

2024 Annual Report 2025



VCU School of Medicine



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VCU

School of Medicine

Our mission is to improve health through exceptional and innovative discovery, training and patient care. Through the VCU Health System, we are Central Virginia’s only academic medical center and the largest single provider of indigent health care in the commonwealth.



A message from the dean

Dear members of the VCU School of Medicine community,

As we reflect on the achievements of the 2024-2025 academic year, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for all that we have accomplished together. This year has been one of innovation, resilience and collaboration — values that define the spirit of our medical school.

At VCU School of Medicine, across all of our departments, centers and institutes, we share an unwavering commitment to shaping the future of health care through cutting-edge research and pioneering medical practices. We are making strides that will impact scientific knowledge and patient care not just here in Richmond, but around the world.

This year, our faculty again distinguished themselves with awards in their specialties and inductions to prestigious organizations, such as the National Academy of Inventors and American Association for the Advancement of Science. Four of our departments cracked the top 25 nationwide for NIH-sponsored research

funding. And hundreds of clinicians were recognized by their peers as being among the top physicians in Virginia.

Our trailblazing Hume-Lee Transplant Center performed the first fully robotic living donor liver retrieval operation. One of our hand surgeons invented a suture-free product to repair damaged nerves. And our world-renown hepatologist at the Stravitz-Sanyal Institute for Liver Disease published breakthrough research linking semaglutide injections to reductions of life-threatening fatty liver disease.

The incoming M.D. Class of 2029 was selected from more than 8,300 applicants; our graduating Class of 2025 posted a 99% match rate post-SOAP, with one out of every four new physicians remaining in Virginia for residency and one of every six continuing their training as residents at VCU. Scholarship awards hit a record high, and we welcomed nearly 500 alumni and guests at our spring reunion.

Our resilience has been tested in many ways, and yet, time and again, our community has risen to meet those challenges. From overcoming obstacles in the classroom to navigating the complexities of the health care and

medical research landscape, we’ve demonstrated as a school what it means to do well while doing good, remaining steadfast in our focus on those we are privileged to care for, teach and inspire. We are not simply training doctors and researchers; we are fostering a community of compassionate leaders who will carry our mission forward.

As you read through this report, I hope you take pride in all that we’ve accomplished together. All of you — students, faculty, staff, trainees, alumni and donors — are the School of Medicine. And your contributions are shaping the future of science, health care and academic medicine.

Thank you, again, for another exceptional year.

Arturo P. Saavedra, M.D., Ph.D.
Dean, VCU School of Medicine
Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs, VCU Health System





Meet the Class of 2028

With 103 students from Virginia and the rest from across North America and as far away as South Korea, the Class of 2028 arrived on the MCV Campus on Monday, July 22 for their two-week orientation known as Transition to Medical School.



In the Class of 2028, you'll find...

- Thrill seekers who have gone bungee jumping, cliff jumping, SCUBA diving, skydiving, spelunking, paragliding, ziplining in the Honduran jungle and cage diving with sharks off the coast of South Africa.
- Two twins and a triplet.
- Speakers of American Sign Language, Arabic, Bulgarian, Farsi, French, Hindi, Japanese, Japanese Sign Language, Portuguese, Tamil and Urdu.
- Athletes who have competed in table tennis, esports, powerlifting, dance, running, swimming, track, cross country, rowing and alpine skiing.
- Twenty-five medical assistants, 14 scribes, 12 technicians, five EMTs and two registered nurses.



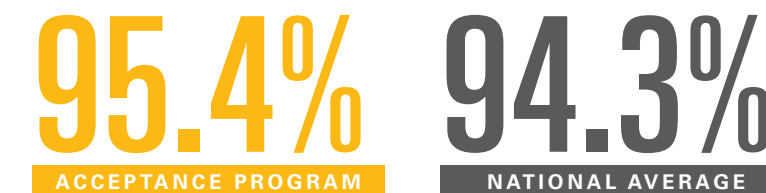
On their way to medical school, they...

- Gained early medical experience in dermatology, family medicine, urology, plastic surgery, psychiatry, ophthalmology, oncology, cardiology, neurology, orthopaedics and pediatrics.
- Cared for at least 33 foster dogs and 24 baby turtles.
- Volunteered at a therapeutic farm, created an American Sign Language in medicine course at their university and set up free clinics in Honduras.
- Worked as teachers, coaches, tutors, a ski patroller, a boba-rista and a touring puppeteer.
- Taught dance, violin, swimming, piano, physics, English as a second language, meditation and tai chi.



Celebrating excellence: M.D. Class of 2025

Match rate prior to the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program:



Match rate after the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program:

99%

2025 Match by the numbers

187	Students graduating
73 students (39%)	Matched into primary care
32 students (17%)	Matched into VCU Health programs
52 students (28%)	Matched into programs in Virginia
5 students	Matched into military programs

Top 5 matched specialties:



Internal medicine



Family medicine



Psychiatry



General surgery



Pediatrics



EDUCATION

EDUCATION

Weight loss rotation equips future physicians to address obesity and its complexities

VCU's Obesity Medical Weight Loss Program includes a team of obesity medicine specialists, dietitians and behavioral health counselors, a months-long waitlist and a four-week rotation for medical students. Available only to M4s, the subspecialty elective addresses a gap in medical education and prepares future physicians in any field to treat and support patients with obesity.

"It's not just about learning a new discipline, but how they'll speak with patients forever, and how they view that person they're next to who may have a problem with obesity."

— Susan Wolver, M.D.

"I didn't think about the way obesity can be an addiction, and the biological, social and psychological reasons it can happen," said Sriya Kolli, an M4 who completed the rotation. "I got a lot more insight into patients' lives than I anticipated."

Susan Wolver, M.D., an associate professor in the Department of Internal Medicine who co-leads the program and elective with Edmond Wickham, M.D., said she can tell whether a student really gets it if, by the end, they choose their words more carefully when speaking to or about patients with obesity.



