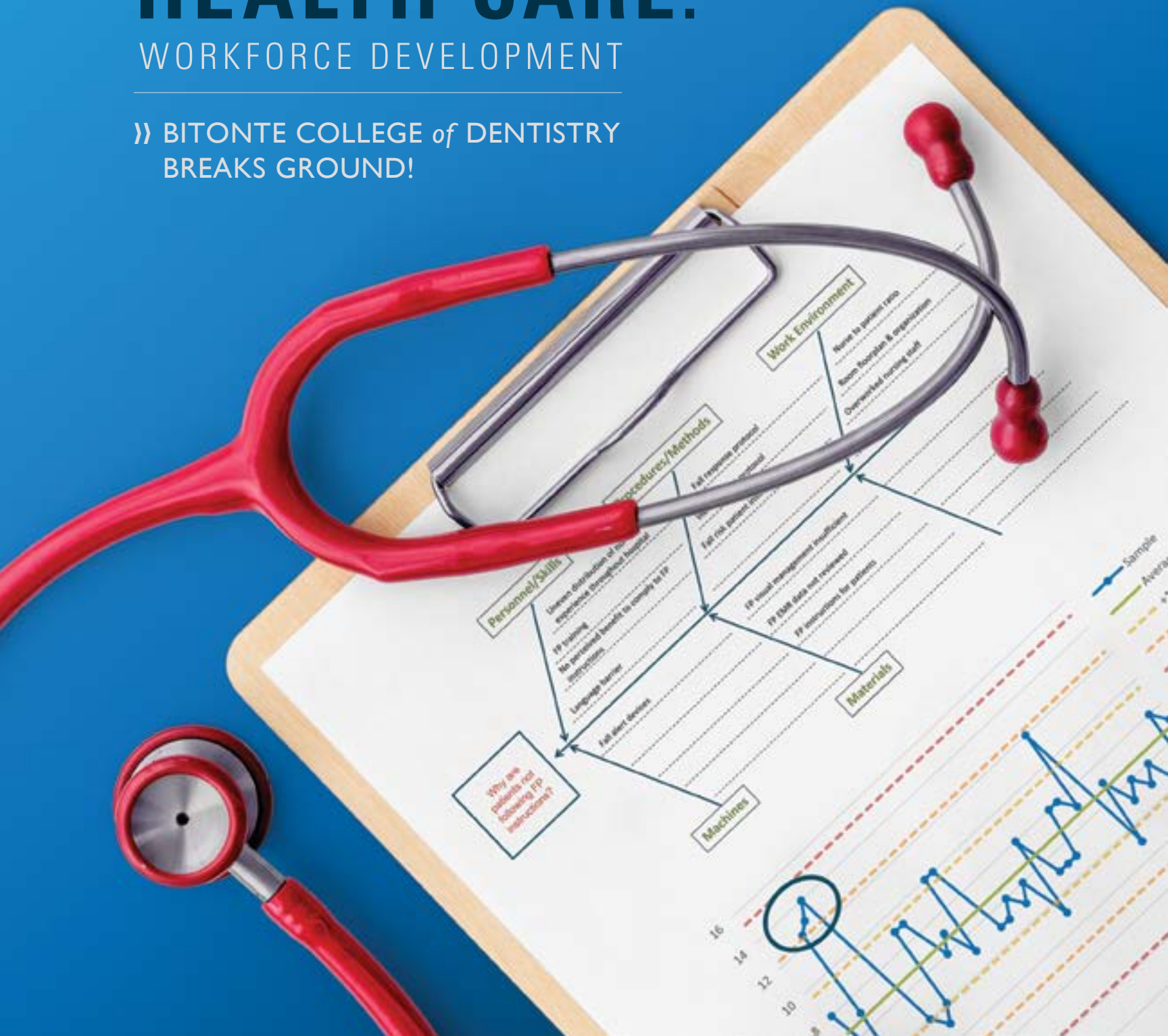




# IGNITE

## *The* BUSINESS *of* **HEALTH CARE:** WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

» BITONTE COLLEGE *of* DENTISTRY  
BREAKS GROUND!



# TRAINING GENERATIONS of **LEADERS**

**H**ere at Northeast Ohio Medical University, we pride ourselves on training the next generation of leaders in health care.

Our graduates have gone on to lead hospitals, such as Teri Lash-Ritter, M.D. ('02), M.B.A., FAAFP, who was recently named president of Akron General, Lodi, Medina, Mercy and Union hospitals; to lead groundbreaking surgeries, such as Frank Papay, M.D. ('84), who completed the country's first successful face transplant; to lead state-of-the-art translational research, such as Crystal Mackall, M.D. ('84), whose work is leading to breakthroughs in the treatment of childhood cancers; and to lead advocacy efforts, such as Jaclyn Boyle, Pharm.D. ('12), who helped achieve provider status for pharmacists in the state.

Our graduates also fill important gaps in the medical workforce here in Ohio. As College of Medicine Dean Marc Basson notes in "Physician Leadership" (page 8), 55% of NEOMED graduates did their residencies in the State of Ohio, and many of them remain in Ohio to practice.

NEOMED is also helping current health care professionals to improve their skills and knowledge to become leaders in their health systems and practices. The NEOMED Executive Education program (page 14), launched with our partners at University Hospitals, is bringing Lean Six Sigma, health and well-being coaching, and other tools to enhance the health care workforce.

These and other articles in this issue of *Ignite* highlight the many ways NEOMED is meeting the needs of today and preparing leaders for the future of health care.

Sincerely,



John T. Langell  
*President*



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 fosters a working and learning environment that celebrates differences and prepares students for patient-centered, team- and population-based care.

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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.

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**On the cover:** The chart depicts tools used in Lean Six Sigma workforce development courses.



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Architectural rendering of the entrance to the Bitonte College of Dentistry.

## DEVELOPING NEOMED'S **NEWEST COLLEGE**

The Bitonte College of Dentistry will help fill a gap in Ohio's workforce

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**A**sk Frank Beck, D.D.S., FAAHD, to explain why Northeast Ohio Medical University is opening a dental college, and he'll tell you: "The number one unmet health care need of the citizens of Ohio is dental health care. It has been the number one for the past 25 years."

The need is so great that Ohioans often present in hospital emergency departments for non-emergent dental care.

"In fact, in the state of Ohio, out of the top 20 non-emergent conditions in a hospital emergency department, numbers 1, 3 and 12 are all dental," Dr. Beck explained. "The challenge is that you have individuals in acute pain with infections and abscesses and they are discharged with an antibiotic and a painkiller, with the

discharge instructions to find a dentist. Well, if they had a dentist, it is more than likely they wouldn't have been sitting there in the emergency room."

While the need for better access to dental care is great, there is a shortage of dentists in the state to fill that need. Dr. Beck notes, Ohio is currently more than 600 dentists short.

### **BUILDING A DENTAL SCHOOL**

Dr. Beck is the inaugural dean of the Bitonte College of Dentistry, which received initial accreditation by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) in August 2024. An impressive accomplishment for Dr. Beck and his team considering the decision to pursue a college of dentistry was made by the NEOMED

Board of Trustees just two years earlier. The College is the third dental school in the state — the others are at the Ohio State University and Case Western Reserve University — and the first public dental school in northern Ohio.

The College was named in recognition of a \$10-million commitment from the Dr. Dominic A. and Helen M. Bitonte Family Foundation.

Following an invitation from NEOMED President John T. Langell, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., Dr. Beck joined an external advisory board in 2021 to investigate the feasibility of developing a dental school at NEOMED. He took a leadership role in bringing together content experts with a range of knowledge from facilities to curriculum to funding

Frank Beck, D.D.S., FAAHD,  
inaugural dean of the Bitonte  
College of Dentistry.



to clinical training. The group also included members with ties to CODA, as well as the Ohio State Dental Board, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers (OACHC) and the Ohio Dental Association (ODA).

The next step was identifying stakeholders. According to Dr. Beck, the advisory board decided, “let’s identify those not only that are in support, but those that might be in opposition.”

Surprisingly, it was organized dentistry that was opposed to the creation of a new dental college in the state. Dr. Beck was prepared for the pushback, though, having been counseled by deans of new dental schools across the country.

“I asked them, what were their biggest obstacles, what was their biggest opposition? And unequivocally it was organized dentistry at the state level. I wanted to understand that opposition. We created an environment of absolute transparency and direct communication,” he shared. “We hosted the Ohio Dental Association here on campus to understand their concerns and their opposition and to share with them our plan. And I think it would be fair to say, their opposition was more from just a lack of communication with regards to the educational model we were developing.”

The ODA, ODH and OACHC continue to play important roles in the development and implementation of the Bitonte College.

