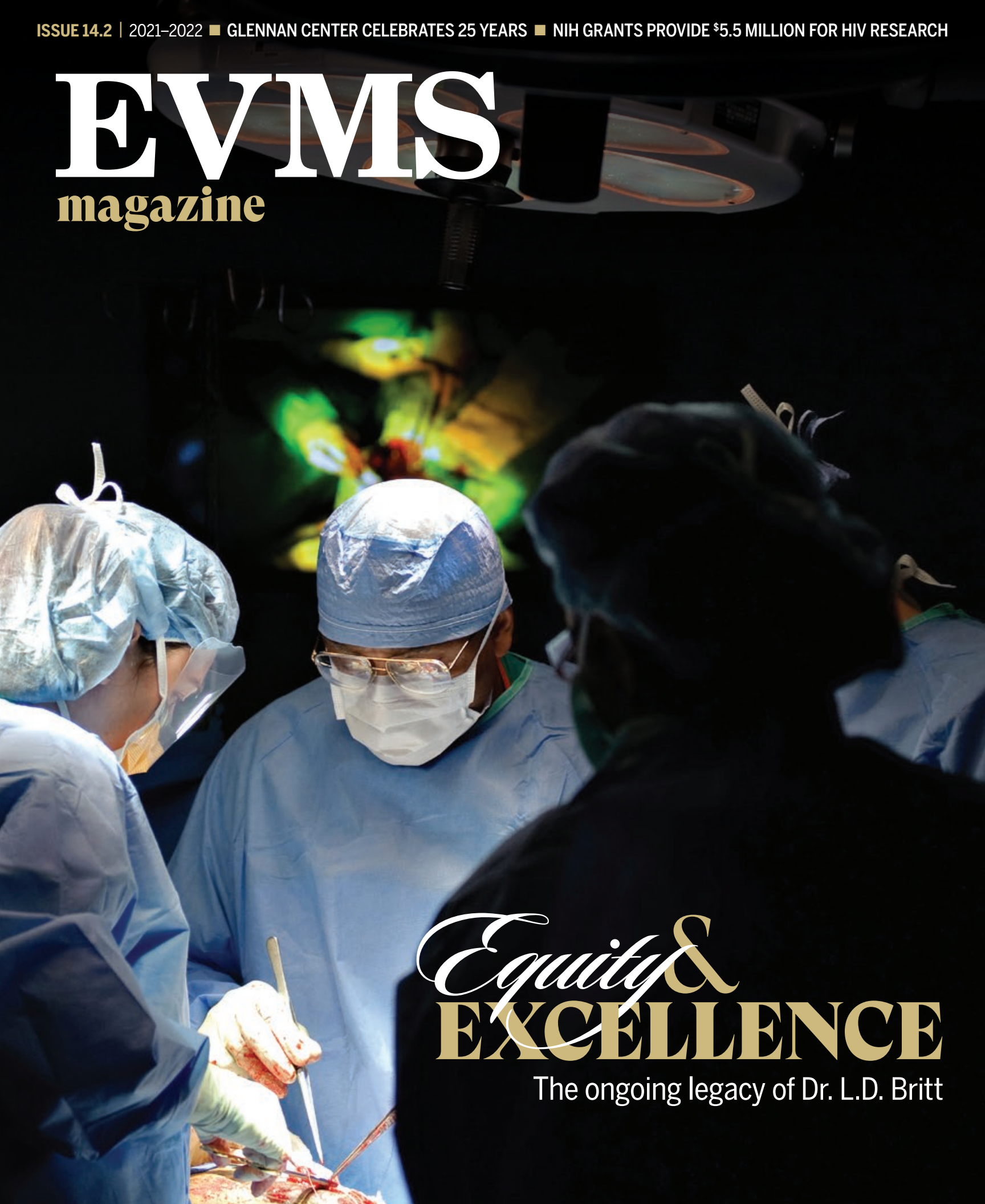


EVMS

magazine



Equity &
EXCELLENCE

The ongoing legacy of Dr. L.D. Britt



On Friday, March 18, EVMS medical students joined their peers across the nation in celebrating Match Day. The event marked EVMS' first in-person Match Day since the start of the pandemic. A total of 143 EVMS graduating students now will head to some of the nation's most prestigious residency programs, including those affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Duke University School of Medicine and Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

Photo by DOUG GARDNER



I Matched at
San Antonio Uniformed Services
Health Education Consortium
in OB/GYN
EVMS

I Matched at
UNC
in ANESTHESIOLOGY
EVMS #EVMSmatch2022

I Matched at
Johns Hopkins
in Pediatrics
EVMS

match2022

I Matched at
DUKE
in EMERGENCY MED
EVMS #EVMSmatch2022

I Matched at
VCU
in Dermatology
EVMS #EVMSmatch2022

EVMS magazine

ISSUE 14.2 | 2021–2022

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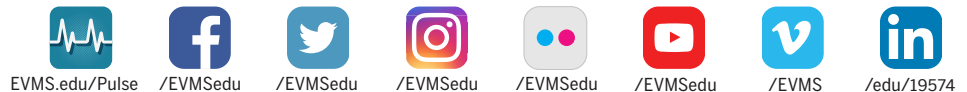
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” – HENRY FORD

Nearly a half century ago, leaders from Hampton Roads’ civic, philanthropic and medical communities came together around a novel idea. They started a medical school, EVMS, founded by the community, for the community. The concept proved transformative. In the 49 years since, EVMS has trained thousands of skilled medical and health professionals and attracted some of most respected and forward-thinking clinicians, researchers and educators in their fields — including, of course, Dr. L.D. Britt, whose ongoing legacy of excellence is highlighted in this month’s issue.

Through EVMS’ community partnerships, clinical services and research — along with our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion — we continue to live and breathe our founding mandate. We strive to reduce health disparities. We lift up and work alongside others. We educate and train students and care for our community members to the best of our abilities with a spirit of optimism and compassion and an eye, always, to the future.

From the beginning, trusted partners who believe in EVMS’ mission have invested in our work, but in the face of rising costs in healthcare and education, our position as an independent school of medical and health professions is becoming more challenging to sustain. Meanwhile, the stakes are high. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic brought into greater focus the many public health issues that demand our attention — highlighting the need for enhanced mental health support; better resources for chronic disease research and management; new tools and strategies to address health inequities; and more time, talent and technology to better prepare our educators, learners, providers and community for future health crises — not to mention the significant workforce shortage that is anticipated in Hampton Roads.

That is why EVMS signed an agreement with Old Dominion University and Norfolk State University last fall to start the ONE School of Public Health, a first-of-its-kind initiative in the Commonwealth, and one that Sentara Healthcare generously supported with a \$2 million gift. In December 2021, EVMS, ODU and Sentara also signed a separate Memorandum of Understanding to explore ways closer alignment or affiliation between EVMS and



ODU could enhance our collaborative efforts to strengthen our educational programs and healthcare outcomes in Hampton Roads.

Since then, leaders from each institution have met regularly to discuss ideas while engaging independently with our respective school communities to ensure questions and concerns — along with our overarching values and cultures — are shared among all parties. There is much work still to be done, and no foregone conclusions, but the discussions so far have been meaningful and enlightening because all groups involved share a deep commitment to the health of people living in Hampton Roads.

During this process, people sometimes ask me, “Why is EVMS exploring this kind of partnership now?” Collaboration is in our DNA. The community leaders who established EVMS acted boldly to address challenges they saw in Hampton Roads. To meet our community’s health needs today, and far into the future, we need similarly forward-thinking solutions. I am confident we will find them.

As we approach our 50th anniversary in 2023-2024, I am so proud to say that EVMS is most assuredly still a school founded by the community, for the community. We are committed to building on our strong foundation, so that EVMS staff, faculty and students can continue to work, learn and teach with the highest possible levels of efficiency, engagement and innovation toward a healthier, more equitable and more resilient future for everyone.

Sincerely,

Alfred Abuhamad, MD



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EVMS honors the ongoing legacy of Dr. L.D. Britt

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*Pictured on the cover:
Dr. L. D. Britt*

Seen & Heard

The EVMS community makes news

Compiled by VIRGINIA HILTON



In recognition of the hard work and dedication of all residents and fellows and especially those serving at EVMS, Norfolk Mayor Kenneth Alexander issued a proclamation declaring Friday, **February 25, as “Thank a Resident Day.”**

“We are grateful to the leadership of Sentara Healthcare for their generosity and recognition of the importance of establishing a school of public health in Hampton Roads.”

**Alfred Abuhamad, MD,
Interim President and
Provost of EVMS and Dean
of the School of Medicine**

Sentara Healthcare recently donated \$2 million to EVMS to support development of the first school of public health in Virginia. EVMS is teaming with Old Dominion University and Norfolk State University to establish the ONE (ODU, NSU and EVMS) School of Public Health.

3 A new NIH study finds that Black mothers are 3 times more likely to die in childbirth

EVMS recently launched the Center for Maternal and Child Health Equity and Advocacy to intensify efforts to address maternal health disparities. The center will study outcomes at the regional and state level to better understand where and why disparities exist.



