

Department Leadership Shuffle Plans Unveiled



The retirement plans of Department Chair Dr. Belinda Vail will have a larger ripple effect on the Family Medicine & Community Health leadership team beginning next month.

Dr. Mark Meyer will take over as interim chair on Nov. 1.

"I'll still be around for a couple of months so we can do a lot of transitioning," Dr. Vail said. "There is quite a bit of transitioning to do because there are a lot of balls in the air right now."

She said she hopes to wrap up as many of her unfinished projects between now and January.

"Dr. Meyer has another job," she said, referring to his post as Senior Associate Dean for Student Affairs, which he plans to keep. "Trying not to leave too many loose ends for him."

Dr. Allen Greiner will remain as vice chair of research and community, Dr. Jennifer Woodward will continue her responsibilities on the clinical side. Dr. Vail told faculty in their September meeting that Dr. Kelsie Kelly will become the department's new vice chair for education.

"This will also allow us to be able to have a little more overarching (role) with the residency so that she can assist not only with Pittsburg and here, but also with Olathe," Dr. Vail said.

"I'm honored to be able to step up into another leadership role and help to keep moving our department forward from an education perspective. We're already doing such a great job," Dr. Kelly said. "I'll be working closely with everyone from GME and UME and then seeing what we can do to continue to propel medicine forward as the premiere educators that we all are."



Dr. Kelly said that the plan is for Dr. Allison Coy to take over for her as program director for the Kansas City-based residency program when the new academic year begins July 1. She plans to stay on the residency faculty as an associate program director.

"With transition comes a lot of potential for change and upset, but we don't want that," Dr. Kelly said. "So I'm not going anywhere."

Drs. Kelly, Zwahlen Win Top Teaching Honor



When the university announced the 2025 winners of the Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award last month, two of the four recipients were Family Medicine & Community Health faculty.

Dr. Kelsie Kelly and Dr. Denise Zwahlen will be recognized at the University Teaching Awards ceremony at the Jayhawk Welcome Center in Lawrence on Tuesday, Oct. 21 at 7 p.m.

The CDTA recognizes exceptional KUMC faculty members who have "demonstrated

superlative teaching ability and contribute to the medical center and its students through excellence and outstanding teaching," with early to mid-career faculty getting preference.

Family Medicine & Community Health can boast six other winners of this award since 2013, including current faculty Drs. Laurel Witt, Belinda Vail, Mark Meyer and Moya Peterson. This is the first time our department has had two professors win the honor in the same year. 

Landon Center Clinic Joins AFHS Movement

The geriatric clinic at the Landon Center on Aging has been recognized as an [Age-Friendly Health System Participant](#), the first phase in a movement among hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and medical practices to help ensure that all older adults receive evidence-based care.

The John A. Hartford Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement began the AFHS project to recognize "clinical care settings that are working towards reliable practice of evidence-based interventions for all older adults in their care known as the 4Ms."

These 4Ms stand for:

- **What Matters:** Knowing and aligning care with each older adult's specific health outcome goals and care preferences, including end-of-life care, and across settings of care.
- **Medications:** If medication is necessary, using age-friendly medication that doesn't interfere with what matters to the older adult, mobility or mentation across settings of care.
- **Mentation:** Preventing, identifying, treating, and managing dementia, depressions, and delirium across care settings.
- **Mobility:** Ensure that older adults move safely every day in order to maintain function and do what matters.



Megan Duree, LPN, Dr. Shelley Bhattacharya, and M2 Bryce Liedtke are the three leads on the project.



The next step is to submit three months' worth of records showing the clinic's commitment to the 4Ms in order to work toward an Age-Friendly Health System—Committed to Care Excellence distinction. 

KU Visit Boosts Hoops for Kenya's Girls



When Dr. Sarah Finocchiaro Kessler made her most recent trip to Kenya with her daughter Fina in August, they brought along some extra cargo: dozens of female hygiene kits and 50 uninflated basketballs.

