

medicine minute

November 11, 2025

announcements



Singal Appointed Interim Division Chief of Digestive and Liver Diseases

Amit Singal, M.D., M.S., a Professor in the Division of Digestive and Liver Diseases and Associate Division Chief, has been appointed Interim Chief of the Division.

Dr. Singal brings extensive experience in clinical leadership and program development. He currently serves as Medical Director of the UT Southwestern Liver Tumor Program and Chief of Hepatology. Under his leadership, the Liver Tumor Program has become a nationally recognized center for multidisciplinary care and innovation in hepatocellular carcinoma management.

After graduating from the University of Michigan Medical School, Dr. Singal completed his internal medicine residency training at the University of Washington, followed by fellowships in gastroenterology and transplant hepatology at the University of Michigan, where he also earned master's degrees in health and health care research and in clinical science with distinction.

Dr. Singal is widely respected for his ability to integrate research, education, and clinical care. He has secured NIH and other federal funding, published more than 400 peer-reviewed articles, and served in leadership roles on national committees, including the governing board for international liver cancer associations. His commitment to advancing patient care and mentoring future leaders exemplifies the values that have distinguished the Division as among the best in the nation. ■



Ribeil Appointed Director of Sickle Cell Program

Jean-Antoine Ribeil, M.D., Ph.D., a Professor in the Division of Hematology and Oncology, has been appointed Director of its Sickle Cell Disease Program. Dr. Ribeil is an internationally recognized physician-scientist whose groundbreaking work in gene therapy has redefined treatment for sickle cell disease (SCD) and other hemoglobin disorders.

Dr. Ribeil earned his medical degree with a specialization in hematology from the University of Limoges School of Medicine and his doctoral degree in blood cell biology from Université Paris VII, where he graduated *summa cum laude*. He trained as a clinical fellow at Necker University Hospital in Paris and pursued research in hematopoiesis and immunology at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS, which translates to National Center for Scientific Research). His career spans leadership roles in academic medicine and industry, including serving as Medical Director of the Biotherapy Department at Necker University Hospital, as Associate Medical Director and Medical Director at Bluebird Bio, and as Clinical Director of the Sickle Cell Center of Excellence at Boston Medical Center. Most recently, he served as Director of that center and Associate Professor of Medicine at Boston University School of Medicine.

Dr. Ribeil's contributions to science and patient care are extensive. He directed the Sickle Cell Reference Center for Adults in Paris for more than a decade, led development of lentiviral gene therapy for hemoglobinopathies, and helped Boston Medical Center become the first institution worldwide approved to deliver FDA-approved gene therapy for adult patients with SCD and beta-thalassemia. His research has produced landmark findings, including the discovery of HSP70's role in erythropoiesis and the physiopathology of thalassemia, published in *Nature*, and pivotal clinical trial results featured in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and *Nature Medicine*. He has authored more than 60 peer-reviewed publications, contributed to international treatment guidelines, and written textbook chapters on hemoglobinopathies and gene therapy.

Recognized for excellence in research and clinical innovation, Dr. Ribeil has received honors such as the Horiba Abx Cellular Hematology Award from the French Society of Hematology and the René Descartes Award for young investigators. He is also committed to advancing diversity and equity in health care, ensuring access to cutting-edge therapies for historically underserved communities.

At UT Southwestern, Dr. Ribeil will lead efforts to expand comprehensive care for adults with sickle cell disease, deliver approved gene therapy treatments, and drive research into next-generation therapies aimed at improving outcomes and accessibility. ■

kudos



Kuppalli to Participate in Leadership Program in Tropical Medicine

Krutika Kuppalli, M.D., an Associate Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases and Geographic Medicine, has been selected by the American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene to participate in the Mid-Career Leadership Program. This year-long initiative brings together scientists from around the world for intensive leadership workshops, mentorship, networking, and career development opportunities.

"Leadership in tropical medicine begins with listening to patients, communities, and colleagues," Dr. Kuppalli says. "My experiences, from directing an Ebola Treatment Unit in Sierra Leone to coordinating global responses at the World Health Organization, have taught me that science and humanity must work hand in hand. I strive to mentor future clinicians to lead with both rigor and compassion."

Dr. Kuppalli's selection reflects her commitment to advancing global health and shaping the future of infectious disease research. ■

education and training



A 'Little School' is Making a Big Difference in Nephrology

The Nephrology Fellowship program is redefining how trainees learn with a curriculum designed for deeper knowledge retention. A standout feature is the "Escuelita" lecture series, created under the leadership of **Kamalanathan Sambandam, M.D.**, a Professor in the Division of Nephrology and Program Director of the Nephrology Fellowship.

