

# OL

## OPENLINES



# WHY?

### 03

#### Marriage and Medicine

Two UF Health physician assistants balance family and medicine.

### 04

#### Cover Story

Alex Parker, PhD, explores why clinicians and scientists engage in research.

### 07

#### Commitment to Compassion

Providing empathetic care through the compassionate weaning initiative.

# Recognizing Contributions to Patient Care, Education

UF Health is proud of its physicians and practices that have been recognized by local and national organizations over the past few weeks and months.

Healthgrades, which aims to inform health care consumers about clinical quality, recognized UF Health Jacksonville with excellence awards in critical care and in cranial neurosurgery at the close of 2018. We were the only hospital in Northeast Florida to receive those distinctions.

After verifying our Level I trauma center in 2018, the American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma selected Brian Yorkgitis, DO, for its Future Leaders Program, which offers in-depth training and mentoring opportunities to trauma and acute care surgeons who are fewer than five years removed from completion of their fellowship.

Two of our physician educators have also been recognized by their peers. Rui Fernandes, MD, and Salam Salman, MD, from the department of oral and maxillofacial surgery, each received International Educator Awards from the University of Florida International Center. Due in part to their efforts, the university was one of five institutions to receive the 2018 Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization. This award is given annually by the Association of International Educators.

On a more local note, UF Health Family Medicine and Pediatrics – New Berlin was voted Best Medical Group by readers of Folio Weekly in the annual Best of Jax competition. Congratulations to Medical Director Chris Scuderi, DO, and his entire team.

We like to give accolades when our physicians and staff are recognized by prestigious organizations. That tends to be when their stories land in these pages, but



the everyday work we do in providing excellent patient care to all those who pass through our doors is worthy of recognition, as well. Remember to recognize members of your team with words of encouragement each day. It truly is the quality of care we extend to our patients that helps us achieve our vision of being the region's most valued health care asset.

Sincerely,

Leon L. Haley Jr., MD, MHSA, CPE, FACEP  
CEO, UF Health Jacksonville

## APPLAUSE!

There are two ways to nominate staff who have exceeded expectations.

EMPLOYEES: Visit [UFHJax.org/applause](http://UFHJax.org/applause)

PATIENTS: Visit [UFHealthJax.org/applause](http://UFHealthJax.org/applause)

Please email [applause@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:applause@jax.ufl.edu) for more information about the Applause! program.







# Marriage AND MEDICINE

## Physician assistant couple shares how they manage work-life balance.

It comes as no surprise that juggling marriage, children and a career in medicine is a tough task. Jennifer and Michael Diana celebrated 16 years of marriage in 2018, and 17 years as physician assistants with UF Health. Through it all, they say teamwork has helped them thrive together.

Jennifer Diana, PA-C, a physician assistant at UF Health Family Medicine – Normandy, has always found joy in caring for others. While attending Barry University for physician assistant school, she met her husband, Michael Diana, PA-C, a physician assistant at UF Health Family Medicine – Merrill Road, who shares the same passion.

Jennifer's strong desire to have a family and a structured schedule made physician studies a perfect fit. Michael also looked forward to raising a family while maintaining a rewarding career.

"I have always wanted a big family and it has been a foremost priority for us," Jennifer said. "We came back to the Jacksonville area to set down roots close to home."

In addition to staying with the same primary care practices for all these years, the two have also worked under the same medical directors since the beginning.

The couple credits their nearly two decades with UF Health Jacksonville to the organization's stability and their comfortable practice schedule. The consistent hours allow for a balance between work and their family of three boys, even on the most hectic of days.

Professionally, Jennifer and Michael value patient relationships above all else. Through the years, these trusted bonds have formed with time and patience.

"As physician assistants, we get to spend quality time with patients and really focus on relationship building," Jennifer said. "I place a strong emphasis on patient education and work a lot on preventive care."

Jennifer has cared for entire families and watched children grow into adults during her time in family medicine. Michael sees adults and seniors in his practice setting.

"I enjoy working with a diverse population," Michael said. "I take pride in being a resource for my patients and helping with diabetes management, especially."

When it comes to helping patients better their health, the couple takes a similar approach.

"We work during each appointment to remind patients about the small changes they need to make to meet their health goals," Michael said. "It is so rewarding when you can tell a patient their lab test results have improved and see the genuine happiness on their face."

Although they sometimes discuss medicine and talk through patient management issues, they try to keep work and home life separate.

Michael notes Jennifer's ability as a master organizer has helped them to stay on top of their many calendars at home. From their own busy work schedules to the kids' school and extracurricular activities, they are committed as a team to make it all happen.

"We are able to plan ahead to take time off for school trips and family vacations," Jennifer said. "We feel very fortunate to lead a balanced life."

## New research dean wants faculty to ask themselves, “Why do I conduct research?”

Alexander Parker, PhD, walks around the UF Health Jacksonville campus with an enthusiasm that is nearly unmatched.

In meetings, he speaks passionately about ways to advance research on a campus that is already positioning itself as the region’s premier academic health center. To move things even further, Parker says faculty members should ask themselves a simple, yet powerful, question: “Why?”

