



# IGNITE

P A R K I N S O N ' S :

S L O W I N G

THE PROGRESSION



Northeast Ohio Medical University is a public medical university with a mission to harness diversity, innovation and collaboration to create transformative leaders and improve health through education, discovery and service. The University embraces diversity, equity and inclusion and fosters a working and learning environment that celebrates differences and prepares students for patient-centered, team- and population-based care.

*Ignite* magazine (Summer 2024, Volume 25, No. 1) is published twice a year 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**

- E. Douglas Beach, Ph.D., Chair
- Darrell L. McNair, M.B.A., Vice Chair
- Sharlene Ramos Chesnes
- William H. Considine, M.H.S.A.
- Karen Soehnlein McQueen, J.D.
- Ward J. "Tim" Timken, M.B.A.
- Phillip L. Trueblood
- Susan Tave Zelman, Ph.D.

**Student Trustees**

- Omer S. Ashruf
- Olivia L. Safady, M.D. ('24)

**Trustee Emeritus**

- Paul R. Bishop, J.D.

**Chief Marketing Officer**

- Tonya Strong-Charles

**Editor:** Jeanne M. Hoban

**Contributors:** Ariana Brooks, Julia Colecchi, Roderick L. Ingram Sr., Jared F. Slanina

**Publication Design:** Scott J. Rutan

**Photography:** Andrea Hallgren, Andrew Jordan, Chris Smanto, Lew Stamp 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.*

# A SEARCH for SOLUTIONS

**E**ach year, nearly 90,000 people in the United States are diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. It is the second most common neurodegenerative disease after Alzheimer's disease.

For physicians, Parkinson's disease is a conundrum. They can make recommendations and write prescriptions to help manage symptoms but cannot cure the disease.

For patients and families, Parkinson's disease is, as Michael J. Fox says, "the gift that keeps on taking."

For scientists, Parkinson's disease is a puzzle to be solved.

In this issue of *Ignite*, you will read how NEOMED researchers, led by Sheila Fleming, Ph.D., are working diligently to find solutions to slow or stop the progression of the disease through exercise. Dr. Fleming is investigating the effects of exercise on the brain and the proliferation of the alpha-synuclein proteins that appear in Parkinson's disease.

Her work hits close to home. You'll also find in this issue the story of my wife, Sara Whittingham, M.D. She is an anesthesiologist, triathlete and U.S. Air Force veteran. Sara was diagnosed a few years ago with Parkinson's disease.

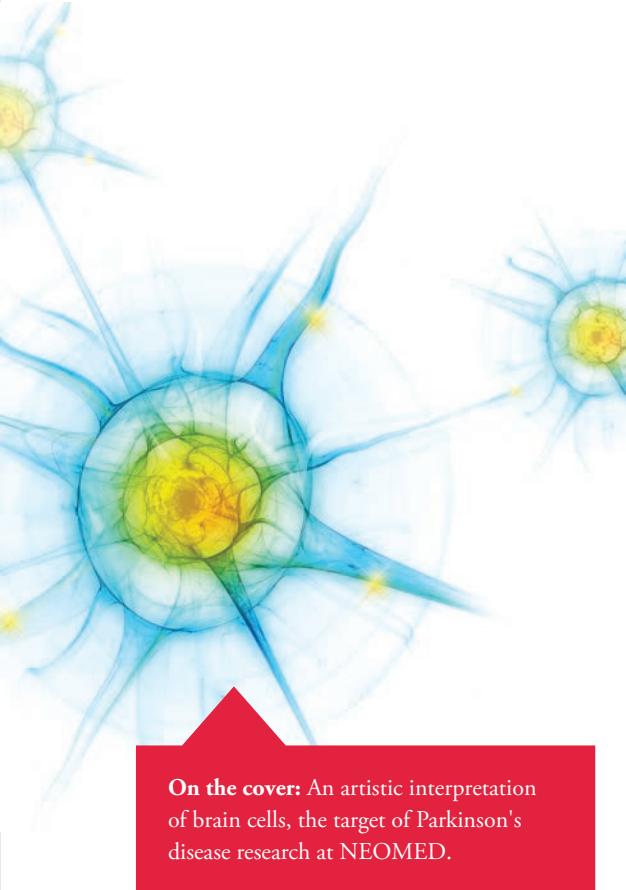
Hopefully one day we'll have a cure. In the meantime, we'll rely on the work of scientists like Dr. Fleming to help slow or stop the progression of the disease.

Sincerely,



John T. Langell  
*President*





**On the cover:** An artistic interpretation of brain cells, the target of Parkinson's disease research at NEOMED.



## DEPARTMENTS

- 18 DONOR SPOTLIGHT
- 20 WHALE WATCHING
- 24 HUMANITIES IN MEDICINE
- 25 INNOVATION
- 26 2024 COMMENCEMENT
- 28 CLASS NOTES

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

*Ignite's* Spring 2023 issue received two awards in the Press Club of Cleveland's statewide contest, including second place in Best in Ohio: Illustrator and graphic design.

## FEATURES

### 04

**SLOWING THE PROGRESSION OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE**  
*In a Department of Defense-funded study, NEOMED researchers investigate the impact of exercise on Parkinson's pathology and cognitive dysfunction.*

### 08

**RACING TO SLOW DOWN PARKINSON'S DISEASE**  
*Triathlete Sara Whittingham, M.D., uses high profile races to raise awareness and funds for research and to advocate for fellow veterans.*

### 10

**THE GREATEST SORT OF PUBLIC SERVICE**  
*Remembering Robert Liebelt, M.D., inaugural dean of the College of Medicine.*

### 14

**AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION**  
*An alumna uses her experience in pharmacy and public health to educate patients and the next generation of health professionals.*

### 16

**50 YEARS OF CREATING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS**  
*Explore this timeline of milestones in NEOMED's history.*



Fayez Almashhori, a graduate student in biomedical sciences at Kent State University, and Sheila Fleming, Ph.D., discuss research on neurodegeneration in the lab.



## SLOWING THE PROGRESSION OF **PARKINSON'S DISEASE**

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**W**hen James Parkinson, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, described what he called “shaking palsy” in an 1817 essay, he focused on physical symptoms and made particular note that the patient in his illustrative case was unimpaired in “the powers of his mind.”

Research has since shown that Parkinson’s disease can affect the mind and thought processes, such as attention, mental processing and problem solving, and memory. But it is unclear exactly how cognitive dysfunction in Parkinson’s dis-

ease develops and how it can be stopped or slowed.

Sheila Fleming, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmaceutical sciences at Northeast Ohio Medical University, is trying to solve that puzzle.

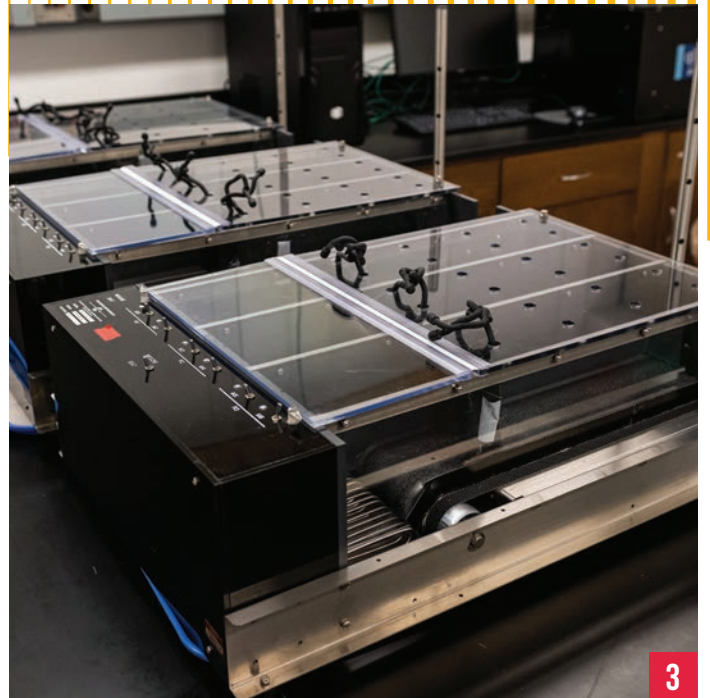
Dr. Fleming and her colleague Caryl Sortwell, Ph.D., Michigan State University, received a four-year, \$3-million Synergistic Idea Award from the Department of Defense: Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs to study a new model of cognitive dysfunction in Parkinson’s disease and the impact of exercise.