The American Medical Association awarded EVMS Street Health first place in the **Accelerating Change in Medical Education Impact Challenge**. The Community-Engaged Learning initiative was recognized for providing free care to unhoused, uninsured and low-income individuals.



Checkered Flag

**YOU GAVE.
THEY GAVE.**

Thank You!

You helped us cross the finish line! Checkered Flag has contributed \$25,000 to support the EVMS Fund, bringing the total amount raised through the Checkered Flag Challenge to \$76,347.

Thank you!

EVMS
Eastern Virginia Medical School

Trending

Highlights from conversations on EVMS social media

Compiled by CAYLA MORGAN



#ArtTherapy Today, second-year [@evms_art_therapy_counseling](#) students participated in hands-on learning in Trauma & Neuroscience Informed Counseling & Art Psychotherapy.

We ♥'d seeing our students gaining experience in EVMS' Sentara Center for Simulation and Immersive Learning today as part of the **#IMIG** Lumbar and Paracentesis Sim Session.



#MilitaryMatch Congratulations to the 11 members of the MD Class of 2022 who recently learned where they will be serving their residencies within the armed forces!



Mutaz Alkalbani
@AlkalbaniMutaz

I am beyond excited to match in **#Cardiology** at [@InovaHealth](#). Looking forward to advancing my training with the amazing faculty and staff at **#Inova**, among people who inspired me to pursue a fellowship in cardiology. Grateful for my mentors at [@EVMSedu](#) for their support.



Students of APAMSA gathered in Waitzer Hall this afternoon for a **#LunarNewYear** celebration.



Today Surgical Assisting students hosted a (mini) **#SutureFest** where they tutored other students in the skills of suturing and tying.



Did you know EVMS is now on GIPHY? Create and share customizable gifs and stickers to share your EVMS spirit. Search [@EVMSedu](#) on [giphy.com](#).

Add your voice to the conversation. [@EVMSedu](#)



Adaptive Gymnastics was launched as an EVMS Community-Engaged Learning Initiative in 2019.

Flipping the script

An EVMS Community-Engaged Learning initiative gives young gymnasts a chance to shine

Story by VIRGINIA HILTON | Photos by BRENDAN ASH

At first glance, seeing children tumbling on a gym mat or jumping on a trampoline might not seem like a big deal, but for the parents surrounding the mat on Sunday mornings at Excalibur Gymnastics in Virginia Beach, it's everything.

Their children are participants in Adaptive Gymnastics, an EVMS Community-Engaged Learning initiative developed for young athletes with neurological, physical or developmental disabilities.

Kaitlin Hardy, MD Class of 2023, was inspired to create the program after her career as a competitive gymnast came to an abrupt end.

"I was a gymnast for my entire life and reached my goal of NCAA Division I gymnastics, only to have the experience taken away from me when I began having epileptic seizures," Ms. Hardy says. "As a coping mechanism, I started working with young people in the community with epilepsy and eventually expanded my interests and began working with children with neurological and intellectual disabilities."

“Through this program,
I have learned so much
about empathy. I’ve also
learned how to tactfully
navigate discussions,
set realistic goals and
work with caregivers.”

Kaitlin Hardy, MD
Class of 2023





When she arrived at EVMS in 2019, she wanted to continue that work but couldn't find any similar programs. She reached out to Excalibur gymnastics, pitched the idea and launched the initiative. When she approached EVMS Community-Engaged Learning about supporting the effort, the group was eager to help and make it an official student initiative. In just two years, the effort has grown from four participants to 40 across three classes. In February 2022, the group hosted a competition at the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

Student volunteers come from both EVMS and the ODU Pre-Health Club. After completing the USA Gymnastics Safe Sport course, they undergo training and are assigned to a specific athlete. Every family fills out a plan for their child, and then the student volunteers work toward creating specific goals for the children. Goals range from learning physical therapy- and occupational therapy-based skills to developing both social skills and the ability to follow multistep directions.

Karen Basanes was thrilled to learn about the new program. Her 12-year-old daughter, Deja, who loves dance and gymnastics, was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder eight years ago. The family tried several different gyms but left every session feeling like the environment wasn't a good fit. Since starting with

Adaptive Gymnastics, they've seen vast improvements.

"We joined the program to help Deja with her physical strength, coordination and social skills," Ms. Basanes says. "We have seen improvements in those areas, as well as speech, self-confidence, awareness, emotional and behavioral aspects. My list could go on. She benefits from something in every class she attends."

While the program is beneficial to the athletes and their families, it's also a great experience for the student coaches.

The goal is to give EVMS students a unique experience in pediatrics, insight into living with disabilities and a chance to explore the benefit of sport in childhood development. "Through this program, I have learned so much about empathy," Ms. Hardy says. "I've also learned how to tactfully navigate discussions, set realistic goals and work with caregivers."

Parents of the participants say they are thankful for the opportunity.

"These volunteers give their time, effort and, most importantly, patience in helping our children," Ms. Basanes says. "It's one thing when it's your own child with special needs, but they are taking the responsibility and dedication to help another individual. That's a heavy role not everyone is willing to take. We need more people like them in our community." □

Since its founding, Adaptive Gymnastics has expanded services from four children to 40.



See a video of the program at evms.edu/AdaptiveGymnastics.

RESEARCH

Pair of NIH grants provide \$5.5 million for HIV research

Story and photo by DOUG GARDNER



An estimated 27,000 people with HIV live in Virginia — including about 8,000 in Hampton Roads. Dr. Woong-Ki Kim and Dr. Ming Lei Guo hope their research will help improve these patients' lives.

People who are HIV positive can expect to live an average lifespan — a prospect unheard of only a generation ago.

But while anti-retroviral drugs have tamed a key aspect of this once-deadly condition, HIV has proven to be a stubborn adversary that continues to linger and haunt its victims.

Two EVMS faculty members hope to help ease this burden. Woong-Ki Kim, PhD, and Ming-Lei Guo, PhD, received a pair of R01 grants totaling \$5.5 million from the National Institutes of Health to fund research to better understand the virus. NIH R01 grants are among the most sought-after, prestigious grants awarded for medically oriented research.

Dr. Kim, Associate Dean for Research Faculty Development and Research Facilities and Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Cell Biology, is continuing his work to find and eliminate remnants of the virus that persist even after treatment.

“Despite effective anti-retroviral therapy (ART) that maintains HIV at non-detectable levels [in blood], HIV is not eradicated,” Dr. Kim says. “When individuals are off ART, or during ‘viral blips,’ viral reservoirs in the central nervous system can quickly rebound.”

Dr. Kim and others have found that a favorite hiding place is in perivascular macrophages (PVMs) — a type of protective white blood cell found in the central nervous system. Despite ART treatment, this HIV reservoir persists, silently awaiting an opportunity to attack the body once again.

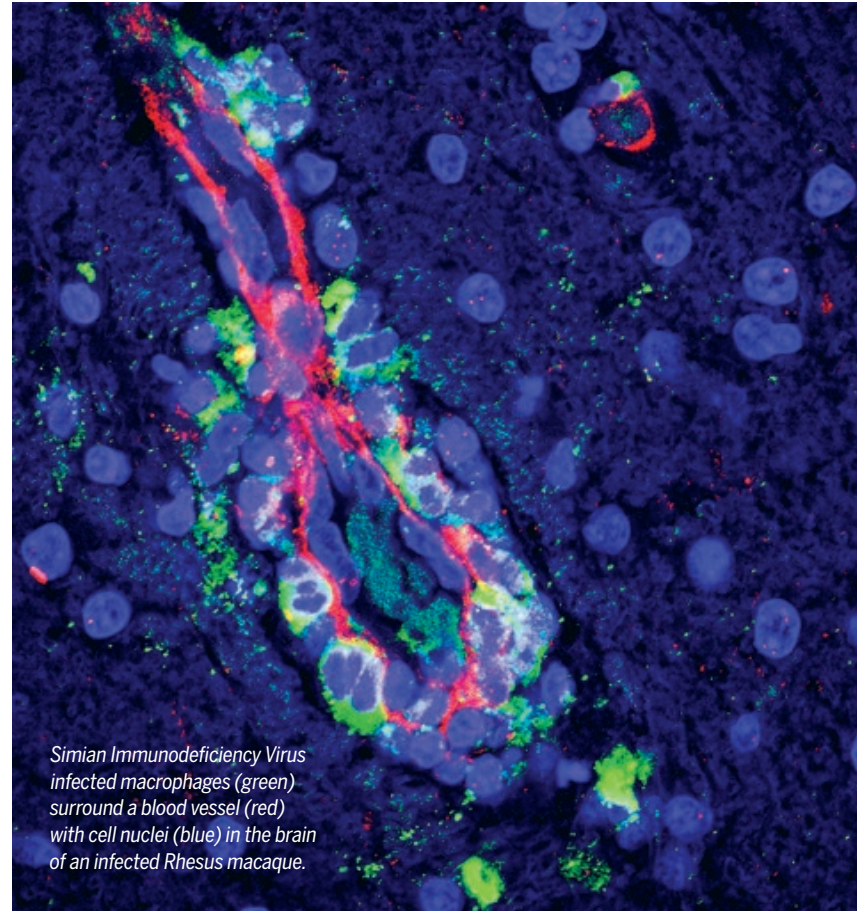
HIV targets these macrophages early during infection and throughout infection even with effective ART, Dr. Kim says.