'The humanities humanize us': Students explore patient care through art

Since 2019, the Medicine, Arts and Humanities elective has offered first-year students the chance to explore dimensions of medicine outside of the traditional classroom setting. Each session takes place in a different Richmond institution — like the VMFA and the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia — and asks students to investigate the intersections of culture, the human experience and medical care.

Megan Lemay, M.D., an associate professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, co-leads the course with Sara Wilson McKay, Ph.D., an associate professor of art education at VCU School of the Arts. They said many students over the years have signed up for the elective to reconnect with their past artistic practices.

One of those students, Antara Sarkar, said she was attracted to the course as a way to reignite her creative spirit, and hearing her peers' points of view has been eye-opening.

"The humanities humanize us and it's a great way to connect with other people," Sarkar said. "As doctors, we can know all these diseases, medications and treatments, but it's a different skill to actually be able to be human with your patients."



From conflict to the classroom

Rosellen Roche, M.D., Ph.D., is no stranger to daunting environments. From studying disaffected youth in the crosshairs of violence to training military medical students using cutting edge technology, Roche's career has followed a common thread — increasing resiliency in the face of challenge.

Now, Roche has brought this passion to VCU's Department of Family Medicine and Population Health. As the new vice chair of medical education, she is dedicated to the pursuit of addressing the nationwide shortage of primary care physicians and training the next generation of family medicine practitioners.

"How we teach our physicians is important because for a large portion of the public, family medicine and primary care doctors are their first and sometimes only experience with medicine."

— Rosellen Roche, M.D., Ph.D.



Pediatrics training supports work-life balance

Centered around resident resiliency, VCU's pediatric residency program operates on a tandem schedule in which residents rotate every two weeks between inpatient and outpatient care, rather than the more typical four-week rotations. It was designed to meet training standards while giving residents breaks between the long and strenuous hours of inpatient rotations. Associate program director Ashlie Tseng, M.D., said the tandem schedule has improved work-life balance and helped prevent burnout.

"The two-week blocks allow residents time to process and learn while still managing the daily life stuff that doesn't stop when you're on inpatient."

— Ashlie Tseng, M.D.

Mural and renamed education space honor Bruce Tucker

In March of 2025, on the highly trafficked third floor of the McGlothlin Medical Education Building, community members unveiled a vibrant mural honoring the life, legacy and involuntary sacrifice of Bruce Tucker. Tucker, an African American man from nearby Dinwiddie County, died on May 25, 1968. Without the consent or knowledge of his family, surgeons at the Medical College of Virginia removed Tucker's heart and kidneys, with a medical examiner's permission, and placed his heart into a white man — Virginia's first human cardiac transplant.



"This impactful artwork is a fitting commemoration of Mr. Tucker's sacrifice," Arturo Saavedra, M.D., Ph.D., dean of the School of Medicine, said. "Its strategic placement in the figurative heart of the medical educational space will serve as a powerful lesson to our future physicians, affirming that the welfare of patients and their families is a sacred bond, inseparable from the privilege and responsibility of caregiving."



EDUCATION

EDUCATION



"A Ph.D. has been seemingly out of reach for so long and now that I'm done, it's made me reevaluate what else I've considered 'out of reach.' It's taught me that while there's still so much to learn, there's also so much I am capable of."

— Lauren Moncayo, Ph.D.

From the lab to the runway

From hand stitching to tracing patterns, Lauren Moncayo, Ph.D. always loved the creativity and glamour of fashion and said that being a model was her "childhood dream job." But when her beloved grandmother was diagnosed with cancer, Moncayo set her sights on a new path: medical research.

"At the time, my sister and I had the idea that we were going to cure cancer," Moncayo said. "As we grew up, we've gotten more realistic about what we can do, but that interest really stuck with us."

Now, having graduated with a Ph.D. from the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology in the spring of 2025, Moncayo is finding her place in medical research while honoring and pursuing the dreams she had as a young girl.

Dr. Fadi Salloum receives Outstanding Faculty Award from SCHEV

Fadi Salloum, Ph.D., FAHA, has been honored with a 2025 Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). The Outstanding Faculty Awards are the commonwealth's highest honor for faculty at Virginia's institutions of higher education.

"I continue this mentorship even as researchers become principal investigators in their own lab because I believe mentorship is a lifelong commitment. And it's not just me offering something to them — I also learn a lot from mentees." — Fadi Salloum, Ph.D.



Salloum has served on the School of Medicine faculty for 16 years and is currently the associate director of research mentoring and preclinical science at the VCU Health Pauley Heart Center. He is also the Natalie N. and John R. Congdon Endowed Chair in Cardiology and associate chair for research in the Department of Internal Medicine.

The award recognizes Salloum's contributions to cardiovascular research and commitment to teaching, mentoring and training the next generation of scientists and physician-scientists. In his role with the Pauley Heart Center, Salloum oversees the research activities and grant applications of Pauley's more junior faculty and early-career researchers.



Graduate education Class of 2025

- 48 Certificate program graduates
- 40 M.S. program graduates
- 24 Ph.D. program graduates
- 5 M.D.-Ph.D. program graduates
- 20 Programs represented
- 135 Awards and recognitions

Fall 2024 enrollment

- 44 Certificate students
- 41 M.S. students
- 42 Ph.D. students





Medical students gain confidence and experience through mentored neurosurgery research

Four medical students, each with different backgrounds and goals, are thrilled to be working in the lab of David Limbrick, M.D., Ph.D., chair of the Department of Neurosurgery. Limbrick, a pediatric neurosurgeon who completed the VCU School of Medicine's M.D.-Ph.D. program in 2001, returned to the MCV Campus in 2023 as the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Chair, a role supported by a philanthropic endowment.

