Faculty Accomplishments

Dr. Alberto Ayala Honored

**Alberto Ayala, MD**, observed his final day of service with our Department on October 31. Dr. Ayala joined the faculty of our Department in 2005, after his retirement from a highly successful tenure at MD Anderson Cancer Center (MDACC)—a retirement from which he promptly returned to take on roles at MDACC as a consultant and at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) as a part-time Professor.

Dr. Ayala earned his medical degree in 1960 from the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León in Monterrey, Mexico. Following an internship at St. Joseph's Hospital in St. Joseph, Missouri, Dr. Ayala completed his residency training at UTMB's John Sealy Hospital and a fellowship at MDACC. Dr. Ayala joined the faculty of MDACC in 1968 as an Assistant Pathologist. Through hard work and tenacity, Dr. Ayala became well-
versed in all aspects of pathology. Dr. Ayala recalls performing over 400 autopsies a year at MDACC during this time. He gradually inherited multiple tumor boards from his colleagues at MDACC, becoming an invaluable consultant on difficult cases, including those involving brain tumors, as there were no formally trained neuropathologists at MDACC at the time.

Over a tenure spanning 32 years, Dr. Ayala served the faculty of the Department of Pathology at MDACC in a variety of roles, including Director of Surgical Pathology and Deputy Chair. Following his initial retirement in 2000, he was named Ashbel-Smith Professor Emeritus at MDACC. Upon joining our Department in 2005, Dr. Ayala became Deputy Chief of Pathology and received academic appointments at the level of Professor at the Houston Methodist Institute for Academic Medicine (now the Houston Methodist Academic Institute), Houston Methodist Research Institute, and Weill Cornell Medical College.

During his long and illustrious career, Dr. Ayala authored over 400 peer-reviewed publications and numerous books and book chapters. With his vast wealth of knowledge from which to draw, Dr. Ayala became such a prolific lecturer that he stopped documenting his lecture schedule in 2001.

Dr. Ayala is proud to name the recently retired Ashok Balsaver, MD, as a key mentor and colleague from when they were both fellows at MDACC. Throughout his long career, Dr. Ayala has mentored countless aspiring young pathologists, including our Department’s own Jae Ro, MD, PhD, whom Dr. Ayala has been honored to call both a colleague and a dear friend.

Dr. Ayala counts himself as fortunate to have had excellent colleagues in our Department over the years. He is especially proud of the strong female leadership in our Department, particularly that of Dina Mody, MD, Suzanne Powell, MD, and Mary Schwartz, MD, and their central role in establishing our incredibly successful graduate medical education programs.

In his well-earned retirement, Dr. Ayala plans to spend more time with his beloved wife Mary and children at their beach house in Galveston and ranch in Livingston, Texas.
A formal reception celebrating Dr. Ayala's lifetime of professional achievement was held December 2 at the Houston Marriott Medical Center.

Congratulations and best wishes for your retirement, Dr. Ayala!

"The Accidental Pathologist": Dr. Dina Mody Reflects on Forty Years of Service with Department

**Dina Mody, MD**, recently marked 40 years of service with our Department, an achievement made possible by dedication, hard work, and a touch of serendipity.

An exemplar in her field, Dr. Mody never intended to enter into the practice of pathology, thus earning herself the sobriquet of "The Accidental Pathologist." Following
Dr. Dina Mody immigrated to the United States in May 1981, settling in Houston, where her husband had accepted employment in the oil and gas industry.

Having been an internal medicine resident in India, pathology was not an area that Dr. Mody was interested in considering. Fate, however, had another idea on that June day. When Dr. Mody entered the Baylor College of Medicine offices for the next year’s residency application, she heard discussion about a pathology resident who had chosen not to begin at Baylor that July. Dr. Mody jumped on the opportunity to enter a program (any program!) that would begin that summer, and the Baylor office staff directed her to go to the Methodist Hospital to speak with the pathology residency coordinator.

Dr. Mody interviewed with Dr. Malcom McGavran of Methodist in Hindi (her third language, after English and Gujarati), telling him that she very much wanted to go into pathology so that she would not waste a year sitting at home. Dr. Mody gave the same "brutally honest" answer in her subsequent interviews with other pathologists in the department. Ultimately, she was accepted to the Baylor/Methodist residency program mere days before the start of orientation. Quickly, she discovered a true passion for the field, joining the faculty of Methodist following the completion of her residency training.

