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The Neurotransmitter

UT Health Austin Pediatric Neurosciences at Dell Children's

Promoting Discovery and Innovation in the Pediatric Neurosciences



The University of Texas at Austin
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Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to **UT Health Austin Pediatric Neurosciences at Dell Children's**. In this issue, we highlight Dave Clarke, MD, recipient of the Child Neurology Society's Gold Foundation Humanism in Medicine Award; new faculty and staff; and several recent accomplishments.

As our nationally ranked program continues expanding its impact in Central Texas and beyond, we remain dedicated to offering outstanding educational opportunities, promoting research and scholarly activity, and delivering exceptional multidisciplinary clinical care for all children with neurological disorders.

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**CLARKE TO RECEIVE THE GOLD HUMANISM AWARD FROM
THE CHILD NEUROLOGY SOCIETY**



Dave F. Clarke, MD

The late Arnold Gold, MD, was a New York City child neurologist and a long-term member of the Child Neurology Society, but many people will be surprised to learn that he was by birth a Texan. Gold's foundation continues to promote his passion for humanism in medical care, supporting Gold Humanism Honor Society chapters at many medical schools, the annual white coat ceremony for new medical students, and the [Gold Foundation Humanism in Medicine Award](#) at the CNS's annual meeting. The [Gold Foundation's website](#) describes humanism in healthcare as a respectful and compassionate approach that is sensitive to the values and the cultural backgrounds of all people. Few people exemplify these qualities as well as the 2024 Gold Humanism Award winner, **Dave F. Clarke, MD**.

Clarke is professor of neurology at Dell Medical School and chief of the successful epilepsy program at Dell Children's Medical Center. He has published dozens of articles and held important leadership positions. His extraordinary dedication to advancing care for epilepsy around the world was recognized by the American Epilepsy Society with its 2023 J. Kiffin Penry Award.

Fewer people know about Clarke's parallel career as a humanitarian. Although he trained in Michigan and Toronto and has spent his academic career in the United States, he has never abandoned his native Caribbean islands. The stunningly beautiful region has few medical specialists, so general physicians and nurses usually care for children with neurological disease. Tests such as EEG and MRI are not always available, and many routine medications are not on the islands' formulary.

For almost two decades, Clarke has returned to the islands two or three times per year for weeklong free clinics, during which he sees dozens of children with epilepsy and other conditions with local practitioners. He often convinces colleagues in neuropsychology, neurology, and nursing to volunteer as well. Between patients, he finds time for lectures and bedside teaching. After returning home, he is readily available to the island physicians who call for patient care advice or for help with a difficult EEG.

Clarke's advocacy in the region resulted in five new epilepsy drugs being added to the government's approved drug formulary. He arranged for the donation of several EEG machines to island clinics, provided instruction about basic EEG interpretation, and arranged for technician training. His efforts represent humanism on a large scale.

A TIMELY UPDATE ON NEURO CUTANEOUS SYNDROMES



Leah Ferrante, MD



Chelsey Ortman, MD

Our understanding of many of the neurocutaneous syndromes has increased substantially in the last few years as we honed our knowledge of the clinical manifestations and delved deeply into the genetics and molecular mechanisms of many of the disorders. Anyone seeking the latest information on these conditions need look no further than recent back-to-back issues of *Seminars in Pediatric Neurology*, guest edited by Dell Medical School child neurologists **Leah Ferrante, MD**, and **Chelsey Ortman, MD**.

The two issues of *Seminars* include reviews of well-known disorders such as tuberous sclerosis complex, neurofibromatosis, and Sturge-Weber syndrome as well as lesser-known conditions such as PHACE syndrome, incontinentia pigmenti, and encephalocraniocutaneous lipomatosis. Most covered disorders are reviewed separately, providing up-to-date information about the clinical features, pathophysiology, and treatment options.

