

UTHealth Houston  
**ALUMNI NEWS**

2021 — 2022 | INAUGURAL ISSUE





# UTHealth<sup>®</sup> Houston

# ALUMNI NEWS

2021 — 2022 | INAUGURAL ISSUE

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**ALUMNI COMMUNITY**

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**Your connection to UTHealth Houston  
extends beyond your education.  
Stay in touch with fellow graduates,  
mentor current students,  
and expand your professional network  
by joining UTHealth Houston  
Alumni Community, the official networking  
platform for alumni and students.**

With UTHealth Houston Alumni Community, you can



**Reconnect**

Find and reminisce with classmates, see what they have been up to, and stay in touch



**Expand**

Leverage your professional network to get introduced to fellow alumni



**Give Back**

Introduce, employ, and be a mentor

**HOW TO JOIN**



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Open up the camera on your phone



**Scan**

Position your phone over the QR code



**Launch**

Launch the code



**Sign up**

Sign up in less than 2 minutes by importing your LinkedIn or Facebook profile



**Brittany Ellis Jewell, PhD '21**  
MD Anderson UTHHealth Graduate School



**Jessica Okunbor, PharmD, RPh, MS '21**  
School of Biomedical Informatics



**Cedar Slovacek, MD '21**  
McGovern Medical School

**See who has recently joined UTHealth Houston Alumni Community!**



**Anamika Khosla, DDS '21**  
School of Dentistry



**Anna Witte, MPH '21**  
School of Public Health



**Kasha Fairy, BSN '19**  
Cizik School of Nursing



**Weston Grove, MD '21, MPH '20**  
McGovern Medical School / School of Public Health

# UTHealth<sup>®</sup> Houston Alumni News

*greetings*

from

**Michael R. Blackburn, PhD**

Dean and John P. McGovern  
Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences  
Endowed Distinguished Professor

MD Anderson Cancer Center  
UTHealth Graduate School  
of Biomedical Sciences

William S. Kilroy, Sr. Distinguished  
University Chair in Pulmonary Disease  
Professor, Department of Biochemistry  
and Molecular Biology

McGovern Medical School  
at UTHealth Houston

Executive Vice President  
and Chief Academic Officer  
UTHealth Houston



**Across the six schools of UTHealth Houston, our alumni and the students who follow in their footsteps are our most esteemed gifts. Through their work, they extend our university's tradition of excellence by transforming health and changing lives in our communities and far beyond. In this inaugural issue of *UTHealth Houston Alumni News*, we spotlight the remarkable achievements of our alumni, students, and faculty, and look ahead to exciting developments in the coming year.**

I am pleased to share the following stories, which feature the people, ideas, and pursuits that make our university extraordinary—from students across the university leading a health drive, to thought-provoking conversations with outstanding alumni, to observing our university's 50th anniversary. We also commemorate a milestone with the launch of our first comprehensive fundraising campaign, *Many Faces. One Mission*.

As you read these stories, I hope you will celebrate our accomplishments with us and continue to connect with the university and your fellow graduates. With the recent launch of our online UTHealth Houston Alumni Community, it is easier than ever to network with other alumni and open doors of opportunity for students. You can get involved by visiting [uthealthhoustonalumni.org](http://uthealthhoustonalumni.org).

As we entered the fall semester with hope for a healthy, engaging academic year, we give special thanks to our many alumni who have safeguarded our communities through the pandemic by providing expert care, developing critical health policies, and driving breakthroughs for better treatments. We are pleased to welcome students back to in-person classes and activities amid improving COVID-19 trends.

On behalf of UTHealth Houston, thank you for setting a powerful example for the next generation of health science professionals and for carrying our university's legacy through your work.



# UTHealth Houston holds inaugural joint commencement ceremonies

*MAY 2021*





## May 2

On Sunday, May 2, UTHealth Houston congratulated more than 400 students as they set off to begin their professional post-graduation journeys. The first of two 2021 UTHealth Houston commencement ceremonies was held at Minute Maid Park for UTHealth Houston School of Biomedical Informatics, MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, and McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston.

The ceremony included remarks from former Houston Texans player J.J. Watt; Janiece Longoria, Vice Chair, The University of Texas System Board of Regents; UTHealth Houston President Giuseppe N. Colasurdo, MD, Alkek-Williams Distinguished Chair; and Walter R. Lowe, MD, Chair and Professor of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at McGovern Medical School, Chief of Orthopedic Surgery at Memorial Hermann – Texas Medical Center and Harris Health Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital, Medical Director of the Memorial Hermann Ironman Sports Medicine Institute, and head team physician for the Houston Texans.

## May 23

On Sunday, May 23, at Minute Maid Park, UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry, UTHealth School of Public Health, and Cizik School of Nursing at UTHealth Houston celebrated more than 1,000 graduates.

The ceremony included remarks from UTHealth Houston President Giuseppe N. Colasurdo, MD, Alkek-Williams Distinguished Chair, and the commencement address was given by UT System Executive Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs John M. Zerwas, MD. There were also remarks from the school deans John A. Valenza, DDS; Eric Boerwinkle, PhD; and Diane M. Santa Maria, DrPH, MSN, RN.



UTHealth Houston congratulates more than 1,400 students as they set off to begin their professional post-graduation journeys.

# UTHealth *Cares* continues mission of service through community distribution event

written by

**UTHealth  
Houston  
students**

**Thanh Le  
Mariya Fatakdawala  
Mary E. Fuentes  
and  
Rigo Gutierrez, MD '21**

CARING  
*for the*  
COMMUNITY



## March 5

Through the pandemic, many changes have occurred with the way UTHealth Houston students interact in classrooms and volunteer in extracurricular activities. However, *UTHealthCares*, a student-led organization that incorporates all six UTHealth Houston professional schools, continued their commitment to the Eastex/Jensen community.

