500 Robotic Heart Surgeries: Fastest Growing Program in the Country Reaches Milestone
ROBOTIC SURGERY

Advanced robotic technology uses 3D high-definition scope and robot-controlled fine instruments inside the chest, which allows Dr. Liao to perform precise, gentle and complex surgical maneuvers inside the heart. The advantages of robotic cardiac surgery include very small incisions through the rib space, less blood loss, lower risk of stroke and wound infection and quicker recovery.

Play video: Dr. Liao discusses minimally invasive and robotic heart surgery

500 Robotic Heart Surgeries: Fastest Growing Program in the Country Reaches Milestone

Kenneth K. Liao, M.D., Ph.D., professor and chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Transplantation and Circulatory Support at Baylor College of Medicine, performed his 500th robotic heart surgery this July.

“This is a huge milestone for us and our patients,” says Dr. Liao. “More and more cardiologists are referring their patients to us for robotic cardiac surgery because they recognize the benefits for the patient including less blood loss and a quicker return to normal life.”

Dr. Liao and his team at the Texas Heart Institute and Baylor St. Luke’s use state-of-the-art robotic technology to perform minimally invasive mitral valve repair and coronary artery bypass grafting surgery. He is the only cardiac surgeon in the Texas Medical Center using the da Vinci Robotic Surgical System to treat valve and coronary disease and among only a handful of highly experienced robotic cardiac surgeons in the United States using it.

Dr. Liao’s robotic cardiac surgery program at the Texas Heart Institute at Baylor St. Luke’s Medical Center is among the top 10 programs in the United States. Since his arrival in 2019, he has performed over 500 robotic heart surgeries, making it the fastest-growing program in the country.

“Cardiologists are referring their patients to us because they recognize the benefits for the patient.”

The multidisciplinary team celebrates their 500th robotic heart surgery.
This spring, the Interdisciplinary Surgical Technology and Innovation Center (INSTINCT) crowned Inspectra Diagnostics as winner of our first-ever Shark Tank competition designed by the department to instill engagement in innovation and commercialization of ideas and inventions developed by department members and their outside collaborators. The Shark Tank top award was $25,000 given to the winning developers to assist them in their product development.

This award, announced at a standing-room-only Shark Tank final round, capped two rounds of competition that included 10 teams of scientists, students and surgeons pitching their ideas and products to a group of savvy shark investors drawn from the department. The Shark Tank judging panel included inventors from the department, other Baylor departments and commercialization leaders from the Texas Medical Center Innovations Center.

As on the Shark Tank television show, inventor teams presented a variety of business ideas and products ranging from medical devices at prototype stage to drug delivery systems that have been tested in research for years and then answered questions from the sharks. The first Shark Tank round included inventors’ presentations at our Grand Rounds in October 2022, with second round finalists presenting in April 2023.

Inspectra Diagnostics presented a revolutionary approach to thyroid testing. Their diagnostic test uses mass spectrometry imaging and machine learning to aid in the diagnosis of thyroid nodules. This new testing approach is faster and less expensive than alternative testing or surgical removal of the thyroid. It also helps patients avoid lifelong side effects caused by partial thyroid removal.

Finalists

Other finalist teams included CANARY Analytics, a team that pitched software that uses ICU data and machine learning combined with artificial intelligence to prevent adverse events after surgery, and CO2 Cautery, an improved electrocautery tool that reduces tissue dissection time by at least 40%.

INSTINCT offers a variety of events, funding, mentoring and more to encourage and aid surgeon inventors in the development of their ideas:

Think Tanks are informal meetings between surgeons, scientists and businesspeople to talk about ideas, solutions, patenting and more.

The Idea Awards are seed grants up to $10,000 to fund the beginning stages of prototyping and researching if there is value in an idea.

Shark Tank is a biannual competition for teams to pitch their ideas for feedback and potentially win a $25,000 award to continue to develop their idea.
Conference a Perfect Blend of the Past and the Future of Surgery

This year, our 11th Annual Research Day was combined with the Michael E. DeBakey Surgical Society Alumni Symposium. The event was held on June 9 and 10 and featured sessions highlighting the clinical, educational and research accomplishments of the department and its alumni both nationally and internationally.

