Welcome to the Spring 2021 Houston Methodist Hospital Department of Pathology and Genomic Medicine Newsletter: The Laboratory Report. If you have contributions or feedback for upcoming newsletters, please email us.

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Faculty Accomplishments

Dr. Balsaver Announces Retirement

Ashok Balsaver, MD, has announced his retirement at the end of June 2021. Dr. Balsaver has been an invaluable member of our Department since 2002, though Dr. Balsaver’s ties to Houston Methodist extend to his days as a trainee. Following the completion of his medical degree in 1960 from the Seth G.S. Medical College in Bombay (present-day Mumbai), India, Dr. Balsaver went on to serve as a resident in New York State and at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. Dr. Balsaver came to Houston in 1966 and then completed fellowships at MD Anderson Cancer Center (1966–1967) and Houston Methodist Hospital (1967–1968), where he spent one year as an Assistant Pathologist before embarking on two years of service in the United States Army as the Chief of Pathology at Irwin Army Hospital in Fort Riley, Kansas. Upon the
culmination of his military service in 1970, Dr. Balsaver returned to Houston, where he joined the staff of the Houston Diagnostic Clinic, serving as Senior Associate Physician from 1971 to 2001. In 2002, Dr. Balsaver rejoined the Houston Methodist family, and he served as a founding member of the Houston Methodist Physicians Organization upon its establishing in 2004. Dr. Balsaver is a member of numerous professional organizations, is a fellow of the College of American Pathologists and the American Society of Clinical Pathologists, and his contributions to our Department are numerous; however, perhaps Dr. Balsaver’s greatest achievement is the regard in which he is held by all of his colleagues throughout Houston Methodist. Following his retirement, Dr. Balsaver will spend more time with his family, including his seven grandchildren.

Please join our Department in celebrating Dr. Balsaver’s lifetime of contributions to pathology and our Department and wish him well in this next chapter of life.

Congratulations, Dr. Balsaver!

Department Members Selected for Membership on National Committee

Medical Director of Microbiology, S. Wesley Long, MD, PhD, and Pat Cernoch MT(ASCP)SM, SV, Manager of the Microbiology Laboratory, have been appointed to the Document Development Committee on Verification of Laboratory Automation of the Clinical Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI). The committee is comprised of a group of technical experts who develop consensus documents to standardize laboratory processes worldwide and includes representation from across government, industry, and health care.

Dr. Long and Ms. Cernoch each were selected based on their expertise in both microbiology and laboratory automation, specifically the successful rapid validation of the Microbiology Laboratory's BD Kiestra automated system.

Congratulations, Dr. Long and Ms. Cernoch on this recognition!

Community News
**Update from Houston Methodist Clear Lake Hospital**

Houston Methodist Clear Lake Hospital Medical Director **David Alrahwan, MD**, is happy to welcome new QA Specialist **Maegan Benbrook** to HMCL. Dr. Alrahwan reports that the HMCL Laboratory deployed two new Cepheid analyzers in late May 2021 for rapid SARS-CoV-2 testing. The Deer Park Emergency Care Center will soon deploy a Roche Liat analyzer, also for SARS-CoV-2 testing. Because SARS-CoV-2 specimen collection volumes have decreased, employee surveillance collections and symptomatic patient collections will be combined beginning in June. The HMCL Blood Bank supported nursing competency for Massive Transfusion Protocol at a nursing skills fair in early May and also hosted a very successful blood drive in late April that was completely booked with donors.

**Update from Houston Methodist Sugar Land Hospital**

Houston Methodist Sugar Land Hospital Medical Director **Seema Mullick, MD**, is happy to report that workload continues to increase to pre-pandemic levels and that the Laboratory is “steadily busy.”

**Department Members Participate in Newly Formed Employee Resource Groups**

As a part of its “Pathway to Unparalleled” initiative, Houston Methodist has launched its first group of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). ERGs are intended to cultivate a supportive and equitable work environment for all employees, especially those in historically underrepresented populations. Three Houston Methodist ERGs have already been formally established: Asian Heritage, Black Ties for Culture, and LGBTQ+ Allies.

