



CMS NEWS

The Chicago Medical School Newsletter

SUMMER 2025 | ISSUE 37



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Cover Image: Members of the Class of 2029 Portes House race to assemble a Jenga tower during the school's annual Field Day event.

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Dean's Message



Greetings from the Dean's Office!

The last few months have been full of celebrations as we bid farewell to the graduating Class of 2025 and welcomed our new Class of 2029 to campus. In between those two events, we've had a busy summer filled with award ceremonies, student support programs, clinical site visits, and visits with some of our wonderful alumni.

On May 30, we celebrated Chicago Medical School's 111th Commencement as 207 graduates received their medical degrees, including one student who graduated with a combined MD/PhD degree. We wish our 207 new doctors all the best as they begin their residencies and move on to the next stage of their careers. I look forward to meeting them in the future as CMS alumni and learning how their careers are progressing.

A few days before Commencement, we held our second annual CMS Student Awards Ceremony on campus to celebrate student accomplishments in many forms. During this event, 140 students received awards and honors across 19 categories, honoring their achievements in areas such as leadership, research, scholastic achievement, dedication to health equity, and service to the school's mission. Among the honorees were 46 Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) inductees, 8 junior AOA inductees, 35 Gold Humanism Honor Society inductees, and 15 Aequitas Health Equity Medical Honor Society fellows. This ceremony was a testament to our students' dedication to excellence in leadership, scholarship, service, and compassionate patient care, and I am confident that our graduates will continue to embody those traits as they embark upon their careers.

As we prepared to welcome our new class this summer, we launched the JumpStart Summer Program, a student support initiative designed to help incoming students adjust to the medical school environment. During the four weeks before the new academic year began, 24 members of the Class of 2029 attended classes and workshops, learned study skills, took quizzes and exams, and gave a presentation on a health advocacy project they had developed. The JumpStart program will ensure that our students have the skills and knowledge needed to have a successful start to their medical school experience, and I thank all the faculty, staff, and administration who devoted so much of their time to this program over the summer.

Earlier this month, we welcomed the CMS Class of 2029 to campus for orientation, culminating in their White Coat Ceremony on August 8. Family and friends gathered together to celebrate the incoming students as they participated in this rite of passage, symbolizing their entrance into the medical profession. Joanna Lewis, MD Class of '05, keynote speaker; Monique Jones, MD Class of '93, interim assistant dean for career and specialty advising; and

Tsion Habtamu, CMS '28, M2 class president, welcomed the incoming students and gave them advice for medical school and for their future careers.

I am pleased to welcome all 203 members of the Class of 2029 to CMS. These students have come to us from 26 different states, with 44% coming from Illinois. Our new students come from all walks of life: three of them have served in the military, and 52 of them have master's degrees. The top five academic majors were biology, neuroscience, psychology, molecular biology, and biochemistry, but some of our incoming students majored in music, history, economics, and hospital administration. Some of them already have some experience in the healthcare field, working as medical scribes and EMTs. Forty-eight students — almost a quarter of the class — are the first in their families to go to college, pioneering a new path for themselves in their journey to become a physician. This class represents the future of medicine, and I am glad to have their breadth of knowledge, skills, and experiences in our CMS community.

I look forward to getting to know our new students a little better as I meet with them one-on-one. I launched this initiative last year to help the M1s successfully transition into their lives as medical students, and I am happy to continue it with the Class of 2029. These meetings give me an opportunity to learn about students' goals, aspirations, and struggles while sharing my perspective on what they can do to succeed in medical school. I've starting meeting with individuals this week, and I look forward to meeting the rest of them in the coming months.

As we celebrated our M1s during the White Coat Ceremony, we were proud to welcome several of our alumni back to campus as they attended the ceremony, with many of them being present to support their children, grandchildren, siblings, or spouses in the Class of 2029. I was happy to be able to meet with Dennis Levinson, MD Class of '67; Stanley Hersh, MD Class of '69; Betty Kung, MD Class of '94; Albert Shen, MD Class of '94; Rania Agha, MD Class of '02; Joanna Lewis, MD Class of '05; and Joyce Joseph, MD Class of '10, at a special alumni reception before the White Coat Ceremony. Later this month, I also had the opportunity to meet with Vivian Giudice, MD Class of '78; Richard Giudice, MD Class of '80; and Neal Khurana, MD Class of '10 as they visited the RFU campus. I always enjoy

these chances to catch up with our graduates, and I look forward to meeting even more alumni next month at the annual CMS Alumni Reunion Weekend, scheduled for September 19-20.

Other recent visitors to campus have included leadership from some of our clinical sites. We welcomed leadership from Advocate Condell and City of Hope in June, and Sinai Chicago and Insight Health in July. In recent months, I've also conducted visits to our sites along with CMS and RFU leadership, visiting MercyHealth Rockford, St. Bernard Hospital, Little Company of Mary, and Silver Cross Hospital. These regular meetings between CMS leadership and our affiliates' leadership help make sure that our students, residents, and faculty are receiving the resources and support that they need to deliver high-quality clinical education.

I'll conclude this message by welcoming Dr. Subhasis Misra to CMS. Dr. Misra started his role as our new DIO and Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education and Clinical Faculty Development on August 18. He brings with him a wealth of experience in medical education, curriculum development, and faculty development, and I know our residency and fellowship programs will be in good hands under his leadership. I also want to thank Dr. Michael Zdon, who retired in June, for his decades of service to CMS in the roles of Senior Associate Dean for GME and CME, Vice Chair of Clinical Sciences, and Professor and Discipline Chair of Surgery.

In my next message, I will share news from our September alumni reunion, as well as our upcoming CMS Faculty and Friends Recognition Dinner, which we will be hosting on October 8. Until then, I wish all our students, faculty, staff, and residents good health and happiness during the months ahead.

Sincerely,



Archana Chatterjee, MD, PhD
Dean, Chicago Medical School
Senior Vice President for Medical Affairs, RFUMS



Commencement

Congratulations to the Class of 2025!

Rosalind Franklin University celebrated its 111th Commencement on May 30 at the Credit Union 1 Arena in Chicago, honoring and celebrating the accomplishments of the Class of 2025 as our 207 new doctors — including one graduate with a combined MD/PhD degree — received their medical degrees, joining a network of more than 22,000 RFU alumni.

CMS graduate **Juan Medina-Echeverria**, MD '25, MS '21, class president, gave the graduate address. "Today is more than just a ceremony," he told his fellow graduates. "It is a testament to our resilience, our sacrifices, and the unwavering commitment that brought us here." Dr. Medina-Echeverria talked about the importance of grit, resilience, and passion, and he thanked his wife, children, parents, and siblings for their encouragement and support during his time in medical school.

Dr. Medina-Echeverria also emphasized the ways he and his fellow students had helped each other and the surrounding community. "At Rosalind Franklin University, we didn't just train in medicine, pharmacy, podiatry, and the health sciences. We built something greater than ourselves," he said. "We built a community — one that supported each other through the toughest times." He recounted student organizations and initiatives like Mini Medical School, which introduced North Chicago fourth

and fifth graders to careers in the health sciences. "We didn't just show up," he said. "We left a legacy."

Keynote speaker **Stephen Trzeciak**, MD, MPH, chairman and chief of the Department of Medicine at Cooper University Health, spoke to the graduates about the importance of compassion in healthcare practice, defining compassion as "empathy plus action." Dr. Trzeciak authored the book "Compassionomics: The Revolutionary Scientific Evidence That Caring Makes a Difference" after struggling with burnout in his career as a critical care physician. He explained that in addition to benefitting patients, demonstrating compassion in a healthcare settings also helps the physician, activating reward pathways in the brain and helping to reduce the stress that leads to burnout.

"My challenge to you, Class of 2025, is this: Commit yourself not only to your specialty, but also to your humanity," Dr. Trzeciak said. "Today you join a legacy of healers, helpers, scientists, and servants that commit not only their minds, but their hearts to the wellbeing of others. In a world that often seems divided, transactional, and impatient, let your compassion be a quiet act of rebellion — a powerful force for good, a statement of who you are and what you stand for." ■



Dr. Rebecca Li



Dr. Juan Medina-Echeverria, class president and graduate speaker

“In a world that often seems divided, transactional, and impatient, let your compassion be a quiet act of rebellion.”

- DR. STEPHEN TRZECIAK, KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Keynote speaker Dr. Stephen Trzeciak



Dr. Angela Yu and Dr. Mariam Zafar-Khan



Dr. Kelly Ho

Congratulations to the **CLASS** of 2025



Dr. Alvin Onyewuenyi



Dr. Farhana Ikmal Hisham



Dr. Elizabeth Kunnel



Dr. Faustina Adams



*Dr. Joseph
Rumenapp*



*Dr. Destin Swartz and Dr. Charmaine
Ong*



*Dr. Luna Al Lababidi, Dr. Mohammed Amr Alazmah, and
Dr. Kaitlyn Alleman*



Dr. Perry Lim



Dr. Paulina Styczula



Dr. Isra El-Khateeb



Dr. Adithya Chandrasekaran



Dr. Che'La Woods



*Dr. Lauren Wohlrab, Dr. Ola Kierzkowska,
Dr. Rebecca Li, and Dr. Donia Momen*



Dr. Med Jimenez



Dr. Melissa Levin

CMS Student Awards Ceremony

On May 28, CMS held its second annual CMS Student Awards Ceremony to recognize and celebrate our students' remarkable accomplishments and achievements in academics, research, service, leadership, and more.

"Today, we come together to honor the hard work, determination, and passion that our students have demonstrated in their pursuit of excellence," **Antwione Haywood**, PhD, CMS associate dean for student affairs, said during the ceremony. "It is through their dedication and resilience that they have achieved outstanding success in various aspects of their academic journey."

Congratulations to all the students who received awards, honors, and recognition!

Aequitas Health Equity Medical Honor Society

This honor society recognizes students who have demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing health equity and social justice.

Neha Basti
Shruthi Bhuma
Swathi Bhuma
Alexander Ellyin
Michael George
Farhana Ikmal Hisham
Patricia Luzuriaga
Jessica Moreno

Neha Patchipala
Radha Patel
Taylor Pullen
Joseph Rumenapp
Emily Standage
Tejashri Venkatesh
Alan Wang

CMS Dean's Award for Service to the School

Established in 1974 to give recognition to graduating students who have been active in school functions and

have demonstrated a continuing interest in the future of the school.

Juan Medina-Echeverria
Perry Lim

Joseph Rumenapp
Angela Yu

Chief Prosector Award

Recognizes and rewards exemplary skills in cadaver dissection, advanced understanding of Clinical Anatomy, and teamwork. Dr. Mervyn Sahud, CMS Class of 1964, funds this award each year.

William Shelby Parsons
Satheeshram Tamilselvan

CMS Tutoring Excellence Award

This award recognizes peer to peer tutors who have shown exceptional performance in four areas: Academic Knowledge, Professionalism, Creativity and Reliability.