*UTHealthCares* would have held its fourth annual community health fair this year at the UT Physicians Multispecialty – Jensen clinic providing food assistance, no-cost health and dental screening, and patient education. Unfortunately, with the pandemic still a major concern, the health fair was ultimately canceled.

Thus, *UTHealthCares* collaborated with UT Physicians and Commissioner Adrian Garcia from Harris County Precinct 2 to participate in a food distribution event at the Northeast Community Center on March 5, 2021, striving to serve the community during these unprecedented times.

Volunteers from all UTHealth Houston schools came together to assemble over 200 care packages consisting of dental supplies, hand sanitizers, and educational pamphlets with information about COVID-19, health precautions, and local vaccine registrations for those currently eligible. On the morning of the event, hundreds of cars lined up in the parking lot of the community center as volunteers visited each car to deliver the care packages, explain the content, and answer health-related questions in a safe and socially distant manner.

Notably, many of the attendees did not have access to or did not know how to find CDC guidelines or vaccine registration sites. One gentleman learned that his at-risk, 80-year-old mother qualified for the vaccine and others immediately started the registration process in their cars. While *UTHealthCares* played a small role during the event, the volunteers and organizers made a lasting impact with the care packages and information provided to the community.



More than 100 volunteers from all six UTHealth Houston schools volunteered during the Second Annual *UTHealthCares* Community Health Fair Jan. 26, 2019.



# Paying it forward to pave the path

*UTHealth Houston alumni  
give back to support  
campaign promise to train  
future health professionals*

written by

**John Kreischer**  
Office of Development

As the demand for health professionals—from physicians to dentists to nurses to researchers to public health experts—continues to rise, *Many Faces. One Mission.* sets the stage to bolster the health care workforce at a pivotal moment. The university's first fundraising campaign and largest philanthropic effort yet, *Many Faces. One Mission.* aims to raise \$500 million to address pressing health challenges and secure the institution's future as a top health science center.

The following alumni spotlights showcase how alumni from across UTHealth Houston are paving the way for our students to follow in their footsteps, aligning with our campaign's commitment to training the next generation of health professionals.



**Mimi Cho-Rohlfen, MD, PhD '00**

Mimi Cho-Rohlfen, MD, PhD '00, who graduated from the MD/PhD program at MD Anderson UTHealth Graduate School and McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston in 2000, established the first endowment to benefit the program. Since creating the MD/PhD Endowment Fund in Honor of Peter Davies, MD, PhD, and Dianna Milewicz, MD, PhD, she has made significant contributions to enhance the support it provides.

Resources from Cho-Rohlfen's endowment enable the MD/PhD program to recruit and retain outstanding students and enrich their educational experiences through scholarships, fellowships, and other awards.

"The MD/PhD program is vital to training physician-scientists to better understand the science behind medicine and all of the hard work that goes into it. I had so many amazing mentors and professors, and I give back in gratitude for the opportunities they provided me to help train the next generation of thinkers and innovators."



**Laura Kreiner, MD '08**

Laura Kreiner, MD '08, established the Roger B. and Francis O. Miller Memorial Scholarship at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston to empower students to pursue their dreams.

As an alumna leading a fulfilling career as a trauma surgeon and Assistant Professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, she hopes her scholarship helps pave the path for those following her lead.

"Medical students face many challenges during their educational careers, and financial instability can be a limiting factor. My hope is that this scholarship will offset the costs of attending medical school, such as books and certification exams, to reduce the overall financial stress. I also want to offer an uplifting hand to students and encourage them to push on and earn their degree because it is worth it. The cycle of support from alumni to students started before me, and I want to encourage it to continue."



**Jeffrey B. Geno, DDS '82**

UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry alumnus Jeffrey B. Geno, DDS '82, echoes the importance of alumni leading by example to support future dental professionals. His gift to a crowdfunding campaign to enhance the Rodney F. Beetar, DDS, MS, Award will help recognize and encourage fourth-year dental students, residents, and faculty who go above and beyond in prosthodontics education.

"My philosophy as a graduate of the School of Dentistry has always been you learn, you earn, and you return. Dr. Beetar gave me and several generations of students the knowledge and skills to become exceptional dentists. I gave to honor his memory and carry that legacy long into the future."

**As our communities continue to contend with shortages of health professionals and pressing health issues, the generosity of friends and alumni like Cho-Rohlfen, Kreiner, and Geno helps UTHealth Houston rise to meet these challenges through *Many Faces. One Mission.***

# MANY FACES. ONE MISSION.

The Campaign for UTHealth Houston

## EXTENDING A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE

For nearly 50 years, UTHealth Houston has built a legacy of excellence in health care education, scientific discovery, and patient care. The contributions of faculty, alumni, trainees, and students touch every part of the health care sector, making a powerful impact on the health of individuals and communities in Houston and beyond. *Many Faces. One Mission.* will empower us to build on this legacy and bring our unique capabilities where they are most urgently needed.

Harnessing the power of philanthropy, *Many Faces. One Mission.* will drive support toward three impact areas at the heart of the university's mission:



TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF

### HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

to address shortages in critical health professions by deepening our commitment to the next generation of practitioners and innovators, as well as the experts who educate them.



IMPROVING

### HOUSTON'S HEALTH

to save lives and improve health outcomes by supporting collaborative research and promoting patient care and public health initiatives.



ADVANCING

### BRAIN AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

to expand on UTHealth Houston's considerable strengths as a leader in brain and behavioral health, dedicated to developing better treatments and making mental health care accessible to all.

