

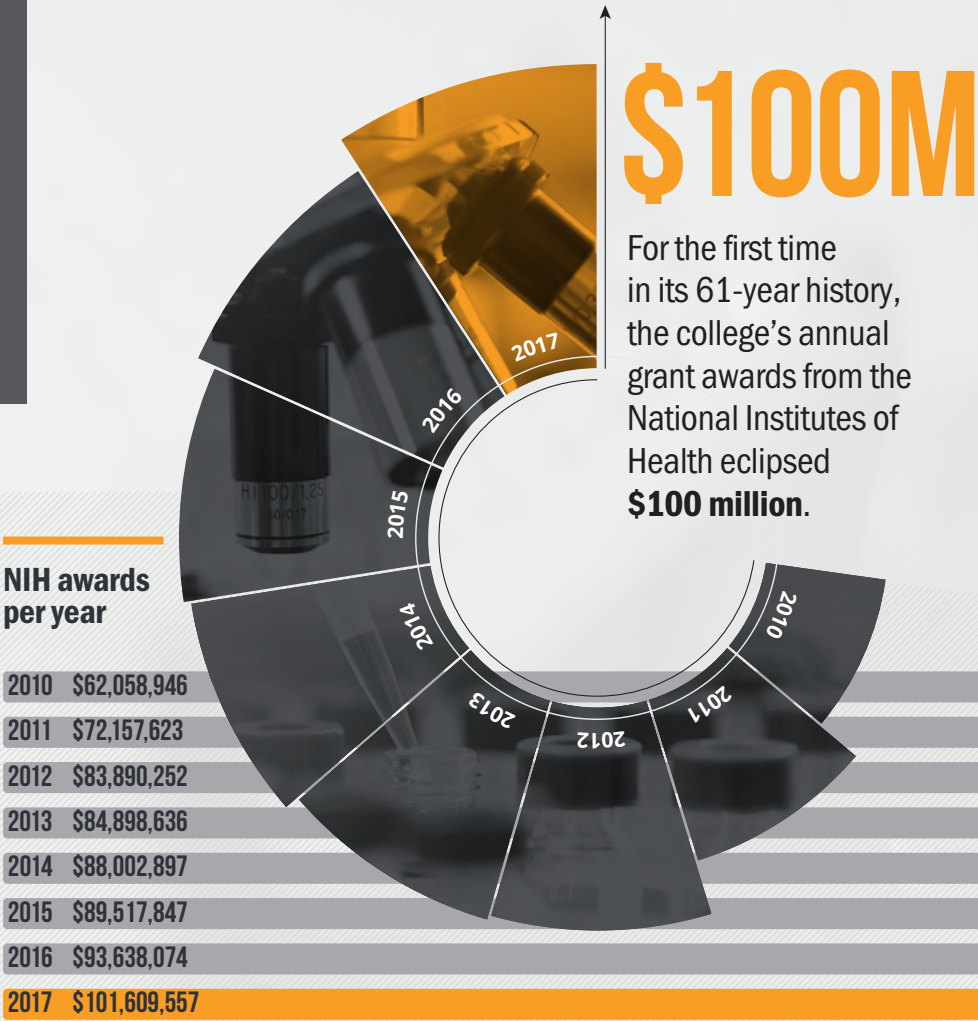
# A MILESTONE REACHED, A FUTURE FORGED

By TYLER FRANCISCHINE

For decades, Laura P.W. Ranum, PhD, director of the UF Center for NeuroGenetics, has worked to understand the fundamental causes of ALS and similar diseases.

Along with her colleagues, she has made extraordinary discoveries in the area of gene mutations and continues to challenge conventional wisdom in her pursuit to find effective treatments for a number of neurological disorders.

Since 1994, Ranum’s lab has been awarded key grants from the National Institutes of Health, the federal agency that funds biomedical and public health research, including several projects and programs at the UF College of Medicine.



“NIH funding has been critical every step of the way,” Ranum said. “We’ve cloned genes that cause various neurological diseases. We’ve used preclinical models to understand how those diseases work, and now we’re using those models to develop therapeutic

strategies to prevent and reverse disease.”

The 2017 fiscal year marked a milestone for the UF College of Medicine: For the first time in its 61-year history, the college’s annual grant awards from the National Institutes of Health eclipsed \$100 million.

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# NEWS CLIPS

## NEW DERMATOLOGY CHAIR APPOINTED

Abel Torres, MD, JD, MBA, has been selected as chair of the UF College of Medicine department of dermatology and will begin his new role July 1. An accomplished clinician, researcher, educator and lawyer, Torres has spent his career caring for patients with health issues such as skin cancer; researching complex dermatologic conditions; training medical students, residents and fellows; and educating physicians on medical-legal issues. Torres, who is currently chair of the department of dermatology and an associate professor of public health at the Loma Linda University School of Medicine in Loma Linda, California, also recently served as president of the American Academy of Dermatology. ■



Abel Torres, MD

From left are Michael L. Good, MD; Alan Porter, MD '71; and UF President Kent Fuchs



