

# CONNECT

FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS

WINTER 2020

A healthier  
tomorrow





# UNMC takes holistic approach to Nebraska's health



**T**hank you for reading this issue of Connect magazine. We hope you will appreciate the opportunity to join us for a deep dive into a single theme.

This time it's how UNMC, your state academic health science center, is committed to improving the lives and health of you and your fellow Nebraskans. In these pages, you'll see a number of ways we are working together for a healthier Nebraska.

We do this the way UNMC approaches most problems, through a holistic, multifaceted, interprofessional, data-driven, team-based approach.

We do this with extraordinary patient care, of course, and with relevant research that aims to make a real difference for real people. With outreach and engagement that takes our work out of the academic campus, and down our state's highways and country roads, to the Nebraskans who need it most.

But, most of all, UNMC is making Nebraska a healthier state through collaboration, partnerships and relationships with a tremendous team across our state.

Community partners include the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Douglas County Health Department, with which we've developed educational experiences for students and helped strengthen our state's public health workforce.

And, with our federal government that has entrusted us with the enormous responsibility to help lead our nation's health security and biopreparedness efforts. We count the U.S. federal government as one of our big community partners, illustrated by the Dr. Edwin G. & Dorothy Balbach Davis Global Center and the UNMC Global Center for Health Security, which shows our standing commitment to building bridges to achieve greater goals.

Please know that we are just as likely to forge a partnership with a community pharmacy, or your local rural clinic, in order to reach our fellow Nebraskans, and to make Nebraska a healthier state.

We invite you to join us on this journey, and to take this deep dive with us, in this latest edition of Connect.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey P. Gold". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D.  
UNMC Chancellor

UNMC Connect is the campus/alumni magazine published annually by the Departments of Public Relations and Alumni Relations at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the University of Nebraska Foundation. Issues of the magazine can be found at [unmc.edu](http://unmc.edu), News and Events. Permission is granted to reprint any written materials herein, provided proper credit is given. Direct requests to [Today@unmc.edu](mailto:Today@unmc.edu).

UNMC is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC-NCA) and enjoys full accreditation of all its professional academic programs.

We are Nebraska Medicine and UNMC. Our mission is to lead the world in transforming lives to create a healthy future for all individuals and communities through premier educational programs, innovative research and extraordinary patient care.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center does not discriminate in its academic, employment or admissions programs, and abides by all federal regulations pertaining to same.

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Jennifer Arnold, senior director of marketing communications

Design: Daake

Photography:  
Scott Dobry  
Corbey Dorsey  
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## COMING SOON

**Editor's Note:** UNMC Connect soon will have a new online presence at [unmc.edu/connect](http://unmc.edu/connect). We'll notify you through social media channels when it goes live. As always, we welcome your feedback and story ideas.

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- May 7**  
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- May 9**  
Commencement Omaha, Scottsbluff



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# unmc news

## Emily McElroy named library dean



Emily McElroy

**E**mily McElroy has been named dean of the McGoogan Library of Medicine at UNMC, effective Jan. 1.

Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., said that McElroy already has been part of the leadership team for some time, and the change in title is an acknowledgement of the key role she plays on campus.

“UNMC has traditionally not used the dean title,” Dr. Gold said. “However, Emily’s job description, scope

of activities (including supervision of faculty involved in scholarly work and teaching, management of staff in different divisions and fundraising activities) are similar to, and in some cases more complex than, other academic health science campuses. This change brings Emily’s title to be commensurate with other nationally regarded campuses.”

## New Division of Allergy and Immunology created

**T**o reflect the growing demand for patient services in allergy and immunology, UNMC’s Department of Internal Medicine has created a Division of Allergy and Immunology, which will include four physicians/faculty members.

Deb Romberger, M.D., the Henry J. Lehnhoff Professor and chair of internal medicine, appointed Jill Poole, M.D., as the division’s first chief, effective Jan. 1.

“There is no better person in the country to lead this division than Dr. Poole,” Dr. Romberger said. “She has grown the allergy group to provide clinical services on Nebraska Medicine’s main campus, at Village Pointe, Children’s Hospital & Medical Center and the Omaha VA Medical Center.

## A new way to show your UNMC pride

**U**NMC is seeking to gain state approval for the creation of a UNMC specialty license plate.

To do so, UNMC needs to gather 250 applications to submit to the Department of Motor Vehicles. Each applicant also must commit to paying the \$70 fee for the specialty plates. Find more information at [www.unmc.edu/license-plate](http://www.unmc.edu/license-plate).



### BY THE NUMBERS

**4,055**

Students enrolled, fall 2019 *(record high)*

**5,728**

Employed by UNMC, December 2019

**\$138 million**

UNMC record in research awards *(2018 – 19)*

Along with our primary clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine, UNMC has an annual

**\$4.8 billion**

impact on the state’s economy.

*(Tripp Umbach study, 2019)*

**500 MILES**

UNMC’s influence reaches across the state with campuses in Scottsbluff, Kearney, Lincoln, Norfolk and Omaha.

**\$741 MILLION**

UNMC’s 2018 – 19 operating budget

*(21% state-supported)*

**5,000+**

Number of trainees taking part in the UNMC Simulation in Motion-Nebraska program (SIM-NE), hands-on training to emergency medical service providers in rural areas across the state, including health professionals in hospitals.

# UNMC creates heart, vascular disease research center

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death and hospitalization in Nebraska, accounting for one in three deaths and totaling more loss of life than cancer and chronic lung disease combined.

That may change with an approved focus on improving cardiovascular health in Nebraska. In 2019, the University of Nebraska Board of Regents voted to create an interdisciplinary cardiac and vascular research center at

UNMC that will enhance basic, clinical and population research.

“Our goal is to become a national and international leader in heart and vascular disease research,” said Merry Lindsey, Ph.D., chair of UNMC’s Department of Cellular and Integrative Physiology and founding director of the virtual center.

Located at UNMC, the Center for Heart and Vascular Research will bring together

multi-disciplinary scientists from across the University of Nebraska to collaborate on translational, clinical and population research. Scientists will participate from such colleges as medicine, public health, nursing, pharmacy, engineering, arts and sciences and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

## Permanent leader named in neonatology

Ann Anderson Berry, M.D., Ph.D., was named division chief of neonatology in the department of pediatrics in the UNMC College of Medicine. Dr. Anderson Berry, who joined UNMC in 2004, had been serving as interim division chief since spring 2018.

Faculty, she said, are leading education programs within the department of pediatrics, doing work in basic science and at the same time providing the highest acuity of neonatal care in the region at Nebraska Medicine and Children’s Hospital & Medical Center.



Ann Anderson Berry, M.D., Ph.D.

## Founding director named

As the founding director of UNMC’s new Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD) program, Nancy Krusen, Ph.D., is designing courses, and ensuring that accreditation is on track – a process she knows inside-out, having served as an accreditation evaluator for the Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education for more than 15 years.

Occupational therapy is a fast-growing profession, with a lot of opportunity – and need – as 32 Nebraska counties have been designated as occupational therapy shortage areas.

Occupational therapy is experiencing rapid growth in new programs nationally, and the accrediting body limits the review of new programs to 18 a year. As a result, UNMC’s College of Allied Health Professions anticipates enrolling its first class of OTD students as early as fall 2021, and no later than fall 2022.

UNMC plans to enroll 42 – 46 students annually in the three-year, 116-credit hour program. UNMC would educate occupational therapy students at its Omaha campus and at the Health Science Education Complex on the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus.



Nancy Krusen, Ph.D.



## Wiping out pancreatic cancer through rapid detection, treatment

UNMC is on a mission to wipe out pancreatic cancer – perhaps the most lethal form of cancer – with a rapid autopsy program that features the most extensive and well-documented collection of pancreatic cancer tissue deposits in the world, and an early detection program for people at increased risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

UNMC receives more than \$8.5 million in annual funding from the National Cancer Institute for its pancreatic cancer research, which includes a prestigious Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE) grant, awarded only to the most outstanding research programs.

## Genetic counseling program receives accreditation

UNMC's new master's program in genetic counseling is the state's first and only accredited genetic education program, a profession with a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics-projected 29% future growth rate.

Founding director Holly Zimmerman said the two-year master's degree program is a unique partnership between UNMC's College of Allied Health Professions and its Munroe-Meyer Institute, which does groundbreaking work in genetics and employs most of the genetic counselors who see patients at several clinical sites throughout Nebraska. The program enrolled its inaugural class of eight students in the fall of 2019.

## BHECN awarded \$3.7 million grant

The Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN) at UNMC was awarded a five-year, \$3.7 million collaborative grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Mid-America Mental Health Technology & Transfer Center grant will provide mental health training and technical assistance to behavioral health-focused agencies and 87 community health centers. The grant will focus on four areas including:

- Integrated behavioral health in the primary care clinical setting;
- School mental health;
- Behavioral health workforce development; and
- Serious mental illness.

## \$3.7 million grant to address shortage of geriatricians

The U.S. Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) estimates a need for 33,200 geriatricians – physicians who specialize in the care of older adults – in the U.S. by 2025. Current projections estimate the supply at 6,230, a deficit of about 27,000.

Thanks to a five-year, \$3.7 million grant from HRSA, UNMC is poised to address this problem.

Spearheaded by Jane Potter, M.D., professor in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology and Palliative Medicine, the goal is to improve the health outcomes of older adults in Nebraska by educating teams of health providers in primary care settings to benefit patients, their families and caregivers.

The grant will provide education to teams in primary care using a medical home (PCMH) model. PCMHs use a team of health care providers – including physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, mental health professionals and social workers – to care for patients as a team when they're sick, but also help keep them well.

## Fellowship programs break new ground in Nebraska

UNMC has developed two new fellowship programs – one in addiction medicine, another in hospice and palliative medicine.

Nebraska's first addiction medicine fellowship program is being called a big step forward to provide patients and families access to addiction treatment training specialists across the state.

The first fellow began the program in September; another will begin in July 2020. The 12-month program, supervised by Ken Zoucha, M.D., associate professor of psychiatry and director of the addiction division at UNMC, provides training in treating the most complex patients and includes prevention, clinical evaluation, treatment and long-term monitoring of substance-related disorders.

Initial funding is provided through a Nebraska Division of Behavioral Health grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Sustained funding is being sought.



Ken Zoucha, M.D.

UNMC, in partnership with Children's Hospital & Medical Center and the Nebraska-Western Iowa VA Healthcare System, also is launching the state's first formal hospice training program to alleviate a shortage of physicians trained in hospice and palliative medicine.

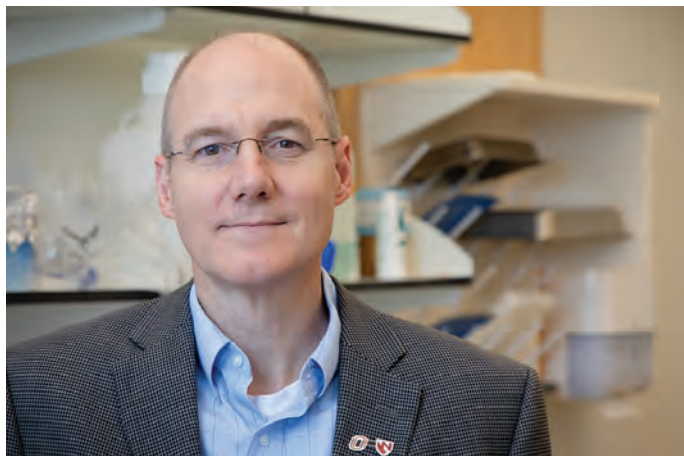
The one-year fellowship will begin in July 2020 with three fellows engaging in adult and pediatric rotations in areas such as pain management, oncology and home hospice. New fellows will be selected each year.

## Grant renewal for \$11.8 million means continued discovery on staph infections

UNMC has received \$11.8 million over five years to continue research on four projects targeting one of the most difficult to treat infections – those caused by methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). The cumulative total of the grant, which was first funded in 2009 by the National Institutes of Health National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, will be \$31 million by the end of 2024.

"We're learning interesting details about how bacteria colonize the skin surface and use the nutrients available to them within a human," said Ken Bayles, Ph.D., principal investigator of the program project grant and director of the UNMC Center for Staphylococcal Research (CSR). "They need nutrition so they've adapted to the human host. We have a better understanding of what the bacteria are eating, so we can find ways to eliminate them."

More than 119,000 people suffered from staph infections in the United States in 2017 – and nearly 20,000 died, according to a



Ken Bayles, Ph.D.

report released recently by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Between 2012 – 2017, there was an increase of 3.9% in community-onset staph infections.

The CSR also has produced a "mutant library" – genetic tools researchers around the world can use in their research. At international conferences, like a recent one in Spain, researchers in their presentations frequently mention the Nebraska tools they use in their research. "It helps enhance our own research while providing valuable tools others can use to advance their research," Dr. Bayles said.

## College of Dentistry

- In October, the College of Dentistry completed a \$4.8 million renovation to create an innovative, state-of-the-art learning environment. In the new clinical and virtual simulation laboratory, students learn the latest clinical techniques using dental trainers with cutting-edge simulation and 3D and virtual reality technology that aligns with the UNMC iEXCEL initiative. In the new digital dentistry design studio, students use the latest CAD/CAM technology and equipment to design dentures and restorations. Additionally, the college's anatomy lab and several classrooms were upgraded with new digital learning technology.
- A \$2.6 million renovation of the Dental Clinic at the Durham Outpatient Center in Omaha was completed in July 2019. The clinic was expanded from seven dental chairs to 15, a conference room was added, and the reception area and sterilization lab were upgraded. The growth allowed the college to start a new residency program: Advanced Education in General Dentistry (AEGD). The first cohort of residents began in July. This space also accommodates the current general practice residency program and will serve as a rotation site for dental and dental hygiene students.
- The addition of an iWall has changed the way many courses are being taught. Faculty members and students are embracing the iWall's interactive learning technology and are using it for small group learning, discussing cases, comparing dental procedures and more. Additionally, the college introduced a new digital dentistry course, enhanced education in evidence-based decision

making, and added a wellness course for first-year dental students.

## College of Medicine

- Benson Edagwa, Ph.D., and Howard Gendelman, M.D., pharmacology/experimental neuroscience, have received a multiple PI award (projects that require a team science approach) from the National Institutes of Health to translate existing antiretroviral drugs into long-acting medications. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has awarded the UNMC team \$748,000 to formulate slow-release, long-acting nanocrystal medicines to improve safety and efficacy in targeting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection.
- The Wigton Heritage Center – now under construction and named after Dr. Robert (Bob) Wigton, a 1969 college of medicine alumnus – will be a 10,000-square-foot transformational gathering place for campus. It will celebrate and memorialize UNMC's history, while also serving as a campus welcome center providing meeting and reception space for special events.

## College of Nursing

- The College of Nursing celebrates 50 years of graduate education and research (academic year, 2019 – 20). With one of the first nursing research centers established in 1968, followed by the MSN program in 1969, the college led the way. The PhD program opened in 1989 and the DNP program in 2011.
- The UNMC College of Nursing and the UNO College of Business Administration announced the opening of a dual degree MSN in nursing leadership and an MBA degree. This collaboration will give

nurses more opportunities to deepen their understanding of the leadership and business aspects of health care.

- College faculty secured two new federal training grants from the Health Resources and Services Administration. One enables the college to establish a residency program for nurse practitioners in rural and underserved areas; the other creates a new curricular emphasis on the health of military veterans in the BSN program.

## College of Pharmacy

- UNMC College of Pharmacy students recently administered free flu vaccinations for the fifth consecutive year as part of their award-winning "Operation Immunization." The groundbreaking annual project features a novel process in which pharmacist interns run the vaccination clinics and deliver the shots.
- The College of Pharmacy Alumni Council presented Gary Stroy, the Distinguished Alumnus Award at the college's annual Scholastic Honors Convocation. Stroy (M.S. in pharmacology, '67) developed the world's first single-use, digital-read blood analyzer. He also co-founded LifeScan, which pioneered the concept of personal blood glucose monitoring for managing diabetes.
- The sixth annual Biopharmaceutical Research and Development Symposium held in August also honored Courtney Fletcher Pharm.D., dean emeritus of the College of Pharmacy. The symposium brought experts from industry, academia and the health care industry, to discuss advances and challenges with infectious diseases.
- The College of Pharmacy hosted the annual Preceptor Development Retreat in August, and it is believed to be the first



# roundup

“zero-waste event” conducted by an individual college at UNMC. A zero-waste event has at least 90% of all the material at that event being reused, recycled or composted.