## AN ACCREDITATION WHIRLWIND

Once the external advisory board established the need for and feasibility of a new dental college, work began on achieving accreditation. First, the new College had to be approved by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (achieved June 2023), then accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (achieved in early 2024) and then through CODA (achieved August 2024).

CODA recommends a 5-year timeline for completing initial accreditation. “Dr. Langell charged our committee with getting it done in 38 months. We were able to achieve it in 34 months,” Dr. Beck shared with obvious pride.

He credits Richard Kasmer, Pharm.D., J.D., former senior vice president for academic affairs and retired dean of the College of Pharmacy, with helping to make that happen. Dr. Kasmer led NEOMED through its 10-year HLC re-accreditation and was familiar with the process. Dr. Beck hired him to serve as special assistant to the dean.

Kristin Z. Victoroff, D.D.S., Ph.D., associate dean for education and academic affairs for the Bitonte College, expertly led curriculum development. Jean Fox,

D.D.S., associate dean for clinical affairs, made sure a plan was in place for the clinical training of future dentists.

Once initial accreditation was achieved, recruitment began in earnest. Within the first couple months, more than 1,800 applications were received from aspiring dental students vying for the 50 available seats in the inaugural class.

## SERVING THE UNDERSERVED

Like the University as a whole, one of the goals of the Bitonte College of Dentistry is to train students who will stay in Ohio to practice.

Ohio has 176 health professional shortage areas for dentistry. Dental deserts exist in Ohio’s rural and urban counties, which have a higher concentration of poverty and patients with complex needs.

Students’ training will focus on working with those underserved groups. There will also be a heavy emphasis on practicing dentistry with individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

“If I’m a graduate dentist who’s never seen a patient on the autism spectrum and don’t really understand their medical needs, their psychosocial or emotional needs, I’m not going to be a very good provider,” Dr. Beck illustrated. “I’m either



At top: Architectural drawings of dental operatories (left) and lecture space (right).

Center: Faculty, staff and students gathered to celebrate the launch of the Bitonte College of Dentistry.

At bottom: Brothers David Bitonte, D.O. (left), and A. Gary Bitonte, M.D., championed a \$10-million commitment from the Dr. Dominic A. and Helen M. Bitonte Family Foundation to develop the Bitonte College of Dentistry, which is named in memory of their parents.

going to attempt to provide for them in a very unproductive manner or I'm just going to say no. By giving students this training starting in year one, they'll be better prepared to work with this very underserved population."

During years three and four, students will divide their clinical training between on-site and off-site opportunities. They will spend half of the time working with clinical partners across the state including hospitals, private practice clinics, federally qualified health centers and other partners. The other half of their time will be spent in the Bitonte College's state-of-the-art dental clinic.

"We're hoping to create a career pipeline of experiences, and that way better address the maldistribution of individuals serving the state," Dr. Beck said. "At the same time, students get to see role models who are working in these locations. And that's really powerful."

## INTERDISCIPLINARY OPPORTUNITIES

Dr. Beck is enthusiastic about what he calls the Bitonte College's "multi-directional, interprofessional, collaborative education model."

"Students will spend a tremendous amount of their first year in didactic studies, which will share facilities, faculty and foundational science experiences with the colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy and Graduate Studies," he said. "We want to eliminate those silos that have traditionally existed in health care education."

The focus on interdisciplinary education opens up opportunities for all NEOMED students, not just those in the Bitonte College. For instance, medical students will be able to take a course in emergency dentistry.

They will also be able to train in the new dental clinic that is being developed on campus.

"The anesthesia students will be training here, the pharmacy students, medical students, public health students. We are creating interdisciplinary rotations. If we have a patient in the dental clinic, there may be a pharmacy student rotating so that we can share knowledge, resources and expertise about pharmacological interventions, if needed. Conversely, the pharmacy student will be viewing the dental patient through a different lens as well," Dr. Beck noted. "So that will enable us to graduate transformational leaders — individuals who were not educated in silos. The outcomes will be better patient safety, better patient care and, most importantly, less utilization of emergent care centers for non-emergent services."

## ADVICE FOR FUTURE DEANS

What advice would Dr. Beck give to someone who is tasked with leading a new dental college?

"Surround yourself with an outstanding team of content experts who are passionate, committed and enthusiastic, empower them, and just stay the heck out of their way," he said.



David Bitonte, D.O., Mary Taylor, senior vice president of operations and finance, and Gary Bitonte, M.D.



Dr. Gary Bitonte with then-State Rep. Gail Pavliga.



Jean Fox, D.D.S., Kristin Victoroff, D.D.S., Ph.D., and Dr. Gary Bitonte.



Frank Beck, D.D.S., (center) with guests.



President John Langell.



NEOMED trustees and senior leadership broke ground on the new college.

## A SYMBOLIC **GROUNDBREAKING**

NEOMED marked a milestone in its progress toward the opening of the Bitonte College of Dentistry with a groundbreaking ceremony on Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024, that was more symbolic than literal.

Workers in fact began building out the new College's clinical spaces months earlier, and both the state-of-the-art simulation training lab and a community dental clinic are expected to be operational later this year.

In his remarks at the event, NEOMED President Dr. John Langell noted, "We are here to serve the state's — and the region's — workforce needs."



For more information on the Bitonte College of Dentistry, visit [neomed.edu/dentistry](https://neomed.edu/dentistry).



Marc Basson, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A.,  
dean of the College of Medicine.

## PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP: TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**W**hen Northeast Ohio Medical University was created in 1973 as a school of medicine, the mission was to address a severe shortage of primary care physicians practicing in the state.

Though filling positions in primary care remains an important part of NEOMED's mission, Marc Basson, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A., dean of the College of Medicine, noted that projections suggest that by 2035, the U.S. might meet or even exceed the demand for primary care physicians.

"We do have a continuing and growing deficit in specialty physicians," Dr. Basson noted.

### THE GEOGRAPHY OF WORKFORCE GAPS

National statistics often mask disparities in health care access. Large urban centers may boast sufficient specialists and primary care physicians, while rural and underserved urban areas, such as parts of Appalachia or inner-city regions, face severe shortages.

More than half of Ohio's 88 counties remain wholly or partly designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) — 42 and 14, respectively — for primary care physicians by the Health Resources and Services Administration. Many of those HPSA counties are in rural Appalachia.

In a free-market system, attracting health care workers to these underserved areas poses a challenge. Dr. Basson argued that educational institutions play a pivotal role in addressing these disparities.

"We don't admit anybody in medical school that doesn't belong here," Dr. Basson stressed, while noting the NEOMED's

focus on recruiting students who are likely to fill gaps in the workforce and serve in underserved areas. For instance, he said, "Rural students tend to end up in rural places because they grew up there; they may like it there."

Similarly, first-generation and economically disadvantaged students bring valuable perspectives that enrich the health care landscape.

By recruiting and training students from rural or underserved regions and encouraging them to remain in these areas post-graduation, NEOMED can better align workforce distribution with local needs.

For instance, NEOMED has implemented strategies to ensure its graduates stay in Ohio. Over 55% of 2024 College of Medicine graduates

pursued residencies in Ohio, and many remain to practice in the state, reflecting the importance of aligning educational goals with community needs.

### SHIFT IN NEED

Part of the reason for the statistical shift for primary care physicians is the growing roles of nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs), who are increasingly addressing primary care needs.

Dr. Basson emphasized the importance of a team-based model where all providers operate at the top of their licenses and have access to experts for consultation. This collaborative approach ensures optimal care while recognizing the value each role brings.

"We talk about NPs and PAs. It's also clear that pharmacists are meeting health care needs, especially in rural communities or in underserved areas in general," he noted. "They're not doing primary care, but they're able to counsel people and help them get their meds and provide vaccinations and talk to them, because there isn't enough primary care available to do it in those areas."

### PREPARING FUTURE PHYSICIANS FOR EMERGING CHALLENGES

Health care is not static, and the demands on physicians are changing. Beyond clinical expertise, doctors must adapt to new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), which is revolutionizing medicine.

To illustrate, Dr. Basson shared a technological shift from early in his career.

“I think about the introduction of laparoscopic surgery, because that was a game changer,” he said. “When I was in residency, there were some gynecologists who did it, but no general surgeon would ever pick up a laparoscope. Then after I finished my residency, I did my Ph.D., so I moved away from clinical work for a few years. By the time I came back, everybody was doing laparoscopy. But I remember when people first started talking about it, we thought this was a terrible idea. It seemed horribly risky. Now, laparoscopic robotic surgeries are mainstream.”

AI already assists with administrative tasks, such as transcription and information retrieval. Future applications might include clinical decision making, real-time diagnostics and even treatment recommendations.

