



UC San Diego

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology & Palliative Care Newsletter



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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 and join us in helping older adults live their best lives longer and improving 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.

SUPPORT US

Happy Holidays from all of us!



Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship

The UCSD/Scripps Health Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship Program has added a partnership with Sharp Hospice, which is now supporting an eighth fellowship training slot, bringing our program into a tie for the third largest fellowship program in the country, alongside UCLA and Emory. This expansion occurred under the tenure of Dr. Tolúwalàṣẹ “Làṣẹ” Ajayi, MD (she/her; [pronunciation](#)) who took over as fellowship program director in July of this year alongside the Scripps Health Co-Program-Director, Dr. Holly Yang, and following in the footsteps of her mentor, Dr. Gary Buckholz.



UCSD Fellowship Director, Dr. Tolúwalàṣẹ "Làṣẹ" Ajayi

Our one-year ACGME-accredited program serves as a launching pad for physicians aspiring to sub-specialize and forge enduring careers in hospice and or palliative medicine (HPM). Beyond honing clinical expertise, the program nurtures leadership potential within its trainees, paving the way for them to assume pivotal roles within the field. In essence, this fellowship program not only enriches the lives of those under its care but also empowers the next generation of HPM specialists to drive innovation and compassion in healthcare. Our joint fellowship program is rooted in a tradition of excellence and provides a distinguished pathway for physicians seeking to excel in the care of individuals facing serious, life-threatening illnesses. The fellowship equips its graduates with a comprehensive skill set, enabling them to provide exceptional care across the spectrum of hospice and palliative medicine, transcending the boundaries of care levels and locations.

Through UCSD's collaboration with Scripps Health, and The Elizabeth and Sharp Hospices, we are able to offer a truly immersive experience, exposing trainees to a diverse range of patient populations and care settings. Throughout the fellowship, participants engage with academic inpatient settings, community hospital environments, hospice houses, and community hospices. This breadth of exposure ensures that fellows develop a well-rounded skill set, ready to navigate the intricacies of hospice and palliative medicine in any context. Our program's commitment to comprehensive training is evident in its diverse training sites and ensures our graduates go on to make significant contributions as hospice medical directors and palliative medicine consultants, serving communities across the United States.

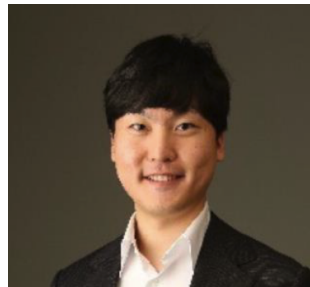
One of the hallmarks of this fellowship program is its exceptional interdisciplinary faculty, renowned for their expertise in patient care and leadership at the local, regional, and national levels. This collective wealth of knowledge not only enriches the educational experience but also fosters a sense of camaraderie between fellows and faculty, creating a supportive network of mentorship opportunities that extends well beyond graduation. The UCSD/Scripps Health Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship Program is not just a training program; it's a community dedicated to advancing the field of hospice and palliative medicine. As she began her new role, Dr. Ajayi said, "When I think about the common thread of what I do with my advocacy, research, and clinical work, it is this: to develop and support a community of people who serve and who leave this place better than it was before. Serving as Program Director of our joint Hospice & Palliative Medicine fellowship aligns perfectly with this mission."

[More about UCSD/Scripps Health Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship Program](#)

Announcing our Incoming 2024-25 Fellows

(To begin in July 2024)

Geriatric Medicine Fellows



Jaeyoun Choi, MD

Jaeyoun Choi, MD, originally from South Korea, completed his medical education at Yonsei University in Seoul. As part of the mandatory military program, he served as a primary care doctor in underserved areas, discovering a passion for geriatrics, particularly in addressing chronic pain in elderly populations. Before pursuing an internal medicine residency at Saint Francis Hospital in Evanston, Illinois, he gained valuable experience as a pain specialist in Korea. In his spare time, he delights in playing with his 16-month-old daughter and enthusiastically engages in outdoor activities.



Daney Lozano, MD

Daney Lozano, MD is American-Mexican-Colombian and grew up in Arizona. She earned her bachelor's degree at Yale University and completed medical school at Loma Linda University. She moved to San Diego for Internal Medicine residency training at UCSD and is very excited to be staying local to pursue Geriatrics fellowship. Her affinity for older adults began in childhood, as she spent her summers with grandparents, and continued throughout residency as she cared for older adults in various settings. Her geriatrics interests range from home-based primary care to consultative medicine to dementia care. She hopes to promote health literacy and access for underserved populations. During her free time, Daney enjoys exercising, running, and reading. She loves exploring the lovely beaches of San Diego and trying new coffee shops or restaurants in North Park.



