Leveraging artificial intelligence to improve patient safety and care quality

By CODY HAWLEY, PhD

When a patient undergoes a routine knee surgery, they are under the direct care of numerous health providers, such as an anesthesiologist, a physician assistant and a surgeon. But when you peel back the layers of what it takes to coordinate a safe and successful operation, there are thousands of caregivers linked by millions of interactions — all of whom must collaborate seamlessly to ensure optimal patient outcomes.

At the UF College of Medicine, physician-scientists are leveraging artificial intelligence to model this expansive clinician-clinician network, creating a robust patient safety graph capturing the almost infinite interactions between caregivers to change how we think about hospital operations and pioneer new ways of delivering quality care.

The patient safety graph is one of the many ways the College of Medicine is turning to AI to improve patient safety under the AI-QI initiative, a series of programs designed to make a tangible impact in the realm of patient care by extending AI research into quality improvement activities at UF Health.

Patrick Tighe, MD ’05, MS, is the associate dean for AI application and innovation at the College of Medicine and the project champion for the AI-QI initiative under the college’s strategic plan. We sat down with Tighe to discuss these groundbreaking AI-QI programs and how they can help physicians enhance quality in health care.

The patient safety graph is one of the many ways the College of Medicine is turning to AI to improve patient safety under the AI-QI initiative.

Visit news.drgator.ufl.edu to view the graph.
Every place in this room senses something about you. Is this enough light, is this enough noise, are you OK, are you moving enough, are you in the bed, are you out of the bed? I think that’s the future of how we will design hospitals.

— Ara Biler, MD, MS, the senior associate dean for research affairs, describing using artificial intelligence to help patients in the intensive care unit with NEC Rightly News, Feb. 4

As a matter of general principle, any products that contain chemicals and cover large surface areas of the skin should only be used if considered necessary during pregnancy.

— John C. Smallan, MD, the E.L. Stalknaker Professor and chair of the department of obstetrics and gynecology, discussing the safety of using self-tanners with Everyday Health, Jan. 12.

“What is the driving force behind the college’s AI-QI initiative?”

A: For once a decade, UF and the College of Medicine have found the way to developing AI advances in health care in collaboration with so many in engineering, pharmacy and psychology. As that technology and science matures, we have been asking, “What do these advances look like when we apply them in a clinical setting? How does it advance care for our patients?”

The AI-QI initiative allows us impact from the classic objectives of expanding knowledge to translating these findings to clinical stakeholders and their individual workflows.

One of the ways you are using AI is to model hospital operations and hidden collaboration points between caregivers. Could you tell us more about this?

A: One of the first opportunities we saw to better quantify our clinical processes and how we take care of patients was by modelling health care as a complex system. To do this, we developed the clinician-clinician patient safety graph, which uses AI to look at how teams collaborate to deliver care for patient populations. We found that in a typical year, thousands of care gaps are connected by millions of patient care interactions, and we can now measure those interactions at scale and use that information to propose improvements to patient care.

Looking at these interaction points between caregivers helps us understand patient care teams and how they cooperate daily. Most recently, we’ve extended the graph to be multimodal, linking clinician networks to similar patterns on other networks of medications, labs, consults and procedures. We can now see who clinicians work with and how these collaborations translate into pathways of ideal care.

How else is the AI-QI Initiative pioneering new approaches to quality and patient safety?

A: We recently launched a new grants program called Rapid AI Prototyping and Development for Patient Safety, or RapidAI, to encourage the creation of unconventional AI solutions that AI health researchers and clinicians might not typically pursue because they aren’t sure they will work. The goal of this program is to create a safe place for developing, testing and advancing innovative AI quality improvement efforts.

We also brought together teams from across UF and the College of Medicine to test a diverse and computing resource called ALPS — AI Labs for Patient Safety — that will create an integrated infrastructure for sensitive analytics and develop an ideal workflow for promoting teamwork across disciplines.

What do you see as the potential impact of these AI-QI efforts in patient care and hospital operations?

A: We often talk about the “Swiss cheese” model for safety, when “holes” in layers of stacked safety systems allow a medical error through. While it’s a nice model, it’s limited use for mapping out a single safety issue. Let alone a complex system like a hospital. I think the AI-QI efforts, through projects like the patient safety graph, will help us not only create this new kind of map, but also use the map to simulate how we can change clinical workflows to improve patient safety.

I’m also excited to link AI-QI to clinical AI research across the college. What if we could predict a patient’s medical error or surgical complication and then use the patient safety graph (a graph to automatically predict potential improvements to the care plan) all before the patient ever arrived at our hospital? One of the long-term goals of AI-QI is to not just help translate and implement the phenomenon AI research underhanded into clinical practice, but to do so in an impactful and sustainable way.

