

# Partnership Pulse

*A Publication by the AU/UGA Medical Partnership*

medicalpartnership.usg.edu  
Summer 2025



*Building for  
the Future*



## From the Desk of the Dean

The past year has been busy and exciting here at the Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership.

Our Athens Free Clinic accomplished a remarkable milestone in February as it surpassed over \$1 million of free health care delivered since opening in 2018. This is an amazing accomplishment, and I am so proud of our faculty, staff, and students who have dedicated countless hours to provide quality health care to the citizens of Athens-Clarke County and the surrounding areas. You can read more about our Athens Free Clinic and its million-dollar milestone on page 8.



ANDREW DAVIS/TUCKER

This edition also features a section dedicated to our talented alumni. These profiles will introduce you to only a few of our outstanding alums who have some unique and inspiring stories to tell. I am so proud of our former students and the impact they continue to make in their communities, and I hope you enjoy learning more about them and their exciting endeavors.

As evident by this issue's cover story, we are quite literally building for the future here in Athens. The School of Medicine's new Medical Education and Research facility broke ground on our Health Sciences Campus in May and will feature 93,600 square feet with state-of-the-art technology and collaborative learning spaces for our students. You can read more about the facility and get a behind-the-scenes look at the renderings on page 14. The remainder of the section dedicated to the School of Medicine features a look at Dr. Yana Zavros and her commitment to groundbreaking research and a timeline of the accomplishments we have achieved since our last issue, including the historic milestone of attaining candidate status with the Liaison Committee on Medical Education.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Partnership Pulse. It is a testament to the remarkable accomplishments of faculty, staff, and students and to our commitment to building a healthier Georgia.

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to each of you for your continued support of the Medical Partnership and the School of Medicine. We could not be where we are today without your unwavering support, and for that, I am forever grateful.

*Michelle A. Nuss MD*

**Michelle A. Nuss, MD**  
 Campus Dean, AU/UGA Medical Partnership  
 Founding Dean, UGA School of Medicine

# INSIDE

- 6 **Match Day 2025**  
Celebrating the 12<sup>th</sup> successful Match Day
- 8 **The \$1 Million Mark**  
AFC surpasses \$1 million of free health care
- 10 **In the News**  
Medical Partnership faculty, staff, and students in the headlines
- 24 **This Is Why I'm Here**  
Alumni feature: Hammad Aslam, MD '14
- 28 **Golden Summer**  
Alumni feature: Colton Wood, MD '16
- 30 **A Day in the Life of a WNBA Doc**  
Alumni feature: Ashley Austin, MD '14
- 32 **Alumni Notes**  
Updates on our alumni
- 36 **A Year in Review**  
A photographic review of select events from the past year
- 38 **Partnership Prestige**  
Faculty, staff, student, and resident accolades

# FEATURES

- 14 **Building for the Future**  
UGA's new School of Medicine begins construction
- 18 **Leading Cancer Research**  
Collaborative approach bridges research-to-clinic gap for personalized cancer treatment

### ADMINISTRATION

UGA President • Jere Morehead, JD  
 UGA Provost • Benjamin C. Ayers, PhD  
 AU President • Russell T. Keen, EdD  
 AU-MCG Dean • David Hess, MD  
 AU/UGA Medical Partnership Campus Dean &  
 UGA School of Medicine Founding Dean • Michelle A. Nuss, MD

### PARTNERSHIP PULSE MAGAZINE

Editor • Lindsey Derrick  
 Art Director & Designer • Jennifer Stowe, MS  
 UGA Photographers • Andrew Davis Tucker,  
 Dorothy Kozlowski, and Chamberlain Smith  
 Contributing Writers • Colton Wood, MD and Ashley Austin, MD

Change your mailing address by contacting  
 MPmedia@uga.edu

Find previous Partnership Pulse issues online at  
[medicalpartnership.usg.edu/news/partnership-pulse/](http://medicalpartnership.usg.edu/news/partnership-pulse/)  
 Submit Alumni Notes or story ideas to [lderrick@uga.edu](mailto:lderrick@uga.edu)

### FINE PRINT

The Partnership Pulse is printed annually for alumni, community partners, and friends of the Medical Partnership.  
 Copyright © 2025 by the AU/UGA Medical Partnership.  
 No part of this publication may be reproduced in any way without permission from the editor.

### STAY INFORMED. FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



Cover artwork by Jennifer Stowe, MS  
 The watercolor cover was created to add a human touch to the architectural renderings for the new medical building of the new UGA School of Medicine. The new facility will be located at the entrance of the Health Sciences Campus off Foster Road. Final design is subject to change.

# news



ANDREW DAVIS TUCKER



# THE \$1 MILLION MARK

Longstanding partnerships between the Athens Free Clinic and community organizations have provided free health care since 2018

By Lindsey Derrick

Fulfilling its commitment to the underinsured and uninsured of Athens-Clarke County and surrounding areas, the Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership's Athens Free Clinic surpassed the milestone of delivering more than \$1 million of health care since its opening in 2018. The Athens Free Clinic connects Medical Partnership students and faculty with sites across the community to provide primary care.

"We could not have reached this mark without our team of faculty physicians, staff nurses, medical students, undergraduate volunteers, community partners, and the support of leadership at the medical school," said Dr. Suzanne Lester, medical director of the Athens Free Clinic. "We have helped community members receive high-quality primary care without incurring medical debt, and we have improved access to treatment for acute and chronic medical conditions."

Several staff members play critical roles in setting volunteers' schedules, coordinating with community partners, and providing medical care. Jeni Fitzpatrick serves as the registered nurse and teaching operations manager, Dr. Kate Meixner is an assistant professor of family and community medicine, and Jen Brown is a registered nurse and teaching clinic coordinator.

Medical Partnership faculty and students provide primary health care at local community partner sites including the Acceptance Recovery Center, Advantage Behavioral Health Systems, Bigger Vision Community Shelter, Cedar Shoals High School, Clarke Central High School, Clarke Middle Health Center, Covenant Presbyterian Church, Foothills Charter High School, Nuci's Space, Pinewoods Community, Potter's House, and Project Safe.

"Beyond providing more accessible health care in our community, I hope that our services have contributed to our communities feeling more empowered in their health care and more trusting of doctors," Lester said.

Since 2018, more than 330 medical students and 19 faculty volunteers have conducted more than 4,400 patient visits through the Athens Free Clinic.

"It really feels amazing to witness the profound impact our team is making on the Athens community," said Fitzpatrick. "The fact that we can teach our medical students while simultaneously providing free medical care to the community is incredibly rewarding."

In February 2021, the Athens Free Clinic began administering COVID-19 vaccines in the Athens community. Faculty and students administered vaccines at the Department of Public Health, Athens Community Council on Aging, Potter's House, Columbia Brookside, Bethel Village, and other community sites. The clinic also partnered with the Clarke County School District to administer vaccines to faculty, staff, students, and families. Overall, the clinic administered almost 4,000 vaccines.

"Since the Medical Partnership opened its doors in 2010, one of our missions has been to serve our surrounding communities," said Dr. Michelle Nuss, campus dean. "I am so proud of the care provided by the Athens Free Clinic and the hard work of our dedicated faculty and staff. It's wonderful to see the impact that the Athens Free Clinic has had in making high-quality health care accessible to those in need."





## Clarke Middle Health Center Unveils New Location

New space at Clarke Middle School brings more health care opportunities for the center

ANDREW DAVIS TUCKER

By Lindsey Derrick

The Clarke Middle Health Center officially has a new home. With construction on the middle school complete, the health center moved into its new brick-and-mortar space in January and held a ribbon cutting celebration for community partners and constituents on May 1.

At 4,000 square feet, the new location for the center brings opportunities to better serve its patients. In addition to more exam rooms, the center features a larger laboratory, a dedicated space for counseling services, and a new community cabinet with toiletries. The center also plans to add nonperishable foods to the cabinet in the future.

“This beautiful new space will allow us to continue delivering care, but in a more efficient environment,” said Suzanne Lester, medical director of the Athens Free Clinic. “We extend our humble gratitude to the Clarke County School District (CCSD) and the project team for this amazing new space.”

### THE CENTER

The Clarke Middle Health Center is a school-based health center—an innovative way to deliver health care to students, families, and staff while remaining on school property. Having the medical services offered on site reduces the time students miss from class and the time that guardians miss from work to take their child to a doctor. It also makes health care more accessible to those with a lack of transportation.

“The center has allowed CCSD students to stay in school, CCSD staff to stay at work, and for CCSD families to have access to better health,” Lester said.

