



AdventHealth Research Institute


# Annual Report **2024**

  
**AdventHealth**



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# Welcome

In 2024, research at AdventHealth sparked groundbreaking innovations that are redefining whole-person care — advancing not only treatments and technologies but also deepening our understanding of the human experience. Each discovery reflects our unwavering belief in the power of the human spirit and our commitment to care that heals beyond the diagnosis. Through bold inquiry and compassionate science, we are shaping a future where innovation and empathy go hand in hand — transforming lives, strengthening communities, and inspiring what’s possible in health and healing.

Innovation is not only measured by new discoveries, but by the lives changed and the hope restored through them. At AdventHealth, our research is guided by both rigorous inquiry and a higher calling — to bring light, clarity, and healing where it is most needed. This report is a reflection of that mission, and a celebration of the people whose dedication makes the extraordinary possible.

Thank you for your interest in learning more about research at AdventHealth by engaging with this year’s Annual Report.

I can assure you it will be time well spent.



*Rob Herzog*

**Rob Herzog**  
Vice President, Research

# Welcome 2024 New Investigators to AHRI

## AdventHealth Cancer for Children



**Jorge Lopez De La Re, MD**  
Pediatrics  
Neonatology



**Bridget Koontz, MD**  
FASTRO Radiation  
Oncology



**Jennifer Seminerio, MD**  
Gastroenterology

## Digestive Health (DHI)



**Monica Aggarwal, MD**  
Cardiovascular  
Disease



**Basiem Barsoum, MD**  
Cardiology



**Usman Bhatti, MD**  
Cardiology



**Marc Iskandar, DO**  
Cardiovascular  
Disease



**James Nguyen, MD**  
Cardiovascular  
Disease



**Thomas Walsh, MD**  
Cardiology

## Heart, Lung and Vascular



**Aqsa Ullah, DO**  
Neurology



**Daniel Goltz, MD**  
Shoulder and Elbow



**Adam Money, MD**  
Operative Sports  
Medicine



**Jason Epstein, MD**  
Non-operative Sports  
Medicine



**John Ruder, MD**  
Operative Sports  
Medicine

## Neuroscience Orthopedic



Transplant



Sula Mazimba, MD  
Advance Heart  
Failure and Transplant  
Cardiology

Rocky Mountain Region



Yousuf Gaffar, MD  
Medical Director,  
Oncology

West Florida Division

Cardiovascular



James Irwin, MD  
Electrophysiology



Khalid  
Mohammed, DO  
Interventional  
Cardiology

Digestive Health



Anas Alsaleh, MD  
Gastroenterology



Michael Harris, MD  
Gastroenterology



Kim-Phung  
Nguyen, MD  
Colorectal Surgery

The Office of the  
Vice President of Research

The AdventHealth Research Institute (AHRI) orchestrates a vibrant research enterprise, integrating scientific discoveries into clinical workstreams to enhance health care delivery. Supporting 870 active clinical studies, AHRI is at the forefront of novel treatment options, accelerating destination programs and developing nationally leading centers of excellence.

AHRI’s robust research infrastructure is vital for recruiting and retaining top clinical leadership and providing a dynamic environment for testing innovative ideas. This commitment to excellence ensures better treatment options at every disease stage, fosters growth and discovery, reduces discovery cycle times.

The Office of the Vice Presidency oversees various departments, each driven to support our investigator community on the journey to become a preeminent health system for clinical and translational research.



202  
Active Principal  
Investigators



878  
Clinical Studies  
Annually



18  
Grant Awards  
in 2024



# AHRI Support for Clinical Center of Excellence Designations and Accreditations

The designations and accreditations below all require research to receive.

U.S. News & World Report  
Best Children's Hospital for Newborn Care in Florida

Level 1 Children's Surgery Center by American College of Surgeons

Children's Oncology Group

ANCC Magnet Recognition Program

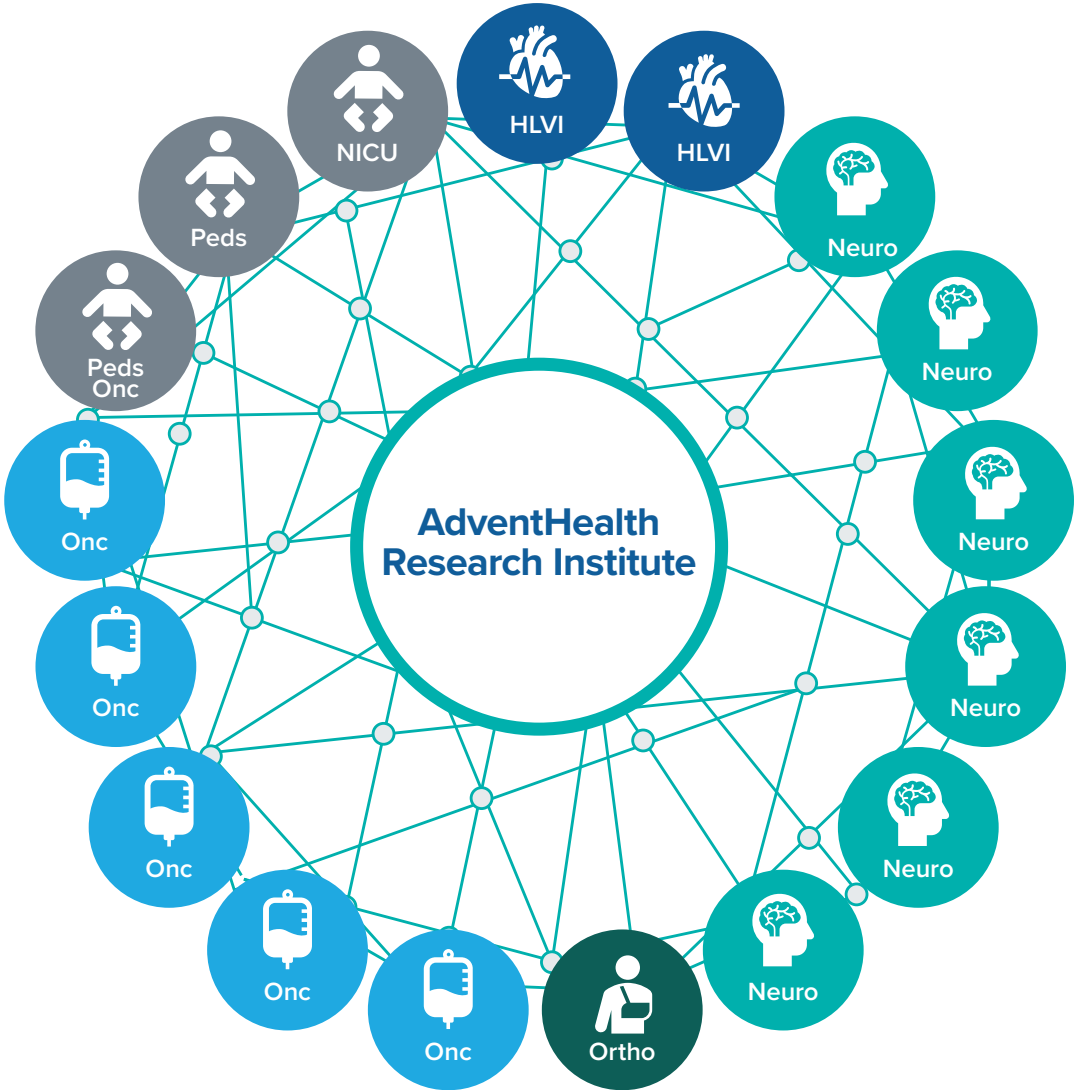
Commission on Cancer

Lymphedema COE\*\*

National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers

American Society of Clinical Oncology

Orthopedic Surgery Residency Program



GME Cardiovascular Disease Fellowship Program

PH Center of Comprehensive Care

DNV Comprehensive Stroke Center

Huntington's Disease Society of America

Hereditary Neuropathy Foundation (HNF)

State-Designated Memory Disorder Clinic

Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA)

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

## System Support

### Research Administration

The Research Administration team at AHRI provides a standardized infrastructure to support operational activities and foster a positive work culture across the organization. They implement engagement activities and coordinate onboarding for all research team members, ensuring everyone feels connected to the research vision.

### Research Services

Research Services at AHRI include the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance, Office of Sponsored Programs, and Office of Intellectual Property Development, supporting clinical operations and ensuring regulatory compliance and financial support. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews all research for ethical standards, scientific merit and regulatory compliance, protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

### Business Development

Business Development at AHRI initiates and supports relationships with research sponsors and partners to access innovative therapies and medical devices for AdventHealth patients. They develop long-term growth strategies and collaborate with stakeholders to implement specialized clinical trials that transform health care.

### Research Operations

Research Operations at AHRI organizes various research teams to evaluate and execute clinical trials and studies, collaborating with other departments to develop feasible opportunities and trial portfolios. They focus on participant safety and clinical advancement, using advanced equipment and facilities to improve quality of life from NICU babies to mature adults.

### Research Data Services Core

The Research Data Services Core (RDSC) at AHRI supports the data needs of research partnerships by providing a portfolio of data products and capabilities, shaping the real-world evidence strategy to drive optimal health care outcomes. By leveraging real-world data, the RDSC strengthens clinical trial accrual, delivers analysis-ready data sets and facilitates secure data transfers.

### Investigator Support

#### Center for Academic Research Excellence (CARE)

The Center for Academic Research Excellence (CARE) at AHRI consists of a team of scientists, mentors, biostatisticians and research professionals focused on improving patient care and clinical outcomes through data-driven research. CARE also provides statistical support and consultations on study design, enhancing the quality of research projects for faculty, fellows, residents and students.




# AHRI Overview

AdventHealth aims to be a leading faith-based, consumer-focused clinical institution delivering exceptional patient care. The AdventHealth Research Institute (AHRI) is pivotal in achieving this goal by integrating groundbreaking research, patient-centered oversight and scientific knowledge into our health care system.


AHRI's vision is to advance globally recognized, whole-person health care research, leveraging our diverse population to enhance community health. Our extensive clinical trial portfolio, involving more than 1,000 investigators and staff, has significantly contributed to medical advancements, including diabetes treatment, neurodegenerative disease understanding immunotherapies and CAR-T treatment innovations. These trials connect patients to leading-edge research and potential treatments swiftly and safely.

As we expand our research capabilities, we remain committed to our mission of Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ, promoting wholeness in body, mind and spirit across our Central, West, South and East Florida divisions and the Multi-State Division. We disseminate this knowledge systemwide, establishing a robust scientific foundation to redefine clinical practice standards. Our leadership fosters collaboration to benefit the community, our health system and researchers.


# AHRI Leadership Team




**Rob Herzog**  
Vice President  
Research




**Chris Davis, PhD**  
Executive Director  
Research Operations




**Shauni Dusan**  
Executive Director  
Research Data Services




**Delores Barnes**  
Director, Oncology,  
Neuroscience and  
Pediatrics Clinical Research




**Tina Bowdish**  
Director  
Cancer Research  
Strategy




**Ashley Brower**  
Director  
Research Admin and  
Strategic Communications




**Kirk Erickson, PhD**  
Director  
Translational  
Neuroscience




**Anita Fletcher, MD**  
Director  
Neuroscience  
Clinical Research




**Bret Goodpaster, PhD**  
Scientific Director  
Translational  
Research Institute




**Christina Jackson**  
Director  
Research Integrity  
and Compliance



**Rossitza Kassabova**  
Director  
Research Finance



**Melissa Quintero**  
Director  
Office of Sponsored  
Programs



**Patricia Robinson, PhD**  
Scientific Director  
Nursing and  
Wholeness Research

# AdventHealth Research Institute Map







## Philanthropy

Philanthropic contributions empower us to help more people live their best, most vibrant lives. Donations from generous community members advance research capabilities across our expanding nine-state network. This makes AdventHealth an ideal platform to increase patient access to clinical trials and support translational studies targeting vital health discoveries that lead to cures.

As one of the largest health care providers in Florida and nationwide, AdventHealth's commitment to excellence is evident in our clinical outcomes and relentless pursuit of innovation that leads to the highest degree of personalized care. These clinical outcomes are powered in part by research conducted at our hospitals. We believe in research as a care option and are grateful to the many individuals who contribute to scientific discovery and medical advancement at AdventHealth.

Donors have a unique opportunity to revolutionize care delivery and impact the health and well-being of this and future generations by fueling research through philanthropy at AdventHealth. There are many ways to support our programs — an annual contribution, a multi-year pledge, event sponsorship or establishing a legacy gift. Some of our most dedicated supporters consider making gifts through their will or trust. Other popular gift-giving options include gift annuities, stock or real estate gifts and IRA rollover contributions.

One of the most impactful ways to advance research activities is by establishing endowed chair positions for promising investigators. An endowed chair enables AdventHealth to attract and retain the best clinical providers and researchers by providing a permanent, stable funding source. These can be named after the donor or a loved one and exist in perpetuity while recognizing a family's legacy of generosity.

## Expanding Capabilities Through Donor Support



Alpha Tau Omega at the University of Florida hosted its third annual fundraiser, raising more than **\$44,000 in 2024 for Cancer Research at AdventHealth**. The event began after one of their fraternity brothers, Lawrence, was diagnosed with cancer at a young age. Thankfully, he is now in remission and Alpha Tau Omega continues to give back and raise awareness in his honor. To date, they have raised more than **\$100,000** for the cause.

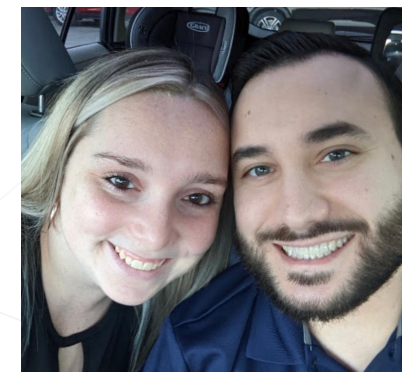


Melvin Field, MD

### The Clinical Trial That Helped Lawrence Become Cancer-Free

Lawrence's brain cancer journey began when he experienced persistent headaches leading to alarming neurological symptoms and seizures. *"The pain was so bad that I went to urgent care,"* he recalls. After an ER visit revealed an 8.3cm brain mass, he underwent a successful craniotomy performed by Dr. Melvin Field, removing 90% of the tumor. *"Physically, I felt fine and — miraculously — I was cognitively the same as I was before the surgery,"* Lawrence shares.

Diagnosed with grade 4 astrocytoma, Lawrence received chemotherapy and radiation and participated in a clinical trial with Optune therapy. *"I felt that going into treatment with the right mindset — in a positive mental state — would give me the best chance to recover well,"* he explains. *"I am excited to share that now my MRIs show no signs of cancer."*



Supported by his family and the AdventHealth team, Lawrence continues to thrive. *"My support system — my amazing family — has been with me every step of the way, and I would not be here without them,"* he says. He hopes his story inspires others and encourages further research funding. *"I pray my story can help inspire and bring hope to people who are sick. I hope it can move those who are able to help fund further research in this much deserved field."*

### Deep-Brain Stimulation Changes Margaret's Life



Mitesh Lotia, MD

Margaret Kohn was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease 10 years ago by Dr. Arnaldo Isa at AdventHealth. Her symptoms progressed rapidly, making simple tasks impossible. After medications failed, Dr. Mitesh Lotia introduced her to Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS), a procedure that dramatically improved her motor skills and reduced her tremors. *"When Dr. Lotia told me about this, there was no question that I wanted to have this done,"* Margaret shared. Since undergoing surgery performed by Dr. Chandan Reddy at AdventHealth Celebration in April 2024, Margaret has focused on raising awareness and supporting the Parkinson's community. *"My journey is far from over, and my experiences*



*can still inspire and uplift others,"* she says. She expresses deep gratitude to her family, friends and the AdventHealth team for their unwavering support. *"Thank you for being my Margie's Parkies. You all hold a special place in my heart,"* Margaret adds.

AdventHealth has partnered with Orlando Neurosurgery to offer advanced neurosurgical care, addressing a wide range of conditions with top experts in the field.





# Introduction to AHRI in Hendersonville (Southeast Region)

## Overview

AdventHealth continues to expand its healing ministry across the southeastern United States, with a strong presence in Kentucky, North Carolina and Georgia. AdventHealth Manchester has served as a vital access point for rural health care in Clay County, Kentucky, with a 49-bed facility, since 1971. In Georgia, AdventHealth’s footprint includes AdventHealth Redmond in Rome — a 230-bed hospital designated as a Level III trauma and Level I Emergency Cardiac Care Center — alongside AdventHealth Gordon in Calhoun and AdventHealth Murray in Chatsworth. These facilities provide comprehensive services from emergency care to surgery and outpatient treatment, anchoring AdventHealth’s commitment to whole-person care in Northwest Georgia.

AdventHealth’s Southeast Region has seen significant growth and strategic development in North Carolina. The flagship facility, AdventHealth Hendersonville, is a 103-bed hospital with consistent recognition from The Leapfrog Group for its patient safety and quality outcomes. The region expanded further with the integration of St. Luke’s Hospital in Polk County, a 25-bed critical access hospital, and has plans underway to establish a new hospital in Weaverville to meet the growing health care needs of Western North Carolina. In addition to inpatient care, the region supports numerous physician practices and outpatient services throughout the area, ensuring convenient access to high-quality care for the surrounding communities.

The Southeast Region has also emerged as a center of clinical innovation and research. The Cancer Services research program, established in 2011 under the leadership of Dr. Jennifer Heaberlin, participates in both industry-sponsored and cooperative group clinical trials. With accreditation from the Commission on Cancer (CoC) and the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NABPC), this program spans four sites across three counties and is supported by two sub-investigators, four nurse practitioners and two research nurses.

In 2024, the region launched a new research initiative in pain management and physical medicine, led by Dr. Jeremy Beckworth and

supported by a dedicated clinical medical research associate. This program conducts industry-sponsored trials at the main hospital and complements the region’s broader strategy of integrating leading-edge research with compassionate, whole-person care.

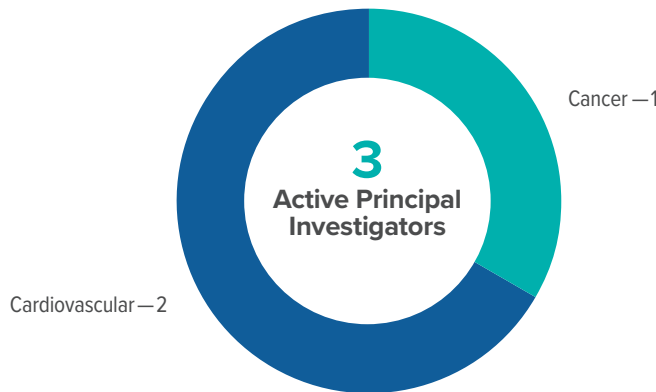
Collectively, these initiatives exemplify how AdventHealth’s Southeast Region is advancing our mission of Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ through clinical excellence, strategic expansion and a relentless commitment to innovation.

## By the Numbers

### Active Studies in the Southeast Region



### Active Investigators in the Southeast Region





# Investigators



Jeremy Beckworth, MD

**Jeremy Beckworth, MD**, is a physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM & R, Physiatry) and interventional pain physician at AdventHealth Hendersonville. After graduating from Loma Linda University School of Medicine, he completed a residency and fellowship at VCU Medical College of Virginia. Before joining AdventHealth, Dr. Beckworth worked at the Emory Spine Center in Atlanta for 15 years and served as the center’s co-director from 2017 to 2022.

He was the Emory PM & R associate residency program director for nine years and won the Teacher of the Year award six times. Dr. Beckworth is an oral board examiner for the American Board of PM & R. He is active with the International Pain and Spine Intervention Society (IPSIS) on its research division and research mentorship committee and as an instructor for its evidence-based medicine course. He has been involved in four studies that have won the best research award at the IPSIS annual meeting.

Dr. Beckworth has been at AdventHealth Hendersonville for two and a half years. He is currently involved with several studies. One is titled “Efficacy and Safety of Rexlemestrocel-L Combined with Hyaluronic Acid in Participants with Moderate to Severe Chronic Low Back Pain.” This study is a Phase III multicenter randomized clinical trial (RCT) of intradiscal stem cell injections for low back pain. A second study is “The Treatment of Painful Diabetic Neuropathy, a Randomized Controlled Trial.” Some studies suggest the underlying cause of neuropathy in people with diabetes is poor microvascular flow to the peripheral nerves. Other studies have shown that a whole-food, plant-based diet can improve arterial flow. A prior case series has shown marked improvement in painful diabetic neuropathy with this diet and this study is an RCT comparing diet, and neuropathic medications.



Jennifer Heaberlin, DO

**Jennifer Heaberlin, DO**, is board-certified in internal medicine, hematology and oncology. She has patient care and research experience treating breast, lung, gastrointestinal, renal and bladder cancers, as well as multiple myeloma.

Dr. Heaberlin earned her Bachelor of Biology at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. She earned her medical degree from Nova Southeastern University Osteopathic Medical School. She also has a Master of Public Health. Dr. Heaberlin was a resident in the internal medicine department at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami, Florida, and served as chief resident from 2010 to 2011. She also completed a fellowship in oncology at Georgia Regents University in Augusta, Georgia, where she served as co-chief fellow from 2013 to 2014.

# Introduction to AHRI in Shawnee Mission (Mid-America Region)

## Overview

Shawnee Mission is new to the AdventHealth Research Institute (AHRI) and focuses on advancing clinical research in cardiovascular and oncology care, with additional work in neuroscience.

The cardiovascular research focuses on cardiac electrophysiology and heart failure. Shawnee Mission has been selected to participate in two cardiac trials and has also contributed to a retrospective data collection study.

Our oncology research is centered on gynecologic oncology, with active enrollment in the MINERVA Study, a biorepository collecting blood and tissue samples from patients undergoing surgery. This work supports future research into individualized cancer treatment. We also support a neuroscience study, RESTORE, evaluating a device to relieve chronic low back pain.



## Cardiology Investigators



**M. Obadah Al-Chekakie, MD, MSc, FACC**

**M. Obadah Al-Chekakie, MD, MSc, FACC**, is a board-certified cardiac electrophysiologist specializing in arrhythmia management and preventing sudden cardiac death. He is skilled in electrophysiology studies, ablation therapy, cardiac rhythm management and device implantation. Dr. Al-Chekakie earned his medical degree from the University of Aleppo in Syria before completing his internal medicine residency at the Cleveland Clinic. He then pursued fellowship training in cardiology and electrophysiology at Loyola University Medical Center in Illinois. In addition to his board certifications in clinical cardiac electrophysiology, cardiovascular disease, internal medicine, echocardiography, and nuclear cardiology, Dr. Al-Chekakie has been pivotal in advancing electrophysiology programs. He established the EP program at Shawnee Mission Medical Center, developed lab and device clinic protocols, and has extensive experience training staff in simple and complex ablation procedures. Recognized for his expertise, *Ingram's* magazine named him a 2021 Top Doctor. His professional memberships include the American Heart Association, the Heart Rhythm Society and the American College of Cardiology, where he has been a Fellow since 2011. Dr. Al-Chekakie has contributed extensively to scientific literature, with numerous publications and book chapters on cardiomyopathy and atrial fibrillation. His research interests are electrophysiology, cardiac imaging, and devices.

**Medical Degree:** Aleppo University Hospital  
**Residency:** Internal Medicine at Cleveland Clinic  
**Fellowship:** Cardiology at Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine



**Andrew Waters, MD, FACC, RPVI**

**Andrew Waters, MD, FACC, RPVI**, is a board-certified noninvasive cardiologist with specialized expertise in heart failure. He earned his medical degree from Saba University School of Medicine before completing an internal medicine residency and cardiovascular disease fellowship at the University of Kansas Medical Center. In addition to board certifications in cardiovascular disease and internal medicine, Dr. Waters holds advanced certifications in echocardiography, nuclear cardiology, cardiac CT and peripheral vascular disease. As a registered physician in vascular interpretation (RPVI), he meets the highest standards in vascular ultrasound interpretation. Dr. Waters is the Shawnee Mission medical director of cardiology, cardiovascular imaging and the heart failure clinic. He is also the cardiology representative for the pharmacy and therapeutics committee and vice chair of internal medicine. Recognized for his commitment to excellence, Dr. Waters has received numerous awards, including most recently the Own It Award (2024). As a Fellow of the American College of Cardiology (FACC), Dr. Waters is fluent in Spanish, with research interests in heart failure and emerging field of cardio-oncology.