Why do clinicians and scientists engage in research? Is it for money and recognition? Is it because of simple curiosity, or is there a deeper desire to leave a positive and lasting impact on the world?

Parker says the last reason is what the UF Health community must keep in mind because that is where true gratification and fulfillment exist.

“I want to help people explore their motivations for doing research,” said Parker, who recently left Mayo Clinic to become the new senior associate dean for research at the University of Florida College of Medicine – Jacksonville. “There is a lot of amazing research happening here. I can help build on this momentum and support a culture that knows why we do research. We want to ultimately practice better medicine and better public health.”

### A curious mind

Parker said he was an inquisitive child growing up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He always had a curious mind and didn’t like to take answers at face value, even if that sometimes got him in trouble with his parents and other adults. He couldn’t stop asking that one question: “Why?”

That curiosity persisted through grade school and into college, where he developed a great appreciation for research’s role as an agent of change.

“Early on, I figured out if you really want to touch a lot of lives and have a lasting impact, you do research,” Parker said. “You figure out answers to important questions and you move entire fields forward, not just one patient at a time. I love the idea of being able to have sustainable impact on much broader populations.”

For most of his career as an epidemiologist, Parker’s research has centered on urologic cancers, with a particular focus on improving ways to prevent, diagnose and treat kidney cancer. For example, he helped create a clinical scoring algorithm that allows urologists to provide better, more individualized management of

patients following surgery for kidney cancer.

“I spent 10 years working closely with our team of clinicians and scientists to better understand the various factors — molecular and otherwise — that can more accurately help determine how patients will fare after their surgery,” Parker said. “What makes us happy now aren’t the papers we wrote or the grants we received but, more importantly, that urologists can now use this information to provide better care.”

Parker has brought that mindset to UF Health Jacksonville, where a precision medicine movement is already underway. This field seeks to leverage technological advancements, primarily around genetic sequencing, to better tailor treatments to the specific needs of the individual patient. The opportunities do not end there, though.

“The approach doesn’t have to be restricted to just using genetics to help guide therapy. We want to explore any technology that gets us better, more personalized answers for patients,” said Parker, who is also director of precision medicine at UF Health Jacksonville. “Precision medicine can be applied across the spectrum of human disease, from prevention and diagnosis to treatment and even quality of life.”

# NEW RESEARCH FERVOR FOR UF HEALTH

### Research at UF Health

One recent afternoon, Parker found the nearest whiteboard to illustrate his vision for research on campus. After detailing the various reasons why people conduct research, he delved into what researchers do: They innovate, test, communicate and transform.

“We can use the problems we see every day in the clinic and community to generate innovative problem-solving ideas,” Parker said. “Then we must have a system that allows us to rigorously and efficiently test those ideas, share the information gained and take things to their logical conclusion. Implementing the change is the toughest part.”

Since arriving on campus, Parker has been meeting with department chairs and other leaders to better understand what role research plays in achieving their respective





# RCH DEAN BRINGS INNOVATION TO

clinical and academic goals. From those meetings, he has begun developing a broad plan to recruit and retain talent, invest in innovative technology and build a research culture of collaboration and partnership — in Jacksonville and beyond.

"We have to collaborate. The world is too big, the problems are too complex and the tools are too sophisticated to think any one person or any one institution can do anything by themselves," Parker said. "In large part, my interactions with physicians here are to make sure we're exploring questions that really matter. Are we making the best use of our people and resources?"

Parker spent more than 15 years at Mayo Clinic, where he held several leadership positions, including vice chair of health sciences research, associate director of the Center for Individualized Medicine, associate medical director of development and a board member of the Executive Operating

Team. He said coming to UF Health had appeal for many reasons, but primarily because of its mission that includes a dual focus on community and clinical care.

"There's a community here and a population we're responsible for," Parker said. "The sensibility of why we exist is around health and wellness, not just high-acuity, complex medical care."

Leon L. Haley Jr., MD, MHSA, CEO of UF Health Jacksonville and dean of the College of Medicine, was thrilled to welcome Parker to campus and believes he is helping the enterprise further its vision to be the region's most valued health care asset.

"As we continue to expand our research efforts, we sought someone with a dynamic background, a strong research portfolio and experience leading large-scale initiatives," Haley said. "Dr. Parker is the perfect fit and we are glad to have him here."





## NURSING RECOGNIZED AT 2018 STERLING CONFERENCE

### Quality improvement project leads to significant reduction in C-section infections

A strategic team formed to address cesarean section infection rates at UF Health Jacksonville was recently recognized for best customer impact at the 2018 Florida Sterling Annual Conference in Orlando.

In 2016, Labor and Delivery nurses noted an increase in readmissions due to surgical site infections following C-section deliveries. The unit formed the Bug Busters team to answer the question, "Why are postoperative C-section patients getting infections and how can we prevent them?"

To align with the hospital's strategic plan, the team sought to improve core measure performance by reducing readmission rates and preventable complications, as evidenced by decreased hospital-acquired infection rates.

The team includes Amanda Ratliff, MSN, RN; Stefanie Buchanan, BSN, RN; Danielle Jones, MSN, RN; Paula Malone, MSN, RN; Shannon Little, MSN, RN; and Johanna Thompson, MSN, RN.