In his research, funded by a \$3.6 million grant, Dr. Kim is using an experimental anti-cancer compound to try to prevent the virus from accumulating in the brain. He will test at multiple intervals — three and five months — to make sure the process is successful. If it works in animal models, it could eventually make its way into human research.

Dr. Guo, Assistant Professor of Pathology and Anatomy, is the first faculty recruit through the new Center for Integrative Neuroscience and Inflammatory Diseases (CINID). He is working with Dr. Kim, also a member of the CINID team, on a second HIV-related grant, valued at \$1.9 million to study the impact of HIV on neuropsychiatric disorders.

“People living with HIV have comparable life-expectancy as their HIV-negative peers, but their life-quality is deeply compromised due to the high prevalence of neuropsychiatric disorders, including depression and anxiety,” Dr. Guo says. No effective treatment exists.

Among people with HIV, drug abuse is very common, particularly in developed countries, says Dr. Guo, who has had three previous NIH grants focused on HIV and drug abuse. Evidence suggests there are several potential contributing factors, including proteins expressed



Simian Immunodeficiency Virus infected macrophages (green) surround a blood vessel (red) with cell nuclei (blue) in the brain of an infected Rhesus macaque.

by the concealed virus and antiretrovirals used long term to suppress the virus, as well as the impact of cocaine and other drugs of abuse.

Drs. Guo and Kim are focused on a newly identified pathway known as “NLRP3 inflammasome signaling.” Tantalizing preliminary data points to NLRP3 as a key part of the intracellular communications behind the neurological damage, Dr. Guo says. They will test this hypothesis and determine if blocking these communications prevents neurological damages.

Their research findings could provide a foundation for the development of treatments to help ease the disorders and perhaps even reverse the neuronal damage. Potentially, a medication to block NLRP3 could be used to prevent the damage, Dr. Guo says. □



Glennan Center marks milestone in education, research and guidance for families dealing with the challenges of aging

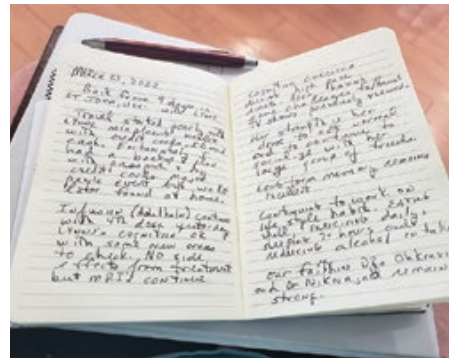
Story and photos by DOUG GARDNER

Jim Morton was feeling overwhelmed.

His wife, Lynne, was showing warning signs of dementia — memory loss, confusion and an inability to manage tasks the retired bookkeeper once had easily handled, such as balancing the family checkbook.

Dr. Hamid Okhravi, Director of the Glennan Center's Memory Consultation Clinic, reviews MRI scans with patient Lynne Morton and her husband, Jim Morton.





Above left: Dr. Okhravi speaks with patient Lynne Morton during a visit to the Glennan Center in Norfolk.

Above: Lynne and Jim Morton discuss her care after a visit to the EVMS Glennan Center.

Left: Jim Morton continues to document his wife's medical journey, including their chance discovery of the EVMS Glennan Center.



“Regardless of age, we see patients with all different types of dementia, other memory problems and patients concerned about memory lapses.”
– Dr. Hamid Okhravi

As the couple sought answers, they found themselves dealing with a dizzying array of medical specialists. Traveling from one doctor’s office to the next, Mr. Morton felt the burden of trying to make sense of everything he was hearing.

“What do I do?” he recalls thinking. “What does this mean? How do I pull all this information together?”

A friend recommended he consider the Glennan Center. Mr. Morton did his research, then contacted the center. Since that time, Lynne has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. Today, Mr. Morton says he is confident Lynne is in good hands.

“I realized the Glennan Center is a place where it all comes together,” he says. “I don’t know what I would do without the Glennan Center. We look forward to coming here. It’s a resource to help us understand.”

The Glennan Center has been an important part of the community for 25 years ever since philanthropist Virginia Cooke Glennan Ferguson chose to fund the center and name it in honor of her father’s family.

While Mrs. Ferguson died a decade ago, her legacy lives on. Over the course of a quarter century, the Glennan Center has become the hub for geriatric-related education, patient care and research at EVMS. In the process, it has helped countless older adults live better, fuller lives.

Today, the Glennan Center stands as a shining example of the power of a shared vision, sustained by the enduring impact of philanthropy.

Dr. Marissa Galicia-Castillo, once an EVMS student herself, now teaches and mentors students, residents and fellows in geriatrics. Teaching is just one of her many roles in her capacity as Director of the Glennan Center for Geriatrics and Gerontology.



Face-to-face with patients

As Jim and Lynne Morton discovered, the Glennan Center provides a spectrum of patient care thanks to a team of highly trained physicians and staff with expertise in geriatrics, dementia and palliative care.

While Glennan staff see patients in offices on the EVMS campus, much of the care takes place in community settings, such as affiliated hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities and continuing care communities throughout the region.

As director of the Glennan Center for 10 years before retiring in spring 2021, Robert Palmer, MD, has witnessed the center's impact firsthand. "The Glennan Center has made invaluable contributions to the health of older adults and to those with serious illness," he says.

Dr. Palmer left his mark. He helped create the Acute Care for the Elderly (ACE) unit, to provide enhanced care for older adults in specially designed hospital units. The interdisciplinary care team includes geriatricians, advanced practice nurses, social workers, pharmacists and physical and occupational therapists.

Programs like ACE care — which significantly reduce the length of hospital stays — are crucial because of a shortage

"Sometimes you make just one little change in [patients'] medicine, and it makes such a difference. It might be the thing that keeps them from going to a nursing home."

— Dr. Marissa Galicia-Castillo

of geriatricians, says Marissa Galicia-Castillo, MD, MEd (MD '97, Internal Medicine Residency '00), the John Franklin Distinguished Chair for Geriatrics, Director of the Glennan Center and Professor of Internal Medicine.

"There's no way geriatricians can see all the older adults who are at risk," Dr. Galicia-Castillo says. "We can do more good as consultants on complex cases in the hospital, in the clinics, in nursing homes, where we've got all the pieces of the puzzle teased out and sorted out so that we can get the patient on the best path."

One of the key puzzle pieces is memory assessment, a longstanding specialty of the Glennan Center. That's where Jim and Lynne Morton found help.

The Glennan Center Memory Consultation Clinic offers diagnosis, treatment and support for patients with dementia and other cognitive disorders. It also provides in-depth assessment of memory problems for patients who have experienced cognitive changes. The clinic cares for some 1,500 patients and has an extensive support system for caregivers.

"Regardless of age, we see patients with all different types of dementia, other memory problems, or patients who are concerned about their memory lapses," says Clinic Director Hamid Okhravi, MD.

Students with an interest in geriatrics regularly interact with older adults, such as in this gathering that included music and games.



“We collaborate very closely with our clinical neuropsychologist, geriatric psychiatrist, neuroradiologists, nuclear medicine specialists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and our local Alzheimer’s Association chapter,” says Dr. Okhravi, who is also the Alfred E. Abiouness Distinguished Professor in Geriatrics and Associate Professor of Internal Medicine.

The Mortons have been impressed with Dr. Okhravi as he has overseen Mrs. Morton’s care.

“Dr. Okhravi has been very clear constantly throughout our journey,” Mr. Morton says. “His calm demeanor, his extensive experience and his willingness to just answer our questions are very reassuring.”

Innovations in treatment

Another vital aspect of the Glennan Center is its effort to continually improve care. The center provides the residents of Hampton Roads with access to cutting-edge experimental treatments that otherwise might not be available locally.

In the past two decades, Glennan Center faculty physicians and scientists have studied a range of potential treatments for various ailments predominant in older adults — a study of ginseng extract that showed some benefit for respiratory illness, research toward a flu vaccine tailored for the aging immune system and the evaluation of a simple screening tool that proved valuable in identifying drivers who might have trouble on the road because they are cognitively impaired.

Today, the center’s greatest research focus is on Alzheimer’s disease and

dementia, Dr. Okhravi says. His research includes cure-oriented studies with a focus on the biology of the disease and care-oriented research, which develops best practices of treatment.

“My approach is to bring both types of research opportunities and high-quality clinical trials for our patients and caregivers in the Hampton Roads community,” Dr. Okhravi says. To that end, he is working to expand campus collaborations to promote team-based, multidisciplinary science.