1



2



3

1. Detail from the Fleming lab.
2. The elevated plus maze is used to measure anxiety in the animal model.
3. Treadmills are used with an animal model to test the effects of exercise on Parkinson's symptoms and pathology.

# M N N G G G G

## T H E P R O G R E S S I O N

“We don't know a lot about how cognitive dysfunction develops and progresses to dementia in Parkinson's. We need a better understanding of the brain regions involved, the pathology and the cellular mechanisms driving that rise in cognitive dysfunction,” Dr. Fleming said. “We also do not have a lot of treatments specifically for cognitive dysfunction. And the common treatments used for motor impairments can actually make some of the cognitive symptoms worse.”

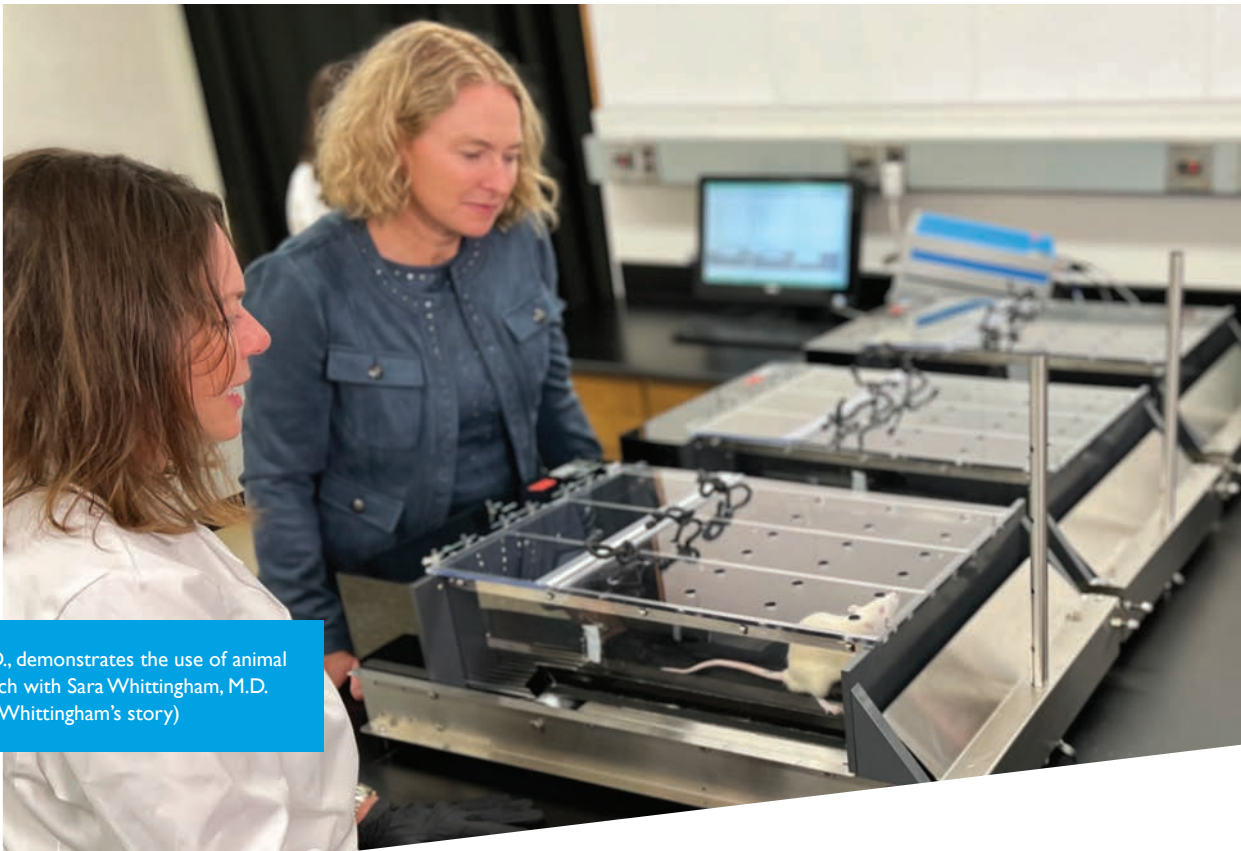
### BUILDING ON PREVIOUS WORK

The two researchers have collaborated for more than a decade, most recently on a \$2-million award from DoD in 2019 in which they explored the effects of exercise on motor function and slowing or stopping the aggregation of the protein alpha-synuclein, a key protein in Parkinson's disease pathology.

Important clinical work by Jay Alberts, Ph.D., at the Cleveland Clinic, and others showed that exercise, especially forced

exercise (where the exercise rate is significantly higher than the voluntary exercise rate), can improve motor scores in people with Parkinson's.

Since bicycles were not practical with her animal model, Dr. Fleming chose treadmills to mimic the intensity of the Albert study. “A treadmill forces you to do it. We have more control by using the treadmills and it matches the clinical work better,” she noted. “The previous study was really to see if there is a protective effect of exercise in this animal model.”



Sheila Fleming, Ph.D., demonstrates the use of animal treadmills in research with Sara Whittingham, M.D. (see page 8 for Dr. Whittingham's story)



We don't know a lot about how cognitive dysfunction develops and progresses to dementia in Parkinson's.”  
 – SHEILA FLEMING, Ph.D.

The current study aims to model stages of cognitive dysfunction in Parkinson's disease using alpha-synuclein preform fibrils, similar to the previous work.

“The hallmark pathology in Parkinson's disease is the development of Lewy bodies and the loss of dopamine neurons in the substantia nigra,” Dr. Fleming explained. “We're creating a model that has these features but then also adding an injection into a region of the brain that is involved in Parkinson's with dementia, the basal forebrain. The goal is to have a Parkinson's disease model without cognitive symptoms, have one with mild/early cognitive impairments, and then have one that progresses to dementia. This will help us better understand how cognitive dysfunction develops in PD and help us identify new strategies for intervention.”

## STAGES OF IMPACT

The earlier research in the Fleming lab focused on motor function and examined the impact of exercise at different points of progression.

Their first experiment examined the effect of exercise in the early stages of Parkinson's disease, before cells begin to die. In the second experiment, there was a month-long lag before introducing exercise and the exercise lasted five months in order to determine the impact on neurodegeneration.

“In both cases we used a battery of sensitive behavioral tests that we know are sensitive to varying degrees of neurodegeneration. We also added one cognitive test, an anxiety-related test and an olfactory test, because all of those are non-motor symptoms that can develop in Parkinson's disease,” Dr. Fleming explained.

Those initial studies showed that exercise had a beneficial effect on motor function but also had a positive effect in the Parkinson's disease model in the cognitive test.

## PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS

With the current study, Dr. Fleming said, “we are pulling out all the stops!”

In addition to the treadmill testing, the study includes a robust battery of cognitive tests exploring different cognitive domains that are affected in Parkinson’s disease.

“In the early to mid-stages of the disease, there are oftentimes problems with executive function; so that’s cognitive flexibility, strategy switching, being able to shift from one topic to another,” Dr. Fleming noted. “The longer you’ve had the disease, the more likely you are to develop cognitive dysfunction.”

In addition to object recognition and memory mazes, operant chambers will be used to test executive function (reversal learning and set shifting) that is often impaired in people with Parkinson’s disease.

“Basically, these are tests where you have to train the animals to press a lever to receive a reward, and then you make the reward a little more complicated to receive. With this equipment we can measure the specific executive dysfunction that is found in patients with Parkinson’s disease,” Dr. Fleming shared. “They’ll have to learn that pressing a certain lever results in a reward, but then we change the reward criterion. Now it’s not a lever but a light that leads to the reward. So you’re changing the set; this is set-shifting. Even control animals will make mistakes when you first change it, but then they learn.”

Reversal learning is similar.