**Medical Degree:** Saba University School of Medicine  
**Residency:** Internal Medicine at the University of Kansas Medical Center  
**Fellowship:** Cardiovascular Disease at the University of Kansas Medical Center

## Neuroscience



**Smith C. Manion, MD**

**Smith C. Manion, MD**, is a board-certified pain medicine specialist and anesthesiologist with Midwest Anesthesia Associates, PA at AdventHealth Shawnee Mission. With extensive experience in clinical practice and research, Dr. Manion has led many groundbreaking studies in pain management and neuromodulation.

After earning a Doctor of Medicine from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2005, Dr. Manion completed a residency in anesthesia at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, serving as chief resident. Further specializing in pain medicine, Dr. Manion pursued a fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Manion has served as the principal investigator for the RESTORE trial and the FDA ReActiv8 clinical trial, contributing to advancements in neuromodulation for chronic pain. With a strong publication record, Dr. Manion has authored numerous peer-reviewed articles on perioperative pain management, imaging-guided pain treatment and strategies for preventing prescription drug abuse. A recognized leader in the field, Dr. Manion has been honored as a top pain medicine specialist in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

**Medical Degree:** University of Missouri-Columbia  
**Residency:** University of Iowa  
**Fellowship:** Massachusetts General Hospital

## Oncology



**Lowell Byers, MD**

**Lowell Byers, MD**, is a board-certified gynecologic oncologist with extensive experience in clinical care, research and leadership. As a principal investigator for gynecologic oncology trials at St. Luke's Hospital, Dr. Byers has played a key role in advancing research through participation in the Gynecologic Oncology Group (GOG) trials and pharmaceutical-sponsored studies, contributing to the development of new treatment strategies for gynecologic cancers.

Dr. Byers earned a Doctor of Medicine from the University of Kansas School of Medicine in 1980 and completed dual residencies in Internal Medicine and Obstetrics and Gynecology at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City. Following fellowship training in gynecologic oncology at the University of Minnesota, the American Cancer Society recognized Dr. Byers as a clinical oncology fellow.

Dr. Byers's research has focused on surgical outcomes, imaging techniques and tumor biology in gynecologic cancers. His published work includes studies on the role of transvaginal ultrasound in gynecologic oncology, hematologic complications associated with malignancy and advancements in laparoscopic lymphadenectomy for cervical cancer. Additional research has explored extracellular matrix involvement in tumor metastasis and the diagnostic value of Doppler sonography in gestational trophoblastic disease. Dr. Byers has also presented nationally on topics such as uterine sarcomas, management of invasive cervical cancer and innovations in continent urinary diversion.

A dedicated member of numerous professional societies, including the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dr. Byers remains actively involved in clinical research contributions. Dr. Byers's research interests include studies on endometrial and ovarian cancer.

**Medical Degree:** University of Kansas School of Medicine  
**Residency:** Obstetrics and Gynecology at Saint Luke's Hospital of Kansas City  
**Fellowship:** Gynecologic Oncology at the University of Minnesota Medical Center





Sara Lange, MD

**Sara S. Lange, MD**, is a gynecologic oncologist at AdventHealth Cancer Institute Shawnee Mission, where she integrates clinical expertise with a strong background in cancer research. Board-certified in gynecologic oncology and obstetrics and gynecology, she specializes in the treatment of gynecologic malignancies, with a focus on minimally invasive and robotic-assisted surgical techniques.

Dr. Lange earned her medical degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine, followed by a residency in obstetrics and gynecology at Carolinas Medical Center, where she served as chief administrative resident. She then completed a gynecologic oncology fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis. Before her fellowship, she was a postdoctoral research scholar in the internal medicine and oncology department at Washington University, where she worked under Dr. Brian Van Tine.

Her research contributions span many topics, including sentinel node biopsy techniques, fertility preservation in gynecologic cancer patients and targeted therapies for rare gynecologic sarcomas. She has co-authored numerous publications exploring the molecular mechanisms of cancer, including the role of malic enzyme 1 (ME1) in oxidative stress and

novel approaches to metabolic inhibition in synovial sarcoma. Her work has influenced advancements in personalized treatment strategies and clinical enrollment for uterine leiomyosarcoma patients.

Dr. Lange is actively involved in shaping cancer care policies and survivorship initiatives as chair of the cancer center committee at AdventHealth Shawnee Mission and a member of the credentials committee. She is a member of the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Her commitment to research and patient care has been recognized through honors such as multiple top doctor awards from *Kansas City* magazine. Dr. Lange is looking forward to offering clinical trials in platinum-resistant ovarian cancer and recurrent endometrial cancer.

**Medical Degree:** University of Missouri Columbia School of Medicine  
**Residency:** Obstetrics and Gynecology at Carolinas Medical Center  
**Fellowship:** Gynecologic Oncology at Washington University School of Medicine



Brenda Shoup, MD

**Brenda Shoup, MD**, is a gynecologic oncologist and Medical Director of the AdventHealth Shawnee Mission Mid-America Oncology Program. Dr. Shoup's career, spanning over two decades, is hallmarked by clinical excellence and numerous contributions to gynecologic cancer research. Board-certified in gynecologic oncology and general obstetrics & gynecology, Dr. Shoup specializes in treating gynecologic malignancies, hereditary cancer syndromes, and minimally invasive surgical techniques. Dr. Shoup earned her M.D. degree from the University of Kansas School of Medicine, completed a residency at the University of Florida-Shands Hospital, and pursued a gynecologic oncology fellowship at the University of South Florida Moffitt Cancer Center, where she researched targeted therapies and molecular mechanisms in ovarian and cervical cancer and was recognized for outstanding research presentations, including at the GSK National Fellows Forum. With a strong background in translational and clinical research, Dr. Shoup has contributed to numerous studies on ovarian cancer and cervical cancer, as well as telomerase inhibition in chemotherapy resistance and the role of interleukins in ovarian carcinogenesis. Her publications include studies on the accuracy of intraoperative pathology, imaging characteristics of thoracic metastases, and aggressive neuroendocrine carcinomas of the female reproductive tract. Dr. Shoup has also presented nationally on topics such as robotic surgery in gynecologic oncology and hereditary cancer risk assessment.

As Medical Director of the Division of Gynecologic Oncology since 2019, Dr. Shoup provides clinical leadership aimed at advancing gynecologic cancer care. Her contributions have been recognized with multiple awards, including the Physician Excellence Award (2021) and the Physician Compassion Award (2019), as well as repeated recognition as a Top Doctor by Kansas City magazine and Ingram's.

A member of the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Dr. Shoup remains dedicated to improving cancer outcomes through innovation, compassionate clinical care, and research that includes clinical trials, with the ultimate goal of incorporating molecularly targeted therapies to further advance cancer treatment for gynecologic malignancies.

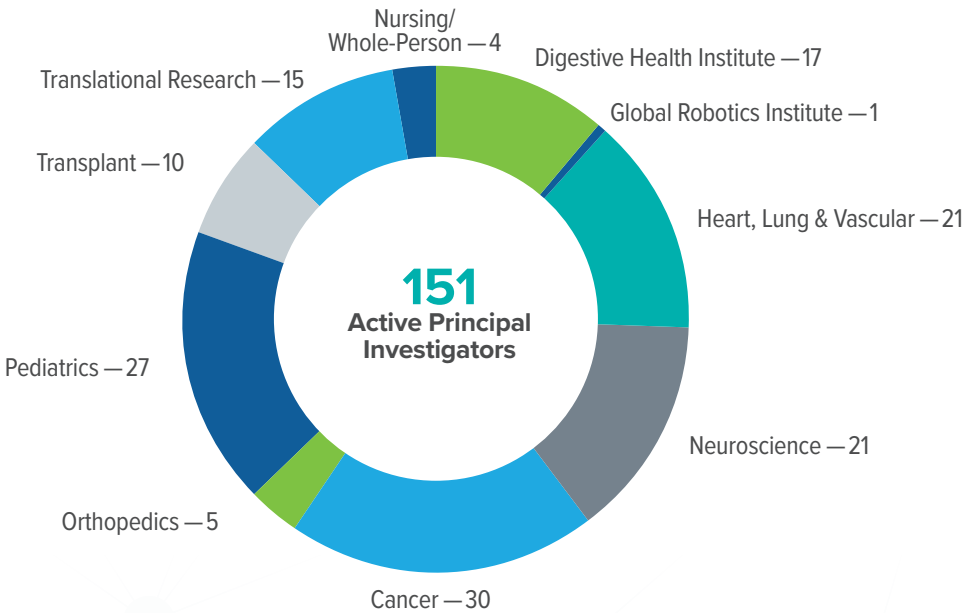
**Medical Degree:** University of Kansas School of Medicine  
**Residency:** Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Florida College of Medicine  
**Fellowship:** Gynecologic Oncology at the University of South Florida Moffitt Cancer Center



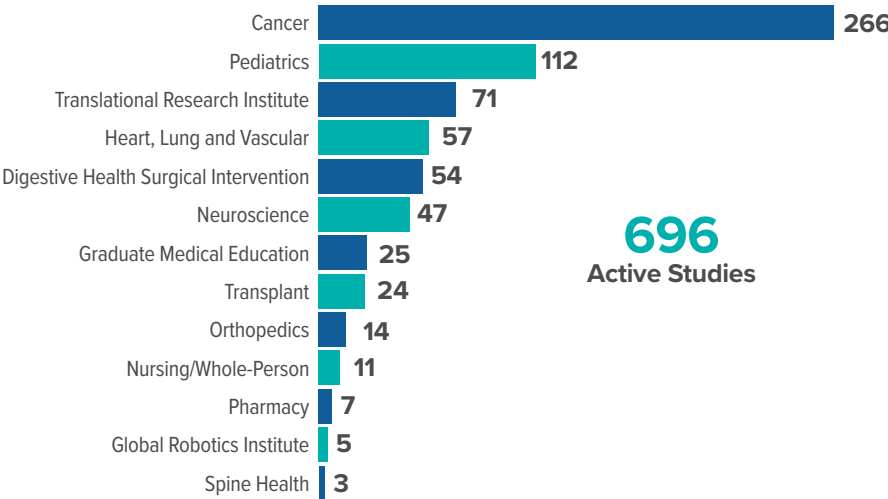
# AHRI in the Central Florida Division

## By the Numbers

Active Principal Investigators in the Central Florida Division

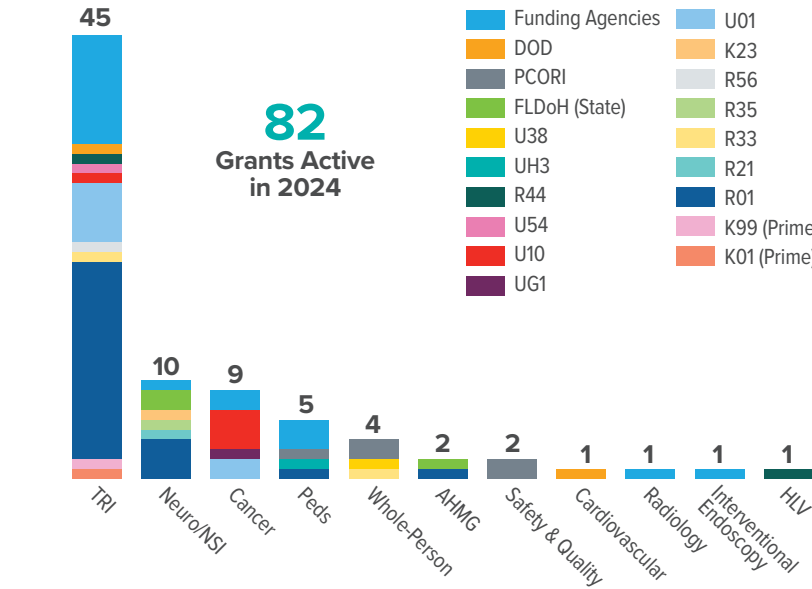


Active Studies in the Central Florida Division



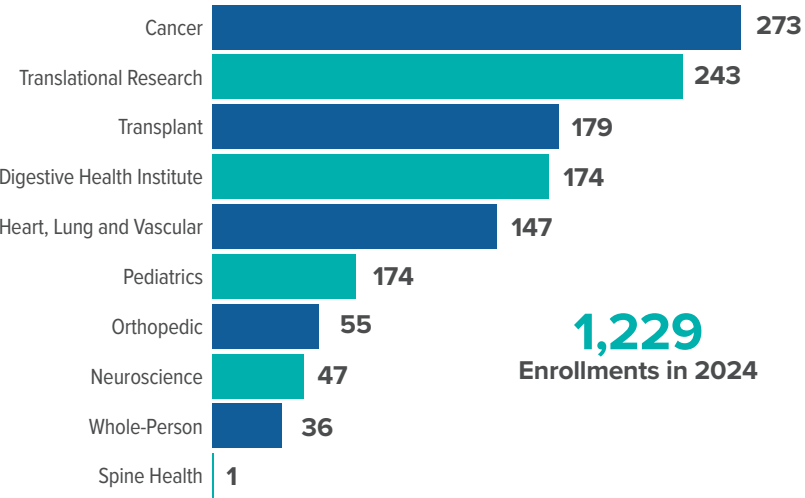
696  
Active Studies

Grants Active in 2024



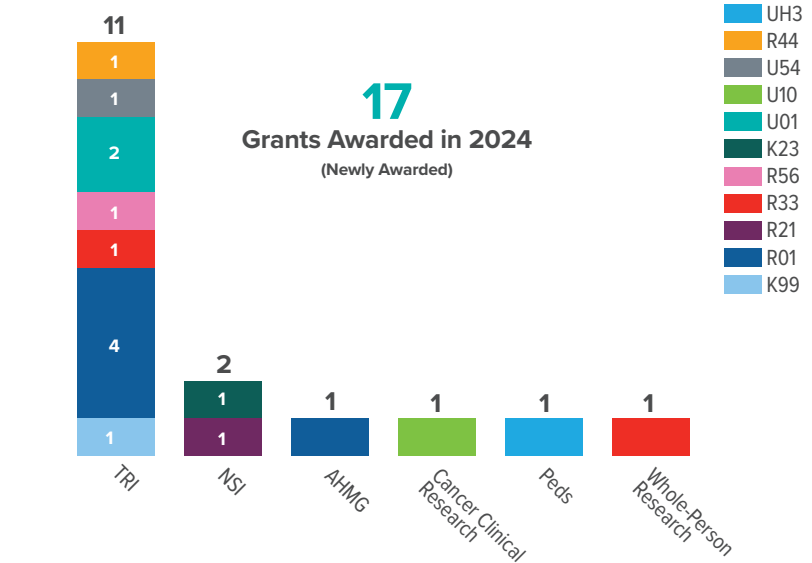
82  
Grants Active in 2024

2024 New Enrollments in the Central Florida Division



1,229  
Enrollments in 2024

Grants Awarded in 2024



17  
Grants Awarded in 2024  
(Newly Awarded)





# AdventHealth for Children

## Overview

AdventHealth Center for Pediatric Research is shaping the future of pediatric health care through innovative research, data analysis and enhanced clinical performance. We aim to achieve national recognition in pediatric care by prioritizing education, research, innovation, equity and diversity.

The research department supports a wide range of clinical trials, including pediatric oncology, investigator-initiated, grant-funded and sponsored studies across various pediatric specialties. Our subspecialty care includes head and neck tumors, mental health, a Level IV pediatric epilepsy center, a Level IV NICU, pediatric cellular therapy, pediatric liver transplants and complex care for patients with intricate diagnoses. We engage in industry-sponsored research and focus on projects that improve survival and outcomes through clinical trials and standardized care.

## Areas of Focus

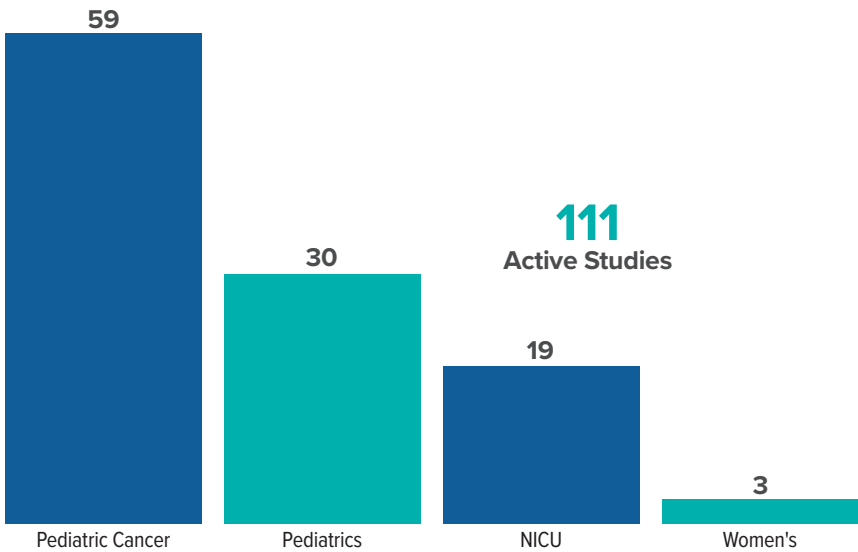
- Asthma
  - Autism
  - Cardiology
  - Dermatology
  - Epilepsy
  - Genomics and Rare Diseases
  - Hematology
  - Hepatology
- Neonatology
  - Neurology
  - Cancer
  - Orthopedics
  - Obesity
  - Sepsis (infections)
  - Urology
  - Vaccines



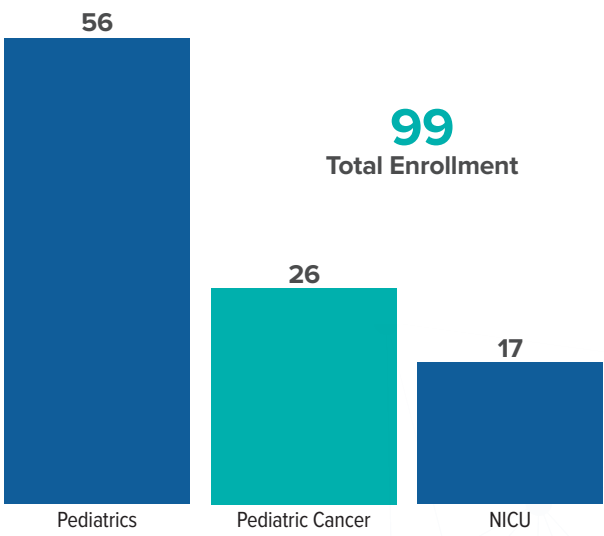
Learn more about AHRI pediatric research and clinical trials.

## By the Numbers

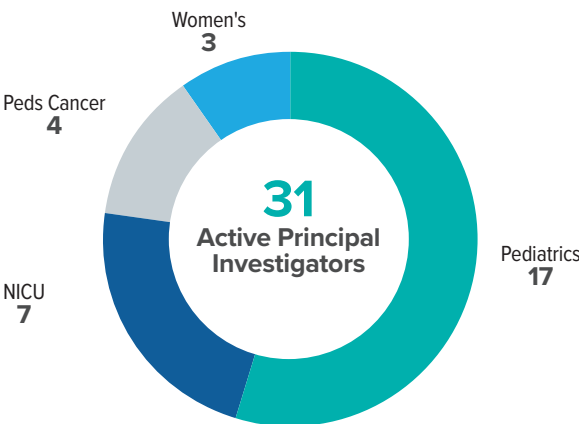
Active Studies at AdventHealth for Children



Enrollment Breakdown at AdventHealth for Children



Active Principal Investigators at AdventHealth for Children



# Featured Researchers and Research

## Groundbreaking Contributions to NF-1 Research



Fouad Hajjar, MD

**Fouad Hajjar, MD**, a board-certified pediatric hematologist and oncologist, has been the medical director of the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases at AdventHealth for Children Orlando since 1994. He has also served as the principal investigator for the Children’s Oncology Group clinical trials at AdventHealth for Children since 2010 and has chaired the AdventHealth Institutional Review Board since 2001.

Dr. Hajjar is involved in numerous clinical trials, most notably a study targeting neurofibromatosis type I (NF-1). NF-1 affects approximately 100,000 individuals in the U.S., with a significant risk of developing plexiform neurofibromas (PNs), which can cause severe disfigurement, pain and functional impairment. The study focused on mirdametinib, a MEK inhibitor, showing promising results in treating NF1-PN. The FDA approved GOMEKLI (mirdametinib) based on the Phase 2B ReNeu trial, which demonstrated significant improvements in pain and quality of life in adults and children.

The study results were published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, with Dr. Hajjar as one of the authors. *“Finally, we have a drug that can help pediatric and adult patients with NF-1 who develop PNs not amenable to surgical removal,”* says Dr. Hajjar. *“I am proud of our team’s efforts and appreciate AdventHealth’s support in facilitating the development of a drug that can aid NF-1 patients with inoperable PNs.”*

## Impactful Research and Global Recognition



Hussnain Mirza, MD

In 2024, our most impactful research was a randomized clinical trial on inhaled nitric oxide treatment in preterm infants (Clinicaltrials.gov # NCT03576885). Despite early termination due to treatment futility, the trial provided significant insights into nitric oxide use in preterm infants. Our work gained notable attention, with our abstract ranking in the top 5% at the Pediatric Academic Societies meeting and invitations to present at the Academic Pediatric Association (APA) sessions and the Tenth International Neonatology Association meeting in Portugal. Inspired

by our trial, a global study involving several cities had been proposed, and we are honored to participate. Despite challenges like the COVID-19 suspension and reduced consent rates, our research received positive recognition, including interest from the Global Nitric Oxide Trial organizers, highlighting the global impact of our efforts.

Another highlight of 2024 was being invited as field experts to write two review articles showcasing our expertise and contributions to the scientific community.

Mani, S; **Mirza, H**; Ziegler, J; Chandrasekharan, P. Early Pulmonary Hypertension in Preterm Infants. CLINICS IN PERINATOLOGY. DOI: 10.1016/j.clp.2023.11.005

## Innovations in Pediatric Cell Therapy



Brian Tullius, MD

**Brian Tullius, MD**, a pediatric cell therapy physician at AdventHealth for Children, serves as research medical director for pediatric cellular therapies and co-chair of the pediatric protocol review committee. A Navy veteran and former flight surgeon, he also holds a Master of Philosophy and continues to publish in that field. His research focuses on adoptive cellular therapies for pediatric malignancies.

In 2022, Dr. Tullius’s team administered the first doses of an allogeneic NK cell product to a child in Florida for AML treatment. In 2023, they partnered with UCF to optimize NK cell therapies for neuroblastoma, leading to a 2024 publication demonstrating that CRISPR knockout of a checkpoint molecule on NK cells improved their metabolic function and ability to eradicate neuroblastoma tumor models. This work attracted grant funding from the Live Like Bella Foundation, supporting ongoing research.

**“We hope that continued pre-clinical work with our UCF partners and the ongoing support of the Live Like Bella Foundation will blossom into a first-in-human clinical trial utilizing CRISPR-optimized, ex vivo expanded NK cells to treat our patients’ relapsed and refractory neuroblastoma.”**

— Dr. Tullius

## Commitment to Enhancing Neonatal Care



Jorge Lopez Da Re, MD

**Jorge Lopez Da Re, MD**, is double board-certified in pediatrics and neonatology and has more than eight years of experience. He completed his fellowship at Cohen Children’s Medical Center of New York and the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research. He has been part of AdventHealth Central Florida for more than five years, contributing to collaborative research projects and conducting individual studies.

In 2024, Dr. Lopez Da Re’s research with AHRI focused on several key areas: assessing the effectiveness of discharge clinical guidelines in reducing unplanned hospital readmissions, identifying gaps contributing to these readmissions, evaluating physiological changes during intubation in newborns with respiratory distress and exploring the leading causes of these changes to improve clinical care. *“My primary objective in conducting clinical research is to significantly enhance patient outcomes. I am committed to ensuring safe discharges and minimizing readmission rates. By focusing on these goals, I aim to contribute to a health care environment prioritizing effectiveness and patient well-being,”* says Dr. Lopez De La Re.

## Advancing Pediatric Sjogren’s Disease Research



Akaluck Thatayatikom, MD

**Akaluck Thatayatikom, MD**, known to his patients as Dr. Ben, is a leading pediatric rheumatologist at AdventHealth. In 2024, he made significant strides in researching pediatric Sjogren’s disease. This autoimmune disorder, which affects the body’s moisture-producing glands, has been notoriously difficult to diagnose in children due to the lack of established criteria and the differences in symptoms compared to adults.

Dr. Thatayatikom’s journey into this field began in 2017, and since then, he has been dedicated to understanding and diagnosing this perplexing disease. His collaboration with Dr. Cha, an oral medicine specialist, College of Dentistry, University of Florida, Gainesville, has been instrumental in advancing this research. Together, they have formed an international research group, bringing together rheumatologists from Europe, Asia and the United States to study childhood Sjogren’s disease.

