



10 YEARS OF COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

YEAR IN REVIEW
2023-2024



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10 YEARS OF COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

The 2023-24 academic year featured a remarkable number of events. First, we celebrated the grand opening of the School of Medicine Education Building II. We also marked the culmination of our 10th anniversary, and launched the 50th anniversary celebration of the Division of Biomedical Sciences. Additionally, we opened our new UCR Health Community Clinic and introduced a new Master of Public Health degree program. Each of these milestones represents a significant leap forward in our commitment to enhancing healthcare in Inland Southern California.

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MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR AND DEAN



As we reflect on the 2023-24 academic year, it is a time to celebrate the outstanding achievements of our students and the unwavering dedication of our faculty and staff, whose commitment to excellence and service continues to define our mission.

The year began with excitement as we welcomed the Class of 2027 in August, marking the start of another chapter in our journey to improve healthcare by training the next generation of physicians.

Soon after, in September, we celebrated the milestone opening of our UCR School of Medicine Education Building II with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 26. The standing-room-only event marked the opening of a facility that will transform medical education on our campus for years to come.

A few weeks later, we hosted our Celebration of Medical Education Gala, where many of our donors toured the new facility for the first time. The evening raised enough funds to grant a Mission Award Scholarship, providing critical support bringing the next generation of physicians to the Inland Empire. This academic year also marked the culmination of our 10th anniversary celebration, a testament to how far we have come as an institution.

In March, we received the tremendous news that the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) granted continued accreditation, with commendation, for our eight residency and fellowship programs. This recognition speaks to the tireless work of our staff, faculty, and students. Soon after, in June, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) reaffirmed the school's accreditation, further validating the education we provide. In May, we were proud to host the Western Group on Educational Affairs (WGEA) Conference at the Riverside Convention Center, bringing over 300 educators from across the region to Riverside. The success of this event reflects the caliber and reputation of our medical school within the broader regional and national academic community.

The conclusion of the academic year brought with it moments of reflection and celebration. In late May, we proudly graduated our eighth cohort of medical students, who embarked on their journey during the height of the global pandemic. Their resilience has set a high standard for future classes. In addition, the Graduate Division Hooding Ceremony recognized the accomplishments of our PhD and master's students in biomedical sciences. As we approach the 50th anniversary of our Biomedical Sciences program in 2024-25, these graduates join the legacy of an esteemed program that has shaped the future of scientific discovery.

This past year has been a true testament to the strength and dedication of the UCR School of Medicine and UCR Health workforce. Our faculty, staff, and students have not only advanced our mission but also continued to make a meaningful impact on the health of the Inland Southern California community. As we look ahead to the coming year, we remain deeply committed to building on these successes, advancing medical education, and continuing to improve the health and well-being of those we serve.

Deborah Deas, M.D., M.P.H.
Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences
Mark and Pam Rubin Dean

BY THE NUMBERS

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

36 PhD students/candidates

28 MS students

70 Total affiliated faculty from across UCR

FACULTY & STAFF

365 Clinical faculty

1,413 Community-based faculty

26 Biomedical Sciences faculty

424 Employees

GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

96 Residents

31 Fellows

MEDICAL STUDENTS

361 MD students

132 First in family to complete college

157 Underrepresented in medicine

175 Ties to the Inland Empire

204 From disadvantaged backgrounds

PATHWAY PROGRAMS

2,394 Pre-med students reached by Pathways (including K-12 students)

91 Matriculated at the UCR School of Medicine

UCR HEALTH CLINICAL CARE

12,773 Patients treated (excluding hospital patients)

46,895 Clinical visits

TRAINING SITES

125 LACE sites

77 Clerkship sites

EXTRAMURAL FUNDING

\$5.3M

Philanthropic gifts

All numbers presented are as of the end of the 2023-2024 academic year.



SOM CONCLUDES ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AS BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES KICKS OFF ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

During 2023-24, the UCR School of Medicine celebrated the 10th anniversary of its founding in 2013. The school held a series of events to commemorate the milestone, including the Celebration of the J.W. Vines Society in April 2024.

But our celebrations are not over. Throughout 2024-25, we'll be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Division of Biomedical Sciences, which was founded in 1974 when then-governor Ronald Reagan signed the California State Budget that created the UCR/UCLA Program in Biomedical Sciences, later called the UCR/UCLA Thomas Haider Program in Biomedical Sciences.

From 1981 to 2016, the Haider Program saw hundreds of students go through an accelerated seven-year program where they got their bachelor's degree from UCR then completed the first two years of medical education here before going to UCLA for the final two years. Our biomedical sciences faculty played an integral role in teaching the students then, and they continue to do so today, teaching our current medical students throughout their first two years of medical education.

We are excited to celebrate the legacy of the Biomedical Sciences program and their 50 years of commitment to the mission, to excellence, and to community.



HUNDREDS ATTEND THE SOM ED II GRAND OPENING

More than 300 guests attended the grand opening of the new School of Medicine Education Building II with a ribbon cutting ceremony on September 26, 2023

Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of the School of Medicine, welcomed the standing-room crowd to the event and acknowledged the many dignitaries in attendance, including state and local politicians, administrators from UC Riverside and UC Health, and members of the UC Regents, as well as community members, UCR students, faculty, and staff.

“Over the last two years, we’ve watched with anticipation as the new School of Medicine Education Building II took shape,” said Deas, explaining that the new space would let the school expand and train more physicians to serve the local region.

“This building will allow us to be together as a community, and that’s huge,” said Kim A. Wilcox, PhD, ninth chancellor of UC Riverside. “I’m so proud and happy for the dean and the college and I look forward to many more years,” he continued. “Twenty-five years from now I’ll be back, and we’ll open up another building.”

Other speakers included Talmadge E. King, Jr., MD, interim executive vice president of UC Health, John A. Pérez, chair of the Health Services Committee of the UC Board of Regents, retired Assemblymember Jose Medina (61st) and Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes (58th), and California State Senator Richard Roth. Following the ceremony, Deas invited guests to explore the classrooms and student study areas of the 95,478 square-foot-building via guided tours.

Andre-Philippe Sam, the medical student representative for the class of 2026, shared his excitement about the new building. “The old building was nice and it did a lot to bring students together, but this will take it to the next level for sure,” he said, adding that he looks forward to the couches and the outdoor study spaces. “There will be great opportunities for students to work together.”



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Xaida Wright, class of 2025

58 STUDENTS RECEIVE IECF SCHOLARSHIPS

In February, the Inland Empire Community Foundation (IECF) awarded \$10,000 scholarships to 58 UCR School of Medicine students, for a total gift of \$580,000. The awards came from the S.L. Gimbel Foundation Scholarship Fund at Inland Empire Community Foundation, *Where Giving Grows*, with the goal of supporting low-income students at the UCR SOM.

“The SOM financial aid team is overwhelmed with joy for our SOM students, and we have sincere gratitude for the generosity of the Inland Empire Community Foundation,” said Kathleen Buckner, director of financial aid. “We look forward to having the opportunity to work with them again in the future.” For its 2023 awards, the foundation originally guaranteed \$300,000 for UCR SOM students before choosing to award \$580,000. The organization initially supported undergraduate students at UCR and extended its support to SOM students in 2018.

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the organization provided \$15,000 of renewable scholarships for UCR medical students. Xaida Wright, class of 2025, was one of the 2023

scholarship recipients. “It meant a lot to me that an organization such as the S.L. Gimbel Foundation felt compelled to offer scholarships to students within and from the community of the Inland Empire to promote future physician retention,” said Wright, who grew up in Rancho Cucamonga. “This scholarship will help me to pursue my future goal of becoming a neurologist by helping to alleviate some of the loans and costs for third and fourth year.”

