

medicine minute

June 3, 2025

research roundup



Reddy Receives Grants to Support Breast Cancer Investigations

Sangeetha Reddy, M.D., M.S.C.I., an Assistant Professor in the Division of Hematology and Oncology, has received a \$200,000 Victoria's Secret Global Fund for Women's Cancers Career Development Award, in Partnership with Pelotonia and the American Association for Cancer Research, to support her to investigate strategies to overcome immune resistance in triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC).

Dr. Reddy developed a dendritic cell-targeted combination of a CD40 agonist, Flt3 ligand, and anthracycline chemotherapy that enhances myeloid cell activation and anti-tumor immunity in TNBC. This work led to the first clinical trial of this regimen in patients with advanced breast cancer. With this new funding, she will investigate how co-targeting myeloid cells and regulatory T cells may further improve therapeutic responses.

Dr. Reddy has also received a \$200,000 METAvivor Early Career Investigator Award, one of four grants given to early career metastatic breast cancer researchers. The funding will support her investigation into how different metastatic sites (such as the liver, lungs, or lymph nodes) in triple-negative breast cancer differ in their immune response to therapy, aiming to tailor immunotherapy for patients with metastatic TNBC. ■



Thinwa Receives CDKL5 Program of Excellence Pilot Grant

Josephine Thinwa, M.D., Ph.D., has received a \$150,000 CDKL5 Program of Excellence Pilot Grant from the Orphan Disease Center and Loulou Foundation to support her research related to CDKL5 deficiency disorder, a rare brain development condition caused by a change in the CDKL5 gene.

CDKL5 helps the brain grow and work properly. Children with a CDKL5 deficiency often have trouble speaking, walking, and suffer from frequent seizures that are hard to treat. Scientists are still trying to understand how CDKL5 works inside cells, which makes finding a cure difficult.

Dr. Thinwa's research focuses on how CDKL5 helps the body fight viruses, especially in the brain, but her work on viruses has also helped uncover ways in which CDKL5 helps the brain function.

"We have found that the immune system can change how much CDKL5 is made and how active it is in the brain," Dr. Thinwa says. "When CDKL5 is missing, brain cells are more likely to die from viral infections. Interestingly, when cells are infected by a virus, they make more CDKL5 and activate it more. This seems to be caused by type I interferons – proteins that cells release to fight viruses."

By studying large gene databases, Dr. Thinwa found that these interferons increase CDKL5 levels in many types of cells even outside the brain. Another similar protein, CDKL1, also increased, suggesting other related proteins might be controlled in the same way. This is important because very little is known about how CDKL5 is turned on or off in the brain. The funding will support Dr. Thinwa's investigation into which interferons affect CDKL5 and how they change its behavior inside cells. ■



Greenberg Receives NIH Grant to Determine How Bacteria Become Antibiotic Resistant

David Greenberg, M.D., a Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases and Geographic Medicine, has received a grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases to identify mechanisms of resistance to pathogen-specific antibacterial antisense compounds and strategies to circumvent them.

"There's an urgent need for new antibiotics because many bacteria are becoming resistant to current treatments," Dr. Greenberg says. "A new method using synthetic molecules called PPMOs (peptide-phosphorodiamidate morpholino oligomers) molecules works by blocking specific bacterial genes, stopping the bacteria from growing."

PPMOs have already been shown to be effective against several dangerous bacteria, even those that are resistant to multiple drugs or form hard-to-treat biofilms, he explains, yet it's not fully understood how bacteria might become resistant to PPMOs.

"This project aims to figure out how resistance to PPMOs develops in three types of bacteria," Dr Greenberg says. "We will create and study resistant bacterial strains and then design new PPMOs to overcome that resistance." ■

Dr. Greenberg is a Distinguished Teaching Professor.

kudos



Gerber's Testimony Regarding Disclosure of Medical Information Leads to New Texas Law

Almost immediately after the 21st Century CURES Act went into effect in 2021, **David Gerber, M.D.**, a Professor in the Division of Hematology and Oncology, began expressing his concerns about the law's information-blocking component, which required releasing all medical test results immediately to patients via electronic portals. As an oncologist, he knew that cancer-related test results were both potentially life-changing and confusing, as they often represented lengthy free-text radiology and pathology reports rather than the simple number of laboratory tests.