“We were fortunate to welcome the alumni society back as it has been almost 10 years since we have hosted in 2014,” says Holly Shilstone, director of advancement and alumni affairs. “It is so important to connect with our alumni and their amazing contributions in the field of surgery and also share with them the incredible growth and contributions of the department of surgery from all of our divisions and mission areas.”

There were over 200 faculty, staff, students, trainees and alumni in attendance for the two-day event that featured division highlights and abstract presentations. Social activities included an informal reception Friday night and a dinner party at the conclusion of the event on Saturday.

Keynote Speaker

The keynote speaker, Craig Miller, M.D., author of A Time for All Things: The Life of Michael E. DeBakey, presented “Decadus Mirabilis: Michael E. DeBakey and the Ten Years that Made Vascular Surgery.” In appreciation of his enormously impactful work chronicling Dr. DeBakey’s contributions and preserving his legacy, Dr. Miller was inducted as an honorary member of the Michael E. DeBakey Surgical Society.

Awards

Best Clinical Research Presentation by a Resident or Fellow
Dr. Paige Brlecic “Lower Socioeconomic Status Adversely Affects Outcomes After Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting” Mentors: Drs. Ravi Ghatta and Todd Rosengart

Best Basic Science Presentation by a Resident or Fellow
Dr. Oluyinka Olutoya, II “Investigating Sex-Based Differences in Congenital Diaphragmatic Hernia with a Novel Translational Model and Spatial Transcriptomics” Mentor: Dr. Sundee Kewanu

Best Quick Shot Presentation by a Resident or Fellow
Dr. Christopher Ryan “Machine Learning for Dynamic and Early Prediction of Acute Kidney Injury after Cardiac Surgery” Mentor: Dr. Ravi Ghatta

Best Quick Shot Presentation by a Student
Samantha Xu “Energy Metabolism Dynamics in Sporadic Aortic Aneurysms and Acute Dissections” Mentors: Drs. Scott LeMaire and Ying Shen

Best Quick Shot Presentation by Clinical, Research, or Education Staff
Dr. Alejandro Zulbaran-Rojas “Electrical Stimulation to Regain Lower-Extremity Muscle Perfusion and Endurance in Patients with Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS CoV-2: A Randomized Control Trial” Mentor: Dr. Bijan Najafi

Best Poster Presentation by a Resident or Fellow
Dr. Andy Espinoza “Preclinical Testing Pipeline Reveals Novel Treatment Strategies for Chemotherapy Resistant Hepatoblastoma” Mentor: Dr. Sanjeev Vasanadavan

Best Poster Presentation by a Student
Christopher Sylvester “Dantrolene Inhibits Lysophosphatidylcholine-Induced Valve Intershittal Cell Calcific Nodule Formation” Mentor: Dr. Jane Grande-Allen

Best Poster Presentation by Clinical, Research, or Education Staff
Naima Rodriguez “Frailty Evaluation by Physical Activity Monitor in Veterans with Cancer” Mentor: Dr. Bijan Najafi

DeBakey Surgical Society Advisory Committee

The Michael E. DeBakey Surgical Society, which merged into the department this past year, held its advisory committee meeting on June 9, with 11 of its committee members in attendance. The society’s mission is to celebrate the legacy of Dr. Michael DeBakey by supporting the community of former and current trainees and faculty members of the department. Key activities include organizing periodic alumni scientific symposia and alumni events in conjunction with national conferences, selecting alumni award recipients and maintaining the alumni database, alumni communications and archives.

The department plans on bringing the alumni back to Houston in two years for the Michael E. DeBakey Surgical Society’s next alumni symposium to be held in 2025.

Follow our alumni updates at surgeryalumni.com
Surgeon Co-Authors New Treatment Approach for Saving Limbs, Begins Term as Society President

Joseph L. Mills Sr., M.D., professor and chief of the Division of Vascular Surgery and Endovascular Therapy, is co-author of the article “Transcatheter Arterialization of Deep Veins in Chronic Limb-Threatening Ischemia” published in The New England Journal of Medicine. This study, called PROMISE II, investigated a new, minimally-invasive treatment approach called transcatheter arterialization of the deep veins (TAD), which involves creating a connection between an artery and a vein to deliver oxygenated blood to the foot in patients with chronic limb-threatening ischemia who have no other options for revascularization, in order to prevent major limb amputation.

