

# UC San Diego

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## SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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The Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology &  
Palliative Care Newsletter



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# Happy Holidays from the Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology & Palliative Care!



As the year comes to a close, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to our faculty, trainees, staff, partners, and community members. Your dedication to advancing compassionate care, innovative research, and education in aging and palliative care makes a meaningful difference in the lives of older adults and their families every day.

We wish you a joyful holiday season filled with rest, connection, and peace, and we look forward to continuing this important work together in the year ahead.

## Spotlight: Stephanie Schmitt, MD



**What is your current profession/role?**

I am an outpatient palliative care physician for our UCSD adult patients and I am an inpatient pediatric palliative care physician at Rady Children's Hospital. I am lucky enough to get to work with the palliative fellows when they do their pediatric palliative care rotation!

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

I found that in the chaotic, sometimes exhausting days of residency - the moments that most punctuated my day with meaning and joy were the ones in which I got to know my patients and families as people - life outside the hospital, what makes their child smile and laugh, what being a parent looks like for them.

I found that palliative care was a way in which I could prioritize building deep, abiding relationships with families and empower them to navigate this crazy medical system of ours. And I think for all of us there are people that change the trajectory of your life - in addition to my patients and my clinical mentors - for me it was my grandfather's caregiver at the end of life, Kay.

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

Most definitely the relationships with my patients and families. And the privilege of getting to hone the wisdom of so many in how they have endured challenges, cope with losses while maintaining a sense of self, prioritized family. It has helped me to distill what is important in my own life and to have more gratitude on a daily basis for the things that are easy to take for granted.

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

Now that we have a baby at home - it is realistically watching half a TV show and going to sleep! But when we are able we absolutely love getting outside - for a walk, for a hike, camping on weekends in Anza Borrego.

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

# Introducing our 2026-27 Geriatric Medicine Fellows & UCSD/Scripps Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellows

## GERIATRIC MEDICINE

### Incoming 2026-27 Fellows



**Diamond Berg, MD**

Dr. Berg earned her medical degree from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and is currently completing her Internal Medicine residency at the University of California, San Diego, where she will finish training in June 2026. Throughout her medical training, she has developed strong interests in cognitive health, medication optimization, preventive care, and supporting aging adults across longitudinal and community-based settings. Outside of medicine, Dr. Berg loves to travel and has visited 25+ countries across four continents. One of her favorite experiences was hiking through the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador.



**Ashkan Hashemi, MD**

Dr. Ashkan Hashemi earned his medical degree from Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Iran and completed his Internal Medicine residency at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. Since July 2024, Dr. Hashemi has been a Research Fellow at the Program for the Care and Study of the Aging Heart at Weill Cornell Medicine, contributing to multiple cardiovascular research projects, including studies on loneliness and heart failure, medication complexity, and post-discharge outcomes. Outside of medicine, Dr. Hashemi cherishes time with his three children and being a supportive partner to his wife. He enjoys cooking—especially Persian cuisine—and dreams of opening a restaurant after retirement.



**Guy Treves, MD**

Dr. Treves earned his medical degree from St. George's University School of Medicine and is currently completing his Internal Medicine residency at Eisenhower Medical Center. His clinical experience includes caring for older adults across inpatient and outpatient settings, with interests in dementia care and supporting patients and families through complex decision-making. Outside of medicine, Dr. Treves enjoys flying and scuba diving. He has logged more than 130 hours of flight time and over 80 scuba dives.



## INCOMING 2026-27 FELLOWS

**Alison Aronstam, MD, MS**

Ali Aronstam graduated from UCSF's School of Medicine and is currently completing her Internal Medicine residency at the same institution. She also has an MS in Medicine and Public Health from UC Berkeley. In her free time, she enjoys baseball (especially listening to SF Giants games on the radio), hiking and biking, and reading. "Through both direct patient care and systems level work, I aspire to expand the reach of palliative care into communities that have not had ready access to the service... as I near the end of residency, I come away with a deep appreciation for the impact that a palliative care provider can have as a clinician, educator and advocate."