“THIS SCHOLARSHIP WILL HELP ME TO PURSUE MY FUTURE GOAL OF BECOMING A NEUROLOGIST BY HELPING TO ALLEVIATE SOME OF THE LOANS AND COSTS FOR THIRD AND FOURTH YEAR.”

- XAIDA WRIGHT, CLASS OF 2025



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BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES, UCR PALM DESERT TEAM UP FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS LECTURES



In the Spring of 2024, the Division of Biomedical Sciences hosted a trio of health and wellness lectures at the UCR Palm Desert Center.

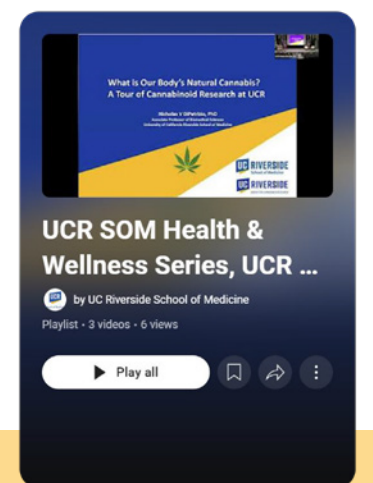
The series kicked off on February 29 with Nicholas DiPatrizio, PhD speaking on “What is Our Body’s Natural Cannabis” and Maurizio Pellecchia, PhD presenting on “Targeted Anti-Cancer Treatments from Academic Research.” On March 26, David Lo, MD, PhD, and his graduate student Keziyah Yisrael, PhD, presented their research on “Asthma and the Salton Sea: Community Studies on the Disparate Effects of Environmental Exposures and Health Impacts.”

The series wrapped on April 2 with Monica Carson, PhD presenting on “Promoting Lifelong Brain Health - It’s Not All in

Your Genes” and Sika Zheng, PhD presenting on “Catalyzing Change: Advancing Health and Biotech Frontiers Through RNA Research at UCR.”



SCAN QR CODE OR VISIT [HTTPS://ATU.CR/HWSERIES](https://atu.cr/hwseries) TO WATCH THE VIDEO SERIES





10TH ANNIVERSARY GALA RAISES OVER \$150K FOR MISSION AWARD SCHOLARSHIP FUND

More than 320 guests attended the 10th Anniversary Gala and Education Building II Grand Opening at the UC Riverside School of Medicine on Saturday, October 21, 2023. The gala was a joint celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the UCR School of Medicine and the opening of the new Education Building II.

Like the five galas before it, this year's event focused on raising funds to support the Mission Award Scholarship Fund. The fund covers the cost of either two or four years of medical school for scholarship recipients in exchange for their commitment to practice medicine in Inland Southern California after their residency training.



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Scholarship recipient Jasmine Gwizdala, class of 2027, spoke to the assembled guests about her experience growing up in Ontario as part of an immigrant family that escaped war in Afghanistan. “Witnessing the socioeconomic barriers my family faced in accessing healthcare motivated me to become a physician committed to providing equitable patient-centered care to contribute to the community I was raised in,” she said, adding that each Mission Award scholarship is an investment in the community’s future. “By supporting me, UCR is not only investing in one student but in the countless lives that I hope to touch as a future physician.”

“It was truly inspiring to witness the overwhelming support of our partners at the 10th Anniversary Gala and Education Building II Grand Opening,” said Edna Yohannes, executive director of development at the School of Medicine. “This year’s remarkable achievement of \$150,000 in proceeds, with hopes to reach \$175k by year-end, brings us closer to awarding a four-year Mission scholarship. The unwavering dedication of our School of Medicine staff and faculty propels us towards even greater heights.”

UCR Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Elizabeth Watkins, PhD, Executive Associate Dean for Student Affairs and the Salma Haider Endowed Chair for the Thomas Haider Program Daniel Teraguchi, EdD, and Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education Pablo Joo, MD also spoke at the event. Other attendees included current and former elected officials Senator Richard Roth and retired Assemblymember Jose Medina, members of the UCR Foundation Board of Trustees, members of the School of Medicine Board of Advisors and School of Medicine Community Advisory Board, representatives from Inland Empire Health Plan and HCA Healthcare, and numerous donors and event sponsors.

A raffle for a vacation in Maui, which was won by Yolette Doucet, raised additional funds to support the scholarship.



Jasmine Gwizdala, class of 2027



TO WATCH THE MISSION SCHOLARSHIP VIDEO
SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT
[HTTPS://ATU.CR/MISSIONVIDEO24](https://atu.cr/missionvideo24)

PROVIDING HEALTHCARE TO THE UNHOUSED

A recently reopened clinic in Riverside focuses on long term, sustainable solutions for providing healthcare to unhoused individuals in the area



In 2023, the number of homeless individuals in Riverside County increased by 12% to over 3,700 people, demonstrating the need for health services for this population. “Anyone who’s spent time in Riverside in the last 10 years can see that there’s been a dramatic increase in the number of folks who are living in tent encampments or on the streets,” said Moazzum Bajwa, MD, MPH, an associate clinical professor of health sciences at the UC Riverside School of Medicine. “Those folks typically have the worst access to health services even though they often need it the most.”

Bajwa serves as a physician at the UCR Health Community Clinic, which aims to provide primary care and referrals for specialty care to the unhoused population in Riverside County. The clinic reopened in September 2023 under the management of the UCR School of Medicine and UCR Health with support from a grant from the UniHealth Foundation.

A COMMITMENT TO HELPING THE HOMELESS

Bajwa noted that beyond those working at the clinic, leadership like Timothy Collins, EdD, CEO of UCR Health, also supports the clinic’s mission. “Making an impact on the lives of others who are in need and providing care and support to assist them in improving their health and welfare is critical to UCR Health’s mission,” Collins said. “We need to be there for those individuals.”

Collins said the clinic is focusing on listening closely to patients to address their unique issues, which, according to Bajwa, tend to be more complex because patients may have been in the cycle of incarceration or have lacked access to medical care for years. The clinic collaborates with nearby social service agencies to provide a range of services. The clinic also adapted to challenges like patients’ lack of a physical address, which can complicate tasks like contacting a patient and delivering lab results, by adding an onsite lab capable of providing immediate results.

IMPROVING PATIENTS’ LIVES

Besides serving unhoused patients, the clinic also provides an opportunity for UCR medical students to directly help homeless individuals while gaining a better understanding of the needs of this population. One such student, Hawkins Sellier, recalled seeing the results of untreated medical issues among the unhoused population as a former emergency medical technician (EMT). “These people had been let down at so many different points in their lives to arrive at the day where they needed an ambulance,” said Sellier. “I see the clinic as an opportunity to proactively care for these patients and prevent some of the conditions that I saw while working in EMS.”

In the six months since the clinic opened, it has provided over 300 patient visits serving nearly 100 patients — meaning that many come back for multiple appointments. For Bajwa, these return visits are the most rewarding. “Personally the best feedback I could ever get is knowing that the patients feel safe, that they can trust us, and that they want to come back to us even as they get back on their feet,” said Bajwa.



UCR HEALTH COMMUNITY CLINIC RECEIVES \$500,000 GIFT FROM SAN MANUEL BAND OF MISSION INDIANS

A \$500,000 gift to the UCR Health Community Clinic from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, a sovereign American Indian tribe of Serrano people in San Bernardino County, California will help address the health and well-being of the unhoused and underserved populations of Riverside. The clinic provides primary care, mental health services, immediate non-emergency medical services, preventive medical care, diabetes supplies, and blood pressure monitors to unhoused individuals and low-income communities.