Since opening in 2022, the center has treated more than 1,700 patients with the amount of care totaling more than \$402,000. The free medical services are provided by Augusta University/ University of Georgia Medical Partnership faculty, nurses, and students. The care at the center focuses on treating acute illness and offering sports physicals, but patients can be referred to specialists for more in-depth treatment.

The center also includes partnerships with other UGA schools and colleges including the College of Family and Consumer Sciences, the School of Law, the College of Public Health, and the School of Social Work.

“School-based health centers really help members of the community overcome barriers to accessing health care,” said Jeni Fitzpatrick, teaching clinic operations manager. “The Clarke Middle Health Center is also unique in that the care our team provides is completely free, which removes the financial strain that might otherwise deter individuals or families from visiting a medical clinic.”

“We are so thankful for the services that the Clarke Middle Health Center has brought to the students, staff, and families of CCSD,” said Amy Roark, director of school nursing services at CCSD. “It’s a wonderful resource to be able to access medical, legal, and behavioral health services conveniently on campus, and we appreciate that, through this collaboration, CCSD students and staff can maximize their time in class, learning and teaching.”



LINDSEY DERRICK

### The Nourish Garden

Students and faculty received a \$5,000 UGA Campus Sustainability Grant to put towards the implementation of a garden on the Health Sciences Campus.

### Faculty & Staff Featured in UGA Columns

The Medical Partnership had three faculty and staff members featured in Columns, the online newspaper for the University of Georgia, this year: Dr. Amiee Martin, director of simulation, was featured in a September issue, Dr. Tim Brown, director of interprofessional education, was featured in January, and Jeni Fitzpatrick, nurse and teaching clinic operations manager, made an appearance in an April edition.



DOROTHY KOZLOWSKI



ANDREW DAVIS TUCKER



ANDREW DAVIS TUCKER

### Nuss Elected to Mastership in American College of Physicians

Dr. Michelle Nuss, campus dean of the Medical Partnership and founding dean of the UGA School of Medicine, was elected to Mastership status in the American College of Physicians (ACP).

To be elected to Mastership, nominees must have Fellowship status in the ACP. Individuals elected to Mastership are nominated by their peers and chosen by the ACP Awards Committee before being approved by the ACP Board of Regents.

Less than 2% of ACP’s 161,000 members have obtained Mastership status.



IAN MCFARLANE

### Internal Medicine Residency Program Continues Accreditation with no Citations

The Medical Partnership’s Internal Medicine Residency Program once again received no citations for institution and program accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). The Internal Medicine Residency Program in partnership with St. Mary’s Health Care System has achieved no program citations since its initial accreditation in 2014.



# Residency Program Celebrates Milestone Match Day

By Lindsey Derrick

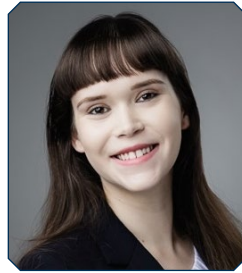
The Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership Internal Medicine Residency Program (IMRP) at St. Mary's Health Care System celebrated a milestone Match Day on Friday, March 21, as the program matched its 10th class of residents.

"We are honored once again to have received so many truly exceptional applicants to our program," said Dr. Lela Ward, program director for the IMRP. "The supportive medical community, dedicated volunteer faculty, exceptional staff, and commitment of St. Mary's Health Care System to quality care truly make this an excellent program to learn and to train physicians in Northeast Georgia."

"This is another exciting year in the history of the Internal Medicine Residency Program," said Stonish Pierce, president and CEO, Trinity Health of Georgia, which includes St. Mary's. "We are confident this next class will continue the tradition of compassion and excellence demonstrated by their predecessors. St. Mary's is proud to be an integral part of the IMRP and its success in bringing more physicians to Georgia and the Northeast Georgia region."

The new residents will begin practicing at St. Mary's Health Care System on July 1.

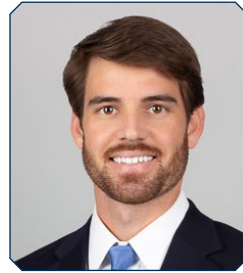
The IMRP Class of 2028 and the schools at which they completed their medical education are:



Morgan Adair, DO  
Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine



Caitlin Biderman, DO  
Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine – Carolinas Campus



Hudson Bridges, MD  
Medical University of South Carolina College of Medicine



Hannah Luft, DO  
LMU DeBusk College of Osteopathic Medicine



Toni-Ann Miller, MD  
University of Medicine and Health Sciences, St. Kitts



Sritha Moram, DO  
Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine



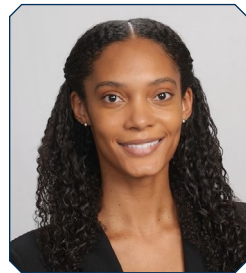
Vinayak Narayan, DO  
Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine



Madison Olds, DO  
LMU DeBusk College of Osteopathic Medicine



Chandni Patel, MD  
Medical University of the Americas (Nevis)



Kalen Roberts, MD  
St. George's University School of Medicine



Patricia Zielinski, DO  
Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine

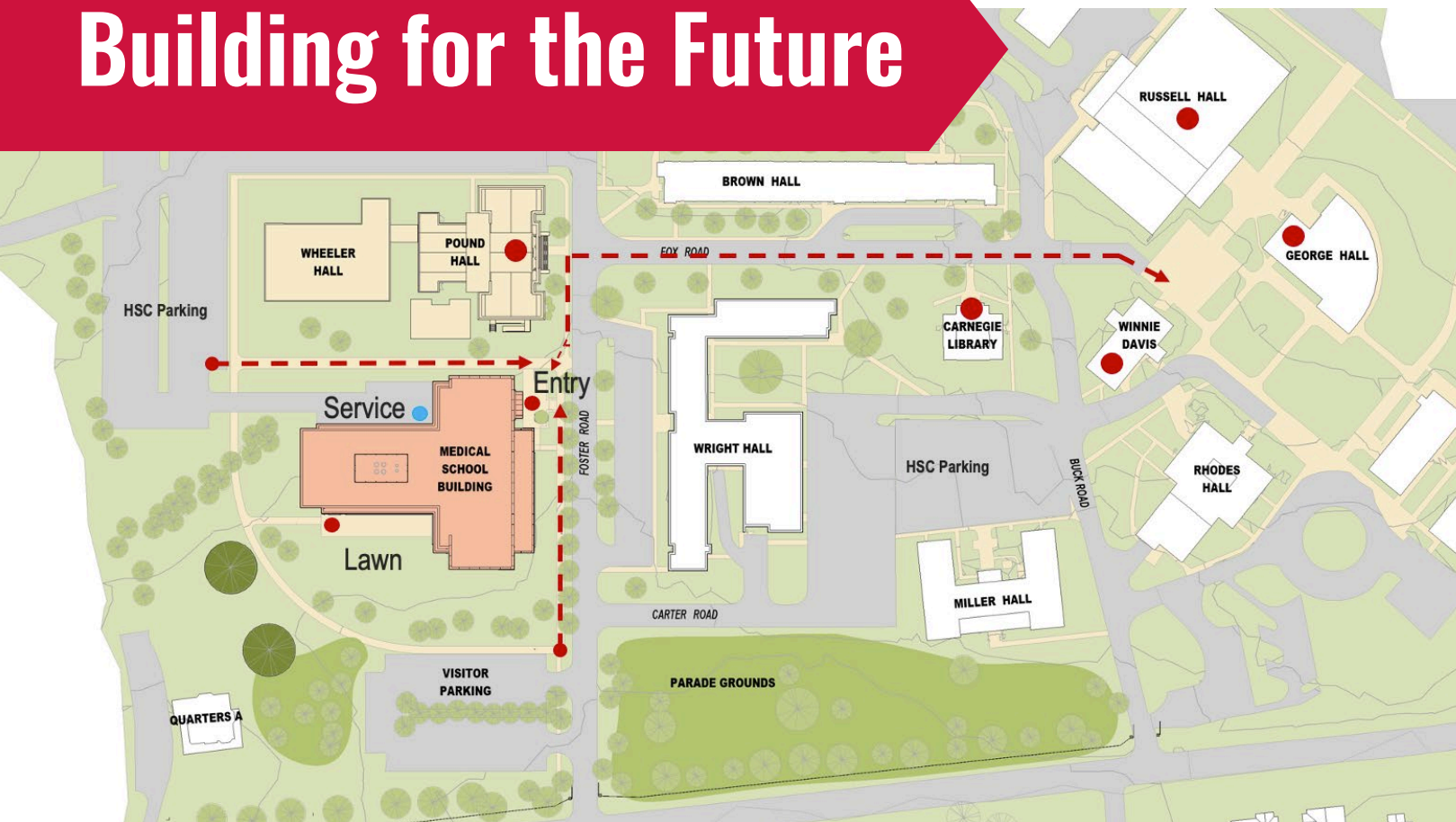


Cyril Mina, DO  
Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine

# cover story



# Building for the Future



## New UGA School of Medicine Education & Research Facility

- \$100 million facility:
  - \$50 million from FY24 amended state budget; UGA raised \$50 million
- 92,000 gross square feet
  - 67,000 gsf educational spaces
  - 25,000 gsf research space
- Design professional selected May 2024: Flad Architects
- Construction company selected May 2024: Turner Construction
- Site location is Foster Road entrance off Oglethorpe Avenue between Pound Hall and visitor parking lot.