While Dr. Mody began her career as the Accidental Pathologist, she has distinguished herself as the Intentional Pathologist. Dr. Mody currently serves as Medical Director of Cytopathology and Director of the Cytopathology Fellowship. Dr. Mody has dedicated herself to service to others through her practice, and was honored in 2019 with the College of American Pathologists’ (CAP) Foundation’s
Gene and Jean Herbek Humanitarian Award for her innovative and unique contributions to the CAP See, Test, and Treat program for women in historically underserved communities.

Dr. Mody credits her background in clinical medicine for her success in relating to people holistically. She is grateful for her many mentors and colleagues throughout her years in our Department, especially Dr. Abe Ramzey, Dr. Harlan Spjut, and Dr. Mary Schwartz, and looks forward to the opportunity to continue to serve through her "accidental" vocation.

Congratulations, Dr. Mody!

**Dr. Chinnaswamy Jagannath and Colleagues Develop Novel Strategy for Tuberculosis Vaccine**

A team led by Chinnaswamy Jagannath, PhD, including colleagues and collaborators at the Houston Methodist Research Institute and Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine have developed a novel strategy for formulating a highly effective *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (Mtb) vaccine. Dr. Jagannath's research involved the creation of a mucosal bovine adenovirus-based Mtb vaccine that incorporates autophagy-mediated antigen presentation, thereby initiating enhanced T-cell response.

Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) is widely used as a vaccine against tuberculosis but has variable success in protecting against Mtb infection in pediatric and adult populations. Despite the routine vaccination of children with BCG, Mtb remains a leading cause of death worldwide. At this time, approximately one-third of the global population is infected with latent Mtb.

Of his team's success at enhancing the efficacy of the conventional BCG vaccine, Dr. Jagannath said: "It is vital because the majority of people in Mtb-endemic countries are already immunized with BCG."
Dr. Randy Olsen Runs 50K in Paris

Randall Olsen, MD, PhD, travelled to Paris (Texas, that is) in late September to run in his first-ever 50k road race. The 31-mile course incorporated a mix of surfaces and involved a bridge crossing over the scenic Red River.

Dr. Olsen is one of many runners in our Department, including Dr. Michael Greenwood, Dr. Thu Ngo, Dr. Andreanna Rivera, and Page Slocum, all of whom participated in the Chevron Houston Marathon or Aramco Half Marathon in the past. Dr. Olsen states, "I'm not an experienced runner, but I enjoy the challenge of endurance sports and the battle against oneself. I've used running, with a focus on fitness and nutrition, as my strategy to beat COVID stress."

Bon travail, Dr. Olsen!

Community News

Houston Methodist Clear Lake Hospital

Medical Director David Alrahwan, MD, reports:

Our laboratory volume has increased this year and we are currently recruiting for more positions, including a laboratory manager. The laboratory is keeping up with hospital demand for more testing and we are scheduled to install a new Roche Cobas analyzer by early next year 2022. Our laboratory department also managed to win first place at the annual "Trunk or Treat" hospital event, reflecting our culture of great teamwork and high spirits during the pandemic.
The HMCL Lab Team, dressed to thrill.

**Laboratory News**

**Donna Armylagos Receives American Society of Cytopathology Volunteer Appreciation Award**

Houston Methodist Hospital Manager of Cytology, Donna Armylagos, CT(ASCP), received the American Society of Cytopathology's (ASC) 2021 Volunteer Appreciation Award at the 69th Annual Scientific Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada. Created in 2018, the award recognizes an ASC member with outstanding leadership skills and an extraordinary commitment to the ASC's vision and mission.
Ms. Donna Armylagos receiving the 2021 ASC Volunteer Appreciation Award.

Ms. Armylagos has been a member of our Department since 2019. She has volunteered extensively with the College of American Pathologists' (CAP) See, Test, and Treat program, served as a CAP laboratory inspection team member, presented on gynecological health at the Día de la Mujer Latina, and been the co-author of several sets of guidelines written for the Houston Methodist Bioreference library.

Congratulations, Ms. Armylagos!

