

SUMMER 2026

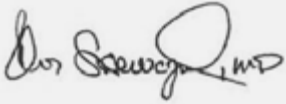
Research Roundup



MESSAGE FROM THE **PRESIDENT** OF **ACADEMICS,** **RESEARCH, AND** **INNOVATION**

As Summer 2026 marked our 10-year anniversary at HMH, our research and innovation ecosystem continues to redefine healthcare into the future. This issue highlights new, national designations in ALS and Parkinson's treatment, with clinical discoveries in antibiotic resistance and immunology. From major oncology presentations at ASCO and dedicated research in clinical trials, to the launch of our new Epic Research Module, our dedicated team forges ahead to deliver cures for our next 10 years, and beyond.

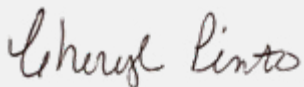
Ihor Sawczuk, M.D., FACS



NOTE FROM THE **VICE** **PRESIDENT**

Reflecting on a decade of progress, our network keeps merging an incredible wealth of talent with a dogged pursuit of excellence. From new clinical centers to groundbreaking studies, this collaboration benefits our patients now, and into the future.

Cheryl Pinto, RN, MBA, CIP
Vice President of Research and
Regulatory Affairs



HMH RESEARCH NEWS

HMH's 10-year Anniversary

In July, we [proudly celebrated HMH's 10-year anniversary](#) and reflected on a decade of redefining healthcare.

Along the way, it's been our talented and dedicated research community driving much of this monumental success. Whether we reach organization-changing milestones like launching the Center for Discovery and Innovation and opening New Jersey's first private medical school in over 60 years in HMSOM, or we achieve daily wins as you read in each Research Roundup issue, our team continually innovates.

We look back on [10 years of success](#) today as we [look ahead to deliver the cures of tomorrow](#).

[See more about HMH's 10-year milestone here.](#)

ALS Association Certified Treatment of Excellence

The ALS Center at Hackensack University Medical Center has been awarded the prestigious designation of an ALS Association Certified Treatment Center of Excellence™, marking a major milestone for the care of individuals with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in the region. The certification recognizes the program's commitment to providing outstanding, multidisciplinary care and its dedication to advancing research in the fight against this devastating disease.

ALS, often called Lou Gehrig's disease, is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, leading to a loss of muscle control. The disease's progression can vary, but it relentlessly impacts a person's ability to move, speak, eat, and eventually breathe. While there is no cure for ALS, a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to treatment has been shown to improve patients' quality of life and can extend survival.

The ALS Association's certification affirms that the ALS Center at Hackensack University Medical Center meets the highest national standards of care. This model brings together a dedicated team of specialists, including neurologists, palliative care experts, nurses, therapists, and researchers, to provide a seamless and patient-centered experience. This integrated approach ensures that patients and their families receive comprehensive support to navigate the complex challenges of living with ALS.



"This recognition is the culmination of a seven-year effort to build a state-of-the-art, patient-centered ALS Center," said Florian P. Thomas, M.D., Ph.D., co-director of the ALS Center and founding chair and Professor of Neurology at Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine & Hackensack University Medical Center. - Robert D. Connors, M.D., co-director of the ALS Center & assistant professor of Neurology at Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine adds "We are incredibly proud of our entire team's compassionate, collaborative, and courageous care for our patients and their families. This designation not only acknowledges our commitment to excellence in clinical care but also solidifies our position as a vital center for ALS research, offering our patients access to cutting-edge clinical trials."

The need for such specialized centers is more critical than ever. The number of people living with ALS in the U.S. is projected to grow from roughly 33,000 to over 36,000 by 2030, driven in part by an aging population. The disease can impact cognition, and research is increasingly focused on the role of genetic factors and environmental links, such as exposure to pollutants.

"Achieving the status of an ALS Association Certified Treatment Center of Excellence™ is a tremendous honor and a direct reflection of our team's unwavering dedication to our patients," said Dr. Lisa Tank, President and Chief Hospital Executive at Hackensack University Medical Center. "This designation provides our community with the assurance that they have access to the highest level of care, right here in New Jersey. We are committed to not only providing exceptional, compassionate care but also to contributing to the vital research that will one day lead to a cure for ALS."

[Click here to read more.](#)

HUMC Named a Parkinson's Foundation Comprehensive Care Center Amidst Rising Parkinson's Rates

As Parkinson's disease continues its rapid rise to become the world's fastest-growing neurological disorder, Hackensack Meridian Neuroscience Institute at Hackensack University Medical Center (HUMC) announced it has been designated a Comprehensive Care Center by the Parkinson's Foundation. HUMC is the only center in NJ to receive this prestigious designation, which recognizes the medical center's commitment to providing outstanding, patient-centered, and team-based care for people with Parkinson's disease (PD).

The designation comes at a critical time. Parkinson's disease is the second most common neurodegenerative disease in the United States, and its prevalence has more than doubled in the past generation. While traditionally associated with older age, there is a noticeable increase in diagnoses among younger adults, with an estimated 4% to 10% of cases classified as Young-Onset Parkinson's Disease (YOPD), where diagnosis occurs before age 50, including some well-known figures; actor Michael J. Fox, diagnosed at age 29 and former professional basketball player Brian Grant, diagnosed at 36.

