Baylor College of Medicine

THE MARGARET M. AND ALBERT B. ALKEK DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

A DOSE OF MEDICINE

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

FALL 2026





HASHEM B. EL-SERAG, M.D., M.P.H.

Vice President of the Learning Health System

Chair of the Department of Medicine

CELEBRATING OUR DEPARTMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS

This issue features the people, partnerships, and ideas shaping the the Department of Medicine. Stories highlight the growth of cardio-oncology at Harris Health, the lasting legacy of the chief resident experience, the translation of artificial intelligence into clinical care, and a milestone for HIV research in Texas. Faculty development and quality improvement initiatives demonstrate how collaboration is strengthening our teams and improving care for patients. These stories reflect the innovation, leadership and commitment that continue to move the Department of Medicine forward.

THE HEART OF CANCER CARE AT HARRIS HEALTH



DR. SEYED EBRAHIM KASSAIAN

Many cancer therapies negatively impact heart health. At Harris Health, a rapidly growing **cardio-oncology program** is bringing cardiologists, oncologists, imaging specialists, and other experts together to identify and manage cardiovascular risks throughout a patient's cancer journey. This initiative is led by **Dr. Seyed Ebrahim Kassaian,** associate professor in the Section of Cardiology. Established in August 2025, this dedicated service line has grown to more than thirty patients per month. During the program's first year, approximately 150 patients received care across inpatient and outpatient settings, and more than 300 encounters are anticipated in the second year.

The program is most impactful for patients whose cancer and cardiovascular care are intertwined. One example is a patient with aggressive Hodgkin lymphoma who also had severe aortic stenosis and cardiovascular complications. The cancer therapy he needed is considered high risk for someone with his underlying conditions. His care was coordinated between the hematology, cardio-oncology, and interventional cardiology teams who collectively advised that he undergo a transcatheter aortic valve replacement before moving forward with cancer treatment. He ultimately completed therapy without major cardiac complications and achieved an excellent oncologic response. In this case, addressing cardiovascular disease did not stand in the way of cancer treatment. Instead, it made that treatment possible.

> "Our goal is not purely to protect the heart from cancer therapy. It is to make sure cardiovascular disease does not prevent a patient from receiving the cancer treatment that may save their life." - Seyed Ebrahim Kassaian, M.D.

This collaborative approach is central to the program's success. Rather than treating a patient's cancer without considering cardiovascular impacts and waiting for complications to occur, the program focuses on earlier prevention, risk assessment, surveillance, and coordinated decision-making.

HEALTHCARE

The Harris Health Cardio-Oncology Working Group brings together expertise from cardio-oncology, oncology, echocardiography, cardiac CT and MRI, interventional cardiology, and pharmacy across Ben Taub Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital, and MD Anderson Cancer Center. By including advanced cardiac imaging, clinicians can even identify some signs of cardiovascular toxicity before patients develop symptoms. Harris Health brings its safety-net mission and diverse patient population, and Baylor contributes subspecialty expertise and infrastructure for education, research, and quality improvement. The collaboration is also creating educational opportunities for internal medicine residents, cardiology fellows, hematology-oncology fellows, and pharmacy residents.

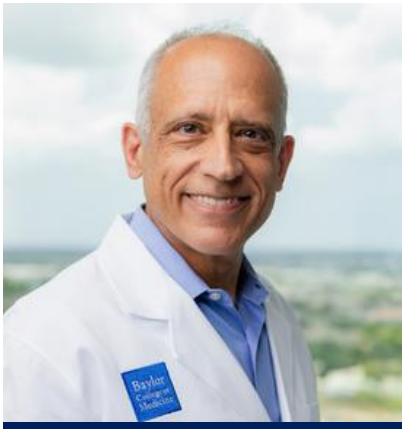
The program's commitment to comprehensive, coordinated care has earned it the International Cardio-Oncology Society Center of Excellence designation with Silver Status. This recognition highlights the team's multidisciplinary approach to treating patients with cancer-related cardiovascular conditions, emphasis on quality metrics, and dedication to continuously improving patient care.