Fina Kessler, a senior at Shawnee Mission East High School, led a basketball camp for teenage girls at Moi University in the city of Eldoret. The camp was part of the nonprofit she created, [Hoops 4 Her](#), inspired by and modeled after the basketball and leadership camps she'd enjoyed back home.

During the weeklong camp, 54 girls from five local middle and high schools learned about basketball and much more. They took part in educational/empowerment sessions, ate meals prepared by a local chef, made a lot of new friends, and got valuable early experience being on a college campus.

Dr. Kessler makes regular trips to Kenya as part of her global health work, previously partnering with Moi University on HIV and cancer projects. She and Kenyan research partner May Maloba signed a new memorandum of understanding with Moi in August to continue the relationship, which now includes girls empowerment camps.

An Obvious Need

It was on one of the previous trips that the idea for this camp was born. During that visit, the Kesslers brought along some soccer balls for local kids to play with.

"I noticed that only the boys got to play," Fina Kessler [told KSHB 41](#). "Seeing the girls watching from the sidelines really stuck with me, because I've always been encouraged to just jump right in and play with the boys."

While attending a summer camp hosted by the Pangea Network in 2024, Fina Kessler was encouraged to create a project to help a community or cause she cares about. She knew that sports really helped to bring her out of her shell in high school and she thought Kenya's girls might see some similar benefits. ➔



Fina Kessler, with some of the kids from this summer's basketball camp.



May Maloba, Dr. Sarah Finocchiaro Kessler, and Moi University Acting Vice Chancellor Prof. Kiplagat Kotut sign a memorandum of understanding to continue the research partnership between Moi University and KU.

Over the course of a year, Hoops4Her raised \$10,000 to cover camp expenses, including \$3,000 that came from a fundraising competition among area high schools.

Maloba worked on navigating logistics back in Eldoret, sharing the project's vision and goals with Moi's leaders, who granted her access to the courts, classrooms, kitchens, and the cafeteria. She also coordinated all the daily schedules and transportation and purchased produce and meats from local businesses to provide lunch for more than 80 people every day.

"It was a complex process with many moving parts and seeing everything come together on the first morning was incredibly rewarding and this made all the effort worth the while," Maloba said.

Moi University women's basketball team captain Genesis Otuche and her teammates served as coaches.

"It was an incredible experience to step into a mentorship role and share the game we love with younger girls," Otuche said. "Coaching them gave my teammates and I a deep sense of pride and joy, especially seeing their excitement as they learned new skills. It also reminded me of how powerful sports can be in building confidence and connections."

Planting a seed

Dr. Kessler says holding the camp at Moi was particularly special, since it's a more rural spot that doesn't get the same kind of opportunities afforded girls in Kenya's larger cities.

"I've always known how rare such opportunities are for girls, especially those in the rural areas where sports amenities are not as easily accessible," Maloba said. "Watching the girls learn how to dribble, shoot, lead and compete on the basketball court was amazing. In that moment, I could see hope stirred in those brilliant young souls."



"I believe this camp planted a seed of possibility," Otuche said. "Many of the girls now know that they not only belong in the village, but maybe also on the court, and that their voices and dreams matter."

When the camp was over, the basketballs were left at the local schools so the girls could keep practicing. In the meantime, Fina Kessler is making plans to do it all again next summer. ➔



"Otherwise there will be a bunch of disappointed girls," she told KSHB 41.

"I hope this project inspires them to keep playing, to support each other, and to pursue opportunities they may not have imagined before," Otuche said. "Beyond basketball, it's about building resilience, teamwork, and belief in themselves; skills that will carry into every part of their lives."

Fundraising for next year's camp is already underway and [you can help](#), either through a direct Venmo or Paypal donation — or by sponsoring a player or funding a new basketball, hygiene kit or branded water bottle.

"All donations go to helping make this camp possible next year in Kenya," Fina Kessler said. "So any support is appreciated, and I very much appreciate the support I've already gotten to help make this whole thing possible to begin with."