Patrick Tighe, MD, MS, on AI-QI efforts

Q&A

Faculty sound bites

NEWS CLIPS

DOCTOR GATOR

COLLEGE ANNOUNCES INTEGRATION OF PHYSIOLOGY AND AGING DEPARTMENTS

Since the College of Medicine’s beginnings, researchers in the department of physiology and functional genomics have generated discoveries in fetal development, gene therapy, vascular biology and cell/receptor signaling. Meanwhile, since 2005, investigators in the department of aging and geriatric medicine scientists and clinicians, have worked to improve the health and quality of life of older adults, using state-of-the-art clinical research space to integrate leading edge research into clinical practice and educate future geriatric medicine scientists and clinicians.

In August, the college combined the departments’ expertise to create a new integrated academic unit: the department of physiology and aging. The merger consolidates the educational programs and research endeavors under one umbrella. Home to 26 faculty members, the newly-formed department is poised to enhance collaboration, with experts working side by side to conduct bench-to-bedside research examining all life phases of the human body.

COLLEGE NAMES NEW CHAIRS

Carol Mathews, MD, an internationally known clinician and translational researcher in obsessive-compulsive disorder, to disorders and anxiety disorders, was named chair of the department of psychiatry in February. She succeeds Duane Mitchell, MD, PhD, the B.L. Stalknaker Professor and chair of the department of obstetrics and gynecology, who became chair of the department of orthopedic surgery and sports medicine in January.

Dan Wasson, PhD, who leads an externally-funded independent research lab that is the world’s leading authority on the brain’s olfactory tubercle and serves as the college’s assistant dean for basic science research, was appointed chair of the department of pharmacology and therapeutics in February.

Brain injury and sleep medicine expert Michael S. Jaffee, MD, who is the founding director of UF’s Brain Injury Rehabilitation and Neuroscience Center, was named chair of the department of neurology in March.

WELCOMING NEW LEADERS

Timothy Money, MD ’92, who served as chair of the department of anesthesiology for eight years, was named chief medical officer for UF Health Shands and the senior associate dean for clinical affairs at the College of Medicine in January.

Jennifer L. Hunt, MD, PhD, chair of the department of pathology, immunology and laboratory medicine, continues to serve as chair while leveraging her experience collaborating across specialties as the new chief of staff for UF Health Shands, a role she was appointed to in January.

Jennifer Bison, PhD, chair of the department of neuroscience and an expert in brain aging, was appointed director of the Evelyn F. and William L. McGuire Brain Institute of the University of Florida in February.

Q&A
In 2022, the college surpassed its goal of 100 gifts to scholarships. Meet some of the key players who helped the college cross the Legacy Challenge finish line.

Part of the reason for our family is, "The best thing you can do on a daily basis is show appreciation," said Duke, an orthopaedic surgeon in Ocala. "We appreciate the foundation UF gave us and we love giving back when we can."

"I want someone who’s going to go out there and change the world," Rosenberg said. "The possibilities are limitless."}

"We’re so proud of the education that we received at the University of Florida College of Medicine," Madani said.

"Coming back to campus and meeting students who have received scholarships, seeing their excitement about the specialties they’re considering and the education they’re receiving — it’s a really good feeling because you know you’re part of making a change," Lofton said.

The goal
When the Legacy Challenge campaign kicked off in February 2017, the UF College of Medicine Medical Alumni Board set an ambitious goal: recruit 100 graduates and friends to support scholarships to help medical and physician assistant students obtain the world-class education they deserve.

The purpose
Born in part to alleviate the cost of medical school in the U.S. and meet the growing national need for health care workers, the campaign aimed to recruit the best and brightest future health care professionals to UF, establishing a lasting legacy by ensuring that students with the commitment and compassion for medicine could pursue their dreams.

The how
Participants got involved in three ways: establishing an endowed scholarship with a gift of $100,000 or more, designated on need-or merit-based criteria; sponsoring a medical student with a gift of $20,000, payable over four years, to provide $5,000 annually to recruit the most competitive medical students; or including the College of Medicine in their estate plans or making a planned gift.

Alumni and friends of the UF College of Medicine team up to meet scholarship campaign goal

By Styllana Revenitis

Then-alumni board president James B. Duke, MD ’85, and his wife, Pam, helped kick off the Legacy Challenge campaign in 2017 with a gift to sponsor a medical student. Duke continued to champion the challenge throughout his term as board president, and he and his wife followed up their original donation with an estate gift to support the College of Medicine.

