

Pathology Newsletter

FEB 2025

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WORDS FROM THE PD/APD



What characteristics make one a “pathologist”? The American Board of Pathology recently published two detailed documents that contain a nearly exhaustive list of discrete pathologic entities that a resident ought to know prior to board examination. Our curriculum and associated didactics are heavily tilted toward instilling medical knowledge. Surely, this answers the question: a pathologist is one who has mastered a required set of medical data. In reality, a pathologist is much more than a vessel of facts. A pathologist is a physician who, as a diagnostician, supports the care of the patient, family, and a diverse community, with compassion, professionalism and scholarship. A pathologist works in interprofessional teams to enhance patient safety and improve patient care quality.

In this newsletter, we want to emphasize the critical role of interprofessionalism in improving healthcare communication and in enhancing collaborative practice, especially within pathology. The practice of medicine is unfortunately stressful and often leads to burnout. Pathologists, like any practitioner of healthcare, may find it easier to create imaginary bollards around their specialty. At best, they may remain isolated and at worst they may blame everyone else for any professional mishaps. Yet, there are numerous studies showing interprofessionalism is linked to positive patient outcomes and to healthy inclusive work environments that tend to elevate the quality of patient care and reduce burnout.

In our department, collaborative work takes place on a regular basis but it receives little recognition. So, in this issue of the newsletter, we are bringing the spotlight to two members of our department that exemplify interprofessionalism. In fact, every subsequent issue of this newsletter will highlight the work of a pathologist and a non-pathologist. First, Dr. Avila is a new member of our faculty. She is a gifted surgical pathologist and a skilled cytopathologist. Quickly upon her arrival, she began forging relationships within the department in order to advance the educational experience of our trainees. Dr. Avila has now started a weekly Wednesday morning slide review session. The second member of our community to be recognized is Rebecca Waller, a cytotechnologist/ cytologist with decades of experience. Mrs. Waller is an amazing diagnostician who is not only well-appreciated by pathologists but is well-known and valued by physicians from across many specialties (e.g., radiologists, surgeons, endocrinologists, pulmonologists, oncologists, ...). Please take the time to read their profiles below.

So, what characteristics make one a “pathologist”? Interestingly and maybe not surprisingly, if you ask one hundred pathologists, you might get one hundred different answers. Nonetheless, what remains an irrefutable fact is that the quality of patient care is positively tethered to strong and transparent collaboration among all who are directly or indirectly involved in the delivery of health care, in other words “interprofessionalism.”

Drs. Von Samedi, Mary Berg, John Fowler, and Lindsey Westbrook

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

REBECCA WALLER, MPH, SCT (ASCP)

Instructor- Cytologist

**Most impactful part of your job.**

I believe the most impactful aspect of my work is the early identification of abnormal cells within cancerous and pre-cancerous lesions. Accurate detection of these cells plays a crucial role in facilitating timely treatment, ultimately leading to improved patient outcomes. This early intervention is essential in preventing the progression of cancer.

What advice would you give to your younger self or someone still pursuing their education?

First, embrace the journey of discovery, even if it means taking unexpected turns. Don't be afraid to change course when you find something that truly sparks your passion. Trust in the value of learning—both inside and outside the classroom. Every experience, whether it's a class, a mentor, or even a setback, contributes to your growth and often gives you a few good stories for later. In life, balance is key—be sure to take time to nurture relationships and care for yourself.

University of degree

B.S. Microbiology (Arizona State University)
B.S.H.S. Cytotechnology (Old Dominion University)
MPH (CU Anschutz- School of Public Health)

Where did you grow up?

Cleveland, OH

What are you most proud of?

My two daughters (Abby, 23 and Lauren, 20). So fun to watch them grow into such kind, intelligent young women.

Favorite thing to do in Colorado.

I love to spend a few days with the family up at Grand Lake each summer and hike the East Inlet Trail. This always includes a mandatory stop at Bonfire Burritos in Golden, CO . If you haven't been, you need to go. You'll thank me later.

Best place you've ever traveled.