Article example: Leah Ferrante and Chelsey Ortman. Genetic principles related to neurocutaneous disorders. *Seminars in Pediatric Neurology*, volume 51, October 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spen.2024.101150>

PEDIATRIC NEUROSCIENCES RANKED BY U.S. NEWS



Only five years after the program's founding, UT Health Austin Pediatric Neurosciences at Dell Children's **ranked 28** among U.S. pediatric neurology and neurosurgery programs by U.S. News & World Report's 2024-25 survey of pediatric programs. "This ranking reflects the rapid progress we have made and underscores our commitment to providing exceptional care for the children who are entrusted to us," commented program chief **E. Steve Roach, MD**.

PEDIATRIC NEUROSCIENCES WELCOMES NEW COLLEAGUES

UT Health Austin Pediatric Neurosciences at Dell Children's has grown dramatically since it was founded in 2019. The multidisciplinary program currently features 20 child neurologists, 21 advanced practice providers, three pediatric neurosurgeons, three pediatric physical medicine and rehabilitation specialists, seven pediatric neuropsychologists, two genetic counselors, and a pediatric neuro-ophthalmologist. We recently welcomed new colleagues to the program.



Kevin Kumar, MD, PhD, is an assistant professor of neurosurgery and a pediatric neurosurgeon. He specializes in the treatment of pediatric brain and spine tumors, vascular malformations, developmental anomalies, and epilepsy. His clinical research interests include neuromodulation, epilepsy, pediatric trauma, and spine and vascular pathologies. He launched the **Kumar Lab** at Dell Medical School to develop novel cellular-based therapeutics for pediatric neurological disorders.

Kumar graduated cum laude with distinction in research from Cornell University and received his MD and PhD from Vanderbilt University's National Institutes of Health-funded Medical Scientist Training Program. His dissertation focused on investigating neuronal manganese regulation in Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases using high throughput screening, induced pluripotent stem cells, and chemical biology approaches. He completed his neurosurgery residency at Stanford University, where he served as chief resident. He then completed an NIH NINDS R25-funded research fellowship in the Stanford Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine. His work focused on developing a platform to replace microglia in the brain as a novel therapy for neurodevelopmental disorders and resulted in the publication of the first proof of concept of this technology in a mouse model of a lysosomal storage disorder. In 2024, he completed his pediatric neurosurgery fellowship at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford.

Kumar has published more than 35 peer-reviewed scientific articles and has received numerous research awards. He is a member of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, the American Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery, the North American Neuromodulation Society, and the Society for Neuroscience.



Allan Lara, MD, is an assistant professor of neurology and a pediatric physiatrist. His clinical interests include neuromuscular disorders, electrodiagnostic medicine, spasticity management, brachial plexus injuries, developmental pediatrics, and ultrasound-guided/EMG-guided procedures.

Lara received his undergraduate degree at UT Austin. He completed medical school and his physical medicine and rehabilitation residency at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and recently completed his pediatric rehabilitation medicine fellowship at Baylor College of Medicine/Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

Lara is a member of the American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine and the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. His research interests include mental health screening methods in the pediatric rehab population and botulinum injections for sialorrhea management. He is highly involved in community service and expanding pediatric rehab care to underserved communities.



Emily Ramirez, DO, is an assistant professor of neurology and a pediatric epileptologist in the Dell Children's Comprehensive Pediatric Epilepsy Center. Ramirez has a special interest in complex pediatric epilepsy, neurogenetics, and adolescent transition of care.

Ramirez earned her undergraduate degree from St. Edward's University in Austin and her medical degree from the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth's Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. She completed residencies in pediatrics and child neurology as well as her fellowship in pediatric epilepsy here at Dell Medical School, serving as child neurology chief resident from 2021-23. She is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Neurology, the Child Neurology Society, the American Epilepsy Society, and the American Clinical Neurophysiology Society.



Tao Song, PhD, is a clinical associate professor of neurology and the technical director of the Dell Children's Magnetoencephalography (MEG) Laboratory. With specialized expertise in MEG hardware and software, Song applies his knowledge to both clinical and research applications, overseeing all technical and research activities in the MEG lab.

