

Pedi Press

A Department of Pediatrics Publication



Message from the desk of Dr. Lara Shekerdeman

Dear All,

As we approach the end of February, I want to take a moment to reflect on the season and the many ways it brings our community together. This month offers several opportunities to recognize and honor the rich diversity of traditions, cultures, and experiences represented across our department.

February includes Valentine's Day, a time that, at its heart, celebrates kindness, connection, and care for one another—values that resonate deeply in the work we do every day. It is also a period of significance for many members of our community observing the Lunar New Year, a time of renewal, reflection, and hope, as well as for those preparing to observe Ramadan and the celebration of Eid in the months ahead. I am grateful for the many ways these traditions enrich our department and for the respect and openness our faculty, staff, and learners show toward one another.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to all who were on site across our campuses during the recent winter storm. Your dedication, flexibility, and commitment to patient care, education, and operations—often under challenging conditions—did not go unnoticed.

Looking ahead with optimism to warmer seasons—spring nears as a time of growth, renewal, and new possibilities. In this spirit, a new chapter is beginning for our Texas Children's Cancer Center, as MD Anderson pediatrics patients transition their care to us in April 2026.

I am continually inspired by the resilience, compassion, and excellence of this department, and I am grateful to work alongside such an extraordinary group of individuals. Thank you for all that you do, and for the many ways you contribute to our shared mission every day.

Happy reading and take care!
Lara

For more Pediatric latest update:
Connect with [Dr. Shekerdeman on LinkedIn](#)

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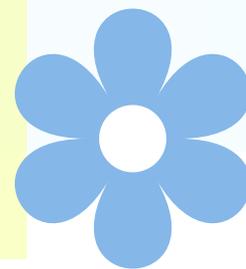
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A Valentine's Day memory of Lara Shekerdeman and her son when he was three years old!

Learn more about our

Advanced Practice Providers (APPs)



Claire Warner, MS, PA-C

Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition
Baylor College of Medicine
Texas Children's Hospital

Introduction

I grew up near Oklahoma City and went to OU for college. Going to PA school at Baylor College of Medicine is what brought me to Houston, and the community I've experienced and the opportunities available in this amazing medical center are what have kept me here.

What is your typical day working as a (specific specialty) APP and what do you enjoy most working in your practice?

My typical day as a PA in Hepatology includes a mix of consulting on post-transplant patients in the ICU, rounding on primary floor patients, participating in transplant Medical Review Boards, and reviewing liver biopsies. This specialty uniquely blends acute and chronic disease management, high-acuity care, and the breadth of general pediatrics. One of the most rewarding aspects of my role is the continuity of care and the opportunity to build long-term relationships with patients and families, even through multiple readmissions. It's truly transformational to walk alongside them throughout the pre- and post-transplant journey.

What inspired you to become an APP in this specialty?

I was drawn to this specialty because of my desire to be part of a truly collaborative team and to provide continuity in patient care. Each day I have the privilege of working alongside the most dedicated and knowledgeable physicians, pharmacists, dietitians, social workers, and nurses. It's an honor to be on a team with them and care for our patients together.

Share a fun fact

My fun fact is that I am a triplet (all girls). We are fraternal, all have different colored eyes, and they are my best friends.

Introduction

I was born and raised in New Jersey and later moved to South Carolina to pursue nursing, earning both my undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Medical University of South Carolina College of Nursing. In June 2004, I interviewed with Texas Children's Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine and was offered an Instructor and Pediatric Nurse Practitioner position in the Division of Critical Care Medicine. Accepting the position was an easy decision—I placed a deposit on an apartment that same day. Shortly after returning home, I told my parents, who had recently retired to South Carolina, that I would be moving to Texas. Today, I continue my career at Texas Children's Hospital, Woodlands Campus, where I serve as the Director of the Critical Care Advanced Practice Providers, a role that reflects both my long-standing commitment to pediatric critical care and my growth as a clinician and leader.

What is your typical day working as a (specific specialty) APP and what do you enjoy most working in your practice?

A typical clinical day involves caring for up to 6 critically and chronically ill children in the PICU. I usually start the day reviewing overnight events, labs, imaging, and ventilator settings so I have a clear picture of each patient before rounds. Morning rounds are patient and family centered, involving physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, and other team members. I enjoy working in the PICU because it challenges me intellectually and emotionally, and that challenge is what keeps me engaged and motivated. I appreciate working alongside an interdisciplinary team where collaboration, mutual respect, and shared accountability directly affect patient outcomes.

What inspired you to become an APP in this specialty?

Before entering nursing, I worked as a paramedic and frequently transported critically ill and injured patients to the emergency department. During these experiences, I observed nurse practitioners and physician assistants delivering advanced, patient-centered care in high-acuity settings. Building relationships with several NPs and PAs and learning about their roles and clinical impact inspired me to pursue advanced practice nursing and ultimately become a pediatric nurse practitioner.

Share a fun fact

Adrenaline junkie at heart—I've bungee jumped, skydived, and never back down from a thrill.



Mark Riccioni, DNP, APRN, CPNP-AC/PC

Director of Critical Care Advanced Practice
Providers, TCH The Woodlands
Assistant Professor, Pediatrics
Baylor College of Medicine
Division of Critical Care



Brandi M. Runnels, MMS, MS, PA-C

Associate Director, Inpatient APPs
Assistant Professor, Department of
Pediatrics, Division of Hematology -
Oncology

Introduction

My name is Brandi Runnels, and I proudly call myself an Army brat—a title that shaped my love for service, adaptability, and collecting new ZIP codes. I was born in New Orleans, and even after seven years in Houston (the longest I've ever lived anywhere), I'll always say I'm from Louisiana. Service is in my DNA thanks to my parents, and I continue that legacy as a member of the Louisiana Army National Guard, where I've served for nearly ten years. I joined Baylor College of Medicine and the Department of Pediatrics as a Physician Assistant in Critical Care. The PICU was one of the toughest decisions I've made, but it ultimately led me to my true passion—pediatric hematology and oncology. When the chance came to help build the inpatient team for this specialty, the transition made perfect sense to everyone (except maybe my boss). I now serve as the Director for the Inpatient APP group, balancing administrative work with my favorite role: being on the inpatient service, which feels like home.

What is your typical day working as a (specific specialty) APP and what do you enjoy most working in your practice?

My day starts with tea, pre-rounding, and formal rounds with our multidisciplinary team. The rest of the day is spent activating care plans, responding to urgent needs, collaborating with consultants, and admitting new patients. No two days are alike. The privilege of walking with patients and families through their most vulnerable moments is what I love most.

