Baylor College of Medicine

THE MARGARET M. AND ALBERT B. ALKEK DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

A DOSE OF MEDICINE

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

SPRING 2026

HASHEM B. EL-SERAG, M.D., M.P.H.

Vice President of the Learning Health System

Chair of the Department of Medicine

CELEBRATING OUR DEPARTMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Big things are happening across the Department of Medicine, from a new NIH-funded center positioning Houston at the forefront of obesity and nutrition research to powerful conversations on the future of AI in medicine at the annual Alkek Lecture. Faculty recognition efforts, promotions, and an impressive fellowship and residency match highlight the people driving progress and shaping the next generation of leaders. Explore how innovation, community, and impact are coming together to move medicine forward. Let me know what resonated with you, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts as we strive to strengthen our shared mission.

ANNUAL ALKEK LECTURE EXAMINES AI'S EVOLVING ROLE IN MEDICINE

From left to right: Scott Seaman, Dr. Peter McCaffrey, Dr. Hashem El-Serag, Charlie Williams

Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to spark excitement across the science and practice of medicine. Last fall, the Department of Medicine brought that conversation to the forefront during its Annual Alkek Lecture by welcoming Dr. Peter McCaffrey from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston as the keynote speaker.

Dr. McCaffrey's lecture, titled "AI Will Change Everything—Just Not the Way We Expect: From Hype Cycle to Health Impact," offered a thought-provoking exploration of how AI is influencing healthcare and where its true impact ultimately lies.

Dr. McCaffrey challenged attendees to think beyond headlines and rapid technological advancements. He advocated for focusing on measured implementation, responsible innovation, and producing meaningful health outcomes. Further, he encouraged a nuanced perspective rather than viewing AI as a disruptive force that will instantly revolutionize care, one that recognizes both its limitations and its potential to improve patient care when thoughtfully integrated.

COMMUNITY

The lecture sparked dialogue among attendees, who represented a broad range of clinical, research, and educational backgrounds. Participants reflected on how AI could enhance clinical decision-making, streamline workflows, support research innovation, and ultimately contribute to better patient outcomes. Discussions also reflected the importance of human-centered values in medicine and ensuring that technology complements rather than replace the relationships at the heart of patient care.

"The Alkek Lecture provides us with an opportunity to thoughtfully examine the forces shaping the future of medicine," said Dr. Hashem El-Serag. "Artificial intelligence holds tremendous potential, but it is through critical dialogue and collaboration that we ensure these innovations truly serve our patients, our learners, and our broader community."

The Department was honored to welcome distinguished guests from the Alkek Foundation, including its President, Charlie Williams, and Executive Director, Scott Seaman. Their presence highlighted the Foundation's continued support of academic excellence and innovation in the Department of Medicine.

The Annual Alkek Lecture remains a cornerstone event for the Department, providing an opportunity to explore emerging topics that shape the future of healthcare while fostering intellectual exchange across specialties. This year's focus on AI aligned with broader institutional efforts to thoughtfully evaluate and implement new technologies in ways that advance education, research, and clinical care.

Dr. El-Serag providing opening remarks.

Dr. McCaffrey sharing his expertise about the future of AI.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

HONORING EXCELLENCE BEYOND CONVENTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

DR. RUCHI GABA

In academic medicine, achievement is frequently measured in grants awarded, papers published, and promotions earned. But what about the quiet mentor who checks in after a long clinic day? The colleague who builds bridges between specialties? The faculty member who creates space for others to feel seen and supported?

Those people matter too.

Recognizing the power and value of these contributions, Dr. Ruchi Gaba, Vice Chair for Faculty Development, launched a new Faculty Recognition Awards Program designed to recognize and celebrate the people and behaviors that shape the heart of the Department of Medicine.

"This initiative grew from observing that much of what makes our department special happens in everyday moments that often go unseen," Dr. Gaba shared. "Faculty support one another, mentor, build bridges across teams, and create a sense of belonging that strengthens our culture."

These new awards recognize community-building, collaboration, inclusivity, mentorship, and professionalism as well as excellence in scholarship and leadership. "Our goal is to build a culture where appreciation becomes part of our daily environment, not just an occasional event," Dr. Gaba explained. "By highlighting different types of contributions, such as community-building and teamwork, we hope to encourage collaboration, kindness, and shared ownership of our department's mission."

