

UC San Diego

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology & Palliative Care Newsletter



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Spotlight: Mariana Romero



What is your current profession/role?

I am a Health Sciences Academic Administrative Officer and serve as the Division Coordinator for Geriatrics Gerontology and Palliative Care in the Department of Medicine. My work blends operations, project management, and strategic support to the leadership across geriatrics initiatives, contributing to the growth and performance of the division and its clinical, research, and educational missions.

What initially inspired and motivated you to pursue a career in your field?

My journey began with a lifelong desire to become a physician and then a growing passion for biomedical research. That led me to pursue a BSc in Biochemical Pharmacy, which enabled me to train for four years as an undergraduate researcher at the Biomedical Research Institute at São Lucas Teaching Hospital (PUC-RS, Brazil). There, I focused on early molecular-biology-based diagnostic research, including a partnership with the Institute of Geriatrics and Gerontology, working for a Neurologist studying genetic mutations potentially associated with Alzheimer's disease.

My original goal was to pursue a research career through master's and doctoral studies, but circumstances led me to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. So, I began my career as a pharmacist and quickly became disappointed in the profession because the pharmaceutical industry placed a stronger emphasis on sales than on patient-centered care, which did not align with my personal and professional values. As a result, I decided to no longer pursue a long-term career as a healthcare provider and instead sought opportunities to develop expertise in business management and work in environments where I could potentially make a difference.

My background in health sciences and management only came together when I joined a Scripps surgeon's private practice as a patient coordinator, surgery scheduler, and financial manager. Soon after, while I was studying Clinical Trials Design & Management at UCSD, a former colleague contacted me about an opportunity at UCSD's Division of Geriatrics & Gerontology, and I took it as a sign.

Over the past seven years, I've grown deeply in Health Sciences Academic Administration, earning my Lean Six Sigma Green Belt and a Project Management certificate, and I'm committed to continuing my professional development and contribute much more to UCSD, potentially through an MBA in Academic Health.

What parts of your work have been particularly inspiring or rewarding for you?

The most inspiring part is witnessing the remarkable growth of the Division. I'm continually motivated by:

- Dr. Moore's leadership accomplishments becoming the Director of the Stein Institute, and more recently, President of the American Geriatrics Society

- Jennifer Reichstadt's tireless work on the SD AD-RCMAR and GWEP projects

- Dr. Nguyen's dedication to the implementation of the Age Friendly Health System and Geriatric Health Literacy initiatives

- The welcoming, patient-centered environment at the Geriatrics clinic

- The exceptional training our faculty provide to our fellows, and to other workforce professionals and caregivers

- The strong research program built by Dr. Molina and his amazing team, and the impactful publications from all our faculty

My greatest rewards are the learning opportunities, and the chance to support meaningful projects and programs that improve the wellbeing of older adults and the broader UC San Diego community.

What is your go-to stress relief activity during a busy workweek?

Taking my son to a park playground, sitting under the shade of a tree with an audiobook, and watching him play. I also love arts and crafts, it is grounding, peaceful, and so joyful!

If you had to choose a different profession, what would it be?

I would be an Architect or Interior Designer because I love the idea of creating environments that make people feel at home.

USNWR Best Hospitals 2026-27

We're proud to share that **UC San Diego Health** has been ranked **#1 in San Diego** for the **seventh consecutive year** by *U.S. News & World Report* in their 2026-2027 "Best Hospitals" survey.

Among the highlights: **Geriatrics was ranked #15 in the nation**, reflecting our continued commitment to excellence in aging care. This recognition celebrates the dedication and expertise of our entire UC San Diego Health team.