Unlike traditional lectures, Escuelita (a Spanish word meaning "little school") uses an outline and chalk-talk format and is intentionally scheduled out of phase with the core lecture series. This approach leverages spaced repetition, a proven technique for reinforcing complex concepts over time.

To make learning even more accessible, all Escuelita sessions are compiled on the [RenalScholar YouTube channel](#), providing trainees and the broader Nephrology and Internal Medicine communities an easy way to revisit and share content.

“This innovative initiative reflects UT Southwestern’s commitment to advancing medical education and supporting fellows in mastering the art and science of kidney care,” says **Ezra Burstein, M.D., Ph.D.**, Professor and Interim Chair of Internal Medicine. “By combining structured learning with creative approaches like the Escuelita series, we’re equipping future nephrologists with tools that foster long-term understanding and excellence in patient care.” ■

Dr. Burstein holds the Berta M. and Cecil O. Patterson Chair in Gastroenterology.

research report



New Genetic Discovery Sheds Light on Lipodystrophy and Metabolic Disorders

Abhimanyu Garg, M.D., a Professor in the Division of Endocrinology, and colleagues have identified a rare novel genetic disorder that not only causes low blood glucose levels and liver dysfunction during infancy but during adulthood results in marked loss of body fat from the arms and legs, called familial partial lipodystrophy (FPL), and sometimes excess fat accumulation in the neck and trunk areas called lipomatosis or lipomas. Their findings, [published in the Journal of Clinical Investigation](#), indicate that this disorder is caused by a change in the *ACAA2* gene, which normally helps break down fats inside the mitochondria.

Adults with this gene change and FPL developed metabolic complications such as diabetes, high blood triglyceride levels, velvety and dark skin in the neck and armpits called acanthosis nigricans, and fatty liver. Imaging tests showed extreme fat loss in the limbs compared to normal patterns. They also had low blood levels of leptin, a hormone that controls hunger and metabolism. Some babies with the condition also had low blood sugar and liver problems, which can be dangerous if not treated early.

ACAA2 encodes for the enzyme involved in the last step of the mitochondrial fatty acid β -oxidation.

“We believe that this gene change doesn’t stop the enzyme from working completely,” Dr. Garg says. “Instead, it may make the enzyme work more efficiently. We will conduct further studies to investigate the effect of the gene change on enzyme activity.”

This may explain why patients with this disorder have high levels of certain fat-related molecules in their blood, especially one called C20:0 acylcarnitine, which could help doctors diagnose the condition.

Finding this gene change could help doctors recognize the novel condition sooner, which can prevent serious problems in infants.

“It also opens the door to new treatments, like special diets or leptin therapy,” Dr. Garg says. “This discovery adds an important piece to the puzzle of how our bodies manage fat and energy.” ■

Dr. Garg holds the Distinguished Chair in Human Nutrition Research.

in case you missed it



What Began as a Simple Question Has Driven Big Change in Trainee Wellness

UT Southwestern is transforming how medical trainees monitor their wellness with the Well-Being Fuel Gauge, a simple weekly check-in that asks, “How’s your fuel gauge?” Since its launch, the tool has collected more than 70,000 responses and 13,000 comments, helping identify stress and burnout early while removing the stigma of asking for help.

Created by **Shannon Scielzo, Ph.D., M.S.**, an Associate Professor in Instruction Administration and Associate Director of Education, the gauge reframes wellness as “fuel” rather than weakness, encouraging self-care without judgment.

“We now have an immense amount of data, and we would like to better understand some of the trends,” Dr. Scielzo says. “For example, we would like to see to what extent programs systematically vary over time, and whether fuel levels correspond to other indicators (such as periods where we know trainees struggle, and performance outcomes).”

Embedded in MedHub, the tool enables rapid feedback and intervention when scores dip, from offering time off to connecting residents with counseling resources. Its success has led to adoption across multiple UTSW programs and even other institutions. Studies published in leading journals confirm its effectiveness, and ongoing research aims to leverage this data to further improve trainee well-being. ■

To learn more, [read the story in Center Times+](#).

News and Digital Media Featuring Internal Medicine Colleagues

- [Zhang Honored with Inaugural AHA Jack Sarver Prize](#) (via *Center Times+*, with Zhao Zhang, Ph.D.)
- [Inside the Brain’s Role in Obesity](#) (via LinkedIn, with Kevin Williams, Ph.D.)
- [Navy Veteran Navigates Cancer Journey from Paralysis to Remission](#) (via *MedBlog*, with Aimaz Afrough, M.D.)

need to know



NORC Pilot and Feasibility Grant Applications Due Nov. 12

Applications for the next cycle of Pilot & Feasibility Grants through the Nutrition and Obesity Research Center (NORC) must be submitted by **11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 12**. These grants support innovative studies in nutrition, obesity, and obesity-related disorders, including research on mechanisms underlying body weight homeostasis.