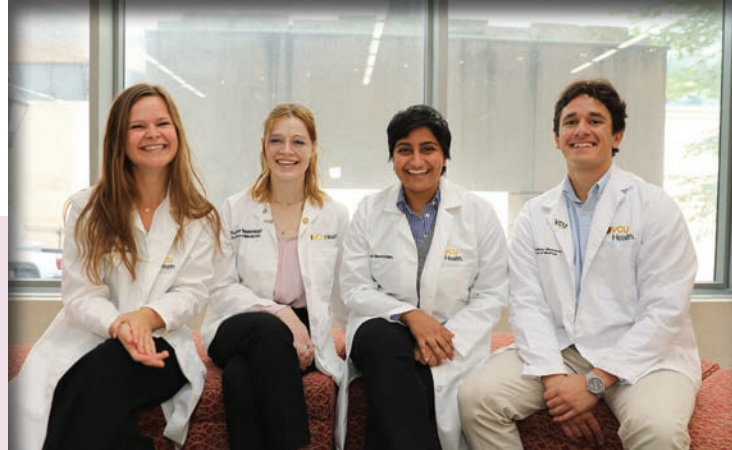
Limbrick wants students interested in neurosurgery to know that they aren't alone in being overwhelmed and freely admits to his own imposter syndrome and feelings of inadequacy when he started out. His mentors within the field helped him overcome those feelings of doubt when he was an M.D.-Ph.D. student at VCU School of Medicine, and now, he wants to pay that forward.



"Mentorship is about building confidence and opening up possibilities for people. And, personally, it's a tremendous amount of fun." – David Limbrick, M.D., Ph.D.

"One small amount of interest and attention can have an enormous impact on someone's career," Limbrick said. "Mentorship is about building confidence and opening up possibilities for people. And, personally, it's a tremendous amount of fun."

In recent years, Limbrick has actively sought funding to support his mentorship priorities — this allows him to bring students into the lab for invaluable hands-on research experience. For example, M3 Konstantinos "Dino" Oikonomou is helping him design a study on how irregular connections of arteries and veins in the brain's protective tissue present in children, one of several projects Limbrick has invited students to join.



"These four students make up a great cohort and they all come from different backgrounds with different interests," Limbrick said. "But they're all linked by the overall mission of improving neurosurgical care for children with disorders."

'Shattering the stereotypes'

Marie Michenková, an M.D.-Ph.D. student, was initially discouraged by neurosurgery's competitive nature and unsure of how welcoming it would be — during the 2023-2024 match cycle, only 68% of M.D. applicants matched into neurosurgery programs. It's also one of the most male-dominated medical fields, with women making up less than 10% of practicing neurosurgeons in the U.S., according to a 2024 report. But in working with Limbrick, she has found a passion for the subject matter and is reframing her perception of the specialty.

Michenková has found a passion for the subject matter, and with Limbrick as her mentor, she's reframing her perception of the specialty.

"You can tell by the number of mentees he has that he's just trying to help so many people be successful," she said. "I think his legacy at VCU, besides the actual clinical and basic science work that he does, will be shattering the stereotypes about neurosurgery."

Our researchers are actively engaged in interdisciplinary collaborations through a network of centers and institutes that span the School of Medicine and the broader university. These partnerships bring together experts to address complex challenges in science, health and society and amplify the impact of our research enterprise. Learn more about our centers and institutes:

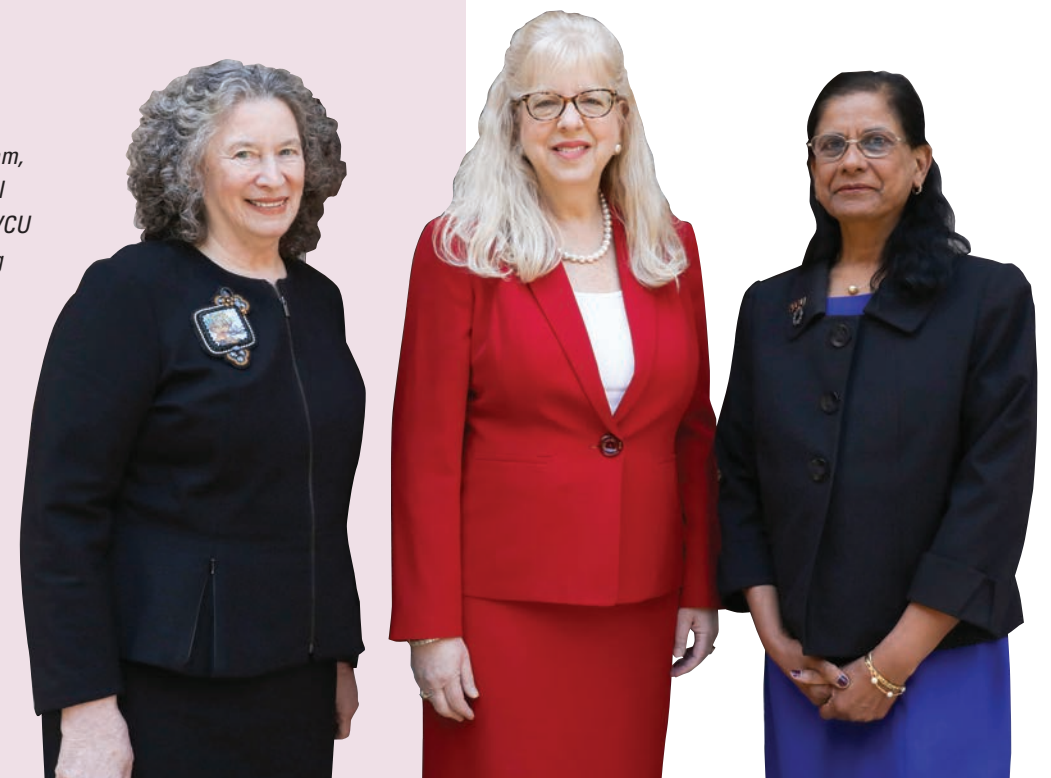


A year of groundbreaking scientific and medical discoveries

2024 Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research Rankings

- VCU School of Medicine maintained its ranking of **60th in the U.S.**
- Overall NIH funding increased by **8.3%**
- Overall NIH funding: **\$83.8 million**
- Three departments in the **top 25**
 - Department of Psychiatry
 - Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology
 - Department of Family Medicine and Population Health
- Department of Family Medicine and Population Health moved up 10 spots and is now **fourth in the U.S.**
- If the newly formed Department of Cellular, Molecular and Genetic Medicine had been included in the rankings, it would be **fifth in the U.S.**

Left to right: Barbara Boyan, Ph.D., Susan Kornstein, M.D. and Mangala Subramaniam, Ph.D. are co-principal investigators on the VCU National Coordinating Center for Advancing Gender Inclusive Excellence.