Allison Kadampellil

Ronald Bangasser, MD '75 Memorial Award

Recognizes demonstrated leadership in medical school. This award commemorates the commitment that Dr. Bangasser had for organized medicine and service to his colleagues.

Neha Basti

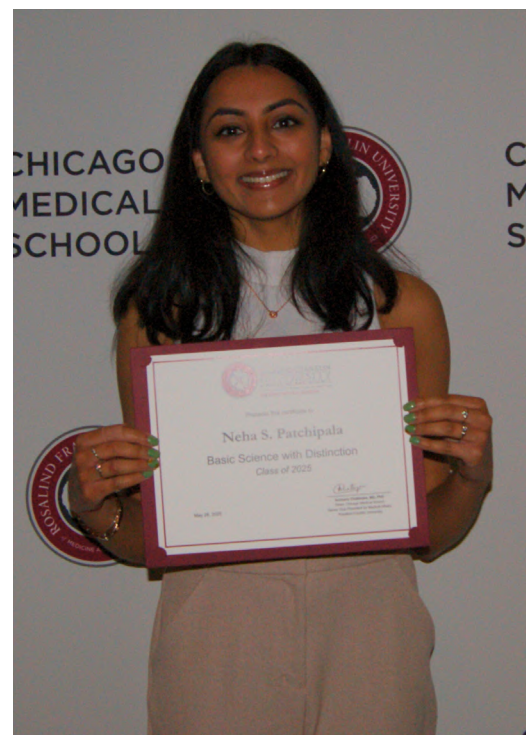
Martin Gecht, MD '44 Memorial Award

Recognizes student efforts in community service projects including development, leadership, assessment, and inspiration of community projects. This award honors Dr. Gecht's love of CMS and commemorates his commitment to the community.

Jessica Moreno

Melvyn Leichtling, MD '48 Oncology Research Award

Established in 1977 to give assistance to students who



submit an outstanding research proposal related to the field of oncology.

Jefferson Sun

John J. Sheinin Research Award

Presented for originality and creativity in a research project conducted while a medical student.

Nikki Barrington

MD with Distinction in Research

Awarded to students who initiate and complete an original independent research project during their tenure at CMS.

Angela Yu

Distinction for Excellence in Interprofessional Healthcare

Recognizes students who embody the Interprofessional mission of the university and will go on to advance Interprofessional collaborative practice after graduating from RFU.

Luke Davis

Michael George

Farhana Ikmal Hisham

Marie Nunez Duarte

Eugene J. Rogers, MD '46 Memorial Award for Excellence in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Awarded to a graduate who will be continuing their career in the specialty of physical medicine and rehabilitation.

Atharv Patwardhan

Excellence in Health Equity Course Award

Recognizes authors of outstanding student projects designed for the CMS Principles of Professionalism, Healthcare, and Health Equity (P2H2) course.

Max Paulus

Brittany Morris

Isabella Niedermair and **Rahi Patel**

Aayush Gupta, **Humaira Islam**, and **Brandon Woo**

Ronald M. Reifler Primary Care Award

Awarded to a graduate who will be continuing their

career in primary care. This award commemorates Mr. Reifler's love of learning and enthusiasm for helping others to reach their potential.

Daniel Sanchez

USPHS Excellence in Public Health Award

Awarded by the U.S. Public Health Service to medical students who demonstrate commitment to public health.

Neha Basti

Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society (AOA)

Election to AOA is an honor signifying a commitment to professionalism, leadership, scholarship, research, and service. A lifelong honor, membership in the society confers recognition for a physician's dedication to the profession and art of healing.

Amin Alayleh

Kaitlyn Alleman

Murad Alostaz

Neha Basti

Reed Berlet

Abhinav Birda

Drake Carter

Alvi Renzyl Cortes

Giovanna Danna

Luke Davis

Qais Dihan

Ireland Flannery

Michael George

Ruxandra Griza

Shannon Gu

John Hoy

Med Jimenez

Kundan Joshi

Allison Kadempelil

Ola Kierzkowska

Erin Kim

Matthew Kim

Laura Li

Rebecca Li

Brian Lilenstein

Perry Lim

Adrusht Madapoosi

Garrett Mamikunian

Megan Mazander

Juan Medina-Echeverria

Warren Nakazawa

Ravi Nayak

Colin Neitzke

Riya Parikh

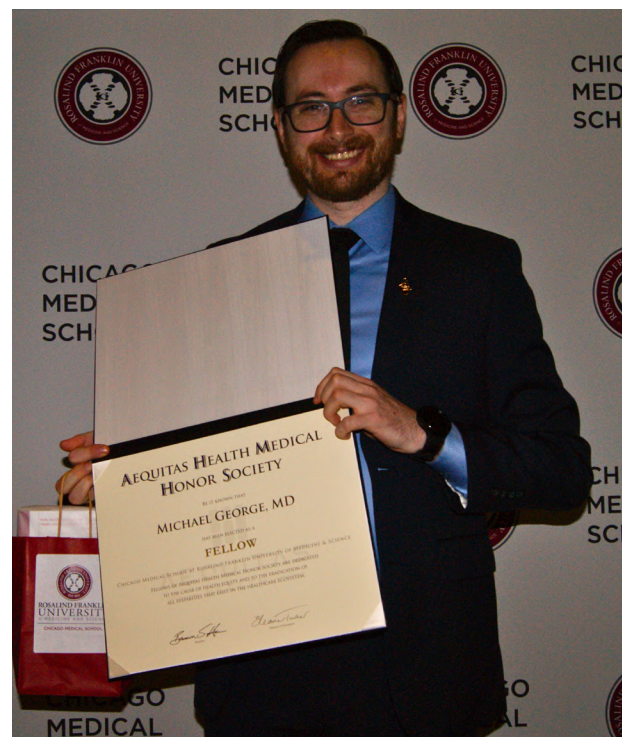
Neha Patchipala

Kushagra Patel

(continued on next page)

From left to right: Juan Medina-Echeverria; Angela Yu;

Neha Patchipala; AOA Inductees; Michael George.



**Radha Patel
Meredith Polaskey
Alexandra Ritger
Cole Roblee
Noah Rubin-Saika**

**Divesh Sachdev
Madeline Scoles
Valerie Shay
Alan Wang
Angela Yu**

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.
Melissa Levin

Junior Alpha Omega Alpha

The following members of the CMS Class of 2026 were inducted into AOA during their third year of medical school.

**Sophia Galluccio
Campbell Goldsmith
Jordyn Greenbaum
Rikhil Makwana**

**Martin Pelletier
Sabina Schaffer
Nathaniel Ung
Jacob Wolf**

Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS)

The GHHS is a community of medical students, physicians, and other leaders who have been recognized for their compassionate care. Students in this honor society have been nominated by their peers for their service to others, integrity, empathy, and commitment to clinical excellence.

**Amin Alayleh
Mohammed Alazmah
Murad Alostaz
Fahed Alrafati
Abhinav Birda
Qais Dihan
Ruxandra Griza
Shahzaib Haider
Sana Hamdan
Farhana Ikmal Hisham
John Hoy
Med Jimenez
Akash Karmur
Jungyun Ko
Elizabeth Kunnel
Shannon Lanza
Melissa Levin
Zachary Levine**

**Laura Li
Rebecca Li
Perry Lim
Juan Medina-Echeverria
Reina Nagasaka
Warren Nakazawa
Vijay Nellutla
Charmaine Ong
Riya Parikh
Kushagra Patel
Umar Rehman
Cole Roblee
Divesh Sachdev
Valerie Shay
Alan Wang
Emma Weiland
Angela Yu**

Strength in Adversity Award

Honors students who embody true resilience — those who rise above challenges and continue to move forward with purpose and strength. This award celebrates students whose courage, perseverance, and inner strength have carried them through profound personal challenges.

**Murad Alostaz
Sai Krupa Rajaramsiva**

**Qais Dihan
Lloyd Sealey**

And congratulations to the faculty recipients who were also recognized during the ceremony:

Alpha Omega Alpha Faculty Recipient

In recognition of a physician faculty member's dedication to the profession and art of healing.

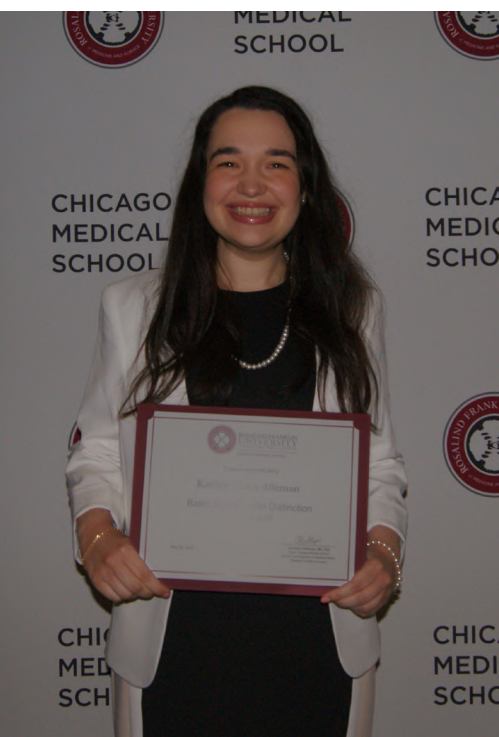
Lucy Hammerberg, MD '82, FACEP, CPE

Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Faculty Recipient

Recognizes a faculty member who demonstrates both clinical excellence and outstanding compassion in the delivery of care.

Monique D. Jones, MD '93 ■

From left to right: Kaitlyn Alleman; Allison Kadampellil; Qais Dihan.





Andrew Kim Selected for Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship Program

Andrew will spend the next year working with Lawndale Christian Health Center to expand a diabetes prevention program, addressing unmet health and wellness needs within the Chicagoland community.

Fourth-year medical student **Andrew Kim** has been selected for the distinguished Schweitzer Fellowship — a year-long service-learning program that helps graduate students design and implement innovative projects to address the health needs of underserved Chicago communities.

Named in honor of humanitarian and Nobel laureate Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellows Program encourages students to become lifelong leaders in service by addressing unmet health needs among underserved Chicagoland residents. Each fellow will collaborate with existing community organizations to create a community-based project, dedicating a total of 200 hours of service. Using a broad public health lens, the new Fellows will work to improve community well-being and target the social determinants of health — the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that have a profound impact on health and quality of life.

As part of the fellowship, Andrew plans to expand a diabetes prevention program for high-risk patients, in partnership with Lawndale Christian Health Center. The program provides contextualized, CDC-sponsored, evidence-based education; equips patients to make best-practice lifestyle changes; partners with local stakeholders; and provides group-based accountability/support to patients. Andrew's goal is to improve health outcomes and promote long-term community well-being.

"I chose to apply for the Schweitzer Fellowship because it uniquely weaves together many of the values I hold dear: what I am learning in medicine, what I live daily in my neighborhood, and what I long to contribute alongside others — bridging my clinical training with community-rooted action," Andrew said. "The Fellowship's commitment to service, reflection, and interprofessional growth mirrors many of my desires to walk alongside neighbors and patients to not just address a diagnosis, but deeper social disinvestment."