What inspired you to become an APP in this specialty?

Pediatrics has always been my calling—sometimes I joke it's because I wanted to be taller than my patients. I love teaching, and hematology/oncology captured my heart with its deep science. My early work in a histopathology lab sparked a curiosity about disease at the cellular level that eventually grew into wanting to treat it. This specialty combines my love of kids and my inner science nerd, and I truly wouldn't want to do anything else.

Share a fun fact

I love traveling! My husband and I take two major vacations a year—one with the kids and one without. We've followed the Women's World Cup from France to Australia, and we're already planning for Brazil in 2027!

Introduction

I completed my academic training locally, earning a BA in Philosophy at the University of St. Thomas, an MPH from UTH School of Public Health, and completed the PA Program at BCM. While finishing my MPH, I worked as a research assistant in the TCH Immunization Program, an experience that strengthened my commitment to improving child health and shaped my path toward clinical practice as a PA. Upon completion of PA school, I joined the DOP in the Division of Critical Care Medicine in 2010 where I benefited from strong APP and physician mentorship and later helped staff the community PICU when it opened at TCH West Campus.

What is your typical day working as a (specific specialty) APP and what do you enjoy most working in your practice?

A typical day in the community PICU is unpredictable, dynamic, and intellectually demanding. Working 12-hour shifts, my day begins with handoff, followed by pre-rounds and interdisciplinary, family-centered rounds. The remainder of the day involves close monitoring, proactive management, real-time clinical decision-making, and ongoing communication with care teams and families. I enjoy the collaborative and rewarding nature of my work, along with the opportunity to support critically ill children and families during vulnerable moments. Community PICU practice requires strong clinical judgment, early recognition of deterioration, and close teamwork. I value opportunities to teach and precept learners, participate in QI initiatives, and pursue a growing role in clinical research.

What inspired you to become an APP in this specialty?

A defining PICU elective during PA school, combining the intellectual rigor I enjoyed in internal medicine with pediatrics, confirmed my commitment to academic pediatric critical care.

Share a fun fact

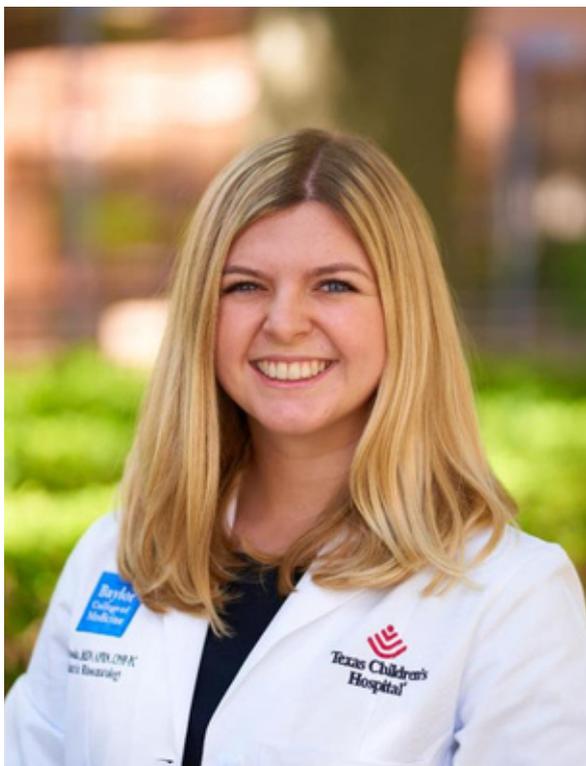
I enjoy hiking across the world and love being an auntie.



Cynthia S. Nelson, PA-C, MS, MPH

Assistant Professor,
Baylor College of Medicine
Division of Critical Care Medicine
Texas Children's West Campus PICU

Learn more about our Advanced Practice Providers (APPs) cont'd



Shelby Jones, MSN, APRN, CPNP-PC

Pediatric Rheumatology, Pediatric Pain
Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine Texas
Children's Hospital

Introduction

My name is Shelby Jones, and I am a pediatric rheumatology nurse practitioner at Baylor College of Medicine. I was diagnosed with juvenile psoriatic arthritis at age two and often joke that I was “raised in the rheumatology clinic.” Working in this field truly feels like home, and being able to relate to children with similar conditions is a gift!

What is your typical day working as a (specific specialty) APP and what do you enjoy most working in your practice?

I serve a unique role in our department, wearing several hats. I see new and follow-up patients in clinic, care for patients in our infusion centers, and provide COPE cognitive behavioral therapy-based coping skills training via telemedicine. This six-week program supports children who struggle with coping with chronic disease. I also hold a dual appointment in the West Campus chronic pain clinic, where I care for patients with conditions such as amplified musculoskeletal pain syndrome, using my CBT background to address pain processing disorders.

I am actively involved in national organizations and currently serve as eLearning Subcommittee Chair on the executive committee of the Association of Rheumatology Professionals. I have spoken nationally and internationally, including presenting my CBT work at the Pediatric Rheumatology European Society meeting in Helsinki.

What inspired you to become an APP in this specialty?

I was inspired to become a pediatric rheumatology APP after growing up as a patient myself, and I feel honored to walk alongside these incredibly resilient children and their families. I am so grateful to get to do this work at TCH!

Share a fun fact

Originally from Georgetown, Texas, I completed my undergraduate degree at The University of Texas at Austin and my graduate degree at Vanderbilt before joining BCM in December 2022. Outside of work, my husband and I love exploring Houston's food and music scene, reading, and creative hobbies—I recently began designing and painting my own needlepoint canvases!

Academic Angle

Shout out to our 2025 Texas Pediatric Society Award Recipients

Congratulations for the outstanding work!



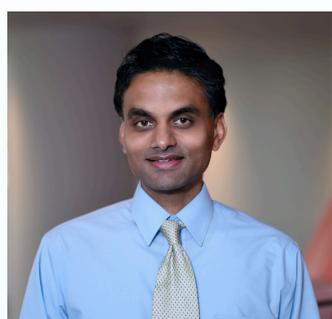
Lifetime Achievement Award

Mark Ward, MD, FAAP, is the recipient of the TPS Charles W. Daeschner, Jr., MD Lifetime Achievement Award, the highest award of the Texas Pediatric Society. TPS Online Webinar: Building Vaccine Confidence: Strategic Communication with Vaccine-Hesitant Parents (Speakers include: Julie Boom, MD and Lindy McGee, MD) BAYLOR COLLEGE OF MEDICINE EDITION, DECEMBER 2025 txpeds.org recognizes his outstanding lifetime contributions to the health and welfare of children. Dr. Ward currently serves as Chair of the TPS Bylaws Committee and is a TPS Past President and Alternate Chapter Chair.



