

UC San Diego

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology &
Palliative Care Newsletter



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Spotlight: Vanessa Serrano Ramos



What is your current profession/role? I'm the lead RN in the Geri clinic. I've been here for almost 6 years. Still loving it!

What initially inspired and motivated you to pursue a career as a nurse? My mom has always worked in the healthcare field. She's the best person I know, so I figured being a nurse like her was the way to go.

What parts of your work have been particularly inspiring or rewarding for you? Whenever I talk to a patient in distress and I'm able to leave the patient feeling better than how I found them, that's the most rewarding part the job.

What is your go-to stress relief activity during a busy workweek? My go-to stress relief is hanging out with my two corgis, Sadie and Winston. They remind me to live in the moment and appreciate the small things in life.



If you had to choose a different profession, what would it be? If I wasn't a nurse, I'd like to think I'd be doing something in academics, like a research scientist.

Congratulations
are in order...



Congratulations to Vanessa Serrano Ramos - Recipient of our 2025 Annual Exemplary Division Member Award

We're proud to announce that Vanessa Serrano Ramos is the recipient of the 2025 Annual Exemplary Division Member Award—an honor voted on by her peers in geriatrics and gerontology.

As the resource nurse for the UC San Diego geriatric medicine clinic, Vanessa plays a vital role in keeping the practice running smoothly. From managing staff and physician schedules to supporting patients and clinic operations, she does it all with grace, patience, and professionalism. As one nominator put it: *"It's no exaggeration to say that the practice would not function without her."*

Congratulations, Vanessa, and thank you for all that you do!



Congratulations to Dr. James Templeman!

Congratulations to Dr. James Templeman, recipient of this year's Excellence in Teaching Award—an honor voted on by our geriatrics fellows in recognition of his outstanding mentorship, teaching, and commitment to education. This honor is well-deserved. Over this past year, Dr. Templeman developed and implemented G-FAME (Geriatric Fellows as Medical Educators), a new curriculum built into the fellowship didactics series. He was also selected as the Associate Program Director for the Geriatric Medicine Fellowship! Congratulations!

[More about our Fellowship Programs](#)



Congratulations to Dr. Ian Neel!

We're proud to share that Dr. Ian Neel has been appointed co-chair of the San Diego County Alzheimer's Project. In this leadership role, Dr. Neel will help guide regional efforts to improve cognitive care, support families, and advance research and innovation in Alzheimer's and related dementias.

Check out this wonderful feature by Annie Pierce highlighting Dr. Neel's dedication to compassionate, evidence-based care:

[Read the article here](#)



Congratulations to Dr. Lindsey Yourman!

Congratulations on being selected as a member of Epic's Geriatrics Specialty Steering Board! This prestigious, peer-elected group helps define best practices for geriatrics care within the Epic system, impacting providers and patients worldwide. Dr. Yourman brings a deep commitment to representing the real-world perspectives of geriatricians and palliative care clinicians across care settings—ensuring their voices help shape the future of care.

What's Happening

Welcome to our 2025-26 Hospice & Palliative Medicine and Geriatrics Fellows!

UCSD/SCRIPPS HEALTH HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE MEDICINE

Welcome 2025-26 Fellows



Dr. April Butler

April Butler is a graduate of the University of Louisville School of Medicine and is currently a chief resident at UC San Diego, where she completed her residency in Internal Medicine/Pediatrics. Outside of work, she enjoys traveling, playing golf, and ice cream. "Keeping patient dignity and humanity at the center of care and forming partnerships with patients and their families anchored me during my residency, and I want to continue to be a part of a field that provides personalized, patient-centered care. I am excited to become a part of a multidisciplinary team with the goal that embodies medicine to me: doing what is best for the patient."



Dr. Errica Capossela

Errica Capossela attended the Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed a residency in Pediatrics at Cohen Children's Medical Center at Northwell Health. She is currently a fellow in Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine at UC San Diego and Rady Children's. Her hobbies include snowboarding, yoga, baking, and knitting. "I recognize now more than ever how we as a medical community need more physicians trained in palliative care, especially in pediatrics. To this day, functioning in a palliative care role is one of the few positions in which I have been struck with the sense that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing."



