



# UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW CHIEF RESIDENTS

### Responding Creatively in the Pandemic

This month we welcome our new chief residents, three recent graduates of our internal medicine residency program who ascend to a leadership role for the 2020-2021 academic year. During this unprecedented time in medicine, these extraordinary young physicians will help teach, mentor, and support the 180 interns and residents who rotate through the Department of Medicine at ZSFG.

This year's chief residents are Lurit Bepo, MD, MPH and Thuy Trang Jennie "TJ" Nguyen, MD, for inpatient care, and Saundra Nguyen, MD, MPH for ambulatory care. All three share a passion for caring for vulnerable populations, improving systems of care, and leveraging this extraordinary time to reimagine patient care and resident education.

### Dr. Lurit Bepo Combining the Micro and Macro

Born in Sudan, Lurit Bepo, MD, MPH, moved to Dallas with her family at age six. A biology and anthropology major at Washington University, she learned how health disparities affected vulnerable populations. "Because of my immigrant experience, I latched onto medicine as a way to equalize things," she said.

While earning her medical degree and master's of public health degree from Emory University, she traveled to South Sudan to shadow a family friend who was an obstetrician/gynecologist. "I heard stories of a woman giving birth in the hospital in the dark with flashlights because the generator had gone out, and people dying from very simple procedures," said Dr. Bepo. That inspired her to pursue a career in policy to improve conditions in low-resource environments. "What I love about medicine and public health together is the combination of the micro and the macro," she said.



Neil R. Powe, MD, Chief of Medicine, with Chief Residents TJ Nguyen; Saundra Nguyen, MD; and Lurit Bepo, MD

Dr. Bepo completed the ZSFG Primary Care Track (SFPC) of the UCSF Internal Medicine Residency. "I've gotten to work with incredible people who are great physicians, demonstrate phenomenal systems leadership, yet are still humble and compassionate," she said.

She also vividly remembers caring for an ICU patient for a month. Sadly, the patient's health declined. When 20 family members came in to discuss comfort care, Dr. Bepo realized she had heard stories about each one. "I'd grown to love the patient and her family, and I cried with them," she said. "Connecting with people can be just as therapeutic as all the medicines we give them."

Dr. Bepo looks forward to honing her teaching skills by leading morning report and organizing noon conferences. Because of the pandemic, the conferences are now virtual, allowing residents

from all three hospital sites – ZSFG, UCSF Medical Center and the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center – to join in. "The outgoing chiefs have been amazing, setting the groundwork for my incoming cohort," she said. Dr. Bepo is also helping prepare for a COVID-19 surge, including developing a robust jeopardy pool – a fallback system in case scheduled residents get sick. "The name of the game is flexibility and adaptability," she said. "It's a testament to the community that we've gotten stronger because of COVID-19."

In addition to her teaching and clinical work, Dr. Bepo will apply to the National Clinician Scholars Program's health policy fellowship program, and intends to advocate for health care reform through her writing. She plans to become an academic hospitalist with a policymaking role at the city, state, or federal level. Outside of medicine, she enjoys hiking, board games, and traveling.

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**Dr. Thuy Trang Jennie “TJ” Nguyen  
Creating Safe Learning Spaces**

Thuy Trang Jennie “TJ” Nguyen, MD, grew up in San Jose, earning her bachelor’s degrees in integrative biology and physiology and her medical degree from UCLA. She volunteered at community health fairs, educating people about diet and exercise and helping them to sign up for Covered California and Medi-Cal. “I enjoyed seeing the relief on their faces after they put in their insurance application,” she said.

Dr. TJ Nguyen also volunteered in Nicaragua, Peru, and Saipan in various clinics and hospitals. “It was astonishing to see the absence of specialists and standard resources like ultrasound,” she said. “At the same time, there are parallels between the socioeconomic challenges those patients faced and the challenges we see at the General. The current pandemic has put social determinants of health into the spotlight.”

For internal medicine residency, she chose UCSF’s PRIME (Program in Residency Investigation Methods and Epidemiology) program. “UCSF does a particularly good job of reminding us that we’re here to be a doctor, but also to bring medicine to the next level, whether through research, community health involvement, or social advocacy,” said Dr. TJ Nguyen.

She appreciates the camaraderie of the program, especially during the most stressful times. “During my ICU rotation there were really heartbreaking decisions for the families, and I sometimes felt overwhelmed,” she said. “Keeping those feelings inside for an entire rotation is not good. My team recognized nonverbal cues, and created a space to take a break on the roof. We didn’t offer suggestions, but just listened to each other and talked about hard experiences. When you see other people being vulnerable, it’s so much easier to be vulnerable, too.”

