



# UCLA UROLOGY

UPDATE



UCLA Urology mentorship, from left to right: Dr. Arnold I. Chin teaching robotic surgical techniques to residents; Dr. Matthew Dunn (middle photo, right) with UCLA Urology fellow Dr. Fuad Elkhoury (left) and UCLA Urology resident Dr. Cindy Gu (center) in the endourology OR; and Dr. Ja-Hong Kim with residents in surgical lab.

## Under Faculty Mentorship, Trainees Blossom as Surgeon-Scientists

For the fourth year of her UCLA Urology residency, Dr. Katherine Fero was part of a research team that utilized “big data” to describe, for the first time, how patients with upper-tract urothelial cell carcinoma are cared for at the national scale — including, importantly, the quality of care received nationally and the costs associated with the care.

But beyond the specifics of that influential work, Dr. Fero believes the year she just completed conducting research under the tutelage of UCLA Urology associate professor Karim Chamie, MD, was one in which she grew into a surgeon-scientist. “Dr. Chamie is a creative and forward-thinking urologic oncologist,” Dr. Fero says. “He has an impressive understanding of the promising avenues of exploration in his field, which allows

for nuanced approaches to understudied problems resulting in high-impact work.”

As a leading academic urology department, UCLA Urology is devoted to educating the next generation of urologists in ways that go beyond teaching them how to interact with patients and perform surgeries. UCLA Urology’s faculty includes national leaders in all aspects of urological research — basic science, clinical trials, and population medicine. And at the intersection of the department’s educational and research

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## Research Mentorship

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Pictured from top to bottom, left to right: Dr. Jesse Mills, mentee Dr. Denise Asafu-Adjei and Dr. Sriram Eleswarapu; Dr. Karim Chamie and mentee Dr. Katherine Fero; Dr. Stanley Frencher Jr. and mentee Dr. Desiree E. Sanchez; Dr. Leonard S. Marks and mentee Dr. Rajiv Jayadevan; Dr. Ja-Hong Kim and mentee Dr. Taylor Sadun; Dr. Renea Sturm and mentee Katerina Lembrikova; Dr. Jonathan Bergman (mentor to Dr. Fero); and Dr. A. Lenore Ackerman (mentor to Dr. Sadun)

*continued from cover*

missions, trainees such as Dr. Fero learn to become scientists as well as clinicians, under the guidance of faculty mentors such as Dr. Chamie. Every resident devotes the fourth year (R4) of their six-year residency to research. But the mentorship begins on day one of their training, and extends until they leave. While many go on to become surgeon-scientists themselves, even trainees who devote their careers entirely to clinical practice are better for the critical thinking and problem-solving abilities they attain.

The mentees aren't the only ones who benefit. "We have brilliant trainees who do incredible independent work," Dr. Chamie says. "Sometimes they help me more than I can help them. They provide me with new perspectives on how we treat disease, and it's exciting when someone can come in and help you see things in a completely different light."

Dr. Desiree E. Sanchez spent her just-completed R4 year working with Stanley Frencher Jr., MD, MPH, UCLA Urology associate professor and director of urology and chief of perioperative services at Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital (MLKCH), evaluating the implementation of an e-consult program in a large, non-integrated network of community health systems serving Medicaid patients. In

addition to her research, Dr. Sanchez developed a pipeline medicine-technology mentorship program focused on recruiting first-generation college applicants and exposing them to medicine. The program, AccessiHealth, recently won the 2021 UCLA Health Equity challenge, securing grant money to further its development.

Given Dr. Frencher's research background and experience working with underserved populations in the community, Dr. Sanchez sought him out as a mentor early in the third year of her residency. "During our first discussion I explained my motivation to work for underserved and marginalized populations throughout my career, with the goal of reducing health disparities," Dr. Sanchez recalls. "He immediately agreed to adopt me as his mentee. Dr.