These awards align with the Department's core values. In supporting and valuing individuals who strengthen teams and foster connections, this reinforces behaviors that support outstanding patient care, education, and research. Importantly, the awards are inclusive of all sections and career stages. Whether an early-career faculty member championing innovation, a mid-career physician building interdisciplinary partnerships, or a senior leader in modeling mentorship and professionalism, all play important roles in shaping our shared mission.

Dr. Gaba knows recognition has the power to shape identity. "When faculty feel appreciated for both their visible and invisible work, it strengthens belonging, motivation, and engagement."

Ultimately, these awards reflect the Department's broader vision for faculty development, one supporting professional advancement, connection, purpose, and community, and affirming that excellence is achieved through collective effort.

FANCIER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER: HOW RETHINKING ROUTINE CARE IMPROVES SAFETY AND REDUCES COSTS

DR. MAYAR AL MOHAJER

What if improving patient safety did not require a new device or major investment, but a simple, thoughtful change in technique? A new multicenter study led by Dr. Mayar Al Mohajer suggests that, in some cases, simplifying routine clinical practices can preserve quality while reducing healthcare costs.

In hospitals, blood cultures used to detect serious bloodstream infections are performed thousands of times each day. However, blood cultures are occasionally contaminated, leading to the prescription of unnecessary antibiotics, prolonged hospital stays, and increased healthcare spending. Many hospitals adopted commercial blood diversion devices to reduce contamination, but these technologies can add substantial costs.

In this study, researchers evaluated whether a simpler approach could achieve similar results. They examined what happened when hospitals transitioned from a commercial blood diversion device to a manual technique that discards the first bit of blood collected during the draw. The study included more than 12,000 adult patients across three medical pavilions in Texas and compared outcomes before and after the transition.

The findings were notable. Switching to the manual technique did not increase blood culture contamination rates, hospital length of stay, or days of antibiotic therapy. Clinical outcomes remained stable across all measured metrics. However, laboratory-related costs decreased significantly. The switch resulted in an estimated $75,000 annualized savings during the postinterventional phase.

"This study shows that we can maintain patient safety and clinical quality while being thoughtful about how we use resources," said Dr. Al Mohajer. "Quality improvement is about achieving better outcomes while creating systems that sustain high-quality care over time."

The findings highlight the importance of continuously examining everyday clinical practices through a data-driven lens. Small deliberate changes in routine procedures can generate meaningful improvements in healthcare efficiency without compromising patient care. For healthcare systems facing increasing financial pressures, the study provides a reminder that innovation does not always mean adding new technology. Sometimes, improving care requires simplifying how medicine is practiced.

FACULTY PROMOTIONS

2025-26 FACULTY PROMOTIONS

Sean Hartig, Ph.D.
Professor

Himabindu Kadiyala, M.D.
Professor

Zhuyong Mei, M.D.
Professor

Arunima Misra, M.D.
Professor

Kent Osborne, M.D.
Distinguished Emeritus Professor

Sarah Ahmed, M.B.B.S., M.P.H., Ph.D.
Associate Professor

Sumimasa Arimura, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

John Berens, M.D.
Associate Professor

Bryan Jiang, M.D.
Associate Professor

Chaitanya Koneru, M.D.
Associate Professor

Kristin Kostick Quenet, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

Margaret Lee, M.D.
Associate Professor

Ronald Maag, M.D.
Associate Professor

Arash Maghsoudi, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

L. Parker Gregg, M.S., M.S.C.S.
Associate Professor

Rehman Sheikh, M.D.
Associate Professor

As of April 1, 2026

HOUSTON POSITIONED AT THE FOREFRONT OF NUTRITION AND OBESITY RESEARCH WITH NEW NIH-FUNDED CENTER

DR. MARK HERMAN

A major milestone in nutrition and obesity research has arrived in Houston and is led by investigators in the Department of Medicine. The Section of Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolism, was awarded a highly competitive NIH P30 grant from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases to establish the **Houston Nutrition and Obesity Research Center (HNORC).** This award, totaling $5.9 million over five years, places Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) and its partner, UTHealth Houston, among an elite group, as the NIH only funds 11 university-based centers.

The Center will be led by Co-Principal Investigators, Dr. Mark Herman and Dr. Kristin Eckel-Mahan, alongside a distinguished leadership team, including Drs. Sean Hartig, Benjamin Arinkiel, Stephanie Sisley, Chunmei Wang, and Samer Mattar. The initiative draws strength from a broad network of investigators at BCM, UTHealth Houston, Ben Taub Hospital, Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Hospital, the United States Department of Agriculture/Agriculture Research Service Children's Research Nutrition Center, Texas Children's Hospital, and other institutions across the Houston area.