## College of Public Health

- Ellen Duysen and the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (CS-CASH) led the College of Public Health’s spring flood response effort by distributing information and supply kits to people in eastern Nebraska impacted by the severe flooding. They also delivered supply kits to a number of regional health departments.
- Kerui Xu (MPH, BIOS ’15; PhD, EPI ’18) is the first public health graduate accepted into the Epidemic Intelligence Service at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. He is in the Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion and works on clostridium difficile infection. He will be deployed to Uganda as part of the Ebola Response.
- Drs. Brandon Grimm and David Palm completed an environmental scan of integration projects between public health and primary care as part of a contract with Nebraska DHHS. They found several ongoing projects and the number of activities has increased in the past three years. Major challenges are a lack of sustainable funding, limited clinic capacity, and a lack of understanding about how local health departments can assist clinics in improving health outcomes.

## Eppley Institute/Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center

- In September, the 2019 Cattleman’s Ball committee from Wauneta, Neb., presented Ken Cowan, M.D., Ph.D.,

director of the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, with a check for \$673,738.95. Since 1998, the Cattleman’s Ball of Nebraska has raised more than \$15 million for cancer research at the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center. The 2020 event will be June 5 – 6 in Columbus, Neb.

- In 2019, Robert Lewis, Ph.D., was awarded the 2018 UNMC Scientist Laureate, the medical center’s highest honor for research. A professor in the Eppley Institute, Dr. Lewis’ research explores proteins that appear necessary for the viability, survival and growth of tumor cells but that are dispensable for the growth and survival of normal cells.

## Munroe-Meyer Institute

- On Aug. 26, the Munroe-Meyer Institute held a ceremonial groundbreaking at the site of its new home at 6902 Pine St., near the University of Nebraska – Omaha’s Scott Campus. The building is expected to open in the spring of 2021.
- In 2019, MMI celebrated its 100th anniversary. A commemorative book was published, and both Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts and Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert issued proclamations declaring Sept. 16, 2019, Munroe-Meyer Institute Day. Books can be purchased through the UNMC Bookstore or the MMI website.
- Philanthropic supporters of MMI enabled the institute to create new initiatives, including a partnership with Millard Public Schools to combat social isolation for special education students, support the renovation and expansion of MMI’s new facility and explore a North Omaha location for the Autism Care for Toddlers Clinic.

- MMI is partnering with the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska on a \$3.7 million Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant. MMI will oversee efforts to provide mental health training, consultation and technical assistance in schools in the four-state area of Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas.

## College of Allied Health Professions

- The College of Allied Health Professions welcomed its first genetic counseling class of eight students in August. The program is a unique partnership between the college, Munroe-Meyer Institute and community partners, and is the only genetic counselor education program in Nebraska training future “translators of genetic information.”
- The Department of Medical Imaging & Therapeutic Sciences (MITS) created a new course for the University of Nebraska High School. “Introduction to Medical Imaging & Therapeutic Sciences” was offered for the first time in August and highlights four e-Learning modules developed by MITS faculty. The course will serve as a resource to expose high school students to vital careers in the imaging sciences.
- The college welcomed its largest class ever in the fall of 2019, with 536 campus-based students (426 in Omaha; 110 in Kearney), and 110 students in distance education programs, for an overall increase of 1.89%. Students from Nebraska were joined by students from 23 other states and China.

# We can be a healthier state

by Ali S. Khan, M.D., M.P.H., dean of the College of Public Health



Ali S. Khan, M.D., M.P.H.

Nebraska. A place already known for agriculture, Kool-Aid, Reuben sandwiches, Husker football and Berkshire-Hathaway.

It's time we added good health to this list and make Nebraska the healthiest state in the nation.

Thanks to the state's leadership, Nebraska already is ranked 17th in the nation for the health of its population, according to America's Health Rankings for 2019. We are fortunate to have exceptional health care provided by UNMC and its clinical partners, Nebraska Medicine and Children's Hospital & Medical Center.

But, excellent health care is only a quarter of what it takes to make an individual healthy – the rest lies in the policies and practices of the society in which citizens work, live, learn and play. These are often referred to as the social determinants of health: economic stability, education, housing, the built environment (physical parts of where we live and work) and the social and community context. Here, too, the state is fortunate to have a network of district health departments supported by the state health department, thriving community organizations and an unsurpassed philanthropic community.

But ranking 17th is far from where we aspire to be – that is, ranked No. 1 as the healthiest state in the nation with no health disparities for under-resourced communities and

persons. All of our health indicators do not reflect the success of collective legislative and executive collaboration, which has led the state in the fewest opioid deaths in the nation. In contrast, the state is ranked 45th for excessive and binge drinking. Unfortunately, too many Nebraskans drink too much and are overweight with all the related health risks. We also are ranked next to last for health disparities.

In this issue of UNMC Connect, we celebrate the people, partners and local communities addressing the lingering health challenges in Nebraska. These stories reflect many novel approaches to HIV-AIDS, cancer, addiction, childhood obesity, rural health, the dangers of vaping, the effect of flood and climate change on agriculture, and the prevention of sex trafficking. All are public health challenges common to every state in the nation. Within these pages you will discover how UNMC is tackling the major health challenges of our time to improve the health of all Nebraskans and provide solutions for the nation.

For better personal health, Hippocrates got it right 2,500 years ago with his advice on the virtues of having a balanced diet and exercise. Today, we would now add in better sleep, quality time with family and friends, and the freedom from addiction to cigarettes and alcohol. These are habits to improve personal health.

For better public health, UNMC, the College of Public Health and all Nebraskans can work together on the required policy changes driven by science to lead the way toward a healthier nation.





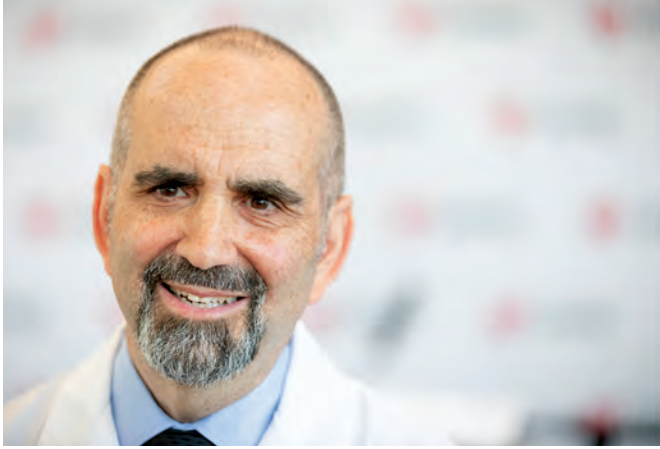
# HIV CURE ON THE HORIZON

by Robyn Murray,  
NU Foundation

The day Howard Gendelman, M.D., announced that his UNMC team, in partnership with Temple University, had successfully eliminated HIV in a living animal was a long time coming after decades of research.

That moment seemed infinitely far off from when he was racing his station wagon on a Sunday morning to see a terminally ill patient at UNMC. That was in the early 1990s, when HIV and AIDS were poorly understood and highly stigmatized.





Howard Gendelman, M.D.

**“Few thought that HIV could be eliminated. But, today, things are no longer as they were.”**

**Howard Gendelman, M.D.**

But when Dr. Gendelman, the Margaret R. Larson Professor of Infectious Diseases and Internal Medicine at UNMC, was called on to see her, the patient was in intensive care with a high fever and showing signs of severe dementia. No one knew what was wrong with her. After an examination, Dr. Gendelman quickly understood she was in the terminal stages of AIDS, an illness that would soon become a worldwide epidemic.

Dr. Gendelman knew the patient had only one chance: promising new drugs had to be administered immediately. The medicine worked quickly. Within a week or two, the patient had regained consciousness and was almost back to her normal self – talking, walking and interacting with her family. It was one of the first complete reversals of AIDS dementia.

That patient’s recovery was likely one of the few moments when emotion proved contagious in Dr. Gendelman’s career as a physician-scientist at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Johns Hopkins, the National Institutes of Health, the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and, for the past 27 years, UNMC.

As the patient later described in a book edited by Dr. Gendelman: He was “like a kid in a candy store.” He paraded his colleagues in to see me and called me “medical history in the making.” She recalled him saying, “It’s moments like these that make me so proud to be a doctor,” and then turning to his colleagues and saying, “It’s time to find a cure!”

That was more than 20 years ago. Since then, AIDS has ravaged communities and claimed an estimated 35 million lives. Approximately 38 million people in the world are infected with HIV/AIDS. Today, it is somewhat contained by antiretroviral drugs that suppress the virus. New infections have fallen 39% from the epidemic’s peak in the late 1990s – a major win in the worldwide battle against the disease. Still, an estimated 1.7 million people become newly infected with HIV every year.

Antiretroviral drugs allow AIDS victims to live semi-normal lives – but not everyone can afford or access these lifesaving medicines. In 2016, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS announced that for the first time, more than half of the world’s population living with HIV was receiving antiretroviral drugs. But, that still leaves roughly 16 million people who live with the disease and do not receive treatment.

Then, came the day Dr. Gendelman announced a breakthrough in the painfully long search for a cure. On July 2, 2019, he, Prasanta Dash, Ph.D., Benson Edagwa, Ph.D., and other UNMC and Temple University researchers announced they had eliminated HIV, the cause of AIDS, for the first time in a live animal.

The discovery was named one of the top 100 scientific breakthroughs of 2019, according to Altmetric, which tracks the dissemination of research online beyond citations in scientific journals. It’s the first time research done in Nebraska hit the top 100 on the Altmetric chart.

The team used a cutting-edge therapeutic strategy, known as long-acting, slow-effective release antiretroviral therapy (LASER ART) in combination with CRISPR, a revolutionary gene-editing therapy, to eliminate the virus in a mouse model of human disease. The model used mice with a human immune system developed, in large measure, by UNMC pharmacology scientists Larisa Poluektova, M.D., Ph.D., and Santhi Gorantla, Ph.D.

“Few thought that HIV could be eliminated,” Dr. Gendelman said. “But, today, things are no longer as they were.”

The announcement was a watershed moment in the history of HIV and AIDS. But, for Dr. Gendelman, it was not a moment of fulfillment. It was more like a step forward in a marathon still in progress. For him, the moment was about the slow-

# One of the top 100 scientific breakthroughs of 2019

## It's the first time research done in Nebraska hit the top 100 on the Altmetric chart.

plodding work of scientific discovery. It was about the curiosity that first brought him into the world of scientific research. It was about the days and nights spent mulling over problems – because the workday of a scientist never really ends. It was about the behind-the-scenes legwork – writing grants, filing financial papers, setting up laboratories. It was about the slow, complicated work that – despite the magnitude of this breakthrough – is far from over.

“When you make a discovery, it’s about incremental steps,” Dr. Gendelman said. “It’s a process and far from a single destination. You must love the journey of science ... the day-to-day operations, the good, the bad, the difficult obstacles. It is all about overcoming the odds and keeping focused on the quest.”

When that quest resulted in the elimination of a virus that has confounded doctors and scientists for years, Dr. Gendelman said the first thing he thought was, “Could this be a mistake?”

“Something happened. It may not be accurate...we must be sure,” he said. “It must be reproduced, and we must search for all controls and all possibilities to any uncertainty.”

So the team tested it again. And again. And again – until they could say with near certainty that the virus had been, to the best of their abilities and knowledge, eliminated.

The discovery was published in the July issue of the prestigious scientific journal *Nature Communications* and picked up by media outlets around the world.

“This achievement could not have been possible without an extraordinary team effort that included virologists, immunologists, molecular biologists, pharmacologists and pharmaceutical experts,” Dr. Gendelman wrote in the press release. “Only by pooling our resources together were we able to make this groundbreaking discovery.”

It also would not have been possible without the infrastructure that UNMC has built over decades, supported by a community that believes in the medical center’s mission – and believes that breakthroughs of worldwide significance can happen in a midsize, Midwestern city when it is empowered to think big.

But the breakthrough is really just the first step. Delivering it to the people who need it in the form of compliance-approved, effective, safe and lifesaving medicine is Dr. Gendelman’s next hurdle. It’s a complex and lengthy process that necessitates layers of testing, and highly specialized procedures and staff who can navigate the delicate process of human trials.

Typically, a powerful industry partner, such as a large drug company, steps in to help. But that can slow the process down significantly, and Dr. Gendelman hopes to move more quickly by producing the medicine in-house at the newly created Nebraska Nanomedicine Production Plant. Fully staffed, this facility will provide the specialized space required to produce FDA-compliant medicine – independently, rapidly and right here in Nebraska.

It will still be slow-plodding work, with highs and lows, hurdles and breakthroughs. But Dr. Gendelman doesn’t want to wait a moment longer than he has to, not when a cure is potentially within reach. The work is evolving rapidly and needs to be in the hands of those who need it. Dr. Gendelman can imagine the satisfaction in their recoveries – and looks forward to being able to take a breath, step back and appreciate what can be achieved, knowing Nebraska is at the center of all of it.

# RIVERS

by Vicky Cerino

The historic flooding that occurred in Nebraska in the spring of 2019 will be talked about for decades.

Some of the stories will be about how UNMC came to the rescue.

Between March 9 and April 1, 2019, a bomb cyclone named Winter Storm Ulmer brought unprecedented snowfall and rain on top of frozen ground to cause one of the greatest disasters in Nebraska's history.

Calls for help were sent out on a massive scale. The flooding forced emergency declarations in 104 cities, 81 counties, five tribal areas and 13 other government entities. All of Nebraska was declared a state of emergency.

Local and national news about the extensive flood damage got the attention of many. An outpouring of support came with money and supplies. Towns were inundated with help. Semi-trucks filled with bales of hay arrived from around the country to feed farm animals. Work groups traveled from the south to help rebuild.

Hard hit was North Bend, population 1,270. Many residents had never experienced flooding and many didn't even know there were levies west of town built to hold excess water back.





# RISING

But, North Bend was in the direct path of the flood. Most of the town's residents were forced to evacuate and many were unable to return to their homes for weeks, said Ellen Duysen, outreach specialist for Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (CS-CASH) based at the UNMC College of Public Health.

Duysen and her colleagues are usually busy training agricultural workers in respiratory protection, hearing conservation and tractor safety in seven states from North Dakota to Missouri.

But in early April, they found themselves in the middle of flood response and relief efforts.

She received a call from a friend and colleague in North Bend who said the community around her had been evacuated. Duysen said water and air temperatures were in the 30s, which is not the norm in floods.

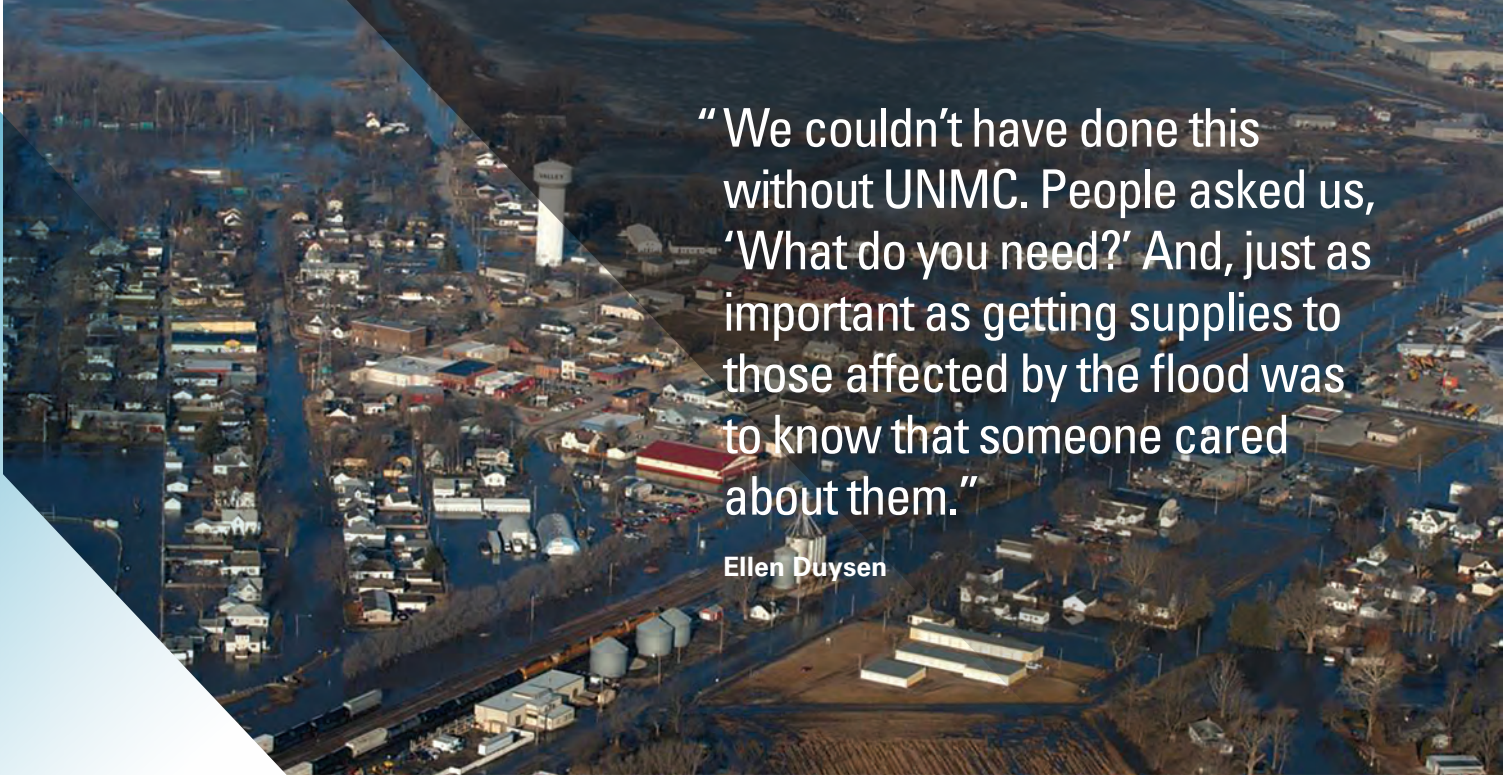
"We know farmers, ranchers and others won't wait for water to recede. They will start recovery efforts immediately, and no one will run to the hardware store to pick up personal protective equipment. They will risk their health to save their livestock, farms and homes," Duysen said.