Frencher has a gift for inspiring confidence in his mentees while being honest and transparent. He is also a Black leader in urology and thus has a unique perspective into the challenges of medicine and disparities in urology. My research year allowed for creativity and development in my goal of tackling health care disparities, and I am excited to see where this momentum takes me."

The mentorship extends to fellows as well as residents. As a UCLA Urology fellow, Dr. Denise Asafu-Adjei is working to characterize and

*"My job is to provide the resources and guidance that allow them to blossom."*



compare access to erectile dysfunction (ED) services at the UCLA Men's Clinic and MLKCH. The project, under the mentorship of Drs. Jesse Mills and Sriram Eleswarapu at the UCLA Men's Clinic, as well as Dr. Frencher at MLKCH, seeks to identify differences in care in order to inform better implementation strategies to ensure equitable ED care at all UCLA-affiliated settings. "My mentorship throughout this project has been tremendous, from both UCLA and MLK," Dr. Asafu-Adjei says. "I received helpful guidance as we built our research project and am excited about the results we will be publishing soon."

Dr. Rajiv Jayadevan spent his research year working with UCLA Urology professor Leonard S. Marks, MD, investigating MRI/ultrasound fusion prostate biopsy in the diagnosis and surveillance of prostate cancer, a field in which Dr. Marks has been a pioneer. Among other things, Dr. Jayadevan was part of a team that reported the targeted biopsy approach to be superior to traditional systematic biopsy at detecting clinically significant tumors, and that when MRI/ultrasound fusion technology is used as part of active surveillance for patients with low-risk prostate cancers, it can predict a patient's chance of needing radical treatment later on. "Via Dr. Marks's mentorship, I learned the value of researching and employing new

technologies in order to provide patients with the best care possible," says Dr. Jayadevan, who completed his residency in June.

For Dr. Taylor Sadun, who also completed her UCLA Urology residency in June, a simple phrase coined by urologist Patrick Bates has intrigued her throughout her training: "The bladder is an unreliable witness." In her research with Ja-Hong Kim, MD, UCLA Urology associate professor, and A. Lenore Ackerman, MD, PhD, UCLA Urology assistant professor, Dr. Sadun has sought to address why the bladder is unreliable in order to understand why recurrent urinary tract infections remain a difficult burden for patients and

providers alike. From interviews with patient focus groups, Dr. Sadun found fear and frustration to be predominant themes. "My pelvic medicine patients in residency have taught me that patient care informs investigation, and investigation advances patient care," Dr. Sadun says. "The stories and struggles of these patients resonate with me, inspiring me to pursue a career in academic medicine rooted in inquiry. It is with unbridled enthusiasm that I look ahead to my next chapter in training as a fellow in pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery at UCLA."

The mentorship of UCLA Urology faculty also includes medical students. Victoria Lee, a student at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine (DGSOM), is involved in a project under the mentorship of UCLA Urology assistant professor Renea Sturm, MD, in which scans are taken of different stages of hypospadias repair surgery and reconstructed into a 3D model with the potential to help standardize measurements, track outcomes and improve patient education. "Dr. Sturm has been an exceptional mentor to me," Lee says. "Her kindness, enthusiasm for our work and willingness to share her time and wisdom are all qualities that I've learned from and hope to embody in my own career."

Katerina Lembrikova, a medical student who worked with Dr. Sturm on another

research project, says the experience opened her eyes to the breadth of possibilities in a career integrating clinical practice and research. "There are many facets of medicine that can't be taught in a lecture or on the wards," Lembrikova says. "Rather, they require experiential guidance and support to transform the student from a scholar to a physician-scholar who will care for their patients with confidence and empathy."

"It is such a privilege to work with students at all levels and across varied fields on campus," Dr. Sturm says. "Our students bring a wealth of personal and professional experience to multidisciplinary design teams. Including all of our perspectives is a vital part of ensuring that we pursue relevant health care innovation to meet the needs of our diverse community."