Leading the way *in patient care*

#1 in San Diego
7 years in a row



Top 20
in the nation

High-performing in
22 of 23
conditions
and procedures



**Nationally ranked
in 8 specialties**

- #7** Pulmonology
& Lung Surgery
- #8** Obstetrics & Gynecology
- #15** Cardiology, Heart
& Vascular Surgery
- #15** Geriatrics
- #24** Neurology &
Neurosurgery
- #26** Diabetes &
Endocrinology
- #27** Gastroenterology
& GI Surgery
- #44** Cancer

UC San Diego Health

What's Happening

Welcome to our 2026-27 San Diego AD-RCMAR Scientists

We are thrilled to introduce and welcome the new cohort of San Diego AD-RCMAR Scientists for the 2026–27 academic year. Funded by the National Institute on Aging, the San Diego AD-RCMAR is one of 17 centers across the country working to strengthen the nation's scientific workforce by supporting outstanding early-career investigators committed to behavioral and social science research on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. These five selected scholars will receive pilot research funding as well as access to research education, data analysis, career development, and community resources.



Kristine Dell, PhD

Research Health Scientist, Neuropsychology

VA San Diego Healthcare System

AD-RCMAR Project: Intraindividual Variability (IIV) in Spanish Language Cognitive Assessment

Kristine grew up in Fairfax, Virginia. She earned her bachelor's degree in Cognitive Science from the University of Virginia before completing her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Penn State University. Her early career goals include examining how to best incorporate novel neurocognitive interpretive frameworks and assessment tools (e.g. individual variability, eye-tracking) that expand interpretation of gold standard neuropsychology assessments and increase the availability and timeliness of neurocognitive evaluations to various patient populations and clinical services. Outside of work, Kristine enjoys running, baking, and spending time with friends.



Aram Kim, PhD, PT

Assistant Professor, School of Exercise and Nutritional Sciences

San Diego State University

AD-RCMAR Project: Mobility-Based Decision-Making as an Early Behavioral Marker of Cognitive Decline in Parkinson's Disease

University of Southern California. Her research focuses on the neurobehavioral mechanisms of how aging and neurological disorders shape the decisions we make about movement. Aram incorporates interdisciplinary approaches from biomechanics, decision neuroscience, economics, and related fields, using tools such as gait analysis, fMRI, and computational modeling. Ultimately, her work aims to inform targeted strategies that improve mobility and quality of life in healthy aging and neurological populations. Outside of work, Aram enjoys exploring new coffee shops, searching for vintage finds, and traveling to national parks.



Francesca V. Lopez, PhD

Postdoctoral Fellow

VA San Diego Healthcare System / UC San Diego

AD-RCMAR Project: Contextual Adversity and Cognitive Aging: Psychosocial and Environmental Pathways to AD/DRD Risk

Francesca Lopez is a postdoctoral fellow at VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) and UC San Diego. She earned her PhD in Clinical and Health Psychology with a specialization in neuropsychology at the University of Florida following a clinical internship at VASDHS/UC San Diego. Her research focuses on mechanisms of brain and behavior change in aging and neurodegeneration with a particular interest in how lifetime risk and resilience factors influence the identification of early markers of change and critical windows for intervention. Outside of research, she enjoys cooking and trying new foods, spending time with family, and exploring the local hiking trails in Southern CA.



Carlos E. Rosas, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology

California State University San Marcos

AD-RCMAR Project: Psychosocial Factors and Cognitive Health: A Risk and Resilience Approach

Carlos was born in Puebla, Mexico, and grew up between Mexico and San Diego, California. He earned his bachelor's degree from CSU San Marcos and his PhD in Psychology, with a concentration in Community and Prevention Research, from the University of Illinois Chicago. His research focuses on understanding how social, psychological, and behavioral factors shape cardiovascular and cognitive health in aging populations, with the long-term goal of developing evidence-informed interventions to promote healthy aging. He is currently an Assistant Professor at his alma mater, CSU San Marcos. When Carlos is not working or thinking about work, he enjoys hiking, working out, and watching futbol.



Tabea Springstein, PhD

Assistant Professor of Psychology

University of California Riverside

AD-RCMAR Project: Differential Exposure and Vulnerability to Contextual Stressors in Daily Emotional and Cognitive Functioning of Older Adults

Tabea Springstein is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside. Born and raised in Germany, she earned her PhD from Washington University in St. Louis before joining the UC Riverside faculty in 2024. Her research examines how emotions and emotion regulation unfold in everyday life and how these processes change across adulthood. Using methods such as experience sampling, smartphone sensing, and advanced statistical modeling, she studies how individual differences and daily contexts shape emotional experiences, with the goal of developing more personalized approaches to promoting healthy emotional aging and reducing dementia risk. Outside of the lab, she enjoys exploring art and architecture, discovering new cuisines, and making the most of Southern California's year-round running weather.

