

CONNECTIVE ISSUE



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CONNECTIVE ISSUE

Contributors

Trenna Brusky, Communications Manager, College of Medicine

Sherry Buckler, Director of Advancement, College of Medicine

Debra Haubrich, Communications Coordinator, College of Medicine

Kelsey Kougiya, Alumni and Community Program, College of Medicine

Amanda Woroniuk, Communications Coordinator, College of Medicine

Design Template

Deanna Miller, Deanna Miller Design

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Contact:

College of Medicine
University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon Campus

107 Wiggins Road
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5E5

Regina Campus

Regina General Hospital
1440 14th Avenue
Regina, SK S4P 0W5



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ON THE COVERS



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Mousumi Bhowmik, graduate student in the Department of Anatomy, Physiology and Pharmacology.

Photography by David Stobbe



Back cover photo:
School of Rehabilitation Science students gain experience through both classroom learning and clinical placements.

Photography by David Stobbe

Send us your ideas

This magazine shares successes and news about the College of Medicine. Please email medicine.communications@usask.ca with ideas for future stories.

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DEAN'S MESSAGE



Dr. Sarah Forgie (MD). Photo by Nicole Romanoff

I am extremely proud of the College of Medicine and excited for our future.

In my first months as dean, I was focused on building connections and learning. I travelled to sites across the province, engaged with our government partners and donors, collaborated with our many departments and units, and celebrated with our teams and students. One thing quickly became apparent, our college is excelling because of our amazing people and our partners. It is the people that drew me here and I am continually reminded that you are our biggest asset.

Our college community should be very proud of our many accomplishments in recent years. We are conducting critical research with broad benefits. We are committed to being a leader among Canadian medical schools with regard to diversity and inclusion. We are the College of Medicine for Saskatchewan—training and developing this province's next generation of scientists and health-care professionals in and for communities across the province. We will have an even greater impact with the implementation of three new master's-level programs and the expansion of our medical school.

I am enjoying our collaborative work on our college's new strategic planning process, and I look forward to broader engagement. This process will chart a path for what we will accomplish together.

I would like to thank the Government of Saskatchewan and our individual and corporate donors. Your ongoing support is critical for our students, programs and ability to perform transformational research. I would also like to thank Dr. Preston Smith (who completed his role as dean in 2023) and Dr. Marilyn Baetz (who was the interim dean for six months in 2024) for their leadership.

The University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine is a gem. From bench to bedside, from clinics to communities, we are enhancing health and wellness across Saskatchewan and beyond. Together, we are truly making a difference. ♥

Dr. Sarah Forgie
Dean, College of Medicine

Dermatology residency training begins at USask College of Medicine Regina campus

Following years of collaborating with other universities to train dermatology residents for Saskatchewan, the College of Medicine welcomed its first resident into its newly accredited dermatology program in July 2024.

“The new dermatology program lays a strong foundation to address health human resources in dermatology for our province,” said Dr. Anurag Saxena (MD), associate dean of Postgraduate Medical Education.

The program will primarily be centered at the college’s Regina Campus and led by Dr. Karen Holfeld (MD), Regina division head, and Dr. Brittany Waller (MD), assistant professor in dermatology. ♥



Medical residents at the Regina Centre Crossing Family Medicine Unit. Photo by Kristen McEwen

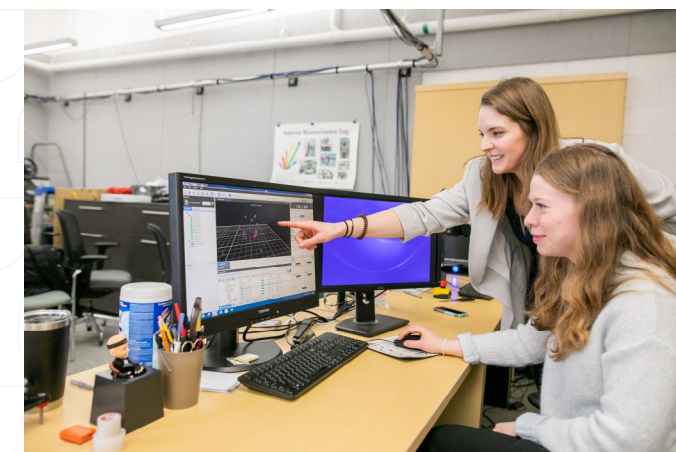


The Good Medicine People space in the Health Sciences Building. Photo by David Stobbe

Good Medicine People space opens

An important new space in the USask Health Sciences Building will help to improve the relationship between the health-care system and First Nation, Métis and Inuit. The grand opening of the Canadian Foundation for Innovation Good Medicine People space was celebrated in March 2024.

The space aims to create a culturally safe environment for Indigenous students, provide opportunities for health science learners to practice cultural safety, advocacy, equity and address issues like racism and reconciliation; and share Indigenous worldviews. ♥



Dr. Angelica Lang (PhD) (left) with the Canadian Centre for Rural and Agricultural Health works with MD student Vivian Heinrichs. Photo by Christina Weese.

USask breast cancer research targets post-treatment function, rehabilitation

Dr. Angelica Lang (PhD) and her research team are testing movement and functional abilities for patients’ post-surgical treatment of breast cancer. The project received \$348,076 over four years from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Project Grant program.

Her research explores relationships between types of surgeries and subsequent movement pattern alterations, as well as their implications for post-surgery rehabilitation. Lang said patients who have had surgical treatment for breast cancer can experience issues with pain, range-of-motion and secondary injuries afterwards.

Lang is an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine and the Canadian Centre for Rural and Agricultural Health. ♥

First of its kind Virtual Health Hub to enhance rural and remote healthcare

An Indigenous-led Virtual Health Hub is being planned on Whitecap Dakota First Nation land south of Saskatoon. The facility will function in collaboration with the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

The Virtual Health Hub, the first in Canada, is a Remote Presence Technology (RPT) initiative that will be supported by the College of Medicine – Northern Medical Services, and Dr. Ivar Mendez (MD, PhD), a pioneer in the utilization of RPT.

“Virtual Health Hub will bring state-of-the-art virtual care technologies to provide healthcare to the most underserved populations in Saskatchewan,” Virtual Health Hub Director Dr. Mendez said. “This unique and highly innovative facility will bring Saskatchewan to the leadership of virtual healthcare delivery in Canada and globally.” ♥



Sod-turning ceremony at future site of Virtual Health Hub facility at Whitecap Dakota Nation in May 2024. Photo supplied by the Virtual Health Hub



USask researchers Dr. Changiz Taghibiglou (left) and Dr. Sara Mardanisamani (right) are developing a new non-invasive screening tool for Alzheimer's disease using AI. *Photo by Erin Matthews*

USask spearheads AI-driven detection of early Alzheimer's through eye screenings

Researchers Dr. Changiz Taghibiglou (PhD) and Dr. Sara Mardanisamani (PhD) are developing a new, non-invasive AI screening tool for those at risk for Alzheimer's disease.

The project aims to develop an AI algorithm that could detect early signs of Alzheimer's disease using retina eye scans. The interdisciplinary project includes researchers from neuroscience, computer science and medicine. The project received a \$150,000 Impact Grant as part of the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF) Solutions Program.

Taghibiglou and Mardanisamani are from the Department of Anatomy, Physiology and Pharmacology. ♥

Support for first of their kind health care training programs in Saskatchewan

The Government of Saskatchewan announced an investment of approximately \$8.1 million to establish two new health-care training programs at USask.

The occupational therapy (OT) and speech-language pathology (SLP) training programs will be two-year masters programs that will each accept up to 40 students per year. The programs have a targeted start date of fall 2026.

OTs and SLPs provide vital health services to communities throughout the province, including children, seniors, and people with disabilities, injuries or illnesses. Under these new programs, students will participate in clinical placements as early as their first year of studies, which will expose them to the health-care sector sooner. ♥



Thanks to Government of Saskatchewan funding, SK students will have new health-care training options available in the province. *Photo by David Stobbe*



Dr. Sarah Forgie (MD) is the new dean of the College of Medicine. *Photo by Nicole Romanoff*

New dean brings a people focus to USask's College of Medicine

A pediatrician, scholar, and esteemed educator, Dr. Sarah Forgie (MD) joined USask as the new dean of the College of Medicine. She officially began her five-year term on July 1, 2024.

Forgie came to USask from the University of Alberta where she served as chair of the Department of Pediatrics in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, a professor in the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, and a pediatric infectious disease physician at the Stollery Children's Hospital. She succeeds Dr. Preston Smith (MD), who departed the role in January, and Dr. Marilyn Baetz (MD), who stepped in as interim dean.

"It is the people that drew me to the College of Medicine. I am excited to build connections and an engaged community within the college, the university, and beyond," said Forgie. ♥

Alumnus receives USask Lifetime Achievement Award

Dr. Jim Dosman (MD'63) was honoured with a 2024 USask Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his influential work in agricultural safety and rural health. Dosman is considered the "Father of Agricultural Medicine" in Canada for his contributions to the health and wellbeing of patients in Saskatchewan and beyond.