Dr. Fero's research has crystallized her career goals. "I feel confident that my future research will be related to patient experience and on the subjects of cost of care, improving value in urology, and minimizing financial toxicity," she says. Through collaborations with another faculty member, associate professor Dr. Jonathan Bergman, Dr. Fero has identified a patient population of particular interest to her: the elderly. "I would like to start my career as a junior faculty member doing important research at the intersection of how elderly urologic patients experience their disease states, the financial burdens and stressors they face, and how we best assess these patients holistically, and provide individualized, high-value care," she says.

Every year, Dr. Chamie welcomes a new R4 into his lab. It's a constant pivot. "One resident wants to do mouse models, the following year a resident wants to work with observational data, the next year it's opioid receptor research, and the year after that it's financial toxicity for patients with cancers," he says. "In all cases, my job is to provide the resources and guidance — the fertile soil and water — that allow them to blossom as they move toward achieving their career goals."



## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

### Fran Feinman



Raised as one of seven children from a poor immigrant family, David Vickter never forgot his humble origins, even after becoming a highly successful business entrepreneur. “His strong belief was that if you are successful, you have to give back,” says Fran Feinman, Vickter’s niece. That philanthropic ethic led Vickter to establish the David Vickter Foundation, which donates to causes of social welfare, education, and health, and has been a staunch supporter of a number of UCLA programs and departments — including UCLA Urology — for many years.

Education was especially important to Vickter, who hadn’t had the opportunity to receive a formal education himself. “David and I were very close, and he particularly valued me because I graduated from UCLA with a degree in economics and got my teaching credential,” says Feinman, a schoolteacher for nearly five decades before retiring in 2015. “So he named me a co-trustee, and ultimately I became the foundation’s director.”

The David Vickter Foundation has given more than \$2 million to UCLA departments and programs since 1975, including annual donations to UCLA Urology since 2011 totaling \$285,000. Feinman traces that support to her introduction to Dr. Mark S. Litwin, professor and chair of the department. “I found him to be caring, compassionate, and dedicated to his profession, as well as to the teaching and training of future urologists,” she says. “UCLA Urology represents an ideal beneficiary for our foundation based not only on its commitment to advancing health through patient care and research, but through its education of the next generation of urologic scientists and clinicians. That dual mission is very important to us.”

Feinman says that when trustees of the David Vickter Foundation convene every year, “it’s a feel-good meeting” because they know they have directed much-needed funds to causes that will improve lives. But for Feinman, the real reward comes from seeing the results of those donations. “Dr. Litwin keeps me apprised so we can see how the funds are being used,” she says. “He’s taken me around and introduced me to some of the residents and researchers, and you can see how much care goes into preparing these individuals who represent our future.”

## Son of Immigrants Seeks to Bridge Health Care Disparities



As the son of Mexican immigrants who did not have the opportunity to pursue educational opportunities, Jorge Ballon grew up without a clear path to college, much less medical school and residency.

But Jorge Ballon is now Dr. Ballon after graduating this spring from the Charles R. Drew/David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. Buoyed by mentorship from UCLA Urology faculty, he is embarking on a urology residency at USC as he continues toward his goal of improving urological care in underserved communities.

After immigrating to Southern California in their teens, Dr. Ballon’s parents worked as laborers until an opportunity arose to take over an animal feed business in Whittier, California. Through hard work and ingenuity, they grew the alfalfa business and were able to put their son through college. There, through epidemiology coursework, Dr. Ballon learned that his lived experiences in a medically underserved community were not the norm. Determined to make a difference for communities like his own, he sought to become a physician.