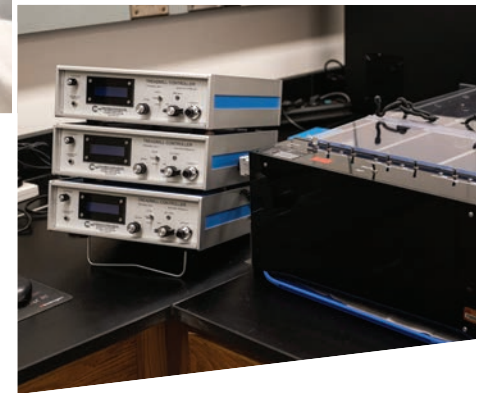
“They learn to press a certain lever to get a reward, and then you shift it, so now they have to learn that a different lever is going to give them the reward,” she said.

While the tests may seem simple, they have been shown to reliably demonstrate cognitive deficits in animal models, similar to those uncovered through studies in people with Parkinson’s disease. For ex-



Sheila Fleming, Ph.D., looks on as research associate Josephine Lepp pipes samples.

Equipment monitors and controls the speed of the treadmills.



ample, the Wisconsin card sort test and similar tests are commonly used in the clinic with human subjects and measure the same aspect of cognition.

“We found in our earlier study that the Parkinson animals receiving exercise actually showed a reduced fear response in the elevated plus maze, a test of anxiety-like behavior, so we are including two anxiety-related tests in the new project as well,” Dr. Fleming added, hopeful that finding will be replicated and enhanced in her current work.

## CONTINUING THE SEARCH

Ultimately, the goal of Dr. Fleming’s research is to find a way to slow or stop the progression of Parkinson’s disease.

While that outcome has not been discovered, there is hopeful progress.

“When we looked at our standard neurodegeneration markers, we’re still seeing cell loss,” she noted. “But we are getting changes in behavior. The experiment we’re doing now is going to be looking at genetic profiles within brain regions important for cognitive function to see if we can pick up differences there.”

And if there are changes in the brain?

“If there are detectable changes, then we need to confirm they are driving the behavior. If it turns out to be protective, that would be huge, right? Oh, my gosh. If we can show a biological basis for the beneficial effect of exercise on cognition in Parkinson’s disease, that’d be amazing.”

# RACING TO SLOW DOWN **PARKINSON'S DISEASE**

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**A** few years ago, Sara Whittingham, M.D., was sitting on the couch at her home and noticed a tremor in her arm. So, she did what many people do when they experience an unexpected symptom. She searched the internet for possible causes.

Over and over again, the search results delivered links to information on Parkinson's disease.

While she was aware of the disease, her knowledge of it was tied to things she had learned in medical school more than 20 years before. Her textbooks had left her with the impression that Parkinson's disease manifests as a hunched over older person, who shuffles, shakes, needs constant care and is on an inevitable downward trajectory. Dr. Whittingham initially felt overwhelmed by that imagined prognosis. As a physician, U.S. Air Force veteran and active triathlete, it was not the future she had pictured for herself.

So, she decided to take action.

She consulted a neurologist at the Cleveland Clinic, where she works as an

anesthesiologist. In addition to providing a diagnosis and care, he shared information on a research study run by Jay L. Alberts, Ph.D., vice chair of innovations within the Neurological Institute. She enrolled in the trial, through which Dr. Alberts aims to determine if long-term, high-intensity aerobic exercise can slow the advancement of Parkinson's disease. Dr. Whittingham soon realized how much exercise helped reduce her symptoms.

"I am probably the luckiest Parkinson's patient in the world," she said. "One of my favorite hobbies and one of the things I'm most passionate about, which is fitness and running and racing — I love to race — is the thing that's going to help me the most and help me to keep ahead of Parkinson's disease."

Dr. Whittingham put that passion to the test, contacting the Ironman organization for a chance to compete in the 2023 Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii. She was accepted into the race, which she saw as an opportunity to raise awareness of the benefits of exercise

in mitigating the effects of Parkinson's disease and to raise funds for Parkinson's research at NEOMED. Her efforts led to an appearance on *Today with Hoda and Jenna*, participation on a panel during the Ironman race and a featured story in the Ironman 2023 documentary, as well as a host of media interviews.

She successfully completed the grueling 140.6-mile race that includes a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile marathon.

## ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Dr. Whittingham continues to use exercise to manage her Parkinson's symptoms and continues to raise awareness. She has also become a vocal advocate for post-9/11 veterans, who seem to be contracting early-onset Parkinson's disease at a higher rate than the general population.

"About 18 months after my diagnosis, I learned that one of my Air Force Academy track teammates, Jenna, had also been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease," Dr. Whittingham told an audience during a



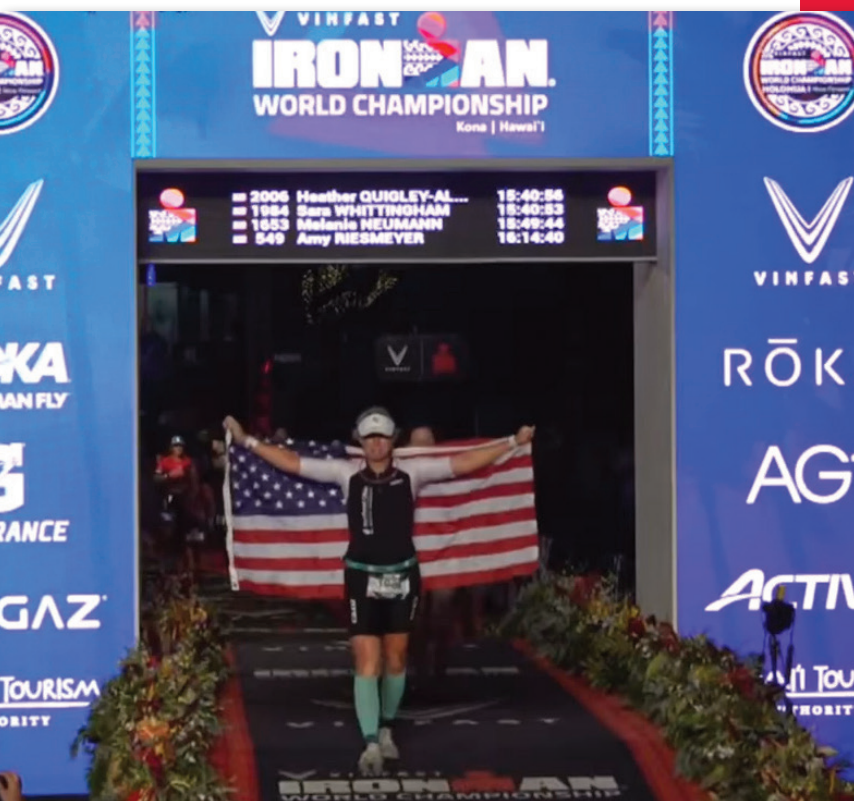
## NEOMED M.D. students train for ultramarathon to raise \$50K in support of University's Parkinson's disease research

Three aspiring doctors attending NEOMED are in training to run a 75-mile race to raise money for Parkinson's disease research at the University.

Hunter Bonfiglio of Akron, Alex Keith of Hartville and Nick Sciarretti of New Philadelphia say their inspiration is Sara Whittingham, M.D., a NEOMED clinical faculty member and wife of NEOMED President John Langell, M.D.

Bonfiglio, Keith and Sciarretti will participate in the Tuscazoar Endurance Race on August 31, 2024. Their fundraising goal is \$50,000 in recognition of NEOMED's 50th anniversary.

Proceeds will go toward Parkinson's disease research at NEOMED, under the direction of Sheila Fleming, Ph.D., who is studying the effect of exercise on slowing the progression of Parkinson's disease. (see page 4)



Sara Whittingham, M.D., crosses the finish line following the 140.6-mile race in the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii.

presentation on NEOMED's VITALS | Visionary Health Leadership in Action thought leadership series.

Both women are physicians, both were deployed to Afghanistan and both were diagnosed with Parkinson's disease the same month. They decided to look into it further and discovered that three other people who had been with them at the Air Force Academy were also diagnosed with early-onset Parkinson's disease.

"This put it at, at least one in 1,000... that's about five times higher than the general population," Dr. Whittingham noted in her presentation.

She sees hope in research like that conducted by NEOMED researcher Sheila Fleming, Ph.D., whose current work studying the impact of exercise in slowing or stopping the spread of Parkinson's disease is funded by the Department of Defense/United States Army Medical Research.

Read more at [neomed.edu/parkinsons](https://neomed.edu/parkinsons).

**YOU** can help!



Inspired by Dr. Whittingham's story, three students in the College of Medicine will participate in a 75-mile race to raise awareness and funds for Parkinson's disease research.