One of the key achievements of Dr. Thatayatikom’s team is the development of the Florida Scoring System (FSS), a diagnostic tool designed to assist in identifying pediatric Sjogren’s disease. This system was created using data from over 200 patients, making it one of the largest studies of its kind. The FSS aims to provide a more accurate diagnosis by considering the unique symptoms and clinical presentations in children, which often differ from those in adults.

The team’s research has been published in prestigious journals, including *The Lancet*, highlighting their work’s importance and impact. Their studies have shown that early detection and diagnosis are crucial in managing Sjogren’s disease and preventing long-term damage. Dr. Thatayatikom emphasizes the need for lip biopsies to identify the disease, even in patients with negative blood tests, as many pediatric patients do not meet the adult criteria for diagnosis.

Dr. Thatayatikom’s work has attracted funding from National Institutes of Health (NIH) and has led to ongoing studies exploring the pathogenesis and genetic factors of Sjogren’s disease. The goal is to develop new treatments and improve clinical practices for managing this challenging condition in pediatric patients. *“We hope that continued pre-clinical work with our partners and the ongoing support of funding organizations will blossom into a first-in-human clinical trial utilizing advanced diagnostic and treatment methods to serve our patients better,”* says Dr. Thatayatikom.

Zeng, WJ; **Thatayatikom, A**; Winn, N; Lovelace, TC; Bhattacharyya, I; Schrepfer, T; Shah, AK; Gonik, R; Benos, P; Cha, SH. The Florida Scoring System for stratifying children with suspected Sjogren’s disease: a cross-sectional machine learning study. LANCET RHEUMATOLOGY. DOI: 10.1016/s2665-9913(24)00059-6



# AdventHealth for Children 2024 Highlights

In 2024, the pediatrics research team at AdventHealth achieved notable milestones, including:

## Top Enrolling Study



**Principal Investigator: Leslie Pineda, MD**

*A Phase 2, Two-Stage, Randomized, Double Blind, Placebo-Controlled, Multiple Ascending Dose Study to Evaluate the Safety, Tolerability, Pharmacokinetics and Preliminary Efficacy of RLS-0071 in Newborns with Moderate or Severe Hypoxic-Ischemic Encephalopathy Undergoing Therapeutic Hyperthermia with Long-Term Follow-Up (STAR) Study:* In 2024, our AdventHealth NICU research team exceeded its enrollment goal for the STAR study by enrolling five babies, one more than originally planned. AdventHealth is one of the top enrollers out of 12 sites for this study.

## Met Enrollment Goal



**Principal Investigator: Anoop Pulickal, MD**

**Donor Breast Milk and Serum Ferritin Levels in Very Preterm Infants: A Prospective, Observational Study (The Breast Milk Study):** Successfully met enrollment goal of 34 babies.

## First in Study Enrollment



**Samarth Shukla, MD**

**The Diaphragmatic Initiated Ventilatory Assist (DIVA) Trial:** First subject enrolled in DIVA at AdventHealth in 2024.

## Top Enrolling Studies in Pediatric Research



**Principal Investigator: Fouad Hajjar, MD**

**APEC14B1 Biobanking registry:**  
18 patients



**Principal Investigator: Akaluck Thatayatikom, MD (Dr. Ben)**

**Sjogren's registry:**  
14 patients



**Principal Investigator: Sean Keyes, DO**

**BEAR registry:**  
14 patients

# Cancer Institute

## Overview

The AdventHealth Cancer Institute (AHCI), one of Florida's largest cancer care providers, is globally recognized for its comprehensive, state-of-the-art care. Patients benefit from the latest treatments and technology through a multidisciplinary care model with cancer subspecialists. AHCI's vision is to achieve national recognition for providing value-based, personalized care through specialized, innovative cancer programs.

AHCI's research initiatives cover clinical, translational, population health research, value-based care, precision medicine and pharmacogenomics. The Institute offers wide-ranging clinical trials and advanced treatment options, including FDA-approved and investigational medications and devices, to improve cancer care and quality of life. Patients also receive spiritual and psychological support, educational programs and guidance from specially trained oncology nurse navigators.

## Areas of Focus

- Brain and Spine Cancers
- Breast Cancers
- Digestive Tract Cancers
- Gynecologic Cancers
- Head and Neck Cancers
- Leukemia, Lymphoma, Myeloma and Blood Cancers
- Lung and Esophageal Cancers
- Skin Cancers
- Urologic Cancers



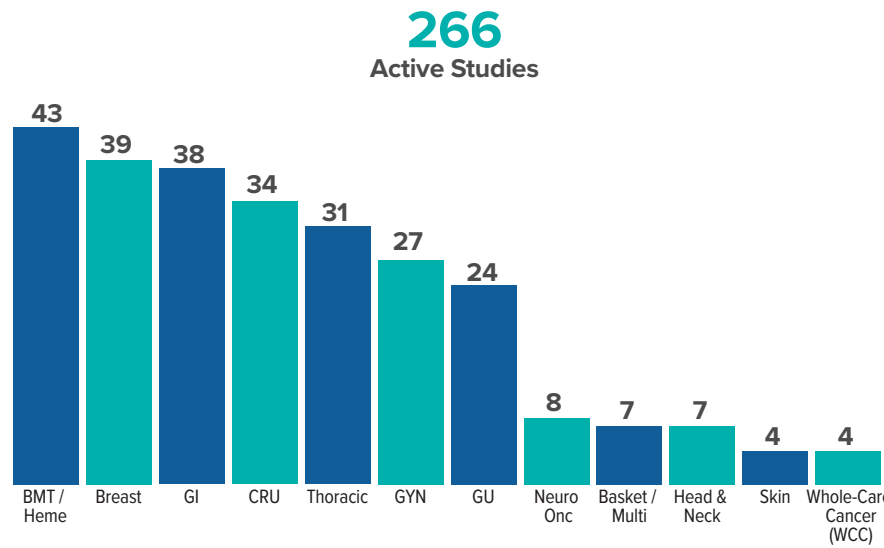
**Learn more about our clinical cancer research.**



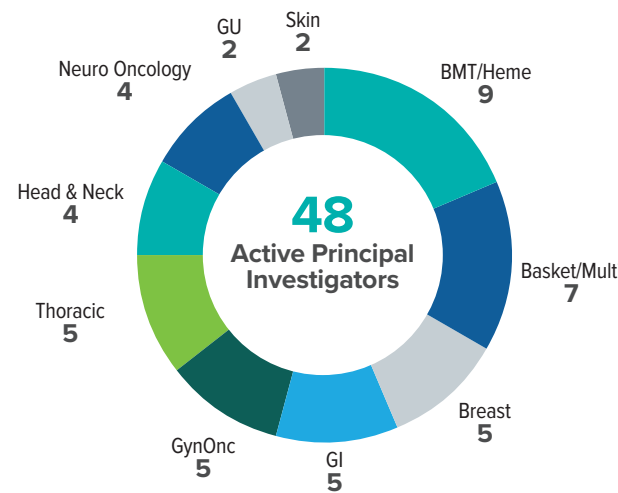


# By the Numbers

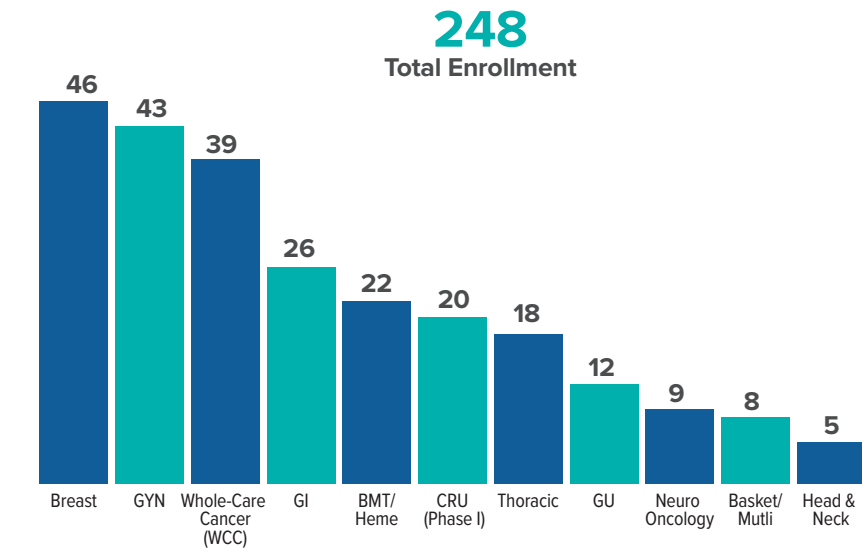
## Active Studies at the AdventHealth Cancer Institute



## Active Principal Investigators at the AdventHealth Cancer Institute



## Enrollment Breakdown at the AdventHealth Cancer Institute



# Featured Researchers and Research

## Highest Enrolling Study



Tarek Mekhail, MD

**Tarek Mekhail, MD**, is the principal investigator (PI) of the study titled “D419ML00003: A Phase IIIB, Randomized, Multicenter, Open-Label Study to Assess the Efficacy of Durvalumab Plus Tremelimumab Versus Pembrolizumab in Combination with Platinum-Based Chemotherapy for First-Line Treatment in Metastatic Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer Patients Who Have Mutations or Co-mutations in STK11, KEAP1, or KRAS (TRITON). The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of these treatment combinations in patients with specific genetic mutations. The team won awards from the sponsor in December for being the highest enrollers in this study.



Robert Holloway, MD

**Robert Holloway, MD**, serves as the national principal investigator (PI) for the intraperitoneal oncolytic virus in ovarian cancer – GOG Foundation Phase III OnPrime clinical trial investigating the use of an intraperitoneal oncolytic virus in ovarian cancer resistant to standard therapies. This trial, known as Olvi-Vec-022/OnPrime, is the first of its kind to explore oncolytic virus therapy for ovarian cancer and is the extension of an investigator-initiated Phase I trial in 2015.

## Significance

This trial represents a groundbreaking and innovative approach within our 2024 portfolio. Dr. Holloway’s leadership has been instrumental in advancing this research.

## ctDNA Research in Gynecologic Oncology

Dr. Holloway has also made significant contributions to ctDNA research in gynecologic oncology. His work includes the first national presentations and publications in endometrial and cervical cancers using ctDNA monitoring for treatment response and prognosis. This approach is quickly becoming the standard of care in gynecologic tumors.

## Significance

The research led by Dr. Holloway and his team has demonstrated the effectiveness of ctDNA-based molecular residual disease detection in patients with stage I uterine malignancies. This innovative method provides valuable insights into treatment response and prognosis, enhancing the management of gynecologic cancers. In 2024 alone, 79 patients were enrolled in the study, bringing the total to 104 patients before enrollment closed. This significant achievement underscores the trial’s importance and the dedication of the research team.

## Collaborative Efforts

Dr. Holloway worked closely with Theresa Khun, MD, one of the gynecologic oncology fellows, to ensure the trial’s success. Their collaborative efforts have been pivotal in managing the trial and advancing the understanding of oncolytic virus therapy for ovarian cancer.

Recio F, Scalise CB, Loar P, Lumish M, Berman T, Peddada A, Kalashnikova E, Rivero-Hinojosa S, Beisch T, Nicosia B, Farmer T, Dutta P, Malhotra M, ElNaggar AC, Liu MC, Vaccarello L, **Holloway RW**. Post-surgical ctDNA-based molecular residual disease detection in patients with stage I uterine malignancies. Gynecologic Oncology. Doi: 10.1016/j.ygyno.2023.12.025

Additional Publications

Neoadjuvant Chemotherapy for Advanced Vulvar Cancer

Dr. Holloway co-authored a groundbreaking publication on neoadjuvant chemotherapy with bevacizumab for locally advanced vulvar cancer. This retrospective analysis represents the first-ever series on this potentially practice-changing strategy for patients with advanced vulvar cancer.

Kuhn TM, Ahmad S, Recio FO, Awada A, McKenzie ND, Kendrick JE, Keller A, **Holloway RW**. Neoadjuvant chemotherapy with bevacizumab for locally advanced vulvar cancer. International Journal of Gynecological Cancer. Doi: 10.1136/ijgc-2024-005402

KRAS Mutations in Endometrial Cancers

Dr. Holloway also contributed to a novel investigation on KRAS mutations in endometrial cancers. Based on a commercial database with 7,870 genomic profiles, this study explores new potential therapeutic strategies with KRASmut-directed therapies, offering significant prognostic and treatment implications.

Kilowski KA, Dietrich MF, Xiu J, Baca Y, Hinton A, Ahmad S, Herzog TJ, Thaker P, **Holloway RW**. KRAS mutations in endometrial cancers: Possible prognostic and treatment implications. Gynecologic Oncology. 2024; 191: 299-306. Doi: 10.1016/j.jygyno.2024.10.026

Gyn-Onc – Memorable Moments

Two young patients with advanced growing teratoma syndrome, who were previously treated for metastatic germ cell tumors, were on hospice with pain and partial bowel obstructions. Both patients were seen for third-opinion consultations. Both patients underwent successfully salvaged treatment with aggressive radical debulking procedures and are alive and well.

OPION B03 Clinical Trial Success



Wassim Mchayleh, MD

In 2024, AdventHealth Cancer Institute (AHCI) made significant progress in treating triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) through the TROPION B03 clinical trial. This trial, led by **Wassim Mchayleh, MD**, focuses on the investigational drug Datopotamab Deruxtecan, an antibody-drug conjugate that delivers highly potent chemotherapy directly to cancer cells, while minimizing side effects.

Janisette Rivera-Rollins was the first Central Florida patient enrolled in this global Phase 3 trial. If the trial delivers superior results, it has the potential to establish a new standard of care for patients with triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) and a potential cure. TNBC is the most aggressive type of breast cancer. It has a high recurrence rate in patients who do not achieve a complete pathologic response to neoadjuvant chemotherapy, which is the target population of this clinical trial comparing the novel agent to the standard of care. The trial aims to enroll 1,075 patients worldwide by 2027, testing the drug alone, in combination with immunotherapy, and against standard treatments. Rivera-Rollins’ participation underscores the importance of diversity in clinical trials, addressing the historical underrepresentation of minority patients.

Groundbreaking Research at AdventHealth: Strengthened by Central Florida’s Diverse Population

In 2024, AHCI continued to advance cancer research through the Ember-4 clinical trial, focusing on preventing recurrence in patients with Stage III HR-positive HER2-negative breast cancer. JaVonne Williams, a 57-year-old patient, embarked on this groundbreaking trial after undergoing chemotherapy, radiation, and a double mastectomy. Her participation highlights the importance of diversity in clinical trials, leading to more innovative treatments and better care for all patients.

AdventHealth’s commitment to inclusivity has earned national recognition, with AHCI clinical trials showing above-average diversity. Nearly half of the participants in one ongoing cancer trial are African American, far exceeding typical representation in research studies. Other trials, such as AVAIL, REST, and WHOLEME ENRICHED, also demonstrate significant minority participation.

Dr. Mchayleh, medical oncologist and medical director of breast oncology at AHCI, emphasizes the importance of building trust and involving families in the education process to break down barriers to participation. Williams’ journey to joining the trial involved careful preparation and education, ultimately giving her hope and a mission to educate others about the accessibility of clinical trials.

AdventHealth continues to pave the way for diverse and innovative research, bringing life-changing treatments to the community and shaping the future of medicine.

Genitourinary Cancers



Guru Sonpavde, MD

Advancements in Genitourinary Cancer Research

**Guru Sonpavde, MD**, focuses on developing drugs and conducting leading-edge clinical trials for novel immunotherapy and targeted therapies across solid tumors in early phase I trials. His special focus is on curing genitourinary (GU) cancers, including prostate, bladder, kidney, penile, and testicular cancers, with a primary emphasis on bladder cancer.

As a national and international principal investigator, Dr. Sonpavde oversees multiple clinical trials involving bladder cancer patients. He has led translational projects to evaluate tumor biology and germline drivers of disease, developed prognostic classifications, and established clinical endpoints specifically for bladder cancer. His affiliations include the Southwest Oncology Group (SWOG) and the Bladder Cancer Task Force of the U.S. NCI GU steering committee. Dr. Sonpavde was quoted in a TIME magazine article regarding cancer research: *“My greatest satisfaction will be to find predictive biomarkers and develop precision oncology. This work can greatly affect the way we treat our patients and why the difference in genetics can greatly affect the efficacy of certain treatments.”*

In addition to his substantial research endeavors, Dr. Sonpavde states, *“I also enjoy interacting with medical residents, fellows and observers to teach and mentor research projects leading to presentations and publications.”*

2024 Wins

- Created a pathway to improve the turnaround time from neoadjuvant to surgery in bladder cancer

- Led the FLASCO Precision Medicine project surrounding metastatic prostate cancer

- Recruited rising researchers Dr. Bridget Koontz (Radiation) and Dr. Zachary Smith (Urology)

- Revolutionized bladder cancer treatment: AdventHealth became the only site in Florida and the first in the U.S. to offer customized mRNA-based immunotherapy treatment, known as the INTERpath-005 V940 mRNA Vaccine Phase II trial, available since April.

- Co-senior author on a major oral presentation at the Genitourinary Cancer (GU)-ASCO symposium in January 2024 for the Pemcab Phase II trial, likely leading to further investigation of zanzalintinib, an angiogenesis inhibitor for advanced bladder cancer.

- Major investigator and steering committee member or co-PI of two recently launched major national or global trials evaluating adjuvant (post-op) immunotherapy:

- MODERN Phase III trial (nivolumab +/- Relatlimab [LAG3 inhibitor immunotherapy]).

- InterPath-005 randomized Phase II trial (pembrolizumab +/- V940), an mRNA molecule coding for 34 neoantigens.

- Co-led correlative studies of tumor tissue to understand the response to a combination of ipilimumab, nivolumab, and sacituzumab in a first-line therapy trial of advanced bladder cancer.

- Developed a prospective study protocol at AdventHealth to collect blood, urine and tumors from bladder cancer patients, with samples already collected from many patients. Analysis of DNA, RNA, and proteins will guide new therapy development.

- Assembled a retrospective database of bladder cancer patients across the national AdventHealth system to enable data mining and translational research linking outcomes with tumor tissue studies.

Dr. Sonpavde’s work continues to push the boundaries of cancer research, offering hope and innovative treatment options for patients battling GU cancers.





Shahram Mori, MD

OV-AML-1231, a study by **Shahram Mori, MD**, achieved its first enrollment in the U.S. and second globally, narrowly missing the first global enrollment by just a few days. This multicenter, open-label, randomized Phase 2 study targets newly diagnosed Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML) patients unfit for intensive chemotherapy due to age or comorbidities. It compares the standard treatment of azacitidine plus venetoclax with this combination plus cusatuzumab. Four patients have been enrolled locally since the study opened in September 2024, with two more in screening. Our site is designated as the Leukemia Center of Central Florida, so we receive any patients newly diagnosed with leukemia from a very wide radius. This trial is exciting and innovative at patients who otherwise would not have been exposed to a clinical trial at the moment of diagnosis.

**“We recently opened the OV-AML1231 clinical trial for acute myeloid leukemia (AML) at our cancer center and had a positive experience. Our team integrated the study into our clinical operations and enrolled patients efficiently. We greatly appreciated collaborating with Oncoverity’s professional team, which was responsive and supportive throughout the process. Participating in this trial not only allowed us to offer an investigational therapy to our patients but also underscored the importance of developing new treatment options for AML, a disease that continues to pose significant therapeutic challenges. We were proud to contribute to the OV-AML1231 trial and the ongoing effort to improve outcomes for patients with AML.”**

— Dr. Shahram Mori

## 2024 First-in-Nation Enrollments and Treatments

In 2024, our team was the first in the nation to enroll and treat participants in the following studies:



Guru Sonpavde, MD

**V940-005:** *A Phase 2, Randomized, Double-blind, Placebo-and Active-comparator controlled Clinical Study of Adjuvant V940 (mRNA-4157) Plus Pembrolizumab Versus Adjuvant Placebo Plus Pembrolizumab in Participants with High-Risk Muscle-invasive Urothelial Carcinoma Post-Radical Resection.*

The purpose of the study is to compare

V940 plus pembrolizumab to placebo plus pembrolizumab post-surgical resection to evaluate prevention of disease reoccurrence.

*Four patients enrolled with enrollment ongoing.*



Carlos Alemany, MD

**XL092-009:** *A Phase 1b/2 Dose-finding and Expansion Study Evaluating the Safety and Efficacy of Zanzalitinib (XL092) Combined with Either AB521 or AB521 Plus Nivolumab in Subjects With Advanced Clear Cell Renal Cell Carcinoma or Other Advanced Solid Tumors.*

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the safety and preliminary antitumor activity of

zanzalitinib in combination with AB521 (doublet) and AB521 plus nivolumab (triplet) in subjects with advanced clear cell renal cell carcinoma.

*Six patients enrolled with a prospective enrollment of five for the AdventHealth Research Institute site.*

# Digestive Health Institute (DHI)

## Overview

The AdventHealth Digestive Health Institute (DHI) is a leading national center for digestive health and specialty surgical care. It excels in advanced treatment for complex diseases. It hosts the largest interventional endoscopy center in the U.S. With multiple accreditations for subspecialty programs, DHI aims to enhance its national reputation for quality and patient experience while expanding research and educational initiatives.

Recognized as a Center of Excellence by the National Accreditation Program for Rectal Cancer (NAPRC) and ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of America’s best hospitals for gastroenterology, gastrointestinal surgery, and colon cancer surgery, DHI’s research significantly improves future surgical care options.

## Areas of Focus

- Bariatrics
- Colorectal Surgery
- Ear, Nose and Throat
- Fatty Liver Disease
- Gastroenterology
- General Surgery
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)
- Urology



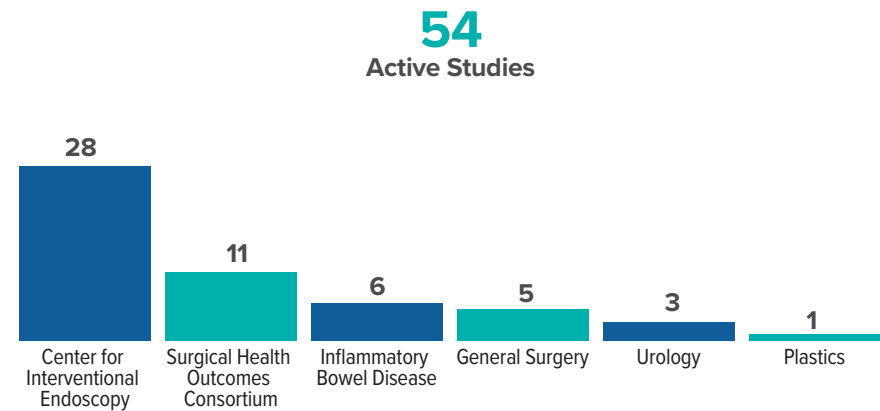
**Learn more about digestive health and surgery research.**



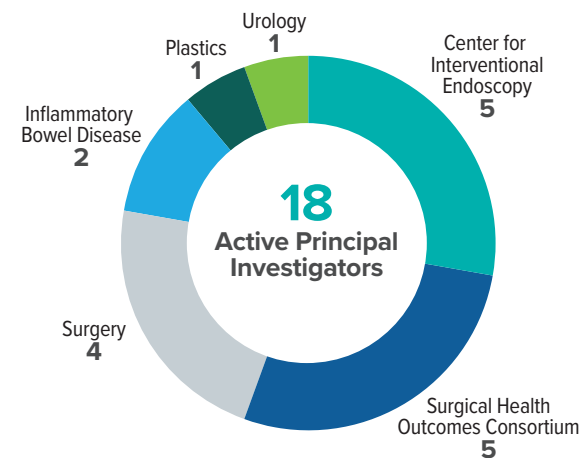


# By the Numbers

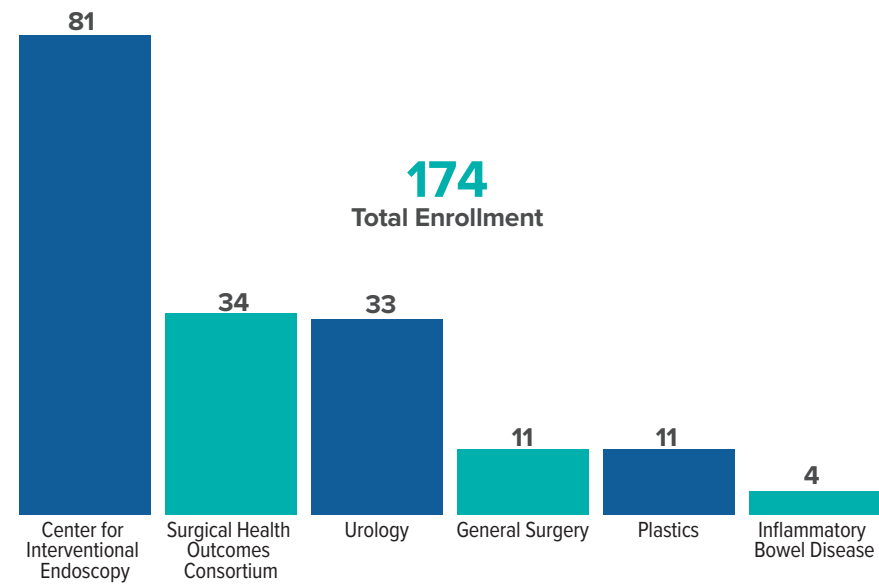
## Active Studies at the Digestive Health Institute



## Active Principal Investigators at the Digestive Health Institute



## Enrollment Breakdown at the Digestive Health Institute



# Featured Research and Researchers



Dennis Yang, MD, FACC, FASGE, AGAF

**Dennis Yang, MD, FACC, FASGE, AGAF**, is the director of Third Space Endoscopy at the Center for Interventional Endoscopy (CIE) at AdventHealth Orlando. Dr. Yang is considered a worldwide expert in peroral endoscopic myotomy (POEM), a minimally invasive endoscopic treatment for esophageal motility disorders, such as achalasia. In 2024, Dr. Yang was the principal investigator of a multicenter study titled “Development and Validation of a Video-Based Per-Oral Endoscopic Myotomy (POEM) Assessment Tool.” The study aimed to develop a standardized assessment tool to assess POEM performance. Dr. Yang was also the senior author of the recent clinical practice updates on POEM by the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) published in Gastroenterology. Dr. Yang also leads an ongoing multicenter randomized trial comparing clinical outcomes between conventional and underwater per-oral endoscopic myotomy (POEM). This study was recognized by the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE), which awarded the study with funding for the duration of the trial and recognized by the ASGE Clinical Research Award for 2025.