“Critical thinking is more important, rather than less important, in the era of AI and the era of the internet,” Dr. Basson contended. “I think this is something we have to wrestle with. Where is the role of the human being going to be in all this, as AI becomes more powerful? I think it's important for our students to really double down on their critical thinking skills, to understand how to use AI as a tool rather than a crutch.”

## BALANCING COMPASSION AND TECHNOLOGY

The essence of medicine lies in human connection. Dr. Basson emphasized that while technology enhances efficiency, it cannot replace the trust and reassurance provided by a compassionate physician.

“What will it mean to be a doctor in 15 years? I hope that our students will still be kind, compassionate people who listen, communicate, take patients seriously, meet them where they live in terms of their culture,” he said.

The constantly shifting health care landscape poses challenges for physicians-in-training.

“I think that the biggest challenge our students will face is to understand and adapt to all this advanced technology, whether it's the technology of today, or whether it's the technology of the near future,” Dr. Basson said. “At the same time, they need to remain compassionate human beings who can provide the other half of what doctors need to provide. We're not just writing prescriptions or doing procedures. We're being there for our patients. And that's something that we have to remember, and we have to champion.

“We're not just training physicians; we're training physician leaders.”



# Over 55%

of College of Medicine graduates  
have pursued residencies in Ohio

## TRAINING PHYSICIAN LEADERS

NEOMED exemplifies how medical schools can cultivate leadership qualities in students. Leadership is embedded in the curriculum, particularly during the fourth-year capstone course. Beyond formal education, students are encouraged to assume leadership roles on College committees and in student groups.

These opportunities allow students to practice leadership skills in real-world contexts, preparing them to navigate the complexities of modern health care.

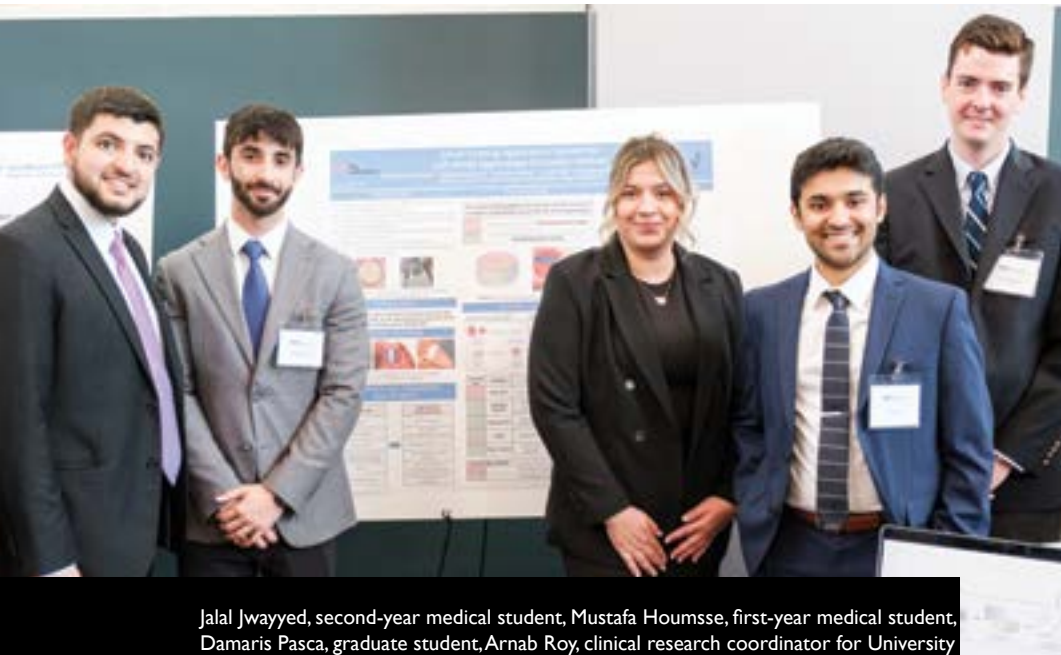
“Like it or not, physicians are going to be leaders, and you can lead well and use your influence well, or you can lead badly and use your influence poorly,” Dr. Basson noted. “A lot of times when people hear ‘physician leaders’ they think of the president of a hospital system. It certainly can encompass being the CEO of a hospital, being the dean of the medical school, being the chair of the department. But, medicine's a team sport. That makes it all the more important that you have leadership skills, so that you can meld the team. And that's very obviously true in a surgical unit or but it's also true in a primary care clinic. It's true every place where we take care of patients.”

NEOMED recently increased efforts to recruit military-affiliated students, underscoring a commitment to fostering leadership.

“Students who have a history in the military have experienced leadership, have probably had some training and some affinity for that in many ways that we think will help them mature as leaders further in the medical field,” Dr. Basson said.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

Leadership, compassion and adaptability will define the next generation of physicians. By fostering these qualities, medical schools like NEOMED are not only meeting current challenges but also shaping the future of health care.



Jalal Jwayyed, second-year medical student, Mustafa Houmsse, first-year medical student, Damaris Pasca, graduate student, Arnab Roy, clinical research coordinator for University Hospitals, and Andrew Muskara, first-year medical student, with the Zonal Coating poster and display at NEOMED's Bench to Bedside competition.

## FILLING THE GAPS

*NEOMED's College of Graduate Studies prepares the health care workforce of tomorrow through a range of programs*

BY JARED F. SLANINA

**T**he Basic and Translational Biomedicine (BTB) program at Northeast Ohio Medical University helps train a new generation of bioinnovators and scientists who are seeking to fill the gaps of the unmet needs for patients.

NEOMED students are putting this into action.

Andrew Muskara and Mustafa Houmsse, graduates of the BTB M.S. program and current first-year medical students, are part of a team that is working to create a life-saving medical device. Their first step, however, was to identify a need.

The team, also consisting of BTB graduates Damaris Pasca and Arnab Roy and second-year medical student Jalal Jwayyed, set their sights on atrial fibrillation, more commonly known as AFib, the most commonly diagnosed arrhythmia, which causes symptoms such as heart palpitations, stroke and in the most severe cases, heart failure. Approximately 450,000 individuals are hospitalized each year in the U.S. with AFib as the primary diagnosis, with 12.1 million Americans expected to be diagnosed with AFib by 2030.

The team narrowed their focus to the fact that patients with AFib are five times more likely to have a stroke as a result of stagnant blood clotting and exiting the heart. Left atrial appendage occlusion (LAAO) is a promising second-line therapy to minimize stroke risk in AFib patients, especially for those who

are unable to tolerate oral anticoagulants or are at an increased risk for bleeding. In this interventional procedure, the left atrial appendage of the heart is physically occluded by an implantable device, preventing thrombus formation and migration from the appendage. However, peri-device leakage and device related thrombus (DRT) are common limitations of LAAO.

To address this issue, the team came up with a novel technique for coating LAAO devices called “Zonal Coating Application System (ZCAS).” ZCAS minimizes peri-device leakage by integrating a two-part thromboresistant and endothelialization-promoting coating onto the device. The end result of the ZCAS is an improved LAAO device that ensures a complete endothelial seal of the left atrial appendage.

Under the guidance of Fayez Safadi, Ph.D., professor of anatomy and neurobiology, the team is working towards getting the device on the market. In

Dr. Safadi's lab, the team developed a novel in-vitro model of LAAO device endothelialization, which they used to validate their ZCAS concept. They presented at the 2024 NEOventions Bench to Bedside Competition, getting feedback from other bioinnovators and investors. The team will be presenting its device at Bench to Bedside as a legacy team in 2025 as they prepare to show the progress they have made in the past year.

## PREPARING FOR THE NEEDS OF TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

The health care workforce is in a constant state of evolution. As populations and technology change, future physicians like Muskara will need more than diagnostic skills to thrive.

NEOMED's College of Graduate Studies is well-prepared to adjust to these shifts. The College continues to grow with programs like BTB that meet the demands of the health care workforce, developing innovative new programs to prepare students for a new world of health care.

Epidemiology — the study of how diseases spread and affect population, and how to prevent them — is just one area that has seen tremendous growth in recent years. The field has grown in importance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with new variants continuing to impact the population. This has

created numerous opportunities for students in the Master of Public Health program. Their work now helps health departments throughout the country be more informed about infectious disease, and how to be more prepared to stop future outbreaks.

But what about the ethical implications? The Medical Ethics and Humanities program helps learners consider the human element as the health care field dramatically evolves. This portion of the health care team is vital as health care systems navigate what is best for the health of the patient. For instance, the implementation of procedures that allowed people to say goodbye to loved ones through Zoom or using PPV during quarantine.

