UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Internal Insights

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
College of Medicine
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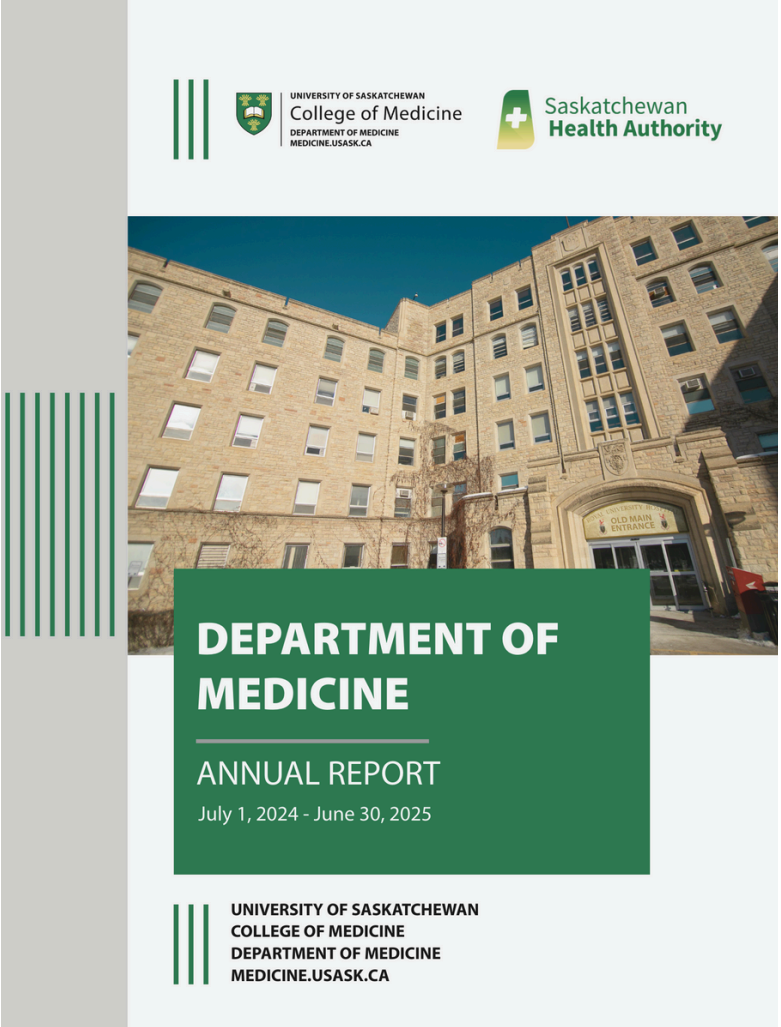

DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE ANNUAL REPORT OUT NOW

The Department of Medicine's annual report is now available online on our website. This report covers the period of July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025.

The department's annual report provides a snapshot of the past year, highlighting the various achievements of our faculty, residents, and staff and sharing the latest updates from our divisions in Regina, Saskatoon, and rural areas. The communications team wants to extend a thank you to everyone who contributed and was involved in the creation process of this year's report.

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Visit our department website for the latest news and information.

Message from the Provincial Head

Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a restful and warm holiday season.

Entering 2026, I want to thank our faculty for a productive 2025 and commend them for their contributions, even amidst an increase in clinical work.

Our department continued to be a leader in research, with our researchers contributing to over 300 publications.

We have also experienced great success in recruitment, with roughly 30 new members joining us in 2025.

With this newsletter, I would also like to present our latest Annual Report. This report highlights the numerous achievements of our department members, as well as showcasing the work of our divisions in Regina, Saskatoon, and rural areas. Thank you to all our members who contributed to this report.

As I near the end of my second term as Provincial Department Head, I want to encourage our members to be active in the selection process of a new Department Head and give feedback where needed.

Sincerely,

Dr. Haissam Haddad, O.C., S.O.M., MD, FRCPC, FRCP Edin, CCPE

Professor and Head
Department of Medicine
University of Saskatchewan
Louis Horlick Chair in Medicine
Provincial Head, Medicine

Research Update

Welcome back to the new year. I hope that everyone had a relaxing holiday season as we start out 2026.