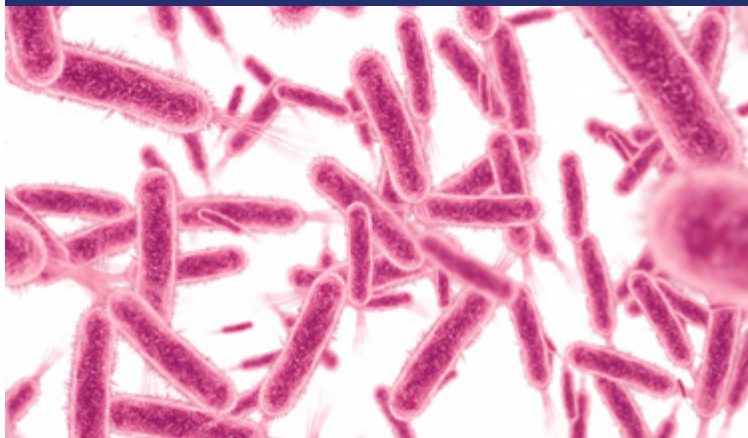


The Parkinson's Foundation's Comprehensive Care Center designation is awarded to centers that excel in providing multidisciplinary, high-quality clinical programs and expanding access to specialized services within their communities. This recognition highlights Hackensack University Medical Center's excellence in delivering advanced, coordinated care for individuals with Parkinson's and their families.

"This designation from the Parkinson's Foundation is a testament to the dedication and expertise of our entire team, and it couldn't be more timely as we see the number of Parkinson's cases grow," said [Florian P. Thomas, M.D., Ph.D.](#), chair of the Neuroscience Institute & Department of Neurology at Hackensack University Medical Center and founding chair and Professor of Neurology at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. "I am incredibly proud of the teams led by [Umer Akbar, M.D.](#), director of the [Movement Disorder Center at Hackensack University Medical Center](#) and professor of Neurology at [Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine](#) and [Hooman Azmi, M.D.](#), director of the Division of Functional and Restorative Neurosurgery at Hackensack University Medical Center and associate professor of Neurosurgery at Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine, whose tireless work secured this honor. This reinforces our commitment to providing the highest level of multidisciplinary care and advancing research to improve the lives of our patients and their families."

[Click here to learn more.](#)





UTI-Causing Bacteria Increasingly Resistant to Current Drugs, per Quest Diagnostics-CDI Joint Study

HMH's Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI) published groundbreaking research in a [joint study with Quest Diagnostics](#) on a growing public health threat.

The nationwide, joint study—[published in Nature Communications](#)—reveals that *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, a common bacterial strain responsible for roughly 600,000 deaths a year, globally, is rapidly developing antibiotic resistance.

Although *Klebsiella pneumoniae*—a common cause of wound and urinary tract infections (UTI), and pneumonia—historically regarded as an infection contracted in hospitals, the research shows that these multidrug-resistant bacteria are now spreading among the population at community-level.

Thousands of samples were analyzed to find nearly 70% of these infections were resistant to the most commonly prescribed oral drugs for the aforementioned infections.

“Our work shows that there is a rapidly-evolving, plasmid-driven epidemic of community-associated multidrug resistant *Klebsiella pneumoniae* across the United States,” said co-author Barry Kreiswirth, Ph.D., the veteran microbiologist at the CDI and professor of Medical Sciences at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine, who spearheaded the years-long project. “We need to continue surveillance of what these bacteria are doing, so we can detect, and ideally control, the emergence of the next high-risk clone.”

The established baseline through this study builds a foundation through which the CDI will continue partnering with Quest to develop effective treatments for vulnerable patients.

[Click here to read more about this Quest-CDI strategic partnership.](#)

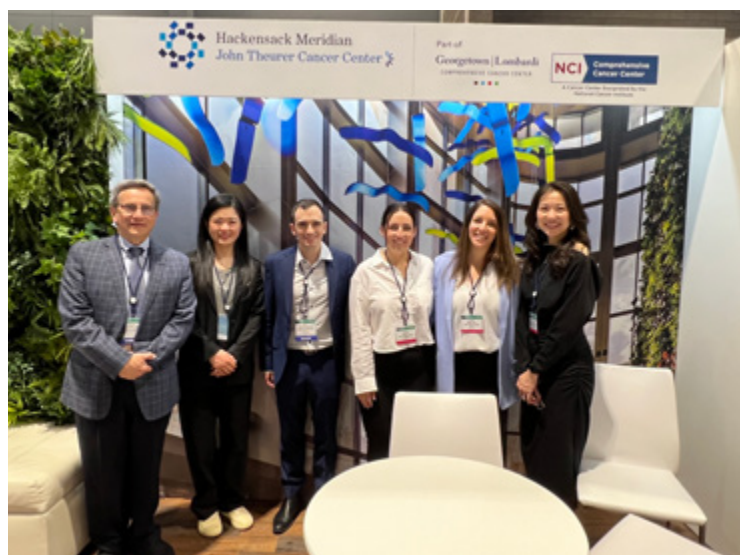
John Theurer Cancer Center at Hackensack University Medical Center Presents Innovative Cancer Research at ASCO 2026