**Yang D**, Draganov PV, Pohl H, Aihara H, Jeyalingam T, Khashab MA, Liu N, Hasan MK, Jawaaid S, Othman M, Al-Haddad M, DeWitt JM, Triggs JR, Wang AY, Bechara R, Sethi A, Law R, Aadam AA, Kumta N, Sharma N, Hayat M, Zhang Y, Yi F, Elmunzer BJ. Development and Initial Validation of a Video-Based Peroral Endoscopic Myotomy Assessment Tool. Gastrointestinal Endoscopy. Doi: 10.1016/j.gie.2023.07.032

**Yang D**, Bechara R, Dunst CM, Konda VJ. AGA Clinical Practice Update on Advances in Per-Oral Endoscopic Myotomy (POEM) and Remaining Questions – What We Have Learned in the Past Decade: Expert Review. Gastroenterology. Doi: 10.1053/j.gastro.2024.08.038

## Highlights

### Awards 2024

- 2024: Top Publishing Principal Investigator Award – AdventHealth Research Institute
- 2024: Top Publisher in High Impact Journals Award – AdventHealth Research Institute

### Committee Assignments 2024

- 2024-present: Chair of Third Space Endoscopy Committee – Foundation for Interventional and Therapeutic Endoscopy (FITE)

### Publications

- 2024: Dr. Yang published 27 articles



## DHI Highlights

### Urology: Highest Enrolling Site for the Study



**Principal Investigator: Michael McDonald, MD**

**Title:** *The HistoSonics Edison System for treatment of primary solid renal tumors using histotripsy (#Hope4Kidney)*

- First site started in the U.S.
- First patient randomized

### Colorectal Surgery: Highest Enrolling Site for the Study (Adult)

**Principal Investigator: Christopher Aquina, MD**



**Title:** *A Minimal-Risk, Multi-Center, Prospective, Clinical Trial to Evaluate the PrevisEA Device for Predicting Gastrointestinal Impairment (ENTAC)*

- Surpassed enrollment goal with 65 participants (target: 50)

### Center for Interventional Endoscopy



**Principal Investigator: Mustafa Arain, MD**

**Title:** *Polyp Temperature Profile and Pathology Correlation at a Single Site (Owl Peak)*

- Exceeded enrollment goals with 55 participants (target: 35)



**Principal Investigator: Natalie Cosgrove, MD**

**Title:** *EchoTip AcuCore EUS Biopsy Needle Post-Market Study (21-07) (EcoTip)*

- Recognized as the top enrolling site in 2024.

### Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)



**Principal Investigator: Ilan Aharoni, MD**

**Title:** *A Phase 3, Randomized, Placebo-controlled, Parallel-group, Multicenter Study to Evaluate the Efficacy and Safety of Guselkumab in Participants with Fistulizing, Perianal Crohn's Disease (FUZION)*

- Successfully met enrollment goal

# Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute

## Overview

The Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute (HLVI) is dedicated to advancing patient care through innovative research and leading-edge treatments. With a vision to transform health care globally, HLVI leverages extensive clinical and scientific expertise to offer patient-focused research. Annually, the institute treats nearly 80,000 patients, providing services ranging from routine arrhythmia treatments to heart and lung transplants. HLVI also connects hundreds of patients with leading-edge research studies and clinical trials, ensuring a seamless “bench-to-bedside” process through its broad network of specialists and hospitals.

## Areas of Focus

- Cardiovascular Surgery
- Coronary Artery Disease
- Heart Failure
- Heart Rhythm Disorder
- Heart-valve Disease Treatment
- Interventional Cardiology
- Pulmonary Hypertension



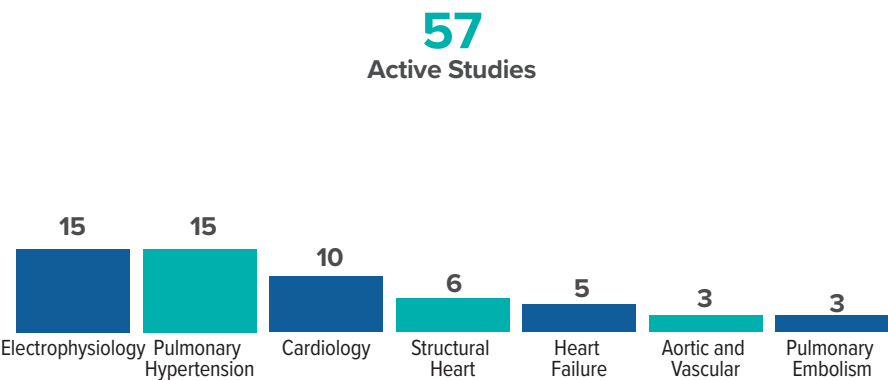
**Learn more about heart, lung and vascular research.**



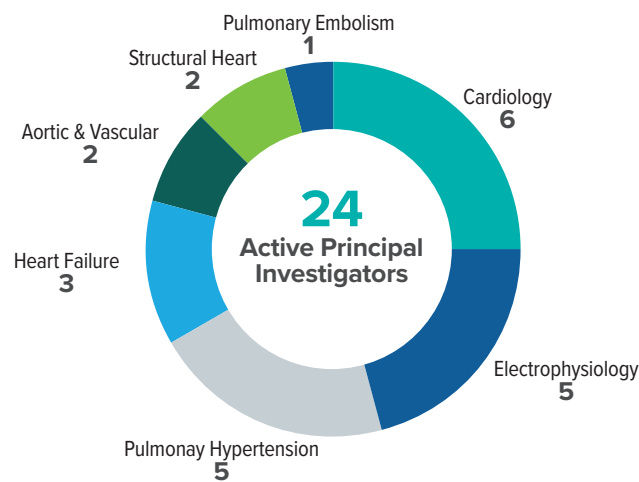


By the Numbers

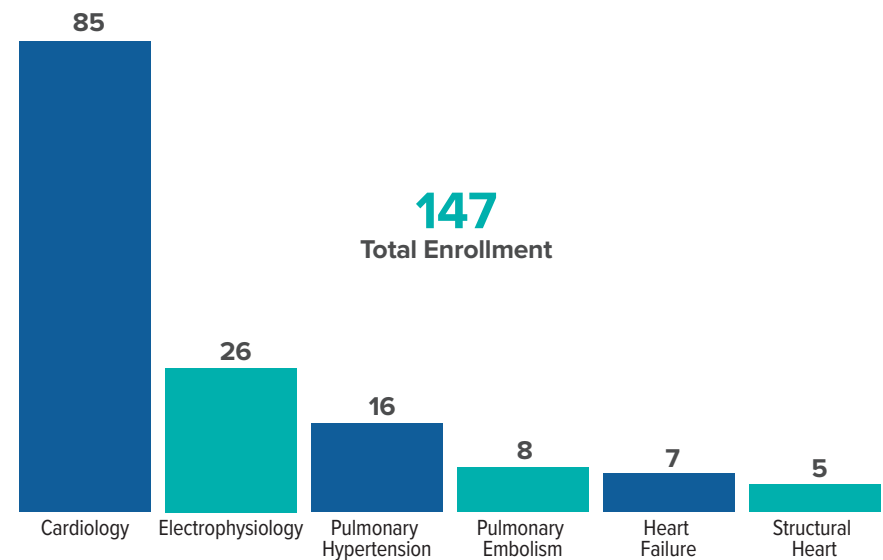
Active Studies at the Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute



Active Principal Investigators at the Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute



Enrollment Breakdown at the Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute



Featured Researchers and Research



Kevin Accola, MD

**Kevin D. Accola, MD**, a leading, board-certified thoracic surgeon at AdventHealth, co-authored the study titled *Midterm Survival and Hemodynamic Outcomes of a Novel Mechanical Mitral Valve Prosthesis*, which evaluates the midterm survival, clinical, and hemodynamic outcomes of the On-X mechanical mitral valve. This research is based on the 5-year results of the Prospective Randomized On-X Anticoagulation Clinical Trial (PROACT). The trial involved 401 patients who underwent mitral valve replacement (MVR) with either Standard or Conform-X On-X mitral valves, comparing low-dose and standard-dose warfarin.

The results showed impressive survival rates, with actuarial survival at 99.7% at 1 year, 95.1% at 3 years, and 92.4% at 5 years. There was no significant difference between the Standard and Conform-X cuffs. Hemodynamic analysis revealed a mean transvalvular pressure gradient (MG) of 4.6 mmHg at 1 year, which remained stable over time. Quality of life also improved significantly, with 96.6% of patients in NYHA class I or II at the latest follow-up.

These findings indicate that the On-X mechanical mitral valve demonstrates favorable survival, stable hemodynamics, and enhanced quality of life up to 5 years post-implantation. This research provides valuable insights for decision-making in young patients who require mitral valve replacement (MVR). The study was sponsored by On-X Life Technologies and CryoLife (now Artivion), and the authors express their gratitude to all patients and research team members who supported the PROACT Mitral study.

Marc Ruel et al.; **Kevin D. Accola, MD** et al. The article is titled Midterm survival, clinical, and hemodynamic outcomes of a novel mechanical mitral valve prosthesis, published in the Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery (2024), DOI: 10.1016/j.jtcvs.2024.11.029.

Redefining Cholesterol Management With PCSK9 Inhibitors



Rohit Bhatheja, MD



Kapil Kapoor, MD

A recent review by **Rohit Bhatheja, MD** and **Kapil Kapoor, MD**, recent review explores the transformative role of PCSK9 inhibitors in lowering LDL cholesterol and reducing cardiovascular risk. These

therapies work by preventing the degradation of LDL receptors, thereby enhancing the clearance of cholesterol from the bloodstream.

Key clinical trials—FOURIER, SPIRE-2, and ODYSSEY Outcomes—demonstrate impressive results, including LDL-C reductions of up to 60% and significant decreases in major cardiovascular events. PCSK9 inhibitors have also shown particular benefit for patients with familial hypercholesterolemia, elevated Lp(a) levels and those intolerant to statins.

The review also highlights future innovations, such as Inclisiran, a long-acting siRNA therapy, and potential gene-editing strategies that may reshape the landscape of preventive cardiology. As the field evolves, PCSK9 inhibitors are paving the way for more effective, personalized lipid management.

Jeswani BM, Sharma S, Rathore SS, Nazir A, **Bhatheja R, Kapoor K**. PCSK9 Inhibitors: The Evolving Future. *Health Science Reports*. Doi:10.1002/hsr2.70174



Naushad Shaik, MD

**Naushad Shaik, MD**, co-authored a significant study published in Heart Rhythm in February 2024, titled “Predictive Value of the PRAETORIAN Score for Defibrillation Test Success in Patients with Subcutaneous ICD: A Subanalysis of the PRAETORIAN-DFT Trial.” This study investigates the PRAETORIAN score’s ability to predict defibrillation success in patients with subcutaneous implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (S-ICDs).

The PRAETORIAN-DFT trial is an international, multicenter trial that randomized 965 patients to either undergo defibrillation testing (DFT) or have the PRAETORIAN score calculated based on chest radiographs. The study aimed to determine if the PRAETORIAN score is non-inferior to DFT in predicting first shock efficacy during spontaneous events.

The study found that a PRAETORIAN score of less than 90 serves as a reliable indicator for DFT success, with a negative predictive value of 99%. Conversely, a PRAETORIAN score of 90 is a strong predictor for DFT failure, with a positive predictive value of 25%. These findings suggest that the PRAETORIAN score can be used to predict defibrillation success and potentially reduce the need for DFT, which carries risks and logistical challenges.

Dr. Shaik’s involvement in this study highlights his commitment to advancing cardiac electrophysiology and improving patient outcomes through innovative research. The findings from this trial contribute to

the understanding of S-ICD efficacy and may influence future clinical practices in managing ventricular arrhythmias.

Reinoud E. Knops, Mikhael F. El-Chami, Christelle Marquie, Peter Nordbeck, Anne-Floor B.E. Quast, et.al, **Naushad A. Shaik**, et.al, Arthur A.M. Wilde, Lonneke Smeding. Predictive value of the PRAETORIAN score for defibrillation test success in patients with subcutaneous ICD: A subanalysis of the PRAETORIAN-DFT trial. Heart Rhythm. Doi: 10.1016/j.hrthm.2024.02.005.

Catheter Ablation as First-Line Therapy in Persistent Atrial Fibrillation



**Usman Siddiqui, MD** Board-certified cardiologist **Usman Siddiqui, MD**, is the co-author of the study titled Catheter Ablation as First-Line Therapy in Persistent Atrial Fibrillation: Patient Characteristics and Clinical Outcomes. This multicenter observational study included consecutive patients with persistent atrial fibrillation (PerAF) who underwent first-time ablation between January 2020 and September 2021 in nine U.S. medical centers. The study aimed to examine the prevalence, patient characteristics, and clinical outcomes of patients with PerAF who underwent catheter ablation as a first or second-line strategy.

The study found that 52% of the 2,083 patients underwent ablation as a first-line rhythm-control treatment. These patients were predominantly male, with fewer comorbidities such as hypertension and heart failure compared to those treated with antiarrhythmic drugs (AADs) as first-line therapy. During a mean follow-up of approximately 326 days, arrhythmia-free survival was similar between the groups. However, patients in the second-line ablation strategy were more likely to continue receiving antiarrhythmic drug (AAD) therapy. The study concludes that a first-line ablation strategy for PerAF is prevalent in the United States, particularly in men with fewer comorbidities. More data are needed to identify patients with PerAF who derive benefit from an early intervention strategy.

Michael Barkagan, Anat Milman, Guy Zahavi, Arwa Younis, Bishnu Dhakal, Sanjay Dixit, Christopher X. Wong, Edward P. Gerstenfeld, Sanjiv M. Narayan, Jared T. Bunch, Lukasz Cerbin, Wendy S. Tzou, Mark Metzl, Aqeel Khanani, Usman R. Siddiqui, Sanghamitra Mohanty, Andrea Natale, Aaron Medina, and Elad Anter. Catheter Ablation as First-Line Therapy in Persistent Atrial Fibrillation: Patient Characteristics and Clinical Outcomes. Journal of the American College of Cardiology: Clinical Electrophysiology (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.jacep.2024.02.035.



**Stacy Mandras, MD** contributed to the SOPRANO study, which evaluated the efficacy and safety of macitentan in patients with pulmonary hypertension (PH) following left ventricular assist device (LVAD) implantation. The study, published in *Pulmonary Circulation*, was a Phase 2, multicenter, double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial. It found that macitentan significantly reduced pulmonary vascular resistance (PVR) by 26% compared to placebo, with a statistically significant reduction in the transpulmonary gradient (TPG). The research highlights the potential of macitentan to improve post-LVAD outcomes by reducing PVR, which may enhance right ventricular function and improve transplant eligibility. Dr. Mandras’s work in this study underscores the importance of exploring effective treatments for PH in LVAD patients to mitigate right-heart failure and improve overall patient outcomes.

Frantz, R.P., Desai, S.S., Ewald, G., Franco, V., Hage, A., Horn, E.M., LaRue, S.J., Mathier, M.A., **Mandras, S., Park, M.H.**, Ravichandran, A.K., Schilling, J.D., Wang, I., Zolty, R., Rendon, G.G., Rocco, M.A., Selej, M., Zhao, C., Rame, J.E. (2024). SOPRANO: Macitentan in patients with pulmonary hypertension following left ventricular assist device implantation. Pulmonary Circulation. Doi: 10.1002/pul2.12446.

Additional Publications

**Vest AR, Schauer PR, Rodgers JE, Mandras S, Tang WHW, DaSilva-deAbreu A.** Obesity and weight loss strategies for patients with heart failure. *JACC Heart Failure*. 12(9): 1509-1527. Sept 1, 2024.

**DaSilva-deAbreu A, Rodgers JE, Seltz K, Mandras SA, et al.** Obesity, Challenges, and Weight-loss Strategies for Patients with Ventricular Assist Devices. *JACC Heart Failure*. Published online June 19, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jchf.2024.04.006>



**Melisa Wilson, DNP, APRN**, contributed significantly to the research on the practical management of oral treprostinil in patients with pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH). The study, published in *Respiratory Medicine*, highlights the challenges and strategies associated with dosing and titration of oral treprostinil, a prostacyclin analogue used to delay disease progression and improve exercise capacity in PAH patients. The research, which involved a multicenter, prospective, real-world observational study, provided valuable insights into patient selection, side effect management, and the efficacy of various treatment approaches. Wilson’s work, alongside other experts, underscores the importance of individualized treatment plans and proactive management of side effects to achieve higher and more efficacious doses of oral treprostinil. Her contributions are pivotal in advancing the understanding and application of this therapy in clinical practice.

Brewer, J., **Wilson, M.**, Coons, J.C., Schmit, A., Whittenhall, M.E., Kimber, A., Broderick, M., Lee, D., Patzlaff, N., Miller, C., Ataya, A., LaRoy, V., King, C.S., Ravichandran, A.K., Kingrey, J.F., Sahay, S. (2024). Practical management of oral treprostinil in patients with pulmonary arterial hypertension: Lessons from ADAPT, EXPEDITE, and expert consensus. *Respiratory Medicine*. Doi: 10.1016/j.rmed.2024.107734.

VOLT-AF IDE | CFD HLV First Volt Implant in Central Florida



**Usman Siddiqui, MD**, (Principal Investigator), and the rest of the CFD VOLT study team successfully performed the first VOLT Implant in the Central Florida Division on July 5th, 2024. Congratulations to the team for this significant achievement. *A Prospective, Multicenter, Single-Arm Study to Evaluate the Safety and Effectiveness of the Volt™ PFA System for the Treatment of Symptomatic, Recurrent, Drug-Refractory Paroxysmal and Persistent Atrial Fibrillation (VOLT-AF IDE)*: The objective of the VOLT-AF study is to demonstrate that the Volt™ PFA System is safe and effective for the treatment of symptomatic, recurrent, drug-refractory paroxysmal and persistent atrial fibrillation (AF).

ALLAY-HF Team: First in Florida to Enroll a Participant



**Dr. Rohit Bhatheja, MD, MBA, FACC, FSCAI**, and his team successfully extended research to a patient who was randomized in the ALLAY-HF clinical trial on January 15, 2024. The team has worked diligently to make it possible for a patient to potentially receive this treatment in a blinded study. Historically, heart failure studies have been challenging to enroll, and this first-in-Florida enrollment is an outstanding achievement.

*Safety and Efficacy of the Alleviant System for No-Implant Interatrial Shunt Creation in Patients with Chronic Heart Failure*: The purpose of the ALLAY-HF study is to evaluate the safety and efficacy of the Alleviant System, a minimally invasive treatment designed to improve heart failure symptoms without leaving a permanent implant in the heart. The study aims to reduce heart failure-related symptoms, hospitalizations, and outpatient events in patients who remain symptomatic despite medical therapy.





# Neuroscience Institute

## Overview

Investigators at the AdventHealth Neuroscience Institute focus on understanding brain health across the lifespan and developing approaches to maintain and improve brain health despite disease or disorder. The Institute aims to enhance healthy brain function, prevent neurocognitive decline, and establish effective treatments. Findings are disseminated through presentations, published manuscripts, and collaborations with industry sponsors.

The Institute brings multidisciplinary experts in neurology, neurosurgery, psychiatry, psychology, and related fields together to mitigate neurologic disorders and age-related cognitive decline. Translational research bridges the gap between basic science and clinical applications, rapidly translating findings into improved patient care. In 2024, the Institute completed 51 peer-reviewed manuscripts in translational neuroscience.

Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, the Institute conducts advanced imaging studies and other leading-edge research procedures, enabling breakthrough discoveries and novel therapies for cognitive impairment. The Institute’s emphasis on collaboration and innovation positions it as a leader in neuroscience research.

## Areas of Focus

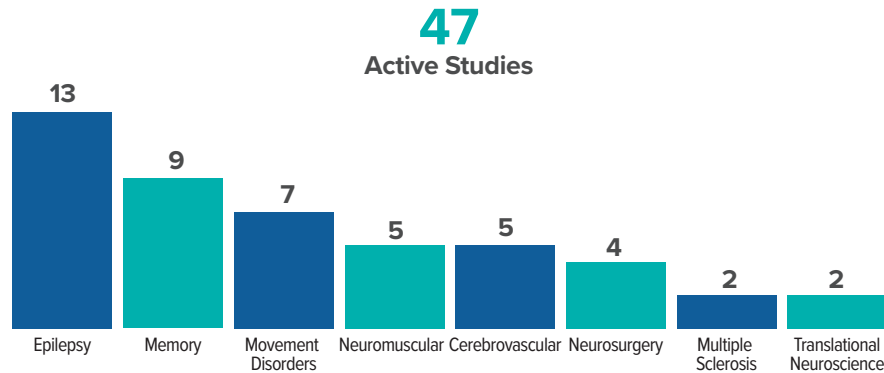
- Alzheimer’s and Memory Disorders
  - Cranial Surgery
  - Epilepsy
  - Headache and Migraine
  - Minimally Invasive Brain Surgery
- Movement Disorders
  - Multiple Sclerosis
  - Neuromuscular Diseases
  - Sleep Medicine
  - Spine Services

## Active Clinical Trials Underway

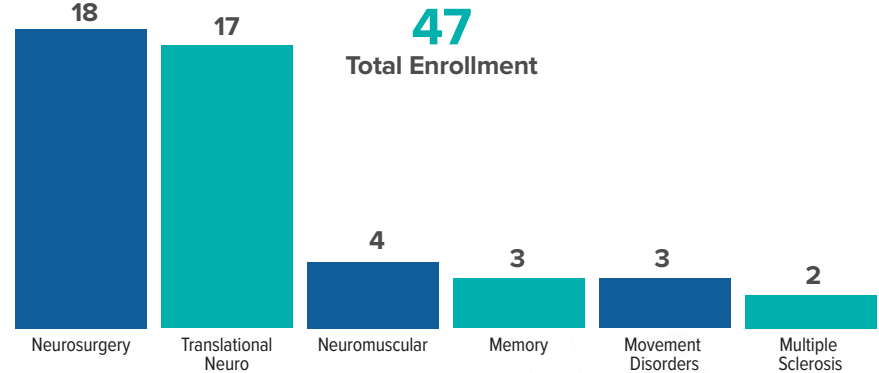
- Alzheimer’s
  - CDKL5 Deficiency Disorder
  - Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy (CIDP)
  - Dementia With Lewy Bodies
  - Dravet Syndrome
  - Glioblastoma
  - Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome
- Spine Surgery
  - Stroke
  - Thrombectomy
  - Multiple Sclerosis
  - Multiple System Atrophy (MSA)
  - Parkinson’s Disease
  - Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA)

## By the Numbers

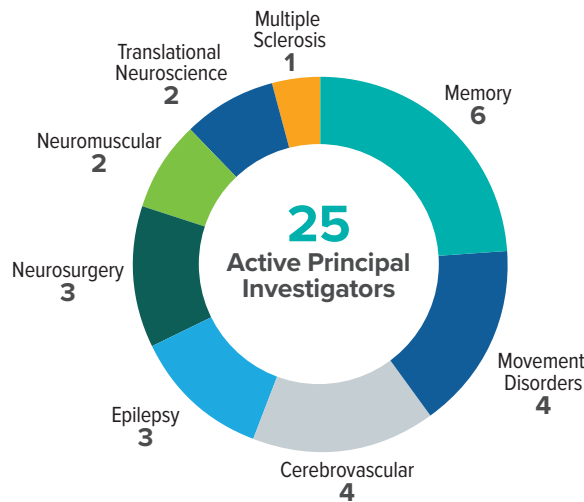
### Active Studies at the Neuroscience Institute



### Enrollment Breakdown at the Neuroscience Institute



### Active Principal Investigators at the Neuroscience Institute



Learn more about neuroscience research.

