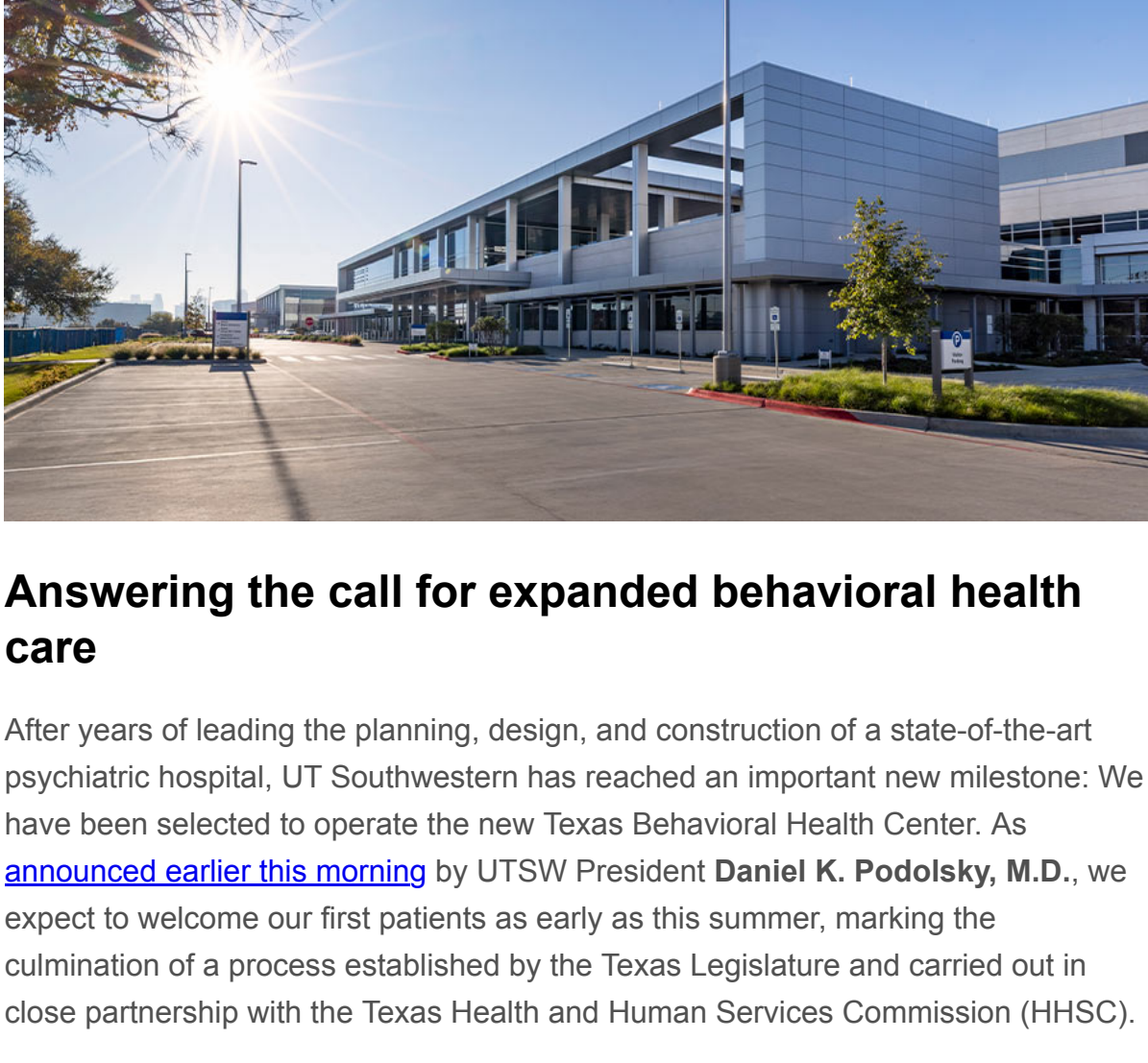




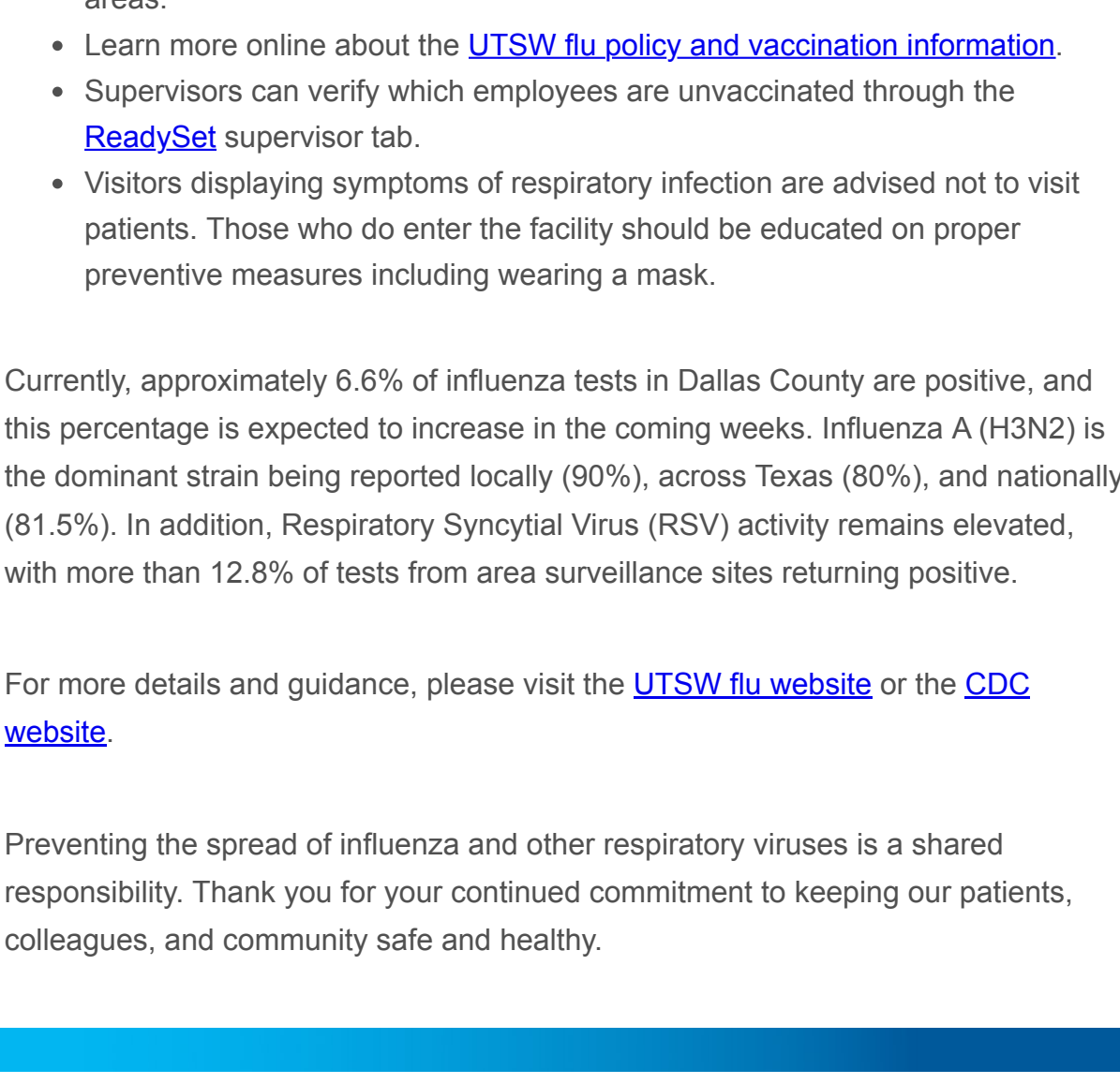
Answering the call for expanded behavioral health care

After years of leading the planning, design, and construction of a state-of-the-art psychiatric hospital, UT Southwestern has reached an important new milestone: We have been selected to operate the new Texas Behavioral Health Center. As [announced earlier this morning](#) by UTSW President **Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.**, we expect to welcome our first patients as early as this summer, marking the culmination of a process established by the Texas Legislature and carried out in close partnership with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).

When fully operational, the hospital will serve adult and pediatric patients, including forensic populations, and will expand access to much-needed behavioral health services across North Texas and the state. Over time, the facility will introduce innovative models of care, including interventional psychiatry and partial hospitalization programs, further strengthening the continuum of care.

