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CELEBRATING OUR DEPARTMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS

From AI integration to clinical expansion, this issue highlights how the Department of Medicine is shaping the future of healthcare. Faculty explored the practical uses of artificial intelligence in medicine, residents gained a new advocate in Dr. Stephanie Sherman, and Dr. Aaron Thrift shared his vision for strengthening epidemiology and population sciences through collaboration and training. The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center celebrated 100 years of VA research led by Houston's own pioneers and reflects on discoveries from the Nancy Chang Symposium that are fueling the next generation of physician-scientists. Finally, Baylor Medicine continues to expand, bringing world-class care to communities in Sugar Land, The Vintage, and The Woodlands.

RESEARCH



FUELING DISCOVERY AT THE THIRD ANNUAL NANCY CHANG RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM



DR. ROLANDO RUMBAUT

More than 150 faculty, trainees, and guests gathered at Baylor College of Medicine on October 3 for the Third Annual Nancy Chang, Ph.D. Research Symposium, a celebration of scientific innovation and the next generation of physician-scientists and PhD scientists. Hosted by the Department of Medicine, this year's theme, "Advancing Human Health Through Metabolic Innovation and Novel Therapeutic Platforms," showcased the department's commitment to translating research breakthroughs into real-world impact.

The keynote speaker, Dr. John Rice, Partner Emeritus at CincyTech, brought a unique perspective bridging science and venture capital. A microbiologist and virologist by training, Dr. Rice has led or supported more than 50 life science investments during his career. His presentation, "Translating Academic Research into New Medicines and Treatments: A Venture Capital Perspective," explored how early-stage discoveries become startup companies, emphasizing the importance of seed funding and venture philanthropy in accelerating translational research.

Baylor faculty took center stage at the symposium, showcasing the spirit of discovery and innovation that defines the institution. Dr. Louise Hecker, associate professor of cardiovascular research, presented "The Potential of Psilocybin as a Geroprotective Agent to Improve Age-Associated Disease Outcomes," sharing new findings that link psilocybin to longevity and healthier aging. Dr. Mark Herman, chief of Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolism, discussed "Gut Check: Metformin's Surprising Role in Intestinal Sugar Control," identifying the intestine as a key site of the drug's mechanism.



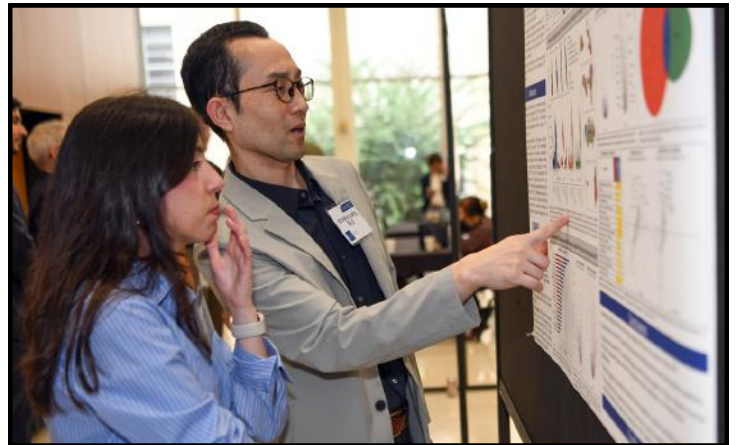
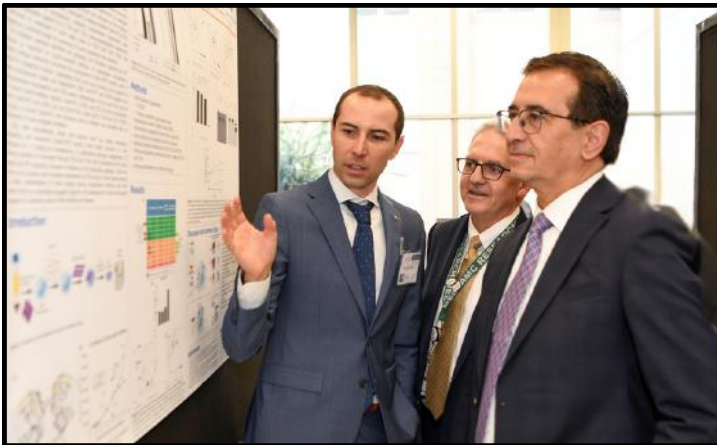
RESEARCH



