

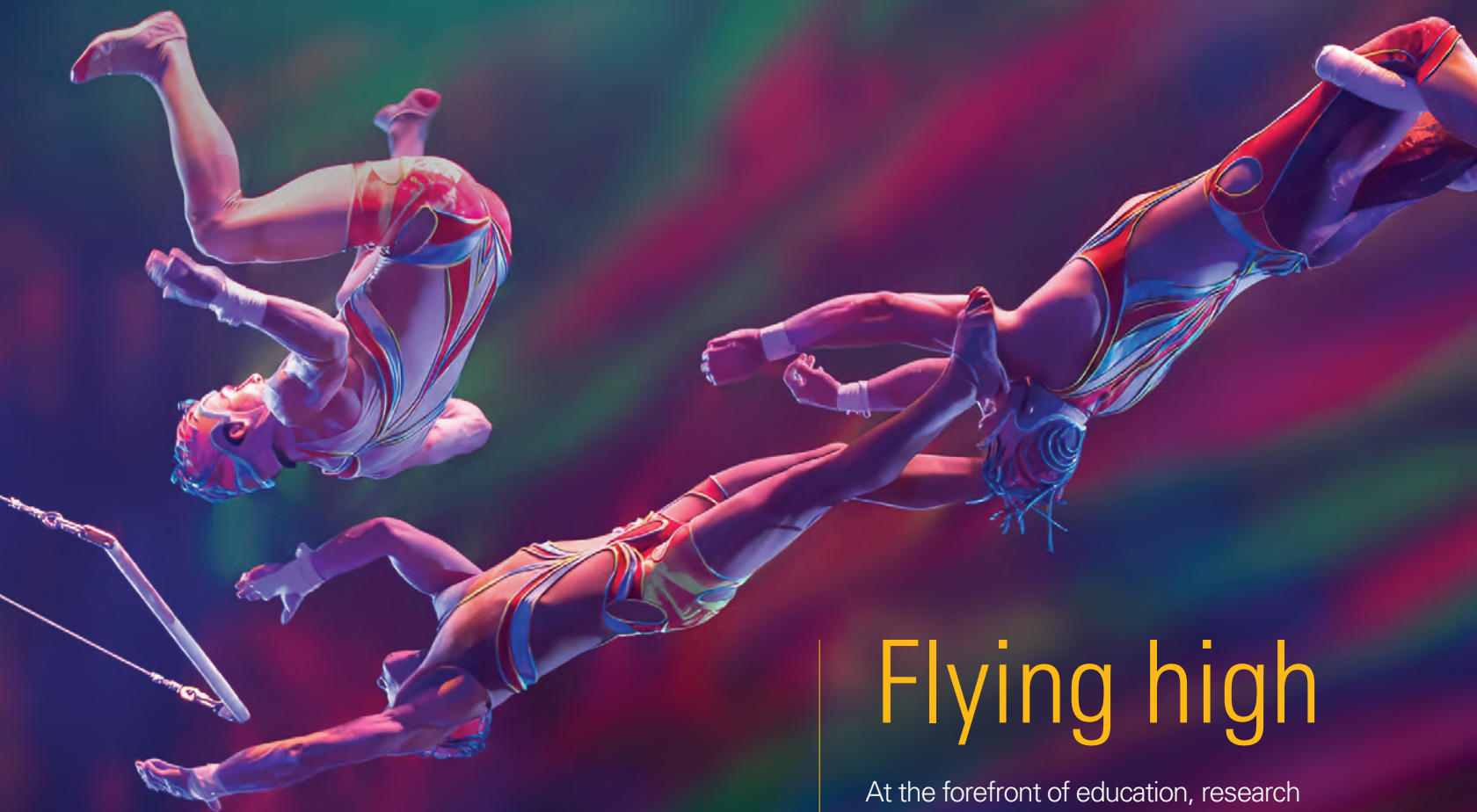
2025

Annual Report

2026



VCU School of Medicine



Flying high

At the forefront of education, research and clinical care, our School of Medicine community is empowered to pursue bold passions — both on the MCV Campus and beyond.



Writing and compilation:

Laura Ingles
Jim Nolan

Images and design:

Arda Athman
Brent Nultemeier, BN Design

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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.

Cover photo: Medical student Tucker Smith (left) took a leave of absence in 2024 to perform trapeze with *Mystère* by Cirque du Soleil. He plans to return to medical school and graduate with the Class of 2027.





A message from the dean

Dear members of the VCU School of Medicine community,

This has been a remarkable year of accomplishment, advancement and adaptation in our medical school. Our collective work has produced clinical, educational and research achievements in which we can all take pride. They validate and affirm the core of our mission:

- Training the physicians, scientists and health professionals of tomorrow
- Conducting innovative research to shape the future of medicine and science
- Advancing compassionate, personalized and accessible health care for our community

Through adaptation and resilience, we have successfully navigated change and challenge and created opportunities for future growth. We have not merely survived. We have thrived.

This year, our outstanding faculty distinguished themselves as leaders in caregiving, with multiple honors and awards from their peers, their patients and their specialties. Hundreds received “Top Doctor” accolades, and others were selected as fellows or leaders in prestigious organizations. For the second consecutive year, four of our departments ranked in the top 25 nationwide for NIH-sponsored research funding.

In the spirit of team science, we partnered with Virginia Tech to procure game-changing equipment for genomic research. We expanded our NICU at the Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU, opened new outpatient space for the Stravitz-Sanyal Institute for Liver Disease and Metabolic Health and broke ground on an ambitious expansion of cardiac care with the Pauley Heart Center Pavillion. The groundbreaking work of our clinicians and researchers were recognized in top tier media and medical journals across the nation and the globe.

Our incoming medical school Class of 2030 was selected from more than 9,200 applications; and our graduating Class of 2026 posted a 99% match rate post-SOAP, with

one-third of our graduation physicians remaining in Virginia for residency training, and a quarter staying right here at VCU, while others landed coveted slots at Yale, Penn, Johns Hopkins and the Cleveland Clinic, among others. These students did not just achieve; they gave back to our school and community with their time and talent.

None of this success would have been possible without our development and philanthropic partners. Again, our scholarship awards hit a record high. Our number of endowed faculty positions rose to 178, and with generous donations were able to provide 43 full tuition scholarships to our students. We also christened our newest department, making it the first named department in the history of VCU: the Dorothy A. Pauley Department of Urology.

SOM continues to move forward, with multiple internal promotions and external recruitments to chair roles and academic leadership that position us for future growth and excellence. In an increasingly competitive and challenging landscape, I am more optimistic than ever that we have the talent and focus to succeed. The pages of this report, right down to the cover featuring one of our talented students literally flying high, are a fitting way to highlight just some of our progress and promise.