This opportunity reflects the confidence of state leaders and community partners in our expertise and commitment. Teams across the institution are now mobilizing to prepare for the opening of the new Center, with more details on timelines, leadership, and employment opportunities to come.

[Learn more in the news release](#)



Important influenza update

Flu activity is elevated nationwide, and hospitalization rates are now the highest observed so far this 2025-2026 season. In response, our Infection Prevention and Control team activated our Influenza Alert status.

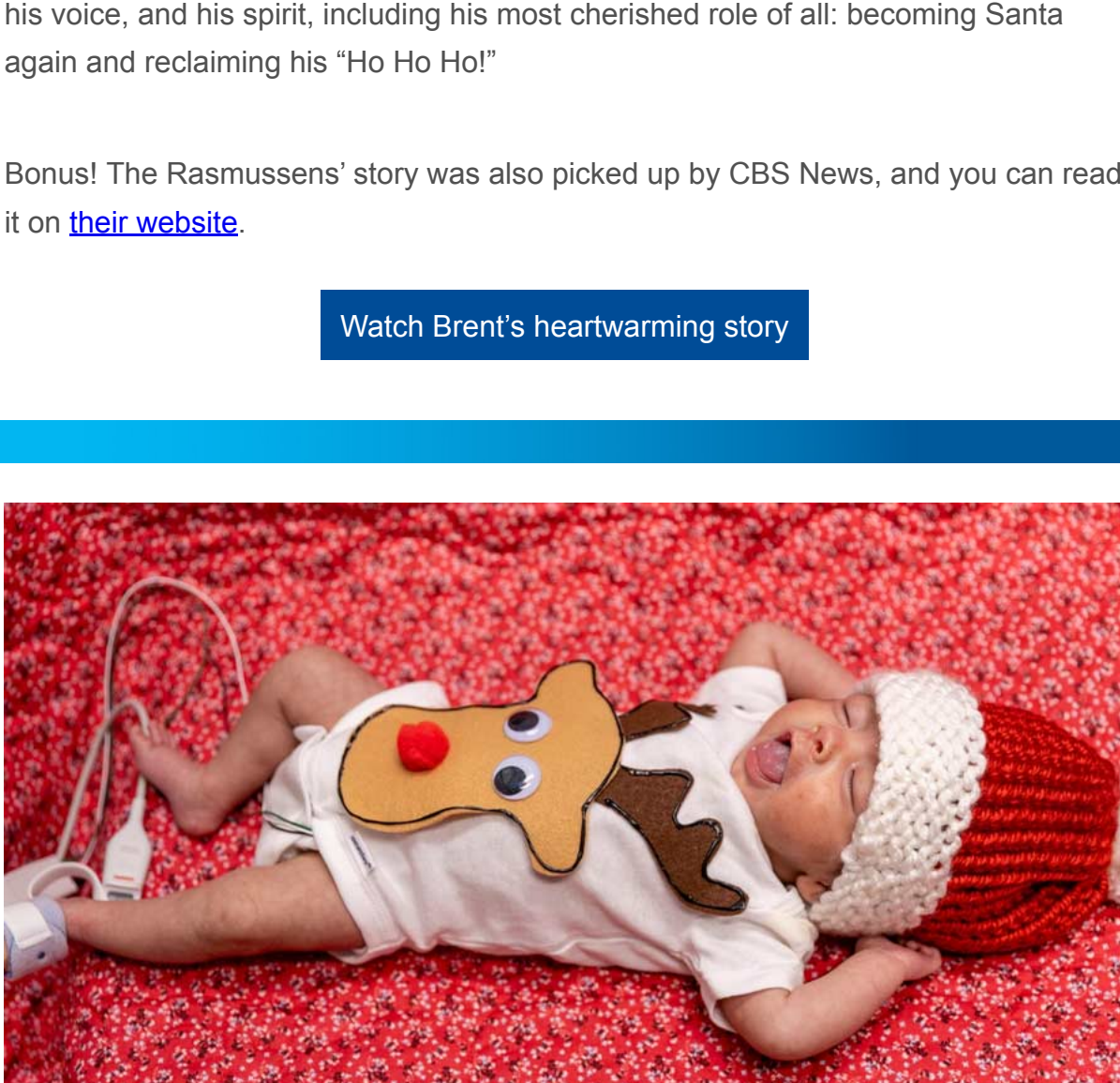
What this means for you:

- All health care providers, students, and trainees, must have proof of their influenza vaccination status (purple sticker on their employee badge) before entering patient care units and procedural areas.
- Unvaccinated employees are required to wear a mask when entering those areas.
- Learn more online about the [UTSW flu policy and vaccination information](#).
- Supervisors can verify which employees are unvaccinated through the [ReadySet](#) supervisor tab.
- Visitors displaying symptoms of respiratory infection are advised not to visit patients. Those who do enter the facility should be educated on proper preventive measures including wearing a mask.

