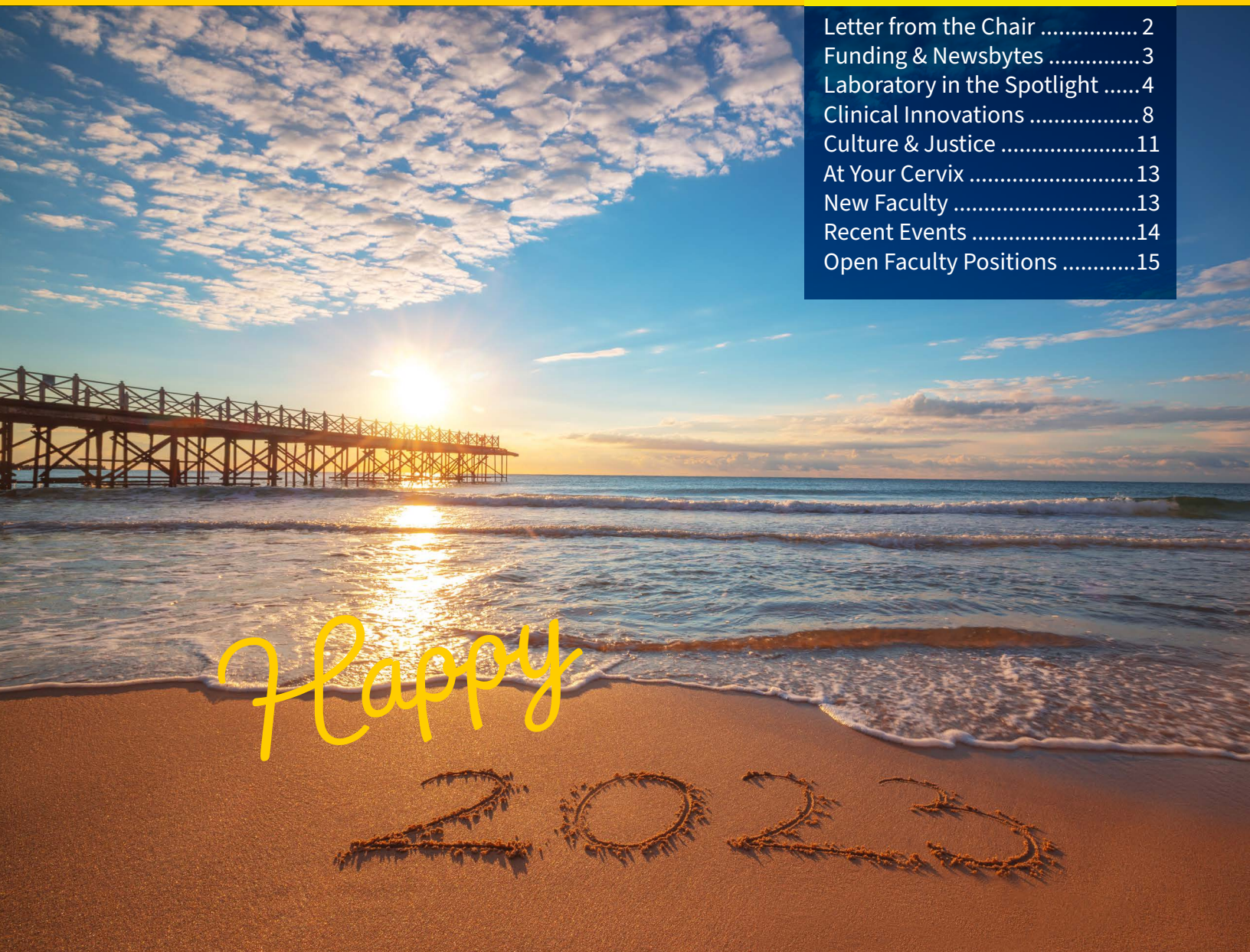




QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

In this Issue

Letter from the Chair	2
Funding & Newsbytes	3
Laboratory in the Spotlight	4
Clinical Innovations	8
Culture & Justice	11
At Your Cervix	13
New Faculty	13
Recent Events	14
Open Faculty Positions	15



UC San Diego Health

*Letter from the Chair*

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



@UCSD_ObGyn
#UCSD_ObGyn



@UCSD_ObGynReproSci
@UCSDObGyn
@UCSD_Urogyn

Dear Colleagues,

Happy New Year! Welcome to Volume 13 of the *Fimbria*; we hope you like the new look and feel of our newsletter. We would like to acknowledge our department's new Director of Communications, Ms. Sunny Worth, for the design and format. In each edition of the *Fimbria*, we focus on one of our multiple basic science labs. For this edition we highlight the lab of David Schlaepfer, PhD.

We also feature our Maternal Mental Health Program, an ongoing program to support women of reproductive age since 2006. Our Culture and Justice Quorum now has a new recurring section, and the resident-led "At Your Cervix" will make its regular appearance. Our [department CV](#) is updated to include 2022.

As always, please enjoy this issue of the *Fimbria*, and feel free to email us with any feedback to Fimbria@ucsd.edu.

Thank you!

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

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Editor & Director of Communications: Sunny Worth

Contact us at: Fimbria@ucsd.edu

Department Curriculum Vitae

Department of OBGYN & RS

FUNDING NEWS



Heidi Cook-Andersen, MD, PhD

Sponsor
California Institute for Regenerative Medicine

Grant
CIRM Discovery Grant “Towards a trophectoderm stem-cell model representing human blastocysts of the highest implantation potential”

Award
3 years, \$1.6M



Pamela Mellon, PhD

Sponsor
National Institute on Aging

Grant
Co-I on Katz Award (R01) with Xu Chen, Assistant Professor in Neurosciences, for “Role of Testosterone in Modulating Tau Pathogenesis in Females”

Award
9/2022-5/2027
\$343,665



Lindsey Burnett, MD, PhD

Sponsor
NIH, National Institute of Child Health & Human Development

Grant
Reproductive Scientist Development Program Senate Grant for “Pregnancy-Induced Adaptations to Protect Against Parturition-Associated Strains in Pelvic Floor Muscles in the Mouse Model”

Award
2022-2024



Amanda Lewis, MD

Sponsor
UCOP

Grant
UC Glycosciences Consortium for Women’s Health

Award
1/1/2023-12/31/2024
\$300k



Alexander (Sasha) Kauffman, PhD

Sponsor
NIH

Grant
Co-I on Matt Butler’s Research Project Grant (R01) (perfect 10) for “The circadian time of food intake and its effect on reproductive health”

