



UC San Diego

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology & Palliative Care Newsletter



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In this edition:

- Spotlight: Ian Neel, M.D.
- Dr. Kiana Aran: Sony Women in Technology Award
- Celebrating Irving Tragen's new book
- Welcome New Hire - Dr. Michael Corley
- What's Happening: **2025 Annual Geriatric Medicine Fellowship Retreat**
- In the News...



Spotlight: Ian Neel, M.D.



What is your current profession/role?

I am a physician in the Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care at UC San Diego, with a primary focus on caring for individuals with dementia. I serve as the geriatric medicine consultant for the Brain Health & Memory Disorders Clinic and am also the clinical lead for the geriatric medicine consult service at Senior Behavioral Health.

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

My interest in geriatrics was sparked by UC San Diego School of Medicine's selective rotation in geriatric medicine during my third year of medical school. In high school and college, I was fascinated by the mind and pursued a minor in philosophy, studying the philosophy of mind. Because of this, I initially thought I would become a neurologist. However, in medical school, I found the greatest joy in sitting with patients, helping them navigate the healthcare system, and guiding them through specialists' recommendations while partnering with them in informed decision-making.

Everything clicked when I took the selective rotation in geriatric medicine. On my first day, I walked into Senior Behavioral Health and thought, "*Whatever I do, I want to work here.*" I was drawn to the co-management model,

where psychiatry and geriatric medicine work together to care for a highly vulnerable patient population. Through the rotation, I also saw firsthand how geriatricians play a critical role in dementia care, challenging the perception that dementia is primarily managed by neurology.

I was particularly inspired by the emphasis on goals of care—evaluating every decision in the context of the whole person. From that moment on, I structured my remaining medical school and internal medicine residency experiences to include as much geriatric medicine as possible. My passion for the field only deepened with time. I was fortunate to have exceptional mentors, including Drs. John Daly, Victor Legner, Daniel Sewell, Arnold Gass, and Khai Nguyen, who further shaped my path. Ultimately, this led me to pursue a geriatric medicine fellowship at UC San Diego.

I love this institution and was honored to begin my career at Senior Behavioral Health, where I continue to work today. Additionally, I now serve as the course director for the third-year selective in geriatric medicine, hoping to provide future medical students with a similarly transformative experience.

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

My work in dementia care is a constant source of inspiration. Educating patients, trainees, and other physicians about dementia—especially the many non-pharmacological interventions that can improve quality of life—has been at the heart of my passion for medicine. Addressing geriatric syndromes, thinking creatively about ways to enhance functional abilities, and reducing harm from overmedication are daily aspects of my work.

Just the other day, I spoke with a patient at the memory clinic about polypharmacy (the use of too many medications). They had been experiencing significant side effects from an overwhelming number of medications and supplements taken over the years. By the end of our visit, I watched as the patient chose to physically throw away six unnecessary supplements that contributed to their pill burden without clear benefit. It was a powerful reminder of how even a single clinic visit can make a meaningful difference in a patient's life.

Can you also provide a few words about the local Alzheimer's Project Initiative and your new role as co-chair of the Clinical Roundtable?

The Alzheimer's Project of San Diego is a county initiative launched by former County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who recognized the critical need for dementia care resources. She allocated county funding to establish a program aimed at improving dementia care.

Over the past decade, the project has united a roundtable of dementia care experts, including representatives from all major San Diego health systems, community organizations, and county officials. Our goal is to educate primary care physicians on dementia screening, diagnosis, and treatment. While specialists receive extensive training in dementia care through fellowships, most physicians do not receive enough exposure to these topics during traditional medical school and residency training.

To bridge this gap, the Alzheimer's Project has developed clinical guidelines on dementia and routinely provides training for primary care professionals across San Diego County. Since dementia specialists are limited in number, it is crucial for us to educate our colleagues so they can confidently assess and care for patients with cognitive impairment. By doing so, we aim to increase early detection of dementia in San Diego, facilitating earlier treatment and interventions that can improve the lives of patients and their families.

This year, I was honored to be appointed as co-chair of the project, focusing on expanding provider education and integrating dementia screening into clinical workflows. I see this as one of the most important aspects of my career—education is a force multiplier. By sharing knowledge, I can help improve care not just for individual patients but for the broader community. More information about our project, along with free webinars, can be found at [Champions for Health](#).

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

My greatest passion has always been music. I was named after musician Ian Curtis (formerly of Joy Division) and grew up exploring my father's extensive music collection, as well as the history of my namesake. Today, I have an extensive collection of my own and love discovering under-the-radar artists.

During my college years, I was a radio DJ at San Diego State University's station, KCR, where I also served as music director. More recently, I had the opportunity to guest DJ at MIT's college radio station during the COVID-19 pandemic—both as a personal stress reliever and to help with public messaging about the pandemic. Music discovery and sharing remain a deep passion and a key source of stress relief for me.