To learn how you can make a difference, visit

[uth.edu/many-faces-one-mission](http://uth.edu/many-faces-one-mission)

**Cizik School of Nursing  
at UTHealth Houston:**

# **Student leader creates COVID-19 resources**



Annie Steinhauser, MSN '21, RN, PCCN

written by

**Laura Frnka-Davis**

Cizik School of Nursing

**Like many nurses, Annie Steinhauser, MSN '21, RN, PCCN, has seen the COVID-19 pandemic come full circle from when it first emerged as an unknown and frightening virus to the hopeful arrival of vaccines to curb its spread.**

**Cizik School of Nursing at UTHealth Houston:  
 Student leader creates COVID-19 resources**

Steinhauser, who recently earned her Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) on the Nursing Leadership and Administration track at Cizik School of Nursing at UTHealth Houston, was on the frontlines at the beginning of the pandemic. She was part of the response team caring for COVID-19 patients aboard the Diamond Princess Cruise Ship that evacuated sick passengers to San Antonio in February 2020.

The knowledge she gained during that experience positioned her well to assist the Texas Nurses Association (TNA) COVID-19 task force with developing educational materials about the virus as part of her preceptorship.

“This past year, we’ve all been bombarded with information from so many different places,” said Steinhauser. “Having a nurse as your information source means you can trust what you are hearing. My experience as a nurse gives me the ability to synthesize the information and distill it into readable, easy-to-understand pieces.”

**Working in collaboration with the TNA’s director of communications, Steinhauser produced several infographics addressing aspects of COVID-19, including:**

- **COVID-19 vaccination types (1)**

Steinhauser created a helpful one-pager that offered explanations of how the Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines differ.

“I found creating a list of COVID-19 vaccine myths easy enough because of the work I had done in vaccine clinics. I had heard almost every myth out there. Contributing a resource for nurses to help dispel myths about the vaccines to their patients, family members, and friends was gratifying.”

- **Proper masking (2)**

Steinhauser’s infographic guided nurses on how to best educate their patients about mask-wearing.

- **Mental health personal protective equipment (PPE) (3)**

Nurses quickly became educated on the types of physical PPE they needed to safeguard themselves against COVID-19, but not necessarily how to protect their mental health. Steinhauser developed an infographic outlining realistic and easy self-care measures nurses could integrate into their extremely chaotic and exhausting days.

Those infographics proved to be so helpful to nurses that Steinhauser was asked to create two more – one on **COVID-19 vaccine myths and facts (4)** and the other on **school safety related to the pandemic (5)**.

Of all the resources she developed, working on the infographic about school safety was the most challenging and rewarding for Steinhauser.

“Through this project, I was able to meet a school nurse who was also a member of the TNA COVID-19 task force and learn directly from her about the challenges the pandemic posed in an education setting,” said Steinhauser.

The school safety infographic is available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. It provides tips for nurses to share with parents and students to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic safely. It highlights the importance of social distancing, handwashing, making sure students wear well-fitted masks, and reminders about keeping children at home if they are sick or showing any symptoms.



The materials Steinhauser created and other helpful resources are available for download on the TNA's COVID-19 website: [www.texasnurses.org/mpage/COVID](http://www.texasnurses.org/mpage/COVID)



### VACCINE OPTIONS

Texas Nurses COVID-19 Task Force

**AUTHORIZED VACCINES**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has two options for authorizing vaccines. Vaccines are approved when they have substantial evidence of safety and effectiveness. For biologics, the COVID-19 vaccines are under Emergency Use Authorization, which involves the best available evidence. These authorized vaccines are still highly safe and very effective.

**Why get vaccinated?**

Getting vaccinated is one of the best ways to stop the spread of COVID-19 and reduce even more mask wearing. COVID-19 is most likely to spread when people catch the virus and potentially pass it on, although researchers have found evidence that vaccinated people have lower rates of infection.

**WHAT TO EXPECT**

All the vaccines cause some side effects, such as soreness, swelling, tenderness or a red, itchy rash. Some people may also experience mild fever, muscle aches, and fatigue. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is responding to the vaccine. They usually go away within a few days.

**Vaccine Comparison**

Pfizer	Moderna	Johnson & Johnson
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two shots, 21 days apart</li> <li>- mRNA vaccine. Contains code for the coronavirus spike protein.</li> <li>- The spike protein is harmless.</li> <li>- The code will dissolve after a few days.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two shots, 28 days apart</li> <li>- mRNA vaccine. Contains code for the coronavirus spike protein.</li> <li>- The spike protein is harmless.</li> <li>- The code will dissolve after a few days.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One shot</li> <li>- Non-mRNA vaccine. Uses a weakened virus to teach the immune system to fight the coronavirus spike protein.</li> <li>- The virus isn't the coronavirus. It's harmless.</li> <li>- The spike protein is harmless.</li> </ul>

### COVID-19 FACTS

Texas Nurses COVID-19 Task Force

**PERSON**

COVID-19 doesn't come from a virus.

**FAKE VIRUS**

COVID-19 doesn't exist. (don't know a)

**INFLATED DEATH RATES**

"Hospitals just want to get more money."

**A MAN-MADE PANDEMIC**

"SARS-CoV-2 was created in a lab or released from a lab."

### MASK UP TEXAS

Texas Nurses COVID-19 Task Force

**PROPER MASKING**

Always wear your mask in the presence of others.

