

# MEDICINE

NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

# MATTERS

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

DECEMBER 2023



The holiday season is upon us, and it feels like the year is moving along so fast! First and foremost, I wish you and your families a very happy and healthy holiday season. Even with the turmoil that always seems present in the world, I hope you can find a place of peace, at least for a short while. At this time of the year, it is also important to reflect on our mission to care for the community and use our unique

talents to improve the lives of someone around us. Think about volunteering or other activities that give back to our community this holiday season....it will mean a lot.

This is also a great lead-in to one of the most notable programs in the Department of Medicine, the Ryan White Program. This program, which started with a Congressional grant in 1990, serves patients with HIV and offers comprehensive, patient-centered, and compassionate care at the highest level. In this edition of Medicine Matters you will read about the passion of those who lead the program and their dedication to serving others. As mentioned in the article, we could only highlight a few of the many people who work in this clinic, and my apologies for this. Please congratulate all those working in the Ryan White Center for their many successes. This clinic is truly a testament to what can be done in healthcare when resources are aligned with dedication, caring, and a sense of purpose. Lastly, I would be remiss in not highlighting the two physicians who have been there from the start, Greg Townsend and Brian Wispelwey. What was once a fatal disease is no longer the case, and their work has made life possible for so many. Dr. Townsend has now passed on the program's leadership to Dr. Kate McManus, and we are certain that the program will continue to flourish under her leadership.

With best wishes,

Mitchell H. Rosner, MD, MACP  
Henry B. Mulholland Professor of Medicine  
Chair, Department of Medicine

 UVA Health | DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

### MISSION

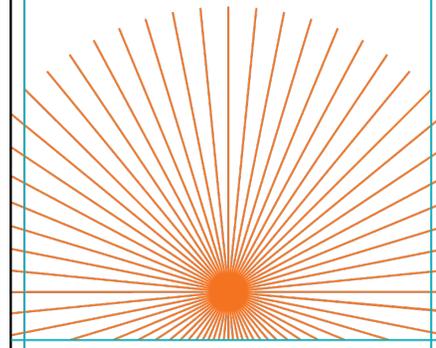
We are dedicated to preventing disease and treating illness, educating and inspiring future leaders in the field of internal medicine, and supporting innovative biomedical research.

### VALUES

We strive for a sense of community, connection, and synergy among all faculty, staff, and trainees.

### PLEDGE

We will conform to the highest ethical standards, uphold the values of our partner organizations, and give back to our community through public service.



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# UVA Health

# DOM UPDATES & NOTES

## DOM Financial Update

### Department of Medicine Summary of Consolidated Financials FY21 as of October 2023

	Budget YTD	Actual YTD	\$ Variance YTD
Work RVUs	393,236	406,603	13,367
Clinical Receipts (NPSR)	25,220,083	26,692,759	1,472,676
Total Revenues	76,012,984	81,404,088	5,391,104
Total Expenditures	72,722,321	77,713,832	(4,991,511)
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>3,290,663</b>	<b>3,690,256</b>	<b>399,593</b>

#### Summary Explanation of Variance:

For the fiscal year through October 2023, DOM reported a consolidated net gain of \$3.7M and a favorable variance to YTD net income budget of \$400K. Clinical receipts surpassed budget by \$1.5M primarily due to unbudgeted Community Oncology and APP charge volumes. Total revenues include \$3.4M Endowment revenue recorded for November through June and \$884K clinical deficit coverage revenue accrual. Total revenue is missing \$629K in delayed MOU agreements. Total expenditures variance is unfavorably impacted by timing of \$3.2M expenditures related to grants and startups, \$1.5M unbudgeted CommOnc Expenses and \$354K under accrued prior year faculty incentives.



Aditya Sharma MD



Shipra Maheshwari MD



Tushar Chopra MD



Jeffrey Wilson MD



Thomas Platts-Mills MD



Emily McGowan MD

## Awards and Achievements

Congratulations to **Dr. Aditya Sharma** (Division of Cardiovascular Medicine) on being named to the [Board of Trustees of the Society for Vascular Medicine](#).

Congratulations to second-year Hematology Oncology fellow **Dr. Shipra Maheshwari** for presenting her work on the *“Impact of Reflexive In-house Next-generation Sequencing on Timing of Treatment and or Surgery as Well as Overall Survival in Patients with Non-squamous Non-small Cell Lung Cancer with EGFR and Other Actionable Driver Mutations.”* at the EGFR Resisters Research Summit.

Congratulations to **Dr. Tushar Chopra** (Division of Nephrology) on being selected by ASN Kidney 360 as Reviewer of the Year. He says, “Peer review is the cornerstone of sound scientific literature, and it helps me mentor young researchers (fellows), create awareness about new research, advance my career, and collaborate with journals and editors.”

