. Dr. Choudhry is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics and the American Board of Pediatric Endocrinology. Dr. Choudhry’s expertise is in pediatric endocrinology.

Dr. Liliana Burdea joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Burdea received her doctoral degree from University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Timisoara, Romania in 2006 and completed her residency at Lincoln Medical and Mental Center in Bronx, NY in 2018. Dr. Burdea is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Dr. Burdea’s expertise is in pediatric endocrinology.

Dr. Nitin Das Kunnathu Puthanveedu joined the Department of Medicine as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine. Dr. Kunnathu Puthanveedu received his doctoral degree from Osmania Medical College in 2014 and completed his residency at Cleveland Ohio Clinic in 2019. Dr. Kunnathu Puthanveedu is board certified with the American Board of Internal Medicine.

Dr. Mustafa Bakir joined the Department of Pediatrics as a Visiting Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Bakir received his doctoral degree from Istanbul University in 1988 and completed his residency at Hacettepe University School of Medicine in 1993. Dr. Bakir is board certified ABP’s Credentials Committee for the Alternative Pathway for Academic Faculty.

Dr. Michelle Rusch joined the Department of Health Science Education and Pathology as a Clinical Associate. In January, Dr. Rusch will transition to full-time status with a faculty title of Teaching Assistant Professor. Dr. Rusch received her doctoral degree from Iowa State University in 2008. Dr. Rusch will assist with design and implementation of educational programs for faculty development in use of clinical simulation, debriefing and assessment.

Dr. Kiran Choudhry joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. Dr. Choudhry received her doctoral degree from Aga Khan University in 2001 and completed her residency at West Virginia University Hospital in 2006. Dr. Choudhry is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics and the American Board of Pediatric Endocrinology. Dr. Choudhry’s expertise is in pediatric endocrinology.

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– VISION –

The University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria will strengthen the health of our communities through transformative innovation, education, discovery and patient-centered care. Through collaborative efforts, UICOMP will improve health equity to promote well-being for all.
Alumni: Stay Connected to UICOMP

1. Current address and email!
   Be sure we have your current name, address, and phone number! If your name has changed due to marriage or you’ve recently moved, be sure to send us your current information. You’ll also want to make sure we have your email address! We have just started sharing UICOMP updates by email. These are short messages and a fun way to see the latest happenings at UICOMP.

2. Follow us on social media!
   Our social media channels are easy ways to follow what’s happening on campus and get the latest news and updates. Find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

3. What’s your news?
   New position or move? Won an honor or award? Connected recently with a fellow alum? We’d love to hear about it. Email your news or information to sgrebner@uic.edu or phone (309) 671-8404. Your photo submissions are welcome as well.

4. Join the UICOMP Alumni Council!
   Simply reach out to Kim Deets at kdeets@uic.edu or phone (309) 680-8613.

Community Garden "Produces"

The Community Garden project organized and led by the UICOMP Department of Family and Community Medicine yielded more than 600 pounds of fresh produce that was donated to Sophia’s Kitchen this season. Sophia’s Kitchen is located in downtown Peoria and serves meals Monday through Friday to the homeless, unemployed, veterans, and the elderly.

Follow us on social media
Join the UICOMP social media communities by liking, following, and tagging UICOMP!
If you are in the LinkedIn community, we welcome alumni and faculty to be sure to include UICOMP as part of their profile.