

Pedi Press

A Department of Pediatrics Publication

October 2025



Message from the desk of Dr. Lara Shekerdeman 🎃

As we move into the heart of fall (per the calendar... not the weather), I want to take a moment to reflect on some recent highlights and share my deep appreciation for the incredible work happening across our Department of Pediatrics.

First, congratulations to everyone on another outstanding year in the U.S. News & World Report rankings. For the 17th consecutive year, Texas Children's has been named the #1 children's hospital in Texas and among the best in the nation. These results reflect the collective excellence, compassion, and teamwork that define our department—every faculty member, trainee, and staff contributor plays an essential role in earning this recognition.

October also brought wonderful opportunities for connection and collaboration. Many of our faculty, past, present and even future gathered at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference in Denver, where we hosted a well-attended departmental reception. It was energizing to celebrate our shared achievements and to see so many of our faculty and trainees representing our institution on the national stage! Closer to home, our department continues to prioritize wellbeing and resilience as we continue our work in responding to the provider engagement survey. Several of our leaders recently participated in the Joy in Medicine Symposium, returning with renewed inspiration and practical ideas to strengthen our collective wellbeing culture. Their engagement underscores our ongoing commitment to supporting one another—not just as professionals, but as people.

This month, we recognize several meaningful October holidays, including Yom Kippur, Indigenous Peoples' Day, and Diwali. As a culturally vast department, we value the many traditions represented among our colleagues. This month, many of our faculty have shared with us more about Diwali and the spirit of light and community it represents. This month, we also celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month and Latino Physicians Day—recognizing the outstanding contributions and lasting influence of our Hispanic and Latino colleagues. We welcome anyone who would like to share their own cultural celebrations in future issues to help us all learn more about one another! See the end of this publication for how you might contribute.

Thank you for all that you do each day for our patients, families, learners, and each other. Your dedication continues to make our department—and our community—truly exceptional.

Happy reading and take care!
Lara

UPCOMING PEDIATRICS GRAND ROUNDS (HYBRID)

🌸 10/24 - Collaborative Care to Prevent Youth Suicide with Mr. Brandon Johnson

🎨 10/31 - Current Landscape of Pediatric Pain Management with Drs. Krista Preisberga and Henry Huang

🦴 11/07 - Musculoskeletal Mythbusters with Dr. Bucky Ribbeck

🧠 11/14 - Psychology: Autism with Dr. Robin Kochel

🌱 11/21 - Mental Health in Cardiac care with Dr. Nadine Kasparian

👨‍⚕️ 12/05 - Physician Scientist - Topic TBD with Dr. Jordan Orange

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Baylor
College of
Medicine

Texas Children's
Hospital

highlighting Our Faculty!



Congratulation to Dr. Jesus G. Vallejo! ★

Dr. Jesus G. Vallejo, widely recognized for his leadership as Senior Associate Dean for Admissions at Baylor College of Medicine's School of Medicine, Professor in the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, Co-Director of the Clinical Scientist Training Program, and Chair-Elect of the Joint Admission Medical Program (JAMP), has been appointed as the **newest Regional Dean of the Baylor College of Medicine Temple Campus!**



Dr. Elyse Portillo, Assistant Professor of Pediatric Emergency Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital, **was recently featured on Fox 26, where she shared her powerful personal journey as a retinoblastoma survivor. Her experience has uniquely positioned her to connect with patients like Katie, a young girl currently battling the same rare eye cancer.** During the interview, Katie's mother spoke about the profound impact Dr. Portillo has had on their family, calling her an inspiring role model for her daughter. **This heartfelt connection highlights the exceptional care and compassion that define the work of Texas Children's Emergency Center and its dedicated physicians! Click the button in the bottom to learn more about this remarkable story and the lasting difference being made at Texas Children's!**

[To learn more click here!](#)

Honoring Dr. Judith Campbell at the Colloquium 2025 for her long-standing contributions to education for the BCM Department of Pediatrics.



Dr. Judith Campbell has been the beating heart of our fellowships—steady, generous, and life-giving. She imagined Fellow's College and, through grace and grit, grew it into a unifying thread across our department. She has mentored nearly every fellowship director I know, illuminating paths, steadying hands, and lifting standards with her quiet courage. Judith's passion for fellows, for our training programs, and for education is simply unquenchable; she has always chosen what is right for learners, even when it was hard, even when no one was looking. Our programs are stronger, kinder, and more future-ready because she poured herself into them. Though she is stepping down from this role, the rhythm she set will continue to guide us—one fellowship, one trainee, one act of integrity at a time.

– Dr. Teri Turner

I often joke that I'm Judith's sidekick, and truthfully, she's the Batman to my Robin—leading with wisdom and a contagious sense of purpose. She shares the most generous gift: her time, wrapped in honesty, authenticity, and a spooky twin-brain connection that still catches us both off guard. In a field where joy can sometimes get buried under pressure, her mentorship has been a steady beacon. Working with her is an honor, knowing her is a gift, and learning from her feels like training under a true Master Jedi. She is, without a doubt, a strong and positive force in my academic career—and more than that, she's left an indelible imprint on my heart through her friendship, her leadership, and her unwavering integrity.

– Dr. Jennifer Rama



the Pediatrics Faculty Development Leaders!

The Pediatric Faculty Development Program supports faculty at all career stages, fostering growth in clinical care, education, research, and leadership. Meet the leaders dedicated to mentorship, career advancement, and building a strong, connected faculty community!



Dr. Wendy E. Quiroz

Associate Division Chief, Critical Care Medicine, Associate Vice Chair of Advanced Practice Providers (Baylor College of Medicine), Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Critical Care (Baylor College of Medicine)



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you?