In medical school he approached Dr. Leonard S. Marks, UCLA Urology professor, with a proposed research project to evaluate prostate cancer severity with MRI/ultrasound fusion biopsy in African American men, who have the worst outcomes with the disease of any racial/ethnic group. Under the guidance and

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# Letter from the Chair



*Seeing the impact  
our mentees go on to  
make [is] at the heart  
of why we went into  
academic medicine.*

UCLA Urology's societal impact is most clearly manifest through the education we provide the next generation of clinical and scientific leaders. And what sets our department apart is the centrality of research in the formative years of our trainees. At the halfway point of their six-year residency, every UCLA Urology resident steps back from clinical training to devote an entire year to research, under the supervision of a faculty mentor. Even more than the clinical skills our trainees develop, this year of close faculty guidance is fundamental to fulfilling our educational agenda. The faculty mentorship then continues during the remainder of residency and often through fellowship. Medical students also spend time with our faculty, sometimes working in medical research for the first time.

This issue's cover story highlights a few of the many UCLA Urology residents, fellows and medical students who have benefited from the powerful mentoring relationships at the intersection of research and education. I believe these experiences are the most important part of a resident's training. Early on, they learn how to perform the everyday tasks of being a urologist — the technical aspects of a surgery or conducting a diagnostic workup — but it's during this research phase that we push them to become critical thinkers and to develop a skill set that allows them to make meaningful contributions to the field of urology. Put another way, our trainees first become fluent in the language of urology; then we guide them to become lyrical, adopting a big-picture perspective and considering how they can pursue the second of three tenets in our school's Cultural North Star: make things better.

As our residents begin that pivotal fourth year, we encourage them to use the time to make the transformation from good to great. We are fortunate to attract the nation's most diverse and accomplished trainees. They come to us with immense potential, and we seek to help them find their academic purpose. As they begin to investigate critical issues in urological science under the supervision of our faculty, they take the first step on the route to becoming thought leaders. We ask them not simply to emulate the clinical and leadership skills of their mentors, but to amalgamate all they can draw from them and customize their own character and strengths. Through the research-year experience, our trainees also learn to be mentors themselves, "paying it forward" to the generation after them. For those of us in mentoring positions, having a hand in that transformation and seeing the impact our mentees go on to make are at the heart of why we went into academic medicine.

❖ **Mark S. Litwin, MD, MPH**

*Professor and Chair, UCLA Urology*



# Kudos

**A. Lenore Ackerman, MD, PhD**, UCLA Urology assistant professor, was named second place winner in the American Urological Association's (AUA's) 2021 Diokno-Lapides Essay Contest on Urodynamic and Neurourology Research.

**Drs. Jorge Ballon** and **Joaquin Michel**, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA (DGSOM) graduates and now urology residents, are co-authors of a paper accepted for publication in *MDM Policy & Practice*. UCLA Urology co-authors include **Drs. Jonathan Bergman**, **Christopher Saigal**, and **Mark S. Litwin**.

**Carol J. Bennett, MD**, chief of urology at the West Los Angeles VA Healthcare Center and Henry E. Singleton Chair in Urology at UCLA, is the 2021 recipient of the Serge & Yvette Dadone Clinical Teaching Award, established to recognize outstanding dedication, innovation, and sustained excellence in clinical and classroom teaching.

**Katherine Fero, MD**, UCLA Urology resident, co-authored "COVID-19 vaccination in incapacitated, unrepresented patients," published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. UCLA Urology's **Dr. Jonathan Bergman** was a co-author.

**Efe Chantal Ghanney Simons, MD**, UCLA Urology resident, co-authored "Diversity and Inclusion in the Urology Workforce: The Time Is Now," published in *AUA News*. She was an invited speaker at the R. Frank Jones Urological Association, Celebrating Black Women, held at the AUA's 2021 annual meeting. She

also received the Society of Women in Urology's 2021 Outstanding Resident Award, the \$25,000 Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation President's Grant Award, and a grant from the Society of Academic Urology. She was honored at the inaugural U ACT Advocacy Awards event in June for her outstanding efforts in advocacy at UCLA.

**Ashley Green-Lott, MD**, UCLA Urology resident, was first author of "Mesothelioma of tunica vaginalis testis: A case report of two subtypes," published in the *Journal of Clinical Urology*.