A highly regarded clinician-scientist, Dosman recognized a need in his home community related to health and safety in the agricultural industry and began investigating the impacts of respiratory diseases in farm environments. He put his research into action, raising awareness and developing programs to prevent and treat agricultural-related health conditions. ♥



Dr. Dosman was honoured at the annual awards gala on October 21, 2024 at the Remai Modern. *Photo by David Stobbe*

Advancing multiple sclerosis research

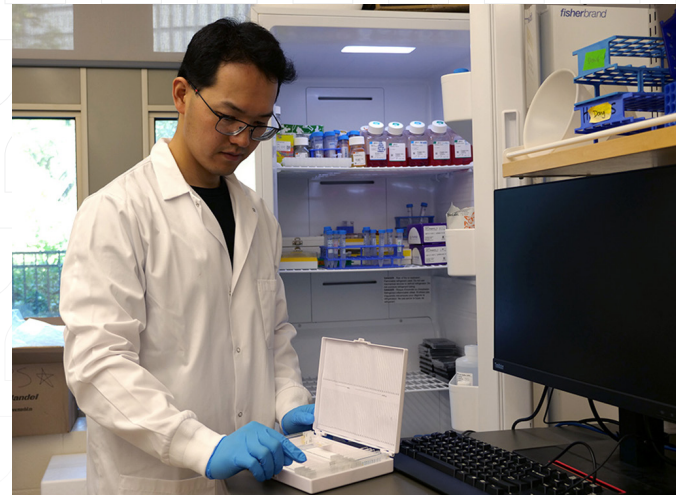
Two USask researchers received a combined \$599,000 in funding from the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF) and Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Canada to advance their work on multiple sclerosis research.

Dr. Michael Levin (MD) and his team are targeting neurodegeneration in MS, while Dr. Sarah Donkers (PhD) and her team are working with Canadian health care providers to develop resources aimed at improving physical activity for people with MS.

Levin (MD) is the Saskatchewan MS Clinical Research Chair and professor of neurology, and Donkers (PhD) is an associate professor in the School of Rehabilitation Science. ♥



From left: Dr. Michael Levin (MD) and Dr. Sarah Donkers (PhD). *Photos submitted*



Dr. Jeff Dong (PhD), researcher in USask's College of Medicine, looks at slides in his lab in the Health Sciences building. *Photo by Matt Olson*

New USask research into aging-related cell damage receives CIHR funding

Researcher Dr. Jeff Dong (PhD) is exploring the mechanisms behind how aging damages cells in the brain and nervous system—leading to the formation of chronic lesions in the brain or the spine that are part of multiple sclerosis (MS).

By better understanding that mechanism, Dong believes his group can learn ways to better address progressive MS, which is the type of MS that becomes increasingly debilitating with age.

The project received more than \$1 million from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Project Grant program. Dong is a research scientist in the Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology. ♥

PGME global training fellowship

A new USask fellowship is helping advance medical education and address health needs around the world. The Global Orthopedic Surgery One-Year Training Program provides specialized training for physicians, giving them the skills needed to improve care in their communities.

The program is directed toward orthopedic residents training in under-resourced areas of the globe. The fellowship began as a joint endeavor between the Broken Earth Charity and the College of Medicine's Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME) Office. So far, two physicians from Haiti have participated in this fellowship. ♥



Dr. Anurag Saxena (MD), Dr. Peterly Philippe (MD) and Dr. Huw Rees (MD). Dr. Philippe is the inaugural fellow in the program. *Photo submitted*



In September, the Waniska Indigenous Centre hosted the first community launch for the Journeys to Wellness: Prairie Hepatitis C Roadmap at HIV Edmonton. Elder Russel graciously opened the event, creating a welcoming and reflective atmosphere to share the knowledge and insights that shaped this essential hepatitis C resource. *Photo submitted*

Innovative Hepatitis C roadmap aims to boost access to care in the Prairies

A new evidence-based resource has been launched to help eliminate hepatitis C as a public health threat in the Prairie provinces.

The 'Journeys to Wellness: Prairie Hepatitis C Roadmap' is the result of a two-year project spearheaded by the Waniska Indigenous Centre, based out of Pewasewkwan (the Indigenous Wellness Research Group) at USask.

The Roadmap contextualizes the Canadian Network on Hepatitis C (CanHepC) Blueprint to Inform Hepatitis C Elimination Efforts in Canada and was developed through a lived experience and community lens. The Roadmap assesses the context, challenges and enablers to hepatitis C care and suppression, and includes priorities to address the hepatitis C wellness journey in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. ♥

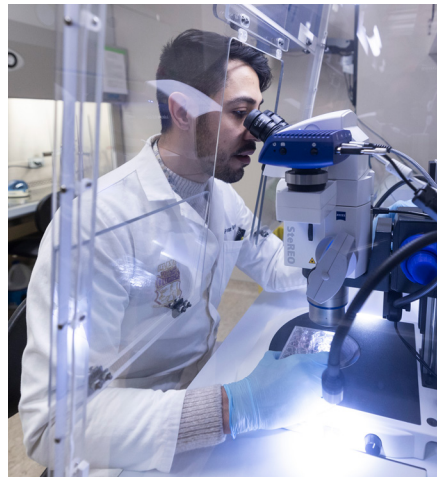
College of Medicine strategic achievements

The College of Medicine has concluded its 2017-2025 Strategic Plan. Considerable progress has been made across the seven pillars, including the following highlights:

RESEARCH CAPACITY

Leverage expertise and opportunities while performing research across the breadth of biomedical sciences, clinical medicine, health systems, and health of populations to create an environment where research can excel.

- Recruited 47 faculty members, including 37 early career researchers and 14 top-tier research chairs.
- Increased the number of awarded Tri-Agency grants—37 in 2016/17 to an average of 63 per year during the strategic plan period.
- Launched the revised biomedical science program in collaboration with the College of Arts and Science.
- Supported over 200 clinical trials through the Clinical Trials Support Unit.



Graduate student, Omar Morales, from the Department of Anatomy, Physiology, and Pharmacology. *Photo by David Stobbe*



Students in the Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology. *Photo by David Stobbe*

QUALITY EDUCATION

Enhance quality and methods of teaching, learning and scholarship. Focus education and training to develop clinicians that excel at meeting the needs of the province, are culturally competent, and are imparted with leadership ability to drive health system transformation.

- All undergraduate-, postgraduate- and continuing medical education programs remain fully accredited.
- Expanded teaching and learning opportunities at our Regina Campus—students can complete their four-year medical degree in Saskatoon or Regina.
- Continue to grow learning opportunities in rural and remote areas, supported by the first Associate Dean of Rural Medicine.
- Established education programs to support faculty development (e.g., the Clinician Educator Diploma, Masters in Education) and continuing medical education.

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Address the priority health concerns of the communities the college is mandated to serve, incorporating authentic community engagement and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Focus on equity and community engagement by interweaving social accountability throughout the college's operations.

- Committed to being a leader among Canadian medical schools in diversity and inclusion.
- Implemented admissions approaches to draw applicants that reflect Saskatchewan's population.
- Established the Social Justice Focus Community Council.
- Selected as the only Canadian medical school to participate in the Anti-Racist Transformation in Medical Education program.
- Established the Department of Indigenous Health and Wellness—the first department of its kind in a Canadian medical school.
- Created welcoming and cultural spaces including the Good Medicine People space.
- Established and renewed first research chair in Indigenous health and wellness.



Students participate in a simulation at the Swift Current site. *Photo by Davis Frerichs*



SRS Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator Liz Durocher and MPT student Hannah Courtoreille in the Good Medicine People space. *Photo by David Stobbe*

INDIGENOUS HEALTH

Respond to the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Report and work in a mutually beneficial and collaborative manner with the Indigenous peoples of Saskatchewan to define and address the present and emerging health needs in Indigenous communities.

- Established the Department of Indigenous Health and Wellness—the first department of its kind in a Canadian medical school.
- Created welcoming and cultural spaces including the Good Medicine People space.
- Established and renewed first research chair in Indigenous health and wellness.



Department of Indigenous Health and Wellness opening celebration in 2023. *Photo by Paige Bell*

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

Focus on support, development and engagement of all faculty members to foster mutually beneficial relationships and empower faculty members as role models for future clinicians and scientists.

- Increased the number of medical faculty by over 200%.
- Updated promotional standards to recognize medical faculty academic contributions. Over 135 faculty achieved a promotion to associate or full professors since 2019—80% of which are medical faculty.
- Strengthened staff and faculty recognition by introducing 12 new awards and boosting nominations for USask and national awards.
- Established a Regina-campus based Faculty Engagement Director.
- Worked with the Saskatchewan Health Authority to lead 16 provincial department head and 30 leader searches and reviews.



Faculty, leaders and SHA partners at the provincial department head forum. *Photo by Catherine Delaney*

ENABLERS

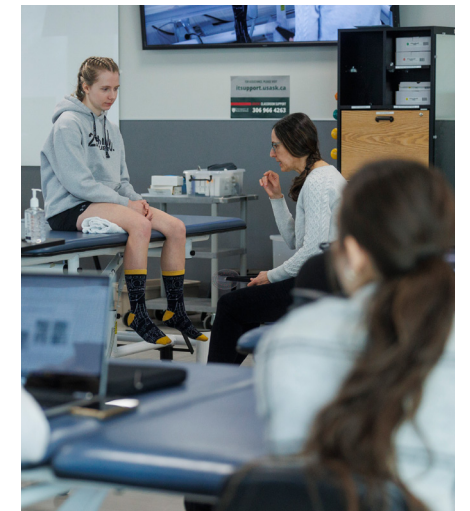
Support the mission and priorities of the College of Medicine.

- Restructured the college funding model with the provincial government.
- Received \$37.9 million in charitable gifts to support students and research.
- Launched the new Alumni and Community Program.
- Provided project management support for key initiatives including provincial partnerships, new and expanded programs, and academic program accreditations.

