



## Fimbria

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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UC San Diego Health



*Letter from the Chair*



**Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, MS**

Samuel SC Yen Endowed Chair

Chair, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences

Professor, Maternal-Fetal Medicine, Obstetrics & Gynecology

UC San Diego Health Sciences

[Department CV](#) | [Website](#)

**Dear Colleagues,**

**Spring is finally here!** Welcome to Volume 15 of the Fimbria; the rebirth of spring heralds our new resident team members, and we are delighted to introduce our 2023-24 incoming intern class. Each issue introduces one of our research labs and clinical innovations. This edition focuses on the lab of award-winning scientist Varykina Thackray, PhD. We also feature our Minimally Invasive Gynecological Surgery Program, a growing program using less invasive techniques to treat gynecological conditions. Our Culture and Justice Quorum is honored for excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the resident-led “At Your Cervix” community work is a highlight.

Visit our [website](#) for information on our divisions, clinical programs, leading edge research, and academic affairs. Please enjoy this issue, and email us with any feedback to [Fimbria@ucsd.edu](mailto:Fimbria@ucsd.edu).

Thank you!

**Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, MS**

*Chair, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences*

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**Translational Research:** Louise Laurent, MD, PhD

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**Editor & Director of Communications:** Sunny Worth

**Contact us at:** [Fimbria@ucsd.edu](mailto:Fimbria@ucsd.edu)

Department Curriculum Vitae

Department of OBGYN & RS

# FUNDING NEWS



**Marianna Alperin, MD, MS**

**Sponsor**

The Society of Urodynamics, Female Pelvic Medicine & Urogenital Reconstruction

**Grant**

Project: “The Role of Mechano-transduction in the Pathogenesis of Overactive Bladder in Women.”

**Award**

2022  
\$25k



**Dwayne Stupack, PhD**

**Co-PI: David Schlaepfer, PhD**

**Sponsor**

Peddle the Cause/ Cure-bound

**Grant**

Neoantigen driven eradication of immune-reprogrammed ovarian cancer

**Award**

7/2022-6/30/2023  
\$132,377



**Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, MS**

**Sponsor**

NIH/NIHLB

**Grant**

Early Intervention to Promote Cardiovascular Health of Mothers and Children (ENRICH) Multisite Resource and Coordinating Center (RCC)

**Award**

8/2022-5/2029  
\$455,087k



**Irene Su, MD, MSCE**

**Sponsor**

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

**Grant**

Studying the impact of state-mandated health benefits for fertility-preservation services on cost and access for Hispanic/Latino cancer patients

**Award**

5/2023-4/2025  
\$314,324



**Sheila Mody, MD, MPH**

**Marielle Meurice, MD**

Second Year Complex Family Planning Fellow

**Sponsor**

Center for Empathy and Technology - UCSD

**Grant**

Patient Experience Regarding Seeking Permanent female Contraception and Technology Influences (PERSPeC-Tive)

**Award**

5/2023-4/2024  
\$30k



**Alice Sutton, MD, FACOG**

**Sponsor**

Center for Empathy and Technology - UCSD

**Grant**

Promoting Empathy and Justice: Reproductive Telehealth in Medical Education

**Award**

5/2023-4/2024  
\$30k



**David Schlaepfer, PhD**

**Sponsor**

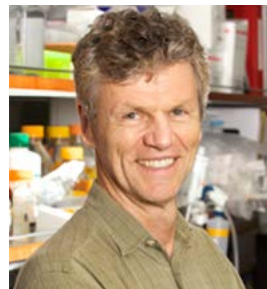
Peddle the Cause/ Cure-bound

**Grant**

HERV env: A Targetable Surface Protein in Ovarian Cancer

**Award**

3/2023-2/28/2024  
\$250k



**Miles Wilkinson, PhD**

**Sponsor**

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

**Grant**

NMD Suppression Therapy

**Award**

11/2022-10/2024  
\$336k

# NEWSBYTES

## Recent News Featuring Outstanding Work by Department of OBGYN & RS Members



[UC San Diego Department of OBGYN & RS ranked #3 in NIH funding for OBGYN departments nationwide by the Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research](#) | BRIMR • MARCH 2023

**Sarah Averbach, Gennifer Kully, Erica Hinz, Arnab Dey, Holly Berkley, Marisa Hildebrand, Florin Vaida, Sadia Haider, Lisa G Hofler**

[Early vs Interval Postpartum Intrauterine Device Placement: Randomized Clinical Trial](#) | JAMA • MARCH 2023

*News featuring Sarah Averbach, MD*

[IUD Placement at Two to Four Weeks Postpartum Noninferior](#) | Health Day • MARCH 2023

**Sarah Averbach, Diana Ha, Audra Meadows, Linda Brubaker, Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman**

[Failure to progress: structural racism in women's healthcare](#) | eClinical Medicine, The Lancet • FEB. 2023

**Jessica Cassin, Maria I. Stamou, Kimberly W. Keefe, Kaitlin E. Sung; Celine C. Bojo, Karen J. Tonsfeldt, Rebecca A. Rojas, Vanessa Ferreira Lopes, Lacey Plummer, Kathryn B. Salnikov, David L. Keefe Jr., Metin Ozata, Myron Genel, Neoklis A. Georgopoulos, Janet E. Hall, William F. Crowley Jr., Stephanie B. Seminara, Pamela L. Mellon, and Ravikumar Balasubramanian**

[Heterozygous mutations in SOX2 may cause idiopathic hypogonadotropic hypogonadism via dominant-negative mechanisms](#) | JCI Insight • JAN. 2023

**Milli Desai, Beth Zhou, Vinit Nalawade, Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, Nina Veeravalli, Henry Henk, James Murphy, Brian Whitcomb, H. Irene Su**

[Maternal comorbidity and adverse perinatal outcomes in survivors of adolescent and young adult cancer: A cohort study](#) | BJOG • JAN. 2023

**Ramez N. Eskander, M.D., Michael W. Sill, Ph.D., Lindsey Beffa, M.D., Richard G. Moore, M.D., Joanie M. Hope, M.D., Fernanda B. Musa, M.D., Robert Mannel, M.D., Mark S. Shahin, M.D., Guilherme H. Cantuaria, M.D., Eugenia Girda, M.D., Cara Mathews, M.D., Juraj Kavcansky, M.D., et al.**

