



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

BUILDING A STRONGER RESEARCH COMMUNITY AT PRIDE HALL

Scientific discovery is an essential element to improve the health of our patients at ZSFG and the residents of San Francisco. In February 2017, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee signed legislation approving a 75-year, renewable, ground lease of land for the construction of a UCSF research and academic building on the campus of ZSFG (see Newsletter Vol 1, Issue 01, February 2017). The project was envisioned to bring 800 researchers on the hospital campus under one roof and exemplifies the 150-year history of the resilient UCSF and ZSFG partnership. That vision, 6 years ago, is now a reality. The modern and safe building gives us the opportunity to build a stronger research community for another 150 years of the UCSF-ZSFG partnership.



A Seismic Shift

“Our clinical mission at San Francisco General is to care for the most vulnerable populations and



Peter Hunt, MD

improve the health of people who are often left out,” said Peter Hunt, MD, Professor of Medicine in the ZSFG Division of Experimental Medicine. He was recently appointed Associate Chief of Research for the

ZSFG Department of Medicine. “In order to move the needle, we need to have people from these populations actively participate in research so we can develop solutions targeted to helping them,” he said.

Pride Hall

For example, as a physician-scientist focused on the inflammatory consequences of HIV infection, Dr. Hunt sees firsthand some of the obstacles between translating some of the cutting-edge discoveries that he and his colleagues make in the lab to patients he sees at ZSFG and in Uganda. “We’ve had effective therapies for HIV for a very long time, but many people don’t know they have HIV, may not be well connected to a clinic or feel welcome there, or might have substance use or mental health issues that could make it difficult to take a pill every day,” he said. “Studying how to get treatments to the most vulnerable people with HIV is a very tangible example of the type of work that happens on the ZSFG campus.”

To accelerate the pace of discovery, ZSFG recently opened Pride Hall, a brand new research and academic building located just south of Building 5. “Pride Hall represents a seismic shift, both literally

and figuratively, in research facilities on the San Francisco General campus,” said Dr. Hunt. Because of requirements that UC employees work in buildings that are up to current earthquake codes, UCSF and ZSFG engaged in a long-range process to construct this facility, the first ever UCSF-owned building on the ZSFG campus. It opened in July 2023, and research teams are starting to move in..

Synergy and Collaboration

However, this has been a challenging transition. Dr. Hunt is working through this transition, addressing the needs of the research community to promote synergy and accelerate collaboration.

He is excited about what will be possible in this new home for research at ZSFG. “We’ll have this critical mass of researchers all under one roof



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One of Pride Hall's five Town Centers

for the first time on the San Francisco General campus," he said. "We'll be bumping into people we never bumped into before. It takes me five minutes to bike to work, and right now it takes me the same amount of time to walk from one side of campus to the other. Oftentimes you develop new collaborations you never would have considered, just by being exposed to work that one of your colleagues is doing down the hall. There are going to be so many more opportunities for that now."

Co-locating researchers opens up many new possibilities. "There are divisions that work on very similar things, using very similar methods," said Dr. Hunt. "For example, the Center for Vulnerable Populations does tons of implementation science, and much of that work overlaps with people in the Division of HIV, Infectious Diseases and Global Medicine. You can imagine lots of synergies there, building on existing collaborations and starting novel ones."

Another affinity group is the many researchers who need to access electronic medical record (EMR) data from patients who receive care at ZSFG. "This can be done in a way that protects patients' personal health information, but there are significant barriers at this site that put investigators at San Francisco General behind those at Parnassus, where investigators can access EMR data for their research without any barriers," said Dr. Hunt. "That's an example of people from vulnerable pop-

ulations getting left behind. We're going to work on those problems collectively across divisions in the ZSFG Department of Medicine who require those data for their research."

Addressing Space Challenges

"When the building was first designed, it was believed that Buildings 3 and 9 were up to earthquake code, and that people currently housed there could remain," said Dr. Hunt. "But subsequently, a review by UC architects revealed that those buildings were no longer up to code, and researchers would also have to move into Pride Hall, even though the footprint was already set. The administration was hopeful that a more efficient use of space in the new building would enable everyone to fit, but it became clear that the space was smaller than could accommodate all the people slated to move in."