Using an interdisciplinary approach, the Fellowship exposes students to real-world interprofessional, collaborative care and aims to develop lifelong leaders in service. The 2025–2026 Fellows include students from a variety of disciplines, ranging from nursing to art therapy and public health. The exceptional class of Fellows was selected from a pool of almost 100 applicants through a competitive process.

In addition to his service projects, Andrew and his peers will also participate in a thirteen-month program that includes monthly meetings, training, and ongoing opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration as well as support from a team of mentors from their schools, project sites, alumni network, and staff. The new Fellows join a network of over 800 Chicago alumni. ■

Announcing the 2026 Aequitas Fellows

Congratulations to the students selected as Aequitas Health Equity Medical Honor Society Fellows!

Twelve students were selected for the third Chicago Medical School chapter class of Aequitas Health Equity Medical Honor Society Fellows in recognition of their leadership and service in the health equity space. These students have articulated how they will advance health equity as an Aequitas fellow and as a future physician. Over the next several months, the fellows will work with community partners to complete a service project focused on promoting health equity.

Aequitas was formed to recognize a society of fellows dedicated to the cause of health equity and to eradicate health disparities in all shapes and fashion. The inaugural chapter was formed in 2021 at the University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine, where Fellows focused on the Native American communities of South Dakota as well as the health disparities that exist in the Black and Hispanic communities of the state. Chapters at other medical schools have been established to identify, recognize, and develop future physician leaders to address the health inequities that exist in our society today.

Students chosen by a selection committee of CMS faculty and Aequitas alumni must take part in a health equity project during their M4 year. Upon completing the criteria for the project, students meeting graduation requirements will be formally inducted into the Aequitas Health Honor Society. Fellows will be acknowledged in the 2026 Commencement program and Awards Ceremony, and will receive a certificate and graduation cord on official induction.

We are excited to welcome the third group of students to the CMS Aequitas Health Honor Society chapter and look forward to their meaningful contributions to the local community through their projects. ■



Aroosha Aamir



Angelica Arzuaga



Nikki Barrington-Zimmer



Gloria Essien



Aayush Gupta



Caroline Madigan



Rikhil Makwana



Kristina Nguyen



Manasvi Paudel



Kayla Talebi



Tommi Tsao



Hyerin Yoon

Student Community Outreach Efforts

Several CMS students participated in volunteer work and community outreach initiatives in recent months, embodying Chicago Medical School's mission of service.

This past spring, **Hyerin Yoon**, CMS '26, took part in a community service initiative, working with community college students interested in healthcare. While working as a tutor at Oakton Community College, Hyerin learned about upcoming health screening events. Determined to promote health awareness in her local community, she reached out to the program director to express her interest in volunteering.

Hyerin proposed a partnership with Chicago Medical School to expand health screenings for Oakton's diverse community, and she was invited to take on a role including both volunteering and mentoring students interested in healthcare at Oakton. At the screening event, she educated participants on proper breast self-exam techniques using a breast model, helping students identify cysts, masses, and lymph node involvement. She also guided them in the visual inspection of breast abnormalities, emphasizing signs such as asymmetry,

skin puckering, and other concerning changes.

Additionally, Hyerin mentored Oakton students as they conducted blood pressure, pulse oximetry, BMI, and wellness screenings during the event.

On July 19, medical students **Travette Daniel**, **Kari Bonner**, and **Hope Horn**, all CMS '27, volunteered at Dr. Nelson Adams' 17th Annual Walk a Mile With a Child event during the National Medical Association Convention and Scientific Assembly at the Hilton Chicago. The students assisted with registration, distributed T-shirts, and ensured participant safety by coordinating wristbands for the walk from the Hilton to Dearborn Henry Park. They also supported the setup and operation of the STEM Community Health Fair that followed. This impactful event fosters connection between Black physicians, families, and youth, promoting wellness, community engagement, and early exposure to STEM through interactive health and fitness activities. ■



The health screening event at Oakton Community College.



Travette Daniel, Kari Bonner, and Hope Horn at the Walk a Mile With a Child event.

Women in STEM Outreach Event

The **CMS Women in Medicine and Science (WIMS)** group hosted Heart of the City for a “Women in STEM” half-day event on July 23. Heart of the City strives to level the playing field for over 1,100 youth in underserved communities in Lake County. Using soccer as the vehicle, their programs are designed to provide a developmental pathway for youth to build social-emotional and leadership skills, access academic support, and earn stackable credentials for postsecondary education and employment success.

Led by CMS faculty **Holly Hunsberger**, PhD, assistant professor of neuroscience and president of WIMS, the participating 7th and 8th graders received a tour of science labs in RFU’s Innovation and Research Park and participated in the College of Nursing’s Empathy Lab, which allows students to embody a variety of disease states and patient diagnoses through virtual reality (VR)

and adaptive equipment, in order to understand patient perspectives. The middle schoolers also participated in a goal-setting activity and received information on available pathway programs during a WIMS panel to discuss future career options. The panel consisted of **Nicole Ferrara**, PhD, assistant professor of physiology and biophysics; **Ria Datta**, MD, psychiatry resident; **Elizabeth Stolarik**, graduate student; **Smriti Gupta**, PhD, postdoctoral research associate in the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease; and **Sofia Ramos de la Cruz**, CMS '28.

Perla Arias, previous INSPIRE and Honors Thesis student, helped guide parents and students throughout the day. WIMS would also like to thank **Dr. Amanda Simanek** and **Dr. Yvette Castañeda** from RFU’s Michael Reese Foundation Center for Health Equity for their continued support and help in getting this program off the ground. ■



A tour of the Innovation and Research Park labs



With Dr. Holly Hunsberger



Using virtual reality goggles in the Empathy Lab



The WIMS Pathway Panel



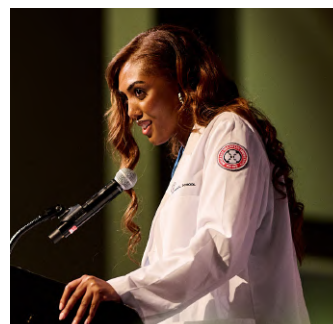
Exploring Mexican Culture Before Medical Practice

Four M2 students traveled to Xalapa, Mexico to participate in a global health experience while broadening their knowledge of the Spanish language and gaining holistic cultural insights.

In June, rising second-year CMS students **Elizabeth James**, **Baylee Rogers**, **Jamie Henning**, and **Abbey Reppen** traveled to Xalapa, Mexico, as part of a collaboration between the Universidad Biomédica Guízar y Valencia (UniBio) and the CMS Office of Global Health. During this month-long immersive experience, the students shadowed physicians, took courses alongside UniBio students, and participated in clinical interactions with patients while broadening their knowledge of the Spanish language and gaining holistic cultural insights.

Hector Rasgado-Flores, PhD, Latinx students and community liaison and professor of physiology and biophysics, accompanied the students on this global health experience. The students spent their first day in Mexico enjoying a cultural day with **Dr. Francisco Aguilar** and his family, before launching into their clinical experience.

Upon their return, the students delivered presentations reflecting on their experiences and the insights gained through this global health opportunity. ■



White Coat Ceremony

CMS welcomed the Class of 2029 to medical school on August 8 with the White Coat Ceremony, the rite of passage that marks the beginning of medical students' journey toward becoming physicians. As students crossed the stage to receive their first white coat — a sign that identifies individuals as physicians and physicians-in-training — they took a symbolic step forward into the world of medicine. During the ceremony, students were coated by their learning community mentor (a faculty member who will advise and guide them over the next four years) and received advice from CMS administration, faculty, alumni, and fellow students.

Pediatrician and CMS alumna **Joanna Lewis, MD '05**, spoke to students in the keynote address, giving them advice for medical school and sharing some of the

things she loves about the practice of medicine and the pediatrics specialty. "As a pediatrician, I've learned that medicine is less about having all the answers and more about being present in the moments that matter," she said. "It's about being human, first and always. At the end of the day, pediatrics is hope. Every day working toward the hope of making the world a better place, one child and their caregivers at a time."

Tsion Habtamu, CMS '28, M2 class president, also shared some words of wisdom with the incoming students, encouraging them to avoid comparing themselves to others; to build their community by leaning on the support and friendship of their classmates; and to take care of themselves mentally, physically, and spiritually. "Welcome to Chicago Medical School, and we can't wait



to see all the amazing things you'll accomplish," she told them.

Students then heard from **Monique Jones**, MD '93, interim assistant dean for career and specialty advising, who talked about the importance of humanism in medicine. The tradition of the white coat ceremony was begun in 1993 by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation to emphasize the importance of compassionate, humanistic patient care. Dr. Jones reminded students of what the white coat symbolized to the patients they would care for, urging them to practice medicine with kindness and empathy, listening to their patients and earning and keeping their trust.

"May your coat be a constant reminder, not just of where you are going, but who you are becoming: a physician, a listener, one who sees the unseen, hears the unspoken, and uses their knowledge to help mend what is broken," Dr. Jones said. "Welcome to the journey! Welcome to a new life. Welcome to a calling. Welcome to the privilege of healing." ■

Additional Orientation Events

The Class of 2029's orientation week also included Field Day games and competitions, and a day of service working with local organizations like Bernie's Book Bank, Feed My Starving Children, and the Waukegan Park District.





JumpStart Summer Program

The JumpStart pre-matriculation program gives medical students an early start to their M1 year, providing resources and skills for success.

During the four weeks leading up to the start of the new academic year, 24 members of the CMS Class of 2029 participated in the JumpStart summer program, an immersive pre-matriculation program designed to empower incoming medical students to navigate the transition into medical school with confidence and clarity. Participating students got an early taste of medical school as they attended lectures given by CMS faculty, met with advisors, participated in workshops on study skills and professional identity, and took quizzes and exams. They also attended two student-led panel sessions, where second-year medical students shared their experiences and answered questions about their first year. These panels and other student-led learning sessions were facilitated by **Stephanie Samson** and **Tina Zhou**, both CMS '28. All content was designed to give the students a strong start to their medical education.

"The students came in with the foundations to succeed, and JumpStart provided the environment to bring them together," said **Monique Jones**, MD '83, interim assistant dean for career and specialty advising and one of the co-directors of the JumpStart program. "JumpStart offered the missing element and fuel to ignite their launch into their medical careers as future physicians."

Andy Okhuereigbe graduated from the University of Maryland-College Park in 2021 with a degree in public health science, with a concentration in premedical sciences and biology. Throughout school, he had loved anything having to do with biology, and after he was first exposed to the idea of a career in medicine during a research internship at Kaiser Permanente, he felt a calling to be a physician, driven by what he termed "an inner yearning to help people." He was also determined to promote cultural competence in health care, inspired in part by the memory of his aunt.

