



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

New Leaders at ZSFG Department of Medicine



For Women's History Month, we are highlighting three outstanding leaders in the ZSFG Department of Medicine. They bring passion, a wealth of talent, and clear visions for the future to their new roles.

Oanh Nguyen, MD, MS
Chief, ZSFG Division of Hospital Medicine
Reengineering Systems of Care

"Research isn't just about nerding out over data," said Associate Professor Oanh Nguyen, MD, MS. "The end goal is improving care for our patients. We do lots of studies that show how to improve outcomes, but translating that to the real world is challenging. I call it the 'last-mile problem' in health care."

In November 2024, Dr. Nguyen became Chief of

the ZSFG Division of Hospital Medicine, which provides comprehensive inpatient care every day of the year and is one of the largest clinical divisions at ZSFG. Building on this foundation of clinical excellence, she hopes to expand her division's efforts in innovation and scholarship.

Dr. Nguyen earned bachelor's degrees in neuroscience and political science from UCLA and her medical degree from UC San Diego. She completed her internal medicine residency at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, drawn by the opportunity to train at Parkland Hospital, one of

the country's largest safety net hospitals.

Her mentors included Ruben Amarasingham, MD, MBA, a pioneer in developing predictive algorithms using electronic health record (EHR) data and former mentee of Dr. Neil Powe. She helped him develop models to predict which patients would be readmitted within 30 days, and how the hospital could better connect them with social services. "Taking care of the whole person and improving care for our most vulnerable patients has been the central theme of my career," said Dr. Nguyen.



Oanh Nguyen, MD, MS



Women Represented in ZSFG DOM



To hone her skills, she spent two years as a UCSF primary care research fellow, earning her master's degree in clinical research with a specialization in implementation science. She then joined the UT Southwestern faculty, caring for patients and investigating how social and structural determinants of health affect patient outcomes.

She sees primary care and hospital medicine as part of the same continuum of care. "A lot of hospital medicine is thinking about how to stabilize patients who are in an acute health crisis and effectively transition them back to the life they were leading before they came to the hospital," said Dr. Nguyen. "It's all-consuming for us while they are hospitalized, but for patients, it's a very brief but critical moment in their lives – one where we have the opportunity to change the trajectory of their illness and set up them for the majority of their recovery outside the hospital."

Improving Care at Scale

At Parkland, she helped lead a study comparing the effectiveness of emergency-only versus scheduled dialysis among undocumented immigrants. The standard of care for patients with end-stage renal disease (ESRD) is scheduled dialysis three times a week. However, most states – including Texas – prohibited undocumented immigrants from receiving this care through government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. These patients could only access dialysis by coming to the Emergency Department when they were in dire straits. "They were just regular people working to support their families, and caring for them in the ED created a sense of

moral distress because we knew they deserved better," said Dr. Nguyen.

After the passage of the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies could no longer deny coverage because of preexisting conditions like ESRD. A hospital social worker referred eligible Parkland ESRD patients to a program which would pay for their health insurance; unfortunately, only half the patients found an open slot at a community dialysis center. "It created a quasi-randomized sample of people who continued on emergency-only dialysis versus scheduled dialysis," said Dr. Nguyen.

She and her colleagues found that patients who received scheduled dialysis had a significant reduction in ED visits and hospitalizations. Their one-year mortality rate dropped to 3%, compared with 17% in the emergency-only group, and their overall care cost about \$70,000 less per year. "We were able to say, 'Doing the ethical thing saves money as well as lives,'" said Dr. Nguyen. Their findings spurred Dallas County to contract with local dialysis centers to provide care to such patients, and helped groups in other states advocate for policy changes. "It was an example of leveraging robust evaluation methods to improve care at large scale," she said.

In 2018, Dr. Nguyen was recruited back to ZSFG. Based on her research about barriers to post-hospitalization recovery, she wondered if giving temporary cash assistance might help patients meet health-related social needs. That led her to become principal investigator of the Silicon Valley Guaranteed Income Project, a randomized

controlled trial assessing the effectiveness of cash assistance on improving housing stability and health among 300 homeless Bay Area families.

One of the biggest challenges was helping community partners understand the rationale behind randomized clinical trials. "They rightfully wanted to protect their community members from exploitation, and it took months of conversations and relationship-building to help them understand we were not 'experimenting' on people," said Dr. Nguyen. "We emphasized that the randomization process was about providing robust results to support our shared goal of data-driven advocacy, as well as fairness about who got cash assistance and who didn't. It was important to use non-jargony language, and to approach these collaborations as true partnerships."

Creating a Learning Health System

In her new role as division chief, Dr. Nguyen is excited to build infrastructure for data-driven clinical operations and innovation. "Those two things are intertwined, and rely on having data and robust evaluation methods," she said. "We are creating the INSPIRE (INnovating Scholarship for Process Improvement, Research, and Evaluation) Incubator, which will help us develop new ways of delivering and evaluating clinical care. We also want to translate our findings into scholarship to inform care at other places."

INSPIRE includes the DREAM (Data for Research, Evaluation and Analytics in Hospital Medicine) Core, a local data core within her division. Dr. Nguyen and her team will compile existing data sets to inform clinical operations and research, and advocate for increased access to deidentified patient data in ways that continue to protect patient privacy and data security.