Peru had been my favorite destination thus far. I went to volunteer in Cuzco at the CerviCusco Clinic and was fortunate enough to get to spend a few extra days in the area. The Incan history and beauty of Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley make this a truly special place.

Something you're passionate about.

I'm extremely passionate about quality healthcare and education being available to all. Those who know me, know my husband and I are almost equally passionate about Halloween!

Who had the greatest influence on your education and/or career path?

My college journey began as an architecture major, but my path took a significant turn when I enrolled in an elective course on the biology of the HIV virus, taught by Dr. Richard Burke. His passion and enthusiasm for virology was contagious, sparking a deep interest in cellular and microbiology. I then changed my major and worked as a research assistant in his laboratory for the next 3 years. I credit Dr. Burke for fostering my love of science.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

MONICA SANCHEZ AVILA, MD

Assistant Professor, Pathology

**Most impactful part of your job?**

The most rewarding part of my job is reaching an accurate diagnosis in a timely manner, ensuring that patients get the right treatment. The ability to make a meaningful difference in someone's health is deeply fulfilling, and it constantly reminds me why I chose this profession.

What advice would you give to your younger self or someone still pursuing their education?

To my younger self, and to anyone navigating their educational journey, I'd say: Never lose sight of the big picture, and always remember that life is choices.

University of Degree

I earned my MD degree from Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) in Mexico.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up mostly in Mexico City, but I lived 3 years in Boston when I was younger.

What are you most proud of?

I am incredibly proud of my brother. A few years ago, he survived a traumatic brain injury from a serious accident. His courage and resilience throughout the recovery process have been nothing short of inspiring. Today, he is a portfolio manager at the investment firm where he works.

Favorite thing to do in Colorado.

So far, I've only experienced Colorado during the fall and winter, but I've fallen in love with the mountains. Learning how to ski has been a highlight.

Best place you've ever traveled.

It's tough to pick just one, but my top five destinations are Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Maasai Mara in Kenya, Tokyo, Patagonia in Argentina and Istanbul.

Something you're passionate about.

I'm deeply passionate about traveling, scuba diving, food tasting, and modern art. The quote "I haven't been everywhere, but it's on my list" really resonates with me.

Who had the greatest influence on your education and/or career path?

My parents have been the greatest influence on my educational and professional journey. Both are dedicated academicians; my mom is a renal pathologist and my dad is a rheumatologist.

SAYING THANK YOU

Thank you to Allison Martin, MD and Askia Dunnon, MD for serving as our Chief Residents.

On behalf of the Department of Pathology, we want to extend our gratitude for your leadership, dedication, and hard work throughout your time as chief residents. Your guidance, support, and commitment have made a lasting impact on our program and the people within it.

Thank you for your patience, advocacy, and the countless hours you've devoted to ensuring everything runs smoothly. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed, and we truly appreciate all that you have done.

Outgoing Chief Accomplishment Highlights:

- Spent months making the resident rotation schedule, the call schedule, and the resident didactics schedule.
- Managed those schedules through numerous changes.
- Helped multiple residents navigate residency through life events.
- Mediated ✨drama✨
- Strongly and continuously advocated for residents.
- Restarted 3 electives, including beta testing the new & revised Informatics rotation.



Thank you to Hannah Schmidt for her hard work as our Residency Coordinator.

The Department of Pathology would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Hannah for her outstanding work as our residency coordinator. Her dedication and contributions have played a vital role in supporting our program, and we truly appreciate all that she has done.

As Hannah nears the completion of her Physician Assistant program, we wish her the very best in this exciting journey and new career. While she will be greatly missed, we have no doubt that she will continue to make a meaningful impact in her new role. Congratulations, Hannah!

A Note From Hannah:



To every person who made my time here so meaningful—especially my team—thank you for taking a chance on me, an EMT with no experience in the administration of graduate medical education. I stepped into this role at a time when, like so many others, I was feeling the weight of clinical burnout from COVID. What I thought would be a temporary job shift turned into more than three years of invaluable opportunities, growth, and relationships—ones that have supported me throughout PA school and will continue to shape me long after I leave.