14 medical students' research abstracts qualified for the **AMA Research Challenge Poster Symposium** in the fall of 2024.

The VCU Institute for Women's Health was **awarded \$3.8 million to advance gender diversity** in science, technology, engineering, math and medicine.

A research effort co-led by School of Medicine faculty members has been **awarded \$9 million from the National Cancer Institute to establish a Cancer Control Engagement Research Center**, aiming to enhance the dissemination and implementation of health promotion and cancer prevention services for residents of income-based housing communities administered by Virginia's Housing and Urban Development.



RESEARCH

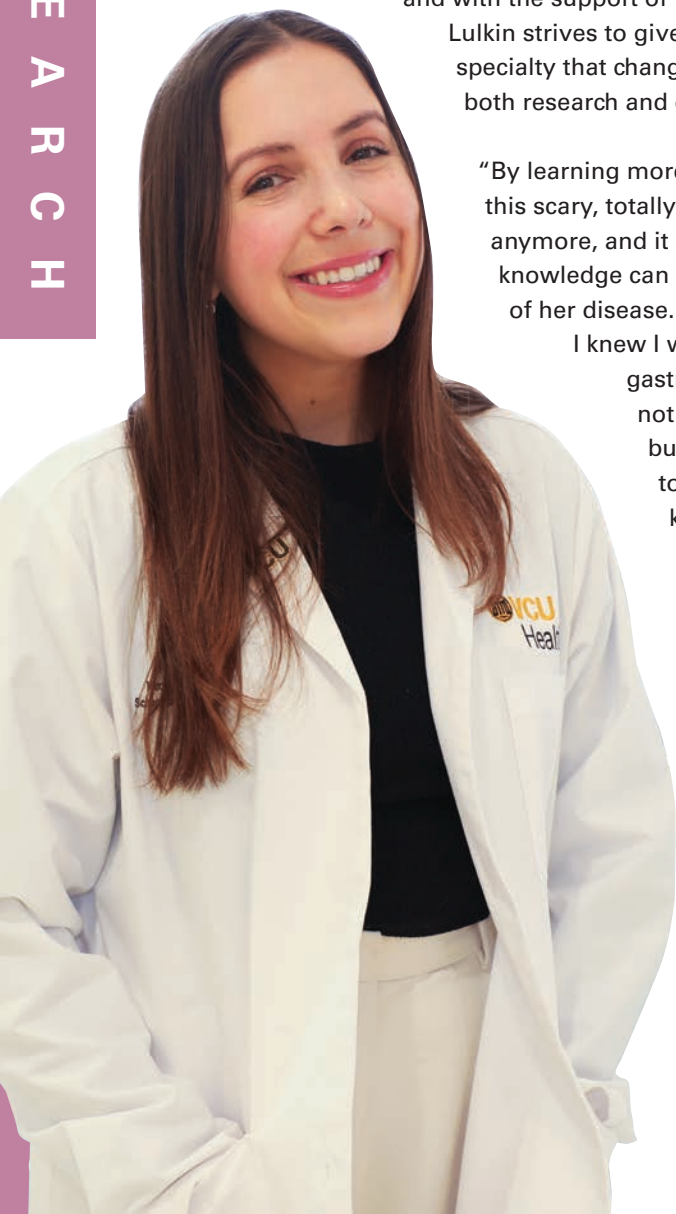
RESEARCH

‘Knowledge can be power’: Medical student’s research driven by childhood diagnosis

When Nicole Lulkin was in sixth grade, she started experiencing gastrointestinal pain and other symptoms that kept her home from school for weeks at a time. For nearly three years, as she and her family sought out answers, she felt disconnected from her body and isolated from her community. Finally, at age 13, receiving the diagnosis of Crohn’s disease — a chronic condition causing inflammation of the digestive tract — gave her a path forward and a drive to learn everything she can about the disorder.

Now an M3, more than a decade later, Lulkin rarely has Crohn’s flare-ups. Drawing on her own experiences as a patient, and with the support of faculty mentors, Lulkin strives to give back to the medical specialty that changed her life through both research and clinical care.

“By learning more about it, it wasn’t this scary, totally abnormal thing anymore, and it showed me that knowledge can be power,” she said of her disease. “When I got to VCU, I knew I wanted to explore gastroenterology and not just learn about it but also contribute to the growing knowledge of it.”



Building connections: New director of medical student research enhances learning opportunities for future doctors

With extensive leadership experience, successful research projects and an M.S. in biostatistics underway, Stephen Miller, D.O., was thrilled to accept the School of Medicine’s new position of director of medical student research.

“VCU is an amazing place that has always done and continues to do outstanding research and really cutting-edge things. Medical students have always been a big part of that, but finding and navigating opportunities has always been a bit of a challenge.”

— Stephen Miller, M.D.

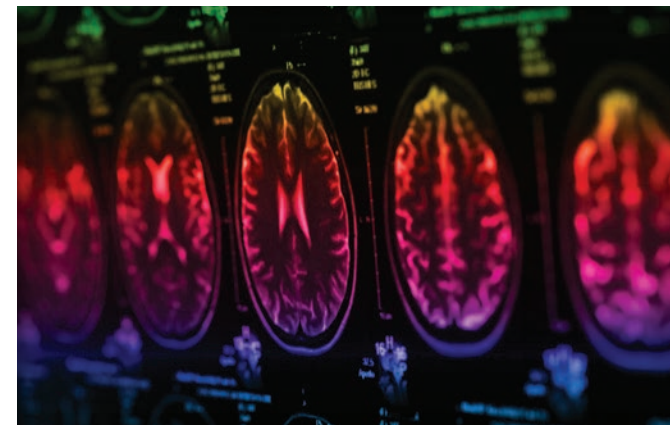
The inaugural role is one of several Office of Medical Education initiatives to enhance opportunities and support for medical student research. The new structure will foster a guided, supportive environment where students can explore their interests, build essential skills and receive personalized mentorship. Students will also have access to workshops on topics like study design and navigating the research process.