Song earned his BSc in optical engineering from Zhejiang University in China and his PhD in electrical engineering from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Following his postdoctoral research in the Radiology Imaging Lab at the University of California, San Diego, he joined Elekta Inc., where he led MEG customer support operations. During his extensive career in industry, he remained dedicated to advancing MEG applications in clinical and research settings, actively collaborating with academic institutions.

Before joining Dell Medical School, Song served as the director of operations for MEGIN in both the United States and China. His current research focuses on functional brain mapping and innovations in MEG technology. His work is widely published in leading neuroscience and biomedical engineering journals.



Ariel Connors, DNP, APRN, joins us from Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago, where she worked as an outpatient psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner for the past year. Prior to that, she worked as a pediatric neurology and epilepsy nurse practitioner at Rush Children's Hospital in Chicago. She has nursing experience working in both the emergency department and on the neurology/epilepsy floor at Dell Children's Medical Center.

Connors earned her Bachelor of Arts in biology and Master of Science in nursing with a Primary Care Pediatric Nurse Practitioner certification from UT Austin. She received her Doctor in Nursing Practice with a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner certification from Rush University in Chicago.

ELECTED & SELECTED

Brumback Awarded Grant for Neurodevelopmental Precision Medicine Program



Audrey Brumback, MD, PhD, pediatric neurologist and an assistant professor of neurology, was recently awarded a \$110,000 grant from the Albany Foundation, an Austin-based nonprofit organization, to fund a precision medicine program she is creating in collaboration with pediatric neurogenetics chief **Kristina Julich, MD**. The goal of the Gene-to-Treatment program is to rapidly develop personalized treatments for patients with autism and other severe neurodevelopmental disorders based on a patient's genetic profile. Brumback is partnering with basic scientists at UT Austin to assess each patient's genetics and screen FDA-approved medications in order to determine whether they can be repurposed to treat the patient's condition.

Julich & Freedman Receive AI Health Outcomes Research Grant



Congratulations to **Kristina Julich, MD**, **Daniel Freedman, DO**, and their colleague from the College of Natural Sciences, Eunsol Choi, PhD, who were selected by Dell Medical School and UT's IC2 Institute to receive \$150,000 for research that will advance the responsible development of artificial intelligence to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities. Their project, "Developing an AI-Based Diagnostic Tool for Epilepsy in Low-Resource Areas," was one of four funded projects selected from 39 proposals submitted by UT interdisciplinary research teams. [Read more about their "intelligent" seizure diagnostic questionnaire.](#)

Irwin Elected as Co-Chair of American Headache Society Special Interest Group



Samantha Irwin, MB BCH BAO, associate professor of neurology and director of the Pediatric Headache Fellowship at Dell Medical School, was recently elected as co-chair of the **Pediatric and Adolescent Special Interest Section** of the American Headache Society. She will serve a two-year term alongside Christopher Oakley, MD, of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Pediatric Neurosciences Faculty Members Receive Dell Med Teaching Awards



Congratulations to the pediatric neurosciences faculty members who were named top educators of 2023-24 by Dell Medical School and the Susan M. Cox, M.D. Academy of Distinguished Educators. Pediatric neuropsychologist **Rosario DeLeon, PhD**, received the Susan M. Cox, M.D. Academy Teaching Health Equity Award, which recognizes faculty members who have excelled in teaching about health equity. **Fifteen pediatric neurosciences faculty members** received GME Clinical Learning Environment Awards, given to clinical teachers based on perfect evaluations by residents and fellows and on their ability to create a positive environment for learning and the patient experience.

Residency Program Ranks #25 in Nation

The **Child Neurology Residency** program at Dell Medical School ranked 25 out of 79 child neurology residencies nationwide according to the **2024-25 Doximity Residency Navigator**. Rankings are based on resident satisfaction, reputation, and objective data. Doximity's Residency Navigator is an online directory that helps medical students make informed residency decisions by providing transparency in the residency match process.

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UT Health Austin Pediatric Neurosciences at Dell Children's is a clinical partnership between Dell Children's Medical Center and UT Health Austin, the clinical practice of Dell Medical School at The University of Texas at Austin.

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[Comprehensive Pediatric Epilepsy Program](#)
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