[Pembrolizumab plus Chemotherapy in Advanced Endometrial Cancer](#) | NEJM • MARCH 2023

*News featuring Ramez Eskander, MD*

[Study: Endometrial Cancer Treatment Has Significant Results](#) | UC San Diego Today • [UC San Diego Health Newsroom](#) • MARCH 2023

[Merck's KEYTRUDA® Plus Chemotherapy Met Primary Endpoint of Progression-Free Survival as First-Line Therapy for Advanced or Recurrent Endometrial Carcinoma](#) | Merck • FEB. 2023

[NRG Oncology NRG-GY018 Study Demonstrates Significantly Improved Progression Free Survival Outcomes for Women with Advanced or Recurrent Endometrial Cancer with the Addition of Pembrolizumab to Chemotherapy](#) | NRG Oncology • FEB. 2023

*News featuring Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, MS*

[Maternal deaths in the U.S. keep climbing](#) | Science News • MARCH 2023

[Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman Named President-Elect of the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine](#) | UC San Diego Today • UC San Diego Health Newsroom • MARCH 2023

*News featuring Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, MS and Audra Meadows, MD, MPH*

[A love letter to Black birthing people from Black birth workers, midwives, and physicians](#) | OBG Management • MARCH 2023

**Ha, Diana MD; Ghebrendrias, Selam MD; Meadows, Audra MD; LaCoursiere, Daphne Yvette MD; Lewis, Amanda PhD; Lawson, Mark MD; Morales, Michael; Gyamfi-Bannerman, Cynthia MD; Brubaker, Linda MD**

[The Culture and Justice Quorum at University of California, San Diego: A Departmental Approach to Dismantling Structural Racism](#) | Academic Medicine • MARCH 2023

**Dequina A. Nicholas; Mark A. Lawson**

[Introduction to Endocrinology: The Hypothalamic-Pituitary Axis](#) | Goodman & Gilman's: The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics, 14e • FEB. 2023

*News featuring Maryam Tarsa, MD*

[‘The last thing we expected’: Black maternal mortality rate prompts families, experts to fight for change](#) | Fox5 San Diego • FEB. 2023

# LABORATORY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## Meet Varykina ‘Kina’ Thackray, PhD, a Reproductive Sciences Leader, and her Research Team Investigating the Role of the Microbiome in Women’s Health



Varykina Thackray, PhD of UC San Diego Thackray Lab

Dr. Varykina Thackray’s 21 years at UC San Diego encompass [leading-edge discoveries](#) in reproductive endocrinology and pioneering work on the intersection between the gut microbiome and polycystic ovary syndrome. Dr. Thackray works with her trailblazing lab team to explore and inform the public about her [scientific passion: the connection between women’s health and the microbiome](#).

### Dr. Thackray’s Journey in Science

Dr. Thackray was born in Ontario, Canada and moved to Indianapolis, IN with her mother and twin sister for high school. A mentor, AP Bio teacher, Mr. Stahly, fostered interest in science. She earned her B.A. in Biology / Psychology from Middlebury College, VT and spent 5 yrs. in research as a lab tech at Cornell Univ., NY and at Ribozyme Pharmaceuticals in Boulder, CO which formed interest in the regulation of gene expression. Dr. Thackray obtained her PhD in molecular biology with Dr. Nordeen at the Univ. of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver. Her studies investigating how sex steroid receptors are influenced by the 3D chromatin environment introduced her to the fascinating field of reproductive sciences.

In 2002, Dr. Thackray moved to San Diego and joined the Mellon lab for post-doctoral training in reproductive endocrinology. A brilliant scientist and inspirational leader, Dr. Pamela Mellon, PhD was an ideal mentor and galvanized interest in mechanistic research. In this supportive environment, Dr. Thackray combined interests in understanding how steroid hormones regulate gonadotropin gene expression using in vitro/cell-based models with experience working with animal models. She received an NIH F32 Postdoctoral Fellowship & NIH K01 Mentored Research Scientist Development award which facilitated her transition to Assistant Professor.



Dr. Thackray with Dr. Pamela Mellon’s Lab in 2006

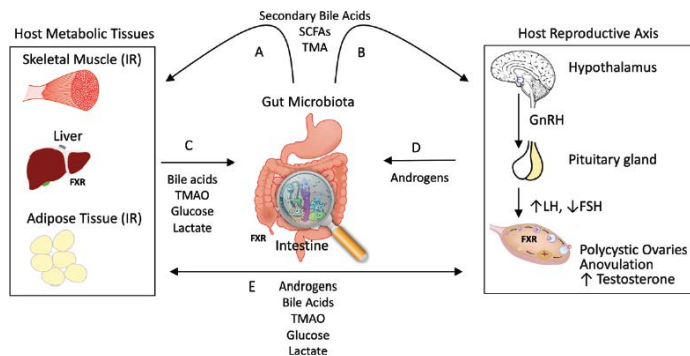
In 2008, Dr. Thackray established her lab in the Leichtag Biomedical Research Building. She became Associate Professor in 2014 and Professor in 2020. She netted the Young Investigator Award from Women in Endocrinology and the Early Investigators Award from the Endocrine Society. Her research has been funded by NIH through R01 grants, P50 Center for Reproductive Science and Medicine at UCSD and the UCSD/UCLA Diabetes Research Center. She has also collaborated with the Ferring Research Institute and Onegevity Health.

Dr. Thackray’s research initially focused on cross talk between metabolism and the reproductive axis. Her lab showed insulin signaling in pituitary gonadotrope cells [activates a specific factor called FOXO1](#) which results in export from nucleus of the cell and increases [transcription of gonadotropin beta subunits](#), thereby providing a mechanism by which fertility can be regulated by metabolic cues. Her interest in the impact of metabolism on reproduction was furthered by collaborative efforts within the REI division to develop a [mouse model](#) that recapitulated both reproductive and metabolic phenotypes of polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

### A Curious Cross Talk: Gut Microbiome and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) Discovery

Women with PCOS have increased risk of infertility, pregnancy complications, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. Given studies that demonstrated a link between the gut microbiome and obesity, Dr. Thackray initiated studies to determine if the gut microbiome plays a role in PCOS.