TPS Early Career Physician Award

Katie Khanh-Van Tran, MD, FAAP is the recipient of the TPS Early Career Physician Award in recognition of her outstanding contributions as co-chair to the TPS Committee on Community and School Health and exceptional leadership as an early career physician.



2025 AAP Special Achievement Award

Sanjiv Harpavat, MD, PhD for his exceptional dedication to the health and well-being of children in Texas



Cultivating Connections Corner

Brought to you by the Department of Pediatrics



We're excited to introduce Cultivating Connection, our new bi-monthly edition of Pedi-Press! This newsletter will highlight opportunities to learn, connect, and grow together, including:

- Wellness Listening Rounds
- Walkabouts and Pop-Ups
- CORE (Coaching tips like the one below!)
- Book Club
- TCH Dine-In Program/Lunch Programs
- Pedi-Specific Faculty Development Opportunities

AND MANY MORE! Stay tuned!



CORE

COACHING FOR OPTIMAL REFLECTION AND EFFECTIVENESS

By Lacey Schmidt, PhD

What is coaching? How does it look? When does it help?

A coach is someone trained to listen carefully and ask meaningful questions to help you derive meaning from what is happening around you. A coach talks with you to help you make sense of your (or your team's) strengths, issues, challenges, and opportunities. There are many listening and questioning (aka coaching methods) a coach might use to do so.

Four common methods are:

- **Goal-Setting and Action Planning Method:** The coach asks questions to help the client identify clear, achievable goals with detailed steps that are most likely to enable the client to progress toward a desired professional outcome.
- **Solution-Focused Method:** The coach asks questions to help the client discover practical solutions to overcome current behavioral, psychological, or social obstacles.
- **Career Visioning and Guided Self-Reflection Methods:** The coach asks questions to help clients clarify, prioritize, and balance their career and work-life wants, needs, and opportunities.
- **Strengths-Based/ Leadership-Development Methods:** The coach asks questions to help the client focus on amplifying existing strengths, so the client feels empowered to explore or pursue their full potential.

There are many reasons you might want or need a coach (versus a mentor), but the easiest way to know when a coach would be most helpful is to decide if you need someone to talk with you in order to empower you to learn, discover, say, or do something you care about. This is distinct from when you would benefit more from a mentor. Mentors help most when you need someone to talk to you and give you examples or stories that enable you to see how things have happened in the past and collect wisdoms from about what worked then (or didn't) that you might try (or avoid) in your own efforts. Another important distinction between coaching and mentoring, is the timeframe and focal length. Mentoring often continues for years and changes focal topics or can even have a more vague focus (like just hearing about your mentors experiences and thoughts). Coaching is necessarily time-bound and focused on a specific topic. In fact, coaching may be a single session focused on having a specific difficult conversation well.

In summary, a coach will be of great help if you find yourself pondering things like CORE coaching clients have brought to our coaches:

- "I have a title, but no team or authority. How do I act to help my priorities happen?"
- "I have a team of highly specialize physicians, but I need to build an interdisciplinary team. How do I act to help build, maintain, and sustain one?"
- "How can I help "sell our why" to create momentum for this priority?"
- "How do I help get everyone on the same page where we all know what the team's priorities are and why?"
- "How do I really want to develop my legacy/ leadership/ resilience/ interpersonal skills?"
- "What vision do I want for my career/ job/ team/ role? And how do I act to communicate and pursue that vision well?"

Introducing Headspace App

Better Mental Health Starts Now: Headspace Launches for Team Members

Whether you care for patients, support families, or keep Texas Children's running behind the scenes, you give so much of yourself every day. This year, Texas Children's is making it easier to support your mental health and overall well-being.

Team members now have access to EAP Plus by Headspace, a free, on-demand resource designed to help you recharge, refocus, and feel supported whenever you need it.

What's Available

Headspace is the new digital experience for our Employee Assistance Program, offering therapy, coaching, self-care tools, and 24/7 support through one easy-to-use platform and mobile app.

You and your dependents have access to:

- Five therapy sessions per issue, per year
- Five video coaching sessions per year, plus unlimited text coaching
- 24/7 phone support and care navigation
- Guided meditations, sleep tools, and stress-relief exercises

Support That Fits Your Day

Whether you're unwinding after a long shift or preparing for a busy day, EAP Plus by Headspace offers flexible support that fits your work and life—alongside our onsite EAP services and Workforce Chaplains program.

How to Get Started

- Visit Texas Children's enrollment link:
 - **General Staff Enrollment:** [Click here](#)
 - **Medical Staff Enrollment:** [Click here](#)
- Create a new Headspace account or connect a personal account to your Texas Children's-sponsored benefit using your email address to verify eligibility.
- Download the Headspace app from the iOS or Android app store (Scan or click the QR code to get started).



Scan for
iOS



Scan for
Android

Welcome to K Club!

K-Club: Cultivating a Community of Research Career Development Awardees

It can feel overwhelming to start a research career on top of patient care, teaching, and other duties. To help fellows and early career faculty on that journey, **Ariel Lyons-Warren** and **Geoff Preidis** have spent the past 3 years developing a unique K Club program. What started as an intermittent peer support group has grown into a year-long, comprehensive, mentored career development award writing program. Each month, K Club offers a monthly virtual didactic lecture focusing on one or more sections of the application. These action focused lectures benefit from **Ariel** and **Geoff's** extensive experience with both writing and reviewing grants – particularly career development grants. Lectures are paired with a small group workshop in which participants get feedback on their own grant as they develop each section. Participants are therefore guided step-by-step in preparing a complete and competitive K08/K23/K99 grant that is ready for submission by the end of the year. Thus, anyone planning to submit a career development award in the next 12-18 months should consider signing up.

How does K Club help TCH faculty?

- **Action oriented teaching** - Our lectures are designed to provide detailed, specific guidance on key components of each section of a K grant, how to write those sections in an impactful way, and how study sections will evaluate your proposal.
- **Peer coaching** - It takes a village to get your first independent NIH grant out the door. Having a supportive peer group going through the same process is immensely helpful for everything from brainstorming to talking through shared challenges.
- **Targeted mentoring** - Each workshop group is led by an experienced faculty member passionate about supporting early career physician-scientists.

Over 100 people have signed up for K club in the last 3 years. Based on data from the first two years (2023, 2024), approximately 80% of workshop participants successfully submit a K award, and 70% of those grants are discussed in the study section – far above the NIH average.