**Han Bao, MBBS, MA**

Han Bao completed her medical education at Nanjing Medical University in China and has earned an MA in Healthcare Ethics from St. Joseph's University and an MBA from Goldey-Beacom College. She is currently a resident in Internal Medicine at Jacobi Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. Her hobbies include hosting tea ceremonies, fishing, and collecting stones. "My residency caring for diverse patients with complex illnesses cemented my passion for palliative care. Leading early GOC conversations in high-stakes situations, I've seen how proactive communication reduces conflict and family distress. Cultural, religious, and health literacy differences often shape difficult reactions to bad news."

**Kevin Han, MBBS**

Kevin Han is a graduate of Shanghai Medical College at Fudan University in China and a current resident in Internal Medicine at SUNY Downstate in New York City. Outside of work, he enjoys cooking Asian fusion cuisine and caring for his pets (which include a puppy, tortoise, gecko, and tree frogs). "I realized that healing isn't only measured by shrinking tumors, but also by the presence of a listening ear and a compassionate heart and a willingness to advocate for the whole person. These are values I hope to carry forward and refine through further training."

**Susan Kennedy, MD**

Susie Kennedy attended UNC Chapel Hill's School of Medicine and is currently a resident in Emergency Medicine at the same institution. Her hobbies range from skateboarding to surfing to trail running; she was previously a hairdresser and salon owner. "During my palliative elective in residency, time slowed. There was time to ask questions around priorities, to gauge understanding, and to explore a person's hopes and fears. I began learning the tools to alleviate suffering...I hope to be the provider that gets to stay in the room, to hold space for the big emotions, whether they be grief, frustration, joy, or relief."

**Justin Nathan, MD, MA**

Justin Nathan earned his MD from New York Medical College, as well as an MA in Health Justice and Bioethics from Temple University. He is currently an Internal Medicine resident at Temple University. His interests include music (especially folk and Americana), reading, backpacking, and weight lifting. "I have come to recognize that helping people to understand their diseases and prognoses as well as advocating for their goal-concordant care is what drives me most. I am especially drawn towards helping those unable to advocate for themselves, due to their illness, poor health literacy, or systemic barriers. It is through the lens of palliative care that I believe I can make my greatest impact."

**Katrina Sadang, MD, MPH**

Katrina Sadang completed her medical education at UCSF's School of Medicine and an MPH from Harvard. She is currently a Chief Resident in Family Medicine at Lifelong Medical Care in Richmond, CA. Outside of work, she enjoys hula dancing, singing karaoke, and watching musicals. "I hope to both practice palliative care and bring a palliative care lens to my outpatient primary care practice. I have particular interest in early integrated palliative care since I believe primary care is an ideal setting to engage patients in palliative care before they present to higher acuity settings such as hospitals or skilled nursing facilities. After fellowship I hope to expand access to palliative care services to underserved communities, including low-

**Jamee Schoepfoerster, MD**

Jamee Schoepfoerster is a graduate of the University of Minnesota Medical School and a current third-year resident in General Surgery at Oregon Health and Sciences University. In her free time, she enjoys ceramics, Nordic skiing, and building furniture for her future house. "My decision to pursue a palliative care fellowship reflects my deep commitment to improving surgical care as a whole. I want to master advanced communication and symptom management skills, become an educator in this space, and serve as a bridge between two historically displaced disciplines. I hope to be part of the broader movement working toward a surgical culture that equally prioritizes both technical excellence and compassionate, patient-centered care."