I would like to start by welcoming Dr. Ozlem Sari, our departmental research facilitator, back! I would also like to thank Dr. Maryam Madani for working with our department over the past few months while Ozlem was away.

We have a number of research activities coming up. Of note, on Friday, January 23, we will have a work-in-progress meeting where we will hear from Dr. George Katselis and Dr. Cari McIlduff (Community Health and Epidemiology) on working with Indigenous communities. Also, our Department of Medicine Research Day is booked for the morning of Friday May 1. Please mark your calendars! Additional information on abstract submissions will be sent out soon.

We are pleased to announce that the Department of Medicine is offering another round of internal research funding this year. There will be four competitions: a general DoM call, a call with a focus on a cardiovascular (the Viktor A Pollak and Mirka B Pollak Cardiology research fund), a call with a focus on arthritis (Pockett Estate Arthritis Research Fund), and a call with a focus on work related to Royal University Hospital (RUH) activities. You would have received an email about this but please reach out to Ozlem if you have not received it.

\ Please remember that there are several research grant deadlines approaching in the next few months. You may want to keep an eye on the announcement emails coming your way and start looking ahead to these to plan future projects. If you are looking for specific research opportunities or would like to speak with someone about moving into research or advancing your research program, please contact Dr. Ozlem Sari (ozlem.sari@usask.ca), the DoM Research Facilitator. Also, please contact her if you have some suggestions for improving research support.

Best of luck in all of your research activities!

-Dr. Josh Lawson
Director of Research,
Department of Medicine

Faculty Updates

Farewell to Dr. Jessie Baptiste and Dr. Michael Zawadowski.

Dr. Jon Dean is now serving as Core IM Program Director, after previously serving as co-program director alongside Dr. Jessie Baptiste. Thank you to Dr. Baptiste for her service in this role.

Dr. Davina Tai is now serving as Division Head of Nephrology for Saskatoon. Thank you to Dr. Rod Stryker for his service in this role.

Dr. Kelsey Tallon is now serving as Division Head of Respirology for Regina. Thank you to Dr. Zenon Belak for his service in this role.

Dr. Alex Wong is now serving as Acting Division Head of Infectious Diseases for Regina. Thank you to Dr. Stuart Skinner for his service in this role.

Welcome to the new faculty recruits to our department:

- **Dr. Shima Shahbaz**, Dermatology, Regina
- **Dr. Jake Towriss,** GIM, Saskatoon
- **Dr. Stephanie Choquette,** GIM, Saskatoon
- **Dr. Leonard Byker**, GIM, Regina
- **Dr. Izn Shahab,** Neurology, Regina
- **Dr. Benedict Blake,** GIM, Regina
- **Dr. Ahmed Gargoum,** Cardiology, Regina

Staff Updates

Bobbie Genereux has left her position with the Core IM Program.

Samantha Thompson has left her role as Department Assistant and Subspecialties Administrator.

Welcome to the new staff in our department:

- **Jeane Magasakay**, Core IM Program Administrator

Getting to Know...

Meet some of our wonderful researchers, faculty, and administrators

Researcher profile: Dr. Julian Tam

A Q-and-A with Dr. Julian Tam, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine in the Division of Respirology and Sleep Medicine.

Could you provide a short description of your background?
I am a respirologist and specialize in cystic fibrosis and lung transplantation.

What is your area of research?
I am the site principal investigator for the Saskatoon Pediatric and Adult Cystic Fibrosis Clinics for the Cystic Fibrosis Canada Accelerating Clinical Trials Network (CF CanACT). I also collaborate with Dr. Juan Ianowski (Department of Anatomy, Physiology, and Pharmacology) and our lab research team in basic research to understand the pathophysiology of CF lung disease. In particular, we are interested in the pulmonary ionocyte which is a rare airway cell type. Some researchers wonder whether pulmonary ionocytes play a critical role in causing CF lung disease because they express the CFTR protein at a very high level. We published work last year showing that ionocytes are responsible for regulating airway acidity.