Congratulations to **Drs. Jeffrey Wilson, Thomas Platts-Mills, Emily McGowan**, (Division of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology) and team on the publication in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* on [Allergic Responses to Common Foods Could Significantly Increase Risk of Heart Disease, Cardiovascular Death. Read more...](#)

Do You Have News You'd Like To Share on Medicine Matters?

Contact Kim Kelley-Wagner [kak2cj@virginia.edu](mailto:kak2cj@virginia.edu)

434.328.0680

# DOM UPDATES & NOTES



Oom Pattarabanjird



Zhenqi Liu MD



Michael E. Williams MD



Joanna Lee MD



Shaina Hasan MD



Joan Ngwuta MD

## Awards and Achievements

Congratulations to graduate student **Oom Pattarabanjird**, who published an article in *Nature Cardiovascular Research* on her [findings for atherosclerosis prevention](#). She is a member of Dr. Coleen McNamara's Lab. [Read more...](#)

Congratulations to **Dr. Zhenqi Liu and team** (Division of Endocrinology), on the publication of their article "[Impact of Free Fatty Acids on Vascular Insulin Responses Across the Arterial Tree: A Randomized Crossover Study](#)" in The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism.

Congratulations to **Dr. Michael E. Williams** (Division of Hematology and Oncology), who, along with Jianguo Tao, MD, PhD, Professor of Pathology, have received a four-year, \$3 million Synergistic Team Award from the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. They aim to enhance chimeric antigen receptor T-cell (CAR-T) immunotherapy for aggressive mantle cell lymphoma (MCL). The project seeks curative MCL therapies by improving CAR-T cells and targeted small-molecule treatments, changing the current approach to relapsed MCL. The team employs advanced genomics, patient-derived models and clinical data and includes researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and MD Anderson Cancer Center. [Read more...](#)

Congratulations to **Joanna Lee, Shaina Hasan, & Joan Ngwuta**, whose abstracts won recognition at the annual Virginia ACP abstract competition. Joanna's research abstract, "*The Role of the Gut Microbial Community in Metabolic Syndrome Risk in the Older Order Amish*," won first place for research. Shaina's QI abstract "*Appropriateness of Cologuard Testing at an Academic Medical Center*" won first place for QI. Joan's QI abstract, "*Identifying Areas for Improvement in COPD Care at an Academic Medical Center*," won second place for QI. Congratulations to those three and to everyone who submitted an abstract to the competition.

## Research in Motion

**Eric Hendrickson, PhD**  
Professor, Division of  
Hematology and Oncology

"Eric Hendrickson, PhD, Professor, Department of Medicine, researches DNA double-strand break repair, which impacts treatment of a variety of human disorders."

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

Have News To Share  
on Medicine Matters?  
Contact [kak2cj@virginia.edu](mailto:kak2cj@virginia.edu)  
434.328.0680

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UVA CARDIO**

**SHARE YOUR  
TRADITIONS  
AND  
CELEBRATIONS  
WITH US!**

Email Kim Kelley-Wagner  
[kak2cj@uvahealth.org](mailto:kak2cj@uvahealth.org)

**FOLLOW  
UVA ID**

**FOLLOW UVA  
NEPHROLOGY**

**FOLLOW  
UVA ENDO**

**FOLLOW UVA  
PULMONARY**

**FOLLOW UVA WOMEN  
INTERNAL MEDICINE  
NETWORK**

**KNOW  
SOME  
GREAT  
CVILLE  
SPOTS?  
TELL US MORE!**

# DOM UPDATES & NOTES

## Awards and Achievements

Congratulations to all of our Department members who have been honored with Patient Experience Awards!

