Congrats Class of 2022
This issue of *Pathways* focuses on the topic of wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted the devastating effects of burnout on healthcare providers, and an American Medical Association (AMA) article “Medical Student Well-Being” documents that medical students are more likely to experience burnout and depression than their peers pursuing different careers and that the elevated risk persists into residency. In this issue, our students share their perceptions and insights in the article “UICOMP Student Wellness: Four Perspectives” on page 4, and on page 6, a few UICOMP faculty weigh-in on wellness as it pertains to residents and fellows. UICOMP’s Center for Wellbeing serves as a resource for physicians and learners, and Director Deb Disney shares strategies for cultivating a sense of wellbeing in her article on page 2.

The UICOMP Student Wellness committee has provided many opportunities to promote and experience wellness among our students by exploring creative outlets. We highlight examples of students’ creative works as part of “Health Humanities,” a curricular elective enjoyed by a number of UICOMP students. On page 12, enjoy two examples of the creativity and thought-provoking results from talented students here in Peoria.

I am repeatedly moved and grateful for the generosity of donors and philanthropists who believe so strongly in UICOMP’s mission and the future of our students that they fulfill critical needs. On pages 9 and 10, we highlight five newly endowed scholarships that provide much needed financial support to our students, who incur tremendous educational and living expenses during medical school. At UICOMP, the average student debt load of our graduates is $279,000. Through establishing endowed scholarships, donors are helping to ease this burden by presenting a financial award that can be annually presented in perpetuity.

UICOMP is excited about the collaboration with UIC, our local healthcare affiliates and community-based organizations to be part of a $22 million research project from the National Institutes of Health for a four-year study looking at the causes, prevention and treatment strategies for long COVID. I am proud of the work of our faculty investigators in this cutting edge study that illustrates the value that UICOMP brings to elevating the care and opportunities for communities and patients in central Illinois. Read more about this exciting research on page 14.

Finally, the Class of 2022 joins our alumni ranks that now total more than 2,200 physicians. We are continually proud of our alumni for the care they provide and the contributions they make to their patients and communities. We were privileged to pay tribute to the 2022 UICOMP Distinguished Alumni Award winner, Dr. Shelly Timmons, who’s currently chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery at Indiana University. Read about her trailblazing career in medicine on page 21, and nominate a deserving alum you know for the 2023 Distinguished Alumni Award!

Sincerely,

Meenakshy Aiyer, MD
Regional Dean
UICOMP Receives Stemmler Award from National Board of Medical Examiners

UICOMP received the 2021 Stemmler Grant Award for its project “Automated Assessment of Written Chart Notes: Generating Reliable, Timely, and Useful Feedback,” led by William Bond, MD, professor of clinical emergency medicine. Bond is collaborating on the project with Suma Bhat, PhD, with the Grainger College of Engineering at University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, and Rachel Yudkowsky, MD, MHPE, with the University of Illinois College of Medicine Chicago. This project will be a collaborative effort with Jump Simulation, Peoria, where Bond is director of simulation research.

The team of physicians and engineers will apply their expertise to improve feedback medical students receive about their written patient notes, in this case after simulated patient encounters. Patient notes allow the learner to share what they have found while interviewing and examining patients, giving faculty insights into their thoroughness and decisions. This effort leads to clinicians who can create patient health records that ensure complete and systematic documentation of a patient’s medical history, diagnosis, treatment and care.

This project will enlist the expertise of the team in natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning, healthcare simulation, and assessment. “Accurate and complete patient notes are foundational to high quality patient care. The process of scoring patient notes of our learners and providing complete and timely feedback is time-consuming. This challenge leads to either limited or time-delayed learner feedback,” explains Bond.

“This project allows us to optimize and individualize feedback for our learners which can be challenging for our clinical faculty physicians who often face rigorous time constraints,” Bond says. “When we are developing students’ skills for patient notes, we are contributing to their diagnostic reasoning abilities, and that has a positive impact on patient care, patient safety, and overall healthcare costs. In the era of immediate note visibility to patients, note writing skill also has implications for patient education and patient perceptions of care.”

UICOMP Regional Dean Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, MACP, says the project exemplifies the power of collaboration. “By harnessing the collective wisdom and talents of our medical school faculty and engineering faculty, we are developing innovative approaches to improve medical education. The result is not only an advantage for our students and faculty, but ultimately for our patients,” she says.

This project builds upon work supported by a Jump Applied Research through Community Health through Engineering and Simulation (ARCHES) grant. Jump ARCHES is a partnership between Jump Simulation and Education Center at OSF HealthCare and Health Care Engineering Systems Center in the Grainger College of Engineering at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Jump ARCHES provides competitive grants to engineers and physicians working together to combat problems in healthcare.

The Edward J. Stemmler, MD, Medical Education Research Fund supports innovation in medical education assessment and provides support for research and development in innovative assessment methodologies or techniques, with the potential to advance assessment in medical education or practice. The National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) administers the award. ■
Cultivating Wellbeing in a Time of Uncertainty

What comes to mind when you hear the term wellbeing? At the Center for Wellbeing at UICOMP, the term refers to the ability to live life to one’s highest capacity by integrating the dimensions of physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, vocational, financial and environmental wellness. The professionals at the Center have suggestions for how to achieve wellbeing that go way beyond just the absence of disease, stress and chaos.

There is inevitable pain when confronted by daily reports of violence and uncertainty. Many people struggle with how to maintain a sense of wellbeing in a world that feels overwhelming. Additional suffering can result when we vacillate between an intense emotional reaction or a temptation to squash emotions and avoid the news completely. A phrase in the mental health world is “what we resist persists.”

So how can we regulate emotions, not resist them, and find a constructive way to navigate the chaos in the environment? One answer is to cultivate self-compassion. Christopher Germer, PhD, and Kristin Neff, PhD, developed Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC), a protocol that offers research-based tools and techniques for promoting resilience. The three pillars of self-compassion are mindfulness, common humanity, and kindness.

The first pillar, mindfulness, refers to the ability to take a stance of a curious observer, naming difficult thoughts and feelings without overly identifying with them. For example, instead of saying “I am so angry” and becoming engulfed in the anger, one could say “I am aware that anger has arisen” and face it with a sense of openness. In “The Guesthouse”, the ancient poet, Rumi, suggested that the mind/body “house” has a steady stream of unexpected visitors in the form of thoughts and feelings. He suggested welcoming each as an honored guest, for it has been sent as a guide. This teaching is aligned with the view of western psychology, which is that emotions show up when events are occurring that could impact wellbeing. To turn toward difficult thoughts and feelings with openness and curiosity facilitates awareness of the lesson embedded within each “visitor”. The action for mindfulness might be as simple as saying “This is a moment of suffering.”

Self-Compassion for Healthcare Communities

SCHC is a 6-hour workshop taught by Bento Soares, PhD, UICOMP professor and chair of the Cancer Biology and Pharmacology Department. This interactive workshop introduces skills and abilities that benefit the individual and, indirectly, the people they serve, such as co-workers, patients, students, and clients. SCHC provides research-based tools and techniques for thriving. Self-compassion practices can be used on the spot while at work with patients and colleagues or at home when facing challenging circumstances. Physicians can earn up to 6.0 CME credits.

October 7, 2022 • Room A115, UICOMP
$120 (Free to UICOMP employees)
The second pillar of MSC, common humanity, refers to recognizing that all humans suffer. Without exception, all will sometimes fall short of their expectations for themselves, and all will experience hardship at some point in their lives. The action for acknowledging the notion of common humanity might be as simple as saying, “This suffering is evidence that we are human, not evidence that we are broken.”

The third pillar of MSC, kindness, refers to being one’s own encouraging coach. Humans have an inner critic that often uses a tone of a bully. Instead, MSC teaches that providing warmth, caring, and soothing for oneself is more conducive to being able to bear the difficulties of life. The action of kindness might be as simple as saying, “May I be kind to myself.”