**Elaine Yan, MD, MS**

Elaine Yan earned her MD from Georgetown University, as well as an MS in Biophysics and Physiology from the same institution. She is currently an Internal Medicine resident at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center. Her interests range from yoga and meditation to Bay Area sports teams to trying new restaurants. "When I reflect on my why in medicine, I often return to the bedside moments I share with patients who are living with serious illnesses, and the ways I work to uphold their dignity at the end of life. Looking to the future, I envision myself working in a multidisciplinary outpatient setting and providing quality palliative care early in patients' disease courses, maintaining transparency of disease prognosis in a culturally competent manner. I want to support patients in navigating serious illnesses, returning agency to patients by engaging them in

More about our Fellowship Programs

# What's Happening

## Photos from our Division Holiday Gathering









Sharing with partners at the recent event "Celebrating Scott Tarde: A Decade of Excellence" — with Scott Tarde, CEO of the George G. Glenner Alzheimer's Family Centers, (center), alongside Dr. Ian Neel, our Division Chief Dr. Alison Moore, and Drs. Annie Nguyen, and Khai Nguyen.

[More about the Glenner Centers](#)

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Dr. Alison Moore presented her work at The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) 2025 Annual Scientific Meeting in Boston, MA. Poster title: "Preparing Geriatrics-Trained Physicians to Discuss Cannabis With Their Older Adult Patients." We are proud to see her leading essential conversations in healthy aging and clinical education!

[More about the GSA](#)





*Congratulations  
are in order...*

**Congratulations to Dr. Toluwalasé (Lasé) A. Ajayi & Allison Kestenbaum**



[Read more here](#)

We're proud to share that Toluwalasé (Lasé) A. Ajayi, MD, FAAP & Allison Kestenbaum have been selected to serve on the expert panel for the 5th Edition of the National Consensus Project (NCP) Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care. These nationally recognized guidelines shape standards of palliative care across the U.S., and their participation reflects our continued leadership in advancing high-quality, patient-centered care.

# Congratulations to UCSD at Home

UCSD at Home won the 2025 California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems/California Health Care Safety Net Institute (CAPH/SNI) Quality Leaders Award for “Telehealth ED-TOC,” which is transforming how Medicare patients transition from the Emergency Department to home. Safe, effective, patient-centered care in action.



[More about CAPH/SNI](#)

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## Congratulations to Anthony Molina, PhD

We are proud to share that Dr. Anthony Molina, Professor in the Department of Medicine, and Research Chief of Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology and Palliative Care, and Kelly Kusche, Biomedical Sciences PhD Student and Stein Institute Scholar, have been selected for the 2026 Accelerating Innovations to Market (AIM) Award. Their faculty-led venture was chosen for its strong translational potential and promise to advance innovative solutions that support health and resilience. The AIM program helps move impactful research toward real-world application.



[Read more here](#)

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## Welcome New Hire

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**We are excited to welcome  
Emily Cowan, who joins us as a  
Research Associate for  
Dr. Benjamin Han's lab in the  
Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology,  
and Palliative Care**

A San Diego native, Emily completed her undergraduate degree in Brooklyn, New York at St. Joseph's University, where her research focused on the effects of prenatal metabolic and oxidative stressors on social behaviors in *Drosophila melanogaster*. Through these experiences, she developed a strong interest in research centered on trauma, social support, and health outcomes among women. Emily is currently pursuing her Master of Advanced Studies in Clinical Research, concurrently with the Clinical Research Enhancement through Supplemental Training (CREST) Program at UC San Diego. Here, she is excited to be building on her past years of experience working in translational HIV research within UCSD's Division of Infectious Diseases and Global Public Health. Outside of work, Emily enjoys coaching a local high school softball team, practicing yoga, and searching for the best vegetarian food in San Diego.

**PLEASE JOIN US IN WELCOMING EMILY!**

## Helpful Holiday Resources

UC San Diego Health – "Sleigh Anxiety with These Holiday Zen Hacks"

Expert-backed tips for managing holiday stress, setting boundaries, and staying grounded during a busy season. Check it out [here](#).

### Alzheimer’s San Diego – “Celebrating a Simple Holiday Season”

Thoughtful guidance on embracing simplicity, connection, and calm—especially for families impacted by Alzheimer’s or dementia. Check it out [here](#).

## In the News...

Dr. Aladdin Shadyab is senior author on a newly published paper in Alzheimer’s & Dementia examining the relationship between epigenetic clocks and plasma biomarkers of Alzheimer’s pathology. Read it [here](#).

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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. 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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