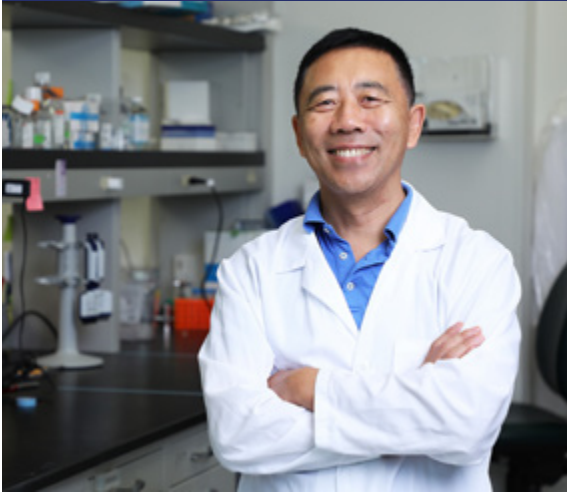
Investigators from Hackensack Meridian John Theurer Cancer Center (JTCC)—part of the National Cancer Institute-designated Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center at Georgetown University—and Hackensack University Medical Center are reporting research findings at the 2026 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting. The meeting is the premier event for cancer professionals and takes place in Chicago from May 29 to June 2.

“The future of cancer treatment begins with translating today’s pioneering exploration into tomorrow’s standard of care, a theme that resonates strongly at this year’s ASCO meeting. For patients who do not respond to standard treatments, it is critical that they have access to a world-class research program. At the John Theurer Cancer Center, our globally recognized investigators are committed to this translation, driving the latest advances in cellular therapy, immunotherapy, and other innovative areas to improve outcomes for patients across the Hackensack Meridian *Health* network and beyond,” said Dr. Andre Goy, chair, vice president, physician-in-chief of oncology, at John Theurer Cancer Center at Hackensack University Medical Center.

Many of the studies focus on innovative therapies for blood cancers and novel immunotherapies. These are areas of expertise for John Theurer Cancer Center, New Jersey’s largest cancer center. The findings of these investigations have the potential to change the treatment and understanding of hematologic, solid tumors, melanoma and other cancers.

[Click here to view the list of ASCO posters/presentations/publications](#) that include authors from JTCC across the topics mentioned above, along with research in immunotherapies and models of care.





CDI Lab Publishes Two Companion Papers Explaining Immune ‘Exhaustion’ – and How We Might Prevent It

Chronic and viral infections can literally exhaust certain key cells in the immune system from a constant barrage of attacks. But a new pair of groundbreaking papers by scientists at the Hackensack Meridian Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI) has now pointed a way to understand how this exhaustion happens at a molecular level – and how medicine might be able to leverage this knowledge into treatments of the future.

[The two papers appear back-to-back](#) in the latest issue of [the peer-reviewed journal Nature Immunology](#).

“Piece by piece, we are unraveling the complex interactions that tie together these immune-system responses,” said Hai-Hui (Howard) Xue, M.D., Ph.D., member of the CDI, professor of Medical Sciences at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine, a member of Georgetown University’s Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center, and senior author on both papers. “We believe we are on track to understand this fundamental process better than ever before – and hopefully save lives in the future because of it.”

The two papers in the journal complement each other’s findings.

The first, “Mapping self-associating chromatin hubs identifies Id proteins as key determinants of exhausted CD8+ T cell fate,” demonstrates how the critical immune system responders called T cells enter a dysfunctional or exhausted state due to the persistence of certain viruses or cancers. Using preclinical models, the team showed through rigorous testing that the fate of success or exhaustion was determined early on by the cells’ success (or lack thereof) in forming hubs of chromatin, webs of interlocked DNA and proteins, which help genetic programming to boost immune regulations. Key to this process are regulators known as Id2 and Id3 proteins which critically stabilize responses and longevity of the immune support structures by regulating their structure and maintenance.

The second paper, entitled “Exhausted CD8+ T cell fate is programmed by dynamic CTCF-mediated enhancer activation and invariant CTCF-imposed barriers,” delves further into the ramifications of the first.

[Click here to learn more about the second Nature paper and view the article in its entirety.](#)

JTCC Oncologist Speaks with Becker’s on New FDA Clinical Trial Model

In June, Becker’s Oncology and Becker’s Hospital Review featured [Miguel Gonzalez-Velez, M.D., an HUMC/JTCC medical oncologist](#), in discussing a new, new real-time clinical trial model, put forth by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

He explained in the article how the new approach compresses safety latency from weeks to days, enabling genuine, adaptive dose-finding for first-in-human agents. The catch, he said, lies in implementation of an infrastructure which requires continuous, clean data submission.

It’s this step that becomes the hurdle for many healthcare entities.

Gonzalez-Velez noted in a *Becker’s Hospital Review* report regarding oncology’s “last-mile problem,” that these demanding data requirements can create significant hurdles for community cancer centers. Without adequate investment in data capture and research coordinator capacity, he warned that the new trial model could inadvertently widen existing care gaps.