One participant wrote

"Presentations are engaging, clear, well-structured, and incredibly practical. The way [K club is] developed is highly effective."

If you are interested in participating, click the link below or scan QR code:

[Click here](#)



K-Club group photo!



Left to right: Ariel Lyons-Warren and Geoff Preidis



Congratulations to Jennifer Fernandez on the Power of Professionalism Award!

On December 16, Jennifer Fernandez received the prestigious POP Award, which celebrates Baylor community members who embody professionalism through their respectful, compassionate, and trustworthy actions. Jennifer, who is one of our DOP administrators, exemplifies these qualities, consistently going above and beyond to support others, communicating with care, and fostering positive, inclusive relationships!

To learn more and nominate someone for the POP award, [click here](#)

Buzz around the block

from the heart of pediatrics



Pediatric Infectious Diseases Celebrating Match Day!

Pediatric Infectious Diseases celebrated a successful 2026 Fellowship Match Day: matching all three Pediatric Infectious Disease positions and our one Transplant Infectious Disease position.

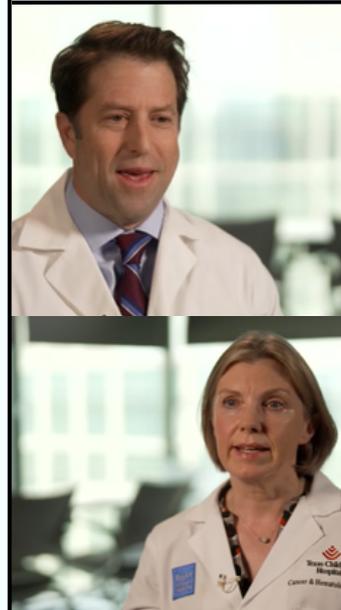


Congratulations to Joseph Luebga, the recipient of the 2026 Rice360 Innovation and Leadership in Global Award!

We're delighted to celebrate Joseph Luebga, the 2026 recipient of the esteemed Rice360 Innovation and Leadership in Global Health Award. This distinguished honor recognizes individuals who exemplify exceptional leadership, groundbreaking innovations, and significant impact in the field of global health!

Congratulations to Dr. Will Parsons!

We're thrilled to announce that Will Parsons, MD, PhD, has been named Chief of the Division of Hematology-Oncology in The Department of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine and Director of Texas Children's Cancer and Hematology Center! We're thankful for his outstanding leadership, and the incredible work by the Division of Hem Onc in transforming lives and solving the unsolvable!



Research Breakthrough on Pancreatic Cancer

As featured on Good Morning America, ABC News' Becky Worley highlights Baylor College of Medicine's breakthrough in pancreatic cancer research with insights from Dr. Benjamin Musher and Dr. Ann M. Leen. [Watch now!](#)



Highlighting a Pedi-Photographer!

Anna Z. Grove is the Director of Research Administration at Pediatric Tropical Medicine. In addition to her professional work, she pursues photography as a passionate side endeavor, focusing on fine art portraits in her downtown studio. Her latest photographic piece, titled "Houston: Ground Control," is currently on display at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH). You can admire her work in Terminal A, near Gate A8. This striking photograph captures Houston's intricate highways from above, offering a captivating aerial perspective, and will be on view through July 2026!

In Memory of true giants in their fields



Thomas Vargo, M.D.
Distinguished Emeritus
Professor of Pediatrics
Baylor College of Medicine
Texas Children's Hospital
Heart Center



Buford Nichols, M.D.
Distinguished Emeritus
Professor of Pediatrics, Baylor
College of Medicine and
Founding Director of the CNRC



Honoring **Dr. Vargo** and **Dr. Nichols**, whose dedication, collaboration, and enduring legacy have shaped our community and the future of pediatrics.

News from Nutrition (CNRC)



Dr. Jieyi Meng, M.D., M.Sc.
Postdoctoral Associate
Pediatrics - Nutrition
Baylor College of Medicine
Houston, Texas United States



Xi Chen, M.D., Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Associate
Pediatrics - Nutrition
Baylor College of Medicine
Houston, Texas United States

Congratulation to Dr. Jieyi Meng and Dr. Xi Chen on their latest publications!

On behalf of the CNRC Postdoctoral Program, we would like to congratulate postdoctoral fellows **Dr. Jieyi Meng** and **Dr. Xi Chen** on the publication of their recent work in Endocrinology. This accomplishment reflects their dedication, scientific excellence, and growing leadership within our research community.

Publication:

Meng J, Chen X, Zhu Y. Whole-brain Mapping Reveals Diet-dependent Neuronal Activation and Selective Resistance to Exogenous FGF21. *Endocrinology.* 2025 Dec 5;167(1):bqaf176. doi: 10.1210/endo/bqaf176. PMID: 41287584; PMCID: PMC12686946.



Faculty Didactic at CNRC Postdoc Seminar Series

On January 6th, **Dr. Evelin Young** delivered an engaging and insightful presentation titled **“Adapting Your IDP for Your Evolving Training Needs”**. She highlighted practical strategies for keeping an Individual Development Plan flexible, relevant, and aligned with shifting career goals.



Evelin Young, Ph.D.
Lead, Office of Postdoctoral
Affairs

News

from the heart of
Immunology, Allergy and
Retrovirology (IAR)



Bundle of Joy Alert!

On November 14, 2025, **Dr. Jennifer Clinton** and **Daniela Carrasco** threw a delightful baby shower for **Dr. Megan Carey**. Just a few weeks later, in early December, **Dr. Carey** welcomed her sweet baby boy into the world!



Coffee with Dr. Jordan Orange!

Following Grand Rounds on 12/5/25 the IAR Division hosted Coffee with **Dr. Jordan Orange!** **Dr. Orange**, former Division Chief and founder of the **William T. Shearer Center** for Immunobiology, now Chair of Pediatrics and Pediatrician In-Chief at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, was welcomed by many former colleagues and friends who stopped by to share memories and express gratitude for his remarkable vision. A special thank you to **Dr. Lisa Forbes Satter** and **Samantha Johnson** for their coordination of this event.



Bringing Whoville at the annual Holiday Party!

On December 5, 2025, the **William T. Shearer Center for Human Immunobiology** brought Whoville to TCH for its annual Holiday Party! This year's theme was inspired by The Grinch, bringing festive cheer to all. From holiday movie trivia and delicious food to thoughtful gifts, the Center proudly united 12 divisions for this joyful celebration. A special thank you to **Daniela Carrasco, Julia Schauer, Maya Murry, and the entire planning committee** for making this event unforgettable!