Pilot grants fund movement disorder studies

The VCU Parkinson’s and Movement Disorders Center awarded funding to five studies across VCU, with researchers representing the School of Medicine, School of Nursing, College of Engineering and College of Humanities and Sciences, plus a faculty member from the College of William and Mary’s Department of Computer Sciences.

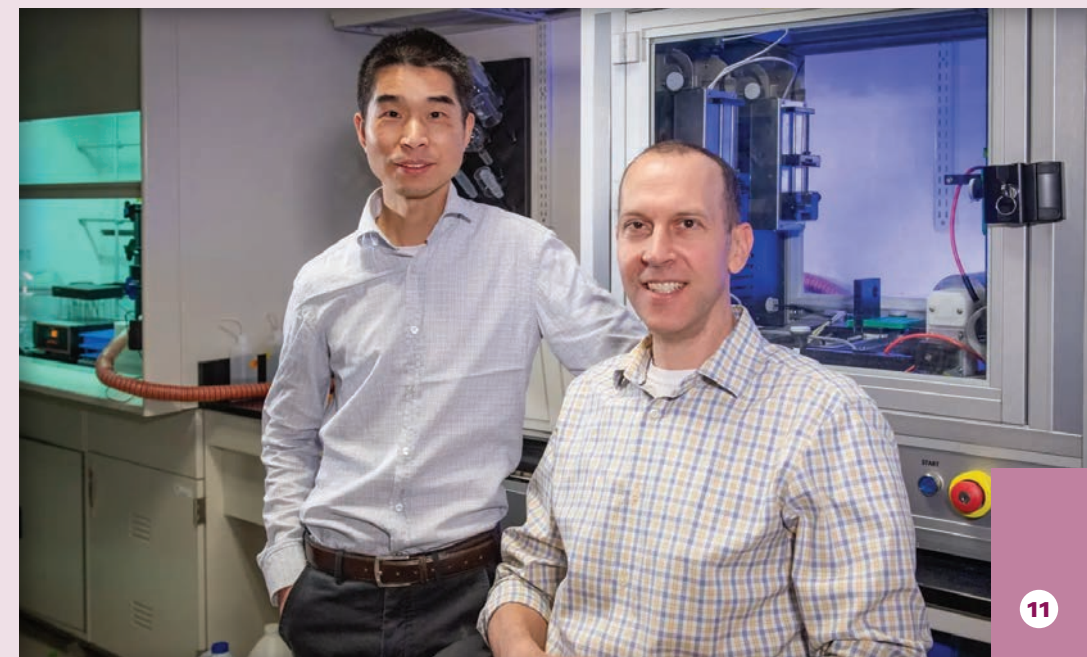
The spirit of invention

Youngman Oh, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Pathology who studies how insulin-like growth factor binding proteins affect cancer and metabolic diseases, was named a senior member of the National Academy of Inventors for his work advancing the field of cancer pathology.



Leading in drug development

Matthew Banks, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, co-led a study with School of Pharmacy researcher Qingguo Xu, Ph.D., reformulating an opioid use disorder medication to extend its therapeutic effects. The latest preclinical study showed promising results in reducing opioid use and withdrawal symptoms.



RESEARCH



RESEARCH

Joining forces

VCU joined the Johns Hopkins Clinical Research Network, a regional alliance of medical centers that offer multisite clinical research. This will allow patients to access more clinical trials in their communities, and it will provide opportunities for physician-scientists to collaborate and expand their capacity to conduct clinical and translational research.

Semaglutide’s potential for fatty liver disease

An international study led by the Stravitz-Sanyal Institute for Liver Disease and Metabolic Health suggests that semaglutide, the active ingredient in weight-loss drugs like Ozempic, can halt and even reverse the damage from a common liver disease. An estimated 15 million people in the U.S. have metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis, or MASH, which is linked to other metabolic risk factors like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. If approved by the FDA, semaglutide would be one of only two treatments available to patients.



'Helping the population that raised me': Dr. Stephanie Crewe reflects on getting back to her roots

Stephanie Crewe, M.D., grew up with her sister and parents in Bellemeade, a working-class neighborhood in the Southside of Richmond, Va. Her parents kept her busy outside of school with extracurricular activities like Girl Scouts and full, family-centric Sundays at church and her grandmother's house, which she joked didn't give her "time to get into much trouble." On some level, she understood at an early age that the support of her two-parent household and strong faith community afforded her a stability many of her peers lacked.

She began noticing inequities in high school, when her classmates "started getting pregnant and having babies." It was so prevalent in the early 1990s that George Wythe High School (now known as Richmond High School for the Arts) opened a day care on campus to help students with children stay on top of their classes. While Crewe said she didn't necessarily perceive the teen pregnancy rate in her neighborhood as a problem at the time, it did raise questions for her.

"It was almost a normative thing, and I wondered, what was it that made these kids more susceptible to these reproductive health outcomes?" she said.

By then, Crewe was already forging her path toward medicine. Nobody in her family had worked in health care, and she'd never met a physician who looked like her, but Crewe's tight-knit community rallied around her as she pursued the dream.

"Stephanie always knew what she wanted to do. She wanted to help people," said Katina Worsham, Crewe's older sister who lives just outside of Richmond in Glen Allen. "It was just her demeanor. She was always caring, always asking how she could help — that's just the way she is."

After completing medical school, residency and fellowship training out of state — she was not accepted into VCU School of Medicine's M.D. program when she applied in the 1990s — Crewe came back to Richmond to join the faculty as an adolescent specialist in 2010. Returning home, she realized it had all come full circle — some of her teenage patients were the children of her old high school classmates.

"For me, it was about coming back and helping the population that raised me," Crewe said. "I am now able to give back, understand what people in that population are going through, and work on chipping away at some of the barriers that exist. I can be a voice for my community."