Looking ahead, the team plans to build a cardio-oncology registry, multidisciplinary research, and structured education. Building on its Silver Status designation, the program aims to further strengthen its national recognition as a model for comprehensive, equity-focused cardio-oncology care. However, as the program's guiding message explains, "Our goal is not purely to protect the heart from cancer therapy. It is to make sure cardiovascular disease does not prevent a patient from receiving the cancer treatment that may save their life."



Dr. Jia and Dr. Kassaian.

TEXAS CENTER FOR AIDS RESEARCH EARNS FULL CFAR FUNDING TO ADVANCE HIV RESEARCH



DR. THOMAS GIORDANO

A future without HIV may sound ambitious, but researchers in the Department of Medicine are working to make that future possible. **The NIH-funded Texas Center for AIDS Research (Texas CFAR)** has reached its next milestone, earning funding as a full Center for AIDS Research after five years as a developmental CFAR. This achievement allows Baylor, UTHealth Houston, and Texas Biomedical Research Institute to expand a collaborative research network dedicated to advancing research into HIV prevention, treatment, and cure. The Texas CFAR is the only center of its kind in Texas.

The Texas CFAR provides the infrastructure, expertise, and resources that help more HIV researchers succeed. Pilot awards support early-career investigators and established researchers from other disciplines who want to bring their expertise into HIV research. Specialized research cores offer services at reduced or no cost, and access to mentoring and scientific expertise helps researchers transform promising ideas into projects that will be competitive projects for funding.

During the developmental CFAR period, federal HIV research funding across participating institutions grew from approximately $12.2 million to $22 million. "The goal of the CFAR is to facilitate and spark other people's research," said **Dr. Thomas Giordano, professor and chief in the Section of Infectious Diseases** at Baylor and Principal Investogator of Texas CFAR. “It's all about accelerating and growing."

> “The goal of the CFAR is to facilitate and spark other people's research... It's all about accelerating and growing.” - Thomas Giordano, M.D.

RESEARCH

Collaboration is a driving force behind that growth. UTHealth Houston brings an established presence in national HIV clinical trial networks, Baylor contributes strengths in investigator-initiated research, virology, and global health, and Texas Biomed adds non-human primate research infrastructure and other basic and translational science resources that strengthen HIV research across the collaboration. "Together, the three of us are much, much stronger than any one of us could be alone," Giordano said. "That synergy is really important."

> “I remember a world before HIV and before cell phones, and while we may never return to a world without cell phones, we could reach a world without HIV... that possibility motivates me every day.” - Thomas Giordano, M.D.

An emerging area of interest is aging with HIV. Modern treatments have significantly extended the lives of people with HIV, but questions surrounding premature aging, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and metabolic conditions remain. Additional areas of interest include implementation science research looking for opportunities to improve how proven prevention and treatment strategies reach communities experiencing barriers to care. "If you're thinking, 'Could I do something in HIV?' The answer is yes!" Giordano said. "We want to try to help you do that."

For Dr. Giordano, the goal extends beyond the next grant or research project. Decades of progress have transformed HIV from a once-devastating diagnosis into a condition that can be successfully managed, yet patients continue to face challenges that research has not fully solved. His career has also given him a unique perspective on how dramatically the world can change within a lifetime. “I remember a world before HIV and before cell phones, and while we may never return to a world without cell phones, we could reach a world without HIV,” Giordano said. “That possibility motivates me every day.” The Texas CFAR's new chapter brings researchers across Texas one step closer to making that possibility a reality.

BAYLOR FOR LIFE: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF THE CHIEF RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

For generations of internal medicine residents, chief residency is more than an additional year of training; it is an opportunity to teach, lead, and give back to the program that helped shape them. Chiefs serve as advocates for residents while also beginning to take on the responsibilities of faculty and program leadership. Many have gone on to become faculty members and leaders, continuing to mentor the residents who follow in their footsteps. Together, their experiences have woven into a tradition that, while ever evolving, has maintained something distinct at its core.