Andy's aunt, like his parents, had emigrated from Nigeria, and she passed away from complications following gallstone removal surgery. "She may not have known or been aware of all the health services available to her," Andy said. "As a future physician, I hope to be a physician that ushers in an environment of inclusivity, a physician that prioritizes cultural competence, and specifically helps bring up minority communities and disadvantaged communities in an equitable fashion."

Andy completed Rosalind Franklin University's Pre-Matriculation Program (PMP) in 2024, and after being accepted to Chicago Medical School, he enrolled in the

JumpStart program. “I really sought after a program that would help equip me, whether it be with study strategies or with a community, in getting back into the mental headspace of being engaged academically,” he said.

Like Andy, **Megha Patel** knew that she wanted to be a doctor. She grew up in a rural part of Florida where access to medical care wasn’t always readily available. “Access to health care has been difficult for a lot of the people I know, including my family members,” she said. “We’ve had to travel over an hour, sometimes even longer, just to get basic care.”

Megha went to Florida State University, where she majored in biology. After graduating, she worked at Johns Hopkins University as a laboratory technician and research coordinator. During the JumpStart program, Megha appreciated the practical skills she learned, like the suturing workshop, and also the sessions on study skills and utilizing the resources available at RFU.

“I feel very prepared academically, but also personally,” Megha said. “I can’t state enough how grateful I am that the school took the time to put this program on for us. I loved every minute of it.”

The JumpStart program aims to help medical students succeed by not only providing foundational academic knowledge, but also equipping participants with a sense of community and psychosocial well-being. “It was wonderful to see the students enter the program feeling unsure and nervous, only to gain confidence and a sense of community in a short amount of time,” said **Netali Ginsberg**, MD, CMS interim director of pathway success and co-director of the JumpStart program. “As their ongoing Academic Advisor, I take great joy in witnessing our JumpStart students apply the valuable skills they developed while working in groups throughout the program.”

Nikki Dixon, RN, MEd, MSN, director of student development and learning success and the third co-director of the JumpStart program, also emphasized the sense of community students developed during the program. “Our students have expressed that many of the connections they made during the program will last a lifetime,” she said. “It’s wonderful to see the students continue to study and socialize together even after the program has ended. I look forward to watching them continue to thrive and grow.”

Connor Quinby, another JumpStart participant, wasn’t a traditional medical school applicant. When he applied to CMS, eleven years had passed since he had finished his undergraduate studies, majoring in music, and begun his career as a concert flutist and pianist. He later earned a master’s degree in medical sciences from Loyola University, graduating during the pan. He worked as a clinical research associate and a biology instructor, teaching human biology at the City Colleges of Chicago. But now he would be on the other side of the classroom, preparing to be a student again.

“Being on the other side now, I had to ask myself, how do I study again?” Connor said of his decision to enroll in the JumpStart program. “So let’s learn how to tackle medical school! It’s been a great experience.” Connor appreciated all the content he learned over the course of the program, from anatomy and immunology lectures to professional development sessions that focused on resilience and mindfulness. The program helped him get acclimated to being a student again.

“I have a better understanding of myself and what my journey is about to be,” Connor said. “You don’t get that experience if you don’t go through a program like this.” ■



JumpStart students Connor Quinby, Armon Green, and Megha Patel, all CMS '29.



Shelby Hicks, Andy Okhuereigbe, Desiree Dombrowski, and Patrick Niec, all CMS '29, with their health advocacy project poster.



Office of Community Health and Engagement Program Updates

The CMS Office of Community Health and Engagement leads community outreach efforts, teaching CMS students leadership and service skills while helping to develop the next generation of scientists and healthcare providers. Below are some of the initiatives we've been working on over the summer.

Mini Medical School

Chicago Medical School launched its first-ever Mini Medical School (MMS) in the Diamond Lake-Mundelein community, following the success of its North Chicago MMS program. The program offers local middle school students a dynamic introduction to the health sciences, expanding access to science education and career exploration in underserved communities. MMS combines engaging lessons, experiments and real-world demonstrations, all led by CMS students and faculty.

Each session of the six-week program focused on a different organ system. The curriculum included interactive explorations of the musculoskeletal system,

brain and mental health, heart and circulation, gastrointestinal system, lungs and respiratory function, and the immune system. The middle schoolers also learned CPR, wrapped mock joint injuries, explored how the immune system protects the body, and experienced firsthand why handwashing is one of the most powerful tools to prevent disease.

"We wanted students to leave each session feeling like medicine is not only fascinating but possible — that they belong in these spaces," said one of the MMS instructors. "This is about building confidence, identity, and community as much as it is about biology."

The CMS MMS program began in 2022 to address the issue of underrepresentation of historically marginalized groups in medicine, particularly among Black and Latino students. The program invites fourth, fifth, and sixth graders from local historically marginalized communities to experience the health professions and explore their interests in science. Participants leave the program not

only with a greater understanding of the human body — but with a stronger sense that they, too, can play a role in building healthier communities.

This summer, Chicago Medical School received a \$25,000 grant from the MolinaCares Foundation that will help us continue to expand this important program.

Hero/Parent Academy

Chicago Medical School launched a Hero/Parent Academy in the Diamond Lake-Mundelein community, creating a bilingual, community-centered space for parents of students enrolled concurrently in the CMS Mini Medical School (MMS). The academy was designed to inform, inspire, and celebrate the vital role that parents and other guardians play in their children's journey toward careers in the health professions.

Each session provided culturally responsive support and practical information in both English and Spanish to meet the needs of local families. At the end of each session, CMS students **Priya Pradhan**, **Mitch Cygania**, **Sofia Ramos de la Cruz**, and **Maig Castellon**, all CMS '28, members of the Mini Medical School Executive Board, provided a summary of what students were learning in their concurrent MMS sessions. This helped bridge the gap between generations and gave parents a clearer picture of the health sciences curriculum their children were exploring.

Throughout the academy, parents heard from a dynamic group of CMS faculty, students, and community leaders. Sessions included inspiration from faculty such as **Dr. Maria Gomez**, who spoke on the importance of STEM and medical education starting at an early age, and **Dr. Frank Maldonado**, who led a student panel of incoming and current students in varying health professions, held at RFU. There were featured presentations, like College Navigation, Legal Planning and Financial Aid for College, and Mental Wellness led by community leaders including Round Lake's Parent Liaison, HACES, Illinois Student Assistance Commission, and Families First Center of Lake County. The final session culminated in a powerful Student Forum, where bilingual students from across RFU's colleges shared their personal journeys into health care.

The Hero/Parent Academy was made possible through an El Centro grant from the University Center of Lake County, part of a visionary effort to educate

and empower communities through access to health education and professional pathways.

Bilingual Forum for Parents of Mini Medical School Participants

An interprofessional group of RFU students shared their journeys and advice in a special forum held during the final session of Chicago Medical School's Hero/Parent Academy, for parents and guardians of middle-school students in the CMS Mini Medical School program. Held at the Diamond Lake Park District in Mundelein, the program brought together bilingual student representatives from Chicago Medical School, Dr. William M. Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine, the College of Pharmacy, and the College of Health Professions' Physician Assistant Program, as well as future medical students from the university's INSPIRE pathway program, who recently received acceptance to CMS. They spoke candidly about overcoming barriers, staying motivated, and navigating the road to becoming health professionals. Speakers addressed parents in both English and Spanish, emphasizing the importance of family support in their educational journeys and honoring the parents and heroes who support their children's educational success.

The forum served not only as a source of encouragement and guidance, but also as a platform to honor parents as "heroes" in the educational success of their children. Parents asked questions about college pathways, application processes, and how to support their students academically and emotionally through rigorous programs.

"This event created a space where families could see themselves in the journeys of our students," said **Melissa Chen**, MD, CMS assistant dean of community health and engagement. "Our hope is that parents leave feeling empowered, knowing that their role is essential to building a new generation of health leaders." ■



CMS Curriculum Retreat

On May 21, the **Office of Medical Education** hosted a springtime curriculum retreat on campus in the Centennial Room. This workshop-style event provided attendees with an opportunity to actively and collaboratively discuss several initiatives of the Curriculum Committee and the Office of Medical Education.

Topics included the CMS Medical Education Program Objectives and Competencies (MEPO) Task Force, as well as updates on action items from the Comprehensive Phase III Review. Guests also engaged in roundtable discussions focused on final recommendations from the

Phase I Curriculum Scheduling and Student Success Working Group. Participants provided feedback on proposals geared toward promoting long-term student success, enhancing the learning environment, and fostering a culture of connection and community.

Attendees included faculty and student members of the CMS Curriculum Committee, the MEPO Task Force, and the Phase I Curriculum Scheduling and Student Success Working Group. Additional guests included members from the Offices of Medical Education and Student Affairs and faculty from the Department of Clinical Sciences. ■

Graduate Medical Education (GME) News



Psychiatry Residents

From left to right: New psychiatry residents Dr. Emaan Mahmood, Dr. Matthew Martin, Dr. Elizabeth Perkins, Dr. Carlos Medina, and Dr. Soham Shah. Inset: Dr. ChenBo Fang and Dr. Haani Tai.

Welcoming New Residents

Internal Medicine Residents — Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center



Dr. Arun George



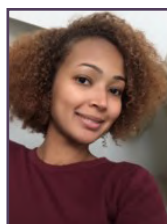
Dr. Saptarshi
Ghosh



Dr. Mugundan
Guhan



Dr. Tetz Cheng-
Che Lee



Dr. Isra Nour



Dr. Anne-Marie
Nwajei

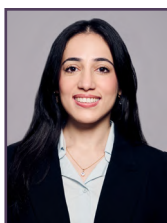


Dr. Sara Oliveira



Dr. Amrit Salwan

Internal Medicine Residents — Northwestern Medicine McHenry Hospital



Dr. Mahpara Ali



Dr. Yasser
Almadani



Dr. Oishi Barua



Dr. Aalima Fatima



Dr. Aigin Heydari



Dr. Sneha Kumar



Dr. Iman Mushfiq



Dr. Jude Ogieuhi



Dr. Sadhu Reddy



Dr. Saiyara Shama



Dr. Aditya Suresh



Dr. Amna Tariq ■

Residency and Fellowship Graduation

Chicago Medical School held its **36th Annual Residency and Fellowship Graduation** with an on-campus ceremony held June 5. We celebrated all our wonderful graduates as they marked this milestone and prepared to move

on to the next chapter of their professional career. Congratulations to all our graduating Internal Medicine residents, Psychiatry residents, and Internal Medicine subspecialty fellows! ■



Graduates from the internal medicine residency program, Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, with Dr. Jonathan Daniels, program director, and Dr. William Cotter, associate program director



Graduates from the internal medicine residency program, Northwestern Medicine McHenry Hospital



Graduating psychiatry resident Dr. Won-He Lee, with Dr. Paul Hung and Dr. Charles Mitschow