"With supportive faculty, excellent programs and a competitive environment without individual competition, the college has been a family for us," Michels said.

"I want someone who’s going to go out there and change the world," Rosenberg said. "The possibilities are limitless."
In memoriam: Nicholas Muzyczka, PhD

Nicholas Muzyczka, PhD, a UF College of Medicine professor emeritus and eminent scholar in the department of molecular genetics and microbiology, died peacefully on Jan. 6 in his Cocoa, Florida, home.

Muzyczka and his team studied the biology of adenovirus, a virus that causes the common cold and is being explored as a tool to deliver genes to fight cancer. He was also a pioneer in research with AAV, which is based on a natural virus that infects and replicates in human cells, then leaves and does not cause disease. Over the last 30 years, his research team has shown how AAV can be used to deliver genetic material to specific human cells. He is listed as an inventor on seven patents related to the development of AAV as the dominant viral vector in gene therapy.

Muzyczka was an accomplished philosophy professor who taught the class “Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century” for 15 years. He also served as a mentor to many students and colleagues, including Edward R. Koger chair.

School of Physician Assistant Studies observes milestone anniversary

In the decades since physician assistants were officially introduced as members of the medical profession, they have become integral to health care practices, focusing on primary care and enhancing patient care. In Fall 2022, the UF School of Physician Assistant Studies, the Sunshine State’s longest-running PA program, celebrated its 50th anniversary.

“Looking back, we are reminded of a time when PA programs were just beginning to be incorporated into medical schools,” said Nina Multak, PhD, MPH, MPAS, the first woman to be a PA program director in Florida. “We had a long way to go, but we were dedicated to providing the best education possible to the next generation of PAs.”

The UF School of PA Studies was founded with just one full-time PA program director, the first of its kind in the U.S. Today, the program is home to over 1,000 students and 1,000 graduates, making it one of the largest and most diverse PA programs in the country.

During the 2023 Celebration of Research Feb. 27-28, which included an art gallery, mentorship roundtable discussions, awards ceremony and more, five College of Medicine faculty members received recognition for outstanding contributions to research or research mentorship. Congratulations to the following UF Medicine faculty — pictured above with senior associate dean for research affairs Azra Bihorac, MD, MS, MBA — who received the 2023 College of Medicine faculty research awards:

1. Riding Star Research Award
   Olga Gyurovova, MD, PhD, an assistant professor in the department of pharmacology and therapeutics, received the Rising Star Researcher Award in Basic or Translational Sciences.

2. Outstanding Research Scientist Award
   Todd W. Brooks, PhD ’98, a professor in the department of pathology, immunology and laboratory medicine and the research director for the UF Diabetes Institute, received the Outstanding Research Scientist Award in Basic or Translational Sciences.

3. Rising Star Research Award
   Coralie de Hemptinne, PhD, an assistant professor in the department of neurology, received the Rising Star Researcher Award in Clinical, Data or Artificial Intelligence Sciences.

4. Faculty Mentorship and Mentoring Award
   Barry Selwin, PhD, a professor in the department of psychiatry, received the Dr. Morris Aghajani-McDonon Distinguished Research Mentorship Award.

5. Outstanding Research Scientist Award
   Michael Huller, MD ’00, a professor and chief of pediatric endocrinology in the department of pediatrics, received the Outstanding Research Scientist Award in Clinical, Data or Artificial Intelligence Sciences.

Visit news.drgator.ufl.edu to view a complete list of faculty, learner and trainee poster presentation award winners.
**HEALTH CARE ACCESS FOR ALL**

**By Emily Walters**

**UF & Equal Access Clinic Network celebrates 30 years of free services in Gainesville**

Connecting at one small veterinarians’ clinic to a vast clinic system, Dr. Christian scored his first patient sting. In 1994, the UF & Equal Access Clinic Network began, serving more than 1,500 patients and $5.8 million worth of services. Today, the network serves thousands of patients annually across the state.

The Equal Access Clinic Network, or EACN, which was established in 1992, is a clinic that serves the needs of patients in need. It is a clinic that offers services to patients who may not be able to afford healthcare.

**THEN AND NOW: 1992 to 2023**

At a glance, the clinic has moved from a small, one-room building to the former Children’s Hospital, which now serves as the home for the clinic.