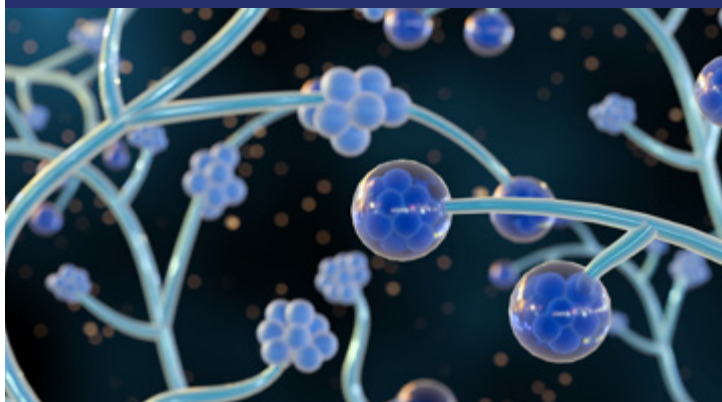
“If we don’t invest in lifting that floor, real-time trials risk deepening the geographic and demographic disparities in Phase 1 access that already exist,” said Gonzalez-Velez.

Dr. Gonzalez-Velez’s national advocacy reflects [his own current work in Phase 1 clinical trials](#) with HMM.

Click here to view the [Becker’s Oncology](#) article.

Click here to view the [Becker’s Hospital Review](#) article.





WHO Publishes Antifungal Report

Fungal infection and disease, an underestimated public health hazard, causes millions of deaths each year, worldwide.

In July, the World Health Organization (WHO) [published a blueprint outlining an implementation framework](#) against the global threat of fungal disease and antifungal resistance.

Playing a major role in the framework's development was the Global Action for Fungal Infections (GAFFI). It helped establish four interlinked domains to improve diagnostics, broaden equitable access to treatment, and strengthen surveillance for infection across all health populations.

The four domains focus on intervention in the public health sector, advancement of therapeutic innovation, and monitoring of environmental drivers.

David Perlin, Ph.D., chief scientific officer and executive vice president for HMH's Center for Discovery and Innovation, currently serves on the GAFFI board.

[Click here to see more info from the CDI and Dr. Perlin.](#)

[Click here to see the WHO's report.](#)

Dr. Lisa Carter-Bawa Wins Communicator Award

In June, Lisa Carter-Bawa, Ph.D., MPH, APRN won the 2026 Communicator Award of Distinction for Social Impact in recognition of her [novel lung cancer communications](#) tool, "LungTalk."

Dr. Carter-Bawa, director of the Cancer Prevention Precision Control Institute (CPPCI) at the Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI), developed LungTalk to support informed, equitable conversations between health care providers and patients about lung cancer screening.

The tool aims to alleviate patients from feeling a stigma around lung cancer screening, reducing barriers to care through the innovative health communication research conducted by Dr. Carter-Bawa and her team.

The Communicator Awards recognizes excellence in marketing and communications, and presents the Award of Distinction for projects that exceed industry standards.

[Read more.](#)



CDI Study Identifies How p53 Mutations Drive Immunotherapy Resistance—and a Path to Overcome It

Immune checkpoint blockade (ICB) therapy has transformed cancer treatment, but many tumors remain resistant. A new study from researchers at the Hackensack Meridian Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI) identifies a previously unrecognized mechanism by which mutations in the p53 gene can limit the effectiveness of immunotherapy—while also revealing a potential strategy to overcome this resistance.

[The findings in the journal Cell Death and Disease could help make future cancer treatments more effective.](#)

The study focuses on the p53 tumor suppressor gene, widely known as the "guardian of the genome."

"Understanding the nuances of how p53 mutations affect tumor behavior is vital to advancing cancer care," said Binfeng Lu, member of the CDI, member of Georgetown University's Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center, and professor of Medical Sciences at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. "Our findings show that while some mutations render tumors resistant to treatment, they also reveal a specific vulnerability."

While p53 mutations are the most common genetic alterations in human cancer, their role in cancer immunotherapy has been complex and, at times, contradictory. The CDI team discovered that certain p53 mutations in colorectal-cancer models actually hinder the efficacy of immunotherapy by manipulating cellular metabolism.

The researchers utilized CRISPR-Cas9 to delete mutant Trp53 in preclinical models of colorectal cancer. They observed that when the mutant Trp53 was removed, the tumors became significantly more susceptible to anti-PD-1 immunotherapy.

The mechanism centers on autophagy, a cellular recycling process that supports tumor survival under stress. Under normal conditions, p53 regulates cell growth in part by restraining mTORC1 signaling. The team discovered that certain mutant forms of p53 exhibit a selective retention-of-function, preserving their ability to suppress mTORC1 despite losing canonical functions such as p21 induction. This sustained inhibition of mTORC1 leads to increased autophagy, which enables tumor cells to better withstand immune-mediated stress, including cytotoxic signals from T cells. In this way, mutant p53 actively maintains a protective metabolic state that limits the effectiveness of anti-tumor immunity.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



School of Medicine Hosts Eighth Annual CHP Symposium

In July, HMSOM celebrated their community impact at their Eighth Annual Human Dimension Community Health Projects Symposium.

This hallmark event showcased the remarkable dedication of the school's second-year medical students.

Throughout the morning, these future physicians presented their yearlong collaborations with community partners as part of the school's Human Dimension (HD) curriculum. Their vital work actively improves the health and well-being of patients across our local communities. By sharing these initiatives with the incoming cohort of first-year students, faculty, staff and leadership, they provided a sterling example of learning through meaningful service.

This dynamic symposium illustrated the core values the HD program brings to the HMM network.