Using 16S ribosomal gene sequencing to identify gut bacteria without having to culture them, her lab was the first to report that [changes in gut bacteria were associated with PCOS](#) using a mouse model of the disorder. Dr. Thackray worked with colleague, Dr. Antoni Duleba, MD and researchers at San Diego State University and Poznan University of Medical Sciences to show that [women with PCOS also exhibit gut dysbiosis](#) linked with elevated androgens. More recent studies from her lab demonstrate [gut metabolites including bile acids are also altered in PCOS](#) and that [exposure to a healthy gut microbiome](#) improved both metabolic and reproductive phenotypes in a PCOS mouse model. These studies demonstrate that androgens can regulate gut microbes in females and modulation of the gut microbiome could provide a therapeutic opportunity to treat PCOS. Preclinical studies in the [Thackray lab](#) focus on how androgen signaling regulates the gut microbiome and on discovering novel pre- and probiotics to treat PCOS.

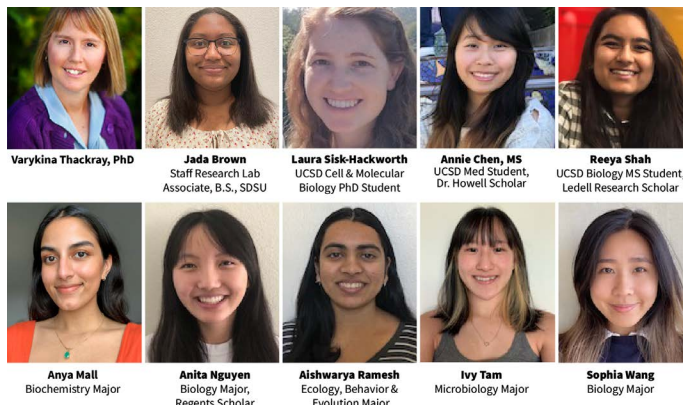


*Relationship between the gut microbiome and PCOS from [Intersection of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome and the Gut Microbiome](#) | Journal of the Endocrine Society*

## The Bigger Picture

Studying the intersection of the microbiome with PCOS led Dr. Thackray to the realization that any condition where sex hormone levels change could affect the gut microbiome and human health including puberty, pregnancy, or menopause. Diseases like obesity and type 2 diabetes, which can lower levels of sex hormones, or medications, which can alter sex hormone levels, could also affect the gut microbiome. Thackray lab is beginning to explore the mechanisms involved in sex steroid differentiation of the gut microbiome. PhD student, Laura Sisk-Hackworth, is using a genetic mouse model to understand the role of the reproductive axis in regulating bacterial communities in different locations within the small and large intestine. Dr. Thackray and Laura are presenting emerging Thackray Lab work at the [Society for the Study of Reproduction Conference](#) summer 2023 in Ottawa, Canada.

## MEET THE THACKRAY LAB TEAM



*Dr. Thackray Lab Team Picnic Lunch at Kate Sessions Park*

## Mentoring Philosophy

Dr. Thackray is passionate about mentoring the next generation of reproductive scientists. She has mentored 5 post-doc fellows, 14 grad, 2 medical, & 22 undergrad students, all have gone on to successful science or medicine careers. Thackray believes in a supportive, collaborative team approach to science and ensures contributions of students & technicians are recognized on abstracts & publications. She is Co-Director of [San Diego IRACDA Post-doctoral Fellowship Program](#) which trains a diverse group of biomedical scientists for academic faculty positions in research and teaching.

## Research Philosophy

With 30+ years of involvement in biomedical research, Dr. Thackray's philosophical approach to research is rooted in a strong belief in the value of basic science:

*"Many key discoveries have occurred in biomedical research because people were interested in understanding how things work at a fundamental level instead of trying to cure a particular disease or develop a specific treatment. Since we can't always predict ahead of time the knowledge needed for new treatments or cures for reproductive diseases, it is important to fund and support research in basic reproductive sciences."*

## Giving Back

Outside the lab, Dr. Thackray is a vocal advocate for the equity and advancement of women in science. She is a long-term member of UCSD [Women in Health Sciences](#), [Women in Endocrinology](#), and the [San Diego Chapter](#) of the Association for Women in Science (AWIS). She served on the AWIS-SD Scholarship & Outreach Committees. Her work with the community was recognized with the AWIS-SD Achievement in Outreach Award. She served as Board Member-at-Large, President, and Past President. Extensive contributions were recognized with the AWIS-SD Leadership Service Award, Board Special Award and [President's Award in 2022](#).



*Science Fair Judging with AWIS-SD Outreach in 2023*

## In Her Spare Time

Dr. Thackray recognizes that women and children, particularly from marginalized communities, are vulnerable to heat stress from a warming planet and pollution from the burning of fossil fuels. She is a founding member of the Green New Deal at UC San Diego organization and has served on the Steering Committee for 4 years. She has worked tirelessly with other faculty, staff, and students to advocate for climate action and justice at UC San Diego and across the University of California. Due in part to the efforts of the [Green New Deal](#) at UC San Diego, the Academic Senate Faculty Passed a Memorial in 2022 on Reducing Campus Fossil Fuel Combustion. In Fall 2022, President Drake declared that the UC leading on climate change is one of his top priorities and, as a first step, the UC funded electrification plans and established a Fossil Free Task Force to guide the implementation of this green transition to renewable energy.

Thank you, Dr. Thackray and Thackray Lab team for your tremendous contributions to reproductive science, UC San Diego and the San Diego community. Visit the [Thackray Lab website](#) to learn more and stay current on their award-winning research.

# CLINICAL INNOVATIONS

## World-renowned Minimally Invasive Gynecologic Surgery (MIGS) at UC San Diego

Springing into action to improve the lives of women through superior care are the highly skilled Minimally Invasive Gynecological Surgery (MIGS) specialists at UC San Diego Health. We hope to introduce our practicing excellence-in-innovation experts and draw attention to patient benefits stemming from their delicate procedures. MIGS evidence-based treatment is an alternative to traditional open surgery where sizeable incision scarring, complication risk, discomfort, and pain are lessened.