**New Educational Partnership with Weber State University Announced**

Our Department is pleased to announce a new program in conjunction with Weber State University (WSU) for students interested in obtaining certification as an American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) Technologist in Microbiology.
Medical Laboratory Science Program Director Tatia Feltman, MEd, worked together with the Houston Methodist Office of Graduate Medical Education and WSU to create the affiliation agreement.

This new affiliation will allow students from WSU to rotate through the HMH Microbiology Laboratory in order to meet the requirements to sit for the ASCP Technologist in Microbiology certification exam. Qualified students will have a bachelor's degree in a related field (e.g., biological science or chemistry) and will be given the opportunity to qualify to take the Technologist in Microbiology M(ASCP) certification examination from the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) via Route 3.

This four course independent study program aims to be an affordable and efficient option for students looking to enter the workforce as a medical laboratory professional.

Congratulations, all!

Team Spotlight: HMH Medical Hematology Laboratory Team

Houston Methodist Hospital's Medical Hematology Laboratory personnel are always available to provide technical assistance in the performance of bone marrow biopsy and aspiration, bone marrow harvesting, and routine hematology (i.e., cell counts and manual differential) testing in various outpatient areas. Bone marrow biopsy and aspiration procedures are also performed at the bedside for all applicable Houston Methodist inpatients. Clinical areas serviced include Bone Marrow Transplant, Hematology, and Oncology.

In 2020, team members Jasmin Davis, Lead MLS; Diep Nguyen, MLS; Ozorkwere Jones, MLS; Khadijat Abiola, MLT; and Candis Jackson, MLS, performed 53 bone marrow harvests, 925 bone biopsies, and 9,938 complete blood counts with automated differential, all of which were vital for providing the highest quality of care for our patients.
Thank you all for your outstanding work!

**Quantiferon Tuberculosis Testing Shifts to Microbiology Laboratory**

The HMH Microbiology Laboratory is excited to announce that QuantiFERON TB Gold Plus testing has gone live on the automated Diasorin Liaison XL instrument, effective November 15. This development allows for round-the-clock receipt of specimens for QuantiFERON IGRA testing from across the Houston Methodist system.

**Achievements and Milestones**

Congratulations to **Victoria Watson** and the Black Ties for Culture Employee Resource Group (ERG) for being Houston Methodist’s top fundraising team at the American Heart Association’s 2021 Heart Walk. Held on November 13 at the University of Houston’s TDECY Stadium, Ms. Watson and her ERG joined over 400 other Houston Methodist employees to support heart health. Black Ties for Culture raised over $3,800 of the $25,987 generated by Houston Methodist.

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Core Laboratory Medical Technologist **Colette Lanier** celebrated 39 years of employment with Houston Methodist Hospital.

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Core Laboratory Chief Medical Technologist **Joseph Noffsinger** celebrated 36 years of employment with Houston Methodist Hospital.

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Medical Technologist **Becky Christensen** celebrated 34 years of employment with Houston Methodist Hospital.
Medical Technologist Specialist **Bonnie Phillips** celebrated 33 years of employment with Houston Methodist Hospital.

Laboratory Medicine Manager **Leah Stewart** celebrated 30 years of employment with Houston Methodist Hospital.

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**Trainee News**

**Trainee Spotlight**

**Michelle Lin, MD**

**Hometown:** San Antonio, Texas  
**Education:** BA in Biochemistry and Cell Biology from Rice University; MD from Baylor College of Medicine

**Neesha Siriwardane, MD**

**Hometown:** Ruston, Louisiana  
**Education:** BS in Biomedical Engineering from Louisiana Tech; MD from Louisiana State Health Science Center
**Current Role:** PGY4 Resident/Chief Resident

**Why HMH?** I met HMH residents, including Dr. de la Garza Bravo and Dr. Duhon, at Baylor during medical school. Everyone had such great things to say about the program. I really love the resident culture and the supportive and collaborative environment that we have here.

**Fellowship Plans:** I was given the amazing opportunity to complete a Breast-Gynecologic fellowship between the second and third years of my residency. I am so grateful for being allowed the flexibility to tailor my training to my individual needs. I plan on entering a Surgical Pathology fellowship following the completion of my residency training.

**Fun Facts:** I have perfect musical pitch and play the piano, cello, and guitar. I really enjoy reading and solving the Sunday New York Times crossword.

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**Current Role:** PGY1 Resident

**Advice for Medical Students:** Find what you're passionate about, especially when choosing a field of interest. And make sure you always show up!