**DIAPHRAGM MASK**

**NOSE WIRE**

**FACE MESH**

**50%**

**70-79%**

### SCHOOL SAFETY

Texas Nurses COVID-19 Task Force

**TIPS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS**

**MODELING MASKS**

**ELEMENTARY**

**MIDDLE TO HIGH SCHOOL**

### MENTAL HEALTH PPE

Texas Nurses COVID-19 Task Force

**PROTECTION FOR NURSES**

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

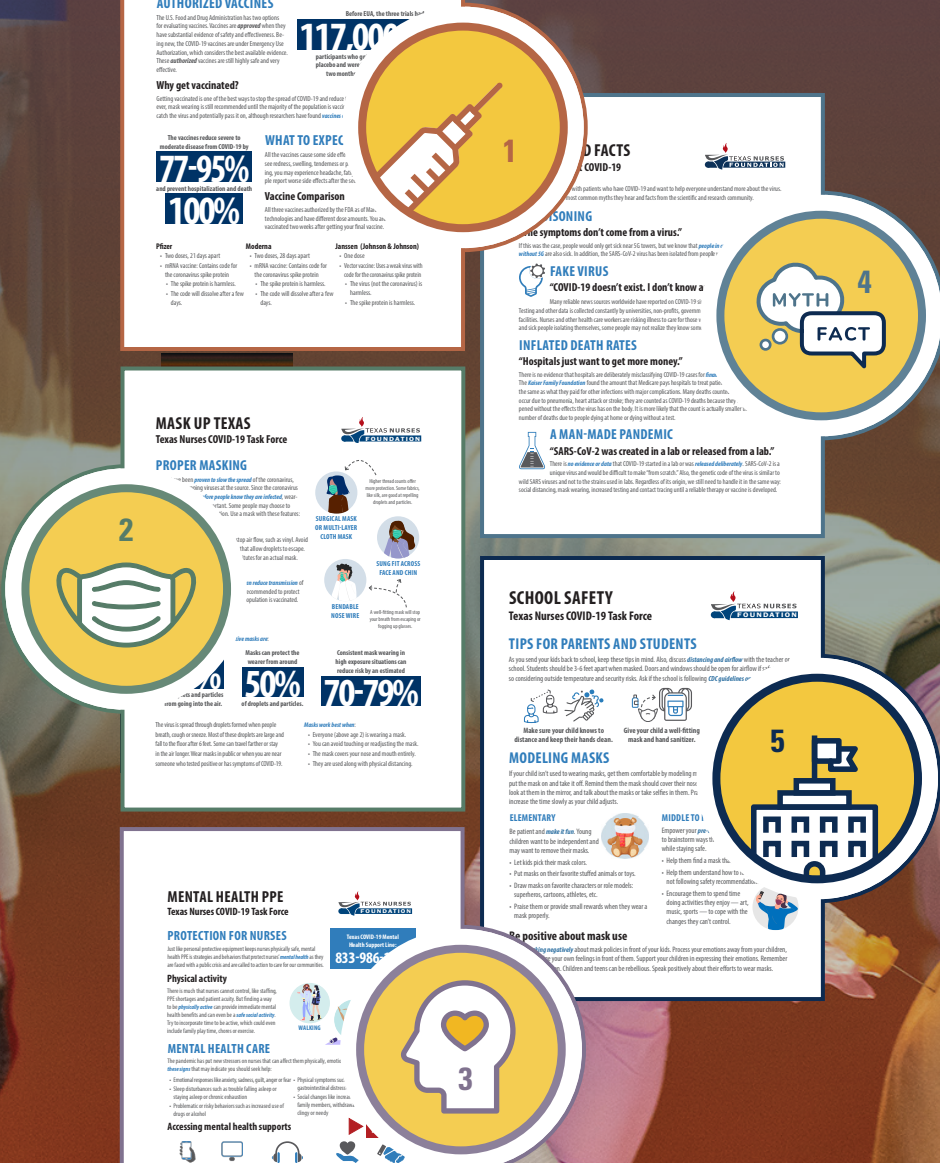
**MENTAL HEALTH CARE**

**Accessing mental health supports**

833-986-3333

### Be positive about mask use

Encourage your child to wear their mask properly. Remind them that wearing a mask is a sign of being responsible and caring for others.





# *Conversation* with an Alumnus

**Nnaemeka Okafor, MD, MS '11**

**UTHEALTH HOUSTON  
SCHOOL OF BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS**

*currently serving as*

**Vice President  
Chief Analytics and Informatics Officer  
Memorial Hermann Health System**

**Assistant Professor, Emergency Medicine  
McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston**

“My proudest accomplishment?

Ultimately, it is raising my kids.

Professionally, thus far, the way we review and manage medical errors in the emergency department is evolving, which has led to system initiative, process and technology changes, as well as new methods to educate clinical providers.”

< **NO**  
Dr. Okafor

Monday 10:20 AM

What is your fondest memory of your time at the School of Biomedical Informatics?

My fondest memory was in the System Engineering class. I really enjoyed the concepts we were taught.

What are your hopes for today's students?

To learn that being a successful team leader requires effective communication and collaboration. Therefore, developing those soft skills is occasionally more important than the technical skills.

What inspires you?

Learning and successfully applying a new skill!

Who is your mentor?

I have several including the late Jim Turley, PhD, RN, former faculty member.

< Dr. Okafor Thursday 3:45 PM

What skill is most vital to your job?

The ability to communicate and collaborate.

What do you enjoy doing on your day off?


Spending time with my family — bike riding, playing cards, or video games.

Who would you most like to meet (alive or deceased) and why?

Muhammad Ali — his story fascinates me. Observing his arc as a young man to a social icon is amazing.

What has been your greatest adventure?

I am still living it — navigating my life! I came from Nigeria to study architecture, then switched to medicine. I was attracted to emergency medicine and planned to deliver care in Nigeria via telemedicine. As I explored telemedicine, I learned about informatics, which exposed me to so much more.

Thank you! | 

# MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences: *2021 Kopchick Fellows*

written by

## Tracey Barnett

MD Anderson UTHealth  
Graduate School

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences is proud to announce the 2021 recipients of the Dr. John J. and Charlene Kopchick Fellowships.

These fellowships are funded through a generous \$10.5 million endowment established by alumnus John J. Kopchick, PhD, and his wife, Charlene.