The day-to-day experience has certainly changed. **Dr. Lee Poythress,** associate dean of student affairs in the School of Medicine and professor of medicine, remembers creating emergency room schedules with pencil and paper and preparing morning report cases without the internet. Faculty regularly joined morning reports, where discussions extended beyond clinical decisions toward ethics, guidelines, and the realities of practicing medicine. Chiefs selected "interesting" cases, researched using textbooks, and compiled them into an annual collection. But what Poythress remembers most is the faculty who shaped his approach to teaching and medicine. "The main theme with all of them was that medicine was fun," he said. "You worked hard, very hard, but you enjoyed the patients, the learning, and each other."

For **Dr. Robert Atmar**, professor of medicine in the Section of Infectious Diseases, the most rewarding part of chief residency was watching many become outstanding faculty members and leaders. The experience reinforced the importance of preparation, communication, and interpersonal relationships. His class of chiefs replaced the traditional chief residents' Grand Rounds with an invited visiting speaker. Their first guest was Dr. Don Seldin, then chair of medicine at UT Southwestern. The visit started a tradition that continues today. Decades later, it is a reminder that each class of chiefs inherits traditions but has the opportunity to shape what gets passed on to those who come next.



1985 Chief Residents featuring Dr. Robert Atmar (Front row, Far right)



1997 Chief Residents featuring Dr. Lee Poythress (Front row, Far right)

EDUCATION



2007 Chief Residents featuring Dr. Wilson Lam (Front row, Second from the Left)



2011 Chief Residents featuring Dr. Stacey Rose (Front row, Middle)

Dr. Wilson Lam, associate professor of medicine and pediatrics and associate program director of the Internal Medicine (IM) Residency Program, remembers navigating workforce limitations, tight budgets, and complex scheduling alongside his co-chiefs during a period of transition. Those challenges taught him to remain calm under pressure, and listen before trying to solve every problem. While helping train another generation of residents, Dr. Lam sees the same culture continuing. "Our Baylor IM residents have a culture of working hard and playing hard," he said. He remembers being continually impressed by their kindness, intelligence, and dedication as physicians and people. "Baylor IM alumni are difference makers in their communities."

Dr. Stacey Rose, associate dean of professionalism, director of the Center for Professionalism and associate professor of medicine, said her Baylor connections became deeply personal during her chief year. When a complex pregnancy required her to be on strict bed rest, she gained a deeper appreciation for the relationships she had built within the program. Chief residency taught Dr. Rose to solve problems, communicate with multiple stakeholders, mentor others, and work through challenges without perfect solutions. It also showed her how strongly her colleagues would support her when she needed them. "I learned that I could rely on my Baylor family for support," she said. That personal connection ultimately contributed to her desire to return to Baylor after fellowship.

Today's chiefs are often inspired by the chiefs who came before them. **Dr. Parth Desai** remembers a chief calling him after a difficult day simply to make sure he was doing okay, an experience that inspired him to "pay it forward." **Dr. Eleanor Smith** credits former chiefs who served as role models and mentors, and **Dr. Blake Northrop** points to mentorship from Baylor faculty as an inspiration for pursuing chief residency. Now they are creating their own experiences for residents, including Dr. Northrop's monthly Jeopardy-style morning report at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. These moments may look different from the morning reports Dr. Poythress remembers from decades ago, but the purpose remains the same. Each generation learns from those before them and finds its own way to make Baylor better for those who follow.



2026 Chief Residents featuring Drs. Parth Desai, Blake Northrop, Hannah Hoff, Tate Truly and Eleanor Smith (From left to right)

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

LEADING ACROSS MEDICINE: DEVELOPING SKILLS, BUILDING NETWORKS

What happens when you bring emerging and established leaders from across one of Baylor's largest departments in the same room? Connections are made. Ideas are exchanged. Challenges are tackled. And, perhaps most importantly, a stronger leadership community begins to take shape.

The **Department of Medicine Leadership Series** is doing just that. **Drs. Joey Fisher, Elizabeth Kvale, and Shital Patel** lead the series, which began in 2022 with a need Dr. Fisher first recognized within her section. As faculty members stepped into new leadership roles, she saw an opportunity to provide additional coaching, mentorship, and practical tools by tapping into the leadership expertise already within the department. A conversation with Department of Medicine Chair, Dr. Hashem El-Serag, helped turn that idea into something bigger: a leadership development experience designed for faculty across the entire department.

