



# IGNITE

## NEOMED MAKES HISTORY

The Bitonte College of Dentistry becomes the first public dental school in Northeast Ohio.



SHAPING THE FUTURE  
*of* HEALTHCARE

Northeast Ohio Medical University is a public medical university with a mission to create transformational leaders and improve health. The University fosters a working and learning environment that celebrates differences and prepares students for patient-centered, team- and population-based care.

*Ignite* magazine is published by the Office of Marketing and Communications, 4209 St. Rt. 44, P.O. Box 95, Rootstown, OH 44272-0095

**President**

John T. Langell, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.A.

**NEOMED Board of Trustees**

Darrell L. McNair, M.B.A., Chair  
William H. Considine, M.H.S.A., Vice Chair  
Kathy Doseck  
Heidi Gartland  
Edward Roth  
Karen Soehnlein McQueen, J.D.  
Ward J. "Tim" Timken Jr., M.B.A.  
Phillip L. Trueblood  
Susan Tave Zelman, Ph.D.

**Student Trustees**

Trinity A. Kronk  
Guido Shero, J.D.

**Trustee Emeritus**

Paul R. Bishop, J.D.

**Advisory Trustee**

James F. Dicke II  
Robert J. Klonk

**Chief Marketing Officer**

Tonya Strong-Charles

**Editor:** Jeanne M. Hoban

**Contributors:** Julia Colecchi, Jared F. Slanina, Taylor Szumski

**Publication Design:** Maria Ahmad

**Photography:** Andrea Hallgren, Andrew Jordan, Chris Smanto and staff

As a health sciences university, we constantly seek ways to improve the health, economy and quality of life in Northeast Ohio. The paper used for this magazine has earned a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and a Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification. Strict guidelines have been followed so that forests are renewed, natural resources are preserved and wildlife is protected. *Ignite* was printed by Printing Concepts in Stow, Ohio, using soy inks.

*No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the editors.*

# EXPANDING OUR BOUNDARIES

**N**ortheast Ohio Medical University continues to grow strategically. We were excited to welcome our first class of 52 future dentists to the Bitonte College of Dentistry in August 2025. The new College, featured in this issue, is just one of many examples of growth as the University expands to meet evolving needs in healthcare.

Another example: our new partnership with Miami University and Christ Hospital Health Network (see page 8) establishes pathways for future generations of physicians to train for a medical career in Ohio. It also extends our boundaries beyond Northeast Ohio to help us improve healthcare in communities across the state.

As we act on our 2030 Strategic Plan, we will be continuing our trajectory of growth.

We look forward to sharing more in the coming months and years about how NEOMED is shaping the future of healthcare in Northeast Ohio and beyond.

Sincerely,



John T. Langell  
*President*





**On the cover:** NEOMED celebrated the historic opening of the Bitonte College of Dentistry with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.



## DEPARTMENTS

- 9 STRATEGIC PLAN
- 16 INNOVATION
- 18 DONOR SPOTLIGHT
- 20 PHILANTHROPY
- 22 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP
- 24 RESEARCH
- 25 SERVICE
- 26 STUDENT LEADERSHIP
- 28 WHALE WATCHING
- 30 TASTES LIKE HOME
- 32 CLASS NOTES

For extended and web-only content, and to explore past issues, visit [neomed.edulignite](http://neomed.edulignite)

## FEATURES

# 04

### NEOMED MAKES HISTORY

*The Bitonte College of Dentistry becomes the first public dental school in Northeast Ohio.*

# 08

### PARTNERSHIP ADVANCES MEDICAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND HEALTHCARE ACCESS IN OHIO

*Partnership with The Christ Hospital Health Network of Cincinnati and Miami University in Oxford establishes pathways for future generations of physicians.*

# 10

### TWO TEAM SPORTS

*NEOMED and the Cleveland Browns work together to expand healthcare education impact. Plus medical student Jason Collins' unique path to NEOMED.*

# 12

### INNOVATION MEETS IMPACT

*Healthcare Transformation IDEATOR competition tackles pressing issues in health inequity.*

# 14

### A CONVERSATION WITH DR. NICOLE KENT-STROLLO

*In this "Conversations with NEOMED," Chief Marketing Officer Tonya Strong-Charles interviews the inaugural dean of students, Nicole Kent-Strollo, Ed.D., M.S.N., APRN, WHNP-BC.*



Ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Bitonte College of Dentistry. From left: Kristin Victoroff, D.D.S., associate dean; Sorin Teich, D.M.D., dean; Frank Beck, D.D.S., dean emeritus; Lily Dinh, the first student admitted to the new College; David Bitonte, D.O., and Gary Bitonte, M.D., whose family foundation supported the development of the new College; NEOMED President John Langell, M.D., Darrell McNair, chair, NEOMED Board of Trustees; Ohio Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel; and Ohio Rep. Heidi Workman.



# NEOMED MAKES HISTORY

## THE BITONTE COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY BECOMES THE FIRST PUBLIC DENTAL SCHOOL IN NORTHEAST OHIO

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**N**ortheast Ohio Medical University celebrated the opening of the Bitonte College of Dentistry on August 22, 2025. On that day, the inaugural class of 52 students donned their white coats for the first time, marking the beginning of their professional journeys and the start of a new venture for NEOMED.

The White Coat Ceremony was followed by a ribbon cutting and tour of the new dental clinic.

"We are grateful for the generosity of the Bitonte Family Foundation and the State of Ohio for supporting the establishment of our fourth college, which aims to provide dental care in rural and urban communities throughout the region," said NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., during the ceremony.

Ohio Lieutenant Governor Jim Tressel was among the dignitaries who visited the NEOMED campus to address the crowd for the historic occasion.

"All 52 students—I only have one request—you stay in Ohio," said Lt. Gov. Tressel.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The main goal for the Bitonte College of Dentistry is to build a sustainable entity, Sorin Teich, D.M.D., M.B.A., dean of the College, shared.

"When we talk about sustainability, we are talking about achieving permanent accreditation, sustainability in the curriculum, sustainability in education, providing workforce for Ohio, providing a great service to our future patients, providing

the best for our students," he explained. "We always say that we are providing an exceptional experience for them, and we are fully committed to that. And overall, the goal is to try to have something that is moving in the right direction and will serve the people of Ohio."

### BUILDING HISTORY

To commemorate the historic launch of the Bitonte College of Dentistry, faculty and students shared what led them to NEOMED and their thoughts on being part of the auspicious occasion.



### DRAWN BY INNOVATION

Dr. Teich is a dentist and prosthodontist, who has worked in private practice and academia. He has also been part of biotech and pharmaceutical start-up companies.

"Many years ago, I had the opportunity to open several start-ups and to manage several very young companies. I think that doing this, opening a dental school here, is very, very similar to that. It is a challenge, but it's also an opportunity," he shared.

**What led him to take a chance on leading a brand-new school?**

"One of the things that I found attractive about NEOMED is the fact that this is not the largest institution, but still it's extremely innovative," Dr. Teich said. "Opening a new program here is a big opportunity to build something from scratch. It's building something in the right way...trying to adopt all the principles and all the requirements that are needed in order to make these students successful. I think that bringing in new students, new staff, new faculty—bringing them together and creating collegiality and creating a real team *de novo*, this is very exciting."



### A SORT OF HOMECOMING

Joining NEOMED was a sort of homecoming for **Jean Fox, D.D.S.**, associate dean for clinical affairs, who previously lived in Northeast Ohio when she was on the faculty at Case Western Reserve University's School of Dental Medicine. She came to the Bitonte College of Dentistry at the behest of her long-time friend and colleague, Kristin Z. Victoroff, D.D.S., Ph.D., associate dean for education and academic affairs.

"She called me out of the blue one day and said, hey, do you want to come back home? And I said, absolutely. What do you have in mind?" Dr. Fox recalled.

She jumped at the chance to help build the new College.

"It took me three months to pack my stuff, finish up my work in Nebraska [where she was assistant dean at the University of Nebraska College of Dentistry]. I arrived here and started the day after the move was complete," she said. "I've seen the plan go from infancy to ready to see patients."

"It's pretty amazing," she said about helping to build the new College. "I have never been a part of such a large plan before. I designed my private practice, but it was minuscule compared to the size and scope of this school."



### CLARITY OF PURPOSE

**Alexandra Ukmar, D.D.S.**, assistant professor of general dentistry, previously taught in the dental school at Case Western Reserve University with Dr. Victoroff and Dr. Fox.

"We were excited that this school is opening at NEOMED, and I really wanted to be here day one," she said.

She was drawn to the Bitonte College of Dentistry because of clarity of purpose.

"I think we really know why we want to do this. We want to make the best practitioners who care about their patients," she enthused. "I think it's our attention to the details that will set us apart and get us to that level of just not being competent, but excellent. And then the students will be able to teach their own patients everything they've learned and apply their knowledge, and then continue to grow as they go through their careers."