SCHOOL OF REHABILITATION SCIENCE

Establish and implement the School of Rehabilitation Science.

- Established the School of Rehabilitation Science.
- Expanded the physical therapy program from 40 to 55 seats.
- Received funding for occupational therapy and speech-language pathology programs, slated to begin in fall 2026.
- Advanced initiatives and strengthened education and research related to Indigenous content and approaches with guidance from the nistotamawin circle.



SRS students participate in a clinical lab. *Photo by David Stobbe*

DEFINING OUR FUTURE...

The college has launched our new strategic planning exercise.

In 2025 we will connect with a range of stakeholders to create our path for the next five years.

Past present and future: Celebrating 60 years of rehabilitation science at USask

The College of Medicine's School of Rehabilitation Science is celebrating six decades of impact and contributions to high-quality physical therapy education and research in Saskatchewan.

AMANDA WORONIUK

Since its humble beginnings at the Saskatoon airport, the School of Rehabilitation Science at the University of Saskatchewan (USask) has been a cornerstone of high-quality physical therapy education and research for students from across the province.

The school, through its focus on interprofessional education, innovative research and evidence-based practice, contributes to clinical care and improves the health of people throughout Saskatchewan. Almost 80 per cent of Saskatchewan's physical therapists are graduates of the school.

On May 23, 2025, the school will mark its 60th anniversary and will welcome back alumni, faculty, staff and friends to commemorate the occasion.

"It's an opportunity to celebrate our past and our present—where we're at, but also our future," said Dr. Brenna Bath (PhD), director of the school. "We're in an exponential growth phase right now and we're really changing. But we've also seen substantial change over the last 60 years. You can see that in our history."

The school trains the next generation of physical therapy clinicians and rehabilitation science researchers.

Photo by David Stobbe

Early beginnings

The university launched a two-and-a-half-year diploma program in physiotherapy in 1965. That year, there were 20 students enrolled. In the 1970s, the program transitioned to a bachelor's degree and, in 1976, the School of Physical Therapy was established within the College of Medicine.

In 2007, the program evolved to a Master of Physical Therapy degree admitting 40 students per year to address the demand for a professional physical therapy program at the master's level. The number of seats in the program has increased over the years, and as of 2023, 55 students are admitted annually.

In 2018, the school changed its name to the School of Rehabilitation Science to reflect the broad range of rehabilitation science research and interprofessional education, and as a signal of the intent to eventually house other rehabilitation profession programs, including speech-language pathology and occupational therapy.

Over the years, the school's name isn't the only thing that has changed. The school moved from its original buildings at the airport to USask's campus—first to St. Andrew's College in 1972 then to its current location in the Health Sciences Building in 2016.

Beyond teaching

In addition to the current Master of Physical Therapy program, the school is "punching above its weight" when it comes to research, according to Bath. Despite having a relatively small faculty complement, there are a number of master's and doctorate students and other research trainees pursuing advanced research training under the supervision of faculty members.

"Our faculty and their collaborative teams have really gone above and beyond in terms of research success, beyond the traditional metrics to actually implementing new ways of care, and different service models that improve access to different populations that traditionally have not had access," explained Bath.

Bath said that access includes delivering care to rural, remote and Indigenous communities, and reaching people with a range of health conditions through different online virtual care platforms.

Bath said the school is also a leader in the areas of Indigenization and decolonization. The school also has an active nistotamawin circle (formally known as the Indigenous Engagement Working Group) and an Indigenous initiatives co-ordinator (the first-of-its-kind in rehabilitation programs in Canada). In addition, the school has connections with Indigenous communities through research and outreach activities, led by faculty who have built relationships over many years and are learning with and from these Indigenous communities.

Launch of new programs

Thanks to a Government of Saskatchewan funding announcement in the spring of 2024, the school will launch master's level programs in speech-language pathology and occupational therapy—both with targeted start dates in 2026, pending all required university-level approvals. After decades of advocacy for these new programs in Saskatchewan, Bath said this is reason to celebrate.

"We're looking forward to having those programs within the School of Rehabilitation Science. It really has been a long-standing vision to have multiple interprofessional programs in rehab science under one roof."

As the school continues to expand its offerings, Bath expects rapid expansion to continue.

"We're going to be ramping up to build our staff and faculty complement for the new programs, and there is going to be a real push over the next couple of years," she said. "In five years, I would anticipate having the two new programs—occupational therapy and speech-language pathology—fully operational and accredited alongside the physical therapy program. As well, expanding the reach and impact of rehabilitation science through new master's and doctoral programs."

Celebrating our community

Collaboration between the school and the public and private sectors is critical, said Bath. Strong partnerships are important to the school's success. These partnerships ensure students receive high-quality education and learning opportunities and meet the program's requirements for entry into practice when they graduate.

"We have many important partners in the clinical community," said Bath. "Our students go out into a range of public and private health facilities and community-based organizations. In the last year, we've been piloting several new and innovative placements for our students. For example, we have students going into West Winds Primary Care Clinic to train alongside family medicine residents and students providing enhanced programming for neurological populations at the Saskatoon Field House."

Bath highlighted how the support the school receives from the clinical community and alumni is crucial. Students benefit from placements where they put theory into practice and are supervised by practising physical therapists and other health-care providers in and around Saskatchewan.

Donors also play an important role when it comes to the student experience and their success in the program. The Master of Physical Therapy program is intensive, which makes it challenging to balance work and studies. Having access to student scholarships and bursaries is very beneficial for USask students.

"That is a really important part of our program, an important part of our student experience, and we are so grateful for that," she said. "We also have long-standing relationships with the physiotherapy provincial organizations—the Saskatchewan Physiotherapy Association, the Saskatchewan College of Physical Therapists—and, in more recent years, partnerships and engagement with the corresponding professional and regulatory bodies, in speech-language pathology and occupational therapy."

Bath emphasizes the vital role alumni have played in the school's continued success and looks forward to seeing many of them at the anniversary celebration this May.

"We really hope we have a phenomenal turnout of alumni at the event in whatever capacity they feel like they can join," said Bath.

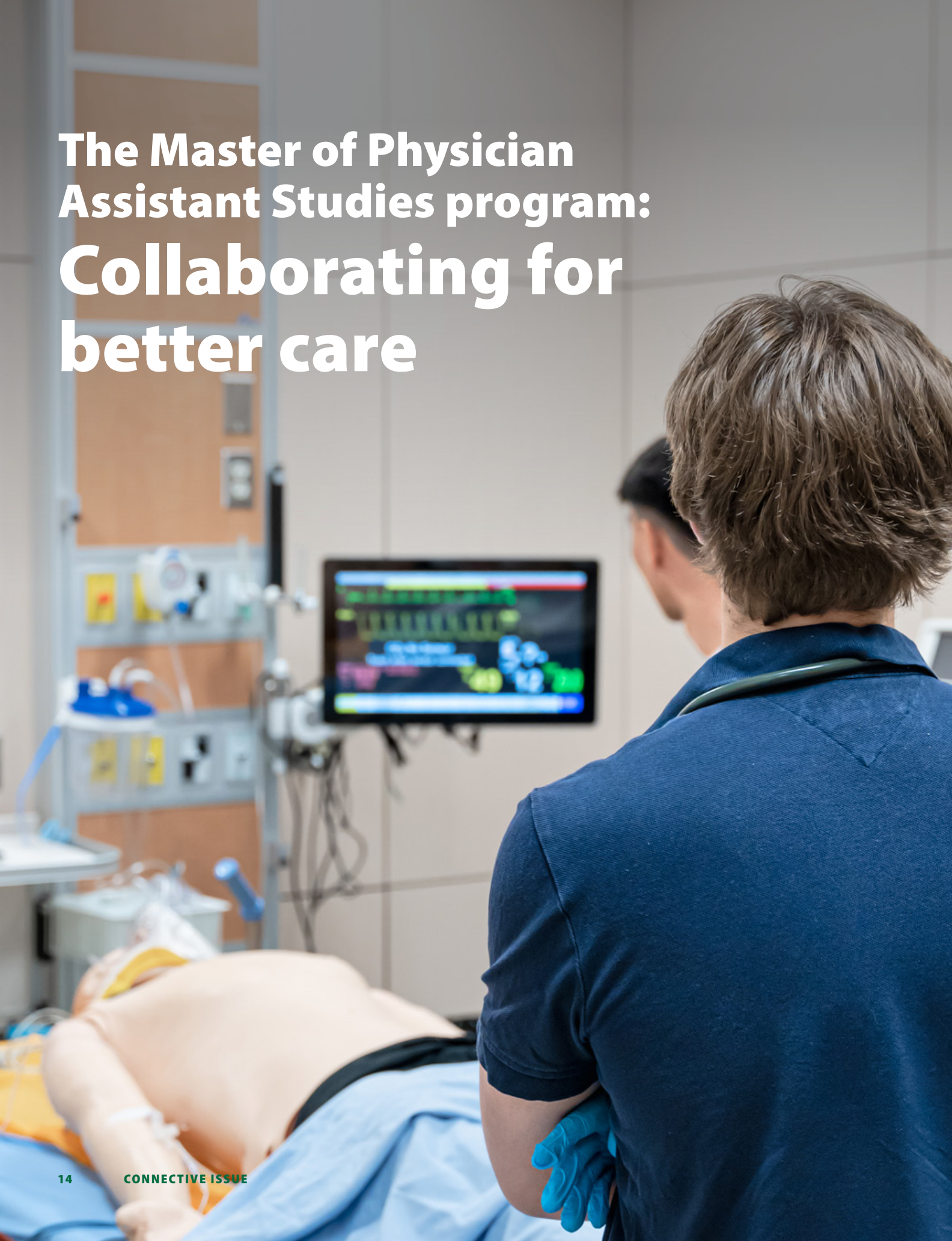
Activities during the 60th anniversary celebration will include a morning student research symposium, followed by an afternoon public open house and an evening gala.