Could you tell us about the "big moments of research" for you?
I prepared a presentation on airway surface liquid and ion transport in CF early in my career. I gained a deeper appreciation for basic science as I learned about the studies that have led to our current understanding of CF lung disease.

Do you have any advice/messages for early-career researchers?
I recommend collaborating with and learning from established researchers.

What are your future aspirations for research?
I believe that understanding the function and location of various airway cell types will facilitate the development of effective gene therapies for CF. My lab research team and I aim to describe which cells need to be corrected in order to cure CF lung disease.

Administrator profile: Joan Aquino

Joan Aquino is the Finance and Admin Coordinator for the Department of Medicine.

Hi, I'm Joan Aquino. I'm your contact for finance and administrative support, alongside Lindsay Doig. I grew up in Palawan, Philippines, and moved to Canada with my family when I was 15.

I completed a Diploma in Business and Accounting, which laid the foundation for my career in finance and administration.

I've working in several different units at the University of Saskatchewan (USask), including roles as a Finance Coordinator at the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, the Diefenbaker Canada Centre, and the College of Arts and Science. I've also worked as an Office Administrator and Finance Officer in the Edwards School of Business, as an Accounting Assistant in the Controller's Office, and as a Clerical Assistant in the College of Medicine.

I joined the Department of Medicine in March 2025. In my current role, I prepare financial reports, support reconciliations, assist with hiring and onboarding, manage time approvals, submit journal entries, process invoices, investigate missing transactions, and support a wide range of financial and administrative functions. What I enjoy most is being part of a high-performing team that supports both the academic and clinical sides of USask and the Saskatchewan Health Authority, contributing to the success of current and future physicians.

Outside of work, I'm committed to personal growth, active in my church community, and enjoy snowboarding in the winter and spending time outdoors throughout the summer.

Celebrating our Success

Recognizing the awards and achievements made by our department

King Charles III Coronation Medal

Dr. Brian Graham (Emeritus Professor Respirology and Sleep Medicine) was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal, in recognition of his contributions to respiratory health. The award was established in May 2023 and administered by the Chancellery of Honours at Rideau Hall. The award acknowledges indiviuals' significant contributions to their community, region, province or territory, and the country at large.

King Charles III Coronation Medal

Dr. Nabeel Samad (Assistant Professor GIM) was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal, in recognition of his significant contributions to Canada. The award was established in May 2023 and administered by the Chancellery of Honours at Rideau Hall. The award acknowledges indiviuals' significant contributions to their community, region, province or territory, and the country at large.

King Charles III Coronation Medal

Dr. Andrea Lavoie (Assistant Professor and Division Head Cardiology – Regina) was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal, in recognition of her significant contributions to Canada. The award was established in May 2023 and administered by the Chancellery of Honours at Rideau Hall. The award acknowledges indiviuals' significant contributions to their community, region, province or territory, and the country at large.

King Charles III Coronation Medal

Dr. Joanne Kappel (Clinical Professor Nephrology) received the King Charles III Coronation Medal for over 30 years of dedicated service with the National Kidney Foundation. Her leadership and wisdom has made far reaching positive impacts for kidney health patients locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally.

ACP Prairie Provinces Chapter Internal Medicine Award

Dr. Michael Prystajecky (Associate Professor GIM) was awarded the American College of Physicians Prairie Provinces Chapter Internal Medicine Award. This award is given to a chapter Member, Fellow, or Master who has an exemplary record in patient care.

ACP Prairie Provinces Chapter Distinguished Teacher/Mentor Award

Dr. Linden Kolbenson (Assistant Professor GIM) was awarded the American College of Physicians Prairie Provinces Chapter Distinguished Teacher/Mentor Award. This award recognizes outstanding mentorship of students, residents, or colleagues as demonstrated by sustained commitment to providing personal and professional guidance to other health care professionals.