“We are also very mindful to the needs of patients who are cognitively intact but are at higher risk of developing Alzheimer’s and other types of dementia,” he says. Along those lines, the center is a site for one of the first trials of a medication designed to prevent Alzheimer’s disease.

Among other research trials underway at the center are two that target agitation in individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. Dr. Okhravi and colleagues nationwide are studying whether CBD oil or the medication escitalopram can help. Four in five people with Alzheimer’s experience agitation or aggression, but there is no FDA-approved treatment.

Recruiting the next generation of caregivers

One of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Glennan Center was the need to prepare future physicians and healthcare providers to deliver specialized care to older adults.

EVMS was among the first U.S. medical schools to require students to undertake specialized training in geriatric care. That was one of the



Physician Assistant Matthew Bourcier, above, and Dr. Hamel Patel care for patients at Beth Shalom Village in Norfolk.



aspects that drew Mrs. Ferguson’s interest and helped inspire her gift to found the Glennan Center.

In part, that training was established to help counter the tendency of physicians to be turned off by the challenge of treating chronic illness. “They want something they can fix,” John Franklin, MD, former Chief of Geriatrics, used to say. “Geriatrics is not a popular field of medicine.”

Another deterrent to attracting more students to geriatrics — then and now — is the pay.

“Geriatrics is not a lucrative specialty,” says Dr. Galicia-Castillo. “One student told me, ‘I love geriatrics, but I’ve got loans I have to pay.’”

This isn’t just a local recruitment problem. The U.S. is experiencing a serious shortage of geriatricians, and the need is only growing. A report released earlier this year by the Alzheimer’s Association estimates that Virginia and the nation as a whole will need a 10-fold increase in geriatricians by the year 2050.

Over the past 25 years, the Glennan Center has done its part to bolster interest in the care of older adults.

Medical and physician assistant students rotate through hospitals, nursing homes and long-term-care facilities to shadow Glennan Center faculty physicians as they care for patients in clinics and at bedsides.

In fact, Glennan Center physicians are seldom without a learner at their coattails, Dr. Galicia-Castillo says. “We’re teaching nearly all the time.”

Students also are introduced to this specialized field in other ways.

Two student groups supported by the Glennan Center — Students for

the Advancement of Geriatric Education and Beyond Clinic Walls — foster interest in geriatrics and stoke the passion of students interested in the profession. The clubs offer students a forum to share ideas and pair student teams with an older adult, so they can witness the challenges of aging.

With support from donor Rosemary Grime Jordan, the Glennan Center launched a fellowship program to provide sub-specialty training in geriatrics for two fellows each year. The center’s “geri-med” program serves as a pipeline for the fellowship — drawing interested students to attend EVMS for their residency training and to then go on to complete the fellowship.

“We find someone who enjoys taking care of older people, get them from the beginning to foster that interest and help them continue into their fellowship,” says Dr. Galicia-Castillo, who was the fellowship’s first graduate.

Another specialized training program — the Brock Fellowship for Hospice and Palliative Medicine — emphasizes the need to help patients maintain quality of life throughout the course of a serious disease. Established through a gift from Joan Brock and her late husband, Macon, the fellowship trains physicians to focus on treating symptoms while making patients comfortable.

These programs dovetail nicely with another Glennan Center staple: sit-down rounds.

Dr. Franklin and Desmond Hayes, MD, another EVMS geriatrics pioneer, created the program to provide an interprofessional educational opportunity to highlight the medical management and social issues facing older patients, says Madeline Dunstan, MS, Associate Director of

25TH
ANNIVERSARY

Contributions from donors have been pivotal to the establishment and advancement of the Glennan Center. Among the programs established thanks to philanthropy:

FELLOWSHIPS

The Brock Fellowship for Hospice and Palliative Medicine

The Lillian and Gideon Welles Grime Fellowship in Geriatrics

ACADEMIC HONORS

The John Franklin Chair in Geriatrics

The Sue Faulkner Scribner Distinguished Professorship in Geriatrics

The Westminster-Canterbury Professorship

The Rosemary, Fenton and Garnett Jordan Professorship in Geriatrics

The Alfred E. Abiouness Distinguished Professorship in Geriatrics

The McKinnon Family Professorship in Palliative Medicine

To learn more about donor opportunities, visit evms.edu/giving



Virginia Glennan Ferguson celebrates the opening of the Glennan Center in 1996 with then-Director Dr. Stefan Gravenstein, left, and geriatrics pioneer Dr. John Franklin.

Education and Instructor of Internal Medicine in the Glennan Center.

“Each month, a resident, geriatrics fellow or student presents details about an older patient and seeks advice from the group,” she says. “The learning is bi-directional. Presenters and others in attendance learn about valuable resources from participants, representing a host of organizations and services for older adults. The community participants, in turn, enrich their understanding of the diagnoses and medical management of complex older patients.”

The Glennan Center also regularly teams up with the M. Foscue Brock Institute for Community and Global Health at EVMS to sponsor community lectures on a range of health topics. It was a gift from the Cooke Fund — a Hampton Roads Community Foundation fund established by Mrs. Ferguson in honor of her mother’s family — that established the Glennan Nutrition Symposium. The symposium highlights the value of nutrition education.

Despite the focus EVMS has placed on geriatrics, few students choose to pursue the specialty. And it’s an issue plaguing medical schools nationwide.

“It’s sad,” Dr. Galicia-Castillo says. “But you hope they take some of the concepts they’ve learned and integrate them into their practice.”

The intersection of care and philanthropy

“People who go into medicine like to help others,” Dr. Galicia-Castillo says. “Studies have shown that geriatricians enjoy some of the best job satisfaction even though they’re not the best paid.”

For her, the satisfaction comes from helping patients successfully battle the challenges of aging.

“Sometimes you make just one little change in their medicine, and it makes such a difference for them. You stop [one medication] and there’s no more brain fog. It’s these crazy simple things, but it’s so impactful for patients

and families. It might be the thing that keeps them from going to a nursing home.”

It was that kind of impact that led Mrs. Ferguson to fund the center.

As a hospital volunteer in the 1960s and ’70s, Mrs. Ferguson came to understand the challenges and risks facing adults as they age.

“I saw many patients brought to the emergency room from nursing homes,” she once recalled, “and I developed a deep respect and concern for them.”

Initially, Mrs. Ferguson, who lived her life modestly, was put off by the funding request to set up the center, says Rob Goodman, her attorney and Cooke Fund advisor. “She said there was no way she was going to part with \$1.5 million,” he recalls of the initial request from the school.

Mr. Goodman helped guide her to a compromise. She agreed to donate \$1.5 million at the time of her death and in the meantime to give the school \$75,000 annually to support geriatrics.

As Mrs. Ferguson saw the center in action and witnessed the care that Glennan Center physicians provided to patients — including her own friends and family — she more than tripled her commitment to the school by eventually donating \$5 million.

Other donors have enjoyed the same fulfillment of watching their gifts at work. Their combined generosity has played an integral role in the center’s success, says Paul Aravich, PhD, a neuroscientist and member of the interdisciplinary team behind the Glennan Center for the last quarter century.

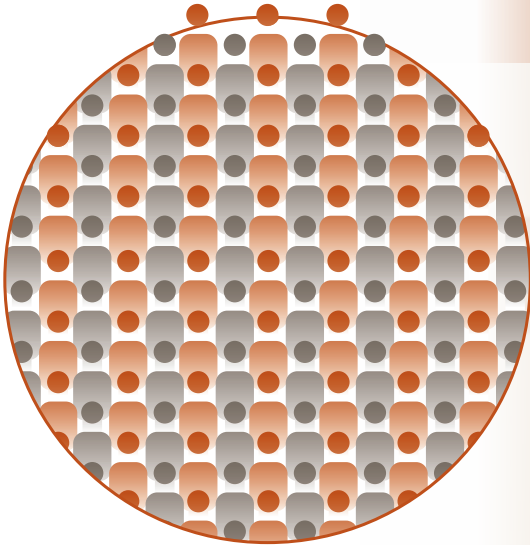
“The generous gift of Virginia Glennan Ferguson, of subsequent donors, of major grant support earned by faculty, and by EVMS itself has allowed the Glennan Center to revolutionize the care of older persons in Hampton Roads,” Dr. Aravich says. “The Glennan Center embodies the community vision of EVMS and has had a global impact.” □

PICTURE THIS

The next generation of geriatricians

The U.S. is experiencing a serious shortage of geriatricians, and the need is only growing. EVMS is working to be part of the solution by training the next generation of providers.

33,200 Number of geriatricians the U.S. will need in 2025 to care for elderly patients.



7,000

Current number of U.S. geriatricians.



1 in 3

Graduate fellowships in geriatrics went unfilled in 2019.

55%

Predicted population increase of Americans over 65 by 2030.

30%

Percentage of adults over 65 expected to need a geriatrician.

50%

Percentage of current geriatricians who practice full time.