# Featured Researchers and Research



Anita Fletcher, MD

Despite advanced diagnostic technology, identifying a causative organism in suspected infectious myelopathy cases remains challenging. Newer technologies like metagenomics are being utilized to enhance diagnostic assays, improving infection identification. Conventional assays have also been optimized for better sensitivity and specificity.

Promptly recognizing and treating infectious myelopathy decreases morbidity and mortality. Key diagnostic tools include serologies, CSF analysis, and imaging. Clinical presentation, epidemiologic risk factors, and recent illness history are crucial for accurate diagnosis. Recommended treatment involves targeted antimicrobials, immune modulation, surgical intervention, supportive care, and interdisciplinary involvement.

**Fletcher AM**, Bhattacharyya S. Infectious Myelopathies. Continuum (Minneapolis). doi: 10.1212/CON.0000000000001393

## Continuum: Lifelong Learning in Neurology

Dr. Fletcher is a contributing author for *Continuum: Lifelong Learning in Neurology*®, the official CME journal of the American Academy of Neurology (AAN). Published since 1993, Continuum® is an in-depth, clinically oriented review journal for practicing neurologists, residents and fellows, advanced practice providers, and neurology professionals. Written by experts, each bimonthly issue contains up-to-date knowledge around a single topic area in neurology. The publication disseminates timely review articles in a lively, interactive format, fostering self-assessment and lifelong learning skills, encouraging critical thinking, and strengthening and improving patient care. Dr. Fletcher says, “*It was an honor to be a contributing author for Continuum and engage with such a respected platform dedicated to advancing clinical education and fostering excellence in neurologic care. I look forward to contributing to ongoing dialogue supporting lifelong learning and disseminating evidence-based practice in our field.*”

## Ongoing Contributions

Dr. Fletcher continues to serve as an investigator on multiple clinical trial protocols focused on multiple sclerosis, progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), and HTLV–1–associated myelopathy at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). She also serves on the NINDS Intramural Scientific Review Committee, contributing her expertise to advancing neurological research and clinical practice.

## Published Research

Dr. Fletcher co-authored the study: “Highly Sensitive 3-Tesla Real Inversion Recovery MRI Detects Leptomeningeal Contrast Enhancement in Chronic Active Multiple Sclerosis.” This study explores using highly sensitive 3-Tesla Real Inversion Recovery MRI to detect leptomeningeal contrast enhancement in patients with chronic active multiple sclerosis. The findings highlight the potential of advanced imaging techniques to improve the diagnosis and understanding of disease progression in multiple sclerosis.

Okar SV, Dieckhaus H, Beck ES, Gaitán MI, Norato G, Pham DL, Absinta M, Cortese IC, **Fletcher A**, Jacobson S, Nair G, Reich DS. Investigative Radiology. Doi: 10.1097/RLI.0000000000001011

## Advisory Board Service

Dr. Fletcher served on the Advisory Board for TG Therapeutics in Copenhagen, Denmark, in September 2024. The advisory board focused on anti-CD20 disease-modifying therapy for multiple sclerosis, reflecting Dr. Fletcher’s ongoing commitment to advancing treatment options and improving patient outcomes in the field of neurology.

## The FLAME Study



Kirk Erickson, PhD

Data collection began in 2024 for FLAME (Follow-up Longitudinal Analysis of Moderate-Intensity Exercise). This cost-effective study conducts a five-year follow-up evaluation of prior participants in the IGNITE (Investigating Gains in Neurocognition in an Intervention Trial of Exercise) study. Participants are invited to return to complete assessments without the intervention. In IGNITE, researchers learned that physical activity is one of the most promising approaches for mitigating age-related cognitive decline and risk for dementia. However, few sufficiently powered randomized clinical trials (RCTs) targeting brain health outcomes have been conducted. Little is known about the biological pathways and moderators of the brain’s response to exercise. To address these gaps, a multi-site, supervised, dose-response aerobic exercise RCT was conducted with brain health outcomes as the primary endpoints in 648 cognitively normal adults aged 65-80. This study, funded by NIH in 2016, included three exercise doses: 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity, 225 minutes per week of moderate intensity, and 150 minutes per week of light intensity.

The IGNITE study has been enormously successful, exceeding sample size expectations, maintaining high adherence and compliance (>80%), minimizing missing data, improving cardiorespiratory fitness, and exceeding the expected distribution of under-represented minorities. Before and after the intervention, we assessed cognition, cardiorespiratory fitness, arterial stiffness, body composition, actigraphy, assays for inflammatory cytokines, neurotrophins, and blood markers of neuropathology. We conducted magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to measure brain morphology, task-evoked and resting functional MRI (fMRI), white matter microstructure and lesions, cerebral blood flow, and positron-emission tomography of Aβ burden. We also measured intellectual stimulation, mood, social networks, sleep, socioeconomic status, physical function, and personality.

The IGNITE results are transformative, impacting the design of future exercise interventions, the conceptualization of neuroplasticity in late adulthood, and public health recommendations for engaging in aerobic exercise to modify cognitive function in late adulthood. However, many unanswered questions remain after the conclusion of IGNITE, which FLAME intends to address. Some of these questions include:

- Does a 12-month aerobic exercise RCT have persistent or protracted benefits to cognitive, neural, or neuropathological outcomes five years after the intervention?
- Was the RCT effective at modifying long-term exercise behaviors?
- Can the rich participant data from IGNITE be utilized to forecast who is more likely to maintain a physically active lifestyle after the intervention?
- How effective was the exercise RCT at modifying the accumulation of Alzheimer’s disease (AD) neuropathology over a 5-year follow-up?
- If cognitive, brain, or markers of neuropathology differ as a function of group assignment 5 years after the intervention, which factors mediate those long-term benefits?

Going into the second year of the FLAME study, more than 72 participants who returned from IGNITE have consented, and 49 participants have completed all assessments. Data collection has been streamlined to be almost entirely electronic, nearly eliminating the use of paper-based forms and documents at all three sites. AdventHealth is working as the coordinating center for data management and analysis. Almost all data from other sites has been automated at the coordinating center to check for missingness and outliers, alleviating human error. The study is progressing well, and researchers are excited to continue answering these important questions.

## The LAMBDA Study

The Longitudinal Assessment of Multidomain Brain Data for Early Detection of Alzheimer’s Disease (LAMBDA study) is a three-year follow-up study focused on Alzheimer’s disease pathology and cognitive status in an older population, with a budget of approximately \$4 million. This study will be a foundation for future R21 and R01 NIH grant proposals. Enrollment of participants began in October 2024. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of diverse research teams and various departments at AdventHealth, 15 participants have already been enrolled. The investigator teams are very excited about the progress towards the primary goal of this study: to create a database that tracks the neurocognitive health status of participants at regular intervals.



Receiving the R21 Grant for Cortisol Assays

Dr. Erickson’s team received an R21 grant for the Exercise, Stress Biomarkers, and Alzheimer’s Disease Neuropathology study. This study will analyze hair cortisol concentration (HCC) in a large and uniquely well-characterized sample of cognitively normal older adults (N=648). Hair samples have been collected and banked both before and after a multi-site Phase III, dose-response, 12-month supervised, randomized clinical trial of exercise titled “Investigating Gains in Neurocognition in an Intervention Trial of Exercise (IGNITE). This study presents an unprecedented opportunity to determine whether aerobic exercise-induced changes to HCC statistically mediate changes to cognition, AD neuropathology, brain volume, or function. This trial aligns with the NIH mission to leverage existing cohort and RCT samples for cost-effectively testing new hypotheses.



Anwar Ahmed, MD

**Anwar Ahmed, MD**, is the Principal Investigator of the A Phase 2b, Multicenter, Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled Study to Determine the Efficacy and Safety of BIIB122 in Participants with Parkinson’s Disease LUMA study, a Phase 2b, multicenter, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study designed to determine the efficacy and safety of BIIB122 in participants with Parkinson’s disease (PD).

BIIB122 is a selective, orally bioavailable, central nervous system–penetrant, reversible kinase inhibitor of LRRK2, a potential treatment for patients with PD. Inhibition of LRRK2 kinase, a genetically validated target, is expected to improve lysosomal function in patients with PD.

LRRK2 variants are an established cause of PD, accounting for approximately 4% to 5% of familial PD and 1% to 2% of sporadic PD. Familial LRRK2 variants are transmitted in an autosomal dominant inheritance pattern with incomplete penetrance. Most identified pathogenic variants in LRRK2 are located within its catalytic domains, including G2019S, the most common variant associated with LRRK2-PD. These variants are hypothesized to increase LRRK2 kinase activity, either through direct mechanisms within the kinase domain or through indirect mechanisms. Additionally, common (non)coding variants in and around LRRK2 have been identified as risk factors for sporadic PD. While the

exact pathogenic mechanisms remain unknown, LRRK2 is believed to play a role in intracellular trafficking in the endolysosomal system, which is overrepresented among rare and common risk variants for PD.

No disease-modifying therapies have been approved for PD at this time. This study will be conducted with participants with early-stage PD, both with and without pathogenic variants in the LRRK2 gene. Treatment with BIIB122 may intervene in an important disease pathway in PD and prevent or slow the progression of motor and non-motor disabilities associated with PD. Participants with early-stage PD were selected because BIIB122 is hypothesized to have a greater effect on PD symptoms and progression when administered earlier in the disease. In early-stage disease, when there is less neurodegeneration in the dopaminergic neurons, the potential exists to restore or preserve lysosomal function in a higher percentage of neurons than in later-stage disease. Pathological studies have shown that four years after a clinical diagnosis of PD, there is already a substantial reduction in staining for dopamine terminals in the dorsal striatum. Therefore, treatments administered in later PD stages may be less effective in restoring the function of dopaminergic neurons and reducing further neurodegeneration.

The study will be conducted at approximately 110 sites globally, recruiting over 600 patients. The double-blind placebo-controlled period is at least 48 weeks and can extend to 144 weeks for each participant. The study is still ongoing, but screening and recruitment have been completed.



Lauren Oberlin, PhD

**Lauren E. Oberlin, PhD**, co-authored a groundbreaking study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine in 2024. The research, titled “Cardiorespiratory Fitness is Associated with Cognitive Function in Late Adulthood: Findings from the IGNITE Study,” explores the relationship between cardiorespiratory fitness (CRF) and cognitive performance in older adults.

The study involved 648 participants aged 65 to 80 years of age, with CRF measured through a graded exercise test on a motorized treadmill. The findings revealed that higher CRF is positively associated with better cognitive performance across multiple domains, including episodic memory, processing speed, working memory, executive function/ attentional control and visuospatial function. The study found that sex, education and beta-blocker use moderated these associations in select cognitive domains.

Dr. Oberlin’s research highlights the importance of maintaining cardiorespiratory fitness to preserve cognitive health in older adulthood. The study’s comprehensive approach and large sample size provide valuable insights into the potential benefits of CRF for cognitive functioning, emphasizing the need for individualized exercise prescriptions to optimize cognitive health in aging populations. This significant contribution to neurocognitive health underscores Dr. Oberlin’s dedication to advancing our understanding of the interplay between physical fitness and cognitive function, paving the way for future research and public health initiatives to improve older adults’ quality of life.

**Oberlin LE**, Wan L, Kang C, Romano A, Aghjayan S, Lesnovskaya A, Ripperger HS, Drake J, Harrison R, Collins AM, Molina-Hidalgo C, Grove G, Huang H, Kramer A, Hillman CH, Burns JM, Vidoni ED, McAuley E, Kamboh MI, Jakicic JM, Erickson KI. Cardiorespiratory fitness is associated with cognitive function in late adulthood: baseline findings from the IGNITE study. Br J Sports Med. doi:10.1136/bjsports-2024-108257.

2024 Highlights

Dr. Oberlin was awarded an NIH-funded clinical trial to examine the impacts of an investigational digital therapeutic on cognition, mood, and brain functional connectivity in older adults with major depression and apathy. She also presented at the II International Congress on Promoting Brain Health Through Exercise Across the Lifespan in Granada, Spain, where she received the Best Oral Presentation Award.



Daniel Okobi, MD, PhD

**Daniel Okobi, MD, PhD**, is the principal investigator for the TRAILRUNNER study, which aims to demonstrate whether people with early signs of Alzheimer’s disease who are still largely independent show clinical benefit from an injectable anti-amyloid therapy. The TRAILRUNNER study addresses significant barriers to access posed by the two FDA-approved medications on the market — lecanemab and donanemab. These

medications were only administered as IV infusions to study participants who generally received amyloid PET scans. Both methods present substantial barriers to patient access, including the need for regular MRI scans and high costs. CSF testing, which also limits access, is widely accepted as a prerequisite to starting these medications in clinical practice.

The TRAILRUNNER study explores whether amyloid scans and lumbar punctures can be bypassed using a generally accurate blood test and whether IV infusion clinics can be avoided by injecting medication under the skin, similar to insulin and other common medications. This approach could potentially allow more individuals to access novel Alzheimer’s medications. The primary goal is to demonstrate that such medications produce both statistically and clinically meaningful patient benefits, which neither lecanemab nor donanemab has yet demonstrated. If successful, this study could significantly improve access to Alzheimer’s treatments and enhance patient outcomes.





# AdventHealth International Brain Health Symposium 2024

From January 25 to 26, 2024, the AdventHealth Research Institute proudly hosted the inaugural AdventHealth International Brain Health Symposium at the AdventHealth Nicholson Center in Celebration, Florida. Ira Goodman, MD, and Kirk Erickson, PhD, brought together leading experts to explore innovative approaches to dementia and normal cognitive aging.

The symposium focused on providing participants with a comprehensive education in all aspects of brain health. The aim was to create a forum for dialogue, discussion, and debate about the etiology, progression, and therapeutic approaches for better understanding cognitive aging. The event fostered a lively yet respectful atmosphere, engaging scientists and clinicians around the topic of brain health in late adulthood.

Featured speakers included Michelle Carlson, PhD from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Kenneth M. Heilman, MD from the University of Florida, Thomas Karikari, PhD from the University of Gothenburg and the University of Pittsburgh, Yaakov Stern, PhD from Columbia University, and Chad Swanson, PhD from Prothena Biosciences.

The symposium attracted a diverse audience, including scientists, physicians, students, fellows, residents and AdventHealth executive hospital leadership. This event marks a significant step forward in brain health and promises to inspire future research and collaboration.

## Post-Doc Spotlight Corner



Audrey Collins, PhD

**Audrey Collins, PhD**, reports that her top moment in 2024 was presenting alongside Dr. Maddison Mellow at the ACSM Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts. Their tutorial lecture, “The 24-hour Activity Cycle and Cognitive Health: From Correlations to Compositional Data Analyses,” showcased their research on the relationship between daily activity patterns and cognitive health. This presentation also highlighted the ongoing international collaboration with Dr. Mellow and other esteemed colleagues at the University of South Australia in Adelaide, Australia. Dr. Collins looks forward to further enhancing this productive relationship in 2025.

Dr. Collins also presented a poster at the 2024 Promoting Brain Health through Exercise Across the Lifespan conference in Granada, Spain. Her presentation was titled “Aerobic Fitness Moderates the Association of 24-Hour Time-Use with Cognitive Function: The IGNITE Study.”



Patricio Solis Urrea, PhD

**Patricio Solis Urrea, PhD**, a postdoctoral research scientist at AdventHealth Neuroscience Institute, is a sports scientist specializing in the relationship between lifestyle and brain health, utilizing neuroimaging. His research focuses on optimizing strategies to preserve cognitive health and reduce the risk of dementia.

By leveraging multimodal neuroimaging, he examines how lifestyle factors, including physical activity, sleep and nutrition, impact cognitive function and brain health — including Alzheimer’s disease — in aging populations. Dr. Solis Urrea also explores the impact of physical activity on white matter microstructure and brain networks in children with overweight or obesity.

In 2024, Dr. Solis Urrea published several articles presenting his findings, including the role of physical exercise in mitigating Alzheimer’s disease through the gut-brain axis, the relationship between fitness, gray matter volume, and executive function in older adults, and the development of efficient methods for quantifying plasma amyloid- $\beta$  biomarkers in Alzheimer’s disease.

He also represented AdventHealth as the president of the Organizing Committee for the II International Congress “Promoting Brain Health Through Exercise Across the Lifespan” in Granada, Spain, where he also won the “Best Collaborator” award



Christina Molina-Hidalgo, PhD

**Christina Molina-Hidalgo, PhD**, is leading a mechanistic line of research focusing on how objective and subjective stress markers can predict brain health in late adulthood, including hippocampal volume, dysfunction, and memory performance. Additionally, she seeks to understand how exercise-related changes in stress pathway activation might influence the neurocognitive benefits of physical exercise.

## Research Presentations

Dr. Molina-Hidalgo presented findings from the Investigating Gains in Neurocognition in an Intervention Trial of Exercise (IGNITE) study at two international congresses, the International Behavioral Neuroscience Society Annual Meeting 2024 and the International Brain Health Symposium 2024. The IGNITE study showed that relational encoding elicited greater hippocampal activity and better performance than item encoding. Additionally, greater hippocampal activity was associated with better performance for both item and relational conditions. However, while levels of perceived stress were not associated with hippocampal activation for either condition, higher perceived stress was associated with poorer relational memory performance compared to the item condition.

These findings suggest that perceived stress may preferentially influence hippocampal-dependent memory performance in older adults but might not do so by influencing hippocampal activation during encoding.

## Dr. Molina-Hidalgo’s 2024 Research Publications

Dr. Molina-Hidalgo has co-authored a collection of articles exploring the effects of alcohol consumption on exercise outcomes and cognitive performance, the impact of aerobic exercise on brain morphology in breast cancer patients, and the relationship between physical activity and amyloid beta levels in older adults. These studies examine how exercise improves memory in middle-aged adults and the role of physical fitness in emotional well-being during

pregnancy, highlighting the importance of physical activity and lifestyle factors in enhancing cognitive and emotional health across different populations.



Kelsey Sewell, PhD

**Kelsey Sewell, PhD**, had a top 2024 moment enhancing international collaborations with colleagues in Granada, Spain. This collaboration resulted in an exciting paper published in *Alzheimer’s and Dementia*, co-first authored by Dr. Sewell and Marcos Olvera-Rojas. The paper demonstrated that blood-based biomarkers (BBMs) accurately reflect brain beta-amyloid (a hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease) in the IGNITE dataset, garnering significant attention from the research community.

Marcos Olvera-Rojas, **Kelsey R. Sewell**, Thomas K. Karikari, Haiqing Huang, Lauren E. Oberlin, Xuemei Zeng, Jill K. Morris, Audrey M. Collins, Jermon A. Drake, Bradley P. Sutton, Arthur F. Kramer, Charles H. Hillman, Eric D. Vidoni, Jeffrey M. Burns, M. Ilyas Kamboh, Edward McAuley, Anna L. Marsland, Yijun Chen, Tara K. Lafferty, Anuradha Sehrawat, John M. Jakicic, Lu Wan, Chaeryon Kang, Kirk I. Erickson. Influence of medical conditions on the diagnostic accuracy of plasma p-tau217 and p-tau217/A $\beta$ 42. The Journal of the Alzheimer’s Association. Doi: 10.1002/alz.14430

Dr. Sewell and Marcos Olvera-Rojas met in person at the international congress Promoting Brain Health Through Exercise Across the Lifespan in Granada, Spain. This meeting was a valuable opportunity to connect and enhance collaborations with Marcos and other group members.

## Key Research Contributions

Some novel, impactful and prominent work from the IGNITE study includes research on BBMs for Alzheimer’s disease (AD). These widely applicable and cost-effective markers represent a significant advancement in the AD field. However, since they are measured peripherally, questions remain about how other conditions influence them. Dr. Sewell’s team was one of the first to show that the ability of BBMs to reflect brain amyloid was influenced by diabetes and cardiovascular conditions, but that BBMs still reflected brain amyloid with high accuracy. In a follow-up study (accepted in *Alzheimer’s and Dementia* but not yet available online), the team showed that blood biomarkers reflect specific cognitive deficits and may help differentiate AD and non-AD related cognitive deficits in aging.





# Nursing and Academic Research

**Caring for Our Caregivers:** AdventHealth continues to prioritize the well-being of health care workers through initiatives like the RISE program, which has been adapted for unit-based nurse leaders. The program has shown to be effective in reducing stress and burnout. Additionally, the Moral Injury Outcomes Scale (MIOS) was validated to assess moral injury in nurses, and Trauma-Informed Peer-to-Peer Surveillance (TIPPS) was studied to provide confidential support to colleagues in distress.

**Center for Academic Research Excellence (CARE):** CARE enhances research through Graduate Medical Education (GME) training and supporting researchers with project design, protocol mentoring, regulatory documentation, and study assistance. In 2024, online modules were implemented for medical students and researchers and support was expanded to include paid members of our research learner pipeline. Breakthroughs include GME grant submissions and increased presentations, posters and manuscripts from residency and fellowship programs. CARE aims to reduce the time between research publication and operational launch, offering comprehensive services to AdventHealth research units, leaders, and clinicians. Five biostatisticians provide our investigators with study design, sample size calculations, randomization and statistical analysis plans.



Learn more about nursing research.

## 2024 by the Numbers

### Programs



79

CARE Support Projects



169

Statistics Supports Projects

### Academic



394

GME Residents and Fellows for Central Florida and West Florida Divisions



11

Research Learners

## 2024 Highlights

RISE for Physicians participants reported life-changing outcomes

### RISE Participants Quotes 2024

“Tremendous impact — I left the retreat 100% mentally rested.”

“I came away with more inner calm than I have had in almost two years. I also came away with a better understanding of who I am, what I am capable of, and what’s important to me.”

“One of the best courses I ever did in my career. It added knowledge and skills that will help me in the present and future of my life.”



“Presenting at AONL in New Orleans to a robust and receptive audience about moral injury and our attention to representation.”

—Stephanie Harris, MLS

## Team Contributions

“As a CARE team member, I cooperated with our team to provide excellent statistical consulting services in AHRI. We provide data analysis results and the story behind the data. We contribute to enhancing doctors’ experiences, techniques and innovations for disease treatments, equipment and tool utilization, primary care, behavioral analyses and medications.”

— Jianbin Zhu, PhD

“The CARE team expanded the number of teams that we support, including UME Ortho and other UME learners.”

— Natalie Reyes, PhD

“The CARE team continuously works toward improving individuals’ whole health and the well-being of different populations, including team members and patients.”

— Amanda Sawyer, PhD

“We are exploring ways to integrate scalable mental health support and well-being initiatives into clinical settings, which become embedded in unit culture, leading to system-level change.”

— Mandi Bailey, MA, LMHC

“Our team examines components that contribute to and support whole-person health, which is significant and sets our team apart.”

— Tere Richard, MHSA

“I had the opportunity to provide technical support to the planning side of Ovid Synthesis to support EBP and other processes in nursing, GME and other disciplines.”

— Stephanie Harris, MLS

“As a biostatistician, I have been fortunate to co-author five peer-reviewed articles in 2024. These publications have showcased our collaborative efforts and emphasized the statistical analysis we bring to the research projects.”

— Fanchao Yi, PhD



# Orthopedic Institute

## Overview

Rothman Orthopaedics Florida partners with top-notch surgeons and academicians, setting AdventHealth Research Institute (AHRI) apart from its competitors by harnessing clinical expertise, research acumen, knowledge and capabilities. This collaboration ensures that research is at the forefront of medical advancements and is directly informed by real-world clinical experiences.

