

Obstetrics & Gynecology NEWSLETTER

EDUCATION FEATURE:

SPARCC Program Launches 2025 Recruitment Cycle

The NIH-funded SPARCC (Student-Centered Pathway to Advance Research and Cancer Careers) program is now recruiting undergraduates for its 2025-26 cohort.

This 12-week hybrid educational initiative, spread out from November 2025 to August 2026, engages undergraduate students in faculty-mentored, hands-on summer cancer research, clinical practicums, and interactive workshops and journal clubs led by leading experts. Participants will gain a deep understanding of clinical and translational cancer research, benefit from professional networking opportunities, and receive guidance from leading experts to prepare them for careers in STEM-related disciplines. A monetary stipend is provided to support scholars' research and learning efforts. There is no tuition fee, and housing support is available for scholars' residing outside the Milwaukee area during in-person sessions.

The SPARCC curriculum builds on the foundation of our previous five-year pathway program funded by the NCI (NCI-R25-CA 221715). From 2019 to 2023, we received applications from 29 states and the District of Columbia and successfully graduated 71 students. Many alumni have gone on to pursue graduate and medical education, enter STEM-related careers, or serve as Clinical Research Professionals.

If you know undergraduate students who may be interested, please share this opportunity, and encourage them to apply!

Application deadline: October 15, 2025

For more information, visit <https://obgyn.mcw.edu/sparcc/> or contact sparcc@mcw.edu.

Welcome to the Fall 2025 OBGYN NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the fall 2025 Edition of the MCW Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology Newsletter!

This issue highlights the exciting launch of the NIH-funded SPARCC program, new research grants, clinical trials, and departmental achievements. We celebrate new faculty and staff, showcase student and alumni updates, and share recent publications that reflect our commitment to advancing women's health through education, research, and clinical excellence. From clerkship innovations to community partnerships like ASCEND WI, this newsletter captures the vibrant momentum across our department. We invite you to explore, connect, and celebrate with us.

Janet S. Rader, MD
she/her

Jack A. and Elaine D. Klieger
Professor and Chair
Department of Obstetrics and
Gynecology

Associate Director, CRTEC Medical College of
Wisconsin Cancer Center



NEW GRANTS:

- **Janet S. Rader, MD (PI); Weichao Chen, PhD (Co-PI):** National Institute of Health/National Cancer Institute (NIH/NCI) - 1R25CA298917-01— Student-Centered Pathway to Advance Research and Cancer Careers
- **Jessica Grusnick, PA:** Froedtert & MCW Thrive Together —Understanding Roles, Building Belonging: Fostering Interprofessional Well-being Among OB-GYN APPs and Residents
- **Pradeep Chaluvally-Raghavan, PhD:** We Care Fund for Medical Innovation and Research — Anti-OSMR Antibody Drug Conjugate Therapy Development for Treating Pancreatic Cancer
- **Akinyemi Ojesina, PhD:** The American Cancer Society (ACS) - D1CR SHE-25-1435849-01-SHE — Developing Cancer Workforce and Awareness in the Rural Upper Midwest-ACS SHE Program

NEW CLINICAL TRIALS:

- **PI: Elizabeth Hopp, MD — CORCEPT-CORT125134-557-BELLA:** This phase III trial compares the effect of olaparib for one year versus two years, with or without bevacizumab, for the treatment of BRCA 1/2 mutated or homologous recombination deficient stage III or IV ovarian cancer. We would like to find out if taking olaparib as maintenance for one year is as good or worse than the usual approach of taking olaparib for two years for ovarian cancer patients.
- **PI: William Bradley, MD — NRG-GY036:** This phase III trial compares the effect of olaparib for one year versus two years, with or without bevacizumab, for the treatment of BRCA 1/2 mutated or homologous recombination deficient stage III or IV ovarian cancer. We would like to find out if taking olaparib as maintenance for one year is as good or worse than the usual approach of taking olaparib for two years for ovarian cancer patients.
- **PI: Anna Palatnik, MD — CHAP Maternal & Child Follow-Up Studies:** A follow-up cohort study of mothers from the primary CHAP trial to see if treatment of chronic hypertension in pregnancy influences the long-term risk of cardiovascular disease.
- **PI: Julia Dickson-Gomez, MD — HOME:** The effect of housing instability and neighborhood deprivation on maternal health: A follow-up cohort study of children born to mothers during the primary CHAP trial to see the effect of treating chronic hypertension in pregnancy on childhood neurodevelopment and cardiovascular health.
- **PI: Emily Smith, MD — Validation of Boden substance use screening tool:** To validate a substance use screening tool in pregnancy.

