



*Great Doctors, Great Medicine since 1828.*

# Faculty Awards Ceremony

Medical College of Georgia Faculty Senate

5 p.m., Tuesday, June 13, 2023



Dear Colleagues:

The MCG Faculty Senate's Faculty Awards Ceremony recognizes exceptional achievement by faculty and residents in the areas of teaching, research, clinical care and service.

Today's honorees have contributed their significant skills and passion to attaining excellence and have set a high standard for us all. We gather today to thank them for their contributions to our medical school and to the dynamic present and future of medicine.

We thank as well the members of the MCG Faculty Senate Faculty Recognition Committee for their diligent efforts to make this celebration possible.

Thank you for all you do.

Most respectfully yours,

David C. Hess, MD  
*Dean, Medical College of Georgia  
Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs  
and Integration, Augusta University  
Presidential Distinguished Chair  
Professor, Department of Neurology*

Julie Dahl-Smith, DO  
*President, MCG Faculty Senate  
Professor, Department of Family Medicine*

**Program**

Welcome	Julie Dahl-Smith, DO President, MCG Faculty Senate Professor, Department of Family Medicine
Remarks	David Hess, MD Dean, Medical College of Georgia Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs and Integration, Augusta University Presidential Distinguished Chair Professor, Department of Neurology
Educator of the Year Awards	Class Presidents
Outstanding Basic Science Teaching Award	Class Presidents
Outstanding Clinical Science Teaching Award	Class Presidents
Resident of the Year Award	Natasha Savage, MD Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education and Designated Institutional Official Professor, Department of Pathology
Mentoring Excellence Award	Lara Stepleman, PhD Associate Dean for Faculty Success and Inclusive Excellence Professor, Department of Psychiatry & Health Behavior
Distinguished Faculty Awards	Almira Vazdarjanova, PhD Chair, Faculty Recognition Committee Secretary, MCG Faculty Senate Professor, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology
	Cassandre Perard, DO Senator, MCG Faculty Senate Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine
Champion of Diversity Award	Dr. Vazdarjanova
Institutional Service Award	Dr. Perard
Patient Care Award	Dr. Vazdarjanova
Outstanding Faculty Award	Dr. Perard
Lifetime Achievement Awards	Dr. Vazdarjanova
Spirit of MCG Award	Dr. Dahl-Smith
Recognition of Faculty Senate Executive Committee	Dr. Hess
Closing Remarks	Dr. Dahl-Smith

## ***Honorees:***

### **Educators of the Year**

**Pamela Tipler, DO**

Associate Professor, Department of Medicine  
Selected By: Class of 2023, Main Campus, Augusta

**Ellen House, MD**

Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Health Behavior  
Selected By: Class of 2023, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

**Clive Slaughter, PhD**

Professor, Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology  
Selected By: Class of 2023, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

**Jennifer Tucker, MD**

Associate Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine  
Selected By: Class of 2024, Main Campus, Augusta

**Lara Hart, MD**

Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology  
Selected By: Class of 2024, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

**David Kozlowski, PhD**

Professor, Department of Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine  
Selected By: Class of 2025, Main Campus, Augusta

**Scarlett Schneider, MD**

Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine  
Selected By: Class of 2025, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

**Puttur Prasad, PhD**

Professor, Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology  
Selected By: Class of 2026, Main Campus, Augusta

**Kimberlee Giffen, PhD**

Assistant Professor, Department of Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine  
Selected By: Class of 2026, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

### **Outstanding Basic Science Teaching Award**

**Department of Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine**

Selected By: Class of 2025, Main Campus, Augusta

### **Outstanding Clinical Science Teaching Award**

**Department of Pediatrics**

Selected By: Class of 2023, Main Campus, Augusta

## **Mentoring Excellence Award**

**Vikas Kumar, MBBS**



Dr. Vikas Kumar is an associate professor in the Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine, program director of the anesthesia and emergency medicine critical care fellowship, director of simulation for medical students and residents and medical director of the respiratory therapy program.

Dr. Kumar's mentoring incorporates debriefing principles, the creation of educational portfolios and logs of educational and scholarly activities. These are effective in ensuring that trainees thoroughly learn the techniques and principles. Dr. Kumar has also incorporated innovative educational methods, such as integrating virtual reality to anesthesia education and using telesimulation for medical student education.

He completed medical school at Bangalore Medical College at Bangalore University and completed his advanced degree in anesthesiology and critical care at Sawai Man Singh Medical College at Rajasthan University in India. He completed his residency and a fellowship in anesthesiology critical care medicine at the Medical College of Georgia.

## **Distinguished Faculty Awards**

### **Basic Science Teaching**

**Robert Mackin, PhD**



Dr. Robert Mackin is an associate professor in the Department of Cellular Biology and Anatomy and a medical educator at the AU/UGA Medical Partnership in Athens, GA.