The Dr. John J. Kopchick Fellowships are awarded to students who demonstrate exceptional character, extracurricular leadership, research excellence, and scholarly merit. Each fellowship provides \$7,500 directly to the student and an



John J. Kopchick, PhD, and his wife, Charlene Kopchick

additional \$7,500 to support their research and training. These fellowships may be renewed for a total award period of up to two years.

The Charlene Kopchick Fellowship is awarded to a graduate school student who demonstrates unique characteristics beyond merit and financial need. Such characteristics may include but are not limited to first-generation college graduates entering graduate research,

students who exhibit exemplary personal character, uniqueness of background and culture, strong work ethic, perceived leadership qualities, and an enthusiastic scientific curiosity.

These fellowships provide \$8,250 of direct aid to the student and an additional \$8,250 to support the student's research and training. This is a one-time award to the student and is not renewable.

On Nov. 8, 2021, the fellows, along with support from MD Anderson UTHealth Graduate School, hosted the second Kopchick Symposium. For more information about this biennial event, please visit [gsbs.uth.edu](https://gsbs.uth.edu).



**Brian Anderson**  
Kristy K. Brock, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Yasaman Barekatin**  
Raghu Kalluri, MD, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Nathaniel Berg**  
Holger K. Eltzschig, MD, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Medina Colic**  
Traver Hart, PhD  
*Advisor*

# Dr. John J. Kopchick Fellows, 2021

## Each fellowship provides

- **\$7,500** directly to the student
- **\$7,500** for research, training
- **may be renewed** for a total award period of two years



**Carolina Garcia Garcia**  
Cullen M. Taniguchi, MD, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Jovanka Gencel-Augusto**  
Guillermina Lozano, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Archit Ghosh**  
Kunal Rai, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Jennifer Hurtig**  
Ambro van Hoof, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Walaa Kattan**  
John Hancock, BChir, PhD, ScD  
*Advisor*



**Yiyun Lin**  
Nicholas E. Navin, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Elia Lopez**  
Edgar T. Walters, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Brigid McDonald**  
C. David Fuller, MD, PhD  
*Advisor*



**Nabina Paudyal**  
Vasanthi Jayaraman, PhD  
*Advisor*



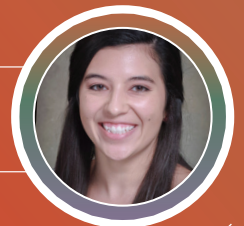
**Deborah Silverman**  
Patrick Hwu, MD  
Moran Amit, PhD  
*Advisor*

## Charlene Kopchick Fellow, 2021

**Soleil Hernandez**  
Laurence E. Court, PhD *Advisor*

## Fellowship provides

- **\$8,250** directly to the student
- **\$8,250** for research, training



# UTHealth Houston School of Biomedical Informatics: Professor Zhongming Zhao, PhD, MS, earns \$4 million research training grant

written by

**Chelsea Overstreet**

School of Biomedical Informatics



Zhongming Zhao, PhD, MS

## May 2021

The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) awarded \$69 million in new academic research and prevention grants for cancer researchers across the state. UTHealth Houston School of Biomedical Informatics Professor and Center for Precision Health Director Zhongming Zhao, PhD, MS, was a recipient of one of the grants.

Zhao, who is also the Chair for Precision Health at the school, was awarded \$3,998,553 for his research

training project titled “Biomedical Informatics, Genomics, and Translational Cancer Research Training Program (BIG-TCR).” The award allows the School of Biomedical Informatics to launch its first fellowship training program.

The collaborative BIG-TCR training program aims to provide a highly interactive, innovative, and interdisciplinary environment to train future leaders and cancer researchers. The program will do so

by leveraging UTHealth Houston’s strong research programs across all six schools. The training will include competency-based training requirements and focus in the areas of cancer biology, stem cell biology, pharmacology and drug discovery, genomics and other omics programs, data science, artificial intelligence, clinical informatics, and translational medicine.

“The program will have three different training levels for PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, and undergraduate summer internship participants,” stated Zhao. “The BIG-TCR team is very excited to give dozens of trainees valuable, hands-on skills in informatics, data science, drug discovery, and other technologies.”

The BIG-TCR program will create or provide new didactic course work, formalized laboratory and informatics core rotations,



Jiajie Zhang, PhD, Dean and The Glassell Family Foundation Distinguished Chair in Informatics Excellence at UTHealth Houston School of Biomedical Informatics, with data scientist and student Salsawit Shifarraw, MS.

dual mentorship, and a series of career development activities. Trainees will also have exposure to both informatics and wet lab research environments. Early on in their program tenure, trainees will work with mentors to create an individualized development plan, including course competency, core lab rotations, research project design, travel, grant writing, and long-term career goals.

Jiajie Zhang, PhD, Dean of the school and The

Glassell Family Foundation Distinguished Chair in Informatics Excellence, said, "Dr. Zhao has a long track record in cancer research and education. He will lead his team as they empower the trainees and give them the knowledge to use state-of-the-art informatics, artificial intelligence, and data science technologies."

Next steps for the BIG-TCR program are to develop and implement the curriculum and program activities. This will include the creation

of a new course focused on the fundamentals of AI in cancer discovery. Other unique features of the program will include peer mentor opportunities, summer Datathons, career development workshops, and standardized evaluation tools to measure quality and effectiveness of the programs for the trainees.

"Moving forward, I look forward to launching our program and attaining our recruitment goals as we reach out to potential trainees from underrepresented minority groups. Beyond that, we will enhance learning facilities, both physical and distance learning, to meet the unique needs of each participant."

# UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry celebrates 10th year at 7500 Cambridge Street

The UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry building was completed in 2012 and dedicated on June 8 of that year before a crowd of more than 1,000 students, staff, faculty, alumni, legislators, donors, and friends.

written by

**Kyle Rogers**

School of Dentistry



## Students

The 7500 Cambridge Street location officially opened May 21, 2012, and since that date, **1,542 students (841 doctorate of dental surgery, 334 dental hygiene, and 367 advanced education)** have passed through the doors during their professional health care journeys, including most recently the 183 graduates from the Class of 2021.