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY PHOTOGRAPHY

## ALUMNUS RECEIVES UF DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Alan Porter, MD '71, HS '74, received the Distinguished Achievement Award from UF during its fall commencement ceremony held in December. The award is given to those with "exceptional achievements in a chosen profession and for demonstrated leadership." Porter opened the first free-standing radiation oncology center in Sarasota, bringing advanced cancer care to a region that had no hospital-based radiation oncology options. Over the years, Porter opened four more centers throughout Sarasota and Charlotte counties. He also was a founding trustee of Hospice of Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties, ensuring end-of-life care for those who succumbed to their disease. ■

# MEDICAL EDUCATION WEEK 2018 CELEBRATES FACULTY, EDUCATIONAL ADVANCES

By TYLER FRANCISCHINE

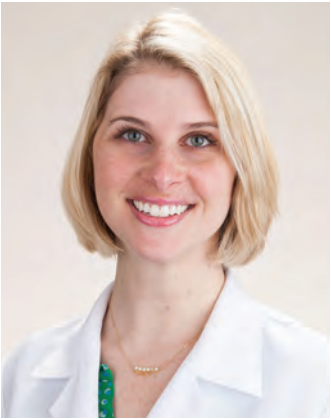
Two UF College of Medicine alumni and faculty members Ryan Nall, MD '09, and Kimberly Merkel, MD '08, were named the 2018 UF College of Medicine Teachers of the Year. The pair was recognized during the annual Celebration of Excellence in Medical Education reception, held March 14 as part of Medical Education Week 2018.

Patrick Duff, MD, associate dean for student affairs and a recipient of a dozen teaching awards himself, says Nall and Merkel are shining examples of UF College of Medicine graduates who honor their alma mater by shaping the next generation of physicians. Nall, named Clinical Teacher of the Year, serves as an assistant professor and the assistant clerkship director in the division of general internal medicine. Merkel, named Basic Science Teacher of the Year, is an assistant professor in the department of dermatology.

"Both are relatively early in their careers and have already achieved a



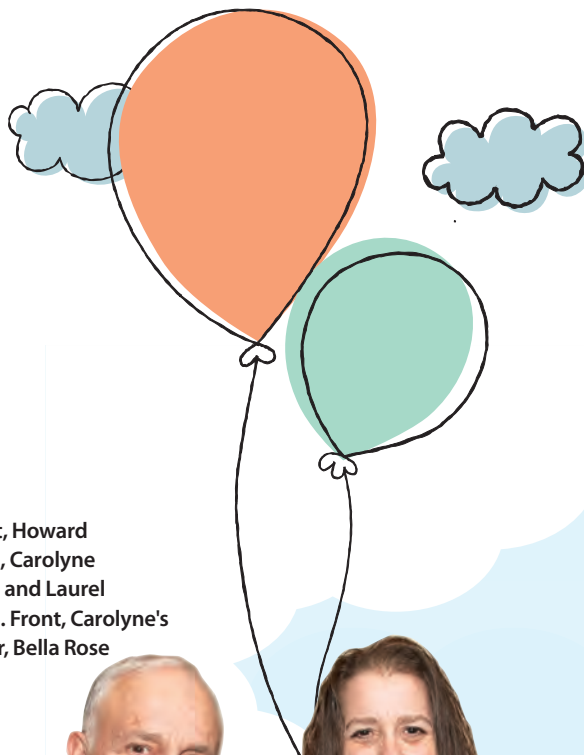
Ryan Nall, MD '09



Kimberly Merkel, MD '08

high level of academic excellence," Duff says. "In essence, they are the new generation of teaching stars."

Kyle Rarey, PhD, received the 2018 Society of Teaching Scholars Lifetime Achievement Award during the reception. Medical Education Week also featured a seminar series with four speakers who discussed their visions for creating a culture of excellence in the next generation of practitioners. The week began March 12 with a talk from Wiley "Chip" Souba, MD, former professor of surgery at the UF College of Medicine and emeritus dean at the Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine, about the behaviors and attitudes necessary to create a culture of professionalism in a health care setting. Grant Harrell, MD '10, director of the UF Mobile Outreach Clinic and an assistant professor in the department of community health and family medicine, gave students and faculty an overview of the evolution of service learning at UF.



From left, Howard Freeman, Carolyne Freeman and Laurel Freeman. Front, Carolyne's daughter, Bella Rose



PHOTO BY SUZANNA MARS

LEON HALEY NAMED CEO OF  
UF HEALTH JACKSONVILLE

Leon L. Haley Jr., MD, MHSA, CPE, FACEP, was named chief executive officer of UF Health Jacksonville in September. The appointment came less than a year after Haley was named dean of the University of Florida College of Medicine – Jacksonville, a position he will continue to hold. Haley officially assumed his new joint role Jan. 1. During his tenure as dean of the medical school, Haley has been a part of many positive changes, including the opening and staffing of the new inpatient unit at UF Health North, a 92-bed facility that is part of a state-of-the-art medical complex in North Jacksonville.