**Highlights of HMH so far:** I've enjoyed the tight-knit environment, getting to know everyone, and the opportunity to learn a lot.

**Fellowship Plans:** Right now, I'm considering both Cytopathology and Surgical Pathology fellowships.

**Fun Facts:** I'm Sri-Lankan American and own an American Bulldog named Ellie (that's her above!). I've been to eleven national parks so far. Big Bend is my favorite; recently I got engaged there!

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**Department Welcomes New Fellowship Coordinator**
We are pleased to welcome **Ramona (Mona) Abrego** as our new departmental Fellowship Coordinator. Ms. Abrego has been with Houston Methodist for 35 years, most recently serving in the Graduate Medical Education office as a Trainee Affairs Coordinator. Ms. Abrego embodies our Houston Methodist ICARE values and brings a wealth of knowledge to her new role with our Department.

Welcome, Ms. Abrego!

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**Trainees Take Part in Advocacy Efforts**

On October 12, **Drs. Lukas Cara, Sylvia Jang, Ashley Holloman, Dyron Allen**, and **Danice Torman** joined **Dr. Bekra Yorke** in virtual meetings with the offices of Senator John Cornyn and Congressman Dan Crenshaw, asking Congress to mitigate impending cuts in Medicare payments for pathologists' services, slated to take effect in 2022. These meetings were part of a College of American Pathologists' "virtual fly-in" event.

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**New Departmental Twitter Account is Live**

We are thrilled to announce the launch of the Department of Pathology and Genomic Medicine Twitter account, [@HMHPath](https://twitter.com/HMHPath)! We enthusiastically encourage your engagement with the account. Please share your exciting news regarding publications, accomplishments, article interviews, and technology or
equipment updates with us so that we may feature it. Any news or content suggestions should be sent to Dr. Heather McConnell or the Pathology Office of Academic Development.

**Faculty Appointments**

Ziad El-Zaatari, MD, received faculty appointments as Assistant Professor of Clinical Pathology and Genomic Medicine (HMAI), Assistant Clinical Member (HMRI), and Assistant Professor of Clinical Pathology and Laboratory Medicine (WCMC). Dr. El-Zaatari joined our Department in July 2021. He has been very active in the creation and curation of digital content for both the Texas Society of Pathologists and for the HMH Graduate Medical Education social media presence, including our new departmental Twitter account. Dr. El-Zaatari is also a member and upcoming Vice-Chair of the College of American Pathologists (CAP) Digital Content Committee.

Congratulations, Dr. El-Zaatari!

**Conferences & Events**

**USCAP 111th Annual Meeting:** March 19–24, 2022 in Los Angeles, California

**ACLPS Annual Meeting:** June 23–25, 2022 in Seattle, Washington

**AACC Annual Scientific Meeting and Clinical Lab Expo:** July 24–28, 2022 in Chicago, Illinois

**ASCP 100th Anniversary 2022:** September 7–9, 2022 in Chicago, Illinois

**CAP22:** October 2–11, 2022 in New Orleans, Louisiana

**Grand Rounds Schedule**
Watch for the 2022 Grand Rounds Schedule in the Winter 2021 issue of *The Laboratory Report*!

**OAD News**

The Pathology Office of Academic Development (OAD) of the Department of Pathology and Genomic Medicine is always here to assist department members with editing manuscripts, grants, posters, presentations, and more. We are available to meet, in person or virtually, to assess how we might assist you. Please contact our general email, pathologyoad@houstonmethodist.org or one of our scientific writers:

Sasha Pejerrey at spejerrey@houstonmethodist.org 713.441.5889

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There is no charge for the OAD’s services, and no project is too big or too small!

If you need help reducing percent overlap within a document for a specific journal requirement or reviewer feedback, please let us know! We have access to iThenticate and expertise in reducing overlap to whatever percent a particular journal may require.

**Faculty Publications**


Ogunboma OB, Matoso A, Cheng L, Shen S, Powell SZ, Osunkoya AO. Metastatic urothelial carcinoma to the brain, spinal cord and spine: A contemporary multi-


Choi JH, **Ro JY**. Mediastinal neuroblastoma, ganglioneuroblastoma, and ganglioneuroma: Pathology review and diagnostic approach. *Seminars in Diagnostic