The Rothman partnership allows AHRI to tap into a vast network of resources, patient data, and clinical insights, which is uniquely advantageous in developing and implementing innovative therapeutic approaches. This extensive network also facilitates the translation of research findings into practical clinical applications, differentiating AHRI from its competitors. Overall, the collaborative efforts with renowned orthopedic specialists and academic experts enhance the quality and relevance of AHRI research and position the organization as a leader in driving advancements in orthopedic care and therapeutic solutions.

## Orthopedic Milestones and Achievements

Our orthopedic milestones and achievements include groundbreaking discoveries, innovative treatments, and a commitment to translational research that directly benefits patients. Rothman Orthopaedics and AHRI leverage their collective expertise to establish new standards of excellence in orthopedic care and drive the development of leading-edge therapies that can improve patient outcomes.

## Areas of Focus

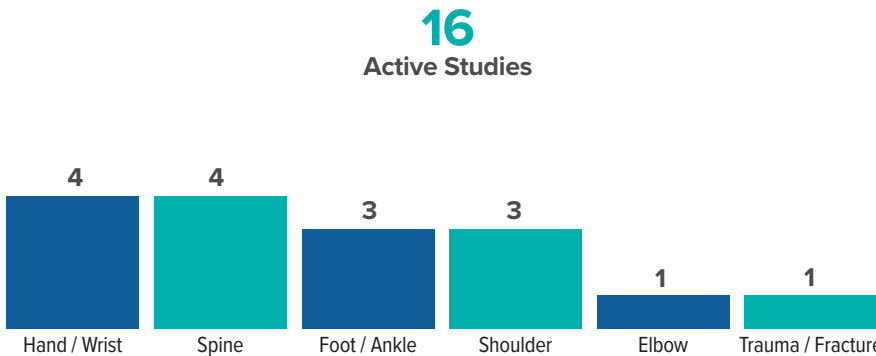
- Hand
- Elbow
- Shoulder
- Spine
- Joint Replacement
- Operative Sports Medicine
- Nonoperative Sports Medicine
- Foot and Ankle
- Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R)
- Orthopedic Trauma and Fracture Care
- Physical and Occupational Therapy



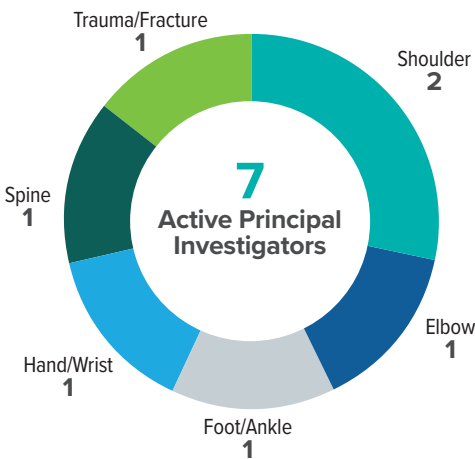
Learn more about orthopedic research.

## By the Numbers

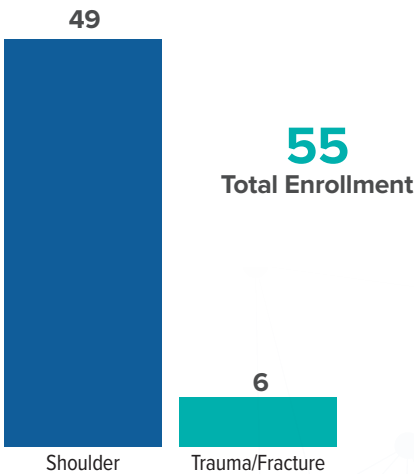
### Active Studies at the Orthopedic Institute



### Active Principal Investigators at the Orthopedic Institute



### Enrollment Breakdown at the Orthopedic Institute





# Featured Research and Researchers



Amir Kachooei, MD, PhD

**Amir Kachooei, MD, PhD**, is conducting research that primarily aims to evaluate trends in orthopedic surgeries among nonagenarian patients (over 90 years old) and assess morbidity and mortality rates following open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF) for elbow and distal humerus fractures. By analyzing these two aspects, the research seeks to inform management strategies and enhance surgical care for this increasingly prominent demographic.

The growing number of older adults over 90 years old highlights the need for tailored orthopedic interventions. The studies demonstrate that age should not automatically exclude patients from surgical options. Careful selections and preoperative optimizations can lead to favorable outcomes.

Despite the higher risks often associated with advanced age, the outcomes of ORIF procedures reveal that many nonagenarians can benefit from surgical intervention, particularly for fractures and dislocations, which represent a significant portion of orthopedic surgeries performed. The increasing trend in surgical volume, projected to continue growing, suggests substantial financial implications for the U.S. health care system. It underscores the necessity for strategies that manage costs while delivering quality care for this vulnerable population.

Over the last decade, more than 5,291 orthopedic surgeries were performed on patients aged 90 and older at Rothman Orthopaedics, reflecting a greater than threefold increase from 2014 to 2023. This significant rise necessitates a thoughtful response from health care providers. With 69% of surgeries focusing on fractures or dislocations, the findings emphasize the need for effective rehabilitation strategies. The studies indicate that satisfactory functional recovery can be achieved even among the oldest patients, suggesting that surgical intervention is a viable and beneficial option.

For those undergoing ORIF, low complication rates (12% for distal humerus and 7% for humeral shaft fractures) affirm the safety of surgical management while providing decent postoperative outcomes, thus encouraging orthopedic surgeons to consider surgical options for appropriate candidates within this age group. The findings from Dr. Kachooei’s studies illuminate critical insights into the surgical management of nonagenarians. As this demographic continues to expand, a comprehensive understanding of surgical trends, outcomes, and implications is essential to ensuring effective health care delivery and addressing the needs of older adults.

## Innovative Randomized Control Trial With Remote Patient Monitoring



Ramakanth Yakkanti, MD

An ongoing randomized controlled trial led by Principal Investigator **Ramakanth Yakkanti, MD**, is underway. This groundbreaking study, titled “Postoperative TKA Episode of Care Optimization through Wearable Device Use,” aims to revolutionize postoperative rehabilitation programs through wearable technology.

This study aims to evaluate whether wearable devices can be used safely, personalized and monitored postoperatively in physical therapy. By leveraging wearable technology, the clinical team can tailor rehabilitation programs to meet each patient’s individual needs, enhancing patient engagement and therapy personalization.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to improve patient outcomes by providing continuous ambulation and objective range of motion data, which was previously unable to be recorded. This breakthrough allows the clinical team to monitor patients’ progress in real time, ensuring that rehabilitation is effective and safe.

AdventHealth is committed to advancing medical research and improving patient care through innovative approaches. For more information about this study, please contact the AdventHealth Research Institute.

# Academic Research

In 2024, the Rothman Orthopaedics research team at AdventHealth continued to garner national recognition, presenting cutting-edge findings at major academic conferences across the country. Faculty, fellows, residents, and research scientists shared over a dozen original abstracts at premier events including the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) Annual Meeting, the Orthopaedic Research Society (ORS) Conference, and subspecialty gatherings such as the American Shoulder and Elbow Surgeons (ASES), the American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons (AAHKS), the American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH), the American Association for Hand Surgery (AAHS), and the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine (AOSSM).

The presentations explored a broad range of topics, from presenting clinical outcomes and innovative techniques in elbow surgeries to the discovery of a ligament in the wrist, as well as biomechanical studies, orthopedic trauma, hip replacement, and optimizing patient outcomes. These abstract presentations not only showcased our commitment to translational research but also reflected our focus on improving patient care through evidence-based advancements.

The research team is actively engaged in developing important national registries for both elbow and hip conditions, contributing to a broader understanding and long-term data collection. Beyond conference presentations, the research team has hosted numerous national and international students and scholars, fostering global collaboration in orthopedic research. Furthermore, the team has been heavily involved in writing books and book chapters, specifically concentrating on elbow surgery, which further solidifies our expertise in this area.

Our researchers engaged in vibrant academic exchange, participated in panel discussions, and fostered collaborations with leading institutions nationwide. The photographs included in this report highlight key moments from these conferences—poster sessions, podium talks, and collaborative networking opportunities that collectively underscore our team’s dedication to advancing the field of orthopedic medicine.



Dr. Amir Kachooei, MD, PhD (middle), Kassem Ghayyad, MD (right) at the ASSH conference in Minnesota

# Orthopedic Academic Research Highlights

In addition to its industry portfolio, the Orthopedic Research Team was one of the first at AdventHealth to invest in an academic structure and support many scholarly activities and projects.



## Active Projects: 118

- Hand: 25
- Elbow: 13
- Shoulder: 16
- Joints: 27
- Foot and Ankle: 7
- Trauma: 9
- Sports: 18
- Spine: 3



## Grants: 10

- Active Grants: 6
- Grants Awarded: 4



## Academic Researchers: 5

- Research Scientist 1
- Senior Research Fellows: 2
- Research Assistants: 2



American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH)



University of Central Florida Orthopaedic Conference





## Pharmacy Investigational Drug Services (IDS)

### Overview

The Investigational Drug Services (IDS) Pharmacy proudly supports the groundbreaking research at the AdventHealth Research Institute. Among the most exciting developments this year has been our involvement in the BriaCell Therapeutics BC-IMT-04 clinical trial, which has offered us firsthand experience with advanced cell therapy.

This study focuses on a novel cancer tumor vaccine that targets metastatic breast cancer (MBC) by introducing tumor-associated antigens into immune-competent intradermal sites. The arrival of this complex investigational product required IDS to acquire new competencies rapidly to handle shipments transported in liquid nitrogen dry shippers.

Our success in safely and effectively managing this therapy was made possible through close collaboration with the Cellular Therapy Lab and the Research Lab team. We ensured operational readiness and upheld the highest safety and compliance standards. This project exemplifies the innovation, adaptability and teamwork that define our commitment to advancing patient care through research.

## Translational Research Institute (TRI)

### Overview

The Translational Research Institute (TRI) remains at the forefront of medical research, transforming methods of conducting studies and clinical trials. Its “bench-to-bedside” approach in translational research is a two-way process. Basic scientists provide clinical researchers with tools and model systems for human studies, while clinical researchers make novel observations and conduct trials to understand disease nature and progression. This multidisciplinary approach improves lives through innovation, leading to discoveries and cures.

TRI’s vision is to develop and conduct world-class translational research addressing diabetes, obesity, the metabolic origins of cardiovascular disease, and aging with diligent respect to AdventHealth’s mission and values. TRI scientists, clinicians and partners are committed to early-phase clinical studies to understand the molecular underpinnings of metabolic disease. The Institute specializes in proof-of-concept and proof-of-mechanism research studies supported by National Institutes of Health (NIH), Foundations, Biotech, and Pharma-funded projects, ensuring scientifically rigorous and high-quality research.

### Areas of Focus

- Aging and Muscle Wasting
- Exercise and Bioenergetics
- Metabolism and Obesity
- Type 1 Diabetes
- Type 2 Diabetes and Prediabetes

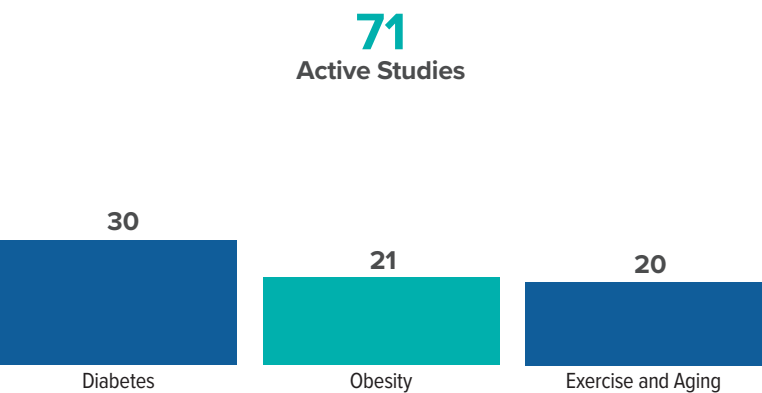


**Learn more about translational research.**

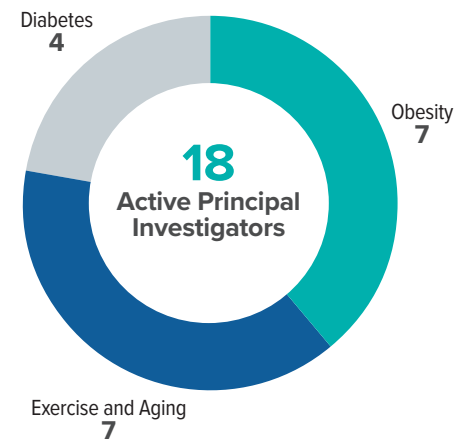


# By the Numbers

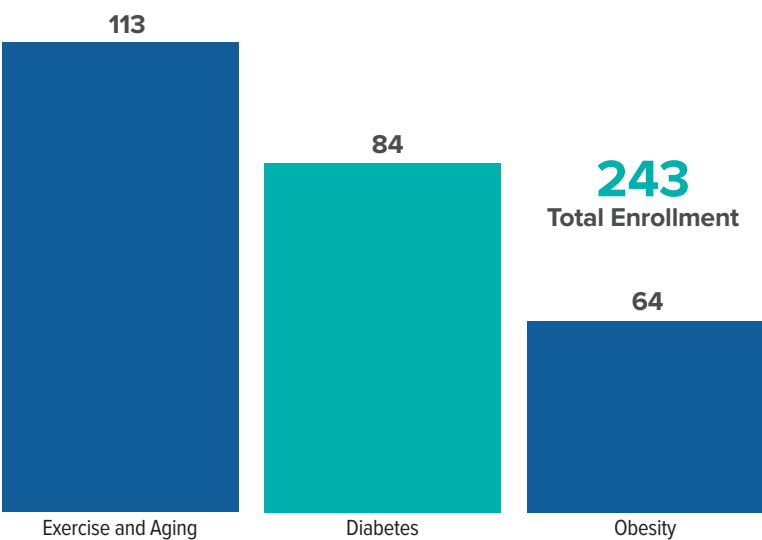
## Active Studies at the Translational Research Institute



## Active Principal Investigators at the Translational Research Institute



## Enrollment Breakdown at the Translational Research Institute



Bret Goodpaster, PhD

**“TRI scientists have developed an outstanding reputation across the country and worldwide for performing innovative research and training the next generation of scientists, attracting funding and support from NIH, pharmaceutical companies, and biotechnology firms. This research is helping us understand complex human diseases and conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, and aging, and is testing novel treatments to enable people to live healthier for longer.”**

— Bret Goodpaster, PhD

# Featured Research and Researchers

## Dr. Anna Casu’s Efforts to Expand Type 1 Diabetes Screening



Anna Casu, MD

Type 1 Diabetes), aims to increase access to care and improve early detection of T1D.

Type 1 diabetes, although less prevalent than Type 2 diabetes, poses significant health risks, including diabetic ketoacidosis, a potentially deadly condition present in up to 60% of children at the time of diagnosis when not caught early via screening. T1D is associated with various acute and chronic complications, including early death.

Dr. Casu emphasizes the importance of early detection and advanced care: “We have improved technology and treatments, including a new medication that can delay T1D clinical onset, and we can predict that T1D will occur. However, the data indicates that people from ethnic and racial minority groups or people in disadvantaged communities tend to have less access to pre-clinical screening and advanced care. We are working to change that.”

Funded by the state of Florida, ACCESS-T1D aimed to bring screening opportunities closer to those at high risk of T1D, reducing their burden and facilitating participation, especially among underserved and disadvantaged populations. Researchers plan to establish a biobank to identify new and better biomarkers of T1D.

Dr. Casu, who herself has T1D, highlights the project’s goals: “We brought screening opportunities physically closer to those who are at high risk of T1D, reducing their burden and facilitating participation, especially of underserved and disadvantaged populations, who often cannot take time off their work or family commitments to take care of themselves.”

Dr. Casu’s dedication to expanding access to T1D screening and care exemplifies AdventHealth’s commitment to provide care to all and improving patient outcomes. Her leadership in the ACCESS-T1D project is a significant step towards better health and early intervention for those at risk of Type 1 diabetes.

## Dr. Paul Coen’s Latest Research on Muscle, Mobility and Aging



Paul Coen, PhD

**Paul Coen, PhD**, an associate investigator at the Translational Research Institute (TRI), has recently co-authored several papers from the Study of Muscle, Mobility, and Aging (SOMMA). Dr. Coen is a co-investigator on this large observational multisite cohort study, which aims to understand the biological basis of muscle aging and its impact on mobility.

One analysis plan from SOMMA was led by Dr. Sofia Ramos, a postdoctoral fellow working with Dr. Coen at TRI. It resulted in a publication in Diabetes, the flagship medical journal of the American Diabetes Association. Titled “*The Role of Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Mitochondrial Oxidative Capacity in Reduced Walk Speed of Older Adults with Diabetes*”, the publication explores the contributors to slower walking speed in older adults with diabetes. Slow walking speed of older adults is a key clinical risk factor for future morbidity and mortality. Despite previous research, the specific factors affecting walking speed in older adults with diabetes remain unclear. **The key findings from the analysis** were that reduced mitochondrial oxidative capacity in skeletal muscle and cardiorespiratory fitness contribute to slower walking speed in older adults with diabetes. By identifying these contributors, the study provides valuable insights that could lead to improved interventions and treatments to enhance mobility and overall quality of life for this population.

This publication, along with many others from SOMMA over the past year, contributed to the decision by the National Institute on Aging to continue supporting SOMMA until 2029. Under the leadership of Dr. Bret H. Goodpaster (SOMMA Principal Investigator), the TRI is now one of three clinical sites for SOMMA, and the TRI aims to enroll about 400 participants who are 70 years of age or older. The SOMMA research team believes that the study’s biorepository of muscle tissue, blood, gene expression data and longitudinal assessments will help fuel additional research efforts within the scientific community, including exploration of potential interventions designed to improve aging and mobility.

**Ramos, S.V.**, Distefano, G., Lui, L.-Y., Cawthon, P.M., Kramer, P., Sipula, I.J., Bello, F.M., Mau, T., Jurczak, M.J., Molina, A.J., Kershaw, E.E., Marcinek, D.J., Shankland, E., Toledo, F.G.S., Newman, A.B., Hepple, R.T., Kritchevsky, S.B., **Goodpaster, B.H.**, Cummings, S.R., **Coen, P.M.** Role of Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Mitochondrial Oxidative Capacity in Reduced Walk Speed of Older Adults With Diabetes. Diabetes. Doi:10.2337/db23-0827.

### Collaborative Research on Dietary Intake Tracking



Karen Corbin, PhD, RD

Accurately determining food intake remains a significant challenge in nutrition research. **Karen D. Corbin, PhD, RD**, an Associate Investigator at AdventHealth Translational Research Institute (TRI), has co-authored a groundbreaking study introducing a metagenomics-powered approach to accurately track dietary intake from gut microbiome samples.

Dr. Christian Diener developed the innovative method, MEDI (Metagenomic Estimation of Dietary Intake) at the Gibbons Lab at the Institute for Systems Biology (ISB). MEDI detects food-derived DNA in stool samples to estimate dietary intake, offering a data-driven alternative to traditional questionnaires. This method leverages stool metagenomics, sequencing all DNA present in fecal samples, including microbial, human, and food-derived DNA.

Data from AdventHealth TRI’s Integrating Quantitative Energetics Determines the Microbiome’s Contribution to Energy Balance study (NCT02939703) played a crucial role in validating this new approach.

Dr. Corbin emphasizes the importance of collaboration in advancing scientific research: *“This is the perfect example of how collaboration advances science. The data from our original study contributed a small but important piece of this new research. We’re excited about this work’s potential to expand our understanding of interactions between diet and the gut microbiome and further develop precision nutrition approaches that could help reduce obesity and other chronic diseases.”*

The collaboration between TRI and ISB exemplifies the power of interdisciplinary partnerships in driving innovation and improving health outcomes. Dr. Corbin and her colleagues continue to push the boundaries of nutrition research, paving the way for more accurate and effective dietary assessment methods.

### Karen Corbin, PhD, RD: ATHENA Orlando Emerging Leader Award Recipient

Translational Research Institute Associate Investigator Karen Corbin, PhD, RD, was the 2024 ATHENA Orlando Emerging Leader Award recipient at the *Orlando Business Journal* (OBJ) “Women Who Mean Business” Awards luncheon. The award is bestowed on recipients like Dr. Corbin, who exemplify the leadership style at the heart of ATHENA’s model such as courage, collaboration and advocacy.

A proud Latina woman in STEM, Dr. Corbin is recognized as an innovative, collaborative, fearless and curious colleague passionate about making science accessible to everyone. She leads leading-edge research on metabolic diseases such as obesity, diabetes and liver disease, focusing on the impact of gut health. She also founded “Geeks That Speak” to help scientists and clinicians translate complex information into engaging stories that drive action and build funding for medical research.

Dr. Corbin is distinguished by her unwavering advocacy, particularly in the world of science, for challenging the status quo to drive scientific progress, standing up for colleagues, and opening doors for young professionals. Her accomplishments are endless, and her impact is profound.

*“We are proud to be part of OBJ’s Women Who Mean Business awards each year, which recognizes incredible women in our community. This partnership demonstrates our alignment in supporting, honoring, and empowering women leaders like Dr. Corbin, who are driving change in our community,”* said Karen Keene, ATHENA Orlando Women’s Leadership, Inc., founder and chief strategic advisor. AHRI is proud of this impressive accomplishment.



### 2024 Highlights



Dr. Karen Corbin recently made significant contributions to the field of diabetes and liver disease. She was part of an expert committee assembled by the American Diabetes Association (ADA) to compose a consensus statement for the early detection of liver disease in people with type 2 diabetes. Dr. Corbin was selected to present the section on nutrition at the ADA meeting in Orlando, showcasing her expertise among esteemed committee members. The consensus statement is set to be released in mid-2025.

Additionally, Dr. Corbin achieved a personal milestone by giving her first television interview in Spanish on Telemundo. This accomplishment highlights her commitment to making science accessible to diverse communities and her ability to communicate complex information effectively across different languages.

**“Our work on mechanisms that impact energy balance sets us apart due to our ability to comprehensively and deeply phenotype human energy metabolism. Since energy metabolism imbalances are at the core of many diseases like obesity, diabetes, liver disease, dementia and cancer, our expertise is unique and valuable to innovation that is poised to transform patient care. TRI’s participation in national scientific meetings elevates our science and our reputation as a health care system that is focused on innovation.”**

— Dr. Karen Corbin

### Innovative Research on Ketosis



Melissa Erickson, PhD

**Melissa Erickson, PhD**, and her team successfully completed clinical testing of an inpatient study designed to test a new approach to induce moderate ketosis in healthy adults by combining a commonly used diabetes medication (SGLT2i) with low carbohydrate diets. This project aims to identify new strategies to achieve moderate ketosis, with the long-term vision of applying these strategies in combination with other clinical therapies to improve patient outcomes in settings such as cancer, metabolic disease and heart disease.

### Unique Research Contribution

This TRI research project stands out due to its high scientific rigor, including the use of an inpatient research setting. Participants stayed in the Clinical Research Unit at TRI for 28 days to receive a special diet and study drug. Daily ketone changes were tracked to capture the precise time course of ketogenesis. The study would not have been possible without the expertise of the Metabolic Kitchen at TRI led by Rita Emerson, who developed and implemented the special study diets. These diets were personalized to each participant and modified based on ketone responses.

### Advanced Approaches

This research used advanced approaches that elevated TRI’s capabilities. The project represents a unique translational collaboration between TRI and Princeton University researchers who initially found that a ketogenic diet in mice with pancreatic cancer helps improve survival. The two research groups collaborated on the study design executed at TRI, marking the starting point of translating promising findings in mice to potential patient applications.

### Investigators From the Diabetes Program Contribute to Key Hypoglycemia Research in Type 1 Diabetes



Anna Casu, MD



Anika Bilal, MD



Richard Pratley, MD

A publication in the journal Diabetes highlights the work of AdventHealth’s Diabetes Program investigators, **Anna Casu, MD**, and **Anika Bilal, MD**, who served as co-authors alongside **Richard Pratley, MD**, in a clinical study exploring therapeutic avenues to mitigate hypoglycemia risk in people with type 1 diabetes (T1D). The study, titled *“A Randomized Controlled, Double-Masked, Crossover Study of a GPR119*



*Agonist on Glucagon Counterregulation During Hypoglycemia in Type 1 Diabetes,”* was funded by The Helmsley Foundation and adds valuable insights to the field of diabetes research.

In this rigorously designed crossover trial, researchers investigated whether MBX-2982—a GPR119 agonist—could improve the body’s hormonal response to hypoglycemia in adults with T1D. Over a multi-phase protocol involving drug administration, washout periods, and controlled insulin-induced hypoglycemia, the team evaluated the drug’s effects on key counterregulatory hormones. Although the compound did increase levels of GLP-1, a hormone known to assist in blood sugar regulation, it did not significantly enhance glucagon release—the primary defense against hypoglycemia.