## THE GREATEST SORT OF **PUBLIC SERVICE**

### *Remembering Robert Liebelt, M.D.*

BY RODERICK L. INGRAM SR.

*As Northeast Ohio Medical University celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding, there was no shortage of those who were willing and able to talk about the school's early days. And quite a few had been there from the very beginning. One of those willing participants was Joseph Zarconi, M.D., a professor of internal medicine and a member of NEOMED's first graduating class in 1981.*

*Dr. Zarconi, who has held several leadership positions at both NEOMED and Summa Health, is not just one of NEOMED's first students, he's also among the University's most liked and storied. Dr. Zarconi's connections to founding members run deep. He considers many of them friends and family and remains in contact with them. Among his favorites is Robert ("Bob") Liebelt, M.D., the College of Medicine's inaugural dean, who mirrored Dr. Zarconi's affection. Their mutual admiration made possible an invitation to Dr. Liebelt's home in fall 2023.*

*The day we visited him followed the weekend on which Veteran's Day was recognized. We were welcomed warmly by Dr. Liebelt and Milotka, his wife of 36 years. Before the interview began, I thanked Dr. Liebelt for his service in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Upon doing so,*

*I realized that the last time we held a conversation with Dr. Liebelt, we were also "coincidentally" celebrating those in the military. It was during NEOMED's 2018 Commencement,*

*which occurred on Armed Forces Day. On that day, Dr. Liebelt received an honorary degree for all of his many contributions during the early years of the University. And it felt like a dual recognition.*

*Again, this time around, Dr. Liebelt's dual service came to mind. When I wished him a happy Veteran's Day and thanked him for his service, he gave the best smile and spoke proudly of the time he served in the Navy.*

*There were framed images of and recognitions from the Navy and NEOMED throughout his home. On a wall behind him, there was a photo of him in the Navy; another of him at his medical office; and several of him at NEOMED. The latter, accompanied by his honorary degree, begged perhaps one more question: As we celebrate our 50th year, what do you want current students to know? Dr. Liebelt replied, "being a physician is the greatest type of public service."*

*Milotka then walked over and sat beside him beneath the pictures of the couple that adorn the wall above his favorite chair. She said to him, "I would like to say something. I'm very proud of you. I love you."*

*Just one month following our interview, Dr. Liebelt died quietly while in hospice on Dec. 16, 2023. He was 96. Ignite is honored to share his final interview as a tribute to his service as a physician, educator and mentor.*

**W**hen he returned from the Navy to his hometown of Chicago, Robert Liebelt decided he wanted to get a job working on the city's bridges. The idea of building something appealed to him.

A turret gunner during World War II, Liebelt was good with his hands, and bridge work — with its engineering science, construction and public good — seemed naturally a good fit. But it wasn't meant to be.

"I was very proud that I served in the Navy," Liebelt shared. "And when I got home, I didn't know what I was going to do. It was my mother who suggested that I consider a career in medicine."

No matter how much wisdom or experience one acquires. No matter how many kids, grandkids, great-grandkids one may have of their own. No matter how many decades one spends on this earth — Bob was in his 10th — one still remembers what Mom said.



## MOTHER KNOWS BEST

Heeding his mother's advice, Liebelt went on to earn several degrees — B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. — on his path to medicine. He obtained his M.D. degree at Baylor University College of Medicine in 1958. Dr. Liebelt remained at Baylor, serving as faculty before being recruited as chair of anatomy by Stanley Olson, M.D., the college's dean who had helped develop Baylor's College of Medicine.

The two became friends and while both would eventually move on to other universities, some 20 years after first meeting, they would work together again. Dr. Liebelt had been serving as the provost at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta when he received an invitation to help build upon a field of dreams located in Rootstown, Ohio.

The invite was at the behest of Dr. Olson. Now serving as chief executive officer and charter provost of Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine, Dr. Olson had developed a plan for the new school built as a consortium medical school of the University of Akron, Kent State University and Youngstown University.

## An architect needs a great builder. And for that, Stanley Olson recommended Dr. Liebelt.

But an architect needs a great builder. And for that, he recommended Dr. Liebelt.

### THE CONSTRUCTION MANAGER

In January 1974, Dr. Liebelt received a call from his old friend Dr. Olson.

"He called me when I was at Georgia and asked if I would come up here and start the medical school with him. And I said, okay. So, I moved from Georgia to Ohio," said Dr. Liebelt.

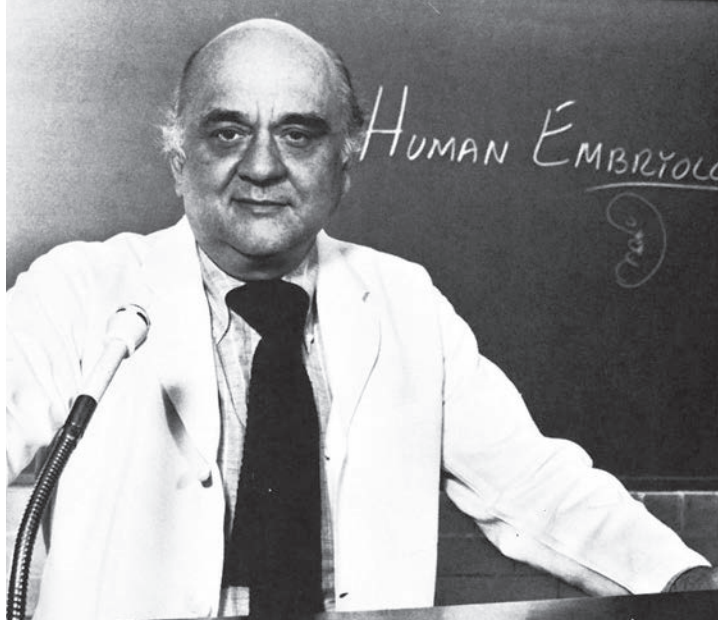
He was initially asked to serve as consultant to the consortium's three universities on their life sciences curriculum. The new college had just been established Nov. 23, 1973. The location of the school had not been decided. There were no buildings. No dean. So, Dr. Liebelt's invitation to consult included a consideration for the fledgling college's inaugural dean position.

Six months later, on the recommendation of Dr. Olson, Dr. Liebelt was appointed as the first dean of NEOUCOM on July 8, 1974. He'd be responsible for recruiting and hiring faculty, and administering the development of curriculum, student admissions and consortium associations. Around that same time, a 54-acre farm near the intersection of Interstate 76 and State Route 44 was purchased to build the campus facilities.

Dr. Liebelt added, "(It was) an open field. Nothing else existed."

With an aggressive architectural and construction plan now in play, Dr. Olson and others had laid a foundation for Dr. Liebelt to design a program for the new College of Medicine to begin offering basic medical sciences to students in September 1977. Pathways with consortium colleges were developed to prepare





**The new college had just been established Nov. 23, 1973. The location of the school had not been decided. There were no buildings. No dean.**

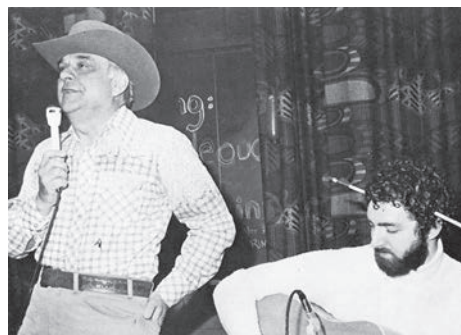
minority and rural high school students interested in the sciences. Dr. Liebelt led the unenviable task of convincing students, parents and others that despite having no facilities, this future medical school was the place for them to earn their medical education.

**A CLASS OF THEIR OWN**

As if accelerating hiring and curriculum development weren't enough, Dr. Liebelt also had to expedite the preparation and training of pathway students from The University of Akron, Kent State University and Youngstown State University. Drawing from his experience as admissions committee chair at Baylor, Dr. Liebelt

formed a joint promotion review committee. Students who successfully completed two years of undergraduate study at the pathways schools would not have to compete with direct applicants to the new medical school. According to *Silver Reflections: A History of the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine 1973-1998* by Margaret J. Neuman Dietz, students who were members of that charter class remember that feature as the most enticing part of the program — acceptance into medical school was particularly competitive.