“It hasn’t taken me long to realize what a special place UF Health Jacksonville is, and I am excited to lead the hospital and the medical school,” Haley said. ■



Leon L. Haley Jr., MD



GAINESVILLE GROUP KEEPS A DREAM ALIVE

By Michelle Koidin Jaffee

Barbara Sperrazza was a dietitian and diabetes educator who had the warmest smile and loved to help people. She lost her ability to read, write, speak and eventually swallow due to frontotemporal dementia, a progressive degenerative brain disease that strikes in the prime of life, typically between ages 45 and 60.

Now, her husband and his brothers and sisters at the Fraternal Order of Eagles of Gainesville are fighting for a cure. They’ve donated \$50,000 to UF’s Barbara’s Dream Fund for Frontotemporal Dementia.

“This is the largest fundraiser we’ve had to date, and we’ll continue to do it,” said her husband, Charles Sperrazza.

A Gainesville financial adviser, he helped found the local chapter of the Eagles in 1996. Over the years, the group has made the Evelyn F. and William L. McKnight Brain Institute of UF a top beneficiary of its charitable fundraising, with a focus on raising

money for research in the areas of Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s disease. More recently, they expanded their focus to include supporting research to find a cure for frontotemporal dementia, known as FTD.

Barbara Sperrazza developed FTD at age 56 and died at age 64 in 2016.

FTD is the second-most-frequent form of early-onset dementia, after Alzheimer’s disease. It results from progressive nerve cell loss in the frontal and anterior temporal lobes.

“I decided,” Sperrazza said, “I couldn’t do anything more for her than the doctors could, so we started this fund for her.” ■

Visit [uff.ufl.edu/019659](http://uff.ufl.edu/019659) to learn more about Barbara’s Dream Fund for Frontotemporal Dementia or to make a donation.

‘RESEARCH MEANS HOPE’

By TYLER FRANCISCHINE

On a blue sheet of paper featuring hand-drawn pastel balloons soaring through the clouds, a 12-year-old girl writes in neat cursive lettering. The note describes the young person’s aspirations for the future, written one week before she passed away from cancer.

Bonnie Freeman’s letter, dated July 3, 1983, explained the mission of Stop Children’s Cancer, a Gainesville nonprofit that seeks to prevent, control and cure cancer in children. Thirty-four years later, Stop Children’s Cancer works closely with researchers at UF Health to advance the cure rate of pediatric cancers through clinical trials.

Howard Freeman says his organization, which he founded with his wife, Laurel, and their daughters, Carolyne and Bonnie, is driven by Bonnie’s desire to help other families dealing with the trauma of a pediatric cancer diagnosis.

“I’ll never forget the day I drove to Bonnie’s pediatrician to hear that she may have leukemia. From that point on, my family’s lives were changed,” Freeman says. “Two to three weeks after she was diagnosed, Bonnie came to us and said, ‘Why don’t we raise money to help other kids and their families, so they don’t have to go through what we’re going through right now?’ For the next two years, Bonnie led her life with so much courage and enthusiasm. We know we can’t bring Bonnie back, but every child that is helped — we call them our Stop Children’s Cancer angels — makes us feel good about what we’re doing.”

In 2017, Stop Children’s Cancer donated \$1 million to the UF College of Medicine. The gift ensures the longevity of the Bonnie R. Freeman Clinical Trials Fund, established in 2011 by a gift of \$1.05 million. Over the last four decades, the Freemans’ organization has helped provide more than \$7 million in funding for pediatric cancer research at the UF College of Medicine. The most recent gift will continue to fund the assistant directorship of clinical research at the UF Pediatric Oncology Clinical Trials Office,

held by Giselle Moore-Higgs, PhD, as well as support the UF Pediatric Sarcoma Center and the center’s development of clinical trials to treat bone cancers like osteosarcoma and Ewing sarcoma.

William Slayton, MD ’92, division chief for pediatric hematology and oncology at UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital, says funding from Stop Children’s Cancer creates ripple effects, ultimately leading to improvements in cure rates for several pediatric cancers.

“Stop Children’s Cancer has allowed us to attract leaders from across the nation to join our pediatric clinical trials program. We’ve doubled the number of physicians in the office from five to 10. That support catalyzed the improvement in our division,” he says. “These trials have had a major impact on the cure rate for children with acute lymphocytic leukemia, or ALL, neuroblastoma and Wilm’s tumors. The survival rate for ALL, which Bonnie had, was 67 percent in 1980. Now it’s close to 90 percent.”

Scott Rivkees, MD, chair of the UF College of Medicine department of pediatrics, says clinical trials — research studies and experiments that test a treatment’s safety and effectiveness — lead to important translatable findings.

“Research means hope, and research is incredibly expensive,” Rivkees says. “The amount of funding we receive through the National Institutes of Health is not enough for us to tackle serious illnesses like pediatric cancer. If not for the support of groups like Stop Children’s Cancer, we wouldn’t have the resources to dream up and test new ideas.”

Slayton calls the Freeman family’s work with Stop Children’s Cancer an inspiring community effort.

“Their work is so vibrant and energetic,” he says. “It shows what an incredible legacy Bonnie’s idea and her family’s work has provided to her community.”