[See more from the event here.](#)



Fat Tissue Could Explain Triple Negative Breast Cancer Spread - and Point to Treatments, Find CDI Scientists

Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) is aggressive and hard to treat. But the role of fat tissue in how the cancer spreads may help point toward new understanding and treatments, according to a new paper from scientists at the Hackensack Meridian Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI) and colleagues at Georgetown University's Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center.

The scientists have now demonstrated that the fat tissue can be hijacked by tumor cells to launch itself to spread further inside the body using adipomes, which are miniscule extracellular vesicles released by fat tissues, spreading outward from the breast and outward to other organs.

This discovery may provide a new strategy for preventing disease progression at much earlier stages than currently possible. The findings appear in [npj Breast Cancer](#), a Nature Portfolio journal, published by senior author Jyothi Nagajyothis, Ph.D., a member of the Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI) and Georgetown Lombardi, and lead author Hariprasad Thangavel, Ph.D., a member of Nagajyothi's research team. The study was conducted in collaboration with Georgetown Lombardi's Robert Glazer, Ph.D., professor of oncology at Georgetown University, and other investigators from the research team.

"The findings of this study establish adipomes as potent and previously unrecognized regulators of the metastatic cascade in TNBC," write the authors.

"This work challenges the traditional view of tumor-adjacent adipocytes as passive lipid reservoirs, and reveals instead their active and dynamic role as key orchestrator of the mammary TME (tumor microenvironment)," they add.

What has previously been known is that the "metastatic cascade" begins with cancer cells invading the stroma which is the supportive tissue and blood vessels in the breast, enabled by invadopodia, which are kind of like tentacles of proteins protruding from the plasma membrane which degrade the body's defense and pave the way for cancer's spread. That process has been well observed by scientists.

Nagajyothi's team has now probed into the earlier phases getting to that process, focusing especially on those adipomes, which are kind of like cellular messengers which kick off the cancer growth cycle.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



Dr. Dawn Neumann Featured for Psychiatric Studies in Traumatic Brain Injury

HMH's Dawn Neumann, Ph.D., FACRM, was recently featured in Psychiatric Times for her innovative research in traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Dr. Neumann leads a [\\$4.3 million grant by the U.S. Department of Defense](#) to study the "Building Emotional Self-awareness Teletherapy (BEST)" program. The article explored this novel treatment, and how it helps military personnel and civilians, alike, overcome alexithymia.

Alexithymia is a condition more commonly called "emotional blindness," and causes the inability in patients to recognize, understand, or express their own emotions.

The research aims to restore the emotional self-awareness for patients, specifically after suffering TBI, improving the quality of life for recovering survivors of brain injury.

Dr. Neumann is the principal investigator and manager of brain injury at HMH's JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, as well as a professor in the Department of Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM).

[Read the Psychiatric Times article in its entirety here.](#)

SUMMER 2026

Research Updates

New Research Module in Epic Will be Available This Fall

We are excited to announce that the Epic Research Module will go live on Monday, November 9.

This is an important milestone for our research community and represents a significant step toward better integrating research into our clinical workflows. The Epic Research Module will help create greater consistency across research operations, improve the visibility of research activity within the electronic health record, and support more standardized and efficient workflows for our research teams, investigators, and providers.

As we prepare for the new module to “go live”, our focus is on ensuring everyone has the necessary information, training, resources, and support needed to be ready for November 9.

What to Expect

You should have recently seen Epic Research updates through several communication channels. You will continue to see them as the project progresses.

New Epic Research Webpage - Coming Soon

Be on the lookout for the launch of our new Epic Research webpage, which will serve as a central resource for information related to the new module. The webpage will be found on the [Office of Research Administration page](#) under “Quick Links”. More details will be shared in the future.

The site is planned to be released before November 9 and to include:

- Training information
- Research workflows and guidance
- Tip sheets and educational resources
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Go-Live readiness information
- Support resources and contacts

Weekly Huddle Updates Began August 31

Epic Research updates should become part of our existing research team huddles.

Each week, teams will receive timely information about what is changing, upcoming training, important workflows, readiness activities and actions researchers may need to take.

Please make huddle participation a priority as we move toward November 9.

Training Opportunities - Ongoing

The training will be virtual and instructor-led, with requirements based on each individual's role and responsibilities within research. It will be mandatory for most research staff who will use or interact with Epic Research workflows.

Managers should enroll team members in the training via the learning management system. The information to do so should have been communicated to research managers via email earlier this month. If you are a team member who believes you should have been enrolled in the training, but have not, please contact your manager. If you are a manager who did not receive the enrollment communication but believe your team should receive the training, please contact epiceducation@hmhn.org.

What is Happening Now?

A significant amount of preparation is already underway behind the scenes.

Research leads across the network, subject matter experts (SMEs), and leadership are actively:

- Completing Epic Research Training
- Validating system access
- Reviewing and building research workflows
- Evaluating and updating SOPs and policies
- Identifying operational impacts
- Preparing training and support resources
- Developing FAQs based on questions from our research community

What Do I Need to Do Now?

For most team members, no immediate action is required today. For now:

- Save the date: November 9, 2026
- Attend your regularly scheduled team huddles
- Watch for the launch of the Epic Research website
- Watch for your role-specific training information
- Review Epic Research communications as they are distributed

Additional actions and deadlines will be communicated as we move closer to Go-Live.

Frequently Asked Questions

We know there will be questions – and we want them.

A comprehensive Epic Research FAQ is currently in development and will continue to evolve as we prepare for Go-Live.