As a chief resident, Dr. TJ Nguyen hopes to create those safe spaces for current residents. She also wants to deepen opportunities for intentional learning, tailoring teaching points to the trainee’s level, whether it’s a third-year medical student or a second-year resident. She also leads development of an intern-specific curriculum, which includes one half-day per month of dedicated time during

which interns learn about topics such as cardiology, rheumatology, hands-on ultrasound skills, and resident well-being.

Dr. TJ Nguyen is also fascinated by operations management, and wants to learn more about behind-the-scenes strategies to optimize the structure of things like rotations and call teams. “It’s an incredible time to be a chief resident, learning the medicine of COVID-19 as well as the operations,” she said. “For example, do we keep COVID-19 patients separate from non-COVID-19 patients in the ICU? And how do you do that efficiently?”

In the future, Dr. TJ Nguyen plans to work as a hospitalist and incorporate global health, ultrasound education, and infectious disease into her career. In her spare time, she enjoys camping, fishing, and foraging for edible mushrooms.

**Dr. Saundra Nguyen  
Telehealth Training in Primary Care**

The daughter of Vietnamese immigrants, Saundra Nguyen, MD, MPH, grew up in Houston and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor’s degree in public health. Spending a summer in South Africa, she witnessed how the interplay of race, politics, and culture contributed to high-risk behaviors, like the belief that having sex with a virgin would cure AIDS. “I enjoyed working with people one-on-one during very intimate and vulnerable times in their lives,” she said.

Dr. Saundra Nguyen earned her medical degree and master’s in public health from the University of Texas Southwestern, working with the North Texas Food Bank to provide nutrition education and fresh produce to people in food deserts. “Public health and medicine have always been intertwined for me,” she said.

She chose the SFPC track for her internal medicine residency at UCSF, drawn by the mission and the people she met on interview day. Dr. Saundra Nguyen learned about the resources available to vulnerable populations in San Francisco, and worked in the ZSFG Richard Fine People’s Clinic with a multidisciplinary team of behavioral assistants and clinicians, psychiatrists, nutritionists, nurse practitioners, and others. “I initially struggled with relinquishing control, but you can’t do it all by yourself,” she said. “You really need a team.”

As chief resident for ambulatory care, Dr. Saundra Nguyen is excited to develop a curriculum for telehealth. She would like to formalize how best to conduct a telephone visit or do a physical exam over video. “I hope that telehealth will be more integrated even after the pandemic,” she said. “I’ve noticed increased access among my own patients, because they don’t have to take time off work or arrange transportation.” Dr. Saundra Nguyen also wants to provide longitudinal mentoring in the ambulatory setting. “The learning curve for outpatient medicine is different, because it’s spread out over three years rather than inpatient rotations that you do for several weeks at a time,” she said. “It takes longer to see the joys of primary care. Eliciting patients’ concerns, making sure they feel heard, and setting an agenda with shared priorities are very important for building rapport.”

After chief residency, Dr. Saundra Nguyen may take what she’s learned at UCSF back to Texas, working directly with underserved populations as well as on systems-level projects. Outside of the clinic, she enjoys biking, running, and traveling.

“My co-residents and the faculty have been amazing role models,” said Dr. Saundra Nguyen. “They’re nationwide experts on issues like homelessness and food insecurity, and recently have rallied together so quickly in support of Black Lives Matter. It’s been truly inspiring to be around so many passionate people at the General.”

*Elizabeth Chur*

*Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson, Brooks Bigart*

**SPOTLIGHT**

**Beth Harleman, MD**, Division of Hospital Medicine, was named Vice Chief of Medicine at ZSFG.

**Suneil Koliwad, MD, PhD**, Division of Endocrinology, was named Chief of the Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism at UCSF Health.

**Courney Lyles, PhD**, Division of General Internal Medicine, is a 2020 recipient of the UCSF Mid-Career Development Award Program.

**Priscilla Hsue, MD**, Division of Cardiology, was selected for the 2020 ARI Liegler Award for Outstanding Teaching and Mentorship.

**Adithya Cattamanchi, MD**, Division of Pulmonary, received the 2020 Mid-Career Assembly Award from the American Thoracic Society.

The Crankstart Foundation bestowed a \$2 Million gift to the **Latinx Center of Excellence**, directed by **Alicia Fernandez, MD**, Division of General Internal Medicine, to establish a contact tracing program for immigrant Latinx.

**Monica Gandhi, MD, MPH**, Division of HIV, ID, and Global Medicine, co-chaired AIDS 2020, July 6 - 10.

