

## Upstate Medical Student Was Semifinalist in AMA Research Challenge

**P**rithi Chakrapani, a third-year student in the Norton College of Medicine, was a semifinalist in the prestigious American Medical Association Research Challenge.

Chakrapani's research abstract—Utilizing Neural Networks for Follicular Lymphoma Grading on Whole Slide Imaging—was one of only 50 selected for the research challenge, which is the largest national, multi-specialty research conference for medical students, residents, fellows, and international medical graduates to showcase and present research.

Prithi Chakrapani, a third-year medical student in Upstate's Norton College of Medicine, became a semifinalist in the national American Medical Association Research Challenge



"I'm honored to represent Upstate at the AMA Research Challenge," Chakrapani says. "My passion for engineering and desire to contribute to integrating artificial intelligence into medicine inspired me to pursue this project. Starting medical school with an engineering background, I became aware of several areas in medicine that could benefit from greater efficiency through AI. This realization motivated me to focus on using these technologies to address challenges in the field."

Chakrapani's research is aimed at improving grading accuracy for follicular lymphoma, a type of blood cancer, by using artificial intelligence (AI) to support pathologists in analyzing tissue samples. The team developed an AI model to make the grading process—often highly variable—more consistent and efficient.

Using more than 1,000 patient tissue images, Chakrapani and her research team trained a neural network to classify samples into three grades of cancer severity. They used a method that analyzes small sections (tiles) of each image and combined the data for a final grade. The model achieved 85 percent accuracy, which they say is better than most human pathologists.

This AI tool could serve as a preliminary grading aid for pathologists, helping reduce workload and improve accuracy in high-volume settings, her team said.

Chakrapani said Upstate has been very supportive of her work. "I appreciate that faculty at Upstate are so responsive and eager to help," Chakrapani says. "The mentors who I have turned to have been extremely helpful in supporting my idea, even if it's not their area of expertise, and have helped connect me with people who would be able to help me merge my two interests."

## Kathleen Knudson, MD, Named Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery

**K**athleen Knudson, MD, has been named assistant professor and director of pediatric neurosurgery in the Department of Neurosurgery at Upstate Medical University. She previously was a practicing pediatric neurosurgeon at ECU Health Medical Center, Department of Neurosurgery and Spine, in Greenville, North Carolina.

Dr. Knudson is board-certified in neurological surgery with a focused practice and board certification in pediatric neurological surgery. Knudson received her medical degree from Case Western University School of Medicine. She completed a neurological surgical residency at George Washington University followed by a fellowship in pediatric neurosurgery at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

Knudson performs numerous surgical techniques, including minimally invasive surgery for craniosynostosis, endoscopic surgery for hydrocephalus, and selective dorsal rhizotomy for spasticity. She is an expert in surgery for epilepsy, craniotomy for tumor resection, the surgical treatment of congenital disorders such as spina bifida or Chiari malformation, as well as many others.



Kathleen Knudson, MD

## Norton College of Medicine Creates Pathway for Veterans of Special Forces

Upstate Medical University has joined a national effort to help veterans become doctors.

The Norton College of Medicine has partnered with Special Operations Forces to School of Medicine (SOFToSOM) to create a pathway to medical school for those who served as medics in special operations forces, such as Navy Seals, Army Rangers, Marine Raiders, and others.

The Norton College of Medicine is the fifth school in the United States to partner with SOFToSOM, a non-profit organization dedicated to aiding "special operators" in their medical education pursuits. Scholars are identified using selection protocols developed by special operations veterans and operational psychologists involved with selection for NASA. SOFToSOM offers these scholars valuable opportunities to conduct research before entering medical school, as well as mentorship and financial assistance. Under this initiative, the Norton College of Medicine has committed to assisting qualifying SOF applicants who have completed the SOFToSOM program with navigating the medical school application process and providing interview opportunities.