"We would invite anyone from the clinical community, alumni or others, to visit our current teaching and learning spaces at the open house," said Bath. "We'll have a variety of stations set up from some of our faculty and researchers, as well as from students who are taking part in unique initiatives and clinical placements. We will also be able to share space and concept design plans for the new occupational therapy and speech-language pathology programs." ■

Left: One of the earliest classes in the physical therapy diploma program*; Middle top: An early electrotherapy modality laboratory at the school's original location*; Middle bottom: The SRS, housed in the USask Health Sciences Building, will celebrate its 60th anniversary in May. *Photos submitted; Right: SRS students participate in Circles of Reconciliation with Indigenous initiatives co-ordinator Liz Durocher. Photo by David Stobbe



The Master of Physician Assistant Studies program: Collaborating for better care



The Master of Physician Assistant Studies, a first-of-its kind program in Saskatchewan, will welcome its first cohort of students this fall. The two-year graduate program will prepare physician assistants to be key contributors to health-care teams across the province.

College of Medicine learners involved in a medical simulation in the Clinical Learning Resource Centre in the Health Sciences Building on the Saskatoon campus. *Photo by Davis Frerichs*

AMANDA WORONIUK

Physician assistants (PAs) are health-care professionals who work under the supervision of licensed physicians but have autonomy to perform a wide range of clinical tasks and procedures, such as conducting patient assessments, prescribing medications, and formulating treatment plans. They can work in all clinical settings including primary care, long-term care, emergency medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and surgical specialties.

Amy Lattimer has more than a decade of experience practicing as a PA in Manitoba. She decided to pursue the profession after having a positive experience with a PA as an undergraduate student in the United States.

"I was very impressed by how thorough, competent and informative of a provider she was, but I also understood the large void in the health-care system she was filling, and in a cost-effective way," she said. "I saw parallel struggles in the Canadian health-care system, and I wanted to be a part of the solution."

Launching a new program to support a team-based model of care

In 2023, Saskatchewan introduced legislation changes that allowed PAs to be licensed to practice in the province. USask's new MPAS program is funded as part of Saskatchewan's Health Human Resource (HHR) Action Plan to recruit, train, incentivize, and retain more health-care professionals.

The MPAS program at USask has 20 seats and opened applications in fall 2024 for its September 2025 start date, receiving an enthusiastic response from applicants.

Dr. Trustin Domes (MD), academic director and lead of the USask MPAS program, said the program will help improve patient care and service delivery, by integrating licensed PAs alongside other health professionals in the province.

“Collaboration with other health-care professionals is one of the pillars of a good physician assistant. A large part of my job is acting as a liaison between my supervising physician, and other health-care providers: consultant physicians, nurses, resident doctors, and other allied health professionals. We are in constant communication to make the best decisions for our patients.”

AMY LATTIMER

“Physician assistants are a key member of the health-care team in numerous areas across Canada and also in other countries,” he said.

Currently, Saskatchewan is recruiting PAs to join the health-care system in communities across the province.

“It’s a huge opportunity for Saskatchewan to bring the program in at this time. I’ve been told by MDs that having a physician assistant has helped bring back some of the joy in medicine,” said Domes.

“With a physician assistant there’s someone there to lend a hand and to help. Bringing in a second pair of hands, a second pair of eyes, just someone to chat about cases—these things are beneficial because it’s bringing back that team approach that the system needs.”

Domes said that establishing a graduate-level program while supporting the growth of a new profession has its benefits, including Saskatchewan-trained graduates who can fill health-care roles.

“I think bringing the academic program in as we’re building the profession in Saskatchewan is a smart move,” he said. “We need to have homegrown PAs.”

A key component of building the program is curriculum development. The MPAS team is working closely with a Physician Assistant Advisory Council (PAAC), which includes practicing Canadian PAs and local physicians, to identify key topics that will prepare students for clinical rotations and licensing exams, while still meeting national curriculum standards.

According to Domes, the two-year program will be innovative, with a lot of hands-on approaches, along with team-based and case-based learning. In the first year, the program will provide foundational knowledge, followed by clinical placement and practice in Year 2, along with a strong research focus.

Social accountability and rural health built into the program

Social accountability and rural health are important components of the program, Domes said. So are partnerships, since they provide students with valuable opportunities to gain hands-on experience and see what career opportunities are available after graduation.

“Making sure that we’re doing things through a social accountability lens is really important in this program,” he said. “We want to bring in learners with diverse backgrounds and we plan to expose our learners to a wide range of environments from the city centre to rural and remote communities.”

Domes said they want learners to experience first-hand how health care is delivered in multiple different contexts with at least half of the clinical experiences in the second year of the program being planned outside of Saskatoon and Regina. Integrating MPAS learners into rural locations is critical for future PA recruitment in rural Saskatchewan—both to support physicians and address rural health-care needs.

“Developing that is really important so our learners understand the needs in the community,” he said. “We’d also love for this program—again, this is a work in progress with our provincial partners—to link the (government’s) human health resource need with our educational program, so that our learners are keenly aware of what jobs are available when they graduate.”



What does a typical day look like for a PA?

For Lattimer, her day starts around 7 am.

“I receive sign over from the night team, where we’re informed of any new consults, surgeries, admissions, or clinical status changes. I then help with a brief didactic teaching session on a trauma topic geared towards the residents,” she said.

Lattimer then completes rounds with the senior resident, surgeon and charge nurse, seeing most of the admitted in-patients. This is followed by a PA-run clinic to see patients after they’ve been discharged.

“The afternoon consists of any unstructured combination of the following: surgical assisting, assessing trauma patients in the emergency department, performing or assisting with procedures, reviewing consults, addressing ward issues, and co-ordinating discharges. At day’s end, around 5 pm, we provide a brief sign over to the oncoming night team.”

What can a physician expect when adding a PA to their team?

“Studies have shown that physicians that have a physician assistant often have a better work-life balance, less stress, less burnout, and more gratification in their work,” said Domes. “And I think that translates into better patient care.”

Health care relies on teamwork. The partnership between a PA and physician improves patient outcomes, improves efficiency and helps physicians direct their attention to more complex cases.

“We know the importance of team-based care,” said Domes. “Having a PA for a physician provides the opportunity to off-load some of that



Dr. Trustin Domes is the Academic Director of the new MPAS program. Photo submitted

work, to increase the access to patients, to be innovative in the way that we’re providing care, to get more thorough out of our cases, and for the physician to focus on areas where their expertise is really needed. These are some of the areas where the physician assistant can improve the system and patient care.”

He added that each PA-physician relationship is unique. Trust and communication are vital for a successful partnership and helps to deliver the best care for the patient.

Lattimer agrees. She said that teamwork and the ability to work seamlessly with many different members of the health-care team are key to being an effective PA.

“Collaboration with other health-care providers is one of the pillars of a good physician assistant. A large part of my job is acting as a liaison

“Physician assistants are a key member of the health-care team in areas across Canada and in other countries.

It’s a huge opportunity for Saskatchewan to bring the program in at this time. I’ve been told by MDs that having a physician assistant has helped bring back some of the joy in medicine .”

DR. TRUSTIN DOMES

between my supervising physician, and other health-care providers: consultant physicians, nurses, resident doctors, and other allied health professionals. We are in constant communication to collaborate to make the best decisions for our patients,” she said.

Programs such as MPAS play an important role in preparing students to fill health care roles, while promoting collaboration in the health-care system.

“I think our ultimate goal is to improve outcomes for patients and strengthen the health-care system,” said Domes. “Having the academic program here is great, because we’re able to train future PAs to help fill those important roles, and work with our health care and provincial partners to provide good jobs for our future graduates to go to.”

MAKING AN IMPACT: celebrating the inaugural donation to the MPAS program

Dr. Gary Siemens’ (MD’69) is establishing the first award to the MPAS program. His generous gift will enable the creation of two annual bursaries for students.

“As an alumnus and physician, I’ve witnessed the critical contributions physician assistants make in health care,” said Dr. Siemens. “Supporting this program was my way of encouraging students to pursue this vital field, knowing they’ll make a meaningful and lasting impact.”



USask leads \$20 million community-centred reproductive health and rights project in Mozambique



Dr. Muhajarine and team leaders engaged with the local community during a recent visit to Mozambique in November 2024. *Photos submitted*

DEBRA HAUBRICH

Health-care researchers from USask are working on a massive international development project to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young women in Mozambique.

This project seeks to establish model communities of care in Inhambane Province of Mozambique by incorporating innovative interventions at the community and health system levels. These community and adolescent/young-women-centred health service sites will serve as examples, showcasing improved outcomes that can be scaled up across other communities.

The project, which recently received \$20 million from the Government of Canada, will provide information and training as well as

opportunities for young people to participate in income-generating initiatives that give them the economic resources required to support better decision making. The project will also improve infrastructure and human resources in the health system, focusing on strengthened gender-sensitive community health support that encompasses accessible sexual, reproductive health and rights services.