Front facade concept design



View from Ogelthorpe Avenue and Foster Road entrance



Conceptual designs only. Designs are subject to change.



◀ **Follow Along!**  
Scan the code to view a live stream of the new building construction.



Views from the shared open laboratories



## Featured Spaces

- Two large auditoriums: one flat and one tiered
- Anatomy lab
- Simulation center with 10 bays
- Clinical skills center with 30 exam rooms
- Learning commons
- Library/Learning resource center
- Student support services
- Faculty and staff offices
- Conference rooms
- Workstations
- Well-being hub
- Group and individual study spaces
- Campus Market Express

A view from inside the tiered large group learning lecture hall. Both halls will have capacity for 130 students.



Projected

# University of Georgia School of Medicine Timeline

January 2024

Governor Brian Kemp recommends \$50 million in the amended budget to support the creation of a medical school at the University of Georgia.

February 2024

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia votes unanimously to authorize the University of Georgia to establish a new independent School of Medicine in Athens.

March 2024

The Georgia General Assembly approves the amended budget, including \$50 million for the design and construction of a medical school building at the University of Georgia, to be matched with institutional funds.

Dr. Michelle Nuss is appointed founding dean of the School of Medicine.

April 2024

The University of Georgia holds a groundbreaking ceremony at the future site of the School of Medicine building.

November 2024

The Board of Regents approves the University of Georgia to grant Doctor of Medicine degree. The School of Medicine submits accreditation application to the Liaison Committee on Medical Education.

February 2025

The School of Medicine is granted candidate status by the LCME.

May 2025

Construction begins on the Medical Education and Research Building on the Health Sciences Campus. Completion is slated for December 2026.

Fall 2025

The Liaison Committee on Medical Education will conduct a site visit to the University of Georgia and the School of Medicine to ensure accreditation compliance.

August 2026

UGA SOM is projected to matriculate the inaugural class of medical students.\*

\*dependent on obtaining preliminary status from the LCME



The learning commons space provides ample seating for studying, group work, and dining.



A prefunction corridor outside the large group learning lecture halls.



Looking into a simulation in-patient bay from the control room where faculty can control manikins and observe students.



A glimpse from inside a simulation in-patient room bay. The new simulation center will feature 10 bays.



Clinical skills exam rooms are designed to mimic a typical doctor's office exam room, thus enhancing the simulated patient experiences for our learners.



A view from inside the designated student lounge area, complete with a kitchen, TV, comfortable seating, and dining space.

# UGA's School of Medicine Leads Cutting-edge Cancer Research

Collaborative approach bridges research-to-clinic gap for personalized cancer treatment

By Hannah Gallant



New research from the University of Georgia's School of Medicine promises to accelerate the development of personalized cancer treatment. The project is led by Dr. Yana Zavros, UGA's inaugural Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar in Molecular Medicine and a leading researcher in cellular and molecular translational medicine.

Zavros and her team use organoids, 3D cell cultures generated from a patient's tumor tissue, to study the tumor environment, discover how the patient's immune system responds to the tumor cells and investigate how the cancer evolves over time. Data from these organoid models has already shown remarkable value, leading to the identification of a targeted therapy for pancreatic cancer that is now being tested in a Phase 2 clinical trial.

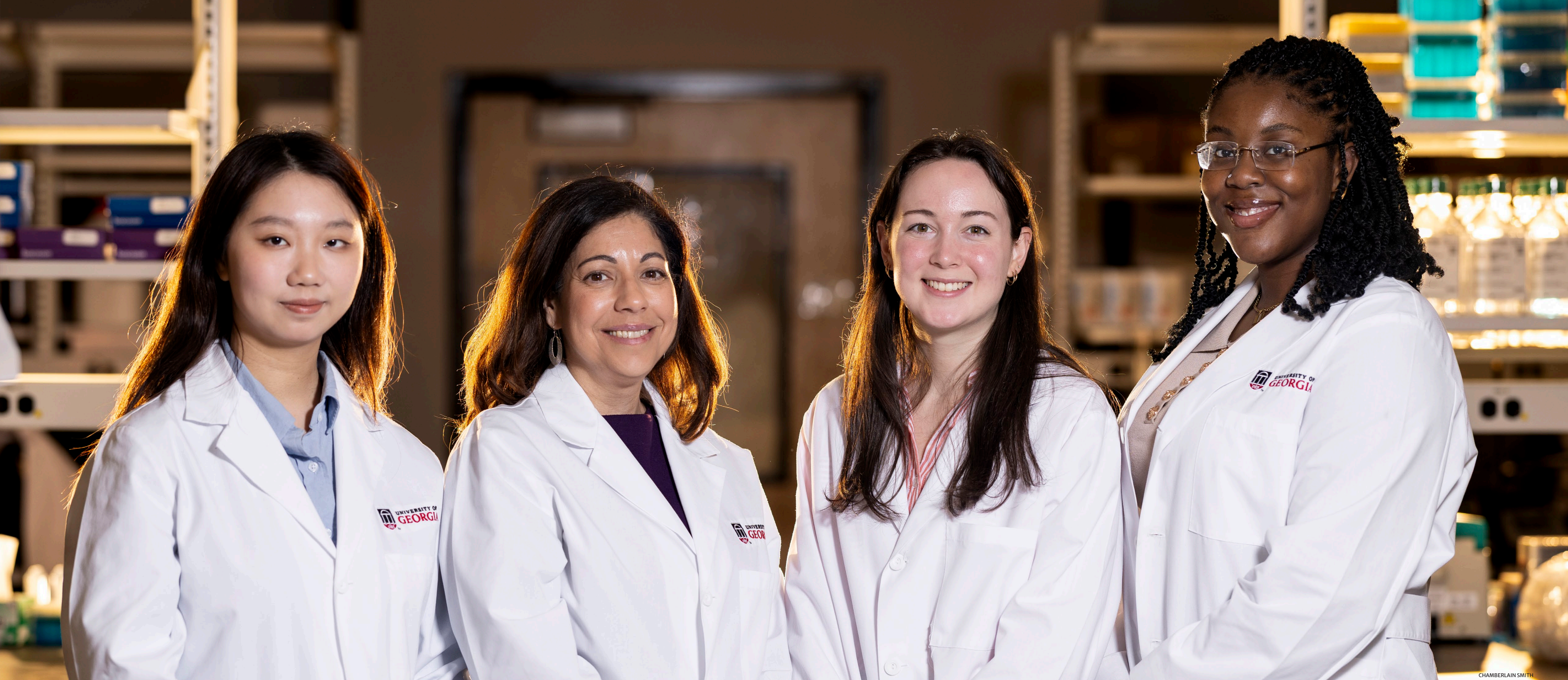
"By using this defined system in cell culture, we can take a deeper investigation into how that tumor was initiated in the context of the surrounding immune cells and stroma," said Zavros, who also serves as a research center director and professor in the department of interdisciplinary biomedical sciences in the School of Medicine. "Organoids allow us to acquire an understanding of the tumor, and this knowledge allows us to potentially diagnose the disease at an earlier stage and also prevent disease progression."

## Advanced equipment brings new dimension to cancer research

This research is possible thanks to new, advanced instrumentation that allows Zavros' team to study tumor tissue in detail—from individual genes to important biomarkers that could become the target for new therapies. The ORION platform enables the visualization of biomarkers within multiple individual cell types that is then compared directly to the patient's pathology of the tumor tissue. The team also has a new microscope system—the Nikon Crest spinning-disk confocal microscope—that captures clear, detailed images of living 3D organoid models in real time. This makes it ideal for studying how these cells grow and behave without causing damage.

UGA's School of Medicine is the only higher education institution in Georgia and one of few in the country with access to this specialized equipment.

"Dr. Zavros has been an exceptional addition to the School of Medicine, and her groundbreaking interdisciplinary research will only further advance the University of Georgia's reputation as a top research institution in the country," said Michelle Nuss, School of Medicine founding dean. "Dr. Zavros' state-of-the-art laboratory has furthered her renowned research abilities and will aid in attracting additional talented researchers to the University of Georgia."