## Patients

As a health care facility, **616,479 patient visits** have taken place in the **300-plus dental operatories** in the student clinics, graduate clinics, and UT Dentists. In total, **1,152,378 on-site procedures** have been completed totaling **\$145,100,467 in value of care.**



## Philanthropy

Community outreach special projects such as Give Vets A Smile and Give Kids A Smile® have seen an additional **estimated cost of care of \$1,344,540 provided to over 2,400 patients.** These projects allow for community service learning for dental and dental hygiene students and residents by providing opportunities for social responsibility.

**UTHealth Houston  
and Cizik School  
of Nursing  
will be celebrating  
their 50th  
anniversaries  
in 2022!**



Since 2012, UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry has called the corner of Cambridge Street and East Road home. The 300,000-square-foot, six-story building was dedicated June 8, 2012, the school's first new address since 1955.

### About the building

The dental school was the largest single-project capital outlay ever for UTHealth Houston with a **cost of \$155 million**.

Major funding came from both state and local sources, including **\$60 million** in tuition revenue bonds, **\$18 million** from the Permanent University Fund, and **\$7 million** raised through the dental school's Open to Health initiative.

Donor recognition walls, each with a background of pink marble from the old dental branch building, grace the first- and second-floor lobbies. Clinics, research centers, classrooms, meeting spaces, and even a department have been named to recognize gifts from alumni and friends of UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry.

Designed by WHR Architects of Houston and built by Hensel Phelps Construction Company, the project created **1,800 jobs** over the three-year construction period.



### About the school

Since 1972, the dental school has been part of UTHealth Houston.

UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry began as the **Texas Dental College**, a private institution in rented quarters above a dry goods store on Congress Avenue. For decades, the school's leadership lobbied to join The University of Texas System, but were unsuccessful until World War II caused an acute need for more dentists. The Texas Dental College formally closed on Aug. 31, 1943, and reopened on Sept. 1, 1943, as **The University of Texas School of Dentistry**. Enrollment doubled.

A grant from the MD Anderson Foundation helped establish the school as a founding institution in the Texas Medical Center, and in 1952, the School of Dentistry's Dean, Fred Elliott, DDS, resigned to become the first executive director of the TMC. That same year, the school broke ground on a new building at 6516 MD Anderson Blvd. It was completed in 1955.

Upon moving into the new facility, also known as "The Pink Palace" because of the pinkish-brown marble exterior, the school assumed a new name, **The University of Texas Dental Branch**.

Nearly 60 years later, the school moved into its current location.

Through it all, UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry has consistently provided **high-quality education, patient care, service, and research**, pursuing a vision of "Improving Oral Health... Improving Overall Health."



# UTHealth School of Public Health: Community Health Practice ranked best doctoral program

written by

**Aaron Nieto**

School of Public Health

**UTHealth School of Public Health's Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) in Community Health Practice was named as the best community health promotion and education doctorate program in the U.S. by BestHealthDegrees.com.**

The Best Health Degrees team ranked programs according to price, accreditation, reputation, and salary potential, using data from *IPEDS and Niche, U.S. News & World Report*, and other higher education rating publications.

The DrPH in Community Health Practice prepares scholars to undertake evidence-based public health practice and research at the advanced level, and builds their ability to

communicate effectively across diverse stakeholders to affect change and advance health programs, policies, services, and systems. The degree emphasizes training in community-driven, grassroots, and intersectional applied research with a focus on addressing social inequity and systems-level change through the adoption of a transdisciplinary framework. Faculty were asked to share their thoughts on what aspects of the program made it so beneficial.



“Throughout the DrPH coursework in community health practice, students work directly with diverse community partners to apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom.”

**Vanessa Schick, PhD**

*Associate Professor  
Management, Policy  
and Community Health*

## UTHealth School of Public Health



**One of the  
top 25 schools  
of public health  
nationwide**



**No. 1 school  
of public health  
in Texas**

*As ranked by U.S. News & World Report*



“Our community health practice faculty are actively engaged with our many and diverse communities beyond coursework, practicing what they teach.

This provides both active role models for our students and direct conduit for the students’ engagement with communities.”

**Robert Morgan, PhD**

*Chair and Professor  
Management, Policy  
and Community Health*

“The faculty that make up this department all work collaboratively to make sure we can meet the needs and research interests of all the students we admit. Mentoring is so important and hard to find as a graduate student. We want to provide not only our expertise but support and mentorship for all our students. We model the respect and teamwork that we expect our students to use out in their communities.”

**Gretchen Walton, JD, MPH**

*Associate Professor  
Management, Policy  
and Community Health*

“Our DrPH students come from all over the globe, and that diversity really comes to life in the classroom where our students are able to share and explore their own experiences as they relate to our research. Working through different perspectives and seeing what we can apply to our programs is such a unique benefit and absolutely essential in a diverse city like Houston.”

**Paige Padgett Wermuth, PhD**

*Assistant Professor  
Management, Policy  
and Community Health*

“While all of the faculty work in community health practice, we each have distinct expertise and connections. Community health affects nearly every aspect of our lives, so the fact that we have faculty who represent a range of expertise from infectious disease, to LGBTQ interests, to breast cancer, to vulnerable populations, means that students are able to see how community health practice is implemented across a number of different contexts and use that to shape their own research plans.”

**Catherine L. Troisi, PhD**

*Associate Professor  
Management, Policy  
and Community Health*

# 2021 McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston *Distinguished Alumnus Award*

written by

**Roman Petrowski**

McGovern Medical School

**McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston has named Arnold dela Cruz Paulino, MD '89, and Greg Swanson, MD '85, as its 2021 Distinguished Alumnus Award recipients.**

The Distinguished Alumnus Award honors alumni of McGovern Medical School who have made significant contributions in the areas of medical science and education or the prevention and treatment of disease, as well as those who demonstrate a continued interest in the medical school and its students. The Distinguished Alumnus Award has been presented by the Alumni Association since 1987.