Dr. Nazeem Muhajarine (PhD), a professor in Community Health and Epidemiology in the College of Medicine and the director of the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit, is spearheading the project. He says it will comprehensively incorporate innovative solutions to support the rights and health of women and young girls across six districts and 30 partner communities in the Inhambane Province.

Muhajarine was in Mozambique when the funding was officially announced.

“The announcement came with a sense of relief, and also a deep sense of gratitude for the work we have done and the partners we have worked with.”

We felt that we were doing the right thing, and that has been acknowledged.”

DR. NAZEEM MUHAJARINE

“The announcement came with a sense of relief, and also a deep sense of gratitude for the work we have done and the partners we have worked with,” he said. “We felt that we were doing the right thing, and that it has been acknowledged [by the Government of Canada].”

Dr. Baljit Singh (PhD), vice-president research, USask, echoes this. “It is gratifying to see the support and recognition for Dr. Muhajarine and his team as they work with our international partners to support this groundbreaking work in improving equity and health of women and young girls in Mozambique,” he said. “USask researchers are embodying what it takes to be the university the world needs in health-care research.”

USask began partnering with Mozambique to do this work in 2017 as part of the Mozambique-Canada Maternal Health Project. It was addressing high rates of maternal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa

through the empowerment of women. The Maternal Health Project ended on June 30, 2024, but USask’s presence in Inhambane Province continued when the Sexual and Reproductive Health for Young Women project was launched in July 2024.

In partnership with the Inhambane Provincial Health Directorate in Mozambique, the new project builds on and deepens the work of improving sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health while focusing on sexual and reproductive health and rights for young women.

“We had great success with the last project, so it is no surprise that we were asked to stay on and continue this work, now with an even greater focus on elevating the sexual and health and rights of young women and girls,” said Dr. Muhajarine.

In a recent visit to Mozambique, Muhajarine and the team leaders met with

local community leaders, elders, health directors, youth leaders and school directors, who all emphasized their readiness to partner with the project team. They were taken to the sites where new community-based primary health care centres will be built.

Muhajarine credits the team’s dedication and skills for the project’s success. He stresses that the team has a diverse range of knowledge, experience and abilities in continuing education, maternal and reproductive health, community engagement and development, construction of health facilities, health system training and management and management of microprojects. Their commitment to the values of the project builds trust and positive relationships with both institutional and community partners, which has proven to be a key success factor. ▀

Exercise your right to breathe: Dr. Brianne Philipenko and asthma



Dr. Brianne Philipenko (MD) is a respirologist and an assistant professor of respirology, critical care and sleep medicine at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine. *Photo submitted*

Dr. Brianne Philipenko (MD) was midway through her respirology fellowship in Calgary when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the city. She started interval workouts at home using a fitness app—when inspiration struck.

"Coming up with a creative, innovative way to allow people to access an exercise program outside of the typical organized pulmonary rehabilitation in a gym setting was something that I became really interested in," said Philipenko.

As a respirologist, Philipenko was already frustrated by the lack of 'mainstay' guidelines on incorporating exercise into severe asthma treatment.

"Coming up with a creative, innovative way to allow people to access an exercise program outside of the typical organized pulmonary rehabilitation in a gym setting was something that I became really interested in."

DR. BRIANNE PHILIPENKO

"I think that's a big disservice for our patients," she said. "We're giving them these fancy medications that improve their asthma, but we're not going after the low-hanging fruit such as physical activity."

"It's something cheap, accessible, that everyone can do, and it's something that I think is very much underutilized."

Even before the pandemic, access to pulmonary rehabilitation programs was severely limited, as most also serve people suffering from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

And Philipenko's asthma patients were often leery of exercise, for fear of triggering an attack.

"You don't exercise, so then you get out of shape and that makes you more short of breath when you exercise," she said. "It becomes a vicious cycle of deconditioning and fear, and it's really hard to break that."

Philipenko teamed up with a physiotherapist and a kinesiologist to develop an at-home rehabilitation program for people with pulmonary hypertension. Patients download an app, then follow the program for eight to 12 weeks, incorporating pacing strategies and breathing exercises to ease their way back into fitness. She's studying what works — and what doesn't.

"We're still in the middle of recruitment," said Philipenko. "The ones who have done it seem to have enjoyed it, and it's been really interesting in that we've had people of very different baseline physical activity levels."

"We have people that are extremely fit exercising every day, to people that never exercise ever, with asthma participating in the study," she said. "It's promising."

By 2021, Drs. Erika Penz (MD) and Donald Cockcroft (MD) — colleagues Philipenko met during internal medicine training — helped convince her to return to her hometown, taking on her current role as a respirologist and an assistant professor of respirology, critical care and sleep medicine at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine.

"They have been giants in the space of asthma, and they really inspired me. They brought me back and made it exciting to participate in the research scene here in Saskatoon," Philipenko said.

She's working with the Asthma Research Lab team, where her patients can now take part in bronchoprovocation studies and clinical trials for new asthma medications.

"As much as I love my clinical practice, it's really nice to have something else going on that shakes things up. And for me, that was research," said Philipenko.

Through her study, she hopes to see a shift in the way exercise is perceived within the guidelines for respirologists, pushing for recognition of its critical role alongside pharmaceuticals.

"That's the wonderful thing about asthma, is that if it's controlled, you should be completely asymptomatic. It's not a progressive disease. And we have some medications that can achieve that for people now. So it's a pretty exciting time to be working in this field." ♥

Creating connections in critical care: Dr. Sabira Valiani



Dr. Sabira Valiani (MD) is a critical care physician and assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine. *Photo submitted*

Dr. Sabira Valiani (MD) was one of the frontline physicians working inside Saskatoon's critical care units four years ago, during the initial lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was really weird," said Valiani.

Valiani said 'a lot of light bulbs went off in my head' amid the automated stillness of the unit, as she watched ventilators breathing for heavily sedated patients.

Covered in head-to-toe personal protective equipment, staff in the intensive care unit struggled to simultaneously treat patients, communicate with family members, and enforce hospital policies.

"Those patients aren't talking to us," Valiani

said. "It was empty, it was overwhelming and it was disconnected all at the same time."

Valiani has now spent seven years in critical care, a move that started with her enrolling in a critical care and ICU elective in Ottawa.

"I loved it. I loved on the medical side, how you could see the life support that you were giving a patient immediately have a physiologic effect and stabilize that patient," she said.

Driven by her experiences during the pandemic, Dr. Valiani delved into research focused on improving patient and family experiences in the ICU. She collaborated with a multidisciplinary team and patient partners to understand the challenges faced by healthcare providers and families alike.

In an article for the Canadian Association of Critical Care Nurses, she and her colleagues examined the effect of visitor restrictions during the pandemic.

Valiani said she remembers tearful goodbyes, families gathered around screens, unable to hug or touch loved ones infected and dying with COVID-19.

"The family's role becomes significantly diminished," she said. "So much of that was disrupted during that time."

In the months and years that followed, visitor restrictions relaxed, but Valiani noticed communication between families, patients and staff still felt awkward.

Valiani and her colleagues turned their lens last year to key moments for Canadians of diverse ethnicities during the critical care journey, in the Canadian Journal of Anesthesia. The findings revealed the strain on health-care providers playing multiple roles and families feeling disconnected from crucial information.

She estimates 30 per cent of Saskatoon's ICU patients travel from remote communities, making it crucial to find ways to keep family members informed in a language they understand well.

"People kind of naturally turned

towards communication technology in the pandemic," said Valiani, noting a number of families cannot be present in-person during the day, as intensivists attend rounds.

Clear and open communication between patients, care providers and families is the key, Valiani said.

"What if we could use artificial intelligence or AI to just translate a medical progress note into an understandable family update?" Valiani asked.

"It doesn't have to be high tech, right? Like it can be a phone call."

Together with the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, Dr. Valiani now works at enhancing patient-family engagement through practical solutions. She emphasizes the importance of involving families in care decisions, acknowledging their unique expertise in understanding patients' wishes.

Her team presented its findings in 2022 at Toronto's Critical Care Canada Forum.

"We have this cohesive approach to defining the problems," said Valiani. "Now we can take this to decision makers and say...these are the things people living this experience actually want." ♥

RESEARCHERS UNDER THE SCOPE

The Researchers Under the Scope podcast explores groundbreaking health research at the College of Medicine. Hear passionate researchers discuss their work and its impact. Presented by the Office of the Vice-Dean Research.



USask researcher secures funding for groundbreaking work on histamine and emerging pathogens



Dr. Jessica Sheldon's (PhD) research focuses on understanding an emerging pathogen that is behind illnesses like hospital acquired pneumonia and bloodstream infections like sepsis. **Photo by Erin Matthews**

Understanding the interactions between microbes and their hosts can lead to new therapeutic strategies for major bacterial threats. From invading the host immune system to gathering nutrients needed to survive and thrive, opportunistic bacteria use many unique strategies to cause infection.

Dr. Jessica Sheldon (PhD), assistant professor in biochemistry, microbiology and immunology in USask's College of Medicine is focused on drug-resistant bacteria and their interactions with histamine, a chemical commonly associated with our immune system and allergies.

Sheldon received funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) for her work on *Acinetobacter*

baumannii (*A. baumannii*), an emerging pathogen that is behind illnesses like hospital acquired pneumonia and bloodstream infections like sepsis.