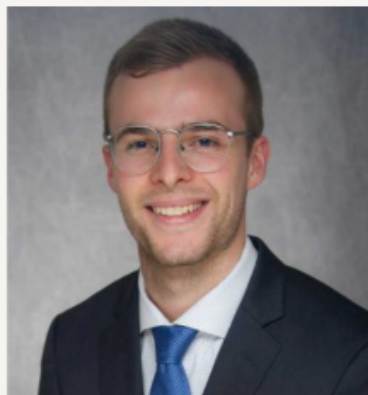
Dr. Zachary Fica

Zachary Fica earned an MD from the University of Utah and is currently a chief resident in Emergency Medicine at UC San Diego. He enjoys birding, triathlons, and games like Dungeons and Dragons. "As a physician, the most rewarding part of my job is when I can help people in their lowest and most vulnerable moments. Sometimes, that means using knowledge and technical skills to cure their disease or manage their symptoms. But most often, helping people means being a compassionate caretaker who is willing to listen, witness, and be present and honest. The opportunities I've had to help my patients in that way remind me why I chose healthcare and why I want to continue my training in Hospice and Palliative Medicine."



Dr. Alban Holyoke

Alban Holyoke graduated from Wright State University School of Medicine and completed his residency in Emergency Medicine at Yale. He is currently an Emergency Physician in the Bay Area at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center and Kaiser Redwood City. His hobbies range from fly fishing to sailing to



Dr. Sawyer Kieffer

Sawyer Kieffer completed his medical education at the University of Iowa and is currently an Internal Medicine resident at Thomas Jefferson University. Outside of work, he enjoys woodworking, rock climbing, and cycling. "Working with [patients with serious illness] made me realize that I am



Dr. Michael McEnany

Michael McEnany attended Wake Forest University's School of Medicine and completed his residency training in Emergency Medicine at the University of New Mexico. He is currently an Emergency Medicine physician at Northern Inyo Hospital in Bishop, CA. His interests include connecting with the natural

range from my fishing to sailing to pinball. "I want to cultivate the skills to treat patients' symptoms, but also help them understand their own humanity and hopefully gain new understanding of my own human experience. It is an exciting time to be in medicine with advances in medications, devices and new technology, but medicine at its core is about people, suffering, and our humanity, and that is what I am seeking in palliative care."



Dr. Michelle Quan

Michelle Quan graduated from UCLA's School of Medicine and completed her Internal Medicine residency at UC Davis, where she was a chief resident. She is currently the Medical Director of the Internal Medicine Pre-Operative Services at UC Davis. Outside of work, she enjoys pottery, graphic design, basketball, and baking. "I am pursuing a fellowship in palliative care because it offers the opportunity to provide comprehensive emotional and physical care. It allows me to continue advocating for patients, ensuring they receive the support and dignity they deserve as they navigate life's most challenging and uncertain moments."

illness] made me realize that I am even more passionate about another side of medicine- the side that's not about curing and fixing and diagnosing and doing, the side that honors the true privilege of caring for another human by providing physical and psychological comfort during serious illness and the most vulnerable transition from life to death."

include connecting with the natural world and learning to play the fiddle. "The methods and goals of hospice and palliative care, to me, represent the core of medicine. Listening with patience, responding to vulnerability with compassion, addressing the origins and continuance of suffering, while openly and bravely discussing the existential nature and threat of illness are all aspects of medicine that I strive to embody."



Dr. Kim Winiker

Kim Winiker earned his MD from the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine and is currently a chief resident at the University of Pittsburgh in Internal Medicine/Pediatrics. His hobbies include skiing, yoga and meditation, ultimate Frisbee, and travel. "In residency, I gravitated toward interactions with the sickest patients, learning about their hopes, passions, and fears, and using these connections to guide my clinical decision-making. I resolved to pursue a career in Palliative Medicine to continue providing care to this complex patient population. I have seen skillful and kind palliative physicians lead patients and families through harrowing circumstances to deeply meaningful outcomes."

Welcome 2025-26 Fellows



Dr. Emily Venvertloh

Emily Venvertloh, DO was born and raised in San Diego. For her undergraduate career she moved to Pennsylvania where she attended Villanova University and received her bachelor's degree in Biology and concentration in Peace and Justice. She later moved back to Southern California for medical school where she attended Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, CA and trained at Arrowhead Regional Medical Center for her Internal Medicine residency. She developed an interest in geriatrics beginning in her undergraduate career and into residency where she cared for older adults in both the outpatient and inpatient setting. Her geriatric interests are varied including PACE programs and inpatient geriatric medicine. Outside of work, she enjoys hiking, cooking, and reading.