Being a faculty development leader allows me the privilege to learn more about the various interests of our Faculty. I am continually humbled by the diversity and passion which drives the Faculty's interests in advancing education, research, leadership opportunities, and a desire to achieve clinical excellence. I am honored to support the Faculty by guiding and mentoring individuals on a personal basis. Sometimes I serve as a sounding board for ideas and provide support where needed. Other times, I have the opportunity to dive a little deeper and work alongside the Faculty to uncover opportunities and work to resolve roadblocks. Faculty development is one of my passions and allows me to help others meet or exceed the goals they have set for themselves.

What are fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work?

We live in the Suburbs North of Houston. When we are not at work my husband and I are dividing and juggling our two teenagers 'activities. Life is definitely busy and never ever dull. This year our son is a Senior and his departure for college is coming way too soon---he might be ready, but we are not emotionally prepared for the day he leaves our nest. In the meantime, I'm grounded to reality by a Chauffer who zips around town braving traffic with her Learner's Permit---the 15 year old driver who calls the shots in our home is a constant reminder of the importance of buckling up! So what do I do for self-care? I spend time with my little family and count my blessings.



Dr. Satid Thammasitboon

Director, Center for Research, Innovation and Scholarship in Health Professions Education [CRIS](#), Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Critical Care Medicine Division

What does being a faculty development mean to you?

For me, being a faculty development leader is about multiplying opportunities. I've been fortunate to benefit from mentors and communities who opened doors for me, and my role now is to help others walk through their own. Faculty development is not just about building skills; it's about cultivating confidence, creativity, and a sense of belonging—helping colleagues see themselves as scholars, educators, and change agents who can shape the future of health professions education.

What are fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work?

I grew up in Southern Thailand, where my dad worked as a tailor in the front of our row house and my mom ran a concession stand for a local movie theater in the back. My earliest lessons in English came not from books or classes, but from listening to the Bee Gees, the Carpenters, and the Beatles drifting out of that theater. Today, when I need to recharge, I turn back to music, long walks with my dogs, and moments of quiet reflection—simple joys that keep me grounded.



Dr. Bonnie McCann-Crosby

Medical Director, Pediatric Endocrinology & Metabolism, Texas Children's Hospital The Woodlands Campus, Associate Professor, Pediatrics, Baylor College of Medicine



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you?

Being a faculty development leader has brought me an incredible amount of joy! I love being able to guide and support my colleagues as they navigate applying for awards and promotion and celebrate their wins as they achieve career goals. Throughout this journey I have learned so much about the amazing work that our providers at The Woodlands Campus are involved in, and it is our goal to showcase this work as much as possible. This role has shown me that when we come together to share projects that are happening across divisions and collaborate, we create a thriving environment full of opportunity for our faculty to shine.

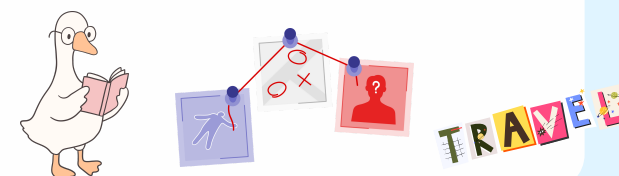
What are fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work?

Fun fact: I worked as a phlebotomist when I was in college. In my non-work time I enjoy playing piano, organizing anything and everything in my house, working out, and gardening.



Dr. Ankhi Dutta

Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Infectious Diseases, Baylor College of Medicine



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you?

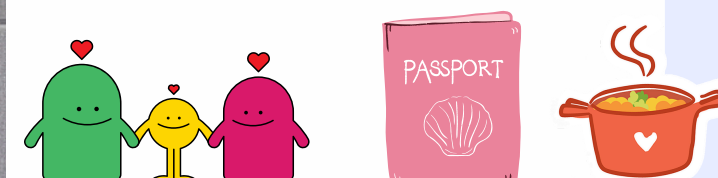
Supporting and mentoring faculty to help them flourish brings me a lot of joy. I love interacting with faculty and incorporating a culture of collaboration and team work!

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? I love reading books, traveling and binge watching crime series!



Dr. Kirstin Gracia Henley

Assistant Professor Baylor College of Medicine Pediatrics Critical Care Division, Department of Pediatrics, CHRISTUS Children's



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you? Being a FD leader means: helping to equip colleagues to thrive in their academic and teaching roles and seeing them flourish in spaces they are most passionate about.

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? I love to spend time outside with my family, travel, cook, garden and weight life!

Meet the Pediatrics Faculty Development Leaders Cont.



Dr. Gordon Schutze

Professor of Pediatrics,
Executive Vice Chair of Pediatrics
Interim Dean of the School of Medicine, BCM
Associate Dean, CHRISTUS Children's



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you? It means opportunity. One of my favorite quotes is "ability is of no consequence without opportunity". So therefore, faculty development should give skills to faculty to make them competitive when jobs they want open. I like to tell people "my job is to give you the skills to take my job, cause I won't be here forever". That is what faculty development is all about

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? I spent the summer between my sophomore and junior year of high school working in Bolivia vaccinating children against measles and the summer between my junior and senior year working in Nicaragua vaccinating children against measles and polio. The program I worked with is a Houston based program called "Amigos de Las Americas".



Dr. Jeffrey J. Kim

Chief, Pediatric Cardiology
Vice Chair, Faculty Development
Professor of Pediatrics
Baylor College of Medicine



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you? Being a faculty development leader is one of the most rewarding aspects of my job. In brief, it allows me to empower faculty members to better define their vision for their career and help align them to achieve their goals. Hopefully, this facilitates growth and advancement in their career and leads to greater satisfaction in what they do every day. (Also, it lets me meet and interact with a lot of neat people.)