"My patients were learning of new cancer diagnoses through smartphone notifications while reading bedtime stories to toddlers, during business dinners, and at family weddings," Dr. Gerber says. "Receiving such information without concurrent interpretation, guidance, and reassurance by clinicians often resulted in anxiety, uncertainty, and occasionally even trauma."

After he started studying and publishing on these issues, he learned that a provision in the CURES Act allowed states to over-ride the information-blocking component. Kentucky did so in April 2022, and California followed in October 2022. Working with the Dallas County Medical Society and Texas Medical Association, Dr. Gerber and Philip Bernard, M.D., a Professor of Pediatrics, brought a similar bill to the Texas Legislature in 2023.

"While it passed both the House and the Senate with more than 95% support, it was among 70 bills vetoed by Gov. Greg Abbott that session due to a political impasse over property tax and school voucher legislation," Dr. Gerber says. "So I brought the bill back to Austin in 2025, and again the Texas House and Senate passed it with widespread support."

On May 19, Gov. Abbott signed SB922 into law. Going into effect in September, it will allow up to a 72-hour delay in the electronic release of potentially life-changing test results (related to cancer or genetic disease) to patients.

"The legislation gives healthcare professionals the opportunity to deliver sensitive and complex test results to patients directly," Dr. Gerber says. "Whether by telephone, telehealth, or in person, verbal communication allows us to explain the big picture significance and next steps before patients scramble to try to interpret these lengthy reports on their own. We will have a chance to convey information with experience and compassion." ■

Dr. Gerber holds the David Bruton, Jr. Professorship in Clinical Cancer Research.



NOTEWORTHY PUBLICATIONS

Navar, Colleagues Find New Drug Helps Lower ‘Bad’ Cholesterol in High-Risk Patients

Ann Marie Navar, M.D., Ph.D., an Associate Professor in the Division of Cardiology, and colleagues reported their findings from a multinational clinical trial that obicetrapib can lower levels of “bad” cholesterol (LDL) by about 30% in people who are already taking the strongest cholesterol medicines available. The BROADWAY trial included over 2,500 people with heart disease or inherited high cholesterol. Even though they were already on treatment, their cholesterol levels were still too high. After taking obicetrapib for about three months, their LDL levels dropped significantly compared to those who took a placebo.

The [study, published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*](#), highlights obicetrapib's potential as an effective add-on therapy for patients with atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease or familial hypercholesterolemia who struggle to meet LDL targets with statins alone. The drug was also found to be safe, with side effects similar to the placebo group.

The findings support obicetrapib as a promising option in the evolving landscape of lipid management. ■

Specialist Bias Drives Diabetes Heart Drug Prescriptions, Study Finds

A new retrospective study reveals that the choice between two heart-protective diabetes medications—SGLT2 inhibitors and GLP-1 receptor agonists—is heavily influenced by the prescribing physician’s specialty. **Ildiko Lingvay, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.C.S.**, a Professor in the Division of Endocrinology, and colleagues found that among 573 patients with type 2 diabetes and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, those treated by cardiologists were significantly more likely to receive SGLT2 inhibitors, while endocrinologists favored GLP-1 receptor agonists.

The [analysis, published in *Frontiers in Cardiovascular Medicine*](#), also found that patients with higher body mass index (BMI) and better kidney function were more likely to be prescribed GLP-1RAs. Despite both drug classes offering similar cardiovascular benefits, the findings highlight a lack of standardized prescribing practices and call for clearer treatment guidelines that consider the broader health benefits of each medication. ■

*Other Internal Medicine researchers who contributed to the study were **Shubham Agarwal, M.B.B.S.**, a former Clinical Fellow in the Division of Endocrinology; **Mujeeb Basit, M.D.**, an Associate Professor in the Division of Cardiology; and **Michael Bowen, M.D.**, an Associate Professor in the Division of General Internal Medicine.*

Abraham, Colleagues Find Internal Medicine Advisors Face Gaps in Training and Support

A national survey of Internal Medicine (IM) clerkship directors reveals significant gaps in training, resources, and institutional support for faculty advising medical students through the high-stakes residency application process, according to **Reeni Abraham, M.D.**, a Professor in the Division of General Internal Medicine and Associate Vice Chair for Undergraduate Medical Education, and colleagues.