# "A VERY SMALL PLACE WITH A VERY BIG HEART"

UF medical student organizes  
Puerto Rico relief initiative,  
hosts donation drive

By TYLER FRANCISCHINE

**SURROUNDED BY BALLOONS, STREAMERS  
AND CUPCAKES DECORATED TO RESEMBLE  
THE PUERTO RICAN FLAG, LYMARIES VELEZ  
BEGINS TO CRY.**

**THE SECOND-YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT IS  
EXPLAINING WHY SHE STARTED THE PUERTO  
RICO RELIEF INITIATIVE, A COALITION OF UF  
MEDICAL STUDENTS, FACULTY MEMBERS  
AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AIMED  
AT PROVIDING THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE  
WITH THE SUPPLIES AND FUNDS THEY  
NEED TO REBUILD THEIR ISLAND IN THE  
FACE OF HURRICANE MARIA'S WIDESPREAD  
DEVASTATION. VELEZ'S OWN FAMILY WAS  
FORCED TO RELOCATE TO THE MAINLAND U.S.  
AFTER THE STORM DESTROYED THEIR HOME.**

The Dec. 9 Stand With Puerto Rico donation drive at the George T. Harrell, MD, Medical Education Building was the first in a string of events Velez is planning. She kicked off the event with a heartfelt appeal, asking attendees to give what they could, specifically personal hygiene products, first-aid kits and bug repellent to combat the mosquito-borne illnesses that result from an abundance of standing water. “Puerto Rico is a very small place with a very big heart. We want to get them back on their feet,” she said. “This is more than an acute disaster; it’s a rebuild effort that will take a long time. Even if it’s not on the news anymore, it’s still happening for the people of Puerto Rico. I want the UF College of Medicine to be a part of that.” Velez introduced two third-year students from San Juan Bautista School of Medicine, Elsa Rodriguez and Brian Torres, who recounted their experiences on the island before, during and after Hurricane Maria, which made landfall Sept. 20. The UF College of Medicine sponsored the pair’s clinical rotations, allowing them to continue their medical training without delay.

“Things were already difficult before Maria hit because of Hurricane Irma,” Rodriguez said.

She said the hardest part of the storm was the lack of communication she had with her family in Miami. A few days after the storm, she and Torres took a Royal Caribbean humanitarian cruise ship to Florida. While on board, the pair volunteered with the ship’s medical team, performing health screenings and cleaning wounds for the other passengers.

“It was a great opportunity to see people come together to help others,” Rodriguez said.

After Rodriguez and Torres spoke, attendees were treated to lunch, followed by Zumba and salsa dance classes. Velez said the event was intended to honor the joy and resiliency of the Puerto Rican people.

Maria Velazquez, MD, director of the UF College of Medicine Anaclerio Learning and Assessment Center, assisted Velez in her efforts to begin the initiative. Velazquez’s mother and four siblings live in Puerto Rico.

“As a Puerto Rican living off the island, I’ve personally felt very guilty for eating warm foods, taking warm showers, even drinking water from the faucet,” she said. “Lymaries and I realized very quickly that we needed to give back something meaningful — supplies they really need.”

The UF College of Medicine group has already sent more than two dozen boxes of donated goods to Puerto Rico. Residents of the town of Morovis, located in the center of the island, were given the personal hygiene products, first-aid kits and bug repellent collected during the donation drive. Future fundraising events will be held this year, Velazquez said, with the goal of raising money to “adopt families with very specific needs.”

“From Day 1, we teach the medical students that they are citizens of the world,” Velazquez said. “They’re in this program to help others, especially those without the means or those living in places without access to care. Puerto Rico is one of those places right now. I’m very proud of Lymaries’ efforts.”

**To learn more or get involved in the initiative, contact Lymaries Velez at [lymaries@ufl.edu](mailto:lymaries@ufl.edu).**

**"EVEN IF IT'S NOT ON THE NEWS ANYMORE, IT'S STILL HAPPENING FOR THE PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO. I WANT THE UF COLLEGE OF MEDICINE TO BE A PART OF THAT."**

— Lymaries Velez

Dr. David Gonzalo, Lymaries Velez, Dr. Victoria Bird, Dr. Maria Velazquez and Dr. Giuliano De Portu at the Dec. 9 donation drive.



PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES

PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES



PHOTO COURTESY OF LYMARIES VELEZ

Left: Event attendees participate in a salsa lesson at the Dec. 9 donation drive. Right: Lymaries Velez and Dr. Maria Velazquez (center) pose with colleagues and friends next to the donation drop-off station in the George T. Harrell, MD, Medical Education Building.

A milestone reached,  
a future forged

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“ACHIEVING \$100 MILLION IN NIH GRANT AWARDS  
DEMONSTRATES THE MOMENTUM OF OUR FACULTY AND PROPELS  
US FORWARD AS ONE OF THE NATION’S BEST PUBLIC RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITIES AND MEDICAL SCHOOLS.”