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? I have watched more K-dramas than I would like to admit.



Dr. Kevin A. Kaplan

Associate Medical Director, West and Woodlands Campuses, Pediatric Pulmonary and Sleep Medicine, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you? Being a faculty leader to me means helping each other achieve our goals. I started learning more about faculty development through my own curiosity about the clinical awards and promotion process. I quickly realized that everyone needs help and guidance to complete our journey. By helping each other to climb one step at a time we will always get higher than doing it alone.

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? A fun fact about me is I enjoy decompressing though walking with or playing with my two rescue dogs.



Dr. Susan Lanelle Gillespie

Associate Professor, Pediatrics-Retrovirology
Physician, Department of Pediatrics, Baylor College of Medicine



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you? Serving as a faculty member in an academic medical center is such a privilege. Most of us chose an academic career because we wanted to directly influence the future of healthcare and the health of our community through one or some combination of the missions of trainee education, research, or patient care. Yet academic medicine is facing unprecedented changes that challenge our ability to thrive as faculty and to find joy and meaning in our professional endeavors. My interest in faculty development is to identify, understand, and to help foster an organizational culture where faculty members feel a sense of satisfaction, belonging, and overall wellbeing. Achieving and maintaining a thriving faculty workforce is essential to ensure the future of healthcare for us all.

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? I recently fell in love with houseplants. I started with just a handful of plants but through consistent care and simple propagation techniques, I creating a small jungle that threatens to overtake my space at home and in my office at work.



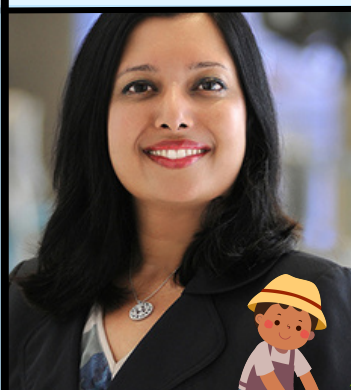
Dr. Joanna Schwartz

Pediatric Emergency Medicine Physician TCH
North Austin, Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Baylor College of Medicine



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you? Being a faculty development leader means getting the opportunity to meet and connect with faculty throughout the hospital and support them in whatever way I can, especially their non-clinical endeavors (promotion, awards, advocacy, education).

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? I recently started playing tennis again for the first time since middle school (!) and just played in my first doubles mixer with my 9 year old.



Dr. Geeta Singhal

Executive Vice Chair, Department of Pediatrics
Professor, Pediatrics Director of Academics, Division of Pediatric Hospital Medicine, Co-Director BCM Faculty Leadership Development Program, Professionalism Partner BCM / TCH



What does being a faculty development leader mean to you? I love faculty development because the faculty teach our future researchers, clinicians, advocates and so much more. The faculty are role models to our trainees and its a honor to support them in being the best they can be.

Fun facts or things you like to do to debrief after work? I love to garden especially since I have become an empty-nester. I also love to travel, watch movies and bake cookies.



Cultivating Connections Corner

Brought to you by the Department of Pediatrics

Introducing Cultivating Connections

Cultivating Connections is a new Department of Pediatrics campaign that brings us together under a shared name and logo to focus on our need for connection, awareness, and meaningful work. It's a foundation for an engagement strategy that we collaboratively build across the department; and many divisions are already engaged in exciting activities that we can spread department wide. While division and department leaders are responsible for championing the building, testing, and hosting of activities to support this campaign; it belongs to all of us and is envisioned as an on-going campaign full of iterations of activities and collaborative efforts that serve to continuously grow our sense of belonging!

RECENT CULTIVATION ✨

Many activities and programs that faculty have requested or suggested via past surveys and suggestions are already happening under the zeitgeist of Cultivating Connections; and more will be added. We would like to share a little bit about five that have been implemented already in 2025 so that you can be on the lookout for them and plan how you want to join in:

🌸 Chair Walkabouts

Dr. Shekerdeman goes on an informal walkabout to connect on a personal level with whomever is in the area for that day and time. This is a chance to connect informally, and have some serendipitous moments where the Chair's ears are yours for a moment. 18 Walkabouts have been conducted so far in 2025. You can request a Walkabout in your area by emailing Lxgurgan@texaschildrens.org.

🌸 Quarterly TCH Campus Visits by the Chair

Dr. Shekerdeman visits to our Texas Children's campuses in The Woodlands, West, and Austin are treasured opportunities to connect directly with faculty, round with teams, and visit inpatient areas. These visits foster meaningful conversations, including one-on-one meetings where faculty can seek career guidance, leadership advice, or discuss challenges related to resources, processes, and wellbeing.

🌸 Tea/Breakfast with the Chair

Once a quarter, Dr. Shekerdeman hosts a breakfast for all faculty in the Lobby of the Administrative Suite on the 19th floor of West Tower at Main Campus. This is a chance to chat with department leaders, socialize with your colleagues in person, and start the day with some collegial fuel. Two breakfasts have been hosted in 2025 to date. The beginning of 2026 will see expansion of these breakfasts to our other campuses.

🌸 Pop-up and Micro-Learning

Keep an eye out for department and division leaders rolling a snack cart through faculty-heavy areas of the hospital and clinics. Stop by to grab a treat and a one-page micro-learning on topics like happiness, reset strategies, and life enhancement findings. So far over 600 people have experienced a pop-up learning connection. You can request a pop-up for your area by contacting jxfernan@texaschildrens.org.