Acknowledging that there is no single solution to address the unhoused crisis in Inland Southern California, Timothy Collins, EdD, CEO of UCR Health, said leaders and leading organizations must step forward and not stand on the sidelines expecting others to solve the problem. UCR Health is the clinical arm of the UCR School of Medicine. “The gracious gift of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians demonstrates they are committed to giving back to their communities and investing in solutions to complex problems,” Collins said. “The San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and their partnership with UCR Health will proactively address the needs of the unhoused population in Riverside County and increase access to primary care, behavioral health, and supportive care and services necessary to improve their lives.”

Funding will allow the clinic to ensure easy in-person and telehealth access for unhoused and low-income residents needing care. The funding also will allow the clinic to serve as a teaching site for SOM residents and medical students who are training to become physicians and want to work and reside in the community. The City of Riverside is home to approximately 20% of the County of Riverside’s homeless population, estimated at 3,725 in 2023. The 2,500 square-foot clinic is part of the only full-service homeless facility in western Riverside County.

“This clinic is an investment that can help reduce costly hospital admissions and, by offering same-day appointments, it provides services to individuals who might otherwise end up waiting for hours in an emergency room,” said Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for Health Sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of SOM. “The gift to the clinic from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians will go a long way to assist the underserved people in our community.” At full operation, the clinic will annually serve approximately 4,800 patients, including 1,300 chronically unhoused. The medical school plans to grow the clinic eventually into a Federally Qualified Health Center, allowing it to receive federal funds to provide healthcare services.



EDUCATION

NEW MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM WELCOMES INAUGURAL COHORT IN 2024

The SOM's new degree program seeks to train the next generation of public health leaders in the Inland Empire

The UCR School of Medicine announced that its new Master of Public Health (MPH) degree program would begin in Fall 2024, bolstering its efforts to improve health among the people of Inland Southern California. The two-year program aims to train a new generation of public health leaders with a commitment to increasing health equity in the Inland Empire who will partner with communities to develop and implement effective public health initiatives.

A team of experienced and dedicated public health leaders came together to build the new degree program at UCR. Mark Wolfson, PhD, the William R. Johnson Jr. and S. Sue Johnson Endowed Chair in the Department of Social Medicine, Population and Public Health (SMPPH), began working to develop the new program in early 2020. "There are quite a few MPH and even doctoral programs in Southern California, but the vast majority of them are clustered along the coast," he said. "We thought there was a real need, but also a real opportunity for UCR because of our focus on health equity, social mobility, and community engagement." The faculty program director of the new MPH program, Mario Sims, PhD, a professor of social medicine, population and public health at UCR, previously worked with the community-based cohort study Jackson Heart Study for 20 years investigating health disparities. "There's an interest in understanding health equity here in the Inland Southern California region, but there's not been a driving program for research and teaching that's been a part of this region like there needs to be," Sims said.

The program has also been championed by Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of the SOM. "The MPH program will draw on the School of Medicine's strength in engaging the community," she said. "It will create a collaborative approach to study and address social determinants of health while training public health professionals who are dedicated to serving the Inland Empire."

The development team collaborated with local public health leaders, including the Riverside County Public Health Department, to create a robust curriculum for the community-focused degree program.

The program's concentration, health equity, addresses the heart of the issue in the medically underserved region. "We think that's really important, especially for serving our area," said Wolfson.



Mark Wolfson, PhD and Mario Sims, PhD

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UCR SOM CELEBRATES MATCH DAY 2024

96% of SOM class of 2024 students were placed into residency programs and 43% will remain in Southern California

In March, the UCR SOM class of 2024 learned where they will spend the next few years of their medical career during Match Day.

The annual event brings together fourth-year medical students and their families to celebrate their next steps toward becoming doctors. At 9 am exactly, students across the country opened envelopes containing the name of the hospital or school hosting their residency program. Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of the SOM, congratulated the class of 2024. "This is a special day, a day that marks another milestone in your professional development," she said.

Guest speaker Melanie Fontes Rainer, director of the Office for Civil Rights at the United States Department of Health and Human Services, attended to recognize the UCR SOM for its contributions to training a diverse physician workforce. "My breath was taken away by the diversity in this room," said Rainer. "Kudos to UC Riverside for... really driving a community-based, mission-focused school, because I think it matters." Of the 68 SOM students who went through the match process this year, 96% were placed into residency programs. Of these, 43% will remain in Southern California for their residency programs, with 26% staying in the Inland Empire, directly

addressing the SOM's mission to train a diverse workforce of physicians to provide care in the underserved region. In addition, 50% of the new residents will enter primary care specialties.

Julia Seiberling, class of 2024, grew up in Riverside and said she was thrilled to be remaining in the area in her first-choice program, psychiatry at the UCR SOM. "I'm really attached to the region, and I know that there's a lot of need here that I saw firsthand growing up," she said. "It feels like a really exciting place to engage in the work that I care about and to take care of the community that I came from."



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THE LONG ROAD TO HEALTH EQUITY FOR ALL

Mario Sims, PhD is continuing the work of generations of scholars to eliminate health disparities and achieve health equity in the Inland Empire and beyond

In high school, Mario Sims, PhD, read a book that would have a profound impact on his life and career: *The Philadelphia Negro*, by W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois, a sociologist and civil rights activist in the early 1900s, linked social conditions, environment, segregation, and other factors to health disparities among Black people living in Philadelphia at the time.

Growing up in Compton, California, Sims, now a distinguished professor and faculty director of the MPH program at UC Riverside School of Medicine, noticed many people in his neighborhood dealing with similar health conditions and other issues that Du Bois studied in Philadelphia, indicating that the issues were ongoing. Du Bois' innovative work motivated Sims to pursue similar research in his own career.

CONTINUING DU BOIS' WORK

Following in Du Bois' footsteps, Sims studied social determinants of health in the Black community in Jackson, Mississippi for 32 years before joining the UCR SOM in 2022. "One reason I came to the Inland Empire versus LA is because LA has been well studied by a lot of universities, but not a lot of scholars have studied conditions that are going on in the Inland Empire," Sims explained.

To Sims, the persisting similar problems with underlying structural racism and inequality mean that society and policymakers have ignored history and are therefore repeating it. But Sims is working to bring change through efforts including conducting research, mentoring students, and serving as the faculty program director of the new Master of Public Health (MPH) program at the SOM.

For Chelsea Nwonwu, class of 2026, Sims' encouragement has been as memorable as their joint research project on racial disparities and health. During a discussion of healthcare disparity complexities, Sims helped inspire Nwonwu to keep working toward change. "His words sparked an intense motivation within me, reinforcing that every step taken towards addressing these issues is a vital contribution to a brighter, more equitable future in healthcare," she recalled.

Many issues have persisted over the centuries, but Sims has noticed improvements, like higher levels of awareness, throughout his career. His goal is to eliminate health disparities and for all people to have health equity--and he thinks it's attainable. "If we press forward, then we will make progress," Sims said. "There is no doubt."



"ONE REASON I CAME TO THE INLAND EMPIRE VERSUS LA IS BECAUSE LA HAS BEEN WELL STUDIED BY A LOT OF UNIVERSITIES, BUT NOT A LOT OF SCHOLARS HAVE STUDIED CONDITIONS THAT ARE GOING ON IN THE INLAND EMPIRE."

- MARIO SIMS, PHD



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UCR SOM HOSTS WGEA CONFERENCE



More than 300 faculty, staff, and students involved in medical education came to Riverside for four days in early May for the Western Group on Educational Advancement (WGEA) Conference, hosted by the UCR School of Medicine and held at the Riverside Convention Center.

The theme for the conference was “Developing Resilience While Adapting to Change,” and the conference featured plenary speakers, poster presentations, and presentations on innovation and research. The WGEA is one of four regional groups of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Group on Educational Affairs.