The Bachelor of Science/Doctor of Medicine program (B.S./M.D. program) was born.



Ultimately 42 students (14 from each of the consortium schools) out of 750 applications were accepted into the undergraduate portion of the program. Two years later, on June 30, 1977, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) awarded the College provisional accreditation.

On Sept. 12, 1977, NEOUCOM welcomed its first class of 48 students (six with traditional bachelor's degrees had also been accepted from other Ohio schools).

Drs. Liebelt, Olson and many others had made a field of dreams come true for many. While all buildings and offices weren't quite ready to be occupied, the class that began in the auditorium that day joined Drs. Liebelt and Olson as part of history.

**CHARTER MEMBERS**

With a little assistance, Dr. Liebelt began reeling off faculty names. "So, Ted Voneida [neurobiology], he was down from Cleveland at Case Western. And Saltzman, yeah, I remember Glenn [behavioral sciences] ... and Norman Taslitz



[anatomy]. Well, I have been thinking about these for quite a few number of years,” he said.

Many of them were charter chairs who brought with them novel approaches that helped make Dr. Olson’s plan and Dr. Liebelt’s execution possible. Drs. Vonedia, Saltzman and Taslitz are often cited by NEOMED graduates as foundational to their own success, and many of those alumni have become leaders themselves. “Anatomy,” “neurobiology,” “communication” and “empathy” are the most common responses received when we ask NEOMED’s transformational leaders, “what made NEOMED so special?” And Dr. Liebelt is the common thread to both faculty and those differentiators.

So, when Dr. Olson announced his plans to retire, he recommended that the Board of Trustees vote to combine the Office of the Provost with the Office of the Dean and make Dr. Liebelt the first to hold the dual role.

Dr. Liebelt became provost and dean in February 1979.



## Drs. Liebelt, Olson and many others had made a field of dreams come true for many.

Upon overseeing the University’s first commencement and conferring degrees to the charter class of 1981, Dr. Liebelt officiated over the presentation of 42 Doctor of Medicine degrees at E.J. Thomas Hall in Akron.

A few months later in November of 1981, Dr. Liebelt announced his resignation after accepting a position at St. Thomas Hospital Medical Center (Summa Health). His official last day was in September 1982 as he remained to ensure the College of Medicine that he helped

build would be a sustainable model for decades to come.

Fifty years later, Dr. Liebelt said he thought it was possible. But he still couldn’t believe that it all happened. He lightly quipped, “Who knows what’s going to happen next?”

Another half-century of creating transformational leaders with Dr. Liebelt’s founding legacy of anatomy and neurobiology, communication and empathy would be just fine.



## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

BY ARIANA BROOKS

*Alumna Sarah Vordenberg, Pharm.D. ('12), M.P.H. ('13), uses her experience in pharmacy and public health to educate the next generation of health professionals and her patients. With a gentle smile and a steadfast dedication to her community, Sarah's journey from a small town in Northeast Ohio to her impactful role at the University of Michigan is nothing short of inspiring.*

**S**arah Vordenberg's journey into the realm of pharmacy commenced during her teenage years. While most of her peers were navigating the typical rites of adolescence, young Sarah found herself drawn to the world of pharmacy. During this pivotal period, she took her first steps into the profession, securing a position at Discount Drug Mart near her small hometown of Spencer, Ohio, in Medina County. With unwavering diligence and a thirst for knowledge, Dr. Vordenberg immersed herself in the intricacies of pharmacy practice, unaware of the profound impact this humble beginning would have on her future trajectory. What initially seemed like a simple job evolved into a transfor-

mative journey, igniting a flame of curiosity and dedication within her.

Her formative years spent at Discount Drug Mart provided invaluable insights into the intricate landscape of health care. It was here that her affinity for working with older adults took root, nurtured by the daily interactions with older patrons

**While most of her peers were navigating the typical rites of adolescence, young Sarah found herself drawn to the world of pharmacy.**

seeking guidance and support for their health needs. This initial spark propelled Dr. Vordenberg towards a career dedicated to geriatric care.

Driven by a desire to make a difference, Dr. Vordenberg pursued her undergraduate studies at The University of Akron. During this time, her aspirations crystallized, leading her to apply to Northeast Ohio Medical University for pharmacy school. Drawn by the institution's location and new (at the time) pharmacy school, Dr. Vordenberg became part of the second cohort of students admitted to the College of Pharmacy. She relished the opportunity to be a part of something new and transformative.

"I just found NEOMED to be a really warm and welcoming environment that felt very comfortable," she reminisced, reflecting on her initial impressions. For Dr. Vordenberg, it was not only the academic rigor that left an impression but also the deep connections forged with faculty and peers alike.

"I appreciated being in a setting where there were both pharmacy and medical students. It was fascinating to be side by side in class as well as to collaborate on projects together" she said.

During her time at NEOMED, her passion for working with older adults was further solidified as she encountered diverse patient populations and health care environments. Immersed in various clinical settings, these experiences not only established her resolve to specialize in geriatric care but also provided a rich founda-

tion for her future career in pharmacy. The wealth of knowledge she acquired served as the cornerstone of her aspirations, shaping her path toward making a meaningful impact in the field.

### FROM CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY

After earning both a Doctor of Pharmacy degree in 2012 and a Master of Public Health degree in 2013 from NEOMED, where she notably became the first graduate of the College of Graduate Studies, Dr. Vordenberg embarked on a transformative journey within the field of pharmacy. Her first stop was a community pharmacy residency with Ohio Northern University, where she honed the pharmacy and public health skills acquired at NEOMED, focusing on patient care, educating pharmacy students and applying research methodologies.

In 2013, Dr. Vordenberg made the pivotal decision to join the faculty at the University of Michigan as a clinical assistant professor, where she has remained for over a decade. These days, she is associate chair and clinical associate professor in the Department of Clinical Pharmacy where she divides her time between teaching,



Sarah Vordenberg displays her diploma as the first graduate of the College of Graduate Studies. Also pictured: Walter Horton, Ph.D., former dean of graduate studies, and Amy Lee, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., program director of the Consortium of Eastern Ohio Master of Public Health program.



My pharmacy training has helped me look at how patients make medication decisions from the perspective of a pharmacist... but my public health degree has helped me think about other factors that matter.”

– SARAH VORDENBERG, Pharm.D. ('12), M.P.H. ('13)

research and community engagement. One of the highlights of her work is her involvement with first-year pharmacy students.

“It’s really fun to work with them during that a formative time as they begin the transition from being a layperson to a pharmacist,” she enthused.

From teaching classes on outpatient pharmacy skills to facilitating discussions on over-the-counter medications, Dr. Vordenberg’s dedication to her students is palpable.

It extends beyond the classroom.

In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Dr. Vordenberg is deeply engaged in creating opportunities for student pharmacists in public health. Her clinical practice involves working with low-income apartment buildings in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she provides essential education and health screenings to community members in need, alongside pharmacy students and other health care professionals. In addition, she coordinates pharmacy student and resident involvement in the University of Michigan Student Run Free Clinic. Her passion for engaging students in volunteer opportunities at a free clinic started when she was a pharmacy student and volunteered weekly at Open M in Akron, Ohio.

However, Dr. Vordenberg’s most profound impact lies in her scholarship and research endeavors. Her research, cited hundreds of times, seamlessly merges her pharmacy expertise with her fervor for public health. One primary focus revolves around understanding and engaging older

adults in the intricate realm of medication deprescribing, a topic that lies at the intersection of pharmacy and public health. As part of her scholarship, she seeks to communicate information to patients through consumer-friendly publications such as the *JAMA Patient Pages*.

“My pharmacy training has helped me look at how patients make medication decisions from the perspective of a pharmacist... but my public health degree has helped me think about other factors that matter,” she explained.

### A SENSE OF APPRECIATION

As Dr. Vordenberg reflects on her journey, she holds a deep sense of gratitude for the support and mentorship she received during her time at NEOMED, which continues to shape her career. “The faculty were fantastic,” she enthused. “I have been able to stay in contact with several faculty after leaving NEOMED, just periodically touch base to see how they’re doing or get some advice as my career has progressed. I appreciate that I was able to develop those relationships when I was a student and have been able to lean back on them throughout career.” In addition, she recently joined the

**After earning both a Doctor of Pharmacy degree in 2012 and a Master of Public Health degree in 2013 from NEOMED, where she notably became the first graduate of the College of Graduate Studies, Dr. Vordenberg embarked on a transformative journey within the field of pharmacy.**



Sarah Vordenberg, Pharm.D., M.P.H., at her graduation from the NEOMED College of Pharmacy (top) and at her White Coat ceremony.