Though research has shown that self-compassion boosts happiness and reduces anxiety and depression, people tend to resist being kind to themselves, perhaps afraid that it would lead to becoming lazy or self-centered. However, the opposite is true. Neff’s research demonstrated that self-compassion can actually help people to be more motivated to bring behavior into alignment with deeply held values. Neff also points out that there are times when fierce self-compassion might be warranted.

This is when the kindest strategy may be to first soothe oneself, but then to take action in one of three ways: 1) by boosting motivation; 2) protecting self or others; or 3) providing for the needs of oneself or others. Neff provides a variety of free guided meditations and practices on her website (self-compassion.org) that can lead to greater ease and well-being in daily lives.

Returning to the opening question: how can we regulate emotions, not resist them, and find a constructive way to navigate the chaos in the environment? The serenity prayer says it best, with the aspiration to have courage to change what can be changed; to have acceptance for what cannot be changed; and to have the wisdom to know the difference. A practice of Mindful Self-Compassion is one method for cultivating balanced hearts and minds making it easier to find that wisdom.

well-being
the ability to live life to one’s highest capacity by integrating the dimensions of physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, vocational, financial and environmental wellness
Jamie Blue, MD  
**UICOMP Class of 2022**

I have been a member of the wellness committee since my first year of medical school. Additionally, I have engaged in my own wellness running two triathlons. I also love to hike the numerous trails in the Peoria area.

Medical school has shown me that in order to have a full tank to give to others you must intentionally give to yourself. I think many times we perceive giving to ourselves as selfish, but it actually is one of the greatest gifts we can give in order to prepare ourselves to serve others. Additionally, being proactive about engaging in things that bring you joy makes life so much richer. Walking into work after a weekend of hiking allows me to put my best foot forward for the patients. Finally, in our fast-moving times, if we are not intentional about engaging in things that energize us sometimes those moments slip away unnoticed.

“We are what we think. With our thoughts we make the world.” What a profoundly simple yet powerful statement. We each view the world through our own lens. You and I may go on the same hike in nature or read the same poem but walk away with entirely different experiences. How profound. With this comes choice. I have found setting a daily intention for finding joy has allowed me to look through a lens that turned the mundane into extraordinarily rich beauty. Setting intentions at the beginning of the day I know will allow my work in the healthcare field to be much richer and more rewarding.

Do the things you love even when you’re tired. It has a strange way of energizing you even at your lowest. Find time for exercise. Find time for art. Find time for the things that bring you joy.

David X. Gao, MD  
**UICOMP Class of 2022**

I’m a part of the team that organized the first Pacer “Spring Steps” challenge. Pacer is an app that counts your steps and can group you into different teams with other users, and the Spring Steps challenge is a month-long challenge where we’re all split up into our manor teams to see who can get the most steps! We had around 90 people participate in 2021, and we hosted the challenge again in 2022.

I found wellness to be extremely important during my Step exams and rotations. Early on in my rotations, I found myself, after a long day, trying to push through as many practice questions as I could. As I went on in rotations, and later in Step 2, I prioritized certain wellness activities like taking a walk while doing my studying or getting in that extra hour of sleep. I found it definitely reflected in my grades, and my peers that I’ve shared these stories with have told me they themselves have experienced the same benefits after prioritizing wellness!

Consistency is key. There would be stretches in medical school where I would stop going to the gym for a couple months at a time. I find it’s better for me personally to go once or twice a week, rather than stop cold turkey and try to pick it up more when I’m on a lighter rotation. In residency, I’ll definitely aim to keep that same level of wellness, even in the ICU and other busier rotations!

My advice to new medical students is to make sure you prioritize friendships early on! Go hangout at that bar or restaurant, play board games when you’re invited, study in a group (if that works with your style) and workout with that classmate. Those friendships become key down the road; in second year, as people start studying on their own timeline more and more, and definitely by third year, as you may see some peers only a handful of times that entire year.

Students visited Mended Hearts Therapeutic Center in Metamora, Ill., to learn about equine therapy and take a wellness break.
Christopher Juarez
MD Candidate
UICOMP Class of 2025

Out of all the wellness activities at UICOMP, the most beneficial resource has been utilizing the Center for Well-being. It is a lens for me to refine my mental wellness. For starters, wellness is one of the most basic forms of self-respect. If we respect ourselves, then self-care must be provided. How we function is based on how we feel. Self-care of our physical and mental selves is integral to being and feeling better. How can we expect to give and help others if we cannot even help ourselves?

Wellness is practiced everyday. It is habitual and requires the same kind of priority as showering, brushing your teeth or keeping your apartment clean. As future health providers we need to lead by example even though we are busy. Everyone knows exercise is important for health and wellness; however, I think something that is under-trained is the mental game. Previous experience with sports psychology and performance has made me overly conscious about my inner voice, goal setting, self-improvement and performance. In most undertakings, there are two components, the physical and the mental. I think most understand the benefits of practicing the physical aspects, which as students that may be studying for the exam, practicing physical exam maneuvers or practicing technical procedural skill. Rarely do people talk about practicing the psychological component. How many times do we allow fear, doubt and worry to creep in? Practicing mindful exercises to diminish these thoughts and learning to speak well about ourselves are important to our self-respect, how we respect others and our overall performance.

If you want to change, find your motivation to do so. If a good consistent habit is hard to create, look at where your priorities lie. When the need is great enough, only then will the habit follow. Since wellness is both mental and physical, one cannot improve oneself if either is neglected. With increasing rates of physician burnout, build your capacity and resilience now in order to endure and overcome later.

Anna Serrano
MD Candidate
UICOMP Class of 2023

I have participated in many wellness activities offered at UICOMP, such as the spring “Get Moving” challenge and Winter Wellness challenge. I am also a member of the UICOMP wellness committee. As a member of the student wellness committee, I have been honored with the opportunity to create wellness events for the student body. My favorite event is the do-it-yourself terrarium, which occurs every spring, and allows students to de-stress by learning about and creating their own plant paradise.

Wellness is a critical component of an individual’s overall health. I have realized in my own life that when I put wellness on the back burner, my life doesn’t seem fulfilled. Each day feels like a chore and I’m just not happy. I refuse to live life feeling this way and for that reason I prioritize wellness.

I have learned that wellness is an integral part of medicine. The health of an individual does not solely rely on their physical wellbeing. It encompasses all aspects of life: mind, body, and soul. As I move forward into residency, I will integrate wellness into the care and treatment plans of my patients.

Wellness encompasses many different things. Whether it is taking a long walk, cooking your favorite food, working out or doing your nails, find something that you enjoy and can do for yourself. Life is short and time is precious. Take time for you and make life worth living.

“If a good, consistent habit is hard to create, look at where your priorities lie.”

Christopher Juarez
MD Candidate
UICOMP Class of 2025
Demanding schedules and a grueling pace during residency are historically common. What has led to an emphasis on wellness and resident wellbeing among academic medicine and why is it important?

**Deb Disney:** Research confirms that burnout impacts nearly every aspect of residency. In 2015, after three resident suicides within a few weeks of each other, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) started to focus on physician wellbeing. The intent was to build resiliency; recognize stress, depression, and burnout; and create interventions to promote wellbeing. ACGME provides a number of tools and resources on their website related to wellbeing.

**M. Jawad Javed, MD:** I believe the shift has come about in part to the overall emphasis placed in society about having more open conversations about mental health and wellbeing. These topics aren’t kept hidden or secretive as they previously were. I think due to some unfortunate events across the country in training programs, the importance of addressing these issues has come to the forefront (and rightfully so).

**Jacob Hopping, MD:** I believe the renewed focus on resident wellness and wellbeing is due to the significant problem of burnout among physicians. There is really an epidemic of burnout resulting in poor care outcomes, early retirements and physicians leaving practice altogether. As a surgeon, I know first-hand the level of commitment to patients that residency requires, which lends itself to poor self-care. Without an institutional focus on wellness, it is too easy to overlook a struggling resident or pass them off as “lazy or incompetent.”