Topics will include

What is changing with Epic Research? Epic Research will impact multiple aspects of how research workflows interact with clinical care. Detailed workflow-specific information will be provided through training, huddles, the new website and additional resources.

Will everyone need training? Training requirements will vary by role. Training will be mandatory for most individuals who use or interact with Epic Research functionality.

Where will I find Go-Live resources? The new Epic Research webpage will become the central location for training information, workflows, tip sheets, FAQs, readiness resources, and support information.

Who should I contact with questions? The Epic Research support and escalation structure is being finalized and will be communicated before Go-Live. In the meantime, please bring questions to your team huddles so that they can be captured and incorporated into our readiness planning and FAQs.

November 9 is a Team Effort

The successful implementation of the Epic Research Module will require partnership across our entire research community - from research operations and support teams to investigators and clinical providers.

Our goal is not simply to turn on the new functionality on November 9. Our goal is to ensure our teams understand the new workflows, know where to find answers, and are prepared to use Epic Research successfully from Day One.

Thank you in advance for your engagement, flexibility, and partnership as we prepare for this important milestone.

Mark your calendar: Epic Research Module Go-Live
November 9, 2026

More information is coming soon. Watch. Learn. Ask questions. Get ready for Go-Live!

New Certificate Program in Clinical Trials Administration Now Offered in Partnership with Fairleigh Dickinson University

We are pleased to introduce the new Certificate in Clinical Trials Administration, a program developed in partnership between Hackensack Meridian *Health* (HMH) and Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU). This stackable graduate certificate is designed to help our team members advance their careers in clinical research and trial operations.

The program integrates academic rigor with real-world, hospital-based experience, preparing professionals to lead, manage, and support clinical research studies within hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and contract research organizations.

Key details of the program include:

- **Curriculum:** Covers clinical trial design, regulatory compliance, data analysis, protocol design, ethics, and operational leadership.
- **Structure:** A 9-credit, 3-course graduate certificate completed part-time over 12 months, with available start dates in both Fall and Spring.
- **Format:** Flexible hybrid delivery combining online asynchronous learning with evening or virtual sessions, tailored for working professionals.
- **Degree Pathway:** All 9 credits apply directly toward FDU's 32-credit Master of Health Science (MHS) in Clinical Research Administration.

The program is structured to align with HMH's annual tuition reimbursement benefit.

Admission requires a resume and a college transcript, though significant work experience may substitute for the bachelor's degree requirement upon review by FDU admissions.

The admissions are rolling for the spring semester and beyond. Course descriptions, enrollment information, and an FAQ page can [be found here](#).

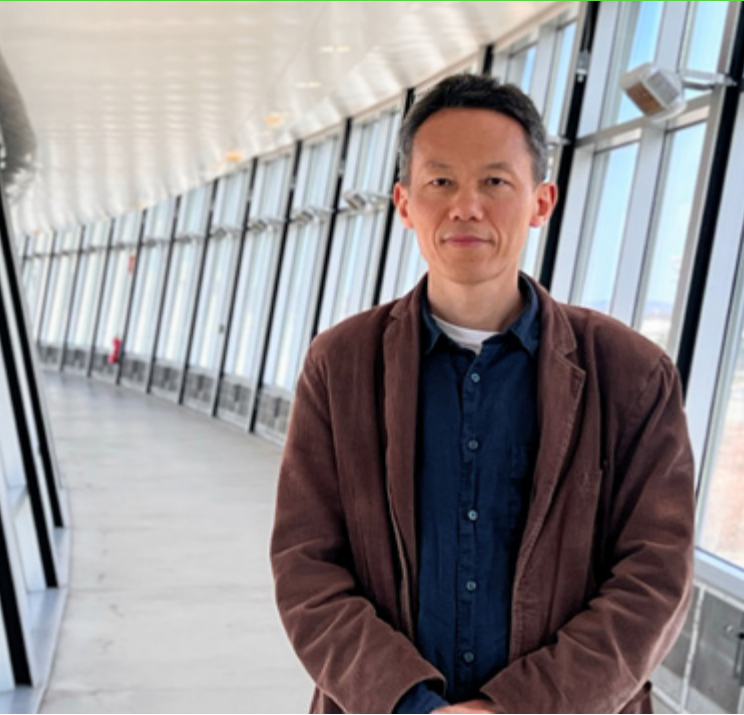
NOTE: This program is not available to HMSOM students as a curricular offering.

The Office of Research Administration Research Orientation Programs: There Is Something for Everyone

The Division of Research Communications and Education within the Office of Research Administration (ORA) prides itself on helping our team members feel prepared for the world of research. Whether it be a new research staff member, a new principal investigator (PI), or a long-standing researcher looking to learn something new, our variety of orientation programs are designed to ensure that there is something for everyone. The **Clinical Research Orientation** for new team members is offered on a quarterly basis and covers a series of essential research topics such as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), protocol basics, regulatory issues, study management, patient eligibility, informed consent, data management, reportable events, auditing and monitoring, and more. The program, which consists of three half days, is required for all incoming research staff and open to any HMH team member who is interested in research. Research team members who have already completed the orientation are always welcome to return for a refresher - for the whole program or just the topics in which they are especially interested. The 1:1 **PI Orientation** is offered to new principal investigators and investigators looking for a 'research refresher.' This one hour session is scheduled at the researcher's convenience and provides an overview of research resources, processes and relevant regulations. Investigators who recently received approval for their studies also have the option to participate in a 1:1 'Post-Approval' Training Session which provides an overview of resources and services available within the ORA that are essential to the facilitation of IRB approved research. For more information regarding these services and other educational opportunities, please visit the [research education webpage here](#).