There is also a demand for greater research compliance to ensure certain ethical demands and other important regulations are being met. This is why a shared course for College of Graduate Studies students, Responsible Conduct of Research, educates students on how every element of the research process should be conducted with integrity. This allows students to serve on agencies such as Internal Review Boards or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, which oversee research involving human and animal subjects, respectively.

“We do a thorough market analysis to determine which professions are growing and what workforce gaps need to be addressed in the near future,” said Julie Aultman, Ph.D., dean of the College of Graduate Studies. “Our primary focus is to provide exceptional education and training, while guiding our students on toward a rewarding career path with an in-demand skillset after they graduate from NEOMED.”

## ADDING A CRUCIAL MEMBER TO THE TEAM

One such career is the certified anesthesiologist assistant.

The College’s Master of Medical Science in Anesthesia (M.M.Sc.A.) program is creating professionals who are ready to immediately enter the workforce as CAAs upon graduation and the passage of a certification exam. The current demand is so strong that many students have job offers within six months of beginning the program, well before graduation.

The two-year program culminates with a several-months rotation at a hospital, which can serve as an orientation process for students before earning their certification.

The M.M.Sc.A. program has been an absolute success in meeting the demands of the health care workforce, as 100% of graduates have had a CAA position lined up prior to graduation.

The demand for CAAs is incredibly high, even though they are only currently licensed to work in 21 U.S. states, as well as Washington, D.C., and Guam. Demand will grow, as more states approve the implementation of CAAs in hospital systems.

The rapid growth of the profession is also creating leadership opportunities, as more CAAs are being educated and trained.

Positions for CAAs in education and management will continue to drive the growth of the field, providing further opportunities for today’s graduates.

## CREATING A NEW PROFESSION

Early in 2025, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine signed legislation creating a new profession to meet the mental health care needs of communities across the state. The Certified Mental Health Assistant (CMHA) graduate degree program, developed by NEOMED, addresses the workforce shortage of mental health professionals. The program will be housed in the College of Graduate Studies.

A CMHA will work exclusively under the supervision of a physician who will make the original diagnosis. The CMHA will carry out the treatment plan as prescribed by the physician.

According to the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, Ohio has 138 Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas and 16 Ohio counties are currently listed as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas.

“This is a historic endeavor that will ultimately save lives,” said NEOMED President John Langell, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.A. “Certified Mental Health Assistants will transform the landscape of mental health treatment by providing greater access to care.”



We do a thorough market analysis to determine which professions are growing and what workforce gaps need to be addressed in the near future.”



Julie Aultman, Ph.D., dean of the NEOMED College of Graduate Studies



Photos clockwise from left; Katherine Tromp, Pharm.D.; College of Pharmacy White Coat Ceremony; pharmacy students in class in the Great Hall.

## A CONVERSATION WITH **KATHERINE M. TROMP, Pharm.D.**

BY TONYA STRONG-CHARLES

*In this first edition of “Conversations with NEOMED,” the University’s Chief Marketing Officer Tonya Strong-Charles interviews Dr. Tromp, the interim dean of the NEOMED’s College of Pharmacy.*

**What are the top reasons someone should choose to pursue a doctorate in pharmacy?**

Pharmacists are in high demand. The job placement rate for NEOMED Pharm.D. graduates has consistently approached 100%. So, not only are you able to find a job, more importantly, you can typically choose the area of specialty that you want and earn a six-figure salary.

There are so many different areas of pharmacy practice, including community pharmacy, institutional pharmacy, managed care and industry, to name a few.

**When many people think about the career of a pharmacist, they probably focus on “community” pharmacists, right?**

Yes — and if you want to work in the community, which many of our students find fulfilling, you still have a variety of options to choose from, such as large chains, regional grocery stores and independent pharmacies.

BY THE NUMBERS:  
The NEOMED College of Pharmacy



The job placement rate for NEOMED Pharm.D. graduates has consistently approached 100%.”

– KATHERINE M. TROMP, Pharm.D.

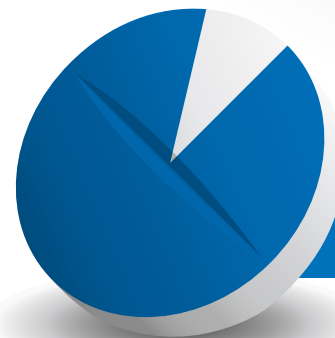
But, if you want to go the residency route and work in a setting such as a hospital or ambulatory care, you can explore that as well. There also are residency opportunities in community pharmacy. NEOMED has a great residency match rate!

An additional option for post-graduate training includes completing a fellowship. These are often with the pharmaceutical industry, and we have students who are doing fellowships with pharmacy manufacturers, concentrating on research and drug development.

#### What makes a NEOMED College of Pharmacy education exceptional?

I think what makes a NEOMED pharmacy education special is our focus on interprofessional education. Our students learn about interprofessional education every semester that they are here. Part of that is learning how to be a good team member — how to work together and function as a team. And then we have different health professions here at NEOMED through the College of Medicine and, soon, the Bitonte College of Dentistry. This is a great benefit, as students from each of our colleges have opportunities to collaborate on health care endeavors that require a multidisciplinary approach.

The ultimate goal is to develop an understanding that patients get their best care when you're working as a team. I always feel confident that when our students graduate, they are definitely ready to make a transformational impact in the real world!



90%

GRADUATION RATE



96%

JOB PLACEMENT RATE



89%

NAPLEX PASS RATE  
(10-year average)

# REWRITING THE SCRIPT FOR IMPROVING HEALTH CARE

The Executive Education program at NEOMED provides the tools, knowledge and mentoring to create meaningful change in health systems

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**T**he journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

That quote, attributed to Lao Tzu, has been used for a couple millennia to demonstrate that impactful change often does not happen in one grand action. Rather it is a series of smaller actions that cumulatively spur progress.

That idea is sometimes lost in approaches to health care improvement.

“If you were to go online and look up any sort of health care summits or conferences, most of them are geared toward either clinicians and how they practice or they’re targeting health care executives, people that work at the macro level of health care in making systemic change,” noted Jordan Cinderich, director of operational excellence at Northeast Ohio Medical University. “What we believe in, and what I believe Lean Six Sigma has validated time and time again, is that real, sustainable, impactful change occurs when you get everyone engaged in the health

system, making small improvements, and the whole system improves.

“The successes that are going to change health care are the everyday actions and improvements of your frontline workers in health care,” he asserted.

Among the cases he shared, Cinderich gave the example of a scheduling coordinator who developed an improvement project that changed scheduling wait time from six months to two months.

That example came from a Lean Six Sigma course Cinderich taught through NEOMED’s Executive Education program for employees of University Hospitals of Cleveland. Since 2022, NEOMED and UH have had an affiliation agreement supporting the joint aim of developing leadership and deploying a transformational workforce who heal, teach and discover.

As part of the UH-NEOMED affiliation, UH staff have access to a variety of professional development programs offered through Executive Education (see sidebar on page 17). Since launching in March 2024 more than 300 UH employees have participated in LSS and other Executive Education programs through date of publication.

“With some of the workers we have in our program right now, this might be the first improvement project they’ve ever





Jordan Cinderich, M.Ed., LSSBB, process engineer and director of the Executive Education program.

been a part of. [Until now,] they've only 'just done their job,'" noted Cinderich. "Now their health system is telling them, 'we're going to educate you and give you the resources to do what you think needs to be improved.' They come through our program and some of the outcomes of the projects we're seeing are huge. That clinic or that office is going to be noticeably better because we empowered that one person."

While one project in one office can create small but meaningful change, empowering employees throughout a health system can turn one meaningful change into thousands.

"If you're continuously dedicated to this type of workforce development, over time the health of your system will improve," Cinderich noted.

### **BUILDING THE PROGRAM**

The NEOMED Executive Education program grew out of a disparate collection of programs for various professional development needs. For example, Lean Six Sigma training was available for NEOMED employees to learn process improvement. Faculty development programs were available to train NEOMED clinical faculty in certain skills, like research and education.

As NEOMED developed its affiliation with University Hospitals, it made sense

to bring the variety of professional development courses together under one program to streamline operations.

"Obviously the hard part about jumping into this new arena is that you're a small fish in a big pond," Cinderich said. "Everyone else has been doing this [professional development training] for a long time. So for us to be successful, it wasn't enough to just have high quality programs. You've got to have people that are interested in doing it."

### **THE NEOMED DIFFERENCE**

Many of the professional development programs marketed to health care professionals were not developed with the specific needs of health systems in mind. NEOMED has taken a different approach — looking at those specific needs and developing programs to address them. Even the Lean Six Sigma courses have been retooled to speak directly to the challenges faced by hospitals and health systems. In January 2025, NEOMED's Lean Six Sigma for Healthcare Operations program earned accreditation by the Council for Six Sigma Certification (CSSC).