Currently, approximately 6.6% of influenza tests in Dallas County are positive, and this percentage is expected to increase in the coming weeks. Influenza A (H3N2) is the dominant strain being reported locally (90%), across Texas (80%), and nationally (81.5%). In addition, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) activity remains elevated, with more than 12.8% of tests from area surveillance sites returning positive.

For more details and guidance, please visit the [UTSW flu website](#) or the [CDC website](#).

Preventing the spread of influenza and other respiratory viruses is a shared responsibility. Thank you for your continued commitment to keeping our patients, colleagues, and community safe and healthy.



Video: Finding Santa's 'Ho Ho Ho' again

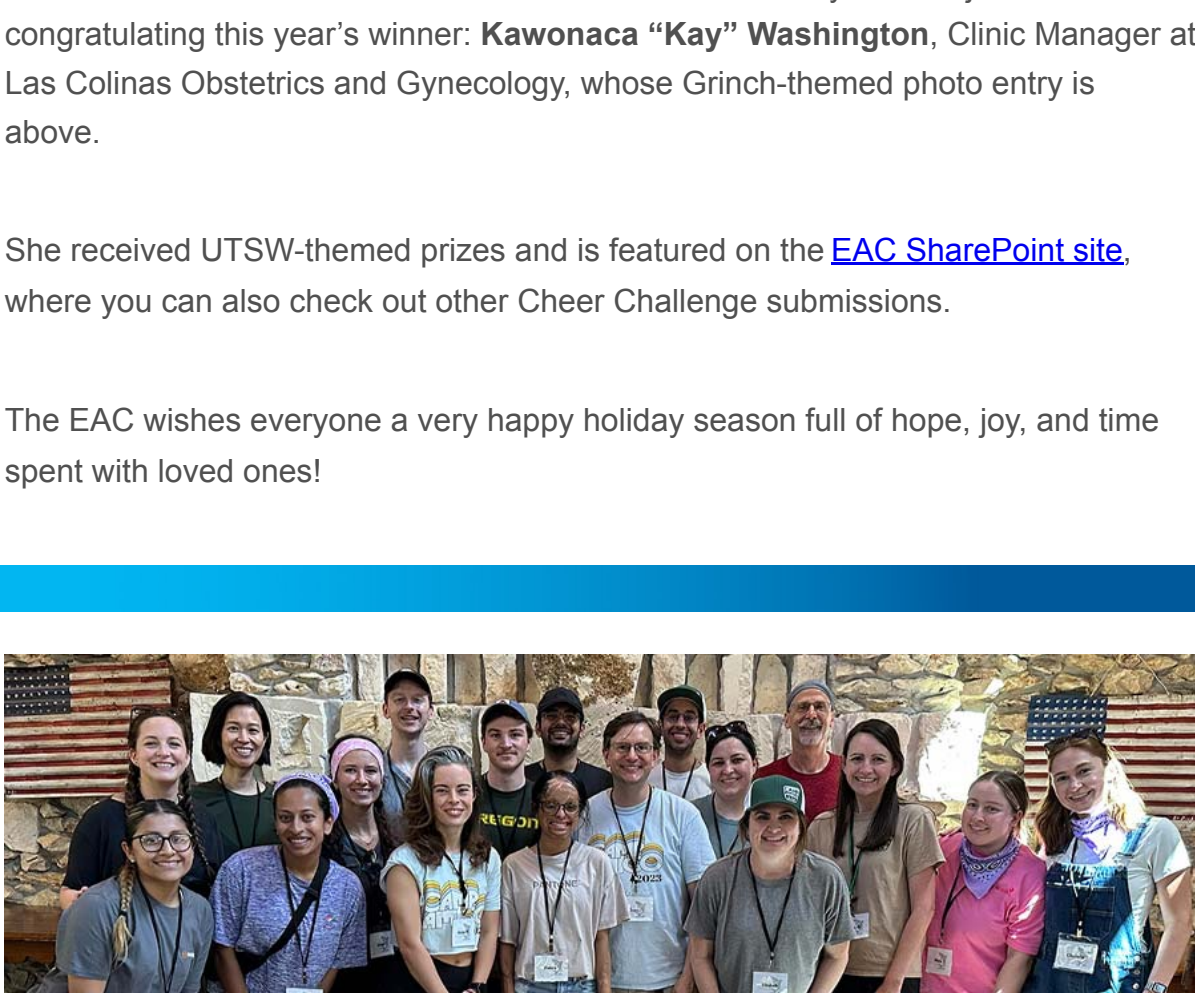
Brent Rasmussen and his wife, Tenesa, had played Santa and Mrs. Claus at Christmastime for the past 25 years. So as the holidays approached in December 2023, they were looking forward to the season's joy and traditions.