"Our main focus for the CIHR grant is teasing apart what the host histamine is doing and what the bacterial histamine is doing," said Sheldon.

Sheldon's lab at USask will use the CIHR grant to help understand how *A. baumannii* uses histamine to establish an infection. Histamine is a chemical created by our bodies that causes familiar symptoms like runny noses, watery eyes or itchy skin. But Sheldon says that some bacteria like *A. baumannii* use histamine to get iron, a nutrient that helps them grow and multiply.

Sheldon and her team are also investigating the potential of antihistamine-based drugs, which could be used in treating drug-resistant *A. baumannii* infections.

"With the rise of antimicrobial resistance, developing new strategies to combat

ERIN MATTHEWS, USASK RESEARCH PROFILE AND IMPACT

"With the rise of antimicrobial resistance, developing new strategies to combat infections caused by these bacteria is essential."

DR. JESSICA SHELDON

infections caused by these bacteria is essential," said Sheldon. "Our approach is to look into re-purposing of pre-existing drugs to help speed up this process."

As an early career researcher, this was Sheldon's first time applying for a CIHR Project Grant, a competitive program that invests in advancing fundamental or applied research in health. Her successful application came as a bit of a shock.

According to data from CIHR, only nine per cent of first-time applicants are successful. Sheldon credits her passion for her research as one of the key reasons for her success.

"As a researcher, I think if you can convey that you are very interested and passionate about your work it gets all the other researchers reviewing these grants excited," said Sheldon. "I'm just fascinated in how bacteria do the things they do."

Receiving an investment of \$900,000 over five years allows Sheldon to provide training opportunities for students and helps draw attention to the research happening at USask.

"I'm incredibly grateful for the funding. It's a huge boost to the university whenever we get these kinds of investments," said Sheldon. "It means that we can hire more people, we can do impactful research, and it helps to put USask on the map. We do great research here, but we often fly under the radar." ▀

STORIES FROM OUR STUDENTS

SHARING THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

The College of Medicine's student blog, Stories from Our Students, offers an inside look of the experiences of students from the School of Rehabilitation Science and the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan.

The blog features the first-person perspective of learners in various years of undergraduate and graduate programs. Students share their unique views on education, leadership, advocacy and learning opportunities outside of the classroom.

Explore what it's like to be a student in one of our programs by visiting medicine.usask.ca/news/student-stories.php ▀

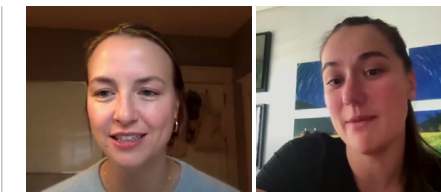
From student athletic trainer to physical therapist

Alumna Joanne Lavoie (MPT'24) Lavoie reflects on her time in the School of Rehabilitation Science and shares what sparked her interest in physical therapy.

As a student, Lavoie earned several awards for outstanding academic achievement. She now works as a physical therapist at Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon. ▀



School of Rehabilitation Science alumna Joanne Lavoie. **Photo submitted**



College of Medicine alumni Dr. Hope Fast (left) and Dr. Sophie McBean. **Photos submitted**

Prince Albert clerkship

College of Medicine alumni Dr. Hope Fast (MD'21), an emergency medicine resident, and Dr. Sophie McBean (MD'21), a pediatrics resident, reflect on their third-year clerkship experiences at the college's Prince Albert instructional site.

With a smaller group of medical students and residents, the clerkship program in Prince Albert provides learners with many opportunities to be directly involved in patient care. ▀

The SLIC experience in Melfort

Hope Packet shares her experience as a third-year medical student in Melfort with the Saskatchewan Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (SLIC) program.

She discusses how her time in a smaller community enriched her learning, offering continuous exposure to a variety of medical specialties and being a longer-term member of a health care team. ▀



Medical student Hope Packet in front of Melfort Union Hospital. **Photo submitted**

Small actions: Greening health care one glove at a time

Medical students Candelaria Aristizabal Londono and Kayla Cropper discuss a project that diverts medical gloves from the landfill to a recycling facility that converts them into construction materials.

They share how this project helps reduce health care's carbon footprint and makes a positive impact in the community. ▀



Medical students Kayla Cropper and Candelaria A. Londono. **Photo submitted**

Jared Price: Pursuing MD and PhD degrees



Jared Price is one of two students enrolled in the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) dual program in the College of Medicine. *Photo submitted*

Jared Price is one of two students enrolled in the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) dual program at USask. This pathway merges medical education with scientific research and typically spans six to seven years.

The MD-PhD program aims to train a diverse and highly skilled cohort of physician-scientist scholars and leaders and provide students with a comprehensive background suitable for bench-to-bed practice.

Students in the program begin with two years of medical training before transitioning into the research phase, which is two to three years. After finishing the research portion and obtaining their graduate degrees, the students return to the MD program to complete their final two years of medical training.

Price is currently immersed in the research component of the program and will return to medical school in summer 2025. His research focuses on identifying and validating novel targeted cancer therapies based on tumor molecular markers.

We asked Price questions about his studies, research interests and career aspirations after graduation.

Can you share a brief overview of your academic background. What degree did you earn prior to this program?

I received my Bachelor of Science degree in biochemistry from the University of Regina between 2016 and 2020. Research has always been important in my education, I had the privilege of completing three National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRAs) during my time as a student along with an honours degree focusing on evaluating phytochemicals for antifungal activity.

Following my honours thesis, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to Concordia University and engage in chemogenomic research in yeast prior to starting medical school.

What inspired you to pursue both an MD and a PhD degree? How do you see these degrees complementing each other?

While in my undergraduate studies, I was faced with the choice of pursuing a career in professional colleges or academia following graduation. Like many other students, I could see the appeal of both options but I could not justify forgoing one or the other. I had always loved science and made that a priority through my undergraduate degree.

I asked myself if I would rather apply the biology and chemistry I had learned in a clinical setting for medicine, or contribute to the field as a scientist. For me, science had to be both and so that made the choice clear – I would choose both as an MD-PhD.

The degrees complement each other wonderfully. On paper they may appear different but I find them to be nearly mirrored. The share a biology focus. Both engage in physical skills with your hands, soft skills with colleagues and other professionals, communication of advanced topics with non-researchers, and, of course, a tremendous amount of reading. Where they differ is where they best support each other.

“Medicine deals with the known and research explores the unknown. Medicine is the guiding hand and research is the flashlight probing the darkness.”

JARED PRICE, MD-PHD STUDENT

Medicine deals with the known and research explores the unknown. Medicine is the guiding hand and research is the flashlight probing the darkness. This program grants you the skillset to learn and apply medical knowledge to a variety of clinical contexts, and to know when your knowledge is insufficient and how to find the answers you need.

Could you tell me about your area of research? What are your primary objectives for your research?

Broadly speaking, my research involves understanding genetic interactions in cancer cells that may be exploitable for therapies. The Vizeacoumar lab (led by Dr. Franco Vizeacoumar) engages in a systems-based approach to screen genes for targeted vulnerability against different biomarkers. While I have engaged in many different projects in this lab, my primary objective is currently to develop a mechanistic understanding of the targeted toxicity that harms the cancer cells but spares the normal somatic cells of the body.

What challenges have you encountered balancing medical school with your research?

This program is very effective at separating the two worlds of research and medical education. While there is some room for compromise, such as retrospective chart reviews during medical school or shadowing physicians during research, the expectation is that most of your time and efforts should be focused on the respective portion of that program. This approach is excellent for ensuring that candidates prioritize the different parts of the program properly but can lead to some regression later.

I find myself so immersed in the research that my medical background is beginning



Jared Price is completing the research portion of the MD-PhD program. *Photo by Davis Frerichs*

to wane. This is mitigated by regular review and revisions of previous course material, staying curious and being informed about different medical developments, and at the end of the research program, enrolment in a clinical reorientation program.

What are your goals after completing the MD-PhD program?

I would like to do my residency in oncology. While I haven't decided if I want a medical or surgical focus to it, I plan to decide that once I return to clerkship at the end of my research. My goals are to eventually achieve a mixed practice as a clinician-scientist where I can split my time between managing my own research program as well as clinical practice.

My time in this program has demonstrated clearly to me that there is synergistic benefit to immersing oneself in both worlds. 'Benchside to bedside' is a common motto for medical research and as a clinician-scientist, occupying both the bench and bedside will offer unique opportunities for both my research and clinical practice to flourish.

What advice would you give to students considering a combined MD-PhD program? What do you wish you had known before starting?

There are a couple things that are important to know and the first is how research and coursework differ. While coursework is clearly defined with dates, exams, syllabi, and other key aspects that restrain its scope, research is far more flexible.

Research is often self-driven, especially in a PhD program, where there is a significant learning curve and where the motivation and direction generally comes from yourself. There is a no study guide or lecture slides that inform you of what experiments or results are needed to progress your research questions. A lot of people, including myself, struggle with that aspect.

The other side is that it is a significant commitment for time. While research stipends essentially freeze the growing student debt from medical school, the PhD portion generally lasts 3-4 years which will force you to change your plans. ♥



Supporting our students

Abd Alfatah Alras is a second-year medical student at USask's Regina campus. Photo by Aisling Gamble

TRENN BRUSKY

Completing a degree in medicine is a major achievement and a huge responsibility. It requires a significant investment of time, money, and dedication.

Support in the form of scholarships, bursaries and awards can be critical in ensuring students have the resources they need to achieve their educational goals.