NEOMED Alumni Association Board of Directors, which has given her the opportunity to re-connect and further engage with her alma mater.

Her journey serves as an inspiration to aspiring pharmacists and public health professionals alike.

As Dr. Vordenberg continues to make a difference in the lives of her students, patients and community members, her story serves as a testament to the power of perseverance, compassion and education in shaping a brighter future for all.

From her humble beginnings in Northeast Ohio to her impactful role at the University of Michigan, Sarah Vordenberg’s journey is a reminder that the path to success is often paved with passion, purpose and unwavering dedication.

## TIMELINE



1



4



2



3



5

19  
**70s**

**1** Senate Bill 72 went into effect on Nov. 23, 1973, and established the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine (NEOUCOM).

**2** The 53-acre Sunny Lane Farms was purchased from Bryan and Dorothy Jones in July 1974 as the home for the new College.

19  
**80s**

**3** NEOUCOM graduated its first class of 42 physicians on May 30, 1981.

Full accreditation was accorded the medical portion of the College's six-year combined B.S./M.D. degree program on June 30, 1981, retroactive to March 5, 1981.

19  
**90s**

**4** The Center for Studies of Clinical Performance opened in July 1994. Later renamed the William G. Wasson, M.D., Center for Clinical Skills Training (or Wasson Center), it would be a design model for clinical skills training across the country.

**5** In May 1996, an outdoor amphitheater was dedicated in honor of Hippocrates, the Greek father of medicine. A bust of Hippocrates bearing the Hippocratic oath was created by sculptor Anna Christoforidis and situated in the amphitheater.

**50**  
**YEARS**



*of* **CREATING**  
**TRANSFORMATIONAL**  
**LEADERS**



## 2000s

**6** The College of Pharmacy was established in December 2005. The College welcomed its first class of 73 students in August 2007.

In June 2008, House Bill 562 was approved, establishing NEOUCOM as an independent health sciences university serving Northeast Ohio.

**7** In July 2009, the College of Graduate Studies was established. The University received degree granting authority for a Master of Public Health degree and established a bioethics certificate program as well as an M.S. and Ph.D. in integrative pharmaceutical medicine (now basic and translational biomedicine).

## 2010s

On April 29, 2011, House Bill 139 was signed into law, officially changing the name of the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine (NEOUCOM) to Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED).

**8** The Village at NEOMED, the University's first on-campus student housing, opened in August 2013 as a result of a public-private partnership between the University and Signet Development.

**9** In September 2014, the NEOMED Education and Wellness (NEW) Center was dedicated in collaboration with Signet.

## 2020s

**10** The COVID-19 pandemic sent courses online and changed the protocols for clerkships, lab learning and even just being on campus. Among the changes, the Class of 2020 experienced the University's first-ever Virtual Commencement Ceremony on May 2, 2020.

**11** The NEOventions Bench to Bedside program was announced on Oct. 21, 2020. The innovation and entrepreneurship program brings together students, medical professionals, industry experts, investors and other stakeholders to design innovative medical technology to meet specific needs of patients for improved health care outcomes with lower costs.

**12** On Sept. 15, 2022, the NEOMED Board of Trustees approved the pursuit of a dental college. Within two weeks, the University received a \$10-million commitment from the Dr. Dominic A. and Helen M. Bitonte Family Foundation for the new Bitonte College of Dentistry.



## GIVING WITH **IMPACT**

*Ian Oppenheim and Marta Williger wanted their gift to positively impact many students each year, so they endowed the Journal of Medical Sciences at NEOMED*

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**W**hen Ian Oppenheim moved to Ohio from Boston, Massachusetts, he was looking for ways to contribute to his new community. His physician, Dr. Erwin Maseelall, invited him to join the NEOMED Foundation Board.

In a meeting with students, Oppenheim recalled the conversation with the emeritus board member with a smile: “He said, ‘I can help you to be a director of a medical university.’ I didn’t know anything about medicine. He said ‘Ah, you’ll learn.’ So, I served on the foundation board and thoroughly enjoyed it.”

Oppenheim served as a member of the NEOMED Foundation Board for nine years until 2023, including two years as

a member of the Executive Committee and a chair of the Committee on Directors. He was also chair of the Planned Giving committee.

While his tenure on the NEOMED Foundation Board has ended, his support for the University has not.

He and his wife, Marta Williger, both elder law attorneys, are the founding benefactors of *The Journal of Medical Sciences at NEOMED* Endowment.

“We knew we wanted to make a gift, but the question was, what kind of gift? We thought of a scholarship, but that would only benefit one student,” Oppenheim recalled.

The couple met with NEOMED President John Langell, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., to discuss options. Dr. Langell

suggested that a gift to the student-led journal would impact numerous students each year by providing an outlet to publish scholarly work and participate in the publication process.

Before making their decision, Oppenheim and Williger met with M.D./Ph.D. student Trinity Kronk, who founded the journal with advisor Fayez Safadi, Ph.D.

“We met Trinity at a fundraiser and we were thoroughly impressed with her,” said Williger.

Before benefiting from the couple’s generosity, the *Journal of Medical Sciences* was supported by strategic initiative funding from the University. To ensure a sustainable future, the journal would need better, more efficient ways to receive new manuscripts, as well as systems to manage the review and publication processes. Those efforts will now be bolstered by the endowment.

For Oppenheim and Williger, the endowment meets their philanthropic goals.

“We could help more than one student,” Oppenheim shared. “We could fund a project that would elevate the University and bring credit to it. And it just seemed to me that would be fun.”



We knew we wanted to make a gift, but the question was, what kind of gift? We thought of a scholarship, but that would only benefit one student.”

– IAN OPPENHEIM



### LEARN MORE

Read the latest issue of the *Journal of Medical Sciences* at [neomed.edu/jms](https://neomed.edu/jms). To learn more about supporting the *Journal of Medical Sciences*, contact **330.325.6662** or [philanthropy@neomed.edu](mailto:philanthropy@neomed.edu).



Ian Oppenheim and Marta Williger met with President John Langell and student leaders from the *Journal of Medical Sciences* at NEOMED.



Students for a National Health Program (SNaHP) was selected as the 2023 Student Organization of the Year in NEOMED's annual campus leader awards.

## STUDENT GROUP FINDS ADVOCACY IS A SNaHP

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**T**he Affordable Care Act was enacted in March 2010 to reform health care and make health insurance accessible and affordable to more Americans. Yet 14 years later, nearly 26 million Americans remain uninsured and nearly one-third of working age Americans have some form of medical debt.

In fall 2021, a group of students from the College of Medicine at Northeast Ohio Medical University decided to become part of the solution to this ongoing challenge. The students worked with faculty advisor Joseph Zarconi, M.D., to form a student organization focused on advocacy to make health care affordable for all.

During its first year, SNaHP — Students for a National Health Program —

attracted 40 members, mostly students in the College of Medicine. Since then, NEOMED's student chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program has grown to more than 160 members from across the Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy and Graduate Studies.

“We work on educating, advocating and coalition building, with the goal to improve health care in all its forms and functions throughout our local community and the country,” said third-year medicine student Saaleha Shamsi, who served as SNaHP president for the 2023-2024 academic year.

The group has actively engaged in talking to legislators, writing op-ed articles for community newspapers, testifying

before city councils in Akron and Kent, Ohio, and other advocacy activities. Much of their work has centered on affordability of care and the idea of single-payer health insurance.

“A national health program allows for universal coverage and can be affordably achieved even as benefits are expanded and cost sharing all but eliminated,” Shamsi contended. “Improving Medicare ensures that all medically necessary care is achieved without copays, deductibles or premiums or a need for supplemental insurance. This could be achieved and equitably funded through progressive taxation. This model includes everyone residing in the U.S.A. regardless of age, income, employment or immigration status and ensures that they are reliably covered for entire life.”

Many advocates from a multitude of organizations over many, many years have

lobbied for Medicare for All or similar restructuring of the U.S. health insurance system. What possible difference can some medical students from Northeast Ohio make?