### MIGS: the Modernized No-Incision Innovation

Ranked among nation's top 50 in gynecologic care by U.S. News & World Report, board-certified MIGS at UCSD delivers leading quality minimally-invasive and robotic-assisted surgeries for endometriosis, uterine fibroids, abnormal uterine bleeding, ovarian cysts, endometrial polyps, and other conditions. Our precision technique is a relief and convenience for patients with reduced pain from no or few small incisions and accelerates return to normal activities and avoidance of hospital. Laparoscopic and robotic procedures – hysterectomies, myomectomies, and ovarian surgeries – are performed as safe, effective treatment for alleviating painful symptoms with improved overall patient outcomes. Our MIGS leadership team:



**CHARLOTTE PICKETT, MD**  
*Minimally Invasive  
Gynecologic Surgeon*

Dr. Pickett completed a fellowship in Minimally Invasive Surgery at Indiana University and joined UCSD this fall. She is passionate about improving the care of women with endometriosis. She partners her surgical expertise with the multi-disciplinary UCSD Center for Endometriosis Research and Treatment team to provide comprehensive care to patients. She is also interested in bringing new techniques and procedures to UCSD, having recently performed the first laparoscopic cesarean scar ectopic resection done here. She is working to soon be able to provide patients with robotic abdominal cerclage and vaginal natural orifice transluminal endoscopic surgery (vNOTES).



**SHIRA VARON, MD**  
*Minimally Invasive  
Gynecologic Surgeon*

Dr. Varon has more than 15 years of MIGS experience evaluating and treating patients with fibroids. Her belief in an individualized approach to patient care spans cutting edge medical therapies apace with the latest minimally invasive therapies for fibroids, including transcervical radiofrequency ablation with the Sonata procedure. Her multi-disciplinary team of infertility specialists, perinatologists, and interventional radiologists collaborate to develop the right approach to ameliorate patient care.



**MIGS:  
DR. PICKETT  
AND DR. VARON**

As a group, treatment volume at Jacobs Medical Center, Koman Outpatient Pavilion, surpasses 1993 gynecologic surgeries every year with 1433 already performed in 2023. UCSD’s beautiful and updated hospital has highly sought after staff, sophisticated operating rooms, and top notch robotic and laparoscopic equipment. Reputable as the region’s only academic medical center, residents at UCSD School of Medicine rotate through intensive Minimally Invasive Gynecological Surgery (MIGS) training every 8 weeks provided by Dr. Varon. Dr. Pickett enjoys assisting with their operative training and simulation sessions.



*Dr. Charlotte Pickett and Dr. Shira Varon in MIGS Simulation Training—demonstrating their skills to trainees*

### COMPARE-UF Clinical Trial

Dr. Varon serves as a lead physician for clinical trials with research focus on a personalized approach to advancing the treatment options of women in their reproductive years with fibroids. She has been involved in pivotal trials including the largest prospective research trial in the country evaluating the efficacy of procedures for women with uterine fibroids (COMPARE-UF). She is studying the effects of myomectomy on ovarian function and is also interested in studying myomectomy performed at the time of Cesarean section in pregnant women with fibroids. Dr. Varon takes interest in studying new medications used to treat women with abnormal uterine bleeding, fibroids, and endometriosis.

Visit our [MIGS](#) and [Fibroid Care](#) health sites to learn more.

## CULTURE & JUSTICE

### Culture & Justice Quorum Celebrates 2023 Inclusive Excellence Award

Congratulations to our Culture & Justice Quorum (CJQ) leadership at the Department of OBGYN & RS for being recognized with an Inclusive Excellence Award! This esteemed award is bestowed by UCSD at the 28th Annual Ceremony for making outstanding contributions in the trifecta areas of inclusion, equity, and diversity in concert with demonstrating exemplary support of the UCSD Principles of Community. Celebrating cultural differences, promoting fairness, and making a better place for working and learning are among the qualities of a Diversity Champion for recognition.



*UC San Diego 28th Annual Inclusive Excellence Award Honorees with Campus Leadership Chancellor Pradeep Khosla held on April 26, 2023*





*Dr. Gyamfi-Bannerman, Chair, Dr. Mai Hoang, and Michael Morales, Administrative Vice Chair and Co-Lead, CJQ, at the Inclusive Excellence Award Ceremony*

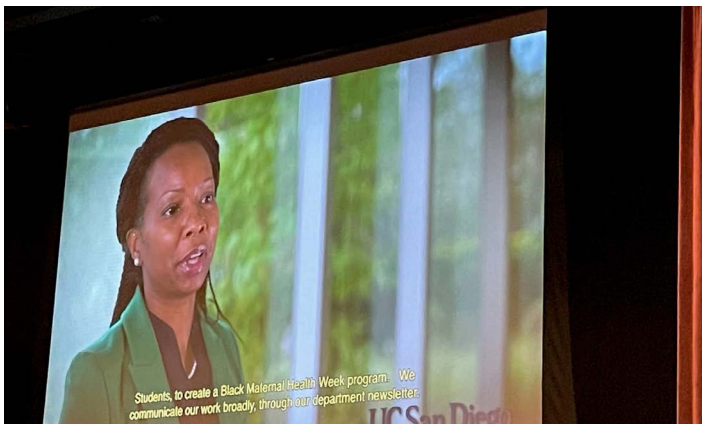


As one of the only Black owned free-standing community birth centers in California, their reproductive health and family building services offer a supportive environment interwoven with culturally-competent, highly skilled holistic prenatal and postpartum care – including a home birth package.

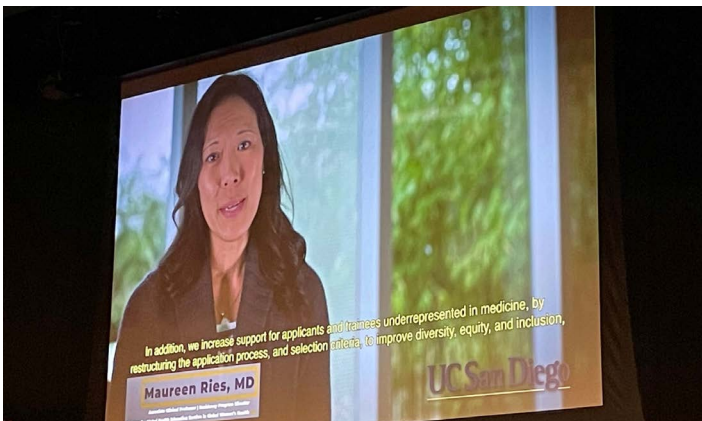
High-risk clients in need of advanced health services can be referred to UCSD and UCSD clinicians and family practice providers may suggest the San Diego Community Birth Center for patients wanting to deliver outside of the hospital system.