Dr. Mackin's teaching responsibilities have spanned from histology to cell biology to biochemistry and molecular biology with recent forays into selected areas of physiology. His current research interests are centered on how to improve the efficiency of medical student learning. Initial projects include a study of how to work with clinicians to improve acid-base teaching, how to work with an art education specialist to improve the teaching of histology and attempts at understanding why and how medical students select online resources to

supplement conventional medical school curricula.

He received his doctoral degree in cell biology from Emory University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Clayton Foundation Laboratories for Peptide Biology, The Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, CA.

## Clinical Science Teaching

### J. Kenneth Byrd, MD



Dr. J. Kenneth Byrd is an associate professor as well as chief of Head and Neck Surgery for the Department of Otolaryngology.

Dr. Byrd attended the University of South Carolina for his undergraduate education, graduating with honors from the Honors College and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He then attended the Medical University of South Carolina, where he was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha and received the Henry Tracy Ivy Award. He then completed his residency training in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at MUSC before pursuing a 2-year fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh in head and neck oncology and skull base surgery. During this time, he also completed the University of Pittsburgh's Certificate in Clinical Research program.

### Janelle McGill, MD



Dr. Janelle McGill is an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics and serves as assistant program director for the Pediatric Student Education Program.

She earned her medical degree from the Medical College of Georgia where she also completed her pediatric residency and spent a year as chief resident prior to joining the faculty in 2019 as a pediatric hospitalist. Dr. McGill is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Council on Medical Student Education in Pediatrics.

## Basic Science Research

### Alexander D. Verin, PhD



Dr. Alexander Verin is a professor in the MCG Vascular Biology Center and Department of Medicine.

Dr. Verin's lab focuses on the mechanisms regulating pulmonary barrier function and the mechanisms regulating endothelial barrier function. His academic achievements have earned him international recognition for his research and expertise in intracellular signaling in lung microvascular endothelial cells and the interplay between the cytoskeleton, purinergic signaling and phosphatases.

He received his master's in biology and PhD in biochemistry at Moscow State University in Russia. He completed his postdoctoral studies at Indiana University in Indianapolis.

## Clinical Science Research

### Askiel Bruno, MD



Dr. Askiel Bruno is a professor in the Department of Neurology. A stroke specialist and accomplished clinical investigator, he is recognized for research and clinical trials investigating the impact of hyperglycemia in acute ischemic stroke, which is both common and associated with poorer outcomes.

His work improving the modified Rankin Scale, which has been used as the primary measure of stroke outcomes, to a simple, more reliable questionnaire format instead has been remarkably impactful in the way many acute stroke trials are conducted and assessed.

He has authored 13 book chapters and more than 120 publications in peer-reviewed journals, many in high-impact journals like *JAMA*, *Archives of Neurology*, *Stroke*, *Neurology* and *Annals of Internal Medicine*. An accomplished educator, he has also mentored 17 stroke fellows.

## Outstanding Young Basic Science Faculty Award

### Danielle Mor, PhD



Dr. Danielle Mor is an assistant professor in the Department of Neuroscience & Regenerative Medicine. Her lab uses the small nematode worm, *C. elegans*, to study mechanisms of neurodegeneration in Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, and the role of the gut microbiome in both normal aging and age-related disease.

Dr. Mor was recently awarded a grant from the Department of Defense to study how neurotoxin exposure in the gut may induce cognitive dysfunction in Parkinson's disease. Her lab employs a combination of RNA-sequencing, imaging, and high-throughput genetic and drug screening approaches to uncover disease mechanisms and discover novel potential therapeutics.

She is also actively engaged in teaching, mentoring, and service activities, including co-directing the Neuroscience I course for biomedical science PhD students, and training undergraduate, graduate and medical students in the lab.

Dr. Mor completed her PhD in Neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania, and her postdoctoral fellowship at Princeton University.

## **Outstanding Young Clinical Science Faculty Award**

### **Rachel Elam, MD**



Dr. Rachel E. Elam is an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine, Division of Rheumatology. Dr. Elam's clinical practice focuses on the diagnosis and patient-centered treatment of autoimmune, musculoskeletal and bone diseases. Her research is focused on fracture risk assessment and prevention, particularly in people with rheumatoid arthritis and other high-risk populations of older adults. Dr. Elam is also passionate about educating the next generation of physicians about rheumatology, and as such, is active in teaching medical students at MCG by delivering lectures in the pre-clinical curriculum and facilitating in the patient-centered learning and ambulatory care clinical experiences.