Conducted between September and December 2023, the study surveyed 140 IM clerkship directors at U.S. medical schools, with 118 responses analyzed. While these advisors play a critical role – guiding a median of 12 students each per application cycle – only 12% reported receiving dedicated time for advising duties.

Less than half of respondents had received formal training on best advising practices, and nearly two-thirds were unaware of whether their institutions offered resources for students underrepresented in medicine. Additionally, nearly half of the advisors now recommend that average applicants apply to more programs than in previous years, reflecting growing concerns over application inflation.

The [findings, published in *Academic Medicine*](#), underscore the need for standardized advisor training, equitable student support, and institutional investment in specialty-specific advising. ■

Staff Members Take on New Roles

We congratulate the following staff members who recently took on new positions within the Department:

- **Kenzie Cocke** – Lead Advanced Practice Provider, Hospital Medicine (CUH)
- **Christina Kim** – Lead Advanced Practice Provider, Digestive & Liver Diseases
- **Nadia Lieu** – Clinical Research Coordinator, General Internal Medicine
- **Oanh Nguyen** – Lead Advanced Practice Provider, Hospital Medicine (CUH)

education and training

Nephrology Fellows Achieve Top 5 Performance on In-Training Exams

For the fourth time in six years, the Nephrology fellows have achieved a mean In-Training Exam (ITE) score that is among the top five in the nation.

“This remarkable accomplishment reflects their intellectual curiosity and dedication of our fellows,” says **Kamalanathan Sambandam, M.D.**, a Professor in the Division of Nephrology and Fellowship Program Director. “That they have done this in four of the last six years demonstrates a consistent pursuit of excellence.”

The ITE is administered by the National Board of Medical Examiners and simulates the American Board of Internal Medicine’s initial certification exam in nephrology. It helps directors to assess program quality and fellows to evaluate their fund of knowledge. The ITE has been given annually since 2009.

UT Southwestern’s Nephrology Fellowship program was started by **Donald W. Seldin, M.D.**, in 1956. Dr. Sambandam has served as Program Director since 2015. During that time, the program has expanded from 10 to 14 fellows. ■

[Internal Medicine News Portal](#)

in case you missed it



Rohatgi, Colleagues Create Framework to Combat Heart and Metabolic Disease in South Asians

A clinical framework conceived by **Anand Rohatgi, M.D., M.S.C.S.**, a Professor in the Division of Cardiology, and colleagues underscores the urgent need to address the cardiometabolic health of more than 5 million South Asians now living in the U.S. Despite strong evidence of elevated risk for heart disease and diabetes in this fast-growing

population, the authors say more needs to be done to understand their unique patterns of disease – especially as risk factors evolve with acculturation.

The comprehensive recommendations, [published in the American Journal of Preventive Cardiology](#), highlight the need for early and comprehensive screening, including assessments of insulin function, body composition, coronary artery health, and genetic risk – particularly in younger individuals and women. Pregnancy is identified as a key window for early intervention, with recommendations to monitor for high blood sugar and blood pressure. Mental health is also emphasized as a critical but often overlooked factor.

To address these challenges, the authors call for culturally tailored care at both the individual and community levels, along with stronger partnerships between healthcare systems and research institutions. Several major studies are already underway which are exploring cardiometabolic, cancer, and mental health outcomes in South Asian populations. Despite this momentum, a major gap remains: identifying lifestyle, behavioral, and pharmaceutical treatments that are both effective and culturally acceptable for South Asians. ■

Parag Joshi, M.D., an Associate Professor in the Division of Cardiology, also contributed to this research.

To read the news UT Southwestern release, click [here](#).

News and Digital Media Featuring Internal Medicine Colleagues

- [Ensuring Optimal Cardiovascular Care is Central to Honoree's Calling](#) (Via American Heart Association, with Joshua Beckman, M.D.)
- [Cardiac Arrest Survival Rates Fell in Early Years of Pandemic](#) (Via UTSW Newsroom, with James de Lemos, M.D., Sakat Girotra, M.D., Eric Hall, M.D., Qiang Li, M.Sc., and Anezi Uzendu, M.D.)

this week



Tong to Present Moss Heart Center Seminar on June 5

Dan Tong, M.D. Ph.D., an Assistant Professor in the Division of Cardiology, will present the [Moss Heart Center Seminar](#) on Thursday, June 5, at noon in NA6.212. Her topic: “Understanding the Diseased Atria.”