🌸 Faculty 1:1 Org Psych Conversations

By regularly visiting campuses beyond the Texas Medical Center, the organizational psychologists in the Department of Pediatrics offer all BCM Pediatrics faculty the chance to drop in and confidentially discuss concerns with an expert. This new service will be available at the West Campus for the first time this December and will return to the Woodlands in January 2026. These on location opportunities are scheduled by campus/site leadership and signups to engage in these conversations will be made available to all faculty.

🌸 Division-led Activities Knowledge-Base

Chair appointed committee developed in response to the 2025 TCH Provider engagement survey have actively met with faculty leaders from across the department to develop a knowledge base of work being done related to wellbeing, culture, problem solving and more. This database is intended to share the good work being done, break down silos and collaboratively expand these successful activities department wide.



Research Recap

New Research Leaders!

Introducing the Baylor Pediatrics Research Team

The goal of BCM Pediatrics Research (BPR) is to make the greatest possible impact on the health and well-being of children and young adults through the remarkable research taking place within our Department.

Our three new Associate Vice Chairs for Research – Dr. Mirjana Maletic-Savatic, Dr. Beth Van Horne, and Dr. Anna Mandalakas – bring a wealth of experience and complementary expertise to the BPR leadership team. In their new roles, they will contribute to strategic planning, research development, and program evaluation across the department. Equally important, they will help foster mentorship, guide career development, and support faculty and trainees in research education, grant preparation, and long-term scholarly growth.

Together, this team will strengthen our shared vision: to cultivate a thriving research environment that supports discovery, collaboration, and innovation – and ultimately improves the lives of children everywhere.



Dr. Mirjana Maletic-Savatic
(Professor, Neurology)



Dr. Beth Van Horne
(Associate Professor,
Public Health Pediatrics)



Dr. Anna Mandalakas
(Professor & Chief of
Global Health)

The Academic Angle

Intro to the Pediatric Chief Medical Student Program

The DOP is proud to launch the Pediatric Chief Medical Student Program, a new initiative offering third-year medical students leadership, teaching, and advocacy experience in pediatrics. Each October, six Houston students will be selected through a summer application process to serve as liaisons between their peers and the DOP. Chiefs will mentor students, support curriculum development, and lead community engagement, all under the guidance of pediatric UME leaders. The program aims to foster future pediatric leaders and enrich student education. **Reflecting on the opportunity ahead, incoming chief Dr. Sanghamitra Misra shared, “I am so excited about this role! It’s an incredible opportunity to support and connect with fellow students while growing as a future pediatrician.”**

Cool things happening in Education! Features around Simulation!

Behavioral Health simulations, led by Dr. Elizabeth Klinepeter and Melissa Cashin from the simulation center, have expanded tremendously to serve a wide range of learners and teams.

The simulation center has a 3D printer. It is already being used to print task trainers and replacement parts, and has even printed a model of a patient’s heart. A team led by Dr. Anthony Arredondo, with partnership from plastics, is developing and evaluating a hand model for teaching nailbed and fingertip injury repairs.

The simulation center, trauma services, and pre-hospital team have partnered to develop a simulation ambulance for outreach to referring hospitals, community organizations, and prehospital providers. Please reach out if you are interested in developing simulation-based outreach education.

Center for Research Advancement Article 2025

The Center for Research Advancement (CRA) currently has >90 research professionals, who have specialized knowledge and skills in various domains, including pre/post-award grants support, research coordination, regulatory services, IND/IDE applications, and budget and contract negotiation. This past year has been an exciting time for the CRA. Under the leadership of Dr. Lisa Forbes Satter (Director of CRA and Chief of Allergy, Immunology and Retrovirology), the CRA has experienced great growth with the addition of new service pods for device-related research and molecular and human genetics.

On August 28th, the CRA held their annual awards ceremony to recognize CRA team members for long-standing years of service and exemplary professionalism and dedication. Joyce Diggs was recognized for 43 years of exemplary service to Baylor College of Medicine during which she has provided tremendous leadership and invaluable mentorship to countless grant administrators within the CRA. To honor her great service and upcoming retirement, the Joyce Diggs Professionalism award for Research Professionals was created. Anastasia Belova, the Manager of Quality Assurance and Quality Control, was the first recipient of this award. Safaa Daou, a Senior Research Coordinator in the Neurology pod, received the prestigious Debbie Barrera Professionalism award for Research Coordination.

Additionally, one principal investigator is selected each year through CRA employee nominations for exceptional contributions to clinical research, protection of research subjects and compliance with research rules and regulations. **This year, the recipient of the 2025 CRA Clinical Research Award for Principal Investigators was Dr. Daniel DeSalvo, an Associate Professor in the Division of Diabetes and Endocrinology. Dr. DeSalvo's nominators described his "exceptional dedication" as a hard-working clinical and research professional, "attention to detail," "professional demeanor," "goal-oriented mindset," and valuable research contributions to improve health outcomes for children with Type 1 Diabetes.** Past recipients for this award include **Dr. Timothy Lotze (2024) and Dr. Bernard Suter (2023) from the Division of Neurology.**

Principal investigators seeking to learn more about the CRA may e-mail cra@bcm.edu or place a service request via <https://orit.research.bcm.edu/ORITServiceRequest>

Left to right: Dr. Sowdhamini Wallace (Assistant Medical Director), Dr. Lisa Forbes Satter (Medical Director), Dr. Daniel DeSalvo (award recipient), Lori Malone (Director of Research Administration), Miki Gillis (Executive Director), Joseph Kanewski (Director of Financial Planning and Analysis), Serpil Tutan (Director of Clinical Research)