ZSFG investigators engaged in years of advocacy for additional space, a need that is particularly acute for bench researchers. "There are problems with density both for dry and wet labs, but you can't do wet lab research from home," said Dr. Hunt. The Chancellor's Office identified a potential site at 499 Illinois Street on the Mission Bay campus to help decompress wet lab researchers at Pride Hall. The site is in the same building that houses the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub, and the Chancellor's Office is currently in lease negotia-

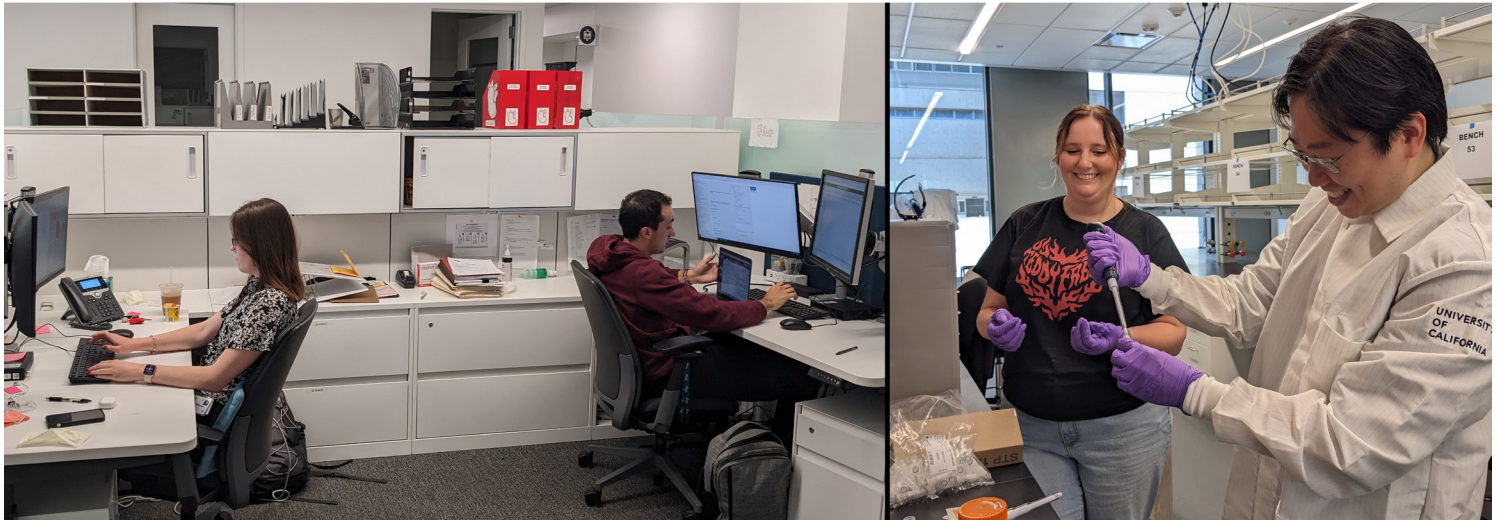
tions.

"We're now trying to figure out if we can move several investigators from San Francisco General to that space," said Dr. Hunt. "As you can imagine, it's a very complicated process to determine who can and wants to move, how to develop a research community at 499 Illinois in a way that is synergistic and sensible, and how to maintain connections between the [Mission Bay and ZSFG] campuses so we're not splitting people off into a small island. We're navigating all those issues right now, but are making a lot of progress. We look forward to developing a new community at 499 Illinois that may be linked to the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub and all the resources at Mission Bay, while maintaining that bridge to communities in Pride Hall."

Dr. Hunt plans to foster community between Pride Hall and 499 Illinois by coordinating seminars that span divisions and rotating which site hosts them. "We want to maintain those bridges to make sure there is still an extensive community, and that nothing is lost by people going to 499 Illinois," said Dr. Hunt. "We'll also have all these new synergies with Mission Bay that perhaps could be leveraged by others who will be based at Pride Hall. There will be many opportunities to further strengthen and grow our research community."