Angelica Suarez-Ramirez, MD

Angelica Suarez-Ramirez, MD grew up in Mexico City before moving to San Diego where she completed undergrad at SDSU. She then moved away from her family to Buffalo NY where she completed medical school and Internal Medicine residency at the University of Buffalo. She is excited to be coming home to pursue her passion for taking care of older adults and the underserved population, which began with her grandma. She is especially interested in home-based care and dementia care as well as the nursing home setting. In her spare time, Angelica can be found trying new places to eat, reading, playing video games, watching movies, or sharing cat videos with her brother.

Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellows



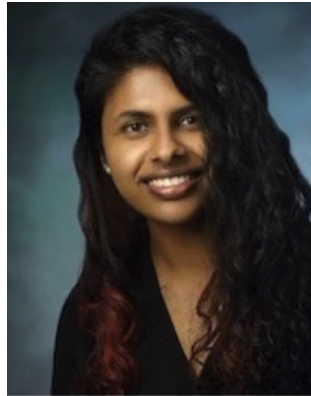
Anna Astashchanka, MD

Anna Astashchanka attended the University of Colorado School of Medicine and completed her Internal Medicine residency at UC San Diego. She is currently a Pulmonary Disease and Critical Care Medicine fellow at UC San Diego. Outside of work, she enjoys writing fiction. “When had medicine become more about doing things to people rather than for people? It reminded me of a poem I read as a college student that I ended up finding again during fellowship - End of Days by Marge Piercy. One verse reads, 'I want someone who loves me there, not a doctor with forty patients and his morality to keep me sort of, kind of alive or sort of undead. Why are we more rational and kinder to our pets than with ourselves or our parents? Death is not the worst thing; denying it can be.'”



Julia Bu, MD

Julia Bu earned an MD from Case Western Reserve University and completed a Neurology residency at UC San Diego, where she was a chief resident. She is currently a fellow in Vascular Neurology at UC San Diego. Her hobbies include marathon running and kickboxing. “I aim to modify the adage ‘Time is brain’, and propose the addendum ‘Time is brain, but outside that window a whole person and community still remain’. Though we have made significant advancements in the acute treatment of stroke, I want to dedicate my career to equitable and meaningful care for patients both inside and outside the acute therapy window as a palliative care trained vascular neurologist.”



Lakshmi Kirkire, MD

Lakshmi Kirkire completed her medical training at the University of Chicago and is currently an Emergency Medicine resident at Johns Hopkins. “As a medical student, I had always thought that palliative care was hospice care, reserved only for patients at the end of their disease course. As I am now nearing the end of my training, I’ve learned that palliative care physicians play a key role in every step of patient care, from patient advocacy and helping patients understand their diagnoses, to symptom management and advanced care planning, all the way up to goals of care and hospice. I’ve found that this spectrum of practice has a large role to play in Emergency Medicine.”



Megan Lau, MD

Megan Lau is a graduate of the UC San Diego School of Medicine and is currently an Internal Medicine resident at UC San Diego. Outside of work, she is a member of a Spanish podcast club. “During residency, I have had the privilege of caring for patients in all stages of life with diverse backgrounds and a variety of medical conditions. Amidst that variety, my interactions with patients facing end-of-life decisions have been the most impactful. This has reinforced my desire to be a part of a field that provides personalized, patient-centered care to individuals and their families.”



Vivian Okonta, DO, MPH

Vivian Okonta earned her DO from Western University of Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific and an MPH from USC. She is now a Family Medicine resident at UC Irvine and has an interest in narrative medicine. “Hospice and Palliative Medicine encompasses social, psychological, and spiritual well-being for each patient, all of which influence overall physical health and quality of life. According to a report published by the World Health Organization in 2020, less than 15% of those in need of Hospice and Palliative Care actually receive it. I look forward to a career in which I can be part of the solution to this area of need.”



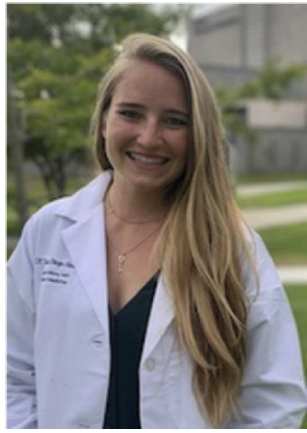
Matthew Schoen, MD

Matthew Schoen attended Stanford's School of Medicine and is currently an Emergency Medicine resident at Stanford. Outside of work, he has run multiple marathons. "My personal and professional journeys have encouraged me to engage with suffering and define my role as someone who helps others face uncertainty. I have found a home within the field of hospice and palliative care. I am inspired to keep this work at the heart of my career, as I continue to follow my passions for medical education and providing comfort in crisis."