"We will offer an interview to SOFToSOM candidates who have met the requisite GPA and MCAT qualifications," said Robert Ruiz, Upstate's associate dean of Admissions, interim vice president for Educational Services and dean of Student Affairs.

Annually, the Norton College of Medicine receives more than 6,000 applicants for only 180 openings. The college interviews 515 students yearly, less than nine percent of all applicants.

"Being invited to interview means a potential student has bounded over a significant hurdle to getting into medical school," Ruiz said. "We are pleased to be able to offer this to women and men who have served our country and bring a unique perspective to healthcare."

"Upstate is proud to make this commitment to those who committed themselves so whole-heartedly to this nation's defense," adds Lawrence Chin, MD, dean of the Norton College of Medicine. "I look forward to seeing special forces veterans studying on our campus."



## Margaret Turk, MD, Honored for Lifetime Achievement and Distinguished Career

Margaret Turk, MD, Distinguished Service Professor of Physical Medical and Rehabilitation, has received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Public Health Association (APHA) Disability Section. The honor follows the Distinguished Member Award from the American Association of Physiatrists (AAP), received last year.

The APHA award is presented to individuals who have made a major contribution to the improvement of health and quality of life for people with disabilities through research, teaching, advocacy, or practice over the course of their career.

This AAP award is reserved for the most distinguished physiatrist, an individual who is of international status, recognized as a major contributor to the field by virtue of teaching, research and scholarly publications, and noted for dedicated service to the AAP.

Dr. Turk, who joined the Upstate faculty in 1989, has dedicated her career to improving the health and well-being of people with disability. An academician and clinical expert in pediatric rehabilitation medicine and neuromuscular and electrodiagnostic medicine, Turk currently serves as her department's vice chair and quality officer, director of pediatric rehabilitation, associate

director of University Hospital's Rehabilitation Units, director for clinical research, and director for student education.

She has chaired numerous university committees and has participated in or led multiple initiatives at the regional, state, and national level to enhance care for patients with disability, including work with the New York State Department of Health, American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (serving as its first woman chairman), American Board of Medical Specialties, Association of Academic Physiatrists, Center for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health, Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, National Academy of Medicine (previously Institute of Medicine), Association of American Medical Colleges, and World Health Organization.

She is a creator of the Disability Education Toolkit, founding co-editor of the *Disability and Health Journal*, has edited several books, authored 25 book chapters/monographs and more than 60 journal articles, and has been recognized with multiple regional, national, and international awards for her work.



Margaret Turk, MD



## Julie White, PhD, Retires From Student Affairs; Robert Ruiz Named Interim VP



Julie White, PhD

After 17 years of service to the Upstate Medical University, Julie White, PhD, retired from her role as vice president and dean of Student Affairs at Upstate.

Innovations and achievements under Dr. White's leadership include the opening of Upstate's only student residence hall, Geneva Tower; the implementation of a campus food pantry to address food insecurity among students; and the creation of the Center for Civic Engagement, which encourages and provides opportunity for student outreach into the local community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, White embraced technology to build online platforms to support students from afar, maintaining virtual interactions to build a virtual caring campus community.

"We thank Dr. White for her outstanding contributions to our campus, for her exceptional leadership of the University's core mission, for her fair and professional handling of difficult issues, and for enhancing the student experience for all, especially in the area of student support. Always available to students and faculty, she has been a tireless champion for our students," says Upstate President Mantosh Dewan, MD. "Dr. White has built and nurtured an extremely effective team and we are grateful that Robert Ruiz has stepped up to continue supporting our students and charting new successes for our campus."

Ruiz was named interim vice president for Educational Services and dean of Student Affairs, effective Dec. 20.

As interim vice president for Educational Services and dean of Student Affairs, Ruiz will oversee services and support for more than 1,400 students enrolled in the university's four colleges. Included in the responsibilities are Student Housing, Student Activities, Academic Support Services, Retention Programs, the Registrar's Office, the Admissions Office, Multicultural Affairs, Student Information Systems, Student Counseling and Financial Aid.