The need is a familiar one in academic medicine. Faculty members often become leaders because they are exceptional clinicians, educators, or researchers. But becoming a leader introduces an entirely new set of challenges, from managing teams and navigating difficult conversations to leading change and understanding how to operate within a large academic medical center. The Leadership Series gives participants an opportunity to develop those skills alongside colleagues who are navigating many of the same experiences. However, the program is about more than leadership training. It is about building a leadership network.



2025-2026 Faculty Leadership Series Cohort

That network is especially valuable within a department as large and diverse as the Department of Medicine. The Leadership Series allows colleagues to exchange perspectives and learn how others approach leadership challenges. These connections can continue beyond the series, creating opportunities for mentorship, collaboration and support.

Rather than focusing solely on broad leadership concepts, the series places leadership development within the context of Baylor and the Department of Medicine. Participants consider their professional goals, challenges and how they can apply what they learn within Baylor's academic and clinical environment. "It is anchored in a way that other leadership training opportunities can't be," Dr. Kvale said. "We focus on Baylor-specific leadership challenges and coach participants toward thinking about and applying their skills within this perspective." The series also connects participants with institutional leaders, beginning with Dr. El-Serag and concluding with the president of Baylor. This gives faculty perspectives on leadership at both the departmental and institutional levels while strengthening the program's focus on practical development and relationship-building.

"I talk to people who have been through the series, and they express appreciation down the line for the connections they have made or the exposure that they got... They have been able to take the concepts that we have talked about and apply them in their leadership role." -Shital Patel, M.D.

For Dr. Fisher, seeing former participants maintain relationships and draw on lessons from the program when facing new leadership challenges demonstrates the ripple effect the series was designed to create. Four years in, the Leadership Series is doing more than developing individual leaders. It is building a connected community equipped to work across boundaries, learn from one another, and help shape the Department of Medicine's future. Faculty are nominated through their sections, with participants selected from those currently serving in or developing toward leadership roles. Faculty interested in a future cohort should speak with their section chief about the nomination process.

QUALITY ACADEMY DAY TURNS IDEAS INTO IMPACT

Small changes in healthcare can make a meaningful difference for patients. That idea was at the center of the Department of Medicine's annual Quality Academy Day, hosted by the Vice Chair Group for Quality Improvement and Innovation at the McNair Campus. Dr. Hashem El-Serag welcomed fellows, faculty, and leaders for a celebration of projects focused on improving quality, safety, and patient care. This year's presentations reflected a growing understanding among trainees of how quality improvement can turn everyday clinical challenges into meaningful change.

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Quality Academy Day allows fellows to identify a clinical problem, work alongside faculty mentors, and develop an intervention over the course of the year. Each team is encouraged to complete at least one **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle** to test and refine its approach. Several teams this year completed two PDSA cycles, an accomplishment that **Dr. Neeraj Agrawal**, assistant professor of medicine in the Section of General Internal Medicine, found particularly impressive given that fellows may have only a few months to complete their projects. "They learn the importance of quality improvement, develop foundational skills and gain practical experience applying those skills so they can drive meaningful change throughout their careers, regardless of their specialty or institution." Dr. Agrawal said.



2026 Quality Academy Day

QUALITY ACADEMY

The **winning poster**, "Insulin Discharge Favorite List: A Quality Improvement Initiative to Standardize Insulin Prescribing at Discharge," was presented by **Drs. Deborah Adenike Osafehinti, Niketa Kalara, Pedro Leonel Rojas, Duaa Abdallah and Asadullah Jat** who were under the mentorship of **Dr. Jordana Faruqi**. Their project addressed challenges surrounding insulin prescriptions at hospital discharge. More consistent prescribing can help patients receive the correct insulin in a timely manner while reducing the time clinicians spend resolving prescription issues.

The **winning oral presentation**, "Improving Identification of Patients at Risk for Obesity Hypoventilation Syndrome in a Veterans Affairs Sleep Fellows Clinic," was presented by **Drs. Nicholas Shaffer, Victoria Wang, Makayla Cox, Joanna Lee, Candace Miyaki, and Michelle Yun,** who were under the mentorship of **Drs. Antara Mallampalli and Supriya Singh**. Their project focused on improving identification of at-risk patients to support earlier evaluation and treatment.