But their world changed in an instant when Brent suffered a massive stroke in his cerebellum. Emergency surgery saved his life, but he awoke unable to walk or speak.

In the weeks that followed, the Rasmussen family turned to UT Southwestern's Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation team, and with their support, Brent began the long, determined journey of healing. Step by step, he worked to reclaim his strength, his voice, and his spirit, including his most cherished role of all: becoming Santa again and reclaiming his "Ho Ho Ho!"

Bonus! The Rasmussens' story was also picked up by CBS News, and you can read it on [their website](#).

[Watch Brent's heartwarming story](#)



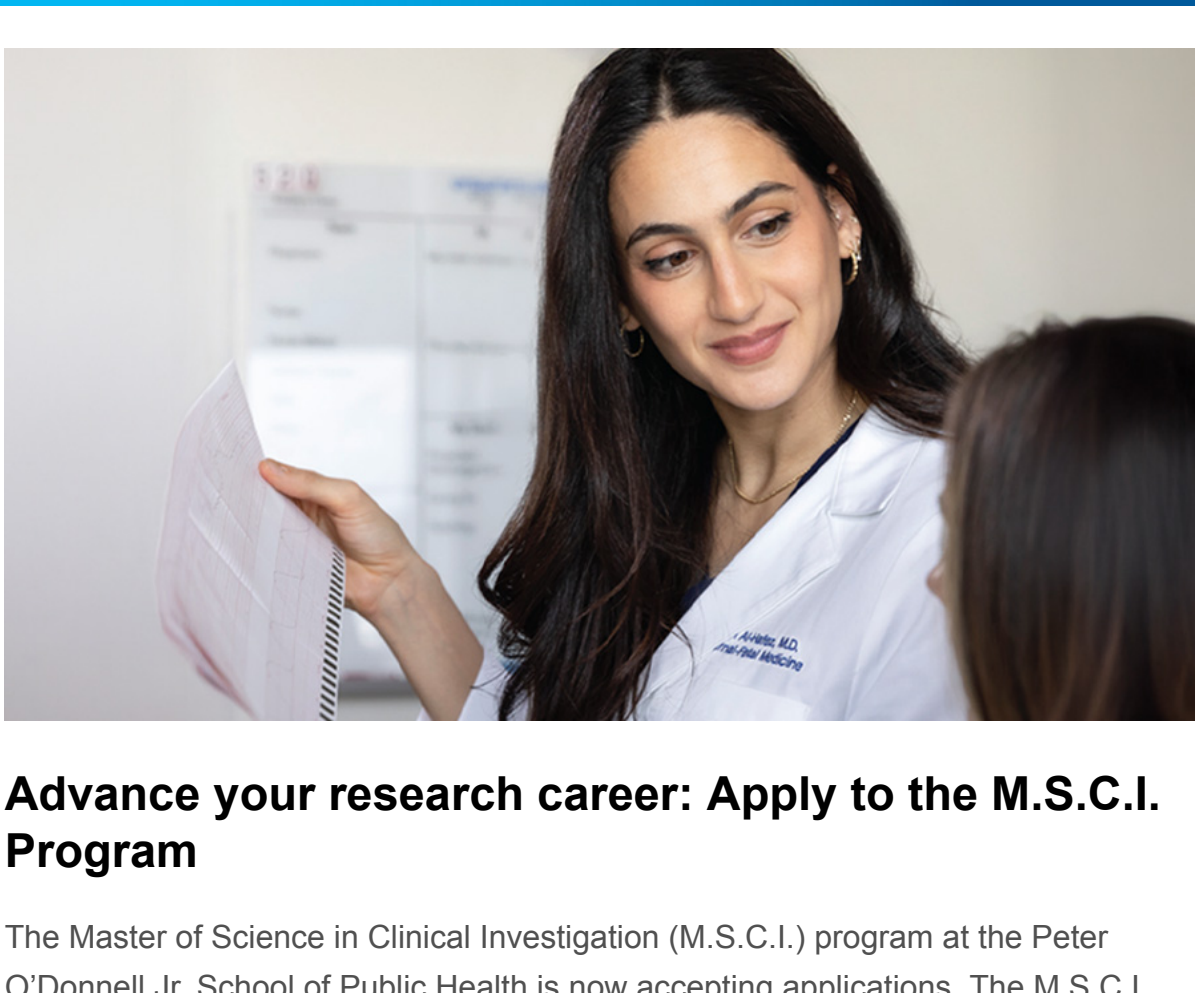
Festive moments warm the NICU

Our Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) team at Clements University Hospital recently added a touch of holiday magic by dressing their tiny patients in festive attire, from reindeer onesies to Santa hats for those who celebrate.

Additionally, [Kaylen's Fight foundation](#) delivered gift bags to the families of every NICU patient, and handmade blankets were provided by Project Linus. In an environment where medical journeys can be difficult, these thoughtful acts of kindness provide newborns and their families with comfort during this special time.

Many thanks to our NICU staff, who take every opportunity to mark significant milestones for the families in their care.

[Visit our Instagram to see more photos](#)