Happy Holidays with the IAR and Rheumatology Administrative team!

On December 17, 2025, The IAR and Rheumatology Admin teams celebrated their annual holiday gathering in style!

This year's "entry fee" was a festive photo for their holiday card. Along with enjoying delicious food and great company, they continued their tradition of tackling a fun craft project; this year, painting Rudolph!

A special thank you to their amazing leaders **Kim Nguyen, Charlene Johnson, and Stephanie Baxter** for organizing such a wonderful event.



Getting ready for the Superbowl!

Wednesday, January 28th, The IAR and Rheumatology admin team hosted their **3rd Annual Gameday Party** in preparation for the Superbowl. Special shoutout to **Taiya Ivery** and **Samantha Johnson** for coordinating this Team Experience event.

News

from the heart of
Immunology, Allergy and
Retrovirology (IAR) cont'd



Annual Retro Kids Holiday Party!

On **December 5, 2025**, The IAR Retrovirology team, led by **Clinic Chief Dr. Mary Paul**, hosted their **annual Retro Kids Holiday Party**. This is a time for patients to enjoy fun, food, and fellowship with others within the Retrovirology community. We can't forget the gifts! Approximately 120 infants, children and their families participated. Special thank you to **Mireya Montelongo** and the planning committee for coordinating this amazing event.



Congratulation to Dr. Sebastian Ochoa Gonazeles!

Dr. Sebastian Ochoa Gonzalez for receiving the **2026 American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI) Faculty Development Award**. This is a three-year award to advance the proposal entitled "Unlocking the diagnostic potential of genome sequencing for inborn errors of immunity through analysis of hidden splice variants".

Fun Times at IAR Annual Holiday Celebrations!

On **Saturday, December 13, 2025**, IAR hosted its **annual holiday celebration** for faculty and staff, featuring the crowd favorite, **El Candente!** This special occasion not only honored the team's hard work and dedication throughout the year but also brought colleagues together from all sites to share in the festivities.

A heartfelt thank you to **Mireya Montelongo**, **Karen Johnson**, and **Reginald Fontenot** for their outstanding efforts in coordinating this highly anticipated event.



Happy Holidays from the IAR Allergy and Immunology Clinical Team!

News from Hematology/Oncology



Highlighting Cheek Week!

During a one-day **Cheek Week** activation at **Texas Children's** in partnership with the **NMDP (formerly Be The Match)**, team members paused for just 5-7 minutes to take the small step of registering for the bone marrow and blood stem cell donor registry and offering hope to patients in need of life-saving transplants.

Cheek Week began at **Texas Children's** in 2020 with a clear purpose: to increase diversity among donors. For patients searching for a perfect match, race and ethnicity matter, and the more diverse the registry, the better the chances of finding that one life-saving connection.



Champions of Care and Education: Celebrating BCM & TCH Faculty

Kathy McCarthy (L), Research Nurse, and **Susan Milligan (R)**, Clinical Research Lead, are members of the Developmental Therapeutics team and have a combined tenure of **84 years at BCM and TCH!**



Alessandro Balzan, PhD, has recently been named **Laboratory Director of the Research Tissue Support Service (RTSS)**. He earned his PhD from the **University of Verona** in Italy, where his research focused on thalassemia major within the pediatric department of the **University Hospital of Ferrara** under the mentorship of **Prof. Caterina Borgna**. He later joined **Baylor College of Medicine** as a postdoctoral fellow, continuing his work in pediatric hematology and genetics in **Dr. Alison Bertuch's** laboratory studying telomere biology disorders. In 2019, **Alessandro** transitioned to the (RTSS) as a Staff Scientist before his Laboratory Director appointment in December 2025.

In addition to his scientific background, **Alessandro** is a trained actor, opera singer and musician! He studied at a conservatory of music in Italy and twice won the Houston Broadway World Award for Best Supporting Performer in a Musical.

A list of his stage credits can be found [here](#).

Awards - Appointments

Congratulations to the following individuals!
(pictured from top to bottom):

- **Rayne H. Rouse, MD** was appointed Co-Chair of the Patient Access Committee for the NMDP-ASTCT ACCESS Initiative. She is also serving as Malignant Hematology Educational Chair for the 2025 American Society of Hematology Annual Meeting.
- **M. Monica Gramates, MD, PhD**, was elected to the American Pediatric Society, joining leaders dedicated to improving child health across North America.
- **Lauren R. Desrosiers-Battu, MS, CGC**, was named Co-Chair of the National Society of Genetic Counselors Pediatric Cancer Subcommittee, supporting collaboration and education for genetic counselors in pediatric oncology.
- **Casey L. McAtee, MD, MPH**, was appointed to the JCO Global Oncology Editorial Board (a journal from the American Society of Clinical Oncology), contributing to peer review, editorial policy, and advancing global cancer research.



Houston Texans Pride

No matter the outcome, Texans Spirit runs strong—from labs to offices to clinic floors, Texans gear was everywhere last week as staff across the hospital showed their hometown pride.

News from Infectious Diseases



The Pediatric Infectious Diseases Postdoctoral Fellows celebrated the holidays.



The Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases celebrated the holidays at our Annual Potluck Luncheon.

Congratulations to the Infectious Diseases Fellows!

2026 Pediatric Transplant ID Fellow



Osama Ibrahim, MD, MBBCh

Pediatric ID Fellowship: Brown University
Pediatric Residency: Boston Children's
American University of Beirut

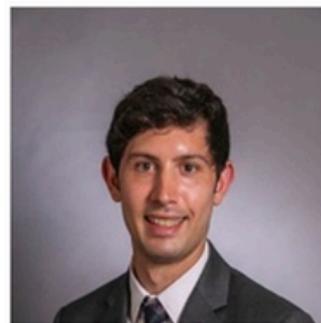
Incoming 2026 PID Fellows

Abdul Almounajed



Corewell Health

Christopher Peek



BCM

Diana "Carolina" Largo Luna



Rutgers



Hani Abou Hatab, MD received a **BPR Innovation Accelerator Award** for his proposal, "Using artificial intelligence and head ultrasound for greater precision in infant meningitis diagnosis"



Jonathon (Chase) McNeil, MD received a BPR Innovation Accelerator Award for his proposal, "Using artificial intelligence and head ultrasound for greater precision in infant meningitis diagnosis" Dr. McNeil also is the recipient of a Norton Rose Fulbright Award in the category of Teaching and Evaluation.



