



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

CELEBRATING OUR DYNAMIC AND CARING STAFF

ZSFG Department of Medicine Staff Excellence Awards 2021

Each year, our department honors staff who have excelled beyond expectations in the areas of Administrative Support, Leadership, Patient Care, and Research. Staff are nominated by colleagues, reviewed by a committee of staff and faculty, and finalized by department leadership. This year's recipients reflect an exemplary commitment to care and innovation, with two awardees selected in each category. All demonstrate a dedication to our mission of serving our community with excellence. We recognized award recipients in an online ceremony on Friday, September 10, 2021.

Excellence in Patient Care Heneliaka Jones, RN, MSN, FNP

Division of HIV, Infectious Diseases, & Global Medicine

Heneliaka Jones, Clinical Nurse, graduated



Heneliaka Jones

from UCSF's Masters in Nursing Program in 2016 and returned to work as a nurse in Ward 86 three years ago, drawn by the desire to work directly with vulnerable patients.

"It was a perfect fit to be here at SF General," said Jones. "Not only did work-

ing with the population here bring me here, but it keeps me here. We are working with a population that needs you, and I need them as well – it completes me as a person."

"I count my blessings that I co-manage my patients with Heleniaka Jones," wrote a nominator. "(She is) one of the most caring, skilled nurses and clinicians that I've had the pleasure to work with. She cares for an incredibly vulnerable group of women living with HIV, many of whom are

people of color, sexual minorities, and survivors of violence and trauma. Not only is she supportive and effective, but her power is in authentically getting to know each patient and what drives them, then lifting them up from there."

"She is a fierce advocate that ensures that our patients' voices are heard and provides education and counsel that empowers them to make informed decisions about their health care," wrote a nominator. Jones values this aspect of her role as well. "Seeing health disparities in our community, as an African-American woman," she said, "you have to stop and see the change that needs to occur, and then become the change that you want to see happen."

Juk Mei *Division of Hematology-Oncology*

While engaged in her medical assistant program, Hospital Assistant Juk Mei was placed in the Positive Health Program in 2018, and found her current role next door at Ward 86. "We have underserved patients in this community and they're the ones who need care the most," said Mei.



Juk Mei



ZSFG Department of Medicine Staff Excellence 2021 Awardees (Top row, L to R) Juk Mei, Chesa Cox, Barbara Alonso; (2nd row, L & R) Raeni Miller, Ivan Leung; (3rd row, L to R) Chris Her, Jennifer Thomas, Heneliaka Jones; with (Center) Chief Neil R. Powe, MD

"So, I haven't thought to be anywhere else but here. This is home." Born and raised in San Francisco, Mei remembers always knowing of ZSFG. "San Francisco General is the heart of the city - it's true," she said. "Everything that comes in, we're right here and centralized."

"Juk has been with our Division for many years now and excels in so many ways," wrote one nominator. "She is often the first person patients see when they come to our clinic, welcoming them to the clinic and answering initial questions, putting our patients, many of whom are facing serious cancer diagnoses, at ease while collecting vital signs, checking medications, and rooming patients. She is warm and caring with our patients but also incredibly bright, able to recognize when patients are not feeling well and to alert providers so we are best prepared to help."

"She always goes above and beyond her duties to help patients," wrote another nominator. "For example, she has called several of my Canton-

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ese-speaking patients to relay important messages to them and ensure they understand the care plan. She is a phenomenal, caring, and detail-oriented individual. ZSFG Onc clinic could not run efficiently without her."

Mei credits her mother and growing up watching her care for an elderly patient with dementia as inspiring her own work. "The way my mom interacted with her while I was a kid, and helping her out, showed me this is how it should be," said Mei. "This is how patients should be treated."

Excellence in Administrative Support Staff

Barbara Alonso

Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care

With a background in agricultural biotechnology and biocommunication working at UC Berkeley for 26 years, Administrative Analyst Barbara Alonso was excited to merge into healthcare at ZSFG. "I



Barbara Alonso

really want to learn more about the health profession and global health in general," said Alonso.

"Barbara is reliable, hardworking, solution pursuing, with a constant positive attitude that fuels her unequivocal support of all her colleagues and

PIs." wrote a nominator. "This past Spring, Barbara stepped up without hesitation to support the assembly and submission of a complex P30 proposal. Despite daunting complexity of a proposal with multiple cores, she showed 100% dedication and passion for the cause, always maintaining a can-do attitude, positive approach, no matter how complex or challenging, and most importantly meeting deliverables and tasks always on time."