### Clinical partnerships enhance research impact

Zavros and her research team work closely with clinical partners throughout Georgia. Collaboration with these experts in surgery, pathology, and oncology is vital to leverage the equipment and research for its greatest potential impacts for cancer patients.

“Interdisciplinary collaboration is successfully established and implemented by a research team that brings unique skills and expertise,” Zavros said. “The clinical perspective and the exchange of knowledge is critical from the beginning of initiating a research study because it helps the translational scientists ask

the important clinical questions in the lab that can then potentially accelerate those discoveries to the patient.”

Her team is working on a project to host detailed scans of the organoid models on the School of Medicine website so pathologists and collaborators across the state and nation can access this interactive data and use it to shape patient treatment. Zavros hopes the data and technological advancements from this research can be applied beyond pancreatic and other gastrointestinal cancers to help scientists study multiple diseases at the cell and molecular level.

### Training the next generation of medical researchers

As she continues to develop the School of Medicine’s research enterprise, Zavros is also grateful for the educational and training opportunities that her lab provides to UGA students. From access to the most advanced equipment to collaboration with a multidisciplinary team of clinical faculty, the lab gives students a hands-on approach to training and research.

“Seeing students come into the lab and take the lead on their project, bringing their own perspective and growing their knowledge in the field because of genuine inquiry is inspiring to me,” Zavros said. “Anything I

can do to provide the opportunities and tools and an environment that promotes excellence and creativity for them to achieve their career goals is what makes me happy as a mentor and advisor.”

*Team Zavros pictured left to right: Xi Sun, graduate assistant; Dr. Yana Zavros; Abigail Branch, research laboratory technician; and Ugonna Ezuma-Igwe, graduate assistant, in Zavros' temporary laboratory at the School of Veterinary Medicine.*



**FOR HEALTHIER PEOPLE.  
FOR A HEALTHIER GEORGIA.  
FOR HEALTHIER GENERATIONS.**

**MAKE A GIFT TODAY**



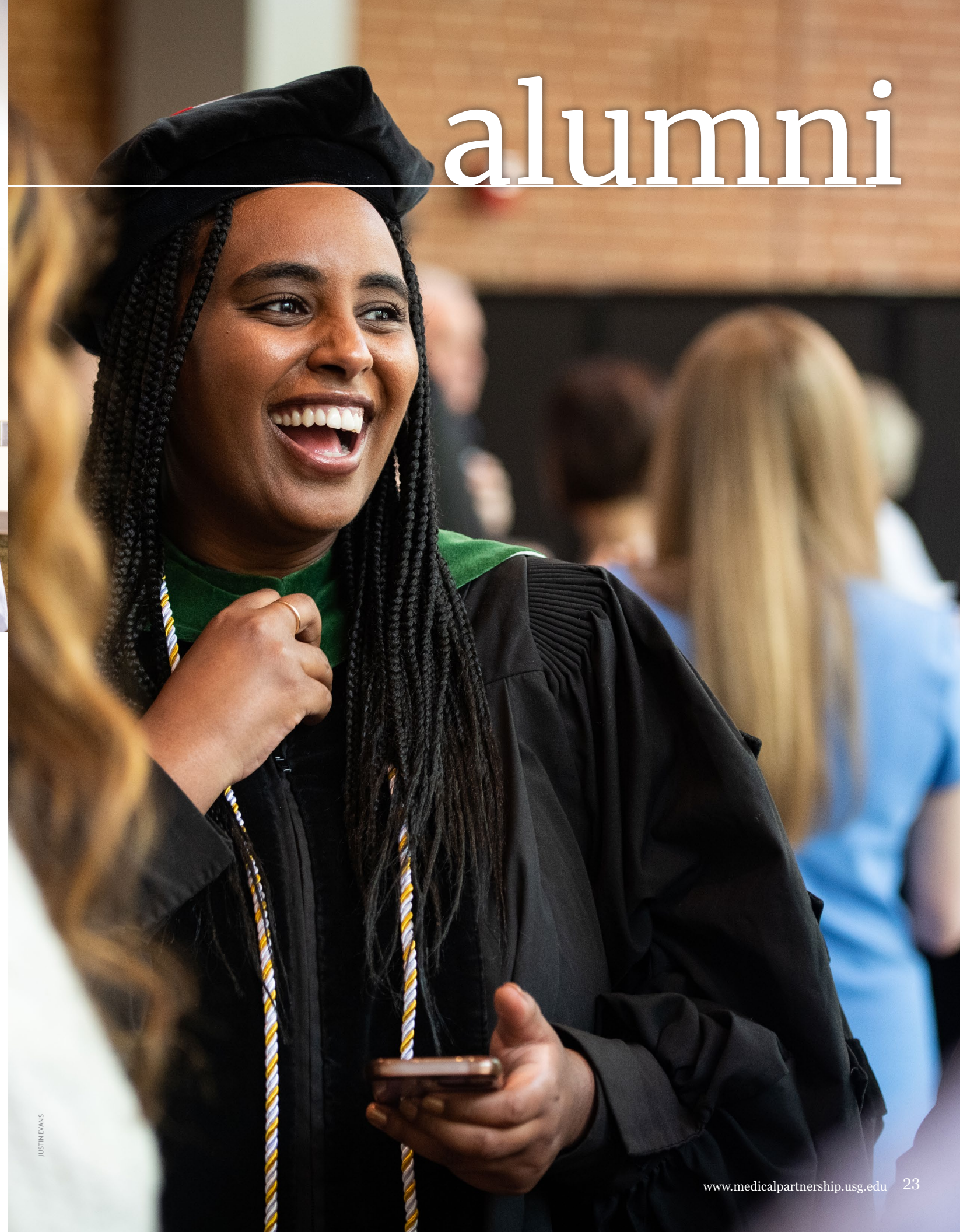
[give.uga.edu/medicine](https://give.uga.edu/medicine)

In the University of Georgia's ongoing mission to serve our state, UGA is building a new independent School of Medicine in Athens to directly address Georgia's critical need for doctors.

UGA is uniquely positioned and ready to address the health care challenges of our state — from the hills of Georgia's northland to the Coastal Empire — and we need your help.



alumni



JUSTINEVANS

# This is why I'm here

By Lindsey Derrick

May 23, 2009.

It was a rainy day in Augusta, Georgia, and Hammad Aslam and his family were headed home to Snellville after looking at apartments.

The 2008 graduate of the University of Georgia had been accepted to the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University and was scheduled to begin classes in just a few short months.

Aslam had settled in the front seat of the family's SUV to take a nap.

And then it happened.

In the inclement weather, the Aslams' car hydroplaned off I-20 and hit a tree. The tree crushed the corner of the vehicle where Aslam was peacefully sleeping and landed on him.

Aslam was life-flighted to Augusta University Health with life-threatening injuries—punctured lungs, broken ribs, and injuries to his brain and spinal cord.

## I can overcome this

Aslam was in a coma for two weeks and woke up to find himself in the traumatic brain injury unit of Atlanta's Shepherd Center. He does not remember the day of the accident, so he was confused to wake up in a strange place with no idea how he got there.

"I had no idea where I was or what happened. Someone, maybe it was a staff member, told me I had been in an accident," said Aslam.

Even though the doctors had saved his life, the prognosis of returning to that life as he knew it was slim—Aslam was paralyzed below the chest and had a 1% chance of ever walking again.

"My first thoughts when I was told that I had a 1% chance of walking again was, 'Okay, that's what you think. But I can overcome this. I will be that 1%.' I figured that I was motivated, I was different, and that I was



going to be a special case," said Aslam. "I thought that I would need to work hard for maybe a few months, but that everything was going to be okay. I thought something life-changing like this could never happen to me. I did not have time for something like this because I was young and had my future set out for me. I was confident that I would be able to start medical school on time two months later in August 2009."

Aslam was at the Shepherd Center for over two months and learned how to live his new life.

"I learned how to be independent. I am completely paralyzed from below my armpits, but I still have full use of my hands and arms. And I still had my mind," said Aslam. "I learned how to transfer on and off my wheelchair, how to drive, and how to take care of myself from the moment I wake up to the time I fall asleep."

The Shepherd Center also showed Aslam that no matter the hand he had been dealt, everything would work out just fine.

"My favorite experiences were connecting with people who had been in wheelchairs for years or decades. Although the whole time I was there, I was still 100% confident that I would be completely healed again," said Aslam. "The things I heard and learned there assured me that everything was going to be okay."

When Aslam was younger and pictured his life as a doctor, he

saw himself as a pediatrician, but after his unique experience with his inspiring doctors at the Shepherd Center, the vision for his future slowly changed—he then saw himself as a physiatrist, a doctor who specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation.