“You’re so right — there are so many groups that care about improving the way health care is managed in this country,” Shamsi agreed. “The biggest reason that SNaHP is different is our student involvement. SNaHP is the student branch of PNHP and this gives us the unique advantage of being mentored and coached by seasoned physicians, who are familiar with the system, while also allowing us a space for collaboration and a voice to enable change in whatever ways we can. It is so empowering to know that our advocacy efforts are supported by physicians across the country who are confident in

our abilities but simultaneously ready to help at every step.”

The NEOMED SNaHP group has grown so successfully that it has become a hub for statewide activity.

“We’ve got one of the largest chapters in the country and have affectionately been referred to as the model chapter!” Shamsi shared. “We feel that our responsibility as such a prominent group has been to provide the resources and avenues to support other students across the state, regardless of the size of their home institution’s chapter.”

The group helped create a coalition with other medical schools across Ohio to form the Ohio chapter of SNaHP, which meets regularly to provide support, troubleshoot and discuss advocacy work that occurs throughout the state.



Medicine students Saaleha Shamsi and Max Brockwell earned first place in oral presentations at the 2024 Community Health Leadership Conference in Miami, Florida. Their presentation was titled “Abolishing Medical Debt for the Residents of Akron, OH.”



**We work on educating, advocating and coalition building, with the goal to improve health care in all its forms and functions throughout our local community and the country.”**

**– SAALEHA SHAMSI, M3, 2023-2024 SNaHP PRESIDENT**

## ERASING MEDICAL DEBT FOR **AKRON RESIDENTS**

SNaHP members Emily Huff, Max Brockwell, Michael Massey and James Moore initiated conversations with the Akron City Council in November 2022, proposing the use of American Rescue Plan funding to abolish medical debt for Akron residents via the nonprofit RIP Medical Debt. This organization uses private donations to purchase discounted bundles of medical debt, clearing an estimated \$100 of debt for every dollar donated. Following negotiation with hospitals, letters announcing debt cancellation are sent to eligible recipients who earn under 400% of the federal poverty threshold or whose debt represents a sum over 5% of their annual income. The proposal was inspired by similar successful projects in Cook County, Illinois, and Toledo, Ohio.

Between November 2022 and February 2023, students developed relationships with city council members by regularly participating in municipal meetings, connecting local government employees to helpful resources, and interfacing with the *Akron Beacon Journal* to promote the project. In March 2023, students organized a group of their peers and local physicians to attend Akron City Council meetings, provide public comment testimony and publish an op-ed impelling the mayor to act decisively on this issue.

After several weeks of negotiations, the city allocated \$500,000 to a contract with RIP Medical Debt, enabling clearance of an estimated \$50 million in medical debt for Akron residents.



1



2



3

1. SNaHP advisor Joseph Zarconi, M.D., with third-year students Sam Accordino and Saaleha Shamsi, following their spring lecture on insurance as a social determinant of health.
2. SNaHP members and faculty advisors attended council meetings in Kent to share information on Medicare for all.
3. Medicine students James Moore and Michael Massey earned a People's Choice Award for their poster on the debt-relief project at the 2024 Ohio State Medical Association meeting.
4. Medicine student Michael Massey testifies before Akron City Council about medical debt.



4

### MEDICAL DEBT RELIEF

The group's biggest achievement so far has been a Medical Debt Relief Project. SNaHP worked in partnership with the nonprofit organization RIP Medical Debt and Akron City Council to help relieve millions of dollars in medical debt for Akron residents.

In fall 2022, the group began discussions with members of city council and by March 2023, the students had organized a group of their peers and local physicians to attend city council meetings, provide public comment testimony, and publish an op-ed impelling the city's mayor to act decisively on this issue.

After several weeks of negotiations, the city allocated \$500,000 to a contract with RIP Medical Debt, enabling clearance of an estimated \$50 million in medical debt for Akron residents.

"We've been able to build on this experience and further our relations with the council through other initiatives. In October 2023, students once again testified in front of Akron City Council regarding a resolution in support of Medicare for All. The resolution passed 12-0 with one abstention!" Shamsi enthused.

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

On campus, NEOMED's SNaHP student group hosts what Shamsi called "power lectures" on topics related to single-payer health care and other issues.

The group also was invited to develop a lecture on advocacy as part of the Patient, Physician and Community courses for second-year medicine students.

"We're super excited to be considered by our professors as knowledgeable and personable enough to introduce our peers to the complex topics we're passionate about," Shamsi said.

She added, "We've been incredibly fortunate to have very supportive mentors, both, at NEOMED and at Akron City Council, and have faced very little push-back in most of the work we do."

### BEYOND CV BUILDING

Shamsi has found working on advocacy efforts to be empowering as a student.

"Advocacy of any kind can be a transformative experience for students, providing them with skills and perspectives that extend well beyond academics," she explained. "From my involvement with SNaHP [and other organizations], I've

enjoyed so many personal benefits like networking opportunities, political awareness and leadership skills. But beyond that, and most importantly so, it helps me understand the importance of being informed about societal issues and taking action to bring about positive change, which is such a rewarding experience.”

She noted the value of the mentors and network that she has built through her involvement with SNaHP, as well as the opportunity to make a tangible impact on the community.

“We’ve taken an active role in our community, which means that, at least for the years you’re at NEOMED, we’re surrounded by the fruits of our labor and the hope that you’ll be inspired to continue your work beyond school,” she said. “We’ve got opportunities to do research nationally, and the opportunity to truly make your voices heard via testimony at local, state and national hearings.”

Her passion for advocacy almost led Shamsi to law school instead of medical school.

“Medical school won, obviously, because I learned and saw that the scope of work we do as physicians is not limited to our patient encounters, or even the hospitals we practice in,” she shared. “I’m so excited to make a positive impact on each and every one of my future patients, and to continue to find ways to advocate for whole patient populations and their betterment as well. It’s always so cool to see physicians who excel at both advocacy and medicine, and I hope to join their ranks one day!”

“ We’ve taken an active role in our community, which means that, at least for the years you’re at NEOMED, we’re surrounded by the fruits of our labor and the hope that you’ll be inspired to continue your work beyond school.”

– SAALEHA SHAMSI, M3, 2023-2024 SNaHP PRESIDENT

## ADVOCATING BEYOND THE STUDENT ORGANIZATION

**SNaHP has taken an active in the Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA), an advocacy organization for physicians, residents and students. Student Saaleha Shamsi shared:**

“OSMA is where resolutions are proposed that can then be advocated by the OSMA to be implemented as state and national policy. Last year, we successfully passed a resolution in support of neutralizing language towards single-payer. We hope this allows the OSMA to be more receptive to single-payer resolutions down the line.

“This OSMA resolution cycle, we’ve had members tackle a variety of issues like improving health care

in the incarcerated population (Shamsi), declaring health care as a human right (Max Brockwell), comprehensive mental health care for students (Elsa Khan), and public medical school education on suicide (Shannon Lam), while collaborating with other schools on a variety of other topics.

“On the reproductive advocacy end, we were stoked to put boots to the ground and have multiple signature drives, where members, led by Alyssa Battaglia and Michael West, garnered hundreds of signatures in support of saying No to Issue One. We’re emboldened by the daily work they’ve done and inspired by the results coalition building achieved.”

# 42<sup>nd</sup>

## William Carlos Williams POETRY COMPETITION

The contest, sponsored annually by the Department of Family and Community Medicine at NEOMED, is open to students attending allopathic or osteopathic schools of medicine in the U.S. and Canada.

*Okonkwo's poem is a tribute to all those who yearn for an escape from illness, inequality and/or fear.*



### 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE WINNER:

**Jude Okonkwo** is a third-year medical student at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and

Surgeons. With early aspirations to become a surgeon-writer, he majored in integrative biology and minored in English literature at Harvard College with a focus on creative writing. In medical school, he continued to grow creatively under the tutelage of Dr. Owen Lewis and the Columbia Studio Lab. His work has been published in many journals including *Pleiades*, *JAMA Poetry and Medicine*, and the *Intima*.