As you comb through its pages, I hope you are reminded of all we have done, and all we can be, when students, faculty staff, trainees, alumni and donors work together. Thank you for an outstanding year.

Stephen L. Kates, M.D.
Interim Dean
VCU School of Medicine



Get to know the M.D. Class of 2029

Jubilant, nervous, stoked, grateful and ready to start.

Those were just a few of the ways VCU School of Medicine's 184 new students described their feelings on the first day of medical school.

With 64% of students from Virginia, the rest representing 17 states and a few from as far as the Philippines and Ethiopia, the Class of 2029 arrived at the MCV Campus on Monday, July 21 for their two-week Transition to Medical School.



In the Class of 2029, you'll find daredevils who have gone skydiving and paragliding; athletes who have competed in everything from soccer and cross country to table tennis and speedskating; speakers of Arabic, French, Gujarati, Turkish and Urdu; musicians who play bass clarinet, guitar, harmonica and qanun; flower-arrangers, crocheters, bakers and scrapbookers; runners of 5ks up to ultra-marathons; and 27 medical assistants, eight EMTs, 14 medical scribes and 14 medical technicians.





EDUCATION

NEW STUDENTS



Meet the newest graduate students

On Thursday, Aug. 14, new graduate students filled the Bruce Oliver Tucker Auditorium feeling excited, nervous and determined. They have arrived from across the U.S. and beyond to begin studying and conducting research across the full spectrum of biomedical sciences at VCU School of Medicine.

Some of these new students plan to become physicians or dentists, while others look forward to careers in academic, government or private sector research. With 26 graduate-level programs, the School of Medicine makes each of these paths available and accessible to students.

Before arriving on the MCV Campus, our new graduate students earned degrees in biology, physics, biochemistry, public health and neuroscience; worked as teachers, psychiatric techs, fine dining servers and apple orchard cashiers; bungee jumped in Zimbabwe and grew up in Panama, Colombia and Mexico; and received awards for their research posters, presented at a conference in Hawaii and became registered dietitians.

EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS

8,306

M.D. student applications

184

first-year medical students

96

first-year graduate students

26

graduate-level programs,
including certificate, M.S.
and Ph.D.

833

total residents and fellows

158

PGY-1 spots filled

EDUCATION





Flying high

Tucker Smith balances his medical education and trapeze career

Tucker Smith knows a thing or two about taking leaps of faith — literally. Since taking a leave of absence from medical school in 2024, Smith has been soaring above crowds in Las Vegas with *Mystère* by Cirque du Soleil, one of the world's most acclaimed aerial trapeze shows.

While his path to becoming a clinician may be unorthodox, Smith has found a way to embrace both of his passions. He plans to return to medical school next year to complete his M4 year, and approaches medicine with a new perspective shaped by his time training and performing with *Mystère*.

“There are so many similarities between the cooperative nature of trapeze and a profession like medicine,” Smith said. “Trapeze challenges me in the best way to be a better teammate in a high-pressure environment, and I think I will be a better physician because of it.”

After college, Smith spent a year touring with a traveling aerial team and moved to Richmond for medical school in 2021. He assumed that his performing days were behind him, but when his father died at the start of his M4 year, Smith found himself drawn back to the activity that had always been an outlet. With an extension on the leave of absence he'd already taken to be with his family while his dad was in the final stages of his illness, Smith packed his bags and moved to Las Vegas to begin training again.

“It was something I needed to at least try,” he said. “I would regret not taking the chance to do something that I cherish so much at the highest level.”

Smith knows his return to medicine will be an adjustment, but said he looks forward to resuming his medical education and graduating with the Class of 2027. He is grateful for the understanding and encouragement he has received from the School of Medicine and the opportunity he has had to pursue both of his dreams.

“The road to becoming a physician takes years and years, and medicine is something most people do for the rest of their life,” Smith said. “I think as long as you work hard and have a plan, making your own path is okay.”





Finding a home in Richmond and research

International Ph.D. students train to become better doctors through science

Shady Azzam and Nada Nassif, who are both originally from Egypt, first met online in 2023. They had each already completed seven-year medical programs to earn their Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery degrees, (MBBCh), the Egyptian equivalent of an M.D., and quickly connected over their mutual passions for medicine and science. They also shared a desire to enhance their degrees with research, and 18 months later, they were married and looking for international opportunities to pursue that dream together.



The couple welcomed their son, Yahia, in 2024, and finding an inviting community to raise the now 2-year-old was their top priority. They said they found that community — and more — at VCU.

Uprooting their lives for their education hasn't been without its challenges. As native Arabic speakers, they both studied English before moving to the U.S., but adapting to the academic setting in a second language was still an adjustment. After getting married, Azzam and Nassif lived in Cairo, the densely populated Egyptian capital surrounded by desert terrain. In Richmond, they found quieter neighborhoods and abundant green space. Whether taking Yahia to Maymont to feed the animals, picnicking in Monroe Park or just stepping out of their Franklin Street apartment for a family stroll, being outside has helped them feel connected to their new community.

"Even the streets are amazing," Nassif said. "It's not very crowded, and there are trees on both sides of the sidewalk. Going for walks here is very relaxing."





Neural networks

How mentorship shaped two neurologists' careers

Emma Parolisi, M.D., was only 16 when she first showed up at a neurology clinic. A high school junior at the time, she commuted from Waynesboro to Charlottesville during breaks from school to tag along as Kelly Gwathmey, M.D., a neurologist at UVA Health, treated patients. Gwathmey was only a few years into her career as an attending physician at the time, and she said she was willing to take on young mentees like Parolisi because she knows firsthand how early opportunities can shape an aspiring doctor's career.

"In my own journey, I started shadowing neurologists when I was in college, and some of those first patients I saw as an observer were the people who inspired me to go into neurology," Gwathmey said. "I could imagine what Emma was going through, and I know how influential and impactful those experiences are."

Gwathmey has been a mentor and role model to Parolisi ever since. The two stayed in touch over the years, and in 2019, they both ended up at VCU School of Medicine — Parolisi as an M1, and Gwathmey as a faculty member. Now, as Parolisi works her way through VCU's neurology residency program more than 12 years after they met, the two are not just mentor and mentee, but also colleagues.

"It was such a full-circle moment," Parolisi said of matching into the program in 2023. "I was so happy that I was getting to stay at VCU, and so happy knowing that she was here too."

A window into pain



Students explore chronic pain through Frida Kahlo exhibit at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

On a Friday night in August, 30 medical students gathered at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for a tour of the visiting exhibition, "Frida: Beyond the Myth," featuring the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo.