SUMMER 2026

Featured Researcher



Li Explores the Brain's Silent-Warning Signals

The human brain is the engine of survival, the organic computer keeping Homo sapiens at the top of the food chain. But for Jiali Li, Ph.D., the most critical moments in a brain's lifecycle have yet to be really understood. These moments aren't the moment of the brain's peak performance, but rather the subtle and silent shifts which happen decades before a disease like Alzheimer's makes itself known.

"Alzheimer's disease is like a breakdown of brain homeostasis, rather than just a single molecular pathway problem," said Li, associate member of the Hackensack Meridian Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI). "Our brain is composed of multiple cell types - like neurons, microglia, oligodendrocytes - and their disruption impacts the entire system's balance."

Li's research program targets the molecular and cellular mechanisms underlying brain aging and neurodegenerative disease, with a specific focus on finding the earliest-possible hallmarks of decline. While most in the field focus on late-stage symptoms like noticeable memory loss, Li is scrutinizing a window 10 to 20 years before those clinical symptoms even appear.

"Jiali Li's work is a fascinating exploration of what we can do to prevent and mitigate disease which still confounds science," said David Perlin, Ph.D., chief scientific officer and executive vice president of the CDI. "It is hugely promising and potentially thrilling science to host here at our institution."

Dr. Li's scientific journey spans multiple countries, and multiple prestigious institutions. He earned his Ph.D. in Neurobiology from Shanghai Medical School at Fudan University, after an M.S. in Pathophysiology at Kunming Medical University. His career also included postdoctoral fellowships at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and Rutgers University.

He joined the CDI in 2025, and currently also serves as a professor of Neurology at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine.

For Li, neuroscience goes beyond a professional specialty - it is also a key to understanding the human condition. He recalls growing up in China by seeing that not many people had aged to the point of neurodegeneration - but when he has visited his hometown intermittently over the years, he sees an older population which has developed many of the diseases which seemed not to exist before. It shows a global need to tackle these emerging health problems.

"For human beings, our brain is the most important," he said. "Brain health is longevity."

[Read more](#)

SUMMER 2026

Featured Researcher Administrator

Guiding Researchers: Pamela Cooper's Unexpected Journey

Pamela Cooper, MS, MSN, RN, OCN

Manager, Investigator Initiated Research Program

Office of Research Administration at HMH Research Institute

While Pamela Cooper, a long-time nurse, no longer provides treatment to patients, she still helps people navigate unfamiliar territory and offers clear, non-judgmental guidance to help assure the best outcome. As the manager of the Investigator Initiated Research Program, Pamela assists researchers with developing and refining their research protocols, so that they are written in accordance with institutional requirements and scientific practicality. She typically engages with researchers early on in the research process. In some cases, people reach out for assistance in developing an idea and drafting a protocol. Other times, she reaches out to the investigators to offer support after reviewing their submitted studies.

Pamela sat down to share with us more about her role and how a series of serendipitous events and a love of learning led her to the position she has today.

How would you describe your role?

My primary role is to help researchers develop their research ideas and format their protocols. I also often see myself as a liaison between many of the departments within the Office of Research Administration. While working with investigators on their research protocols, I often pick up on other research related needs that they have and connect them with the relevant teams. I've also been trying to promote awareness of my program's services via outreach to the medical residents; meeting with the residents has been among my favorite parts of my role. On top of that, I do departmental reviews in eResearch for protocols that are investigator initiated.

How did you end up in your current position?

I was originally a social worker. While working in that role, I happened to sit next to a nursing educator in the office and loved listening to her classes. They sounded really interesting and when I mentioned how much I enjoyed them, she suggested that I should become a nurse and be an educator too. So I did! Once I began nursing school, the nurse educator became a mentor and remained a mentor for many years thereafter. I was happy as a nurse educator, but another colleague of mine from Ocean Medical Center kept mentioning that they were really looking for a research nurse and thought that I would be a great fit. I didn't think much of it initially, but she kept bringing it up and I finally agreed to consider it.



It was in oncology research, and while I had no experience in research or oncology, I happened to have a special interest in the latter because my father had passed away from cancer. I ended up working in that role for three years. I later spent eight years in Radiation Oncology at the Jersey Shore University Medical Center, and later as an Oncology Navigator. My position evolved over time, but I credit ultimately getting my current role to Tracy Micalizzi. She asked me to work on a Long COVID study, and I met Elli Gournas Paleoudis, who oversees the Investigator Initiated Research Program, through that. I also worked with Dr. ElSahwi, who is a gynecologic oncologist and an avid researcher. I learned a lot about investigator initiated research through his work, as well. The support from Tracy and Elli has really led me to where I am today, and I really enjoy working with them both.

What guidance would you offer new researchers who want to get things started on the right foot?

Reach out early! That's the best advice I can offer. We can help people be most efficient if they come to us early. For example, there have been times when people reached out to us after they had already completed quite a bit of the protocol, and we had to let them know that they were using an outdated template. The biggest mistake I see is people trying to wing it on their own. We can help you get through the process, including submitting your study for review via eResearch.