"One of the biggest things that kept me motivated the years after my injury was a sense of purpose. I figured that if I was put in this situation, then I would use it to my advantage," said Aslam. "By becoming a physiatrist and caring for others after life-changing injuries or illnesses, I would be able to connect with them on a deeper level so they, too, could understand that life goes on, and we can still use whatever we have left to make our lives and the lives of those around us better in some way."

## I knew I could be good at this

Aslam did not begin medical school in 2009 as he anticipated, but he only deferred his admission for one year. By the time he was ready to come back to the Medical College of Georgia, the Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership campus in Athens was preparing to open in the fall of 2010.

When Aslam heard of the new campus opening in the town of his alma mater, he switched his campus preference to Athens to become part of the inaugural class of the Medical Partnership.



*Aslam finished a physical medicine and rehabilitation residency at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and then completed a spinal cord injury fellowship at Stanford University.*

“I immediately knew it was going to be a great choice,” said Aslam. “I would get to be in Athens for another four years, and I would be a part of something new and exciting.”

Even though he was on an exciting path, Aslam quickly found out how difficult that path would be once classes began.

“I thought the first few months after my accident were the hardest of my life, and then I went through medical school,” said Aslam. “I was completely unprepared for how fast things were, and I was still trying to adapt to my new physical impairments and my new life.”

He also said it was difficult mentally to cope with his new way of life while being around new people.

“Looking back, I now know that I was very insecure because I had had a traumatic brain injury and a spinal cord injury. I felt inferior to my peers,” he said.

Even though medical school put him to the test, Aslam said everyone at the Medical Partnership made everything accessible and possible for him.

“They did so much,” said Aslam. “They made sure the building was fully accessible, and they even made sure the anatomy lab was wheelchair accessible. Some attendings would take extra time to show me how to do certain things. For example, on a physical exam, some things were not possible to conduct from a wheelchair. They showed me how to modify it a little bit and how to streamline a physical exam to make it a lot easier for me.”

Aslam said being the first class at the Medical Partnership was both an exciting and a difficult milestone.

“We did not have the benefit of having any upperclassmen to give us tips like how to study or what to look out for on the exams. We didn’t have any of that, so we learned everything trial by fire,” said Aslam. “It was tough. It was interesting being a part of the first class to graduate from there.”

Aslam graduated from the Medical Partnership in 2014 and matched into internal medicine at Augusta University Health. He was on a spinal cord unit rotation during his intern year when he knew he had made the right career move.

“I was definitely able to connect with patients who were going through a lot of life-changing events,” said Aslam. “I actually wasn’t sure I wanted to even go into the specialty when I started medical school. I knew I could be good at this, but I also didn’t know if it would affect me personally. I didn’t know if I would see a patient and then go home and not be able to sleep at night. But once I actually started working with these types of patients, seeing them on my rotations, I felt the exact opposite. I felt like I could connect with them better, and that’s why I was here. That’s where I could use my talent for best.”

Aslam then finished his residency doing three years of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. After residency, he completed a spinal cord injury fellowship at Stanford University.

## That’s why I’m here

In 2019, Aslam found his way back to Georgia where he took a position at Northside Gwinnett as the medical director at Glancy Inpatient Rehabilitation Center Duluth.

“I did interview for jobs with larger spinal cord injury centers around the country, but there’s nothing that competes with being here, being close to home, and serving my community and getting that feeling of actually helping my community,” said Aslam.

He sees patients who have spinal cord injuries and brain injuries and patients who are stroke survivors. His typical day consists of educating his patients about the prognosis of moving forward.

“Patients undergo three hours of therapy per day—physical therapy, occupational therapy, and sometimes speech therapy if they had a stroke or brain injury or other neurologic injury. I always ask how their therapy is going, and I manage any issues that are interfering with therapies,” said Aslam. “Individuals with spinal cord injuries have a whole host of issues that most people are not aware of. One of my patients has really bad temperature dysregulation, and I was able to reassure him and say, ‘Hey, I know you’re cold. I’m always cold, too. That’s part of the spinal cord injury.’”

Aslam, now 38, is married to Zainab Alwan, whom he met during his third year of medical school, and he wakes up every day happy to go to work.

“I can honestly say I love my job,” said Aslam. “As the medical director, I still see a whole lot of different diagnoses and most commonly strokes and fractures, but we still see a lot of spinal cord injuries, brain injuries, and other diagnoses. And it’s just awesome being able to connect with these patients who are also going through something incredibly tough.

One patient who I saw recently has a very high spinal cord injury and is much more physically impaired than I am. But he thanks me every time I go in there even though he speaks a different language than me. We have to talk through a translator, and I didn’t even know how well I was connecting with him because of that, but he’s told me that it brings him comfort when I talk to him.”

Aslam sees himself staying at Glancy for the foreseeable future (and hopefully becoming a community faculty member at the future University of Georgia School of Medicine) as he continues to give hope to his beloved patients.

“As doctors, our ultimate goal is improving function and quality of life,” said Aslam, “and that’s my goal with each of my patients. If I can make a small impact with each of my patients every day, that’s why I’m here.”

And of course, to bring comfort to patients who are going through the same trials he went through himself.

“I like to show patients that they’re able to get past whatever is going on right now. They may feel like their life is over, but it’s just beginning,” said Aslam. “Everything will be different, but we can figure out ways to make the best out of what we’re given in this life.”



# GOLDEN SUMMER



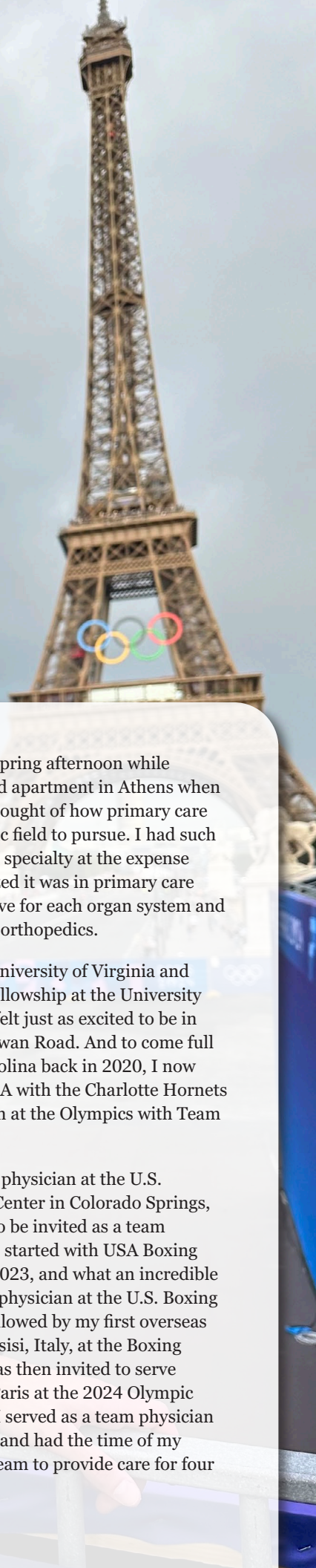
*By Colton Wood, MD*

*Dr. Wood is a 2016 graduate of the Medical Partnership. He served as a team physician for USA Boxing during the Summer 2024 Olympics in Paris.*

I still remember an early 2013 spring afternoon while studying in my McGowan Road apartment in Athens when a dream was born in my heart—I thought of how primary care sports medicine would be a fantastic field to pursue. I had such a hard time only committing to one specialty at the expense of my love for all the others. I realized it was in primary care sports that I could hold on to my love for each organ system and maximize my time in nonoperative orthopedics.

After finishing residency at the University of Virginia and my primary care sports medicine fellowship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I felt just as excited to be in this field as I did that day on McGowan Road. And to come full circle, after we settled in North Carolina back in 2020, I now serve as a team physician in the NBA with the Charlotte Hornets and have served as a team physician at the Olympics with Team USA.

I completed two weeks as a team physician at the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO. in May 2023 and was blessed to be invited as a team physician with Team USA Boxing. I started with USA Boxing as a team physician in September 2023, and what an incredible ride it has been! I served as a team physician at the U.S. Boxing Olympic Trials in January 2024, followed by my first overseas role as a Team USA physician in Assisi, Italy, at the Boxing World Qualifier Tournament 1. I was then invited to serve the USA Boxing Olympic Team in Paris at the 2024 Olympic Games. From July 26 to August 6, I served as a team physician for USA Boxing at the Paris Games and had the time of my life. I worked alongside a medical team to provide care for four



female and four male boxing athletes and treated conditions from respiratory viruses to facial lacerations to mental health to other ailments. During the two weeks, our team was thrilled to watch our own Omari Jones (71kg male) win a bronze medal to contribute to Team USA's success in the Paris Games.