She has even bigger plans for Hoops4Her in the future, including helping to build new basketball facilities in Kenya — and perhaps also having similar camps in the metro area.

"There's girls (here) that would benefit just as much," she said. "Bringing that to Kansas City would be amazing." 

KU's Medical Arts Symphony Launches New Season



The Medical Arts Symphony kicks off its 66th season with a concert at Battenfeld Auditorium on Saturday, Oct. 11.

The program features *Symphony No. 8* by Antonin Dvorak and Robert Schumann's *Concerto for Cello*, featuring cellist Eman Chalshotori.

The performance begins at 7:30 p.m., with a free pre-concert talk about the music starting around 6:45.

The concerts, as always, are free.

The Medical Arts Symphony also has concerts set for December 6 and February 14, before concluding the season on Friday, April 17 at Johnson County Community College's Yardley Hall.

Social Worker Tasha Rube Joins FM Clinic

Tasha Rube, LMSW, who joins our outpatient clinic this month, brings more than a decade of experience as a social worker, mostly in outpatient primary care and in specialty or dialysis clinics.

"My passion is helping patients and families navigate the challenges that come with health conditions, whether that's connecting them to resources, supporting caregivers, or making sure they feel confident about their options," she said. "I especially enjoy collaborating with care teams to find practical solutions that truly make a difference in people's lives."

Rube says she loves spending time with her daughter, whether they're playing pickleball, practicing yoga or hiking. She also has two rescue dogs who spend their days at doggy daycare while she's at work.

"At home, they love cuddles and playing ball," Rube said.

Some of the things she likes to do away from work include exploring new places in Kansas City, getting lost in a good fantasy or science fiction book, cooking flavorful meals, painting with watercolors and taking time for spiritual reflection.

"Most of all, I enjoy connecting with loved ones and creating meaningful experiences that bring balance and joy to my life," she said.



Clinic Chili Cookoff Set for October 22



The Family Medicine Outpatient Clinic's annual Halloween Chili Cookoff is getting an earlier start this year.

With Halloween on a Friday, and to avoid schedule conflicts, the spicy showdown will be held at noon on Wednesday, Oct. 22nd in the clinic's large conference room.

Bakers and chili makers are encouraged to bring their best pot of chili and/or desserts for everyone to sample.

Judges will determine who takes home first, second, and third place in each category.

Signup forms for chili, desserts and side dishes are available in the clinic RN room.

Clinic Profile: Connor Macias, LPN

Connor Macias, LPN, a recent addition to the ambulatory clinic care team, says the two things she likes most about her job are the friendly work environment and the variety of patients we see.

Before joining Family Medicine, the Ottawa, Kansas, native previously worked at a CVS Minute Clinic, as well as a brief stint working in corrections.

Away from the office, Connor enjoys watching, reading, and listening to true crime stories, as well as walking and playing with her dogs. She's also been doing some gardening and successfully grew her own vegetables for the first time this summer.

When asked to pick a spot for a dream vacation, she said she'd go to Italy.

"For the sites and food!" she says.

A movie Connor likes to recommend is the 2019 crowdpleaser [*The Peanut Butter Falcon*](#).

She says Chinese food is her favorite type, and her favorite treat is ice cream.



Greiner, Martinez Honored at Conference

Dr. Allen Greiner and Clarissa Carrillo Martinez were among the honorees at the 2025 Heartland Conference on Health Equity & Patient-Centered Care at Children's Mercy Park in early September.

Dr. Greiner received the Jae Edgar Bennett Health Renegade Award, which recognizes those who do what it takes to improve the lives of their communities, "regardless of how unpopular it is or how unorthodox the intervention or path they take to get there."

Martinez, a veteran of the COPE project and the current Project Manager for the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) initiative in Southwest Kansas, was named the Regional Health Equity Champion for 2025.