Department member **Victoria “Vickie” Watson** is a founding member and current Chair of the Black Ties for Culture Group. Vickie has been an enthusiastic proponent of the ERGs, having already presented to her colleagues in early 2021 to share her experience with this new employee resource. Of the Black Ties for Culture Group, Vickie says “Black persons, (which includes the entire African diaspora) often have different perspectives based on our unique experiences and diverse cultures. Our goal for Black Ties for Culture is to listen to those various points of view, in order to better advocate for and improve the work environment for our Black
Sexually Transmitted Infections Testing Transitions to Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory

The Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory continues to expand its test offerings to support high-quality patient care throughout the Houston Methodist system. On April 15, 2021, molecular testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including *Chlamydia trachomatis*, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, and *Trichomonas vaginalis*, to aid in the diagnosis of chlamydial, gonococcal, and trichomoniasis infections, respectively, transitioned to the Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory at Houston Methodist Hospital. The new STI tests are performed on the recently acquired automated, high-throughput Panther instruments using transcription-mediated amplification technology. Assay development, clinical verification, and laboratory implementation of these new molecular tests was spearheaded by Molecular Validation Specialist Erika Walker, MLS and Molecular Specialist Holli Dale, MLS, under the guidance of Molecular Pathologist and Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory Associate Medical Director Jessica Thomas, MD, PhD, MPH.

Congratulations to the MDL team on this exciting milestone!

HBV Quantitative PCR, HCV Quantitative PCR, HCV Qualitative PCR, and HIV Quantitative PCR Testing Resumes In-House at HMH MDL
The Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory is pleased to announce that, effective June 8, the following tests have returned in-house: Hepatitis B Quantitative PCR (HBVQT), Hepatitis C Quantitative PCR (HCVQT), Hepatitis C Qualitative PCR (HCVL), and HIV Quantitative PCR (HIVQT).

**Sabrina Badgett, Chief MLS, and Molecular Validation Specialist Erika Walker, MLS,** collaborated on the assay and IT validations with Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory Medical Director Randall Olsen, MD, PhD, and Daisy Lee, Lab IT analyst. The MDL night shift team (**Sabrina Badgett, Chief MLS; Omar Halilah, MLS; Tony Nguyen, MLS; Dani DuFresne, MLS; Erick Gonzalez Ibarra, MLS; Imani Smith, MLA; Mimi Pongvachararak, MLS; and Mei Wu, MLS**) will run these four tests on the Abbott Alinity automated analyzer that was purchased last year.

Erika Walker, MLS, pictured with the Natu Puntachart, MLS, aliquoting Abbot Alinity instrument. Ms. Walkerplasma for the HCVQT. assisted Sabrina Badgett (**not pictured**) with the IT validations.

Sabrina Badgett, MLS, with the Abbot Alinity instrument.

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**Anita Farr Announces Retirement from Houston Methodist The Woodlands Hospital**

**Ms. Anita Farr,** Laboratory Director at Houston Methodist The Woodlands Hospital (HMTWH), has announced her retirement at the end of June. Ms. Farr has been with Houston Methodist since 1982 and has held various roles of increasing responsibility throughout the Houston Methodist system during her tenure.

Ms. Farr began her career at Houston Methodist as a Bench Technologist and rose to the role of Manager of the Core Laboratory and HLA. She has participated in many
successful initiatives at Houston Methodist. She also served as Laboratory Director at Houston Methodist Willowbrook Hospital for several years. In her role as Laboratory Director at HMTWH, Ms. Farr was responsible for the successful opening of the new HMTWH Laboratory. The Woodlands Laboratory continues to show steady growth in volume and service under her leadership.

Ms. Farr has been a tremendous asset to Houston Methodist over the years and we wish her the best of luck in her retirement.

Trainee News
Residency and Fellowship Graduates Honored by Department

Graduates from our Department’s Anatomic and Clinical Pathology (AP/CP) residency program and nine of our Department’s fellowship programs were honored at a departmental ceremony on June 3, 2021. Video of the ceremony, including the pronouncement upon graduates of the Houston Methodist “seal of approval” by Department Chair James M. Musser, MD, PhD, is available online.

The Houston Methodist Hospital Graduate Medical Education ceremony will occur on June 18, 2021, at 7 PM; because of COVID-19 precautions, this ceremony will once again be held virtually. For more information on how to view the HMH GME graduation, please contact Ginger Jozwiak.
2020–2021 Program Graduates

**AP/CP Residency**
Ahmed Shehabeldin, MD
Tiffany Sheu, MD

**Breast-Gyn Pathology Fellowship**
Michelle Lin, MD

**Clinical Chemistry Fellowship**
Zhicheng Jin, PhD

**Cytopathology Fellowship**
Chiraag Gangahar, MD
Kent Swimley, MD

**GU-Medical Kidney Fellowship**
Harmanjot Singh, MD

**Hematopathology Fellowship**
Jacob Armstrong, MD
Fadi Alakeel, MD

**Selective Hematologic Pathology Fellowship**
Jessica Tomsula, MD

**Molecular Genetic Pathology Fellowship**
(Graduation Date: August 24, 2021)
Debbie Walley, MD

**Neuropathology Fellowship**
Alejandro (Alex) Perez, MD

**Surgical Pathology Fellowship**
Ziad El-Zaatari, MD
Ashley Garcia, DO
Do Hwan Kim, MD
Congratulations to all of our graduates!