The study enrolled 105 patients with nonhealing ulcers and no available conventional surgical or endovascular revascularization treatment options. The results showed that TAD was successful in 99% of patients and 66% of the patients had amputation-free survival at six months. No device-related adverse events were reported.

Overall, the study showed that TAD is a safe and successful option for patients with chronic limb-threatening ischemia who are facing the prospect of leg amputation and have no other available conventional surgical or endovascular revascularization treatment options.

Society for Vascular Surgery

Mills currently serves as the 2023-2024 Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) president. The mission of the SVS is to advance excellence and revolution in vascular health through knowledge, outreach, research, and awareness. The society is a national advocate for vascular surgeons and additional medical personnel who are dedicated to the prevention and study of all vascular disease.

Center for Global Surgery Team Visits Geneva

Our new Center for Global Surgery was launched by Rachel W. Davis, M.D., assistant professor and Center for Global Surgery director, this past winter as an expansion of our one-of-a-kind global surgery track within our General Surgery Residency Program (also developed and launched by Dr. Davis in 2014).

“As we learn and provide care across the globe, we are also fortunate to have had the opportunity to go to centers such as the World Health Organization in Geneva and meet key leaders in the field of global surgery,” says Dr. Davis. “These relationships are imperative to the growth of our center, but more importantly the effectiveness of our educational and research programs.”

Sabrina Bernhard, administrator for the Center of Global Surgery, notes “Having a seat at the table in the global health capital of the world during the most pivotal weeks in the year was truly surreal. We cannot wait to return next year.”

Marking the advent of this new program designed to expand the study of delivering surgical care to the underserved worldwide, Dr. Davis was joined by center members Yao Yang, M.D., Katayoun Madani, M.D., and Sabrina Bernhard in participating at the World Health Assembly meeting in Geneva in April. They advocated for safe, timely and affordable surgical care; met other stakeholders and collaborators to form relationships within the community and learned about high level advocacy, diplomacy and policy within the field of global surgery.
Renowned Summer Surgery Program Begins Again

The 2023 Michael E. DeBakey Summer Surgery Program launched in June with 14 students from schools around the nation joining the department to experience close engagement with our surgery teams. In existence for over 60 years, the program has produced many graduates who have gone on to careers in medicine and surgery.

The program familiarizes the student as observers with hospital and operating room environments as well as work-life and time management skills. Students selected for this eight-week program are assigned to a surgery faculty mentor whom they shadow in their surgical service activities at one of the following hospitals: Ben Taub Hospital, Baylor St. Luke’s Medical Center or Texas Children’s Hospital.

Students are introduced to the fundamentals of a surgical practice and have the opportunity to acquire skills used in the evaluation and treatment of surgical conditions. Perioperative evaluation, operative principles and post-operative care are emphasized. Functioning as a sub-intern on a busy surgery service, students work with faculty, residents, medical students, nurses and administrative personnel. The student is expected to become an integral part of the team by participating in rounds, operative cases, patient care and conferences.

The program success couldn’t be possible without Bradford Scott, M.D., vice chair for education, Ramiro Fernandez, M.D., program director, Holly Shilstone, director of advancement and alumni affairs and senior consultant for education, and Caitlyn Williamson, senior program coordinator.

Metabolic and Weight Loss Conference a Success

The Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery held its first CME-accredited metabolic and weight loss conference on May 20, with participants attending both in person and virtually. “Metabolic Syndrome and Severe Obesity: A Modern Multidisciplinary Approach” was a one-day course of lectures and interactive panel discussions providing learners with the current state of metabolic syndrome as a disease of epidemic proportions and current understanding of causes and available treatments that help reverse the disease.

Course directors were Samer Mattar, M.D., professor and chief of the Division of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery, Olubunmi Oladunjoye, M.D., M.P.H., assistant professor in the Department of Medicine and Matthew Yang, M.D., assistant professor in the Department of Medicine. The conference was highlighted by Demis Lipe, M.D., a physician who gave a very powerful account of her experience as a patient, including the bias and prejudice that she faced in the two years prior to her surgery and the difference bariatric surgery has made in her life.