Abd Alfatah Alras grew up watching his father, an orthopedic surgeon, change lives. From grade one he knew he wanted to be a doctor, too.

Abd was born and raised in Syria. His family left Syria because of the war, lived as refugees for a period, and has called Saskatchewan home for the past seven years.

"Saskatchewan is now the place where I have stayed the longest... So, to me, it's like my home now and I'm very fortunate to have a lot of opportunities and a lot of blessings from this land," he reflected.

Before entering USask's College of Medicine, Abd completed an undergraduate degree in kinesiology—receiving the Dean's Medal as the graduating student with the highest grade-point average. Now a second-year medical student at USask's Regina campus, he is navigating living away from his family while pursuing his passion.

Although the transition to living in Regina was challenging, Abd believes being selected as a student for the Regina campus was a blessing and a privilege. The smaller, more intimate classes have helped him with both the educational and the social aspects of school. "I really enjoy my time in the classroom. As they say, I'm really enjoying the journey. I think when I finish medical school, when I reflect on it, it will be one of the best times in my life," said Abd.

Medical students often have to balance the cost of tuition and living expenses on top of the demands of a rigorous program. Bursaries, scholarships and awards provide important financial relief that allows students to focus on their studies and dedicate more time to valuable extracurricular activities like clubs, internships, and research projects. The College of Medicine currently offers over \$300,000 in bursaries and scholarships, which are made available by generous contributions from alumni and donors.

Abd, who juggles his studies, family commitments, community involvement, volunteerism and work, explained it like this: "When you get a bursary, it is equivalent to the income of one to two full-time jobs. How I love to think about it is that every \$20 I receive from a scholarship is just one hour of my time that is being freed."

He has been able to spend his extra time studying and to continue helping to build a strong, supportive academic community with those around him.

While completing his undergraduate degree, Abd co-founded and was the director of the award-winning USask Amal Humanitarian Club, which serves the community while providing volunteer and leadership opportunities for students.

As a medical student, he and some of his Regina campus classmates started the Good Doctor Club. Members gather to review past course

GIVING: MAKING AN IMPACT

"Patients come to you in a very vulnerable state, and with their families concerned for them. You are the one who can help them; you're the one who is there to support them when they are most vulnerable.

That's why I study hard, because I want to make sure that I can help my patients the best way I can."

ABD ALFATAH ALRAS

material to keep knowledge fresh and improve their retention. Abd stressed that he is only able to be part of this valuable extracurricular group because of the time freed up for him because of his bursary.

Abd also explained that medical school is often the last stage when students will experience financial strain—that it can be stressful worrying about school and financing especially with the pressures of a busy schedule. He said donor support, "is a great investment that makes a huge positive change to a student... Being on the receiving end of it, I can tell you for sure I will be a donor as well once I start having an income, I believe that it's definitely worth it. It's a good investment."

What is Abd most looking forward to about becoming a doctor? He thoughtfully explained, "patients come to you in a very vulnerable state, and with their families concerned for them. You are the one who can help them; you're the one who is there to support them when they are most vulnerable... That's why I study hard, because I want to make sure that I can help my patients the best way I can." ♥

Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation and USask partner in support of pediatric education and research in Saskatchewan



Gift announcement May 22, 2024. Photo by David Stobbe

The Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation (JPCHF) and the University of Saskatchewan (USask) are joined forces to improve children's health through greater investment and emphasis on pediatric education and research.

Through their largest investment to date, JPCHF committed \$2 million over five years to create the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation Pediatric Research Fund at the Department of Pediatrics based in the College of Medicine at USask. The partnership was announced in May 2024.

Under this new partnership, the fund will support the work of Dr. Terry Klassen, the newly appointed Provincial Pediatric Department Head, to advance knowledge and care in pediatrics throughout the province. It will help to advance provincial pediatric research and move towards a Learning Health System.

"This significant partnership with the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation will support our shared commitment to

providing exceptional pediatric healthcare in Saskatchewan. In addition to supporting the work of new Provincial Department Head in Pediatrics, Dr. Terry Klassen, this funding will enhance pediatric education programs for USask medical students and help us lead critical research that will positively impact families in Saskatchewan and beyond," said Peter Stoicheff, USask President and Vice-Chancellor. "As leaders in medical science, our College of Medicine is grateful for partners like the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation that enhance our ability to make a difference in the communities we serve."

"The Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation Pediatric Research Fund is a monumental first for Saskatchewan," said Brynn Boback-Lane, President and CEO of Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation. "Innovative research transforms health outcomes and this provincial network will play an essential role in discovering significant advances improving children's health care throughout Saskatchewan."

Dr. Marilyn Baetz, Interim Dean at USask's College of Medicine at the time of the announcement, said the shared vision for a better future for pediatric

"Through education and research, we can strengthen the network of services we provide for families when emergencies happen or when care is needed, not only in Saskatoon at the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital, but across the province."

DR. TERRY KLASSEN

care in Saskatchewan is what makes the partnership with JPCHF so strong.

"Dr. Klassen's outstanding research in pediatric healthcare promises groundbreaking discoveries in Saskatchewan," she said. "The partnership between the College of Medicine and Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation highlights the importance of prioritizing patients alongside world class research. We are grateful for JPCHF's commitment and support, fueling this vital work and ensuring a brighter future for pediatric health care in our province."

Dr. Klassen will work to transform and harmonize pediatric care in Saskatchewan including all research, teaching and clinical care. As a nationally recognized leader and innovator in pediatrics, Klassen said his vision includes a strong provincial system of health care that works seamlessly for children, youth and their families.

"Through education and research, we can strengthen the network of services we provide for families when emergencies happen or when care is needed, not only in Saskatoon at the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital, but across the province," said Klassen. ♥



Students at the College of Medicine Regina Campus at the Regina General Hospital. Photo by Davis Frerichs

Together, we raised \$400,000 for the Regina Campus expansion!

The campaign for the College of Medicine Regina Campus expansion at Regina General Hospital has successfully concluded, raising an incredible \$400,000 thanks to the generosity of our donors and alumni.

We want to express our sincere gratitude to each and every donor who helped us reach this goal and to Hospitals of Regina Foundation (HRF) for their outstanding partnership on this project. HRF's generous matching gift of \$200,000 has significantly enhanced the impact of every donation, showcasing their steadfast dedication to advancing healthcare in Saskatchewan. This support not only strengthens our health-care system but also plays a crucial role in shaping the future of medicine in southern Saskatchewan and empowering the next generation of health-care professionals. Once again, thank you. We are excited to see the positive impact that the new facilities and your support will continue to have for years to come.

The expansion includes a state-of-the-art anatomy lab and modern teaching spaces, allowing students to complete their entire four-year medical degree in southern Saskatchewan with innovative, hands-on training. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to this milestone achievement. Your support ensures a stronger, healthier future for our province. Thank you. ♥



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GIVING: MAKING AN IMPACT

Margaret Cotton Memorial Bursary

The late Dr. David Cotton's legacy lives on through the Margaret Cotton Memorial Bursary, a tribute to the mother who first inspired his journey into medicine.

Margaret's strength during her battle with cancer left a lasting impression on him as a young man, shaping his path as a physician. Years later, after losing her and facing his own terminal diagnosis, Dr. Cotton established this endowed bursary to honour her memory. Through his gift, he ensured that future medical students at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine would have the support they need to pursue their dreams of becoming doctors. ♥



Dr. David Cotton. Photo submitted

LEGACY GIVING: a gift in your will can ensure our future

A legacy gift can inspire greatness and shape the landscape of medial innovation for years to come. Your gift can play a pivotal role in empowering our college to deliver exceptional education. With your support, we can accelerate groundbreaking research that transforms lives and advances critical programming. Together, let's build a legacy of healing and hope that resonates far beyond our lifetimes.

For more information, please contact:
medicine.advancement@usask.ca

Areas to Give:

Alumni and Community Program

This peer-funded initiative fulfills the needs of our community through communications, professional and social engagements and fundraising to support the next generation of practitioners.

Indigenous health

Our researchers and clinicians participate in collaborative and mutually beneficial partnerships aimed at improving the health of Indigenous people and communities in culturally appropriate ways. Your gift supports ongoing research initiatives aimed at improving the health of Indigenous communities, families, and individuals.

Physician assistant studies

Physician assistants are clinicians who practice under the supervision of a licensed physician. Support Saskatchewan's first training program for these health-care professionals.

Research growth

Our scientists are performing cutting-edge research. Your gift enables our research teams to decrease chronic disease burden including cancer, multiple sclerosis, heart disease and stroke, and Alzheimer's.

School of Rehabilitation Science

Our school prepares high-quality, collaborative physical therapy clinicians and rehabilitation researchers who are focused on improving function while promoting mobility and participation. Your donations will advance rehabilitation science and health-related learning, teaching, research, and mentorship.

Student support

Respond to current student needs and attract future leaders. Your donations will ease medical students' financial burdens and allow them to concentrate on their studies. Your support will inspire the next generation of leaders in medicine and ensure that doctors in Saskatchewan reflect the population and the people.

GIVING TO THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

The world's problems are growing in size and scope, highlighting major areas of concern in medical education, research and support.

The health of our community depends on philanthropic investments in research, from people like you.