Award
7/2022-6/2027
\$3,145,789

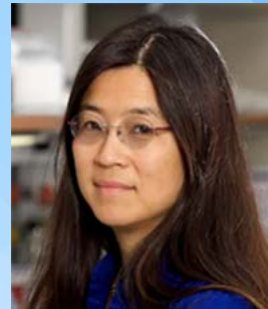


Varykina Thackray, PhD

Sponsor
Senate

Grant
Senate Grant for “Role of beta-glucuronidases in sex differences in the gut microbiome”

Award
1 year, \$15k

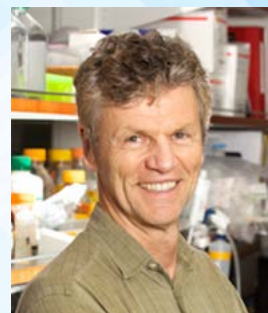


Louise Laurent, MD, PhD

Sponsor
NIH

Grant
RADx-UP Phase 3 Grant to develop long-term sustainability strategies for project: CO-CREATE-Ex: Community-egaged Optimization of COVID-19 Rapid Evaluation and Testing Experiences

Award
11/2022-11/2024
\$2,036,883

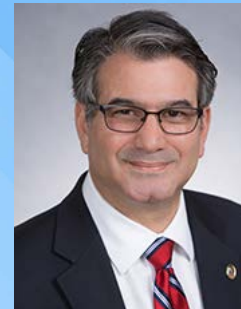


Miles Wilkinson, PhD

Sponsor
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

Grant
Path to a Cure Research Grant for Pregnant “NMD Suppression Therapy”

Award
12/2022-12/2024
\$336k



Mark Lawson, PhD

Sponsor
National Science Foundation, awarded by University System of Maryland (USM)

Grant
Co-I on Grant for the UC President’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program – Dr. Lawson is PPF Director – supporting USM Promise Academy and UC-PPFP as example / template programs to be adapted and implemented by the University of Texas system, the Texas A&M system, and the University of North Carolina system. PPF supports postdoctoral fellows who show promise as UC Faculty and who advance the mission of inclusive excellence.

Award
5 years, \$10M
11/2022-11/2024

NEWSBYTES

UC San Diego OBGYN & RS in the Media



UC San Diego
Jacobs Medical Center and
Hillcrest Medical Center

JAN 2023 • Understanding Quality of Contraceptive Counseling in the CHARM2 Gender-Equity Focused Family Planning Intervention | Science Direct | Sarah Averbach, M.D.

JAN 2023 • San Diego Has Seen a Jump in Home Births During COVID Years | KPBS | Alice Sutton, M.D.

JAN 2023 • Sex, Puberty, and the Gut Microbiome | Reproduction Laura Sisk-Hackworth, Ph.D., Varykina G. Thackray, Ph.D

DEC 2022 • 2022-2023 Best Hospitals Maternity Care (Uncomplicated Pregnancy) / 2022-2023 Best Maternity Hospitals U.S. WORLD & NEWS REPORT

DEC 2022 • Oh Baby: UC San Diego Health is Delivered Highest Rating for Obstetric Care | UCSD NEWS | Michelle Brubaker, Cynthia-Gyamfi-Bannerman, M.D., Maryam Tarsa, M.D.

DEC 2022 • Muscle Stem Cells and Fibro-Adipogenic Progenitors in Female Pelvic Floor Muscle Regeneration Following Birth Injury | Nature.com NPJ | Marianna Alperin, M.D.

DEC 2022 • For Patients with Sickle Cell Disease, Fertility Care is About Reproductive Justice | NPR | H. Irene Su, M.D.

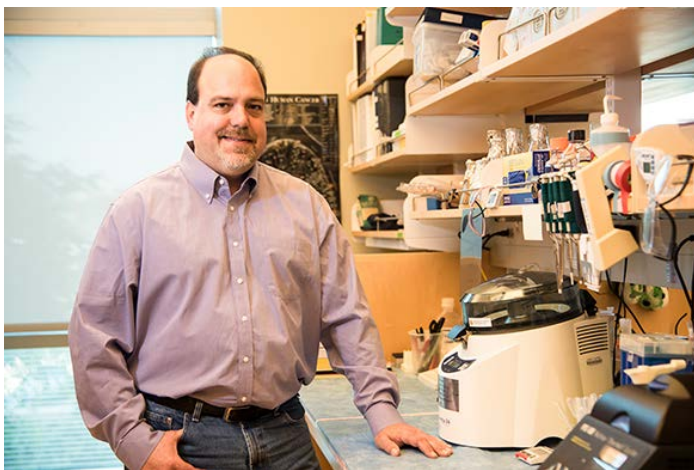
NOV 2022 • Number of Babies Born Pre-term in Illinois has been on the Rise for Years | CBS News Chicago Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, M.D.

NOV 2022 • The Rate of Babies Born Premature Saw a ‘Concerning’ Increase in 2021, Report Finds | USA Today Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, M.D.

NOV 2022 • UCSD Health Expands to PHR for Express Care

LABORATORY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meet David Schlaepfer, PhD & the Research Team Inspiring Us from the Groundbreaking Schlaepfer Translational Science Laboratory



Dr. Schlaepfer's Fascinating Story and Distinguished Contributions to Advancing Novel Solutions

I was born and raised in southern California, active in sports throughout my youth, and served as student body president for a high school of 3000 students. I graduated cum laude from Princeton University with an A.B. in Biology (1985) where I was introduced to and became enamored with experimental science. As a graduate student in biological chemistry mentored by Dr. Harry Haigler PhD at UC Irvine, I was the first to purify, clone, and

characterize annexin V – now widely used as a commercialized (but non-patented) marker for cell death. As a postdoctoral researcher with Dr. Tony Hunter, PhD at The Salk Institute for Biological Studies, I showed that integrin receptor binding to fibronectin matrix was linked to Ras-MAP kinase by Grb2 binding to a specific tyrosine phosphorylated site in focal adhesion kinase (FAK). In 1996, I joined the Department of Immunology at the Scripps Research Institute as an Assistant Professor where my group led the field in the molecular analyses of FAK protein function in promoting cell movement, invasion, and tumor cell survival. In 2005, I was awarded an American Heart Association Established Investigator Award for our pioneering work demonstrating differential roles for FAK expression or activity in developmental blood vessel morphogenesis using conditional knockout and knockin transgenic mouse models.