### PART OF SOMETHING NEW

**Renato Roperto, D.D.S., Ph.D.**, chair and associate professor of general dentistry, was inspired by the vision and mission of NEOMED and was enthusiastic about being part of the new College.

"The chance to help launch a new dental school was really an opportunity that I could not pass up," he said. Before coming to NEOMED, Dr. Roperto had worked in clinical practice, teaching and research in different institutions and in three different countries: Brazil, Canada and the United States.

Those experiences, he said, "gave me the perspective and the skills to help build a new dental school here at NEOMED."

He is excited to see the College grow. "Being part of this launch feels exciting and humbling. You're not just building a program or programs. We are shaping the future, for students, patients and mainly for the community. The opportunity to lay the foundation is truly, truly inspiring for me."



### THE NEWEST AND BEST TECHNOLOGY

Salem resident **Rebekka Hall**, a first-year student, earned her bachelor's degree from Kent State University.

"It really just made sense for me to stay here," she said. "It was super nice to be able to practice in an area that I know and love."

Hall also plans to stay in Ohio and work in underserved communities as a dentist.

How does it feel to be part of the inaugural class of the Bitonte College of Dentistry? "It feels really good," she said. "I think that we are really fortunate to be able to train with the newest and the best technology...and have the best professors that know a lot about dentistry and [dental] education. I'm really excited to see what happens."



### A CHILDHOOD DREAM

First-year student **Brock Janowicz** grew up in Stark County and now lives in Canton.

"I always imagined or kind of dreamed of NEOMED opening up a dental school. And when I heard that they did, it was perfect timing, when I was just finishing up undergrad," he shared.

With his childhood wish coming true, he is excited to be among the first students of the Bitonte College of Dentistry.

"I'm super grateful and thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this inaugural class," he said. "I feel that the faculty has really put in a lot of time and effort to make sure that we're ready to go. We have all the top-notch equipment and everything to hit the ground running to really succeed."

He plans to stay in Ohio after completing his studies to work in rural, underserved communities.



### DRAWN BY REPUTATION

First-year student **Angelene Kontul** also grew up in Northeast Ohio, which played a role in her decision to apply to the Bitonte College of Dentistry.

"Being close to a support system was very important to me," she said.

She also chose NEOMED based on the University's reputation.

"Their medical school has an awesome reputation, so I knew the dental school would follow that path," Kontul said. "The opportunity to use brand-new equipment [was also a draw]. I think it's really going to set me up for my career."



### CLOSE TO FAMILY

A Toledo native, first-year student **Alex Pham** wanted to stay in Ohio for dental school and remain close to family.

"I'm excited to be a part of the inaugural class," he said. "I chose NEOMED because I believe in their mission, and I believe that the faculty and staff have shown immense support thus far. I'm excited for what's to come next."

## PARTNERSHIP ADVANCES MEDICAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND HEALTHCARE ACCESS IN OHIO

BY TONYA STRONG-CHARLES

In November 2025, Northeast Ohio Medical University announced a groundbreaking, innovative educational partnership with The Christ Hospital Health Network of Cincinnati and Miami University in Oxford establishing pathways for future generations of physicians to train for a medical career in Ohio.

Ohio is facing a projected shortage of 1,200 primary care doctors over the next decade, according to estimates from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Together, NEOMED, The Christ Hospital Health Network and Miami University are addressing today's critical need for more healthcare professionals to improve the health of Ohioans.

"NEOMED's partnerships with The Christ Hospital and Miami University represent a pivotal development that will change the landscape of patient care in Ohio by giving our medical students more opportunities to connect with and serve communities across the state," said NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D.

NEOMED's collaboration with The Christ Hospital introduces expanded clinical rotation opportunities across southwest Ohio for the University's medical students, beginning in July 2026.

Additionally, NEOMED and Miami University will launch an early assurance program for Miami undergraduate students interested in attending NEOMED's College of Medicine.

"This exciting collaboration allows us to offer our students greater options in regards to advanced healthcare education,



(From left) The Christ Hospital Health Network President and CEO Debbie Hayes, NEOMED Board Chair Darrell McNair, NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D., The Christ Hospital Health Network Board Chair Amy Hanson, and Miami University President Gregory Crawford gathered in Cincinnati on Oct. 21, 2025, to discuss the healthcare education goals of their collaboration.

which will benefit overall health and wellness in the state of Ohio for years to come," Miami President Gregory Crawford said. "Our students, faculty and staff understand the crucial importance of developing future healthcare professionals, and this innovative partnership is an immensely positive step in that direction."

"We are excited to announce this partnership for medical students in southwest Ohio," said Debbie Hayes, President and CEO of The Christ Hospital Health Network. "One of the challenges facing healthcare is ad-

ressing the need for quality healthcare providers. By partnering with NEOMED and Miami University, two well-established organizations, these future physicians will have a place to learn and grow while we keep these talented providers here in the Greater Cincinnati region. This is an investment not just in our medical students but the health of our community for decades into the future."





# CREATING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2030

**N**ortheast Ohio Medical University adopted a new strategic plan in 2025, outlining a vision shaped by the input and priorities of our stakeholders—students, faculty, staff, alumni, clinical partners, trustees and the communities the University serves.

**Creating Transformational Leaders Strategic Plan for 2030** builds on the successes of the previous strategic plan and highlights the strength of collaboration. A year-long refresh process actively engaged the NEOMED community to assess past successes, identify opportunities, and define a vision for the future of NEOMED. The streamlined three-pillar structure includes Academics, Discovery and Engagement & Operations, and features 12 targeted strategic initiatives with value-driven action plans that outline specific steps to achieve our mission and vision.

## ACADEMICS PILLAR: EMPOWERING FUTURE HEALTHCARE LEADERS

- Create Transformational Healthcare Leaders for a Changing World
- Deliver an Exceptional, Student-Centered Experience
- Establish and Strengthen Strategic Educational Partnerships

## DISCOVERY PILLAR: ADVANCING RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Expand, Elevate and Promote NEOMED's Research Portfolio
- Leverage Strategic Collaborations for Greater Impact
- Foster an Environment to Promote Research Excellence
- Create Impactful Opportunities for Student Research and Innovation

## ENGAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS PILLAR: BUILDING A TRANSFORMATIONAL CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

- Position NEOMED as a Premier Destination for Top Talent
- Strengthen Engagement and Accountability Across All Stakeholders
- Enhance NEOMED's Reputation through Leadership and Citizenship
- Promote Leadership and Community Engagement
- Create a Culture of Transformational Excellence Driven by Innovation

## MISSION

Create transformational leaders and improve health.

## VISION

Forge the future in innovative health education and research excellence.

## VALUES

**Excellence:** We are committed to the highest standards of academic and research excellence, continuously striving for innovation and distinction.

**Integrity:** We uphold the highest ethical standards, acting with honesty, accountability and transparency.

**Collaboration:** We believe transformation arises from interdisciplinary teamwork, strong partnerships, and the sharing of knowledge, all which drive innovation and improve outcomes.

Pursuant to Ohio Revised Code 3345.0216, NEOMED declares that it will educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth; equip students with the opportunity to develop the intellectual skills they need to reach their own, informed conclusions; will not require, favor, disfavor, or prohibit speech or lawful assembly; create a community dedicated to an ethic of civil and free inquiry, which respects the autonomy of each member, supports individual capacities for growth, and tolerates the differences in opinion that naturally occur in a public higher education community; treat all faculty, staff, and students as individuals, to hold them to equal standards, and to provide them equality of opportunity, with regard to those individuals' race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.



Among many partnership activities, students enjoyed an on-campus "tailgate" party with Chomps the mascot and co-branded giveaways.

This strategic alliance is further developing NEOMED's capacity to address public health issues facing Northeast Ohio communities through education and advocacy.

## TWO TEAM SPORTS

### NEOMED AND THE CLEVELAND BROWNS WORK TOGETHER TO EXPAND HEALTHCARE EDUCATION IMPACT

**N**ortheast Ohio Medical University and the Cleveland Browns announced a partnership that kicked off in September 2024. This strategic alliance is further developing NEOMED's capacity to address public health issues facing Northeast Ohio communities through education and advocacy.

"Everything we do at NEOMED is a team sport—training the next generation of physicians, pharmacists, dentists and scientific researchers," said NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D. "As a 'Proud Partner' of the Cleveland Browns, we can increase access for our students to serve the communities of Greater Cleveland. Nearly 4,000 NEOMED graduates are healthcare professionals working across Ohio."

As part of the partnership, NEOMED is prominently featured at Huntington Bank Field, as well as on the NFL team's website, social media and gameday media

network. The University's students have benefited from participation in exclusive events to engage with the Browns medical staff and the organization's "Browns Give Back" community initiative. The initiative presents the opportunity for NEOMED to collaborate on innovative, impactful community outreach involving students in Northeast Ohio.