Dr. Mandeep Bajaj, professor of Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolism, delivered “Metabolic Effects of GLP-1 Receptor Agonists: Looking Beyond Weight Loss,” highlighting their potential benefits for inflammation, liver health, and cardiovascular function. Still, it was the trainees who stole the show: Dr. Ashwin Rao, Dr. Yun “Alex” Zhang, and Dr. Armando Marrufo captivated the audience with dynamic oral presentations spanning gastroenterology and pulmonary science, and 38 trainees presented vibrant research posters, proving that the future of discovery at Baylor is brighter than ever.

“The Nancy Chang Symposium is more than a showcase, it’s a catalyst,” said Dr. Rolando Rumbaut, professor of Pulmonary, Critical Care, and Sleep Medicine, and vice chair for research. “It brings together creativity, collaboration, and purpose. This is how we turn ideas into discoveries that change lives.”

The symposium honors Dr. Nancy Chang, a pioneering biochemist, entrepreneur, and philanthropist whose career has led to multiple FDA-approved therapies and who has participated enthusiastically in the symposium. Through this annual event, the Department of Medicine continues to advance her legacy of innovation and excellence in biomedical research.





BAYLOR MEDICINE EXPANDS ITS REACH ACROSS HOUSTON



DR. KALPESH PATEL

Baylor College of Medicine's Department of Medicine is growing once again, as Baylor Medicine is bringing world-class care closer to where patients live, work, and thrive. With new clinical sites opening throughout the region, including multispecialty clinics in Sugar Land, The Vintage, and The Woodlands, patients will be able to see Baylor physicians in their own neighborhoods. These sites bring together experts from internal medicine, orthopedics, and other specialties to provide coordinated, patient-centered care. Each new location represents a promise to deliver compassionate, high-quality healthcare in the heart of every community.

Dr. Kalpesh Patel, medical director of Baylor Medicine in the Department of Medicine, shares, "By expanding our footprint, we can welcome more faculty, train more learners, and connect with broader patient populations - all while enhancing access to Baylor's world-class expertise."

This growth opens the door for greater collaboration, both in clinical care and academic discovery. It will allow Baylor Medicine to broaden its educational and research impact. Additional clinical locations mean new opportunities for trainees and investigators to engage with diverse patient populations, strengthening both discovery and patient care. The expansion has been met with enthusiasm from both patients and faculty, proving that the demand for Baylor-level care extends far beyond the Med Center's borders.

"We want to bring the Medical Center to the community as opposed to waiting for the community to come to the Medical Center," Dr. Patel said. "Our goal is to provide sophisticated care to all patients regardless of geography."

As Baylor Medicine continues to expand across Houston, the vision remains clear: deliver innovative care, strengthen education and research, and meet patients where they are. Together, we are building something bigger than geography... we are building a community of care that reflects the heart of Baylor Medicine.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT



EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF AI IN HEALTHCARE | VICE CHAIR GROUP FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT



DR. RUCHI GABA

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the landscape of modern medicine, and the Vice Chair for Faculty Development launched an exciting new series to explore this evolution. The Department of Medicine hosted its first AI in Healthcare series this year, an eight-week program during January through March 2025, designed to introduce the faculty and staff to both basic and applied aspects of AI in healthcare.

The initiative was led by Dr. Ruchi Gaba, Vice Chair for Faculty Development, who identified AI as a priority through a faculty needs assessment.

“AI is everywhere, but it is so intimidating that we don’t always know how to use it,” Dr. Gaba said. “We wanted to create something practical and approachable that would help faculty integrate AI into their work.”