In 2007, I joined the [UC San Diego Health Moores Cancer Center](#), Division of Gynecologic Oncology, as a Professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences. The move to The Moores Cancer Center was to foster translational ovarian cancer research that may impact patients. The FAK gene (PTK2) is localized to a genetic locus (chromosome 8q24.3) amplified in over 70% of high grade serous ovarian cancer. Elevated FAK expression is associated with aggressive tumors and decreased overall patient survival. The [Schlaepfer lab](#) incorporates multiple cutting edge research tools and newly derived ovarian mouse tumor models to elucidate molecular mechanisms of tumor chemotherapy resistance.

An investigator-initiated clinical trial at the Moores Cancer Center termed **ROCKIF** (**R**esensitization of **C**hemotherapy Resistance by **K**inase **I**nhibition of **F**AK) in collaboration with Dr. Michael McHale, MD and Verastem, Inc. is testing the Schlaepfer lab hypothesis that intrinsic and adaptive cisplatin chemotherapy resistance in ovarian cancer is dependent in part on FAK activity. As such, ROCKIF is testing whether small molecule FAK inhibitors, orally deliverable with few adverse events to patients, will sensitize ovarian tumors (known to express high levels of FAK) to cisplatin chemotherapy killing effects. Funding for this trial was made available by the San Diego philanthropic patient advocate group “Nine Girls Ask?” (for a cure to ovarian cancer) led by a stage IV ovarian cancer survivor, Joan Wyllie, who was diagnosed and treated at the Moores Cancer Center.

Few effective treatments exist to break the cycle ovarian cancer recurrence and the eventual development of chemotherapy resistance. In the last decade, antibody-based checkpoint inhibitors have revolutionized immunotherapy treatment options for T cell-induced tumor eradication. However, current immunotherapy combinations have shown limited effectiveness against ovarian cancer in part due to a tumor-generated and T cell disabling immunosuppressive tumor microenvironment. In a recent paper published ([Ozmadenci et al, PNAS, April 2022](#)) in collaboration with Dwayne Stupack, PhD, the Schlaepfer group utilized genomic, transcriptomic, multiplex immunofluorescence, flow cytometry, and a syngeneic ovarian tumor model to demonstrate the potential for use of oral FAK inhibitor and anti-TIGIT checkpoint immunotherapy as a rationally-derived immunotherapy combination for high grade serous ovarian cancer. A future clinical trial is in the planning stages with [Inxmed, Inc.](#) that will incorporate the [Schlaepfer](#) and [Stupack](#) labs in translational science questions.



David Schlaepfer, PhD and Joan Wyllie, CEO and Founder of Nine Girls Ask?

Nine Girls Ask? Support ROCKIF Trial

Mentoring Achievements, Research Philosophy & Mission Statements

Achievements

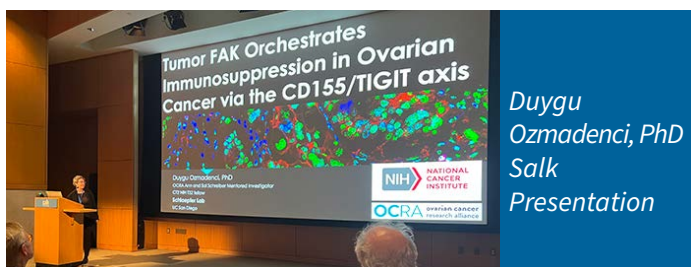
- I have mentored more than thirty graduate students, postdoctoral, or MD fellows who have achieved productive careers in academia (departmental chairmen) or executives and scientists in the bio-pharmaceutical industry.
- I have been continuously funded by the NIH since 1996. This funding supports research activities, academic mentoring, and excellence in education.

Dr. Schlaepfer's Philosophy & Mission

- I strive to make translational gynecologic oncology research advances and look forward to new opportunities in working with clinical colleagues in bench-to bedside research projects.
- I strive to foster a shared interest in learning, discovery, and growth as unique individuals in a lab environment that is educationally rigorous yet inclusive and supportive of diverse backgrounds, past training, or career goals.
- I emphasize building strong foundations of communication based upon active listening, and I encourage independent and critical thinking.
- My research lab provides students and researchers the opportunity to test new hypotheses and make discoveries that move science forward.



David Schlaepfer, PhD and Dwayne Stupack, PhD Lab Teams



Meet the Schlaepfer Lab Team

Lab Team (not-pictured):

Joanna Zhang, BS, UCSD Masters Student, and Ka'i Chauvin, Research Assistant



Antonia Boyer
Research Assistant,
Lab Manager



Marjaana Ojalill, PhD
Postdoc Researcher



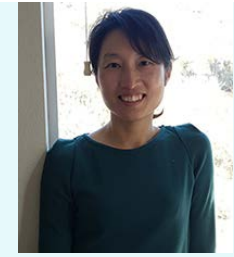
Maryam Abbas
Undergraduate at
UC San Diego



Marvin Xia
Undergraduate at
UC San Diego



Lily Chen, MS
Research Assistant



Jung-mi Byun, MD, PhD
Visiting Professor



Schlaepfer Lab Team Luncheon and Celebration

Schlaepfer Lab Overview

We are funded by two NIH R01 grants from the National Cancer Institute: 1) to study molecular mechanisms of ovarian cancer drug resistance and 2) the role of FAK signaling within ovarian tumor cells leading to an immunosuppressive tumor microenvironment.