Dr. Joy Fatunbi, graduating reproductive medicine and immunology fellow



Dr. Ammar Ahmed, graduating pulmonary disease fellow, with Dr. Richard Lenhardt



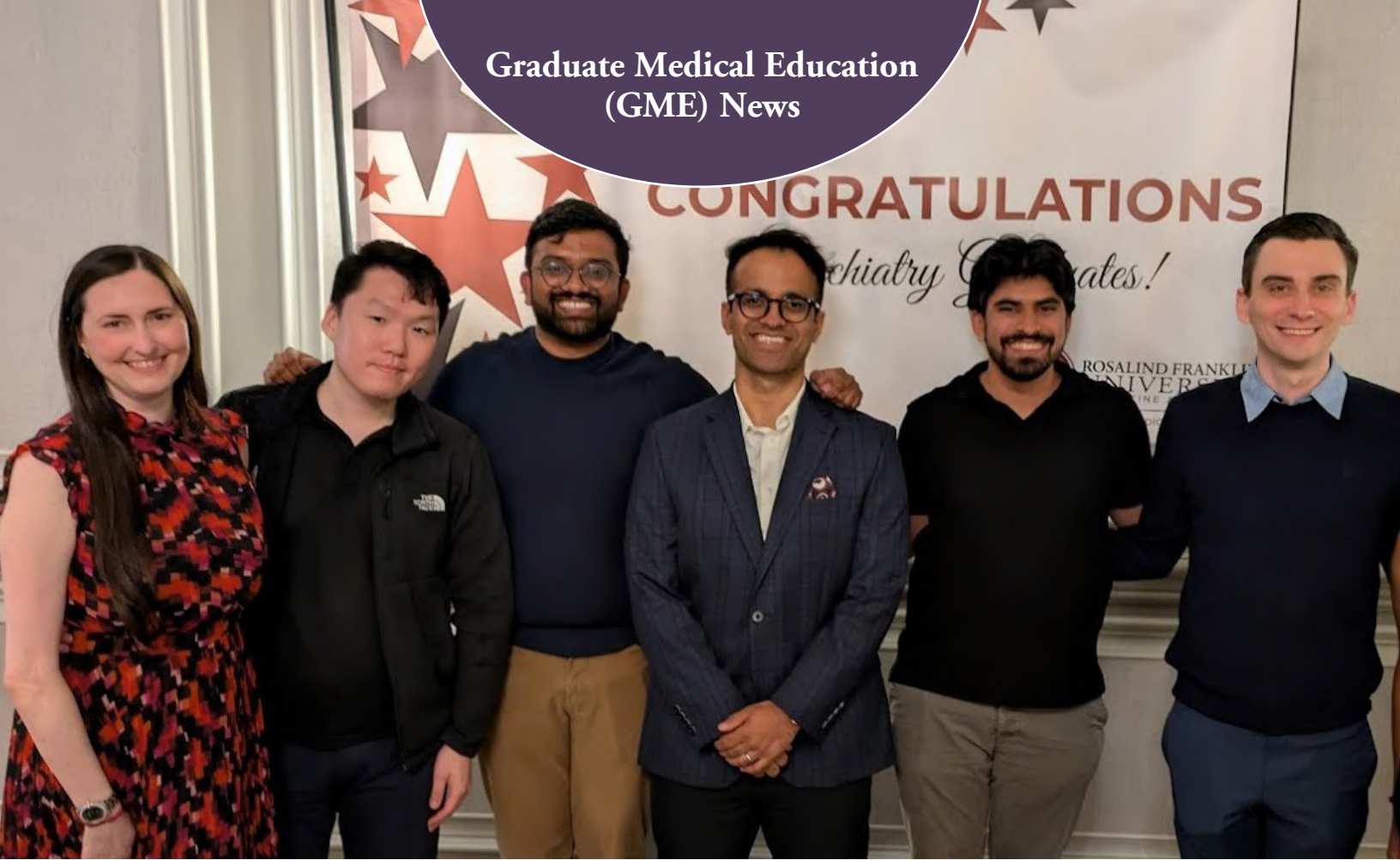
Dr. Ravi Kumar, graduating internal medicine resident, with Drs. Maryna Shayuk, Prashant Sura, and Ted Lorenc



Dr. Elda Mullaj, graduating cardiology fellow



Dr. Harsha Gondi, graduating cardiology fellow



Psychiatry Residency Dinner and Awards

The CMS psychiatry residency program celebrated the exceptional Class of 2025 during the program's annual graduation dinner and awards ceremony, held on June 6. The graduating residents have navigated the challenges of residency with resilience, compassion, and unwavering commitment to patient care. Several residents were recognized for their outstanding achievements.

The winners of the psychiatry residents' annual poster competition, held in April, received their awards at this ceremony. **Dr. James Estaver** and **Dr. Sidra Parveen** received first place for their poster titled "Crisis Control: Evaluating a Novel Simulation Program for Teaching Agitation Management to Psychiatry Residents." **Dr. Michael Luo** received second place for his poster titled "Exposure Therapy for Social Anxiety: Finding Humans Less Scary." **Dr. Brandon Fleres** and **Dr. Ryan Shu** received third place for their poster titled "A Novel Perspective on Kratom and Psychosis." **Dr. Stephanie Moss** was awarded the "faculty choice" prize for her poster titled "Dissociative Identity Disorder: A Case Report on the Intricacies of Trauma & Identity Formation."

Dr. Ria Datta received the Collegiality and Humanism Award, given in honor of CMS faculty Dr. Chandra Vedak.

Dr. Obaada Elhomsy and **Dr. Connor Haszto** received the Marc Fahami Award for Passion in Psychiatry, awarded to two residents each year for demonstrating a passion for the field of psychiatry.

Dr. Abdullah Damra was named Resident Teacher of the Year, an honor awarded by medical students for excellence in teaching.

The following CMS psychiatry faculty also received awards, nominated by psychiatry residents. **Dr. Jinny Kim**, assistant professor, was named Clinical Teacher of the Year, and **Dr. Andrew Schiller**, instructor, was named Academic Teacher of the Year. **Dr. Miriam Robinovitz**, assistant professor, received the Faculty Service Award.

We wish all our graduates the very best in their future endeavors! ■

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Clayton Kazan, MD '01



Dr. Clayton Kazan, CMS Class of 2001, is an emergency medicine physician who currently serves as Medical Director for the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Dr. Kazan talked about his career and his lifelong passion for Emergency Medicine Services (EMS).

Dr. Kazan was interested in being a firefighter or EMT since childhood, and he got his start in health care as an EMT in 1994, when he was an undergrad at UCLA. "I just fell in love with it," he said. "I went to medical school specifically to be an ER doctor, because to me that was the closest equivalent to what I was already doing."

In 1997, he left LA to go to Chicago — describing the move from California to the Midwest as "a culture shock and a weather shock" — and enrolled in Chicago Medical School. It was a good fit for him, because at the time CMS was one of the only medical schools to require an emergency medicine clerkship. Emergency medicine was still a relatively young specialty — it was only approved as a medical specialty in 1979 — and CMS had placed an impressive number of emergency medicine residents compared to many other medical schools.

But as a medical student, Dr. Kazan missed EMS. After his first year, he went back to LA and spent the summer teaching Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS) and Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS). Upon returning to CMS, he joined a local volunteer fire department in Lake Bluff during his second year. "That gave me enough opportunity to keep my beak wet in EMS while I was studying," he said.

As Dr. Kazan began his clerkships in his third year at CMS, his passion for emergency medicine solidified. "When I went through my clerkships, I really enjoyed all of them," he said. "I could see myself as an internist, a surgeon, a psychiatrist. I really enjoyed it, but then when I did emergency medicine, I thought, This is what I want to do. 100%."

In his fourth year, Dr. Kazan double matched into a transitional year internship and an emergency medicine residency. After graduating from CMS in 2001, he completed his internship at the University of Hawaii before returning to his hometown to begin his emergency medicine residency at UCLA. Throughout his residency, he still maintained his EMS extracurriculars, continuing to teach ACLS classes on the side and choosing residency electives like ride-alongs in ambulances and flying with air operations.

After completing his residency, Dr. Kazan worked in a trauma center while also serving as clinical faculty at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. "But I always had other EMS activities on the side," he said, "because that was really where my heart was."

He worked as the associate medical director for the UCLA paramedic program, and then served as the medical director for the Los Angeles County Paramedic Training Institute. He was on LA's EMS Commission, which he chaired for several years. Then in 2010, he became the chairman of the Emergency Department and assistant medical director at St. Francis Medical Center in Lynwood, CA.

Since 2015, Dr. Kazan has served as medical director of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Serving 59 cities and 4 million residents within LA County, the fire department handles an average of 1,100 medical calls a day. As medical director, Dr. Kazan oversees the paramedic and EMT operations for those patients. He also serves as a liaison to the healthcare system, working with local hospitals and the LA County Department of Public Health.

"If we once thought that we really weren't part of public health, the pandemic really flipped that on its head," said Dr. Kazan. "EMS is absolutely a component of public health." The fire department now partners with public health agencies to promote healthy and safe behavior, trying to keep people healthy before they call with an emergency. And during the pandemic, the fire department was in charge of setting up COVID testing sites for the whole county, in partnership with the City of Los Angeles;



Dr. Kazan as a volunteer firefighter with the Knollwood Fire Department in Lake Bluff during his time at CMS.

by April 2020, they were testing 10,000 people a day. Dr. Kazan also devoted himself to promoting public health through vaccine advocacy.

More recently, he was on call to handle any medical emergencies during the LA fires earlier this year. In January 2025, as the Palisades and Eaton fires burned and the winds spread the flames, Dr. Kazan was on standby to call in ambulances if any hospitals needed to be evacuated. As firefighters worked on putting out the flames, Dr. Kazan focused on the day-to-day health emergencies. "The fires didn't stop anyone from calling 911 for their chest pain, belly pain, toe pain, ankle sprain. And it was, of course, the middle of the cold and flu and respiratory virus season," he said. "So we had kids with RSV and all these other things, calling at the same time as we were sending 75 fire engines out onto these fires."

Dr. Kazan's passions include quality improvement and process development, and he is always looking for ways to bring new strategies and technologies to the fire department. In his time as medical director, he has launched numerous innovative and nationally recognized initiatives. He participated in the rollout of a pre-hospital blood transfusion program in LA County, which started in April of this year. He also advocated for a "triage to alternate destinations" program which would allow paramedics to take mental health patients to a psychiatric

urgent care center instead of being required to take them to a hospital emergency department. His advocacy for the program eventually led to changes in legislation, and he was awarded the California EMS Achievement Award. He has also received the California EMS Authority Distinguished Service Medal.

When it comes to advice for current students, especially those considering a career in emergency medicine, Dr. Kazan emphasized the importance of work-life balance and devoting time to family, friends, and hobbies. "Make sure that you don't become a workaholic and a slave to your profession, but actually value yourself as a human being, as a member of the community, a member of your family," he said. "Emergency medicine has to be more than just a job for you to be good at it. You really do have to be committed to it. But it doesn't have to be your whole life either."