Each weekly session explored a different angle of AI’s role in medicine, from education and research to clinical care and ethics. Faculty and staff gained exposure to tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, and NotebookLM through hands-on demonstrations, along with real-world case discussions that highlighted opportunities and challenges in the field. The program also addressed institutional policies, offering “cheat sheets” and resource guides to help participants understand what AI tools can be used and how.

The series also emphasized the importance of responsible innovation. Speakers highlighted how AI can support clinical decision-making, improve efficiency, and reduce administrative burdens for providers. BCM’s system-wide efforts, including the Learning Health System’s AI Task Force, were presented as examples of how institutional collaboration can accelerate progress. Attendees engaged in dialogue about both the opportunities and limitations of AI, underscoring the need for ongoing evaluation. The series created a shared space for exploring how technology can enhance patient care while maintaining human-centered values.

For Dr. Gaba, the most rewarding outcome was the gratitude expressed by colleagues. “What I’m most proud of is when people stopped me in the hallway to say thank you,” she reflected. “It was so rewarding to hear that this made a difference for them.” Dr. Gaba and her team are preparing a part two series that will dive deeper into AI applications, ensuring the Department remains at the forefront of innovation in healthcare.

VETERANS AFFAIRS



HONORING 100 YEARS OF VA RESEARCH WITH HOUSTON LEADING THE WAY



DR. BIYKEM BOZKURT

This year marks the 100th anniversary of VA research, a century defined by innovative discoveries, lifesaving treatments, and a long commitment to improving the health of Veterans and all Americans. Since 1925, VA Research has stood at the intersection of science and service, shaping modern medicine and enhancing care for millions.

“A century of VA Research shows what is possible when science and service come together. The research we do honors the sacrifices of Veterans by ensuring they receive the very best care today and in the future. I am proud that our MEDVAMC Research Service Line mission, ‘Improving health and health care through

science, scholarship, and innovation,’ supports both the clinical and education missions of the VA, and contributes to the health of our nation.” — Dr. Laura Petersen, Associate Chief of Staff for Research at MEDVAMC; Professor of Medicine and Chief, Section of Health Services Research

At the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC), the celebration carried a local impact. The team hosted a Veterans Experience Fair, where researchers connected directly with veterans to share ongoing studies and encourage participation in clinical trials. Currently, more than 1,000 Houston-area veterans are enrolled in active studies, helping to drive discoveries. The MEDVAMC Research Service Line alone supports over 537 active projects led by 458 dedicated professionals who are transforming the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of complex health conditions affecting veterans every day. From neurological disorders to cancer and diabetes, our research teams are pioneering new frontiers in medicine.



VETERANS AFFAIRS



As part of the nationwide VA Research Week 2025 and Clinical Trials Day, Houston hosted a special Veteran Engagement Panel: 100 Years of Research: Saving Lives, Limbs, and Lungs. The event featured a special message from Dr. Charlie Lan, Chief of Staff at MEDVAMC, and was moderated by Dr. Barbara Trautner, Deputy Associate Chief of Staff for Clinical Research, alongside Juan Carlos Ramirez, M.D. and Ph.D. candidate.

“The 100th anniversary of VA research is more than a milestone. It is a reminder of the trust veterans place in us when they participate in clinical studies. Their courage fuels discoveries that transform their own care and advance medicine for all. At Houston VA, we are proud to honor that legacy while driving forward the next century of innovation and impact.”
— Dr. Biykem Bozkurt, Vice Chair of Veterans Affairs, Department of Medicine.

The centennial celebration reminds us that every breakthrough in VA research is powered by the service of veterans, the expertise of our researchers, and the commitment of our teams. As we reflect on 100 years of progress, we proudly look forward to leading the next century of innovation, ensuring veterans continue to receive the care and hope they deserve.





DR. STEPHANIE SHERMAN STEPS INTO NEW ROLE AS SENIOR ASSOCIATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR



DR. STEPHANIE SHERMAN

The Internal Medicine Residency Program at Baylor College of Medicine is entering an exciting phase with the creation of the Senior Associate Program Director position. Dr. Stephanie Sherman, a longtime educator and associate program director, has been named the inaugural leader in this role.