**Student leaders signal the first Equal Access Clinic location, inside the former Salvation Army on East University Avenue, in 1994.**

**Current student leaders in front of the old Salvation Army on East University Avenue, in 1994.**

**Leading the clinic's dozers of volunteers is Michael McDonald, a student at UF’s McKnight Brain Institute, and the clinic's current executive director. McDonald first became involved with the clinic as a first-year medical student and has since served as a clinic coordinator, and financial director for the program.**

**Visible at the clinic's dedication ceremony is Dr. Christian scoring his first patient sting. In 1994, the UF & Equal Access Clinic Network began, serving more than 1,500 patients and $5.8 million worth of services. Today, the network serves thousands of patients annually across the state.**

**Veteran and trauma surgeon Robert Borrego, MD ’84, gives back through a dedication to teaching and patient care.**

Just behind the front lines in Iraq, Robert Borrego, MD ’84, spent four months inside a Mobile Army Medical Field Hospital, where he saw the sights of soldiers and children injured in the war in 2003.

He had joined the Army Reserve years before, after volunteering to be on standby as a surgeon during the Gulf War, but it wasn’t until the Iraq War that he was called to serve on active duty. For the UF College of Medicine alumnae, his military experience with a small, mobile surgical team allowed him to give back to the country that became his family’s second home.

When Borrego was 9 years old, he and his mother, father, and three siblings left Cuba’s political unrest and moved to Miami. Initially wanting to pursue marine biology because of his love for water sports and his father’s career as a fisherman, Borrego was swayed when an adviser in college noticed his affinity for science and people and recommended that he consider a career in medicine. Borrego found his calling in surgery as a third-year medical student at UF and specialized in trauma and critical care as a resident and fellow at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He served as the trauma service and training at Florida State University and at St. Mary’s Medical Center in West Palm Beach.

Borrego is helping to train rotating medical students and residents to become tomorrow’s top trauma surgeons. He looks forward to growing the teaching program at St. Mary’s Hospital and aims to start a surgical fellowship on top of the residency program’s success. And although he is no longer part of the military, Borrego still serves the U.S. with St. Mary’s as part of the White House Medical Unit, a health care network that provides worldwide emergency action response and comprehensive medical care to the U.S. president, vice president and their families.

In his free time, Borrego enjoys spending time outdoors with his wife, Cori, and two children, Roberto and Alexa. They especially like the beach, where they can go boating, swimming, diving and fishing, as Borrego did with his own father growing up.

“I got a great education from medical school at the University of Florida College of Medicine, and it’s an honor to have been able to do this for so many years,” he says. “I feel privileged to be a trauma surgeon, to have been part of the military and to take care of people every single day.”

— ROBERT BORREGO, MD ’84

**Left: Borrego hauling a shark on a beach.**

**Right: Borrego wearing an Army uniform with a fellow service member.**
Under new name and leadership, The Wertheim UF Scripps Institute will innovate biomedical research

Largest individual gift in UF history names The Herbert Wertheim UF Scripps Institute for Biomedical Innovation & Technology, launches $1 billion public-private partnership

By DOUG BENNETT AND STEVE ORLANDO

U F’s newest research center has a new name and new leadership that will help the institution drive the future of biomedical research and innovation.

The Dr. Herbert and Nicole Wertheim Family Foundation provided $100 million — the largest gift from an individual donor in University of Florida history — to elevate the status of UF Scripps as one of the world’s leading forces in biomedical research and to advance the groundbreaking work of faculty at the Aupeir, Florida, campus, now called The Herbert Wertheim UF Scripps Institute for Biomedical Innovation & Technology.

This transformational lead investment will launch a 10-year, $1 billion public-private partnership — spearheaded by The Herbert UF Scripps Institute — that is focused on amplifying fundamental science, driving research that translates profound discoveries from bench to bedside to business, training students and engaging community and business leaders.

The new UF associate vice president of research, Joe G.N. “Tig” Garcia, MD, recently joined the faculty of the Aupeir campus as the Herbert A. Wertheim Professor of Innovation.

“Tig” Garcia, MD

With demanding early-career work schedules, medical residents and fellows often feel the strain of stress. By completing the Well-Being INDEX questionnaire, now available through a project under the umbrella of UF’s College of Medicine’s strategic plan, UF Health trainees can better understand stressors in their lives and gain access to strategic plan.

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The short, confidential web-based questionnaire, developed specifically for health care professionals, also allows residency and fellowship programs across the college to gather anonymous data that can be used to address specific areas of concern regarding the well-being of their trainees. As a result, the college will be better able to identify specific areas to focus houseoffwell-being improvement efforts.

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College launches platform for faculty mentoring and development

This spring, the College of Medicine launched the Faculty Mentoring Resource Center, a centralized hub where faculty can access key resources and connect with mentors to receive personalized coaching.