28

Number of new U.S. graduate fellowship programs focused on training geriatricians added between academic years 2001-2002 and 2017-2018. The increase represents virtually no growth when adjusted for the rising U.S. population.

\$233,564

Average total compensation for geriatricians in 2018. By comparison, anesthesiologists are paid twice as much, and cardiologists and radiologists average more than \$500,000. Meanwhile, a 2009 survey of 42 medical specialties found that geriatricians report higher career satisfaction than most other medical specialties.



FEATURE

Equity & EXCELLENCE

The ongoing legacy of Dr. L.D. Britt

Story by MARY WESTBROOK

CE



The last thing Franchell Richard Hamilton, MD (Surgery Residency '12), wanted to deal with at 3 a.m. after a grueling day at the hospital was a phone call. On the line, a nurse had a question about a non-emergency patient order — something Dr. Hamilton had placed 18 hours earlier.

“You’re waking me up now to ask me this?” snapped Dr. Hamilton, then a second-year resident at EVMS.

Later in the day, Dr. Hamilton walked into the office of her mentor, L.D. Britt, MD, MPH, ready to vent.

She didn’t get the response she expected. Instead, Dr. Britt told her to take a seat.

“Dr. Hamilton,” he said, shaking his head. “When are you going to learn that if you want to get your message across, there’s a better way to talk to people?”

Ten years later, Dr. Hamilton still remembers that lesson — and many others she learned from Dr. Britt, the Edward J. Brickhouse Chair in Surgery, the Henry Ford Professor of Surgery, Vice Dean for Clinical Affairs, and Professor and Chair of EVMS Surgery.

Now a bariatric surgeon and author, Dr. Hamilton came to EVMS as something of a rebel: an outspoken Texan with nose piercings and a penchant for questioning authority. In addition, Dr. Hamilton, also Chief Medical Officer of the digital wellness company Fresh Tri, is a Black woman, a demographic that makes up only 2% of the U.S. physician workforce — and an even smaller percentage of the country’s surgeons.

“In retrospect, I think Dr. Britt understood how hard it was going to be for me as a female African American surgeon,” Dr. Hamilton says. “He wanted my surgical, medical and interpersonal skills to be unimpeachable. He was protecting and preparing me. His efforts made all the difference. I owe my career to Dr. Britt.”

Dr. Hamilton is not alone in feeling this way. For almost 40 years, Dr. Britt has been an EVMS faculty member, working tirelessly as a teacher and mentor, not to mention an internationally recognized leader in the world of surgery.

As a Black man who grew up in the segregated South, Dr. Britt has pushed past social, economic and political

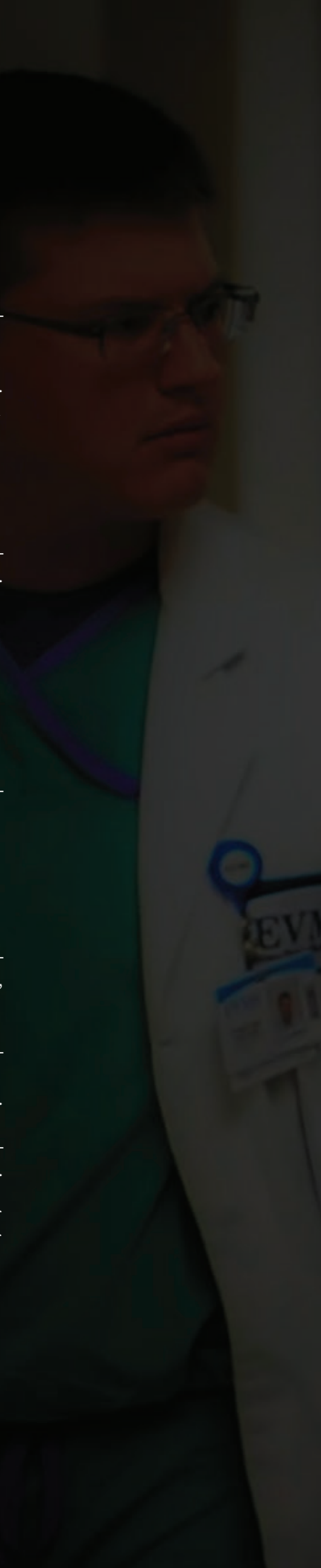
barriers to earn many of the medical and surgical community’s highest honors and to serve in some of its most influential roles, including President of the American College of Surgeons (ACS). His list of firsts is dizzying. Among other achievements, Dr. Britt was the first Black American to have an endowed chair in surgery and the first EVMS physician to be named to the prestigious National Academy of Medicine. He also was the first Black surgeon to be presented with the ACS’ Lifetime Achievement award — an honor so prestigious that it has been given to only four other surgeons in the organization’s 108-year history. A prolific researcher, Dr. Britt was awarded a \$2.5 million grant in 2017 from the National Institutes of Health on behalf of the ACS to address healthcare disparities — and at EVMS both an endowed scholarship and fund in his name help the school diversify and expand its student, faculty and staff populations.

Dr. Britt’s most enduring legacy, however, centers on his dedication to three core areas: providing expert patient care, educating the next generation of providers and improving the health of the entire Hampton Roads community.

“My greatest honor is taking care of patients,” Dr. Britt says. “There’s nothing better than getting patients the surgical and medical interventions they need. A close second to that, for me, is teaching.”

This spring, EVMS is celebrating Dr. Britt’s commitment with the installation of a statue in his likeness, crafted by world-renowned artist Mario Chiodo. The statue will stand on the lawn of Waitzer Hall and serve as a source of pride and inspiration for the entire campus community, says Alfred Abuhamad, MD, Interim President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine.

“Dr. Britt has devoted his entire professional life to addressing healthcare disparities, mentoring and serving others and delivering unparalleled patient care,” Dr. Abuhamad says. “Our hope is that each person who passes the statue will not only appreciate the work of this talented artist but understand the magnitude of Dr. Britt’s lifelong dedication to healthcare, research and education.”





**“MY GREATEST
HONOR IS TAKING
CARE OF PATIENTS.
A CLOSE SECOND
TO THAT, FOR ME,
IS TEACHING.”**

DR. L.D. BRITT

Ties that bind

Dr. Britt's story — and his journey from rural Virginia to some of the most hallowed halls of medicine — has been well documented. It's a tale of grit, determination, focus and heart.

During his childhood, Dr. Britt's parents emphasized excellence. Their expectations were high, and yet Dr. Britt exceeded those expectations by attending the University of Virginia as an undergraduate before earning dual degrees from Harvard's medical school and school of public health.

Medicine, Dr. Britt says, was a natural calling even if his path to becoming a surgeon was not straightforward.

"The best advice I've ever gotten — and it's turned into advice I also give — is this: Use any perceived weaknesses to your advantage," Dr. Britt says. "Develop yourself. Yes, there are biases and challenges — racism, sexism and more. Those things are real, and we face them, but the greatest weapon against all of that is excellence. I've always felt I can beat racism into the ground with excellence."

By the time Dr. Britt finished his surgical residency at the University of Illinois School of Medicine, some of the top medical schools and teaching hospitals in the country were courting him. He chose instead to return to Hampton Roads so that he could give back to his home and play a role in EVMS' future.

"Some people at the time told me to think bigger, to go someplace more established," Dr. Britt says. "I knew Hampton Roads needed me, and I wanted to grow with our new medical school. Sometimes, you have to listen to yourself and ignore other people. My colleagues told me I wouldn't excel here, but I have. In fact, I ended up helping many of those same people along the way, and I did it from EVMS."

Dr. Britt joined the EVMS faculty in 1986 and has served as Chair of EVMS Surgery since 1994 and Vice Dean for Clinical Affairs since 2021. For the first 25 years of his career, he traveled to Suffolk every Tuesday to see patients, including some of his former schoolteachers, who couldn't make it to Norfolk.

The trips, he says, were a way for him to both stay connected with his past and better understand the current needs of the community.

"As a young man, I looked around my community, the segregated Jim Crow South, and I saw real struggles," Dr. Britt says. "If my family members had to go to the doctor, they packed a lunch because getting to that appointment, being seen by a doctor, getting home — it would take hours. I knew something was wrong. The issue of healthcare disparities was our biggest challenge. It's what drew me into medicine.

"We still have healthcare disparities. To be honest, that's what keeps me in medicine."

Paying it forward

Several years ago, Nell Maloney Patel, MD (Surgery Residency '06), faced a crisis of confidence. After years of exceling — as a girl growing up in New York City and as Chief Resident during her time at EVMS — she was questioning her career. For advice, she called her mentor, Dr. Britt.

"I was second-guessing myself and, frankly, suffering from imposter syndrome," says Dr. Patel, today a colorectal surgeon and Director of the General Surgery program at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick, New Jersey. "At one point, Dr. Britt stopped me and said, 'Dr. Maloney, are you still in there? Because this is not the Dr. Maloney I know.'"

The response helped Dr. Patel rediscover her footing.

"Dr. Britt's words were a touchstone for me," she explains. "I felt like I woke up during that phone call. He fundamentally put me back on track."