Center Receives Excellence Designation

St. Luke’s Health Baylor St. Luke’s Medical Center has received the Optum Center of Excellence Designation (COE) for Bariatric Surgery. Programs designated as an Optum Bariatric Center of Excellence meet higher standards such as fewer complications and readmissions which translates to a higher level of successful procedures than other comparable programs.
New Clinic Brings Care Closer to Home

We are now able to offer patients in The Woodlands an opportunity to see surgeons without driving all the way to the Texas Medical Center.

Stacey Carter, M.D., medical director of Breast Surgery at St. Luke’s Health–The Woodlands Hospital and associate professor in the Division of Surgical Oncology, specializes in the use of localization methods for targeted removal of small volume breast disease. She has a strong interest in oncoplastic surgery and works closely with the plastic surgery and reconstructive team at Baylor College of Medicine to optimize aesthetic outcomes. In her spare time, Dr. Carter enjoys traveling, walking and hiking and spending time with family.

Mark Mettauer, M.D., associate professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, has served The Woodlands community for almost 20 years and is now partnering with Baylor Medicine at this new site. He brings a wealth of experience in minimally cardiac and thoracic surgery, peripheral vascular disease and endovascular techniques. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his family. His hobbies include hunting, fishing, and outdoor sports.

Vivek Patel, M.D., assistant professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, is a Baylor College of Medicine alumni and cardiothoracic surgeon whose practice encompasses cardiac, thoracic and vascular surgeries, including ECMO and minimally invasive cardiac surgeries. Dr. Patel has published numerous abstracts, manuscripts and textbook chapters in clinical and basic science research, while also filing a patent for a novel strategy for cardiac regeneration. In his free time, Dr. Patel enjoys spending time with his family and two children.

HEALTHCARE UPDATE

First Heart Transplant Performed at Houston VA

Department of Surgery surgeons together with other Baylor College of Medicine physicians recently sent home the first patient ever to have undergone a heart transplant at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC).

While it is not unusual for doctors at Veterans Affairs to coordinate or carry out heart transplants, this milestone event makes MEDVAMC only the second VA facility in the nation with a heart transplant program. This success was recently followed by two additional heart transplants and comes after the implantation of four left ventricular assist devices in a program begun at the MEDVAMC in 2022. The VA heart transplant program joins large and successful programs in liver and kidney transplant established in 2007 and 2014, respectively.

“We are so proud to be offering this service and providing options for veterans with heart failure in the south,” says Alexis Shafii, M.D., associate professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Transplant and Circulatory Support and program director, who performed the first transplant and is assisted in leading the program by Alexander Schutz, M.D., assistant professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. “Our patients can now stay closer to home and receive care in the region, rather than traveling to distant states for transplant care.”

The first heart recipient was John Graves, an Air Force veteran and Texas resident. He had ischemic cardiomyopathy, a condition that makes it difficult for the heart to deliver blood to the rest of the body, which led to heart failure. His condition declined as he waited for the transplant: in May 2022, he could walk about 1,200 feet in six minutes but by December could only walk about 200 feet in the same time.

After transplant, Graves is recovering well and working with a physical therapist and looking forward to hiking and eventually running.

Looking to the future, Dr. Schutz noted that the program anticipates performing a total of more than a dozen heart transplants and circulatory support device implantations annually.
The American Lung Association in Texas honored Gabriel Loor, M.D., associate professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Transplant and Circulatory Support, at the American Lung Association Fight for Air Climb on May 20.

“Dr. Loor has devoted his professional career to improving the lives of patients with lung disease. He is widely respected for his expertise and compassionate care, but his commitment to lung health goes beyond his clinical practice,” said Charlotte Maffia, executive director of the Lung Association in Texas. “He is an inspiration to his patients, colleagues and community, and his commitment to building a better future for patients with advanced lung disease is truly admirable.”

At the event, Dr. Loor was honored for his contributions to lung transplantation. He pioneered the use of portable ex vivo lung perfusion for donation after cardiac death lung transplantation, becoming the first surgeon in the United States to do so. These advancements have greatly improved the field of transplants and have led to better outcomes for patients. Dr. Loor’s dedication to providing excellent care to patients has earned him many prestigious awards, including the Dr. Charles H. Bryan Annual Clinical Excellence Award in Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery at the Cleveland Clinic.

Dr. Loor has also been a staunch supporter of the Fight for Air Climb since 2018 and led a team this year to surpass their fundraising goal.