Nine Girls Ask

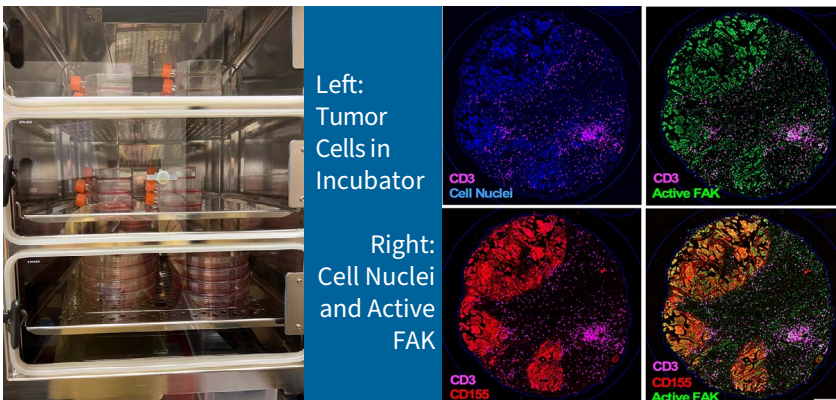
“Nine Girls Ask? for a cure for Ovarian Cancer!” is the inspiration and dedication of Joan Wyllie who has “beat the odds” and has survived stage IV ovarian cancer with no evidence of disease for 10+ years. Nine Girls is named on behalf of Joan, her three daughters, and four granddaughters along with hundreds of supporters encompassing patients, survivors, family members, and local San Diegans who formed a non-profit foundation to provide support for women along their ovarian cancer treatment journey. Joan was diagnosed, treated, and recovered under care of the UCSD Gynecological Oncology Division led by Steven Plaxe, MD and now by Michael McHale, MD. Since 2010, Nine Girls Ask (NGA) has donated funds to purchase various pieces of research equipment in the Schlaepfer and Stupack labs. In 2017, a years-long NGA fundraising effort enabled the initiation of the ROCKIF clinical trial at the Moores Cancer Center. NGA support continues to be a vital resource for the acquisition of cutting-edge research equipment, and the interactions of Schlaepfer lab personnel with NGA members is educational for all involved.

Project 1

We have inactivated the FAK gene by CRISPR DNA editing within murine and human ovarian tumor cells and have re-expressed wildtype or various function-altering mutations of FAK. The goal of these studies is to understand the role of FAK activity (it is an enzyme that will modify other proteins) as a function of its localization in cells. FAK is hypothesized to function at the cell periphery in conjunction with integrins at the cell surface. It is known that FAK signaling can lead to changes in RNA transcription of targets involved in stem cell maintenance, DNA repair, and cell growth-survival. As biochemical cell fractionation and immunofluorescent analyses reveal that activated FAK can move to the nuclear region upon tumor cell exposure to cisplatin chemotherapy, we are testing the hypothesis that nuclear FAK has specific functions and downstream targets promoting ovarian cancer cell survival.

Project 2

One of the biggest challenges to extending patient survival from recurrent ovarian cancer is to understand how these tumors can “hide” from detection by the immune system. Immunotherapy encompasses treatments that use the body’s own immune system to help fight cancer.



Left:
Tumor
Cells in
Incubator

Right:
Cell Nuclei
and Active
FAK

CD3
Cell Nuclei

CD3
CD155

CD3
CD155
Active FAK

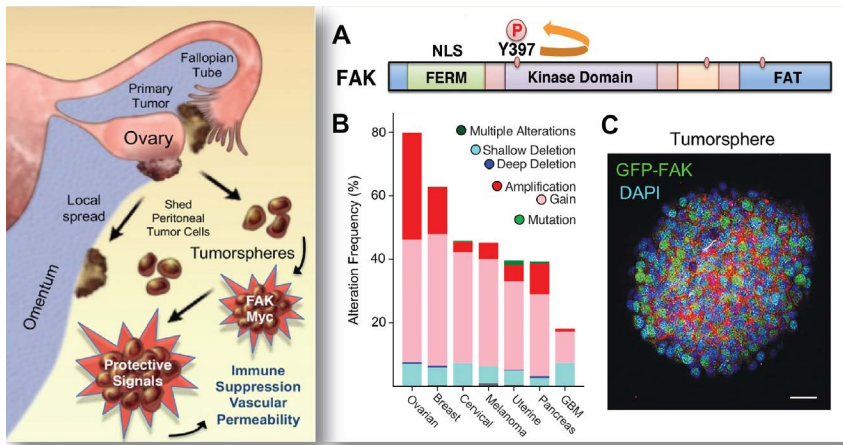


Fig. 1 Ovarian Cancer Progression Model | **Fig. 2 Elevated FAK Levels in Ovarian Cancer**

Despite successes in other types of cancer, immunotherapy treatments for ovarian tumors have had limited success in promoting patient survival. Our work builds upon the idea that ovarian tumors can upregulate immune “protective” molecules and that these provide a “shield” against immune cell attack. We have found that FAK activity drives the expression of CD155 protein on tumors cells and this interacts with the TIGIT receptor on immune cells to limit immune cell activation in the tumor microenvironment.

Combination of the oral FAK inhibitor delivery with antibody-directed blockage of the TIGIT receptor significantly enhanced the survival of mice with chemotherapy resistant ovarian tumors. Mouse survival was associated with the formation of tertiary lymphoid structures within and nearby tumor sites as a marker of immune activation in the process of tumor killing. Ongoing research is focusing on the molecular mechanisms of how FAK is functioning within the tumor cells to promote CD155 expression and to determine signals and potential biomarkers involved in TIGIT and tertiary lymphoid structure regulation.

Fascinating Scientific Research Findings, Insights, and Progress

A new avenue of research in the lab is combining molecular proteomics by mass spectrometry, RNA sequencing, a new mouse model of ovarian cancer, and the analyses of patient-derived ovarian tumor cells of known genetics to test whether elevated FAK expression is driving the production of extracellular matrix proteins abundantly found in ascites fluid of advanced stage tumors. As these matrix proteins – termed the Matrisome – can bind back to tumor cells via integrin receptors triggering more FAK activation, we believe that this feed-forward signaling linkage acts to sustain increased FAK activity and tumor cell survival, especially in tumor spheroids that exist and grow within the ascitic peritoneal fluid of advanced cancer patients.

New Year’s Resolutions & Lab Goals

Our basic research depends on coordinating experiments with ovarian tumor cells in culture, implanted tumor experiments in mice, and finding parallels with our newly derived Moores Cancer Center ovarian tissue microarray and harvested patient-derived tumor cells. We have specific hypotheses being tested and it is imperative to publish our experimental results to push science forward and apply for continued grant funding. This is the cycle of our academic research. We also received quite a bit of international social media coverage of our April 2022 publication in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Science](#) (Ozmadenci et al.) as noted:

- [How Ovarian Cancer Defies Immunotherapy \(UC San Diego Today\)](#)
- [Lethal Ovarian Cancer Checked by Dual Attack on Immune Checkpoint, in Mice \(Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News\)](#)
- [New combinatorial strategies to treat ovarian cancer \(Drug Target Review\)](#)
- [Ovarian Cancer Fights Back Immunotherapy – Here’s How \(Med India\)](#)
- [How Ovarian Cancer Defies Immunotherapy \(Technology.org | Science & Technology News\)](#)
- [How Ovarian Cancer Defies Immunotherapy \(Science Blog\)](#)
- [How ovarian cancer defies immunotherapy \(SCIEN MAG | Science Magazine\)](#)
- [How ovarian cancer defies immunotherapy \(Research News\)](#)
- [PNAS / TIGIT](#)
- [¿Cómo el cáncer de ovario desafía la inmunoterapia?](#)
- [DESCUBREN CÓMO EL CÁNCER DE OVARIO DESAFÍA LA INMUNOTERAPIA Y LO HACE UNO DE LOS TUMORES MÁS DIFÍCILES DE TRATAR](#)
- [Descubren cómo el cáncer de ovario desafía la inmunoterapia y lo hace uno de los tumores más difíciles de tratar](#)
- 13 July 2022: Biomedical Picture of the Day, MRC London Institute of Medical Science / [Breaching the Defense](#)
Blocking tumour protein FAK releases checkpoint brake making ovarian cancer susceptible to immunotherapy

My number one goal for 2023 is to see an international clinical trial come to fruition in the testing of FAK inhibitor and anti-TIGIT checkpoint immunotherapy in platinum resistant ovarian cancer as a new therapy for CD155+ and FAK+ ovarian tumors. The pharmaceutical company Inxmed has an ongoing clinical trial testing Doxil chemotherapy in combination with their small molecule FAK inhibitor (IN10018) in ovarian cancer ([ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT05551507](#)). This trial is building upon our findings that FAK inhibitor sensitizes tumors (possibly those tumor cells that have FAK copy number gains and high FAK expression) to chemotherapy as we are also testing in the MCC ROCKIF trial using the Verastem (defactinib) FAK inhibitor. Preliminary findings from this trial presented at scientific meetings are highly encouraging.

Inxmed and UCSD (with Dr. Michael McHale, MD and Dr. Ramez Eskander, MD) are planning the “next step” clinical trial of testing Doxil, IN10018 FAK inhibitor and an anti-TIGIT blocking immune therapy. The [Schlaepfer](#) and [Stupack](#) labs are planning translational science questions that can be answered in this future trial such as evaluating molecular biomarkers in trial patient blood samples termed as “liquid biopsies.”

Advice on Running a Long-standing Successful Lab with Medical Breakthroughs

Personal time management, active listening, and building a strong lab team mentality are some of the important things that I have learned “on the job.” There is not a course on how to run a lab and although there are books on the subject, it comes down to finding the right combination of people who have different skills, lots of perseverance, and resiliency in the face of lots of technical obstacles along the experimental journey. I mentor in the UCSD Cancer Center junior faculty grant writing program on how clear and concise writing can communicate one’s ideas and excitement about one’s research; this principle is of key importance to obtaining grant funding. My lab is comprised of undergraduates, a master’s student, research assistants, postdoctoral researchers, and a visiting scientist. We have also hosted gynecologic fellows in their years long research rotations. One of our most used FAK knockout murine tumor cell is termed “KT13” which stands for the thirteenth clone analyzed by Kristen Taylor MD, a former gynecologic oncology fellow.

Barriers to Research Goals and Advice on How to Overcome Obstacles

I feel that part of the public has lost faith in science over the last decade. Funding is always hard fought and many of the public believe that drug companies are the main research engine. With the new administration in place for two years, I am reminded by President Biden’s pledge that “doing nothing is not an option” and that “restoring trust in science will not be simple after four years of lies, half-truths, misdirections and conspiracy theories.” Scientists are not necessarily revered, and the funding for biomedical research has remained flat (except for stimulus funding) for far too long. It is sad that the percentage of students in the US choosing basic research as a career option is at a very low point (see [The Declining Interest in a Research Career](#)). Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education for our youth needs to be followed up with better career options for researchers, especially those who have families to support.

Visit schlaepferlab.org to learn more and stay current on our lab research and exciting news updates.

CLINICAL INNOVATIONS

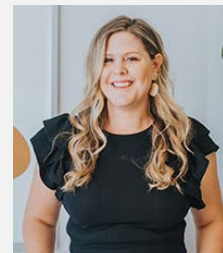
Clinical Innovations: Partnering to Support Women in Mental Health



Jessica Kingston,
MD, OBGYN Generalist
Division Director



Alison Reminick,
MD, Psychiatrist



Amber Rukaj,
Licensed MFT

With the beginning of a new year and resolutions for health and mindfulness, we meet with three of our outstanding specialists to learn what UC San Diego is doing to pave the way for improving patient care in reproductive mental health. The directors of the Women’s Reproductive Mental Health (WRMH) Program (formerly known as the Maternal Mental Health (MMH) Program) – Obstetrics & Gynecology Division Chief, Jessica Kingston, MD, Reproductive Psychiatrist, Alison Reminick, MD, and Marriage and Family Therapist, Amber Rukaj – discuss the mental health issues that arise within the range of reproductive experiences including pregnancy, breastfeeding, perinatal loss, and infertility.

This issue of *Fimbria* shines a spotlight on our mental health care program which encapsulates whole-person expert reproductive mental health care. This multidisciplinary team includes clinical resident training, cross-specialty collaboration, and focused patient care. WRMH / MMH serves to actively assess social determinants to provide preventative treatment for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) for patients who are at risk. Meet the stellar team delivering compassionate care to our patients during the life-changing events that encompass pregnancy, childbirth, fertility journeys, pregnancy loss, prenatal development stages and beyond.

Program History

Inception of the Women’s Reproductive Mental Health (WRMH) Program

In 2006, prompted by a UC San Diego patient’s suicide, the Maternal Mental Health Program began to take shape. Integration of universal screening using the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) tool at prenatal intake and at each postpartum visit became paramount to detecting perinatal mood disorders and perceived extent of coping with transition into parenthood. The EPDS 10 item questionnaire asks patients to disclose how they are feeling and assigns a score (0-30) for the clinical assessment of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.

At the time of implementation, 10-30% of patients at UCSD screened positive with initially no internal source for mental health care. For this reason, Amber Rukaj, Co-Director and Clinical Supervisor for MMH, was hired in 2006 and in collaboration with Jessica Kingston, MD, Obstetrics & Gynecology Generalist Division Director and UCSD School of Medicine Professor in the Department of OBGYN & RS, helped build the MMH program. In 2016, the program's name was broadened to Women's Reproductive Mental Health Program, to reflect the diversity of women's health mental care concerns serviced by the team.