Despite the chaos of a career in EMS, Dr. Kazan has never regretted going into the career he's loved since he was a child. "Emergency medicine is a good life, but it's not an easy one. But I think it's extremely rewarding to help people," he said. "I still absolutely love my decision to have gone into medicine. If I had to do it over again, I would do it exactly the same." ■



Five-year-old Clayton, displaying his passion for EMS from an early age.

Ronald Ritz, MD '72, Shares His Photography

Retired plastic surgeon **Dr. Ronald Ritz**, CMS Class of 1972, has shared his keen eye for the visual world through an avid interest in photography. He strives to capture the “decisive moment,” as described by photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, which in a single iconic image tells the story of an event or environment. Dr. Ritz has also shared his professional expertise with other surgeons caring for patients in underserved communities across the globe.

Five of Dr. Ritz's photographs were published this spring in the 2025 volume of Synapses, the creative journal of Chicago Medical School. Additional images will be featured in the 2026 edition. See his gallery online at <https://legacygalleryphotography.com>.



Man Selling Car, Flea Market Athens, Greece 1976

“This image is one of my favorite photos, juxtaposing a dapper man who sat out there all day trying to sell that car.”



Portrait of Three Women, Kenya, Africa 2014.

“My wife and I have done a lot of traveling. On trips to Africa, we’ve visited villages and have gone on wildlife expeditions. We spent several hours photographing in a village where I saw these three women. They reminded me of the famous photo of three coal miners. All of the women there adorn themselves like this...it’s their makeup. Most of the work I did at that time was street photography...you just had to be quick, unobtrusive, and blend in.”



Medical School Graduation, Chicago, 2016.

“The young man in the middle is my son (Matthew L. Ritz, MD '16), getting ready for his graduation from Chicago Medical School. They’re down in the parking lot getting ready, and I saw this sign. I just told him and three of his friends, ‘You’ve got to stand under this sign...This is what’s ahead of you!’ That photo is a favorite of mine. He’s doing great. He’s a pediatric anesthesiologist in Denver.”



Vietnam War Protest, Chicago 1968.

"As I was walking around looking for an apartment to start medical school, there was this big rally in Grant Park. This photograph is one of my earliest images, taken with a Minolta 35mm camera. I was so happy to be accepted to CMS. Those days were a very tumultuous time, as now, on an even bigger scale. For me, this woman symbolized what the whole protest was describing in one image. I've always been attracted to juxtaposition. She was going for it, and really stood out."



Little Cowgirl, Rodeo Finals, Las Vegas, 2024.

"I took this photo at the National Rodeo Association... she was actually being held by her father, and I was able to capture this look just as she turned her head. There are a lot of people there, crossing in front of you and obscuring your view. It was just fortuitous that when the crowd cleared for that one instant she turned her head to look at me — that's when I got the photograph."



The Treasury, Petra, Jordan, 2018.

"You walk about a mile through this narrow slot canyon, which opens up into this space with this incredible building called the Treasury. Most of the shots you see are after you've exited the slot canyon, in order to capture the whole building. This image is shot through the end of the canyon, giving a different perspective on where this building is and what you have to walk through to get to it."



Street Portrait, Tel Aviv, Israel, 2018.

"We just parked the car going to the marketplace, and he was the parking attendant, a great-looking guy with the wind blowing his hair. I used him in another photograph, in a composite and made him the God image."



Street Portrait, Petra, Jordan 2018.

"The man in this photograph is actually riding a horse. He's just a happy guy, having a great time riding. I really wanted to focus on his face."



Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, 2024.

"This building is one of Frank Gehry's many incredible architectural structures. The image is a venture of mine into architectural photography, which is really all about light and form. It's a remarkable building. I spent a lot of time in post-production working on lighting this building, because it was a pretty flat day so you really didn't have a lot of light and shadow to create this three-dimensional view of this incredible building. I had to do some removal of cars; there's a fair amount of Photoshop involved."



Southern Utah Landscape, 2024.

"Last year while we traveled through Utah, we had to hike in a couple miles to capture this image. The stormy skies looked out of this world, like from the moon. I've never been much for landscapes, and black and white photography is my entire medium. I did a lot of [digital] post production on this image to capture my vision. Unlike street photography, there's a lot of interpretation, so the final image portrays what you thought you wanted it to look like. It's crafting a vision, like painting but with the camera." ■

STAFF CORNER

Get to know the people who make CMS a great place to study and work!



Chrysanthemum "Chrysee" Gorospe

Coordinator of Community Health Engagement Programs,
Office of Faculty Affairs and Engagement
Time at CMS: 5 months

Chrysee Gorospe was born in the Philippines as the youngest of five daughters. From an early age, her parents instilled in her the importance of education. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree at Marquette University, where she met her husband, and a Master of Education in Secondary Science Education at Franklin Pierce University.

"As the youngest daughter, I was in a unique position where I was the only one in my family who completed all my years of education in the States," Chrysee said. "Thankful for my parents' sacrifices immigrating to the United States, I knew that being an educator was how I can best give back to my community that helped

raise me. I wanted to share my knowledge that I gained with the next generation by providing high quality STEM and biomedical science education and guidance as they navigated pursuing various healthcare careers."

Chrysee's passion for education led to an opportunity to complete her Teaching Fellowship at Stanford University. After earning her Master of Science in Human Biology, she found her way to Chicago Medical School's community outreach programs, drawn especially to the school's Mini Medical School (MMS) program — an initiative to expand access to science education and career exploration for fourth- through eighth-graders in underserved communities. "As my family grows, it's nice being able to assist my nephews in navigating their educational journey and watch them surpass what I accomplished at their age," Chrysee said, "and one day I hope to guide my future children in their education as well."

Chrysee joined the Office of Community Health and Engagement (OCHE), within the CMS Office of Faculty Affairs and Engagement, in March 2025, and in only a few months, she has already made a big impact on the office. "Chrysee has truly transformed the CMS Office for Community Health and Engagement," said Chrysee's supervisor. "Her energy, spirit, and unwavering dedication have elevated our office, our Mini Medical School, and new Parent/Hero Academy to new heights, inspiring all of us along the way."

Her job duties include helping with writing new curricula and updating lesson plans to maintain the rigor of STEM and medicine topics in the MMS program. She also works to maintain positive relationships with grant funders, community partners, and the CMS students who volunteer in the MMS program. Chrysee also helps spread awareness within CMS of the programs and resources offered by OCHE.

Outside of work, Chrysee enjoys going on road trips with her husband, exploring local restaurants and coffee shops, and traveling around the world with her family. When she's not traveling, she works on journals and scrapbooks filled with memories from her trips. She also likes playing volleyball, pickleball, and tennis with her nephews and friends. She's slowly learning how to cook her parents' recipes for all her favorite dishes, and she also likes to spend time working her way through her library full of books on her "TBR" list. ■

Awards & Accomplishments



Archana Chatterjee, MD, PhD, dean of CMS and senior vice president for medical affairs for RFU, received The Portes Foundation and Institute of Medicine of Chicago (IOMC) Award for Excellence in Prevention of Disease during the IOMC's 2025 Annual Leadership Awards ceremony on June 26.

Dr. Chatterjee was also invited to serve on the AAMC Council of Deans (COD) ad hoc advisory committee for the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) Strategic Visioning project. This multi-year strategic visioning initiative is aimed at ensuring that accreditation standards and elements are current and effective in the context of the changing medical education environment.

Joanna Dabrowska, PhD, PharmD, associate professor of cellular and molecular pharmacology, Center for Neurobiology of Stress Resilience and Psychiatric Disorders, received a new five-year, \$1.7 million RO1 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH/NIMH) for her research project titled "The Role of Oxytocin in Modulating Activity of the Supramammillary Nucleus and Social Recognition Memory." This is an MPI grant with Dr. Hala Harony-Nicolas from Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City.



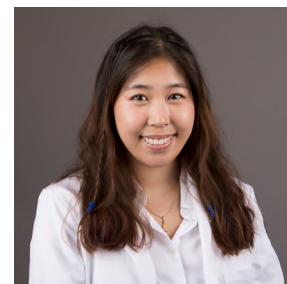
Dr. Dabrowska was also appointed a standing member of the Neurobiology of Motivated Behavior (NMB) study section, National Institute of Health (NIH), for the July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2029 term.

Each year, the Executive Student Council recognizes seven students with the Student Leadership Awards. Congratulations to the two CMS students who received an award this year in recognition of their commitment,

dedication, and service to RFU and the community: **Delaney Griffiths**, CMS '27, received the Chicago Medical School Student Leadership Award, and **Crystal Banh**, CMS '27, received the At-Large Student Leadership Award.

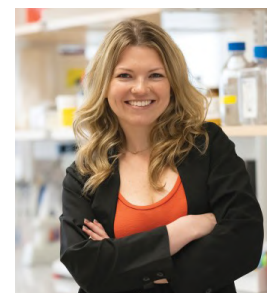


Delaney Griffiths



Crystal Banh

Holly Hunsberger, PhD, assistant professor of neuroscience, Center for Neurodegenerative Disease and Therapeutics, received a renewal of her Health Disparities Research LRP Award by the National Institute on Aging as part of the National Institutes of Health's loan repayment program, for her work on sex-based health disparities in Alzheimer's disease.



EunJung Hwang, PhD, assistant professor of cell biology and anatomy, Stanson Toshok Center for Brain Function and Repair, was named to the "Illinois Researchers to Know 2025" list by the Illinois Science and Technology Coalition. She is one of just 12 faculty members across the state selected for innovation, interdisciplinary excellence and real-world impact. Dr. Hwang is advancing translational approaches to treat age-related neurological disorders.

School & Department News

Pamela A. Perepelitsky, CMS '28, received the Donald A. Pegg Leadership Award from the American College of Lifestyle Medicine (ACLM). Pamela's award includes seed funding for her project proposal, and she will use the funds to support a culinary medicine workshop she is developing for first-year medical students with Dr. Melissa Bernstein, CHP associate professor and chair of nutrition, and Ms. Janice Dowell, CHP adjunct lecturer of lifestyle medicine. The workshop will highlight the role of nutrition in the prevention and management of chronic diseases while introducing students to lifestyle medicine and its six pillars early in their education.



Daniel were in attendance to support her outstanding work and impactful presentation.



Prianka Belancourt (center) with classmates Kari Bonner and Travette Daniel



Neelam Sharma-Walia, PhD, associate professor of microbiology and immunology, Center for Cancer Cell Biology, Immunology, and Infection, received the Monica Ply Research Innovation Award. Established in honor of Monica Ply, an esteemed supporter of research

at RFU during her lifetime, the award is presented annually to support research of cardiovascular disease and/or Parkinson's disease. Dr. Sharma-Walia will use the award to develop an innovative concept of viral infection in human cardiac cells.



Maureen Benjamins, PhD, assistant professor of medicine at CMS and senior research fellow at the Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI), recently published a commentary, "Safety-Net Providers: A Missing Piece of the Health Equity Research Landscape" in the *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*.

The article examines SUHI as a case study and proposes concrete solutions for expanding the role of these institutions within public health research.