Dr. Tong received her medical degree from the Tongji Medical College in China and her doctorate from the University of Western Ontario in Canada. She completed internal medicine residency training at the University of Iowa, followed by advanced training through a cardiology fellowship at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

As a physician-scientist, Dr. Tong’s research and clinical interests are focused on cardiovascular conditions that are tightly associated with metabolic diseases, particularly heart failure with preserved ejection fraction and atrial fibrillation.

She joined the UT Southwestern Faculty in 2021. ■



Michigan's Elliot Tapper to Discuss Cirrhosis on June 6

Elliot Tapper, M.D., an Associate Professor of Internal Medicine in the Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology and Academic Chief of Hepatology at the University of Michigan, will present the [Internal Medicine Grand Rounds](#) lecture on **Friday, June 6, at 8 a.m. in D1.502**. His topic: "Improving Quality of Life for People with Cirrhosis."

Originally from Winnipeg, Canada, Dr. Tapper holds a bachelor's degree in biology and political theory from the University of Chicago. He received his medical degree from Emory University in Atlanta and completed internal medicine residency training at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, where he served as Chief Resident and obtained fellowship training in gastroenterology.

Dr. Tapper's research aims to improve the outcomes, quality of life, and freedom from adverse events for patients with cirrhosis. His research is funded by the National Institutes of Health, Patient Centered Research Outcomes Institute, and Industry. He has led randomized trials to improve quality of life, prevent falls and hepatic encephalopathy, examine mind-body methods for symptom control, and evaluate food-as-medicine to treat cirrhosis and control symptoms. His expertise is in quality improvement interventions, medical decision-making modeling, and big data analysis. ■

Other Noteworthy Lectures & Conferences This Week

- **Tuesday, June 3, 2 p.m.:** [Dissertation Defense](#) with Kartik Kulkarni (mentored by **Dr. Nikhil Munshi**) – "Navigating Spatial Organization of the Genome During Cardiac Pacemaker Lineage Specification"
- **Thursday, June 5, Noon:** [Graduating Fellow Talk](#) with Dr. Thuylinh Nguyen (Nephrology) – "AKI Requiring Dialysis (AKI-D): What's New, What's Next?"
- **Friday, June 6, Noon:** [Hematology & Oncology Faculty Recruitment Seminar](#) with Dr. Miriam Osei (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute) – "High-Risk Outcomes in Sickle Cell Disease: Malignancy, Renal Failure, and Care Transitions"
- **Friday, June 6, 1 p.m.:** [Endocrine Grand Rounds](#) with Dr. Grant Herrington (Endocrinology) – "The Changing Landscape of Obesity Care"

on the horizon



Summer Career Development Series to Begin on June 13

The Internal Medicine Research Conference is launching a [summer career development series](#) on **Friday, June 13, at noon in D1.200**, with a presentation by **Amit Singal, M.D., M.S.**, (pictured at left) a Professor in the Division of Digestive and Liver Diseases, and **Hao Zhu, M.D.**, a Professor in the Division of Hematology and Oncology. Their topic: "Hiring and Managing Your Research Team."

Regular programming for the Internal Medicine Research Conference will resume in September. ■

Dr. Singal, a Dedman Family Scholar in Clinical Care, holds the Willis C. Maddrey, M.D. Distinguished Chair in Liver Disease.

Dr. Zhu holds the Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Distinguished Chair in Therapeutic Oncology Research.

reminders



Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Sharon Reimold

Friends and colleagues from throughout UT Southwestern will gather on **Monday, June 16, from 5 to 7 p.m. at Pegasus Park** to honor the life and legacy of **Sharon Reimold, M.D.**, who died last November. Sharon was a beloved leader, an exceptional physician, and a passionate advocate for her colleagues and the department.

"This special gathering will be a time to reflect on Sharon's profound impact on academic medicine, patient care, and our community," says Professor and Chair **Thomas Wang, M.D.**, on behalf of the event organizers. "Through shared stories and memories, we will celebrate the values that defined her life and the legacy she leaves behind. Sharon touched the lives and careers of many at UT Southwestern and across the nation." ■

If you have photos or memories to share, please send them to IMA@UTSouthwestern.edu.

Look for the next *Medicine Minute* on **Tuesday, June 10, 2025**.
Share feedback and news items with us at IMNews@UTSouthwestern.edu