"Stephanie always knew what she wanted to do. She wanted to help people." — Katina Worsham

A world first in robotic surgery

VCU Health's Hume-Lee Transplant Center was the first in the world to perform a living donor liver retrieval using state-of-the-art robotic technology. This groundbreaking achievement marks a significant leap in minimally invasive transplant surgery, setting a new standard for precision, safety and care for living donors.

"Living organ donors are the true heroes. It is of the utmost importance that we take every step to make their experience as comfortable as possible," said David Bruno, M.D., FACS, director of the Hume-Lee Transplant Center and associate professor in the Department of Surgery. With this robot, we can achieve that goal and save more lives."

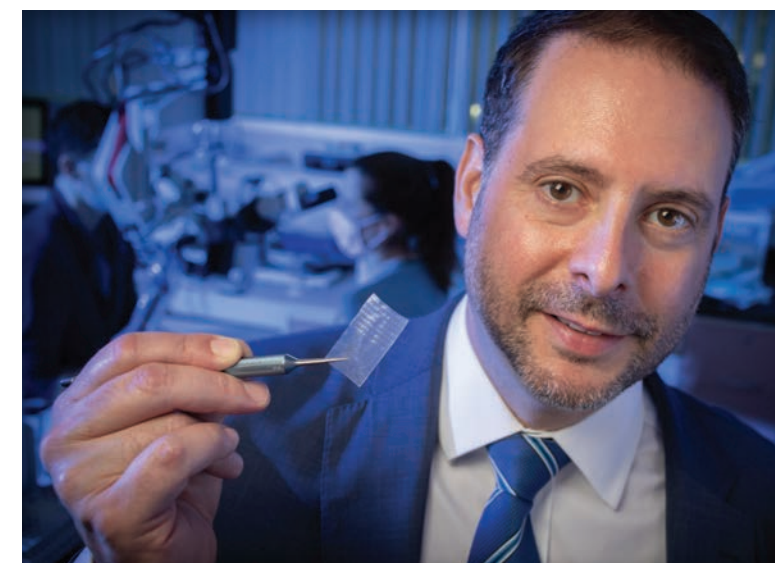
Burn center uses new skin regeneration technology to treat severe burn injuries

The VCU Health Evans-Haynes Burn Center, a Level I comprehensive burn center for both pediatric and adult patients, is the first in Virginia to gain use of new technology to help skin heal after a burn injury. The new machine, called RECELL GO™, will process a person's own skin instead of relying on hand preparation by the care team.

Michael Feldman, M.D., medical director of the burn center, professor in the Department of Surgery and holder of the endowed B.W. Haynes Jr., M.D. Professorship in General and Trauma Surgery, noted that this new technology allows health care professionals to give their full attention to patients while customizing their wound care.

"Our patients need us at their bedside while they are healing from severe burns," Feldman said. "We are proud to be the first burn center to adopt this cutting-edge technology in the commonwealth."

— Michael Feldman, M.D.



VCU surgeon's Nerve Tape gains popularity in operating rooms

Developed by Jonathan Isaacs, professor and chair of the Division of Hand Surgery in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Nerve Tape received clearance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2022. The tiny biologic wrap that repairs severed peripheral nerves, and as more surgeons around the U.S. begin using it, Nerve Tape could become one of VCU's most successful licensing ventures ever.

New mobile cancer screening initiative provides more access for rural Virginians

A new 50-foot trailer now travels between three VCU Health locations to provide rapid scans for patients waiting for cancer screenings in under 17 minutes — about half the time of a traditional scan. This innovation expands the medical facilities' capacity to get patients scanned and on treatment plans, aligning with the mission of VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center to reduce health inequities for all patients.





CLINICAL CARE

The forgotten population: A growing need for geriatricians

A handcrafted wooden Superman shield, with the word “doctor” across the middle, sits on Brittany Craven, M.D.’s desk. It was a gift from a patient, whose recent diagnosis and treatment of normal pressure hydrocephalus improved his mobility so much that he can now make it down the basement stairs to his woodworking shop for the first time in months.

“He said I was the first doctor to listen to him,” Craven said of the man in his 70s who had had poor balance and trouble walking until she referred him to a VCU neurosurgeon. “I’ve always loved working with older patients, and they are truly the forgotten population.”

Craven, a VCU School of Medicine alum, is one of about 20 geriatricians — physicians who care for adults over the age of 65 — in the Division of Geriatric Medicine. VCU’s geriatrics service includes outpatient, inpatient, palliative, home-based and nursing facility care across three locations, plus a 12-month geriatric medicine fellowship program, which Craven leads.

With older adults making up nearly 17% of the U.S. population in 2020, the demand for geriatricians is growing. Studies show that patients under the care of geriatricians have better outcomes and shorter hospital stays than those under the care of general practitioners. But according to a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the national shortage of geriatricians is projected to reach a deficit of nearly 27,000 by 2025.



Medical student Jessica Dahringer (left), loved connecting with 87-year-old Alice Warner as part of a School of Medicine program that matches medical students with adults who are aging in place independently.

“Everyone wants their loved ones to come see us, but there are very few of us. Outside of major city centers it can be really hard to find a geriatrician.”
— Brittany Craven, M.D.

“Everyone wants their loved ones to come see us, but there are very few of us,” Craven said. “Outside of major city centers it can be really hard to find a geriatrician.”

Experts across disciplines at VCU have been preparing for this shortage through enhanced curriculum for M.D. students, a robust fellowship program and continuing education for other specialists to care for older adults within their practices.



Medical Society of Virginia honors three School of Medicine faculty for outstanding service to their patients and community

The 21st annual Salute to Service Awards, sponsored by the Medical Society of Virginia (MSV) Foundation, honored six physicians across the Commonwealth for their commitment to serving their patients, institutions and communities. Of those six, three are VCU School of Medicine faculty members: Melissa Bradner, M.D., Stephanie Crewe, M.D. and José Muñoz, M.D.

Last year, the MSV was under the leadership of Alice Coombs, M.D., chair of the Department of Anesthesiology. She was the first Black female president — and only the fourth female president — of the professional society, which was founded in 1821. Coombs had the rare distinction of leading two state medical societies throughout her career, having served as president of the Massachusetts Medical Society in 2010.