— Michael L. Good, MD  
Dean, UF College of Medicine

To UF Health researchers and faculty, this means renewed support for experimental therapeutic research in a variety of areas, such as neurodegenerative diseases, the brain, cancer, diabetes, sepsis, infectious diseases and age-related diseases. The figure contributes to a total of \$141.8 million of NIH awards to the colleges, centers and institutes that comprise UF Health, the university’s academic health center. This marks the seventh consecutive year that NIH funding for UF Health has increased, according to David S. Guzick, MD, PhD, senior vice president for health affairs at UF and president of UF Health.

“Due to the talent, dedication and persistence of faculty and staff across

UF Health, there has been consistent improvement in NIH funding,” he said. “This continuing growth shows the scientific excellence of the research conducted by faculty at UF Health is recognized at the national level.”

Reaching this milestone is a testament to the expertise and hard work of researchers and physicians, both those who have worked at the college for many years and those recently recruited as part of UF’s preeminence faculty recruiting initiative, said UF College of Medicine Dean Michael L. Good, MD.

“Achieving \$100 million in NIH grant awards demonstrates the momentum of our faculty and propels us forward as

one of the nation’s best public research universities and medical schools,” he said.

Stephen Sugrue, PhD, UF College of Medicine senior associate dean for research affairs, said the college experienced a funding increase of 8.5 percent over the last year, exceeding the 6 percent increase in the NIH budget.

“Not only did the number of grants increase, the size of our grants also increased considerably,” he said. “This means we are doing bold, multidisciplinary science with a high impact. These are cooperative, collaborative efforts. Our biggest success is in recruiting the right people who can form teams to attack important issues of human health.”

FOR STUDENTS, BY STUDENTS:

Graduate student committee builds  
lecture series from the ground up

By TYLER FRANCISCHINE

A small conference room in the Academic Research Building hums with activity as a group of students in the UF College of Medicine Graduate Program in Biomedical Sciences plans their next move.

The eight-student committee is working to establish an annual Distinguished Lecture Series, an initiative to bring prominent researchers to the Health Science Center.

The group wanted to start the series with an impressive speaker and recruited New York University School of Medicine professor of pathology and microbiology Dan Littman, MD, PhD, to give the first lecture, which took place Feb. 1.

Littman, an investigator for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute who has made several important discoveries in virology and immunology, spoke on the influence of the microbiota on T-cell immunity.

Clayton Santiago, PhD '18, in the department of ophthalmology, said the committee's goal in organizing the new lecture series was to provide opportunities for students to have a dialogue with established researchers and scientists.

“We want students to have face-time with high-profile scientists to learn about their career paths and research findings and see how they did it,” he said. “That doesn’t happen very often.”



PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES

Dan Littman, MD, PhD, addresses the audience on Feb. 1.

“We want students to have face-time with high-profile  
scientists to learn about their career paths and research  
findings and see how they did it.”

— Clayton Santiago, PhD '18

Filipa Moniz, a graduate research assistant in the UF College of Medicine, said students of several fields benefited from learning both the research and life experiences of Littman, an immunologist whose work boasts more than 58,000 citations.

“The multidisciplinary aspects of Dr. Littman’s research attracted students from across the Health Science Center,” she said. “Even though Dr. Littman is a high-profile scientist now, he was once a student with all the same dreams and struggles as us.”

Littman’s lecture attracted a full house, with people standing in the back and leaning against the walls to listen.

“I’ve never been welcomed by so many students at one time,” he said. “This level of unparalleled enthusiasm is something I’ve never experienced.”

Littman commended the lecture series organizers for their commitment to

bringing high-profile research directly to their campus.

“You’re doing something right here,” he said. “Students should be front and center in the research experience.”

Casey Keuthan, a PhD candidate in the department of ophthalmology, said her committee hopes this event will become an annual occasion.

“Even after we’ve graduated and moved on, we hope students will take this project on and continue to recruit high-profile scientists to our campus,” she said.

## CROSSING THE 50-YARD LINE

# We're halfway there!

The UF College of Medicine is recruiting alumni and friends, including you, to join our team. Establish a scholarship for a UF medical student and be part of the Legacy Challenge. As medical school expenses in this country continue to rise at a rapid pace, your commitment to our students will leave a lasting legacy for future generations of Gator doctors.

In our goal to recruit 100 commitments to the Legacy Challenge, the UF College of Medicine asks Who's Next?

Join the team:

- The Class of 1960
- In memory of Dr. Joseph A. Walton Jr. | '60, given by his family
- Dr. Jean Bennett | '60
- Dr. Angelo and Mrs. Alberta Anaclerio | '62
- Dr. Harvey and Mrs. Donna Thalblum | '65
- Dr. Randall Hobgood | '70
- Dr. Jo-Anne Stenger | '74
- Dr. Livingston L. Eaddy | '75
- Dr. John and Mrs. Melissa Hendrickson | '75
- In memory of Dr. J. Stephen Waters | '75, given by his wife Shelley Waters and family
- Drs. Barbara and Dennis Williams | '75
- Dr. Donna and Mr. Allen Baytop | '76
- Dr. Peter Katona | '77
- Dr. Michael D. Maddox | '77
- Dr. Maude Lofton | '79
- Dr. Charles and Mrs. Debrah Barish | '80
- Dr. Robert Cooper and Mrs. Suzanne Coulias | '81
- Dr. William H. Cooper IV | '81
- Dr. James O'Mailia | '82
- Dr. Katherine J. Pierce and Mr. Michael Hawley | '82
- Dr. E. William Akins III and Mrs. Sandy Akins | '83
- Dr. Carlos and Mrs. Sandra Donayre | '83
- Dr. James and Mrs. Pam Duke | '85
- Dr. Mark and Mrs. Lyn Michels | '85
- Dr. Rhodes and Mrs. Jennifer Kriete | '88
- Dr. Patricia McFall Calhoun | '89
- Dr. R. Dean and Mrs. Elizabeth Hautamaki | '89
- Dr. Herbert Knauf III | '92
- Dr. Noel and Mrs. Erica Maun | '92
- Dr. Jason and Mrs. Denise Rosenberg | '95
- Dr. G. Nicholas Verne | '95
- Drs. Craig and Katherine Banull | '96 and '97
- Dr. Fred and Mrs. Loan Huang | '96
- Dr. Karen Reeves | '96
- Dr. Francis Herrbold | '98
- Dr. Sunil Joshi | '98
- Drs. Brian and Kavitha Taschner | '98
- Dr. Stephanie Hollis and Mr. Brian Bosley | '00
- Dr. Stephanie Walker | '00
- Drs. Shireen and Steven Sims | '01
- Dr. Wayne Cheng | '02
- Dr. Michael and Mrs. Danette Good
- Dr. Peter W. Orobello Scholarship, established by family and friends
- Dr. Henry and Mrs. Susan Baker
- The Musikantow Foundation

## THEIR FUTURE YOUR LEGACY

### #WhosNextUF

Commit today: [alumni.med.ufl.edu/scholarships18](https://alumni.med.ufl.edu/scholarships18)

Let's get 10 more by the first football game, Sept. 1!



PHOTO BY MINDY C. MILLER

# Alum wins Outstanding Young Alumn

By TYLER FRANCISCHINE

From the private practice she founded in Atlanta to her work with the Department of Juvenile Justice, Sarah Vinson, MD '07, strives to identify the socioeconomic and political factors that negatively affect the mental health of underserved minority populations, with the goal of removing the stigma around receiving treatment.

Vinson's work is having an enormous impact in and beyond her community as well as within the field of psychiatry. The University of Florida recently recognized her contribution, naming Vinson a 2018 Outstanding Young Alumnus and honoring her during an April 14 ceremony held in Gainesville.

As the founder of the Atlanta-based practice Lorio Psych Group, Vinson works as a triple board-certified child and adolescent, adult, and forensic psychiatrist. She also works as a regional youth detention center psychiatrist, caring for incarcerated youth.

"Our biggest challenge is understanding all the things outside of medicine that make people sick," Vinson said. "I deal with failures of the housing, education and criminal justice systems and how those manifest in distress, especially in children."

Vinson said people didn't speak about mental health in the small northwest Florida town where she was raised. After moving to Gainesville to attend UF, she began learning the language surrounding psychiatry and made connections within her own history.

"When (former UF psychiatry chair) Mark Gold gave a lecture on the neurobiology of addiction, it helped me understand why people I knew and loved acted differently under different circumstances," she said. "I realized it didn't always have to end up the same way for those people."

Vinson credits Gold, MD '75, along with Donna Parker, MD '90, and Richard Christensen, MD, for not only teaching her about medicine, but teaching her to believe in herself.

"I really struggled my first semester of medical school. I was wondering, 'Am I cut out to be a physician?' There were faculty here who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself," she said. "To go from someone questioning whether they belong here to receiving the Outstanding Young Alumnus Award reinforces the profound sense of gratitude I have for the faculty here."

Vinson visited her alma mater in early April for the second annual Celebration of Diversity Week, which comprises events that highlight diversity, inclusion and equity in health care. While moderating a dean's grand rounds panel discussion, Vinson explained to students, faculty and staff the impact the UF College of Medicine has had on her career ever since her teen years when she attended the UF Health Care Summer Institute, a program that immerses minority high school students in the world of health professions.

"I had never seen a black doctor until I met Dr. Parker," she said. "The HCSI was incredibly impactful. It all started here at the UF College of Medicine for me in many ways."

Although Vinson's activities — including the online resource OurselvesBlack.com and the book "Pediatric Mental Health for Primary Care Providers," published this year — keep her schedule packed, she finds each day to be rewarding and renewing.

"To have this platform, given my background, is not something I take for granted," she said. "I am in a position of privilege, and I'm using that to educate others. That's a reward."



PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES

## FACULTY SOUND BITES



**"It's a tricky virus."**

If you look to your left and you look to your right, any one of those people could be incubating and spreading the flu."

— Nicole Iovine, MD, PhD, an associate professor of medicine in the division of infectious diseases and global medicine, discussing the flu epidemic with The Independent Florida Alligator, Jan. 23.