Participation in Quality Academy Day has continued to grow among faculty, fellowship directors, and other members of the Department of Medicine. Dr. Agrawal hopes that momentum will lead to increasingly impactful and sustainable projects in the years ahead. **Drs. Kyler Godwin** and Neeraj Agrawal lead the initiative, with support from faculty mentors and the administrative team. Quality Academy Day gives trainees a platform to demonstrate how identifying a problem, testing a solution, and measuring the results can translate into better patient care.

INNOVATION

BEYOND THE ALGORITHM: BUILDING AI FOR REAL-WORLD CLINICAL CARE



DR. ASHWIN RAO

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping medicine, but within the Department of Medicine, the focus goes beyond exploring what AI can do. **Dr. Ashwin Rao**, assistant professor of medicine in the Section of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, is working to determine how these technologies can be responsibly integrated into clinical care to make a difference for physicians and patients. At the intersection of artificial intelligence, clinical informatics, and implementation science, Dr. Rao and his collaborators are developing an AI-powered clinical decision support application designed to transform a complex piece of gastroenterology care: determining if and when patients should return for screening or surveillance colonoscopy to help prevent colorectal cancer.

INNOVATION

The application uses large language models to bring together relevant information from a patient's colonoscopy and pathology results and translate those data into a guideline-based recommendation. Importantly, the application does more than provide an answer; it provides the evidence supporting its recommendation and identifies cases where information could be ambiguous or warrant closer physician review.

"Large language models can sound very convincing even when they're wrong, and asking them how confident they are doesn't reliably tell us whether an answer is correct," Dr. Rao said. "That's why we developed and validated an approach that helps identify uncertain cases and flag them for closer review. These guardrails help make uncertainty visible, even when the answer itself sounds confident." Providers can review the AI-generated recommendation, understand what it is based on, and then agree with or modify it before making the final clinical decision. What makes the initiative particularly significant is that Dr. Rao's team is taking the technology beyond the research environment and working to embed it directly in Epic, an electronic health record software clinicians already use.

The team has completed retrospective validation using datasets across multiple sites and prospective validation. Recently, they integrated the application into a test instance of Epic that simulates the clinical environment. The next step is translating the technology into a live Epic environment and studying its performance in a clinical trial.

Dr. Rao's project demonstrates that successful AI implementation depends on more than an algorithm's performance. The initiative brought together clinicians, informatics experts, and information technology teams to help shape the application's design and use within real clinical workflows. Through stakeholder feedback and "think-aloud" sessions, in which clinicians describe their thought process while using the application, the team is refining how recommendations and supporting evidence are displayed, improving workflow fit and identifying factors that may help or hinder adoption.

"We're trying to build this from a learning health systems perspective so that we can deploy this technology, collect our feedback and information and iteratively refine it as providers use it." -Ashwin Rao, M.D.

medicine can play in shaping the next generation of healthcare technology.

DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

FACULTY PROMOTIONS

The Department of Medicine congratulates the following faculty on their well-deserved promotions. Their expertise, leadership, and dedication advance our mission and make a lasting impact on our patients, learners, and the broader community.

PROFESSOR



Anita Kusnoor, M.D.



Kalpesh Patel, M.D.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR



Ang Li, M.D.



Sanjay Mediwala, M.D.



Sarah Nadeem, M.D.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR



Tyler Brehm, M.D.



Erin Brown, M.D.



Itunu Sokale, M.D.

As of September 1, 2026

THANK YOU

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS MOVE OUR MISSION FORWARD

This issue of *A Dose of Medicine* captures the energy and purpose driving our department forward, from innovative research to programs that strengthen mentorship, leadership, and community. Every story reflects our shared commitment to improving lives through discovery, education, and compassionate care. If these stories moved you, consider scanning the QR code to make a gift. Your support fuels innovation, empowers our people, and helps us turn possibility into progress. Together, we can keep advancing medicine and shaping a healthier future for all.



Health Services Research Members at 2026 Veterans Affairs Research Week



The Newly Expanded Vintage Cardiology Team



Gastroenterology and Hepatology Members at 2026 Digestive Disease Week



2026 Internal Medicine Resident Graduation

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