The 2021 Distinguished Alumnus Awardees will be recognized, along with the 2020 Distinguished Alumnus Award winners, during Alumni Weekend March 25-26, 2022.



**Arnold dela Cruz Paulino**  
MD '89

“To be honored by my own medical school may be the best accolade that I have received. I am humbled to the nth degree that my medical school is proud of me and my accomplishments.”

Paulino is a Professor and Director of Pediatric Radiation Oncology in the Department of Radiation Oncology at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Following his graduation from McGovern Medical School in 1989, he completed his residency at Loyola University Chicago in 1994 and a fellowship at the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

Originally from the Philippines, Paulino called the award a testimony to his parents' hard work and the notion that the American dream is still possible.

“To be named as a Distinguished Alumnus of McGovern Medical School is definitely a tremendous honor for me and my family,” Paulino said. “I came from the Philippines and just became an American citizen when I entered medical school at the age of 19 years. My parents worked very hard in this country with double jobs, and what some may call menial jobs supporting me and my siblings. Although I was far from being the best student in our medical school class, I was perseverant in the face of many obstacles.”

Paulino said that the Distinguished Alumnus award is special, because McGovern Medical School is where his career started.

“To be honest, when Roger Khetan, MD '94, McGovern Medical School Alumni Association president, called me and informed me I was a 2021 Distinguished Alumnus, I wanted to call the alumni office to report the ‘prank,’” he said. “I did not believe it fully until I received the letter.”

Throughout his career, Paulino has been named Teacher of the Year by the Association of Residents in Radiation Oncology four times, most recently in 2013. He also was awarded the Golden Apple Teaching Award from Houston Methodist Hospital in 2013, the Distinguished Service Award from the American Board of Radiology in 2010, and the Luis Delclos Teaching Award in Radiation Oncology from MD Anderson Cancer Center in 2020. He is a fellow of the American Society for Radiation Oncology and the American College of Radiology.

Paulino thanked his family and teachers in college, the medical school, and postgraduate training for playing an important part in his career.



Greg Swanson  
MD '85

“When I was a first-year resident, I discovered a mass deep in the abdomen of a patient that was actually quite subtle. When

I had my attending examine the patient, he turned to me and said, ‘Where did you go to medical school?’ It was a proud moment. I have always appreciated the basic cores that were instilled in me.”

Swanson is a radiation oncologist for Baylor Scott & White Clinic in Temple, Texas. A 1985 graduate of McGovern Medical School, Swanson completed his residency in radiation oncology at the Mayo Clinic in 1989.

Swanson said that winning the Distinguished Alumnus Award is an honor, and remarked that even though he was fortunate for somebody to take notice of his career and recognize him for it, he spent two years with 200 capable students who also went on to become dedicated physicians.

“While I had the opportunity to do some things that got me noticed, I hope I can be seen as representative of my equally remarkable classmates who dedicated themselves to their patients,” Swanson said. “With everything, I have always tried to put patients first and hope that I truly have. By being named a distinguished alumnus, I aspire to be a truly worthy representative.”

Reflecting on medical school, Swanson recalled being prepared for the worst after one of his best friends informed him of how cutthroat his medical experience was at a different school, where students were always trying to out-do each other. Swanson found the experience at McGovern Medical School completely different, having the pleasure of getting to know all of his classmates and learning in an environment that is selfless instead of selfish.

Swanson said that he is grateful every day for his wife who supported him and his long hours and frequent absences. The couple married in college and made the decision not to delay their family.

“She gave up her teaching career to stay home and be a full-time mom, and I hope our four children realize how blessed they are for that. I can’t say enough,” he said.



MAY OUR  
CIRCLE **REMAIN** UNBROKEN

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WE ARE ALL THE  
**#MANYFACESOFUTHEALTHHOUSTON**

ENGAGE WITH US THROUGH THESE EXCITING EVENTS!

UTHEALTH HOUSTON 2022  
**GIVING DAY**

We invite you to join us for **GIVING DAY** on **Tuesday, April 5, 2022**. Your generosity in support of the many faces of UTHealth Houston will advance our pursuits of learning, discovery, and healing, which will change lives throughout our communities. **Together, we can make a lasting difference.**

#UTHEALTHHOUSTONGIVES | [GIVINGDAY.UTH.EDU](https://givingday.uth.edu)

 UTHealth<sup>®</sup> Houston

4 | 20 | 2022

UTHealth Houston

JOINT ALUMNI MIXER

**JAM**

## CONTACT US

Our alumni are a great asset to the UTHealth Houston community. We have numerous opportunities that will allow you to share your knowledge, create meaningful relationships, and grow your network. Reach out to us at [alumni@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:alumni@uth.tmc.edu) to get started.

**UTHealth Houston alumni** have established careers across the nation and across the world. Our extraordinary students have graduated to become doctors, dentists, dental hygienists, nurses, medical researchers, public health experts, health informatics system analysts, professors, educators, and leaders in the health care community.

Through the Office of Alumni Engagement, alumni are invited to attend **Joint Alumni Mixers** and other engaging events, receive printed and electronic communications, and get involved in various university programs.

To learn more, visit [go.uth.edu/alumni](https://go.uth.edu/alumni)



UTHealth Houston alumni love to get out, socialize, and network! Join us for our Joint Alumni Mixers, Women in Medicine events, Alumni Weekend, 2022 Commencement, and more, coming soon! Check out the calendar on the back of this issue for more details.



BECOME INVOLVED AND GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR  
UTHEALTH HOUSTON ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT TEAM!