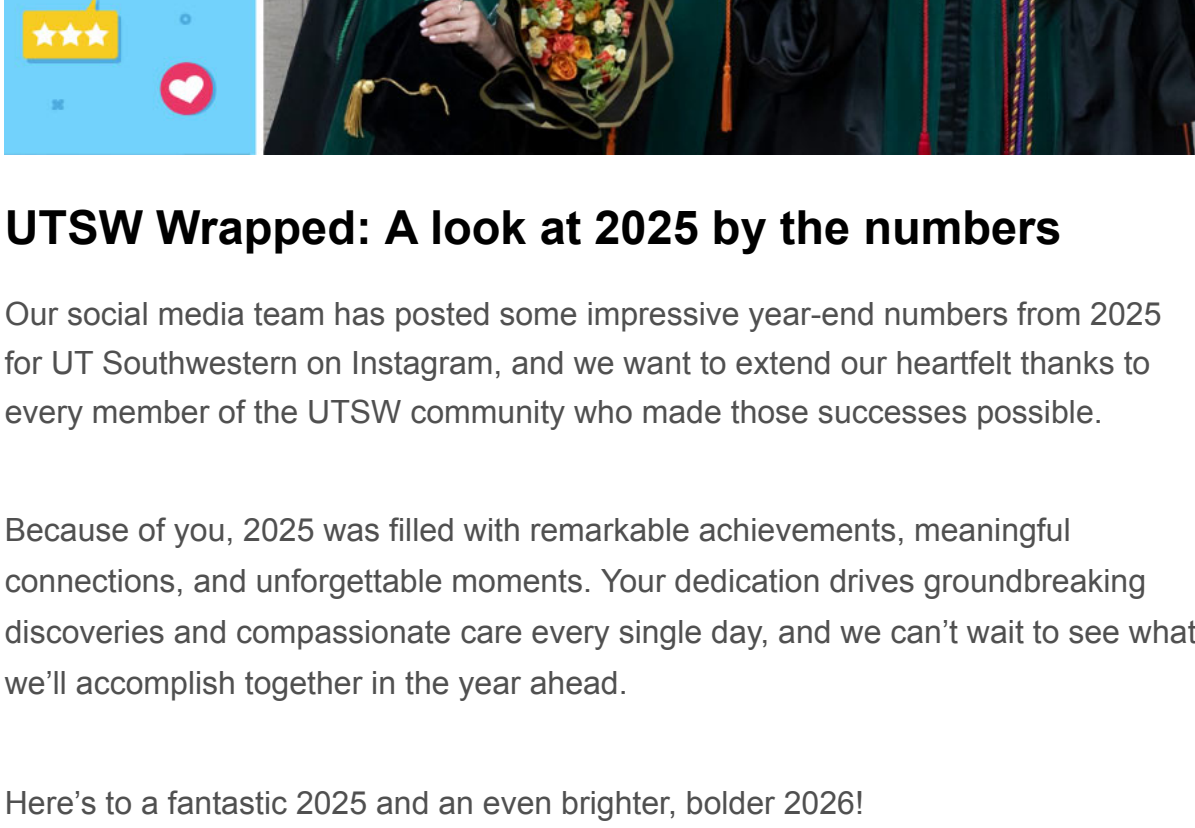


Celebrating joy and creativity across UTSW

Thank you to all who participated in this year's Employee Advisory Council (EAC) Holiday Cheer Challenge! The EAC received some delightful submissions of festive celebrations and decorations around our UTSW community. Please join us in congratulating this year's winner: **Kawonaca "Kay" Washington**, Clinic Manager at Las Colinas Obstetrics and Gynecology, whose Grinch-themed photo entry is above.

She received UTSW-themed prizes and is featured on the [EAC SharePoint site](#), where you can also check out other Cheer Challenge submissions.

The EAC wishes everyone a very happy holiday season full of hope, joy, and time spent with loved ones!



Seeing beyond the scars: UTSW's Craniofacial Surgery team hosts Camp Amigo

When Shakira Effendi was just a year old, a fiery explosion in Pakistan's Swat Valley changed her life forever. Severe burns left scars that drew stares and silence and drove her into a shell until she found Camp Amigo, a weekend retreat where kids with craniofacial differences discover acceptance and joy.

Hosted by UT Southwestern's Craniofacial Surgery team, the camp turns a quiet Texas nature preserve into a haven of zip lines, campfires, and friendship. For children who've endured surgeries and isolation, it's more than fun; it's freedom.

For surgeons like **Alex Kane, M.D.**, Camp Amigo is on a mission to let kids be kids. And for campers like 11-year-old Rylie Whitlock, it's a chance to soar – literally – on a zip line, leaving fear far behind.

Learn how Shakira's journey led her back – as a counselor – to Camp Amigo, where together with UTSW faculty and staff, she and her team give kids the chance to heal, embrace who they are, and experience something unforgettable.

[Inside Camp Amigo](#)

Advance your research career: Apply to the M.S.C.I. Program