Mohammad Abuannadi	Cardiology	John MacKnight	General Medicine
Deborah Adams	General Medicine	Rohit Malhotra	Cardiology
Dana Albon	Pulmonary	Howard Malpass	Pulmonary Critical Care
Curtis Argo	Gastroenterology	Louise Man	Hematology/Oncology
Mercedes Armstrong	Cardiology	James Mangrum	Cardiology
Teresa Artale	General Medicine	Hannah Mannem	Pulmonary Critical Care
Emily Ayers	Hematology/Oncology	Paul Marshall	Hematology/Oncology
Michael Ayers	Cardiology	Andrew Mihalek	Pulmonary Critical Care
Stewart Babbott	General Medicine	Trish Millard	Hematology/Oncology
Maria Badaracco	General Medicine	Oliver Monfredi	Cardiology
Kenneth Ballew	General Medicine	Mohamed Morsy	Cardiology
Brian Behm	Gastroenterology	Rebecca Mullan	General Medicine-Geriatrics
James Bergin	Cardiology	Maheswari Murugesan	Cardiology
Kenneth Bilchick	Cardiology	Angie Nishio Lucar	Nephrology
Sue Brown	Endocrinology	Pranav Patel	Hematology/Oncology
Ross Buerlein	Gastroenterology	Craig Portell	Hematology/Oncology
David Callender	General Medicine	Michael Ragosta	Cardiology
Brittany Cavanaugh	General Medicine	Matthew Reilley	Hematology/Oncology
Margaret Crook	Endocrinology	Christopher Rembold	Cardiology
Alan Dalkin	Endocrinology	Vanessa Shami	Gastroenterology
Lien Dame	General Medicine	Christa Sharpe	Cardiology
Andrew Darby	Cardiology	Yun Shim	Pulmonary Critical Care
Eric Davis	Pulmonary Critical Care	Anna Smith	Allergy/Immunology
John Densmore	Hematology/Oncology	Karen Starr	General Medicine
Patrick Dillon	Hematology/Oncology	Daniel Strand	Gastroenterology
Michael Douvas	Hematology/Oncology	Meaghan Stumpf	Endocrinology
Kimberly Dowdell	General Medicine	Angela Taylor	Cardiology
Alden Doyle	Nephrology	Christina Tieu	General Medicine-Geriatrics
Carolyn Driscoll	Gastroenterology	Carl Valentine	Cardiology
Firas El Chaer	Hematology/Oncology	Mary Vance	Endocrinology
Jeanine Engel	General Internal Medicine	Indumathy Varadarajan	Hematology/Oncology
Heather Ferris	Endocrinology	Anita Vincent-Johnson	Nephrology
Tabor Flickinger	General Medicine	Leonid Volodin	Hematology/Oncology
Jeanetta Frye	Gastroenterology	Andrew Wang	Gastroenterology
Elizabeth Gaughan	Hematology/Oncology	Max Weder	Pulmonary Critical Care
Thomas Gehrig	Cardiology	Brian Wentworth	Gastroenterology
Matthew Goodman	General Medicine	Andrew Wolf	General Medicine
Richard Hall	Hematology/Oncology	Matthew Wolf	Cardiology
Evan Heald	General Medicine	Mark Worthington	Gastroenterology
Zachary Henry	Gastroenterology	Jae Yun	Rheumatology
Nicolas Intagliata	Gastroenterology		
Katherine Jaffe	General Medicine		
Min-hee Kang	Cardiology		
Paul Katzenstein	Rheumatology		
Varinder Kaur	Hematology/Oncology		
Michael Keng	Hematology/Oncology		
Jennifer Kirby	Endocrinology		
Daphne Knicely	Nephrology		
Rachel Kon	General Medicine		
Anubhav Kumar	Nephrology		
Dennis Kumral	Gastroenterology		
Timothy Kyin	Allergy/Immunology		
Tri Le	Hematology/Oncology		
Simon Lehtinen	General Medicine		
Janet Lewis	Rheumatology		
Zhenqi Liu	Endocrinology		

UVA Health has also earned [WebMD](#) Patient Choice and [Medcape](#) Provider Choice awards for several specialties. It has been named a “Best in Class” health system in Virginia for its cancer, heart, orthopedics, neurology, and digestive health care. UVA Health University Medical Center is ranked as Virginia’s No. 1 hospital in Newsweek’s Best-in-State Hospitals 2024 list. Additionally, three of the medical center’s specialties – neurosurgery, oncology and cardiology – were ranked among the best in the world in the news publication’s [2024 list](#) of the world’s best specialized hospitals. And all four of UVA Health’s medical centers have received an ‘A’ Hospital Safety Grade from [The Leapfrog Group](#), an organization committed to reviewing and rating hospitals across the country on their quality and safety performance. Congratulations one and all, and thank you for all you do!

# DOM UPDATES & NOTES

## Shark Tank For 100K and 50K Research Grant Development Awards!

Researchers, do you want a chance to win a bite out of a \$150,000 grant funding award allocated by Dean Kibbe? Then dive into the School of Medicine “Shark Tank” Research Competition!

Here’s what you need to know:

- Plan to develop a team to pitch your idea for an NIH U or P equivalent grant submission to the audience at the 2024 School of Medicine Research Retreat.

- Teams will develop a persuasive short pitch to present on stage, answer “biting” questions about their idea, and submit to audience polling/voting to select the winner in Shark Tank format.

- 1st place team receives 100K and the 2nd place team 50K to submit a U or P grant; all teams receive consultation with other UVA investigators that have previously received these awards; the winning team receives grant administration assistance from the administrator with prior U/P experience.

- Multidisciplinary teams are encouraged.