Dr. Patel's experience is not unique.

Across the country, surgeons and providers who trained under Dr. Britt at EVMS tell similar stories about his dedication not only to their education and training but to their lives and careers — long after medical school and residency. He recommends them for positions, helps them plot their professional paths, accepts invitations to speak at their schools and associations and reaches out when his own extensive travel brings him to their cities — just to say hello and check in.

Mayur Narayan, MD, MPH, MBA (MD '02, Surgery Residency '07), Associate Professor of Surgery at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City, remembers seeking Dr. Britt's counsel during his third year of medical school after he received a blistering evaluation from another surgeon.



**“I’VE ALWAYS
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DR. L.D. BRITT

**“DR. BRITT HAS A VISION FOR PEOPLE,
SOMETIMES BEFORE THEY HAVE IT
FOR THEMSELVES.”**

**DR. MAYUR NARAYAN (MD '02,
SURGERY RESIDENCY '07)**





“It was career ending,” Dr. Narayan says, “along the lines of, ‘Not everyone is cut out for surgery.’ I was devastated.”

Dr. Narayan’s early days at EVMS were rocky. Having sailed through his undergraduate courses, he assumed medical school would be as smooth. Instead, he buckled under the pressure; he even repeated his first year. Dr. Britt, though, recognized Dr. Narayan’s potential and became a champion for him.

“I don’t know what he saw in me, but that’s part of who he is — he has a vision for people, sometimes before they have it for themselves,” Dr. Narayan says. “He told me if I was determined to become a surgeon, I should keep working hard and become a surgeon.”

Dr. Narayan, now a Master Surgeon Educator with the American College of Surgeons, sees Dr. Britt as his “surgical father,” the first person he turns to in times of both defeat and triumph.

“The beauty of Dr. Britt’s sponsorship is that he’s with you for the accolades and the challenges,” Dr. Narayan says. “He put his arm around me that day in his office, and that arm has never come off.”

Keith Newby, MD (MD ’90), a member of the EVMS Board of Visitors, cardiologist and Sentara Healthcare’s Medical Director of Health Equity, says his own relationship with Dr. Britt got off to an inauspicious start: Dr. Newby was late to class — an infraction the notoriously punctual surgeon cannot abide. Worse, Dr. Newby was moving slowly and sporting a fraternity T-shirt.

“He was tough on me,” Dr. Newby says with a laugh. “He directed questions to me all through class. I’d actually been up all night studying, so I knew the answers. He asked me to come by his office later, and he said, ‘I do not like the T-shirt. I do not like the tardiness. But I’m impressed with your knowledge base. I’d like to help you.’”

Dr. Newby stayed in touch with Dr. Britt through his internship and residency at Emory University Hospital and School of Medicine and his fellowship at Duke University Medical Center. He still turns to his former teacher for guidance.

“When you have Dr. Britt as your role model — with his compassion, diligence and humility — you want to emulate him,” Dr. Newby says. “I think his major contribution, beyond even patient care or education, is he changes people. You are a different, better person after you’ve trained with Dr. Britt.”

Building a better tomorrow

Beyond EVMS, Dr. Britt has played an instrumental role in almost every major advancement in the surgical community since he began practicing, and he has become a reliable and valued advocate for his colleagues in the operating room, says David Jennette, CSA. The Chief Administrative Officer of The National Surgical Assistant Association has worked for more than 20 years to streamline and modernize state laws and association language, surrounding the profession of surgical assisting. At various points in that process, Dr. Britt has provided meaningful assistance and guidance.

“Legislatively, I can’t think of a more significant person in Virginia than Dr. Britt when it comes to surgical assistant licensure,” Mr. Jennette says. “While he was president of the American College of Surgeons, he made it a point to support our petition to update certification legislation in the state. His name made a huge, positive impact on our efforts.”

K. Craig Kent, MD, Chief Executive Officer of UVA Health and Executive Vice President for Health Affairs at the University of Virginia, estimates Dr. Britt, who chairs UVA Health’s Board of Visitors, has personally touched the lives of thousands of surgeons, physicians and providers in his lifetime.

“He’s been a sounding board for so many people when they are facing challenges,” says Dr. Kent, who has known Dr. Britt for 25 years. “It does not matter who you are. You could be a surgical resident at another school, and if you get him on the phone, Dr. Britt will answer your questions and support you.”

Dr. Britt’s willingness to serve others is striking, in part, because of the heights he has achieved, Dr. Kent says, but it’s also a testament to who he is as a human.

“He attracts people,” Dr. Kent says. “He connects with them. He makes them better. You could have 100 people in a room, and all eyes would be on him because he’s always going to be one of the smartest people in the room. The truth is that the entire landscape of surgery and surgical education looks different today — better — because of L.D.” ■

Honors and Achievements

Dr. Britt is the author of more than 220 peer-reviewed publications, more than 50 book chapters and non-peer-reviewed articles and three books. He serves on numerous editorial boards, including the Annals of Surgery, Archives of Surgery, World Journal of Surgery and the Journal of the American College of Surgeons, among others. In addition, he is a reviewer for the New England Journal of Medicine.

A member of Alpha Omega Alpha, Dr. Britt also is the recipient of the nation's highest teaching award in medicine, the Robert J. Glaser Distinguished Teaching Award. Both the American College of Surgeons and the Association of Surgical Education have honored him with Lifetime Achievement awards. More than 190 institutions throughout the world have invited Dr. Britt to serve in their schools as a distinguished visiting professor. He was inducted into the National Academy of Medicine and holds honorary fellowships from the French Academy of Surgery, the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa, the Royal College of Surgeons of Glasgow and the Southern Surgical Association, among other honors.

In 2019, EVMS established The Dr. Britt Diversity and Health Equity Fund through the philanthropic giving of both the Oliver Fund, a donor-advised fund established by Frances Martin Lindsay, and the Hampton Roads Community Foundation. The fund provides support for research, initiatives and scholarship that address issues that are central to diversity, equity and inclusion in a number of ways and through many different efforts.

In addition, one of EVMS' most prestigious funds, the L.D. Britt, MD, MPH, Endowed Scholarship, has been awarded 20 times since its inception. Established in 1995, the scholarship is presented to a promising minority medical student.

Read more about Dr. Britt's professional achievements and career milestones at evms.edu/Dr. Britt.



L.D. Britt scholars in 2021 with Dr. Britt, center, and Mekbib Gameda, EVMS' Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion, far left.



**“THE ENTIRE
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**DR. CRAIG KENT,
CEO, UVA HEALTH**

Each year, participants in Wine, Women and Fishing compete to have the most festive boat and team in the "Crazy Crew" competition, a longtime highlight of the event.





Fishing for a cure

For 20 years, Wine, Women and Fishing has raised funds for breast cancer research at EVMS

Story by MARY WESTBROOK

On the surface, a fishing tournament has nothing in common with breast cancer research.

One is a festive occasion that leaves the winner with competition swag and bragging rights. The other is a highly scientific field that requires experts to work methodically and patiently on treatments for a disease that affects millions of Americans every year.

For 20 years, however, the Wine, Women and Fishing fundraising event has brought the two worlds together.

Organized by the Chesapeake Bay Wine Classic Foundation, Wine Women and Fishing draws dozens of teams annually to Virginia Beach for a women's-only billfish tournament. During the event, participants journey into the Atlantic Ocean to catch-and-release blue and white marlin, along with a variety of meat fish. After the tournament, community members who want to support the cause join the tournament participants — along with their friends and loved ones — for dinner, an awards presentation and a party at Rudee Inlet that has become a can't-miss social event.

To date, the event has raised about \$850,000 for breast cancer research

at EVMS, including research conducted through the school's Leroy T. Canoles Jr. Cancer Research Center. Linda Church, Chair of Wine, Women and Fishing, says she hopes the 2022 event, scheduled for Sunday, Aug. 21, will push that total close to \$1 million.

"So many people have been impacted by breast cancer or lost someone they loved to it," Ms. Church says. "One of my best friends died of breast cancer in 2006. I'll do whatever I can to help researchers develop new treatments and find a cure."

EVMS faculty members say the money raised is making a profound difference on research and patient care. For example, Wine, Women and Fishing donations have helped fund research into how certain biological markers shape a patient's response to chemotherapy. Funds also have allowed EVMS researchers to collaborate with peers at the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center at Old Dominion University on robotics-based initiatives that could decrease the need for surgical interventions in some patients. In addition, money generated from the event supports critical research staff, notes Eric Feliberti, MD, Professor



of Surgery and Associate Director for Clinical Care Research at the Leroy T. Canoles Jr. Cancer Research Center.

“There is a whole infrastructure behind cancer research that has to exist for us to move forward,” Dr. Feliberti says. “The money raised by Wine, Women and Fishing helps provide that infrastructure, and the investment means that we can conduct these important research trials right here in Hampton Roads.”