However, my perspective on stress relief shifted six years ago with the birth of my son, James (named, of course, after the British rock band *James*). My life now revolves around my children, whom I raise with my incredible wife, Cassie. Our six-year-old, James, and four-year-old, Siena, are my greatest joys. I love watching them develop their own interests—James is passionate about Legos, math, and *Minecraft*, while Siena loves art and cats. Naturally, I've also taken it upon myself to introduce them to music, and I enjoy seeing which unexpected bands they gravitate toward.

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

If I hadn't become a physician, I likely would have pursued a career in philosophy education. Ethics, metaphysics, and the philosophy of mind have always been passions of mine, and I incorporate philosophical thinking into everything I do. Even during my time as a radio DJ, I often found myself breaking down the philosophy behind song lyrics.

Today, my main outlet for this passion is serving on the ethics committee at UC San Diego. I remain deeply grateful for the intellectual foundation laid by my professors at SDSU, particularly Robert Francescotti and Peter Atterton. Their teachings continue to shape my approach to both medicine and life.


Celebrating Dr. Kiana Aran's Groundbreaking Bioengineering Achievements

We are thrilled to congratulate Dr. Kiana Aran on being recognized as one of three inaugural winners of the **Sony Women in Technology Award with *Nature*** for her pioneering work fusing biology with electronics to enhance precision medicine. Her groundbreaking research includes the development of gene-editing technology that enables scientists to detect genetic mutations in real time.

This award was launched to honor outstanding international women researchers who are leading breakthroughs in STEM fields for the betterment of society and the planet. Reflecting on this achievement, Dr. Aran noted that her

work “*validates the journey of taking a fundamental discovery and evolving it into a commercially viable technology that directly supports the biotech and healthcare industries.*”

Dr. Aran holds joint appointments in the Department of Bioengineering and our Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care. **Congratulations, Dr. Aran!** We are proud of your innovative, translational research and the well-deserved recognition you have received.



The banner features a black background with a diagonal split into blue and purple. On the left, there is a logo with three overlapping geometric shapes in orange, purple, and green. Text on the left reads "2025 Mid-Career Winner". On the right, there is a portrait of Dr. Kiana Aran, a woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a black sleeveless top. Text on the right identifies her as "Dr. Kiana Aran, Professor of Bioengineering, University of California at San Diego".

**SONY
WOMEN IN
TECHNOLOGY
AWARD**
with *Nature*

**2025
Mid-Career
Winner**

Dr. Kiana Aran
Professor of Bioengineering
University of California at San Diego

[Read more here](#)