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Presented by UTHealth Houston  
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**uth.edu**

# THESE *are the* TIES



## our MISSION

The mission of UTHealth Houston is to **educate** health science professionals, **discover** and **translate** advances in the biomedical and social sciences, and **model** the best practices in **clinical care** and public health.

**9**  
Graduate degrees



**48,819**

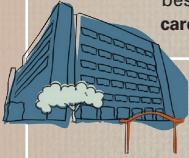
Alumni making a difference around the globe

**10**  
Professional degrees



## our VISION

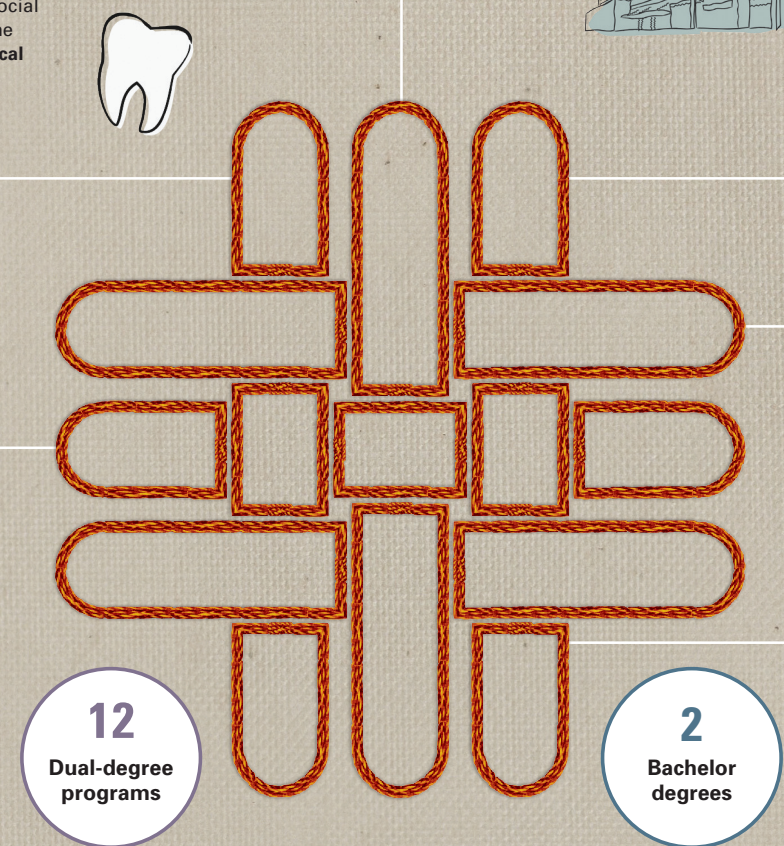
Excellence above all in the quest to be an acknowledged leader in the collaboration to **treat, cure, and prevent** the most common diseases of our time through **education, research, and clinical practice.**



## our CAMPUS

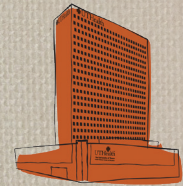
Located in the **Texas Medical Center**, considered the largest medical center in the world, UTHealth Houston consists of more than **60 owned buildings and leased facilities**, with a total of nearly **5 million square feet of usable space**. Additionally, we have extended our reach across the state through our **regional public health campuses and various community outreach clinics.**

**HOUSTON**



**12**  
Dual-degree programs

**2**  
Bachelor degrees



## WHY?

We pursue our mission in order to **advance the quality of human life** by enhancing the **diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease and injury**, as well as **promoting individual health and community well-being.**

## Living LEGACY

UTHealth Houston is **Texas' resource for health care education, innovation, scientific discovery, and excellence in patient care.** UTHealth Houston is **one of the nation's most comprehensive academic health centers.**



## education

Our faculty **educate and train the next generation of health care providers and researchers** to provide outstanding patient care and improve community health in Houston and beyond.



## UTHEALTH HOUSTON ALUMNI ARE CALLED TO CARE



## research

Our faculty and students **conduct research to improve the dual pillars of health and well-being while addressing our nation's most pressing public health crises.**

UTHealth Houston ranks in the **top four universities in Texas in terms of total NIH funding in FY20**, with **\$116.2 million** awarded to date.



## patient care

UTHealth Houston is here for our community, and **has provided more than \$10.7 million in unreimbursed charity care.** Our faculty, residents, fellows, and students provide inpatient care at our **six primary teaching hospitals.**



*that* **BIND US** *together*

TEAR ALONG THIS LINE TO SAVE INFORMATION ON REVERSE



## SEE YOU AT AN UPCOMING UTHEALTH HOUSTON ALUMNI EVENT!

FEBRUARY

**McGovern Medical School  
and School of Dentistry  
Scholarship Reception**

MARCH

**McGovern Medical School  
Alumni Weekend**

APRIL

**UTHealth Houston  
Joint Alumni Mixer**

MAY

**UTHealth Houston  
Commencement**

*For a full list of events or for more event details, visit  
[go.uth.edu/AlumniEvents](http://go.uth.edu/AlumniEvents)*



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UTHEALTH HOUSTON FAMILY!**



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## CLASS NOTES

**Submit Class Notes!**  
Class notes include job promotions, career changes, entrepreneurial ventures, photos, family news, gatherings with classmates, or anything new to share with the UTHealth Houston alumni community.

[go.uth.edu/ClassNotes](http://go.uth.edu/ClassNotes)



## UPDATE YOUR INFO

Have a new phone number or email address? Want to receive the electronic version of our alumni newsletter? If so, please take a moment to update your contact information at

[go.uth.edu/UpdateInfo](http://go.uth.edu/UpdateInfo)

**UTHEALTH HOUSTON  
ALUMNI NEWS**

INAUGURAL ISSUE  
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