**Ja-Hong Kim, MD**, UCLA Urology associate professor, will serve as physician quality officer for UCLA Urology. The role includes serving as the motivator and guide for quality improvement projects throughout the department.

**Mark S. Litwin, MD, MPH**, UCLA Urology professor and chair, received the 2021 Sherman M. Mellinkoff Award, which honors the ideal of the finest in doctor-patient relationships and medical education. It is the highest faculty honor awarded by the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

**Nima Nassiri, MD**, incoming UCLA Urology transplant fellow, received \$100,000 in funding from the OneLegacy Foundation to support his research investigating immunological tolerance in kidney transplant recipients.

**Christopher Saigal, MD, MPH**, UCLA Urology professor and vice chair, was one of only 25 urology faculty nominees in the U.S. for the 2021 AUA Residents and Fellows Teaching Award.

**Desiree Sanchez, MD**, UCLA Urology resident, was part of a team that was named winner of the UCLA Health Innovation Challenge – Health Equity Pitch Contest, receiving \$5,000 for their project *AccessiHealth*, a new app-based program that will help open the pipeline to students from underserved backgrounds and prepare them to enter fields in the health professions, including urology. She also co-authored a review of diversity in urology, published in *Urology* with **Drs. Mark S. Litwin** and **Stanley K. Frencher, Jr.**

**Victoria Scott, MD**, former UCLA Urology resident and fellow in the Division of Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery, co-authored "Fear and frustration among women with recurrent UTIs: Findings from patient focus groups." UCLA Urology faculty co-authors included **Drs. Jennifer Anger** and **Ja-Hong Kim**.

**Allan Siapno**, DGSOM student, received the Dean's Leadership in Health and Science Scholarship and will now take one year off to focus on research looking at health disparities in men with prostate cancer. His primary mentor will be UCLA Urology chair **Dr. Mark S. Litwin**.

**Erika Wood, MD**, UCLA Urology resident, had an abstract, "A Qualitative Assessment of Drivers, Barriers, and Value in Robotic-Assisted Lower Urinary Tract Reconstruction," accepted for the AUA 2021 annual meeting's Moderated Poster Session. Co-authors include **Renea Sturm, MD**, UCLA Urology assistant professor.

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mentorship of Dr. Marks, Dr. Ballon was first author on a study, published in the journal *Urology Practice*, that focused on bridging the health inequity gap. Dr. Ballon also spent time being mentored by Dr. Stanley Frencher Jr., accompanying the

UCLA Urology associate professor during his clinical practice at Martin Luther King Community Hospital, where he gained experience in providing urologic care to vulnerable patients in South Los Angeles.

"My experiences with Dr. Marks and Dr.

Frencher showed me why urology is such a great specialty, and fueled my desire to become a physician advocate," Dr. Ballon says. "They set the trajectory for the career I want to have."

## Lynn Stothers, MD



When Dr. Lynn Stothers completed her urology residency at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver in 1994, there were few women urologists and no one in Canada who could offer her the specialized fellowship training she sought in female urology, reconstructive surgery and urodynamics. So Dr. Stothers went south, where she

learned from one of the world leaders in the field, Dr. Shlomo Raz, currently a UCLA Urology distinguished professor emeritus. More than a quarter-century later, Dr. Stothers — now a leader in her own right as a surgeon-scientist on the UBC faculty — says the UCLA Urology experience continues to guide her.

“At UCLA I was taught to think outside of the box,” Dr. Stothers says. Dr. Raz would ask her to consider how she would do a certain operation with little support or supplies, as might be the case in a low-income country, while also challenging her to think about how a surgery would be performed without any limitations — for example, with instruments that had yet to be invented. “This led to a ‘think big’ mentality that I continue to have today — to design what I believe to be the best solution for patients, then work backwards to figure out what is necessary to make it happen,” Dr.

Stothers explains.