"Barbara was hired to support administrative needs of 2 multi-country research projects involving collaborations across 8 countries and 15 institutions. She has done a remarkable job supporting multiple aspects of these projects. Investigators and staff at all of the collaborating institutions have sent me unsolicited emails relating how helpful she has been and how easy she is to work with, a testament to her strong people skills that go beyond expectations of her role."

Chesa Cox

Division of HIV, Infectious Diseases, & Global Medicine

Communications Analyst Chesa Cox's, experience



Chesa Cox

growing up in Guam informs her dedication to infectious disease research and care. "There's a skin condition that's very common in Guam that people rub garlic on, and it goes away because of antibacterial properties," said Cox. "So that drew me to infectious diseases

- that people can have these experiences happen but they're fixable. When I came here, I learned that infectious diseases are a mark of developing country, and to me, it was like that's how life is, as well as with people here without healthcare. It's two sides and two worlds."

"Chesa's efforts to support the division throughout the COVID-19 pandemic were invaluable," wrote a nominator. "She was an essential component of the UCSF - Unidos en Salud partnership from the beginning and executed numerous projects to ensure the partnership's continued success. To start, she worked with a diverse team from different UCSF and community sites to build the Mission testing sites from the ground up. Afterwards, she coordinated and refined the testing site workflow to increase efficiency and to meet the community's needs. Chesa was not only an essential piece to the division, but also to the community organizations as she facilitated partnerships. She ensured everyone's needs and expectations were met and truly catered to the community."

Excellence in Leadership

Raeni Miller

Central Administration

Research Administration Manager Raeni Miller draws from both her art degree studies and mathematical mind to form optimum results. "I try to have an open mind and sometimes I'm able to think outside of the box a little more and come up with creative solutions to complicated situations," said Miller. "I really like the detective aspect of the job and how to make it work, where you are here and need to get there, and figuring out the right process to meet the goal."

"Raeni brings such a wide breadth of knowledge and also understands what RFAs actually do and UCSF processes are becoming even more complex," wrote a nominator. "Pre and post COVID, Raeni has truly rallied to keep our team together via weekly group meetings



Raeni Miller

where we share on a professional level as well as check in on a personnel level. Raeni has inspired me to be the best worker I can be, strive to develop myself personally and professionally and to actually care about what I do and the overall connection to UCSF's Mission and PRIDE values."

Miller credits having wonderful mentors and her colleagues, from faculty to administrative to janitorial staff, for her career at ZSFG. "It's three months or 30 years," she said. "It's a lot of super mission-driven people who are trying to do a lot with limited resources and not out for glory but choosing to be here."

Jennifer Thomas, MPH

Division of General Internal Medicine

Division Manager Jennifer Thomas's intense



Jennifer Thomas

commitment to HIV care as a teenager in Sonoma county brought her to ZSFG as a research assistant. Twenty-nine years later, Thomas has worked in almost every pillar of our mission from research to administration, patient interaction to education, infusing every workplace

with her exceptional care. Thomas credits an extended family legacy of medical careers, along with her father's work as a union longshoreman with her foundations in social justice and commitment to public health. "The work that is done here at ZSFG is very real and fundamental and crucial," she said. "The last year and a half, and even prior, there's nowhere else I would rather be."

"Jennifer Thomas is the hero of our Division and a star within DOM and SOM," wrote a nominator. "She has guided our interim division chief,

our faculty, and our staff through a transition in leadership, UC Path, and COVID, all with grace, calm, and compassion. She is the heart and soul of DGIM, someone who inspires both faith and trust even in the toughest times."

"Jennifer Thomas is in her 13th year serving on the UCSF Committee on Family Services, advocating for a variety of UCSF populations, including faculty, staff, trainees, post-docs, and students," wrote a nominator. "She carries this focus and advocacy into her daily work to all staff and faculty on issues as diverse as pay equity, hiring and retention, and child care. Last year, she leveraged a faculty member's contact to coordinate with a private law firm, SFGH/SFDPH/UCSF leadership and legal & IT depts to offer pro bono legal services and a webinar that was made available to all staff at SFGH, allowing folks to prepare/update a basic estate plan. She is the fundamental advocate to ensure we can leverage our grant funding and philanthropic donations, ensuring that we have the logistical and financial support for the crucial community outreach for COVID testing and vaccination."

Excellence in Research

Chris Her

Division of Gastroenterology

Chris Her, Senior Research Associate, values the innovative and multi-faceted aspect of his role in the lab. "You get to dabble in a little bit of everything and hear about other projects and experiments," said Her. "And there's the independence and ability to work with my hands. There is always something new and more to learn."