**Department of OBGYN & RS Black Maternal Health Week April 11-17**

In celebration of Black Maternal Health Week April 11-17th, CJQ UCSD SOM, SNMA, and LMSA hosted a screening of acclaimed film Aftershock followed by an expert panel discussion moderated by Dr. Audra Meadows, Vice Chair on the U.S. Maternal Health Crisis. Panelists included Dr. Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, Department Chair, Nikki Helms, Licensed Midwife and Founder of the San Diego Community Birth Center, Dr. Shani Cooper, Doula and Founder of Root & Soul: Integrative Health, Dr. Toluwalasé (Lasé) A. Ajayi, Pediatrician and Principal Investigator of PowerMom, Jessica Wade, Maternal & Infant Health Initiatives from March of Dimes, San Diego County, and Dr. Akilah Weber, OBGYN and Assembly Member, District 79.



*Dr. Audra Meadows, Vice Chair and Co-Lead, CJQ, featured in the award show video discusses CJQ DEI work*



*Dr. Maureen Ries, OBGYN Residency Program Director, featured in the award show video discusses OBGYN & RS DEI Efforts*



*From far left: UCSD Medical Student, Dr. Toluwalasé Lasé, Nikki Helms, Dr. Shani Cooper, Dr. Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, Dr. Akilah Weber, UCSD Medical Student, Dr. Audra Meadows, Jessica Wade at UCSD C&J hosted BMHW Event*

**CJQ In the Community**

The CJQ values meaningful collaborative relationships with local organizations committed to improving racial equity and well-being. This spring, Dr. Audra Meadows, Vice Chair of Culture & Justice, visited with Nikki Helms, Licensed Midwife (LM) and Founder, of the San Diego Community Birth Center for a tour and meeting over a shared mission to serve community.





*Dr. LaWana Richmond, Business Development Manager in the Transportation, Parking, & People Management Department, with residents Dr. Hayley Schultz and Dr. Christine Zachek*



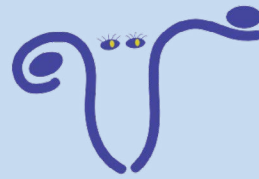
*C&J Quorum Hosts 50+ Attendees from the Community with Aftershock Film Pre-Screening Reception Food from Flavors of East Africa Followed by Panel Q&A*

Please visit our [Culture & Justice Quorum website](#) to learn more about our department’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts and to RSVP for our upcoming events! Everyone is invited to participate!

## AT YOUR CERVIX

### This Issue’s Highlight – Refugee Populations

#### *At Your Cervix*



#### **At Your Cervix (AYC) Resident Leads**

- Milli Desai, MD, MAS, MHS
- Tatyanna Henderson, MD
- Hayley Schultz, MD



#### **What refugee populations do we care for?**

Many! San Diego has resettled more than 40% of refugees entering the State of California in the last decade, and is one of the top three counties (including Los Angeles and Sacramento) for refugee resettlement. San Diego is a uniquely located border city housing new refugees from all over the world who cross the border into the United States through Tijuana, B.C., Mexico. As political states of countries all over the world change, the refugee population changes as well. Two of our most common populations currently are those from Haiti and Afghanistan.

#### **What are some of the unique health challenges providers need to consider when caring for refugee populations?**

Most of the refugees we care for are Obstetric patients, many of whom have had limited or fragmented prenatal care. Some refugee and asylum seeker patients have traveled through multiple continents in high-stress situations during their pregnancies. Research has shown that multiple barriers to care exist for refugees, including navigating the healthcare system, language translation, social stressors, family safety, and access to food and housing.

#### **What resources are available in San Diego?**

Three of the largest refugee resettlement organizations in San Diego are the International Rescue Committee, Catholic Charities, and Jewish Family Service. The federal government’s goals are for refugees to have help with resettlement in their first 90 days, and these organizations assist with pre-arrival preparation, reception, placement, immigration, case management, cultural orientation, employment, translation, and more.

## How are we working to improve care for refugees in San Diego?

UC San Diego has a few programs geared towards education for caring for this population with unique sets of health needs and circumstances. Our new Prevensaca clinic (featured in last quarter's At Your Cervix newsletter) provides care for some refugees and asylum seekers in Tijuana itself. The UCSD OB/GYN residency program is working on incorporating a Refugee Care curriculum into our didactic sessions.

The UC San Diego Health Obstetrics (OB) Refugee and Asylee Case Navigation Program was developed to provide efficient, inclusive, and effective care for our refugee and asylee patients, thereby eliminating barriers to obstetrics care. This program is eligible to any UC San Diego Health Obstetrics patient who identifies as a refugee or asylum seeker, at no cost. The program provides assistance for pregnancy related services and information, access to the healthcare system including prenatal and postpartum care, appointments, and social services, translation services, and providing pediatric and newborn items.

In order to help patients have access to the Refugee/Asylee Case Navigation Program, providers and nurses can place a consultation referral in the Epic Electronic Medical Record. This can be done in either the inpatient, outpatient, and/or triage settings.

### What's coming up?

We must always seek to improve our understanding and care for all of our patients, and several Quality Improvement and research projects are under way to assess outcomes and areas for improvement in the care of these patients.

One upcoming project is through a grant from CVS Health Foundation and America's Essential Hospitals, in which UC San Diego was selected as one of ten hospitals to improve obstetric hypertension outcomes. Our project will focus on Haitian Creole obstetric patients, who have higher rates of hypertensive disorders in pregnancy, by initiating focus groups to understand how we can better provide obstetric care to our refugee population.