The Fight for Air Climb is an annual event held in cities around the country to support people with lung disease through fundraising and research.

American Lung Association Honors Dr. Gabriel Loor for Lung Transplant Contributions

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Dr. John P. Williams

John P. Williams, M.D., a breast cancer surgeon and 1997 graduate from Baylor College of Medicine’s General Surgery Residency Program, is deeply passionate about patient care and is equally committed to advocating for patient education and advancing cancer policies in the United States.

Road to Becoming a Breast Cancer Surgeon

Dr. Williams originally wanted to be a neurologist. “I wanted to be a neurologist until I realized that surgery fascinated me more than the brain,” Dr. Williams said. “My need to diagnose a problem and be capable of fixing it was insatiable.”

He practiced general surgery initially, but ultimately specialized in breast surgery after he learned how he could help patients desperate for hope. “I appreciated surgery, and specifically breast cancer surgery, because it gave me an opportunity to help those facing the complexities of a diagnosis of cancer,” he said.

Advocacy and Patient Education

While Dr. Williams’ clinical practice in Virginia has helped countless breast cancer patients, he wanted to do more to advance cancer education and policy on a larger scale. In 2008, he founded the Novant–UVA Multidisciplinary Breast Cancer Conference in Haymarket Virginia to enhance the team approach of breast specialists working together. Under his leadership, the conference developed into The UVA Community Health Breast Center in 2009. The Center includes a multidisciplinary team that helps women receive better cancer care.

In 2018 when Dr. Williams realized the medical community wasn’t teaching breast cancer patients what they need to know to be able to ask the right questions to get the best care, he created an online resource: The Breast Cancer School for Patients.

Advisor to Presidents

Just one year after launching the online educational resource, Dr. Williams received a presidential appointment to be chairman of the President’s Cancer Panel at the National Institute of Health. Each year the three-person panel issues an annual report with policy recommendations about an important topic in cancer.

Dr. Williams hopes all his efforts will continue to improve care for patients. “If I were to influence anything, it would be to reach more people through apps and free platforms that we don’t already use. I also hope to bring a human touch to policy that helps heal cancer patients. If I can do that, I will have succeeded in my life’s mission.”
What projects are you most proud of?
I am most proud of my collaborations with Rice Bioengineers on 3D printed organs and my qualitative work on imminent death donation. While they seem disparate, I think they both address a large need in society.

What do you like most about your job?
I love to spend time with my children, playing chess and video games. I've really enjoyed indoor gardening, where I take dying plants and then resuscitate them. I have an orchid ICU and am graduating into propagation and hydroponic techniques. I'm feebly learning the piano. And I have date nights with my husband.

N. Thao N. Galvan, M.D., M.P.H.
Associate Professor of Surgery
Division of Abdominal Transplantation

Where are you from?
Atlanta, GA

What made you choose to become a surgeon?
I was delighted that my first rotation was surgery—I was happy to get it over with. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I would never go into surgery. But I learned my preconceived notions of what a surgeon were very far from reality. I realized that a surgeon was one willing and able to make sound judgments in high stakes situations. A surgeon is also someone who thrives on immediate results. In the end, choosing surgery was easy because I found that what truly makes a surgeon is one who appreciates that well-regarded risks can lead to great rewards.

Choosing transplant specifically was a more difficult decision. The training is time consuming and difficult, making it a significant investment for me and my family—but I was drawn to the technical demands of the operation and how my mentors in transplant exemplified the pursuit of excellence.

Choosing transplant specifically was a more difficult decision. The training is time consuming and difficult, making it a significant investment for me and my family—but I was drawn to the technical demands of the operation and how my mentors in transplant exemplified the pursuit of excellence.

What do you like most about your job?
I am able to experience the sheer magic of what it is to take a precious gift from one family and deliver it to another family. That inspires a great deal of gratitude.

Is there anything you would tell someone thinking about going into surgery?
I will share two things that my anatomy professor shared with me that have stayed. The first thing is “Get up.” As an intern, you will get a 3:45am page about a patient just as you lay your head down for a short rest. That patient, who you know ordinarily to be of sound mind, is now altered. You could easily prescribe the Ativan that is suggested and lay back down, or you could get up. Just. get. up. Go see the patient. In 15 years, I have never regretted losing sleep to check on the patient.