Introducing

CORE



COACHING FOR OPTIMAL REFLECTION AND EFFECTIVENESS

The Department of Pediatrics is proud to introduce CORE (Coaching for Optimal Reflection and Effectiveness), a program dedicated to supporting leaders, faculty, and staff in navigating the complex demands of academic medicine. CORE offers confidential, personalized coaching to strengthen leadership skills, improve communication, and foster resilience across all stages of a career to individuals within the BCM Department of Pediatrics

Led by **Gia Washington, PhD**, CORE brings together a diverse team of coaches whose specialties align with the real challenges faced in our academic community. Each coach highlights their focus areas and shares a guiding philosophy that shapes their approach:

- **Jessica Casas, MD, MPH** – Career, Communication, and Leadership Coach | Early to mid-career faculty, leaders | "Let's get curious together."
- **Roger Nicome, MD** – Executive Coach (Co-Active) | Early career, POC/DEIB | "How do we get to a place of deeper insight and more options?"
- **Lacey Schmidt, PhD** – Teamwork, Career Development and Wellbeing Coach | Teams, leaders, groups | "My job is to ask great questions."
- **Joan Shook, MD** – Executive Coach (Co-Active) | Women, mid- to late-career legacy | "Helping you reclaim your purpose and thrive in a complex world."
- **Paul Sirbaugh, MD** – Executive Coach (Presence-Based) | Early career, chiefs of service | "Listen with empathy, learn with intention, lead with inspiration."
- **Kelley Slack, PhD** – Assessment Lead | Conducts psychological assessments to guide coaching engagement and growth planning | "Understanding your current position is key to mapping your future direction."
- **Gia Washington, PhD** – Executive Coach (Co-Active), Director of CORE | Leaders, executives, mid-career transitions | "Let's be strategic."

Together, the CORE team creates a space where reflection leads to growth and insight fuels effectiveness. Their shared commitment ensures that every coaching conversation moves beyond problem-solving toward lasting impact. By cultivating deeper self-awareness and illuminating new perspectives, CORE invites each of us to pause and consider: How are my leadership and communication skills serving me today—and how might they grow tomorrow?

BCM DOP APP Social EVENT

Dr. Lara Shekerdemian, Chair of the Department of Pediatrics hosted an evening social in September to recognize and promote connection amongst the BCM Pediatrics APPs!

"It was a wonderful evening catching up with old friends and meeting new ones – I was so happy to host our APP colleagues and look forward to more opportunities to connect with them in the future!"
– Lara"



VitalTalk

COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING CONTINUES!

Strong communication is essential to patient- and family-centered care, especially during high-stakes conversations. Research shows that training improves clinicians' ability to navigate serious illness discussions—leading to better patient experiences, outcomes, and quality of life. **VitalTalk is a nationally recognized program that helps clinicians develop skills for tough conversations—delivering serious news, responding to emotions, and aligning care with patient values.** Originally developed for oncologists, it now serves clinicians across many specialties. Since launching at Texas Children's in September 2024, 86 faculty, staff, and trainees have completed a course, rating it an average of **4.92/5**.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive:

"VitalTalk has improved my ability to connect with families and break down communication barriers. The focus on active listening and thoughtful language makes a real difference."

– Wendy Quiroz Nasser, DNP, APRN, CPNP-AC/PC

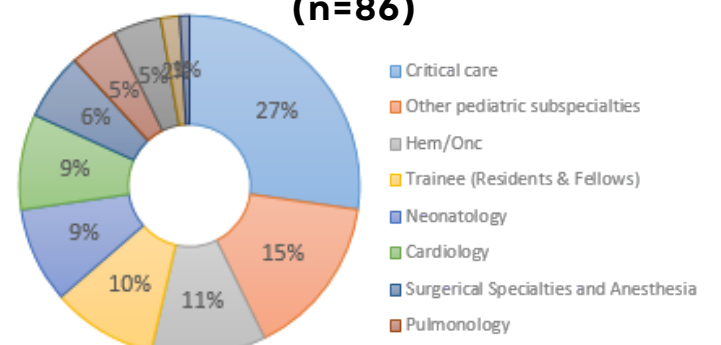
Several fellowship programs now include VitalTalk in orientation, and the pediatrics residency will pilot a workshop this fall. Customized courses for divisions are also in development. Courses are led by Texas Children's VitalTalk Champions—clinicians from across specialties who completed 40+ hours of training. A new cohort will begin training in spring 2026. Faculty development is supported by the Texas Children's Hospital Insurance Company.

Enrollment for 2026 courses is now open via the [Texas Children's VitalTalk SharePoint](#). For custom sessions, contact Amanda Padilla or Kim Sawyer.



Texas Children's VitalTalk Champions Drs. Hatel Moonat (Oncology), Marina Ma (PM&R and Palliative Care), Meghna Singh (Palliative Care – Austin), Amanda Padilla (Complex Care and Palliative Care), and Kim Sawyer (Palliative Care) attended the VitalTalk Summit in May 2025.

VitalTalk Participants' Specialties (n=86)



AAP National Conference!

