

In Ignotis “Into the Unknown”

Message from the Chair

I hope you all are doing well. I'm thrilled to share some exciting highlights and updates from our department:

- First, let's extend a big congratulations to Dr. Chinelo Okigbo for being selected as one of the recipients of the Junior Clinical Investigator Award! This prestigious award offers protected time and funding for research over three years, along with valuable career mentorship. It's a fantastic opportunity for those pursuing a clinician-researcher path, and we're excited to see the impactful research that will come from it.
- The Junior Clinical Investigator award was modeled after the Department of Medicine's Rising Scholar Program, which provides essential support and mentorship to learners transitioning from residency or fellowship to a faculty position; Dr. Emily Cunningham is our first Rising Scholar! These programs are invaluable in nurturing talent and fostering career growth within our department.
- Take a moment to peruse the list of publications below. It's inspiring to see the wealth of ongoing funded and unfunded studies within our department resulting in peer-reviewed publications. Your dedication to scholarly work is truly commendable, and I encourage you to keep up the fantastic work.
- A heartfelt thank you to all faculty members who have dedicated their time to mentoring medical students, residents, and fellows. Their success in presenting at regional and national conferences, and even winning awards, is a testament to your invaluable guidance and support.
- As we continue to navigate the integration between EVMS and ODU, please stay informed about important updates. Keep an eye out for news regarding benefits enrollment, which opens on May 1st. This is a crucial step, and missing the deadline means waiting until next year for enrollment opportunities.

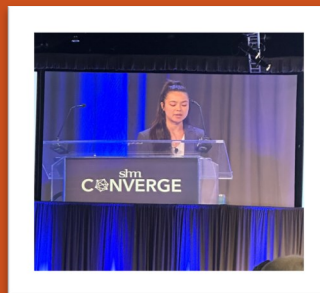
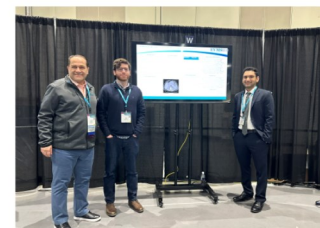
Thank you all for your hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence. Together, we are making a difference in healthcare and academia.

Peer Reviewed Presentations

- 1) Obaitan I, Wehbe H, Easler JJ, Stethen JT, Mahendraker N, Tong Y, **Vargas A**, Dewitt JM, Bick BL, Fogel E, Gutta A, Sherman S, Watkins J, Gromski M, Saleem N, Zyromski N, Al-Haddad MA. Factors predictive of hospital length of stay in patients with an index episode of acute necrotizing pancreatitis. *Pancreatology*. 2024 Feb;24(1):32-40.
- 2) Bavuso M, Miller N, **Sill JM**, **Dobrian A**, **Colunga Biancatelli RML**. Extracellular vesicles in acute respiratory distress syndrome: Understanding protective and harmful signaling for the development of new therapeutics. *Histol Histopathol*. 2024;39:131-144.
- 3) **Casselini CM**, **Parson HK**, Frizzi KE, Marquez A, Smith DR, Guernsey L, Nemmani R, Tayarani A, Jolivalt CG, Weaver J, Fernyhough P, **Vinik AI**, Calcutt NA. A muscarinic receptor antagonist reverses multiple indices of diabetic peripheral neuropathy: preclinical and clinical studies using oxybutynin. *Acta Neuropathol*. 2024 Mar 25;147(1):60.
- 4) Botros L, **Qayyum R**. Association of platelet distribution width with all-cause and cause-specific mortality in us adults. *Int J Cardiol*. 2024 Apr 23:132100. doi: 10.1016/j.ijcard.2024.132100. [Epub ahead of print].
- 5) Tong H, Pan F, Zhang X, Jia S, **Vashisht R**, Chen K, Wang Q. Effect of prone positioning on survival in adult patients receiving venovenous extracorporeal membrane oxygenation for acute respiratory distress syndrome: a prospective multicenter randomized controlled study. *J Thorac Dis*. 2024;16:1368-1377.

Posters & Presentations

- 1) **Okhravi HR** was an invited speaker for the Psychiatric Society of Virginia's Spring Meeting on 02 March 2024, The Significance of Anti-Amyloid Monoclonal Antibodies in Alzheimer's Disease Treatment: Truth or Myth.
- 2) **Okhravi HR**, **Niknejad B**, & Gibson E conducted a symposium, Enhancing Participation: A Randomized Controlled Trial on the Impact of Community-Based Group Screening for Increased Black Adult Enrollment in Alzheimer's Prevention Trials, at the Southern Gerontological Society (SGS) annual meeting on 03 April 2024 in Greenville, SC.
- 3) **Flathers E**, **Aggroia V**, **Tahhan S** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Dry Needling, the Double Edged Sword*.
- 4) **Sitt Naing A**, **FNU Ayesha**, **Bahniwal R**, **Flemmer M** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *What a Stiff Person! Progressive encephalomyelitis with rigidity and myoclonus*.
- 5) **Nguyen L**, **Palmer C**, **Carton J**, **Amoako-Kissi E**, **Blumrick C**, **Wyant J**, **Tahhan S**, **Kassabo W** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Something in the Water: What Can Cause Acute Encephalopathy and Rhabdomyolysis?*



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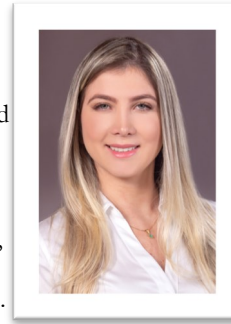
Researcher Spotlight—Alejandra Vargas, MD

Please tell us about yourself: I am originally from Medellín, Colombia—a city at the forefront of healthcare innovation, and community vibrancy. I embarked on my medical journey inspired by my hometown's spirit, & my path took an exciting turn when I joined EVMS for my residency.