And they've had the chance to go to a game or two.

"We greatly appreciate NEOMED's commitment to enhancing pathways for young people to pursue professional degrees in healthcare and are proud to team up with them," said Haslam Sports Group Vice President of Community Relations Jenner Tekancic. "Their focus on serving the local community through volunteerism and their attention to developing young leaders is not only timely, but essential for Northeast Ohio."

# FROM FINANCE TO FIRST RESPONDER

MEDICAL STUDENT JASON COLLINS TOOK A UNIQUE PATH TO NEOMED

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**P**atient encounters with healthcare often begin with emergency medical services (EMS).

Sometimes, that's how future physicians start their healthcare journeys, too.

At least that's the case for Jason Collins, a second-year student in the College of Medicine at Northeast Ohio Medical University.

## FROM ECONOMICS TO MEDICINE

A native of Fort Wayne, Indiana, who now lives in Shaker Heights, Ohio, Collins attended Case Western Reserve University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in economics with minors in biology and chemistry. After graduation, he spent time working in finance as an analyst for a hedge fund. While the work was intellectually demanding, he realized his long-term interests were shifting. Still, he credits his economics training for giving him "insights others might not have," especially when thinking about healthcare systems and policy.

His career interests began to shift toward healthcare before even graduating from college. In 2019, he obtained his

emergency medical technician (EMT) license and joined the student-run EMS team at CWRU. He later volunteered as an EMT in Hudson, Ohio, and, in February 2020, joined Physicians Ambulance, which provides EMS, patient transport and event medicine services. That role opened doors to one of the most unique parts of his EMS experience: working on the field at Cleveland Browns games.

Now in his sixth season, Collins works three or four games a year on the offensive bench, primarily supporting tight ends and running backs. There's only one golf cart allowed on the field—and he's the one riding in it. "It's fun," he said. "I wasn't a huge football fan before I started doing this, but when the players are excited, it's exciting. You can't help but pick up the energy."

## BUILDING A CAREER IN EMERGENCY MEDICINE

His sports medicine experience extends beyond football. He has worked stints with the Cleveland Guardians and the Cleveland Cavaliers, and he served as an EMT on the set of the *Superman* film shot in

Cleveland in the summer of 2024. During professional games and events, EMTs are responsible for the medical safety of players and referees, supported by an on-site ambulance crew for major trauma and, during Browns games, overseen by an ER physician and anesthesiologist from University Hospitals.

Becoming an EMT required six months of training, Collins explained. He broadened his clinical exposure through an emergency medicine rotation at University Hospitals. When it came time to apply to medical school, he chose just one: NEOMED. Emergency medicine is where he sees his future, and NEOMED felt like the right fit.

As a medical student, Collins is an active member of the Emergency Medicine Interest Group and serves on the College of Medicine's curriculum committee. He was also selected as a "coater" for the White Coat Ceremony of the College of Medicine Class of 2029, helping the newest medical students get started on their professional journeys.





## INNOVATION MEETS **IMPACT**

Healthcare Transformation IDEATOR competition tackles pressing issues in health inequity

BY TAYLOR SZUMSKI

**A**ccording to Feeding America, more than 1.6 million Ohioans live with food insecurity. The link between food insecurity and negative health outcomes is well documented.

Northeast Ohio Medical University and University Hospitals hosted a high-energy, two-day innovation challenge to tackle this pressing health equity issue in April 2025. The third annual Healthcare Transformation IDEATOR brought together faculty, staff and students from the two institutions to develop ideas to address food insecurity, with a spotlight on its impact on maternal health and infant mortality in Northeast Ohio.

First launched in 2023, the IDEATOR competition was created to foster bold thinking and collaboration between healthcare professionals, academic institutions and community leaders. Each year, participants are given a real patient story to spark empathy and creativity as they

work in multidisciplinary teams to design actionable, entrepreneurial solutions. With support from expert coaches and access to practical tools, teams transform ideas into reality—all in just 48 hours.

The event culminated in a public pitch competition, where teams presented their solutions to a panel of judges.

### The IDEATOR competition was created to foster bold thinking and collaboration.

Taking first place was Team NutriSNAP, whose idea centered on a mobile app designed to support Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) users. The app would connect users to health navigators, nutritious and budget-friendly food options, and practical resources to stretch their monthly benefits—addressing a common challenge where

most SNAP recipients run out of funds after just two weeks.

Team leader Ramy Ahmed, Pharm.D. ('25), found the IDEATOR to be an eye-opening experience. “Working alongside individuals from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise allowed us to develop a well-rounded, functional solution to address food insecurity,” he said. “I came to understand that food insecurity isn’t just about affordability—it’s also about time, access and skills. This experience showed me the powerful impact healthcare professionals can have when we focus on the real challenges people face outside the clinic or pharmacy.”

Winning teams receive funding, mentorship and continued support from an Entrepreneur-in-Residence to help bring their ideas to life.

The 2026 IDEATOR competition will be held Feb. 11-12.



The first day of competition is spent developing ideas.



First-year medical student Varun Raja presents to the judges for his team.



Teams presented their ideas to a panel of judges.



Members of the winning team, Team NutriSNAP, during ideation.

NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D., addressed attendees at the 2025 IDEATOR.





Events like the campus picnic and Week of Wellness are just a couple of the activities in Academic Affairs and Student Services.



## A CONVERSATION WITH **DR. NICOLE KENT-STROLLO**

BY TONYA STRONG-CHARLES

*In this edition of “Conversations with NEOMED,” the University’s Chief Marketing Officer Tonya Strong-Charles interviews the inaugural dean of students. In her role, Nicole Kent-Strollo, Ed.D., M.S.N., APRN, WHNP-BC, oversees Academic Affairs and Student Services. She helps ensure a student-centered environment at the University and leads strategic initiatives to enhance the student experience.*

**Welcome to NEOMED! What attracted you to this opportunity to become the University’s first dean of students?**

So – there are a couple of reasons:

I was formerly a faculty member at Youngstown State University in our nurse practitioner program, and what introduced me to NEOMED is that I had the opportunity to work with the Wasson Center. We brought our [YSU] students here several times a semester. I was able to witness the professional growth of many young people, and the institution itself. What an amazing place! I’m proud to say that I’ve had several Youngstown State students who chose to come to NEOMED to pursue a career as a doctor or pharmacist.

**Now that you’re here, what is your vision for the role of dean of students?**

The vision is really to make sure that every one of our students understands that we care about them. They bring their gifts and talents to NEOMED—and they should feel

## Academic Affairs and Student Services Offices

“

[Students] bring their gifts and talents to NEOMED—and they should feel that we are here to help them reach their goals.”

– DR. NICOLE KENT-STROLLO

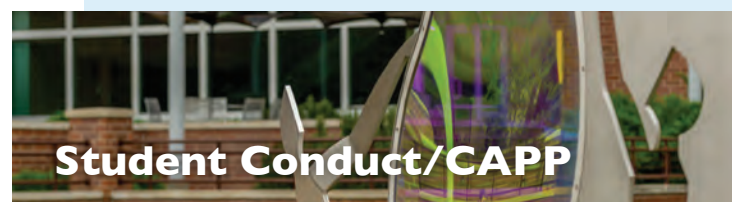
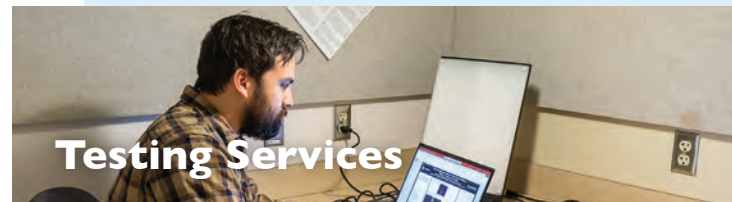
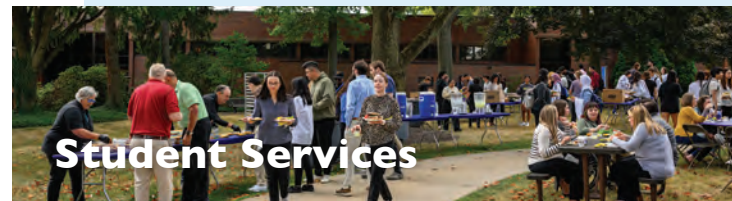
that we are here to help them reach their goals. We also know that each student brings a unique situation: While some have just completed their undergraduate education, others may have already had years of experience in another career. Several students are married with children. Some are single parents, and still others are the primary support for their families. Any or all of that can be stressful, so I want them to know that that we're here to support them along that journey.