Solutions Take Shape

In 2008, a UC San Diego Family Medicine/Psychiatry resident with special interest in perinatal psychiatry joined the MFT team and began seeing patients one day/week at UC San Diego Health Medical Offices South (MOS). With "suicide and overdose being recognized as the leading cause of death for women and childbearing people in the first year following pregnancy," as noted by the Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance (MMHLA), UCSD clinician and therapist efforts advocate for treatable solutions.

Success Continues with Collaboration

Alison Reminick, MD, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine, was hired in 2015 and strongly contributes to the continued success of services and collaborations between the Department of Reproductive Medicine and the Department of Psychiatry.

Women's Reproductive Mental Health Program Training Site

The Women's Reproductive Mental Health (WRMH) Program functions as a training site for both therapists from the University of San Diego's Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) program working towards licensure and for UCSD psychiatry residents to refine skills in reproductive psychiatric care and perinatal psychopharmacology. The program aims to train psychiatry residents and therapists to work collaboratively on patient care. This pragmatic strategy fosters close interprofessional relationships to make a meaningful difference in improved maternal health status and quality-of-life. Education is at the forefront of WRMH through training the next generation of MFT's and medical residents to become transformative leaders in collaborative care and reproductive mental health. Given the high patient need and demand and shortage of maternal mental health professionals, educating more physicians and therapists is a priority for the San Diego community. Each year approximately 7-10 psychiatry residents and 2-4 MFT therapists are expertly trained in clinical excellence at UC San Diego Health and seeded into the community to build a stronger foundation for treating the spectrum of reproductive mental health disorders. A unique aspect of the WRMH program is its co-location within and collaboration of our Obstetrics and Gynecology and Psychiatry departments.



From left: Becky Marquez, Amber Rukaj, Co-Director, Jamie Deluca, Betsy Muirhead, Alison Reminick, MD, and Caryolyn Suttle

Much Appreciation to Our Women's Reproductive Mental Health Team

OBGYN

Jessica Kingston, MD, OBGYN Generalist Division Director

Psychiatry

- Alison Reminick, MD
- Ashley Clark, MD
- Simerjeet 'Simi' Brar, MD
- Stephanie Martinez, MD
- Psychiatry Residents (currently 8 residents)

Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT), Psychotherapy

- Amber Rukaj, Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist (LMFT), Villa La Jolla Clinic (VLJ), Medical Offices South (MOS) Clinic
- Evelyn Robarts, LMFT, Reproductive Endocrinology & Infertility, (VLJ)
- Carolyn Suttle, LMFT, Directors Place
- Jamie Deluca, PhD, Department of Psychiatry
- Becky Marquez, PhD, MFT trainee – MOS Clinic, Medi-Cal patients only
- Betsy Muirhead, MFT Trainee – MOS Clinic, Medi-Cal patients only

Program Referral Volume

On average, WRMH receives **100+** internal referrals per month. The majority originate from Ob/GYN and REI clinics with a few from Family Medicine and Internal Medicine. Approximately **50%** of patients referred see psychiatry specialists since the initial MFT assessment concludes patients could benefit from medication management. Most patients prefer to initiate care with a therapist first before establishing with a psychiatrist. The relationship with the MFT is crucial and increases the likelihood of follow through with a psychiatrist for medication evaluation. MFTs work diligently to reduce barriers for patients and serve as a liaison strengthening the patient-psychiatrist clinical relationship.

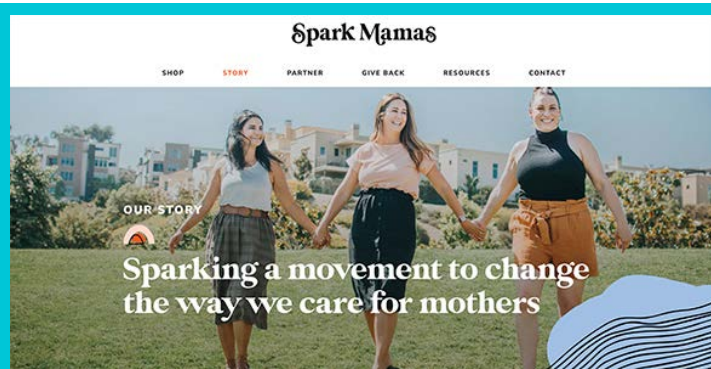
What Makes the Women’s Reproductive Mental Health Program Successful?

Telehealth

Telehealth emerged as an invaluable tool to leverage reproductive mental health care by reducing barriers such as transportation, parking costs, childcare, pregnancy travel discomfort, and illness. Virtual visits improve access to care, particularly for our disadvantaged communities where patients struggle with bus fare, public transport commute times and schedules, and finding childcare to allow for clinical visits. Telehealth is convenient for patients and providers because addresses inequities in seeking care thereby reducing stress on patients and families. Moreover, this tool improves space utilization for clinicians and office sites.

Reproductive Mental Health Trends

Spark Mamas, the brainchild of UC San Diego Health’s Amber Rukaj and fellow therapist Chelsea Haakmeester, is an awe-inspiring innovative endeavor dedicated to supporting mothers. The newly launched Spark Mamas is an online gift registry designed to support San Diego-based mothers throughout their parenthood journey. The new “Wishlist” registry features more than 20 products and services from local women-owned businesses.



Gifts of beauty, connection, support, time and wellness can be purchased as a re-imagined solution to take care of moms through the “isolation, invisibility and the loss of spark” during the “maternal adjustment” phases.

Women business owners supporting women and their children made this inspiration possible. As a postpartum doula and licensed MFT, Amber Rukaj’s Spark Mamas gives back to the community by partnering with nonprofits like the Postpartum Health Alliance and donates to their mission of providing perinatal mental health awareness, education and support for mothers in the San Diego community. Know a new mama? Refer them to the site that nurtures their well-being and covers their wellness from doula packages to birthing courses to infant sleep mentoring, pelvic floor therapy and much more. Visit [Spark Mamas](#) to see this impressive, first-of-its-kind collaborative resource.



Postpartum Health Alliance (PHA)

Dr. Kingston, Dr. Reminick, and Amber Rukaj (Past President of PPH) are further involved with the nonprofit Postpartum Health Alliance (PHA). These operations are centric to raising awareness about Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) while supporting local San Diego perinatal wellness professionals. PHA operates a “warmline” to receive messages 24/7 with a 24-hr contact turn-around from trained PHA volunteers. New parent concerns are addressed and not dismissed. Moreover, PHA provides research-based resources and educates providers in perinatal wellness and mental health through holding workshops on a mission to prevent misdiagnosis of PMADs. According to the [PHA](#), “**1 in 5 moms and 1 in 10 new dads**” are impacted by PMADs – Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders. In the same vein, [Postpartum Support International \(PSI\)](#) states “**1 in 7 moms and 1 in 10 dads suffer from postpartum depression.**” Please recommend these sites to patients in additional need of a personalized support system and reduce their barriers to care.