**Ryan Finkenbine, MD:** Although the concept of “wellness” has been around for several hundred years, it wasn’t until the mid-1970’s with the work of John Travis, MD, that the idea began its slow integration into medicine. Today, we know that physician wellness translates to improved patient wellness, too. A shift from focusing on long hours to more efficient and meaningful hours has increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and improved patient outcomes. A growing database is beginning to illustrate that wellness in medicine also improves the bottom line. This type of information is quickly being adopted in the corporate world as well. It seems likely that with thoughtful input and understanding leadership, a robust educational environment can be created that is at once rigorous, welcoming and comfortable.

**Q Can demanding schedules and wellness co-exist?**

**Deb Disney:** Ideally, I believe we need to take a hard look at how the field of medicine can make broad revisions in what is demanded of residents and find a way to provide more discretionary time. However, until that happens, a demanding schedule and wellbeing can co-exist, but it may require a paradigm shift of how we view stress. Dr. Kelly McGonigal stated in her TED Talk, “How to Make Stress Your Friend,” that chasing meaning is better for your health than trying to avoid discomfort. In her book, *The Upside of Stress*, she says stress is not necessarily bad for your health and that embracing stress is more important than reducing stress. She cited a study in which researchers asked 30,000 adults how much stress they felt in the past year and whether or not they thought stress was negative. Eight years later, high stress people were 43 percent more likely to have died, but only if they believed that stress was bad for their health. Those who did not view stress as harmful had the lowest risk of death than anyone in the study, even lower than those who reported experiencing very little stress. The conclusion of the researchers was that stress alone is not the risk factor, but rather the combination stress plus the harmful had the lowest risk of death than anyone in the study, even lower than those who reported experiencing very little stress. The conclusion of the researchers was that stress alone is not the risk factor, but rather the combination stress plus the belief that stress is harmful. Dr. McGonigal reflected that when you change your mind about stress, you can change your body’s response to stress.

**M. Jawad Javed, MD:** As for co-existence, simply put – absolutely. However, there is one caveat – we have to actively seek and work toward this co-existence. Namely, the work and burden of work is not going away, and if you are unable to set boundaries, more will easily be added to your plate. We have to self-regulate and be able to identify those factors telling us when we need to be more aware of our own wellness and wellbeing. I feel training programs are much better at teaching residents both how to identify burnout and how to cope with it.
Jacob Hopping, MD: While on the surface a dichotomy exists, wellness can be incorporated into the grueling pace of residency with: strategic time off, attending focus on the resident “as a person” and recognition of a job well done to name a few. Too often good patient care goes unrecognized. A sincere recognition of the resident’s efforts can go a long way toward wellness.

Emily Horvath, MD: I think demanding schedules during training and wellness during training in many ways both HAVE to exist. The only way to truly learn to practice medicine is to spend time taking care of patients. You can only learn so much from a textbook – the rest is by experience. However, it’s impossible to take care of patients well and learn well if an individual is suffering in any sphere of wellness – physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. Wellness really needs to be at the forefront of our minds in order to maximize the value of the training experience.

Jay Clore, MD: I think wellbeing can exist within a demanding schedule, but it requires discipline and commitment and organizational support. Residents need wellbeing tools, but what they need even more is time to put them to use.

Deb Disney: I believe that all levels of administration in both the hospital and the university are starting to release the old-school, unrealistic paradigm of medicine in which residents are expected to put their own needs last. It is logical that it is easier to give a dollar if you have a dollar. It is also logical to see that it is easier to provide care for others if you have first provided care for yourself. It is not possible to make a car travel a journey of 1,000 miles on an empty tank, and yet the mind/body vehicles of residents are expected to travel the journey of residency not resourced with the basic fuel of self-care.

The American Medical Association website (ama-assn.org) lists five things institutions can do to prevent resident burnout. These include destigmatizing and raising awareness about depression; building systems to confidentially identify and treat depression; establishing a more formal system of peer and faculty mentoring; promoting a supportive culture during training; and fostering efforts to learn more about resident wellness.

M. Jawad Javed, MD: It starts from the leadership prioritizing emotional health and wellness – an inherent acknowledgement that these terms are not just words written in a policy. Each of these terms means a commitment to place the health and wellness at the level where we place emphasis on things like patient care or quality and safety, etc. It’s when we take the best care of ourselves that we are able to take the best care of others.

Jacob Hopping, MD: Recognition that residents are just as susceptible to burnout takes a systemic culture shift. In my early years of practice, I encountered an attitude that I was too “new” to be burnt out or emotionally exhausted. The feeling was that I just hadn’t been through enough to “deserve” recognition of my emotional health. Residents (and attendings) at ANY point in their training/career are susceptible to emotional distress. Taking care of a sick patient who dies or suffers a complication can induce distress or even PTSD if not addressed. Residents need to know that services are available to discuss these issues. Attendings need to be open to safe debriefing and dialogue with the residents about these kinds of issues. The demanding schedule of residents makes services like counseling and therapy difficult to procure, and emotional (and physical) health can be prioritized by having on-site services available.

Emily Horvath, MD: I think as a system/organization, there has to be a conscious effort to recognize the barriers to wellness that exist currently and will develop in the future. Wellness is an ever evolving process; it’s not a “thing” to be achieved. As new challenges come up, we always need to be asking “how does this impact the residents physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually?” Once those questions are explored, we must be willing to make actionable changes as an institution. We need to anticipate issues that might become a problem rather than try and fix them once they are already affecting the residents.
Jay Clore, MD: Commitment and values-based practice from program leadership and faculty are essential. Residents model what they see their attendings doing just as children model their parents’ behaviors. If faculty tell residents it’s important to practice stress reduction, to take vacation and to leave work at the hospital, but then they themselves never take a day off, answer emails at 10 pm and are “always on,” then residents aren’t going to take the advice seriously and will develop unhealthy work habits just like their attendings have modeled for them despite the messaging. This also requires support and resources from the organizations, which unfortunately, are currently severely understaffed so taking time off and tending to wellbeing is a difficult thing to do for anyone in healthcare right now.

Individually or within a specific program, how have you witnessed residents prioritizing wellness?

Deb Disney: I wish I could say more! I do know there are specific program directors who refer residents for counseling.

M. Jawad Javed, MD: I feel the UICOMP Department of Pediatrics has done a tremendous job prioritizing wellness for the past many years. They have incorporated it into their educational curriculum, have discussion around numerous topics, and allow for time to actually “express” their wellness in the forms of retreats, yoga, meditation, etc.

Jacob Hopping, MD: Residents, in my experience, do a poor job of prioritizing their own wellness. A lot of “wellness” revolves around socializing outside of the hospital, which typically involves alcohol. I’ve never seen this develop into a problem per se, but more focused attention on physical wellbeing is important for long-term wellness. I’ve organized resident hikes and several of my colleagues have opened up their pools or lake houses for outdoor fun. The early mornings and late nights do not readily allow for exercise, so many residents will take the stairs instead of the elevator as a simple way to get their “steps in”.

Emily Horvath, MD: In our program (Internal Medicine), we really strive to have personal wellness be a topic that is discussed openly and frequently. Dr. Sidney Stewart spearheaded the creation of a Wellness Rotation for our residents – which allows them opportunities to reflect on their personal wellness goals and share them with their peers. Our residents have taken the initiative to become more active (taken exercise classes together, organized group outdoor activities), strengthen social bonds (planned dinners or group outings together) and even shared pieces of creative writing.

Jay Clore, MD: We’ve had a great chief resident this past year who, despite the pandemic, has organized great team-building activities for our residents both safely in person and virtually. He’s provided extra support to those residents in need of a little more by reaching out and communicating to the program leadership, “Hey – this person could use a little more checking in” so we can all step up our support. I’ve seen residents be appropriately assertive with setting their limits and say “no” when asked to participate on research projects or committees that they don’t have the time or energy for right now. I’ve seen residents increase their exercise routines and resume creative outlets despite fatigue.

What is UICOMP doing to encourage a culture of resiliency and wellness among its residency programs?