**Your role, in particular, gives you a glimpse into the challenges students are facing outside of the classroom. Tell me why this work is rewarding for you.**

I think the first thing that comes to mind is: it's a privilege. If we think about it any other way, it can be completely overwhelming. So, if I am sitting here and I'm exhausted, as many of us are at the end of the day, and a student walks in and needs help with something, I think of how I would want someone in my role to respond to my son or daughter—or any of my family members. This is how I've always thought about how I connect with others—since the time I was a nurse practitioner. When someone chooses to come to you for support, it is a privilege to serve them. The Dean of Students office should always be welcoming.

**Would you say that you've come full circle when you consider your background in healthcare?**

Every day I get to have the opportunity to work with students who will make a difference in people's lives. I've worked in a lot of great places, but the people here at NEOMED are, quite frankly, some of the nicest people I've ever met!



# TAKING IDEAS FROM BENCH TO BEDSIDE

## NEOMED students help provide real-world medical solutions at annual competition

BY JARED F. SLANINA

One idea can make a world of difference for patients everywhere. But how does that idea turn into a real product that makes it to the patient?

NEOMED’s Bench to Bedside program helps provide this solution, pairing students with professionals from various industries to develop medical innovations from concept to prototype.

The program culminates with the annual NEOvations Bench to Bedside Competition in a showcase event, where teams can earn up to \$10,000 as a first-place prize to invest in their innovations.

### WRAP STAR

The prize money has made a major impact for Wrap Star, the team that took home first-place honors at the 2025 competition. The team, which includes College of Medicine students Sarah Kassis, Sofia Perez, Surbhi Srinivas, Emma Dang and Sarah Mizra, created a reversible, color-changing gauze and wrap that senses humidity to enhance wound care monitoring.

“Winning first place validated that our idea was real, feasible and worth pursuing,” said third-year medical student Sarah Kassis. “It gave our team confidence and momentum to keep pushing forward.”

The team has been actively working on the patenting and prototyping process to bring Wrap Star closer to real-world use.

“Wrap Star will help improve wound care by making bandaging simpler, quicker and more secure,” Kassis contended. “This

means patients will get better protection and healing, while also making the process easier for healthcare providers and families.”

The Wrap Star team also earned the People’s Choice award and an additional \$1,000 in prize money.

### NEOFLOW

The team behind NEOFlow, a device to improve flow in dialysis, was also among the winning teams. The group, which includes NEOMED students Adam Grden, Sameer Parashar and Nafees Sathik, was awarded third-place and \$2,500 in seed money for their device.

“NEOFlow aims to reduce mechanical complications that arise due to clogging on the catheter and visceral fat wrapping around the catheter. In doing so, it reduces the need for an additional surgery,” Sathik explained.

The Wrap Star team included students Sarah Kassis, Sofia Perez, Surbhi Srinivas, Emma Dang and Sarah Mizra, Pictured with 2025 Bench to Bedside speaker Amol Soin, M.D. ('02).



NEOMED Student Sameer Parashar shares information about NEOFlow with a guest. The third place NEOFlow team included Parashar and fellow students Adam Grden and Nafees Sathik.



The team has since been busy filing for a provisional patent as they work towards gaining a utility patent. They have also presented the catheter at the American Society of Nephrology Conference and the Association of Indian Physicians of Northern Ohio Conference in the fall. Additionally, NEOFlow is conducting additional tests with a new design to improve the flexibility needed for more accurate results.

“This award gave us validation for the necessity and potential profitability of the product,” said Sathik. “It showed us that even though there are people who do not know what peritoneal dialysis is, they are invested in our idea of improving patient outcomes.”

**LEARN MORE**

To learn more or become involved with NEOMED’s NEOvations Bench to Bedside program, visit [neomed.edu/bench-to-bedside/](https://neomed.edu/bench-to-bedside/)



The second-place team Ignite Recovery included University of Akron students Andrew Martin, Hailey Essinger and Matt Flaker. They developed an outer covering for burn wound dressings to reduce pain and maximize patient comfort.



Two teams earned Legacy Team Awards of \$1,000 each during the 2025 competition: AccessiChart, comprised of team members Kayla Johnson, Brigid Devine and Morgan Smith, and the Wound Reel, comprised of team members Meredith Farrell, Abigail Schwenk, Yena Kong, Varun Raja and Jack McCarthy



## INVESTING IN STUDENTS, SHAPING THE FUTURE

GENEROSITY OF NEOMED ALUMNUS HELPS FUTURE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**H**arold (Hal) White, M.D. ('84), grew up with a wide variety of interests. The Akron resident graduated from Firestone High School and went on to attend Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where he majored in zoology. He had an affinity for and an interest in science, but he hadn't decided exactly what direction his career would take.

That changed when he began working in the research lab of Dr. William Falor at Akron City Hospital (now Summa Health Akron Campus). There, he helped develop a noninvasive vascular lab used to test patients for peripheral vascular disease.

"I learned quite a bit," he recalled. "I was even called on to instruct residents on how to perform and interpret the tests. I figured out, you know, I'm just as capable as some of these guys, and I could do what they are doing too."

With that realization, Dr. White set his sights on a career in medicine. After a

couple of false starts, he earned direct admission to the fledgling Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine, now Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED), just as the school expanded to welcome more students with undergraduate degrees, rather than just students on the B.S./M.D. path through affiliated universities.

### THE IDEAL SETTING

At the time, Rootstown, Ohio, offered little more than a high school, a grocery store, one stoplight, and the Cosmic Pig game room. "Anyone from my class who hasn't been back would be stunned," he said. "The changes on campus are incredible. But for me, back then, it was the ideal setting for starting medical school and immersing myself in the basic sciences. I just loved the medical school here."

Dr. White went on to become an interventional radiologist. During his residency at Indiana University, he trained

under one of the pioneers of the specialty. Because his program relied heavily on residents rather than fellows, he gained hands-on experience that far exceeded what many peers received in larger, more traditional settings.

He compared that experience to his student days at NEOMED. "The medical students received a tremendous amount of hands-on experience that, in some places, you didn't get until you were an intern or resident. I was very thankful for the type of experiences I had here as a student," he said.

### A GENERATIONAL COMMITMENT

Today, after a long and successful career, Dr. White is focused on giving back to the institution that helped shape him, and is, in fact, the University's most generous alumnus. His philanthropy is directed toward areas where he believes he can make the greatest impact. He has

funded an endowed scholarship, making it possible for students to achieve their career goals in medicine.

“I want to do something that really affects students. That’s very important to me,” he said.

A recent gift to NEOMED’s Bitonte College of Dentistry supports several operatories, or dental treatment rooms, where dental students will receive essential hands-on clinical training. “That’s a particular need the University has right now, and I’m able to help with that,” he said.

His commitment to supporting education is deeply rooted in his family. His mother grew up in southeastern Ohio, where her father began working in the coal mines at age 14 after his own father was injured in an accident. Although Dr. White’s grandfather never returned to school, he nurtured a lifelong love of learning, reading the encyclopedia and studying books he received from a local pastor. Dr. White’s father, originally from Connecticut, moved to Ohio to attend Ohio University, primarily due to the affordable tuition. His parents met at Ohio University, united by the belief that education could unlock opportunity. Their education was interrupted by World War II; however, the GI bill allowed his father to complete his education after the war and subsequently go on to attend law school.

That belief in education turned into a generational commitment. Dr. White’s parents established multiple scholarships—two at Ohio University and three at the University of Akron—for students with limited means. “There’s a tradition of supporting education in my family,” Dr. White said. “Both of my parents improved their lives through education, and it was always important to them that others had the same opportunity.”

Dr. White is continuing that legacy at NEOMED, establishing support that directly benefits students and helps advance the University’s mission. “I’m extremely thankful for the opportunities I received by going to NEOMED, so I wanted to give back,” he said.

He is proud of how NEOMED has evolved. “I want them to just keep doing what they’re doing. They’re extremely innovative and creative,” he said of the University. “Some of the programs they’ve started are the first of their kind in the country, groundbreaking. I hope they continue on that path.”

A member of the NEOMED Foundation Board of Directors, Dr. White also hopes his story encourages others to give back, no matter where they are in their lives or their careers. “You can start off with a small amount. Even giving \$250 or \$500 a year over 20 or 30 years makes a significant difference,” he said. “And later in your career, you



**Contributing to the development of the healthcare providers of the future is a truly worthwhile legacy. I encourage everyone who has benefited from this institution to give back.”**

**– HAL WHITE, M.D. ('84)**

may have an opportunity to make a more substantial contribution. Contributing to the development of the healthcare providers of the future is a truly worthwhile legacy. I encourage everyone who has benefited from this institution to give back.”





Family members helped celebrate the opening of the Timken Foundation Medical Design Innovation Center. From left: Henry H. (Kurt) Timken, Joy Timken, Robert R. (Bob) Timken, Ward J. (Tim) Timken, Jr., and Ward J. (Jack) Timken, Sr.

## LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

### Timken Foundation Medical Design Innovation Center (MEDIC) provides space and tools for healthcare innovation

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

The Timken Foundation Medical Design Innovation Center (MEDIC) at Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) supports the needs of bioinnovators across Northeast Ohio. Students from NEOMED and other nearby institutions, entrepreneurs, healthcare systems, medical device companies, and regional and state economic development organizations all can benefit from the collaborative meeting space, benches, equipment and machinery for device design, prototyping and testing, and education and other resources.

"This space is more than just a place for us to convene. This incredible space is a collaboration and brainstorming area. It's become very popular with our students," NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D., said during a reception to officially open the collaboration space. He noted that the creation of the MEDIC was made possible by the generosity of the Timken Foundation of Canton.

"The Timken Foundation has been a partner of this University since its inception and has helped us achieve incredible things together," he said.

The MEDIC space helps the University achieve its mission by extending learning beyond the classroom and providing opportunities to solve clinical challenges and improve health.

"The vision of this University is to create transformational leaders, not just physicians who understand healthcare delivery and that practice their skills, not just pharmacists who practice their skills, or dentists," explained Dr. Langell, "but to create leaders who can go beyond the knowledge that we share with them to create new knowledge."

The Timken Foundation MEDIC provides a space where creative teams of students, faculty, staff and other professionals can come together to improve healthcare through increasing access, enhancing delivery of care and developing new technologies.

"The Timken Foundation has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with NEOMED and has witnessed the impact they have created in Ohio's healthcare community," said Board President Robert Timken. "We are excited to support the new MEDIC project and the many students it will serve."

The Timken Foundation MEDIC is the home to NEOMED's master's degree program in innovation. In that program, students work with clinical partners to identify healthcare challenges and develop possible solutions. Several graduates of the program have pursued patents for devices developed during the program.

The center also provides design and development space for competitors in the University's annual NEOventions Bench to Bedside competition. Students in the Bitonte College of Dentistry will also benefit from the space as they learn applications of 3D printing and other technologies in their field.

"In addition to allowing our students and outside companies to come in to prototype, to develop and to design, we could not do this without the generosity of the Timken Foundation," Dr. Langell expressed. "On behalf of the University and our Board of Trustees, thank you for giving us this capability. And now it is our job to deliver on the impact of what this could mean for our communities and for healthcare."



Bob Timken, NEOMED Board Chair Darrell McNair, and Trustee Tim Timken.



From left: First-year medical students Sameer Parashar and Nafees Sathik share information on past projects with faculty member Jesse Young, Ph.D. (center)



NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D. (left), MEDIC Director James Keszenheimer, Ph.D., Bob Timken and Tim Timken.



Student Trustee Guido Shero gives a tour of the MEDIC to members of the Timken family and other guests.



Members of the Timken family in the MEDIC workshop.

Photos: Andrea Hallgren



Amol Soin, M.D., in his lab.

“It” is Ohio Pain Clinic, a freestanding, multidisciplinary pain management center, which Dr. Soin opened in 2007 in his hometown of Dayton.

From the start, Dr. Soin was committed to an integrated approach to pain management. “You have to address the social and emotional aspects of pain in addition to the physical,” he said. “Sometimes there’s no surgery, no pill that’s going to fix things. People still need help. Psychological therapy, coping mechanisms—all those are integral.”

### ROOTS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Dr. Soin traces his entrepreneurial spark back to the 1990s, when he attended a wedding during the height of the dot-com boom. Surrounded by young founders building companies and raising capital, he wondered how that same energy might apply to healthcare. “Nearly 20% of the U.S. GDP is healthcare,” he said. “It’s one of the largest industries out there, so there have to be innovative opportunities to deliver care cheaper, more efficiently, better.”

As he explored medical specialties from cardiology to orthopaedics to nephrology, pain management stood out. “I realized that in pain, we’d been doing the same thing for four or five decades: derivatives of aspirin or morphine,” he noted. “They don’t work all that great, and they all have baggage. Meanwhile, people are still in pain. I thought, this is a cool opportunity.”

That mindset eventually led him beyond clinical practice and into the world of patents, devices and biotechnology. He also spent a year as president of the American Society of Pain Physicians; in that one year he published more than 20 journal articles. But that work didn’t energize him. “I realized that getting a patent—that’s exciting,” he said. “To prove you’re the first person ever to think of something

## PHYSICIAN ENTREPRENEUR

Alumnus Amol Soin, M.D., parlayed curiosity into success

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**W**hen Amol Soin, M.D., began the six-year B.S./M.D. program at Northeast Ohio Medical University, he expected to have a successful, but traditional, career in medicine. By the time he completed his residency at Rush University and a fellowship at Cleveland Clinic, the 2002 NEOMED alumnus realized clinical training was just the beginning. “I’m a naturally curious person,” he said. “In addition to my residency and fellowship, I got two

master’s degrees in science from Dartmouth [College] and Brown [University], and then an M.B.A. from the University of Tennessee, which helped me a ton because it was a physician-based M.B.A.”

His M.B.A. cohort included both experienced physicians and new medical school graduates who challenged his thinking and helped him refine his business model. “It felt like I not only got a degree, but free consulting out of it,” he joked. “By the time I was done, I opened a practice and went for it.”

in the history of recorded time; that's a high bar. I wanted to create something nobody had done before."

### BREAKTHROUGH IDEAS

His first patent was a pharmaceutical pill for diabetic neuropathy using sodium nitrate, a compound more commonly associated with preservatives in bacon and bologna than with biomedical innovation. But sodium nitrate has properties that promote blood vessel and tissue regrowth, including nerve repair. Dr. Soin ran clinical trials and ultimately licensed the drug to Cleveland Diabetes Care in a \$225-million arrangement that included royalties and milestone payments.

As his success grew, so did his credibility with potential partners and investors. "After something like that happens, funding becomes a lot easier," Dr. Soin noted. "People think lightning might strike twice."

His second major venture emerged during his fellowship year: a nerve stimulator to treat amputation stump pain, developed in part through the BioEnterprise business incubator in Cleveland. Dr. Soin played a role in helping to build a company, called Neuros Medical, around the device. The path to approval from the Food and Drug Administration took far

longer than expected. "We started in 2008 and thought we'd be approved by 2012 or 2013," he said. "We got approved in 2024. Sixteen years!"

### STAYING ENERGIZED

For all of his innovations, Dr. Soin acknowledges that clinical practice can become routine. "It's fun for about 10 years, and then your second 10 years, it just becomes like a job," he said. To keep himself energized, he structures his days into "pods," that is, distinct four-hour blocks dedicated to different types of work.

"One pod might be seeing patients in clinic; another might be doing procedures. Another is political work. I'm on the State Medical Board of Ohio. Another pod is innovation: companies, patents, lab work," he explained. "When you start a new block, it feels new. You bring a different energy."

He traces this approach back to lessons learned while preparing for Step One exams at NEOMED, where he and his roommates lived in what he called a "pressure cooker of studying." His solution: a mandatory 30-minute break every evening to "do something totally awesome." The ritual, he said, gave him and his friends something to



**I wanted to create something nobody had done before."**

**- AMOL SOIN, M.D.**

look forward to and kept them sane. Many of those roommates remain close friends, including members of a long-running "fancy football" league (a name born from a father's misheard comment mistaking fantasy football for fancy football) for the last 26 years.

### LASTING IMPACT

Reflecting on the arc of his life and career, Dr. Soin notes that things could have turned out very differently if he had not attended NEOMED. "You don't understand the impact of your decisions when you're 18," he said. "I wouldn't have met my wife. I wouldn't have the family I have now. I wouldn't have had the same hunger or friend group. All those were ingredients that became the recipe of my life as it exists today. And for that, I'm grateful."



Amol Soin, M.D., was keynote speaker for the 2025 NEOvations Bench to Bedside competition showcase at NEOMED.



## MOVING BEYOND ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL PRESCRIPTIONS

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**O**ne-size-fits-all rarely fits anyone well. That's true in clothing design and it's also true in pharmaceuticals and their clinical application.

"Currently, we have a very archaic model where we assess medication doses for patients based on age, weight and other parameters that just group people together. Those have nothing to do with different ways that people will actually process medication when they take it," said Moses Oyewumi, Ph.D., professor and chair of pharmaceutical sciences at Northeast Ohio Medical University. "We just create this broad bucket and say, if someone is at this age, at this weight, the dose will be that."

Dr. Oyewumi believes precision medicine offers a better solution that will result in better outcomes for patients.

"When a patient takes a medication, before it can be effective, the body will process that medication. How much can get to the blood? How much will be metabolized?" Everyone's body will react differently to a medication based on their genes. Because of that, said Dr. Oyewumi, "the actual dose is not really what the patient is taking. The actual dose is what makes it to the point where the drug can act."