#### Sources:

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/sdrcc-covid19-rpt.pdf>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33956548/>

<https://obgyn.ucsd.edu/patient-care/ob-refugee-asylee-program.html>

## GREETINGS INCOMING RESIDENTS

### It's a Match! Introducing Our New Resident Interns!



**Lugman Hodgkinson**  
Stanford University



**Rebecca Kolodner**  
George Washington University



**Ashley Lopez**  
Columbia University



**Nyerovwo Faith Okifo**  
Yale School of Medicine



**McKensie Wall**  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



**Emily Yang**  
UC San Diego

## NEW STAFF HIRES

### Welcome to the Department of OBGYN and RS!



- **Christine Albano** | Research Administrator
- **Jajakumar Anbazhagan** | Senior Research Associate at Dr. Miles Wilkinson Lab
- **Christina Buenrostro** | Nurse Practitioner (NP) - Postpartum (new role for Department of OBGYN & RS)
- **Rodrigo Carrasco** | Postdoc Researcher at Dr. Kellie Breen Church Lab
- **Willi Cheung** | Senior Research Associate at Dr. Louise Laurent Lab
- **Samantha LaBelle** | Clinical Research Coordinator
- **Ricardo Enrique Flores Ortega** | Clinical Research Coordinator at Dr. Irene H. Su Lab
- **Luiza Perucci** | Postdoc Researcher at Dr. Louise Laurent Lab
- **Johanna Romero** | Business Office Coordinator
- **Valentina Stanley** | Clinical Research Supervisor

# UPCOMING EVENTS

**March for Babies 2023!**  
Saturday, May 20<sup>th</sup>

Join the UC San Diego Health Team  
<https://www.marchforbabies.org/team/UCSDOB>

The first 50 people to join and donate at least \$50 will get a limited addition UCSD Miracle Marchers t-shirt!



SCAN ME




UC San Diego Health **MARCH FOR BABIES**

# RECENT EVENTS

## UC San Diego Black Maternal Health Week

*Birthing the Magic*  
Collaborative  
Presents

**Restoring the Joy of Birth**  
**Black Maternal Health Week 2023**

Tuesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>  
7 PM ET/6 PM CT/4 PM Pacific

**FREE Virtual.**

*Hope Is Not a Plan: Managing Preeclampsia*




with  
Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, MS, FACOG  
Chair, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology & Reproductive Sciences,  
UC San Diego School of Medicine and UC San Diego Health

Hosted By  
Valencia P. Walker, MD, MPH  
Vice Dean, Health Equity and Inclusion, Geisinger Medical School  
Neonatologist

Learning you are at risk of developing (or have) preeclampsia can be quite scary, given it can result in severe health issues for mom and baby. But hoping for the best is not the answer. Join Dr. Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman and Dr. Valencia P. Walker as they simplify the latest science and provide practical learnings about this condition that effects so many.

### Department Black Maternal Health Week Events

**2023 UC SAN DIEGO BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH WEEK**

In recognition of the **Black Maternal Health Week**, please join us as we host a viewing of the movie **Aftershock (2022)** followed by a panel discussion on the U.S. Maternal Health Crisis.



**SAVE THE DATE**  
**FRIDAY, APRIL 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
Refreshments 4:30 p.m.  
Film Screening 5:00 p.m.  
Panel Discussion 6:30 p.m.

**Location**  
UCSD School of Medical Education and Telemedicine (MET) Lower Auditorium  
9500 Gilman Dr., La Jolla, CA 92093

**EVENT SPONSORS**  
UC San Diego Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Science's Culture and Justice Quorum, SNWA, and LMSA

**AFTERSHOCK PANELISTS**  
Moderator  
**Dr. Audra Meadows**  
Vice Chair, Culture & Justice  
UCSD Department of OB/GYN and RS

**Panelists**  
**Dr. Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman**  
Chair, UCSD Department of OB/GYN and RS

**Nikki Helms**  
Licensed Midwife and Founder  
San Diego Community Birth Center

**Dr. Shari Cooper**  
Doula and Founder  
Root & Soul: Integrative Health

**Dr. Toluwatase (Lase) A. Ajayi**  
Pediatrician and Principal Investigator  
PowerMom

**Jessica Wade**  
Maternal & Infant Health Initiatives  
March of Dimes, San Diego County

**Dr. Akiyah Weber**  
Assemblymember, District 79

**Aftershock**  
MOVIE SCREENING & PANEL DISCUSSION

**OncLive<sup>®</sup> IPC**  
INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN CANCER

**A Virtual Event With Live Q&A**

**Gynecologic Cancers**  
Practice Changing Updates From SGO And Beyond

Click Here to **REGISTER** Monday, April 24, 2023 • 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM PT

Presented by the University of California Gyn Oncology Programs:

- UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center
- Moore Cancer Center UC San Diego Health
- UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center
- UCLA Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center
- UCI Health Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center

**TOPICS:**

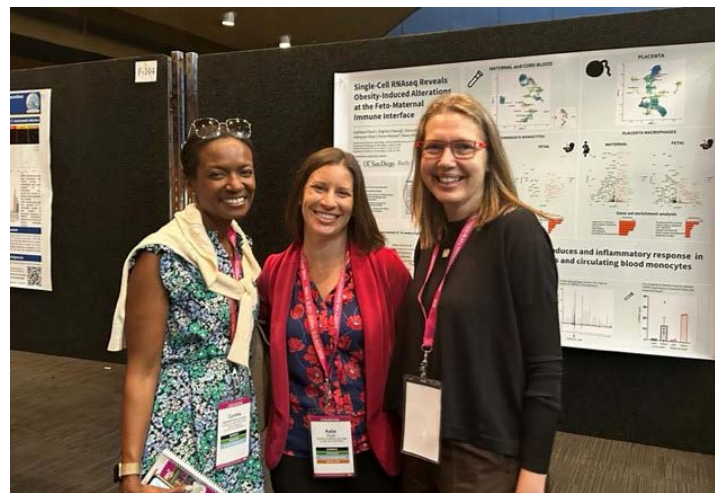
- PARP Inhibitor Use in Ovarian Cancer
- ADCs in Ovarian Cancer
- Current and Emerging Standards in Endometrial Cancer
- Preoperative Frailty Screening, a Surgical Pause Worth Waiting For
- Endometrial Cancer: Molecular Case Discussion
- Live Q&A

Health care providers, dinner is on us! Pre-register, attend, and complete our post-event survey for a \$50 GrubHub® credit.