My professor's second and related precept was “Decide who you are going to be before you start.” We are bound to fail sometimes, but by reminding ourselves who we resolve to be and having high expectations of ourselves, we will be more likely to become that ideal version of ourselves. That way, despite being tired or hungry or distressed, no matter what, we have principles that we stand by. And exhibiting principled behavior is what every person should have in their physician.

What do you like to do when you’re not working?
I am trying to learn how to make stained glass. I enjoy doing craft projects when I have free time. Currently I am trying to learn how to make stained glass.

Where did you go to school?
University of Houston–Clear Lake.

What made you choose your career?
I got inspired by a book called How to Lie with Statistics during my junior year in college and wanted to be able to present data truthfully. Data is present in everyday life and in every field. I decided go into data analytics to use data to help organizations make vital decisions.

What do you like most about your job?
The thing I like most about my job is that I get to work with different people from all areas of the department. I also enjoy helping everybody with their data to help them do their job more efficiently.

What do you like to do when you're not working?
I like being able to identify a problem and fix it right then and there. As for my choice of specialty, it is going to come down to finding a balance between that which is meaningful, challenging, with colleagues I enjoy working with, and that lets me prioritize family when I need to.

What do you like most about your job?
Getting a little better at it (hopefully) every day.

Where are you from?
Seoul, Republic of Korea

What made you decide to go into medicine?
I love to spend time with my children, playing chess and video games. I've really enjoyed indoor gardening, where I take dying plants and then resuscitate them. I have an orchid ICU and am graduating into propagation and hydroponic techniques. I'm feebly learning the piano. And I have date nights with my husband.

What made you decide to go into medicine?
Medical has felt like a calling, for as long as I can remember. I do not think that there is any other profession more fundamentally decent, noble, or meaningful than medicine and no other profession that demands more of you. I really couldn't imagine doing anything else.

What made you choose surgery and how will you choose your specialty?
I am able to experience the sheer magic of what it is to take a precious gift from one family and deliver it to another family. That inspires a great deal of gratitude.

What made you choose surgery and how will you choose your specialty?
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What do you like most about your job?
Getting a little better at it (hopefully) every day.

Where are you from?
I was born and raised in Vietnam, but I have lived in Houston for almost 10 years.

What do you like most about your job?
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My Le (Mylee) Hoang Dong
Data Analytics Associate

Where did you go to school?
I got both my bachelor's and master's degree at University of Houston–Clear Lake.

What made you choose your career?
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Weight loss

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

Derek Erstad, M.D., assistant professor in the Division of Surgical Oncology, has been appointed as assistant director for the robotics training program in the General Surgery Residency Program. In this role, Dr. Erstad will provide leadership and oversight in the growth and integration of the robotic training program across Baylor St. Luke’s Medical Center and the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center. The new program includes multidimensional learning through virtual simulation, wet lab training and proctored teaching, with progressive complexity spanning all five residency years.

Livia S. Eberlin, Ph.D., associate professor in the Division of Surgical Oncology, has been appointed as an adjunct associate professor in the Department of Genitourinary Medical Oncology at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Under this role, she will continue to collaborate and lead research projects with collaborators and clinicians at MD Anderson.

Jeffrey Ross, D.P.M., M.D., associate professor of surgery in the Division of Vascular Surgery and Endovascular Therapy, has been named section chief of podiatry. Dr. Ross is a podiatrist specializing in diabetic leg amputation prevention and limb salvage. With over three decades of experience in his field, he has participated in over 150 lectures and presentations and published 132 publications in various industry journals. He presents nationally and internationally on subjects ranging from sports medicine and biomechanics to wound healing and limb preservation.

Zane Quach, D.O., assistant professor in the Division of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, has been appointed to associate director of the surgical intensive care unit (SICU) at Baylor St. Luke’s Medical Center. In this role he will work with Michele Loor, M.D., SICU medical director, to create a formal SICU quality improvement process, provide a forum for advanced practice providers and create practice management guidelines for surgical critical care. He will also continue his duties as director of the surgical immediate care unit and in the general surgery program.