In between boxing matches I covered for Team USA, I wrote national protocols for USA Boxing to establish standards of care on topics including concussion, laceration repair, wound care, joint trauma, and others. After the Games, I spent time with my amazing wife visiting sites such as the historic D-Day beaches of Normandy, the Palace of Versailles, the cathedral of Notre Dame, a private cruise down the Seine River, a tour of Paris by sidecar, and so many other great things. What a blessing this adventure was to me and my family. What a huge thank you I owe to the Medical Partnership for training and preparing me during my years of undergraduate medical education. I am forever grateful.

# SLAM DUNK!

## A day in the life of a WNBA doc

By Ashley Austin, MD

*Dr. Austin is a 2014 graduate of the Medical Partnership. She is currently the team physician for the New York Liberty, the 2024 WNBA champions.*

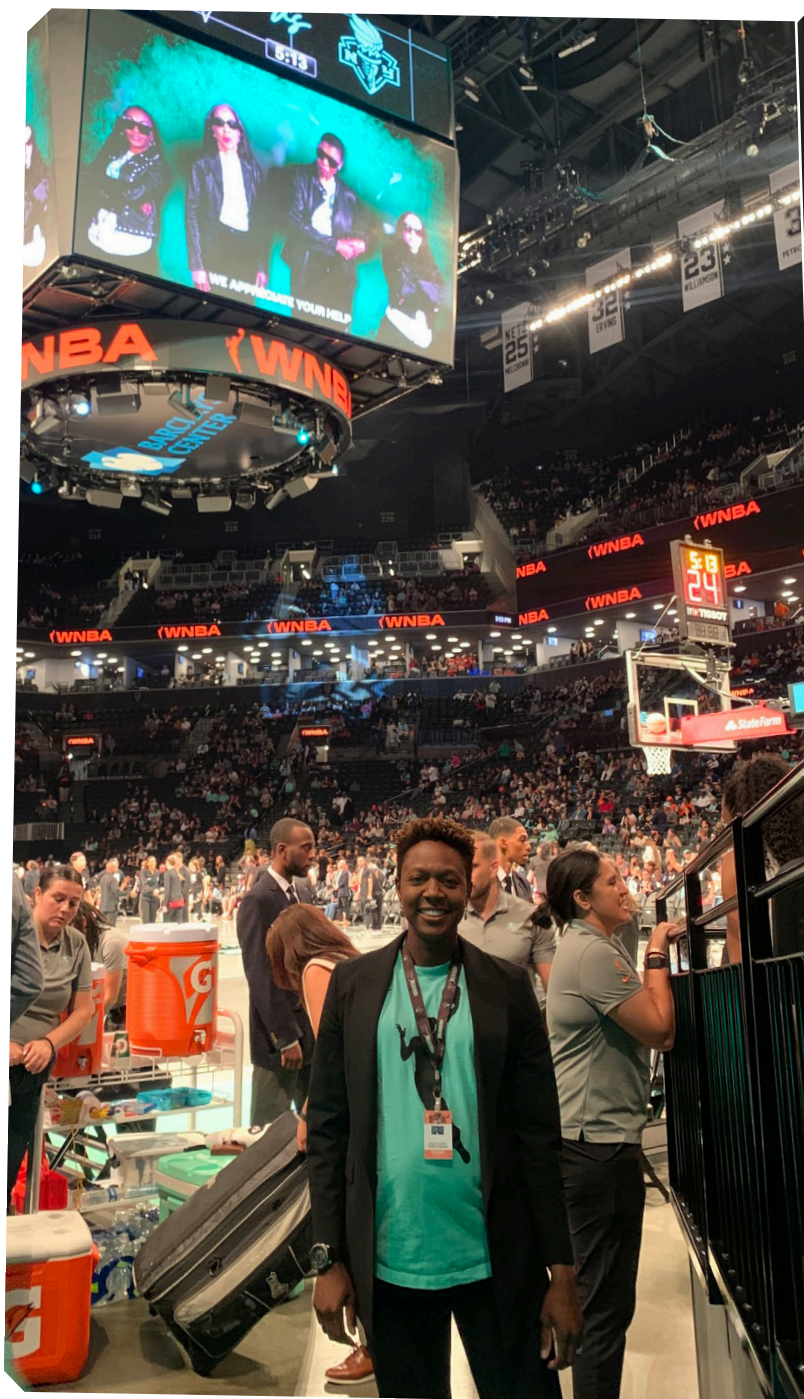
My ultimate dream was to come full circle from playing Division I collegiate basketball to then taking care of women's basketball players, who will always hold a special place in my heart. It is a way that I have been able to stay around the game of basketball even after all these years. I have now done this at the collegiate level (team physician for the University of Washington women's basketball team) and professional level (team physician for the New York Liberty, the 2024 WNBA champions). I was also selected as one of four physicians to spend a month in the WNBA COVID-19 bubble (the "Wubble") and take care of all of the teams during the 2020 season.

Until recently, the WNBA was one of the most under-resourced professional sports associations. Despite being a great landing place for players in their post-collegiate years, there was still room for a lot of improvement with marketing and advertisement, player salary increases (many WNBA players took on second jobs in the off-season or played overseas to support themselves and their families), dedicated practice and game facilities, and having consistently, high-quality medical and performance staff. Historically, these WNBA teams were also covered by healthcare providers who were men.

Much has changed since I first started watching the WNBA in its inaugural season in 1997. Salaries have increased enough for many players to just play in the WNBA as their only job. The league has expanded to 12 teams, and television coverage is higher than ever. Teams are selling out arenas and getting

their own practice facilities separate from their NBA counterparts. Teams are also diversifying their healthcare staff. I'm a big believer that our medical team should, in part, be reflective of the population we service. It is an amazing work environment to work with members of our performance team who are also women and underrepresented in their respective fields.

In a way, I feel like I have grown up with this league. It is my greatest honor to now be a part of the healthcare team for one of the original eight teams of the WNBA. It is the ultimate opportunity, and I do not take any day for granted.



### BEHIND THE SCENES OF A GAME DAY

#### 8:30 AM-4:30 PM

- Workday at hospital for special surgery
- Receive updated player injury report and game status

#### 4:45-5:30 PM

- Travel to Barclays Center in Brooklyn, NY during NYC rush hour traffic!

#### 5:30 PM

- Drop things in the training room and assess if any players need to be seen before the game. This is usually facilitated by the performance staff, which includes athletic trainers, exercise physiologists, physical therapists, dietitians, massage therapists, and chiropractors.

#### 5:30-6:30 PM

- Sit in the training room while players are getting taped or are doing warm-up exercises and training activities. This is also another opportunity for informal check-ins with players who are stopping through and who have had recent ailments. It is also a way to be visible and present in case something unexpected comes up.

#### 6:30-6:50 PM

- Eat a pre-game meal

#### 6:50 PM

- Medical meeting between the New York Liberty medical staff and the local EMS team, as well as the visiting athletic trainers to review the emergency action plan, including the protocol for a sudden cardiac arrest or emergency requiring CPR, other medical emergencies, and orthopedic emergencies. We also discuss the hospitals we will transport to if an athlete needs a higher level of care than can be provided at the arena.

#### 6:55-7:00 PM

- Last bathroom break before the game starts. Go to team physician-assigned seating (usually not directly behind the bench or on the floor level with the bench, given it would be difficult to watch the game while having to look over athletes who are tall).

#### 7:00 PM

- Tip-off
- Halftime: Hang out in the training room and be available for anything that might come in.

#### 9:00 PM

- Game ends

#### 9:00 PM until ?

- Management of any post-game musculoskeletal injuries or medical ailments
- Post-game meal

CLASS OF 2014



**Erik Hansen, MD**, is an associate professor in orthopedics, fellowship director of the adult reconstruction fellowship, and medical director of Total Joint Operations at the Medical University of South Carolina.

CLASS OF 2015



**Saumya Dave, MD**, published her most recent book, *The Guilt Pill*, in April. She also welcomed a baby boy last summer.



**Russ Ledford, MD**, was recently named section director for hospital medicine and was promoted to associate professor at Vanderbilt University.



**Zach Rohm, MD**, will be joining the Medical College of Georgia as an assistant professor of neurology.

CLASS OF 2017



**Sarah Singh, MD**, won Atlanta's Top Doc Award for 2025 in radiation oncology. She also welcomed a baby girl in December 2024 with her husband, **John-Michael Perez, MD**, Medical Partnership Class of 2019.

CLASS OF 2018



**Ebony Caldwell, MD**, joined the faculty at Howard University College of Medicine, where they are now a clinical assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry. Within the department, Caldwell serves as the director of community engagement and new programming and associate program director for the psychiatry residency program.