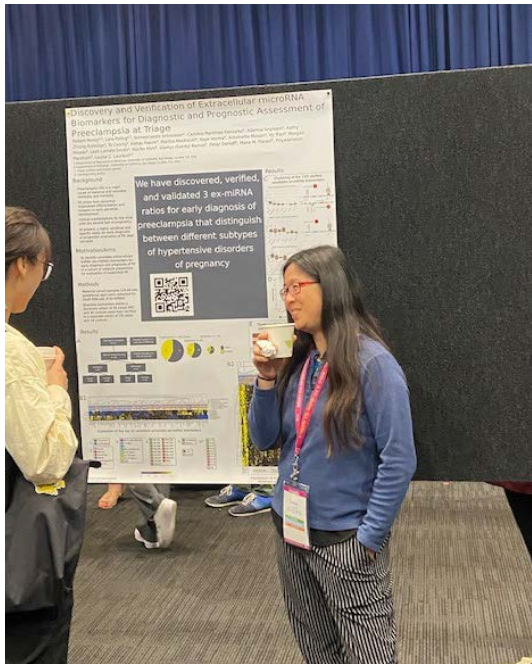
Pre-register, attend, and stay to the end to be eligible to win a \$150 gift card.

## Society for Reproductive Investigation Meeting

The 2023 70th Annual Meeting of the Society for Reproductive Investigation (SRI) was attended by the Department of OBGYN & RS from March 21-25 in Brisbane, QLD, Australia.



Drs. Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, Katie Fisch, and Eniko Sajti (Neonatology) at SRI



Dr. Louise Laurent at SRI

# OPEN FACULTY POSITIONS

UC San Diego  
School of Medicine

Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology,  
& Reproductive Sciences

Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences  
Academic Specialist

The Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at the University of California, San Diego is seeking academic specialists with a clinical interest in inpatient care to join the Hospitalist Division. This division member will join 5 current Hospitalists to provide both inpatient and outpatient care at the UCSD Medical Center Hillcrest Labor and Delivery. The Hospitalist team provides 24/7 coverage for low to moderate risk obstetrics patients. Hospitalists also perform ER consultations, admissions and surgeries for gynecology patients presenting in the emergency room or for obstetrics patients presenting to the Level 1 trauma center. The hospitalist team works with midwives, residents and students. Work duties are negotiable, and will include a blended role with a strong emphasis of inpatient care and general outpatient clinic. As an example, a typical week may entail a 24 hour inpatient shift and 2.5 days of outpatient clinic. Our Hillcrest clinic is home to a diverse patient population.

Successful applicants will demonstrate an aptitude towards exceptional working relationships with certified nurse midwives and nurse practitioners as well as a dedication to medical education including the direct teaching of residents and medical students.

Qualified applicants should be Board Certified or Active Candidate status in general obstetrics and gynecology. Previous experience or fellowship training in an OB/GYN hospitalist program is not a requirement. The appointment and salary will be commensurate with qualifications and experience in accordance with UC policy. The University of California is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, age or protected veteran status.

UC San Diego Health offers an extensive range of women's health throughout San Diego. Our original medical center is located in the heart of San Diego and is our lower volume labor and delivery site with plans for further growth as the medical center is currently undergoing re-development.

Interested applicants must apply using the following link: <https://ajol-recruit.ucsd.edu/IPF03335>

Please also send curriculum vitae, cover letter along with names and contact information of references to:

Gina Frugoni, MD Division Director  
Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences  
[gfrugoni@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:gfrugoni@health.ucsd.edu)

## Associate or Full Clinical Professor in Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery

The Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) is seeking to expand its Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery (FPMRS) Division with the recruitment of a fellowship-trained, board certified FPMRS OBGYN physician with outstanding clinical and leadership experience and skills. The current division members include nationally recognized leaders of the subspecialty dedicated to training the next generation of leaders in FPMRS. The division shares residency/fellowship training and research activities with colleagues at Kaiser Permanente, San Diego. The division engages in basic science research (which includes pelvic floor physiology), translational research (Urobiome) and clinical research with membership in NIH sponsored networks (e.g. Prevention of Lower Urinary Tract Symptoms (PLUS) and Pelvic Floor Disorders Network (PFDN)). Division members collaborate in a multi-disciplinary environment with FPMRS board certified/eligible urologists, who share in the clinical, educational and research missions providing outpatient services at three locations in San Diego County and surgical care at the Jacobs Medical Center in La Jolla. The division plans to expand these services to satellite clinics in outlying San Diego County regions.

This position, estimated to be 100% effort, may be in the HS clinical or Clinical X series at the Associate Professor or full Professor rank. Candidates should have a commitment to excellence in clinical care, patient safety, patient satisfaction, education, research and participate actively in these missions of the division. Candidates must have a MD or MD/PhD, be board certified in general Obstetrics & Gynecology and board certified in FPMRS, eligible for appointment at the Associate Professor/Professor level and must have or obtain an active license to practice medicine in California.

The candidate should demonstrate an eagerness to collaboratively engage as the co-clinical medical director in our multidisciplinary outpatient Women's Pelvic Medicine Center and have the ability to direct the FPMRS fellowship program jointly administered by UC San Diego and Kaiser Permanente. Ideal candidates should have clinical experience in the management of the full spectrum of pelvic floor disorders including vaginal, abdominal and minimally invasive surgical approaches. Applicants will be expected to practice clinical FPMRS, teach students, train residents and fellows, mentor resident and fellow research projects, mentor junior faculty and participate in administrative functions of the division, department and University. Spanish fluency preferred.

The ideal candidate for this position is someone with:

- At least 4 years post fellowship experience
- Demonstrated scholarship and leadership skills
- Desire to collaborate with a well-established and highly functioning multidisciplinary, multispecialty team of gynecology and urology trained FPMRS specialist
- Interested in developing and refining leadership skills from a team of nationally known faculty and clinical leaders
- Desire to explore innovative & new methods of care in FPMRS, and training of the next generation of FPMRS specialists
- The ability to develop and expand the clinical mission to neighboring communities
- Goals to contribute to the education of medical students, OBGYN and urology residents, and FPMRS fellows

Candidates are required to show a demonstrated commitment to diversity and equity by submitting a Diversity Statement of past contributions and/or future plans of excellence in this area as part of their application for an academic appointment.

