

Newsletter of The Multicampus Program in Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology

Volume 2, Number 1, Jan 2025

Editor: Arun Karlamangla

Members of the MPGMG Executive Committee

- UCLA Division of Geriatrics: Arun Karlamangla, Patty Harris, Nelva Macdonald
- VA Division of Geriatrics: Cathy Lee
- VA Geriatrics Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC): Cathy Alessi
- VA Geriatrics and Extended Care (GEC): Manuel Eskildsen
- Harbor UCLA Geriatrics: Mailee Hess
- Borun Center and Advanced Research Fellowships: Deb Saliba
- Geriatric Medicine Fellowship: Erin Cook
- Intensive Course: Dan Osterweil

Mission/Charter of MPGMG

- 1) Provide guidance for all multicampus geriatrics initiatives/programs, such as Geriatric Medicine fellowship, Advanced geriatrics research fellowships, Intensive Course, CAGI (California Academic Geriatrics Institutions) meetings, and Geriatrics Grand Rounds.
- 2) Recognize exceptional/inspirational faculty with awards.
- 3) Facilitate and champion communication/collaboration (including research) between campuses
- 4) Disseminate selected list of achievements (such as grants/honors/awards) to faculty and to lay public using for instance social media (e.g., in the Geriatric Medicine fellowship X feed).

Achievements & Updates from Units & Multicampus Programs

Education Programs:

1. The Geriatric and Extended Care Nurse Practitioner Residency Training Program leadership is keen on increased education collaboration with the MPGMG units and programs. Please contact its director, Dr Tiffany Owens, with ideas for common/shared education activities.
2. The Geriatric Medicine fellowship filled 9 positions on the match and accepted one additional applicant outside of the match, so we will have 10 fellows this year. This is terrific in light of the fact that there is a nationwide decline in Geri fellowship applicant numbers, and 40% of fellowship slots across the country did not fill.
3. We are researching ways to increase interest in the fellowship by creating combined tracks with IM residency, National Clinical Scholars program (NCSP), training in health care administration, and other IM subspecialty fellowships (e.g., Clinical Preventive Medicine)

Advanced Fellowships:

1. One current NCSP fellow will be starting her Geri Fellowship program in July, and a current Geri fellow will be starting NCSP in July with his clinic based in Olive View.

VA GRECC & GEC:

1. The CLC had to temporarily relocate patients to Long Beach and Loma Linda because of the Palisades Fire; patients have now returned.
2. A recent federal directive related to hiring at the VA may affect new hires. Guidance on implementing this and other directives is awaited, but it was noted that the freeze exempts health care providers.

Harbor UCLA Geriatrics

1. They are creating Geriatrics teaching modules to be used county-wide.
2. The Companion Care program is in the advertising phase.

Researcher Spotlight: Dr Jon Wanagat

Dr. Jonathan Wanagat is a physician and scientist at UCLA and the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System, focusing on the care of older adults and understanding the science behind aging. Dr. Wanagat's journey to UCLA began with an undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, MD and PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he also completed his residency in internal medicine, and fellowship in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Washington.

Patients' concerns about losing physical abilities inspired his interest in how aging affects muscles, specifically skeletal muscle and the mitochondria—often called the "powerhouses" of our cells. Mitochondria generate the energy our muscles need to function, and each mitochondrion relies on its own DNA, called mitochondrial DNA, to work properly. Mitochondrial DNA is unique. It's tiny—about a million times smaller than the DNA found in a cell's nucleus—and shares similarities with bacterial DNA because mitochondria evolved symbiotically from ancient bacteria. Despite its small size, mitochondrial DNA is essential for nearly all cells, including muscle fibers, to function normally.

Dr. Wanagat's research has revealed that mitochondrial DNA changes significantly as we age. Mutations in mitochondrial DNA increase exponentially with age in human muscle tissue, mirroring the rise in age-related health risks. These mutations accumulate over time, causing cells to die and potentially contributing to the aging process.

In recent years, Dr. Wanagat and his team have explored ways to reduce these mutations. Interestingly, interventions known to extend lifespan—like caloric restriction or the drug rapamycin—also lower mitochondrial DNA mutations and cell death. This connection suggests that mitochondrial DNA mutations might play a role in aging and could even serve as a biomarker, or measurable indicator, for predicting aging and testing new longevity therapies.

To advance this research, Dr. Wanagat's team has developed innovative tools and techniques, such as laser capture microdissection, digital PCR, and nanopore sequencing, to study mitochondrial DNA more closely. These efforts have led to collaborations with researchers across the U.S. and globally, supported by organizations like the NIH, Veteran's Administration, American Federation for Aging Research, and the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. Today, Dr. Wanagat and his team are working on diagnostic tools to help predict an individual's future health and response to interventions aimed at promoting healthy aging and longer life.