Her passion projects include working to improve food access, promoting physical activity and using culturally relevant strategies to support families in breastfeeding. ★

Resident Profile: Dr. Kavya Nataraj

PGY1 Dr. Kavya Nataraj says her time at medical school here at KU played a big role in leading her to pursue a career in Family Medicine.

"Volunteering at JayDoc was my favorite experience during medical school and the Family Medicine faculty quickly became some of my favorite people to work with," she said. "I really enjoyed the focus of patient education and community health. FM was my favorite rotation, and I quickly figured out that this was the specialty for me!"

When she's not working, Dr. Nataraj says she enjoys cooking, hanging out with her family and friends and dancing. She says she grew up dancing and has learned multiple styles over the years.

"I'm really proud of all of the performances and choreography I've been able to put together for different events while representing my culture," she said.

Dr. Nataraj grew up in Olathe and says one local place she recommends is [Café Corazon](#), her favorite coffee shop. It has locations in Brookside, the Crossroads or just south of campus at Westport and State Line roads.

Dr. Nataraj says she'd love to visit Thailand someday.

She says her favorite treats are chocolate chip cookies or cookie cake. 



Summit Spotlights Kansas Birth Equity Challenges

Dr. Kelsie Kelly and Dr. Hannah Billings attended the 2025 Birth Equity Summit on Sept. 12, part of the Heartland Conference for Health Equity and Patient-Centered Care.

The summit, now in its fourth year, was held at Children's Mercy Park, where attendees took part in a morning Birth Justice Walk on the apron of Sporting KC's pitch.

Some of the panels included discussions on newborn screening data, tools to boost community engagement, fatherhood and mental health, and strategies to help empower breastfeeding supporters.

Dr. Billings attended the event as part of her Birth Equity Scholars Training experience, which trains residents to seek solutions to improve maternal, paternal, and infant health outcomes.

Dr. Parente Publishes Editorial on 4-Year Residency

Dr. Dan Parente has authored an editorial in this month's *Family Medicine* about a 12-year pilot study looking into whether Family Medicine residents would be better off in a four-year residency instead of three.

The Length of Training Pilot Study began in 2013 with the goal of learning whether extending residencies improved physician performance overall. It's controversial, but supporters suggest an extra year would give residents more time to navigate medicine's modern complexities and let them become proficient on the wide array of subjects family docs must learn.

Dr. Parente's editorial, [which you can read here](#), argues that an extra year on resident-level salaries would take a financial toll on trainees and may lead them to delay starting families. A four-year residency would also narrow the pipeline for producing new family physicians at a time when they're desperately needed.

Parente makes a case for more flexible residency options in family medicine and perhaps adjusting the fourth-year medical school curricula and expectations. He writes that, at the very least, more data should come in before any changes are made.

The editorial is part of a wider discussion of the four-year residency concept in the September issue of *Family Medicine*, and [you can read the additional articles at this link](#). ★



PGY1 Dr. Austin Gartner does a POCUS exam on Dr. Nicole Yedlinsky's knee during a session on joints during core time on Wednesday, Sept. 17. Our residents get POCUS training all year long.

Dr. Shanks Shares Abridge Experiences

Dr. Denton Shanks is helping the Health System spread the word about the AI-driven notetaking tool Abridge and how it's changed his patient encounters.

Dr. Shanks, the Health System's Medical Director of AI, Informatics, and Digital Health, appeared on a recent edition of *Open Mics* to explain how he uses AI. ([Watch it here](#))



Physicians bring Abridge into the exam room so it can record and summarize what's said, turning the full conversation into detailed notes for the patient's EMR.

Dr. Shanks says Abridge has cut his after-hours workload. On a full clinic day previously, he would go home, spend time with his family, and then write notes well into the night. Now, he can check the notes from Abridge and sign off on them moments after the visit ends, leaving his evenings mostly free.

He says it also allows him to be a more active listener.