At the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine, the bright young minds of today are being prepared to lead tomorrow's healthcare innovations as future medical practitioners and scientists. We are developing new treatments and supports that give hope to those struggling with mental health and addiction. We are helping to ease the burdens of chronic conditions like heart disease, asthma and diabetes. We are making discoveries right now that will win future battles as new health-care crises arise. We are working alongside Indigenous communities for improved, equitable, culturally safe care. And we are improving access to care for residents in rural and remote communities and regions of Saskatchewan.

By supporting the College of Medicine, you are ensuring that education, research and clinical care continues to improve and advance. We are Saskatchewan's only medical school. Your support means we can train the next generation of doctors and physical therapists and discover cutting-edge treatment for diseases in our province, for our province—and that means improved health and well being for our people and communities.

With your support, we will fulfill our vision: to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Saskatchewan and the world.

Together, we can transform medical education and research so that vulnerable people are not left behind and medical research is a priority.

Make a Gift. Change a Life.

Your support for the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine fuels life-changing research, trains future doctors, and provides vital student scholarships. Invest in better healthcare—give today. To make a charitable contribution, please visit medicine.usask.ca/alumni/giving.php

Contact information for the Advancement team:



Sherry Buckler
Director of Advancement
sherry.buckler@usask.ca
306-966-2600



Jared Fingler
Advancement Officer
jared.fingler@usask.ca
306-966-8273



Jeff Aramenko
Advancement Officer
jeff.aramenko@usask.ca
306-966-8811



Kelsey Kougiya
Alumni Relations Officer
kelsey.kougiya@usask.ca
306-966-5763

To learn more about supporting these initiatives or any others, please contact a member of the Advancement team or visit medicine.usask.ca/alumni/giving.php

Dreams, determination, and legacy: Honouring Dr. Geraldine Kurz

KELSEY KOUGIYA



Dr. Geraldine Kurz, MD'73, made a significant donation to the Alumni and Community Program that will fund initiatives that connect students, resident, alumni and faculty with one another to help them thrive, just as she did. *Photo submitted*

In December 2024, the College of Medicine bid farewell to an alumna whose life story reflects determination and ingenuity that will not soon be forgotten. In celebrating Dr. Geraldine Kurz, MD'73, the Alumni and Community Program remembers not only an accomplished physician but also a determined and generous soul who embodied the very spirit of our college community.

Her story began in the now-abandoned Saskatchewan village of West Bend. Born into a family that valued play and curiosity, she said her father delayed sending her to school until she was 7 years old. "My father didn't believe in sending kids to school early; he wanted me to be free to play as long as possible," she said. Geraldine's first day of school in the two-room school, which she describes as her first true memory, was the catalyst that sparked a lifelong passion for reading and learning.

The school did not have a library. A box of loaned books would be shipped from Foam Lake, SK, on the first day of each month. Geraldine eagerly awaited these shipments and made it her mission to read each book from cover to cover, regardless of whether she was interested in the topic.

The West Bend School only offered a syllabus to Grade 8, but Geraldine's father recognized her passion for education and arranged for her to board with a distant relative in Foam Lake, 20 miles away, where she could attend high school.

"My father only went to school until grade 8," she said, "but he saw how much education meant to me." A favourite teacher at Foam Lake High School encouraged her to continue her studies after graduation, which led to her first University of Saskatchewan degree, a Bachelor of Science in Home Economics, in 1964.

While the responsibilities of adult life followed, something unexpected happened that helped her discover her true calling. Her then husband, a dentist, had a stack of anatomy books in the house. "One day, I picked one up, and I couldn't put it down," she recalled. Intrigued, she worked her way through several volumes, and emerged with a newfound goal of studying medicine.

After being denied entry to the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine on her first application, Geraldine ingeniously discovered a backdoor route. Enrolling in the College of Arts and Science, she was able to

take the first-year medicine classes and, while studying, she reapplied. "It didn't feel sneaky, but I guess it was now that I think about it," she conceded.

This time, she earned an admissions interview. "During my interview, one of the panellists asked, 'Who will clean your house while you're off being a doctor?' Without thinking, I blurted out, 'Well, I'll hire a house cleaner, of course!'" she laughed. "I still can't believe I said that, but it was true. A messy house wasn't going to be what stopped me."

While Geraldine was writing her last exam of the semester, her professor came and stood beside her. "He grabbed my exam and said, 'I think you can hand that in now.' Then he replaced it with an envelope." Inside was a letter; she had been accepted into the second year of the Doctor of Medicine program. That moment, she said, was one she would never forget.

Graduating from the College of Medicine set the stage for a fulfilling career as a board-certified dermatologist in California. Despite her success, she never forgot her Saskatchewan roots or the institution that shaped her path.

Prior to her passing, Dr. Geraldine Kurz made a significant donation to the College of Medicine's Alumni and Community Program that will fund initiatives that connect students, residents, alumni and faculty with one another and with opportunities to help them thrive, just as she did.

"I wish I could have come back home along the way," she said. "I miss Saskatchewan." Geraldine's legacy will forever be intertwined with the College of Medicine, encouraging others to dream big, work hard and give back.

By sharing Geraldine's story, it is the Alumni and Community Program's hope that others will be inspired to share their own path that led them to the USask College of Medicine in pursuit of becoming a physician. ♥

This interview was conducted in August 2024.

Standing the test of time: Four decades of the Highlights in Medicine Conference

The College of Medicine invites alumni, former faculty, deans, students, and researchers to join us for the 2025 Highlights in Medicine Conference from June 19 to 21, 2025. The theme is, "Care in Matters of Life and Death: Collaborative learning for the enhancement of patient care in all stages of life and circumstance." Don't miss this chance to reconnect, contribute, and celebrate.

KELSEY KOUGIYA

The Highlights in Medicine Conference has been a cornerstone event for the College of Medicine, showcasing the college's commitment to lifelong learning and community engagement, and celebrating its medical achievements. As the conference marks its 40th anniversary this year, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the inaugural conference and the remarkable journey of growth and transformation since its inception.

The first-ever conference, themed "Medicine—Today and Tomorrow," was held in June 1984. This ambitious event invited speakers and attendees to examine society's evolving expectations of its physicians. The conference provided a platform for professional interaction, the exchange of ideas, and discussions on emerging developments in medicine. All former deans

of the college were invited to attend, with Drs. Wendell MacLeod, John Gutelius, and Bob Murray joining the celebrations. The first Highlights in Medicine Conference was deemed a resounding success.

With mostly alumni in attendance, the conference lectures and social gatherings were filled with nostalgia. Guests reminisced about boarding houses, supportive landladies, and the financial challenges of their student years. Lectures included several from the School of Medical Sciences, the predecessor to the College of Medicine; many shared touching stories of experiences during the Great Depression, the Second World War, and early days in medical practice. These heartfelt stories underscored overall gratitude for the college as the foundation of fulfilling medical careers. The inaugural conference's success set the stage for what would become a cherished College of Medicine tradition.

Over the past 40 years, the Highlights in Medicine Conference has grown into a platform for professional connection and development. It has expanded to include broader participation from students, faculty, and practising physicians from across the

medical community. Together, conference goers reflect on rapid advancements in medicine, evolution of cutting-edge research, landmark technological innovations, and pressing global health issues.

The Highlights in Medicine Conference remains a testament to the enduring bond between the College of Medicine and the medical community. It is not merely a professional gathering but also a celebration of shared history, mutual support, and collective aspirations for the future of medicine. The stories shared at the inaugural conference in 1984 continue to resonate; reminding us of the resilience, dedication, and camaraderie that define the medical profession.

Through the Highlights in Medicine Conference, the College of Medicine continues to exemplify its commitment to fostering a vibrant, connected, and forward-thinking medical community. Here's to the next 40 years of learning, sharing, and celebrating the people and practice of medicine. ♥

College of Medicine

Students



407	521	1,060	132	258
Undergraduate Medical Education	Postgraduate Medical Education	Biomedical Sciences *	Master of Physical Therapy	Master and PhD (various fields)

*students studying biomedical sciences within the Bachelor of Science program, a partnership between the College of Medicine and the College of Arts and Science.

Staff and Faculty



470+	2,200+	throughout the province, support over	20	departments, divisions and academic units
Staff	faculty			

Research



\$41 million
New funding awarded to College of Medicine researchers in 2023-24



457 Active researchers



328 Awarded projects

New Programs

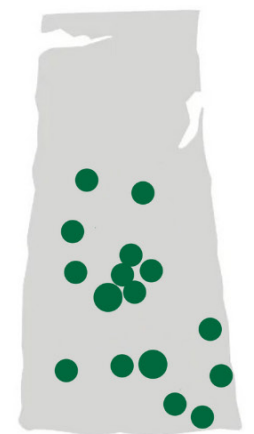
3

New graduate level programs

- Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS)**
August 2025 start date
- Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT)**
Fall 2026 targeted start date
- Master of Speech Language Pathology (MSLP)**
Fall 2026 targeted start date

Locations

Our main campuses are in Regina and Saskatoon with training sites located across the province.



A photograph of a man and a woman in a clinical or laboratory setting. The man, on the left, is wearing a dark polo shirt and is holding a small medical device or instrument. The woman, on the right, is wearing a grey top and is smiling at the man. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a laboratory or clinical environment. The entire image has a green tint.

The College of Medicine is a leader in improving the health and well-being of the people of Saskatchewan and the world.

As a socially accountable organization, we improve health through innovative and interdisciplinary research and education, leadership, community engagement, and the development of culturally competent, skilled clinicians and scientists. Collaborative and mutually beneficial partnerships with Indigenous peoples and communities are central to our mission.