The Master of Science in Clinical Investigation (M.S.C.I.) program at the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health is now accepting applications. The M.S.C.I. degree provides rigorous training in clinical research methods, biostatistics, implementation, dissemination, and funding strategies, equipping you to excel as a leader in clinical investigation.

Designed for individuals with backgrounds in science, engineering, or health care, the program helps you accelerate your career with advanced, hands-on training supported by world-class faculty and a flexible scheduling model.

If you're ready for the next step, visit the [program website](#) and [apply today](#).

Looking for more information? Join the virtual info session on Tuesday, **Jan. 13**, from noon to 1 p.m.

[Attend the M.S.C.I. virtual open house](#)



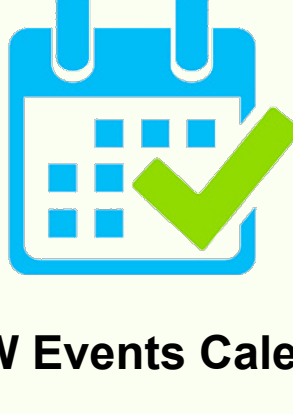
UTSW Wrapped: A look at 2025 by the numbers

Our social media team has posted some impressive year-end numbers from 2025 for UT Southwestern on Instagram, and we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to every member of the UTSW community who made those successes possible.

Because of you, 2025 was filled with remarkable achievements, meaningful connections, and unforgettable moments. Your dedication drives groundbreaking discoveries and compassionate care every single day, and we can't wait to see what we'll accomplish together in the year ahead.

Here's to a fantastic 2025 and an even brighter, bolder 2026!

[Check out the numbers on Instagram](#)



UTSW Events Calendar

Looking for your daily dose of happenings?

The UTSW Events Calendar is updated every day.

[View upcoming or trending events](#)

Share your *Insider* suggestions by sending them to utswinsider@utsouthwestern.edu. Looking for an item in a past edition of this newsletter? Check out our [Insider archive](#).

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