Dr. Will Fleming

Will Fleming, MD grew up in a small suburb just outside New Orleans, Louisiana, where the city's rich and eclectic culture deeply shaped his perspectives. He earned a degree in Anthropology from Tulane University, where he later completed his medical degree. Dr. Fleming's interest in Geriatric Medicine stems from his desire to work with underserved populations while cherishing the vibrant stories and unique experiences of older adults. His career aspirations include integrating geriatric medicine into hospital-based care to improve care transitions and reduce inpatient risk factors. Outside of medicine, Dr. Fleming enjoys spending time with his wife and two-year-old as they eagerly await their next addition in early 2025. He also loves exploring San Diego's best coffee spots, running, hiking, and catching beach sunsets.



Dr. Julia Larson

Julia Larson, MD was born and raised in Saint Louis, Missouri. She earned her bachelor's degree at Missouri State University and completed medical school at Saint Louis University. Looking for warmer weather, she moved to San Diego for her Internal Medicine residency at UC San Diego. Her journey to becoming a Geriatrician began with her grandfather, a World War II veteran, who inspired a special kind of admiration and respect for the older generations. Geriatrics has been sprinkled into her studies, from a college minor in Gerontology to research projects in medical school and residency. She is thrilled to continue her Geriatric education here at UC San Diego. Her free time is spent reading, running, and crafting. She is rarely found without multiple books and projects in progress.

[More about our Fellowship Programs](#)

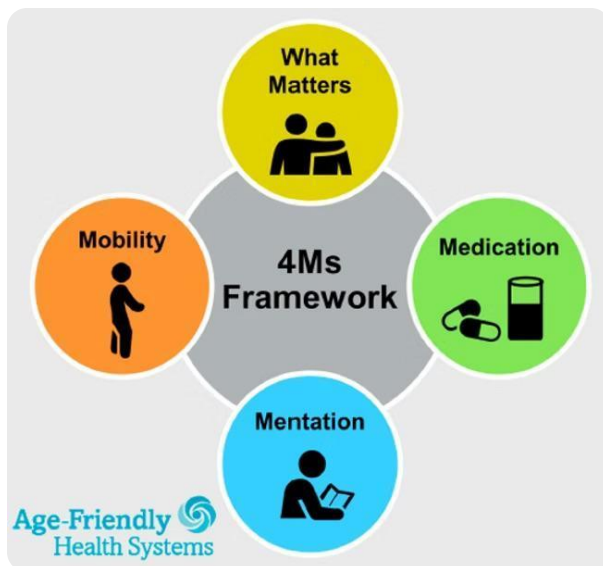
Summer Gathering with Division Staff

The Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care's staff gathered for a warm and joyful summer celebration at Dr. Moore's—great company, good food, and a beautiful way to connect outside of work.



Helpful Resources

The 4Ms of an Age-Friendly Health System



Are you familiar with the “4Ms” of an Age-Friendly Health System? UC San Diego and our San Diego Imperial Geriatrics Education Center are actively working to apply this framework to care of our older patients and helping other health systems in San Diego to provide age-friendly care. Learn more at the link below, which includes resources for not only clinicians, but also tips for older adults and caregivers to discuss the 4Ms with their health team.

[Learn more about the 4Ms here](#)

The Age-Friendly Health System is a national initiative! This new podcast talks about how 4Ms care is helping improve the care of older adults and making a real difference.

[Listen to the podcast here](#)

The podcast cover for "Health Literacy Out Loud" features a light blue background. At the top left is a purple smartphone icon with a green stethoscope graphic. The text "Health Literacy Out Loud" is in bold, with a subtitle "Podcast interviews with those in-the-know about Health Literacy". Below this, the text "Age-Friendly Health Systems" is in bold, followed by "featuring Leslie J. Pelton". On the right is a photo of Leslie J. Pelton, a woman with brown hair wearing a purple top. At the bottom, there is a speaker icon and the text "Listen now at [HealthLiteracyOutLoud.com](https://www.healthliteracyoutloud.com)".

In the News...

Dr. Benjamin Han and former UC San Diego Geriatric Psychiatry fellow Dr. Haley Solomon delve into why older adults with chronic illness are turning to cannabis—and what the science says about benefits and risks. Read it [here](#).

New UC San Diego research, led by Dr. Benjamin Han, finds a sharp rise in cannabis use among baby boomers—now at 7.4% in 2023 vs. 0.4% in 2005—highlighting evolving approaches to health and symptom relief in older adults. 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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