Dr. Elam studied public health at Johns Hopkins University, graduating with a master's of science in biostatistics. Dr. Elam earned her medical degree at MCG and subsequently completed her internal medicine residency and rheumatology fellowship at MCG/AU Health and the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center. Dr. Elam is an active member of the American Society of Bone and Mineral Research, the American College of Rheumatology and the Georgia Society of Rheumatology.

## **Champion of Diversity**

### **E. Vanessa Spearman-McCarthy, MD**



Dr. E. Vanessa Spearman-McCarthy is the associate dean for Learner Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as well as an associate professor of internal medicine and psychiatry. Her clinical duties include 13 years of service as the medical director of the Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry Service at Augusta University Health, as well as practicing as an outpatient general internal medicine attending.

Her dedication to clinical and educational mission have afforded her numerous awards and recognitions. Most recently she is the recipient of the 2023 National Alumnae Association of Spelman College Hall of Fame Award, 2022 American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) INSPIRE Award, the 2022 Association of Medicine and Psychiatry (AMP) President's Award, the 2022 Academy of Consultation Liaison Psychiatry (ACLP) Special Recognition Award, the 2022 MCG

Department of Psychiatry Outstanding Clinical Faculty Member of the Year Award, the 2022 AU Health Patient and Family Centered Care Partnership Award, and the 2022 Rosa T. Beard Debutante Club Society of Excellence — Rosa T. Beard Legacy Award.

She chairs the Association of Medicine and Psychiatry DEI Committee as well as the the Health and Wellness Committee for the National Alumnae Association of Spelman College (NAASC). She is a member of the AMWA DEIJ Committee and is a member of the ACLP DEI Committee. She is also a member of the AAMC's Constructing an Equitable, Inclusive, and Anti-racist Medical Education Learning Environment Work Group.

## **Institutional Service Award**

**Terence O’Keeffe, MD**



Dr. Terence O’Keeffe was born in Salisbury, England, where he lived up to the age of 19 when he moved to Scotland to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh. He graduated in 1986 with his bachelor’s in medicine, in addition to a first class honors degree in pathology. During his time in medical school, he realized that he was interested in a career in trauma, and as this specialty was not available in England, he moved to the US in 1999. He completed a general surgery residency at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland, then completed his fellowship in trauma and critical care and a master’s in public health at the University of Miami.

His first faculty position was at UT Southwestern in Dallas in 2006, where he worked as a trauma surgeon at Parkland Hospital. In 2008 he moved to the University of Arizona in Tucson, where he became the director of the Critical Care Fellowship. During his almost 11 years in Arizona, Dr. O’Keeffe achieved tenure and was promoted to full professor. He served as the interim division chief of trauma in Tucson before being recruited to MCG in 2019 to be the chief of trauma and J. Harold Harrison Distinguished University Chair in Trauma Surgery.

He has been a prolific researcher, having authored and co-authored over 190 peer-reviewed articles and 20 book chapters. He has worked on multiple grant funded research projects, and is currently working on the first trauma study here in Augusta to use exception from informed consent. His research interests include critical care medicine, transfusion protocols, traumatic brain injury and injury prevention.

## **Patient Care Award**

**J. Drew Prosser, MD**



Dr. J. Drew Prosser is an associate professor in the Department of Otolaryngology. He serves as the section chief of the Pediatric Otolaryngology Division and director of the Otolaryngology Residency Program.

Dr. Prosser is a Georgia native who graduated from Statesboro High School in 2000 and the University of Georgia in 2004 with honors and a bachelor’s degree in genetics. He attended the Medical College of Georgia where he graduated in 2008 as a member of the Alpha Omega Alpha Medical Honor Society. He stayed at his home institution for residency training in otolaryngology, where he was a finalist for resident of the year. In 2015, he completed a two-year fellowship in pediatric otolaryngology at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. He returned to the Medical College of Georgia as assistant professor in pediatric otolaryngology with a special interest in pediatric airway surgery. He is board certified in otolaryngology, with a sub-certification in complex pediatric otolaryngology.

## Outstanding Faculty Award

**Xin-Yun Lu, PhD**



Dr. Xin-Yun Lu is a professor and serves as chair of the MCG Department of Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine. She is a pharmacologist, molecular behavioral neuroscientist and Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar in Translational Neuroscience.

Dr. Lu's research focuses on exploring the molecular, cellular and epigenetic mechanisms underlying the pathogenesis and treatment of neurodegenerative and neuropsychiatric disorders. She has published over 80 peer-reviewed articles, many of which were featured in high-impact journals. Since 2017, Dr. Lu has secured four NIH funding as sole PI or contact PI, with more than \$8 million in funding. She has been invited to serve on study sections and editorial boards and has organized several symposiums.

She is dedicated to mentoring young faculty members and graduate students. She delivers lectures to graduate courses and shares her vision for neuroscience with young scholars. She is also a supportive guide for newly established junior faculty members.