Professional Training Workshops

Judy Le, president of TakeRoot Leadership Consulting and Coaching, led a training series this year designed to promote and develop leadership skills for the staff, residents and faculty of the department. The series of workshops begin with a speaking engagement at the department grand rounds and subsequent workshops designed to build a leadership framework for the respective groups. Training workshop topics included building and renewing trust, leading self and leading teams.

Surgeon Data and Coaching Improvement Program

Seventeen department faculty members are part of a 12-week program aimed at improving individual performance through comprehensive physiological analytics and one-on-one coaching. The program is led by Bryan Ferguson, founder and CEO of Arena labs who shares his past experience as a United States Navy Seal to improve personal flourishing. Arena's platform combines objective physiological data, subjective performance data, assessments, content tools and other tools to provide feedback and improve performance. The goal of the collaboration is to build higher performing medical teams through data and coaching. The program includes wearable device monitoring of participants' physiologic response to stress and follow up sessions with the Arena team where they explore these responses and ways of lowering stress.

Top 20 for Five Years

The Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery has been in the top 20 of US News and World Report for the past five years. The surgery program ranked as high as thirteenth over the past five years and this year came in just behind Emory, University of Pittsburg Medical Center and The Ohio State University and ahead of Chicago, University of North Carolina and The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. The surgery program was also the #1 ranked surgery program over the past five years. Of the five other departments eligible for ranking, Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine was also ranked in the top 20 at seventh place. The rankings are based on reputational survey of deans and other academic leaders.
Kyle Blackburn, a first-year medical student, won the best poster award at the Cardiovascular Research Institute Symposium, an annual Baylor College of Medicine conference. His mentors include Scott LeMaire, M.D., Joseph Coselli, M.D., and Marc Moon M.D.

Elizabeth Bonefas, M.D., Alexandria Sarenski, P.A., James Suliburk, M.D., and George Van Buren II, M.D., were named 2022 Patient Experience All Stars for achieving an overall care provider score above the 90th percentile for Press Ganey. This award measures patient experience, including quality, satisfaction and overall experience with Baylor Medicine.

Eugene Choi, M.D., Ronald Cotton, M.D., N. Thao N. Galvan, M.D., Ravi Ghanta, M.D., Peter Jindra, Ph.D. and Jayer Chung, M.D., received a 2022 Norton Rose Fullbright Award. This award was initiated in 2001, to provide an opportunity for Baylor College of Medicine faculty meeting designated standards of quality, quantity and breadth to receive recognition for their sustained, exemplary educational contributions. Faculty can receive awards in four categories: teaching and evaluation, educational research, educational contributions. Faculty can receive awards in four categories: teaching and evaluation, educational research, educational contributions.

Lily Cheng, M.D., assistant professor in the Division of Pediatric Surgery, received the Ester Tسا Sugg Research Award for her project “AAS/SUS Research Awards Are Highly Successful in Fostering Future Surgeon-Scientists.” The award is granted to the highest-scoring abstract from a Society of Asian Academic Surgeons.

Samuel Creden, M.D. and Jorge Portuondo, M.D., general surgery residents, won the Surgical Jeopardy challenge at the 18th Annual Academic Surgical Congress. They challenged other teams from across the nation in a friendly game of Surgical Jeopardy and were ultimately victorious.

Rachel Davis, M.D., R. Taylor Ripley, M.D., Roberto Vera, M.D., Hyun Sung Lee, M.D., Ph.D and Zachary Gray, PA-C received a Power of Professionalism (POP) award from Baylor College of Medicine. This award is given to those who demonstrate respect for the patient, family, the patient’s local physician and who recognize the need for clear and compassionate communication, as well as recognizes and respects the value of differing opinions in clinical decision making.

Raymon Grogan, M.D. and Michele Loor, M.D. have been inducted into The Society of University Surgeons (SUS). Membership into the SUS is given to persons of well-established professional position and demonstrated scholarly or creative ability that positively impacts their field.

Melissa Koci, M.D.; Erin Greenleaf, M.D.; Juliet Holder-Haynes, M.D.; S Julie-Ann Lloyd, M.D.; Ashley Kaim, PA-C and Ashley Benning received 2023 Women of Excellence Awards. The award recognizes service to Baylor College of Medicine through demonstrated leadership in addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion above and beyond generally anticipated scope of responsibilities.