After returning to UBC following her UCLA Urology training, Dr. Stothers developed a successful clinical and research practice in female urology and neuro-urology. Her research has focused on technology development for lower urinary tract symptom diagnosis and treatment, with an emphasis on non-invasive measurements with limited or no disposables. “The number of persons affected globally with lower urinary tract symptoms is staggering — billions of people,” she says. “And much of the world lacks the diagnostic tools to be able even to make the diagnosis, because our current technologies are invasive, expensive, and require trained personnel. One of my greatest satisfactions has been to be able to test these devices in areas of the world where they’re especially needed.”

Dr. Stothers also addresses issues involving education as an elected member of the UBC Senate. She supports philanthropic endeavors in her role as a board member of the American Urological Association’s (AUA’s) Urology Care Foundation. In September, Dr. Stothers will receive the Victor A. Politano Award from the AUA for excellence in advancing innovative methods for treating urinary incontinence around the world. “These are concepts that can be traced back to my UCLA Urology family,” Dr. Stothers says. “So many of the things that I’m doing now are a direct extension of my UCLA education.”

## Black Women in Urology at UCLA

By Efe Chantal Ghanney Simons, MD



Nationwide, only 58 Black women were practicing urologists in 2018, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges, comprising just 0.6% of the urology physician workforce — a clear disparity considering that Black women represent 7.1% of the U.S. population. With so few Black women in urology, one would expect very few,

if any, at each academic institution. While this is predominantly true, UCLA Urology is currently home to nine Black women urologists and urologists-in-training. We hail from radically different walks of life, possess unique interests within the field of urology, and represent the spectrum of career stages, from urology applicant to professor. When considering the factors that led us all to UCLA, several themes emerged.

First, each of us was seeking a home institution that would embrace and support our career ambitions, which often fall outside the mold of what is expected of the “typical” academic urologist. Our research interests include advances in medical education, global urology, health policy advocacy, basic/translational science, clinical trials, and health disparities outcomes research; the urology department and broader academic institution recognized the importance of each of these research endeavors and were willing to support them. Under the leadership of its chair, Dr. Mark S. Litwin, and formerly Dr. Jean B. deKernion, UCLA Urology continues its tradition of

championing its trainees and faculty. Second, building a community of Black women, which includes pioneers such as Dr. Carol Bennett, provides role models for trainees and junior faculty, as well as opportunities for mentorship. As the old adage goes, you cannot be what you cannot see, which makes this type of environment so attractive for urology applicants and early-career faculty. They can see themselves reflected in the identities of other established Black women urologists, whose lives exemplify that their budding career aspirations can also be realized. Finally, we all value equity in care delivery and were drawn to serving patients from minority and underserved backgrounds, including those who receive care at our affiliated county and Veterans Affairs hospitals.

With the creation of the American Urological Association (AUA) Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, the AUA is signaling its commitment to do the work necessary for raising up a generation of future urologists who reflect the diversity of our patient population. The UCLA experience informs us that urology training programs that are intentional about creating diverse teams look beyond the mold of the cookie-cutter urologist or resident and instead provide mentorship that elevates and sponsors the unique career goals of individuals. It also reminds us that inclusive departments that are champions for equity are one step closer to optimizing the environment where all can truly belong.

*Dr. Ghanney Simons is a UCLA Urology resident. This article was adapted from AUA News, published by the American Urological Association.*



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UCLA Health hospitals in  
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# 1 in Los Angeles,  
# 1 in California and  
# 4 in the nation in the 2020  
U.S. News and World Report rankings.



UCLA Urology: #6 in the Nation  
Highest Ranked in Los Angeles



# The Men's Clinic at UCLA

## DID YOU KNOW?

Weight gain is closely associated with declining testosterone levels. If you are having trouble dropping the extra weight you gained during the pandemic, even with the reopening of gyms, you may benefit from a men's health hormone profile at The Men's Clinic at UCLA.

*The Men's Clinic at UCLA is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary health and wellness center located in Santa Monica, now with locations in Burbank and Santa Clarita.*

*For more information or to make an appointment, call (310) 794-7700.*



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### UPDATE

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