Deb Disney: There is a new contract between the office of Graduate Medical Education (GME) and the UICOMP Center for Wellbeing to provide wellbeing content embedded in the residency programs. GME and the UICOMP Center for Wellbeing just collaborated and provided an all-day retreat for residents, physicians, and staff. Dr. Bento Soares was the speaker, and his topic was Self-Compassion for Healthcare Communities. We were able to award up to 6 CMEs for attendance.

M. Jawad Javed, MD: UICOMP has been very purposeful in incorporating numerous opportunities of dialogue around the concepts of resiliency and wellness. This is accomplished in forums like town halls, workshops, faculty development, etc. They occur throughout the year in different venues and platforms to different groups which keeps these topics fresh and recurrent.

Jacob Hopping, MD: The Department of Surgery has had several wellness sessions throughout the year. These have included brief lectures on diet and nutrition, exercise and emotional health. Wellness sessions are protected time when the phones are not supposed to ring.

Emily Horvath, MD: I think, as I mentioned before, a huge part of creating a culture of wellness is to keep it at the forefront of our minds. We have to normalize having wellness (and struggles!) as part of our daily conversations. Many of us used to feel that expressing struggles during training was admitting weakness. However, I think here at UICOMP, we are trying to turn this around and show our residents that it is the opposite – it is a sign of strength to be able to ask for help!

Jay Clore, MD: UICOMP’s GME leadership is leading by example. Dr. McBee Orzulak has hosted the first residency training program leadership wellbeing retreat for all program directors, associate directors and coordinators. He’s also contracted with the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine’s Center for Wellbeing to conduct a needs assessment and to develop a wellbeing curriculum for all UICOMP residency programs to ensure compliance with ACGME common program requirements and consistency across departments. The curriculum will target wellbeing at the organizational, programmatic and individual levels with an eye towards meaningful cultural changes.

Residents at ANY point of their training/career are susceptible to emotional distress.”
New Endowed Scholarships Awarded to UICOMP Students

In 2022, UICOMP presented a number of new scholarships to reward and financially support medical students. These scholarships are made possible by the generosity of donors who desire to support students on their journey to becoming physicians and offset the heavy debt of a medical education. Establishing an endowed scholarship allows donors to create a fund to annually recognize medical students. Thank you to the donors for their scholarship investment, and congratulations to the scholarship recipients!

Jim and Kathrine Owens Endowed Scholarship

PRESENTED TO Dominique Bruncko (not pictured) and Eliot Rapoport

During his 38-year career with Caterpillar Inc., Jim Owens and his wife Katie had the opportunity to live and visit communities all over the world. Upon his retirement as Caterpillar CEO, Jim and Katie Owens demonstrated their philanthropic passion by funding this scholarship that honors medical students who have demonstrated leadership and academic excellence. The scholarship this year recognizes student leaders who have made significant contributions to the Peoria campus and the College of Medicine.

Dr. John C. and Erma K. Stutzman Scholarship

PRESENTED TO Gaby Gonzalez-Cantoran, Kim Krawzak, Cory Mahler (not pictured) and Mit Patel

John C. Stutzman was raised on a farm near Carlock, Illinois, and graduated from Bluffton University in 1950. He attended Illinois Wesleyan University to complete pre-medical coursework and worked as an orderly at Mennonite Hospital in Bloomington. Dr. Stutzman graduated from the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine in 1956. During the two years he served as the medical officer at the Grenfell Mission Hospital in Canada, he participated in medical trips via dog sled and boat to perform medical procedures along the Labrador coast. Dr. Stutzman established his urology practice in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1967 and also served as a consultant in urology at Hospital Albert Schweitzer in Haiti. Now retired, Dr. Stutzman is a cellist and enjoys music as an avocation. This scholarship recognizes students who have demonstrated an interest in serving a medically underprivileged area.

UICOMP Senior Scholars Scholarship

PRESENTED TO Joseph Fong (not pictured), Tyler Morgan, and Claire Schaibley (not pictured)

Our Senior Scholars are a valuable UICOMP resource. Senior Scholars is a group of retired and retiring physicians who are dedicated to developing a spirit of collaboration, life-long learning and support to enrich the learning environment at the Peoria regional campus. This allows these experienced physicians to share their knowledge and skills with our learners, allows them to give back to their profession and to give back to the medical school and community. This scholarship is awarded to students with high academic merit and financial need.

continued
New Endowed Scholarships Continued

Diane Elson
Endowed Scholarship
PRESENTED TO
Andrew Bank and Anna Kolasa
Dr. Elson (UICOMP Class of 1985) completed her Internal Medicine residency, clinical fellowship in Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes, and a research fellowship at the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Elson was actively involved in the education of medical students, residents and fellows at the University of Wisconsin Department of Medicine. She served as the Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism Division’s director of medical student and resident education and the associate director of its fellowship program. She is the recipient of numerous awards recognizing her role as teacher and preceptor, including twice receiving the Endocrine Fellows’ Award for Excellence in Endocrine Teaching. This scholarship is presented this year to students who have engaged in local community service and demonstrate financial need.

Dr. Uma Parvathi Kalyan-Raman
Endowed Scholarship in Pathology
PRESENTED TO
Jordan Boyle
Dr. Uma Kalyan-Raman was the first neuropathologist in central and downstate Illinois and the first woman pathologist in Peoria. In 1976, she was recruited as the first woman physician member of the faculty and helped build and grow the neuroscience program. In addition to significant scholarly work, Dr. Kalyan-Raman devoted her expertise to her clinical work with patients who had brain tumors or neurological diseases. She, along with her husband, Krishna Kalyan-Raman, taught students and residents in Peoria for more than 20 years. This newly established scholarship is awarded from the Department of Health Sciences Education and Pathology to a student demonstrating high academic merit and financial need.

Opportunities to Make an Impact Through Scholarships
The commitment to the future of medicine begins with supporting the diverse group of bright minds who enter the doors of UICOMP on their path to becoming future physicians. This begins by providing the financial support the students need to succeed, oftentimes in the form of scholarships. In addition to providing students financial stability, scholarships also allow UICOMP to competitively recruit sought-after students and ease the ever-loomimg burden of debt. This allows students to focus on their education and experiences with patients, faculty, and peers. Scholarship awards further enhance their freedom to pursue their unique paths on their journey to becoming excellent physicians.

UICOMP alumni and friends interested in supporting students through scholarship can reach out for more information by contacting Kim Deets at kdeets@uic.edu or phone (309) 680-8613.

“It is every man’s obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it.”

– Albert Einstein
While completion of medical school annually brings joy and pride to each UICOMP class, this year also brought a celebration of resilience, adaptability and diligence for the Class of 2022 who also overcame the ambiguity and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. After two years of “virtual” events, UICOMP returned to hosting in-person celebrations for the Class of 2022 allowing them to gather with friends, family and one another for the milestones of Match Day and Convocation.

During Convocation at the Peoria Civic Center, Douglas Grow, MD, (UICOMP Class of 2022), summarized that four years of medical school equated to thousands of hours in the hospital, 33,000 test questions, 400,000 flash cards, and countless hours studying. He acknowledged that friends and family of the Class of 2022 sacrificed as well. “For you, it was two missed funerals, ten missed birthdays, and countless hours with my godson at the zoo,” Grow said. He countered that all was not lost. “But no matter how we count the hours, in the future going forward, you will know that every appendix that we remove, every sore throat that we treat, every compression that we make that preserves life just a little bit longer will be because the values that you have instilled in us,” Grow said.

In describing the UICOMP Class of 2022, he said, “Like all med students, we were a class that was very protective of our time and our grades. We’re a class that not only treated our patients with respect but also treated our standardized patients, our fake patients, with respect and made sure they were treated well. We’re a class where the phrase, ‘hey, did you get enough sleep last night’ was uttered far more than ‘hey, how did you do on that test?’ We have shed that idiosyncratic, neurotic competitiveness that so typically defines a medical student and decided to support each other with fervor.”