Following a bus accident as a teenager, Kahlo dealt with lifelong chronic pain — a theme that was often symbolized in her expressive paintings. As the students examined photos of the artist and her self-portraits, they searched for hints of Kahlo's experience. Could her stoic expression be a mask for her inner pain? Is the style of her hair an insight into her deteriorating health? Do paintings of ripe, open fruits suggest her desire for children?

While these questions were part of a dialogue about a single artist's experience with lifelong pain, they also represented the kinds of conversations that regularly take place in the M.D. program's Patient, Physician and Society, a longitudinal course designed to nurture caring and compassionate physicians.

"I like to tell people the PPS course is everything that's not in a science textbook," said Melissa Bradner, M.D., a 1999 residency alum, professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health and M3/M4 course director for PPS. "It's the doctor-patient relationship, shared decision-making, death and dying, palliative care. It's a chance to think about pain in a more complex way."



Method acting

Standardized patients bring simulated medical scenarios to life

Maria Lewis sits in an exam room, checking her watch and fidgeting as she waits by herself. After an ultrasound appointment due to some minor spotting, she was sent across the hall to see the OB-GYN. When a young woman in a white coat enters the room, she introduces herself, consults her clipboard and asks Lewis a series of questions about her health history and how she's feeling.

The doctor then looks the patient in the eye and says in a calm, steady voice: "I have some unexpected news." Lewis's pregnancy, eight weeks along, is no longer viable. Lewis's eyes widen, and she nods along as the expert in front of her lays out the next steps and explains the pros and cons of each treatment option.

As they wrap up the appointment, a female voice announces over the loudspeaker: "This simulation has ended. Please begin feedback."

Claire Whelen, a professional actor portraying the part of the patient, breaks character and smiles encouragingly at the person in front of her — a third-year medical



student. They discuss the student's communication choices and her ability to convey all the necessary information, with both clinical accuracy and compassion, within the 20-minute period. Whelen fills out a form to document her observations, then waves goodbye and resets the room for the next student. Retaking her seat on the swivel chair, she is once again 28-year-old Maria Lewis, an elementary school teacher who is about to find out that she has had a miscarriage.

Whelen is one of about 40 standardized patients, or SPs — trained actors who simulate realistic clinical scenarios for current and future physicians to practice and assess their skills — who work at VCU's Center for Human Simulation and Patient Safety. SPs are at the forefront of the M.D. program's clinical training, often providing medical students with their first ever clinical encounters. They are part of a robust, collaborative system that helps future doctors develop the bedside manner and communication skills they need to treat real patients.

According to Aaron Anderson, Ph.D., a professional actor and founding director of VCU's standardized patient program, taking on the role of an SP is unlike any other acting job.

"They don't do this for the money, and I know this to be true because I trained most of them," said Anderson, who is also a professor and associate chair in the Department of Theatre at the VCU School of the Arts. "They do this because being a standardized patient is the most straightforward, uplifting, purely good thing, with no ambiguity. If you do this right, you will make the world a better place. That's your job."

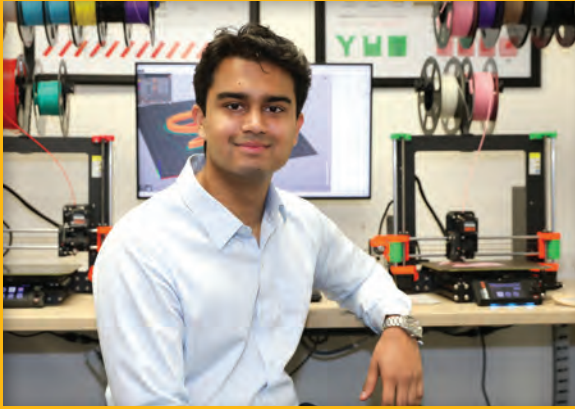




EDUCATION

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

EDUCATION



Designing a difference

Nihal Patel, a lifelong tech hobbyist and aspiring orthopaedic surgeon in the Class of 2028, has designed and manufactured dozens of cost-free 3D-printed devices to improve the day-to-day lives of individuals with disabilities. These creations include cupholders, pencil grips and a custom cane holder that attaches to a wheelchair or a table.



The future of dermatology

Deaquan Nichols, of the Class of 2027, was named a 2026 Dermatologist of Tomorrow, a scholarship program sponsored by the cosmetics brand Clinique and the Skin of Color Society Foundation. The scholarship provides funding for clinical, research and mentorship opportunities for medical students that demonstrate a commitment to health equity.

The power of preparation

The Class of 2027's Luke Johnson co-authored a study that tackles one of the most precarious situations for an anesthesiologist: an operating room blackout. The paper was published in MedEdPortal, and the goal is to ensure that residents have prepared for and practiced worst-case scenarios in their training.

Investigating movement disorders

Two students in the Medical Scientist Training Program and their mentors received funding in the latest round of pilot grants from VCU's Parkinson's and Movement Disorders Center. Nico Druck will study GPI-based neural markers of balance and instability in Parkinson's disease, and Chelsie Poffenberger will study TBI-induced neurodegeneration of the retina and visual processes.

Passion project

Class of 2027 student Alex Erling used funding through the Dean's Summer Research Fellowship to investigate the relationship between cellulitis and periprosthetic joint infection, a rare post-operative condition that caused her grandfather to lose his leg. The findings of her project were published in the Journal of Arthroplasty in July 2025.





MATCH 2026



M.D. Class of 2026

94%
match rate
before SOAP

99%
match rate
after SOAP

93.5%
national average
match rate before
SOAP

71

students matched into
primary care specialties

36

students staying at
VCU Health for their
residency training

57

students completing part
or all of their residency
training in Virginia

SOAP - Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program

Graduate education

57
certificate program
graduates

34
Ph.D. program
graduates

38
M.S. program
graduates

20
graduate programs
represented

Top matched specialties:



Internal medicine



Family medicine



Psychiatry



Emergency medicine



Pediatrics



OB-GYN



'No way for a child to grow up'

Uncovering the roots of aggression in children



James Blair, Ph.D., refuses to believe that any child is inherently bad.

As an expert in cognitive neuroscience, he has been studying the brains and behaviors of kids with impulsive aggression for more than 30 years. Now, with new insights into the neural mechanisms underlying aggressive behavior, he has arrived at the VCU School of Medicine to translate his findings into improved psychiatric care.

Blair has teamed up with two prominent clinician-researchers — Robert Findling, M.D., M.B.A., chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Ekaterina Stepanova, M.D., Ph.D., chair of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry — with the goal of developing new individualized treatments based on both biological and environmental risk factors. For Findling and Stepanova, who have spent years working to improve how childhood aggression is understood and treated, Blair's research brings a complementary perspective that strengthens that ongoing effort.