Open Communication

Dr. Hunt has met individually with each of the ZSFG Department of Medicine's division chiefs to understand their specific challenges and opportunities, and is incorporating this into a longer-term vision of the future of research at ZSFG. One shared priority is developing better ways to support early-stage investigators, particularly researchers from groups underrepresented in science. "Investigators from underrepresented populations are particularly important for our campus," said Dr. Hunt, noting that they bring linguistic and cultural competencies that can inspire trust and encourage ZSFG patients to participate in clinical research. "Also, one of our missions is to train the next generation," he said. "When students come and see mentors who look like them, they have role models who can help inspire them to continue in their careers.... Taking care of our early-stage investigators and those from underrepresented populations will help us be a stronger, healthier community moving forward."



On the left, Taylor Fakadej, Clinical Research Coordinator (left) and Gerardo Rubio Monroy, Clinical Research Coordinator (right) from the Division of Gastroenterology. On the right, Cassie Rapp, Lab Assistant (left) and Alan Leong, Staff Research Associate (right) from the Division of Hematology-Oncology.

Dr. Hunt assumed his position this past spring, after serving as Chair of the Core Design Group for Pride Hall as well as a member of its Governance Committee. “I was seeing some of the issues that were likely to come up, and had already been advocating and working behind the scenes for some time,” he said. “What was happening in terms of the compression and space was a threat to the community, and I felt I needed to respond. This has been a very stressful time for all the research teams at San Francisco General. We’re a very mission-driven group and feel passionately about what we do. When the infrastructure needed for us to do what we do is threatened, that’s very upsetting.”

However, just like ZSFG always does in the face of challenges – from the AIDS crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic – the community pulled together. “It has galvanized our community, and people are stepping up, problem-solving and troubleshooting,” said Dr. Hunt. “We are identifying issues as they occur, trying to solve or mitigate them. There’s a sense of togetherness and shared mission that we’ve always had in our research community at San Francisco General. That gives me the greatest hope, as we work together to solve problems.”

It hasn’t always been easy. Dr. Hunt said. “I’ve tried to say, ‘We hear you. We know about these issues, and are actively working on them. I can’t

promise anything I don’t personally control, but I will continue to advocate until we get these issues addressed.’ People may say, ‘Why should I be optimistic? Show me the proof!’ These are scientists, after all. That’s been difficult, but we’ve done the best we can.”

He has drawn on decades of experience in his new role. “My own research is very collaborative and driven by team science,” said Dr. Hunt. “Everything I’ve ever done has been with teams and other people. It’s always required understanding people who have a very different perspective, skill set and background. I’ve learned some communication styles that can be helpful in navigating issues. Persuading people starts with understanding where they are coming from, and speaking to them so they can hear you. More than anything, those skills are the ones that have helped me in the last several months. It’s been gratifying to see how I can make a difference, helping persuade people to get where I know we need to go. That takes careful communication, and I’m grateful I’m able to help in that capacity.”

Dr. Hunt appreciates all his colleagues at ZSFG. “I’m inspired by my community every day,” he said. “They have put down what they were doing to chip in, be constructive, and help solve problems. I’m also inspired by the institution. At the end of the day, UCSF is a good place, and always

tries to do the right thing.... I’m really thankful to serve in this role and work on behalf of the community I love. While we’re going through difficulties related to space right now, we’re going to navigate those challenges together, and we’ll come out stronger on the other side. I know our research will continue to grow and strengthen long into the future.”

Elizabeth Chur

Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson, Kevin Weil

SPOTLIGHT

Larissa Thomas, MD, was named Interim Chief of the Division of Hospital Medicine.

Lisa Ochoa-Frongia, MD, Division of General Internal Medicine has been selected for the 2023 Class of the Haile T. Debas Academy of Medical Educators

Mary Gray, MD, Division of Cardiology was selected for the peer-nominated 2022-2023 Excellence in Interprofessional Teaching Award from the UCSF Program for Interprofessional Practice and Education (PIPE) and the Haile T. Debas Academy of Medical Educators.

Neil R. Powe, MD, MPH, MBA, Chief of Medicine, received the Cato T. Laurencin Distinguished Research Career Award from the National Medical Association, the organization representing African American physicians and their patients in the United States