This year’s graduating class selected Jonathon Fisher, PhD, clinical assistant professor of Health Sciences Education and Pathology, to give the faculty address. Dr. Fisher summarized the medical school journey of the Class of 2022. “Just when you felt confident about tackling that pesky Step 1 exam, a global pandemic arrived and the entire world changed. The testing centers closed. The school lurched into online teaching, and nothing was certain,” Fisher said. “The early days of the pandemic were absolute chaos, but you had work to do. You finished your Step 1 exams despite the delay and the closed centers. You adapted to remote learning ...You accepted social distancing and wearing masks everywhere you went. You took extra steps to protect the patients that you saw from an airborne killer that was ravaging across the globe, and you successfully finished your clerkships and your board exams during an unprecedented time in human history.”

UICOMP Regional Dean Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, talked about life’s transitions during her remarks. “This day marks an important milestone in your professional life. It marks a transition from medical student to doctor, transition from medical school to residency, transition from theory to practice, and a transition to taking on increased responsibility and accountability,” she said. “Transitions are perfect times for us to examine where we are, compare it with where we’ve been, and anticipate our next steps and where we are headed. Times of transition can be strenuous, but they also bring about exciting opportunities! We have the opportunity to start fresh, to rethink our priorities, and to be intentional about new goals and habits.”

As the members of the UICOMP Class of 2022 begin their residency training, they are entering 18 different specialties in 19 states. Of those, 29 graduates pursued primary care, and 24 matched to training opportunities in Illinois. Seven matched to UICOMP residencies and will remain in Peoria. The top four specialties students chose were Pediatrics (9), Family Medicine (6), Internal Medicine (6) and Emergency Medicine (5).
Inspiration in Medicine

Health Humanities IM 502 is an elective that is conducted remotely and is open to third and fourth year medical students across all campuses of the University of Illinois College of Medicine. It specifically focuses on the application of creative arts and humanities disciplines to expand and enrich discourse about human health and wellbeing. The health humanities can take many forms, from the history of medicine and medical ethics to creative writing, film and visual arts.

Here we feature two student projects from Health Humanities IM 502. Both students are members of the UICOMP Class of 2022. The course offers an online gallery for viewing student work at https://peoria.medicine.uic.edu/health-humanities-im-502/

Be Present, Not Perfect

By Carly Woodin, MD, UICOMP Class of 2022

"Be present, not perfect" is a quote that Carly Woodin originally heard in a TED Talk and was her inspiration for a wooden sculpture that depicts those words in the form of a sound wave. "In the Ted Talk, Elaine Meyer discussed the importance of being 100 percent present when with others," Woodin says. "I found the quote so beautifully simple. We can’t be expected to be perfect all the time, but we can be expected to be present in that moment."

This creation was not Woodin’s first time creating a sound wave with wood. When COVID-19 struck in March 2020, Woodin felt a little lost and tried her hand at woodworking at the prompting of her grandfather. She and her sister came up with the idea of creating a sound wave sculpture to honor their brother. The Woodin sisters’ childhood accomplishments could be found on the refrigerator and in frames adorning the walls, but her brother, who has Down syndrome, didn’t have those same certificates and mementoes. The sisters decided to create a visual representing his favorite words of “bye-bye-bye” in the form of sound waves created using a variety of wood – pine, cherry, oak, Cyprus, basswood and cedar. The result was a beautiful piece of art that now hangs in the Woodin family’s home.

Of Lesson Plans and Human Emotion

By Dominique Bruncko, MD, UICOMP Class of 2022

Empathy is taught to us as the phrase “That must be hard.” Robotically parroting a patient’s emotions back at them: “You sound angry.” “You must be frustrated.”

Formulaic fractionated squeezing until the humanity drips out; this is not what empathy is.

It is finding another’s haunted house of fears looming over them, and not burning it down but providing a flashlight hope in the dark and the comfort of not being alone.

It is bringing in stickers. “Your family will be here soon.”

It is sitting side by side with a scared mother. “We’ll do our best.”

It is letting her listen to her child’s heart through your stethoscope. “Can I bring you a glass of water?” reassuring her that her baby is alive. “We’re here with you.”

Soft things – what matters is that they are expressed at all.

Empathy is not one thing. It makes exceptions, it has mercy. It lives, and it loves.
The Rural Illinois Medical Student Assistance Program (RIMSAP) presented UICOMP with a $500,000 donation in January 2022 to support the Rural Student Physician Program at UICOMP. RIMSAP is sponsored by the Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois State Medical Society. It has helped many qualified applicants to hurdle financial needs or borderline academic barriers to a medical education. This program has assisted over 800 students with a recommendation and/or loans to the University of Illinois. This program is designed to provide doctors in rural communities in Illinois.

The Rural Student Physician Program (RSPP) at UICOMP is an immersive, clinical experience in a rural setting that introduces medical students to the rewards and challenges of rural and underserved medicine. Nationally, about 20 percent of the population is rural yet less than 10 percent of doctors serve there. In Illinois, almost twice the number of primary care providers serve in large urban areas rather than rural settings.

RSPP is a critical resource to help narrow this gap. Many UICOMP RSPP graduates return to rural communities to practice medicine following residency training in areas such as family medicine, surgery, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, and other specialties. Others go on to work with urban or suburban populations with added sensitivity to the needs of rural life and more compassion for the underserved.
Peoria Campus Collaborates on NIH’s RECOVER Research focused on Long COVID

UICOMP will collaborate to study causes, prevention and treatment strategies for long COVID in central Illinois. The work is part of a broader collaboration led by University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) researchers that is projected to receive approximately $22 million from the National Institutes of Health over four years to research long COVID, a term used to describe lingering or new symptoms of COVID-19 following recovery from the initial acute phase of the illness.

The funding is part of the NIH’s “Researching COVID to Enhance Recovery” (RECOVER) Initiative. UIC is leading this Illinois-based research consortium called ILLInet RECOVER. The project team involves both Chicago and Peoria researchers who will work with patients, public health departments, health care providers and community-based organizations to study what makes an individual vulnerable to long COVID.

“This collaboration is a great example of how we can leverage the skills and knowledge of UICOMP and UIC communities to bring about a great opportunity for our local community and the central Illinois region. By partnering with affiliate healthcare systems and the Peoria City/County Health Department, we can not only further our understanding of long COVID, but also provide resources and clinical support to patients here in Peoria and surrounding communities,” says Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, regional dean of the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria.

This initiative will focus on understanding how to help people infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, avoid long COVID effects. These effects can include fatigue, shortness of breath, brain fog, sleep disorders, fevers, gastrointestinal symptoms, anxiety, and depression, and their severity can range from mild to completely debilitating.

The ILLInet RECOVER team will explore factors that might be protective and what interventions may be needed to help long COVID patients get back to normal as quickly as possible. Researchers will focus on understanding long COVID in adults and its impact on vulnerable communities in both urban and rural areas.

A co-principal investigator of the ILLInet RECOVER initiative who will be leading the Peoria effort is Sarah Stewart de Ramirez, MD. Dr. de Ramirez is associate dean for population health equity innovation and associate professor of emergency medicine and director of equity innovation medicine at UICOMP as well as medical director of population health at OSF HealthCare.

“Bringing the ILLInet RECOVER initiative to the greater Peoria community and this collaboration with the Peoria City/County Health Department, both healthcare systems, and our not-for-profit social care partners is an incredible opportunity. It will allow our community of patients, especially those historically under-represented in research but immensely impacted by COVID, to contribute to the collective understanding of long COVID. Peoria will be a part of the discovery and recovery story of COVID, helping to identify future treatments and ensuring equitable access to the fruits of that scientific labor,” says Stewart de Ramirez.

Through community outreach and in partnership with community-based organizations, the ILLInet RECOVER researchers hope to enroll, conduct baseline health assessments, and follow 1,000 Illinoisans age 18 and up from Chicago, Peoria and surrounding communities.

UICOMP Director of Research Services, and an investigator on the study, Sarah Donohue, PhD, says, “This study is a great example of how the College of Medicine can collaborate locally, statewide, and nationally to solve important problems and contribute to a scientific body of work on what is one of the most pressing health issues of modern-day life.”