"Dr. Blair's work allows the team to integrate biological insights with clinical observations, behavioral assessments and statistical analyses," Stepanova said. "This dynamic, interdisciplinary team is helping fill

critical gaps in knowledge, offering hope for better understanding, support and care for children and families affected by aggressive behaviors."

Impulsive aggression is an uncontrolled behavioral response to a situation, characterized by immediate, explosive and violent behaviors that are often out of proportion to the initial trigger. In children, this can mean verbal outbursts like screaming, yelling or making threats, and physical actions like hitting or destroying property. As impulsive aggressive children get older, these behaviors can intensify and put them at greater risk of harming themselves and others, doing poorly in school and ending up in the justice system.

Findling, a pediatric psychiatrist of more than 30 years, said children with impulsive aggression tend to be acutely aware of how others perceive them. His own patients as young as 6 have shared with him that they know other kids think they're "bad" and that their teachers don't like them.

"That's no way for a child to grow up," Findling said. "The issue has to do with reactivity, not being bad, and our job is to understand the underpinnings of that reactivity so we can give these kids the outcomes they deserve."

Blair echoed that sentiment, adding that aggressive behavior should not be mistaken for a moral failure or a lack of empathy. He said it reflects differences in brain function, often compounded by social-environmental factors like family stress, and should be addressed with the same level of understanding and treatment as other emotional disorders like depression or anxiety.

"These aren't bad kids. There are just brain-level issues that give rise to this behavior," Blair said. "We know how to help a lot of people with different emotional disorders, and it would be good for both the individual and for society if we can help these people, too."

Networks that heal

Research under new leadership

Fadi Salloum, Ph.D., a dedicated researcher, educator and mentor with more than 25 years of experience at VCU, is the School of Medicine's new senior associate dean for research. To translate discovery into care, Salloum champions systems thinking, team science and training the next generation of researchers.

"At first, you're mastering techniques and learning from people who've been doing this for a long time, then you begin asking why," Salloum said of his early research days. "Why do some people have a heart attack and go on without further issues, while others develop long-term problems, despite receiving similar care and medical treatment? I found myself equally excited by asking new questions and then building ways to answer them."



RESEARCH



R
E
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H

RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS

\$316.9M

total research dollars

\$88,138,578

in NIH funding

60th

**in the U.S. in
NIH funding**

12

**departments in the
top 50 in NIH funding**

1,100

**patients enrolled in
clinical trials**

436

**studies open to
enrollment**



RESEARCH

Transforming cancer radiation therapy

William Song, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Radiation Oncology, is leading the development of a new portable, foldable water tank used in radiation therapy.

When filled with water, the tank mimics human tissue to measure and verify the radiation dose from cancer treatment machines called medical linear accelerators, or LINACs. The accelerators treat cancerous tumors, and the tank, which sits under a LINAC, measures the dose and shape of the invisible beams — critical to ensuring patient safety and therapy dosage.

Tanks have gotten bigger and more expensive to move, Song said, which is a problem when trying to reach patients in remote settings. So, what if he could make a portable water tank, while improving the quality and speed of the radiation detectors within?

“We realized that if we could make the water tank portable that it could solve a major problem in how hospitals manage and calibrate these machines,” Song said. “Advancement doesn’t mean more complexity. We want to make things simple and portable so that it can be used in a wide, economical and accessible manner.”



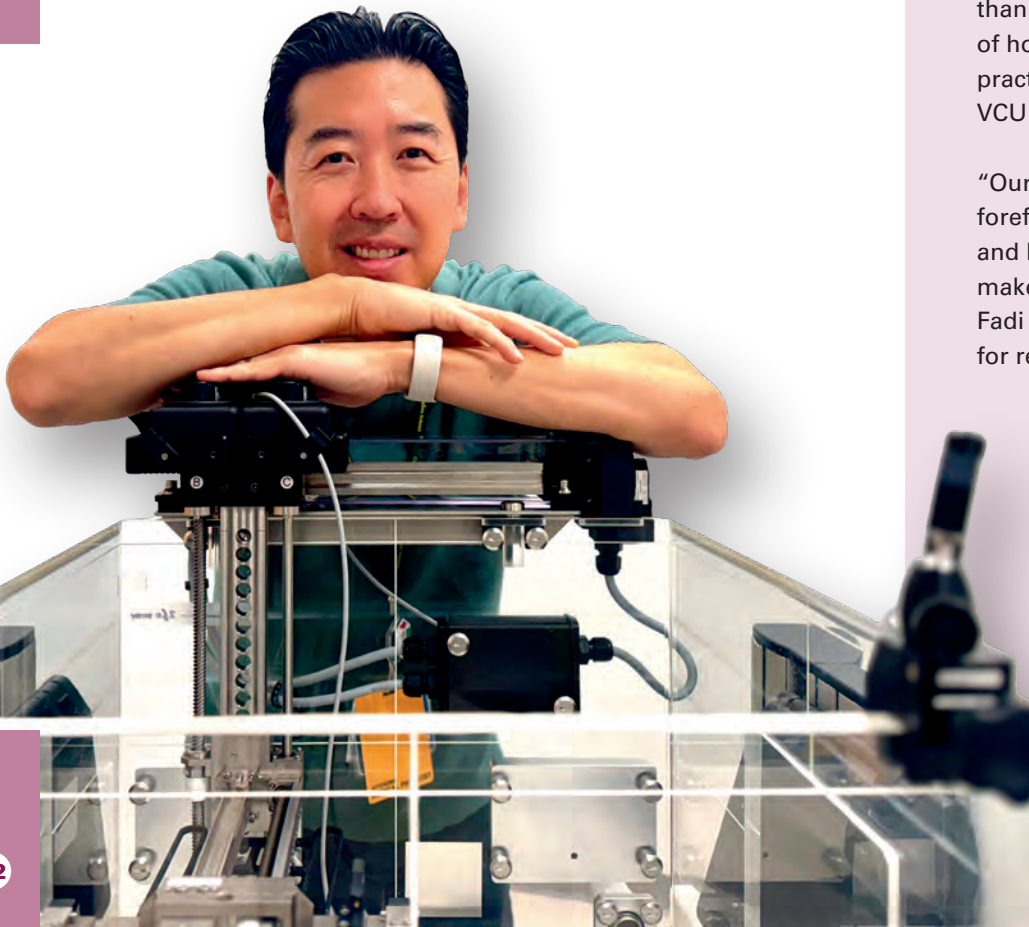
Ruff on Lyme: Vaccinating therapy dogs

Partners across the School of Medicine gathered in April to raise awareness of Lyme disease prevention and provide Dogs on Call therapy dogs with certificates for a free, federally-approved canine vaccine for the disease. The innovation, developed by Richard Marconi, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, has provided dogs with broad protection against Lyme disease for more than 10 years. The event was a celebration of how VCU research is being directly put to practice to benefit a program that supports VCU Health patients and team members.