Mentoring is another thing NEOMED's program provides that is not usually incorporated in other development programs.

"Other programs, they just give you the curriculum and then they walk away. We [NEOMED] are giving you the cur-



The successes that are going to change health care are the everyday actions and improvements of your frontline workers in health care"

— JORDAN CINDERICH, NEOMED director of operational excellence

Right: The inaugural cohort of the Health and Well-Being Coaching certificate program.

Opposite page: Jordan Cinderich, second from left, leads a Lean Six Sigma class for University Hospitals physicians and other health professionals.



“  
“  
I'm doing something that  
I'm seeing right in front of  
my eyes that's contributing  
to improving health care in  
Northeast Ohio.”

riculum, we're mentoring, we're walking alongside you,” Cinderich said. “We're providing resources and access to experts who will actually help in achieving outcomes, not just educating employees and walking away.”

**HEALTH COACHING**

One course in the Executive Education menu was added specifically at the request of University Hospitals: A Health and Well-being Coaching certificate.

Over the past decade, evidence-based health and well-being coaching has gained increased attention from health systems as a way to support patient recovery and to help patients manage chronic conditions. The health and well-being coach will assist with mindfulness, goal setting and lifestyle changes to improve well-being.

The six-month program at NEOMED prepares students from various backgrounds with foundational skills and knowledge. Learners study behavior change, coaching psychology, motivational interviewing and coaching techniques. The course is accredited by the National Board for Health and Wellness Coaching (NBHWC) and students who pass the program will be able to apply for the NBHWC exam.

“We're the only program that educates the students and then facilitates, through our partner hospital, the 50 hours of interaction for our learners need to sit for the exam,” Cinderich noted. That innovation is setting a standard for health and wellness coaching. The accrediting board has indicated that it may begin requiring other programs to provide similar access.

**WHAT'S NEXT**

Cinderich anticipates growing the Executive Education program over the next year, launching new programs and reaching additional learners. Programs are being explored in the areas of leadership, artificial intelligence, data analytics and project management.

“Right now, health care is having a hard time,” he noted. “Retaining people and paying for external people to come to their organization that bring those skills, it's very expensive. It's cheaper to take the workforce you have that's already dedicated to your system and train them to do these things that are becoming very important in health care.”

In addition to adding new courses, Cinderich would like to look beyond hospital systems to grow the program.

“I’d like to look at health care more broadly,” he said. “Right now, we’re focused on our partner hospital systems that feed into our ecosystem here at NEOMED. But health care is much more than hospital systems, right? There are other types of clinics. There are public health departments. There are health commissions. There are insurance companies. There are a lot of different parties that feed into health care.

“I think over time, if we could bring more of those types of people together, it then situates NEOMED with a very privileged seat to be doing quality improvement and, longitudinally, we will have a unique view of the full value stream of health care. When you roll your sleeves up and you help with quality improvement projects and you learn what everyone’s problems are across the whole value stream, then I think you can understand, how do we fix health care?”

Even though he is not a clinician who works directly with patients, Cinderich is excited to see the impact of his work on improving the quality of care patients receive.

“We know that in some small way, we’re contributing to health care improvement with Executive Education,” he said. “It provides a platform where you take that magnifying glass and get so much closer to seeing health care transformation in action, to where we’re designing programs and executing them on a much larger scale. And we’re seeing it firsthand in a shorter period of time. It’s not four years like our med school. It’s 10 months. It’s one year. And you’re seeing data about how our patients are doing now or how much shorter wait time is or how much more compliant we are.

“That is super exciting because I’m not healing patients at the bedside, but I’m doing something that I’m seeing right in front of my eyes that’s contributing to improving health care in Northeast Ohio.”



**NEOMED Executive Education offers high-quality professional development training and process improvement trainings that prepare health professionals to lead teams, optimize systems and improve health care.**



**Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt for Health Care Operations**

*The Yellow Belt program shares basic principles of the Lean Six Sigma process improvement methodology, a patient-centered and data-driven approach to increase operational efficiency, improve patient satisfaction and outcomes, and control process variation in organizations.*



**Lean Six Sigma Green Belt for Health Care Operations**

*The Green Belt program shares more LSS tools and basic statistical analysis for process improvement.*



**Fellowship in Academic Medicine – Clinical Education**

*The FAME-E program encompasses curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment strategies and program leadership to prepare participants to adeptly design and deliver impactful medical education programs.*



**Fellowship in Academic Medicine – Clinical Research**

*The FAME-R program is designed for clinicians and health professions educators who wish to improve their skills as clinical researchers and scholars.*



**Health And Well-Being Coaching Certificate Program**

*This course prepares students from various backgrounds with the foundational skills and knowledge to be health and well-being coaches. The curriculum involves theory and practice in behavior change, coaching psychology, motivational interviewing and coaching techniques.*



**Fellowship Innovation-Research and Entrepreneurship**

*The FIRE program provides the education, training, resources and mentorship needed for a novice inventor to go from concept to commercialization.*

**HOW TO ACCESS**

Learn how NEOMED can support workforce development needs at [neomed.edu/executive-education](http://neomed.edu/executive-education).

DONOR SPOTLIGHT



Foundation Board Chair Mark Mosley spoke on the impact of NEOMED on health care.



Second-year medical student Rahul Kumar shared the student experience at NEOMED.



President John Langell spoke on NEOMED's bright future.

On Nov. 1, 2024, alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff and friends gathered for the NEOMED Grand Casino, honoring the 50th anniversary of the University's founding. Guests were greeted on the red carpet by President John Langell, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., as they enter the NEOMED Education and Wellness (NEW) Center, transformed into a Monte Carlo-style casino.

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(pictured below with President John Langell and his wife Sara Whittingham)



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# NEOMED GRAND CASINO





## NEW LEADERSHIP FOR NEOMED FREE CLINIC

**Class of 1994 alumna Saira Ismail, M.D., was named medical director of newly restructured and renamed clinic**

BY SHANNON LAM AND RAHUL KUMAR

*Saira Ismail, M.D., ('94), a family physician who practiced in Hudson, Ohio, was named medical director of the NEOMED Free Clinic in August 2024. Two Clinic team members — second-year medical students Shannon Lam and Rahul Kumar — sat down with Dr. Ismail to discuss her plans for the Clinic and share her passion for medical education with the NEOMED community.*

**Rahul: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

**Dr. Ismail:** I was born and raised in Ohio, and I joined the six-year B.S./M.D. program right out of high school. I studied and worked hard. [Outside of medicine] I am married, the mother of three grown sons, and I really enjoyed living and having a private practice in the same town for 25 years. It was a great setup. I felt very much rooted in the community and was an integral part of that community. I'm excited to take the knowledge from my experiences and share it with all of you: the future generation of physicians who will take care of us. I'm really excited about using this position to not only foster community-based education but also a sense of service. I've always had a service project in my life, and that has become a larger priority over time.

**Shannon: You mentioned you had a private practice in the same area here in Northeast Ohio for 25 years. What were some reoccurring issues that you tended to see, and what would you like to see change as we become practicing physicians?**

**Dr. Ismail:** I had the privilege of working in an affluent, well-insured community. The challenges there were not some of the challenges you have here. People had food security, people had transportation, people — most of them — had insurance. But I can tell you, I really learned that disease processes cross socioeconomic status and all people deal with depression, anxiety, chronic diseases, and are interested in wellness. So, it was a very eye-opening experience to know, just because you have insurance or come from an affluent area doesn't mean you still

will not suffer and have conditions that need a caring, competent physician. Every person deserves that, wherever you come from and whatever zip code you live in.

**Rahul: Absolutely. I noticed that you are also a clinical assistant professor of family and community medicine at NEOMED. I was wondering if you could talk about your involvement with NEOMED and what that role looks like for you.**

**Dr. Ismail:** That [role] comes with the clinical experience of having medical students at the practice and volunteering. I was a volunteer here before accepting the medical directorship, so it was really about teaching clinical skills at

the office site.