The most popular session of the conference was a panel discussion titled “Satisfaction with Student Satisfaction.” A panel of administrators and students, moderated by UCR SOM Senior Associate Dean of Medical Education Pablo Joo, MD, discussed the impact that student satisfaction surveys make on medical education programs and the challenges that they can present when used by the LCME to make high-stakes decisions.

Another popular panel was “Evolutionary Pathways: Exploring AI’s Role in Medical Education,” which delved into the transformative impact that artificial intelligence is having on medical education and presented a deeper understanding of the challenges and benefits used by the technology. Denise Martinez, MD, the associate dean of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the UCR SOM, was the keynote speaker at the Sunday plenary session.

Her topic, “Innovative Resilience: California’s Model for Diversity Amidst Legislative Hurdles,” offered a platform for educators, policymakers, and healthcare professionals to collaborate and shape inclusive practices for the future of medical education. As part of the festivities, guests were able to tour the UC Riverside Botanic Gardens and attend a reception and tour of the new SOM Education Building II.



UCR SOM Senior Associate Dean of Medical Education Pablo Joo, MD

“The 2024 WGEA Conference was an incredible success and brought a variety of important topics and thought leaders in medical education to the table,” Dr. Joo said. “I am incredibly proud of and thankful for the hard-working team of people here at UCR who worked for 18 months to make this an incredible event. We are still receiving kudos from participants from around the country.”



RESIDENCY AND FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS ACCREDITED WITH COMMENDATION BY ACGME

All eight residency and fellowship programs at the SOM that are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) received continued accreditation, with commendation, in March 2024. The ACGME reviews graduate medical education programs annually to ensure that they adhere to all program requirements. The reviewers commended every UCR SOM program for their “demonstrated substantial compliance with the program requirements without any new citations.” “I was mighty pleased,” said Rajesh “Robby” Gulati, MD, associate dean for Graduate Medical Education. “It means that we have the capability and the expertise to run excellent programs.”

Priscilla L. Verales, psychiatry residency program coordinator, said that receiving accreditation with commendation recognized their hard work. “This means that UCR School of Medicine’s residency programs are standing out and providing exceptional training and education to our residents,” Verales said. “It demonstrates that we are well on our way to fulfilling our mission of bringing physicians to our community and training them to treat patients in our region.”



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UCR SOM RECEIVES CONTINUED ACCREDITATION FROM LCME



On Tuesday, June 18, the UC Riverside School of Medicine learned that it had received continued full accreditation from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). LCME accreditation is a voluntary, peer-reviewed process of quality assurance that determines whether the medical education program meets established standards while also fostering institutional and programmatic improvement.

“This would not have been possible without the hard work and collaboration of many, including faculty, staff, and students,” said Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor of health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean, in an announcement to the school. “I would like to thank Dr. Pablo Joo, senior associate dean for medical

education, for his leadership, LCME sub-committee chairs, sub-committee members, faculty, administrative and executive assistants, staff, trainees, students, and affiliates for your unwavering commitment to excellence throughout this process.”

“The successful accreditation is a testament to the dedication and passion of the entire UCR SOM community—and marks just the beginning,” Joo said. “It provides a strong foundation upon which we will build, leveraging our strengths, creativity, and passions to become national leaders in mission-based medical education.”



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DAVID A. ACOSTA SPEAKS AT DEI COLLOQUIUM



ACOSTA IS PICTURED WITH ASSOCIATE DEAN DENISE MARTINEZ, MD, AND VICE CHANCELLOR FOR HEALTH SCIENCES AND MARK AND PAM RUBIN DEAN DEBORAH DEAS, MD, MPH

David A. Acosta, MD, FAAP, chief diversity and inclusion officer at the Association of American Medical Colleges, was the speaker at the UCR School of Medicine’s J.W. Vines Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Colloquium. The event was held on May 22, 2024 in the School of Medicine Education Building II.

Acosta spoke on “Empowering Equity: Tackling DEI Challenges in Medical Education,” and reviewed the current status of DEI in academic medicine, the present DEI-related challenges facing medical education, the impact of anti-DEI laws and legislation, and how an equity-centered framework might help achieve racial equity and justice in today’s learning environment.



DEAS NAMED DISTINGUISHED LIFE FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of the UC Riverside School of Medicine, was selected as a distinguished life fellow of the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

The distinguished fellowship is the highest membership honor the APA bestows upon members and is awarded “to outstanding psychiatrists who have made significant contributions to the psychiatric profession in at least five of the following areas: administration, teaching, scientific and scholarly publications, volunteering in mental health and medical activities of social significance, community involvement, as well as for clinical excellence.” “I am both humbled and honored to receive this recognition,” Deas said. “I am grateful to my mentors throughout my career as well as my colleagues from the APA who have been so supportive throughout my career and I accept this recognition with gratitude, fully aware of the collective effort of many that has shaped my journey in psychiatry.”



CELEBRATION OF WOMEN IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE 2023

The first event in the new SOM Ed II building highlighted women’s achievements in medicine

The School of Medicine hosted the 2023 Celebration of Women in Medicine and Science on September 12 with Shirley Malcom, PhD, the senior advisor and director of SEA Change at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), delivering the keynote address. It was the first event held in the new School of Medicine Education II building, showcasing the modern, forward-looking space while highlighting the importance of promoting women’s contributions to the field into the future.



Event co-organizer Rosemary Tyrrell, EdD, director of the Office of Faculty Development and a health sciences assistant clinical professor, noted that women have traditionally been underrepresented in medicine and science. “While that representation is becoming more balanced, there is still a ‘leaky pipeline’ for women to advance to leadership positions within the field,” she said. “This event celebrates the achievement of women in these fields and also gives us an opportunity to explore and discuss issues related to some challenges that women still face.”

In Malcom’s keynote address, she reflected on her long career in science and medicine and the hurdles she overcame as a Black woman in the field. She focused on her perseverance and encouraged younger women to follow in her footsteps. The event also included a panel discussion featuring several faculty members from the SOM. They covered topics including maintaining both work-life balance and access to opportunities for women, the importance of mentorship for women at all levels of their career, and the need for sponsorships for women to achieve higher level positions and national recognition, and engaged attendees in discussion.

Tyrrell said she wanted people to come out of the event with a hopeful attitude. “What I always hope is that people will learn something valuable and walk away feeling inspired to make the change they want to see,” she said.

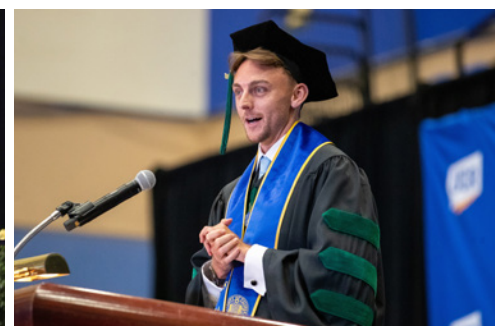


SIXTY-SIX STUDENTS RECEIVE THEIR MD DEGREES AT COMMENCEMENT

The UCR School of Medicine class of 2024 began their medical school journey online during the COVID-19 pandemic, but finished it on May 31 surrounded by cheering family and friends. This year, 66 students received their degrees.

Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of the School of Medicine, highlighted the class's unprecedented path in her opening remarks during the ceremony. "I could never have predicted the challenges you would face nor the necessary changes we would make to prevent disruption in your medical education," Deas said, noting that the students took their first medical school classes via Zoom and had their White Coat Ceremony delayed by a year. "Your class will be forever recognized as the most pioneering class in our school's history-- the class that bravely and successfully navigated uncharted territory."