“Our researchers and clinicians are at the forefront of addressing emerging challenges and bringing new scientific solutions to make the world a better place,” said Fadi Salloum, Ph.D., senior associate dean for research at the School of Medicine.

“This event is a recognition of the impact of VCU research for improving the lives for both humans and their pets.”

RESEARCH





A team led by Michel Aboutanos, M.D., chief of the Division of Acute Care Surgical Services in the Department of Surgery, has created a **device that mimics real blood flow** in surgical training simulations. Peter Pidcoe, Ph.D., a physical therapist with a joint appointment in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, has worked with surgeons to build prototypes of a pump that delivers pulsatile and responsive circulation.

Researchers led by Michael Miles, M.D., Ph.D., in the Departments of Pharmacology and Toxicology and Neurology, have found that the drug tideglusib, which is currently in clinical trials for brain disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, might also have **potential for treating alcohol misuse**.



Ruth Brown-Ennis, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry, appeared in person at the **United Nations** in March to present her findings from her lab's NIH-funded research on loneliness in adolescents and adults with Down syndrome. The presentation, framed around the theme "Together against loneliness," was in conjunction with World Down Syndrome Day.



The VCU Parkinson's and Movement Disorders Center became the only center in Virginia to be recognized as a **Lewy Body Dementia Association Research Center of Excellence**.

Derek Sant'Angelo, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, has been named a fellow of the **American Association for the Advancement of Science**, the world's leading general scientific society.

With a \$6.5 million grant in partnership with the State University of New York at Albany, VCU's Center for Inherited Myology Research established a **Wellstone Muscular Dystrophy Specialized Research Center**.



In partnership with Virginia Tech, the School of Medicine **unveiled the Illumina NovaSeq X Plus**, a high-throughput DNA sequencing machine for large-scale genomics research. This is the first time two Virginia institutions have jointly owned and operated a single piece of SCHEV-funded instrumentation.



From a heart transplant to the global stage



Two years after receiving a heart transplant, lifelong athlete Kyle Dodd competed in the World Transplant Games.

A baseball player, strong swimmer and U.S. Army veteran, Dodd always defined himself by staying active and competitive. Those instincts helped carry him through a life-threatening heart crisis and, ultimately, to the World Transplant Games, an international multi-sport event celebrating life after transplant.

Just after Thanksgiving 2022, he became ill. He was vomiting and unable to keep food down, assuming it was just a stubborn stomach bug. By late December and into January, his condition worsened. After multiple emergency room visits, he was admitted to VCU Medical Center, where his health declined rapidly. Years earlier, he had been diagnosed with left ventricular noncompaction cardiomyopathy, a rare congenital heart condition that limits the heart's ability to pump blood effectively. He was placed on medication, lived what he described as "a very normal life" and was followed for years by Keyur Shah, M.D., interim chief of the Division of Cardiology at the VCU Health Pauley Heart Center.

By early 2023, Dodd's left ventricle was no longer functioning, and his organs began to fail. When Pauley's advanced heart failure team evaluated him, they discovered a massive blood clot inside his left ventricle. With his heart failure so advanced, the transplant team was called in to collaborate on Dodd's care.

"The good news is that Kyle was in the right place at the right time," Shah said. "Being in Central Virginia, he would not have survived if he were anywhere but VCU Health."

"I was just running the rat race and taking things for granted, and now I get to participate in a lot of new experiences and talk to others about transplantation. My transplant has opened up a whole new path in my life and weirdly changed it for the better."

– Kyle Dodd, heart transplant recipient



A new heart and a new goal

When he was discharged after his transplant, Dodd focused on rebuilding. Like all heart recipients, doctors and therapists want patients to stay active and moving, and he worked on regaining basic strength, endurance and confidence in his body. He began walking to the end of his driveway — then laps, then miles. "Move every day" became his rule.

After his fiancée, Becca, showed him a video clip from the World Transplant Games, competing in the next summer games — just over a year away — became his goal. In 2025, he represented Team USA in Dresden, Germany, competing in golf (winning a bronze medal), swimming and men's ball throw (winning silver). While Dodd loved competing, he said the camaraderie was just as meaningful.

"I didn't know anyone else who'd had a transplant before I went to the games. Being around people who had gone through the same thing was incredible," he said. "It gave me perspective — and gratitude."



Targeted radiation therapy for glioblastoma

At VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center, the neurosurgical team has debuted a first-in-market tile-based brachytherapy to treat glioblastoma, the most common and most aggressive type of brain tumor in adults.

“With aggressive tumors like glioblastoma or brain metastases, you can never eliminate every cancer cell. The delay before radiation effectively gives those remaining cells weeks to recover and grow before treatment resumes,” said Ryan Cleary, M.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Neurosurgery. “Tile-based brachytherapy allows radiation to be delivered directly to the surgical cavity at the time of surgery, reducing delays and potentially improving outcomes.”

Preserving flexibility with scoliosis surgery

Chester Sharps, M.D., an associate clinical professor in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, is one of the first orthopaedic surgeons in Virginia to offer vertebral body tethering for scoliosis. The surgery, performed at the Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU, corrects spinal curvature in kids while preserving flexibility.

“It represents a paradigm shift in scoliosis care,” Sharps said. “Unlike fusion, which immobilizes vertebrae, VBT maintains spinal motion and growth potential, making it ideal for children with remaining skeletal development.”

CLINICAL CARE

BY THE NUMBERS

45,574

inpatient discharges

5,440

**trauma admissions
at our Level 1
trauma center**

3,075

newborn deliveries

2M+

outpatient visits

529

**total organs
transplanted at Hume-Lee
Transplant Center**

No. 9

**gastroenterology-
hepatology program
worldwide***

*per U.S. News & World Report



Providing unmatched care for infants

A \$28 million, 20-bed neonatal intensive care unit in the Children's Tower brings Children's Hospital of Richmond (CHoR) at VCU's total number of NICU beds to 60. In January 2026, officials cut the ribbon on the new unit, which complements the hospital's existing NICU across the street in VCU Medical Center next to labor and delivery services.

"Our mission at VCU Health is to preserve and restore the health of all people, including our tiniest patients," said Marlon Levy, M.D., senior vice president for VCU Health Sciences and CEO of VCU Health. "With our 40-bed NICU continually at capacity, the need for this expansion to serve babies requiring critical, innovative medical care was evident — and we were honored to respond accordingly."

The Level IV NICU at CHoR provides the highest level of care available for premature and full-term infants with critical medical needs. This includes a full range of heart and respiratory support, advanced imaging, as well as on-site surgical capabilities.