Presentations & Publications

Prianka Belancourt, CMS '28, presented her research as a 2025 Nth Dimensions Scholar at the National Medical Association Convention and Scientific Assembly at the Hilton Chicago on July 19. Her project, titled "Capitate Resection and Radiocarpal Arthrodesis with Scaphoid Autograft for Treatment of Extra-Axial Chordoma of the Wrist: A Case Report," highlighted her dedication to scientific inquiry and health equity. Classmates Kari Bonner and former Nth Dimensions Scholar Travette

Joanna Dabrowska, PhD, PharmD, associate professor of cellular and molecular pharmacology, Center for Neurobiology of Stress Resilience and Psychiatric Disorders, along with **Walter Francesconi**, PhD; **Valentina Olivera-Pasilio**, PhD '23; **Fulvia Berton**, PhD; **Susan H. Olson**; **Rachel Chudoba**, PhD '24; and **Lorena Monroy**, all researchers in Dr. Dabrowska's lab, published a research manuscript titled "Vasopressin and Oxytocin Excite BNST Neurons via Oxytocin Receptors, Which Reduce Anxious Arousal" in *Cell Reports*.



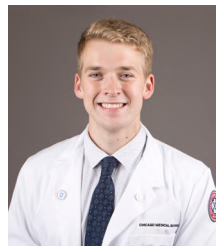
Members of the Dabrowska lab

Dr. Dabrowska also chaired symposia at two conferences, delivering a talk titled “Vasopressin and Oxytocin Integrate Interoceptive Signals and Fear Memory in Extended Amygdala” during the International Regulatory Peptide Society Meeting (RegPep) in Washington, DC and a talk titled “CRF-BNST Neurons Modulate Anxiety-Potentiated Startle in a Sex- and Estrous Phase-Dependent Manner” during the European Brain and Behaviour Society (EBBS) annual meeting in Bordeaux, France.

Robin L. Dyer, MD, OTR, MHPE, CHSE, assistant professor of internal medicine, and **Kevin Kingston**, standardized patient educator in RFU’s Center for Advanced Simulation in Healthcare, presented at the Chicago Simulation Consortium at Loyola University on August 15. Their presentation, titled “It’s All Greek (and Latin) to Me! A Medical Terminology Tutorial for Standardized Patients,” was an interactive virtual tutorial that Dr. Dyer developed for RFU’s standardized patients to help them learn medical terminology. Once Dr. Dyer and her colleagues in the Baldwin Institute for Interprofessional Education successfully deploy the tutorial for RFU’s standardized patient pool, they plan to share the tutorial externally for other programs to use.



Dr. Robin Dyer



Thomas Finn, CMS '27, co-authored an article titled “Multimodality Imaging in Evaluating and Guiding Percutaneous Left Atrial Appendage Occlusion,” published in the *Journal of the American Society of Echocardiography*.



Holly Hunsberger, PhD, assistant professor of neuroscience, Center for Neurodegenerative Disease and Therapeutics, co-authored a publication in *Scientific Reports* titled “Alprazolam Induces

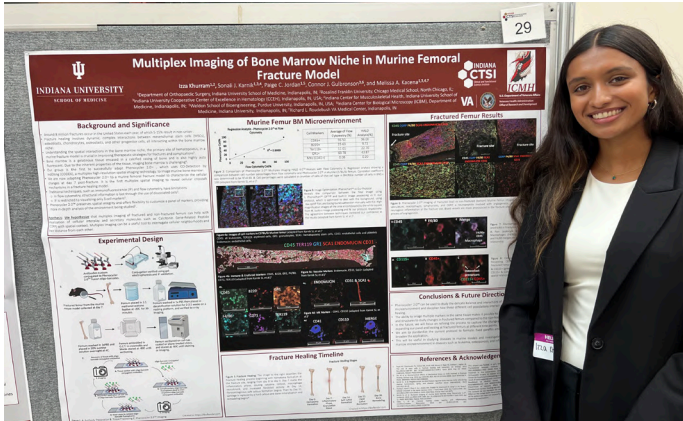
Anterograde Amnesia for Contextual Fear Memory and Alters Dorsoventral Hippocampal Neuronal Ensembles in Female Mice” with co-authors **Lainey Toennies**, research technician, and **Kameron Kaplan**, a graduate student in Dr. Hunsberger’s lab who was first author on the paper. Dr. Hunsberger also authored an article titled “Combinatorial Targeting of NMDARs and 5-HT 4 Rs Exerts Beneficial Effects in a Mouse Model of Alzheimer’s Disease,” published in *Alzheimer’s Research & Therapy*.

EunJun Hwang, PhD, assistant professor of cell biology and anatomy, Stanson Toshok Center for Brain Function and Repair, gave a presentation during the August 6 BioInnovations Speaker Series program, titled “Weathering the Biotech Blues with Innovative Illinois Programs.” Her presentation was followed by a panel discussion with industry experts.

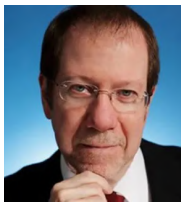
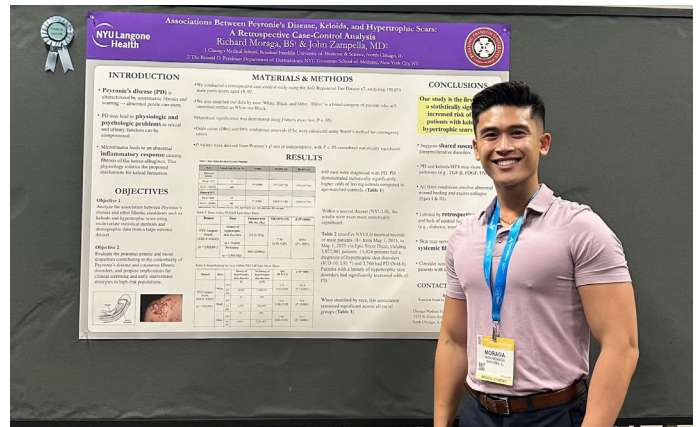


School & Department News

Izza Khurram, CMS '28, presented a poster titled "Multiplex Imaging of Bone Marrow Niche in Murine Femoral Fracture Model" at a poster presentation session at Indiana University School of Medicine, where she conducted research over the summer.



Innovation Academy in Chicago this July, where he was awarded 5th place out of over 220 accepted abstracts. His abstract was titled "Associations Between Peyronie's Disease, Keloids, and Hypertrophic Scars: A Retrospective Case-Control Analysis." Richard also published a manuscript titled "Evolving Dermatology Antimicrobial Prescribing Patterns: National Trends and the Emerging Role of Doxycycline Postexposure Prophylaxis," published in *Clinics in Dermatology*.



Elliot M. Levine, MD '78, clinical associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, co-authored a case report titled "Indocyanine Green (ICG) Imaging: Case Report of Innovative Isthmolece Diagnosis and Repair in a Post-Ablation Patient and Literature Review," published in the *Archives of Gynecology and Obstetrics*.

Ligaya Marasigan, MD, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, delivered a special medical grand rounds presentation on May 28, hosted by the CMS chapter of Alpha Omega Alpha. Dr. Marasigan's presentation was titled "A Journey Through Global Medical and Education Volunteering," and she discussed things to consider before embarking on an overseas medical mission trip.



James O'Donnell, PhD, MS, associate professor of cellular and molecular pharmacology, was first editor on *O'Donnell's Drug Injury*, 5th Ed. (Taylor & Francis Publishing, 2025), and he co-authored thirteen chapters for the book: "General Principles of Pharmacology," "Adverse Drug Reactions: Allergic Focus," "Drug Induced Falls," "Drug Induced Liver Disease," "Dangers of Opioids," "Fetal Drug Exposure," "Medication Errors," "Anticoagulants: Therapeutics, Risks, and Toxicities," "Pharmacist Malpractice and Liability," "Alcohol," "Marijuana: Pharmacology, Toxicology, and Forensic Issues," "Involuntary Intoxication," and "Forensic Drug Testing."

Sanjna Patel, CMS '27, presented a poster titled "Barriers and Facilitators for Participation of Individuals in HIV Vaccine Trials" at the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, Great

Richard Moraga, CMS '27, presented his research abstract at the 2025 American Academy of Dermatology

School & Department News

Lakes Chapter Annual Meeting on June 13. **Ameer Abdeljaber**, CMS '27, and **Roxane Rohani**, PharmD, MSc, BCACP, assistant professor of cellular and molecular pharmacology, Center for Cancer Cell Biology, Immunology, and Infection, were co-authors on the poster.



Sanjna Patel

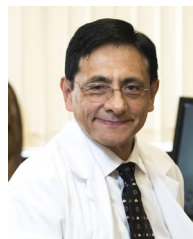
Martin Pelletier, CMS '26, presented a poster titled "Outcome of Sedative-Assisted Intubation for Ketamine vs. Etomidate: A State Survey" at the Illinois College of Emergency Physicians (ICEP) Ginny Palys Annual Symposium, held in May at Northwestern Medical Center.



Daniel A. Peterson, PhD, professor of neuroscience and director of the Center for Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine, authored "To Recruit or to Graft? Comparing the Recruitment of Resident Non-Neuronal Cells by Lineage

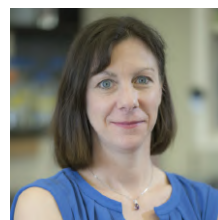
Reprogramming with Engraftment of Stem Cell-Derived Neurons for Neuronal Replacement Therapies," a mini review article published in *Frontiers in Neuroscience*.

Peter Pham, CMS '27, was first author on an article titled "Non-Pharmacological Pain Management of Rheumatoid Arthritis," published in the journal *Current Rheumatology Reports*.



Hector Rasgado-Flores, PhD, professor of physiology and biophysics, and Latinx students and community liaison, is first author on a book chapter titled "Succeeding Along the Research Track as an Underrepresented in Medicine Faculty," published in *LHS+ Identity, Development, Empowerment, and Resources Seminar Book* (Springer, in press). Dr. Rasgado-Flores also co-authored a paper titled "Designing Competencies to Advance Health Equity for Latino, Hispanic, and Spanish-Origin Communities," published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Paras Sahani, CMS '27, co-presented a poster titled "Role of Rab11 Family Interacting Proteins in Immune Recognition of Breast Cancer" at the American Association for Cancer Research Annual Meeting.