**Save the Date: Feb 2-3 at the Forum Hotel, School of Medicine Research Retreat (all faculty and staff welcome)**

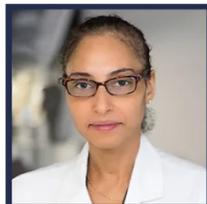
For more information contact [Scott Heysell MD MPH](#)



## iDRIV: Inspiring Diverse Researchers in Virginia



Chelsea Marie, PhD



Francine Garret-Bakelman, MD, PhD



Ileana Mauldin, PhD



Cherise Green Brackett, BS, MD



Ana Karina de Oliveira, PhD



Eunice Odiase, MD



Nicolas Ortiz, MD

## Cultivating Research Excellence Through a Career Building Program

The integrated Translational Health Research Institute of Virginia (iTHRIV) seeks to promote diversity and excellence at UVA by offering an innovative career mentorship program “inspiring Diverse Researchers in Virginia” (iDRIV). iDRIV provides education, coaching, mentoring, and sponsorship for underrepresented early-career investigators in medicine and biomedical science. In the past 3 years, iDRIV has graduated 24 scholars across three cohorts. Participants have been predominantly female (92%), with 33% identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, 29% as Black, and 13% Asian. Notably, 38% of scholars have subsequently achieved at least one significant accomplishment, such as receiving a local research honor or award and an extramural funding award from a foundation or federal agency.

**For the 2024 cycle sessions will be held every other Tuesday from 2-3:30 pm from January 16th, 2024-June 4th, 2024 and is open to all school of medicine departments.**

Eligibility: Participants must meet the following:

1. Fellows, Clinical Instructor, Assistant Professor, Early Associate Professor (<5 years) and Post-Doctoral Fellows
2. Committed to a career in clinical, basic, or translational research
3. Meet the NIH definition of underrepresented persons in biomedical research NIH Definition

[APPLICATION](#)

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# DOM UPDATES & NOTES

## In Media

### Thomas P. Loughran Jr., MD, Highlights a Decade of UVA Comprehensive Cancer Center Achievements Supported by Philanthropy (UVA Health)

Thomas P. Loughran, Jr., MD, recently signed on to lead the UVA Comprehensive Cancer Center for another five years. In a Q&A for UVA Health Development's publication Investing in Hope, Dr. Loughran reflects on the center's key accomplishments over the past decade and shares his vision for taking the Cancer Center to even greater heights, including through the new UVA Paul & Diane Manning Institute of Biotechnology.



[READ MORE](#)

### Dr. Andrew Wolf is Lead Author on New Lung Cancer Screening Guidelines (UVA Today)

Andrew Wolf MD, (Division of General Medicine) is the lead author of the American Cancer Society's updated advisory on lung cancer screening, which recommends an additional 5 million people be tested for the disease, the world's leading cause of cancer death. He said is the lead author of the American Cancer Society's updated advisory on lung cancer screening, which recommends an additional 5 million people be tested for the disease, the world's leading cause of cancer death.



[READ MORE](#)

### Almost Four Years In, Is It Time To Start Treating COVID Differently? (UVA Today)



With the 2023 holiday season fast approaching – Thanksgiving is Nov. 23 – people are asking when they should start treating the coronavirus as a common illness to navigate, much like the flu or a cold. The pandemic arrived in the United States in January 2020. Almost four years later, Petri said it's reasonable for families to wonder how to behave.

[READ MORE](#)

### Dr. Taison Bell Celebrated As Distinguished Scholar by The Office of Engagement



Congratulations to Taison Bell MD, who was honored by The UVA Office of Engagement as a Distinguished Scholar on Nov 1st, where he was recognized for the outstanding nature of his FY2022-23 contributions and commitments.

[READ MORE](#)



# FOLLOW THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

# DOM UPDATES & NOTES

## In Media

### Ask the Expert | What medical conditions most commonly cause older adults to become homebound? (Daily Progress)

What medical conditions most commonly cause older adults to become homebound, and what kinds of medical services are available for homebound patients?

[READ MORE](#)



### COWIMS Woman of the Month for November Is Leslie Blackhall, MD (Medicine in Motion)

In recognition of National Hospice and Palliative Care Month, the Committee on Women in Medicine and Science (COWIMS) Woman of the Month for November is Leslie Blackhall, MD, an associate professor in the Department of Medicine and division chief of its Division of Palliative Care. Dr. Blackhall is also a researcher with the Center for Biomedical Ethics and medical director of UVA Health palliative outpatient clinics.

[READ MORE](#)



## In The Community



Great work continues to be done in our community by The Kidney Disease Screening and Awareness Program at UVA ([KDSAPatUVA](#)). Thank you to the entire team of medicine residents, medical students from the Department, and students from the KDSAPatUVA program, as well as Drs. Okusa, Chopra, Nishio, and Luna.

# DOM UPDATES & NOTES

## Kindness and Kudos

“Those within the Department are the best of the best, and you should hear about it! Below is a small sampling of the feedback the students submitted about attendings and housestaff. If you have a kind word of thanks or praise you would like to share here, contact Kim Kelley-Wagner at [kak2cj@uvahealth.org](mailto:kak2cj@uvahealth.org). And thank you to everyone for all you do every day!”