Celebrating Irving Tragen’s New Book: Esperanza - Daring to Dream Beyond Borders

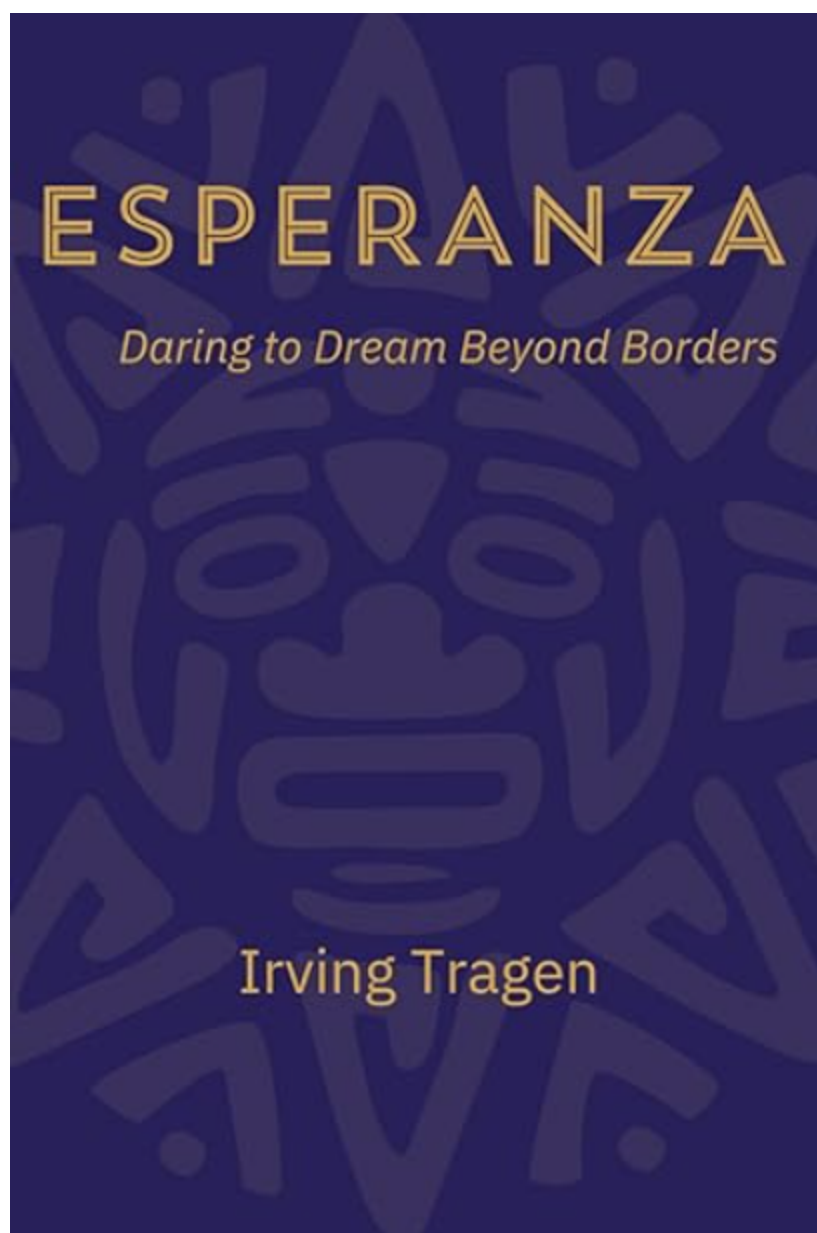


We are delighted to announce the release of longtime friend and generous supporter of our division, **Irving Tragen’s**

new book, *Esperanza – Daring to Dream Beyond Borders*.

A distinguished diplomat, legal scholar, and philanthropist, Mr. Tragen has dedicated his life to international service and education. His latest book offers a compelling narrative of resilience, hope, and the pursuit of a better future across borders.

"Drawing on decades of experience living in and working with Latin America, author Irving Tragen weaves a powerful story of resilience, aspiration, and the power of education. Esperanza, meaning 'hope' in Spanish, embodies the courage to break barriers and the determination to create a better future. Through Esperanza's journey, Tragen explores a universal struggle - one shared by countless others who leave their homes in search of a dream."



[Link to the book](#)

Welcome New Hire



We are excited to welcome Dr. Michael J. Corley, who joins us as an Associate Professor in the Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology and Palliative Care, and the Stein Institute for Research on Aging

Dr. Corley is a San Diego native and earned his undergraduate degree from John Muir College at UC San Diego. He then spent 10 years in Hawaii, completing his Ph.D. and postdoctoral research in epigenetics, neuroscience, HIV, and immunology at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. After five years at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City as an Assistant Professor leading a geroscience research program, he is excited to return to UC San Diego. He looks forward to collaborating across the Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care, the Stein Institute for Research on Aging, and the broader UCSD community. Outside of UCSD, he enjoys golfing at Torrey Pines and exploring the many beautiful courses across sunny San Diego.

PLEASE JOIN US IN WELCOMING DR. CORLEY

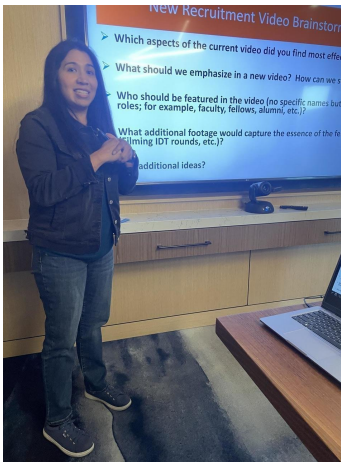
What's Happening

2025 Annual Geriatric Medicine Fellowship Retreat



Geriatrics faculty, fellows, and staff gathered for a day of collaboration and strategic planning. The retreat focused on reviewing program evaluations, discussing best practices for poster presentations, and brainstorming ideas for a new Geriatric Medicine Fellowship promotional video. It was a valuable opportunity to reflect, innovate, and plan for the program's continued success.





More about our Geriatrics Fellowship Program

In the News...

Dr. Ian Neel interviewed for KPBS article "FDA links deadly listeria outbreak to frozen nutritional shakes." Read the full article [here](#).

Dr. Ian Neel interviewed in Medscape, "Tackling Overtreatment in Geriatric Patients Takes Sustained Efforts." Read the full article [here](#).

Allison Kestenbaum's paper "Palliative Care Spiritual Assessment and Goals of Care Discussions in the Neurocritical Care Unit: Collaborating with Chaplains" is published in *Neurocritical Care*. Read it [here](#).

Drs. Kyle Edmonds, Jenn Byrne, Paula Mesarwi, Jeremy Hirst, Rabia Atayee co-authored a paper "Descriptive Analysis of Dexmedetomidine's Utility in a Palliative Care Unit at the End of Life" in the *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 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 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.

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