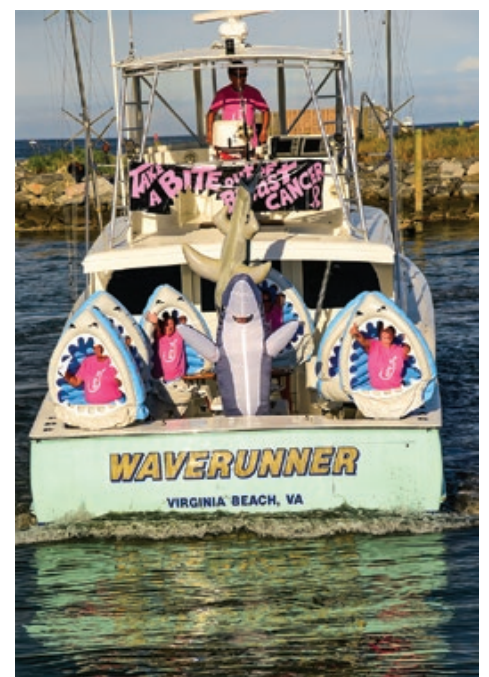
A robust breast cancer research program in a region as diverse as Tidewater also ensures EVMS faculty members can work to address one of the most vexing challenges of the disease — persistent health disparities among patient populations. According to the American Cancer Society, Black women have a 41 percent higher death rate from breast cancer than white women. The gap widens when researchers look only at younger women. Black women with breast cancer who are age 50 and younger have a mortality

rate double that of young white women.

John Semmes, PhD, the Anthem Distinguished Professor for Cancer Research, Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Cell Biology, Associate Dean for Translational Research and Director of the Leroy T. Canoles Jr. Cancer Research Center, says the event is “a wonderful way to make a difference in breast cancer research and care in Hampton Roads.”

“The fishing tournament itself is first class and the participants are so enthusiastic,” Dr. Semmes says, noting that many EVMS faculty and staff members have participated on tournament teams or as event volunteers.

“Wine Women and Fishing has provided such a positive vehicle for raising funds to support research at EVMS for 20 years,” Dr. Semmes adds. “The organizers epitomize the determination and sense of humor that characterizes many patients and families dealing with breast cancer. Their energy sets the tone for the entire event.” □





MARK YOUR CALENDAR

This year's Wine, Women and Fishing event takes place on Sunday, Aug. 21, at the Southside Marina in Virginia Beach. The tournament is open to women with any level of fishing experience, including beginners. The tournament takes place from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and is followed by a dock party, awards celebration and dinner, along with music from the headline band, Guava Jam. Find out more, register for the tournament and buy tickets for the festivities at cbwc.org.

Over the past two decades, Wine, Women and Fishing organizers have raised roughly \$850,000 to support breast cancer research at EVMS. "They've found a way to make the event an opportunity to celebrate as a community," says EVMS scientist Dr. John Semmes.



Daniella Pizarro received the 2021 Thomas M. and Angela Taylor Health Professions Scholarship. The scholarship covers two years' tuition for a female, minority student from Hampton Roads.

YOUR SUPPORT

Healing hands

Story by MARY WESTBROOK | Photo by BRENDAN ASH

Daniella Pizarro, MPA Class of 2023, has a vision for her future

When Darlene Pizarro was pregnant with her daughter Daniella, she had a recurring dream: Her baby's hands were glowing.

"My mom would wake up my dad and say, 'What do you think it means?'" says Daniella Pizarro, MPA Class of 2023. "Eventually, they settled on the idea that I had healing hands."

The story of her mother's visions — and her father's faith in his daughter's gifts — has become a central and poignant narrative for the Pizarro family. When Ms. Pizarro was in high school, her father, Daniel, became sick. Each day after school, Ms. Pizarro kept a journal of her father's symptoms and made his favorite ham-and-cheese sandwiches. When Ms. Pizarro was 16, her father died on Christmas Day.

"It was a very hard time for our family, but one of the people who helped us the most was the PA who cared for my father," says Ms. Pizarro. "Even after my father passed away, she would call every few months and check in on us and tell us what a special man he had been. That meant so much."

Ms. Pizarro hopes to follow in that provider's footsteps.

The recipient of the 2021 Thomas M. and Angela Taylor Health Professions Scholarship, Ms. Pizarro started her healthcare career in April 2020 as an emergency room technician, working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, at Chesapeake Regional Hospital. The Virginia Beach native applied to only one PA program because she felt in her heart that EVMS was the perfect place to pursue her dream of providing longer term, compassionate care to patients and their families.

Earning the scholarship, which covers two years' tuition, was a blessing, she says.

"To be able to study and focus on becoming the best PA I can be without the worry of debt hanging over my head is such a relief," Ms. Pizarro says. "I feel like I am on the path I'm meant to be on and that my dad is looking down at me and smiling, telling me to keep going."

As President of PA Students for Inclusion and Diversity, a student group founded in 2021, Ms. Pizarro also is passionate about diversifying the profession.

"Growing up in a Puerto Rican and Black household, I was bilingual from the moment I could say words," says Ms. Pizarro. "The importance of being culturally aware and knowledgeable was taught to me at a young age as I navigated through the mixing pot of my bicultural family's practices and experiences."

Ms. Pizarro saw the dehumanizing implications of cultural and language barriers firsthand when her own grandmother struggled with late-stage dementia.

An estimated 3% of U.S. physician assistants are Black, and only 6% are Hispanic.

"She had forgotten the entire English language and could speak only her native tongue, Spanish," Ms. Pizarro explains. "I would accompany her to her doctor's appointments and notice the fear in her eyes as she felt unheard and misunderstood. That's when I realized the impact of the lack of inclusivity and diversity in healthcare. There were not many providers who looked like us to advocate for us."

Currently, an estimated 3% of U.S. physician assistants are Black, and only 6% are Hispanic. Those are statistics Ms. Pizarro hopes to change.

"This is one of the driving forces of why I am pursuing medicine," she says. "Patients need and deserve more providers who look like them. America is full of people of different backgrounds and cultures, and I wholeheartedly believe that our healthcare system should mirror that." □



Watch a video of about Ms. Pizarro's story at evms.edu/DaniellaPizarro.



Lift up every voice

As Assistant Director of Training and Ombudsperson of Diversity and Inclusion, Diane Holland, MPA, MHRM, makes the case for DEI champions at every level.

Interview by MARY WESTBROOK

Photo by DOUG GARDNER

Q&A

Diane Holland, MPA, MHRM, measures success in one word: trust.

“When someone trusts me enough to come and ask for help, I feel like I am doing something right,” says Ms. Holland, who joined EVMS in Fall 2021 as Assistant Director of Training of Diversity and Inclusion. She’s also Ombudsperson for the office, where she acts as a liaison, sounding board and advocate for the entire campus community.

“Every challenge we face in the space of diversity, equity and inclusion is an opportunity to find solutions and to improve the learning and working environment in a positive way for everyone,” Ms. Holland says. “We have to listen, ask questions and be willing and ready to act.”

Ms. Holland came to EVMS with 18 years of experience in counseling, litigation and investigations. As a civil rights investigator at Norfolk State University, she was instrumental in building the standard operating procedures for the university’s Title IX program. Ms. Holland also served as a trainer and an instructor for the Virginia Department of Social Services, delivering statewide continuing education in social work skill development, state guidance, coaching and leadership training.

Mekbib Gameda, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion, says he created Ms. Holland’s position to fill a critical role identified in EVMS’ strategic plan to advance health equity and inclusion.

“Diane enhances our diversity, equity and inclusion — DEI — training and serves as an institutional ombudsperson who can provide a safe listening space for staff and faculty,” Mr. Gameda says. In her first semester on the job, Ms. Holland successfully launched the Inclusive Excellence in Medicine (IEM) training program, which allows faculty, staff and residents to gather in small groups over a seven-week period for focused study and strategic thinking around DEI.

Ms. Holland also has experience in human services, serving children and families in the public and private sectors. She worked for Richmond Public Schools’ Talent Office in Employee Relations, providing conflict mediation and investigations for Title IX and employee relations, and is a certified master life coach and qualified mental health professional.

Q. Where do you see the most significant opportunities for DEI growth as an institution?

A. DEI principles are not new to EVMS, but we have the opportunity now to further shape our future — and to be creative about how we craft and communicate our vision. Through initiatives like our IEM training, we can build champions for these principles and help create a school that is even more inclusive, welcoming and safe for everyone, regardless of their background. Having this focus keeps us in line with a larger effort, an important movement that’s happening across the country.

Q. Can you talk more about your vision for DEI training efforts?

A. Being a change agent takes time, skills and resources. We have to investigate processes and interrogate why, how and when we make decisions. We need champions at every level. That’s where I’ve seen training come into play in a powerful way. For example, our IEM cohort members come together from different areas of EVMS to grow and learn. We move from talking about DEI principles to sharing personal stories and formulating strategies on how to implement change. The effect is profound. One participant came back to ask for more recommendations on anti-racist books and resources. She told me that before the training, she hadn’t realized the extent of her privilege. She wanted to do better. That’s change.