*“The residents and attendings were the best part. Very med student friendly.”*

*“Great attendings and residents who were great at doing EPAs, providing teaching, and giving student feedback.”*

*“I learned so much from this rotation. I felt immersed in the clinical environment and a part of decision making on a daily basis.”*

*“Tested my knowledge and clinical decision making. I am a stronger student now because of this rotation. We got autonomy to take an active role in patient care.”*

*“All the faculty were wonderful to work with and clearly cared about students.”*

## Welcome To The World



Congratulations to Sam Konkol (Pulmonary/Critical Care fellow) and wife Mary, who welcomed son Maxwell Roth Konkol on November 16, 2023

**MINFULNESS MATTERS**  
A Newsletter from the UVA  
Mindfulness Center

## Episodes of the Podcast “Medicine Life” with Dr. Taison Bell

Check out “This Medicine Life,” with Department of Medicine host Taison Bell, MD. A podcast for physicians in academic medicine who are just trying to make it work! We’re interviewing medicine faculty and discussing life, career, and everything in between.

**CLICK TO LISTEN**



DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE  
**MEDICINE GRAND ROUNDS**  
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



Follow DOM on  
**INSTAGRAM!**

## COME SEE HOOS RUNNING WITH GIM!

Non-competitive, all-inclusive running group focused on building wellness and growing camaraderie.

‘Run with GIM’ (General Internal Medicine) 5pm every Wednesday across from the South garage on the corner of Jeanette Lancaster and Crispell Dr.

Written and photographed by Kim Kelley-Wagner

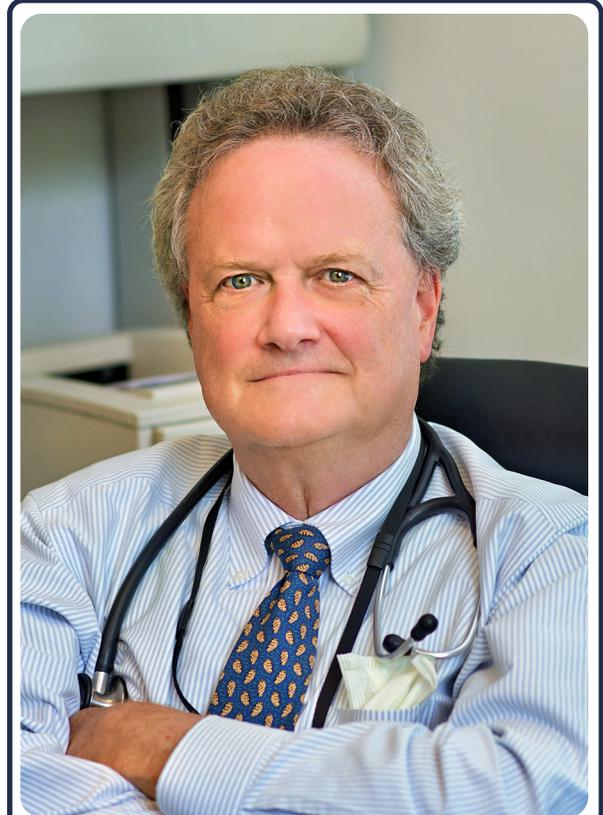
## What a Couple of Fellows Can Do

When Doctor Brian Wispelwey arrived at the University of Virginia as a fellow in 1986, he had probably seen and treated more cases of HIV than most of his mentors. Wispelwey saw his first cases of HIV while a fourth-year medical student in 1981 while helping run a clinic as Chief Resident in Boston. At the time, common thought was that AIDS mainly appeared in large city populations, but the medical community would discover that to be a misnomer.

According to the World Health Organization, those infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) has reached more than 80 million people, and about 40 million have died from acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), the most advanced state of the disease, since the start of the pandemic ([World Health Organization, HIV and AIDS, Key Facts, 2023](#))

In the United States, AIDS became the leading cause of death for all Americans ages 25-44 years old in 1994. By 1997, AIDS-related deaths declined by 47 percent, nearly half, due to the introduction of highly active antiretroviral therapy. ([CDC Weekly, Mortality Attributable to HIV Infection Among Persons Aged 25-44 Years – United States, 1994, 1996/ PubMed, U.S. AIDS death rate decreases by nearly half, 1999](#))

As Chief Resident at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, Dr. Wispelwey became involved with enrolling patients in the first AZT trials; AZT (zidovudine) would change everything. After completing residency, Wispelwey narrowed his choices between Massachusetts General and UVA in deciding where to do his Infectious Diseases fellowship. With all things being equal, you can thank Charlottesville's more reasonable cost of living for our gain.