Grant Stimes, PharmD, MPA, BCPS, BCIDP received an Early Career Award for Excellence in Patient Care



Denver T. Niles, MD, D(ABMM) received an Early Career Faculty Award for Excellence in Patient Care



Welcome to our newest faculty member, **Dr. Meghan Kidd**, who was appointed as Instructor of Pediatrics in the Division of Infectious Diseases and who will work at our Austin Campus covering our inpatient service for six weeks of the year. **Dr. Kidd** is a Medical Officer with the Texas Department of State Health Services.



Brittany Ann Rodriguez, PharmD, BCIDP was elected Fellow of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (FPIDS). A Clinical Pharmacy Specialist in Pediatric Infectious Diseases and Antimicrobial Stewardship at Texas Children's, Dr. Rodriguez is one of only three pharmacists nationwide ever to receive this recognition, typically reserved for physicians.



Catherine (Mary) Healy, MD was elected Fellow of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (FPIDS); one of the highest honors in the field of Pediatric infectious Diseases.



Claire Bocchini, MD was promoted to Associate Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Infectious Diseases

News from Developmental Pediatrics

The **Developmental Pediatrics division** hosted several special events for **Meyer Center for Developmental Pediatrics** and Autism patients and families during the last few months. In October, we held a **Games Night Social for 25 adolescents and young adults with intellectual and developmental diagnoses**. Participants sang karaoke, danced to tunes played by a volunteer DJ, played video games provided by a mobile game truck and just enjoyed hanging out together. Since there are limited social opportunities for neurodivergent teens and young adults, we plan to offer this event several times throughout the upcoming year.

Our November event was our annual **“Parents’ Night Out,”** where families drop their children off with experienced volunteers for a 4 hour break from caregiving. A team of **30 volunteers**, including **social workers, physicians, psychologists, nurses, trainees and community members**, cared for **more than 50 children (infants through age 12)** with developmental diagnoses and their siblings. Thanks to the generosity of community donors such as Ace Hardware, we were able to host the event at Wonderwild and provided dinner and snacks for everyone.

Here are a few of the comments from parents whose children participated:

- *“My children were both able to participate in something fun while being cared for by professionals that work in the field. My anxiety levels while out to dinner with my spouse were at an all time low.”*
- *“We were nervous at first, but it was very nice to dedicate some time to each other. We feel like a better team when we appreciate each other. Everyone was kind and helpful and non-judgmental.”*
- *“I’ve never experienced being able to safely drop my kids off and have time to myself for free.”*
- *“I never get a night off. This was very beneficial for my mental health. Thank you so much. I really needed this.”*

Finally, in **December** social worker **Jennifer Torres** and the rest of the Meyer Center social work team hosted **“Pictures with Santa”** for our clinic families. Children received holiday gifts and treats, and families were welcome to take holiday photos of their children with our volunteer Santa Claus. Thank you to **Jennifer** and her team for making these children’s visits to our clinic a festive and fun experience!

All of the Meyer Center’s events are open to the community.

For information about future events, subscribe to our newsletter: [Click here](#)

Lots of opportunities at Wonderwild for kids to have fun and get their energy out!



Meyer Center staff and volunteers at the 2025 Parent’s Night Out event at Wonderwild



Dance Party at the Meyer Center Social Games Night

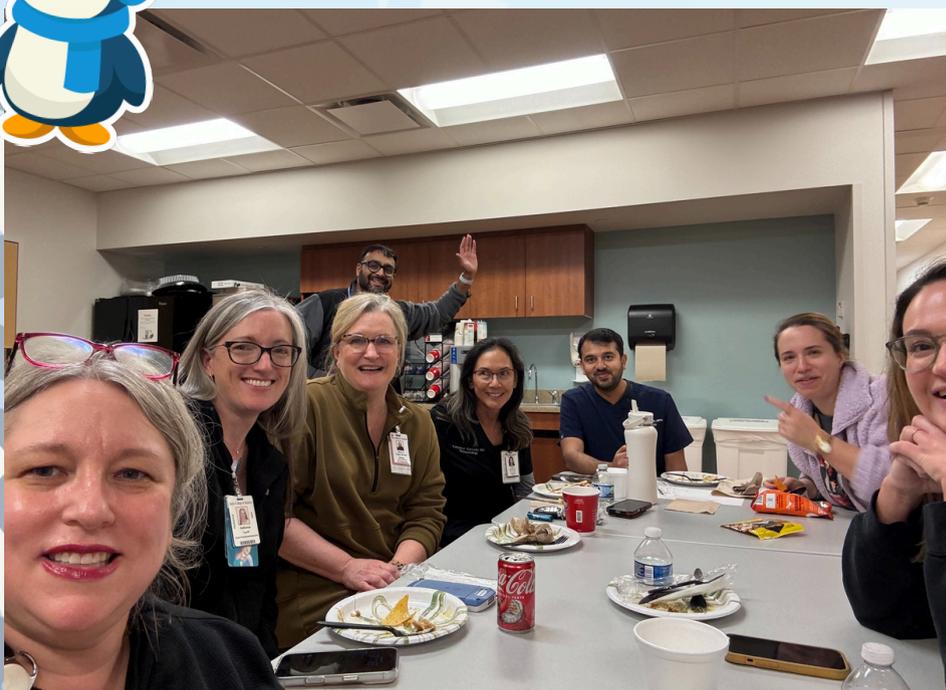


The social work team also got to visit Santa and his elf!

RIDE OUT

with Texas Children's

A big thank you to our incredible team members for their dedication and adaptability during January's ride-out. Your commitment to patient care and support truly embodies our core values. In this edition, we celebrate the highlights and appreciate everyone who participated. Let's honor teamwork and excellence together!



The Woodlands



Austin



Med Center



Residents



West Campus



Diabetes + Endo



PEDI-TEAM

on the Run!

Highlight of those who participated in the Houston Chevron Race!



Many of our faculty have said this was their 4+ marathon!

Featuring running groups from various divisions, such as the Pedi-Endo "DiaBesties" and the Cardiology "Heart and Soles" team!

INTRODUCING OUR PEDIATRICS

VALENTINE SWEETHEARTS!

Lacey Schmidt + Laura Loftis

Introduction:

Lacey Schmidt and Laura Loftis have been married for 15 years. Laura has been an attending physician in critical care in the Department of Pediatrics at Texas Children's Hospital for over 20 years, but their first chance to work together started in November of 2024 when Lacey joined the Department of Pediatrics as an organizational psychologist.

How did you two meet? Originally, we were supposed to be golf buddies who were equally bad at golf, but that spiraled into chatting about history and science and all the many other things we enjoyed in common so we arranged a dinner to chat more that turned into a four-hour conversation which shut the restaurant down.