Nicholas Tom, MD

Nicholas Tom graduated from UC Davis's School of Medicine and is completing his residency in Internal Medicine at Kaiser Permanente Oakland. He practices multiple types of martial arts, including karate and Wing Chun. "I have found my calling in Palliative Medicine, caring for patients whose medical complexity is matched by their social, emotional, and spiritual needs. The relationships I have formed with these patients and their care teams, and learning about their stories and values, have shaped the way I practice medicine and communicate with others. In my career, I hope to further explore disparities in access to end-of-life care and develop care models which help to narrow this gap."



Julia Wilkins, MD

Julia Wilkins completed her medical education at New York Medical College and is currently a Family Medicine resident at UC San Diego. “My greatest joy as a physician comes from sharing life's most important moments with patients and their families. These opportunities tend to come at life transitions, such as the birth of a baby or the death of a loved one. To walk with other people in these moments is a precious gift, and not something I ever take for granted. It is common to hear physicians—especially residents—say, ‘I've forgotten why I went into medicine in the first place.’ Too often the job is tied to checklists and documentation rather than true human connection. Being present with patients as they experience life's transitions is deeply gratifying for me, never more so than when they are confronting terminal illness.”

[More about our fellowship programs](#)

Welcome New Division Members!



Welcome Aladdin Shadyab, Ph.D.

We are excited to welcome Dr. Aladdin H. Shadyab, who joins us as a tenured Associate Professor of Medicine and Public Health. He was recruited through the Chancellor's Joint FTE appointment in the Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care, Department of Medicine, and the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science.

Dr. Shadyab, who is of Iranian origin, was born and raised in San Diego, CA. He received his PhD in Epidemiology from the University of California, San Diego and joined the UCSD faculty as an Assistant Professor of Epidemiology in 2019. He is delighted to join the Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care, where he looks forward to contributing his expertise in geroscience and the epidemiology of aging to new projects and collaborations. Outside of work, he enjoys going to the gym and swimming.

Please join us in welcoming Dr. Aladdin Shadyab!

What's Happening/Events

More photos from our Division Holiday Party



Mariana Romero, EB Sladek, James Templeman, Ben Smarr



Kathryn Dere, Mayra Bugarin, Roopali Gupta, Jennifer Kim, Laura Jimenez



Heidi Yeung, Heather Herman, Kyle Edmonds



Paula Smith, Alison Moore, Stephanie Thai, Beatrice Garcia, Laura Jimenez



Khai Nyugen, Sonny McGowan, Stephanie Thai



Lourdes Guerrero, Jamie Foo, Dania Abu-Baker, Alison Moore



Back row: Kiana Aran, Veronica Gonzalez and her daughter, Matt Satre, James Templeman, Lissette Moreno Nahab, Eddie Lam, Alison Moore, Michelle Nava, Khai Nguyen. Front row: Anjoulie Pujji, Vanessa Serrano, Tessa Antalan, Stephanie Thai and Reva Nafsu

In the news...

- Dr. Alison Moore is quoted in [mHealth Intelligence](#) article "Using a Smartphone Attachment to Make Neurological Screenings Equitable" Read it [here](#).
- Congratulations to Dr. Aladdin Shadyab whose manuscript in weight loss and exceptional longevity was selected as the Editor's Choice for the December issue of the Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences. Read it [here](#).
- Congratulations to Rabia Atayee, Jennifer Kim, and Tammy Rubenzik (as well as 2022-2023 Hospice and Palliative Care fellow, Brandon Perkovich) on their publication in Journal of Pain & Palliative Care Pharmacotherapy (JPPCP), "Use of Fosaprepitant for Management of Suspected Antimicrobial-Associated Nausea: A Case Report." [Read it here](#).
- Congrats on the recent publication by Dr. Tolúwalàṣẹ "Làṣẹ" Àjàyí, "Self-Reported Medication Use Across Racial and Rural or Urban Subgroups of People Who Are Pregnant in the United States: Decentralized App-Based Cohort Study" published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR). Read it [here](#).
- Dr. Aladdin Shadyab was interviewed by [The American Association for Retired Persons](#) about his research on aging and longevity, and how to live well into your 50s. The article also features his research on physical activity and the genetics of longevity. Check it out [here](#).

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