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee of internal and external physicians and scientists. Up to four recipients will be selected, each receiving \$50,000 for one year, with funding beginning Jan. 1, 2026. Awardees will also have access to prorated costs for NORC Metabolic Core facilities.

Eligibility is limited to independent investigators and faculty members at UT Southwestern. Postdoctoral fellows or their equivalents are not eligible. The program welcomes new investigators launching research careers in nutrition and obesity, established investigators seeking to apply their expertise to these areas for the first time, and experienced researchers in nutritional sciences or obesity who wish to pursue an entirely new direction. Previous NORC P&F awardees are not eligible.

Applicants may submit only one proposal, and collaborative efforts are encouraged. Women and underrepresented minorities are strongly encouraged to apply. Proposals should include an abstract, specific aims, a research plan, references, budget, NIH-format biosketch, and a letter of support from a department chair, division chief, or center director. Detailed criteria and guidelines are available online. ■

[View Criteria & Guidelines](#)

this week



Freeland to Discuss Opioid Use Disorder in Elderly Patients at Dallas Internist Club

Deborah Freeland, M.D., an Assistant Professor in the Division of Geriatric Medicine, will speak at the Dallas Internist Club on **Thursday, Nov. 13, at noon in the A.W. Harris Faculty Club and Alumni Center**. Her topic: "Opioid Use Disorder in Elderly Patients."

Dr. Freeland holds a bachelor's degree in biology with a business minor from Southwestern University. She earned her medical degree at UT Southwestern Medical Center and completed internal medicine residency at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. She then returned to UT Southwestern for advanced training through a fellowship in Geriatric Medicine.

Dr. Freeland joined the UT Southwestern faculty in 2021.

The Dallas Internist Club welcomes all physicians engaged in the practice of internal medicine, particularly those with an interest in primary care or general medicine seeking to stay up to date with recent developments and clinical advances. ■

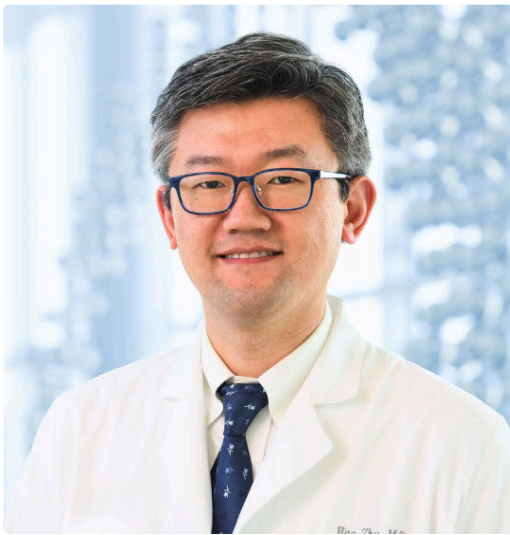


Tufts University's Iris Jaffe to Discuss Mineralocorticoid Receptors on Nov. 14

Iris Jaffe, M.D., Ph.D., a Professor of Medicine in the Division of Cardiology and Executive Director of the Molecular Cardiology Research Institute at Tufts University, will present the [Internal Medicine Grand Rounds](#) lecture on **Friday, Nov. 14, at 8 a.m. in DD1.502**. Her topic: "Mineralocorticoid Receptors: Evolutionary Mediators of Wound Healing, Turned Harmful by Modern Lifestyle."

Dr. Jaffe holds a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from the University of Pennsylvania, where she also earned a doctoral degree in molecular and cellular biology in addition to her medical degree. She completed internal medicine residency training at Massachusetts General Hospital, followed by a fellowship in cardiology at Brigham and Women's Hospital and a research fellowship at Tufts-New England Medical Center.

Dr. Jaffe's research focuses on uncovering how vascular dysfunction contributes to cardiovascular diseases such as heart attack, stroke, and hypertension, with a particular emphasis on the role of aldosterone and its receptor, the mineralocorticoid receptor (MR). [Her lab](#) investigates the direct effects of aldosterone on blood vessels and explores molecular mechanisms underlying these processes to identify novel therapeutic targets, using advanced cellular, animal, and translational models. ■



Zhu to Present Somatic Genetics Approach in Understanding Liver Disease

Hao Zhu, M.D., a Professor in the Division of Hematology and Oncology, will present the [Internal Medicine Research Conference](#) on Friday, November 14, at noon in D1.502. His topic: "Somatic Genetics as a Discovery Approach in Liver Disease."