"Without proper protection on hand, people are going to put themselves at risk. Our goal was to spare people from respiratory problems and physical hazards by providing the supplies they needed."

Duysen and her colleagues set out to educate and protect people from the cold waters and the hazards of recovery – exposure to mold and hidden dangers.

"It was a witch's brew," she said. "Things were floating downstream from farms – debris and animals. Information needed to come out fast. We didn't know what some of these hazards would be – we had never experienced this before."





“We couldn’t have done this without UNMC. People asked us, ‘What do you need?’ And, just as important as getting supplies to those affected by the flood was to know that someone cared about them.”

Ellen Duysen

The Elkhorn River flooded the town of Valley.



Ellen Duysen

Generous donations of money, supplies and kits that contained cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment were key to the initial recovery and relief efforts. Efforts were coordinated with state officials and particularly health departments, which were major resource centers. “The health departments were

heroic in distributing supplies,” Duysen said.

UNMC activated its Incident Command Team for response and recovery efforts for the floods. The team worked long hours to ensure communication and resources were provided to those in need, said Elayne Saejung, director of emergency management at UNMC.

Saejung, who coordinated and tracked UNMC’s disaster-response efforts, said UNMC employees and those across the University of Nebraska system, made donations and

volunteered in the flood relief effort. UNMC, Nebraska Medicine and the University of Nebraska at Omaha operated a Flood Relief Donation Management Center on the UNMC campus to meet the needs of communities, colleagues and students impacted by flooding.

Several weeks after the flood, a statewide public health association meeting in Lincoln became a rallying point. Duysen was able to take five vehicles with more than 1,500 flood-recovery packs to health department heads. The packs provide protection against a wide range of health and safety hazards as well as education about the hazards.

The public, UNMC community and organizations like MAP International, a faith-based nonprofit that provides life-changing medicines and health supplies to mission clinics and hospitals in 104 countries around the world, also answered the call for help. A MAP International semi-truck delivered 15 pallets of flood recovery kits to UNMC that included respirators, gloves, Tyvek suits, scrub sponges, outdoor protective eyewear, tote bags, and health kits containing hygiene essentials.

To date, more than 2,800 flood recovery kits have been distributed across eastern Nebraska and southwest Iowa.

Some of the kits went to emergency managers in three counties and were distributed for post-flood disease



Student Jill Oatman packs emergency kits into a car before delivering them to farmers.

surveillance, said Allison Dye, emergency response coordinator at the Three Rivers Public Health Department. "The supplies were critical to addressing mold cleanup and reducing negative health effects," she said.

"We couldn't have done this without UNMC," Duysen said. "People asked us, 'What do you need?' And, just as important as getting supplies to those affected by the flood was to know that someone cared about them."

Duysen and other UNMC leaders and faculty members helped educate the public about safe clean-up, as well as health topics related to floods, through the media and webinars.

"People were hungry for information," Duysen said.

Among the many stories she heard from people directly and indirectly affected by the flooding were the ones about losing livestock.

"Some lost their calves, cows and equipment. Some animals were swept away and drowned, others got hypothermia and died from freezing water temperatures as farmers were unable to rescue them," Duysen said. "It was personal to them, and they felt helpless and hopeless. That piece of their lives were gone; they knew they would have to start over."

## Flood damage costly

To date, more than \$400 million in federal dollars for public assistance and \$115 million for individual assistance has been dispersed, according to Bryan Tuma, director of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture estimates a \$400 million loss to livestock and \$440 million to crops, which doesn't include infrastructure, such as roadways leading to farms.



Flood-damaged levees and other infrastructure along the Platte and Missouri Rivers will cost far in excess of \$1 billion to repair, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

## Are you prepared?

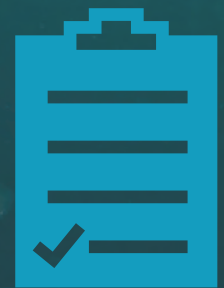
If you had to leave your home in five minutes, what would you grab?

In the event of flooding, Duysen suggests putting needed items, including important documents in a waterproof/fireproof container that could be grabbed by a handle and carried out.

"Having an emergency plan can lessen the stress," she said. "Without a plan, people spend hours recreating paperwork for a mortgage, social security and insurance. And, that's on top of losing their home."

Today, many people are still recovering. There are concerns that standing water will freeze this winter, then thaw with no place to go.

"The only thing we can do is prepare," Duysen said. "This is going to happen again."







# CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS HEARTLAND



Jesse Bell, Ph.D.

by Vicky Cerino

The changes in climate aren't just about the planet's increasing temperature, the melting polar ice caps or the rising sea levels.

It's about what's happening right here in Nebraska.

Flooding. Heat waves. More mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus. The first Zika virus-carrying mosquito in Nebraska. Armadillos, which prefer warm, moist climates, found in Brownville, Neb. A longer ragweed pollen season.

Jesse Bell, Ph.D., the Claire M. Hubbard Professor of Health and Environment in the UNMC College of Public Health, researches the effects of extreme heat, drought and heavy precipitation on human health locally and across the nation.

"This is something that's already impacting Nebraskans and it's only going to continue. It's a health threat for us and our families," said Dr. Bell, who, before joining UNMC, worked at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), where the mission is to understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans and coasts.

"The science behind climate change is well established and well understood. It's what you do about it – that's the debate. The impact is pretty significant."

While it is difficult to determine the full extent that climate change contributed to the 2019 flooding in Nebraska, a lot of the changes, he said, especially in temperature and precipitation is due partially, if not mostly, to anthropogenic sources – increases in CO<sub>2</sub> – greenhouse gases.

"Floods and other weather-related events are increasing and they have a direct impact on farms and the farming community," Dr. Bell said.

"Over the past 100 years, we've seen changes in all of our extreme events across the United States."

Since 1960, there have been 57 major disaster declarations by Nebraska state/tribal governments, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Brian Tuma, of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, said there have been

15 flood-related major disaster declarations for Nebraska since 2008.

On Nov. 25, the World Meteorological Organization released a report that said levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have reached another record high. "This continuing long-term trend means that future generations will be confronted with increasingly severe impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures, more extreme weather, water stress, sea level rise and disruption to marine and land ecosystems," said the report.

UNMC is part of a national consortium that shares a five-year, \$175 million cooperative funding agreement from NOAA to conduct research in Earth system science. The agreement funds the new Cooperative Institute for Satellite Earth System Studies, a consortium of 20 academic and nonprofit institutions. UNMC's role will be to help understand the human health impact from changes in the environment.

One of Dr. Bell's research tasks is to enhance preparedness and public education and help reduce the potential impact of the next event.

"There are health impacts associated with climate change and we're already starting to face it in Nebraska," he said. "We need to be prepared for tomorrow."

## Major Nebraska Disaster Declarations



1960 – 2008    2008 – 2019

57

15



# HELP US CREATE A STRONGER FUTURE.

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▶▶▶

JOIN THE NU ADVOCATES TODAY AT  
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# SMALL, BUT DEADLY

## Vaping products proving more harmful than ever before

by Lisa Spellman

The first time Joe, 16, tried JUUL he got so sick he threw up.

Within 10 minutes of taking a hit off the electronic cigarette, Joe, of Omaha, was so overcome with dizziness and nausea that he laid on his bathroom floor for three hours until he felt better.

"It's called being 'nic sick'" Joe said.

What Joe (not his real name) didn't realize at the time was the electronic cigarette contained nicotine, unlike the previous device he had been using since age 13.

Joe didn't move on to the popular, flash drive look-a-like, JUUL, until he was a freshman in high school and by then he already had been vaping with friends for two years.

Joe's story doesn't surprise Daisy Dai, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of biostatistics in the UNMC College of Public Health.

The prevalence of trendy e-cigarette use among U.S. high school students increased dramatically from 1.5% 2011 to

20.8% in 2018, with a 78% surge from 2017 to 2018, Dr. Dai said.

This alarming statistic is due in large part to the number of flavors that are widely available and the popularity of the pod-mod style e-cigarette JUUL.

"Gummy bear, watermelon, Mountain Dew, the flavoring of e-cigarettes has become one of the leading reasons for current tobacco use among youth," Dr. Dai said.

Joe's favorite flavor was mint.

And, because youth don't associate vaping with traditional cigarette use, they often don't realize they are at risk for nicotine addiction until it is too late, she said.

Joe said he quickly realized he was addicted to nicotine within three months of using JUUL.

"It's the first thing you think of when you wake up in the morning," he said.

He estimates he vaped more than 250 times a day.





Daisy Dai, Ph.D., recently published a study that found marijuana use in electronic cigarettes increased among U.S. middle and high school students from 2017 to 2018.

“It’s so new, we just don’t know the extent of the damage it could potentially cause,” said Todd Wyatt, Ph.D., professor of environmental, agricultural and occupational health in the UNMC College of Public Health.

Dr. Wyatt has studied the toxic mix of JUUL and alcohol use and how it affects the human body since 2018.

In late September, he testified at a hearing on the topic in front of the Health and Human Services Committee of the Nebraska Legislature. The hearing revolved around Legislative Resolution 173, an interim study introduced by Nebraska State Sen. Tom Quick of Grand Island, to examine health concerns about chemicals and pollutants found in e-cigarettes and people involuntarily exposed to toxins and chemicals from secondhand vapor.

Dr. Wyatt testified on the research findings he’s had on the unique injury the combination of vaping and alcohol presents in inhibiting the normal repair process in the lung.

“The recent high-profile cases reported in the media involving vaping appear to involve acute, or rapid injury,” he said. “This is in contrast to the chronic lung injury associated with traditional cigarettes. We don’t yet know what the chronic lung effects are related to JUUL. This may not appear for years or decades.”

Dr. Wyatt focuses his research on JUUL, which he said contains 50 milligrams of nicotine in each pod, four times as much nicotine as in one cigarette.

He said he chose this particular brand because it commands 80% of the market and uses a patented nicotine delivery method that utilizes a benzoic acid salt form of nicotine which mimics the free acid form of nicotine found in cigarettes, creating a nicotine that’s smoother to consume and thus, more satisfying to the smoker.

The larger problem, both Drs. Dai and Wyatt said, is in childhood nicotine addiction.

Studies have shown a strong association between vaping and marijuana use among adolescents and young adults, who

are three times more likely to move on to newer generation devices for vaping marijuana than youth who never try vaping, Dr. Dai said.

This ultimately could lead to use of substances like cocaine or opioids that have stronger addictive effects, she said.

“The tobacco use landscape has substantially changed in recent years among youth,” Dr. Dai said. “Comprehensive tobacco control strategies need to be modified to take into account that cigarette smoking is on the decline while other non-cigarette tobacco use is rising.”

Dr. Dai said educational campaigns about the harmfulness of vaping also are needed to protect youth and suggests raising the minimum legal age of tobacco sales to 21.

Joe said he never considered smoking cigarettes, nor did any of his friends who use electronic cigarettes.

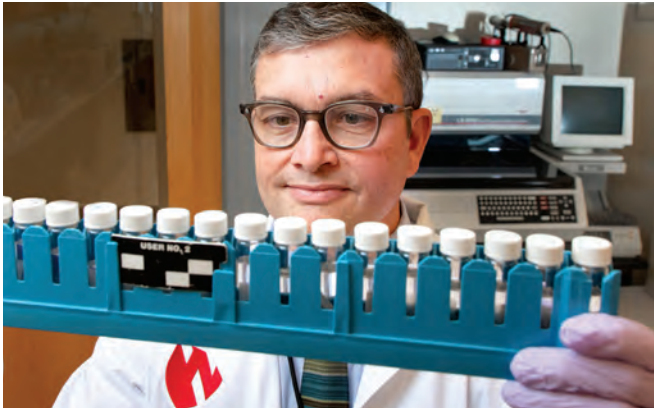
But vaping, he said, “seemed harmless.”

Brian Boer, M.D., a section chief for critical care medicine in the UNMC College of Medicine, said he now sees more acute lung injury directly attributed to electronic cigarettes in otherwise healthy young men who end up in the intensive care unit at Nebraska Medicine, where he treats patients for pulmonary illness.

An assistant professor of pulmonary and critical care medicine, Dr. Boer said he sees at least two or more patients a month who come in short of breath with a low grade fever and muscle aches. They quickly become so sick they end up on oxygen or worse – sedated on artificial life support in the ICU.

After ruling out other causes, like pneumonia or acute asthma, Dr. Boer said he biopsies the lungs and sees evidence of artificial compounds and other byproducts from electronic cigarettes in the cells.

“CT scans reveal a characteristic pattern that resembles acute respiratory distress syndrome in both lungs,” Dr. Boer said.



Todd Wyatt, Ph.D., studies how the toxic mix of JUUL and alcohol use affects the human body.

What is most alarming, he said, is this is occurring in otherwise healthy people, who have never smoked cigarettes but who took up vaping and end up in life-threatening situations.

“None of this is FDA regulated so you don’t know what is in (the electronic cigarette). We are all worried about what the long-term outcomes are going to be,” he said.

Joe also began to worry this summer after a friend showed him internet articles on the dangers associated with vaping.

That’s when he decided to quit and turned to physician assistant, Jill Selzle, a tobacco treatment specialist with the Nicotine Dependence Clinic at Nebraska Medicine for help.

Selzle said Joe is among a handful of people she has helped quit e-cigarettes.

Selzle said she applies the same principles for treating nicotine withdrawal in people who smoke combustible tobacco, which is focused on addressing the psychological and physical aspects to nicotine addiction.

“Electronic cigarettes were created for people who want a realistic transition to use to help them quit smoking, but there is no data on how to help people quit using them,” Selzle said.

Youth who are using these devices are at greater risk for addiction, she said, because their brains are still under development.

“When we inhale nicotine it gets to the brain within five heartbeats and a person can begin to feel the effects of nicotine withdrawal within two hours,” Selzle said.

Once he made his mind up to quit, Joe said he cut in half the number of times he vaped during the day, as well as cut in half the amount of nicotine he ordered in his refill pods and continued to do so until, eventually, he was able to stop altogether.

Now, he tells his friends, “Vaping isn’t any safer than smoking cigarettes.”

## VAPING CAN KILL

Concerns about vaping among youth and images of young people hooked up to respirators combined with news reports of serious lung injuries and deaths attributed to electronic cigarettes has led numerous states to ban e-cigarette flavors from being sold. Large retailers, like Walmart, Kroger and Walgreens, are discontinuing the sale of electronic devices altogether.

In May of 2019, the state of Nebraska passed a bill, effective in January, that banned anyone younger than 19 from purchasing electronic cigarettes. By Sept. 30, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reported the first death related to vaping illness. Since last March when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began tracking the problem, there have been 59 confirmed deaths and more than 2,600 hospitalizations in the U.S.

“Public health can evolve rapidly and requires agility in establishing new surveillance and tracking systems,” said Tom Safraneck, M.D., epidemiologist with DHHS. “We have collaborated with the CDC and other states to study any reported case with a standardized survey tool and to combine all findings at the national level to come up with a complete picture of this previously unseen health problem.”

Just before Thanksgiving, a link was found.

According to a Nov. 25 Washington Post article, the CDC had discovered that vitamin E acetate oil, which is being used to dilute THC in black-market vape cartridges, is responsible for disrupting normal lung functions.

