



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

CELEBRATING OUR DEDICATED STAFF WITH HEART

ZSFG Department of Medicine Staff Excellence Awards 2022

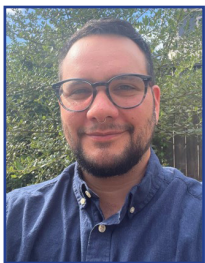
Each year, our department honors staff who excel beyond expectations in the areas of Administrative Service, Leadership, Patient Care, and Research. Staff are nominated by colleagues, reviewed by a committee of staff and faculty, and finalized by department leadership. This year's awardees hold a wealth of professional and personal experience in creating compassionate care. All demonstrate a dedication to our mission of serving our community with excellence. We recognized awardees in a virtual ceremony on Friday, September 25, 2022.

Excellence in Research

Asher O'Donnell

Division of HIV, Infectious Diseases, and Global Medicine

Clinical Research Coordinator Asher O'Donnell's commitment to community wellbeing first emerged as a volunteer with ZSFG partner organization Project Open Hand. "I'm just supporting my community. I'm also a trans queer person and I really felt connected to that work. I've worked on several randomized control trials and am working with different populations. Now I'm working with ZSFG patients with congestive heart failure exacerbations."



Asher O'Donnell

"That was a really impactful study, running up and down the stairs of Building 100 from our office to inpatient floors, meeting the nursing staff, working with the diet office and getting to know the ins and outs of how the hospital functions," he said.

Prior to arriving at ZSFG, Asher studied biochem-



ZSFG Department of Medicine Staff Excellence 2022 awardees: (Top row) Asher O'Donnell, Dave Graham-Squire, (Bottom row L and R) Rahitha Thomas, Ghezal Saffi with (bottom row, center) Chief of Medicine Neil R. Powe MD

istry, women's and gender studies, and the history of the HIV epidemic. "I've landed in a place where there is a crossroads," he said. "I had never heard of social determinants of health or food insecurity before getting into this work. I wanted to work in HIV research and I've found a niche that works really well for my own interests."

Care weaves through all areas of Asher's pursuits. "Asher goes above and beyond the ordinary duties of his job to create truly meaningful and thriving community-based research collaboration – both internally at UCSF and externally with local community clinics and non-profits – that is equitable, inclusive and effective," wrote a nominator.

"His job is to coordinate clinical trials of medically tailored food support among vulnerable populations served by local nutrition agencies, and he does that with excellence," wrote a nominator.

"Just as important, however, is his prioritization of and effectiveness at pursuing and building equitable relationships with our local partners to sustain

buy-in with the work and to expand our recruitment network; and supporting the growth and leadership of our junior staff and interns, almost all of which are both underrepresented racial and sexual/gender minorities, and who are part of the communities affected by our research."

Asher is thankful to grow in his career at ZSFG, learning research grant funding and interacting with patients, leading him to consider continuing his education with a doctorate to become a principal investigator (PI) or into a master's program. "One thing that is certain is that I want to stay in research and with what's going to take me to the next level so I can continue giving back."

Asher reflects on his journey as an expansion of academic focus. "At first, I had imagined life in this small, microscopic place, and now I've really gone to the macroscopic. Social determinants of health really look at population health and asks who is benefiting from our science and work. That resonates with me more than career or interests."

FOLLOW US ON:



@Neil_R_Powe



/ZSFGDOM



Department of Medicine



ZUCKERBERG
SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL
Hospital and Trauma Center

Excellence in Patient Care

Rahitha Maria Thomas, RN

Division of Nephrology

Nurse Practitioner Rahitha Maria Thomas carries forward a family tradition of clinical care, with



Rahitha Thomas RN

credits her personal experience alongside her professional knowledge in providing care to patients.

"I started my career as a dialysis nurse for more than ten years and became aware of the risk factors that make them become a dialysis patient," Rahitha said. "I thought if I become a nurse practitioner, I can see and treat them before they become a dialysis patient."