Interested Applicants must submit a CV, contact information of 3 references, and a separate statement summarizing past or potential contributions to diversity.

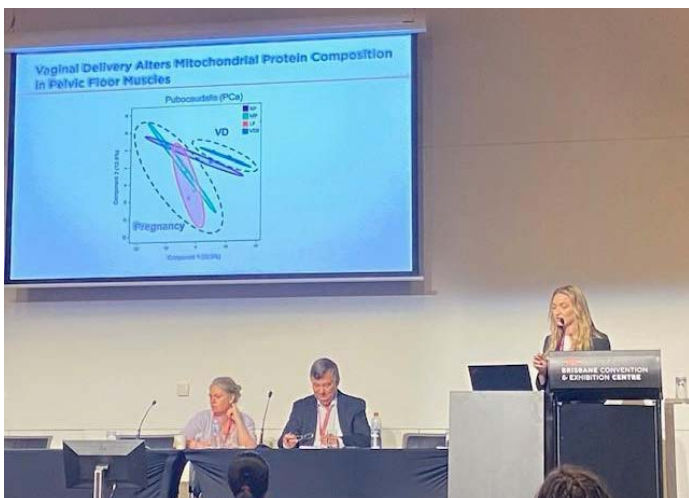
Please apply using this job application portal: <https://ajol-recruit.ucsd.edu/IPF03335>

The University of California is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age or protected veteran status.

For questions regarding the position, please contact Emily Lukacz, MD, Division Director, Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery: [elukacz@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:elukacz@health.ucsd.edu)



Dr. Marianna Alperin presentation with panel at SRI



Dr. Lindsey Burnett presentation with panel at SRI

**FACULTY POSITION IN COMPLEX FAMILY PLANNING**

We are excited to announce and are now accepting applications for an Assistant or Associate Clinical Professor Faculty Position in Obstetrics & Gynecology.

The Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) is committed to academic excellence and diversity within the faculty, staff and student body and is seeking a Complex Family Planning faculty member to join our team.

Candidates must have a MD or MD/PhD in areas of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Candidates with an MD must be board eligible or board certified and be eligible for a California medical license or equivalent certification/permit as determined by the Medical Board of California.

This position will include clinical care and teaching of medical students, residents and fellows. Clinical responsibilities will include staffing complex family planning clinics and operating room procedures. There will also be a generalist clinic and twice a month obstetric in-house call. The educational responsibilities will include family planning didactics for the medical students, residents and fellows.

The appropriate series and appointment will be at the Assistant or Associate Professor level and will be based on the candidate's qualifications and experience. A link to full descriptions of each series is provided for your review:

HS Clinical Professor - see: [http://www.ucop.edu/academic-personnel-programs/\\_files/apm/apm-278.pdf](http://www.ucop.edu/academic-personnel-programs/_files/apm/apm-278.pdf)

Applications must be submitted through the University of California San Diego's Academic Personnel RECRUIT system at: <https://apol-recruit.ucsd.edu/JPF03335>. Also, please email me ([smody@ucsd.edu](mailto:smody@ucsd.edu)) if you interested.

Salary is commensurate with qualifications and based on the University of California pay scales. Appointments may require candidates to be self-funded. As a member of the Health Sciences Compensation Plan, the appointee should be aware that there are limitations on outside professional activities and clinical moonlighting is expressly prohibited. Additional information can be found here: [https://www.ucop.edu/academic-personnel-programs/\\_files/apm/apm-671.pdf](https://www.ucop.edu/academic-personnel-programs/_files/apm/apm-671.pdf)

**ELECTIVE FOR VISITING MEDICAL STUDENTS**

UCSD OBSTETRICS, GYNECOLOGY & REPRODUCTIVE SCIENCES



**APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

- Students must have completed all required core clerkships at their home institution
- Students must complete the VSLO application available through AAMC
- Students must submit the visiting elective scholars program application at the time of VSLO submission

**THE VISITING ELECTIVE SCHOLAR PROGRAM FOR URIM MEDICAL STUDENTS**

THE DEPARTMENT OF OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY AT UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO IS PLEASED TO OFFER THE VISITING ELECTIVE SCHOLARS PROGRAM FOR 2023

**OVERVIEW**

Our department recognizes that patient well-being is influenced by the relationship with their providers. The relationships that are formed over the course of care can be enhanced by a mutual understanding of lived experiences which can be achieved through a diverse provider pool. To help us achieve this goal, we developed a scholar program to promote the recruitment and development of medical students from backgrounds underrepresented in medicine to participate in a sub-internship within the department of obstetrics and gynecology at University of California San Diego. Through this scholar program, we hope to engage medical students to develop relationships with residents and faculty and pursue training at our institution.

**ELIGIBILITY**

We encourage fourth year medical students from backgrounds underrepresented in medicine and in good academic standing at a U.S. LCME-accredited medical school who intend to match into a residency program in Obstetrics & Gynecology. As defined by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), "Underrepresented in medicine means those racial and ethnic populations that are underrepresented in the medical profession relative to their numbers in the general population."



**AWARD SPECIFICS**

Recipients will participate in a four-week clinical elective in Gynecologic Oncology, Maternal-Fetal Medicine, or Complex Family Planning based on availability starting August 2023.

- Recipients will work with division faculty and will be paired with a URIM faculty mentor
- Recipients will be involved in resident educational sessions including didactics and simulations within the Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology

**Gynecology**

- The selected recipient will receive a \$1200 scholarship.
  - Housing, if requested, will be provided in the form of a private room in a shared suite with graduate students on the UCSD campus.
  - Recipients are responsible for identifying their independent travel plan and transportation while in San Diego.
- Please submit application at the time of VSLO application. Notification of award will be made 60 days prior to your rotation.



Please direct documents and questions regarding the scholars program to the Obstetrics & Gynecology Residency Program: [obgyninternresidents@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:obgyninternresidents@health.ucsd.edu)

UC San Diego Health

**Department of OBGYN & RS News is on Social Media. Come Join Us!**



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