That's where precision medicine comes in.

"In layman's terms, precision medicine is the ability to customize medication or tailor it to individual needs," explained Dr. Oyewumi.

It is a product of pharmacogenomics, the study of the role of the genome in drug response as it pertains to variations in how the body absorbs, distributes, metabolizes, retains and eliminates drugs, as well as how drugs act on targeted sites in the body.

### THE RIGHT DOSE OF THE RIGHT MEDICATION

"We are so different genetically with the way we relate with drugs. Pharmacogenomics helps us see how much of a drug will make it to blood circulation, how much will be metabolized, how much the body will push out," Dr. Oyewumi explained. "If we don't design the dose based on those things, we may be giving the patient too much drug or too little drug."

He offered pain management as an example of an area where precision medicine could have a big impact. If someone is prescribed an opioid at too low a dose, their pain will not be managed properly. If the dose is too high, it could lead to side effects and addiction.

"This is the overall goal of precision medicine, to know some of the individualistic parameters that will affect the way medication will be effective, that affect how much side effects there are. And then ensure the overall safety of the patient so that they don't take too much or too little, and they just get the medication that they need," he said.

Precision medicine can also show which medication would be the most appropriate for a particular patient.

### CHALLENGES TO ADOPTION

While precision medicine can help ensure that patients receive the right medication in the right dose, there are challenges to widespread implementation.

Mass production of pharmaceuticals, especially in tablet form, does not lend itself to precision medicine. For instance, if tablets are mass produced with a dose of 10 milligrams of an active ingredient, but a particular patient

needs 7.5 milligrams, results will not be optimal.

"That's a major challenge because traditional large scale medicine manufacturing is a big business," said Dr. Oyewumi. "If we are talking of customization for the patients, there's not much that can be done. When medicines are mass produced, we have the limitation to be able to do that."

Another challenge is the amount of time it can take to create customized medication. Dr. Oyewumi's lab is exploring medication delivery systems and looking for ways to improve delivery using 3D printing and other technologies, in effect moving manufacturing to the point of care.

"We are looking at the situation down the road where it would be possible to use genetic components to know the dose. And when you know that you can customize that dose for the patient," Dr. Oyewumi said. A simple blood test would provide much of the information needed to customize a dose, such as assessing the amount of the metabolizing enzymes present that will impact the effectiveness of the drug. "I believe that's the way to go, because we really need to give way to a newer method that will be less wasteful, that will not expose the patient to unnecessary medication but that will be effective," he said.

Dr. Oyewumi referred to the work of Xinwen Wang, Ph.D., his colleague in the department of pharmaceutical sciences, who is working to identify both genetic and non-genetic factors that contribute to interindividual variability in disease progression and drug response. Findings from such research will have great impact on establishing safe and effective application of medications in clinical settings.

# STRENGTHENING CRISIS RESPONSE FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE ACROSS OHIO

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**R**ecent research from the Sentencing Project shows that incarceration of juvenile offenders does not reduce delinquent behavior, impedes education and future employment, and does lasting damage to health and well-being, among other negative outcomes.

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence (CJ CCoE) at Northeast Ohio Medical University is working with communities across Ohio to strengthen crisis response systems to help young people before they enter the justice system.

Through hands-on facilitation, data gathering and analysis, and collaboration with local stakeholders, NEOMED staff are helping six counties—Franklin, Logan, Montgomery, Portage, Summit, and one to be determined—assess and enhance the services that support youth and their families experiencing behavioral health crises before, during and after justice contact.

NEOMED's expertise in this area is well established. The University has long been known for coordinating Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) across all 88 Ohio counties, earning a reputation that led state officials to specifically request NEOMED's leadership for a new effort funded by the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program. The CJ CCoE received a non-competitive, three-year, \$1.5 million grant from the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services to improve responses for juveniles involved in the justice system.

The Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (Byrne SCIP) provides funds to help states strengthen crisis intervention initiatives, including programs designed to prevent violence, support individuals

with behavioral health needs, and divert people from deeper involvement with the justice system. For the NEOMED CJ CCoE, the goal is not necessarily to add new services but to help communities determine which existing systems need to be bolstered, supported or better connected.

"With adults, significant housing needs exist in crisis intervention work, followed



by transportation," noted Ruth Simera, M.Ed., LSW, executive director of the CJ CCoE. "With juveniles, the challenges look different but the gaps can be just as significant."

A major component of NEOMED's work involves Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM), a collaborative, cross-systems planning tool that helps counties visually map how individuals with mental illness encounter both the behavioral health and criminal justice systems—from first contact through re-entry. NEOMED staff have facilitated workshops that span a day and a half and bring together 25 to 40 community stakeholders, including juvenile detention staff, behavioral health service providers, child protective services, schools, parents and youth, among others. Together, they examine how local services interact, where communication breaks down, and what opportunities exist to reduce unnecessary justice system involvement.

Communities emerge from these workshops with four to five prioritized action items that become part of a "living, breathing" report compiled by NEOMED. Staff conduct periodic check-ins and provide ongoing support to help counties stay focused on their target populations and navigate challenges that arise.

Across Ohio, common themes have emerged. For juvenile systems, priorities often include building a stronger crisis response system; establishing both formal and informal respite options for families; developing re-entry plans that help youth transition safely back home and to school; and improving information sharing while maintaining compliance with privacy regulations.

A remaining challenge exists when detention and child protective services are not appropriate, but the youth should not return home during the crisis. "There is a significant gap for these families who need assistance in that space," said Simera.

Best practices continue to evolve, but three core components guide effective crisis care: a reliable place to call; someone who can respond; and somewhere to go.

"The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline has really strengthened the first element," said Simera. "Mobile Response and Stabilization Services, or MRSS, is strengthening the second element. Many communities are supplementing that with co-response models pairing law enforcement with mental health professionals or trained peers, which can be adapted differently in rural and urban counties."



# A RISING VOICE IN GLOBAL HEALTH

NEOMED PHARMACY STUDENT DEANNA LAUGHLIN REPRESENTS 600,000 PEERS WORLDWIDE IN INTERNATIONAL ROLE

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

Since beginning her journey as a pharmacy student at Northeast Ohio Medical University, Deanna Laughlin has taken on multiple leadership roles with student organizations on campus, across the state and nationally.

In August 2024, she went international, when she was elected as the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation Pan American Regional Projects Officer.

That appointment has taken her around the world as a representative voice for pharmacy students across the globe.

## WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

As an IPSF delegate to the 78th World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva, Switzerland, in May, Laughlin was one of a select group of pharmacy students worldwide chosen to attend the prestigious global policy forum hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The WHA convenes health ministers, policymakers and global health leaders to determine international health priorities, set policy agendas and coordinate responses to major public health challenges.

"Participating in the World Health Assembly allowed me to witness firsthand how global health policy is shaped and how the pharmacy profession can contribute to systemic change," Laughlin shared.

Connecting with pharmacy students from across the world fostered international dialogue, promoted cultural understanding and showcased the many ways pharmacists contribute to public health around the world.

Laughlin believes her presence at the WHA helps reframe the identity of pharmacy students as more than just future dispensers of medication; they are

emerging public health advocates and health systems leaders.

"I joined IPSF's global delegation to represent the voice of over 600,000 pharmacy students worldwide. In doing so, I want to advocate for key issues, including equitable access to medicines, youth engagement in global health decision making, and the role of pharmacists in achieving universal health coverage," she said.

## UNITED NATIONS FORUM

In July, Laughlin attended the 2025 United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York City.

"I joined passionate youth leaders to spotlight the intersection of health, gender equity, climate action and decent work all through the lens of several sustainable development goals," Laughlin shared. "As a young woman in STEM and a future pharmacist, I was proud to contribute to dialogues that not only centered youth voices but also demanded accountability and intergenerational solidarity in policy development and implementation."

Hearing from delegates from other parts of the world was powerful, said Laughlin, especially in the face of climate change, economic inequities and gender equality challenges.

During the forum, Laughlin joined panelists from UNICEF, the UN Youth Office and NCD Alliance, a nongovernmental agency, in a session on how youth can tackle non-communicable diseases (NCD). In another session, Laughlin presented on the importance of having a pharmacist on the care team and the need to reinforce the global commitment to HIV/AIDS.



"These conversations reinforced my commitment to championing pharmaceutical systems and strengthening anti microbial stewardship, especially in under-resourced settings," she said.

## WORLD CONGRESS IN KENYA

In August, Laughlin traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, to attend the IPSF World Congress.

"It was an experience that blended leadership, service, cultural exchange and professional growth in ways I will carry with me for years to come," she enthused.

Side by side with students from Germany, Philippines, Liberia, Kenya, United Arab Emirates and others, Laughlin participated in an intensive leadership development program during the conference.