What do you most enjoy about your work?

I enjoy in-person sessions a lot. I love seeing people face-to-face. It also brings me a lot of joy and satisfaction when people send me accepted manuscripts that we've worked on together.

Do you have any hobbies or extraprofessional interests?

I am very active in the local Central New Jersey Oncology Nurse Society Board. I am in the midst of planning a nurse oncology retreat in October near the beach. We try to combine relaxation, such as chair massages, with educational programs. We have meals, relaxation, and wellness tips at the retreat. I have also coordinated volunteering at our local food bank, as we encourage our members to volunteer.

As for other hobbies, I like to fish and crab, I do a lot of DIY projects in my house, and I love gardening.

SUMMER 2026

Academics Bulletin



HMSOM White Coat Ceremony Welcomes Ninth Cohort of Students

The Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine has officially welcomed the latest cohort of promising medical students at its White Coat Ceremony, held at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark yesterday.

The 162 incoming students making up the 2026 Cohort, put on the white coat symbolizing their journey toward their medical degrees (M.D.s) which they will work toward over the next four years, or an accelerated three-year track.

"This medical school was founded to address New Jersey's physician shortage," said Robert C. Garrett, FACHE, CEO of Hackensack Meridian *Health*. "Since 2018, we have trained more than 500 doctors, and last month we graduated our largest class yet. With nearly two-thirds of this incoming cohort from right here in New Jersey, we are keeping top medical talent in-state and ensuring our communities have easily accessible care for decades to come."

"This is an extremely talented group, and we are excited to bring them into the fold," added Jeffrey Boscamp, M.D., president and dean of the School. "It's especially gratifying to see how many New Jersey residents are staying in the state to become doctors."

[Click here to learn more about HMSOM's newest cohort.](#)

HMSOM Bike Build

The latest cohort of 162 students at HMSOM began their medical education not with textbooks, but with a practical lesson in teamwork and community service.

During the school's annual Bike Build event, these future physicians partnered to construct 34 new bicycles for the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton. Local children also attended, actively participating in assembling their new rides alongside the medical students.

This collaborative initiative serves as the official kickoff for the Human Dimension curriculum, a core program designed to put humanistic medicine into immediate action. By starting their academic journey focused on local outreach, these students truly demonstrate our health network's overarching mission. Building bicycles today establishes a strong foundation for vital community connections for years to come.

[See more visuals of this amazing community event here.](#)



SPRING 2026

Academic Affairs Roundup



Hackensack Meridian Health Graduates Largest Number of Residents and Fellows Yet for Network

Hackensack Meridian *Health* has graduated its largest number yet of residents and fellows, strengthening the medical workforce for another generation of clinicians.

The total of 314 graduates from HMH's Graduate Medical Education (GME) program were celebrated at ceremonies at Bell Works and The Venetian in June. The graduates trained across five HMH hospitals, and more than 65 of these new physicians will remain within the HMH network.

This largest group of graduates was an increase of 29 percent from last year's group of 244, which reflects the growing strength of the network's GME program.

"This is an outstanding group of clinicians, and we are continuing to train the best of the best," said Ihor Sawczuk, M.D., FACS, the president of Academics, Research, and Innovation at HMH, associate dean of Clinical and Research Integration and Linda and Peter Hanson Professor and Chair Emeritus of Urology at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. "Our GME programs continue to strengthen the network, and vice-versa."

The graduates were split between the five big academic medical centers at HMH: Jersey Shore University Medical Center (92 graduates from 19 programs), Hackensack University Medical Center (91 across 19 programs), Ocean University Medical Center (46 through seven programs); Palisades Medical Center (43 from seven programs), and JFK University Medical Center (42 across 13 programs).

Specialties include: Dentistry, Internal Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Pediatrics, General Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Pharmacy, Anesthesiology, Pulmonary Critical Care Medicine,

Geriatric Medicine, Hematology Oncology, Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine, Endocrinology, Infectious Disease, Interventional Cardiology, Urology, and others across all the sites.

"We continue to find ways to improve our training, and our workforce," said David Kountz, M.D., MBA, MACP, vice president and chief academic officer for Hackensack Meridian *Health*, as well as senior associate dean for Graduate Medical Education and professor of Medicine at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. "This is what it's all about."

[Click here to view the full article.](#)

GME Professionals Day 2026

In August, the Academic Affairs team celebrated GME Professionals Day.

Occurring on the third Friday in August, GME Professionals Day is an annual tradition brought forth by the Association for Hospital Medical Education to express gratitude for administrators, coordinators, and directors who work tirelessly to optimize the formative training of residents and fellows.

From onboarding trainees—while consistently providing wellness and educational support in their journeys—to diligently managing and maintaining standards governed by the Accreditation Council, the expertise of GME Professionals shapes the next generation of healthcare practitioners and leaders.

The Academic Affairs team thanks its GME Professionals for their continued and unwavering commitment to clinical excellence.



SUMMER 2026

Quarterly Question

How can missing data impact research findings?

- a. It can reduce statistical power
- b. It can reduce representativeness of a sample
- c. It can reduce bias
- d. A and B only
- e. All of the above

To answer the question, please click [here](#).

The first person to submit the correct answer will receive a Hackensack Meridian *Health* gift.