"Chris has been a research associate with the Liver Center since 2010. He is extraordinarily skilled in the preparation of primary cells from rodent and human livers, which involves technical precision and maintenance of sterility through prolonged processes. Chris' core operation shut down during the pandemic, but upon reopening, Chris worked hard to enable his clients to make up for lost time. Whereas other core facilities in the Liver Center experienced a 25-40% decline in business in 2020, Chris' core hit 90% of its 2019 volume, all based on extra work performed in the latter half of the year."

"Chris stands out in his willingness to help at any time, day or night, weekday or weekend, to isolate primary cells from human livers. We receive

human livers on an unpredictable schedule (donor organs rejected for transplant); thus, livers become available with literally no notice. Chris is willing to drop whatever he may be doing on his personal time to take advantage of these unique opportunities. Without his cooperation, the Liver Center would not be able to offer this special resource."



Chris Her

While the science motivates Her's work, his colleagues at ZSFG provide inspiration. "It's the people and diversity of people here, as well as the wealth of knowledge that everyone shares," said Her. "There's always interesting people and interesting stories."

Ivan Leung, MS

Division of Hematology-Oncology

A commitment to both science and service drew Clinical Research Coordinator Ivan Leung to



Ivan Leung

ZSFG. While volunteering as an HIV counselor at the SF Community Health Center, he learned of the role available in Hematology-Oncology as Clinical Research Coordinator.

"It's a privilege to be able to work with this patient demographic, especially to utilize my skillset in Cantonese," said Leung. "The patients we serve, with their stories and struggles, are very inspiring."

"Since coming to UCSF he has been an exemplary research coordinator, working efficiently and effectively to help consent patients to clinical trials, coordinate their complex visits and study procedures, answering questions from patients, and helping to summarize and write up our work. Ivan is fluent in Cantonese, having grown up in Hong Kong, and has been incredible in explaining complex clinical trials to our Chinese patients. He is able to effortlessly translate complicated study terminology, but able to understand and account for the complex cultural challenges faced by many of our Chinese patients."

"Ivan specifically was the lead coordinator for our first inpatient cancer clinical trial, one that focused on pain management and the role of acupuncture, and was able to independently consent and the help accrue over 100 patients to this study, a major feat," wrote a nominator. "It is so unusual to see a person excelling at every aspect of competence and compassion. He has made a tremendous difference in bridging the distance between SFGH and UCSF and he has directly impacted the medical care and access to research."

With an undergraduate in Biochemistry, and Master's in Physiology from Georgetown University, Leung plans to apply to medical school to continue his service as a safety net hospital doctor.

Brooks Bigart

Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson

SPOTLIGHT

ZSFG **flu vaccines** are available in the Cafeteria, Building 5, 2nd Floor, Mon.- Sat., 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM. UCSF employees are strongly encouraged to utilize the UCSF Occupational Health Services (OHS) team, also in the back of the cafeteria, to ensure your record is directly updated in UC Umbrella: Mon., Wed., Fri., through the end of October, 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM.

September is **Women in Medicine Month** and **Latinx Heritage Month** is September 15 - October 15. We celebrate our faculty, staff in both of these communities as leaders!

Paul Blanc, MD, Division of Occupational Medicine, **Jennifer Mandal, MD**, Division of Rheumatology, and **Mike Reid, MD**, Division of HIV, Infectious Diseases, and Global Medicine, received the Academy of Medical Educators 2021 Program for Interprofessional Practice and Education (PIPE) Teaching Award.

Binh An Phan, MD, Division of Cardiology, was selected as a new member of the The Haile T. Debas Academy of Medical Educators.

Dean Sheppard, MD, Lung Biology Center, received the 2021 Lifetime Achievement in Mentoring Award from the Campus Council on Faculty Life.

Payam Nahid, MD, Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care, was selected by the ACTG as Co-Vice Chair of the Tuberculosis Transformative Science Group.

In Memoriam

Dr. Anitha Toke passed away on Friday, Sept. 17th. Dr. Toke was an highly valued member of our ZSFG DOM faculty, based in the Nephrology Division. She was an outstanding teacher, mentor, role model, nephrologist, colleague, friend, and leader.

In addition to her outstanding clinical skills, Anitha was the Director of Nephrology Outpatient Services at ZSFG. In this context, she oversaw two outpatient clinics and served as Medical Director of the UCSF/SFGH Dialysis Center, which provides hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis services to more than 120 patients within the ZSFG/SF DPH system. She improved treatment systems and, through her expeditious and thoughtful handling of the emerging COVID pandemic, avoided any serious outbreak within our population of highly vulnerable dialysis patients.

She is survived by her husband Aditya Mukherjee and two children, Arav and Aarya.