Memorable story: We did play golf a couple of times and it was obvious it would be pretty hard to determine who was worse. Laura hit a golf ball straight into a thin little sapling of a tree (the only obstacle in sight) that ricocheted back at her. Both of us hit the ground. Laura for safety. I was just weak with laughter. We agreed she finally won the title of "Worst Golfer."

What's it like working together? We've always enjoyed bouncing ideas and questions off one another, and it's really nice now that we both have a first-hand understanding of one another's work context and culture. Sometimes Lacey's professional confidentiality standards mean that details can't be shared, even with a spouse, but it's still nice to be able to talk about personal feelings, hopes, and goals together with a spouse who has some understanding of the background already.

If we had to describe our relationship in 3 words: Loving, Collaborative, Genuine

Mounika Kandukuri + Reddy Mokalla

A Journey of Ten Years: From Postgraduate Strangers to Partners for Life

We met in 2013, during our postgraduate days, a time when everything felt new and uncertain. I saw him on day one and felt something strange. The funniest part is that I was busy helping him find his soulmate, never realizing that life had already chosen us for each other. We became friends, then inseparable, and eventually fell in love. There was no dramatic confession, no sudden moment, just two people slowly realizing they felt safest with each other. So, when he proposed on April 10, 2015, my heart already knew the answer.

Loving each other wasn't always easy. We grew up knowing the realities of love marriages, so we chose patience, promised to work hard, and build our lives before standing together. We pursued our fellowships and, after 3 years of effort and hope, we married in 2018. Marriage made us teammates. We shared everything and supported each other in hard times. And never chose distance when Life tested us. Every challenge taught us patience, understanding, and the courage to stay. Our journey then brought us to the United States for his postdoctoral work. And with incredible support from our mentor, **Dr. David Allison**, I was able to join him, and we continued learning and growing together just as we did as students. Then, in 2025, far from home but close to each other, our daughter was born and rewrote our definition of love overnight.

Today, even at work, his cabin is just a few steps from mine. It's a small reminder that through every twist and turn, our favorite place has always been next to each other.

This is our story.

Imperfect, tested, deeply real and still unfolding side by side

In three words, our relationship is "statistically significant love"





Celebrating Lunar New Year: Tradition, Community, and Shared Joy!

from Lynda Yuezhen Lin MD, Pedi Endocrinology

Lunar New Year always arrives in my home with a sense of ceremony—and a sense of fun. As we welcome the Year of the Horse, a year said to favor energy, movement, and bold spirits, I’m reminded that my favorite celebrations are the ones that gallop just a little off script.

The festivities begin with familiar sights: red 对联 (spring couplets) flanking the doorway, delicate red 窗花 (paper cuttings) catching the light, and the character “福” hung upside down so good fortune doesn’t miss its cue.

One of my favorite traditions is inviting my fellows into my home to make dumplings together. The real magic unfolds around the kitchen table. Dumplings, a Lunar New Year staple shaped like ancient gold ingots, represent prosperity and togetherness. We keep the rules refreshingly simple: classic shapes are welcome, creativity is encouraged, and learning follows the medical mantra of “see one, do one, teach one.” Folding techniques—and confidence—circulate freely.

As medical professionals, our creativity naturally spills into humor. The dumplings we make are rarely uniform—some misshapen, some oversized, others barely holding together. The tiniest earn the title SGA, the most ambitious become LGA, and the unfortunate few with ruptured seams are lovingly diagnosed with “gastroschisis.” The most unconventional creations are transferred to a special tray—the proudly designated “Dumpling ICU.”

By evening’s end, red envelopes are exchanged, and everyone leaves carrying containers of their own dumplings—deeply personal and entirely perfect. Long after the flour is wiped away, these dumplings continue their quiet work, delivering luck, laughter, and the warm reminder that celebration is best when shared.



With my work sister Dr Kathy Hwu (left), welcoming the Lunar New Year in a Qipao – where tradition meets celebration, one graceful step at a time.



Decorations: 对联 (spring couplets), 窗花 (paper cuttings), and the character “福” hung upside down to signify that blessings and good fortune have arrived.

A tray of dumplings humorously labeled the “Dumpling ICU,” where pediatric humor met Lunar New Year tradition.



Highlighting **BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

The Importance:

Black History Month celebrates the lasting impact of Black healthcare professionals in medicine and pediatrics. Despite systemic barriers, their leadership, innovation, and dedication have advanced care for children and families, highlighting the ongoing importance of equity, representation, and access to high-quality pediatric care for all. In this editorial, we want to highlight the many pioneers who have helped shape healthcare today - those who have transformed the lives of many and the systems.

Spotlight: Black Pioneers in Healthcare

From groundbreaking surgeons to public health leaders, Black medical pioneers have transformed lives and systems:

Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler - the first Black woman physician in the U.S.

Dr. Charles Drew - innovator of modern blood banking and transfusion

Henrietta Lacks - whose cells revolutionized medical research and continue to save lives today

Their legacies remind us that progress is built on courage and vision! This Black History Month, we honor the legacy of Black excellence in medicine and reaffirm our shared commitment to equity, dignity, and improved health outcomes for the communities we serve!



Image source: Texas State Historical Association. Used under fair use for educational purposes (17 U.S.C. § 107).

Pioneer Spotlight: Dr. Catherine Juanita Elizabeth Roett-Reid

Dr. Catherine Juanita Elizabeth Roett-Reid was a trailblazing pediatrician who helped shape the future of children's health care in Houston. In 1956, she became one of the first Black physicians on staff at **Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital**, breaking racial barriers in academic medicine and pediatric care. As Houston's first African American pediatrician, Dr. Roett-Reid was deeply committed to improving health outcomes for underserved children, establishing a well-baby clinic and contributing to important pediatric research.

Beyond her clinical work, Dr. Roett-Reid was a dedicated advocate for children and families, serving on civic and social service boards and mentoring future generations of physicians. Her legacy at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital reflects a lifelong commitment to excellence, equity, and compassionate care—values that continue to inspire the medical community today!

Source: [Texas State Historical Association](#)

RAMADAN AND EID CELEBRATION!



Celebrating Ramadan/Eid and it's many traditions from Dalia Bashir, Critical Care Medicine

Ramadan is the Islamic Holy month, a time when we fast, from sunrise to sunset- no food, no drinks, and a lot of patience! Through fasting and prayer, the month is meant to help us reset spiritually, practice self-discipline, and grow empathy for those less fortunate. It is a month of togetherness. Across the Islamic world, Ramadan wraps faith, generosity, and family into one cozy, meaningful season of reflection, prayer, and shared meals.