2021–2022 Chief Residents and Chief Fellow Announced

Congratulations to our 2021–2022 Chief Residents, Michelle Lin, MD, and Jim Hsu, MD, PhD, and 2021–2022 Chief Fellow, Ashley Holloman, MD. Many thanks to our outgoing Chiefs Residents, Tiffany Sheu, MD, and Lukas Cara MD, and outgoing Chief Fellow, Jessica Tomsula, MD, for their hard work and dedication during the past year.

Dr. Michelle Lin  Dr. Jim Hsu  Dr. Ashley Holloman

Faculty Appointments
Weill Cornell Appointments
Conferences & Events

**AACC Annual Scientific Meeting and Clinical Lab Expo**: September 26–30, 2021 in Atlanta, Georgia

**CAP21**: September 25–28 in Chicago, Illinois

**ASCP 2021**: October 27–29 in Boston, Massachusetts

Grand Rounds Schedule

**September 8, 2021**
Daniel J. Brat, MD, PhD
Magerstadt Professor and Chair
Department of Pathology
Feinberg School of Medicine
Northwestern University

**October 5, 2021**
Sanjay Mukhopadhyay, MD
Department of Pathology
Cleveland Clinic
OAD NEWS

The Office of Academic Development (OAD) of the Department of Pathology and Genomic Medicine is available and fully staffed during the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic 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 or 713.441.5889; Adrienne Winston at awinston@houstonmethodist.org or 713.441.3395; or Heather McConnell at hmcconnell@houstonmethodist.org or 346.238.4346. 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.

Featured Faculty

Paul Christensen, MD

Hometown: Gunnison, Utah

Education: BS in Computer Science from Brigham Young University; MD from UT McGovern Medical School
Dr. Paul Christensen

Current Role: Staff Pathologist

Family/Hobbies: Married to a dentist. Together, they have a 1-year-old daughter. Enjoys outdoor activities, especially skiing and golfing. Currently learning new cooking skills with HelloFresh.

Advice for Trainees: Learn to use a Pivot Table

Dr. Christensen joined the Department as a faculty member in July 2020. Dr. Christensen completed his residency in our Department, as well as fellowships in Clinical Chemistry and Clinical Informatics. He was the inaugural Clinical Informatics fellow for our program, which was the first of its kind in Texas. While an undergraduate, Dr. Christensen excelled during two software engineering internships he completed at Intel Corporation. He ultimately entered medical school to pursue his goal of becoming a physician. Following courses in histology and an elective rotation in pathology at Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital in Houston, Dr. Christensen felt drawn to pathology because of the people, the content, and the overall positive experience. During his residency at HMH, Dr. Christensen learned about the emerging field of informatics. As a trainee he was involved in numerous informatics-related projects, including the creation of the Houston Methodist Variant Viewer, an application that facilitates the interpretation of next-generation sequencing data, and the Respiratory Pathogen Epidemiology Snapshot, a public facing website that tracks the flu and other respiratory pathogens in real-time. In his role on our faculty as an informatics specialist, Dr. Christensen continues to be involved in a wide array of research projects and he loves helping pathologists to answer questions with data.

**Dr. Powell Honored with National Recognition for Academic Pathology Article**
Departmental Vice-Chair for Education and Chief of Neuropathology, Suzanne Z. Powell, MD, and co-authors have received national recognition for their recently published article "Evidence-Based Alignment of Pathology Residency with Practice II: Findings and Implications." The article presents findings from a four-year series of surveys from new-in-practice pathologists ascertaining the importance of a variety of practice areas during residency training.

The publication has received critical acclaim, garnering praise from Chair and Professor of Pathology at the Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell, James M. Crawford, MD, PhD, as a "gorgeous paper from a great team."

Congratulations, Dr. Powell!

Faculty Publications


El-Zaatari ZM, Thomas JS, Divatia MK, Shen SS, Ayala AG, Monroig-Bosque P, Shehabeldin A, Ro JY. Pleomorphic giant cell carcinoma of prostate: Rare tumor with unique clinicopathological, immunohistochemical, and molecular
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehpc.2021.200488


Duhon DJ, Anton CR, Ro JY, Venta LA, Anton RC, Schwartz MR. Osseous metaplasia in hemangiomas of the breast: Case reports and literature review.


**Hao S**, Lu X, Gong Z, Bassett RL, Hu S, Konoplev SN, et al. The survival impact of *CKS1B* gains or amplification is dependent on the background karyotype and *TP53*...
deletion status in patients with myeloma. *Modern Pathology*. 2021 Feb;34(2):327-335. [https://doi.org/10.1038/s41379-020-00669-7](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41379-020-00669-7)


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