The class of 2024 upholds the SOM's mission to increase access to medical care in Inland Southern California, with 26% of the class staying in the Inland Empire and 43% in Southern California for their residency training, their next step toward becoming physicians. In addition, 81% of the class will enter primary care specialties and other specialty areas that are lacking in the Inland Empire. "This is a remarkable outcome," said Deas.



Keynote speaker David Rubin, MD, MSCE, executive vice president of University of California Health, touched on the hurdles the class has overcome and emphasized the importance of community in his address. "Today, you join a community of physicians profoundly impacted by a world that is hurting... Never doubt the impact you can have, and take heart in knowing that you are not alone," he said.

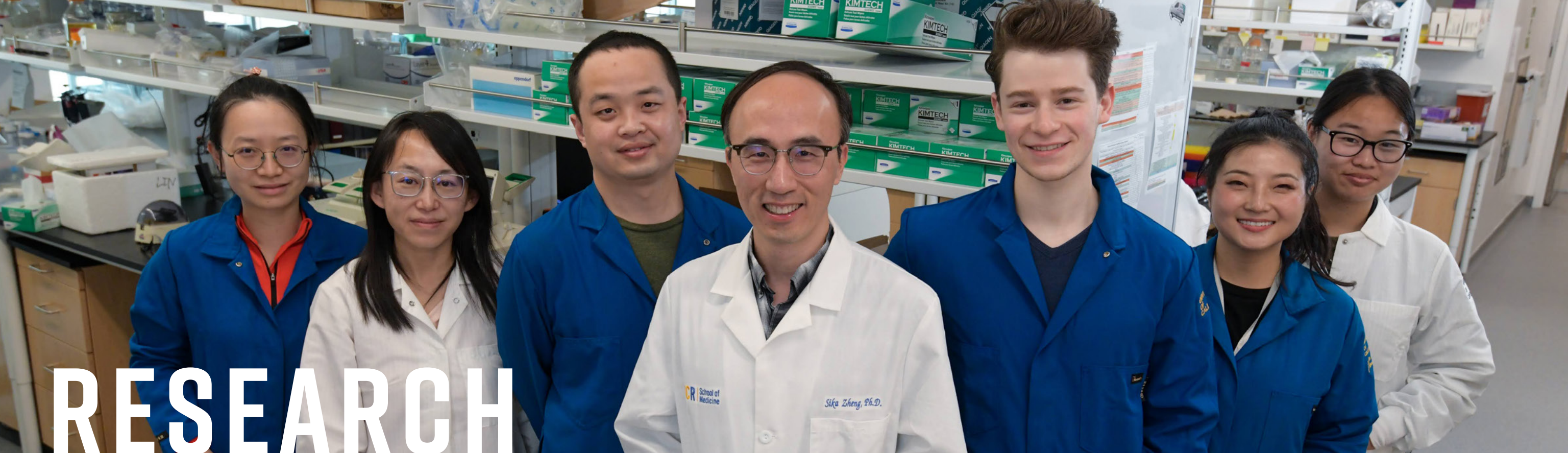
"[Today] has been a long time coming," said Brook Yirgu, class of 2024. Yirgu, who will enter UCLA's internal medicine residency program, grew up in Inglewood, California before attending high school in Riverside. "Ultimately, serving underserved communities is the main goal of mine," he said. "If I can do it locally, I'll be that much happier."



TO READ THE FULL STORY
SCAN QR CODE OR VISIT
[HTTPS://ATU.CR/COMMENCEMENT](https://atu.cr/commencement)

"TODAY, YOU JOIN A COMMUNITY OF PHYSICIANS PROFOUNDLY IMPACTED BY A WORLD THAT IS HURTING... NEVER DOUBT THE IMPACT YOU CAN HAVE, AND TAKE HEART IN KNOWING THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE."

- DAVID RUBIN, MD, MSCE, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF UC HEALTH AND COMMENCEMENT 2024 KEYNOTE SPEAKER



RESEARCH

RNA BIOLOGY AND THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Sika Zheng, PhD has helped UCR become a hub for RNA research with the potential to help treat neurodegenerative diseases

As a child, Sika Zheng, PhD, founding director of the Center for RNA Biology and Medicine and a professor of biomedical sciences at the UC Riverside School of Medicine, was fascinated by the cycle of life and death. His curiosity led him to pursue a PhD in neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University with a focus on neurodegeneration.

Eventually, Zheng's work on neuronal longevity became the basis for his career. Zheng dove into examining neurons at the molecular level during his postdoctoral research at UCLA and began investigations into alternative RNA splicing, essentially the cellular process that allows a gene

to produce multiple RNA molecules of different sequences and functions in different cells. RNA is the copy of a cell's DNA that translates genetic code to create proteins and drives other cell processes.

Zheng focused on bridging the fields of RNA and neuroscience to make new discoveries, an objective he continued to pursue when he joined the UC Riverside School of Medicine in 2014. He is now continuing his research, which may benefit health issues in the local community and beyond, as part of his new UCR Center for RNA Biology and Medicine.

MENTORING THE "TRUE HEROES" OF SCIENCE

Beyond Zheng's research, his commitment to guiding his students and trainees is also clear. "They are the true heroes behind all of these scientific discoveries," he pointed out, noting that students and postdocs are often the ones handling pipettes or taking care of animals in the lab.

Doctoral candidate David Nikom recalled Zheng encouraging him to develop a class paper on alternative RNA splicing in disease into a textbook chapter. "After sending him my revised draft he said it deserved to be in a journal, rather than [as a] book chapter, which felt amazing," Nikom said. They published the review paper together in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* in 2023. "Dr. Zheng sets the bar high because he knows you can reach it," Nikom said.

"In the end, the goal is to do good science while simultaneously setting each student up for the future with a solid scientific background even if they don't necessarily stay in academia. If they're equipped with that kind of scientific mindset, I think they're going to do good things in the world," Zheng said.

"IN THE END, THE GOAL IS TO DO GOOD SCIENCE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY SETTING EACH STUDENT UP FOR THE FUTURE WITH A SOLID SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND EVEN IF THEY DON'T NECESSARILY STAY IN ACADEMIA. IF THEY'RE EQUIPPED WITH THAT KIND OF SCIENTIFIC MINDSET, I THINK THEY'RE GOING TO DO GOOD THINGS IN THE WORLD."

- SIKAZHENG, PHD

TRAINING COMMUNITY PHYSICIANS WHILE CONDUCTING COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Meera Nair, PhD focuses on immunology research while supporting the local community

Meera Nair, PhD, an associate professor of biomedical sciences, originally came to UCR because of its plans to open a medical school. The day she was hired, in October 2012, the SOM received its preliminary accreditation. “To me, it was really exciting to join the biomedical sciences faculty, which had this motivated mission to serve the community, to have a new medical school, and to contribute in that way,” Nair said.

Nair focuses on immunology research, a field that took center stage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Soon after COVID-19 appeared, she worked with the SOM’s Center for Health Disparities Research and the Department of Social Medicine, Population, and Public Health to conduct community-based participatory research. This included visiting the homes of local residents to receive consent for their research participation—a task that normally would fall to graduate students but for the risks of the new disease.

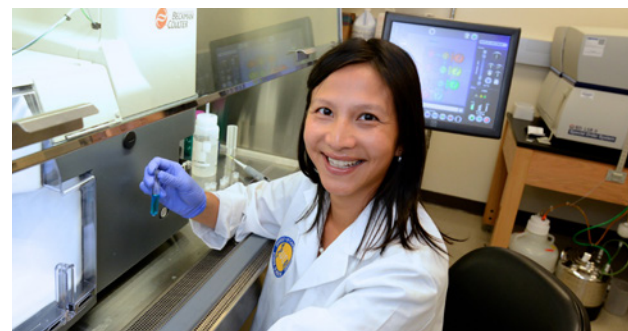
Since then, Nair has helped further the school’s connection to the community by hosting community events, such as a COVID-19 community chat held in April 2023. “It wasn’t only doing the research that was important, it was important to communicate the research to the participants who enrolled in our study,” Nair explained. “That’s exactly the mission of our school.”