Vitamin E acetate is found in many foods, nutritional supplements and cosmetics and does not usually cause harm when swallowed as a supplement or applied to the skin. However, because it is an enormously sticky substance like honey that clings to the inner lining of the lungs, it causes problems when inhaled.



Edward Jenner

Marie Curie

Florence Nightingale

Joseph Lister

Alexander Fleming

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**[ YOUR NAME HERE ]**

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# ART GRACES THE MEDICAL CENTER'S NEW FRONT DOOR

by Karen Burbach

Last fall, UNMC and the Nebraska Medical Center unveiled a new front door.

The revamped southern entrance – made possible by philanthropists Bob and Polina Schlott and named the Medical Center Plaza – features a lighted walkway through 18 ceramic columnar sculptures created by Omaha artist Jun Kaneko.

Located on the northwest corner of 42nd and Leavenworth streets, the 13-foot-tall, 3,000 pound columnar sculptures are incorporated into a grove of mature trees. Benches line the walk and provide visitors, medical center employees and students the opportunity to seek calmness and beauty amid a tranquil park-like setting.

“For the first time, visitors who travel up 42nd Street to our campus will have a first impression that matches the extraordinary patient care, research and education that takes place within our campus,” said UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D.





Two monument signs stand across 42nd Street, on the northeast corner, in front of the Dr. Edwin G. & Dorothy Balbach Davis Global Center, welcoming visitors to a campus that also has been transformed thanks to generous donors and public-private partnerships.

A plaque recognizes Polina's mother, Larisa Poluektova, M.D., Ph.D., a professor in the UNMC Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Neuroscience and co-director of the Translational Mouse Model Core Facility, as a "relentless investigator, pioneering discovery and advancing biomedical research."

"UNMC represents the best of what's going on in Nebraska," Bob Schlott said. "It is truly an amazing facility with a lot of momentum."



Robert and Polina Schlott celebrate the dedication of the medical center's new southern entrance and the unveiling of a plaque in honor of Polina's mother, Larisa Poluektova, M.D., Ph.D., a UNMC scientist.

# CHILDHOOD OBESITY GROWING PROBLEM IN STATE

Unique program will help families in rural communities

By Elizabeth Kumru

Nearly one in three children in Nebraska are overweight or obese, a statistic that places the state 21st in the U.S., according to America Health Rankings.

Two University of Nebraska researchers are focused on lowering that number by overcoming childhood obesity one family at a time.

Jennie Hill, Ph.D., associate professor of epidemiology in UNMC's College of Public Health, and Kate Heelan, Ph.D., professor of exercise science and director of the Physical Activity and Wellness Lab at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), want to reduce obesity rates among children from lower-income families in rural communities.

The free program is designed for families with children ages 6 - 12 and teaches them to identify better food choices, modify unhealthy behaviors and increase physical activity.

Drs. Hill and Heelan will repackage Building Healthy Families (BHF), a 12-week intensive program with follow up through one year designed by Dr. Heelan and started in 2009 in Kearney, so it can be replicated in small communities across the country.

The five-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds the train-the-trainer program, which will be launched in North Platte, Columbus, Gering, Wayne, Grand Island, Hastings and Scottsbluff. A team of local organizations and partners from each community will be trained to deliver the BHF program to families in these towns and surrounding areas.

These communities will work with the researchers to implement the program and secure the necessary resources to ensure its sustainability. Finally, an advisory board

will develop ways to generate sustainable funding and reimbursements for the program.

Building Healthy Families was previously funded through the Rural Futures Institute and the University of Nebraska Research Initiative, which is intended to facilitate research beyond any single campus.

Up to 20 families will be chosen to participate in each town over two years.

The CDC reports that obesity affects nearly one in five children in the U.S., with higher rates in lower-income families and rural areas that don't have access to the same resources as urban cities. Effective research-tested, family-based programs have been available for more than two decades. However, getting these programs started and sustained in communities has been difficult – particularly for rural areas.

"Patterns of physical activity, eating and weight tend to be pretty consistent across family members," Dr. Hill said. "That's why we do family-based treatment. The best programs endorse family-based, lifestyle modification for this age range because it benefits the entire family. Increasing the knowledge, skills and capacity of the caregivers is essential to helping kids change their behavior."

Children younger than 12 are not yet free to choose their own food, she said. "Their parents still control a good bit of their home environment and the activities they are engaged in.

"The funding from CDC will help us test ways to involve communities in setting up and sustaining effective childhood obesity treatment programs so that rural areas and small cities across Nebraska and other Great Plains states can benefit," Dr. Hill said.



Each community will receive a small grant to pay for supplies, but also will invest its own resources in the form of a team of people who will teach nutrition and behavior modification and guide physical activities.

Materials developed by Dr. Heelan for Building Healthy Families are in the process of being converted by Trifoia™ into a digital package that includes online resources, program materials and training modules. Trifoia™, is a company that specializes in media rich website, training and mobile applications for researchers and organizations in need of customized training.

“Having a turnkey program is a critical first step in our work, but we are also really interested in how to support communities in starting the program and, most importantly, planning for long-term sustainability of the program in their communities,” Dr. Hill said.

“The beauty of the digitized program is that rural communities don’t need licensed professionals to teach the modules,” Dr. Heelan said. “They just need someone who is interested in that subject. All the materials and training will be provided.”

Also key to the program’s success is that it is fun. “The physical activities are engaging and more games than structured exercise,” Dr. Heelan said. “The kids really like it.”

Lifestyle behavior modification is stressed along with a unique “traffic light” eating plan that easily identifies healthy foods (green), slow down foods (yellow) and unhealthy choices (red).

The Traffic Light Diet was developed by Leonard Epstein, Ph.D., SUNY Distinguished Professor of pediatrics, University at Buffalo, N.Y. It is likely the most studied pediatric weight management intervention and has demonstrated efficacy across a wide range of randomized controlled trials in children 6 - 12 years of age, Dr. Heelan said.

“We have a 10-year track record of success for the Building Healthy Families program,” she said. So far, 75 families have completed the program. Children lost an average of 4.3% in body mass and their parent’s lost 7% body mass. Health benefits can be seen after losing 3 – 5% body mass.

Also, they’ve kept the weight off. Children who’ve completed the Kearney program are gaining less weight one year later compared to children who did not join the program.

Overweight or obesity in children is a growing problem in the United States. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the prevalence of childhood overweight or obesity has tripled since the 1970s.

Obesity is a big problem for adults in Nebraska as well. Since 2012, obesity of adults increased 20% from 28.4% to 34.1% of adults, placing Nebraska at 35th in America’s Health Rankings for 2019.

“Childhood is an important time for setting individuals on a trajectory for good health throughout their lives,” Dr. Hill said. “Extra weight amplifies their risk for chronic diseases as young adults and into adulthood.” All that extra weight is associated with the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, elevated blood pressure and asthma.

Childhood obesity also takes an emotional toll. Overweight children often have trouble keeping up with other kids and joining in sports and activities. Other kids may tease and exclude them, leading to low self-esteem, negative body image and even depression.

By getting the whole family involved, researchers hope to break the cycle of weight problems and obesity, boost children’s physical and mental health, and help them establish a healthy relationship with food that will last a lifetime.

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Any research project requires an entire team to be successful.

Other members of the research team include:

### From UNMC:

Paul Estabrooks, Ph.D.,  
Harold M. Maurer  
Distinguished Chair  
and professor of  
health promotion;

Chris Wichman, Ph.D.,  
assistant professor of  
biostatistics; and

Tzeyu Michaud, Ph.D.,  
assistant professor in  
the Center for Reducing  
Health Disparities.

### From UNK:

Todd Bartee, Ph.D.,  
professor of exercise science;  
Bryce Abbey, Ph.D., associate  
professor of exercise science.

### Building Healthy Families Program co-founders:

Nancy Foster, Ph.D.,  
pediatrics psychology, UNMC  
Munroe-Meyer Institute;

Kaiti George, R.D.,  
Hy-Vee dietitian in Kearney.



# COMMUNITY NEEDS TO DRIVE RURAL HEALTH 2030 PLAN

by Karen Burbach

Each time UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., travels across the state, he asks community leaders the same question: “What can UNMC do to help your community?”

And, he continually gets the same answer: “workforce, workforce, workforce.”

UNMC is doing more to meet those needs. Enrollment topped 4,000 this year – largely from expanding existing programs, namely nursing programs in Kearney and Lincoln, and allied health in Kearney. In addition, UNMC launched a new master’s degree in genetic counseling – the state’s first and only accredited program.

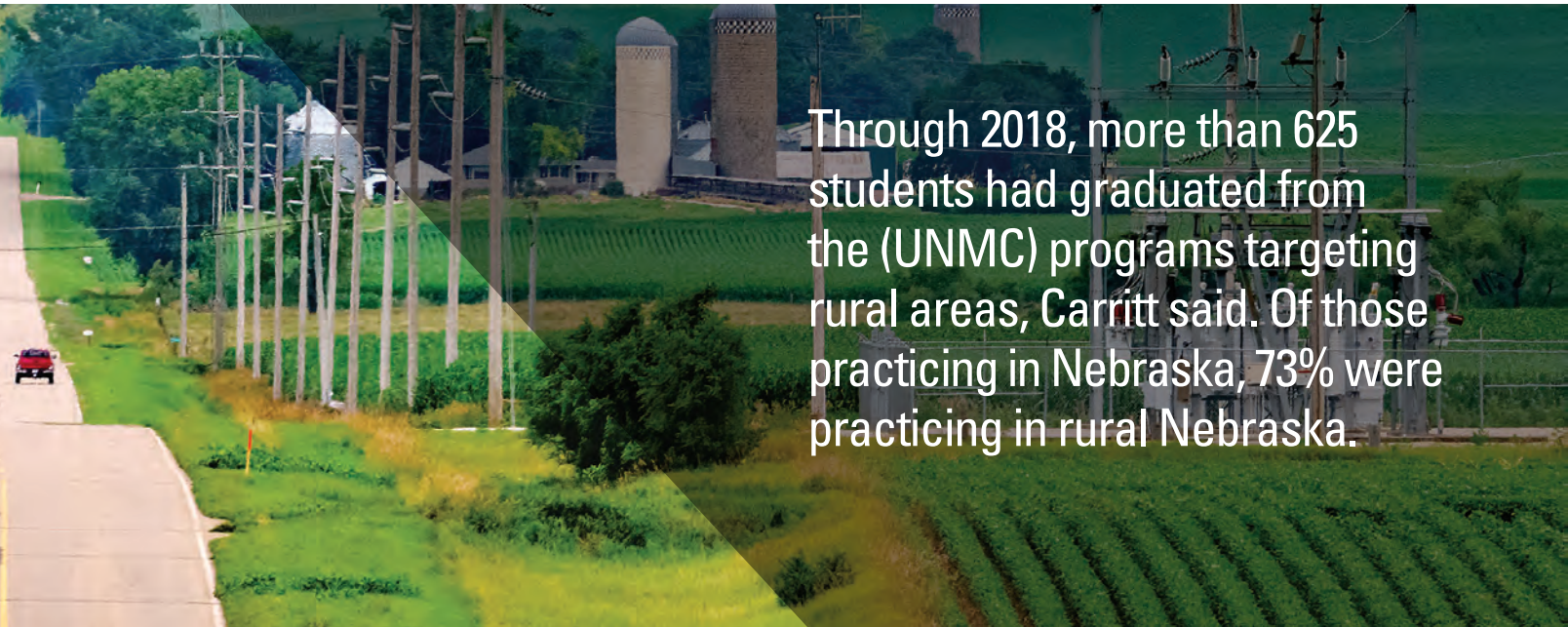
Even so, workforce issues remain and UNMC has a strategy.

Recently renewing its longstanding commitment to rural health, UNMC named Nicole Carritt as the inaugural director of rural health initiatives. Carritt, who holds a master’s degree in public health from UNMC, works with UNMC’s rural partners to enhance the university’s impact across the state. As director, she also will oversee and implement UNMC’s Rural Health 2030 Plan, which details how UNMC, its partners, and rural Nebraskans can together shape a new vision for a healthy rural future.

“We want to have a clear understanding of what changes are ahead,” Carritt said, “including what the health landscape might look like in 2030, and how we can prepare and adjust our system to best shape a healthy rural future.”

The plan includes revitalizing UNMC’s rural guaranteed admissions pathway programs, which date back to the early 1990s. Early on, UNMC partnered with the state colleges to provide guaranteed admittance to programs, with expectations





Through 2018, more than 625 students had graduated from the (UNMC) programs targeting rural areas, Carritt said. Of those practicing in Nebraska, 73% were practicing in rural Nebraska.

that students would spend significant time training in rural areas and then return there to practice.

Today, nine professions at UNMC participate in the Rural Health Opportunities Program (RHOP) with state colleges and the Kearney Health Opportunities Program (KHOP) at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK). Another program in public health, PHEAST, also attracts rural students. A fourth program, Urban Health Opportunities Program (UHOP), targets underserved urban areas.

Through 2018, more than 625 students had graduated from the programs targeting rural areas, Carritt said. Of those practicing in Nebraska, 73% were practicing in rural Nebraska, and the remaining 27% were practicing in urban Nebraska.

In revitalizing the program, UNMC will examine system improvements, eligibility and enrollment, regular student connection to UNMC, data collection and analytics, and recruitment and retention. Doing so, Carritt said, will ensure the program prepares a diverse cohort of students that are well-prepared to meet the unique health care needs of the state's rural areas.

The Rural Health 2030 Plan also involves expanding access to specialty clinical services across the state via telehealth – an effort made easier now that Nebraska law requires insurers to reimburse for telehealth services. In June, UNMC's primary clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine, introduced a tele-epilepsy clinic inside Mary Lanning Hospital in Hastings, Neb.

"The patients are roomed just as they would be in one of our clinics," said neurologist Proleta Datta, M.D., who conducts the telemedicine visits. "The only difference is that the nurse prepares the Zoom conferencing tool."

"If it's a simple case, I provide a consult and the patients may follow up with their primary care provider," Dr. Datta said. "For more complex patients, further neurodiagnostic tests and follow-up may be arranged at UNMC in Omaha. Providers in Hastings have been receptive."

"The patients I've seen through telemedicine like it," she said. "Not only are we saving them significant time, we're offering convenient access to an epilepsy specialist."

It's a similar story with Nebraska Medicine's telestroke program, which has multiple sites across the state to help patients get appropriate intervention sooner in their local emergency departments, improving the outcomes from stroke.

The neurology team is considering expanding its Community Connect program to other Nebraska sites, such as Beatrice, North Platte and Norfolk. In addition, Nebraska Medicine offers a telemedicine clinic for high-risk OB patients in Shenandoah, Iowa, and hopes to expand the ultrasound services to western Nebraska – again, in an effort to increase patient accessibility.

The Rural Health 2030 Plan offers UNMC a road map, Carritt said, to improve workforce needs, leverage technology and provide all Nebraskans access to quality health care that's close to home. "Our investment in rural Nebraska will be based on the needs of the communities," she said. "I'm excited to see how we can even better serve rural Nebraska over the next 25 years."



# THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

by John Keenan

Every day, an average of 130 Americans die after overdosing on opioids. It has become such a national problem that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared opioid misuse a nationwide public health emergency in 2017.

For some reason, Nebraska has largely escaped the opioid epidemic. Last year, there were only 7.1 drug deaths per 100,000 population in the state – which puts Nebraska in the No. 1 spot on America’s Health Rankings for the least number of deaths for opioid misuse.

Nebraska still has problems with drugs – methamphetamine (meth) remains the chief concern of law enforcement and alcohol the primary drug of misuse, but Nebraskans have proactively worked to address opioid misuse and addiction. The Nebraska Legislature adopted and strengthened an electronic prescription drug monitoring program; relaxed rules for administering a life-saving, overdose-reversing drug; and granted immunity from prosecution for drug crimes related to individuals who call for help during an apparent overdose.

In 2016, under guidance from the Attorney General’s Office, the Nebraska Coalition to Prevent Opioid Abuse formed after a summit at UNMC drew participants from the fields of medicine, social services, government and law enforcement. A year later, the coalition released its first Strategic Initiative Report, detailing efforts in three broad areas: prevention, treatment and law enforcement. A second opioid conference is set for May 12 at UNMC.

UNMC has taken aim on substance use disorder, including opioid misuse, in the state.





Ken Zoucha, M.D.



Shinobu Watanabe-Galloway, Ph.D.

Ken Zoucha, M.D., assistant professor of psychiatry, broadly breaks UNMC’s efforts into three categories:

- Training more providers who can treat substance use disorders;
- Positioning trained providers in medical homes throughout the state to maximize their impact; and
- Educating the general public on substance use disorders.