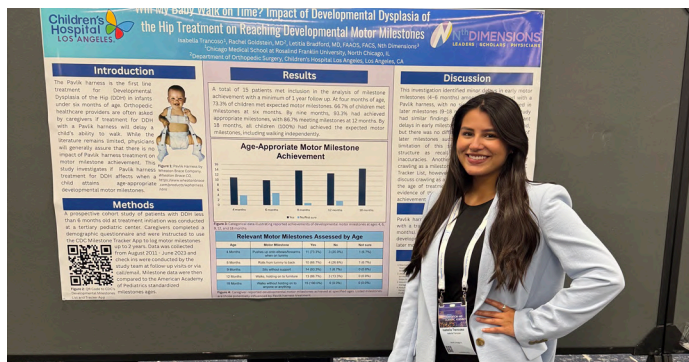
Beth Stutzmann, PhD, director of the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease and Therapeutics and professor and discipline chair of neuroscience, gave an invited talk titled "Shared Calcium Channelopathies Across Neurological

Disorders" at the Ion Channels Meeting in Tours, France. Dr. Stutzmann also served as session chair for the "Calcium Signaling and Disease" session of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology's Calcium and Cell Function conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

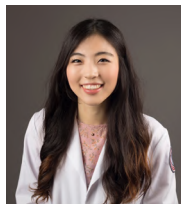
Over the summer, **Isabella Trancoso**, CMS '28, participated in a pediatric orthopedic surgery research internship at the Children's Hospital Los Angeles through an organization called Nth Dimensions. Her research was on the impact of Pavlik harness treatment for

School & Department News

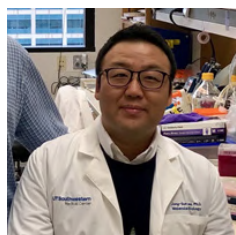
developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) on reaching motor milestones. Afterward, she presented an oral poster presentation titled “Will My Baby Walk on Time? — Impact of Development Dysplasia of the Hip Treatment on Reaching Developmental Motor Milestones” at the National Medical Association’s Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly, held July 19–23 in Chicago.



Hyerin Yoon, CMS '26, was first author on a paper titled “A Rare Incidental Finding of Appendiceal Ganglioneuroma During Screening Colonoscopy,” published in the *International Journal of Clinical Case Reports and Reviews*. She was also first author on an article titled “Recommendations for Spinal Cord Stimulation Trials,” published in the North American Neuromodulation Society (NANS) newsletter.



Events and Other News



The Center for Genetic Diseases recruited **Jong-Sun Lee**, PhD, as a tenure-track assistant professor. His research focuses on the role of long noncoding RNAs (lncRNAs) in regulating gene expression and their contribution to carcinogenesis.

His work aims to translate these findings into novel therapeutic strategies. Dr. Lee previously served on faculty at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

CMS leadership went on a site visit to **Insight Chicago Hospital** on May 23, meeting with **Dr. Asim Saeed** (second from right), Chief Academic Officer and Designated Institutional Official (DIO), and **Ms. Yvonne McCauley** (third from left), Assistant DIO.



CMS, RFU, and Insight Chicago Hospital leadership.

Aidan Butler, a first-year medical student at the University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences, selected the lab of **Holly C. Hunsberger**, PhD, assistant professor of neuroscience in the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease and Therapeutics, as the site for his summer research internship project investigating the impact of benzodiazepines and psilocybin on Alzheimer’s disease, with a focus on neuropsychiatric and cognitive symptoms. Mr. Butler received a Medical Student Research Scholarship through the American Academy of Neurology to support the project.



Aidan Butler

James J. O’Donnell, PhD, MS, associate professor of cellular and molecular pharmacology, organized the **38th annual meeting of the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics—Great Lakes Chapter (ASPET-GLC)**, which was held on June 13 at Northwestern University in Chicago. 170 pharmacologists, bioinformaticists, biologists, clinicians, and students attended the conference, which focused

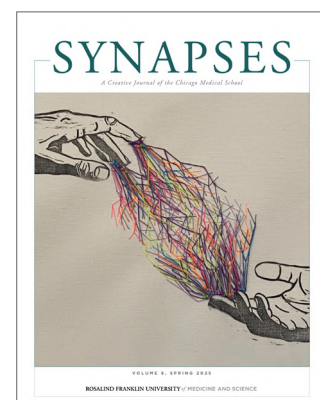
on the theme “AI, Big Data, and Beyond: Computational Approaches to Drug Discovery and Pharmacology.” Dr. O’Donnell has served as President of ASPET-GLC from 2023 to 2025.

More than 40 RFU-affiliated faculty, staff, and students contributed to research presented in the ASPET-GLC poster session, including the following individuals from CMS:

- **Vidyadhara D J**, PhD, assistant professor of neuroscience, Center for Neurodegenerative Disease and Therapeutics; Noémie Arrivé and Maria Fernanda Parra Lancheros, lab volunteers
- **Sanjna Patel**, CMS ’27; **Ameer Abdeljaber**, CMS ’27; **Roxane Rohani**, PharmD, MSc, BCACP, assistant professor of cellular and molecular pharmacology, Center for Cancer Cell Biology, Immunology, and Infection
- Kameron Kaplan, SGPS ’26; **Lainey Toennies**, laboratory technician; **Holly C. Hunsberger**, PhD, assistant professor of neuroscience, Center for Neurodegenerative Disease and Therapeutics
- **Thrishna Chaturvedula**, CMS ’27; and Adrian Kocinski, Sarah McNeer, Alyssa Broncano and Wendy Goodman, PhD, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
- **Theresa Hopkins**, CMS ’27
- Joseph Benedict, SCPM ’27; **Keith D. Philibert**, MS, senior research associate; **Xiaomeng Shao**, research assistant; Dr. Charlie Yang, facilities manager, Midwest Proteome Center; Stephanie Wu, DPM, dean, SCPM; and **Marc J. Glucksman**, PhD, director of the Center for Proteomics and Molecular Therapeutics and director of the Midwest Proteome Center
- **Ethan Oliver**, CMS ’27
- **Sarah Syed**, CMS ’26; **Dennis Stevens**, MD, CMS director of clinical research
- Rachel K. Parker, SGPS ’27; Mallika Padival, laboratory manager; Rose Jasmin Montes, research technician; **Nicole C. Ferrara**, PhD, assistant professor of physiology and biophysics, Center for Neurobiology of Stress Resilience and Psychiatric Disorders
- Elise Webber, SPGS ’27; **Beth Stutzmann**, PhD, professor and discipline chair of neuroscience and director of the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease and Therapeutics

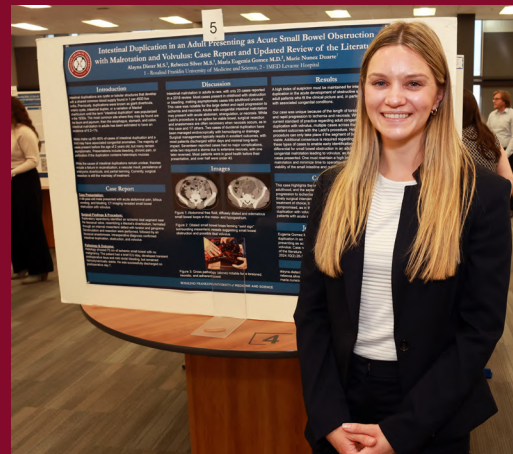
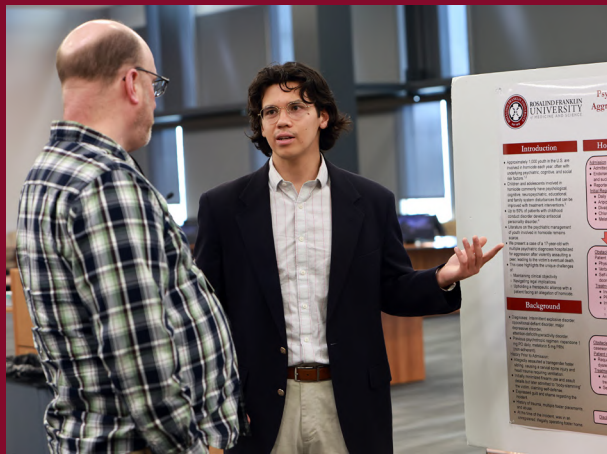
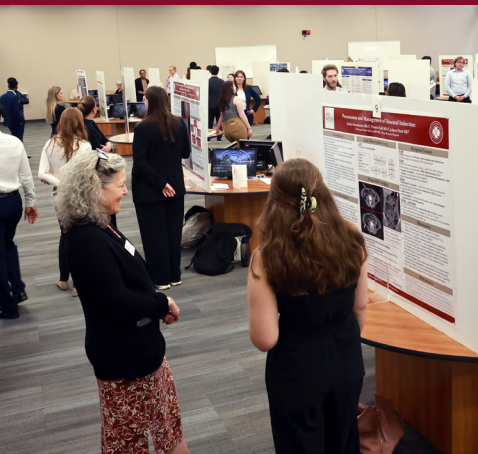
- **Sawyeh Maher**, CMS ’27
- **John P. Bair**, PhD, clinical associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences; **Guvardaan Bal**, CMS ’27
- **Aayush Kaul**, CMS ’27
- **Neil Outarsingh**, CMS ’27; Namhee Kim, PhD, data resource core lead, Michael Reese Foundation Center for Health Equity Research
- Minal Mohammed, Lake Forest College summer research intern; **Joseph Reynolds**, PhD, associate professor of microbiology and immunology and director of the Center for Cancer Cell Biology, Immunology and Infection; **Kristen Patterson**, research technician; LP Adhikari, SGPS ’26
- Nabah Sultan, Lake Forest College summer research intern; Christopher Kywe, SGPS ’27; **Neelam Sharma-Walia**, PhD, associate professor of microbiology and immunology, Center for Cancer Cell Biology, Immunology, and Infection.

Chicago Medical School hosted its 9th annual **Synapses Salon** on May 7 to celebrate the release of the latest volume of Synapses, the CMS creative journal. The event coincided with the opening of an exhibit featuring art, photography, and poetry submitted by CMS students, faculty, staff, residents, and alumni. The journal and the art exhibit showcase the creativity and talent of the Chicago Medical School community. Featured speakers at the salon included **Meghana Mohan**, CMS ’28, whose artwork “Strings of Fate,” was chosen for the cover of this year’s volume; Heather Kind-Keppel, EdD, CMS assistant professor of humanities and health care and associate vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion, RFU, who talked about her handmade jewelry-making; **Pamela Perepelitsky**, CMS ’28, who read her poem “The Time We Don’t Get Paid For”; and **Talia Kahn**, CMS ’27, who discussed her fiction submission titled “The Departure.” ■



SAVE THE DATE

Chicago Medical School M3 Clinical Poster Day



Wednesday, April 22, 2026
1:30 – 4:00 PM
RWCLC 2.060

Please join us to learn about the clinical experiences of our M3 students this year! Come and learn about rare cases and see all of the interesting photos.

Each poster will be judged by Faculty and winners will be chosen!



**For more information, contact Yolanda Lewis at 847-578-3309
or Yolanda.Lewis@rosalindfranklin.edu**



In April, more than 20 CMS students participated in a fundraiser for Misericordia Heart of Mercy, a residential facility in Chicago for children and adults with disabilities. During Misericordia's "Candy Days" fundraiser on April 26, the students collected donations on sidewalks in front of retail locations and restaurants throughout the city, raising over \$1,000.

We want to hear from you!

**To submit information or news for upcoming issues, contact
Candice Kosanke at candice.kosanke@rosalindfranklin.edu.**



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CHICAGO MEDICAL SCHOOL