**Shannon: What would you like to see the NEOMED Free Clinic accomplish in the upcoming years?**

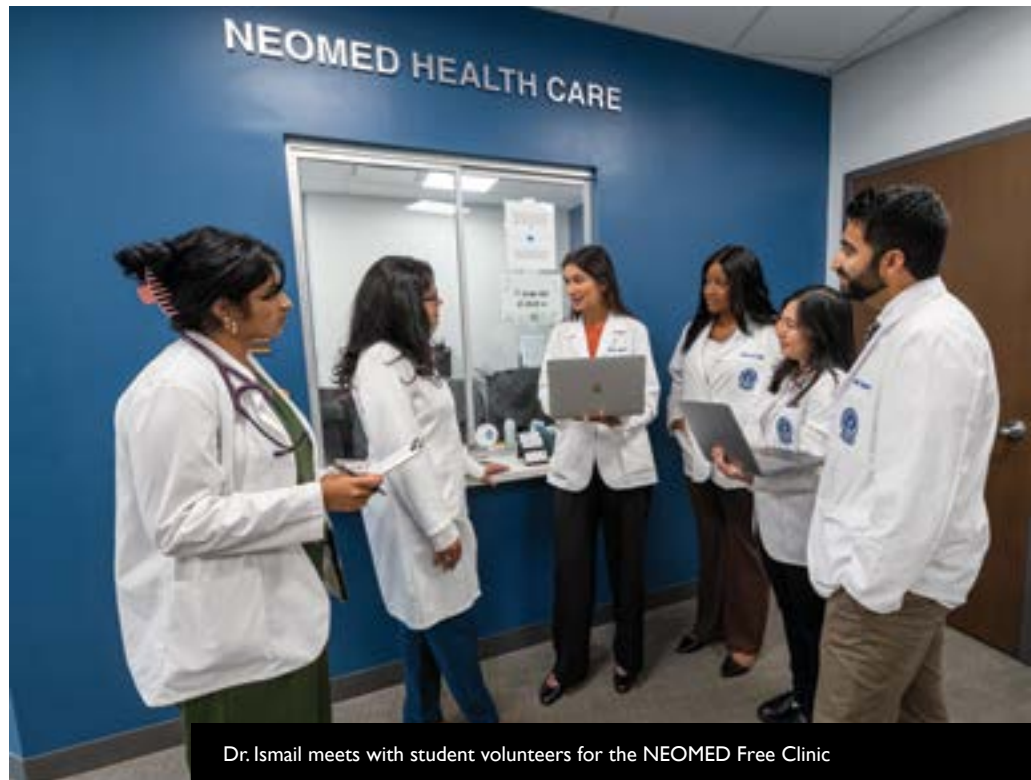
**Dr. Ismail:** I'd like to leverage my experience with running a private practice and bring that knowledge to the Clinic. I want to focus on having a patient-centered perspective and adding that to the balance of the teaching environment here. For example, everything from looking at patient flow, bringing ambulatory office testing to the patients here on a more consistent basis, and offering services here in a way that mirrors a little bit more of what they would get in a private practice, because the tools and resources are here. NEOMED is very much committed to this Clinic and the students are bright, motivated and passionate. I hope to leverage all of that and deliver it to the patient care experience here.

**Rahul: I was wondering if you could explain what it means to be a medical director, and if you had any specific plans for your role here.**

**Dr. Ismail:** My role is really to highlight the talent that's already here and to help nurture it. I want to bring out the best possible experience that students can have here with everything available to them, and really dedicate myself to that experience. One of the things that I am thankful for that the school has done with the restructuring is they have carved out this position, so my focus is the NEOMED Free Clinic. I don't have other administrative responsibilities in the department that could be a distraction. I can focus 100% on the experience here, and I'm really grateful for that. I'm looking forward to building relationships, not only within the University but the surrounding community and health care institutions to harness those talents and expertise to the Clinic. It deserves that, and it needs that, and I'm happy to be a part of that process.

**Rahul: Helping with the NEOMED Free Clinic means that you'll be working closely with many NEOMED students. Why is medical education important to you?**

**Dr. Ismail:** As a student, I remember some of the preceptors



Dr. Ismail meets with student volunteers for the NEOMED Free Clinic

and mentors that I had and how they shaped not only how I practice medicine, but also my approach to patients, my work ethic and other aspects that really develop my professionalism. I think it's an honor to be part of your medical education, to be part of the experience, to help you mature and develop into the medical professional you're destined to become, and to nurture all of that.

My love really is the bedside, but I also see the excitement in helping students translate their knowledge into real-life applications. What also excites me is helping students learn how to interview patients, how to manage their time and how to develop an assessment and plan, because each patient is unique, meaning you really need to know their background. What are their resources? Can they come to their doctor's appointments on time? Do they have food security? Where are they grocery shopping? Who's doing the cooking? Because, if you don't know that, you're missing a big part of the picture of how to help the patient [manage chronic conditions]. You need to be able to see the patient in that context. I'm a family physician. I feel strongly that you need to be able to see your patient in the context of their environment and in their family to really deliver care that is tailored to who they are, and I'm excited to teach students how to master these skills.



## BREAKING NEW GROUND IN ALLERGY AND IMMUNOLOGY: DR. SANDRA HONG'S **JOURNEY AND VISION**

BY ARIANA BROOKS

**W**hen it comes to advancing the field of allergy and immunology, Sandra Hong, M.D., M.B.A., has made a significant impact. Her career has been one of dedication, innovation and transformative care. As chair of the Department of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and medical director of the Food Allergy Center of Excellence (FACE) for the Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Hong has made many contributions to her field and is redefining the standard of care for patients with food allergies. In a conversation with *Ignite*, she shared insights into her journey, the challenges patients and their families face and the groundbreaking work being done under her leadership.

### A LEADER IN ALLERGY AND IMMUNOLOGY

Dr. Hong joined Cleveland Clinic in 2005, bringing her experience and passion for patient-centered care, establishing her as an integral part of the institution. After years of impactful work, she assumed the

role of chair of the Department of Allergy and Clinical Immunology in 2022 — a milestone she describes as “an honor that definitely changed [her] life a bit.” Reflecting on her path to leadership, she candidly admitted that becoming department chair was not part of her original plan when she graduated from NEOMED’s College of Medicine in 1997. However, her extensive leadership experience, including her four years as a regional medical director for Cleveland Clinic’s family health centers, made her a natural fit for the role.

Among her most notable achievements is the establishment of the FACE in 2020, which has become a beacon for patients seeking holistic and transformative care. Despite launching just as the COVID-19 pandemic began, the center has become a pioneering institution in food allergy treatment expanding to three locations in the northeast Ohio area.

### TRANSFORMING FOOD ALLERGY CARE

The Food Allergy Center of Excellence stands out for its holistic, multidisciplinary approach. As Dr. Hong explained, “We wanted to create a center where patients could receive holistic care, so we made sure that we had registered dietitians and pediatric psychologists who specialize in food allergies to support both the patients and their families.” This approach addresses not just the physical aspects of food allergies but also the emotional and psychological challenges that patients and their loved ones face.

Over the years, there has been a noticeable increase in food allergies among children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 8% of children are affected by food allergies; roughly one in 13 children. One startling statistic highlights the importance of this comprehensive care: studies have shown that children with multiple food allergies have a 50% chance of being bullied. Dr.



Sandra Hong, M.D., celebrated the opening of multiple food allergy centers, including those at Hillcrest Hospital (opposite page) and the Strongsville Family Health and Surgery Center (above).

Hong emphasized the broader implications of food allergies, noting, “Having food allergies really increases anxiety, depression and isolation.” Addressing the psychological toll of food allergies is a critical component of Dr. Hong’s work. This is why the FACE team works diligently to support families on all levels beyond managing dietary restrictions.

“Patients that were at high risk for developing food allergies were asked to avoid foods. We’re learning that avoidance is actually the opposite of what we’d like to do,” Dr. Hong noted, explaining how the FACE treatment plan differs from some other medical practices.

A hallmark of FACE is its focus on oral immunotherapy (OIT), a treatment that may offer hope to families managing life-threatening food allergies. OIT works by gradually introducing small amounts of allergens into a patient’s diet to build tolerance.

“Typically, only about 20% of children with a peanut or tree nut allergy will develop a tolerance to it,” Dr. Hong explained. “If we are able to treat these children below the age of four, their tolerance rate is closer to about 90%.”

This early intervention offers a life-changing shift, enabling patients to safely consume foods that once posed severe risks.

While OIT has been recognized as an alternative to food avoidance in treating food allergies, further research is needed to determine the long-term efficacy and safety of OIT with different populations of patients before it can be widely available. With access to specialized OIT treatment being limited, families often travel from the tri-state area and beyond to Cleveland Clinic for OIT, underscoring the need for such services.

### A PASSION FOR MEDICINE AND LEADERSHIP

Dr. Hong’s journey into medicine was inspired by her mother, who encouraged her to pursue a career in health care. Her mother’s guidance led both Dr. Hong and her sister, Susan Hong, M.D. (’95), to pursue medical careers. Both attended NEOMED and now work at the Cleveland Clinic. Dr. Sandra Hong completed the six-year B.S./M.D. program at NEOMED in 1997, followed by allergy and immunology specialty training through a fellow-

ship at Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical School in Boston.