Level IV NICUs are also prepared to care for micro preemies, such as Lennox Crutchfield who weighed less than one pound when he was born at nearly 23 weeks gestation. He spent 143 days in the CHoR NICU, undergoing intense monitoring and care while growing in size and strength. Lennox is now a thriving 3-year-old.

"Whether for specialized procedures or ongoing care, our neonatal transport team brings infants who have delivered at other hospitals by ground or air 24/7 for the expertise of our specialists," said Karen Hendricks-Muñoz, M.D., chair of the Department of Pediatrics, the William Tate Graham Endowed Chair in Neonatal Medicine and physician-in-chief of CHoR.

The Children's Tower NICU spans 28,000 square feet with 16 single and two twin rooms that are among the largest in the country. Each patient room includes sleep accommodations, breastmilk storage and private bathrooms for parents.

How Narcan in emergency departments is saving lives

The number of people dying from opioid abuse is 10 times what it was two decades ago, according to the latest data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The nasal spray naloxone (Narcan™) can bring someone back from death in mere minutes, but with a cost of upwards of \$45 per dose, it is often inaccessible to vulnerable patients.

In a recently published study, a research team led by Brandon Wills, D.O., a professor in the Departments of Emergency Medicine and Psychiatry, found that implementing a naloxone discharge program in a hospital can bring down that statistic by more than half. This study kicked off Wills' efforts to bring the Naloxone Project to Virginia — it equips hospitals with naloxone, which is then directly given to patients who are most at risk of having opioid use disorder or experiencing an opioid overdose. Wills and his team train health care workers to provide these interventions, including educating patients about how to use naloxone and recovery resources.

"By focusing on a patient population we were already treating, we could easily provide patients with the medication and teach them how to use it," said Wills. "Giving at-risk patients the tools to potentially help themselves and others struggling with opioid use disorder can help combat the opioid epidemic."



Hundreds of School of Medicine faculty were included in **Virginia's Top Doctors**, an annual feature that recognizes doctors from across the state. Richmond Magazine also featured more than 200 faculty on its **Top Docs** list, with every clinical department and dozens of clinical subspecialties represented.



VCU Health Pauley Heart Center broke ground on a new outpatient pavilion in Richmond's Diamond District. With advanced diagnostics and innovative treatments under one roof, the Pauley Heart Center Pavilion will increase clinical capacity to meet the growing needs of patients and lower current wait times for appointments requiring complex imaging and consultation with specialists.

In October 2025, VCU School of Medicine and VCU Health leaders cut the ribbon on the new **Liver and Metabolic Health Outpatient Clinic**, which is expected to serve 3,000 new liver patients in its first year.

In March 2026, School of Medicine and VCU Health leaders gathered to celebrate the placement of the final beam on the new **Chesterfield Pavilion**. The state-of-the-art facility, which will bring together surgical services, diagnostics, infusion therapy and more in one location for Chesterfield residents, is on track for completion in 2027.

Clinical honors and appointments

Stephen Kates, M.D., interim dean of the School of Medicine, was appointed president of the American Orthopaedic Association and began his term in May 2026.

Victor Yazbeck, M.D., an associate professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, is serving on the Lymphoma Rounds Advisory Board.

Karen Hendricks-Muñoz, M.D., was appointed chair of the Department of Pediatrics and physician-in-chief of the Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU.

Jeffrey Haynes, M.D., a professor in the Departments of Pediatrics and Surgery, was the 2025 recipient of the MCV Physicians Distinguished Clinician Award.

Dimal Shah, M.D., an assistant clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry, received the Service by an Early Career Physician Award from the Medical Society of Virginia Foundation.



Rising to the challenge



Sarah Hanson, M.D., has dedicated her career to improving health outcomes for all mothers.

For School of Medicine alumna Sarah “Sally” Hanson, M.D., obstetrics and gynecology is “the best job in the hospital.” It doesn’t matter whether the hospital is in Africa, Thailand or rural Alaska — just a few of the many places around the world where she has practiced medicine.

“I’ve always said I’m going to work in the most challenging places with the people who need the most help,” said Hanson, director of global health programs at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, a major teaching hospital affiliated with Harvard Medical School.

Since 2022, Hanson, her husband and their four children have been based in Gaborone, Botswana, where she spends 75% of her time building sustainable women’s health initiatives and teaching residents through the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership.

She spends the remainder of the year in Boston, where she is a member of the Harvard Medical Faculty Physicians.

“Having a baby or being a doctor is the same no matter where you are,” Hanson said. “But in Botswana, I’m definitely a ‘boots on the ground’ person as one of their few faculty members. We wear a lot of hats.”

Hanson discovered her passion for global health and reproductive health care while she was an undergraduate at George Mason University. In the late 1990s, she worked in a clinic that saw a significant number of patients with HIV at a time before antiretroviral treatments and therapies were widely available.

“It captivated me that the people who were most impacted by that disease faced factors that were out of their control, people that were in some way vulnerable,” Hanson said. The observation later inspired her to want to work in places where patients

had less access to care. “I chose to come to the MCV Campus because of its philosophy of being completely immersed in the community.”

It was at the VCU School of Medicine where Hanson found support for what she calls her “crazy ideas.” After earning her medical degree in 2006, she went on to complete her residency at the Johns Hopkins Hospital before working internationally with Doctors Without Borders and spending over a decade serving Indigenous communities in Alaska through the Indian Health Service.

“There’s a saying that if it’s important to you, you find a way. If not, you find an excuse,” said Nicole W. Karjane, M.D., one of Hanson’s mentors who serves as professor and residency program director in VCU’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. “Sally’s always just found a way. She has the attitude that she can fix things.”



Connection through disability

Alumna Jessica Hupe, M.D., shares her personal experience as a congenital amputee and athlete to inspire patients and trainees.

Born without bones in her left hand, Jessica Hupe, M.D., understands the unique challenges facing rehabilitation patients. She went through more than 30 reconstructive surgeries by age 9, plus physical and occupational therapy. Those experiences didn't stop her from dreaming big.

"My family shares an attitude that we all have challenges in our lives. The more you embrace them, the more you'll be able to accomplish," said Hupe, medical director of multispecialty rehabilitation at Sheltering Arms Institute, a collaboration with VCU Health.

Hupe remembers her doctors encouraging her to push herself and assuring her that her situation would get better. Their support inspired her to become a physician herself. She said she feels particularly connected to patients who are amputees, and she shares her own adaptations with them, like how she ties her shoes or puts her hair in a ponytail.



"Patients come in and have so many questions," Hupe said. "I reassure them, 'We're going to do this together. We're going to show you the ways to accomplish the things you want to do.'"