Dr. Zoucha highlighted two training programs that UNMC, with the help of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), created: A one-year addiction medicine fellowship and a month-long executive addiction medicine program aimed at doctors and other providers who already are practicing.

The yearlong course results in board certification in addiction medicine. The executive program provides training on how to deal with patients with substance use disorders.

“Hopefully, as those people go out into their practices, they then become the expert in their area and are able to provide guidance in their practices,” Dr. Zoucha said.

Another effort is Project ECHO (Extension for Community Health Outreach), now in its third year, which Dr. Zoucha described as a “hub and spoke” model of teaching providers about addiction.

“Twice a month, we have ‘hub’ members who are specialists in addiction medicine – nurses, physicians, therapists, counselors, a peer specialist – who provide a lecture about an addiction medicine topic and follow with case presentations from participants,” he said.

Providers call in from across the state, sometimes seeking advice on difficult cases. The result: a larger group of educated providers sharing experiences with addiction medicine.

The Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN) also has partnered with other entities within the med center and DHHS to provide conferences for substance use disorders, including a 2019 conference on opioid use disorder treatment that took place in both Omaha and Kearney.

“A lot of our focus has been on opioid use disorders,” Dr. Zoucha said. UNMC is currently providing the training

needed for providers to prescribe an evidence-based medication treatment for people with opioid use disorders.

“You have to have special training to be able to prescribe that medication (buprenorphine) for opioid use disorder, so we’re working hard to train more people,” he said. “We’re building opportunities now to do live training throughout the state.”

The department of psychiatry also is developing models of care, Dr. Zoucha said. “We’re taking the model out to other places, so they can see that this is something they might replicate.”

Finally, the department is working to build a phone line service for providers to call in to speak to experts if they have a difficult case concerning substance use disorder.

Though Nebraska hasn’t been hit as hard by the opioid crisis as some states, said Shinobu Watanabe-Galloway, Ph.D., vice-chair of epidemiology and research director for BHECN, the state is close to the national average in prescribing opioids.

Dr. Watanabe-Galloway is part of the Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment (SBIRT) Project, which is taking place in Nebraska and surrounding states. The SBIRT effort is aimed at increasing outreach to rural populations.

“Through these projects, we do screenings of individuals living in the rural area,” Dr. Watanabe-Galloway said. Project collaborators go to farm shows and farm education events to provide substance use disorder screenings for farm workers.

“We are collecting data to see what’s going on in the rural areas, because we do not have a clear picture of the problems in those communities,” she said. “We hope that by reaching out to the population and building more awareness, we can prevent people from getting addicted.”

Dr. Watanabe-Galloway said she is cautiously optimistic as UNMC and Nebraska mobilize to fight the opioid epidemic and other substance use disorders.

“There’s more encouragement and interest from the public for us to tackle this problem,” she said. “After a crisis, or even as we are going through a crisis, there’s also opportunity – because people are ready to make changes.”



# FROM CUBA TO COLUMBUS

UNMC graduate overcomes obstacles to embrace opportunities

by Colleen Fleischer

Radiel Cardentey-Uranga is a proud UNMC graduate.

His mom made him look at her hands.

They were swollen, again.

She reminded him how much they ached, day after day, from her job packaging meat at a factory in Columbus, Nebraska.

“She told me, ‘This is the reason you have to go to college. You should get an education. It’s going to help you in the future,’” said Radiel Cardentey-Uranga, a recent graduate of UNMC.

A few weeks before his graduation, Cardentey-Uranga turned 23. He dreamed of a career in radiography, using his hands to help people. He sees that career within his reach now – and maybe, down the road, he’ll become an M.D. or Ph.D. or a physician’s assistant – and he sees himself giving back to the community. He knows it’s all thanks to his parents and teachers and all the people who extended their hands to him along the way, pulled him up to where he is today.

To who he is today:

- A hardworking, recent college graduate, the first in his family to attend college.

- A grateful recipient of two UNMC scholarships: the Charles R. O’Malley Scholarship and the Hermene K. Ferris Scholarship, generous gifts from people who don’t even know him.
- A proud citizen of the United States, as of 2018.
- And a proud narrator of a very unlikely story. One he can hardly believe himself, he says, as he tells it over the phone from his home in Columbus.

His story began in Cuba. It began even before he was born, when his hardworking dad was thrown in jail for two years for speaking out against the government.

“He wasn’t in favor of the tyranny or the dictatorship they had,” Cardentey-Uranga says. “He publicly spoke the truth that the government didn’t want known.”

When his dad got out of jail, he tried to go back to working in construction. He had a good reputation working with his hands, in masonry. But police harassed him, gave him tickets. The family eventually immigrated to the U.S. as refugees.

Cardentey-Uranga was 16 when his family moved to Washington state. After a while, his parents divorced and he and his mom moved to Columbus. His mom, whose hands were used to doing hair and nails back in Cuba, took on that tough factory job.



Cardentey-Uranga could barely speak or understand English and wasn't much of a student at first at Columbus High School. He'd dropped out of school in Cuba in ninth grade for fear he'd be taken for mandatory military service.

He struggled, especially in math and physics. "Basically," he said, "I had to learn it all from scratch."

He joined the high school soccer team, which helped because some of the players spoke Spanish. He took a weekend job at an animal shelter, and that helped him learn English. He started to fit in.

A few teachers took him under their wings, encouraged him to try for higher education and pointed him in the direction of Central Community College.

But he didn't think he was college material. He figured he'd just find a factory job when he graduated.

That's when his mom made him look at her swollen hands.

"She said, 'This is the reason you have to finish school. I'm making the sacrifice for you. You should take this opportunity,'" Cardentey-Uranga said.

He did. He asked questions about the path to higher education. He took the ACT, but scored poorly at first. He started at the community college, way behind the other students. He took evening classes, summer classes. He got to know one of the instructors there, and she suggested he consider a career in radiography. She told him UNMC had a radiography program he could take right there in Columbus.

Radiography?

He researched it, loved what he saw and applied to the program at UNMC, which has a partnership with a hospital in Columbus. As part of the application process, he was required to do a three-day job-shadowing stint to make sure he really wanted to work in that field.

"I liked the job," Cardentey-Uranga said: "I felt like it really fit me because I'm using my hands constantly, in different ways. You get to work with people from all different backgrounds and cultures."

He applied for scholarships and received the O'Malley and Ferris scholarships.



Cardentey-Uranga became a United States citizen in 2018.

The O'Malley Scholarship was created by the largest gift to benefit UNMC's College of Allied Health Professions students to date. Besides allowing the college to endow funds for a cohort of "O'Malley Scholars," the gift provides an additional \$500,000 if matched by other allied health donors through 2022. The matching arrangement allows benefactors to endow their own named scholarships, with the benefit of doubling their gift.

"I guess someone realized that I was working hard to achieve good academic performance. The scholarships truly make a difference.

"What impacted me the most is that there are people looking out for me, who are invested in my future – people who care."

Cardentey-Uranga graduated from UNMC with a bachelor's degree in medical imaging and therapeutic science in May 2019. He will go on to receive a post-baccalaureate certificate in cardiovascular interventional technology through UNMC.

In his thank you letter for the Ferris Scholarship he wrote: "I am looking forward to achieving my career goal at UNMC and hopefully someday to be in your shoes and give back to the community in the same way you are doing with me."

He also created a thank you video for the trustees of the O'Malley Trust, telling them his unlikely story – and promising his story will continue.



# COLLABORATION IS KEY TO CANCER PREVENTION AND CURES

by Kalani Simpson

The Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center is the world's most integrated cancer center.

The only cancer center in Nebraska with the National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation, it is one of 71 NCI-designated centers in the country, earning this designation based on scientific excellence and the capability to integrate diverse research programs focused on cancer.

Its mission is to understand, prevent and cure cancer in Nebraska through premier educational programs, innovative research, the highest quality patient care, and outreach to underserved populations.

For more than 40 years, UNMC has offered patients the most current and innovative treatment options available through the integration of cutting-edge research into state-of-the-art care.

This deep commitment has been underscored by a vast investment in facilities, research, clinical care and, mostly, people. People come from all over the world to study, work and be treated at UNMC.

Hospitals across the state now use standardized protocols for cancer treatment developed by UNMC physicians and offer clinical trials for their patients. And, once a year, cancer physicians and researchers meet with ranchers at the Cattlemen's Ball.

According to the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, more than 200 basic and clinical researchers conduct studies attacking cancer from every conceivable avenue. The latest funding total is more than \$60 million annually.

Nearly 150 clinical trials, most of them multi-institutional, provide patients with cutting-edge therapies.

And, the opportunity for collaboration has exploded.

Not just because patients can now make one phone call and see every specialist, therapist, counselor and dietician in a single visit.

And, not just because this entire team of health professionals review the patient's progress together to craft a comprehensive, team-based treatment plan.





## Cancer deaths on rise in Nebraska

In the past six years, cancer deaths increased 3% from 182.2 to 187.6 deaths per 100,000 people.



America's Health Rankings 2019

## Nebraska's rank in HPV immunization

HPV is a common virus that can lead to certain types of cancer later in life. Getting your 11–12 year-old child two doses of the HPV vaccine can prevent these cancers.



America's Health Rankings 2019

What really makes this the world's most integrated cancer center is that someone new is sitting at that table – a cancer researcher.

The idea, said Kenneth Cowan, M.D., Ph.D., director of the center and of the Eppley Institute for Research in Cancer, is that scientists can gain new perspectives that remind them to focus their research on problems that are important to actual patients.

And, clinicians get to hear about the latest basic research findings.

Through this unique alchemy, a new idea might light up the room.

That's exactly what happened, Dr. Cowan said.

A scientist sat in on a meeting. Asked a question.

And, now? "A brand new collaboration, in the last year, merging clinical faculty and researchers to develop an immunotherapy for pancreatic cancer," Dr. Cowan said.

Lymphocytes, or special white blood cells, can activate in a way that attempts to fight off pancreatic cancer. But, too few

of them do. "So few," Dr. Cowan said, "it isn't helping fight the cancer sufficiently to help the patient."

Thus, the idea: let's harvest these lymphocytes from pancreatic cancer patients and grow them in a lab – in numbers that will make a difference, numbers big enough to fight cancer.

"And reinfuse them back into the patient. So it will be the patient's own lymphocytes that will be given back to them. Ones that we know are targeting their cancer," Dr. Cowan said.

"But now in mass numbers."

This immunotherapy would be added to standard approaches, and its effectiveness tested as part of clinical trials.

The UNMC team applied this year for FDA approval for a protocol.

It will be available here, and nowhere else.

It's just one way UNMC is working to make Nebraska a healthier state.

# Nebraska is 8th in the nation in childhood cancer. Highest in the Midwest.



**8th**  
in the nation

Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018

## The Watershed

Eleanor Rogan, Ph.D., professor and chair of environmental, agricultural and occupational health, in the College of Public Health, and professor in the Eppley Institute for Research in Cancer and Allied Diseases, is looking for patterns.

She's looking at numbers. At charts and maps.

She wonders if there is a connection between the nitrate-rich water and an alarming number of children who have cancer in our state.

Nebraska is eighth in the nation – and the highest in the midwest – in terms of incidence of childhood cancer, according to statistics compiled by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“The question is,” Dr. Rogan said, “do agricultural chemicals have anything to do with the high incidence of pediatric cancer in Nebraska?”

Well, the data is too spotty and inconsistent to be considered scientific proof. Yes, the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Geological Survey, the state of Nebraska all have periodically taken samples to test water quality, but not in the way a UNMC scientist would.

Is there a pattern? Yes, but “We haven’t proven anything yet,” Dr. Rogan said.

And yet kids who live in the areas surrounding Nebraska’s rural watersheds are getting cancer at an alarming rate.

So, Dr. Rogan and her collaborators – including those from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Colleges of Agriculture and Engineering – are on the case.

“There’s a simple way you can test your (well) water,” Dr. Rogan said. “Anybody can do it.”

And, “there are ways to treat the land,” Dr. Rogan said.

Certain types of grass can be planted to create a buffer zone and keep potentially tainted water from flowing downstream.

Meanwhile, the NU team itself will test the water, so we can know for sure and do something about it, if needed.

It’s a big project.

“We’re going to be at this for the next 10 years,” Dr. Rogan said.

She is determined to make Nebraska a healthier state.

## Continuum of care

The thing about cancer, said Deborah Levy, Ph.D., Hawks Chair, and director of the Center for Cancer Prevention and Population Science at the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center and the College of Public Health, is to think about prevention and control along the entire continuum of care.

That is, we want to prevent you from getting cancer altogether. Or test for biomarkers, to identify cells in their precancerous stages. If you are diagnosed with cancer, we want to catch it early. If we’ve caught it, we want to cure it, if possible. If cured, we want to keep it from re-occurring. And so on.

All with the goal of “helping the person live a productive life,” Dr. Levy said.

But, it’s prevention that will be one of the center’s greatest emphases, going forward.

Dr. Levy envisions growing collaborations statewide among Nebraska’s health care providers, patients, researchers and university faculty members. Such multidisciplinary teams can tackle issues from many angles, she said.

Cancer touches almost every Nebraskan. Multifaceted efforts to fight it are making Nebraska a healthier state.



# alumni news

## The UNMC Alumni Association



### Mission

Engage alumni and support UNMC.

### Vision

Informed, inspired and invested alumni and friends.

## Fiscal Year 2019 Innovation Fund Impact Report

The full impact report can be viewed online at [www.unmc.edu/alumni/about/newera.html](http://www.unmc.edu/alumni/about/newera.html)

### Impact Areas

**Alumni:** The UNMC Alumni Association (UNMCAA) facilitates opportunities for alumni to engage in the life and advancement of UNMC through outreach events, continuing education, communications, advocacy, wellness initiatives and class reunions.

- **44,000** alumni make up the membership of the UNMCAA; residents and fellows are now welcomed as members, adding 4,000 more members.
- **64** events for alumni, friends and students.
- **1,087+** alumni attended an event.
- **5,082** followers on UNMCAA-facilitated social and professional networking sites.

**Students:** The UNMCAA provides critical support to UNMC students, thanks to the generous donations made to each of the college-specific Innovation Funds. The UNMCAA is the conduit for the formation of meaningful student-to-alumni relationships.

- **882** students participated in alumni-sponsored professionalism or matriculation ceremonies.
- **1,636** student engagement contacts through UNMCAA hosted or sponsored events.
- **193** students participated in a professional development event, including mock interviews, CV development, alumni and student networking and more.

**UNMC:** The UNMCAA, through its people and programs, seeks to advance the mission of the university to enhance the margins of excellence.

- **100** volunteers on **seven** alumni councils meet regularly with the deans of their respective colleges to plan engagement strategies in alignment with campus priorities.
- **400** retirees engaged through the UNMC Retiree Association.
- **350** parents, spouses and family members of medical students are engaged through the College of Medicine Parents & Family Association.

“The individuals who contribute to the UNMC Innovation Funds are making a substantial impact for students, alumni and the university. A sincere thank you to those who give back to UNMC in the form of their time, their talent, and their treasure. Our work is not possible without this generous support.”

**Catherine Mello,**  
UNMC Alumni Director

## Meet your UNMC Alumni Association team



**Catherine Mello**  
Director

catherine.mello@unmc.edu  
402.559.4354



**Kat Hamilton**  
Associate Director

kat.hamilton@unmc.edu  
402.559.1063



**Jeanne Berry**  
Associate

jeanne.berry@unmc.edu  
402.559.4385

## We love hearing from you!

Email your professional and personal news to: [alumni@unmc.edu](mailto:alumni@unmc.edu).

Stay tuned for a special edition of Class Notes this spring. This digital publication will be emailed to alumni and available online. If you have a new email address, be sure to update your contact information online: [www.unmc.edu/alumni](http://www.unmc.edu/alumni). For those who submitted notes that were not published here, they will be included in the spring publication.

## Ways to get involved in your alumni association

The UNMC Alumni Association and each college's Alumni Council have countless ways for you to get involved with your alma mater. We look forward to working with you to build your connection to UNMC. Send an email to [alumni@unmc.edu](mailto:alumni@unmc.edu) if you would like to get involved in one of the areas below.

- Volunteer to serve on your college's Alumni Council
- Serve as a preceptor
- Learn more and/or volunteer to serve in the College of Medicine Host Program
- Start a local alumni group in your area
- Nominate a colleague for an award
- Serve as a reunion class leader
- Contribute to the UNMCAA Connections Project Blog
- Submit your news for Class Notes
- Join the conversation on social media
- Donate to an Innovation Fund
- Sign up for the UNMC Alumni Directory
- Sign up to be a University of Nebraska Advocate

## 2020 travel opportunities

The UNMC Alumni Association has partnered with industry-leading travel organization Go Next to offer three travel cruise adventures in 2020. The trips have special rates available for UNMC alumni who travel as a part of the program. Additional trips will be offered in 2021. For more information, visit: [www.gonext.com/groups/university-of-nebraska-medical-center](http://www.gonext.com/groups/university-of-nebraska-medical-center).