These findings suggest that while GPR119 agonists, such as MBX-2982, engage their biological targets, they may not offer a viable therapeutic strategy for preventing hypoglycemia in type 1 diabetes (T1D) patients. This study underscores the importance of translational research in refining our understanding of endocrine pathways and guiding the development of safer, more effective diabetes treatments.

The publication reinforces the Diabetes Program’s commitment to advancing knowledge that informs real-world clinical practice and patient safety.

**Expanding Access to Diabetes Technology: Pratley and Casu Co-Author Landmark Study on Automated Insulin Delivery in Older Adults**

In a groundbreaking multicenter clinical trial published in NEJM Evidence, AdventHealth investigators Dr. Richard Pratley and Dr. Anna Casu joined a team of national experts to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of automated insulin delivery (AID) systems in adults aged 65 and older with type 1 diabetes (T1D). This NIH-funded study is one of the first of its kind to focus on a population that has historically been underrepresented in diabetes technology research.

The study enrolled 78 older adults, who each used three different insulin delivery methods over sequential 12-week periods. Results revealed that AID systems—particularly hybrid closed-loop systems—significantly decreased time spent in hypoglycemia, a major concern for older individuals, without increasing the risk of hyperglycemia.

One of the most important findings of the study was that older adults, including those with mild cognitive impairment, were able to use AID systems safely and effectively. Despite requiring slightly more time

for onboarding, most participants adapted well to the technology and expressed a willingness to continue its use. These results dispel common concerns about older adults’ ability to manage advanced diabetes devices and underscore the importance of broadening access to digital health innovations.

This publication reinforces the commitment of Drs. Pratley and Casu—and the AdventHealth Diabetes Program—to improving care and quality of life for all people with diabetes, regardless of age or technological familiarity. Their work continues to lead the way in evidence-based, inclusive approaches to diabetes treatment.

in combination with other clinical therapies to improve patient outcomes in settings such as cancer, metabolic disease and heart disease.

**Advancing Hope for People with Type 1 Diabetes and Kidney Disease: The FINE-ONE Study**



Tina Thethi, MD

The FINE-ONE study, led by **Tina Thethi, MD**, represents a significant step forward in addressing a critical treatment gap for individuals living with type 1 diabetes (T1D) and chronic kidney disease (CKD). These patients face an elevated risk of rapid disease progression and currently have limited therapeutic options specifically approved for their condition. The FINE-ONE study evaluates the efficacy of finerenone—a non-steroidal mineralocorticoid receptor antagonist—in delaying CKD progression when used in addition to standard of care, compared to placebo. This research highlights the ongoing efforts within the medical community to identify and validate new therapies that can meaningfully improve outcomes for this vulnerable population.

Finerenone has shown promise in related populations, but the FINE-ONE study is unique in focusing on individuals with both T1D and CKD, where there is an unmet medical need. By rigorously assessing clinical outcomes and disease progression, the study aims to generate evidence that could support the approval of a novel treatment option and reshape the care landscape for these patients. Dr. Thethi’s leadership ensures that the study is scientifically rigorous and focused on patient-centered care, embodying a commitment to innovation, hope, and healing. As the study progresses, it stands as a testament to the power of research in advancing new frontiers in medicine and transforming the lives of those most in need.

**Post-Doc Spotlight Corner**



Cheehoon Ahn, PhD

**Cheehoon Ahn, PhD**, achieved a significant milestone in 2024 by publishing his doctoral work in *Nature Metabolism* last September. As the first author, Cheehoon demonstrated that long-term exercise can remodel fat tissue in adults with obesity. This groundbreaking paper not only advanced our understanding of obesity and exercise but also generated critical preliminary data for his fellowship application to NIH. Cheehoon’s dedication to research continues to pave the way for innovative approaches to tackling obesity and improving metabolic health.

**Ahn, C., et al.** (2024). Long-term Exercise Remodels Fat Tissue in Adults with Obesity. *Nature Metabolism*. Doi:10.1038/s41591-024-01234-5.



Anika Bilal, MD

2024 was a remarkable year for **Anika Bilal, MD**, a postdoctoral research fellow at AdventHealth Translational Research Institute. In May, Anika published an original research article in *Diabetes Care* on impaired awareness of hypoglycemia in older adults with Type 1 diabetes. This significant work was also mentioned in the July 2024 episode of the *Diabetes Care on Air* podcast, produced by the American Diabetes Association affiliated journal and hosted by Dr. Alice Cheng and Dr. Michael Rickels. This accomplishment has been incredibly rewarding for Anika, as it has paved the way for new research opportunities and collaborations.

**Bilal, A., Yi F, Whitaker K, Igudesman D, Pratley R, Casu A,** (2024). Impaired Awareness of Hypoglycemia in Older Adults with Type 1 Diabetes: A Post Hoc Analysis of the WISDM Study. *Diabetes Care*. Doi:10.2337/dc23-0456.



Daria Igudesman, PhD, RD

**Daria Igudesman, PhD, RD**, a dedicated researcher, reached a significant milestone in 2024. She was invited to speak at the Advanced Treatments and Technologies in Diabetes conference in Florence, Italy. Daria presented a session on the intricate connections between diabetes, the gut microbiome, obesity and nutrition, sharing her expertise with an international audience. This invitation underscores her contributions to the field and her commitment to advancing diabetes research and treatment.



Justine Mucinski, PhD

In 2024, **Mucinski, PhD**, received an R33 pilot grant from the National Institute on Aging (NIA), awarded by Duke University, to study the long-term effects of calorie restriction on circulating ceramides in healthy men and women. This project led to an invitation for Justine to give a short talk at the Keystone Symposia: Lipids in Cellular Function and Disease, which took place in April 2025.

Additionally, Justine published a first-author paper in the *Journal of Hepatology* from a clinical trial completed during her PhD. The study demonstrated that diet and exercise significantly improved liver health and histology in people with metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH), highlighting the importance of exercise in treating the disease. These accomplishments marked a significant year for Justine and reflected her dedication to advancing research in metabolic health and liver disease.

**Mucinski, J., et al.** (2024). Diet and Exercise in People with Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatohepatitis (MASH). *Journal of Hepatology*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhep.2024.06.017>.



Alejandra Petrilli, PT, PhD

**Alejandra Petrilli, PT, PhD**, a Translational Research Institute researcher, investigates the role of pancreatic stellate cells (PSC) in the human pancreas and the pathogenesis and progression of 1 diabetes, 2 diabetes, and pancreatitis. Her research focuses on understanding the phenotype of different PSC subpopulations and their potential for therapeutic targeting. In 2024, Dr. Petrilli conducted a novel grant-awarded study using state-of-the-art spatial imaging of the transcriptional activity of the human pancreas at subcellular resolution. She presented her groundbreaking findings at the largest assembly of pancreatologists at the 2024 Joint Meeting of the American Pancreatic Association (APA), Japan Pancreas Society (JPS), Chinese Association of Pancreatology (CAP), and International Association of Pancreatology (IAP).

Using this advanced technology, Dr. Petrilli revealed the plasticity of the exocrine cells and demonstrated the distribution of PSC subpopulations in healthy and diseased pancreata for the first time. Her work was selected as Poster of Distinction, an honor reserved for top-scoring posters. Additionally, the review committee was impressed by her research in pancreatic science and selected her as a recipient of the APA 2024 Young Investigator Travel Grant.



Dr. Petrilli's achievements in 2024 highlight her dedication to advancing our understanding of pancreatic diseases and her potential to contribute to therapeutic innovations.



**Solia Ramos, PhD** achieved a significant research breakthrough in 2024 by publishing an article in the journal *Diabetes*. The study, The Role of Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Mitochondrial Oxidative Capacity in Reduced Walk Speed of Older Adults with Diabetes, examined how cardiorespiratory fitness and mitochondrial oxidative capacity impact walking speed in older adults with diabetes. "This was a big accomplishment because I was able to attain experience with a large multi-site cohort study in which I was involved in data analysis and had the opportunity to ask and answer an important research question."

**Ramos SV**, Distefano G, Lui LY, Cawthon PM, Kramer P, Sipula IJ, Bello FM, Mau T, Jurczak MJ, Molina AJ, Kershaw EE, Marcinek DJ, Shankland E, Toledo FGS, Newman AB, Hepple RT, Kritchevsky SB, Goodpaster BH, Cummings SR, Coen PM. Role of Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Mitochondrial Oxidative Capacity in Reduced Walk Speed of Older Adults With Diabetes. *Diabetes*. doi:10.2337/db23-0827



The top moment for **Katie Whytock, PhD**, receiving the prestigious K99 award for her research titled Determining Cell and Spatially-Distinct Skeletal Muscle Transcriptional Aberrations in Insulin Resistance and Type 2 Diabetes early in 2024. This award recognizes her exceptional work and dedication to understanding the complexities of skeletal muscle transcriptional changes in insulin resistance and Type 2 diabetes. Katie's achievement marks a significant milestone in her career and paves the way for further groundbreaking research in this field.

## Grateful Patient Message for the TripleG Research Team

"After my last check-in at the institute today, I just wanted to drop you and everyone at the TRI a quick follow-up. **THANK YOU! You should know that the work that you all are doing is changing lives, FOR REAL It's really amazing. It has transformed me into someone who feels I can accomplish anything. I'm not sure if I will ever know if I was on TripleG or a placebo, but I feel like either way, I would have succeeded in this journey because I had all of you behind me. And even without the shots, the weekly "beatings" (kidding) got me in a healthy state of mind I needed to be in I thank you, and my wonderful, supportive wife and three kids thank you. I am a better person from this study.**

Please share this with Kory, Rita, Angelo, and everyone downstairs. I truly appreciate all their support and guidance in this journey. Also, I want to thank Kristen, Tara, and the entire team upstairs. I know I was a pain in the ass with all the "cold water" requests. :)

Overall, the TRI is one of the best teams I've worked with personally and professionally Outstanding professionalism with a personal touch. Keep up the incredible work you are doing!"

# Transplant Institute

## Overview

The AdventHealth Transplant Institute is a nationally recognized healthcare team dedicated to advancing treatment for organ failure and transplantation care for patients in Central Florida and across the nation. The institute aims to be the destination of choice for complex organ disease and transplantation by providing clinically superior, innovative, and individualized care to improve patients' quality of life. Researchers at the institute strategically select protocols that offer new or improved treatments not otherwise available to patients.

The AdventHealth Transplant Institute is home to Orlando's only transplant program. Since 1973, the institute has performed over 6,000 organ transplants, thanks to the generosity of many donors. It also boasts one of the nation's oldest and largest kidney transplant programs and offers the only Living Donor Program in Central Florida.

## Areas of Focus

- Advanced Heart Failure
- Advanced Liver Failure
- Advanced Lung Failure
- Heart Transplant
- Liver Transplant
- Lung Transplant
- Mechanical Circulatory Support (MCS)

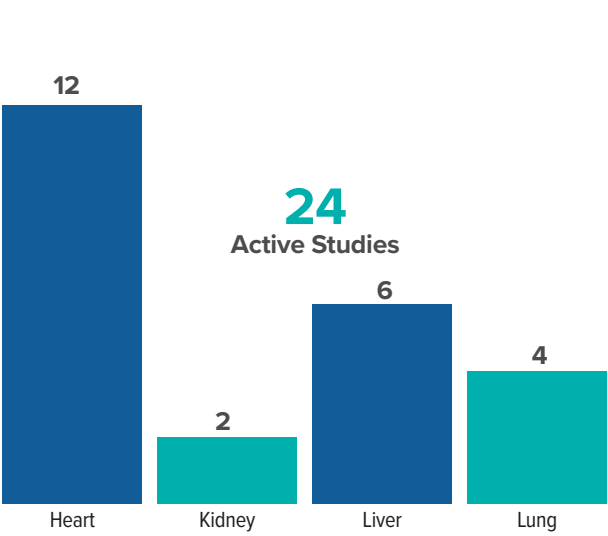


Learn more about transplant research.

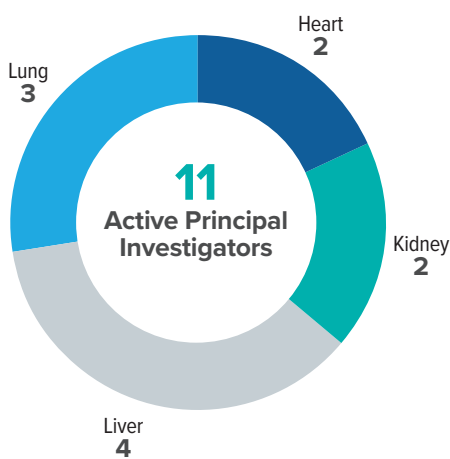


# By the Numbers

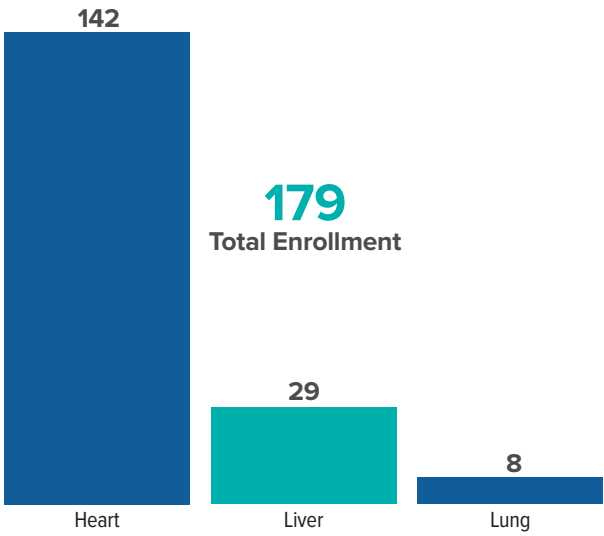
Active Studies at the Transplant Institute



Active Principal Investigators at the Transplant Institute



Enrollment Breakdown at the Transplant Institute



# Featured Research and Researchers

## Chilling Choices: Heart Transplant Outcomes Using SherpaPak With Long Ischemic Time Versus Traditional Ice Storage With Short Ischemic Time



Andrija Vidic, DO

**Andrija Vidic, DO**, a board-certified advanced heart failure and transplant cardiologist at AdventHealth, is the co-author of the study titled *Chilling Choices: Heart Transplant Outcomes Using SherpaPak With Long Ischemic Time Versus Traditional Ice Storage With Short Ischemic Time*. This retrospective study compared outcomes between traditional ice storage (ICE) with short ischemic times (<3 hours) and SherpaPak Cardiac Transport System (SCTS) with long ischemic times (>4 hours), using data from the GUARDIAN registry. The review found that SherpaPak Cardiac Transport System travel distance was almost 10-fold greater than ICE (82 miles for ICE vs. 765 miles for SCTS). There was no significant difference in primary graft dysfunction (PGD), length of stay (LOS), post-transplant mechanical circulatory support (MCS), and 30-day survival between the two methods. However, SherpaPak Cardiac Transport System showed statistically significant reductions in 24-hour inotrope scores and right ventricular (RV) dysfunction. Propensity-matched cohorts showed similar rates of MCS utilization and PGD, but SCTS trended toward less RV dysfunction and lower inotrope scores despite almost double the ischemic time. The study concludes that donor heart preservation with SCTS continues to be effective in prolonged ischemic times without sacrificing post-heart transplantation clinical outcomes, potentially aiding in expanding donor organ geography.

Hassan FarHoud, Zubair Shah, Tarun Dalia, Scott Silvestry, Hirak Shah, Dan Meyer, David D'Alessandro, and **Andrija Vidic**. Chilling Choices: Heart Transplant Outcomes Using SherpaPak With Long Ischemic Time Versus Traditional Ice Storage With Short Ischemic Time. ASAIO Journal (2024). DOI: 10.1097/MAT.0000000000002357







## AHRI in the Great Lakes Region

### Overview

UChicago Medicine AdventHealth is advancing oncology research through a robust portfolio of clinical trials, providing patients in Chicago's western suburbs with access to leading-edge cancer treatments. This collaboration leverages UChicago Medicine's status as a National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center and its extensive experience in conducting cancer clinical trials. The joint venture's integration of academic and community health care systems facilitates the expansion of clinical trials and the development of innovative treatment programs that leverage the strengths of both organizations.

At the UChicago Medicine AdventHealth Cancer Institute in Hinsdale, Illinois, patients benefit from comprehensive, personalized cancer care that includes access to advanced clinical trials, state-of-the-art diagnostic imaging and supportive services — all under one roof. This integrated approach ensures that patients receive the latest in cancer treatment options close to home, reflecting the joint venture's commitment to enhancing patient access to specialized treatments and coordinated care.

## AHRI in the Rocky Mountain Region

### Overview

The Rocky Mountain Region, one of the newer additions to the AdventHealth family, continues to provide exceptional care with leading-edge treatments and a dedicated whole-person care system throughout Colorado. The region is comprised of five hospitals: AdventHealth Avista, AdventHealth Castle Rock, AdventHealth Littleton, AdventHealth Parker and AdventHealth Porter. The Rocky Mountain Region provides the latest research in our community and builds a solid foundation for the future growth of research. AdventHealth Parker and AdventHealth Littleton have the distinction of being Nationally Accredited programs for breast cancer sites, due to our remarkable care of oncology patients.

Our nationally and internationally recognized physicians at the Colorado Joint Replacement at AdventHealth Porter are committed to improving patient care through innovation and research.

### Areas of Focus

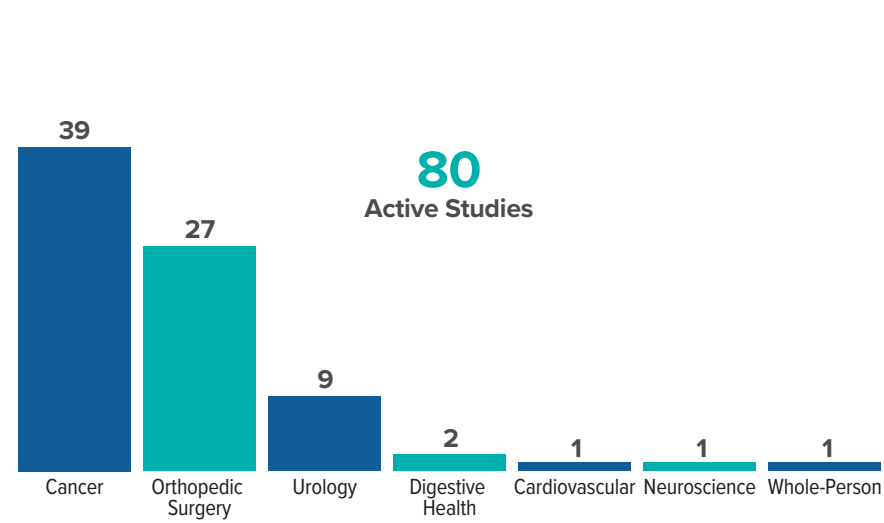
- Cancer
- Cardiovascular
- Digestive Health
- Orthopedic Surgery
- Neuroscience
- Urology



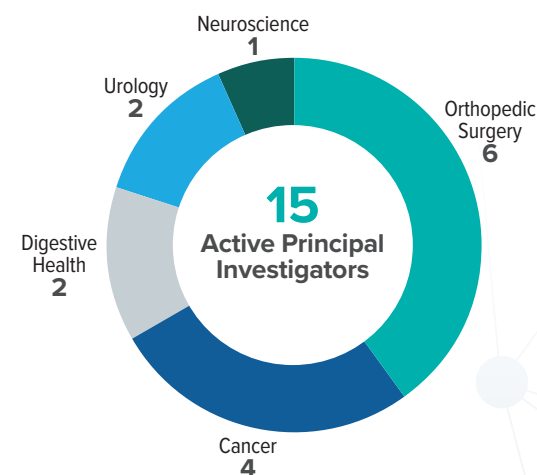


# By the Numbers

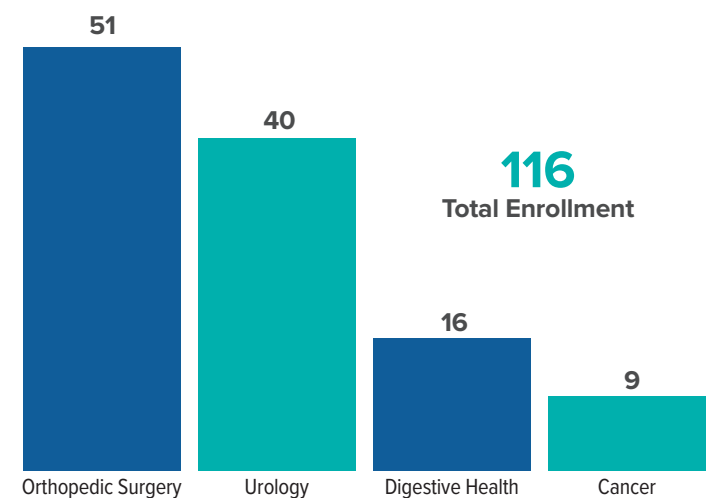
## Active Studies in the AHRI Rocky Mountain Region



## Active Principal Investigators in the AHRI Rocky Mountain Region



## Enrollment Breakdown in the AHRI Rocky Mountain Region



# Featured Researchers and Research

## Orthopedic Surgery

### Commercial Synovial Antigen Testing: Inferior to Traditional Culture for Diagnosing Periprosthetic Joint Infection



Jason Jennings, MD, DPT

In collaboration with the Rothman Institute, **Jason Jennings, MD, DPT**, has conducted a significant multicenter study on diagnosing periprosthetic joint infection in patients undergoing total knee arthroplasty revision. This study, which is in close collaboration with the Rothman Orthopaedic Philadelphia group, aims to compare the efficacy of a commercial synovial antigen testing with traditional culture methods.

Dr. Jennings explains, *“This study is crucial because it involves collaboration with the Rothman Institute, which has been a central hub for many of my research projects. Alongside Dr. Parvizi and other colleagues, we have extensively investigated the challenges of diagnosing infections where bacteria cannot be easily cultured.”*

The research highlights a critical issue: despite knowing a patient is infected, there is a 25 to 30% chance that traditional methods may fail to grow bacteria. Dr. Jennings notes, *“Although our diagnostic test may confirm an infection, isolating the causative bacteria can be problematic, leading us to explore alternative diagnostic methods.”*

Over several years, Dr. Jennings observed that a commercial test, advertised as a better solution, did not perform as expected. *“We compiled our data and demonstrated that the commercial test was not superior to traditional culture methods,”* he says. This finding was presented at prestigious national meetings, including the American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons and the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, and was published in the *Journal of Arthroplasty* in 2024.

Dr. Jennings emphasizes, *“Our study shows that traditional culture methods remain the gold standard for diagnosing periprosthetic joint infections. The commercial test did not provide additional valuable information and sometimes resulted in false positives, potentially misleading treatment decisions.”*

In conclusion, Dr. Jennings asserts, *“While new diagnostic tests are emerging, our research indicates that traditional laboratory cultures are still the most reliable method for diagnosing infections in patients with a joint replacement. This finding is vital for ensuring accurate treatment and avoiding unnecessary tests that do not enhance diagnostic accuracy.”* This study underscores the importance of relying on proven diagnostic methods and cautions against the premature adoption of commercial tests that may not offer significant advantages over traditional practices.

Tarabichi S, Johnson RM, Quinlan ND, Dennis DA, Parvizi J, **Jennings JM**. “Commercial Synovial Antigen Testing is Inferior to Traditional Culture for the Diagnosis of Periprosthetic Joint Infection in Patients Undergoing Revision Total Knee Arthroplasty.” *The Journal of Arthroplasty*. Doi: 10.1016/j.arth.2024.03.067

## Transplant



Hunter Moore, MD, PhD

**Hunter Moore, MD, PhD**, is passionate about helping patients with major life-altering conditions return to health after a transformative operation. He finds great joy in seeing patients outside the hospital setting as they reflect on their journey back to a disease-free life.

Dr. Moore grew up in a family of physicians who cared for a wide range of patient populations, inspiring him

from a young age to pursue a career in medicine. He was particularly drawn to caring for individuals with life-changing diagnoses, by not only treating these patients but finding new ways to improve their recoveries.

Dr. Moore received his medical degree from the University of Vermont. He went on to complete a general surgery residency and an abdominal transplant and hepatobiliary surgery fellowship at the University of Colorado, where he also received his PhD. His clinical practice includes the treatment of end-stage renal disease, cirrhosis and liver, pancreatic and renal cell cancers with vena cava thrombectomy and reconstruction. He also has clinical expertise in the management of acute bleeding and thrombosis disorders.