"I have my personal experience as my father was a dialysis patient and became a kidney patient because he had high blood pressure that was not diagnosed in time," she said. "He was put on dialysis and died in 2018. He never complained and was a very compliant patient. He didn't want to tell problems to his doctors. So with my patients, I can empathize because my father went through that."

Rahitha is commended for her commitment to patients. "Rahitha has worked above and beyond expectations during the unexpected, prolonged leave of two attending nephrologists," wrote a nominator. "Without hesitation, she volunteered to care for additional dialysis patients at two satellite locations and ensured patients continued to receive excellent care. This additional coverage lasted for more than a year."

She is known for being able to create a mutual understanding with patients who may be reluctant or express difficulty with treatment. In one instance, she was able to create a new, more reciprocal relationship. "She opened her heart to the patient and continued encouraging the patient to respect providers and staff and complemented

the patient as reinforcement when they exhibited good behavior. Now this patient is becoming more polite with staff and providers using pleasantries and thanking staff which has previously never had happened. This positive outcome largely is due to Rahitha's hard work and her responsive approach."

"I have a lot of family with kidney problems so I understand very well," said Rahitha. "My parents always taught me to be kind to others, helpful to others. When I help someone I feel good, so I knew that I should go into the medical profession. I like to be with the patients - it gives me pleasure." Rahitha draws on a deep sense of empathy and compassionate flexibility. "When communicating with patients I learn how to approach and learn from past mistakes and how to be patient. They will give clues to their personality and I deal with them based on that," she said. "My parents always taught me to give respect. Give respect, and listen, and they will give respect back."

Rahitha plans to pursue her doctorate in nursing to continue educating patients around kidney disease. "I want to keep them away from dialysis so that they can enjoy their lives," she said. "If we can educate early, teach about consequences, and control risk factors, we can delay the progression of kidney diseases, which is life changing."

Excellence in Leadership

Dave Graham-Squire

Center for Vulnerable Populations

Dave Graham-Squire couples robust knowledge of statistics and economics with his strong interest



Dave Graham-Squire

in social issues. After 14 years with a UC Berkeley labor and employment research institute focused on policy, he joined the Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (BHHI) as Lead Statistician just prior to the start of the pandemic.

"So much of what we did in the first year was meeting basic needs and fulfilling researcher analytical gaps to help support counties' continuum of care and the state's response to people experiencing homelessness...We were often being supportive of local cities, public housing authori-

ties, and homelessness response systems to help in any way that we could...There's a lot of satisfaction, immediate satisfaction. It's been a combination of immediate impact, policy work and support and longer-term academic research."

Dave is celebrated for leading a team to value both BHHI goals and individual staff achievement and wellbeing. "Dave fosters an environment where all of his employees are asked to reflect on their professional development and growth," wrote a nominator. "Dave models a growth mindset for his team and encourages open and transparent communication. His approachable and kind demeanor allows for his team members to feel supported and heard. Dave is a truly remarkable leader, mentor and supervisor."

"Dave leads a team of four statisticians and data scientists at BHHI. The workload is immense and he is regularly juggling complex data projects, while also managing and supporting his team," wrote a nominator. "He leads weekly team meetings, has weekly one-to-ones with his staff, leads a regular journal club where his team can read an article and talk about it in a learning/supportive work environment. He also encourages his team members to use our BHHI professional development funds to further their learning."

Dave celebrates the meaningful work of practitioners, PIs, the qualitative research team, and data collection teams in gathering and creating the data, while acknowledges the value of analysis. "There's an incredible amount of social good that can be done, particularly with public health and economic justice," he said. "There's a lot of data and a lot of need for quantitative work."

He credits his commitment to creating impactful social change to his parents. "It's a bit of a family legacy," he said. "My parents were union and labor organizers and I'm the kind of freakish one who's more into numbers. So this feels right."