Taking Action

Recognizing factors and responding with pregnancy and postpartum interventions is essential for improved maternal health outcomes. Expanding partnerships with providers and point-of-care professionals within the larger health system is pivotal to preventing the progression of maternal mental health disorders. Difficulties have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic and heightened stressors for our obstetrics patients by exacerbating their reproductive mental health tolerance. In sum, take action to expand the scale of care through interdisciplinary WRMH resident training, encouraging provider networking, and supporting staff needs to treat Medi-Cal patients who have no access to higher health care; advocate for policy changes and increased funding for reproductive mental health at the federal and state level. Learn more about our [WRMH Program](#) and [Postpartum Care](#).

Thank you incredible Women’s Reproductive Mental Health (WRMH) team for your remarkable contributions to reproductive mental health care!

CULTURE & JUSTICE



Department of OBGYN & RS Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Reception

On Wednesday, January 18, 2023, the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences celebrated the life and legacy of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. – an influential civil rights leader, inspiring orator, and honorable recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. King espoused American values of peace, freedom, and justice – ultimately changing the world as a leader of social progress. Dr. King was fundamental in advancing civil rights in the United States for all Americans and ending the legal segregation and disenfranchisement of African Americans. He often spoke out against institutional and systemic racism advocating for necessary, structural changes in society. To that end, and in service to Dr King’s legacy, our department publicly presented the [Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences Anti-Racism Statement](#), created by the Culture and Justice Quorum Ambassadors. This statement of our department’s values seeks not only to forward our mission and vision, but also to inspire and foster a spirit of action among our colleagues and local community. To learn more about the life, work, and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., visit [The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change](#) (The King Center).



Department Chair, Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, with Crystal Cene, MD, Chief Administrative Officer for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and Valita Jones, PhD, Administrative Director of the PRIME Program at the MLK Reception



Resident Diana Ha, MD, reading out the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, & Reproductive Sciences Anti-Racism Statement



Department Chair Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, and Vice Chair of Culture & Justice, Audra Meadows, MD, welcome UC San Diego colleagues at the MLK Reception and present the new Department of OBGYN & RS Anti-Racism Statement



Celebrating MLK with Food and Refreshments from Rhythm’s Chicken & Waffles, a Black-owned Restaurant

OB REFUGEE & ASYLEE CASE NAVIGATION PROGRAM



Obstetrics (OB) Refugee and Asylee Case Navigation Program

UC San Diego Health in collaboration with our community now provides Obstetrics (OB) Refugee / Asylee Care Navigation to help eliminate barriers to obstetrics care by making healthcare more efficient, inclusive, and effective for our refugee and asylee patients. This program assists with providing pediatric care for a newborn including supplying baby care items (car seats, baby clothes, diapers, etc.) and works to advance equity for our patients.

Program Overview

- Guidance to pregnant patients through the UC San Diego Health Care system
- Assist with access to pregnancy related services and info.
 - Ensure that prenatal & follow-up care is available
 - Assist patients with acquiring appropriate social services
 - Help locate resources and support to meet patient needs
- Enhanced patients' healthcare experience
- Reduced communication barriers between patient and care team

Eligibility

OB patients who identify as a refugee or asylum seeker

Program Access

- Provider / Nurse create consult in EPIC- Refugee / Asylum Seeker Care Navigation
 - For UC San Diego Health patient referral process, see Tip Sheet: IP OB Consult to Refugee / Asylum Seeker Care Navigator Program. The tip sheet provides step-by-step system process for UCSD providers to refer a patient.
- Patients in the hospital (triage and inpatient) or in UC San Diego Health clinics can be referred to our program.
- Telephone: (619) 214-4624
- OBRefugee@health.ucsd.edu



OB Refugee / Asylee Case Navigation Leadership

Maria (Eliza) Garay, OB Refugee / Asylee Care Navigation Program Manager, OBGYN Surgical and Support Services Manager, Women & Infant Services

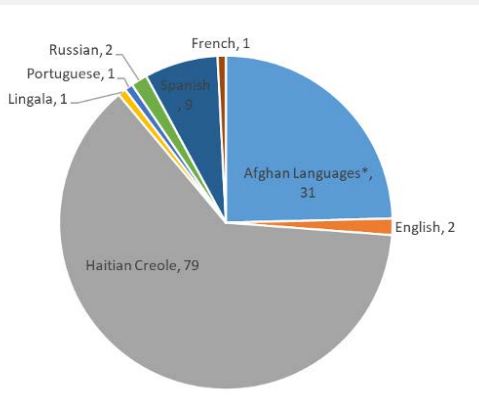
OB Refugee/Asylee Data

Patients Assisted

Inpatient/Triage	98
Ambulatory	29
Total	127

Language	# of Patients
Arabic	1
Afghan Languages*	31
English	2
Haitian Creole	79
Lingala	1
Portuguese	1
Russian	2
Spanish	9
French	1
Grand Total	127

*Afghan Languages: Pashto, Dari and Farsi



2022 No. of Patients in OB Refugee / Asylee Case Navigation Program Charted by Language

Scan QR code to support the OB Refugee & Asylee Case Navigation Program



AT YOUR CERVIX

At Your Cervix (AYC) Resident Leads

- Tatyanna Henderson, MD
- Hayley Schultz, MD

At Your Cervix



What is At Your Cervix?

At Your Cervix (AYC) highlights the department's community partnerships. Every quarter, the Resident Leads focus on a project involving a specific underserved group in San Diego and spearhead a resident-led effort for community service and engagement. Our hope is for AYC to help promote and coordinate participation with the Department of OBGYN & RS.

How does AYC promote UCSD's Culture & Justice / Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) ambitions?

Our role as doctors spans far beyond individual patient care. We have a desire and duty to promote equity by recognizing disparities and striving to close the gaps that prevent underserved populations from receiving the quality of healthcare they need. We work with our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion leads to find projects that work towards this goal.

This issue of Fimbria's At Your Cervix highlight – PrevenCasa Clinic



From far left: Department of OBGYN & RS Jorge Alvarado, MD, Sarah Averbach, MD, and Resident Christy Zachek, MD with PrevenCasa Site Supervisor Alex Gonzalez

What is PrevenCasa?