CLASS OF 2020



**Kenny Hearn, MD**, and his wife Alana welcomed a baby girl in September 2024.



**Kyle Royalty, MD**, joined Athens Eye Doctors and Surgeons in August of 2024.

CLASS OF 2021



**Peter Bodunrin, MD**, will be joining Athens Eye Doctors and Surgeons this summer.

CLASS OF 2022



**Humzah Ali, MD**, will serve as the inpatient chief resident for internal medicine at Dell Medical School for 2025-2026 academic year.



**Amanda (Watchel) Hammond, MD**, will serve as the chief resident at the Wellstar Kennestone Internal Medicine Residency Program for the 2025-2026 academic year.



**Jake Lawing, MD**, just finished a chief resident year at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and will be returning to Athens this summer to work in the emergency department at Piedmont Athens Regional.



**Austin Lynch, MD**, will be starting a child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship at the University of South Carolina Prisma in Columbia, SC in July.



**Leah Topper, MD**, married Nate Jones in April 2025 in Durham, NC.

CLASS OF 2023



**Rachel Gerald, MD**, will serve as a chief resident for the Boston Medical Center Family Medicine Residency Program for the 2025-2026 academic year.

# 360 with Dr. Brian Brewer

Dr. Brian Brewer has done a 360. A native Athenian, Brewer attended the University of Georgia and walked on to the football team to play between the hedges on Saturdays. Being an athlete in college exposed him to encounters with how athletic trainers interact with players, and he was able to build connections with the team's primary care doctors and orthopedic surgeons. Brewer graduated from UGA with a bachelor's in both biology and exercise and sport science in 2010. After graduation, he made the Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership his home for seven years as he completed both his MD and his internal medicine residency with the program. Even after attending a sports medicine fellowship at the University of Kentucky, Brewer came full circle when he returned to Athens to practice at St. Mary's Internal Medicine Associates. The 360 is complete.

## FAST FACTS

*Undergraduate*  
University of Georgia, 2010

*Medical School*  
Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership, Class of 2015

*Residency*  
Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership - Internal Medicine

*Fellowship*  
University of Kentucky - Sports Medicine

*Current Practice Location*  
St. Mary's Internal Medicine Associates

- Awards & Honors*
- UGA Varsity Football Iron Man Award
  - UGA Football Senior Letterman
  - Medical College of Georgia Dean's Summer Research Fellow
  - AU/UGA Medical Partnership Resident Professionalism/Ethics Award

Brian J. Brewer, MD

ANDREW DAVIS/TUCKER



**We want to know the amazing things our alumni are doing!**

Submit your Alumni Note for the next issue of the Partnership Pulse. Please scan the QR code and complete the short form. Please contact Lindsey Derrick at [mpmedia@uga.edu](mailto:mpmedia@uga.edu) if you have any questions about your Alumni Note submission.

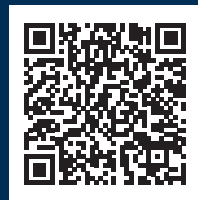
Your generosity helps ensure the continued growth of health care in Georgia.

*Every gift makes a difference.*

AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY  
MEDICAL  
PARTNERSHIP  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



Give to the AU/UGA MEDICAL PARTNERSHIP



- Scholarships
- Athens Free Clinic
- Pathways to Medicine
- Support Fund

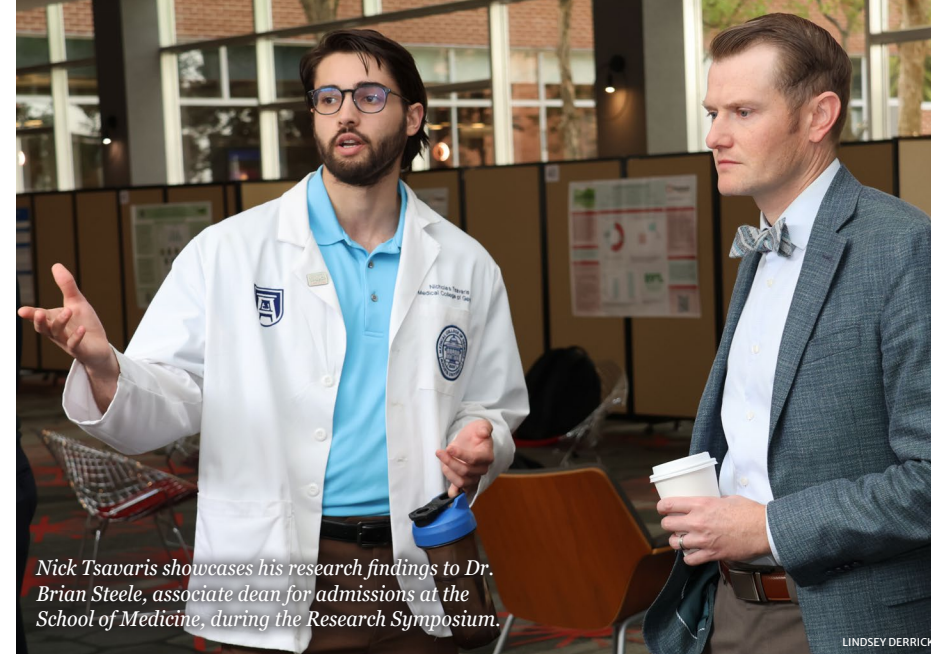
# etcetera





Dean Michelle Nuss takes part in the Dean's Challenge with the University of Georgia women's basketball team alongside Dean Denise Spangler from the Mary Frances Early College of Education and Dean Usha Rodrigues from the School of Law. The Dean's Challenge is an annual friendly competition between UGA schools and colleges to see who can get the most fans in the stands to cheer on the Lady Dawgs.

UGA ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



Nick Tsavaris showcases his research findings to Dr. Brian Steele, associate dean for admissions at the School of Medicine, during the Research Symposium.

LINDSEY DERRICK



The Class of 2028 celebrates the first day of orientation.

LINDSEY DERRICK



Christina Shin works at the Teddy Bear Clinic at Piedmont Athens Regional. The clinic allows children to learn about common medical procedures through play.

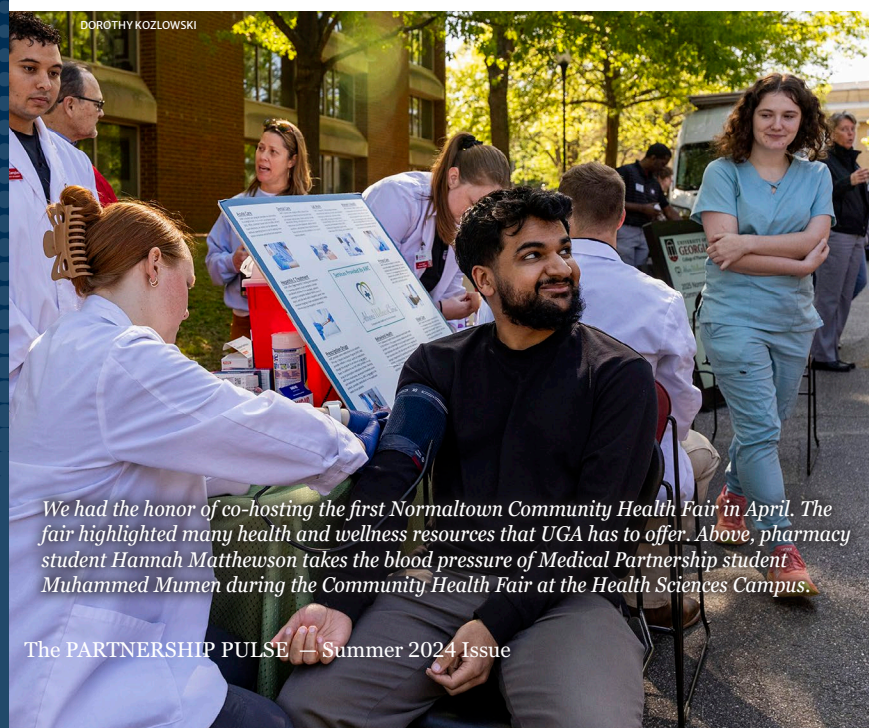


The annual Wine and Cheese fundraiser brought in \$3,500. All proceeds go to the Athens Free Clinic and the Student Government Organization.

CORBIN LEWALLEN



The Class of 2028 shows off their new white coats during the annual White Coat Ceremony in Augusta.



We had the honor of co-hosting the first Normaltown Community Health Fair in April. The fair highlighted many health and wellness resources that UGA has to offer. Above, pharmacy student Hannah Matthewson takes the blood pressure of Medical Partnership student Muhammed Mumen during the Community Health Fair at the Health Sciences Campus.