Nair also enjoys mentoring students while furthering research. Former student Luqman Nasouf, MD worked in Nair’s lab during the summer after his first year of medical school and is now a pulmonary and critical care fellow at UC Irvine. Nasouf continued sepsis research with Nair as an internal medicine resident at UCR, ultimately co-authoring a paper with her in the *Journal of Inflammation Research* in 2022. “It was really

helpful to be local and do clinical research, and to work with students from the Inland Empire so they’re involved in their own community,” Nair said.

Nair’s research examines how differences in people, such as various medical conditions, affect their immune response. This is particularly important in the Inland Empire, where there’s a high prevalence of chronic conditions.

Nair said that the pandemic highlighted the importance of diverse immune responses after different people experienced varied outcomes from the virus. Determining the appropriate immune response to target the infection in different people was Nair’s challenge. “I like the analogy of, there’s a burglar in the house, and you could arrest him without damaging the house, or you could just bomb the whole house and the burglar as well—but you’d have no more house,” Nair said. “I think one of the impacts that I’ve had is really highlighting the complexity of the immune response and how it’s different in different people.”



“TO ME, IT WAS REALLY EXCITING TO JOIN THE BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES FACULTY, WHICH HAD THIS MOTIVATED MISSION TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY, TO HAVE A NEW MEDICAL SCHOOL, AND TO CONTRIBUTE IN THAT WAY.”

- MEERA NAIR, PHD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES



TO READ THE FULL STORY
SCAN QR CODE OR VISIT [HTTPS://ATU.CR/NAIR](https://atu.cr/nair)

A TRUE MENTOR AT THE UCR SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Iryna Ethell, PhD has positively impacted students, faculty, staff, and the community over two decades at UCR



At a neurology conference a few years ago, Iryna Ethell, PhD, the associate dean of academic affairs and a professor of biomedical sciences at the UCR Riverside School of Medicine, noticed that children with autism would sit quietly for hours, scream suddenly, then sit quietly again. When Ethell asked the kids about this behavior, she learned that the screaming helped reset their brains after being overwhelmed by their hypersensitivity to background noise. The kids mentioned that music with specific beats also helped.

These conversations led to Ethell’s research on music for autism. Her initial studies in mouse models have indicated that developmental exposure to sound could reduce anxiety and hyperactivity, with possible benefits for young people with autism. She also examined whether exposure to certain sounds could help adult mice, since children in medically underserved areas like the Inland Empire may not receive a diagnosis or medical attention at a young age.

AN OUTSTANDING MENTOR

Ethell herself came from an underserved community in Ukraine and said she identifies with people in Riverside, the city she now calls home. After joining UCR in January 2002, Ethell contributed to the development of the UCR School of Medicine from the UCR/UCLA Thomas Haider Program in Biomedical Sciences, with the four-year medical school opening in 2013. In addition to conducting research at the university, Ethell said she enjoys teaching medical students.

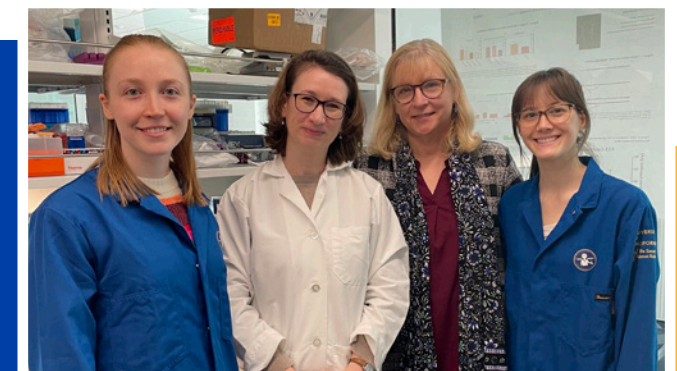
One such student is Samantha Sutley-Koury, a biomedical sciences PhD candidate from Rancho Cucamonga who said Ethell’s similar experiences have helped her navigate her own first-generation status. Ethell also helped Sutley-Koury attend a conference in Spain, which they traveled to together. “She really goes above and beyond for the students and she cares about them,” Sutley-Koury said. In recognition of her mentorship, Ethell received the SOM’s Outstanding Mentor of the Year Award in 2023.

Ethell also supports faculty and staff through her role as associate dean of academic affairs at the SOM. “Dr. Ethell is a true mentor in every sense,” said Margi Burnett, the director of academic affairs.

FOCUSING ON THE COMMUNITY

Ethell’s commitment to the mission of the SOM—improving the health of people in Inland Southern California—is clear in her autism research. She is also focused on increasing awareness and sharing information about resources with people in the area. “Hopefully, people from Riverside County will listen to me because I’m doing the research [locally],” Ethell said.

Ethell also values meeting parents and kids with autism to learn what’s important to them. “Interacting with them and understanding what their problems are helps you to actually focus your research so you can actually contribute meaningfully,” she said.





CLINICAL

HEALTHY PREGNANCIES FOR ALL

Brenda Ross, MD focuses on empowering pregnant women and helping improve birth outcomes in the Inland Empire

Recently, a pregnant patient's work obligation resulted in her missing a dose of her medication, likely leading to a health issue that harmed her fetus. She delivered successfully, but her baby passed away after six days.

To the surprise of Brenda Ross, MD, a maternal fetal medicine specialist at UCR Health, the patient viewed the experience positively. Ross explained that for the patient, having any time with her baby was a better result than her first pregnancy, where the child died in utero. "Going back through the challenges and the complications of her pregnancy with her helped me to understand that her perspective was very different from mine," Ross said.

EMPOWERING PREGNANT WOMEN

Ross originally planned to specialize in pediatrics for her career but found fulfillment in obstetrics and gynecology. "All pregnant patients deserve the opportunity to have as uncomplicated a pregnancy as possible," she said.

As the director of the HIV and Pregnancy program at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine earlier in her career, Ross worked with pregnant women who carried the stigma of their diagnosis and displayed a wariness of the medical establishment. "It was critical to help them understand that...the fact that they were HIV-positive didn't mean that they were not valuable or powerless," said Ross. "Bringing that background with me to Riverside gives me a broader scope of the importance of helping women understand and exercise their power during

pregnancy." At UCR Health, Ross applies this experience to the local common issue of diabetes. "I focus on motivating patients who have diabetes to exercise their power to impact the pregnancy outcome by making sure that they follow the recommended diet regimen [and] exercise regularly," Ross said. She also works to make services more accessible for pregnant women in the Inland Empire as one of just a few perinatologists (specialists in high-risk pregnancies) in the area.



Brenda Ross, MD

IMPROVING PREGNANCIES THROUGH RESEARCH

Ross is also resuming her research to help improve pregnancy outcomes in the Inland Empire and beyond. Her current projects include evaluating the quality of breast milk in women who get varied amounts of sleep and examining rates of vaccine uptake among pregnant people before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, among others.

Ross noted that her research areas are global issues, but that the challenges are magnified in the Inland Empire. "It is clear that the only way medicine moves forward is by research, and I want to be part of that process," she said.