Locally, OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria will serve as a recruitment and testing site for the study, and UnityPoint Health will also serve as a testing site. The Peoria City/County Health Department will be a key collaborator in identifying and providing outreach to patient participants. Additional recruitment of patients will occur with help from the community-based organizations of Central Illinois Friends and Peoria Friendship House, and the Tri-County Urban League will also be participating in study-related community engagement activities.

Monica Hendrickson, MPH, administrator Peoria City/County Health Department, says, “For over 24 months, Peoria City/County Health Department has been at ground-zero in seeing the impacts of COVID-19 in our community. This collaboration allows the knowledge gained by the public health system, the skills of our healthcare systems, and the expertise of UICOMP in learning more about the virus and how it will impact our community’s health in the future.”

Study participants will fill out a survey about their health, get a brief physical exam, and have some lab tests every three to six months for a period of two years. Test results will be shared with the participant, and if requested, with their health care providers.

The NIH funding for ILLInet RECOVER is provided by other transaction authority, or OTA (OT2HL16184701). According to the NIH, other transactions, or OTs, allow for much greater speed, flexibility, and accessibility in performing research and prototyping activities than standard procurement contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements.
UICOMP Research Day 2022 was held in March with 73 research presentations. Congratulations to this year’s winners!

**STUDENTS**

First Place, Clinical Vignette:  
Andrew Kuehnle – Colonic intussusception caused by a submucosal lipoma

Second Place, Clinical Vignette:  
Ishita Bhattacharya – Pinworm infection in 6-year-old presenting as acute appendicitis

Third Place, Clinical Vignette:  
Rosemary Ngozi Ogbonna – Post traumatic Acute Otitis Media, Mastoiditis, and CN VII Palsy After Skull Fracture

Collin O’Bryan – Dual pathology skin lesions in AIDS: a window of opportunity for early detection and treatment of hidden coexisting conditions

First Place, Research Poster:  
Michael Jay Neff – Differential Expression of Intestinal Lymphocyte Subsets in an Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia Musculus model

Second Place, Research Poster:  
Alexis Reinders – Examining the role of SMYD3-AKT signaling in promoting radioresistance in medulloblastoma

Catharine Leahy – Predictors of Hydro nephrosis in Children with Urinary Tract Infections

Third Place, Research Poster:  
Stephen DeMartini – Preoperative Severity of Carpal Tunnel 32 33.5 Syndrome Presentation by Race

Catharine Leahy – Pediatric COVID-19: Medical and Social factors associated with hospitalization and medical management

Andrew Schuler – The Use of a Biceps Flexion Strength Exam Simulator for Improvement of Neurological Examination Skills in Medical Training

**RESIDENTS**

First Place, Research Poster:  
Caitlin Rodeghier, DO – Virtual Reality Assisted Right Internal Jugular Central Line Training Versus Traditional Style Training in Emergency Medicine Students

Janaki Tokala, MD, MBA – Unusual Presentation of NK-T Cell Lymphoma with Dyspnea

Second Place, Research Poster:  
Mena Henien, MD – Cost Impact and Short-term Outcomes of Pacemaker Implantation after Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement

Third Place, Research Poster:  
Tasneem Adenwala, MD – Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the Lung presenting as a Fungating Ulcerated Skin Lesion
Stewart de Ramirez Named Associate Dean for Population Health Equity Innovation

Sarah Stewart de Ramirez, MD, MPH, MSc, was appointed UICOMP Associate Dean for Population Health Equity Innovation. This new position will advance the work of the regional campus in supporting the strategic direction surrounding population health and health care disparities, and Dr. de Ramirez will act as a strategic leader to further efforts to promote health equity and enhance opportunities to create solutions for disparities in population health and health care outcomes.

Stewart de Ramirez joined UICOMP in 2015 and is an associate professor of emergency medicine and led the growth of the global rural innovation program for medical students at UIC. She has an extensive list of publications and published abstracts with a research interest in innovative solutions for population health disparities, particularly in austere settings. Dr. de Ramirez has led the OSF Innovation efforts on social determinants of health and currently directs population health for OSF HealthCare.

She earned her medical degree from Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, and completed her residency training at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine where she practiced emergency medicine and led its international emergency medicine innovation efforts. Additionally, Dr. de Ramirez holds an MPH from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and an MSc in Development Economics from the London School of Economics. She served as a Global Health Fellow in the Division of Infectious Disease with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and worked at the Columbia University Earth Institute’s Millennium Villages Project.

Here at UICOMP, Dr. de Ramirez developed and implemented the EquiMed track (formerly Innovation in Rural Global Medicine), a four-year specialty track to teach medical students the intricacies of developing innovative solutions to address health care disparities, nationally and globally. She brings a passion for health equity, research and population health, both globally and locally, that will help UICOMP advance its strategic efforts in health equity.

Pharmacology Educators Award Given to Dr. Roni

Monzurul Roni, PhD, Health Sciences Education and Pathology, was awarded Pharmacology Educators Award by the American Society of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics. He was chosen for “his outstanding abstract in pharmacology educational research and his exceptional teaching performance in the classroom.” The award includes $1,000 for travel to ASPET annual meeting to present his research.

Fahey Named Interim Chair Radiology

Kevin Fahey, MD, was appointed Interim Chair and Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Radiology at UICOMP. Dr. Fahey has been on the UICOMP faculty in the Department of Radiology for more than 20 years and has demonstrated a commitment to student education and the development of residents, including receiving the Radiology Residency Faculty Teaching Award. His commitment to quality education and scholarly work align with the UICOMP mission and vision as well as the strategy to grow training opportunities through the radiology residency.

He graduated from UICOMP and completed an internal medicine internship as well as his radiography residency at UICOMP/OSF Saint Francis Medical Center. He completed a cardiothoracic imaging fellowship at University of Wisconsin Madison before accepting an academic appointment at UICOMP. Dr. Fahey has fully contributed to UICOMP through his committee work, and in teaching and training medical students and residents.

Dr. Fahey brings experience and clinical skill as well as a compassion for education and scholarship and a commitment to teach, train and mentor the next generation of physicians.

Congratulations, Dr. Shaikh!

Dr. Nadia Shaikh, UICOMP assistant professor of clinical pediatrics, was awarded the OSF Saint Francis Medical Center’s 2022 Dr. Mary Draeger Schultz Patient Safety Award. This award is given to an individual who exemplifies patient safety in his/her daily work and embraces a culture of safety. The award is named for the late Dr. Schultz, former patient safety officer of OSF HealthCare Children’s Hospital of Illinois and medical director of the newborn nursery. The award was established to recognize those individuals who share the same love, passion and dedication to patient safety as Dr. Schultz.

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.
Melissa Williams Joins As Simulation Ed Coordinator

Melissa Williams, MSN, RN, joins UICOMP as simulation education coordinator. Melissa will support faculty and content experts in the planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of simulation-based curriculum programs for both undergraduate and graduate medical education. She will lead the training of standardized participants for clinical simulations and will have a leadership role in the development and revision of campus-wide and/or departmental curricular policies and procedures. During the early years of her nursing career, she provided direct patient care and worked as a nurse educator at a local nursing college where she served as an academic coach, mentor, and tutor while also providing test-taking seminars across the curriculum.

Erica Litzsey Joins as Program Coordinator

Erica Litzsey will serve as the project manager for both medical colloquia and synthesis for UICOMP. She will also fill the role of program coordinator for EquiMED and Urban Medicine (UMED) at the Peoria regional campus. Erica has an extensive background in social services management with an emphasis on program leadership and development. These skills will integrate well within the EquiMed and UMED programs.

Tsung Named Interim Head of Neurosurgery

Andrew Tsung, MD, was appointed UICOMP Interim Head of the Department of Neurosurgery. Dr. Tsung joined the UICOMP faculty in 2009 and is associate professor with tenure and the Patrick W. Elwood Endowed Associate Professor in the Department of Neurosurgery. In addition, Dr. Tsung is an associate professor in the Department of Cancer Biology and Pharmacology. A clinician scientist, during his tenure, he is a two-time recipient of the GME Faculty Teaching Award and a two-time winner of the UICOMP Researcher of the Year Award. He has an extensive list of publications, book chapters and poster presentations. Dr. Tsung has been a true educator and mentor who has provided training and research opportunities to UICOMP students through the years. He is actively engaged in brain cancer research with faculty in the department of Cancer Biology and Pharmacology and has helped advance care of patients with brain cancer through research and high quality clinical care.