CLINICAL CARE



More than 240 VCU Health doctors named ‘Virginia’s Top Doctors’ by Virginia Business magazine

In January, Virginia Business released its 2025 edition of “Virginia’s Top Doctors,” a list of 1,423 providers who were nominated by their peers last year. More than 240 physicians at VCU Health, most of whom are also School of Medicine faculty, received recognition across more than 80 specialties and subspecialties.

U.S. News & World Report ranks VCU Medical Center as best hospital in Richmond



VCU Medical Center was recognized as the No. 1 hospital in the Richmond metro area for the 14th consecutive year and the No. 2 hospital in Virginia for a second year in a row by U.S. News & World Report. VCU’s cardiology, heart and vascular surgery, orthopaedic surgery and rehabilitation units were all ranked in the top 50 nationally.





Endowed scholarship helps reduce medical school debt for future primary care physicians

As a National Health Service Corps scholarship recipient, Stephen Levin, M.D., a 1979 alumnus, committed to providing two years of primary care services in an underserved area after residency. At a clinic in Camden, New Jersey, alongside like-minded young pediatricians, he found himself surrounded by an environment of need.

After observing the lack of access to primary care faced by marginalized populations, Levin and his wife, Christine, endowed the Stephen A. Levin, M.D., and Mrs. Christine C. Levin Scholarship to encourage medical students to pursue primary care. The scholarship is particularly targeted to students with a commitment to practice in underserved urban or rural areas. It is expected to be awarded for the first time in the 2025-2026 academic year.

“To go into a specialty like pediatrics, or any primary care specialty, you’re going to forgo income when you make that decision,” Levin said. “If you have significant medical school debt, it’s going to be much harder to make that decision. That was one reason we decided to fund a scholarship for primary care physicians.”

Dr. Scott Strayer champions the breadth of practice available to family medicine physicians

As a medical student on the MCV Campus, Scott Strayer, M.D., said, “I loved everything about every rotation. I think that’s a typical family doctor story. And I particularly like procedures. I was leaning toward a surgical specialty or subspecialty, but I started to think about what drew me into medicine and about the early teenage influence of my family physician.”



Like many other family medicine physicians, Strayer — who is a Class of 1994 and residency alumnus — was intrigued by its scope of practice, from tympanostomy and tonsillectomies to improving maternal outcomes, particularly in rural areas where patients may have less access to specialists.

“I actually did a deep dive into endoscopy and became proficient and credentialed. I’ve been doing that for 20-plus years and helping to train family docs who then go into underserved areas where there is no one to do an endoscopy. Essentially, we are saving people’s lives by providing access to this critical service for cancer screening.”

— Scott Strayer, M.D.

Today, as the Harris-Mayo Chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health, Strayer draws upon those early experiences to help shape his current role as leader, mentor, counselor and educator for future generations of family practitioners.

Inspired by mentor’s guidance, alumna brought deep brain stimulation surgery to rural Texas

When neurosurgeon Leslie Hutchins, M.D., a neurosurgery housestaff alum who completed training in 2014, performed the first deep brain stimulation (DBS) surgery at Hendrick Medical Center in Abilene, Texas, it not only transformed the life of a patient with a severe movement disorder. It also marked the fulfillment of her decade-long quest to bring the groundbreaking procedure she learned on the MCV Campus to her hometown, offering hope to thousands of patients in the region.

In VCU’s Department of Neurosurgery, Hutchins was introduced to the multidisciplinary approach that would shape her career. She shadowed neurologist Mark Baron, M.D., in the VCU Parkinson’s and Movement Disorders Center, along with Kathryn Holloway, M.D., a 1990 housestaff alum and director of the deep brain simulation program,



who is a renowned pioneer of the frameless surgical approach. DBS uses implanted electrodes to deliver electrical stimulation to specific brain areas, alleviating symptoms of neurological disorders like Parkinson’s disease, essential tremor and dystonia.

Throughout her residency, Hutchins participated in 96 DBS surgeries under Holloway’s guidance. After returning to Texas following her residency, she soon recognized a significant gap in advanced treatment

options like DBS in the rural communities surrounding Abilene.

Her mission became clear: Bridge the gap and bring DBS to Hendrick Health.

Hutchins and her team successfully performed its first DBS procedure in the fall of 2024.

“Patients in rural areas face geographic and cultural barriers to quality health care. DBS has become well known in metropolitan areas, but it would be new here.”

— Leslie Hutchins, M.D.

From the clinic to City Hall

Danny Avula, M.D., a Class of 2004 alum, was elected the 81st mayor of the City of Richmond in November 2024.

In addition to completing medical school and one of his two residencies at VCU School of Medicine, Avula served as health director of the Richmond City and Henrico County health departments for 13 years. Governor Terry McAuliffe appointed him to the State Board of Social Services in 2013, in 2021 Governor Ralph Northam appointed him to lead Virginia’s COVID-19 vaccination effort and in 2022 Governor Glenn Youngkin appointed him commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services. Avula has also been a member of the MCV Foundation board since 2023.





Four pilot projects igniting innovation on the MCV Campus

Joe and Sally Jenkins were already longtime supporters of VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center when fate brought them face-to-face with the true impact of their philanthropic endeavors.

When Joe took a fall during their southern sojourn a few years ago, a chest X-ray to check his injuries revealed a small black dot on his lung. He sent those X-rays north, where Massey's expert team of physicians diagnosed him with early-stage lung cancer and initiated a treatment plan that brought Joe back to Richmond.

Today, Joe proudly said, he is cancer-free.

Their experience — and the lingering question of “what if” the cancer had not been found — continues to fuel their desire to give in support of Massey's research that aims to discover and treat cancer in its earliest stages.

“We're interested in supporting research that helps with early detection,” Sally said. “Massey is a national leader in cancer care and we're living examples of that.”

Research drives scientific progress, and philanthropy drives research. Scientific data from successful pilot projects, like those supported by the Jenkinses, is often the key component in securing grant funding that allows the project to progress to the next stages of research.

Throughout the MCV Campus, pilot projects are often made possible by private philanthropy.