Since joining Upstate in July 2023 as associate dean of Student Admissions, Ruiz and the admission team have overseen record application growth in several programs while also establishing partnerships to increase enrollment from Central New York and the city of Syracuse. Ruiz has held senior leadership roles at Tulane University, Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences, the University of Michigan Medical School, and spent nearly a decade in the higher education technology private sector.

Additionally, Sharon Huard, associate dean of Student Affairs and Campus Life, and Nicole Morgante, associate dean of Student Operation Systems, Financial Aid, and University Registrar, will both assume additional interim responsibilities in areas of student success and student-related technology systems.



Robert Ruiz

## Timothy Canavan, MD, Named Chair of Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology



Timothy P. Canavan, MD

Timothy P. Canavan, MD, was named chair for the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, effective October 28, 2024.

Dr. Canavan most recently served as vice chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine (UPMC), where he also held leadership posts in the Maternal Fetal Medicine program and Labor and Delivery.

Canavan has extensive expertise in the field of maternal health. He is the author of more than 30 published papers in peer-reviewed journals, has authored numerous books, chapters and abstracts, and has earned more than \$240,000 in research grants for six different studies. He has also done extensive manuscript review and conference planning. He is a member of the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the American Institute of Ultrasound Medicine. He serves on the advisory editorial board for the *Journal of Ultrasound in*

*Medicine*, the editorial board of the *Journal of Clinical Ultrasound* and is the international editor for *Ultrasound* (British Medical Ultrasound Society).

His current research focus includes abnormalities in fetal growth and the influence of the placenta on fetal congenital heart disease.

Canavan did his undergraduate work at St. John's University in Queens, where he graduated magna cum laude and earned the Gold Key in chemistry. He earned his MD at the SUNY Health Science Center in Brooklyn in 1988 and his MSc at the University of Pittsburgh in 2005. He earned the Galloway Oncology Fellow at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center New York in 1991. He is certified in maternal-fetal medicine by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

## Zuri Williams '27 Awarded Sarah Loguen Fraser, MD, Alumni Scholarship

**Z**uri Williams '27, a second-year medical student at Upstate, was selected as the 2024 recipient of the Sarah Loguen Fraser, MD, Alumni Scholarship. The scholarship is named for the first African-American woman to graduate from what is now Upstate Medical University's Alan and Marlene Norton College of Medicine and the fourth African-American woman physician in the United States.

Williams, from Cincinnati, Ohio, says her interest in pursuing a career in medicine stems from issues that include the high maternal mortality rate for Black women and episodes of racial injustice and exploitation in medicine, such as the Mississippi appendectomies and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.

A graduate of Hampton University, Williams has become active in campus service at Upstate. As the immediate past president of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) at Upstate, Williams revitalized and expanded the organization's efforts in mentorship by creating the inaugural SNMA Family Groups, which connected students with a doctor and resident mentor to guide them through various stages of their medical journey—from master's programs to applying for residency. She also organized an event hosting nearly 200 GEARUP 8th-grade students from the Syracuse area that included a panel of diverse medical professionals and provided early exposure to medicine through hands-on activities.



Zuri Williams '27, center, Sarah Loguen Fraser, MD, Alumni Scholarship recipient, with K. Bruce Simmons, MD '79, member of the Medical Alumni Board of Directors, and Nakeia Chambers, MEd, director of Access Programs and Student Inclusion

Williams has volunteered in multiple health-related initiatives, such as taking blood pressure readings in the community, assisting pregnant women at Crouse Hospital, and educating students at Binghamton University about the dangers of improper medication storage and disposal.

Upon earning her medical degree, Williams hopes to uplift her patients in underserved communities.



**LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE:** More than 75 first- and second-year medical students had the opportunity to network with faculty members and Syracuse-area alumni physicians representing a full array of medical specialties at the annual Career Advisory Networking Dinner, sponsored by the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation on March 5.