### Gaelic Inspiration

July 12 – 22 | Dublin to Dublin

Discover the lush landscapes and fascinating heritage of Ireland aboard Oceania Cruises' Nautica on this spectacular nine-night cruise.

### Forests & Fjords of Alaska

July 30 – Aug. 10 | Seward to Vancouver, BC

Explore the forests and fjords of Alaska's coastal cities on this unforgettable 11-night trip aboard Oceania Cruises' Regatta.

### Cosmopolitan Havens

Nov. 3 – 11 | Rome to Monte Carlo

Sail to some of the most cultured cities on the western Mediterranean on this seven-night cruise aboard Oceania Cruises' elegant Marina.



# 2019 awards for meritorious service

The UNMC Alumni Association and its councils recognize alumni and honorary alumni for their meritorious service through the annual awards program. To read biographies on these outstanding recipients, please visit [www.unmc.edu/alumni](http://www.unmc.edu/alumni) and click on Councils and then the applicable profession name.

## College of Medicine



**Distinguished Alumnus Award**  
Peter J. Whitted, MD, JD  
Class of 1979

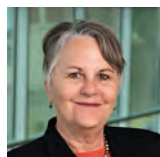


**Early Career Achievement Award**  
Sheritta A. Strong, MD  
Class of 2004

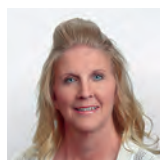


**Dedication to Student Excellence Award**  
Kelly J. Caverzagie, MD  
Class of 2001

## College of Nursing



**Distinguished Alumnus Award**  
Lynne Buchanan, PhD,  
APRN-NP, BC  
BSN 1979, MSN 1983,  
Post-Master Certificate 1999



**Nursing Excellence Award**  
Michelle Young, MSN, RN  
BSN 2009, MSN 2013



**Honorary Alumnus Award**  
LaDonna Tworek

## Graduate Studies Program



**Distinguished Alumnus Award**  
Gary C. Sieck, PhD, FAPS



**Early Career Achievement Award**  
Christine E. Cutucache, PhD



**Honorary Alumnus Award**  
David A. Crouse, PhD

## College of Dentistry



**Honorary Life Membership Award**  
Jennifer K. Kallio, DDS

**Distinguished Service Award**  
Charles "Fritz" Craft, DDS  
Class of 1980

**Alumni Achievement Award**  
Eugene E. Keller, DDS, MS  
Class of 1965

**Outstanding Educator Award**  
Henry A. St. Germain Jr., BA, DMD, MSD, MEd

## College of Public Health



**Distinguished Alumnus Award**  
Sumit Mukherjee, MD, MPH, MS  
MPH 2003, MD 2010



**Early Career Achievement Award**  
Aurora Le, MPH, CPH  
MPH 2016

## College of Pharmacy



**Distinguished Alumnus Award**  
Gary H. Stroy  
Class of 1967

## Follow the UNMC Alumni Association on Social Media

@UNMC\_AA  
Represent us: #unmc alumni

@unmc alum

UNMC Alumni group

## GET INVOLVED WITH CURRENT STUDENTS THROUGH BLOG

Alumni are invited to participate in the UNMCAA's Connections Project Blog through short written or video content. The blog is a place for #unmc alumni to share real-world information and advice with current students and fellow alumni. Some of the topics covered include well-being, professional skills, personal finance, and time, treasure and talent. If you would like to learn more or become involved, send an email to [alumni@unmc.edu](mailto:alumni@unmc.edu). Alumni may participate from anywhere in the world, so connect with us today.

## Allied Health Professions

### Scott Sanderson CP'12

Omaha, Neb., was elected president of the Nebraska Perfusion Society in June 2019. He is an adjunct professor and clinical education coordinator in the UNMC clinical perfusion program and is a staff perfusionist with Nebraska Medicine.

### Lisa Bartenhagen MITS'93

Gretna, Neb., is completing her sixth year of an eight-year term as the president of the board of trustees for the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists.

### Alison Beiler MITS'08

Bellevue, Wash., is employed by Harborview Medical Center in Seattle and works in infectious diseases, patient care and clinical research. She recently published two articles in the Journal of Hospital Medicine. She and her husband have two boys.

### Hilary Galvan MITS'13

Grand Island, Neb., is a sonographer for Mary Lanning at Midwest Imaging in Grand Island. She and her husband Benito have a daughter, Scarlett.

### Dawn Essink MLS'79

Omaha, Neb., retired in April 2019.

### Karen Kloke MLS'98

Rochester, Minn., has been employed at the Mayo Clinic for 20 years. She was promoted to director of scientific and technical publications for the department of laboratory medicine and pathology and Mayo Clinic Laboratories in September 2018.

### Mariah Dougherty MN'19

Omaha, Neb., joined the faculty in the UNMC medical nutrition program in the summer of 2019. She previously worked as a nutrition therapist, both inpatient and outpatient, at Nebraska Medicine.

### Michelle DiBaise PA'90

Scottsdale, Ariz., was promoted chair and program director of the A.T. Still University Department of Physician Assistant Studies on July 1, 2019.

### Hung Nguyen PA'98

Huntington Beach, Calif., retired in September 2018 after 36 years of practice and has gone back to school to obtain his terminal degree in the physician assistant field. He will graduate in May 2020 with his Doctor of Medical Science Degree from the University of Lynchburg.

### Pamela Dickey PA'99

Kearney, Neb., joined the UNMC physician assistant program on the Kearney campus in the summer of 2019. She practiced in family medicine for almost 20 years, with seven years of emergency medicine experience. She and her husband Wade have three children: Kaelin, Garrett and Gavin.

### James Hornberger PA'00

Mount Pleasant Mills, Pa., started a job in urgent care, practicing at the Evangelical Community Hospital in Lewisburg.

### Dawn Garcia PA'01, '03

Tucson, Ariz., moved to Tucson and retired from the Army in 2016.

### Logan Foster PA'05, '06

Alamogordo, N.M., is in his second year of medical school at the Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine.

### Adam LeCroy PA'07, '08

Riverton, Utah, works in cardiothoracic surgery at the University of Utah Medical Center.

### Karen Pauley PA'10

Marysville, Ohio, is celebrating 30 years of marriage this year and has three sons.

### Cassie Gehling PA'17

Norwalk, Iowa, joined the St. Anthony Clinic in Coon Rapids in July 2019 after previously serving in the Madison County Health Care System where she worked in urgent care and family medicine.

### Jose Nuno PA'17

Norfolk, Neb., and Josie Clark PA'17 started seeing patients in summer 2019 at their new business, Nebraska Health and Wellness Clinic. Their private medicine clinic offers help with acute and chronic illness management and they serve patients in both a traditional setting and through telehealth. Both speak Spanish and strive to break the barrier for patients who only speak Spanish.

### Lance Herold PT'76

Omaha, Neb., retired on July 11, 2019.

### Susan Hageman PT'03, '05

Grand Island, Neb., recently completed level 1 of pelvic health physical therapy through the American Physical Therapy Association's Section on Women's Health in Austin, Texas. She practices at Athletico Excel Physical Therapy.

### Sara Bills PT'04

Lincoln, Neb., received the Outstanding Teacher Award from the UNMC Faculty Senate in April 2019. She serves as an assistant professor in the division of physical therapy education at UNMC.

### Michael Moravec PT'04

Scottsbluff, Neb., opened Bluffs Physical Therapy in April 2018. He and his wife, Lisa Moravec DH'02, broke ground in October 2019 on the permanent location of their physical therapy clinic in Scottsbluff, which will open in May 2020. Lisa is a professor and site coordinator for the UNMC College of Dentistry West Division Dental Hygiene Program and is the president-elect of the American Dental Hygienists Association. Mike and Lisa stay involved with their boys and their community. Their children are: Logan, 18; Luke, 16; Mitch, 14; and Ben, 12.

### Jason Wheeler PT'05

San Antonio, Texas, became a fellow in the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists.

### Ryan Gallagher PT'09

Norfolk, Neb., joined the staff of Antelope Memorial Hospital in Neligh in the summer of 2019. His mother, Karen Gallagher P'78 has practiced at AMH for over 41 years. He was previously employed with Overland Rehab Services for nine years. He provides services in Neligh, Osmond and Plainview. He and his wife Tanya have three children: Jackson, Jordan and Everly.

### Ty Schmidt PT'13

Sidney, Neb., recently became a fellow in the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists.

### Brittany McClary PT'14

Alliance, Neb., manages Alliance Physical Therapy, where she has worked since graduation. She has enjoyed developing her manual therapy skills and, in 2016, completed certification in dry needling. She and her husband Anthony have three children: Corinne, Gabe and William.

### Rashelle Hoffman PT'15

Omaha, Neb., received a Presidential Graduate Fellowship from the University of Nebraska in September 2019.

### Melissa Parks PT'18

Norfolk, Neb., recently co-published an article in the Physical Therapy Journal titled "Current Low-Cost Video-Based Motion Analysis Options for Clinical Rehabilitation: A Systematic Review."

### Normajeane Driscoll PT'19

Bridgeport, Neb., joined Fremont Therapy Group and Rocky Mountain Sports in the summer of 2019 and sees patients in Green River and Rock Springs. She is an avid weightlifter and has a hobby of competing in Strong Man competitions. She also is a certified strength and conditioning specialist.

### Hannah Seufferer PT'19

Hickman, Neb., joined CHI Health St. Elizabeth in Lincoln as an acute care physical therapist in the summer of 2019.

## Medicine

### Tom Jensen M'55

Safford, Ariz., began his career as an intern at St. Joseph in Phoenix and has stayed in Arizona, retiring in 1990 from family practice. He served as president of the Arizona Academy of Family Physicians. He has four children.

### Carol Swarts M'59

Seattle, Wash., was honored with the Lincoln Award from Northern Kentucky University. The award celebrates individuals who exemplify the qualities of outstanding citizenship, notable achievement and distinguished service.



**Leo J. McCarthy M'62 '64**

Indianapolis, Ind., received the Irving S. Cutter Medal from the Phi Rho Sigma Medical Society in June 2019 for his extraordinary service to the field of medicine. In November 2018, the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh established the McCarthy Award for History of Medicine Research.

**Duane Krause M'67**

Fremont, Neb., and his wife Helen have been retired since 2008. They enjoy spending time with their four adult sons, three grandsons and two great grandsons. They both remain healthy and active and enjoy traveling.

**Wallace Duff M'68**

Omaha, Neb., works in private practice full-time, but also is an author of thriller/mystery books available in print and online.

**Richard Hirschler M'69**

Goshen, Ind., is retired, but works part-time when time allows and there is a need.

**Richard Strand M'69**

Scottsdale, Ariz., was approved in the summer of 2019 as a Belize Honorary Consul for Arizona. Among other things, the approval process included a formal interview with the Belize ambassador and the CEO of the Belize Foreign Ministry. Honorary consuls are representatives designated by a foreign government to look after the affairs of their citizens in foreign countries.

**Rowen Zetterman M'69**

Omaha, Neb., retired in June 2019 from UNMC after 54 years of service. He and his wife Joanie have been married for 53 years and have three sons. In retirement, he plans to travel and spend time with family.

**John Baldwin M'71, P'67**

Bellevue, Wash., retired from his private rheumatology practice after 34 years. He is an emeritus professor of medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine and is a retired brigadier general, U.S. Air Force.

**Roger Pumphrey M'72**

Colorado Springs, Colo., was diagnosed with mantle cell lymphoma in 2018 and retired. He is currently in remission.

**Gary Waddington M'72**

Scottsdale, Ariz., leads an active retirement enjoying time with children and grandchildren, traveling, skiing and playing golf. His wife's illness and death two years ago was the catalyst for retirement.

**Gerald Luckey M'73**

David City, Neb., is retired after enjoying family medicine in David City for 45 years.

**David Bingham M'75, P'71**

Lincoln, Neb., retired Jan. 1, 2019.

**Mark Elles M'73, '75**

Lone Tree, Colo., retired in 2017 after 39 years with the Denver Internal Medicine Group. He is president of the Denver Clinical and Pathological Society and has been chairman of the board of censors for the Denver Medical Society for the past 25 years. He and his wife Eileen are enjoying their first grandchild.

**Mark Hutchins M'76**

Lincoln, Neb., and his wife **Deanna Hutchins M'76** have completed 38 years in private practice and continue to look after patients. Dee does outpatient work at Gynecology & Fertility PC and he sees patients at Nebraska Hematology Oncology PC.

**Lynne Kirk M'77**

Dallas, Texas, was named chief accreditation officer for the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) in summer 2019. She comes to the ACGME from a 30-year career in internal medicine and geriatrics at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

**John Beithon M'78**

Eden Prairie, Minn., retired recently and continues to live in Minnesota with family. He is still involved with guideline development and legal defense as an expert witness.

**Andrew Brainard M'79, Family & General Medicine '82**

Surprise, Ariz., surpassed 20 years of service at the Del E. Webb emergency room as an attending physician.

**Patricia Klarr M'80**

Northville, Mich., is on faculty at the University of Michigan Medical School. She relished the opportunity to give her oldest son Daniel his diploma as he graduated medical school in May 2019. Her uncle, **Ron Pigeon M'85, '88** also was in attendance.

**Deborah Lindquist M'80, MLS'73**

Flagstaff, Ariz., retired April 26, 2016, with exception to occasional locum tenens.

**Susan Martini M'80**

Park City, Utah, retired in July 2018.

**Scott McPherson M'80**

Omaha, Neb., is now the medical director at the Clarkson Family Medicine Residency.

**Samuel Pirruccello M'82**

Lincoln, Neb., received the Outstanding Mentor of Junior Faculty Award from the UNMC Faculty Senate in April 2019.

**Jim Hlavacek M'83**

Salinas, Calif., was elected as Monterey County's Physician of the Year for 2019.

**Randy Kohl M'84, Family & General Medicine '87**

Springfield, Neb., retired as medical director for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services and now serves as alternate medical/lab director for a plasma center in Council Bluffs and one in Lincoln. In addition, he performs veteran exams part-time and is a member of the Nebraska Blue Cross Blue Shield Medical Policy Committee.

**David Kingsley M'84**

Kearney, Neb., has a band called TREO, which recently released its fifth CD, "Lost in a Song." The band plays mostly original music and has donated all proceeds – more than \$25,000 – to children's charities.

**Dave O'Dell M'84, Internal Medicine '89**

Omaha, Neb., has been elected to receive

the American College of Physician's highest awards: the Mastership and the Dr. Jane F. Desforges Distinguished Teaching Award. He will receive both in April 2020. He serves as a professor in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine.

**Eddie Pierce M'84**

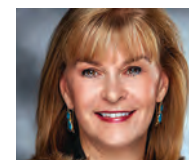
Lincoln, Neb., started as part-time faculty in September 2019 at the Lincoln Family Medicine Residency Program.

**Robert Plambeck M'84, '87, '91**

Lincoln, Neb., is proud to announce that his fifth and final child Ben, started medical school at UNMC in the fall of 2018. Son **Rob Plambeck M'12** is a critical care intensivist in Omaha and **Joe Plambeck M'15** is a senior anesthesiology resident at UNMC. Daughter-in-law **Anna Seeley PA'13** and daughter **Sarah Froehlich PA'16**, both work at Lincoln Pulmonology and Critical Care, in Lincoln, Neb.

**Julie Vose M'84 Residency '90**

Omaha, Neb., was elected a fellow in the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in June 2019. She is chief of the division of oncology/hematology in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine.

**Jean Ogborn M'85, Pediatrics '89**

Folsom, Calif., is semi-retired after 30 years at Johns Hopkins Children's Center. She commutes to work in the Pediatric Emergency Department at Hopkins one week a month and spends the rest of the time enjoying northern California or sailing the Chesapeake Bay with her husband and family.

**Mark Franco M'86**

Omaha, Neb., and his wife **Nancy Franco N'84, '86** started a small orchard and vineyard northwest of Omaha. They are both employed at Methodist Health System. Their children all work in medical careers: John as a physician, Kathleen as an MRI/radiation tech, and Matthew as a physical therapist.

**Harris Frankel M'86**

Omaha, Neb., was named on Becker's Hospital Review in the listing of 100 hospital and health system chief medical officers to know. This is the fourth consecutive year that he has received this honor. He is a practicing neurologist and associate professor of neurological sciences at UNMC.



**Elizabeth Lau M'86, Anesthesiology '90**  
Walon, Neb., received the 2019 Lincoln Inspire Award in the small/medium business category for her leadership with Associated Anesthesiologists PC over the past 29 years.