### Escape!

i  
what's the optimal frustration  
for a black man  
only so much oxygen  
in the room  
panic feels like a titration of haldol  
like punching at sound-proof glass.  
suicide is aggression  
turned inside out  
outside in  
pointed safely at a black man's body

ii  
my therapist said my love life was dystopian  
I said that loving *her*  
was like diving into cold snow

shock turned pain turned numb

was it really so odd I could  
identify each part of myself  
by a woman I had loved

iii  
his joke was about Covid & cycling  
and how one night he had tried gathering  
all his wine bottles into the shower

& tried conjuring the late boston nights & halfway blackouts  
& 4am decisions & chattering of dumb young people  
to try to do it again  
but different

the poor n-gga didn't know  
that one didn't escape algorithms  
could only enter new ones

Learn more at [neomed.edu/wcw-poetry-competition/](https://neomed.edu/wcw-poetry-competition/)

# INNOVATION



## STUDENT INNOVATORS

Twenty-four student teams from Northeast Ohio Medical University and other universities demonstrated their medical technologies at the 2024 NEOventions Bench to Bedside Competition. Keynote speaker Raymond P. Onders, M.D. ('88), professor of surgery at University Hospitals and Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, shared his insights on innovation and application of new technologies to patient care. First-place honors went to Sound Pass, a reusable motion sensor and ultrasound relay housing to assist neurosurgeons with insertion of external ventricular drain, developed by a team from the University of Utah. A team of 2024 graduates of NEOMED's College of Graduate Studies earned the second-place award for Wound Flow Monitor, a wireless, ultrasonic flow meter for surgical wound drains.

Photos: Andrew Jordan



2024 COMMENCEMENT



# MEDICINE

NEARLY

# 300

## GRADUATES

in MEDICINE, PHARMACY  
& GRADUATE STUDIES

# 122

COLLEGE of MEDICINE  
MATCHES

# 98%

COLLEGE of MEDICINE  
MATCH RATE





# GRADUATE STUDIES

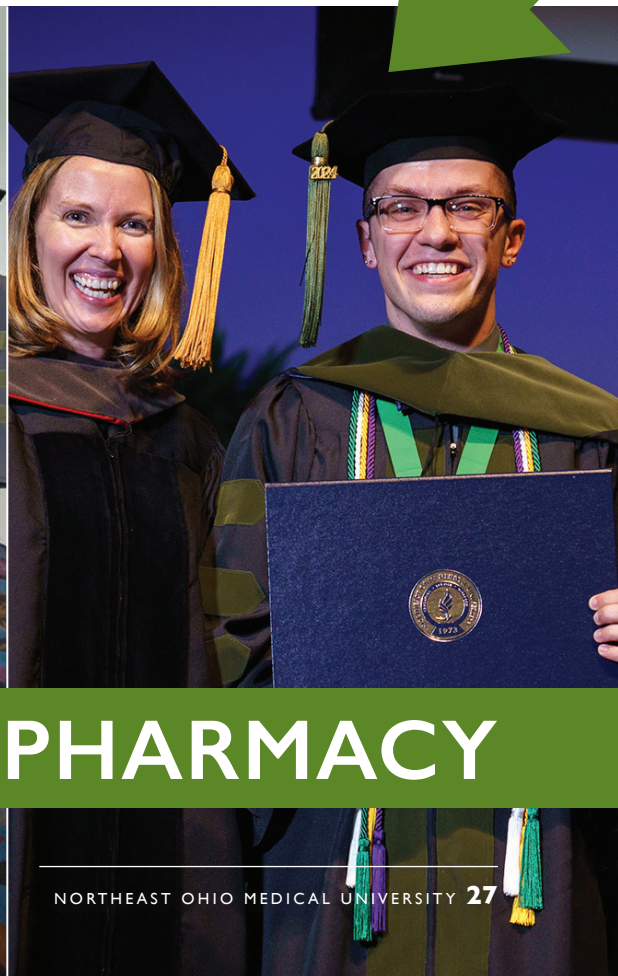
## FIRST CLASS of GRADUATES

from the MASTER of MEDICAL SCIENCE in ANESTHESIOLOGY PROGRAM

## BEST-IN-OHIO

PGYI MATCH RATE for PHARMACY GRADUATES

Photos: Chris Smanto, Larry Spencer and staff



# PHARMACY

## 1982



**Kurt R. Hahn, M.D.**, retired from the New York State Office of Mental Health as the clinical director (acting) of the Elmira (New York) Psychiatric Center.

## 1985



**Mark Libertain, M.D.**, has been promoted to associate vice president/ deputy chief medical officer at Aetna/ CVS in the Medical Policy and Operations Department.



**Duane J. Taylor, M.D.**, was inducted into the Hall of Distinction of the American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery and Foundation.

## 1993



**John Beckner, M.D.**, a board-certified psychiatrist, has joined the Hamilton Physician Group for Behavioral Health in Dalton, Georgia.

## 2001



**Cynthia Kravec, M.D.**, received the Mahoning Valley Leadership in Health award from Mercy Health Foundation. Dr. Kravec is an internal medicine physician at Mercy Health – St. Elizabeth Youngstown.

## 2012



**Brendan Malik, M.D.**, was appointed chief medical officer for St. Joseph's Hospital-South in Riverview, Florida.



**Fredy El Sakr, M.D.**, was selected among the “Top 30 in Their 30s” for interventional cardiology by the Society for Cardiovascular Angiography & Interventions. The honor recognizes early-career interventionalists who epitomize the qualities expected of future leaders in interventional cardiology.

## 2013

---



**Paula Politis, Pharm.D.**, and her husband, Seth, welcomed their second son, James, on October 25, 2023.

## 2014

---



**Navdeep Tandon, M.D.**, an interventional cardiologist, joined Steward Cardiology at Sharon Regional Medical Center in Hubbard, Ohio.

## 2016

---



**Amit Parikh, M.D.**, has been promoted to chief medical officer of Bend Health of Madison, Wisconsin.

## 2017

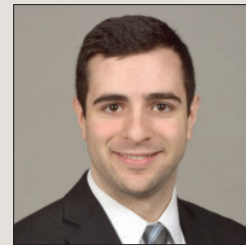
---



**Suraj Batish, M.D.**, has been named pediatric medical director for Antelope Valley Medical Center in Lancaster, California. Dr. Batish leads the Antelope Valley's only hospital-based pediatric unit.

## 2018

---



**Vincent Notareschi, Pharm.D.**, started a new position as a medical information specialist at EVERSANA, an independent provider of global services to the life science industry.

## 2023

---



**Paul Lungu, Pharm.D.**, started in a new pharmacist position at Akron Children's Hospital.

# NEOMED CONNECT



Bringing students and health care professionals together in the spirit of mentorship.



Become a mentor today!  
Sign up at [connect.neomed.edu](https://connect.neomed.edu)



NORTHEAST OHIO MEDICAL UNIVERSITY  
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



# VITALS

VISIONARY HEALTH LEADERSHIP *IN ACTION*



# 17 minutes

is the average physician-patient visit.

Given the same amount of time, we've asked thought leaders to engage in positive change discourse.



Join the conversation.

Step into a world of  
**GLITZ & GLAMOUR**  
honoring the

**50**<sup>TH</sup>

ANNIVERSARY  
of NEOMED'S *founding*.

NORTHEAST OHIO MEDICAL UNIVERSITY  
**GRAND CASINO**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2024 • 5:30-10:30 p.m.**

NEW Center • 4211 St. Rt. 44, Rootstown, Ohio 44272

**\$225 WHALE/VIP TICKET** ♦ **\$125 GRAND CASINO TICKET**

CASINO  
GAMES



FOOD



MUSIC

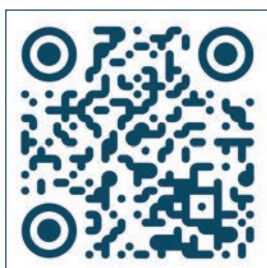


SILENT  
AUCTIONS

Includes cocktail hour, three hours of gaming, open bar,  
gourmet hors d'oeuvres and a commemorative gift.

All proceeds benefit the Blue Fund which supports NEOMED  
student scholarships and academic/program enhancements.

**SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE.**



For more information, to register, or to sponsor  
the Grand Casino visit [neomed.edu/casino](https://neomed.edu/casino).

For questions, please contact the Office of Alumni Relations  
at [philanthropy@neomed.edu](mailto:philanthropy@neomed.edu) or **330.325.6653**.

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!

*The median  
salary is*  
**\$145K!**

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