What Hupe didn't expect as a physician was how much she would be able to teach. In her role as an associate professor, residency program director and vice chair of education in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, she also brings positivity, resilience and encouragement to her trainees.

"I really love having the opportunity to teach. Shaping the next generation is something that's made this role even more fulfilling," said Hupe, who holds the Carl W. LaFratta, M.D., Professorship, named in honor of the 1931 alumnus of the Medical College of Virginia. "I want to stay here for the rest of my career and hopefully bring in a lot of other very talented physicians. Through the help of the endowment, I can really prioritize education and how much we invest in our trainees to help them become the best physicians they can be."



10 Under 10

Brent Monseur, M.D., Class of 2016, was named a 2025 10 Under 10 honoree by VCU Alumni. As a board-certified OB-GYN and founding director of the Q+ Family Building Clinic at Stanford University School of Medicine, Monseur led a highly specialized team dedicated to improving reproductive outcomes for sexual and gender minority populations.

The 10 Under 10 awards recognize the noteworthy and distinctive achievements of alumni who earned their first VCU degree within the past 10 years.



The power of a name

The Dorothy A. Pauley Department of Urology is VCU's first named department

The late Dorothy A. Pauley wasn't interested in just moving the needle. A longtime MCV Foundation trustee and beloved Richmond philanthropist whose family name is synonymous with generosity, she leaned into efforts that transformed lives on a profound scale. Her heart was open and her spirit was genuine, and it's those attributes that will permeate the newly named Dorothy A. Pauley Department of Urology at the VCU School of Medicine.

It is the first named department in VCU history.

In honor of the care Pauley received at VCU Health, the Endeavor Legacy Foundation has made a significant gift to the School of Medicine that stands to propel urology care to new heights. The naming gift follows the department's elevation last year from a division within the Department of Surgery, where urology had been housed since the 1950s, to a stand-alone department.

It's a historic moment full of possibilities for those charged with leading the department into the future.



"A gift of this magnitude sets us up for transformational change," said Adam Klausner, M.D., Endeavour Legacy Foundation Distinguished Chair in Urology and interim department chair. Being a stand-alone department, no longer part of the Department of Surgery, "gives us a seat at the table." The support of the naming gift "allows us to really do the things we need to do to make local, national and international impact and become the top urology program anywhere."

The changes this gift has already initiated — plus those planned for the future — are significant. Goals include recruitment and retention of renowned specialists in the field as well as protecting time for faculty to pursue grants. These faculty will also expand the residency training program, and — in collaboration with colleagues at VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center and across the School of Medicine — advance state-of-the-art clinical care for patients with complex medical needs. Together these initiatives will ensure the department remains a national leader in a rapidly changing field.

"The benefit of having an endowed department is that it provides financial support that lasts forever," Klausner said. "The name Dorothy Pauley will be on our department and those in charge will be able to continue to use those resources and remember what that name meant, because it got us there and it's going to continue to make us grow."



Honoring Jim McGlothlin

Jim McGlothlin, a longtime philanthropist and supporter of the School of Medicine, passed away in August 2025. The generosity of McGlothlin and his wife, Fran, has enabled and inspired students and faculty researchers across a range of disciplines.

Unlocking Potential: VCU's Campaign for the Future

The university's newest campaign is guided by priorities that reflect our deepest commitments: to our students, faculty, patients and community, and to our shared future. With a university-wide goal of **\$1.838 billion**, this initiative will expand access to medical education, support cutting-edge research and prepare the next generation of physician-leaders and scientists.

First McGlothlin Scholar graduates

Nikhil Chandravel, M.D., a VCU undergrad alum and **member of the first McGlothlin Scholars cohort**, graduated in 2026 as part of the Competency-Based Graduation program. This selective program provides early mentorship and clinical experiences in the student's chosen specialty, with the expectation that graduates will complete their residency training at VCU Health. After graduating from medical school debt-free, Chandravel will stay at VCU for his emergency medicine residency.



PHILANTHROPY BY THE NUMBERS

200+

**endowed scholarships
for students**

43

**full-tuition
scholarships awarded**

32

**half-tuition
scholarships awarded**

178

**endowed faculty
positions**



Mobile medicine

An interdisciplinary group of MCV Campus students volunteer for pop-up clinics in rural, underserved communities across Virginia.

On a chilly Saturday morning in October, a small group of medical students piled into a 3:30 a.m. carpool headed toward the Rockingham County Fair Grounds near Harrisonburg, Va. There, they joined an interdisciplinary group of volunteer physicians, nurses, dentists and other health and social services professionals at a mobile pop-up clinic hosted by Remote Area Medical, a national organization that provides free primary health care services to underserved communities.

Founded in 1985, Remote Area Medical (RAM) coordinates, funds and staffs pop-up clinics around the U.S. to provide cost-free medical, dental and vision care to communities lacking adequate access to primary care. Services are open to anyone, no questions asked, and provided on a first-come, first-served basis. Over the course of the weekend, volunteers see as many patients as possible, usually in the hundreds.

RAM at VCU, one of many university chapters of the organization, was co-founded in 2024 by chapter president Sydney Williams, an M3, and vice president Katherine Ladocsi, a third-year in the School of Dentistry. Since then, the student interest group has organized volunteers that have traveled to nine pop-up clinics in rural communities throughout the commonwealth and North Carolina.

“It’s an opportunity for us to learn about a different type of care and the challenges that come with working in underserved groups,” Williams said.

By the time student volunteers arrive at a clinic around 6 a.m., the parking lot is almost always full of patients, many of whom arrived the night before. Over the course of the weekend, medical, dental, pharmacy, nursing and undergraduate students assist throughout the clinic, either as general support or in a position aligned with their field. Volunteer health care professionals provide a range of services from general physicals, dental cleanings and eye exams to more specialized care like tooth extractions, glaucoma testing and on-site prescription glasses. For many patients, it is the first time they have seen a medical provider in years, Williams said.

People with limited or no health insurance often delay seeking care because of the cost barrier, leading to worse outcomes as health concerns go unaddressed. The towns and counties hosting RAM clinics are also more likely to be affected by the nationwide primary care physician shortage. Over the years, Ladocsi and Williams have seen the consequences of this in RAM pop-up clinic attendees, from a man who needed multiple teeth pulled at once to a woman who could no longer drive because her glasses prescription was so long expired.

“I think of RAM as more of a bridge than a band-aid solution,” Ladocsi said. “The number of patients that rely on these clinics shows to policymakers how badly more support is needed.”





Bridging the gap

Medical and graduate students can choose from dozens of student interest groups (SIGs) that allow them to build friendships, explore specialties, celebrate shared interests and engage in meaningful volunteer work. The list below highlights community-focused SIGs that encourage students to step off campus, connect



with local communities and give back through service. (Scan the QR code for descriptions of each group.)