ASCEND WI Annual Retreat: A Day of Reflection and Reconnection

Held Wednesday, June 11, 2025 | ThriveOn King

The ASCEND WI team gathered at **ThriveOn King** for the annual **U54 ASCEND WI Retreat**, a day dedicated to celebrating milestones, sharing insights, and looking forward to continued progress in maternal health across Southeastern Wisconsin.

From morning reflections to afternoon team-building, the retreat highlighted the passion and progress of each ASCEND WI initiative. It was a meaningful opportunity to reconnect as a transdisciplinary team united by a shared vision: improving maternal health outcomes through community partnership, research, and collaboration.

Each of ASCEND's four core initiatives embodies one aspect of our mission:

BUNDLE

Building trust and uniting clinician teams through doula partnership—Focused on collaborative care models that center birthing people's voices.

HOME

Addressing housing instability and neighborhood conditions—Exploring how secure housing and neighborhood investment affect maternal outcomes.

ENHANCE-M Education

Early career development to enrich maternal health research pathways

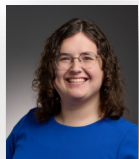
Supporting the next generation of maternal health scholars and investigators.

TEAM

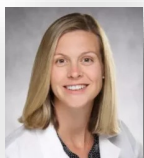
Creating cross-disciplinary teams for maternal health innovation

Fostering collaboration between clinicians, researchers, and community stakeholders.

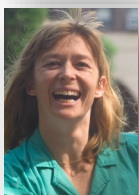


WELCOME FACULTY:

Alex Brill, MD — Assistant Professor in OBGYN, joining us from our OBGYN residency program.



Emily Hill, MD — Associate Professor in OBGYN, division of Gynecologic Oncology, joining us from University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.



Rebecca Mahn, MD — Assistant Professor in OBGYN, joining us from Jacobi Medical Center, NYC.



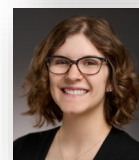
Ushma Patel, MD — Assistant Professor in OBGYN, division of Urogynecology, joining us from the Urogyn Fellowship at UW-Madison.

WELCOME SECONDARY FACULTY:

Yaqiang Wang, PhD — Assistant Professor in Biophysics; Secondary Faculty in Obstetrics & Gynecology

WELCOME NEW STAFF:

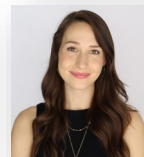
Nathan Whitaker — Grants Coordinator.



Hailey Bock — Research Technologist with Dr. Bill Chen.

WELCOME ADVANCED PRACTICE CLINICIANS:

Shannan Cantu Santoli, CNM— Certified Nurse Midwife in General OBGYN, joining us from Cudahy Health Department.



Dani-Joy Kovac, CNM— Certified Nurse Midwife in General OBGYN, joining us from Ascension SE Wisconsin- St. Joseph.

CLINICAL UPDATES:

Complex Gynecology —We have started offering complex gynecology new patient virtual navigation visits this year.

IN THE NEWS:

- TMJ4 news reporter Adriana Mendez shared her story and experience under the care of our **Reproductive, Endocrinology and Infertility division**.



- Christna Wichman, DO**, interviewed on WI Journal Sentinel article on “Mental well-being of mothers is taking a nosedive, major nonprofit study shows.

✓ MARK YOUR CALENDARS:**September 24, 2025: Sterner
Endowed Lectureship****Aimen Shaaban, MD —****“40 Years of Prenatal Therapy for Congenital Diaphragmatic Hernia”**

Director, The Chicago Institute for Fetal Health; Attending Physician, Pediatric Surgery
Professor of Surgery, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

MCW Bolger Auditorium**November 5, 2025: Delfs, MD Endowed Lecture****Sarah Adams, MD —****“Telescoping the Translational Pipeline - opportunities for innovation in cancer research”**

Professor, Gynecologic Oncology The Donna Tomky and Richard Geer Endowed Professor in Ovarian Cancer Research, University of New Mexico School of Medicine, Albuquerque, NM

MCW Bolger Auditorium**April 17, 2025: Women’s Health Conference****Brookfield Conference Center**

To support our department in research or education, visit our website at

<https://obgyn.mcw.edu/about-us/philanthropy/>

or call (414) 955-4711 to donate.