PrevenCasa is a nonprofit border clinic that cares for a high-risk patient population, provides HIV/AIDS education and safe sex resources to refugees, asylum seekers and patients in the Zona Norte community in Tijuana, B.C., Mexico.

How are we involved?

Every month, a resident from the PGY-4 class accompanies one of our faculty members to a day at the clinic. Our primary roles are to learn about refugee health and coach Pasantes (interns in Mexico's medical education model) who rotate through the clinic specialty obstetric and gynecologic skills for use in this clinic and beyond.

NEW FACULTY

Welcome to UC San Diego School of Medicine



Kelly Culwell, MD
Complex Family
Planning



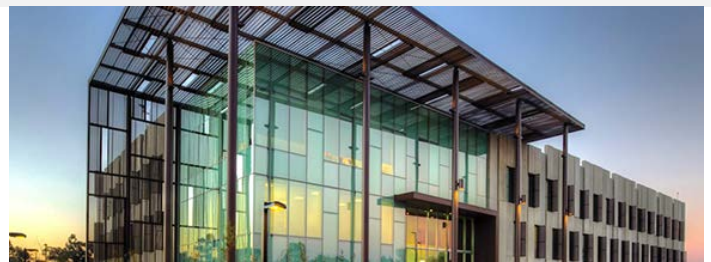
**Mariana Ramos-
Rivera, MD**
OBGYN Generalist



Michelle Tang, MD
OBGYN Generalist

New faculty previously featured in *Fimbria* VOL. 12

- **Ukachi Emeruwa, MD**, Maternal-Fetal Medicine
- **Maureen Farrell, MD**, OBGYN Generalist
- **Ariana Melendez, MD**, OBGYN Hospitalist
- **Charlotte Pickett, MD**, Minimally Invasive Gynecologic Surgery



Welcome to the Department of OBGYN & RS

Welcome Samone Whitfield

We are thrilled to welcome you to our Business Administration as a Research Administrator. Samone is an expert in grant proposals!

Welcome Chelsea Saelee

We are thrilled to welcome you to our Business Administration as Faculty Support for our Obstetrics & Gynecology Division.

RECENT EVENTS

University of California C5 Gynecologic Oncology Consortium

C5 – UC San Diego, UC Davis, UC Irvine, UCLA, and UCSF (November 2022)

Michael McHale, MD, Gynecologic Oncology Division Chief, led a very successful C5 2022 consortium at UC San Diego. C5 is a yearly pilot program (thriving in its second year) for fellows from UCSD to join with other fellows from the University of California’s 5 fellowship programs (UC Davis, UC Irvine, UCLA, and UCSF). This program has morphed into an education and think tank collaboration taking place over a day-and-a-half and is attended by 1-2 faculty members and 1-4 fellows from each school. 20 fellows participated this year!

The event begins with a casual Friday evening faculty and fellow dinner featuring a keynote lecture from a UC Alumnus former fellow followed by a Saturday morning breakfast and didactic program. Each year fellows present theme-based case discussions with a faculty distillation of data. Topics for this year included ‘Front line ovarian cancer maintenance’ from UCI, ‘Recurrent endometrial cancer’ from UCLA, ‘Recurrent cervical cancer’ from UCSD, ‘Platinum resistant ovarian cancer’ from UC Davis, and ‘Platinum sensitive ovarian cancer’ from UCSF. Saturday afternoon is reserved for collaborative research initiatives with a 5-hour surgical lab session at the Center for the Future of Surgery. C5 concludes with a Saturday dinner attended by program supporters. Planning for next year’s event is already in the works to continue collaborating and revolutionizing the field of surgery and gynecologic oncology!



UC San Diego Health Clinical Fellows Presenting



Great Turnout and Representation



Dinner Program Hosted by Dr. Michael McHale



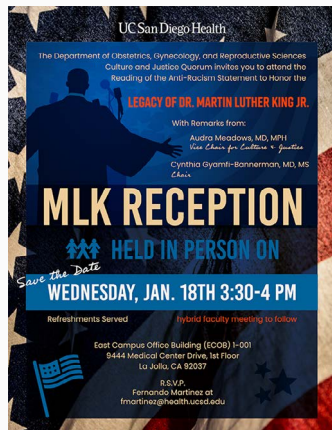
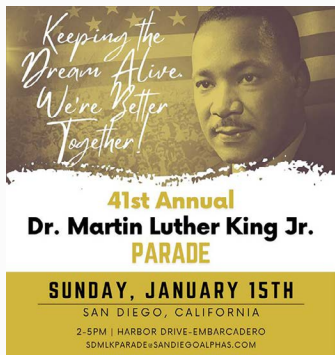
Clinical Fellows From All Programs

Department of OBGYN & RS Holiday Party

December 2022



From far left is: Marni Jacobs, PhD, Louise Laurent, MD, PhD, Priya Pantham, PhD, and Cynthia Gyamfi-Bannerman, MD, MS



This year the Department of OBGYN & RSco-sponsored San Diego's Martin Luther King Day Parade

Culture & Justice Quorum MLK Reception with Anti-Racism Statement Unveiling

OPEN FACULTY POSITIONS

Openings / Join Our Team

UC San Diego School of Medicine Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, & Reproductive Sciences

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.

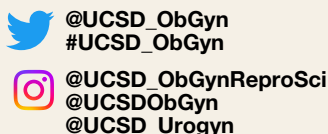
The appropriate series and appointment will be at the Assistant or Associate Professor level and will be based on the candidate's qualifications and experience. A link to full descriptions of each series is provided for your review:

HS Clinical Professor - see: http://www.ucop.edu/academic-personnel-programs/_files/apm/apm-278.pdf

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) 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

Department of OBGYN & RS
News is on Social Media
COME JOIN US!



Contact Us & Subscribe to Our Newsletter: Fimbria@ucsd.edu
UC San Diego Health, 9444 Medical Center Dr., La Jolla, CA 92037

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://apol-recruit.ucsd.edu/JPF03335>

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

Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences Hospitalist Physician

The Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at the University of California, San Diego is seeking a new Hospitalist division member to join 5 current Hospitalists to provide care at the UCSD Medical Center Hillcrest Labor and Delivery location. 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 and occasionally assists with perinatal day clinics on site. Work duties average 42 hours per week with a full-time commitment of 85 24-hour shifts per year.

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 preferred but 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 Hillcrest 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://apol-recruit.ucsd.edu/JPF03335>

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