"It was empowering to learn alongside passionate pharmacy students from around the world who share the same vision of advancing our profession globally," she said.

During the General Assembly, Laughlin had the opportunity to help review policies and proposals shaping the IPSF's future.

“One of the most meaningful moments for me was presenting my plan for the Pan American Region as the nominee for Regional Chairperson,” she shared. “I am honored that my nomination was accepted, and I look forward to serving pharmacy students across the Americas in this new leadership role.”

Laughlin also had some time to experience local attractions. That included a safari and marine park visit with other delegates, some of whom she would see again at the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) World Congress.

“Outside of the IPSF Congress, I immersed myself in Kenya’s vibrant culture and pharmacy community,” Laughlin shared. Those experiences, she said, “gave me a deeper appreciation for the diversity of training models worldwide.”

### FIP WORLD CONGRESS

In September, Laughlin traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark, to attend the FIP World Congress, thanks to a Ton Hoek Scholarship she received through APhA Foundation.

“This was the most impactful opportunity that I have received as a student, and it came at the best time in my career. I had just been elected as the IPSF Pan American Chairperson, and it allowed me to network with many individuals at the international level to unlock opportunities for our region,” Laughlin shared. “This experience was more than a professional milestone; it was a defining moment in my journey as a future pharmacist, public health advocate and global health diplomat.”

The FIP World Congress is one of the largest and most influential gatherings of pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists and educators worldwide.

During the congress, Laughlin participated in leadership development, policy dialogues, scientific sessions and international networking events, advocating for student involvement in global health diplomacy and pharmacy workforce development.

### PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION

In October, Laughlin traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the 62nd Directing Council of Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). One of the highest governing bodies of PAHO, the council brings together ministers of health and senior delegates from across the Americas to adopt regional health policies and shape the future of public health in the hemisphere.

As head of the IPSF delegation, she contributed to discussions on priority health issues, including antimicrobial resistance, digital health transformation, pandemic preparedness, equitable access to essential medicines and vaccines, and others. She collaborated with global youth leaders and regional partners to elevate the role of pharmacy professionals within PAHO’s strategies for universal health coverage and resilient health systems.

“I was able to present our position on gender equity, and to have individuals from our region resonate with that intervention made me feel that I was truly making the impact I dreamed of as a student,” Laughlin said.

She returns to NEOMED with strengthened partnerships, deeper insight into regional health governance, and a renewed commitment to preparing student pharmacists to lead in global public health arenas.



[These experiences] reminded me why I chose this path: to be part of a profession that not only heals but also unites communities around the world.”

Laughlin is grateful for the many opportunities her role in IPSF and APhA Foundation has given her.

“I have connected with so many individuals with different experiences and perspectives that have truly inspired me to continue my pursuit as a global health advocate,” she said. “These experiences have truly reaffirmed my passion for global health, infectious diseases and pharmacy leadership, and they reminded me why I chose this path: to be part of a profession that not only heals but also unites communities around the world.”



## BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF SERVICE NEOMED'S HABITAT FOR HUMANITY CHAPTER

BY JULIA COLECCHI



Left to Right: Anas Bakdali (M2), Adelrahman Boghdady (M2), Fatemah Abed (M2), Corrie Stofcho, M.D. ('06), Brandon Galero (M1), Dhisan Kashyap (M1), and Matthew Crump (M1) volunteered at the ReStore resale shop.

When a student arrives at Northeast Ohio Medical University, they often do so with a passion for helping others. But for Abdelrahman Boghdady, a second-year medical student, that passion extended beyond the clinic and into the heart of the community.

Boghdady spent his undergraduate years volunteering with a Habitat for Humanity chapter at Kent State University, and he noticed a gap at NEOMED. While many service opportunities existed, they were often one-time events that filled up quickly. He believed a new student organization was needed to provide consistent, long-term involvement—a place where students could see the tangible, lasting impact of their efforts. Inspired by this realization, the NEOMED Habitat for Humanity chapter was born.

The organization's mission is built on four core pillars: Direct Service, Fund-

raising, Education and Advocacy. These goals go together with the curriculum in NEOMED's College of Medicine, which emphasizes the impact of social determinants of health on patient outcomes. By directly supporting the creation of safe and affordable housing, members gain a firsthand understanding of a key factor that influences a person's well-being. This is more than just community service; it's an extension of students' medical training, strengthening both the community and their future practice.

"As future healthcare professionals, it is essential to understand the broader challenges our patients face," Boghdady said. "Through Habitat, we gain perspective on the barriers people encounter in accessing safe and stable housing. It helps us see beyond the clinic, practice empathy and develop the habit of shifting perspective when working toward solutions."

Being part of the Habitat chapter also offers professional and personal growth. On a build site, people from all backgrounds come together to work toward a common goal, fostering collaboration, teamwork and communication. Challenges are solved together, teaching members to adapt, support others and think critically as part of a team.

For students, one of the most rewarding parts of the experience is the hands-on work, said Boghdady. Working alongside a construction leader and fellow students, they might be installing drywall, painting, or framing.

And the best part?

"We often get to meet the families who will call these houses home," said Boghdady, sharing his enthusiasm for seeing directly how his hard work will benefit members of the community. "It's a refreshing break from the academic grind and a chance to learn new, tangible skills."



Left to Right: Second-year medical students James Scantling and Daniel Leonard on a build site.



The family received the keys to the home on September 29, 2025.



First-year medical student Brandon Galero volunteering at the ReStore resale shop.



Left to Right: Second-year medical students Shirsha Koirala, Abdelrahman Boghdady, James Scantling, Daniel Leonard, Rachel Johnstone, Ahmed Barghout and Anas Bakdaliieh take a break on the construction site.

## CREATING A LASTING LEGACY

Boghdady hopes that the NEOMED Habitat for Humanity chapter creates a lasting legacy.

“We envision it as a meaningful bridge between NEOMED’s students, faculty and staff, and the wider community,” he emphasized. “The long-term goals are to continue recruiting committed members, raising funds for Habitat’s projects, educating the campus about housing challenges, and advocating for safe, decent and stable housing for all.”

Ultimately, the NEOMED Habitat for Humanity chapter is building more than just homes; it’s building a community, fostering a culture of empathy and helping to prepare the next generation of health-care professionals to see the patient as a whole person with human needs, and not just medical needs.



Left to right: Second-year medical students Shirsha Koirala, Daniel Leonard, Abdelrahman Boghdady and James Scantling.



## 'WRAPPING UP' A FAMILY TRADITION

Second-year medical student Porter Snowden shares his wife Jasmine's recipe for tamales—and the meaning it has for their family.

BY JARED F. SLANINA

Second-year medical student Porter Snowden would enjoy the occasional tamale from the supermarket freezer aisle while growing up in Pennsylvania, and with parents from southern California, he probably had more exposure to Mexican dishes than many of his neighbors. However, he gained a newfound appreciation for the dish after trying the homemade tamales made by his wife, Jasmine Aleman.

"It was phenomenal," exclaimed Snowden when asked about that first bite. "It was so, so delicious," he said, struggling to put into words just how good it tasted.

### A FAMILY TRADITION

For Jasmine, making tamales was something that she always reminded her of her early childhood.

"It was a family event, with all hands on deck," Aleman said. "I have many fond memories of spending the day making tamales with my mom and sisters, just us sitting around talking and laughing all day."

Aleman's family would spend one or two full days making about 200 tamales. Sometimes her mom would sell the popular treat, with some going in the freezer to enjoy at a later date.

"My first job was just not to eat the meat before they could go into the tamales," Aleman said with a laugh. She was eventually "promoted" to making dough balls and filling once she was old enough for those responsibilities.

The tradition of making tamales ahead of Christmas remains a family tradition for Aleman, whose mother, Blanca Aleman, was hard at work helping with the current batch for this story and NEOMED's Multicultural Festival. Blanca uses a recipe handed down from her own mother, although she scrapped a few ingredients to make it her own.

Each batch includes three different types of tamales—pork, chicken, and poblano and cheese. Jasmine's favorite is the poblano and cheese, and she learned early that she had to get one quickly after they were prepared as they would go fast as a popular choice among the children. Snowden's favorite is the pork tamales, although he admits he would happily eat any of the options.

Snowden and Aleman keep busy with four young children, who they have introduced to the tradition. They enjoy helping make the tamales but especially enjoy eating the final product—the tamales even get the stamp of approval from the oldest child, who is a notoriously picky eater.

### SOME HELPFUL TIPS

Jasmine provided some helpful tips for anyone who would like to try her recipe. Patience is important, as it is a time-consuming dish with many steps.

"Just take your time and don't get overwhelmed," she said. "Just take it step-by-step."

She also suggested to do plenty of taste-testing throughout the process and make adjustments based on your taste. She will often make extra sauce to freeze for the next time they make tamales.