Nandan Kumar Mondal, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Transplantation and Circulatory Support, received the 2023 ASAIO Abstract Award for his abstract “Urinary Vitamin D Binding Protein and Kidney Injury Molecule-1 May Predict the Risk of Acute Kidney Injury in Heart Failure Patients Undergoing CF-LVAD Implantation.” Dr. Mondal also was awarded a Travel Award from ISHLT 2023 Annual Conference in Colorado, Denver for his abstract, “Cardiac Mitochondrial Stress Burden and Impairment of Oxidative Phosphorylation are More Profound in Human Heart Donated after Circulatory Death Than Heart Donated after Brain Death.”

Harveen Lamba, M.D., MSc, assistant professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Transplantation and Circulatory Support, won the 2023 ASAIO Abstract Award for the project “Incidence, Outcomes, and Risk Factors of Acute Kidney Injury in Patients on Percutaneous Mechanical Circulatory Support with Impella 5.0 and 5.5 for Cardiogenic Shock.”

Kenneth L. Mattox, M.D., was awarded the prestigious 2023 John P. McGovern Compleat Physician Award, joining an elite group of physicians who have been recognized by the Houston Academy of Medicine for enriching the field of medicine through their compassionate care, training and research.

Bijan Najafi, M.D., MSc, professor of surgery, director of Center to Stream HealthCare in Place and director of clinical research in the Division of Vascular Surgery and Endovascular Therapy, has been elected for induction into the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering College of Fellows.

Katie Nordick, M.D., general surgery resident, won the 2023 ASAIO Abstract Award for the project “Left Ventricular Assist Device Implantation: Why Cardiopulmonary Bypass Time Matters.” Dr. Harveen Lamba was her mentor on the project.

Jeffrey Ross, D.P.M., M.D., associate professor of surgery in the Division of Vascular Surgery and Endovascular Therapy, has been appointed to the Medical Education Committee on the American College of Sports Medicine. The committee identifies strategies and develops resources to improve the training of health care professionals to ultimately support their efforts in assessing and promoting physical activity with their patients.

Alexander Schutz, M.D. was accepted into the American Association for Thoracic Surgery (AATS) 2023 Leadership Academy. The leadership academy is an intensive, didactic and interactive program to help leaders improve their administrative, interpersonal and mentoring skills.

Ying Shen, M.D., Ph.D., has received the Dr. Mark L. Entman Teaching Award for Excellence in Cardiovascular Education. The award is given by Baylor College of Medicine Cardiovascular Research Institute based on learner feedback and evaluation scores.

Youmna Sherif, M.D., global surgery resident at Baylor College of Medicine, was selected for an AMA Journal of Ethics Editorial Fellowship. As a fellow, she will develop and edit a complete issue for the AMA Journal of Ethics, which will focus on surgical care for incarcerated patients and be published later this year.

Eric J. Silberfein, M.D., R. Mario Vera, M.D., and R. Taylor Ripley, M.D., have received Professional Educator Appreciation and Recognition (PEAR) Awards from Baylor College of Medicine students. The PEAR awards were founded by Baylor students to recognize their instructors and faculty for excellence in teaching, mentorship, and/or for outstanding general assistance and inspiration.

Sanjeev Vasudevan, M.D., associate professor in the Division of Pediatric Surgery, has received a $100,000 Baylor College of Medicine Interim Funding Award for his project, “A Novel Humanized Pipeline for Liver Cancer Drug Response.” The final goal is to predict patient responses to therapy and expand the use of combination strategies with targeted agents in new clinical trials.

Samantha Xu, M.P.H., a Sarnoff Research Fellow in the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, won the ATVB Young Investigator Travel Award for her research project “Energy Metabolism Dynamics in Macrophages of Sporadic Aortic Aneurysms and Acute Dissections” at the annual Council on Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology conference. Her research examines the gene expression profile of energy metabolism in macrophages of aortic aneurysm and dissection. Dr. Xu’s mentors are Scott LeMaire, M.D., and Ying Shen, M.D., Ph.D.

She also won the 1st Place Young Investigator Oral Presentation Award at the 2023 Chinese American Academy of Cardiology Research Symposium. The Chinese American Academy of Cardiology (CAAC) is a professional organization for academic professionals in cardiovascular medicine and research and holds an annual conference for collaboration and learning.