**Mark Synovec M'86, Pathology '91**  
Auburn, Kan., received the College of American Pathologists' (CAP) 2019 Advocate of the Year Award. He is recognized for his outstanding accomplishments in political advocacy on behalf of the CAP.

**James Wisecarver M'86, Pathology '90**  
Omaha, Neb., retired from UNMC in June 2019, however he still teaches residents, does service work in the hospital and spends time in the lab. His career at UNMC goes back almost 29 years.

**Sharon Hammer M'88**  
Omaha, Neb., received an inaugural Nebraska Medicaid Provider Award from Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts in June 2019. She has been a psychiatrist for more than 26 years and is an assistant professor of psychiatry at UNMC.

**William Lydiatt M'88, Otolaryngology '93**  
Omaha, Neb., was named vice president of medical affairs and chief medical officer for Methodist Hospital in Omaha in July 2019. He is a head and neck surgical oncologist and has been a member of the Methodist Hospital medical staff since 1996. He also serves as chairman of the department of surgery.

**James Smith M'88**  
North Platte, Neb., an emergency medicine physician for Great Plains Health in North Platte, was recognized during UNMC's May 2019 commencement ceremony with the J.G. Elliott Award. The award is given for outstanding contributions to medicine and health programs for the state of Nebraska and UNMC.

**Joseph Billig M'91**  
Denver, Colo., recently graduated first in his class with an MBA in health care management from the Creighton University Heider College of Business. He lives in Denver with his wife and two children and is regional medical director for the Colorado Permanente Medical Group.

**Kathleen McDonald M'91**  
Friendwood, Texas, received the Don Fox Chemistry Award in September 2018 from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. The award recognizes a chemistry major who has excelled in their career post-graduation.

**Robert Taylor M'91**  
Papillion, Neb., joined UNMC in the summer of 2019 as an assistant professor in the department of surgery and practices at the Bellevue Medical Center. He also covers trauma and emergency medical surgery at Nebraska Medicine.

**Michael Wadman M'92**  
Omaha, Neb., was inducted into the Millard North High School Hall of Fame in October 2019. He serves as professor and chair of the UNMC Department of Emergency Medicine.

**Daniel Herold M'94, Diagnostics Radiology '98**  
Hastings, Neb., was named to the Mary Lanning Healthcare Board of Trustees as a medical staff member. He has worked at Hastings Radiology since 1998 and served as its president for 15 years.

**Michael Halferty M'95**  
Lincoln City, Ore., joined Adventist Health as the medical director of Urgent Care Clinics.

**Deborah Clements M'97, Family & General Medicine '99**  
Highland Park, Ill., was elected as president of the Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors and serves as treasurer on the executive committee of the board of the National Resident Matching Program.

**Daniel Anderson GS'96, M'98, Internal Medicine, Electrophysiology '06**

Omaha, Neb., was named chief in the division of cardiovascular medicine in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine in October 2019. He also is a member of the physician leadership team for Nebraska Medicine's Heart and Vascular Center clinical program.



**Kevin Policky M'99**  
Overland Park, Kan., serves as the medical director of anesthesia at Overland Park Regional Medical Center in Kansas City, Kan.

**Chad Vokoun M'00, Internal Medicine '04**  
Omaha, Neb., was named acting section chief of hospital medicine in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine and medical director for hospital medicine at Nebraska Medicine.

**Kelly Caverzagie M'01, Internal Medicine '05**  
Omaha, Neb., was elected to the American Medical Association's Council on Medical Education in the summer of 2019. On July 1, 2019, he was promoted to the academic rank of professor in the UNMC internal medicine division of general medicine-academic. He also serves as associate dean for educational strategy at UNMC and vice president of education at Nebraska Medicine.

**Maria Michaelis M'01, Anesthesiology '05**  
Omaha, Neb., was promoted in July 2019 to associate professor at UNMC and also serves as secretary of the Nebraska Board of Medicine and Surgery.

**Kari Simonsen M'01**  
Elkhorn, Neb., was appointed interim chair for the UNMC Department of Pediatrics and pediatrician-in-chief and senior vice president of pediatric services for Children's Hospital & Medical Center in September 2019. She is a pediatric infectious diseases specialist. In 2018, she completed the Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine program.

**Angie Brennan M'03, Family & General Medicine '06**  
Saint Paul, Neb., recently received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Chadron State College.

**Brett Hill M'03, Urology '09**  
Omaha, Neb., practices at the Urology Center, PC in Omaha and in the spring of 2019 also began seeing patients one day a month at the Boone County Health Center Specialty Clinic in Albion, Neb.

**Sasha Shillcutt M'03, Anesthesiology '07, GS '16**  
Blair, Neb., was promoted to the academic rank of professor in the UNMC Department of Anesthesiology in July 2019.

**Joshua McConkey M'03**  
Georgetown, Texas, was promoted to the rank of colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserves on Aug. 4, 2019. Col. McConkey is the medical director for over 80 Special Forces Pararescuemen with the Combat Search and Rescue squadron. In his civilian practice, he owns and operates the Freestanding Emergency Facility, Family Emergency Room, in Georgetown.



**Wes Whitten M'13**  
Lincoln, Neb., started the Nebraska Pain Institute in 2018. He plans to add a new doctor to his work family in 2020 and a third child to his family in late 2019.

**Allison Ashford M'08, Internal Medicine '13**  
Omaha, Neb., serves as the program director of the medicine-pediatrics residency program. She spends her clinical time as a hospitalist splitting between internal medicine at UNMC and pediatrics at Children's Hospital & Medical Center. In May 2019, she received a Golden Apple Award from fourth-year medical students.

**Judson Davies M'08**  
Omaha, Neb., practices at Urology Center, PC in Omaha and in the summer of 2019 also began seeing patients one day a month at the Boone County Health Center Specialty Clinic in Albion.

**Zachary Meyer M'09, Family & General Medicine '12**  
Grand Island, Neb., was recognized in April 2019 with the Marion D. and Theodore H. Koefoot Jr., M.D. Outstanding Preceptor in Rural Family Medicine Award.

**Geoffrey Mickells M'09**  
Atlanta, Ga., continues to work in the pediatric intensive care unit at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Scottish Rite and was recently named medical director of the Children's Critical Care Transport Team.

**Daniel Hershberger M'10, Internal Medicine '13**  
Bellevue, Neb., serves as an assistant professor in internal medicine-pulmonary and critical care at UNMC. In May 2019, he received the Golden Apple Award from first-year medical students.



**Amanda Marshall M'11, Cardiology '17**  
Elkhorn, Neb., completed her pediatric critical care fellowship at Arkansas Children's Hospital and joined Omaha's Children's Hospital & Medical Center as a cardiac intensivist in August 2019.



**Stephen Mohring M'12**  
**Internal Medicine '15**

Elkhorn, Neb., finished the 2019 Boston Marathon in 3:01:21.

**Evan Correll M'13**

North Platte, Neb., began seeing patients at the Medical Specialists Center in September. Dr. Correll specializes in general orthopedics such as hip, knee and shoulder replacements; knee and shoulder scopes; fractures and carpal tunnel.

**Greg McClanahan M'13, Family & General Medicine '16**

Ord, Neb., was named chief of staff at the Valley County Health System. He joined the team in 2016 and provides care in Ord and Loup City. He and his wife **Jackie McClanahan (N'11)** have two children, Matthew and Grace.

**Jordan Warchol M'13,**  
**Emergency Medicine '16**

Elkhorn, Neb., was named the Nebraska Medical Association's 2019 Young Physician of the Year in September 2019. She serves as an assistant professor in the UNMC Department of Emergency Medicine.



**Scott Wewel M'13**

Kearney, Neb., joined the staff at Franklin County Memorial Hospital in Franklin, Neb., in January 2019.

**Janae Dudgeon M'14**

Lincoln, Neb., practices with Syracuse Area Health, where she has been since 2017. She sees patients in Weeping Water and Syracuse.

**Steven Osborn M'14**

Omaha, Neb., graduated from radiology residency at UNMC and is in a one-year neuroradiology program at Northwestern Hospital.

**Joshua Stopak M'14**

Coralville, Iowa, received the American Society of Anesthesiologists Resident Scholar Award in 2018, the best pediatric anesthesiology fellow award from the Cleveland Clinic in 2019 and is a pediatric anesthesiologist at the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital.

**Karolyn Fox-Dahl M'15**

Omaha, Neb., graduated from the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine Anesthesia Program in the summer of 2019 and is completing a critical care fellowship at UNMC. She and her husband Jason have a son, Clay.

**Melissa O'Dell M'15**

Omaha, Neb., joined the UNMC psychiatry faculty in the fall of 2019. She also practices at Nebraska Medicine.

**Kelli Osborn M'15**

Meadow Grove, Neb., practices at the Antelope Memorial Hospital in Neligh, Neb.

**Ashley Tiahr M'15**

Laurel, Neb., practices in family medicine at the Pender Medical Clinic. She and her husband John have two sons, Jacob and Travis.

**Brent Jameson M'15**

Stromsburg, Neb., practices at Prairie Creek and Annie Jeffery Family Medicine in Osceola, Neb.

**Robert Weir M'15**

Dallas, Texas, received the 2018 Dallas Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Award. He also was featured at UT Southwestern for creating the new combined neurology and psychiatry residency, as well as for work in autoimmune encephalitis. He is completing postdoctoral work in neuromodulator with magnetic seizure therapy and autoimmune neuropsychiatric disease.

**Tate Johnson M'16**

Elkhorn, Neb., received the Resident Research Award from UNMC's Department of Internal Medicine in June 2019.

**Dalton Nelsen M'16**

Omaha, Neb., joined UNMC in the summer of 2019 as an emergency medicine ultrasound fellow, instructor and staff physician in the department of emergency medicine.



**Michael Powell M'16, Family & General Medicine '19**

Cambridge, Neb., joined Tri Valley Health System in July 2019. He and his wife Laura have a son, Camden.

**Suzanne Stewart M'16**

El Dorado Hills, Calif., graduated from UC Davis Pediatric Residency on July 1, 2019 and is practicing with Marshall Pediatrics in Placerville, Calif.

## Residency

**Arwa Nasir, Pediatrics '92, PH'10**

Omaha, Neb., was selected in May 2019 for a prestigious Fulbright Award to teach and do research in Jordan as part of the Fulbright Middle East and North Africa program.

**Ann Anderson Berry,**  
**Pediatric Medicine '01, GS '14**

Omaha, Neb., was appointed interim executive director of the Child Health Research Institute, a collaborative effort between UNMC and Children's Hospital, in September 2019. She was named division chief of neonatology in the UNMC Department of Pediatrics in April 2019. She is enrolled in the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine program through Drexel University in Philadelphia.

**Jessica Leibhart, Family & General Medicine '12**

Ogallala, Neb., joined the Banner Health team at Ogallala Community Hospital where she provides obstetrics and comprehensive care with an emphasis on musculoskeletal system and preventive medicine.

**Sarah Lundin, Obstetrics and Gynecology '14**

Denison, Iowa, has been admitted as a fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. She serves as an OB-GYN specialist at the Crawford County Memorial Hospital.

**Vijaya Bhatt, Internal Medicine '15**

Omaha, Neb., received a clinical research award from the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine in June 2019.

## Nursing

**Mary Martin N'69**

Montgomery, Texas, and her husband **Max Martin D'70** celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary June 1, 2019, which also was her 50th anniversary of graduating from the UNMC College of Nursing. They retired to Texas in 2012 and have two children and five grandchildren.

**Virginia Anders-Ellmore N'76**

Newport Beach, Calif., retired from the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services on March 28, 2019. She was a nurse practitioner in internal medicine for 29 years.

**Tavi Baker N'76**

Council Bluffs, Iowa, plans to retire from Nebraska Medicine in 2020. She spent the first 25 years of her career caring for patients with kidney and pancreas transplants. She was the first full-time transplant coordinator in the state of Nebraska and spent many years in research and nephrology. She has two children and four grandchildren.

**Ellarene Sanders N'77**

Austin, Texas, was appointed the part-time executive director of the National Hartford Center for Gerontological Nursing Excellence in July 2019. She also serves on the nursing faculty at Texas Tech.

**Gail Kollars N'81**

Kearney, Neb., renewed her nursing license after 14 years of it being inactive, and has been serving as a hospice nurse for Aseracare Hospice for over five years.

**Sue Nuss N'82, GS'07**

Omaha, Neb., was appointed to the board of directors for the Visiting Nurse Association in the summer of 2019. She serves as the chief nursing officer for Nebraska Medicine and vice president of operations at Bellevue Medical Center.

**Roberta Kroeger N'84**

Lincoln, Neb., serves as an instructor in the UNMC College of Nursing Lincoln Division and as a family nurse practitioner. In the summer of 2019, she was awarded the American Association of Nurse Practitioners Nebraska State Award for Nurse Practitioner Advocate Excellence.



**Stacy Rooker N'84, '01**

Council Bluffs, Iowa, presented on CAR T-cell therapy with **Dr. Matthew Lunning (Internal Medicine '10)** at an oncology nursing conference in Iowa in November 2019.

**Carol Kampschnieder N'95**

West Point, Neb., retired in October 2019.

**Sydney Buckland N'98**

Omaha, Neb., graduated in May 2019 from UNMC with her PhD in nursing and accepted a faculty position as assistant professor in the family nurse practitioner track. She also is continuing her research in psychocardiology.

**Andrea Chrisman N'03, '10**

Grand Island, Neb., and her husband Trent started the Golden Rule Skin Clinic in Hastings in spring 2018. As a nurse practitioner, she is the lead provider and patients pay through a direct pay care model. Led by the Golden Rule, their goal is to provide affordable, individualized dermatology care for all patients.

**Sara Slingsby N'03**

Kearney, Neb., is a flight nurse with AirCare at CHI Good Samaritan and recently was honored for completing more than 1,000 missions since the start of her employment.

**Jessica Livingston N'05**

Omaha, Neb., graduated in December 2019 with her master of science in nursing degree from Nebraska Wesleyan University.

**Jessie Fechner N'07**

Omaha, Neb., was promoted to director of nursing at Methodist Women's Hospital in September 2019. She also became certified as a nurse executive through the American Nurses Credentialing Center and graduated with her Master of Science in nursing, nurse executive from Methodist College in May 2019.

**Lesa Hoppe N'07**

Lincoln, Neb., graduated with a PhD in nursing education from the University of Northern Colorado and was promoted to associate professor, undergraduate nursing, at Bryan College of Health Sciences.

**Amy Birdsong N'08**

Kelseyville, Calif., graduated in May 2019 with her doctor of nursing practice degree from the University of Maryland Baltimore. She works as a nurse practitioner for the San Francisco VA Health Care System.

**Stephanie Maddox N'14**

Omaha, Neb., graduated in May 2019 with her doctor of nursing practice in family practice. She works as a nurse practitioner at CHI QuickCare.

**Kathleen Pfeffer N'15**

Lincoln, Neb., returned to UNMC in May 2018 to pursue her doctor of nursing practice in family practice.

**Jennifer Rystrom N'17**

Tilden, Neb., accepted the role of interim chief nursing officer at West Holt Memorial Hospital in Atkinson, Neb.

**Paige Tenski N'17**

Washington, D.C., received the Daisy Award in February 2018. She worked two years in neuroscience in the ICU at Nebraska Medicine and, after receiving her CCRN certification, is a traveling nurse.

**Lauren Walford N'17**

Omaha, Neb., became one of the first nurses in the new Nebraska Medicine Apheresis Department, which provides in-house procedures and participates in research studies throughout the hospital.

**Hope Mahoney N'18**

Tecumseh, Neb., celebrated one year with Bryan Health as a psych registered nurse.

**Brianna Beasley N'19**

Maple Grove, Minn., is on the medical surgical unit at Maple Grove Hospital. She and her husband Alexander are expecting their first child, a boy, in February 2020.

**Amanda Berkland N'19**

Omaha, Neb., is a hospitalist APRN at Methodist Fremont Health.

**Maribel Lopez N'19**

Sioux City, Iowa, works in the emergency room and is grateful for her UNMC education.

## Pharmacy

**Reginald Hain P'76**

Central City, Neb., is semi-retired, works three days per week and loves it!

**Kathryn Labbe P'78**

Mesa, Ariz., retired in August 2019 after 41 years of pharmacy practice in retail settings in the Phoenix area. She and her husband Carl have been married for 38 years; he also retired in August. They are both recipients of the prestigious Bowl of Hygeia Award, and enjoy traveling, relaxing and spending more time with family.

**Bette Cataldo P'79**

Chesterfield, Mo., retired as a hospital pharmacist from Missouri Baptist Medical Center in St. Louis in July 2019. She turned her resignation in 40-years-to-the-day that she graduated from UNMC.