Dr. Herman emphasized that this award is more than funding; it represents momentum. ***"This grant is a testament to the depth of expertise and collaboration across our Houston research community," said Dr. Herman. "HNORC will serve as a catalyst, bringing together investigators, clinicians, and trainees to accelerate discoveries that improve the lives of patients affected by obesity and nutrition-related diseases."***

HNORC's mission is to enhance the multidisciplinarity and quality of obesity and nutritional sciences research by providing access to specialized services, resources, and expertise. By centralizing infrastructure and fostering cross-institutional collaboration, the HNORC will support the efficient and effective movement of ideas from bench to bedside. HNORC will include three biomedical research cores: the Clinical and Translational Obesity Research Core, Cellular and Molecular Metabolism Core, and Neuroendocrine Core. These cores will provide cutting-edge support across the full spectrum of obesity and metabolism research. The HNORC houses an enrichment program focusing on training, mentorship, and professional development, cultivating the next generation of leaders in nutrition and metabolic science.

This NIH award highlights the scientific strength and collaborative spirit that define BCM's partnership with UTHealth Houston. Given the rising impact of obesity and nutrition-related diseases nationwide, this center positions Houston at the forefront of innovative solutions. Through partnerships, expanded resources, and a commitment to scientific excellence, the HNORC will drive discoveries that meaningfully improve health outcomes.

EDUCATION

2025 FELLOWSHIP MATCH

The Internal Medicine Residency Program continues to be among the best in the country. The residents participated in more than 100 conferences and matched in the nation's top fellowship training programs.

Allergy and Immunology

Benjamin Daines: Duke University
Maria Lee: University of Pennsylvania

Cardiology

Laiba Asif: Baylor College of Medicine
Faiz Baqai: University of Texas, Houston
Zachary Cerra: University of Texas, Austin
Karl Lundin: University of Utah
Idine Mousavi: Mount Sinai Morningside
Fernando Padilla: Baylor College of Medicine
Tusharbhai Patel: Rush University Medical Center
Hannah Smati: New York University
Nathan Smith: Texas Heart Institute
Emily Xiao: Oregon Health & Science University
LakshmiPriya Uppalapati: University of Colorado - Denver
Cassie Weyland: Texas Children's Hospital

Endocrinology

Farida Eid: Baylor College of Medicine
Mariya Fatakdawala: Stanford Medicine

Gastroenterology

Irene J. Lee: Houston Methodist Hospital
Michael Perrin: Yale University
Pooja Prasad: Baylor College of Medicine
Michael Shi: Baylor College of Medicine
Kei Takigawa: Johns Hopkins
Andres Urias Rivera: Baylor College of Medicine

Hematology and Oncology

Samuel Black: Baylor College of Medicine
Kabir Grewal: University of Texas Southwestern
Louis Hinkle: MD Anderson Cancer Center
Trevor Jamison: Vanderbilt University
Vladislav Jdanov: University of Arizona
Walid Macaron: MD Anderson Cancer Center
Kelly Meza-Capcha: MD Anderson Cancer Center
Trung Nguyen: Baylor College of Medicine
Mathew Pendo: University of South Florida / Moffitt Cancer Center
Caitlynn Pham: Baylor College of Medicine
Valerio Rasi: Baylor College of Medicine
Nithya Sridhar: Rush University Medical Center

Infectious Disease

Fernando Centeno: University of Washington
Margaret Ginoza: University of California-Los Angeles
Zachary Kinler: Baylor College of Medicine
Monica Lou: Stanford
Anabel Medrano: University of Pennsylvania
April Nguyen: Baylor College of Medicine

Pulmonary and Critical Care

Jacob Friedman: Baylor College of Medicine
Bryan Nguyen: University of Texas, Houston
Anjiya Sulaiman: Boston University
Chelsea Wu: Baylor College of Medicine

Rheumatology

Christopher Boldt: Stanford
Irene S. Lee: Johns Hopkins
Zaara Qasim: Duke University
Shunshun Yan: Baylor College of Medicine