SETTING KIDS AND FUTURE PHYSICIANS UP FOR SUCCESS

UCR Health pediatrician Esther Caroline McGowan, MD cares for children in the community while fostering the next generation of physicians



As a child in Botswana, Esther Caroline McGowan, MD, still remembers the love that her mother, a nurse, had for her patients. “That was one of the reasons that I wanted to get into medicine,” recalled McGowan, now a pediatrician at UCR Health. “In my mind, everyone deserves to have care from someone like my mom.”

Throughout McGowan’s medical education in the United States, she found herself alarmed by the disparities in healthcare present even in the resource-rich country. Her experiences drove her to focus on serving the underserved, leading her to join UCR’s pediatrics department in August 2022. McGowan loves working with children in particular because of her ability to positively affect their health--and lives--for years to come. “You’re checking for their developmental milestones” as they grow up, McGowan explained. “Whatever it is that they want to do in the long run, you have the potential to influence that.”

Sometimes, it’s up to her to notice an issue and make sure it gets resolved. In other cases, McGowan is able to support parents in getting their children the help they need. “You’ll have the mother saying, ‘Thank you, I knew something was wrong, but no one was listening to me,’” she said.

McGowan also serves as co-director of Longitudinal Ambulatory Care Experience (LACE), a unique SOM program that pairs

students with clinicians in the community and allows them to work directly with local, underserved patients from their first year of medical school. “Dr. McGowan intimately understands the challenges of under-represented minority students in medicine,” said Moazzum Bajwa, MD, MPH, LACE co-director and an associate clinical professor of health sciences. “Dr. McGowan encourages our team to challenge the status quo and offers thoughtful perspectives on how to improve upon existing ideas, programs, and structures.”

Beyond the patients she works with individually, McGowan aims to help an even broader group with her research on mental health. She is building on her fellowship research project, which examined the effect of resilience factors on reducing the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACES) to promote mental health in adolescents. McGowan is also becoming more involved in clinical trials to help increase access for underserved and underrepresented patients. “I want to make sure I’m advancing research that’s going to benefit patients long after I’m practicing,” McGowan said.



MAKING YOUR HEALTH OUR PRIORITY

UCR SOM serves patients in the community through its clinical enterprise, UCR Health. As a community-based medical school, UCR offers health services at five clinics located throughout the region: UCR Health Multispecialty Center, UCR Health Inland Empire Women’s Health Center, UCR Health Comprehensive Psychiatric Services, UCR Health Community Clinic, and UCR Health Coachella Valley Pediatric Center.

UCR Health’s mission is to deliver outstanding patient care in alignment with community needs and to increase service capability and capacity for underserved and rural areas. The health system champions a bold vision to be a leader in healthcare service delivery and serve the Inland Empire as an integrator of care to improve the health of individuals with focused attention on quality, throughput, service, and communication.

With dispersed locations across the region, UCR Health increased healthcare access enabling local residents to receive high-quality, university-based healthcare without driving long distances. UCR Health’s local clinics have also attuned our providers to the unique needs of individuals and families residing in the Inland Empire. In September 2023, the UCR SOM and UCR Health reopened UCR Health Community Clinic, a service site uniquely designed to deliver primary care and referrals for specialty care to the unhoused and low-income population in Riverside County. Between July 2023

through June 2024, UCR Health conducted more than 46,000 clinical visits and treated more than 12,000 patients.

Our physicians and specialists embody UCR Health’s commitment to improving healthcare in the Inland Empire. In addition to providing quality care to patients, many conduct community-based research seeking innovative solutions to the region’s most pressing health issues and share their knowledge with physicians in training at the UCR SOM to prepare future doctors to serve the community. As UCR Health continues to grow its footprint, adding new locations and specialties to expand, the clinical enterprise remains unwavering in our mission of serving the Inland Empire.





UCR SCHOOL OF MEDICINE HOSTS EVENT HONORING THE J.W. VINES MEDICAL SOCIETY

The organization played a critical role in helping establish the UCR School of Medicine and its community-based mission

In early April, the UCR SOM hosted “A Celebration of the J.W. Vines Medical Society and its Impact on the UCR School of Medicine” to recognize the organization’s influence on the SOM and its community-based mission. The event featured current and past leadership from UC Riverside, SOM, and the Vines Society who shared the organization’s history, challenges, and successes.

The Vines Society was founded in 1987 to provide educational opportunities for African American students pursuing health science careers, with the goal of addressing health challenges faced by African American people in the Inland Empire. Part of these efforts, which the speakers recounted, included lobbying the University of California and the California legislature to create the UCR SOM to help improve access to healthcare in the region. The organization also influenced the SOM’s mission

of training a diverse workforce of physicians to serve the area. “We’re here to...thank the Vines Society for their advocacy,” said Kim Wilcox, PhD, chancellor of UC Riverside. “Without that, we could well imagine we wouldn’t even have a medical school.”

The event “was fantastic and I think it helps to show what community activity can do to affect change,” said Ernest Levister, Jr., MD, past president of the Vines Society. “I think the community, not only outside of the medical school but within the medical school, had no idea the impact that the Vines Medical Society had,” added Leita Harris, MD, the organization’s current president. “I’m just happy that...people were willing to go ahead and say yes, this is something that’s long overdue and people do need to know.”

Toward the end of the event, Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of the School of Medicine, announced that in honor of the organization, the SOM would rename its annual diversity, equity, and inclusion colloquium as the J.W. Vines Diversity Equity Inclusion Colloquium.

The new name “demonstrates that they made a critical impact and it gives honor to what they have done, and this will be at the School of Medicine in perpetuity,” Deas said.

“That was a surprise,” said Harris. “I think it’s nice that they found a way to honor the organization in a long-lasting way.”



SOM PRIME PROGRAM RECEIVES \$40,000 GRANT TO CULTIVATE PATIENT SELF ADVOCACY

In March, the School of Medicine’s Program in Medical Education (PRIME) received an Association of American Medical Colleges NEXT Grant of \$40,000 over two years to support a project that will work to help African American patients grow their self-advocacy skills to achieve better symptom management, overall health, increased confidence, and satisfaction with healthcare services. UCR SOM is one of five institutions to receive the competitive grant.



The UCR SOM PRIME ABC Program aims to produce physicians who are specifically trained to address the healthcare needs of the African, Black, and Caribbean (ABC) communities of Inland Southern California. “This project will use the communities of practice (CP) model to cultivate self-advocacy skills within participants drawn from Inland Southern California’s Black community,” said Adwoa Osei, MD, the director of the UCR PRIME Program and a pediatrician with UCR Health who leads the project.

“CPs have the potential to play a critical role in supporting the development of self-advocacy skills by fostering shared learning, support networks, mentoring relationships, skill-building opportunities, and a culturally sensitive approach,” she added.

PROGRAM PROVIDING MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS TO UNHOUSED POPULATIONS RECEIVES \$5,000 MINI-GRANT



The SOM Center for Healthy Communities awarded the Inland Empire Street Medicine (IESM) program a \$5,000 grant as part of their annual mini-grant program.

IESM’s program, “Changing the Cycle: Menstrual Health Initiative,” will provide sustainable menstrual products and workshops in both English and Spanish to unsheltered populations. These individuals often face difficulties in obtaining basic menstrual supplies, which can result in serious risk of toxic shock syndrome. The initiative will focus on minimizing the gaps in reproductive health by offering instant relief and encouraging upcoming healthcare providers to have conversations about menstrual health.

“We are immensely honored to be a recipient of the UCR SOM Center for Healthy Communities mini-grant this year,” said Anh Voong, a third-year biology major at UCR and project lead and grant writer for IESM. In its fifth year, the grant program has disbursed more than \$40,000 to community medicine and population health projects.