Created as part of the college’s strategic plan, the center aims to cultivate a community for faculty through an online dashboard that promotes a culture of growth and collaboration. The platform includes three portals: peer-to-peer, which allows prospective mentors and mentees to build online profiles and find matches based on shared interests; circles, an online chatroom where members can set up groups to talk with other faculty to answer questions or collaborate on research ideas; and bootcamps, which provides a step-by-step guide to enhance the orientation experience for new faculty.

“We want to prioritize building lasting connections,” said Jennifer Boney, PhD, Chair of the department of neuroscience, director of the Evelyn F. and William L. McKnight Brain Institute and champion of the membership initiative. “This platform will be another valuable resource for our faculty and will help empower them to take charge of their careers.”

“Getting a cutting from the tree under Hippocrates taught medical students to understand stressors in their lives and gain access to strategic plan. This platform will be another valuable resource for our faculty and will help empower them to take charge of their careers.”

B enow the cream-colored scaled bark and broad green leaves of a plane tree, medical students at the UF College of Medicine have honored the Hippocratic oath and belonged closely with members who best exemplify the ethics of harmlessness, professionalism and teaching in the medical school since 1969, when the graduating class and university worked with American and Greek colleagues to revive an ancient cutting from a plane tree, commonly known in the U.S. as a sycamore, on the Greek island of Aegina Island.

In early 2022, Tisher and colleagues noticed the tree by the hospital was struggling to thrive and had put out many suckers, indicating lack of nutrients. As part of the effort to rehabilitate the tree, Tisher and Dr. Nicholas Veronis, a lecture in the department of environmental horticulture at UF’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, removed the offshoots and immediately thought to share the wealth.

While Schutzman worked on successfully raising 15 of the new cuttings, Tisher contacted peer institutions to gauge interest in receiving a tree and starting their own Hippocratic award ceremony. Ten schools responded favorably, and eight have already received their own tree.

One cutting went to the Florida State University College of Medicine, where Robert Watson, MD, ‘91, understands the impact of the Hippocratic tree and award from both the student and faculty perspective. Prior to becoming a UF professor, Watson served as a professor of neurology at UF, spent 7 years in the sister associate dean for educational affairs and earned the Hippocratic Award from the class of 1991. Years later, he noticed anCurrency beneath a plane tree cutout in front of UF Wilmot Botanical Gardens.

Read about UF’s first conference on health and care, which took place this week at news.drgator.ufl.edu.

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By Emma Behrmann

Leora Lieberman, MD ‘19, and Robert Eisinger, PhD ‘20, MD ‘22, owe their medical foundation and their relationship’s origins to the UF College of Medicine — and a friend who dabbled in matchmaking. Now, they plan to give back to both.

When Lieberman was in her third year of medical school, her friend and classmate Emma Segal, MD ‘19, urged her to meet Eisinger, who was in his second year of the MD-PhD Training Program. Thanks to Segal’s matchmaking abilities, the two went on a date in 2018, and the rest is history.

The couple spent time together but apart when Eisinger stayed in Gainesville to complete his MD-PhD training and Lieberman moved to Pennsylvania for residency at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia in 2019. Three years later, Eisinger matched at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is now a neurology resident.

Upon closing the more than 900-mile gap that separated them and reflecting on their time at the College of Medicine, the couple wanted to thank the institution and the friend who gave them the experiences they cherish. Last June, Lieberman and Eisinger established the Dr. Emma Segal Award to help ease the financial burden for medical students applying to residency programs and participating in the couples match.

Medicine, academia, and long-distance relationships can pose a difficult balancing act. Couples who want to stay together may need to travel more often or apply to more residency programs to ensure they live in the same city, which is an expensive process.

“We didn’t want people to apply to fewer places and risk not being able to be together because they don’t have the extra finances to apply,” Eisinger said. “We’re hoping that for couples who want to stay together, they’re able to do so more easily with these extra funds that can support their applications.”

The Dr. Emma Segal Award aims to support College of Medicine students who are in relationships and helps couples align their paths.

“This award just goes to show how caring and kind Robert and Leora are and how much they want to give back,” said Segal, who remains close friends with Eisinger and Lieberman and received a FaceTime call after they got engaged in July 2021. “We can all say how much we loved being part of UF College of Medicine. You develop long-lasting relationships, and this award sheds light on that.”

Lieberman and Eisinger’s love for one another and the College of Medicine inspired this award that hopes to keep other love stories alive.

“We both are really grateful that our foundational learning was in an environment that was so supportive, warm and loving,” Lieberman said. “We are grateful for the people and the community. We hope we can support other students in their journeys.”

The Dr. Emma Segal Award supports residency applicants who aim to align their path with their significant other’s.