Breaking the fast is a cherished daily ritual, often starting with dates and a warm bowl of soup, followed by the main dish, good conversation, and some excellent new TV shows!

One of my favorite memories of Ramadan in Sudan was: at the moment of breaking the fast (Iftar), you step outside and see mats laid out in the streets, with boys and men sitting together to eat (even passersby are expected to join in!) while girls and women gather indoors. Every house shares a plate, or a drink with their neighbors, turning the entire stress into one big communal table. It's simple, generous and feels like everyone belongs!



How others celebrates + the values of Ramadan/Eid



From Nawara Alawa (Syria)

We decorate with lanterns and crescent moons. Lentil soup and fattoush are a must! And for Eid we make "Mamoul" and "Na-im (sugar cookie)".



Image show Mamoul Cookies!

Nour Gebara (Lebanon)

In Lebanon, after decorating the town with lanterns and lights, we break our fast with dates, nuts, and apricots. Follow it with the lentil soup and fattoush salad, then the main dish. And Qatayif are a MUST for dessert. Oh, and in the middle of the night, hearing the Dawn Caller - who wakes up the neighborhood to eat a meal before the sun comes up.



From Marwa Mansour (Egypt)

In Egypt, Ramadan is all about street decorations, extended Iftar tables on the streets, and lots and lots and lots of sweets!!



From Haitham Al-Khatib (Jordan)

We break our fast with dates in hand, bowl of hot soup and prayer. Then the tables fill with food, the rooms fill with laughter mingling with the chants of worshippers. It's time when hearts feel fuller, not just from food but from togetherness and gratitude.



From Laboni Malik

One of the most meaningful parts of Ramadan for me is the time spent with family. We wake up together before sunrise for Suhoor and, after fasting all day, gather again at sunset to break our fast with dates and a home-cooked meal. These daily traditions continue throughout the month of Ramadan and create a strong sense of togetherness, gratitude, and spiritual connection.



Ramadan ends with the sighting of the new crescent moon- celebrated as "Eid ul-Fitr". We prepare cookies and desserts. We wake up early on Eid day, dress up in new clothes to go attend Eid prayer, and visit friends and family. And the kids have it best- they get gifts- mostly in the form of money! Common things we get asked when fasting: Can we drink water or coffee? No! Not until the sunsets in the evening. Then we drink all the water and coffee! What if you don't feel well? If you are traveling or not feeling well, you can skip fasting!

RAMADAN AND EID CELEBRATION!



Ramadan: A month of Gratitude, Giving, and Togetherness from Bursa Dalgic

One of my earliest memories of Ramadan is the feeling in the house just before sunset. Even when I was too young to fast, the time leading up to the iftar when families gather to break their fast was full of excitement. Everybody is gathering, the table slowly filling, and a shared sense that something meaningful was about to happen. The atmosphere felt warm, calm, and joyful, and it made Ramadan feel special long before I understood its religious significance.

That same joy carried into Eid al-Fitr. As children, we looked forward to visiting relatives and neighbors, wearing new clothes, receiving small gifts or pocket money, and sharing sweets and meals. It was a time when community felt tangible, when doors were open, visits were frequent, and joy was meant to be shared.

Today, Ramadan is observed by nearly two billion Muslims around the world, making it one of the most widely observed religious practices globally. From dawn to sunset, adult Muslims fast from food and drink, but the essence of Ramadan goes far beyond fasting alone. It is a time of increased mindfulness: of one's actions, intentions, relationships, and responsibilities toward others. Many use this month to pause, reconnect with their faith, and cultivate gratitude for everyday blessings.

A central value of Ramadan is compassion for those in need. Acts of charity and service are especially emphasized whether through formal giving, preparing food for others, supporting local organizations, or simply being more attentive to those around us. These experiences reflect what Ramadan and Eid aim to cultivate more broadly: reflection, generosity, gratitude, and connection both within families and across communities.



Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr: Our Family Reflection from Seife, Uysal

Ramadan is a month that our family looks forward to each year with great anticipation and gratitude. It is a time that brings families and communities together—spiritually, emotionally and socially—and reminds us of what truly matters in life.

During Ramadan, we fast from dawn to sunset, abstaining from all food and drink, and yes, including water. Indeed, fasting is physically challenging, yet it helps our spiritual growth. It teaches us self-discipline, patience, and mindfulness. By willingly giving up even the most basic needs, we admit nothing truly belongs to us but our creator. This realization helps us approach life with greater humility and gratitude.

Ramadan also deepens our sense of compassion. Experiencing hunger and thirst helps us better understand the struggles of others and encourages us to be more empathetic, generous, and kind. Charity is an important part of the month, reminding us of our responsibility to help each other in need. Many of us engage with the Qur'an, our holy book, and reflect its messages, more during Ramadan than at any other time of the year. Throughout the month, we often gather with friends and families for iftar dinners, breaking our fast together at sunset and praying together afterward. These shared moments strengthen our bonds and reinforce the importance of community.

Our children experience Ramadan in their own special way. They eagerly wake up early for suhoor, the pre-dawn meal before fasting begins, and many of them enjoy trying to fast for part of the day. We have three boys, ages 10, 7, and 4. The two older ones often want to fast on weekends; our 10-year-old can usually make it all the way to sunset, while our 7-year-old typically breaks his fast around lunchtime. Their excitement, curiosity, and growing sense of responsibility make the month even more meaningful for us as parents.

During the last 10 days of Ramadan, we increase our worship and charity. At the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr marks the joyful conclusion of this blessed month and is a day of gratitude, celebration, and togetherness. We begin the day with special prayers, followed by visiting family and friends, sharing meals, and exchanging greetings and gifts. The children receive special gifts, and the celebration becomes a joyful culmination of a month filled with several blessings.

Ramadan is ultimately a time of renewal—for our faith, our relationships, our community and our commitment to becoming better versions of ourselves. It is a month that leaves a lasting imprint on our hearts long after it ends, and as it concludes, we already find ourselves counting down to the next one.





Let us know how we did!
**Scan or press this QR code to share
your thoughts!**



For **photo and content submissions**, email us at
DepartmentofPediatrics@texaschildrens.org
If you want to **request a page for content**, email
Lana Thai at Lxthai@texaschildrens.org

Message from Lana Thai, our media specialist:

I appreciate everyone who has submitted! It's been wonderful to showcase everyone's efforts, and I can't wait to continue highlighting all the amazing contributions from our department!



Thank you for Reading!

keep doing you and take care!