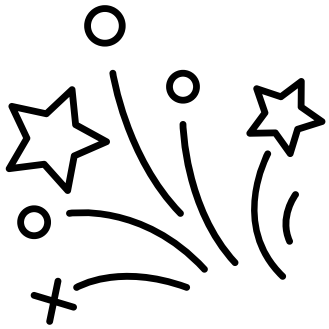
Photo credit: Tammy Zdunich

DoM faculty member receives grant for ICU care project

Congratulations to **Dr. Sabira Valiani (Assistant Professor GIM),** who received the Royal University Hospital Foundation's 2025 Women Leading Philanthropy (WLP) $100,000 Grant.

Her research project, Using Human Centred Design to Transform Patient and Family-Centred Care in the ICU, will enhance communication and compassion in critical care settings by designing sustainable, patient and family-focused strategies, starting at Royal University Hospital – with the potential to expand across Canada.

WLP is a program funded by women donors to RUH Foundation in support of female-led health care initiatives.



Celebrating our Success (cont'd)

Recognizing the awards and achievements made by our department

1939 Resident Teacher Award in Medicine

Dr. Riad Al-Sabbagh (Respirology Resident) was awarded the 1939 Resident Teacher Award in Medicine. This award recognizes medical residents who have excelled in teaching while at the College of Medicine at USask.

PGME Award for Exemplary Role Model Faculty Member

Dr. Alex Rajput (Neurology) was awarded the PGME Award for Exemplary Role Model Faculty Member. This award was created to recognize faculty members who have excelled as a role model for resident learning in University of Saskatchewan postgraduate training programs.

CanMEDS Exemplary Resident Award

Dr. Dammy Bello (Core IM Resident) was awarded the CanMEDS Exemplary Resident Award for PGME. Residents who receive this award demonstrated excellence in the Medical Expert role and have integrated all seven CanMEDS roles in an exemplary manner, specifically demonstrating commitment to the profession, high standards of professionalism, life-long learning, excellent interpersonal skills, transformational leadership abilities and work-life balance.

Congratulations to **Brenda McLaren** who celebrated 25 years with the Department of Medicine in August. She is the Administrative Assistant for Dr. Caspar-Bell of the Saskatoon Endocrinology Division of the Department of Medicine.

Connecting Colleagues

The Core IM program held their Resident Research Days on Nov. 25 and Dec. 2, 2025. Thank you to all staff and faculty who helped to run this wonderful showcase.

The Department held its annual holiday lunch on Dec. 11, 2025.

The department's administrative staff held a holiday gathering at Wet Paint Pottery on Dec. 15, 2025.

Congratulations to all of our amazing faculty and staff!

We're so lucky to have you!

USask researchers publish first Canadian guidelines for Spinal Bulbar Muscular Atrophy

Researchers at the University of Saskatchewan (USask) have published the first Canadian clinical guidelines for Spinal Bulbar Muscular Atrophy (SBMA), a rare hereditary neuromuscular disorder. To read the full article, please visit the news section of our website or use the QR code here:

BE WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS

In the News

Podcast: Guideline offers roadmap for spinal and bulbar muscular atrophy care. Canadian Medical Association Journal Podcast. (Dr. Kerri Schellenberg, Neurology).

Publication Highlights

Best practice recommendations for the clinical care of spinal bulbar muscular atrophy

Schellenberg KL, Caspar-Bell G, Ellis C, Johnston W, **King A**, King M, Korngut L, Kushneriuk B, **Lavoie AJ**, McGonigle R, **Newton J,** O'Connell C, Shoesmith C, Suchowersky O, Warman-Chardon J, Wunder S, Pfeffer G.

Spinal bulbar muscular atrophy, a rare neuromuscular condition highly prevalent in First Nations and Métis-identifying populations in western Canada, has previously lacked guidelines and standardized care. These practice recommendations were developed by an interdisciplinary working group to create 41 recommendations, addressing both clinical, emotional, and cultural considerations to address continued care of spinal bulbar muscular atrophy.

Link:
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40983380/

Sodium-Glucose Cotransporter 2 Inhibitors Preceding ST-Segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction: Global Proteomics and Pathobiological Insights

Shavadia JS, Tomilin M, **Chumala P, Mangipudi R,** Udell J, **Haddad H, Katselis GS.**

Sodium-glucose 2 receptor inhibitors, a class of Type 2 diabetes medication, manage blood sugar by inhibiting sodium-glucose transport protein 2. They also help improve kidney and heart health. This study explored how these proteins differ in patients on and not on these medications prior to experiencing a STEMI (ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction) type of heart attack.