Denver 2025

CONGRATULATIONS! *Award Winning Faculty and Trainees*



Dr. Heather Crouse

Associate Professor of Pediatrics (Emergency Medicine)
2025 American Academy of Pediatrics
Section on Emergency Medicine's
Michael Shannon Humanitarian Award



Dr. Gina Aloisio

Assistant Professor of Pediatrics (Emergency Medicine)
2025 Ken Graff Young Investigator Award
AAP Section on Emergency Medicine



Dr. Noel Mensah-Bonsu

Associate Professor of Pediatrics (Developmental Pediatrics)
2025 American Academy of Pediatrics,
Section of Developmental and Behavioral
Pediatrics (SODBP) Richmond-Coleman
Award



Dr. Neha Dhawan

Pediatrics Resident
2025 American Academy of Pediatrics,
Section of Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine,
Top 10 Section of Neonatal-Perinatal
Medicine Abstract award



Dr. Robert Schulman

Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics (Nutrition)
2025 American Academy of Pediatrics,
Section on Nutrition, Samul J. Fomon
Nutrition Award



Dr. Doug Moodie

Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics (Cardiology)
2025 American Academy of Pediatrics,
Section of Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery (SOCCS) Helen Taussig Founders Award

AAP Social

HOSTED BY LARA SHEKERDEMIAN

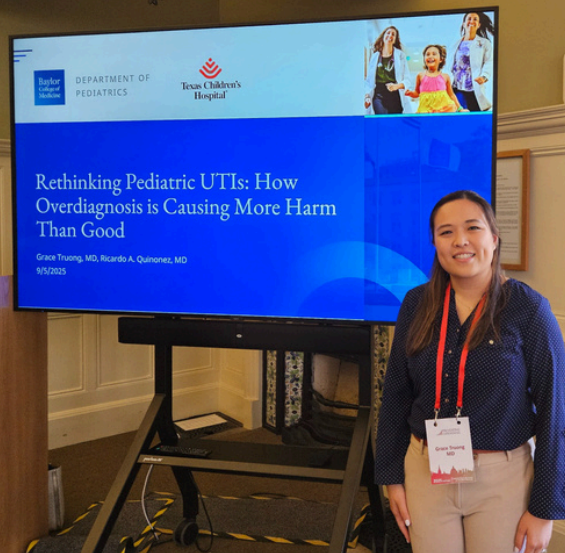


BCM Pediatrics Alumni Social
hosted by Dr. Lara Shekerdeman!
A fantastic evening with past,
present and future DOP members!



Preventing Overdiagnosis 2025

Dr. Grace Truong presented at the **Preventing Over diagnosis 2025 conference in Oxford, UK**. The presentation focused on the over diagnosis of pediatric urinary tract infections. It was an ideal platform to engage with colleagues and discuss how pediatricians can refine diagnostic criteria to protect children from unnecessary labeling and antibiotic treatment.



Buzz around the block from the heart of pediatrics

SPARK—the Largest Study of Autism in History—is Celebrating 10 Years!

SPARK (Simons Foundation Powering Autism Research for Knowledge) is a national cohort of individuals with autism and their families that is focused on two main goals: identifying new genetic causes of autism and speeding up the pace of autism research to get answers more quickly. Texas Children's is one of more than 30 clinical-site partners for SPARK, and over the past 10 years—under the leadership of site PI, Robin Kochel, Ph.D., the TCH site ranked #1 for average number of new enrollments per year. It is credited, too, for enrollment of more than 3,500 of the 50,694 SPARK participants who have provided both clinical data and a genetic sample. Recruiting this many families is no small feat. Dr. Kochel and her team use a wide variety of strategies to outreach and engage families in both the clinical setting and the broader community. In fact, they now have a specific program of research on evidence-based recruitment of participants for clinical studies, highlighting strategies that improve engagement among families of color who are often underrepresented in clinical research. As a result, Dr. Kochel was awarded two supplemental SPARK grants expressly to outreach and engage culturally diverse families in SPARK. Dr. Kochel and her team will be celebrating this 10-year milestone and the scientific achievements made possible by SPARK throughout the year. If you would like to learn more, visit the SPARK website at www.sparkforautism.org/texaschildrens or contact a member of Dr. Kochel's team at asdresearch@bcm.edu



From left to right, Zoe Obei-Appiah, Brendan Traynor, Robin Kochel, My-Linh Luu and Gabriela Marzano



Faculty Development day at the Christus San Antonio

Drs. Henley, Schmidt, Singhal and Slack presented at Christus for faculty development day! They also met with fellows and residents and discussed topics ranging from promotion to communication to wellness.



Woodland Faculty Meet and Greet

Held each quarter, the Woodlands Pediatrics Meet & Greet brings faculty together for meaningful in-person connections—an opportunity to catch up, share experiences, and strengthen our sense of community.



Woodland Dr. Feign's Ice Cream celebration

TCH Woodlands recently hosted Dr. Feign's Ice Cream Celebration, where individuals enjoyed ice cream cake and connected with others in a fun, relaxed setting. It was a sweet way to bring the community together and share some smiles!

Buzz around the block

from the heart of pediatrics cont.



Tri with Heart: Waco race with the Cardiac Team!

On October 5th, the Tri with Heart team—made up of a multidisciplinary ICU group racing to support pediatric cardiac critical care—competed in the Waco Ironman 70.3, raising funds for research and education in the Texas Children’s Hospital Cardiac ICU.



Paging Future Pediatricians Event: A Peds Interest Group Event for Houston Medical Students!

In September, nearly 100 medical students from across the Texas Medical Center gathered for the Houston-wide Pediatric Medical Student Social, hosted by Baylor College of Medicine. The Paging Future Pediatricians event brought together students from BCM, UTHealth McGovern Medical School, Texas A&M EnMed, and the University of Houston for an evening of networking, collaboration, and inspiration. Attendees had the opportunity to engage with peers and hear from esteemed pediatric leaders shaping the future of the field!



Diabetes Camp Rainbow: A Legacy of Care, Community and Fun!