To all of the residents, fellows, and faculty I have worked with—through this role, I gained an even deeper appreciation for the immense sacrifice and dedication required in medical education. The work you do, the time you invest, and the incredible breadth of knowledge you possess changes lives - I will carry that respect with me and continue to advocate for you throughout my career. Thank you again for everything. Wishing you all the best, and I hope our paths cross again in the future!

With immense gratitude - Hannah

A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW CHIEFS

Dear Colleagues,

As your new chief residents, we're excited to share our vision for our program. Residency is challenging, but it doesn't have to be a solitary journey. What makes this program truly strong is our people. Our goal is to create a connected environment where every resident is supported and valued.

To achieve this, we've identified a few key goals:

1. Build a Supportive Resident Community

We aim to foster a culture where residents can lean on each other for help, and where mentorship is a natural part of daily work. We want everyone to feel connected and supported, both professionally and personally.

2. Balance Work and Learning

We will advocate for efficient workflows that protect educational opportunities while maintaining quality patient care. We believe that it is essential to create space for both hands-on teaching and practical experience.

3. Enhance Feedback Mechanisms

Our goal is to promote a feedback culture that is developmental, timely, and actionable—encouraging growth, confidence, and fostering continuous improvement.

4. Prioritize Well-Being

Resident well-being is a top priority. We will work towards realistic workloads, wellness initiatives, and open communication to help prevent burnout and promote a healthy work-life balance.

We know that the best ideas come from collaboration, so we encourage you to share your thoughts and suggestions with us as we work to implement these goals and continue to make our program even better.

Sincerely,

Your Chief Residents,

McKinzie Johnson, MD

&

Joseph Ferrante, MD



Raising the Bar

CU Anschutz Hematology Makes a Significant Impact at the 66th Annual American Society of Hematology Conference



The ASH Annual Meeting & Exposition is the foremost event in classical and malignant hematology, drawing over 30,000 health professionals, clinicians, researchers, and educators from around the globe. CU Anschutz's outstanding presence at the conference underscores their dedication to advancing hematology and enhancing patient care through innovative research and collaboration.

Click [here](#) to see the full article



Recent Publications:

Adekunle Alabi, PhD

Assistant Professor,
Pathology

JCLA Journal of Clinical Laboratory Analysis

Open Access

Measurement of Whole Blood Tacrolimus Concentrations by LC-MS/MS and Immunoassay Methods: Influence of Immediate-Release vs Extended-Release Tacrolimus Formulations

[Read Full Text Here](#)

IMPACT STATEMENT

This study highlights the differential biases between immunoassay and LC-MS/MS for the measurement of whole blood tacrolimus concentrations in patients receiving immediate-release vs extended-release tacrolimus formulations. These assay biases should be considered when interpreting tacrolimus concentration measurements in clinical practice, as subtherapeutic or supratherapeutic tacrolimus exposure may lead to poor outcomes in transplant recipients.

Faculty Feature



Kristy Crooks, PhD

Associate Professor,
Pathology



Dr. Kristy Crooks was elected to the Board of Directors of the Association for Molecular Pathology, Genetics Subdivision Chair, serving a 2 year term through November 2026.

The Genetics Subdivision is comprised of AMP members who indicate that they have a professional interest in medical genetics.

The Genetics Subdivision Leadership has membership on the Clinical Practice, Nominating, Program, and Training & Education Committees to ensure the continuing education and professional development of those who use molecular diagnostics in the diagnosis and management of genetic diseases and disorders.

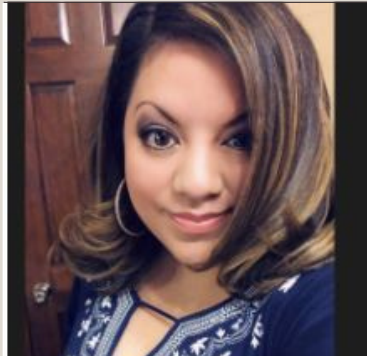
Meet the Pathology Program Coordinators!

With all the new faces and some changes within the department, we thought this would be a good time to reintroduce our program coordinator team!