Labor and Delivery has seen the infection rate decrease from an average of 8.7 out of 100 C-sections to a range of 0 to 1.4 out of 100 C-sections within seven months of implementing the updated procedures.

"Our team used multiple methods to trace and determine the potential root causes of the infections," said Ratliff, a clinical quality nurse leader. "After creating a process control system flowchart for

C-sections, we performed thorough chart reviews, unit assessments and conducted patient and staff surveys."

Nurses from various units put the plan into action by revising the labor and delivery protocols for the application of chlorhexidine, or CHG, on C-section patients. CHG is used for infection prevention due to its antimicrobial properties. A standardized practice has since been established to include two or more applications of CHG, patient education, surgical site dressing removal on the second postoperative day, evaluation of the surgical site prior to discharge and staff-assisted showers.

The Bug Busters presented their findings in the team showcase event at the Florida Sterling Conference in June. The team event allows groups from across the state to highlight problem-solving process improvement strategies.

Recognized as the nation's premier conference for practical learning in all areas of leadership and management systems, the Florida Sterling Conference is held annually. The event is hosted by the Florida Sterling Council, a public-private partnership serving Florida through assessment, training and recognition for performance excellence.

"We are honored by this opportunity to represent the tremendous work of nursing at UF Health Jacksonville and play a role in improving outcomes for our patients," Ratliff said.



“

It is our job to do right by the patient through adequate support and education when it comes to their care.

”

Ravindra Maharaj, MD

## COMMITMENT TO COMPASSION

**A multidisciplinary approach to provide dignified end-of-life care**

The most difficult moments in hospital care often involve the end-of-life decisions patients and family members must make. UF Health Jacksonville seeks to ensure those facing these circumstances receive empathetic support through an initiative called compassionate weaning.

Ravindra Maharaj, MD, a palliative care physician, launched the enhancement in hospital protocols relating to end-of-life care.

“We sought to apply our multidisciplinary approach to palliative care to improve quality of life for our patients and their families,” Maharaj said. “It is our job to do right by the patient through adequate support and education when it comes to their care.”

Maharaj enlisted Pamela Schauben, RPh, manager of inpatient pharmacy services, to assist in revising current procedures for our most critically ill patients.

“Dr. Maharaj and our entire team want to ensure our patients and their loved ones have the most comfortable experience possible,” Schauben said. “Having handled end-of-life care for my own family members, this is a very close and personal matter for me.”

When lifesaving measures are ineffective and attending physicians determine that the patient is dying, the palliative care team is consulted before the option of compassionate weaning is offered.

Patients who opt-in are moved to designated rooms and are removed from life-sustaining equipment. The rooms are much larger in order to accommodate family members, and the unit has fewer visitation restrictions. This allows for a more home-like atmosphere.

Patients and families benefit from a peaceful environment — free from the noisy monitoring alarms and interruptions found in most ICU settings. Nurses manage comfort measures to provide patients with a peaceful death.

Valerie Platt, DNP, division director of nursing specialty services, and Seth Osenkarski, MSN, a clinical quality nurse leader, developed guidelines and a workflow to prepare nurses.

“Providing care for our patients and their loved ones in a patient’s final hours is an honor,” said Platt.

Nursing staff in units where a transfer has been requested first obtain a butterfly bag from Osenkarski. The butterfly symbolizes the transition between life and death. The bag contains palliative care and hospice information, along with resources for the patient’s family. Staff work together to gather extra supplies, such as tissues, chairs and amenities to ensure the comfort of the grieving family.

A purple butterfly is placed on the outside of the patient’s door. The butterfly is a universal symbol of hospice care and notifies staff to check in frequently with family members to ensure all needs are being met.

“I believe all patients deserve the dignity of choosing their end-of-life journey,” said Osenkarski. “The designated Progressive Care Unit is an ideal setting due to the lower nurse-to-patient ratio and the availability of quiet rooms where families can gather to honor their loved one and grieve.”

# OL

## OPENLINES

### NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

April – Feb. 8  
May – March 8

Submit your copy and photos via  
email to [openlines@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:openlines@jax.ufl.edu).

.....

### EDITOR

Tripp Miller

### DESIGN & LAYOUT

Darcy Ladd

### PHOTOGRAPHER

Karel Danzie

### CONTRIBUTORS

Natalie Spindle  
Jesef Williams

.....



[UFHealthJax.org](http://UFHealthJax.org)

### PHOTO SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

We welcome photos that are taken or submitted by employees. Photos should be at least 3 megabytes (3MB) in image size to be published. Please try to take or submit photos that are clear (camera is held very still); not backlit (flash is used and/or light source is not behind the subject); and framed correctly (feet are not cut off and/or subject is not shown too far away). Employees are encouraged to arrange photography with the Media Center before an event to ensure quality. **Direct questions to [openlines@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:openlines@jax.ufl.edu) or call 244.9750.**

*Visit [OpenLines.UFHealthJax.org](http://OpenLines.UFHealthJax.org) to find current and past issues of Open Lines.*