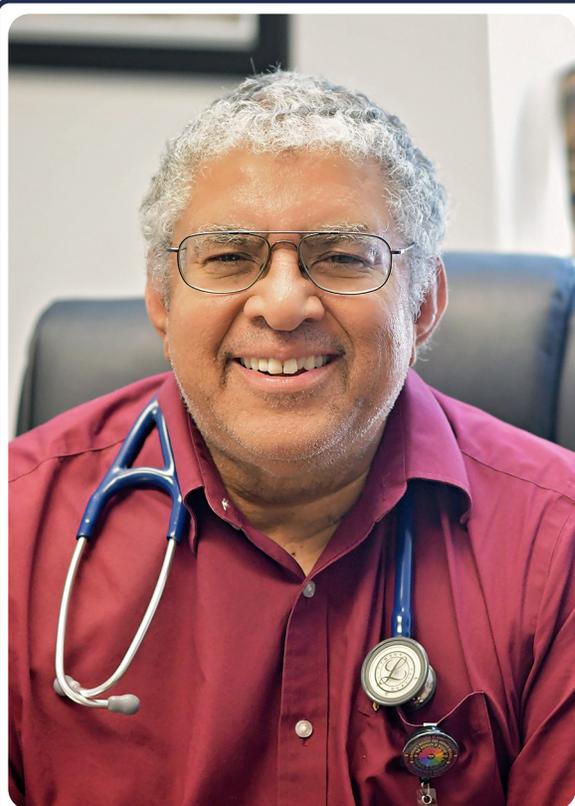


**Brian Wispelwey MD**

Brian Wispelwey was number one in his medical school class; he could have chosen any field or specialty he liked. But it was the fact that everyone else was running away from HIV/AIDS that held an attraction, "I thought, maybe this is where I am supposed to be; I can make a difference." Dr. Wispelwey chuckled when he recalled conversations with colleagues in other specialties who have been baffled by the choice of concentrating his efforts on treating patients with HIV. "They clearly don't get it," he smiled.

With his residency clinic knowledge, he and another fellow with HIV experience created a clinic within UVA to bring patients to one central location for all their treatment needs. After his fellowship, Wispelwey was offered a faculty position and has continued running the Clinic.

Initially, the only available funding was from the state, and the Clinic's staff was minimal. In 1990, Congress passed the Ryan White Care Act, and grant funding became available. These funds included provisions for early intervention, such as HIV testing and counseling, which was an essential step in preventing and helping to stop the progression of the disease. It also provided prenatal and maternal care for HIV-affected mothers and children born with the infection.



**Greg Townsend MD**

and maternal care for HIV-affected mothers and children born with the infection.

## SPECIAL FEATURE - The Ryan White Center at the University of Virginia

About the time the Ryan White Act was working its way through Congress, Dr. Greg Townsend was finishing his fellowship at UVA. Though he found HIV and AIDS a fascinating disease to study, he had not planned on becoming a doctor working strictly with HIV patients. “Everybody died,” he recalled. Emotionally, it could be a complex space to occupy as a physician.

However, Dr. Townsend surprised himself one day when asked what he planned on doing with his future after fellowship. “I heard myself saying, ‘I want to work with HIV patients.’ and thought, wait, did I just say that? Can that be right? But I realized that with the development of the new drugs and treatments, people were living well, living longer and healthier lives.”

He went on to explain his life’s ambition. “I wanted to be a primary care doctor; I wanted to be Marcus Welby! A kindly doctor who cared for everyone cradle to grave; everybody loved me,” he laughed. “That was my idea of a physician; you took care of everybody.” Townsend has outstretched his arms on his desk, bringing them together as if embracing someone or gathering in his ‘everybody.’

He continued, “So what has happened with HIV is that I have fulfilled my dream of being Marcus Welby. I have patients in my Clinic that I have been seeing for thirty years. And it’s wonderful! It’s such a gratifying experience.”

By the mid-90s, the new drugs and combined therapies were so successful that incredible health and life expectancy improvements changed within a year. In 1995, the University of Virginia’s HIV clinic took in 160 new HIV/AIDS patients, 130 of whom died. The following year, 1996, the Clinic admitted 170 new patients with only a death rate of two—an incredible medical triumph.

Nobody is dying of HIV right now; patients live with it. Babies are no longer automatically born with the infection if their mothers are HIV-positive as long as she is taking the appropriate medications. It has been decades since a child was born HIV-positive at UVA. So, a shift in care has both improved and evolved.

### Excellence Amplified

Everlyne Sawyer enters a room like a forward force. Her enthusiasm fills the space the moment she steps into it. Everlyne has a firm handshake and a quick smile that reaches her eyes. She is a person who is both earnest and laughs easily, someone you immediately want as a friend. Ms. Sawyer has been the Ryan White Center’s Program Manager for the past four years; she knows every employee, every patient, and all the stats. It quickly becomes evident that her compassion in that knowledge drives her enthusiasm. She pointed to success after success. Introduced every person working at the Clinic with pride and praise for their daily accomplishments.