Pat Braund

Fellowship Coordinator
(BB/transfusion, Cyto,
Forensic, GI/Liver, Surg
path)



Fran Jeelani

Academic Services
Manager - Pathology
Residency Coordinator



Cassie Thomson

Residency and Fellowship
Coordinator



Irma Salas

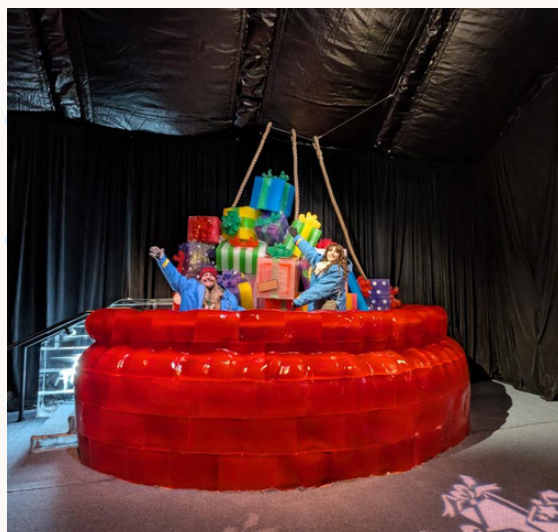
Fellowship Coordinator
(Peds Path) & Education
Coordinator



Julia Schuster

Fellowship Coordinator
(Breast/GYN, Soft Tissue,
Derm, Heme, MGP)

Happy holidays





Pathology

happy
hour

MARCH 21, 2025

STAY TUNED FOR:

Match Day

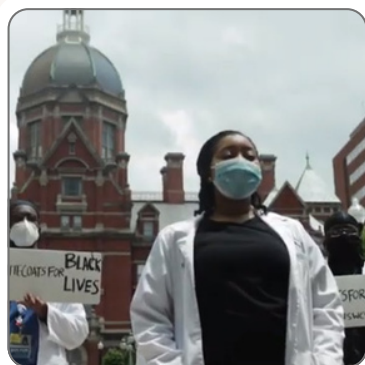
ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE DEPARTMENT OF PATHOLOGY
IS EXCITED TO LEARN WHO WILL
BE JOINING US ON JULY 1ST!

KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR AN
INTRODUCTION OF OUR NEWEST
MATCHES!

UPCOMING

events



*White Coats for Black Lives and
Bioethics and Humanities Student
Group*

Time: 12pm to 1pm

Location: Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics
and Humanities (R27), Art Gallery and
Gossard Forum

Feb.

24

2025



*Denver St. Patrick's
Day Parade*

Celebrate St. Patrick's spirit with fun,
laughter, and a wee bit of blarney!

Location: Downtown Denver

March

15

2025



Match Day

An exciting time when we know who
will join us next academic year!

March

21

2025

Did you KNOW?

February Highlights

DEI Resources and Campus Impact:

Amid recent executive orders restricting diversity practices in federal agencies, educational institutions, and private companies, the University of Colorado remains steadfast in its mission to advance medical education, research, and patient care. While the external landscape may change, our commitment to excellence, service, and inclusivity remains unwavering. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamental to our campus culture and educational initiatives, and we will continue to uphold these values as essential to our community and our work.

Below, you will find resources for mental health support as well as information on how these DEI restrictions may impact our campus.

- [Mental Health Resources](#) **here**
- [Information on DEI Restrictions](#) **here**

Federal Transition Updates:

With the transition to new federal leadership in January 2025, the administration has introduced policies and regulations that may impact research operations at higher education institutions nationwide. CU Anschutz leadership, along with the University of Colorado's federal relations team and legal counsel, is closely monitoring these changes to assess their effects on our research community. While some areas allow for immediate action, others require further clarification. This site will remain updated with the latest information for the CU Anschutz research community.

- [Updates](#) **here**

Black History Month:

Black History Month, celebrated every February in the United States, is a time to recognize and celebrate the achievements and contributions of African Americans throughout history, highlighting their struggles and triumphs against oppression, with a focus on educating people about their significant impact on society

- [Resources and History](#) **here**