EDUCATION

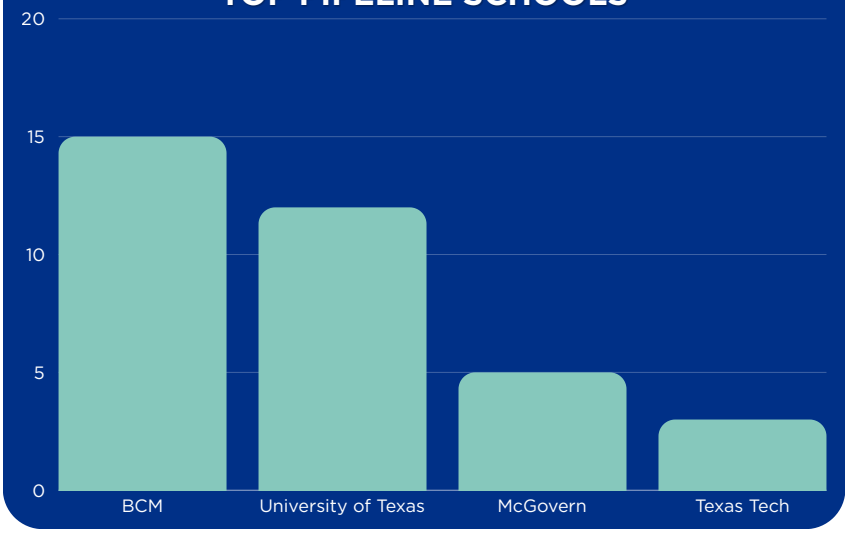
2026 RESIDENCY MATCH

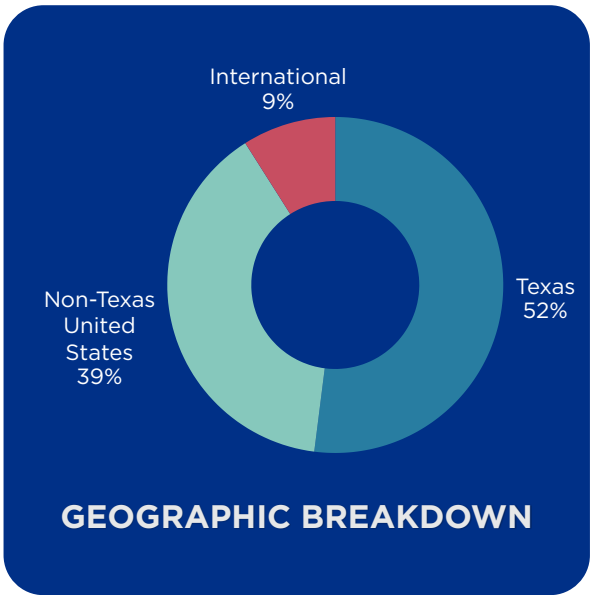
4,037
APPLICATIONS

73
TOTAL INTERNS MATCHED

557
INTERVIEWS

TOP PIPELINE SCHOOLS





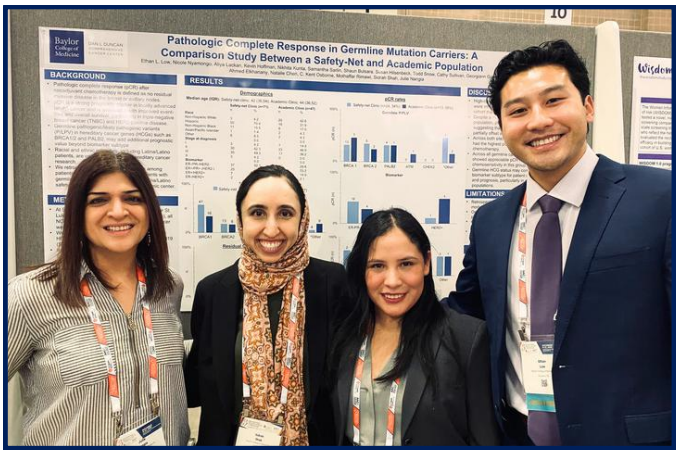
GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

2025-2026 Chief Medical Residents with the Medical Education Leadership Team.

THANK YOU

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS MOVE OUR MISSION FORWARD

This issue of *A Dose of Medicine* shines a light on the momentum we are building together: from major research initiatives to new groups that strengthen mentorship, leadership, and connection across our department. Every story we shared reflects the heart of our mission and the impact we are making as a community. If you felt inspired reading these stories, we invite you to scan the QR code to support our department. Your encouragement and support help us dream bigger, reach further, and make a real difference. Together, there is no limit to what we can achieve.



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