More about the San Diego AD-RCMAR

*Congratulations
are in order...*

**Division Faculty Co-Lead Central Lab for \$101M
XPRIZE Healthspan Competition**



We're proud to celebrate two of our own! Anthony Molina, PhD, and Michael Corley, PhD, will co-lead the Stein Institute for Research on Aging's new role as Central Laboratory and Biorepository for the XPRIZE Healthspan Competition — a \$101M global effort to develop interventions extending human healthspan by at least a decade.

Congratulations to Dr. Molina, Dr. Corley, and the entire Stein Institute team on this incredible recognition of our division's leadership in aging research.

[More about XPRIZE Healthspan Competition](#)

In the News...

A new *Journal of Palliative Medicine* article from our amazing Palliative Care team explores compassionate, patient-centered guidance for difficult decisions in serious illness. Read it [here](#).

The San Diego Union Tribune highlights UC San Diego Health's return to the U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals Honor Roll—including our No. 15 national ranking in Geriatrics. Read more [here](#).

Dr. Kyle Edmonds discusses gaps in the proposed palliative care benefit for home care in McKnight's Home Care. Read more [here](#).

In JAMA Internal Medicine: Dr. Lindsey Yourman, MD warns that AI tools doctors rely on could quietly decline in quality over time. A call for independent standards, before it's too late. Read more [here](#).

Recent publications from PubMed:

[Responsiveness of epigenetic aging biomarkers to longevity interventions in humans](#)

Aging biomarkers can potentially allow researchers to rapidly monitor the impact of an aging intervention without the need for decade-spanning trials. However, before the use of aging biomarkers, such as epigenetic clocks, as surrogate endpoints, their responsiveness to interventions that target aging must be tested. Here we curate TransLAGE, a harmonized database of 51 public and private longitudinal interventional studies, and calculate a consistent set of 16 prominent epigenetic clocks for...

Fri, Aug 21, 2026

[Read more](#)

[Past-Month Tobacco and Cannabis Co-Use by Chronic Disease and Sociodemographic Factors Among U.S. Adults 65+ Years \(2021-2023\)](#)

BackgroundTobacco and cannabis co-use prevalence is rising, with older adults disproportionately impacted.ObjectiveAssess tobacco and cannabis co-use by health and sociodemographic characteristics among adults 65+ years.MethodsUsing National Survey on Drug Use and Health nationally representative data (2021-2023), we estimated past-month tobacco and cannabis co-use prevalence among adults 65+ years (N = 15,672). Multinomial logistic regressions examined associations between health and...

Thu, Aug 20, 2026

[Read more](#)

[Blood DNA Methylation Predicts Long-Term Risk of Dementia in Prospective Cohorts](#)

Blood-based DNA methylation may help identify biological changes related to dementia risk before clinical symptoms appear. We conducted an epigenome-wide association study of incident all-cause dementia in 5,999 cognitively healthy women from the Women's Health Initiative Memory Study, 777 of whom developed dementia over up to 25 years of follow-up. Baseline blood DNA methylation was tested for association with time to dementia. One CpG site, cg05917797, was significantly associated with...

Wed, Jul 29, 2026

[Read more](#)

We want your feedback!

Did you know that the division has a virtual suggestion box where you can provide anonymous feedback? [You can access that here.](#)

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.

You can also access the virtual suggestion box on the division's [website](#) – scroll to the bottom of the homepage and click on the feedback link.

Not signed up yet? [SIGN UP HERE](#)

Please consider donating to our mission. While we continue to make great strides, we are limited on what we can accomplish with existing funds. We encourage you to become involved with the UC San Diego Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care. Join us to help older adults live their best lives longer and improve care for individuals with serious illness. By supporting our efforts, you can ensure that our research, education programs, and clinical care keep pace with the needs of our community and remain strong.

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