“One of my core values has been to help others,” she shared. “We are able to improve quality of life, and I love being a part of my patients’ lives.”

Dr. Hong’s passion for her field is evident not only in her clinical work but also in her commitment to leadership. When asked about her leadership style, she described herself as a servant leader.

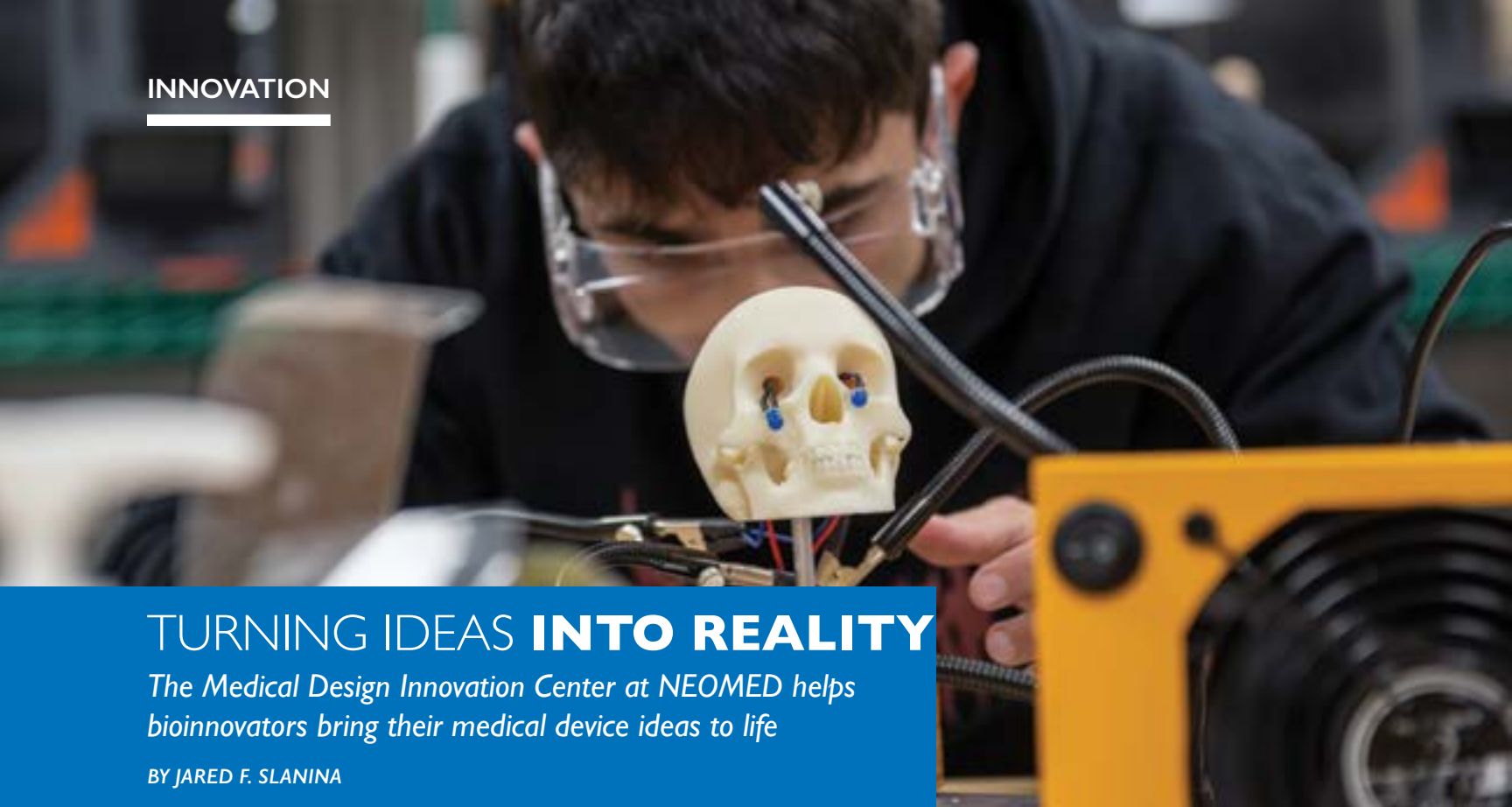
Her dedication extends beyond her immediate team. Dr. Hong has also contributed to addressing burnout among physicians while providing meaningful opportunities for aspiring medical students. A prime example of this is her role as the enterprise lead for four educational scribe programs at the Cleveland Clinic. This initiative allows post-baccalaureate students to train and gain firsthand experience in medicine while providing support to physicians. The program has a 90% acceptance rate to medical school, and many of these students return to work at Cleveland Clinic for a year after completing their studies.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The future of allergy and immunology is evolving, with advances in biological medications and immunologic therapies reshaping the field. Dr. Hong remains optimistic about the potential for OIT to become a standard treatment, emphasizing the need for continued research.

For aspiring physician leaders, Dr. Hong offered this advice: “When you’re uncomfortable, you’re growing.” She also emphasized the importance of collaboration and staying true to one’s core values.

Dr. Hong’s work and compassionate leadership exemplify the transformative power of medicine. Through her efforts, the Cleveland Clinic’s Food Allergy Center of Excellence is working to set a new standard for care, offering hope to families navigating the challenges of food allergies.



## TURNING IDEAS INTO REALITY

*The Medical Design Innovation Center at NEOMED helps bioinnovators bring their medical device ideas to life*

BY JARED F. SLANINA

**A**n idea can change the world. However, bringing that idea to life can be a long and cumbersome process that can easily hit a wall, well before coming to fruition.

The Medical Design Innovation Center (MEDIC) at NEOMED is looking to help bioinnovators break through that wall and turn their ideas into reality. These ideas can have implications that go far beyond the NEOMED campus and Northeast Ohio — potentially improving the health of individuals from around the globe.

“The MEDIC brings a great new capability to the region, and in particular, the neighboring hospitals that don’t have their own resources for creating medical device prototypes,” asserted James Keszenheimer, Ph.D., director of the MEDIC.

Dr. Keszenheimer notes that physicians and other medical professionals could have an ‘a-ha!’ moment for a device or form of medical technology that would benefit the patient in the middle of a procedure. However, it too often can end there without the proper resources and guidance.

“We can put together prototypes in a matter of days, even minutes, using facilities we have at NEOMED,” said Dr.

Keszenheimer. “We can test those prototypes in the hands of clinicians and patients and then get feedback and refine the prototypes and put together a business solution that can interest investors.”

Considering the costly and time-consuming nature of medical device development, developing something quickly with immediate and valuable feedback is an incredibly helpful tool for bioinnovators.

### TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

The MEDIC has also proven to be a valuable tool for bioinnovators at various experience levels.

“One of the great things we do is training the next generation of clinicians and engineers on how to use the resources that are available in the MEDIC to discover unmet clinical needs, to act on those clinical needs, and to come up with solutions,” said Dr. Keszenheimer.

With palpable enthusiasm, he demonstrated an example of how the work being conducted at the MEDIC can translate into improved outcomes for the patient. Holding up a model of a spine, he exclaimed how it was created using computed tomography (CT) scans to create the

model using a 3D printer. This gives the physician an opportunity to create a model of the patient’s own damaged spine and compare it side-by-side with a healthy spine.

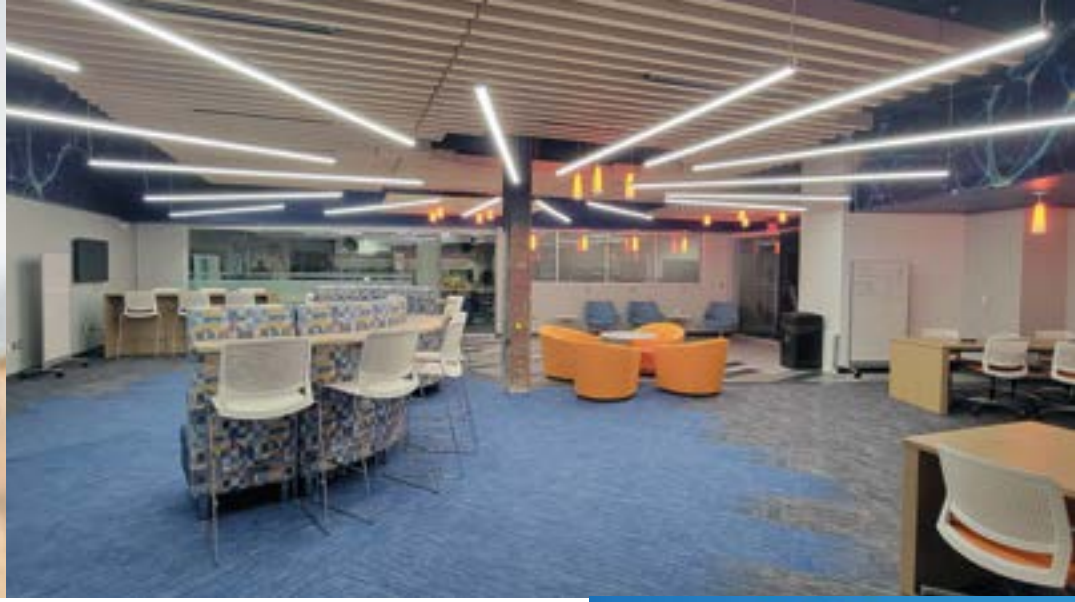
“This is a game-changing tool in patient education,” said Dr. Keszenheimer.