There is also one very important tip for anyone who is a novice to tamale-making—you are not supposed to eat the corn husk, which is used as wrapping for the filling during the steaming process. Just simply unwrap the corn husk and set it aside before enjoying the tamale.

Snowden realized this was an important tip after handing out tamales to some of his classmates. By the time he made it back to his seat, he realized one of his friends had just finished the tamale, corn stalk and all.

"He still seemed to enjoy it, although it probably wasn't easy to chew through the corn stalk," Snowden said with a laugh. "It's hard to go wrong with a homemade tamale—especially compared to the ones in the freezer aisle."

## A WELCOME BREAK

Snowden appreciates joining in on the family tradition of making tamales, and something they are passing along to their young children.

“It’s just a great way to spend time with our family and take a break from the rigors of being a medical student,” Snowden said.

Porter Snowden (left) and wife Jasmine Aleman (right) gathered their children to make tamales with Jasmine’s mother, Blanca Aleman.



# TAMALES RECIPE

FROM JASMINE ALEMAN

## PORK FILLING

### Ingredients

- 4–5 lbs. pork butt
- 1 whole garlic bulb
- 1 whole onion, halved
- 2 tbsp chicken bouillon
- ½ tsp black pepper
- Enough water to cover

### Instructions

1. Place pork, garlic, onion, bouillon and black pepper in a large pot. Cover with water.
2. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until pork is tender and pulls apart easily (about 2–3 hours).
3. Remove pork and shred. Strain and reserve 2–3 cups of the broth for the sauce and masa.

## RED CHILE SAUCE

### Ingredients

- 20 dried guajillo chiles
- 10 dried ancho chiles
- 1 tbsp of the reserved chile cooking water
- Reserved pork broth (about ½ cup for blending)

### Instructions

1. Remove stems, seeds and veins from chiles.
2. Boil in water for 20 minutes until softened (reserve some of the cooking water).
3. Blend chiles with ½ cup reserved pork broth until smooth. Strain into a bowl.

## GUISADO (PORK WITH SAUCE)

### Ingredients

- Shredded pork
- Red chile sauce
- 1 tbsp cumin
- ½ tsp black pepper
- Garlic and onion from pork broth, blended with ½ cup reserved pork broth

### Instructions

1. In a large pan, combine shredded pork with red chile sauce. Mix well.
2. Add the blended garlic, onion and broth mixture.
3. Season with cumin and black pepper. Taste and adjust seasoning.
4. Simmer until most liquid has evaporated and the sauce clings to the pork.

## MASA FOR TAMALES

### Ingredients

- Prepared masa (or masa harina)
- Warm reserved pork broth, as needed

### Instructions

1. In a large bowl, mix masa.
2. Gradually add warm pork broth until the dough is soft, spreadable and slightly sticky.

## ASSEMBLY

1. Soak corn husks in hot water until pliable.
2. Spread a thin layer of masa onto each husk.
3. Add a spoonful of the pork filling in the center.
4. Fold sides over, then fold the bottom up.
5. Steam tamales for 1–1½ hours, until masa pulls away from the husk.

## 1985



Colonel Fred Marquinez, M.D., a flight surgeon and retired medical oncologist, assumed command of the 179th Medical Group in the Ohio Air National Guard and the United States Air Force's 179th Cyberspace Wing.

## 1987



David R. Little, M.D., M.S., FAAFP, FAMIA, clinical informatics physician at Epic, collaborated with a team of investigators from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Epic to publish "Vaccine Effectiveness of JYNNEOS against Mpox Disease in the United States" in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on May 18, 2023. The paper received the 2024 Charles C. Shepard Science Award as the best CDC research publication in the category of Prevention and Control.

## 1987



Keith Roller, M.D., was sworn in on Sept. 20, 2025, as president of the Ohio Society of Anesthesiologists for the 2025-2026 year.

## 1989



Theresa Gillis, M.D., received the prestigious Distinguished Member Award from the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the 2024 AAPM&R Annual Assembly in San Diego. The AAPM&R is the largest organization of physiatrists in the U.S. This award recognizes Dr. Gillis' contributions to the specialty. Her career caring for patients with cancer at multiple National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer centers, teaching and influencing generations of PM&R resident and Oncology Rehabilitation fellowship physicians, has spurred the growth of this emerging subspecialty in physiatry. Dr. Gillis was elected to join the AAPM&R Board of Governors as a Member at Large. She is currently the service chief, rehabilitation and attending physiatrist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

## NEOMED ALUMNI ELECTED AS FELLOWS OF ACCP



NEOMED alumni **Philip King, Pharm.D. ('13), BCPS**, and **Dustin Carneal, Pharm.D. ('15)**, have been elected as Fellows of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (FCCP)—one of the highest honors in the profession. They are the first NEOMED alumni to be elected as ACCP Fellows.

The FCCP designation is earned through a highly selective, peer-reviewed process recognizing sustained excellence and leadership in clinical pharmacy. As of 2025, only about 600 pharmacists worldwide hold this credential. Eligibility requires a minimum of 10 years of post-licensure clinical experience and comprehensive documentation of sustained professional contributions, evaluated by a national peer review committee. Points are awarded for the scope, depth and sustained impact of contributions—making this distinction a true mark of professional achievement.

## 1999



Paul Pannozzo, M.D., joined Desert Spine and Sports Physicians, a sports medicine clinic in Arizona. Dr. Pannozzo specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation and pain management.

## 2017



Douglas Gugel-Bryant, Pharm.D., and colleagues from Sanford Health published “Pharmacist-managed diabetes care and change in A1C: A retrospective matched cohort study” in the *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy*, vol. 8, issue 1, 28-33.

## 2020



Bharath Balu, Ph.D., M.D., FAAD, a board-certified dermatologist and fellowship-trained Mohs surgeon, will lead Dermatology Partners' new office in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

## 2007



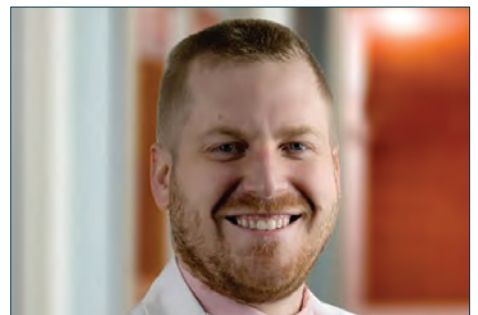
Chirag Shah, M.D., was appointed chair of the Allegheny Health Network Cancer Institute's Department of Radiation Oncology.

## 2018



Benjamin Yglesias, M.D., has joined UNC Health Surgical Specialists of Southeastern Health Mall and the medical staff of UNC Health Southeastern as both a general and bariatric surgeon.

## 2022



Jacob Brock, M.D., a board-certified family medicine physician, joined the Pioneer Physicians Network. He is now seeing patients at Medina Primary Care.

## 2016



Dana Wilkerson, Pharm.D., was installed as president of the Ohio Pharmacists Association in spring 2025.



Jessica (Casterline) O'Neal, M.D., academic neonatologist at The Ohio State University, was recently named associate medical director of transport for Nationwide Children's Hospital.

## SHARE YOUR NEWS

We'd love to hear about your achievements, promotions, awards and other personal and professional milestones. Submit a class note at [neomed.edu/alumni/](https://neomed.edu/alumni/).

# NEOMED CONNECT



Mentor a student, welcome a new graduate to your region, and strengthen our alumni community, one connection at a time.



Start making connections today!  
Sign up at [connect.neomed.edu](https://connect.neomed.edu)



NORTHEAST OHIO MEDICAL UNIVERSITY  
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

## INVEST IN TOMORROW'S TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS



**Gifts to the Blue Fund** have an immediate impact on our students and the entire NEOMED community as they provide much needed financial support for scholarships, academic programs, ceremonies like the White Coat and other urgent needs.



[neomed.edu/give](https://neomed.edu/give)

**BLUE  
FUND**

Northeast Ohio Medical University Foundation



# VITALS

VISIONARY HEALTH LEADERSHIP *IN ACTION*

---

is now on the **AMA ED HUB!**

---



It's now easier than ever to access FREE CMEs on your own schedule from NEOMED's health leadership speaker series presented in collaboration with University Hospitals.

BECOME A TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER IN PHARMACY  
**Earn your Doctor of Pharmacy degree**

*With a Pharm.D. degree, you have dozens of career options.*

**Here are just a few:**

**Ambulatory Care Pharmacist**

**Compounding Pharmacist**

**Community Pharmacist**

**Clinical Hospital Pharmacist**

**Informatics**

**Pharmaceutical Industry**

**Specialty Pharmacist**

Just **60 HOURS** of prerequisite  
coursework needed to apply!

High job placement, high-paying  
jobs at the world's most prestigious  
clinics and hospitals.