The University’s Ryan White Center is indeed worthy of praise, as evidenced by its many accolades. It is recognized as among the top five Ryan White clinics by the *Human Resources Services Administration* (HRSA). It’s named *Excellence of Comprehensive Clinical Care* nationally and *Excellence in Patient Quality Improvement*. Additionally, its *Quality Improvement Plan* in 2022 is statewide renowned, and they were featured at the *VDH Statewide Quality Summit* in 2022. The Center is a source of clinical innovation for other disease management clinics at the University. It is an outstanding platform for education and research at UVA and the community. Its HIV patient viral suppression is at 91.50%, which is above Virginia state and national goals. But most importantly, it serves a majority-minority, socio-economically disadvantaged population with many barriers to life-saving medical care, ending the HIV epidemic.



Everlyne Sawyer

## SPECIAL FEATURE - The Ryan White Center at the University of Virginia

The Clinic currently has 974 patients, not all from the immediate Charlottesville area. Some come from distant parts of Virginia, some even from other states. One of the many reasons the Ryan White grant is essential is that it helps with transportation, and many would not be able to get medical care without it. When visualizing medical treatment, some might only consider medications and a doctor's attention. But when the creators of the Ryan White Act wrote it, they wanted to be sure each patient's needs were being met beyond the basics of medical intervention. After all, if a person is homeless or hasn't eaten, making sure they take daily medication may not be a priority.

The program's official name is the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act, which became federal law in 1990. It not only provides for HIV medical care but also psychiatric and psychological mental health treatment, OBGYN care, anal PAP and anoscopy (HRA) services, nutrition and substance abuse counseling, and patient support groups. It helps pay for on-site pharmacy services, HIV/AIDS resources, and linkages for an inmate program (CHARLI) for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, as well as medical and non-medical case managers and community health workers. The Clinic is comprehensive; all services are available in one place, so the patient only needs to visit one location, and providers come to them as necessary.

Dr. Greg Townsend explained, "We're here to make sure our patients get the best care they possibly can in a way that causes them the least problem and effort on their part. Most of our patients have a lot of other things going on. They don't need to worry about whether they will be able to make it to multiple doctor's offices or afford medications. So it is vitally important for us to make sure - to the extent that it is possible - that we take care of our patients medically, and they don't have to worry about their care."

As impressive and essential as these statistics and functions are, its people are the biggest reason for the achievements of the University of Virginia's Ryan White Center. Everlyne Sawyer wants to be sure that all staff at the Center, no matter their role, understand that each patient may be struggling with many more challenges beyond just their health condition. She said, "We have to meet them where they are, no matter what. That is why we are so successful - everyone here understands that."

Everlyne continued, "Another reason for the Clinic's success is how everyone works as a team. For instance, the entire team gets an email if a patient comes in and their viral load isn't what it should be. The goal is to quickly get the patient back on track, and a plan for that will be in place within two days. Without the grant, we couldn't take that all-hands-on-deck approach and do what we do now. If we haven't seen or heard from a patient in a while, we don't assume everything is going well; we make contact to be sure."

The result of this kind of caring, besides the impressive medical results, is people who mean something to each other beyond a clinical setting. On the walls hang framed quilts and art pieces made by patients. They bring baked goods and make small handmade gifts. Incredible care has been shown to patients; in turn, like friends, they reciprocate in ways they can.



**Tichina Toliver and Veronica Ross**

"I have been with the Clinic for almost two years as a Patient Insurance Coordinator. It is a great environment to work in where everyone goes above and beyond to meet the needs of our patients. Working at the Ryan White Center has made me appreciate the role I have in helping others when they might feel 'stuck.' Navigating the insurance world could be stressful for some, but we can manage it as a team." **Tichina Toliver**

"I am a Community Health Worker at the Clinic and have been with the Clinic for 23 years. We work hard to meet our patients where they are. Sometimes, we are the only ones who know their [medical] status, so the only time they feel completely comfortable. I tell them, 'I only know you from this moment forward; what has happened in the past doesn't matter.' You could be the one person that makes a difference in someone's life." **Veronica Ross**

# SPECIAL FEATURE - The Ryan White Center at the University of Virginia

Everlyne says that working at the Ryan White Center has put into perspective the disparities that continue to exist in our communities, not only in attaining medical care but in assuring basic human needs such as food, housing, and companionship. Sadly, a stigma remains for many around those with HIV, and there are still ample numbers of the misinformed. For some who have HIV infection, those who treat them medically may be one of the few social connections they have. “It grounds you,” [knowing this] says Everlyne. “This clinic model is not that expensive to emulate. Doing great work and patient care doesn’t require a lot of money and degrees; it just takes good medicine and good people.”

## It Takes a Special Kind of Person

Operating the Clinic and retaining staff hasn’t always been easy, not only from a financial perspective, having to fund operations primarily from grants, but also from an emotional one. Brian Wispelway reflected, “We all enter into medicine to save lives, and we would often lose a lot of staff not because they weren’t passionate about the work, but because they couldn’t stand the loss of so many, mostly young people. Death is a reality; it’s going to happen. Our goal in medicine is always supposed to be prolonging quantity certainly, but also quality of life. Unfortunately, we often get too much into quantity and not enough into quality.”