**Henry Durivage P'79**

Yardley, Pa., received a 2019 National Institute of Health Director's Award in July 2019. His award results from his extensive work on an NCI Cancer Immunotherapy Network clinical trial to determine the clinical efficacy of pembrolizumab immunotherapy as the first systemic intervention for patients with advanced Merkel cell carcinoma. Pembrolizumab was subsequently FDA approved for this indication in December 2018. He serves as senior director, pharmacovigilance and regulatory affairs at Theradex Oncology.

**Charles Krobot P'69, '84**

Omaha, Neb., received the Bowl of Hygeia Award from the Nebraska Pharmacists Association in the summer of 2019.

**Allison Dering-Anderson P'86**

Omaha, Neb., was inducted into UNMC's Interprofessional Academy of Educators in the fall of 2019.

**Susanne Hiland P'86**

Bentonville, Ark., was named a finalist for the 2019 Next-Generation Pharmacist Lifetime Leadership Award from the Pharmacy Times and Parata Systems. The annual program recognizes 30 exceptional pharmacy professionals in 10 categories.

**Charles Phillips P'88**

Waukee, Iowa, serves as professor of social and administrative pharmacy and associate dean of curriculum and assessment at Drake University and in June 2019, was named a Windsor Professor of Science.

**Scott Knoer P'96**

Medina, Ohio, received the John W. Webb Lecture Award from the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists in the summer of 2019. He is the chief pharmacy officer at the Cleveland Clinic.

**Kristi Kuper Williams P'99**

Katy, Texas, recently transitioned into a new role as director of clinical pharmacy for DoseMe/TabulaRasa Healthcare.

**Jolyn Merry P'12**

Lincoln, Neb., received the 2019 Distinguished Young Pharmacist Award from the Nebraska Pharmacists Association in the summer of 2019.

**Broderick Olson P'17**

Los Angeles, Calif., works as the 340B and revenue cycle pharmacy program coordinator at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

**Nichole Boggs P'19**

Lincoln, Neb., is a pharmacy manager with Walgreens in Lincoln.

**Christine Zentner P'19**

Cedar Rapids, Neb., joined the Boone County Health Center Pharmacy in the summer of 2019. She enjoys spending time with her fiancé, golfing, playing with her dog and being outside.

## Dentistry

**David Gleason D'65**

Beatrice, Neb., retired in March 2019, after 54 years in his practice, Gleason Dental Clinic. His sons, **Timothy Gleason D'92** and **Daniel Gleason D'07** both practice there, and the family recently built a new, state-of-the-art facility.

**Daniel Dymerski D'72**

Sun City, Ariz., has been in practice for 35 years in Littleton, Colo. He and his wife Sharon have a son and daughter, who are both married and live in Denver. They have one grandchild.

**Robert Roesch D'76**

Fremont, Neb., earned board certification in the American Academy of Dental Sleep Medicine.



**Hunter Yost M'78**

Tucson, Ariz., recently published an article titled "Mixed Features, Suicide, and Adolescents at Risk," on the Psychiatric Times website.

**Diane Hourigan D'81**

Durham, N.C., sold her dental practice in Chapel Hill and retired at the end of August 2019.

**Monica Hlavacek D'82**

Salinas, Calif., retired Aug. 31, 2019. She plans to travel to Poland, France, Abu Dhabi and the Philippines.

**Kenneth Tusha D'82**

Creighton, Neb., was sworn in as the president of the Nebraska Dental Association in spring 2019. He has practiced in Verdigre, Neb., since 1984 and added the Bloomfield, Neb., office in 1994.

**Jeane Best D'84**

Denver, N.C., retired and moved to this town in North Carolina.

**Jim Jenkins D'84**

Lincoln, Neb., received the Spirit of Community Service Award from the UNMC Faculty Senate. He serves as assistant professor, adult restorative dentistry, and director, dental alumni affairs, for the UNMC College of Dentistry.

**Gregory Tuttle D'90**

Provo, Utah, signed an agreement with Septodont to develop a needle-bending guide for distribution in the U.S. dental market. The TNN Needle Guide is being developed to complement his TuttleNumbNow technique, a one-step localized intra-osseous anesthesia method designed to reduce onset time and improve efficiency.

**Steven Maller D'92**

San Antonio, Texas, retired from the U.S. Air Force in 2013 as a colonel and is presently in private practice. He is a fellow of the American College of Dentists, a diplomate with the American Board of Periodontology, and serves in numerous other organizations.

**Michelle Frye DH'10**

Anchorage, Alaska, recently began working for the Libby Group and provides outreach to communities in Alaska and abroad. One such trip was to Vietnam in February 2019, where she worked with the East Meets West Dental Center.

**Melissa Moutray D'10, M'13, Oral Surgery '16**

Garden City, Kan., is a fellow in the American College of Surgeons.

**Melissa Waters D'10**

Flower Mound, Texas, recently moved back to the Dallas area after purchasing an established pediatric dental practice. She was previously in Hilton Head, S.C.

**Joshua Kats D'12**

Norfolk, Va., is an oral and maxillofacial radiologist diplomate and an American Board of Oral & Maxillofacial Radiology Fellow.

**Ashley Askelson DH'17**

Cocaz, Neb., and her husband TJ purchased a new home and are expecting their first child in February 2020.

**John DeLaet D'19**

Kearney, Neb., recently started his own practice, DeLaet Dental in Kearney. He also received the 2019 Hanau Best of the Best: Excellence in Prosthodontic Award from Whip Mix.

**Natalie Gile D'19**

Kearney, Neb., opened Gile Family Dentistry in Kearney in 2019.

**Gillian Loseke D'19**

Alliance, Neb., joined the dental office of Dr. Cade Cannon in Alliance in May 2019.

**Public Health****Kathryn Istas PH'11**

Kansas City, Mo., accepted a position with the American Academy of Family Physicians in Leawood, Kan. She works in the population health and science division as the program and evaluation strategist. She is in her third year of work toward her public health doctorate from the University of Illinois Chicago.

**Graduate Studies****Amy Brower GS'01**

Dakota Dunes, S.D., serves as the associate project director of the Newborn Screening Translational Research Network for the American College of Medical Genetics. The ACMG recently was awarded a five-year, \$13 million contract extension to support the groundbreaking research in newborn screening.

**Diane Pickering GS'03**

Omaha, Neb., serves as the laboratory manager in the Human Genetics Laboratory at UNMC's Munroe-Meyer Institute. In the summer of 2019, she was recognized with the Chancellor's Gold U Award for outstanding performance.

**Avadhut Joshi GS'06**

Kirkland, Wash., recently joined the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance as an associate director of the pharmacokinetics laboratory. The alliance is part of the University of Washington Medical Center, Seattle's Children's Hospital and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center.

**Joshua Soucek GS'13**

Omaha, Neb., started a new role as scientific officer at Sanguine Diagnostics & Therapeutics in 2019.

**Staci Haney, GS '16**

Bellevue, Neb., received a post-doctoral research award from the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine in June 2019.

**In Remembrance...****Eleanor Granum N'41**

Macon, Ga., April 27, 2019

**Edward Langdon M'46**

Omaha, Neb., May 27, 2019

**Tom Miya P'47, '48**

Omaha, Neb., May 30, 2019

**William Penn P'49**

Sidney, Iowa, May 26, 2019

**Densel Fankhauser P'50**

Tecumseh, Neb., June 5, 2019

**Sigurd Daehnke P'52, M'60**

Winfield, Kan., April 21, 2019

**Phyllis Messman N'52, '86**

Bruning, Neb., Aug. 8, 2019

**Jean Molde N'52, '53**

Reno, Nev., April 20, 2019

**Josephine Pinckley N'52, '58**

Omaha, Neb., Aug. 14, 2019

**Vivian Fortune N'53**

Henderson, Neb., March 28, 2019

**Kay Srb MLS'53**

Carrollton, Texas, July 1, 2019

**Robert Heins M'54**

Lincoln, Neb., March 8, 2019

**Kayo Smith M'54**

Torrington, Wyo., Aug. 18, 2019

**J. Keith Blincow M'55**

Isle of Palms, S.C., July 28, 2019

**Aleta Hermes N'55**

Torrance, Calif., July 16, 2019

**Janis MacLay N'55**

Elk Grove, Calif., May 22, 2019

**John Mills M'55**

Greenly, Colo., March 31, 2019

**Lloyd Smith D'55**

Manitou Springs, Colo., Sept. 27, 2019

**Stephen Carveth M'56**

Lincoln, Neb., March 6, 2019

**Lawrence Bauer Sr. M'57**

Kearney, Neb., April 7, 2019

**Bethany Sundquist N'58**

Denison, Iowa, June 21, 2019

**Martin Dumler M'59**

Denver, Colo., April 14, 2019

**Charles Samuelson P'61**

Benkelman, Neb., May 31, 2019

**Barbara Gammel N'62**

Lincoln, Neb., May 20, 2019

**Marlyn Cline D'63**

Montrose, Colo., May 29, 2019

**John Stevens M'68, '70**

Bayard, Neb., June 24, 2019

**Gordon Ham M'69**

Denver, Colo., June 4, 2019

**Thomas Kleinkauf M'69**

San Antonio, Texas, April 13, 2019

**Todd Sorensen M'69, '71**

Scottsbluff, Neb., May 21, 2019

**Donald Owen II M'71**

Omaha, Neb., Feb. 26, 2019

**Barbara Horn N'73**

Honea Path, S.C., July 1, 2019

**Denise Metzner MLS'77**

Falls City, Neb., April 23, 2019

**Louise Lowe P'78**

Kearney, Neb., April 3, 2019

**Virginia Clayton N'79, '83**

Omaha, Neb., June 1, 2019

**Mark Swenson P'86**

Norfolk, Neb., May 11, 2019

**Larry Skradski MLS'92**

Omaha, Neb., July 16, 2019

**Bradly Einspahr P'96**

Hooper, Neb., July 17, 2019

**Heather Springer N'11**

Lincoln, Neb., May 30, 2019

**Ramon Fusaro, MD, PhD**Plattsmouth, Neb., Jan. 15, 2020  
Dermatology Chair 1970 – 2008**Births****Nathan Reyelts PA'04**

Fairmont, Minn., and his wife, Kellie, welcomed a daughter, Bethanie Jean, on Dec. 10, 2018. She joined sisters Annie, Julia, Mollie, Lauren, and brothers Evan and Collin.

**Jena Depue MITS'07**

Gretna, Neb., and her husband, Jeff, welcomed a son, Levi Jeffrey, on April 21, 2019.

**Emily Griess N'08**

Hastings, Neb., and her husband, Joshua, welcomed a son, Bo Madsen, on Aug. 15, 2019. He joined brother Johnathan.

**Samantha Minnick PT'08**Holdrege, Neb., and her husband, **Kyle Minnick PT'08**, welcomed a son, Tyson Kyle, on June 3, 2019.**Ryan Gallagher PT'09**

Norfolk, Neb., and his wife, Tanya, welcomed a daughter, Evely Elizabeth Mae, on Sept. 30, 2018.

**Geoffrey Mickells M'09**

Atlanta, Ga., and his wife, Rebecca, welcomed their second child, a son, Henry, in March 2019.

**Megan Frickel PT'10**

Wellfleet, Neb., and her husband, Mark, welcomed a son, Bridger Carson, on Aug. 18, 2019. He joined sister Caroline, 3.

**Mandi Champ P'11**

Fremont, Neb., and her husband, Tim, welcomed a daughter, Ricki, on Nov. 11, 2018. She joined Elias, 4, and Merelise, 2.

**Laura Vinson PH'12**

Omaha, Neb., and her husband, Shawn, welcomed a son, Jack Ryan, on June 17, 2019.

**Lisa Bilek GS'13**

Omaha, Neb., and her husband Tony, welcomed their first child, a son, Bennett Karl Joseph, on Sept. 26, 2018.

**Jenna Stratman P'15**

Elkhorn, Neb., and her husband Carson, welcomed twin sons, Hank Woods and Clark Hugh, on Sept. 13, 2019.

**Hope Mahoney N'18**

Tecumseh, Neb., welcomed a daughter, Lana Kay, on Sept. 2, 2019.

**Alyson Hanish N'19**

Omaha, Neb., and her husband, Michael, welcomed a son, Dominik, on Nov. 18, 2018.

**Hannah Seufferer PT'19**

Hickman, Neb., and her husband, Andrew, welcomed their first child, a son, Jasper Ross, on Sept. 10, 2019.

**Marriages****Dawn Criado PA'01, '03** & Javier Garcia  
November 2018**Michelle Schultz DH'10** & Bronson Frye  
Girdwood, Alaska, Sept. 21, 2019**Justine Uryasz N'10** & Ryan Richard  
Kansas City, Mo., May 4, 2019**Marnie Thrasher PA'12** & RJ Dellutri  
Omaha, Neb., Sept. 20, 2019**Hilary Nevrivy MITS'13** & Benito Galvan  
St. Paul, Neb., March 23, 2019**Kia Petersen D'13** & KC Gruber  
Lincoln, Neb., Oct. 27, 2018**Kathleen Sellon N'15** & Adam Pfeffer  
Crete, Neb., Oct. 12, 2019**Hannah Snyder P'15** & **Einstein Juma M'16**  
Ridgefield, Conn., Sept. 8, 2018**Caitlin Boadwee PT'17** & Sean Poulicek  
Papillion, Neb., May 18, 2019**Haley Brummer N'17** & Tyler Keenen  
Norfolk, Neb., June 9, 2018**Cassie Gehling PA'17** & Jacob Esdohr  
Norwalk, Iowa, April 7, 2018**Brock Nelsen D'17** & Katherine Kirby  
Vail, Colo., March 30, 2019**Kayla Rankin PA'17** & Anthony Steenson  
Estes Park, Colo., July 5, 2019**Lauren Weber M'16, Emergency Medicine '19** & **RJ Brogis, Family Medicine '19**  
Paradise Valley, Ariz., March 8, 2019**Natalie Cantral D'19** & Nathan Gile  
Kearney, Neb., Dec. 22, 2018**Nichole Lux P'19** & Kenneth Boggs  
Lincoln, Neb., July 7, 2018

# 2020 UNMC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION EVENTS

For more information about these events, please visit us online at [unmc.edu/alumni](http://unmc.edu/alumni).**FEB. 26, 2020**UNMCAA & UNOAA Alumni Night on the Court  
UNO Basketball game at Baxter Arena  
Omaha, Neb.**MARCH 27, 2020**College of Public Health Alumni Reunion  
Omaha, Neb.**April 7, 2020**College of Medicine Alumni Council  
John S. Latta Lecture  
Ed Boyden, Ph.D.  
11:45 am – 1:00 pm  
Omaha, Neb.**April 28, 2020**UNMCAA Showdown in O-Town  
Nebraska vs. Creighton  
Tailgate & baseball game**SEPT. 11 – 12, 2020**UNMC College of Dentistry Alumni Reunion  
Lincoln, Neb.**OCT. 23 – 24, 2020**UNMC Alumni Reunion Weekend for the Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy and the Graduate Studies Program  
Omaha, Neb.





# TATTOO ARTISTS FIGHT SEX TRAFFICKING

by Elizabeth Kumru



Mel Judkins, owner of Black Squirrel Tattoo in Omaha, helps to recruit other artists in the fight against sex trafficking.

**T**attoos are an expression of individuality, often called body illustrations. But, for some, they are a label of the sex trafficking trade.

Sex traffickers often tag their girls with dollar signs, crowns or the pimp's name. A brand, so to speak, that is imprinted on the chest, arms or legs.



Sex trafficking hits close to home. More than 900 individuals are 'sold' in Nebraska every month. These are people of every gender, race and age. The younger the person, the higher the price.

Today, tattoo artists and cosmetologists in Nebraska are being recruited and trained to identify the classic signs of sex trafficking so they can offer help.

Mel Judkins, owner of Black Squirrel Tattoo in Omaha, calls it "good karma" to get involved. "We can make a small difference by just being observant. Asking a casual 'are you okay?' can change everything for them."

Judkins has been in the tattoo business for nearly 20 years and did a lot of crown and dollar sign tattoos in the early 2000s. "They were common tattoo designs. Knowing what I know now, it's disturbing to see how the context can be misused."

Judkins is working with UNMC's College of Public Health in this novel approach to combat the sex trade.

"We have a unique relationship with our clients. We spend a lot of time, one-on-one with them, and can be more effective if we're trained to be observant and know the classic signs of sex trafficking.

"Many tattoo artists don't realize there is a connection, but once I explain it, they want more education on the topic. I'm hoping that once we get the ball rolling, we can train others at tattoo conventions around the country."



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