This summer, **Camp Rainbow**—led by **Dr. Sheila K. Gunn**—was held from July 20–24 at Camp Lone Star in Tomball, Texas. The camp welcomed over 100 children, including those living with Type 1 diabetes as well as their siblings. Under the attentive and compassionate care of a dedicated medical team—including providers, nurses, and diabetes educators—campers enjoyed a week filled with fun, friendship, and unforgettable memories. Most importantly, they learned valuable skills to help them thrive while managing diabetes!



7th Annual BCM/TCH Diabetes & Endocrinology Research Retreat

The Division of Diabetes and Endocrinology held its 7th Annual Research Retreat on September 18, 2025, bringing together faculty, fellows, and research staff from multiple campuses and the adult Endocrinology and Metabolism team at BCM. Highlights included research presentations from pediatric and adult investigators, a keynote by Dr. Kurt Griffin on building research programs, and a discussion on implementation science, all aimed at fostering collaboration and professional development. The retreat was organized by Drs. Rebecca Schneider Aguirre and Serife Uysal (Co-Chairs), along with Drs. Maria J. Redondo, Stephanie Sisley, Alexandra Cox, and Jolene Joseph.



Lara Shekerdemian
Breakfast
Pop up!

News from Diabetes/Endocrine

Baylor awarded grant to establish the Houston Nutrition and Obesity Research Center- featuring Dr. Stephanie Sisley as Co-I!



Congratulations to **Dr. Mustafa Tosur** on getting awarded the **NIDDK dkNET Grant Award**

The Department of Pediatrics **congratulates Dr. Mustafa Tosur, Associate Professor in the Division of Diabetes and Endocrinology, on receiving a \$175,000 dkNET Pilot Funding Program grant (through NIDDK) for his project, “Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for Precision Medicine in Youth-Onset T2D.”** In collaboration with Dr. Maria Redondo and the TCH Data Science Team, Dr. Tosur will develop an AI model using electronic medical records from Texas Children’s Hospital to predict key outcomes in youth with Type 2 diabetes—such as glycemic control, treatment response, and insulin independence within 2–5 years of diagnosis. This innovative project addresses the rising incidence of youth-onset Type 2 diabetes and reflects our continued commitment to precision medicine and improving outcomes for all children.



Congratulations to **Dr. Olivia Ginnard** for receiving the **American Heart Association Career Development Award!**

Dr. Olivia Ginnard was recently awarded the American Heart Association Career Development award (\$231,000 over 3 years) to support her research investigating vitamin D receptors' role in the brain on energy homeostasis and to further her professional development. She will continue to be mentored by her mentor, Dr. Stephanie Sisley. This relationship has not only resulted in achieving this essential funding but has fostered first author publications and multiple research awards. In addition, her collaboration with Dr. Yong Xu’s lab, a leader in neural feeding circuitry research, has resulted in multiple co-author publications in high-impact journals, such Cell and Nature Metabolism.

News from Hematology-Oncology

2024
Dr. Marilyn Hockenberry
Advanced Practice Provider (APP)
for Excellence in Clinical Practice,
Education, and Research



**Texas Children's
Hospital**
Cancer & Hematology
Center

Laura E. Sealy, DNP, APRN, CPHON, CPNP-AC



Congratulations to **Dr. Laura E. Sealy!**

Laura E. Sealy, DNP, APRN, CPHON, CPNP-AC, was the 2024 winner of the Dr. Marilyn Hockenberry Advanced Practice Provider (APP) for Excellence in Clinical Practice, Education, and Research at Texas Children's Cancer and Hematology Center. Laura Sealy is an acute care certified pediatric nurse practitioner who earned her certification and Doctorate of Nursing Practice from the University of Florida. She specializes in pediatric hematology-oncology and treats patients for the Leukemia Program in the outpatient clinic at Texas Children's Cancer and Hematology Center.

News from Infectious Diseases



On **May 12, 2025**, the **Pediatric Infectious Diseases leadership** held a day-long faculty retreat at Ill by Wolfgang Puck with an emphasis on communication, collaboration and career development. The retreat was facilitated by **Kelley Slack, PhD**, Organizational Psychologist in the Department of Pediatrics.



Dr. Jeffrey R. Starke was celebrated on the occasion of his retirement on July 31, 2025. **Dr. Starke was on the faculty of Baylor College of Medicine for greater than 40 years and served as the Director of the Children's Tuberculosis Clinic for more than 30 years.** His contributions to pediatric infectious diseases have shaped the field and transformed the lives of countless patients and our communities. Upon his retirement, Dr. Starke was honored with the title of Distinguished Emeritus Professor - a distinction awarded to tenured faculty in recognition of their exceptional contributions to the College.



Dr. Jonathon (Chase) McNeil was named Advisor for the BCM Medical Student Inquiry Program effective September 1st, 2025.



Dr. Beenish Rubbab received the ATXcellence Employee Recognition Award on August 12th, honoring employees, providers and partners who consistently go above and beyond, exemplifying our HEART values:

Humility Excellence Accountability Respect Trust



Dr. Katherine King and Dr. Lisa Forbes Satter were awarded an R21 by the National Institutes of Health for their research: "Utilization of JAK inhibitor therapy in a transplant model of STAT1 GOF disease."



News from Emergency Medicine

On October 8, the division of Pediatric Emergency Medicine (PEM) volunteered at Kids' Meals, an organization dedicated to ending hunger for children in Houston. Every day, Kids' Meals delivers thousands of healthy meals to the homes of preschool children in the Greater Houston area. While onsite, the PEM crew made a total of 1,324 sandwiches, which will feed families in 7 Houston zip codes. The organization packs the meals in hand-decorated paper bags, and many of the division members who were not able to join the onsite sandwich-making party, contributed instead by decorating lunch bags before the event. The Emergency Center has recently started a standardized process spearheaded by the PEM fellows, where families with young children who self-identify as having limited food resources are referred directly to Kids' Meals. This allows the EC, which often serves as the safety net for our most vulnerable communities, to further improve the health of children in our region.