Q. What do you think people misunderstand about diversity, equity and inclusion?

A. Some people think it’s a fad or a statement on a website — maybe they confuse it with affirmative action. When I hear that type of response, I back up and ask, “OK. How do *you* define diversity?” It could be race, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, age — so many things. The most common misconception people have is that DEI is only about recruitment, hiring, promotion and treatment of minorities, but it is not. DEI is about embracing the differences of others while meeting their unique needs in a trusting workplace where everyone is treated with value, dignity and respect. Effecting sustained, meaningful change is never going to be a single, one-size-fits-all proposition. The movement is all of us, pushing forward together every day. □

What is an ombudsperson?

Diane Holland, MPA, MHRM, is the Assistant Director of Training and Ombudsperson of Diversity and Inclusion at EVMS. What does that mean? Basically, she’s a connector, liaison and advocate — a person charged with embodying the key principles of EVMS’ policies on diversity, equity and inclusion while educating others and helping to advance the school’s mission.

“Being a change agent takes time, skills and resources.”

Diane Holland, MPA, MHRM

Man of the people

Dr. Alvin Harris has dedicated his career to the health and well-being of Western Tidewater

Story by MARY WESTBROOK | Photo by ERIC LUSHER

Alvin Harris, MD (MD '78), became interested in medicine because of beetles. Growing up in rural Franklin, Virginia, Dr. Harris and his six siblings played outside often, running with animals, inspecting insects.

"If you have a scientific mind in that environment, you ask questions," Dr. Harris says. "Why do June bugs fly? Why do some insects have hard bodies and some have soft bodies?" From there, you get interested in biology, chemistry and physics. Before you know it, you're wondering what the human body is like and how it functions."

Dr. Harris' family encouraged his curiosity. His mother, a hospital custodian, purchased a newspaper every day for the family, so her children had something new to read and study.

"It also helped that I was the youngest child," Dr. Harris says. "One of my sisters wanted to be a teacher, so she practiced on me. Because of her, I knew my ABCs before I started school. I was already ahead."

As a sophomore at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Dr. Harris considered two career paths based on the school's

focused curricula, which encouraged professional or business tracks. Inspired by his love of science — and his distaste for finance — he chose medicine.

At EVMS, Dr. Harris found more than a medical school. He discovered a community of like-minded individuals and a vision for his future.

"EVMS leaders were focused on doing something radical: training physicians to be more humane, to have more empathy," Dr. Harris says. "This was a medical school for the community. Our teachers impressed upon us the importance of seeing the whole patient, not just a disease or condition."

Dr. Harris took that approach with him when he returned to Franklin to practice general medicine. At the time, he was the area's only Black doctor.

"My patients were mostly from rural backgrounds and rather poor," he says. "As the only African American physician, I was busy. There were so many patients to see. Because of my training at EVMS, I always felt that I owed my patients more than they owed me. It was a privilege to serve them."

Dr. Harris also cared for incarcerated individuals and worked with leaders at Southampton Memorial Hospital, today Bon Secours Southampton Medical Center, when they installed a secure medical ward at the hospital. "Everyone deserves high-quality medical care," Dr. Harris says, "and that includes inmates."

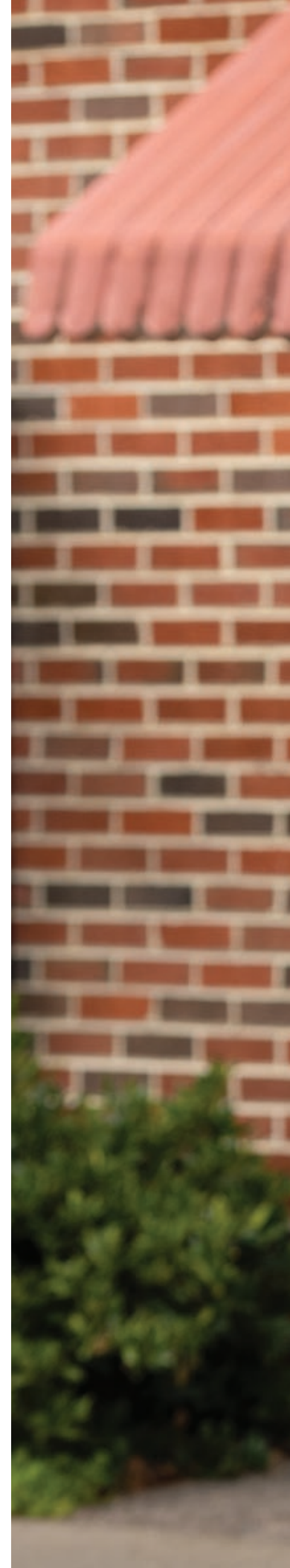
As an EVMS alumnus, Dr. Harris has served in a number of volunteer leadership roles. He is a member of the school's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and a mentor and facilitator for Health and Justice, a Community-Engaged Learning initiative that introduces medical students to the health needs of members of the region's incarcerated population. Dr. Harris also recently created the Alvin E. Harris, MD '78 Endowed Scholarship, which will provide financial support to underrepresented minority medical students, including those from rural areas of Virginia.

"Dr. Harris' commitment to EVMS and our students is second only to his commitment to the health of the larger community," says Mekbib Gameda, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. "As a donor and a mentor, he's been a tireless advocate and a trusted supporter for many years."

Dr. Harris says he remains invested in the future of the school that helped him turn his curiosity into a career.

"I am proud that EVMS continues to serve as a beacon for healthcare delivery throughout Tidewater," he says. "The school complements our local health systems and has been a magnet for attracting talent to this area. EVMS is helping to prepare the community for our future." □

Dr. Harris was once the only Black primary care physician in his community. Today, the town hall of Capron — in Southampton County, Virginia — serves as a reminder of that past. The building was once a local health clinic, with separate entrances for white and Black patients.





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**DR. ALVIN HARRIS
(MD '78)**

PHOTO ESSAY

True Colors

Photos by CAYLA MORGAN

After a pandemic-enforced hiatus, the Holi celebration returned to EVMS this spring. The event, hosted by the EVMS chapter of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, marks the coming of spring.

On March 27, EVMS students, including Pallavi Samudrala, MD Class of 2024 (right), celebrated Holi, also known as the Festival of Colors. Each powdered hue carries a meaning. For instance, red symbolizes love and fertility while green stands for new beginnings.





Left: Members of the MD Class of 2024 made a pyramid of colors. Pictured top row from left to right: Pallavi Samudrala and Hemu Yeluru. Pictured in the bottom row from left to right: Parth Contractor, Blaise Marshall and Rohan Sharma.

Below Right: This was the first Holi Festival at EVMS for Mayuri Kathrotia, MD Class of 2024.



See a video of students celebrating Holi at evms.edu/Holi2022.



Alum pens book to inspire daughter

After a health scare, an EVMS grad unfolds a new chapter

Story by VIRGINIA HILTON

Medical students are trained to handle difficult situations for their patients, and that training played an important role two years ago when Ethan McGann's daughter, Charlie, was born.

Dr. McGann was then in his fourth year of medical school at EVMS. The prenatal appointments had gone as expected and without complications, so Dr. McGann and his wife were shocked when Charlie was born with a rare birth defect that left her with only one hand.

Amniotic Band Syndrome occurs when the fibrous bands of the amniotic sac get tangled around a developing fetus. The constriction can cause a variety of problems, depending on where the bands are located and wrapped. In Charlie's case, the placement of the band on her left wrist likely halted the development of that limb.

"During medical school you see a broad range of medical maladies. You see the bad stuff and the sad stuff," Dr. McGann says. "At the end of the day, my daughter is just missing a hand. While some things may be harder for her, she is already doing things that I never would have expected like climbing on furniture and riding her little bike."

To process what was happening, Dr. McGann began journaling. A recurring theme in his writing: He wanted to help Charlie feel confident about who she is and what she can accomplish in life — and he wanted to help other children and families in similar situations.

Eventually, those journal entries formed the basis of Dr. McGann's children's book, "The Band That Stole My Hand."

The book chronicles the adventures of a fictionalized Charlie as she skateboards, surfs and explores new activities. Dr. McGann wrote and edited the book after learning he had matched in Otolaryngology at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth. The book was published in July 2021 and is now available in bookstores.

"My overarching hope is that through this book, Charlie has a way to disarmingly tell her story and express who she is," Dr. McGann says. "I wanted to demystify limb differences and empower those who have had their own medical challenges to tell their stories." □



“MY OVERARCHING HOPE IS THAT, THROUGH THIS BOOK, CHARLIE HAS A WAY TO DISARMINGLY TELL HER STORY AND EXPRESS WHO SHE IS.”

Dr. Ethan McGann, (MD '21)



See a video of the McGann family at evms.edu/DrMcGann.

Dr. Ethan McGann was in his fourth year of medical school at EVMS when his daughter, Charlie, was born with Amniotic Band Syndrome. He wrote a children's book to help Charlie and other children learn to live with and appreciate differences.



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