What research project are you currently working on, & why does this topic interest you? Throughout my research journey, I have explored a broad spectrum of topics, ranging from the microbiome to distinct pancreatic conditions such as acute pancreatitis, post-ERCP pancreatitis, and insufficiency, alongside the genetics of colorectal cancer. Currently, I'm deeply involved in meta-analysis and retrospective data collection projects. Despite the wide array of subjects, the complex nature of pancreatic diseases remains my primary fascination. This profound interest is driving me toward a fellowship in pancreatic diseases, where I aim to contribute meaningfully to our understanding and treatment of these conditions.

How did you connect to your research mentor & what skills have you learned while working with this individual? Finding the right research mentor was a pivotal step in my journey. With a clear vision of my interests in GI, including a strong inclination towards academic medicine and specific research topics, I sought a mentor who mirrored these passions. This search led me to Dr. David Johnson, a distinguished name in the field of gastroenterology. I reached out, shared my interests, and expressed my eagerness to contribute to the field, which began a fruitful mentorship. Working with Dr. Johnson and other principal investigators has been an enriching experience, teaching me not just about GI, but also about the importance of commitment and the willingness to go above and beyond. Balancing residency, research, and personal life has been challenging, but it has significantly honed my time management and efficiency skills.

What excited you about research or the research process? What excites me about research is the profound capacity to initiate projects that have the potential to transform clinical practice. The journey from conceptualizing a question to implementing quality improvement initiatives embodies a thrilling expedition of discovery, innovation, and real-world application. This process not only satisfies my intellectual curiosity but also significantly contributes to advancing patient care.



Reminders:

Grand Rounds:

Wednesdays at noon in Waitzer Hall, Suite #300

- 5/1/24— Dr. David Harlan MD, UMASS Chan Medical School
- 5/8/24 - Dr. Mitchell Shiffman, MD, Bon Secours Mercy Health
- 5/15/24, Dr. Sophia Lanzkron, MD, Johns Hopkins University
- 5/22/24, Dr. William Horton, MD, University of Virginia

Upcoming Research Events in Hofheimer Hall—5th floor Large Conference Room; Hybrid option available on Zoom:

- Research Workshop: Statistical Overview, 5/7/24 @ 5:00 p.m.
- Research Hour, Fridays 2:00-4:00 p.m.
- Research Journal Club: 5/21/24 @ 5:00 p.m.

Please send updates to:

SillJD@evms.edu

Posters & Presentations continued...

- 6) **Sitt Naing A, Hoerle RQ, Flemmer M** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Bizarre Blockage: Unexpected Clot in an Unexpected Place*.
- 7) **Ahn J, Ball P, Tahhan S** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Warburg Effect: Lactic acidosis due to Prostate Cancer*.
- 8) Ghiorzi JS, Badrish V, **Thomson K, Sill JD, Qayyum R**. Plenary presentation at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge 2024. *Medicaid Expansion's Impact on Heart Failure Mortality: A Nationwide Study*
- 9) **Javed MU, Stogner L, Dulli M, & Tahhan S** Poster presentation at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Epidural Blood-patch for treatment of intracranial hypotension in Jehovah's witness*.
- 10) **Dod R, Alagha T, & Tahhan S** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Beyond Booze and Stones – A Case of Hypertriglyceridemia-Induced Pancreatitis*.
- 11) **Sitt Naing A, Bahniwal R, McAuliffe J, Inayet N** Poster presentation at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Blowing Off Some Steam (Carbon Dioxide): Olanzapine Induced Dyspnea*.
- 12) **Sitt Naing A, Bartholomew E, Inayet N** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Uncharted Territory in Mycobacterial World: Second Case Report in US*
- 13) **FNU Ayesha, Schmidt C, Zahra T** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Tip of the Deadly Thrombotic Thrombocytopenic Purpura Iceberg*.
- 14) **Achitoov M, Williams J, Bluitt B, Dunstan M, Galicia-Castillo M** presented the following poster at the Society of Hospital Medicine Converge in April 2024, *Moral Distress in Compassionate Release: Insights and Interventions for Providers*.
- 15) **Tasha T, McCarron M, Jnawali C, Kassabo W, Tahhan S** presented the following poster at the American College of Physicians annual conference in April 2024, *Are we ALL able to make a diagnosis?*

Awards and Media Highlights

Galicia-Castillo M was featured on Wavy 10 to discuss the topic of end-of-life care. The Hampton Roads Show segment entitled, Creating an Advance Care Plan ran on 11 April 2024. Watch the link [here](#).

Johnson DA was featured on Medscape on 18 April 2024. Video: Exploring the Microbiome-Esophageal Disease Connection. Watch the clip [here](#).