DOROTHY KOZLOWSKI



Students from the Class of 2028 arrange bouquets of flowers in honor of those who gave their bodies to science during the annual Body Donor Memorial Ceremony.

LINDSEY DERRICK



Students from the Athens campus Class of 2025 gather for a group photo at the Hooding Ceremony.

MICHAEL HOLAHAN

# Partnership Prestige

## Faculty & Staff

**Jeni Fitzpatrick, RN, MSN, RNC-OB**, nurse/teaching clinic operations manager, won the PhD Student Research Award for Georgia State University-College of Nursing and Health Professions.

**Eve Gallman, PhD**, associate professor of neuroscience, was named 2025 Outstanding Reviewer for the Medical Science Educator by the journal's editorial board.

**Kearney Gunsalus, PhD**, associate professor of biochemistry and molecular biology, received the 2025 Professor James L. Roberts ABE Scholar Award from the Association of Biochemistry Educators.

**Ken Rosenthal, PhD**, professor of immunology, co-authored the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the textbook Medical Microbiology. Rosenthal has co-authored the book since the first edition 36 years ago. Rosenthal authored the immunology, virology, basic bacteriology, and infectious disease sections of the book. Previous editions have been translated into multiple languages, including Italian, Korean, Chinese, Romanian, Portuguese, and Spanish.

**Clive Slaughter, PhD**, professor of biochemistry, received the 2025 Outstanding Manuscript Award from the Journal of Biomolecular Techniques for his regular "Article Watch" contributions.

**Abby Ward, MEd**, lead program coordinator for the Medical Partnership's Internal Medicine Residency Program, was elected to serve a three-year term as a councilor on the APDIM Program Administrators Advisory Council beginning July 1.

### Educators of the Year Award- Spring 2024

Class of 2024- **Tom Howdieshell, MD**

Class of 2025- **Kim Rathbun, MD, PhD**

Class of 2026- **Tom Howdieshell, MD**

Class of 2027- **Brett Szymik, PhD**

## Students

**Delaney Lockwood**, Class of 2026, designed and led a program focused on building emotional resilience for care partners of people living with dementia at a local support group. She converted the program into an online platform for her Master of Public Health capstone project.

**Grace Snuggs**, Class of 2026, is serving as a member of the Georgia Cervical Cancer Awareness Day planning committee.

The Medical Partnership has been named a Changemaker Institution through the Kern National Network for Flourishing

in Medicine. This was accomplished in part by the leadership team of the Medical Improv Student Interest Group (**Grace Snuggs, Danielle Jolly, Katie Hendley, and Jordan Mixon**) with **Amy Baldwin, PhD**, professor of biochemistry and molecular biology, and **Dean Michelle Nuss**.

## Scholarship Awardees

**Barbara L. Schuster Scholarship:** The Barbara L. Schuster Scholarship is awarded to a student who has demonstrated evidence of future leadership.

**Shereen Farooq**

**Benson White Coat Scholarship:** The Benson White Coat Scholarship is awarded to a student (or students) who embodies the vision and mission of the AU/UGA Medical Partnership by demonstrating leadership in research and scholarship.

**Delaney Lockwood**

**Howard and Caryl Cohen Scholarship:** The Howard and Caryl Scholarship is merit-based and awarded to an incoming or current AU/UGA Medical Partnership student.

**Brennen Anderson  
Farris Sabir**

**Kyra Urquhart-Foster**

**JL Smith Professional Fund Award:** The JL Smith Professional Fund Award is awarded to a first-year student doing summer research in pediatrics, and/or a fourth-year student pursuing a career in pediatrics.

**Danielle Jolly**

**Jackson Kelly**

**Kirby Memorial Scholarship:** The Kirby Memorial Scholarship is a recurring scholarship awarded to a student (or students) who demonstrates exceptional citizenship and professionalism.

**Lucas McCook**

**Grace Snuggs**

**MCG/UGA White Coat Scholarship:** The MCG/UGA White Coat Scholarship is awarded to a student (or students) with excellent academic qualifications who has demonstrated professionalism and good citizenship.

**Tucker Hickox**

**Simpson White Coat Scholarship:** The Simpson White Coat Scholarship is awarded to a student (or students) who demonstrates campus engagement and excellent scholarship.

**Attila Dos Santos  
Falon Hassett**

**Youssef Mohamed  
Denise Reed**

## Honors Inductees

**Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society**, a professional medical organization, recognizes and advocates for excellence in scholarship and the highest ideals in the profession of medicine. Members have a compelling drive to do well and to advance the medical profession and exemplify the highest standards of professionalism.

**Sergio Alcantar  
Brennen Anderson  
Will Evans  
Christine Gough  
Falon Hassett  
Chandler Johnson ('24)  
Phillip Loan  
William McCormick  
Kaley Parchinski  
Elizabeth Roth  
Farris Sabir  
Joshua Siar  
Katherine Street**

St. Mary's Internal Medicine  
Resident Inductee:  
**Vinod Jeyaretnam, DO**  
Piedmont Athens Regional  
Internal Medicine Resident  
Inductee:  
**Elizabeth Soladoye, MD**  
AU/UGA Medical Partnership  
Faculty Inductee:  
**Tresa Chappell, MD**  
MCG Alumnus Inductee:  
**Cristina Elstad, MD**

**Alpha Upsilon Phi (AUPhi)** is an honorary campus society that was founded at the Medical College of Georgia in 2008 to promote and recognize exemplary service and leadership efforts.

**Tucker Hickox  
Chandler Johnson**

**Delaney Lockwood  
Eric Santana**

**Blue Key Honor Society:** Founded in 1926, the University of Georgia chapter of the Blue Key Honor Society is the third oldest chapter of the national organization. UGA Blue Key recognizes second, third, and fourth-year undergraduate students, as well as graduate and professional students of outstanding character and ability who have achieved distinction in three key areas: scholarship, leadership, and service.

**Chandler Johnson**

**GHHS Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award:** The Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award recognizes graduating students and faculty members who demonstrate both clinical excellence and outstanding compassion in the delivery of care and who show respect for patients, their families, and healthcare colleagues.

Class of 2024 Medical Partnership Faculty Member Inductee: **Ellen House, MD**

**Dean's Clinical Honor Society:** The Medical College of Georgia established the Dean's Clinical Honor Society in 2017 for the purpose of honoring outstanding medical students who consistently achieved high academic excellence throughout the core clinical clerkships of the third-year of medical school.

**Nebil Ahmed  
Sergio Alcantar  
Brennen Anderson  
Ashley Catanzarite  
Joseph Cleland  
Samuel Coppola  
Marisol Escanuela  
Will Evans  
David Filston  
Christine Gough  
James Griggers  
Falon Hassett  
Elizabeth Huang  
Harris Jamal  
Chandler Johnson ('24)  
Thomas Johnston  
Jackson Kelly**

**Phillip Loan  
Delaney Lockwood  
Mitchell Lomis  
William McCormick  
Robert Moody  
Kaley Parchinski  
Erik Rosas Rosas  
Elizabeth Roth  
Farris Sabir  
Eric Santana  
Joshua Siar  
Deborah Song  
Katherine Street  
Justin Swaby  
Niral Thaker  
Kyra Urquhart-Foster**

**Gold Humanism Honor Society:** In 2002, the Arnold P. Gold Foundation established the Gold Humanism Honor Society as a signature program to recognize medical students, residents, and faculty who practice patient-centered care by modeling the qualities of integrity, excellence, compassion, altruism, respect, and empathy.

**Will Evans  
Tucker Hickox  
Harris Jamal  
Chandler Johnson ('24)  
Delaney Lockwood  
Shivani Patel  
Erik Rosas Rosas  
Eric Santana  
Sachi Shastri**

**Katherine Street**  
St. Mary's Internal Medicine  
Resident Inductee:  
**Chelsey Carter, MD**  
Piedmont Athens Regional  
Internal Medicine Resident  
Inductee:  
**Raheem Robertson, MD**



**Faculty, staff, students, residents & alumni: we want to feature you!**

*Accepted to a conference?*

*Published in a journal? Honored with an award?*

Let us know so we can share the good news with our Medical Partnership family and friends! Email the Office of Communications at MPmedia@uga.edu or scan the QR code.

Please include all pertinent information related to the award, publication, or conference, such as the journal name or professional association, publication citation, and a brief description of the award or article.

AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY

# MEDICAL PARTNERSHIP

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

UGA Health Sciences Campus  
108 Spear Road  
Athens, Georgia 30602  
[www.medicalpartnership.usg.edu](http://www.medicalpartnership.usg.edu)



◀ **Follow Along!**

Scan the code to view a live stream of the new building construction.