He graduated from Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and completed his neurosurgery residency at UICOMP/Illinois Neurological Institute where he served as chief resident. He completed a Neurosurgical Oncology Fellowship at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. Dr. Tsung is currently completing his MBA with a data analytics focus from the University of Illinois. His clinical expertise is complex brain and spinal tumor/skull base, intraoperative MRI, awake surgery, pituitary and endoscopic brain surgery as well as cervical/thoracic/lumbar instrumented and non-instrumented spine surgery, and peripheral nerve. He is director of the Brain Tumor Center and Director of Neurological Services at the Illinois Neurological Institute with OSF HealthCare.

Dr. Tsung’s UICOMP contributions have expanded beyond clinical care, teaching and mentorship to encompass collaborative research, community outreach, and philanthropy. Specifically, he has collaborated with the Mark Linder Walk for the Mind and KB Strong community-based organizations in their quest to share information and raise funds to support brain cancer research locally.

Dr. Tsung’s experience and success in clinical medicine, research, training and mentorship of learners will help UICOMP continue and further elevate the strength and success of the Department of Neurosurgery.

Morgan Hansmeier Appointed Medical Education Specialist

Morgan Hansmeier joins UICOMP as medical education specialist and will coordinate undergraduate medical education activities for the simulation program. She will organize simulation schedules, contribute to planning, run sessions, assemble assessment/evaluation data and communicate with other medical education specialists and coordinators. She will also contribute to developing strategies and processes for exchanging and disseminating details related to simulation content and opportunities. Morgan brings a strong background to the program with expertise in education, administration and photography/social media.

Sawlaw Joins Essentia Health – St. Mary’s

Joshua Sawlaw, MD, joined Essentia Health – St. Mary’s Medical Center in Duluth, Minn., as a hospitalist. He completed his residency in Family and Community Medicine at UICOMP after earning his medical degree from Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield.

Sawlaw Joins Essentia Health – St. Mary’s

Joshua Sawlaw, MD, joined Essentia Health – St. Mary’s Medical Center in Duluth, Minn., as a hospitalist. He completed his residency in Family and Community Medicine at UICOMP after earning his medical degree from Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield.
Kelli Evans Joins UICOMP as Senior Director of Development

Kelli Evans joins UICOMP as the senior director of development. She will be responsible for leading the major gift strategy and solicitations for regional campus initiatives and will work closely with the Dean’s office, department heads and faculty in developing and implementing strategies to solicit gifts, scholarships, facilities and endowments to meet critical needs.

Kelli previously served as director of development for the Caterpillar College of Engineering & Technology at Bradley University. Prior to joining Bradley, Kelli worked for 16 years with the American Cancer Society. She has a record of service and volunteerism in the Peoria area. A long-time team captain for Relay For Life, she is active in Peoria North Rotary, most recently serving as president. She currently serves on the community needs grant review committee for the Community Foundation of Central Illinois and is a reading/pen pal volunteer with Roosevelt Magnet School.

Students Receive Research Honor

Congratulations to UICOMP students Alejandra Pineda (top) and Sonia Ramirez, both members of the Class of 2024, who were honored during this year’s OSF Research Day held May 4. They received first place for platform and poster session for their project entitled “Use of Mobile Food Pantries to Promote Food Security within Peoria’s Latino Community.”

UICOMP Researchers Taking Closer Look at Commonalities Between COVID-19 and Brain Cancer

A team of UICOMP researchers in the Department of Cancer Biology and Pharmacology had their work published in Cell Death and Disease published by Nature Publishing Group. The work entitled “Galectin-1 activates Carbonic anhydrase IX and modulates glioma metabolism” is examining the commonalities of the spike protein present in COVID-19 and human Glioblastoma.

Galectin-1 is a type of animal lectin that binds preferentially to β-galactoside sugars. The team’s findings suggest that increased levels of Galectin-1 correlate with reduced survival in Glioblastoma patients, which supports the idea that it plays a significant role in the development of Glioblastoma. While the studies have focused on Glioblastoma and COVID-19, they are generally applicable to other types of cancer that express Galectin-1 signaling, such as melanoma, breast and bladder cancer.

The research team includes representatives from the Cancer Biology and Pharmacology Department – Maheedhara Guda, PhD, research specialist; Swapna Asuthkar, PhD, assistant professor; Kiran Velpula, PhD, assistant professor; and from the Neurosurgery Department – Andrew Tsung, MD, associate professor.

UICOMP Student Quoted in Dermatology Article

Katherine Perlman, MPH, (UICOMP Class of 2024) was quoted, and her research cited, for the article “Skin of Color Dermatology Wants to Make Health Care Inclusive” in SELF magazine in March 2022. Perlman had co-authored an International Journal of Women’s Dermatology study that found roughly 15 percent of all images in common medical student resources depict the skin of people of color, while people of color comprise about 40 percent of the US population.

“If you only learn to recognize a disease in people of one skin color, then you might miss those same diagnoses in people of different skin colors,” Perlman is quoted as saying.

Dr. Thembi Conner-Garcia Joins Health Science and Pathology Faculty

Thembi Conner-Garcia, MD, MPH, joins UICOMP Undergraduate Medical Education in a teaching faculty role. Dr. Conner-Garcia is an internal medicine trained physician who earned her MD and completed her residency training at UICOMP. She completed a primary care fellowship at University of Texas. She has practiced both inpatient and outpatient internal medicine with her most recent area of interest in substance use disorders.

Dr. Conner-Garcia will be the Block 3 clinical course director and will have additional teaching roles within both the health illness and society curriculum and the Doctoring Clinical Skills (DoCS) course.
Denton Presented Lifetime Service Award

Scott Denton, MD, was honored with the Lifetime Service Award by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). Denton is clinical associate professor in the Health Sciences Education and Pathology Department and is an active member of the NAME where he serves as secretary as well as a member of the board of directors.

Rau Focuses on Patients with Preterm Labor

Nicole Rau, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics, led a study that explored the role of information in reducing anxiety of patients hospitalized with preterm labor. The study provided patients with detailed information about what to expect with a premature birth. Some patients received the information in the form of printed handouts while others were given an app-based electronic tablet. Both groups experienced comparable benefits, a 50 percent reduction in anxiety, after receiving the detailed information.

Visiting Student Program Opens Opportunities to Students Underrepresented in Medicine

This year UICOMP’s Graduate Medical Education office introduced its new Underrepresented in Medicine (URM) Visiting Student Program. The program is open to medical students who are part of a group that is underrepresented in medicine which includes students who identify as African Americans and/or Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native American (American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians), Pacific Islander, mainland Puerto Rican, LGBTQ+, and students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Students can experience a month-long rotation in one of 11 specialties – emergency medicine, family medicine, internal medicine, med-peds, neurology, neurosurgery, OB/GYN, pediatrics, psychiatry, radiology or surgery. Participants will receive mentoring from faculty and residents as well as housestaff and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council.

Through a competitive application process, a limited number of training opportunities are available which also provide a $1,500 stipend to defray costs associated with travel and Peoria accommodations during the visiting rotation.

Michelle Rusch Named Director of Simulation

Michelle Rusch, PhD, will serve UICOMP as director of simulation and clinical assistant professor in the Department of Health Sciences Education and Pathology. She will work with faculty on clinical simulation education and programs in collaboration with the Jump Simulation Center. Her involvement with simulation education includes: design and review of activities, curriculum design, instruction and training, longitudinal course planning, evaluation of assessment measures, developing faculty debriefing protocols, scholarly activity and the exploration of innovative technology in simulations. Michelle will also direct the UICOMP simulation team.