Link:
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40554404/

Meta-Analysis: Mortality Trends and Risk Factors in Severe Alcohol-Associated Hepatitis

Siddique MR, **Haque M,** Idalsoaga F, Diaz LA, Im G, Singal AK, Hoang S, Khan MQ, Arab JP.

This meta-analysis reviews the literature surrounding short-term mortality trends in severe alcohol-associated hepatitis, a life-threatening condition. Reviewing 34 studies comprising 1586 patients, it was concluded that short-term mortality for this condition remains high and has not improved in recent decades, highlighting the need for effective therapies, improved transplantation processes, and better prognostics tools.

Link:
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40974371/

Find the latest research publications from our department on our website or by using the QR Code:

Department of Medicine in the News

HIV is quietly surging in Saskatchewan. *This is Saskatchewan, CBC Saskatchewan.* (Dr. Cara Spence, Infectious Diseases). https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/1416-this-is-saskatchewan/episode/16114998-hiv-is-quietly-surging-in-saskatchewan

AI Tool May Reduce Risk for Unexpected Hospital Deaths. *MedScape.* (Dr. Rabia Shahid, GIM). https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/ai-tool-may-reduce-risk-unexpected-hospital-deaths-2024a1000h3v?form=fpf

Opinion: AI offers opportunity for better Indigenous health care. Opinion, Saskatoon StarPhoenix. (Dr. Jarol Boan, GIM). https://thestarphoenix.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-ai-offers-opportunity-for-better-indigenous-health-care

A conversation with Jarol Boan, author of 'The Medicine Chest: A Physician's Journey Towards Reconciliation. *Saskatchewan Weekend with Shauna Powers, CBC Saskatchewan.* (Dr. Jarol Boan, GIM). https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-205-saskatchewan-weekend/clip/16051448-a-conversation-jarol-boan-author-the-medicine-chest

The private cost of public service: how sharing science about COVID put experts in the crosshairs. *This is Saskatchewan, CBC News.* (Dr. Alexander Wong, Infectious Diseases). https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/covid-19-doctor-opens-up-toll-stress-1.7480601

'It brings back a component of PTSD': The toll COVID-19 took on this infectious diseases expert. CBC News. (Dr. Alexander Wong, Infectious Diseases). https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/9.6681015

Sask. researchers evaluate effects of breast reconstruction surgery on cancer survivors. CTV News. (Dr. Angelica Lang, CCRAH). https://www.ctvnews.ca/saskatoon/article/sask-researchers-evaluate-effects-of-breast-reconstruction-surgery-on-cancer-survivors/

New mobile wellness bus to offer primary medical, addiction care from the streets of Saskatoon. *CTV News.* (Dr. Mark Fenton, Respirology, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine). https://www.ctvnews.ca/saskatoon/article/new-mobile-wellness-bus-to-offer-primary-medical-addiction-care-from-the-streets-of-saskatoon/

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We acknowledge that we live and work on includes the Treaties 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 Territories and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

Events

Grand rounds are held every Wednesday from 12pm-1pm in-person at the Vivian Asher Theatre and via Zoom, September through June.

Reminders

- All department faculty must provide a profile photo for our website. Please send a photo or send a photography request to DoM.Communications@usask.ca. Need to update your profile? Contact us too!
- Share your successes! If you have a 'win' to share, contact our communications specialist!

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We want your feedback! What do you think of Internal Insights?

Internal Insights is YOUR newsletter. Get to know each other by sharing information about your special projects, upcoming events, as well as personal and professional success stories. Email DoM.Communications@usask.ca with your events, activities, photos, and anything else that you think would be interesting to your colleagues in the department.

Questions? Comments? Accessibility concerns? Send an email to the Department of Medicine Communications team at DoM.Communications@usask.ca.

To see past newsletters please visit our Department of Medicine website:

https://medicine.usask.ca/department/clinical/medicine-pages/internal-insights-newsletter.php