# Alumnus Award for work in mental health



**“To go from someone questioning whether they belong here to receiving the**

**Outstanding Young Alumnus Award**

**reinforces the profound sense of gratitude I have for the faculty here.”**

— Sarah Vinson, MD '07



**Methamphetamine is such a menace because the amount of dopamine released following meth abuse is so huge that after long-term abuse these people experience psychosis. If that effect were blocked, it could really help people to beat their addiction.”**

— Habibeh Khoshbouei, PhD, an associate professor of neuroscience and psychiatry, discussing her team’s findings on using medicines to decrease the reward effects of methamphetamine on the brain with WTXL ABC 27, Dec. 20.



**“People are always looking for a test and a pill. What we need is some good advice and the perseverance to work on our lifestyle.”**

— Thomas Pearson, MD, MPH, PhD, a professor of epidemiology and medicine and the executive vice president for research and education at UF Health, discussing reducing inflammation and associated complications with NPR, July 21.

**“This is a breakthrough because everybody in this country thought this was not possible. It’s an amazing thing to have happen in Gainesville.”**

— Nash Moawad, MD, MS, an associate professor in the department of obstetrics and gynecology, discussing what is believed to be the first instance of a patient undergoing a full laparoscopic hysterectomy without general anesthesia with The Gainesville Sun, Dec. 15.



Nash Moawad, MD, MS

# Fighting blindness with gene therapy

By DOUG BENNETT

PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES



Shannon E. Boye, PhD '06

Shannon E. Boye, PhD '06, has an eye for tackling some of the toughest sight-robbing vision problems. It's an arduous mission: packaging corrective genes inside a harmless virus and deploying it to correct retinal disease.

Colleagues and collaborators in ophthalmology research note that Boye has had a major impact on gene therapy for eye diseases. Yet she speaks modestly — almost matter-of-factly — about spending years searching for a viable treatment.

"I owe much thanks to many people for getting my research to where it is now," said Boye, an associate professor in the department of ophthalmology at the UF College of Medicine.

Her determination and collaborative spirit have brought Boye significant recognition. She recently received an award given to scientists whose work has important clinical applications. The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology Foundation presented a Carl Camras Translational Research Award to Boye during its annual meeting. It includes a \$12,000 honorarium.

Since the early 2000s, Boye has led the development of a gene therapy for Leber congenital amaurosis type 1, or LCA1. Patients lose their vision due to a genetic mutation that inhibits protein production in the eye's rod and cone photoreceptors.

A series of findings published by Boye and her colleagues between 2012 and 2015 showed the gene therapy was safe and effective at restoring vision and retinal function in mouse models and worthy of study in human clinical trials. The French pharmaceutical firm Sanofi established a research collaboration with UF and the University of Pennsylvania to develop LCA1 gene therapy.

While Boye's accomplishments are widely respected, it's her other qualities that also help make her science successful. One of her peers, University of Pennsylvania ophthalmology professor Samuel Jacobson, MD, PhD, offers this assessment: Dynamic scientist. Humble and self-effacing. Collaborates well with many different scientific groups.

In nominating Boye for the award, Jacobson said Boye has the crucial scientific instincts to understand which diseases are within reach to treat.

Her research "has evolved over the years to the point of being critically important for current progress in treating human retinal blindness," Jacobson noted.

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

### Gene therapy to treat symptoms of Pompe disease found safe in first human trial

A gene therapy that treats respiratory problems in early-onset Pompe disease was shown to be safe during its first human trial, UF Health researchers have found. The inherited disease causes a complex sugar to accumulate in cells, leading to abnormal function in muscles and nerve cells.

The therapy uses a harmless adeno-associated virus to deliver a functional copy of the affected gene to muscle cells in the diaphragm of patients who have respiratory troubles. Nine patients completed a trial that found the therapy agent produced no adverse effects and improved respiratory function in the study participants, said Barry J. Byrne, MD, PhD, director of the UF Powell Gene Therapy Center and a pediatrics professor in the UF College of Medicine. The findings were published recently in the journal Human Gene Therapy Clinical Development.

### One in nine U.S. men are infected with oral human papillomavirus

One in nine, or 11 million, U.S. men are infected with oral human papillomavirus, or HPV, a new study by UF researchers finds. The study, led by Ashish Deshmukh, PhD, an assistant professor in the department of health services research, management and policy in the UF College of Public Health and Health Professions, appeared in the Annals of Internal Medicine in October. The study found that men are seven times more likely to be infected with cancer-causing oral HPV strains like HPV type 16, with men ages 50 to 69 at highest risk. Deshmukh said the study raises important issues as current HPV vaccination rates among men remain low.



Ashish Deshmukh, PhD



### UF research opens new avenue for treatment of Alzheimer's disease

UF neuroscientists have validated a potential pathway to halt the progression of Alzheimer's disease. Protein pieces called amyloid beta, or Abeta, play a role in triggering Alzheimer's disease, and scientists say the accumulation of Abeta 42 is key in promoting the disease. A class of compounds developed to treat Alzheimer's disease known as gamma-secretase modulators have been shown to lower levels of Abeta 42 but raise levels of shorter Abeta peptides. The researchers report the Abeta peptides were not toxic in two animal models and were protective from the toxic effects of Abeta 42. The findings hold the potential for a drug therapy to stop Alzheimer's progression to be tested in humans.



PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES

# ANSWERING *the* *call*

Former sheriff's deputy Connor McVey trades his badge for scrubs.

By STYLIANA RESVANIS

When Connor McVey and his partner arrived at the trailer, a gruesome scene awaited. The sheriff's deputies were responding to a call about a domestic violence incident in which a husband and wife nearly died in a murder-suicide stabbing. After a quick survey of the situation, they jumped into action to subdue the husband and wrestle the knife away. Then they got to work providing first aid on the couple until the paramedics arrived. Both victims survived, and for McVey, that dispatch call changed the course of his career. After spending three years as a deputy sheriff in his hometown of LaBelle, Florida, McVey — who holds a master's degree in criminal justice — turned in his badge and set his sights on becoming a physician assistant.

**"The most important skill I learned from my law enforcement training is the ability to stay calm and collected in stressful situations."**

— Connor McVey, MPAS '18

"I was always the guy who volunteered to handle the Baker Act or Marchman Act calls, who de-escalated the situation and was the last to go hands-on," he says. "I felt I was making a connection with people with mental illnesses, but I wasn't able to help — instead, I was dropping them off at jail or a facility. I decided to switch to medicine, so I could try to help them before they got involved with law enforcement." As a new graduate of the UF School of PA Studies, McVey plans to dedicate himself to treating those with mental illnesses through a career in psychiatry. He says his law enforcement background will come in handy as he enters the health care arena. "The most important skill I learned from my law enforcement training is the ability to stay calm and collected in stressful situations," he says. "As a PA, you might see someone as just another patient. As a sheriff, you might see the person as just another suspect, victim or traffic stop. But in both fields, it's important to keep in mind that this person will likely remember how you act, what you say and the outcome of your actions for the rest of their life."

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## Sey Hee Park



PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES

The UF College of Medicine lost a colleague, beloved friend and alumnus on Jan. 9. Sey Hee Park, MD '16, passed away unexpectedly from a heart condition, leaving his co-residents and all who knew him with a large void. Park was known for his jovial spirit and his ability to befriend everyone he encountered. He was a double Gator, graduating with both his undergraduate and medical degrees from UF, and he was on his way to completing a community health and family medicine residency.

Passionate about people, Park was investigating the topic of resiliency in medical students and residents. His family has established a fund in his honor, the **Sey Park Memorial Fund for Resident and Student Education and Resiliency Outreach**.

"Sey helped several of his classmates and colleagues work through personal or academic issues. He wanted to not only provide support but look at that topic in a systematic fashion. Hopefully going forward, it will provide funds to support initiatives that encourage resiliency — peer-to-peer networking and social groups and just supporting each other at the medical student and resident level," said Ki Park, MD '06, Park's sister and an assistant professor of medicine at UF.

Visit [giving.UFHealth.org/seyparkmemorial](https://giving.UFHealth.org/seyparkmemorial) to learn more about this initiative.

***"Thinking about Sey, I remember most his laughter, his passion and his love for others. When he joined the residency, we discovered his passion for a wide variety of things: technology, Gator athletics, family, good food and family medicine. You didn't have to know Sey for long, though, to know that his biggest passion was people."***

— Samuel Dickmann, MD '14  
Assistant professor, department of community health and family medicine

***"Sey guided me in reaching out for help, supported me through difficult decisions and constantly checked via text to see how I was doing. He made me feel like I was not alone and believed in me when I could not believe in myself."***

— Elizabeth Harlan, medical student, class of 2019

## New award for student excellence honors longtime anatomy professor

By TYLER FRANCISCHINE

Members of the UF College of Medicine class of 2020 established a new award for student excellence, named after a beloved faculty member. The Class of 2020 Kyle E. Rarey, PhD, Award for Excellence in the Anatomical Sciences was given to second-year medical student Colleen Cowdery during a ceremony held Feb. 15.

To qualify for the award, students must demonstrate excellent academic performance in the anatomy curriculum, exhibit deference and gratitude for those who donated their bodies for medical education and exemplify the attributes instilled by Rarey. After students nominate their peers, a selection committee of faculty members deliberates and chooses the winner.

Class of 2020 president and academic chair Wayne Dell was inspired to establish this award when he learned there wasn't

already an honor named for Rarey.

"Dr. Rarey has taught us to develop grit and how to tackle the most difficult science of anatomy," Dell said. "He guides us along both the scientific and humanistic aspects of medicine."



PHOTO BY W. CHARLES POULTON

The Class of 2020 Kyle E. Rarey, PhD, Award for Excellence in the Anatomical Sciences was given to second-year medical student Colleen Cowdery during a ceremony held Feb. 15.

Rarey has taught at the UF College of Medicine since 1984. He currently serves as the director of the UF Center for Anatomical Sciences Education and a professor in the departments of anatomy and cell biology and otolaryngology. Over the decades, Rarey has received many teaching awards, most recently the 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award from the UF College of Medicine Society of Teaching Scholars, five Teacher of the Year awards and nine Basic Science Teacher awards.

He said the award came as a complete surprise to him when it was announced during the February cadaver ceremony, an event organized by second-year students to honor those who donated their bodies for medical education.



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