Dr. Zhu holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Duke University and a medical degree from Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He completed internal medicine residency training at the University of California San Francisco and fellowship training in oncology at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. He then performed postdoctoral research at Boston Children's Hospital, where he explored connections among RNA biology, cancer, and regeneration in mouse models.

Dr. Zhu joined the faculty of the [Children's Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern](#) (CRI) 2012, the same year he received a Burroughs Wellcome Career Award for Medical Scientists and a Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) Scholar Award. In 2016, he received a Stand Up to Cancer Innovative Research Grant.

He serves as Director of the CRI Tissue Regeneration Program and a co-leader of the Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center Development and Cancer Research Program. He is also an attending physician in the Multidisciplinary Liver Cancer Clinic at Parkland Memorial Hospital.

The [Zhu laboratory](#) investigates how injury, regeneration, and wound healing shape organ function and cancer development, using the liver as a model system. Their research focuses on the role of somatic mosaicism in chronic liver disease and cancer, employing human genomics, *in vivo* genetic screening, and lineage tracing to uncover mechanisms driving these processes. ■

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



Annual Oncology Review Scheduled for Nov. 15

The 2025 Oncology Year in Review is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 15, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. in NG3.112. Co-directed by Sawsan Rashdan, M.D., an Associate Professor in the Division of Hematology and Oncology, the in-person CME program will provide participants the most up-to-date and clinically relevant information presented at key oncology conferences throughout the year.

Faculty from the Division of Hematology and Oncology will present didactic lectures offering expert analysis and highlight practice-changing data from these major meetings, with a focus on their direct impact on patient care.

[Download the conference agenda.](#)

Register for the Oncology Year in Review

Other Upcoming Lectures & Conferences of Note

- Tuesday, Nov. 11, Noon: [Ethics Grand Rounds](#) with Dr. Katie Watson (Northwestern University) – “The Ethics of Access: Obstetric Emergency Care and Reproductive Counseling After Dobbs”
- Wednesday, Nov. 12, 8 a.m.: [Geriatrics Grand Rounds](#) with Dr. Robert Haddox (Geriatric Medicine) – “The Aging Brain on Music”
- Wednesday, Nov. 12, 10:30 a.m.: [Women’s Health Research Symposium](#) with Dr. Suzanne Conzen (Hematology & Oncology) – “Bench to Bedside: Tubulo-ovarian Cancer Biology and the Important Role of Cortisol Signaling”
- Thursday, Nov. 13, Noon: [Renal Grand Rounds](#) with Dr. Keisa Mathis (Rheumatic Diseases) – “Neuroimmune Regulation of Kidney Outcomes in Lupus Hypertension”
- Friday, Nov. 14, 12:15 p.m.: [Endocrine Grand Rounds](#) with Dr. Michael McPhaul (Endocrinology) – “Insulin Resistance Measures and the Assessment of Metabolic Health”

reminders

Faculty Town Hall Scheduled for Nov. 13

A virtual Town Hall for Department faculty will be held on Thursday, Nov. 13, at noon, via Zoom.

“This is a follow-up action item from our SCORE report that we presented to faculty at the September Forum,” explains Rachel Bonnema, M.D., M.S., a Professor in the Division of General Internal Medicine and Associate Vice Chair of Faculty Development. “This will be the second of multiple planned Town Halls this year to improve communication and hear about concerns from faculty.”

During the event, Department leadership will present updates and respond to faculty concerns submitted in advance. ■

To submit a question or raise a concern for leadership to address, click [here](#).

Join the Town Hall on Zoom

on the horizon

Young Physician-Scientist Series to Spotlight Funding Strategies

The 2025 Young Physician-Scientist Series, a collaboration between UT Southwestern, Duke University, Vanderbilt School of Medicine, Washington University School of Medicine, Weill Cornell Medicine, will present “Building a Diverse Funding Portfolio” on Wednesday, Nov. 19, at 3 p.m. over Zoom. The session will explore strategies for obtaining funding a lab through multiple channels, including foundation, federal, and industry support.

Register to Receive the Zoom Link



Administrative Leadership Retreat Highlights Department Growth

Administrative leaders recently gathered for a strategic retreat focused on the state of the Department and its role in supporting the university's mission. The session provided an in-depth look at the Department's financial performance, research programs, and faculty recruitment efforts aimed at supporting the expanding clinical enterprise.

In addition to these updates, attendees participated in an interactive team-building exercise centered on character strengths and natural talents. The activity encouraged leaders to explore their unique qualities, fostering a greater sense of purpose and energy as they work collaboratively to advance departmental goals. ■



Jon Garinn
Medicine Minute Editor

Look for the next *Medicine Minute* on **Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025**.

Want to access an item in a previous edition of the newsletter? [Check our *Medicine Minute* archive.](#)

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