Study Focuses on Equitable Breast Cancer Screening

Sarah Stewart de Ramirez, MD, UICOMP associate dean for population health equity, was lead author of a study entitled “Closing the Gap: A Comparison of Engagement Interventions to Achieve Equitable Breast Cancer Screening in Rural Illinois” that was published in Population Health Management’s special issue on Reducing Health Disparities in Underserved Populations. The study found that targeted text reminders and other interventions eliminated the disparity in the rate of breast cancer screening between economically advantaged and disadvantaged patients.

The study included more than 4,000 women and was conducted by OSF HealthCare with funding by the American Hospital Association’s Institute for Diversity and Health Equity and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois.

VanHeukelom Joins Bronson LakeView

Seth VanHeukelom, DO, joins Bronson LakeView Family Care in Paw Paw, Michigan. He completed his residency in family medicine at UICOMP and has a special interest in procedures, adolescent medicine and sports medicine.

Residents Selected for Future Leaders Program

Carrie Downing-Larick (left) and Elena Patel, (right) both UICOMP Family and Community Medicine residents, were chosen for the newest class of American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians Future Leaders.
Aiyer Named Regional Dean for College of Medicine Peoria

Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, MACP, was appointed Regional Dean for UICOMP by University of Illinois College of Medicine Executive Dean Mark Rosenblatt in February 2022.

Dr. Aiyer becomes the eighth regional dean to lead the Peoria campus since its founding in 1970. She was named interim regional dean in April 2019, succeeding Dr. Sara Rusch. Prior to taking over as interim dean, Dr. Aiyer served as associate dean for academic affairs at the Peoria campus, where she was responsible for medical student education. Dr. Aiyer also holds the titles of professor of clinical medicine and Head of the Department of Health Sciences Education, a department she helped design and create in 2016.

Born and raised in India, Dr. Aiyer received her medical degree from the Madurai Kamaraj University. She came to the United States to complete her internal medicine residency at the University of Louisville and UICOMP, where she served as chief resident. Dr. Aiyer remained in Peoria and joined the faculty of the College of Medicine in 1996.

Dr. Aiyer is a champion for medical education and curriculum development. An internist by background and a hospitalist, she was actively engaged in resident education and training. The former director of the UICOMP Caterpillar Faculty Scholars Fellowship, she has mentored over 50 junior faculty. She was instrumental in the expansion of the Peoria campus to a four-year medical school campus and is a proponent of curricular innovation and technology-enhanced medical education.

She completed the selective Executive Leadership for Academic Medicine (ELAM) program, the nation’s only in-depth leadership program for women in academic medicine as well as the University of Illinois System’s President Executive Leadership Program (PELP).

As Interim Regional Dean, Dr. Aiyer has been an integral leader for not only the Peoria campus but also the College as a whole during the COVID-19 pandemic. The UICOMP Graduate Medical Education program expanded, adding two new fellowship programs during the pandemic, and the regional campus’s research efforts have additional infrastructure and support with the creation of a Research Services Division to support and elevate the research and scholarship for faculty, staff and learners. Her efforts supporting philanthropy led to the establishment of two endowed professorships and more than $1.5 million in new student scholarship and rural education endowment.

Additionally, Dr. Aiyer leads a Peoria Healthcare Collaborative Initiative to identify and address healthcare disparities. She also continues the vision for the campus by embarking on a strategic planning initiative, building on the College-wide effort.

An excellent clinician and a nationally recognized medical educator, Dr. Aiyer chaired a task force to help develop a national curriculum for sub-internships at medical schools nationwide, which earned her national recognition and the Louis Pangaro Education Program Development Award. She also received the Raymond B. Allen Golden Apple Award for outstanding contributions to teaching and the Illinois Laureate Award of the American College of Physicians in Illinois. She also was awarded Mastership by the American College of Physicians (ACP), the national organization of internists.

UICOMP Welcomes New Faculty

Dr. Joyce Turley joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. She received her doctoral degree from Northwestern University Medical School in 1989 and completed her residency at the Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin in 1996. Dr. Turley is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Her expertise is in neonatal-perinatal medicine.

Dr. William Frese joined the Department of Pediatrics as a Visiting Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. He received his doctoral degree from University of Illinois at Chicago in 2002 and completed his residency at University of Michigan Health System in 2005. Dr. Frese is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. His expertise is in hospital medicine.

Dr. Wajed Haddad joined the Department of Pediatrics as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics. She received her doctoral degree from Jordan University of Science and Technology in 2007 and completed her residency at Southern Illinois University in 2012. Dr. Haddad is board certified with the American Board of Pediatrics. Her expertise is in neonatology.

Dr. Sayeeda Yasmin joined the Department of Medicine as an Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine. She received her MBBS from Madras Medical College in 1993 and completed her residency at The Finch University of Health Sciences/Chicago Medical School in 2000. Dr. Yasmin is board certified with the American Board of Internal Medicine and American Board of Geriatrics. Her expertise is in geriatrics.

Dr. Nadir Khan joined the Department of Pediatrics as a Visiting Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics/Physician Surgeon/Section Chief. He received his doctoral degree from Khyber Medical College University of Peshawar in 1982 and completed his residency at University of Kansas Medical Center in 1989 and the Cincinnati College of Medicine in 1990. Dr. Khan is board certified with the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology with special qualifications in child neurology and epilepsy. His expertise is in neurology.
Shelly D. Timmons, MD, PhD, is the 2022 recipient of the UICOMP Distinguished Alumni Award. She becomes the 18th graduate (among more than 2,000 medical school alumni) to receive this honor in the College’s 52-year history. She serves as chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery at Indiana University School of Medicine and is the first woman to lead the IU department and only the fourth woman to serve as chair of a neurosurgical department at a U.S. medical school.

A member of the UICOMP Class of 1991, Timmons served as president of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons in April 2019, the first time a woman led the national organization. A specialist in neurotrauma and neurocritical care, Timmons is a prolific scholar and researcher who has authored 25 book chapters, 57 peer-reviewed articles, 35 published abstracts, oral and poster presentations and more. With a career focus on traumatic brain injury, she is a highly regarded and sought after lecturer and presenter, having completed well over 100 invited lectures and visiting professorships. Additionally, she has led or co-led numerous funded clinical research studies sponsored by NIH and industry partners.

Dr. Timmons has previously held administrative, clinical and academic appointments at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Geisinger Health System in Danville, Penn, and University of Tennessee Health Science Center-Memphis. She completed residency training at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center-Memphis in 1997 and earned a PhD in anatomy and neurobiology there in 2002.

“The University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria 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 the outstanding efforts of Dr. Timmons for excelling in her field with accomplishments that span research, education and clinical medicine as well as public policy and national leadership,” says Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, UICOMP regional dean.

“Her work illustrates the impact UICOMP alumni are having within their respective disciplines, within their organizations as leaders, and within their healthcare systems and communities.”

The UICOMP Distinguished Alumni Award is annually presented by the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria Alumni Council. Selection for the honor is reserved for those who are highly distinguished in their chosen field and who, in deed or in action, reflect the importance of their education at UICOMP.

Nomination criteria and forms may be found online at https://peoria.medicine.uic.edu/distinguished-alumni. Nominations are currently open for the 2023 award. Deadline for full consideration is November 15, 2022. You may also contact Kim Deets at kdeets@uic.edu or (309) 680-8613 to request a nomination packet.

Nominate UICOMP Alums for 2023 Award!
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.

PHS Now Offers LGBTQ+ Primary Care
Positive Health Solutions (PHS) expanded its clinical services to include primary care to the LGBTQ+ community. Expanding medical services to include primary care, as well as gender affirming care, helps fill a gap in central Illinois, according to PHS Director Lisa Roeder. The clinic’s care team is comprised of medical providers who understand the everyday, as well as unique, health concerns of LGBTQ+ patients.

A clinical site within the UICOMP Internal Medicine Department, Positive Health Solutions provides comprehensive medical and case management services for persons who are living with HIV/AIDS and offers primary medical care for the LGBTQ+ community. The PHS offices and clinic are located at 222 NE Monroe, Suites 901 and 904, in downtown Peoria.