Dr. Lu earned a medical degree from Binzhou Medical College in China; a doctorate in pharmacology from Washington State University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Mental Health Research Institute of the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor.

## Lifetime Achievement Awards

**Robyn Hatley, MD**



Dr. Robyn M. Hatley, Leon Henri Charbonnier Endowed Chair in Surgery at MCG and the Children's Hospital of Georgia, has been a faculty member at the medical school for more than 35 years. He first came to MCG as a general surgery resident in 1981. After residency, he completed a fellowship in pediatric surgery at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

For the last 25 years, he has chaired the Pediatric Trauma Committee at CHOG. He also co-directs the hospital's extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or ECMO, program, which has been recognized since 2006 with a Gold Award for Excellence in Life Support from the Extracorporeal Life Support Organization.

A distinguished educator, he has previously served as a counselor for the MCG Summer Educational Enrichment Program, or SEEP, a pipeline program for students from underrepresented, nontraditional and/or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. He has mentored countless medical students and residents throughout his long career.

He has been honored with the medical school's Exemplary Teaching Award every year from 2008-11 and from 2016-21. The MCG Class of 2008 also named him Educator of the Year and in 2017 he received the Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award, which recognizes graduating medical students and faculty members who are exemplars of humanism in the care of patients.

He has authored more than 45 publications in refereed journals and six books and book chapters.

Hatley earned his bachelor's degree in biology in 1977 from Eastern Kentucky University, where he excelled academically and served as captain of the football team. The university named him its Outstanding Alumnus in 1990. He earned his medical degree from the University of Kentucky in 1981.

## **Michael Rivner, MD**



Dr. Michael Rivner is Charbonnier Professor Emeritus of Neurology as well as director of the Electrodiagnostic Medicine Laboratory and the ALS Clinic at MCG and AU Health.

Dr. Rivner has been an indelible part of the Department of Neurology for 39 years. He first came to MCG and AU Health as a neurology resident in 1978. He also completed a neuromuscular diseases fellowship at MCG/AU Health in 1983 before joining the faculty that same year.

A pioneering leader in ALS and myasthenia gravis, he established the first ALS Center in Georgia at MCG/AU Health in 2004, which was the only one in Georgia to be certified by the ALS Association until 2018.

An accomplished educator and valued mentor, he directed the Clinical Neurophysiology Fellowship Program from 1992-2016, training more than 20 fellows; and the Pain Fellowship Program, the first in the nation to be housed in a neurology department, from 2003-07. He has authored more than 17 book chapters and 100 publications in peer-reviewed journals.

Despite his “retirement” in 2016, Dr. Rivner is still active in clinical service, including running another ALS clinic in partnership with Atrium Navicent Health Rehabilitation Hospital in Macon, Georgia. He also conducted groundbreaking research identifying and characterizing a rare subtype of myasthenia gravis with antibodies to LRP4.

## **Spirit of MCG Award**

### **Neal Weintraub, MD**



Dr. Neal Weintraub is Georgia Research Alliance Kupperman Eminent Scholar in Cardiovascular Medicine and chief of the Division of Cardiology in the MCG Department of Medicine. He also serves as associate director of the Vascular Biology Center.

A native of Albany, Georgia, who always aspired to return to Georgia to serve, he has a reputation as a dedicated clinician-scientist who is committed to improving cardiovascular health in this community and improving patient care.

He has had continuous grant funding from the National Institutes of Health and the American Heart Association and has mentored countless other investigators as well. He is the primary mentor for two MD/PhD students and for faculty members who have received numerous NIH awards, including K08, K23 and RO1 awards. He has led two separate Program Project grants from the NIH and currently collaborating on a third. Most recently, he served as project lead for a \$2.84 million grant through the new AHA Strategically Focused Research Network that is focused on cardio-oncology and minority health.

Dr. Weintraub has a long track record of service for the NIH, reviewing basic science, clinical and business grant applications and was recently appointed chair of the major cardiovascular section, Atherosclerosis and Inflammation of the Cardiovascular Sciences.

# **MCG Faculty Senate Executive Committee 2022 – 2023**

Julie Dahl-Smith, DO, President  
Vishal Arora, MD, President-Elect  
Eric Lewkowiez, MD, Vice President  
Almira Vazdarjanova, PhD, Secretary  
Vincent J.B. Robinson, MD, Immediate Past President

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Laura Mulloy, DO  
Jigarkumar Parikh, MD  
Cassandre Perard, DO  
Erickson Yap, MD

# **MCG Faculty Senate Faculty Recognition Committee**

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Eric Lewkowiez, MD  
Nikhil Patel, MD  
Puttur Prasad, PhD