**Denise Cartwright**

“I am an HIV Non-Medical Case Manager (Ryan White Program, Eligibility-Intake Specialist). I determine who is eligible for Ryan White Services based on their income. As an Intake Specialist, I am among the first people a newly diagnosed patient sees when they come to the Clinic.

“HIV does not discriminate. Our Clinic has patients from every walk of life—low and high-income, young and old, from every profession. These folks walk through the door, and we support them.”

been criticized, and rightfully so, that when patients are at the point of dying, we let nurses and palliative care take over, and we’re gone. No! That’s when they need us the most. We’ve been involved with them this far; don’t just walk away.”

The phrase, ‘It takes a special kind of person,’ was voiced multiple times while speaking with those at the Center. Each was talking about their colleagues, not only their compassion for patients, but how often they ‘go the extra mile’ to ensure a patient gets their medication, has transportation, food, or just someone to let them know they’re cared about. All those who work at the Ryan White Center do so because they want to work at the Ryan White Center. It changes a person.

Dr. Wispelway continued speaking about early years at the Clinic, “Here [treating HIV/AIDS patients], I realized fairly quickly that you developed relationships with people, and they were so thankful for their care. They were going to die, but we had helped them deal with that and helped get them further along than they probably would have. They still died and died fairly young, but it switched my paradigm of thinking from, ‘don’t just stand there, do something,’ to sometimes it’s ‘don’t just do something – but stand there.’” After a pause, he went on, “Often doctors have



**Sierra Van Heel-Smith LPN**

“My position at the clinic is as an LPN/ Phlebotomist, and I have worked here for four years. I think it is important for people to know that this is a safe space for our patients; they can trust us.”

Despite the loss and death rate in the initial days of HIV/AIDS, by fighting for his patients who found it so difficult to get services and support, Dr. Wispelway realized that he was making a difference; he came to understand that “survival wasn’t always the only measure of success.”

# SPECIAL FEATURE - The Ryan White Center at the University of Virginia

“When I began to think more on these things, I found that the term ‘physician’ means ‘to care’; it doesn’t mean ‘to cure.’”

Wispelwey’s philosophical way of thinking isn’t an accident; the tradition in which he grew up instilled a belief that *“it’s not all about you; you’re here to make a difference.”* His parents implanted a sense of community responsibility; his father, in particular, was dedicated to volunteer work despite his busy schedule. “Do what you can do. The bottom line is that you want to look back on your life and feel good about what you’ve done,” said Wispelwey.

Greg Townsend’s family also influenced his life’s trajectory, “My parents inculcated in me that my ‘job’ for the rest of my life was to make the world a better place. That’s what I get to do here every day. I get to make the world – a little bit of it – a better place. I get to help change the lives of people whose lives might otherwise not be as satisfying, healthy, or rewarding as they might be. I get to be a part of that process. And I get to do it daily with people who have the same mission that I do. It’s incredibly satisfying.”

Every person spoken with seemed to share this philosophy to make a difference, to make the space they occupy better than they found it. Each is unique, yet they share a common goal: the betterment of the lives of those who pass through the Center’s doors. And regardless of role, each plays their part with purpose. Sincerity may seem a small thing, but assuredly, it is not, especially to the vulnerable.

There remains no remedy for HIV infection; however, it no longer holds those affected by it in the blinding grip of despair that it did when it first rampaged in the early days of *‘the plague,’* Research continues on better therapies and possible cures, including here at the University of Virginia. Through the evolving stages of the disease and its treatment, dozens of care providers have assisted in many roles to make the worlds of those who come to UVA’s Ryan White Center a better place. Two doctors have been there from the beginning while still in their fellowships and remain four decades later: Brian Wispelwey and Greg Townsend. Undoubtedly, what they have achieved was well worth it, a thing done well and to be proud of. Anyone should be able to *get that.*

## Equations

Most people might make happiness their life’s goal, but happiness cannot be realized without taking action to attain it. What makes each individual happy undoubtedly differs; however, happiness will not be achieved without purpose. If what one does is of value, if it is useful, that will produce happiness. Therefore, happiness is the byproduct of usefulness. Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed it perfectly: “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” This quote by Emerson sums up the Ryan White Center and each person who now or ever has worked within its walls: people with an incredible commitment to a common purpose and the evidence of comfortable happiness. May we all be so lucky to have made some difference and lived so well.

*Author’s note: Many exceptional people work in the Ryan White Center; only a few have been highlighted here. Some of those pictured happened to be available to me on the day I visited, and they were kind enough to let me photograph them and answer my questions. There are dozens more that have not been mentioned by name, working with patients and behind the scenes. There is no one hero; there is an entire team of them. They’ve worked quietly for nearly forty years, tucked into a corner of the Infectious Disease Clinic. I realize that a few words in an article are not enough to express the positive impact this group of remarkable individuals has made in the lives of so many, but it has been my honor to have tried.*