OPEN HOUSE 2024 WELCOMES COMMUNITY TO THE SOM

The annual event invites prospective students and community members to learn more about medical school



In early April, the UC Riverside School of Medicine hosted Open House 2024, an annual event that helps attendees learn more about the school and the path to entering the health professions. More than 600 people attended the event, including prospective students, medical school applicants, high school students, and their families.

Deborah Deas, MD, MPH, the vice chancellor for health sciences and the Mark and Pam Rubin dean of the School of Medicine, welcomed the attendees. “I hope that you take the time to attend the events,” she said, “but also and more importantly, the time to connect with each other and connect with School of Medicine staff, faculty, as well as our students.”

Open House 2024 offered the opportunity to attend student panels and faculty presentations, tour the Center for Simulated Patient Care, and explore the new SOM Education Building II. Attendees could also speak to representatives from UCR Health and learn more about the SOM’s new Master of Public Health (MPH) program, which began in fall 2024.

Linda Castro, from Norco, CA, came to this year’s event to get more insights into medical school. A first-generation college student attending Riverside City College, Castro said she always wanted to go into medicine but wasn’t sure how until she joined the California Medicine Scholars Program (CMSP). As one of the UCR SOM Pathway Programs, CMSP supports community college students on their journey to medical school. Castro said she was looking forward to touring the Center for Simulated Patient Care while increasing her motivation to get into medical school and pursue her dream of

becoming a dermatologist. “Especially because I grew up with a lot of hyperpigmentation,” she explained, “being able to help little girls that went through the same thing but didn’t know what was going on would really be my end goal.”



2022-2023 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Research Achievement Award in Biomedical or Basic Science Research
Natalie Zlebnik, PhD, Assistant Professor, Division of Biomedical Sciences

Research Achievement Award in Clinical Research
Kimberly Lakes, PhD, Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Neuroscience

Research Achievement Award in Population Health Research
Evelyn Vázquez, PhD, Assistant Professional Researcher, Department of Social Medicine, Population and Public Health

Basic Science Educator of the Year Award
Monica Carson, PhD, Chair, Division of Biomedical Sciences, Professor of Biomedical Sciences and S. Sue Johnson Presidential Endowed Chair in Glial-Neuronal Interactions

Clinical Educator of the Year Award
Toshia Yamaguchi, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Neuroscience

Community Educator of the Year Award
Jason Sacdalan, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of Family Medicine

Lifetime Achievement Award
Christian Lytle, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Biomedical Sciences

Outstanding Mentor of the Year Award
Iryna Ethell, PhD, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and Professor of Biomedical Sciences

Distinguished School of Medicine Service Award
Kenneth Ballou, MD, Professor and Interim Chair, Department of Family Medicine

Distinguished SOM Service to UCR Cross-Campus Community Award
Sika Zheng, PhD, Professor of Biomedical Sciences and Director of the Center for RNA Biology and Medicine

Distinguished SOM UC Systemwide Service Award
Meera Nair, PhD, Associate Professor, Biomedical Sciences

SOM Junior Faculty Distinguished Service Award
Stephanie Handler, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of OB/GYN

Award for Healthcare Innovation
John Agapian, MD, Associate Clinical Professor, Health Sciences, Department of Surgery

Professionalism Award
Jason Sacdalan, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Health Sciences, Family Medicine

Award for Excellence in Patient Care
Moazzum Bajwa, MD, Associate Clinical Professor, Health Sciences, Family Medicine

Staff Mission Awards (CARE Awards)

Staff Mission Award - Education
Marleen Mendoza, Academic Technologies Project Manager, Office of Medical Education.
Michelle Fulbright, Admissions/ Student Affairs Manager, Office of Student Affairs

Staff Mission Award - Research
Angelica Bazan, Senior Financial and Administrative Analyst, Division of Biomedical Sciences

Staff Mission Award - Clinical
Jessica Flores, Medical Assistant, UCR Health. Rubie Herrera-Onate, Medical Assistant, UCR Health

Staff Mission Award - Administration
Kristen West, Project/ Policy Analyst, Finance and Administration

Medical Education Awards

Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award
Janet Cruz, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Health Sciences, Department of OB/GYN

Staff Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award
Tracey Bereal, Associate Director, Educational Instruction

Outstanding Community Service Award for Staff
Herlinda Bergman, Class of 2024

Outstanding Community Service Award for Faculty
Adwoa Osei, MD, Associate Clinical Professor, Department of

Pediatrics
Outstanding Graduating Student Family Medicine
Garrick Johnson, Class of 2024

Outstanding Graduating Student Internal Medicine
Shamieh Banihani, Class of 2024

Outstanding Graduating Student OB/GYN
Violeta Covarrubias, Class of 2024

Outstanding Graduating Students Pediatrics
Moices Uribe & Manpreet Singh, Class of 2024

Outstanding Graduating Student Psychiatry
Aaron Fichtner, Class of 2024

Outstanding Graduating Student Surgery
Hana Abdirahman, Class of 2024

Stewart and Elaine Shankel Award
Shamieh Banihani, Class of 2024

Thomas Haider Clinical Award of Excellence
Nolan Winicki, Class of 2024

Dean's Mission and Values Award
Hana Abdirahman, Class of 2024

Dean's Social Justice Award
Alma Esparza Castaneda, Class of 2024

Excellence in Public Health Award
Cintya Beltran Sanchez, Class of 2024

Alumni Recognition Award for Excellence
Stephanie Handler, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of OB/GYN

Neal L. Schiller Award
Anne VanGarse, MD, Associate Dean of Clinical Medical Education

Outstanding Year 1 Instructor
Monica Carson, PhD, Professor and Chair, Division of Biomedical Sciences

Outstanding Year 2 Instructor
Paul Kellerman, MD, Professor of Medicine, Nephrology

Outstanding Year 3 Instructors
Esmail Sebt, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Stephanie Handler,

MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of OB/GYN. Esther McGowan, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Pediatrics and LACE Co-Director

Outstanding Specialty (Year 4) Instructor
Lucas Friedman, MD, Emergency Medicine, Riverside Community Hospital and Ultrasound Division Director

Outstanding LACE Doctor Year 1
Dhaval Kapadia, MD, Family Medicine, Kaiser Permanente

Outstanding LACE Doctor Year 2
Thomas Oliveira, MD, Family Medicine, Kaiser Permanente

Outstanding LACE Doctor Year 3
Frank Mercardante, MD, Pediatrics, Kaiser Permanente

Outstanding Community Faculty
Nicholas Sheets, MD, Community Faculty Member, Critical Care Surgery

Outstanding LACE Student MS1
Lindsey Ondieki, Class of 2027

Outstanding LACE Student MS2
Christine Khanbijian, Class of 2026

Outstanding LACE Student MS3
Katrina Villavert, Class of 2025

Outstanding PIP Projects MS3
Roy Mendoza and Marcia Trochez, Class of 2025 "Racial Disparities in Melanoma Metastasis: A Comparative Study of White and Hispanic Patients"

Outstanding PIP Projects MS3
Keerat Kaur, Class of 2025 "Does greater medical complexity call for more patient-provider time?"

Outstanding Clerkship Students MS3
Catherine Lowe, Class of 2025
Allen Seylani, Class of 2025
Violeta Covarrubias, Class of 2024

External Campus Awards

UCR Staff Assembly People Helping People Award
Stephanie Sandoval

Mary Johnson Outstanding Retiree Award - UCR Retiree Association
Kathy Barton

BOARD OF ADVISORS

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OUR MISSION

The mission of the UCR School of Medicine is to improve the health of the people of California and, especially, to serve Inland Southern California by training a diverse workforce of physicians and by developing innovative research and healthcare delivery programs that will improve the health of the medically underserved in the region and become models to be emulated throughout the state and nation.

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