The technology can be used to demonstrate a plethora of other health issues in real time. For instance, a physician could demonstrate the difference between clogged heart valves and healthy, well-functioning heart valves using an exact replication of the patient’s heart from the CT scan. This allows the physician to educate the patient in a direct way that helps explain why a surgery is necessary and how it will greatly improve the health of the patient.

The possibilities are endless — all it takes is an idea. The MEDIC helps with the rest to turn an idea into a reality that will have a transformative impact on patients near and far.

#### LEARN MORE

*Find out more about NEOMED’s Medical Design Innovation Center at [neomed.edu/medic](http://neomed.edu/medic).*



The **Medical Design Innovation Center (MEDIC)** at NEOMED supports the needs of bioinnovators across Northeast Ohio by providing space, tools, know-how and education.

MEDIC works with students, entrepreneurs, health care systems, medical device companies, regional and state economic development organizations, and other educational institutions to address unmet clinical needs through prototype development, pre-clinical validation, and support from entrepreneurial ecosystem partners.

Learn more at [neomed.edu/medic](https://neomed.edu/medic).





Garden Club members (from left) medical students Margaret Kilbane, Kennedy Watson, Natalie Thornton, Rachel Fair, Bailey Taylor and Henyah Dardir, and Ph.D. student Andrea Arias-Alvarado.

## NEOMED GARDEN CLUB GROWS VEGETABLES...**AND WELL-BEING**

BY JEANNE M. HOBAN

**T**here are multiple studies showing the positive impact of gardening on well-being, mental health and quality of life.

That sounds like the perfect study break for busy students in the health professions! The NEOMED Garden Club would agree.

Club vice president and second-year medical student Henyah Dardir noted: “One of the reasons we wanted to revive the gardening club was to have an outlet for students to come in and get some time outside and sort of play in the dirt, if you will.”

Dardir has been purposeful in her activities, balancing classes with co-curricular resume builders and “exploring parts of myself that I lost in undergrad.”

“Something I really love about NEOMED: People will say that medical school is really good at making some of

the most extraordinary people feel like they're normal or below average. But I never feel like that here. I feel like here, if you have a plan, if you want something, NEOMED will give you all the tools it can to make you achieve those things,” Dardir enthused.

### SHARING COMMUNITY

The Garden Club has outdoor space on NEOMED's University Circle just north of the Book Depository. Anyone passing the spot on a spring, summer or fall evening will likely see at least a few students working in the garden.

Those passers-by are encouraged to stop in and help themselves to a fresh tomato or some basil for their dinner.

“We really encourage people to go and grab stuff,” said club president and second-year medical student Kennedy

Watson. “We tell [people] all the time, if you see a really red tomato while you're walking, go and pick it, because we don't want them to go to waste.”

Nodding to Dardir, Watson added, “We both really enjoy being able to share that with the NEOMED community. [It's] like the fruits of the labor of the garden.”

On a fall day as harvest season was nearing its end, there was still a wide range of produce flourishing in the garden. Tomatoes, peppers, okra, kale, cucumbers, pumpkins and more were ripe and ready for picking. Some of those vegetables would be pickled or canned (recipe at [neomed.edu/ignite](http://neomed.edu/ignite)).

“Part of the inspiration for the canning comes from pickled okra. I really wanted to grow okra here. It's a cultural dish that I grew up with [in Egypt],” Dardir noted. “Pickled okra is one of those things that you can find everywhere as well. So that was part of the reason why I wanted to have pickling be part of us sharing the produce with everyone all around campus. Things only stay fresh for so long. Pickling them is a great way to extend the longevity of them and to be able to share.”

Other members of the Garden Club are encouraged to add plants that had meaning for them as well.

“We leave it open for anyone to come take whatever they want and for anyone to plant whatever they want,” Dardir said. “In doing that, we got a lot of really cool things. We got purple basil; we got okra; we have a student who is growing yams. We have cucamelons or Mexican gherkins. So those are just some examples. We have lots of other things, but we really wanted people to be able to bring parts of themselves that they can't find anywhere else in Rootstown, like some of those fruits and vegetables.”



## CELEBRATING MILITARY SERVICE

The NEOMED community came together to reflect on the many sacrifices of United States Service Members during the inaugural Celebration of Military Service on Nov. 4, 2024. The event was highlighted by a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Purple Star Military Lounge, an area in the NEW Center for military-connected students to enjoy a private space and interact with other service members and Veterans.

Photos: Staff



## 1983



John A. Bastulli, M.D., FASA, has been elected president-elect of the Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA). Dr. Bastulli's term as president begins in April 2025. He will serve a three-year term as a member of the OSMA's Executive Committee and Board of Directors. Dr. Bastulli is also a member of the OSMA Foundation Board, Focused Task Force on State Legislation and Political Action Committee.

## 1988



Denis Lunne, M.D., FACP, was awarded the 2024 Evelyn V. Hess, M.D., MACP Master Teacher Award at the Ohio Chapter of the American College of Physicians (ACP) Scientific Conference. This award recognizes Master Teachers of Medicine who have been active in teaching medical students, residents and/or peers. Pictured with Awards Committee member Austin Fredrickson, M.D., FACP ('14).

## 1990



Karanvir "Kanny" Grewal, M.D., cardiologist with OhioHealth, has been installed as president of the Columbus Medical Association.

## 1991



Theresa Michele, M.D., director of the Office of Nonprescription Drugs at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, presented The Future of Nonprescription Drugs on VITALS | Visionary Health Leadership in Action, NEOMED's health leadership program presented in collaboration with University Hospitals.

## 1996



Reena Mehra, M.D., was appointed division head for pulmonary, critical care and sleep medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle. Pictured with Lawrence Ho, M.D. ('07), a UW Medicine physician specializing in pulmonary and respiratory disease care.

## 1997



Darrin Bright, M.D., was named chief of musculoskeletal services for OhioHealth in Columbus, Ohio. He will oversee orthopaedic surgery and non-surgical orthopaedics as well as sports medicine and primary care teams.

## 1999



Shalina Nair, M.D., has been appointed chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the Larner College of Medicine at the University of Vermont and the UVM Health Network. As chair of family medicine, Dr. Nair will lead physicians, scientists, educators, residents, fellows and staff at the health system's locations across Vermont and northern New York.

## 2003

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Anup Kanodia, M.D., married Rupal R. Shah, M.S., M.P.H., in Columbus, Ohio, in a four-day celebration that included several NEOMED alumni. The wedding, a mixture of American, Indian and African traditions, was featured in the *Columbus Dispatch* and *Bostonia* magazine.



Jeanne Lackamp, M.D., DFAPA, FACLP, was selected to serve as chair of the Department of Psychiatry, psychiatrist in chief for University Hospitals (UH), and director of the UH Behavioral Health Institute.

## 2011

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Sean M. Platt, M.D., joined the physician staff at Retina Associates of Cleveland. His principal areas of interest are macular surgery, retinal detachment surgery, AMD, diabetic retinopathy, retinal lasers and ocular oncology.

## 2017

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Ali Noorzad, M.D., joined The Steadman Clinic as an orthopaedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine, hip preservation and hip reconstruction.

## 2018

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Sai Krishna C. Korada, M.D., joined the Genesis Heart & Vascular Group, specializing in general cardiology.

## 2019

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Pawan Solanki, M.D., joined UPMC Pain Management in Coudersport and Bradford, Pennsylvania. Dr. Solanki completed his anesthesiology residency at University of Buffalo in New York, and a fellowship in chronic pain medicine from UPMC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

## 2023

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Abigail (Chauvin) Akers, M.D., joined the team of physicians and providers at Women's Health of Murray in Murray, Kentucky, as an obstetrician/gynecologist.

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# AWARD RECIPIENTS

SATURDAY, APRIL 5 at 5:30 p.m.





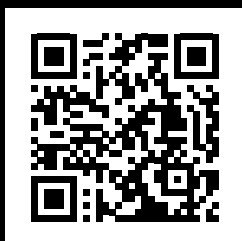
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