"Now I have no fear of not facing the computer," he said, "Giving my full attention to the patient and knowing that AI is going to ambiently record this conversation and document it well."

He also told *Open Mics* about a pilot AI project in our clinic that helps nurses with the first drafts of responses to patient emails, saving time and allowing them to customize a personal reply. ★

Kudos

From Dr. Madeline McFarlane:

I'd like to give kudos to **Dr. Jenna Ball** and **Dr. Liz Arbuckle**. They both stepped in to help the IPS team when we got a large amount of admissions at once and were feeling very overwhelmed. It did not go unnoticed, and it was very much appreciated!

From Dr. Bailee Wilson:

Shoutout to **Dr. Paige Eickhoff** for coming through with an admit on my short call for IPS — I really appreciate your help!

Big thanks to **Dr. Liz Holmes** and **Dr. Nick Dombrowski** for all their hard work during your first month on IPS interns! You both did amazing!

And lastly, shoutout to the entire IPS team for making this month enjoyable despite the chaos. Appreciate the energy and teamwork!

From Dr. Nicole Yedlinsky:

Kudos to **Dr. Kinsey Huff** for staying with the laboring patient and attending the C-section delivery. I know the patient was happy to have you there!

Kudos to **Dr. Liz Arbuckle** for some excellent injections in sports clinic.

UPCOMING DEADLINE

The next Family Medicine & Community Health monthly newsletter comes out on Wednesday, Nov. 5

Please email any materials to jfield2@kumc.edu no later than noon on Wednesday, Oct. 29.

Patient Appreciation

"I have to point out the staff, all the way from the doctors to the nurses and the people who clean my room and took care of my basic needs. I love the diversity and competence of the people who are on staff at KU Med."

"I appreciate Dr. Darche for assessing my situation and deciding against administering an injection that would have caused me additional pain for only a temporary fix. This option has not worked in the past and would not relieve my hip and thigh pain. Although the next step will also be painful, it will provide more effective pain relief."

"I much appreciated the comments on leaving to ensure I had a follow-up appointment."

"I wish I could remember med students' names because I would commend them."

"It's wonderful to see the next generation of doctors doing so well while in medical school."

"Dr. Jaeger sets the bar very high with service and concerns and listens to my concerns. (He is) top-shelf and I will and have recommended Dr. Jaeger for his service. Awesome person and doctor!"

"Dr. Witt and her care team were amazing. I was nervous about my appointment because I had Dr. Vail for the past 25+ years and did not know how my new provider would be. She exceeded my expectations!"

"Dr. LeMaster, who is no longer my primary care doctor, is still on staff, and when I was in the hospital for five days, he stopped by and saw me several times and looked at my chart and it was good to say it was like seeing an old friend. Also, while I was in the hospital, I saw (resident) Dr. Brown and he is being mentored by Dr. LeMaster, along with some other medical students."

"I love my doctor!!!!"

October Birthdays



Dr. Bruce Liese	1
Dr. Giulia Bonaminio	2
Dr. Joel Hake	8
Kelly Reyes-Martinez	12
Dr. Allen Greiner	13
Sherri Cooper	16
Dr. Lucas Thompson	25
Dr. Wendi Born	29



October Service Anniversaries

Bianca Peterson	16
Dr. Denise Zwahlen	8
Sherri Cooper	6
Kelsi Crawford-Sorensen	3

Did we miss your birthday?

We try to keep current records, but sometimes things fall through the cracks. If your birthday wasn't on the list last time — and you want it to be — email Jeffrey Field at jfield2@kumc.edu to let us know!

SAVE THE DATE



Sustainability & Wellness Fair

Monday, Oct. 20
11am-1pm

Ad Astra Room (5th Floor HEB)
Great People | Free Food | Prizes

Email Dr. Shelley Bhattacharya with questions



Family Medicine Holiday Party

Friday, December 12
6pm

Overland Park Convention Center
6000 College Blvd

Watch your email for more details soon!