Dr. Moore is well regarded in the transplant community, having received multiple awards and grants, such as the Vanguard Prize and the Veloxis Fellowship in Transplantation Grant from the American Society of Transplant Surgeons. He is a National Institute of Health (NIH) funded researcher with over 200 publications.



Urology



Lawrence I. Karsh, MD, FACS

**Lawrence Karsh, MD, FACS**, earned his medical degree from The Chicago Medical School. After completing his General Surgical training at The University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, he completed his Urology residency at Brigham and Women’s Hospital/Harvard Medical School.

A specialist in Genitourinary Oncology, Dr. Karsh co-founded The Urology Center of Colorado, where he serves as an attending Urologist, Director of Research, and past co-chair of the Advanced Therapeutics Clinic. He is a Certified Principal Investigator with an experience of 270 clinical trials. Dr. Karsh has authored many peer-reviewed publications and serves on the editorial board for Bladder Cancer. He is an active member of the AUA, SUO, ASCO, as well as SWOG. He served on the bladder cancer subcommittee and the advisory board for the SUO Clinical Trials Consortium from 2010 to 2020. He was the principal investigator for the Heat Biologics (HS410) Phase 2 and JNJ-56021927 (TITAN) Phase 3 clinical trials within the SUO-CTC.

Dr. Karsh is a member of the Denver Academy of Surgeons and serves on the scientific advisory committees for Astellas, Vaxiion, and Aurora Oncology. He is frequently sought as an expert consultant by pharmaceutical companies and research organizations engaged in developing new treatments and technologies in the field.

Digestive Health



Douglas Adler, MD

**Douglas G. Adler, MD, FACG, AGAF, FASGE**, received his medical degree from Cornell University Medical College in New York, NY. He completed his residency in Internal Medicine at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center/Harvard Medical School in Boston, MA. Dr. Adler completed both a general gastrointestinal fellowship and a therapeutic endoscopy/ ERCP fellowship at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. He then returned to the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center for a fellowship in endoscopic ultrasound.

Dr. Adler is currently Director of the Center for Advanced Therapeutic Endoscopy (CATE) at Porter Adventist Hospital in Denver, Colorado and is Director of the Advanced Endoscopy Fellowship at CATE. Dr. Adler is

also the Editor-in-Chief of *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy*. Prior to moving to Colorado, Dr. Adler was a tenured Professor of Medicine at the University of Utah School of Medicine in Salt Lake City, UT. Dr. Adler was also the GI Fellowship Program Director at the University of Utah School of Medicine for seven years. Dr. Adler focuses his clinical, educational, and research efforts on the diagnosis and management of patients with gastrointestinal cancers and complex gastrointestinal disease, with an emphasis on therapeutic endoscopy.

Dr. Adler is an internationally recognized expert on all facets of ERCP, EUS, gastrointestinal stenting, third-space endoscopy, and other topics. He is the author of more than 600 scientific publications, articles, and book chapters and he has published 9 gastroenterology textbooks, including the first textbook on Interventional Endoscopic Ultrasound.

2024 Rocky Mountain Region Highlights

Research Publications and Presentations

- **15 Research Publications** in 2024, showcasing AHRI’s commitment to advancing medical knowledge and innovation.
- **2 Poster Presentations** and **5 Podium Presentations** at various prestigious conferences highlight our active scientific community participation.

Awards and Recognitions

- **Frank Stinchfield Award** from the Hip Society for the project: *Pre-operative Surgical Prep is Ineffective at Eliminating C. Acnes Prior to Total Hip Arthroplasty*. This award underscores our dedication to impactful orthopedic research and excellence.

Ongoing and Future Research

- **27 Active Studies** are underway, reflecting our robust research agenda and dedication to continuous improvement in innovative patient care.

AHRI in the West Florida Division

Overview

AdventHealth’s West Florida Division (WFD) supports some of the nation’s brightest medical minds, collaborating with surgical pioneers, scientists, and researchers to spark lifesaving breakthroughs. Using leading technology and innovation to deliver our standard of whole-person care, the research network of care includes AdventHealth Tampa and AdventHealth Ocala. Getting care at AdventHealth means getting access to the latest research studies, procedures, and technologies available, including access to medical, surgical and device-related clinical trials. The Digestive Health Institute is one example of AdventHealth’s efforts to advance patient care through leading-edge, patient-focused research. Finding tomorrow’s medical breakthroughs starts with today’s research.

Areas of Focus

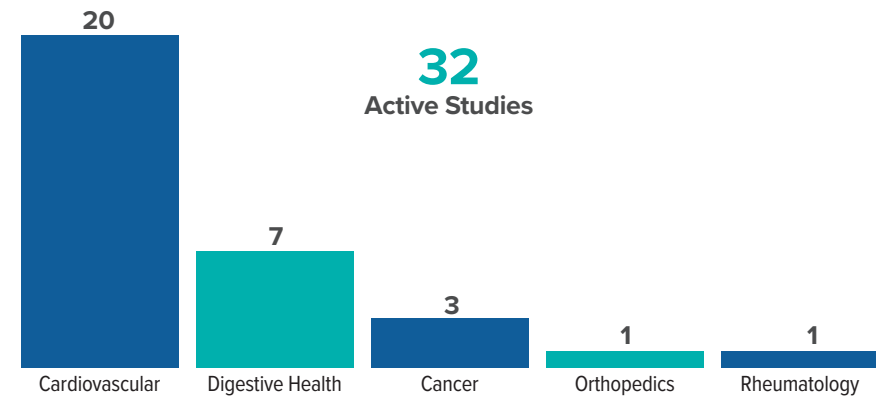
- Cardiology
- Digestive Health
- Cancer



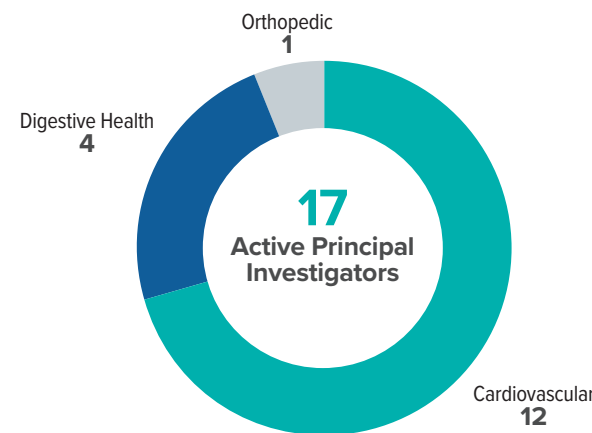


# By the Numbers

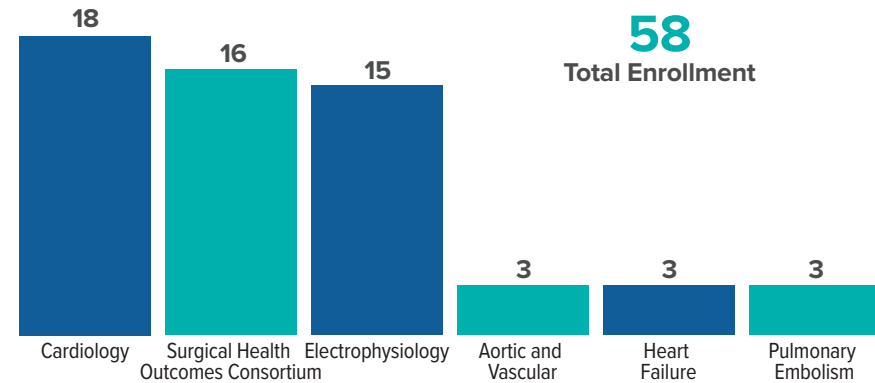
## Active Studies in the AHRI West Florida Division



## Active Principal Investigators in the AHRI West Florida Division



## Enrollment Breakdown in the AHRI West Florida Division



# Featured Researchers and Research

## Cardiology



Charles R. Lambert Jr., MD, PhD

**Charles Lambert Jr., MD, PhD**, and his team conducted the Poseidon clinical trial to investigate the prevalence of systemic inflammation in patients with atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) and heart failure (HF). This study measured systemic inflammation using high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hsCRP) levels.

The Poseidon trial was a collaboration between Lambert’s research team, the AHMG practice, and physicians. The partnership was instrumental in screening and enrolling 49 eligible patients for the study, surpassing the initial target of 25 AdventHealth patients.

The Poseidon study’s primary objective was to gather data on the prevalence of high systemic inflammation levels in individuals with cardiovascular disease. By understanding the extent of inflammation in these patients, the research aims to provide insights into the underlying mechanisms of heart and blood vessel diseases and identify those at higher risk of elevated inflammation levels.

Dr. Lambert emphasized the importance of this research, stating, “*The information we collect in this study can help us better understand diseases of the heart and blood vessels and who is more likely to have high levels of inflammation.*”

The Poseidon trial’s success in exceeding its enrollment target highlights the dedication and effectiveness of the collaborative efforts between Dr. Lambert’s team and AHMG. This study represents a significant step forward in cardiovascular research, potentially improving patient outcomes through a deeper understanding of systemic inflammation in ASCVD and HF patients.

## Study on STEMI DTU by Dr. Abela



Oliver Abela, MD

**Oliver Abela, MD**, evaluates the impact of mechanical unloading of the left ventricle (LV) using the Impella CP device for 30 minutes before coronary reperfusion with percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI). The study aims to determine whether this approach can reduce infarct size and improve prognosis for patients with ST-elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) compared to PCI alone without LV unloading.

## First Volt Implant in Tampa, Florida



James Irwin, MD

The West Florida Division VOLT study team, led by Principal Investigator **James Irwin, MD**, successfully performed their first Volt implant as part of the VOLT-AF IDE study. This milestone marks a significant advancement in a atrial fibrillation (AFib) treatment.

The objective of the VOLT-AF study is to demonstrate that the Volt™ PFA System is safe and effective for treating symptomatic, recurrent, drug-refractory paroxysmal and persistent AFib. The Volt™ PFA System represents a leading-edge approach to managing AF, offering new hope to patients who have not responded to conventional treatments.

# Patient Grateful Message

One of the patients enrolled in the STEMI DTU research study shared their heartfelt gratitude:

**“I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere thanks for being enrolled in the STEMI DTU research study and for saving my life. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such an important area of medical research. Knowing that my participation may help advance medical knowledge and improve patient care is reassuring. I also greatly appreciate the dedication, support, and professionalism the entire team showed throughout this process.”**



Digestive Health



Ahmed Allawi, MD

**Ahmed Allawi, MD**, conducted his inaugural clinical trial in the WFD, ASTELLAS, which marked a significant achievement for the Digestive Health Research program. This pioneering study aimed to evaluate the clinical utility of ASP5354, a compound that enhances the visibility of the ureter, using a near-infrared fluorescence (NIR-F) imaging device. The innovative method developed through this trial eliminates the need for stenting the ureter during procedures, offering a less invasive and more efficient approach to patient care.

Dr. Allawi, the principal investigator (PI), led the study with remarkable results. *“This was my first clinical trial here at WFD as a PI, and it was a success for the Digestive Health Research program,”* he stated. The trial successfully enrolled seven patients, demonstrating the potential of ASP5354 in clinical applications.

ASTELLAS’ success validated the effectiveness of ASP5354 and paved the way for future clinical trials within the department. Dr. Allawi emphasized, *“This study opened the door for more clinical trials in our department,”* highlighting the trial’s role in fostering a robust research environment and encouraging further exploration into digestive health.

The ASTELLAS trial represents a significant milestone in advancing medical research at WFD, showcasing the department’s commitment to innovation and excellence in patient care. Dr. Allawi’s leadership and the collaborative efforts of the research team have set a strong foundation for continued success in clinical trials and research initiatives.



Michel Murr, MD

**Michel Murr, MD**, a renowned bariatric surgeon at AdventHealth Tampa, has co-authored a significant study published in *Surgery for Obesity and Related Diseases*. The study, titled *“Subjective Improvement of Reflux Symptoms After Conversion of Sleeve Gastrectomy to Roux-en-Y Gastric Bypass and Concomitant Repair of Hiatal Hernia,”* addresses the common issue of reflux symptoms following sleeve gastrectomy (SG).

The research involved a retrospective review of patients undergoing conversion from SG to Roux-en-Y gastric bypass (RYGB) with concomitant hiatal hernia repair. The study aimed to assess the outcomes of this conversion on reflux symptoms, nausea, vomiting, dysphagia, and abdominal pain, as well as postoperative proton pump inhibitor (PPI) use.

Key findings from the study include:

- **Improvement in Reflux Symptoms:** Significant improvement in reflux symptoms and reduction in PPI use were observed during early follow-up (median: 14 months) and sustained at late follow-up (median: 32 months).
- **Reduction in Nausea and Dysphagia:** Improvement in nausea and dysphagia reached statistical significance at late follow-up.
- **Weight Loss:** Patients experienced additional weight loss post-conversion, with a decreased body mass index (BMI) and increase percent of total body weight loss.

The study highlights the importance of evaluating and repairing hiatal hernias during the conversion from SG to RYGB to improve reflux symptoms and overall patient outcomes. Dr. Murr’s research contributes valuable insights into managing post-SG reflux symptoms and the benefits of revisional bariatric surgery. Dr. Murr’s dedication to advancing bariatric surgery and improving patient care is evident through his research and clinical expertise. His work continues to shape the field of metabolic and bariatric surgery, providing better solutions for patients with complex surgical histories.

Umana, L., Corsello, J., Grist, T., Gonzalvo, J.P., Dietrick, J., Murr, M.M. Subjective Improvement of Reflux Symptoms After Conversion of Sleeve Gastrectomy to Roux-en-Y Gastric Bypass and Concomitant Repair of Hiatal Hernia. *Surgery for Obesity and Related Diseases*. Doi: 10.1016/j.soard.2024.09.014

2024 Highlights

Keynote Speaker

- **The Lives We Touch.** Dr. Murr delivered an inspiring keynote address at the Florida Chapter of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS), emphasizing the profound impact of bariatric surgery on patients’ lives.

Presentations at ASMBS San Diego 2024

- *The End of MASLD* and the Role of Liver Biopsy. Dr. Murr presented on the evolving understanding of metabolic-associated steatohepatitis (MASLD) and the critical role of liver biopsy in its diagnosis and management.
- Tran T, Glaun G, Gonzalvo JP, **Murr MM.** *Takedown of Fundoplication of the Gastric Pouch and Repair of a Recurrent Post-Gastric Bypass Hiatal Hernia.* This presentation highlighted the technical challenges and solutions in revisional bariatric surgery.
- Glaun G, Tran T, Gonzalvo JP, **Murr MM.** *Band Over Bypass Disasters.* Dr. Murr and his colleagues discussed complications and management strategies for patients with band-over bypass procedures.



Sharona Ross, MD

**Sharona Ross, MD**, has made significant strides in advancing the field of surgery by applying new technologies, particularly robotics. Her ability to convert entire operations to robotics is a remarkable accomplishment. Since early 2022, there have been no conversions from robotic to open surgery, showcasing the efficiency and effectiveness of robotic procedures.

Dr. Sharona Ross, MD, is leading a groundbreaking study titled *A Prospective, Single-Center Investigation of the da Vinci SP® Surgical System in Hepatopancreaticobiliary and Foregut Operations for Benign and Malignant Disease*. This research aims to evaluate the safety and performance of the da Vinci SP® Surgical System, along with its instruments and accessories, in complex hepatopancreaticobiliary (HPB) and foregut operations.

The da Vinci SP® Surgical System significantly advances minimally invasive surgery. Dr. Ross’s investigation seeks to assess the system’s efficacy and safety in performing intricate HPB and foregut procedures, including hepatectomy, pancreatectomy, cholecystectomy, gastrectomy, and esophagectomy.

Minimally invasive surgical techniques, such as those enabled by the da Vinci SP® Surgical System, offer numerous benefits, including reduced recovery times, minimized surgical trauma and improved patient outcomes. This study is crucial in determining the system’s viability and effectiveness in these complex surgeries.

The investigation aims to provide comprehensive data on the safety and performance of the da Vinci SP® Surgical System. Positive results could lead to broader adoption of this technology in surgical practices, enhancing patient care and expanding the capabilities of minimally invasive surgery.

Dr. Sharona Ross’s study is poised to make significant contributions to minimally invasive surgery practices. By rigorously evaluating the da Vinci SP® Surgical System, this research will help shape the future of surgical interventions for HPB and foregut diseases.



In 2024, Dr. Ross began working with industry partners on integrating artificial intelligence in surgery and telesurgery. This innovative approach aims to enhance health care equity, ensuring everyone can experience the same health care quality. By increasing access and accessibility, this technology has the potential to benefit many people across the world, particularly those in rural areas or underserved countries. Patients can receive treatment in their hometowns without the need to travel, and they can be treated by clinicians with the right expertise, making a significant difference globally.

Dr. Ross also introduced the concept of the Flip Room, which eliminates turnover and increases efficiency by allowing surgeons to move between surgical rooms from one console. This innovation further enhances the efficiency of surgical procedures and optimizes resource use.

As president of the Society of Robotic Surgery in 2024, Dr. Ross strengthened her network of providers and remains highly connected within the field. Her leadership and dedication to advancing surgical technology and health care equity continue to drive positive change and improve patient outcomes worldwide.



Iswanto Sucandy, MD

**Iswanto Sucandy, MD**, contributes significantly to robotic hepatobiliary surgery through his academic teaching and international courses. He is currently running the International Robotic Hepatobiliary Course in Ghent, Belgium, in collaboration with Orsi Academy. This course, available here, is designed for surgeons with basic knowledge of robotic surgery and familiarity with minimally invasive liver surgery.

The Masterclass in Robot-Assisted Hepatobiliary Surgery offered by Orsi Academy spans two days and includes hands-on training on human cadaver models and scientific lectures. The International Laparoscopic Liver Society (ILLS) and the European-African Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association (E-AHPBA) endorse this comprehensive training program, ensuring participants receive high-quality education and practical experience.

In addition to his teaching endeavors, Dr. Sucandy had an impressive 62 peer-reviewed published articles in 2024, further solidifying his expertise and influence in the medical community. His dedication to advancing surgical techniques and educating fellow surgeons underscores his commitment to improving patient outcomes and fostering innovation in hepatobiliary surgery.

# Research Participant Recruitment

AHRI's dedicated recruitment team initiates participants' research journeys by facilitating study opportunities, scheduling appointments, maintaining databases, and partnering with community and provider outreach efforts. The team brings awareness and access to clinical trials and research studies to all.

## TRI Internal Contact Center

The Recruitment Core occupies office space with telephones, computers, and other equipment. Four full-time recruiters prescreen participants, schedule screening visits, and communicate via phone, text, email, and mail.

## After-Hours Contact Support

Third-party vendors support recruitment efforts, with additional team members providing after-hours and weekend call center support to increase contact with potential and current participants.

## Partnerships — Research Data Services Core (RDSC)

The RDSC facilitates data abstracts from various databases to help determine patient enrollment eligibility. Clinical Research Unit members perform detailed chart reviews to assess eligibility.

## Partnerships — Marketing

The Recruitment team collaborates with AdventHealth marketing specialists to develop study-specific campaigns targeting eligible participants through print, traditional, digital, outreach, and retention marketing methods.

## Provider Engagement

The Research Engagement team raises provider awareness of clinical trials using various marketing tools and coordinates with physician liaison groups to educate providers about ongoing studies. Informed providers can alert patients about participation opportunities.

## INPRACTICE

A Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN): aligns with AHRI's mission to expedite groundbreaking research. It aims to develop a network of primary care practices, promote research that transforms primary care, disseminate key findings, create collaborations, and increase patient access to innovative trials.

## Community Outreach

AHRI's community outreach and engagement initiatives focus on building relationships and trust within the community, raising awareness about research opportunities, and increasing access to studies and trials. The team hosts educational seminars and participates in community events to expand outreach and emphasize the significance of research as an additional care option.

## Epic Recruiting Committee: AIT

The Epic Recruiting Committee is pivotal in supporting recruitment efforts by formalizing and optimizing Epic's digital tools to enhance participant engagement and study enrollment. Its overarching goal is to ensure Epic tools are used effectively to identify, engage and enroll research participants. The committee oversees and manages several Epic tools critical to recruitment, including Our Practice Advisories (OPAs) and MyChart messages.





# Participate in research.

You could be part of the next medical breakthrough that changes everything. Participating in our research studies gives you the exclusive opportunity to access new and leading-edge therapies. Your participation will also contribute to advancing medical knowledge and benefit future generations. Our experienced and compassionate team will provide you with expert care and support. Additionally, if you qualify you may receive compensation for your time and travel expenses.



Learn more about how  
to join a research study.

# Celebrating Excellence: A Look Back at 2024

Throughout 2024, AdventHealth physician investigators and scientists achieved extraordinary milestones that elevated the standard of research excellence across the AdventHealth system. Researchers have made remarkable strides, with numerous publications appearing in the world’s most prestigious medical journals, including *The Lancet*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, *Nature Medicine*, *European Heart Journal*, and *Circulation*, underscoring the global impact of the work underway across various Centers for Discovery (CFDs).

In particular, Dr. Richard Pratley, based at the Translational Research Institute, led impactful research published in *The Lancet*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Nature Medicine*, *European Heart Journal*, and *Circulation*. Dr. Guru Sonpavde from the CFD - Cancer division contributed to *NEJM* and *Annals of Oncology*, while Dr. Sula Mazimba from Transplant was featured in *JAMA*. Additional high-impact contributors included Drs. Terry Mamounas and Mohamedtaki Tejani in *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, Dr. Wahab Kahloan in *Nature Reviews Endocrinology*, and Dr. Regino Gonzalez-Peralta in *Lancet Gastroenterology & Hepatology*. Notably, TRI researchers Drs. Bret Goodpaster, James DeLany, Lauren Sparks, and Justine Mucinski were published in *Cell Metabolism*, further solidifying the Institute’s leadership in translational research.

Research productivity soared in 2024. Dr. Iswanto Sucandy from WFD - Tampa authored 53 publications, followed by Dr. Sharona Ross with 41. TRI’s Dr. Richard Pratley produced 30, while Neuroscience’s Dr. Kirk Erickson and TRI’s Dr. Paul Coen each published 28. All reflect a lasting commitment to scientific advancement and the dissemination of knowledge.

This year was also hallmarked by funding success as several investigators were awarded prestigious new grants: Dr. Karen Corbin (NIH R01), Dr. Kirk Erickson (NIH R21), Dr. Katie Whytock (NIH K99), Dr. Anna Casu (FLDOH), and Dr. Lauren Oberlin (NIH K23). For the first time, Drs. James Tarver, Samarth Shukla, Justine Mucinski, Katie Whytock, Jeanette Green, and Akaluck Thatayatikom secured their first major funding, marking a pivotal step in their research careers.

Underlying each accomplishment is the steadfast dedication of AdventHealth’s MD and PhD investigators to advance scientific discovery and innovative patient care and to elevate AdventHealth as a leader

in clinical and translational research. Their leadership and passion are essential in shaping a legacy of excellence that will guide the future of health innovation. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the collective efforts of our investigators, partners, and supporters, who ensure that AdventHealth research remains impactful, transformative, and deeply aligned with the organization’s mission of providing whole-person care.

## Celebrating Excellence: A Look Back at 2024

In 2024, AdventHealth Research Institute continued to honor the remarkable achievements of its physician investigators and scientists, whose tireless dedication and innovation advanced medical science and brought forward new possibilities in patient care.

The year’s highlights included prestigious publications in top-tier journals such as *The Lancet*, the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM), *JAMA*, *Nature Medicine*, and *Circulation*. Investigators were also recognized for prolific publication records, new and first-time grant funding, and leadership of high-performing clinical research teams.

The accomplishments of AdventHealth’s MD and PhD investigators continued to elevate the system’s profile as a preeminent leader in clinical and translational research. Their efforts pushed the boundaries of knowledge and laid the foundation for a strong and lasting research legacy.

**The leadership, perseverance, and innovation displayed by AdventHealth’s research community in 2024 set the bar for scientific excellence. Their contributions are not only appreciated but also foundational to the future of healthcare. Join us in celebrating these exceptional achievements as we look forward to continued momentum in 2025.**





# 2024 Publications

## AdventHealth for Children

Dereddy, Narendra; Moats, Rita Antonia; Ruth, Deborah; Pokelsek, Ann; Pepe, Julie; Wadhawan, Rajan; Oh, William. Maternal recorded voice played to preterm infants in incubators reduces her own depression, anxiety and stress: a pilot randomized control trial. JOURNAL OF MATERNAL-FETAL & NEONATAL MEDICINE. DOI:10.1080/14767058.2024.2362933

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