Adaptive Sports SIG

The Body Science Brigade

Cross Over Clinic

Early Childhood Special Education at VCUSOM

First Physicians @ VCU

Health Opportunities for People Everywhere (CARITAS partner)

Hooked on Medicine

Just Keep Swimming

Juvenile Justice Initiatives

Let's Go LEGO

Medical Spanish at VCU

Medical Students for Maternal Health Equity

MedMentors

No One Dies Alone at VCU

The Period Education Project

Queer POC Community

Refugee Connect

Remote Area Medical at VCU

SMILE

The Simple Sunflower

UV and Me



Teaching hydration in the classroom

An interdisciplinary team of VCU health sciences faculty led by Melanie Bean, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Pediatrics, collaborated with Virginia elementary schoolchildren, parents and teachers to create the Hydration Heroes initiative. Following a community-based participatory research model, the NIH-funded effort educates students on the importance of hydration and health benefits of choosing water over sugary beverages.

"Your community knows itself best," Bean said. "They are true partners that are invested from the start."

Mapping a path to better outcomes in the opioid crisis

Jacqueline Britz, M.D., a professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health, is leading a multidisciplinary team in investigating opioid use disorder by looking at the "positive deviants" — communities that are performing significantly better than expected, despite facing the same economic and social risk factors as their neighbors. Identifying "what is going right" is informing the tools researchers are developing to tackle the ongoing opioid crisis.

"Solutions to many public health challenges already exist within communities," Britz said. "Collaborating with communities to explore the community assets driving positive health outcomes can inform strategies for future impact."



AROUND CAMPUS



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Arturo Saavedra, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A., former dean of the School of Medicine, was named executive vice president and provost of VCU, after serving in the role on an interim basis since December 2025.

Lisa Denzin, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Cellular, Molecular and Genetic Medicine, has been appointed a **fellow of the American Association of Immunologists**.

Monica Baskin, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, has been named interim director of VCU Massey Comprehensive Care Center. She has also been selected to serve on the **Association of American Medical Colleges' board of directors** for the next year.



The 2026 recipients of the **Women in Science, Dentistry and Medicine Professional Achievement Award** are Ashley Cowart, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Cellular, Molecular and Genetic Medicine and Kathryn Holloway, M.D., professor in the Department of Neurosurgery.

Christopher Woleben, M.D., a pediatric emergency physician and Class of 1997 alum, was named associate dean of admissions. Donna Jackson, Ed.D., a two-time VCU alum with more than two decades of experience in higher education, has been named associate dean of admissions outreach and engagement.



Surbhi Bansal, M.D., associate professor in the Department of Ophthalmology, wakes up at 4:45 a.m. every morning to spend the first hour of her day writing. That dedication culminated in the publication of her novel "Do Not Follow" in late 2025.

For the third consecutive year, the School of Medicine recognized the exemplary work of staff members with its **Staff Distinction Awards**. The Individual Excellence awardees are Jesse McMillan, director of the Office of Medical Education; Jennifer McClenny Dickerson, senior administrative coordinator in the Department of Internal Medicine; Aaron Wallace, administrator in the Department of Neuroscience and Anatomy; and Briana Lowery, M3 clerkship coordinator in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health. The Excellence in Collaboration team awardees are Stephanie Ganser, director of student engagement and Jasmine Cousins, student engagement specialist, both in the Office of Medical Education.



After 17 years at the helm of the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, **William Dewey, Ph.D., stepped down as chair** and resumed his faculty position. A worldwide leader in the field of addiction science for more than 50 years, Dewey has dedicated his career to serving both the School of Medicine and VCU.



Senior leaders

Stephen L. Kates, M.D.*

Interim dean, School of Medicine
Interim executive vice president for medical affairs,
VCU Health

Scott P. Stringer, M.D.

Vice dean, School of Medicine
Senior associate dean, clinical affairs

Monica L. Baskin, Ph.D.*

Interim senior associate dean, cancer innovation

John E. Delzell Jr., M.D., M.B.A.

Senior associate dean, graduate medical education

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.

Senior associate dean, faculty affairs
and development

Luan E. Lawson, M.D., M.A.Ed.

Senior associate dean, medical education
and student affairs

Anita M. Navarro, Ed.D.

Chief of staff

Paul F. Peterson, M.B.A.

Chief administrative officer
Senior associate dean, business affairs

Fadi N. Salloum, Ph.D.

Senior associate dean, research

**Denotes interim appointment*

Department chairs

Alice T. Coombs, M.D.

Anesthesiology

L. Ashley Cowart, Ph.D.

Cellular, Molecular and Genetic Medicine

JiaDe Yu, M.D.

Dermatology

Harinder S. Dhindsa, M.D.

Emergency Medicine

Scott M. Strayer, M.D., M.P.H.

Family Medicine and Population Health

Patricia J. Sime, M.D.

Internal Medicine

Derek B. Sant'Angelo, Ph.D.

Microbiology and Immunology

Myla D. Goldman, M.D.*

Neurology

Pamela E. Knapp, Ph.D.

Neuroscience and Anatomy

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

Neurosurgery

Christine R. Isaacs, M.D.*

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Mary K. Daly, M.D.

Ophthalmology

Wilhelm A. Zuelzer, M.D.*

Orthopaedic Surgery

Laurence J. DiNardo, M.D.

Otolaryngology

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

Pathology

Karen D. Hendricks-Muñoz, M.D.

Pediatrics

Jill C. Bettinger, Ph.D.*

Pharmacology and Toxicology

David X. Cifu, M.D.

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Robert L. Findling, M.D.

Psychiatry

Ann S. Fulcher, M.D.

Radiology

Douglas W. Arthur, M.D.

Radiation Oncology

Vigneshwar Kasirajan, M.D.

Surgery

Adam P. Klausner, M.D.*

Dorothy A. Pauley Department of Urology

**Denotes interim appointment*



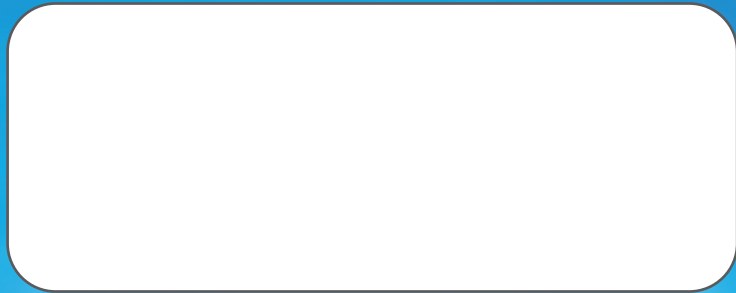
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1201 E. Marshall St.
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