For Dr. Sherman, the opportunity is a chance to strengthen the foundation and expand the reach of the residency program. “This new role is really about building more connectivity,” she says. “It allows me to focus on how we support residents, how we communicate as a program, and how we continue to grow together.”

One of her priorities is fostering stronger lines of communication among residents, chiefs, faculty, and administration. “We have incredible people in this department and training program,” she explains. “My goal is to make sure stakeholders’ voices are heard to foster strong communication and meet everyone’s needs.”

Dr. Sherman is also looking ahead to the culture and community of the residency. With more than 200 residents across multiple sites, finding ways to connect people is crucial. Whether it is through educational initiatives, wellness programming, or events such as Match Day celebrations, she envisions the program as not only rigorous in training but also rich in shared experiences. Guiding and mentoring residents remains a top priority. Dr. Sherman plans to expand opportunities for career development, including fellowship preparation and professional growth.

“Our residents are at such a pivotal time in their lives,” she says. “I want to be part of helping them see what’s possible and giving them the tools to get there.”

As the role takes shape, she is excited about the possibilities. “Being the first to step into this position means we get to define it together,” Dr. Sherman reflects. “It is about listening, learning, and laying the foundation for something that will benefit the program for years to come.” With her energy, vision, and focus, Dr. Sherman sees the Senior Associate Program Director role as more than an administrative title; it is a means to build community, enhance training, and position the residency program for even greater excellence.



DR. AARON THRIFT LOOKS TO THE FUTURE OF EPIDEMIOLOGY AND POPULATION SCIENCES



DR. AARON THRIFT

For Dr. Aaron Thrift, stepping into the role of Section Chief of Epidemiology and Population Sciences is less about starting fresh and more about rebuilding with purpose. Over the next few years, he envisions the section becoming a strong contributor to the Department of Medicine's mission, but also a central resource for the College as a whole.

"We're in a period of refocusing," Dr. Thrift explains. "It's about clarifying how we can make the greatest impact, both within the department and across the institution."

He believes much of that impact comes from the people. Dr. Thrift is known for his collaborative mentor style. He is committed to supporting faculty and staff by keeping communication open and honest. "I want to see our faculty expand, succeed, and elevate the research," he says. "If I can help make that happen, then I have done my job as a leader."

Another important priority is training. Already the Director of a CPRIT-funded training program, cancer epidemiology, Dr. Thrift is especially excited about bringing more students, residents, and fellows into the section, making it a vibrant hub for education and training in epidemiology. "Expanding training opportunities is what I am most looking forward to," he says. "I want to see more learners engaged with our research and energized by the possibilities in this field."

When reflecting on what sets the department apart, Dr. Thrift points to a culture of pursuing meaningful change. "There is a real openness here to ask bold questions, to push for impact, and to make a difference in outcomes and training. It's not merely checking things off a list; it's producing work that makes a difference," he says.

With that spirit, Dr. Thrift sees the Section of Epidemiology and Population Sciences entering a new chapter, one centered on growth, collaboration, and education. His vision is clear: build a strong foundation, invest in people, and position the section to drive meaningful changes in research, training, and beyond.

FACULTY PROMOTIONS



2025 LIST OF FACULTY PROMOTIONS



Ursula Braun, M.D.
Professor



Jessica Davila, Ph.D.
Professor



Christina Kao, M.D., Ph.D.
Professor



Francesca Polverino, M.D., Ph.D.
Professor



Sai Saridey, M.D.
Professor



Milena Suarez, M.D.
Professor



Aaron Thrift, Ph.D.
Professor



Muhammad Ajmal, M.D.
Associate Professor



Sehrish Ali, D.O.
Associate Professor



Valerie Danesh, Ph.D.
Associate Professor



Yuriko Fukuta, M.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor



Nimrit Goraya, M.D.
Associate Professor



Courtney Miller-Chism, M.D.
Associate Professor



Antony Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Associate Professor



Isabel Valdez, M.S.
Associate Professor



Liang Xie, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

As of October 1, 2025

THANK YOU



YOUR SUPPORT HELPS MOVE OUR MISSION FORWARD



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





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