Diwali

The meaning of Diwali

Diwali symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil, reminding us of the power of hope and positivity! – Rathi Asaithambi

What does Diwali mean to you?

Growing up in India, Diwali was always such a vibrant and special time of year. Even though I come from a Christian family, it was a festival that transcended religion and wove itself into the fabric of our shared culture. I still remember the glow of diyas lining doorways, the sweet aromas drifting between neighbors, and the night sky alive with fireworks...memories that still light me up from within!

For me, Diwali (or Deepavali, as it is called in Southern India where I grew up) has always carried the meaning of light, warmth, and hope, and a feeling of being connected to something greater than ourselves.

- Priya Raj, M.D, M.S



Photo from last year Diwali celebration at Dr. Deepak Mehta's place, where many members of the TCH aerodigestive team came together!



Photo shared by Joyee Vachani



Diwali celebration at the Woodlands

In the area of India my parents are from (Calcutta, West Bengal) we celebrate Durga Puja - typically a few weeks before Diwali. Both festivals celebrate light over darkness and the triumph of good over evil. It is a time for music, dancing, food, family, and community and my favorite time of year!

- Joyee Goswami Vachani, MD, M.Ed

Diwali is a special time for me. My father, who is no longer here, loved Diwali. Since I grew up in Oklahoma, we celebrated at home with our family. We focused on gratitude, for our families and for our lives. We celebrated with a homemade meal and lighting candles. Now, even though my own children are grown, they know to come home for Diwali to be with family and loved ones.

- Geeta R. Singhal ❤️

HALLOWEEN

COOL FACTS

TOP CANDIES IN THE UNITED STATES

Source: Google Trends, Innerbody, 2024-2025



Message from Lara Shekerdemian

My personal favorite is BRITISH Cadbury's dairy milk chocolate, and yes – it has to be from the UK!

DID YOU KNOW?



The Teal Pumpkin Project, launched by Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE), is a nationwide initiative that promotes a safer, more inclusive Halloween for children with food allergies. By placing a teal-colored pumpkin outside your home, you signal that you offer non-food treats—like stickers, glow sticks, or small toys—that are safe for all trick-or-treaters. With one in 13 children affected by food allergies, this simple act helps ensure every child can enjoy Halloween without the risk of allergic reactions. To participate, simply display a teal pumpkin, stock up on allergy-friendly goodies, and consider adding your home to the FARE Teal Pumpkin Project map at tealpumpkinproject.org.



GUESS THE CHIEF RESIDENT'S

HALLOWEEN OUTFITS



🎃 **Keep your eyes peeled — the Chief Resident might be lurking around in costume!**

This year's Halloween theme is Toy Story (with one mischievous Minion and the iconic Silk Sonic joining the fun), so be on the lookout for your favorite characters roaming the halls. You never know who might be hiding in plain sight!

Can you guess who's dressing up as who this year?



Dr. Daniel Bland
Pediatrics Chief Resident
Houston



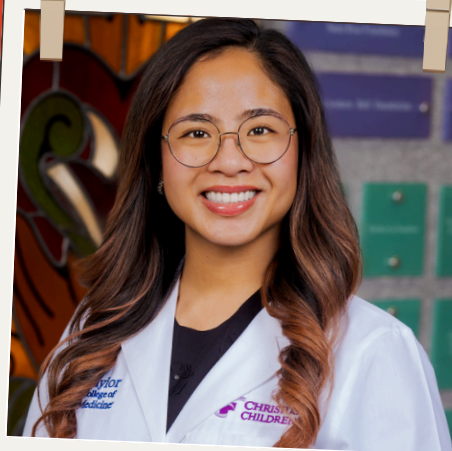
Dr. Manasa Kanukurthy
Pediatrics Chief Resident
Houston



Dr. Katherine Naeger
Pediatrics Chief Resident
Houston



Dr. Joyce Tong
Pediatrics Chief Resident
Houston

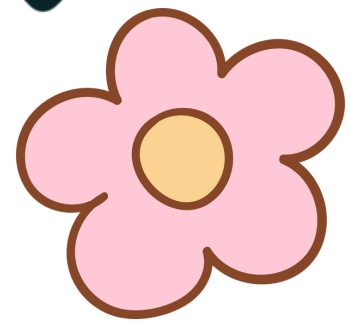
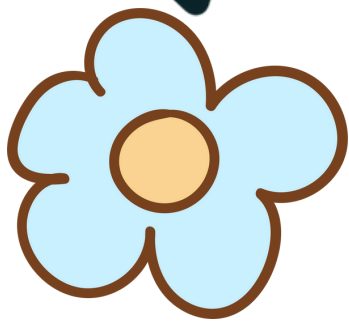


Dr. Katherine "Kat" Arriola
Pediatrics Chief Resident
San Antonio



Dr. Alyssa Wilder
Pediatrics Chief Resident
San Antonio





Let us know how we did!
**Scan or press this QR code to
share your thoughts!**



For **photo and content submissions**, email us at
DepartmentofPediatrics@texaschildrens.org!
If you want to **request a page for content**, email
Lana at Lxthai@texaschildrens.org!



Meet the editorial developer!

Hi! My name is Lana Thai, and I'm excited to have recently joined the TCH family as a media specialist. In my free time, I enjoy playing games and have recently picked up crocheting as a new hobby. I'm looking forward to creating and sharing many more publications with the department in the future!

Thank you for reading and take care!