SPOTLIGHT

Latinx Heritage Month 2022
September 15 - October 31

<https://mrc.ucsf.edu/events/latinx-heritage-month-2022>

ZSFG flu vaccines and COVID bivalent boosters are available! Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays; Building 5, 4th Floor, 4E; 7:30 AM - 3:30 PM.



Excellence in Administrative Service

Ghezal Saffi

Division of General Internal Medicine

Passion for patient dignity infuse Ghezal Saffi's dedication to create pathways for care. Ghezal



Ghezal Saffi

began as a chronic pain intern for the Richard Fine People's Clinic (RFPC) while pursuing a master's in biology, eventually transitioning into her current role as Quality Improvement Data Analyst with the clinic. "This was my first time working in a safety net hospital and I fell in love with it," said Ghezal. "I love our patients, the team that I work with, and our medical director Dr. Rosenthal. She gives me so much support...I have a lot of autonomy and room to work on projects that I'm passionate about."

"Ghezal is an extraordinary staff member and colleague," wrote a nominator. "Ghezal is filled with initiative, integrity, and compassion. I have rarely met anyone with as much dedication to and

passion for her work...She has been responsible for planning and implementation of a clinic-based ,San Francisco Cancer Initiative, breast cancer screening program in RFPC that is in its' second year. The project is dedicated to reducing disparities in mammography screening and abnormal mammogram follow up for Black/African American and Native American/Pacific Islander patients. Ghezal has worked closely with the Avon Breast Center, primary care outreach workers, and our own clinic staff to develop a workflow for phone calls, appointment scheduling, gift cards and taxi vouchers to support completion of screening and follow up on abnormal results. She has created a workflow and training guide for same day scheduling and direct scheduling of mammograms by clinic staff that has now been adapted for use in clinics across SF Health Network."

Ghezal draws from her own experience as a patient to inform her understanding of patient experience. "I was a patient at Highland hospital, a county hospital similar to (ZSFG) General's set-up for many years, prior to coming here," she said. "And from my perspective, I love the care patients get here at San Francisco General. When I was a patient before, I didn't see that care and

respect at the time that people get here and I'm so thankful to see the other side of it."

A commitment to equity prompted Ghezal's dedication to additional projects. "Ghezal has also been a driving force behind the creation of RFPC's Anti-Racism and Equity Workgroup, convened in the months following George Floyd's death in 2020," wrote a nominator. "This new workgroup is devoted to making the clinic a more welcoming and inclusive space for our patients and staff, and to reducing our healthcare disparities. Ghezal has been the engine for this work, helping get the group off the ground, doing the design and legwork for our equity-focused newsletter, drafting agendas, running meetings, keeping notes, and doing all she can to make sure this new team endeavor succeeds."

"Coming from someone who has been underserved and underrepresented myself, I'm so proud to be in an organization that stands up and is committed to what's right," said Ghezal. "I love to see patients getting the respect they deserve, whether they are housed or speak English or not."

Brooks Bigart

Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson



ZSFG celebrated the ZSFG Poetry Walk with a dedication ceremony in the Comfort Garden outside of Building 80/90 on Friday, September 25, 2022.

Wynne Bamberg from the ZSFG Dean's Office; Anile Woods, ZSFG Head Gardener; and Laurae Pearson, Director of Administration and Finance, ZSFG Department of Medicine, spoke at the event.



A truly collaborative installation between UCSF and ZSFG, the walk incorporates poems from this year's UCSF Department of Medicine Poetry and Visual Arts Magazine *Further Together*. An online edition is available here: <https://dom.ucsf.edu/third-annual-dom-poetry-contest>

Photo Left (left to right): Wynne Bamberg, Anile Woods, Laurae Pearson

Photo Top: Rebecca Fox, installation artist (left), Scott Canazales, ZSFG community member (second from right), and Anile Woods (far right) with UCSF DOM poets (left to right) Nelya Veselya, Lorraine Hart, Swati Sudarshan, Tom McNalley, and Gina Morena-John.



Photos: Laurae Pearson