Typically ranging from \$20,000 to \$50,000 per year, pilot grants allow researchers and physicians a chance to collect “proof of concept” data that they can then use to solicit substantial funding from the NIH, Department of Defense, the American Heart Association and other national organizations.

“If someone has a great idea, but no, funding, it will only remain a great idea,” said Fadi Salloum, Ph.D., who holds the Natalie N. and John R. Congdon Sr. Endowed Chair in the VCU Health Pauley Heart Center. “Without pilot funding, scientists may never have the opportunity to grow that research.”

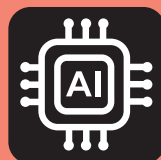
Four research topics being explored with the support of pilot funding



Can what you eat protect your heart during chemotherapy?



Are pesticides at the root of cognitive decline?



Can AI and data science revolutionize medicine?



Could one gene mutation be the breakthrough in understanding lung cancer?



Laxmikant Deshpande, Ph.D., a 2006 pharmacology and toxicology alumnus and professor in the Department of Neurology, investigates how chemical compounds called organophosphates impact cognitive decline and contribute to memory loss.

Transforming education and advancing research: The lasting impact of philanthropy

Scholarship awards **hit a record high** in 2024-2025

VCU School of Medicine students benefit from **more than 200** endowed scholarships

32 full tuition scholarships were awarded during the 2024-2025 academic year, including 22 McGlothlin Scholarships

The School of Medicine's faculty are **supported by 171** endowed chairs and professorships



KEY DATES

2025
2026

Transition to medical school begins	Monday, July 21
White coat ceremony	Friday, Aug. 1
M1s begin classes	Monday, Aug. 4
Graduate student orientation	Thursday, Aug. 14
Graduate students begin classes	Tuesday, Aug. 19
Match Day	Friday, March 20
Student Honors Day	Thursday, May 7
M.D. hooding ceremony	Friday, May 8
Advanced degree recognition ceremony	Friday, May 8

In March 2025, scholarship recipients met with and thanked some of the donors who have impacted their education and their lives through philanthropic gifts at the annual MCV Campus Endowed Scholarship Brunch.





Medical students provide free health screenings at community clinic

Just four blocks from their classrooms, preclinical medical students are getting a preview of their future careers caring for their community.

Once a month, members of the Student Family Medicine Association (SFMA) student interest group gather in the sun-bathed atrium of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in downtown Richmond to provide cost-free basic health screenings to anyone that wants it.

The health screenings are held during St. Paul's Emmaus Lunch Ministry, a weekly event that attracts around 100 Richmond downtown community members, offering a free hot meal, social service referrals, financial assistance and donated items. Throughout the lunch event, guests trickle into the atrium, where students offer to take their blood pressure, check their blood glucose levels and consult on their results and any other concerns they may have. For students, it's a chance to start putting what they're learning into practice and connect with members of the community.

Samara Shabon, an M1 and SFMA vice president of community outreach, noted that preclinical medical students spend a lot of time at their desks learning about medicine, and getting out into the community is an opportunity for hands-on learning and practice.

"Being in the free clinic serves as a reminder of why we're studying for these long hours and taking these exams. Interacting with the community gives me energy and joy."
— Samara Shabon, M1

Rosellen Roche, M.D., Ph.D., vice chair of medical education in the Department of Family Medicine and advisor to SFMA, said engaging with the community is an essential part of family medicine. She noted that the specialty relies heavily on communication and trust between physician and patient, and she encourages aspiring family doctors to seek out opportunities to practice those skills.

"Being involved with the community is part of being a family medicine physician, so seeing patient and community-member needs is important," Roche said. "Early opportunities like this contribute to understanding patients within the context of family and community."



Senior leaders

Arturo P. Saavedra, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A.
Dean, School of Medicine
Executive vice president for medical affairs, VCU Health

Brian M. Aboff, M.D., FACP
Senior associate dean, graduate medical education

Michael S. Donnenberg, M.D.
Senior associate dean, research

Niles T. Eggleston
Senior associate vice president, medical philanthropy and alumni relations

Michael S. Grotewiel, Ph.D.
Senior associate dean, graduate education

Amelia C. Grover, M.D.
Interim senior associate dean, faculty affairs and development

Donna H. Jackson, Ed.D.
Interim senior associate dean, admissions and student outreach

Luan E. Lawson, M.D.
Senior associate dean, medical education and student affairs

Anita M. Navarro, Ed.D.
Chief of staff

Paul F. Peterson, M.B.A.
Interim senior associate dean, finance and administration

Scott P. Stringer, M.D.
Senior associate dean, clinical affairs

Robert A. Winn, M.D.
Senior associate dean, cancer innovation

Department chairs

Douglas W. Arthur, M.D.
Radiation Oncology

David P. Chelmow, M.D.
Obstetrics and Gynecology

David X. Cifu, M.D.
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Alice T. Coombs, M.D.
Anesthesiology

L. Ashley Cowart, Ph.D.*
Cellular, Molecular and Genetic Medicine

Mary K. Daly, M.D.
Ophthalmology

William L. Dewey, Ph.D.
Pharmacology and Toxicology

Harinder S. Dhindsa, M.D.
Emergency Medicine

Laurence J. DiNardo, M.D.
Otolaryngology and Dermatology*

Robert L. Findling, M.D.
Psychiatry

Ann S. Fulcher, M.D.
Radiology

Karen Hendricks-Muñoz, M.D.*
Pediatrics

Vigneshwar Kasirajan, M.D.
Surgery

Stephen L. Kates, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgery

Adam P. Klausner, M.D.
Urology

David D. Limbrick Jr., M.D., Ph.D.
Neurosurgery

Pamela E. Knapp, Ph.D.
Anatomy and Neurobiology

Guang-Yu Yang, M.D., Ph.D.
Pathology

Patricia J. Sime, M.D.
Internal Medicine

A. Gordon Smith, M.D.
Neurology

Scott M. Strayer, M.D., M.P.H.
Family Medicine and Population Health

Huiping Zhou, Ph.D.*
Microbiology and Immunology

**denotes interim chair*



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