DEPARTMENT NEWS

- **Robert Rydze, MD; Emily RW. Davidson, MD; Abbey Merryman, MD** have been selected to the Epic Specialty Steering Boards/Advisory Boards.
- **Dr. Weichao "Vera" Chen** was approved for membership in the Medical College of Wisconsin Cancer Center on July 7, 2025.
- **Weichao "Vera" Chen, PhD**, has successfully completed the Graduate School Research Mentoring Academy at the Medical College of Wisconsin.
- **Rameesa Darul Amne Syed Mohammed, PhD**, received the MCW Cancer center postdoctoral fellowship for years 2025 - 2027.
- **Mitch Depke, MD ('26) and Kathryn Tighe, MD ('28)** were awarded the 2024-2025 Best Resident Teaching Award.
- **Dr. Denise Uyar** was awarded the 2024-2025 APGO Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award.
- MCW student Vienne Seitz won the OBGYN Klieger Award and MCW student Elisha Jaeke won the OBGYN Brennan Award for the 2024/2025 year.
- **Jackie Peebles, MD; Ty Manning, MD; Kate Schoyer, MD; Perna Pandya, MD; Raven Koeppler, MD; Sarah Wesley, ('26); Alexander Choi, ('28); and Kristen Lentsch, MD ('28)** were awarded MCW's Outstanding Medical Student Teacher Pins Awards for 2024-2025 year.

STUDENT NEWS:

The OBGYN medical student clerkship has undergone several recent updates. In July 2025, Dr. Prerna Pandya and Jessica Grusnick assumed roles as clerkship director and co-director, supported by education coordinator Laura Kopacki. Drs. Mona Farez and Zachary Colvin provided guidance during the transition. The clerkship continues as part of the 12-week integrated surgical block in the Fusion curriculum, with the third rotation block now underway.

Resident involvement in student orientation and learning sessions has expanded. Dr. Mitch Depke led a patient-based session on postpartum hemorrhage, while Drs. Samantha Boettcher and Kathryn Tighe facilitated a Q&A session and helped teach vaginal delivery and prenatal exam skills during a clinical skills workshop.

This fall, twelve students applying to OBGYN residency were interviewed and supported with SLOE letters. To improve efficiency and quality, Dr. Vera Chen partnered with the clerkship team to develop an AI-assisted letter-writing process.

Finally, timely feedback and evaluation remain priorities. Faculty and residents are encouraged to provide students with real-time feedback on clinical skills, self-directed learning, and professionalism, and to complete OASIS evaluations promptly to ensure accurate grading.

FUN NEWS:

Medical Education Coordinator, Laura Kopacki, participated in Storm the Bastille 5k Run and Blood Cancer United Scenic Shore 150 mile Bike Ride!

DEPARTMENT NEWS CONT'D:

- **Laura Kopacki, Medical Education Coordinator**, was a presenter in a small group for the MCWfusion Educator Development Retreat. Along with two other coordinators, she presented on organization techniques in Brightspace for coordinators.
- **Jessica Grusnick, PA**, completed her Masters of Health Professions Education degree from Maastricht University.
- **Jessica Grusnick, PA**, is a Project lead for the Kern National Network funded project: *Enhancing Flourishing for Nurse Practitioners and Physician Associates: A Comprehensive evaluation of autonomy, collaboration, and flourishing to develop career ladders*.
- **Jessica Grusnick, PA**, was an Invited panelist speaker: MCW APP leadership and professional development program, APP leadership panel.
- Genetic Counselor, **Emma Kell, MS**, presented her thesis on "Assessing the impact of updated NCCN guidelines on clinical management and risk communication for the CHEK2 p.1157T variant in breast cancer" at the Wisconsin Genetic Counselors Association annual meeting.

ALUMNI CORNER:

We'd like to hear from you!
Please send us your
updates to:

obgynresidency@mcw.edu



DEPARTMENT SOCIAL—September 6:

We hosted a department social this past September at Third Space Brewing Company and had a group from the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF) for some singing entertainment and fundraising to kick off our academic year.



AUDAXITY—Bike Ride Fundraiser for Cancer—August 17:

On August 17, more than 1,050 riders, volunteers, fundraisers and supporters joined forces for the inaugural Audaxity bike ride to advance groundbreaking research at the Medical College of Wisconsin Cancer Center. Thank you to everyone who committed their time, energy and financial resources; your efforts will make a real difference in our quest to end cancer. Our department, along with the Dean's office, raised more than \$13,500.



**Stay in touch and
follow us!**

**Have something to share?
Send it our way!**

mcwobgyn@mcw.edu

Faculty Promotions:

- **Libby Hopp, MD**—Associate Professor of Gynecologic Oncology
- **Jessica Smith, MD**—Fetal Concerns Director
- **Prerna Pandya, MD**—Medical Student Co-Director
- **Jessica Grusnick, PA**—Medical Student Co-Director
- **Anna Palatnik, MD**—Vice Chair of Clinical Research

PUBLICATIONS:

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