"I want our division to be a model for a learning health system, in which we analyze and evaluate data in a continuous way and feed results back into adapting care delivery to better meet patient needs," said Dr. Nguyen. "It's hard, largely because people with robust data skills and evaluation methods are grant-funded researchers, and operations people are hospital leaders who operate on a different timeline and have different incentives. It's hard to bring those two groups together, but I have a little of both, so I hope to help our group blend those two worlds"

Dr. Nguyen also plans to develop early-career faculty through the new ASCEND (Advancing Scholarship, Clinical Excellence, Education, and INnovation Development) program. “We want to equip our faculty with skills to be academic hospitalists of the 21st century,” she said. ASCEND will provide opportunities to develop additional clinical skills, cultivate the ability to work with data, and enhance leadership skills. “Many of our faculty join our division straight out of residency, and this will provide additional mentorship for navigating an academic career and developing an area of scholarship,” she said.

Dr. Nguyen’s passion is fueled in part by serving as the family translator and navigator for her parents, who were both refugees from Vietnam. “They understood English but spoke with an accent, and I saw how they were treated differently, even though in Vietnam they were college-educated professionals,” she said. “It got under my skin. It also made me wonder, doesn’t everyone deserve fantastic care, regardless of who they are or how much money they make?”

She also enjoys making systems better. “I love solving very big, complex problems,” said Dr. Nguyen. “If you want better results, a big part of the solution is thinking about how to reengineer the system so it works better.”

**Serena Loya, MS-HAIL
Manager, ZSFG Division of Nephrology
Passion to Learn and Lead**

Though she is relatively new to ZSFG, Serena Loya, MS-HAIL, is no stranger to UCSF. Before becoming the Division Manager for the ZSFG Division of Nephrology in January 2024 to work with division chief Delphine Tuot MD, she served for 15 years in many roles at UCSF Fresno. “When I started at UCSF Fresno, my son was eight months old, and he just turned 17,” she said with a smile.

She began as an administrative assistant in the UCSF Fresno Division of Cardiology, then became their fellowship coordinator, helping establish the interventional cardiology fellowship program. “I was excited to not only get our fellowship up and running, but also successfully applying for grant funding to support the salary for the fellow,” said Ms. Loya. In honor of her



Serena Loya, MS-HAIL



New Outpatient Dialysis Unit Under Construction in Bldg 5, 3rd Floor

exceptional service, she was recently recognized through creation of the UCSF Fresno Cardiology Serena Loya Fellow of the Year Award.

“I fell in love with academic medicine,” said Ms. Loya. She served as supervisor of fellowship programs across the UCSF Fresno Department of Medicine, a job which expanded to include the internal medicine residency program. When UCSF Fresno built a new cancer institute, she helped launch the hematology/oncology fellowship program. She also worked with her IT colleagues to develop videoconferencing abilities, so faculty and trainees could participate in didactic sessions hosted by San Francisco-based campuses. “At the time, there were only five hematology/oncology faculty at UCSF Fresno, so this really helped faculty and trainees broaden their knowledge base,” she said. “Later, when COVID hit, hematology/oncology was already prepared to participate in remote lectures.”

She eventually served as administrative manager for the UCSF Fresno Department of Medicine, partnering with the “mother ship” to bring useful tools from San Francisco to Fresno. “The main campus has everything, so we didn’t need to reinvent the wheel,” said Ms. Loya. For example, she helped roll out

faculty and staff performance evaluation portals at UCSF Fresno.

Ms. Loya was inspired to go back to school, earning her associate and bachelor degrees from the University of Phoenix. “I wanted to be an alumnus just like everyone else, so then I decided to complete the accelerated, one-year master’s program at UCSF for health care administration,” she said. “My colleagues have seen me grow as a person, mother, student and leader.” She worked closely with Michael Peterson, MD, who served as Associate Dean at UCSF Fresno for many years. “He helped me identify skills that I didn’t see in myself, and guided me throughout my career,” she said.

Hands-On Learning

She loved working at UCSF Fresno, but wanted to expand her knowledge and skill set. Because of UCSF Fresno’s organizational structure, there were fewer opportunities to learn about patient care and financial aspects of healthcare administration. Ms. Loya was delighted when she was hired as Division Manager for the ZSFG Division of Nephrology.

She wanted to continue living in Fresno, where she has deep roots. So Ms. Loya spends about half her workweek commuting from Fresno, and the rest working from home. She immersed herself in getting to know San Francisco. When

she started her new job, she stayed in different neighborhoods in San Francisco and the Bay Area, commuting by bus, BART, Caltrain, car and foot to ZSFG. “For example, I’ve stayed in the Marina District, and saw all walks of life during the hour and 45 minute bus ride to ZSFG,” she said. “Now I have a better perspective on what it takes to get to a doctor’s appointment.”

She’s taken the same approach to learning about her division. “I’m a visual, hands-on learner, and am a big supporter of shadowing people,” said Ms. Loya. To learn about their dialysis clinic, she watched patients get checked in and get prepared for dialysis. “They appreciated that someone wanted to learn more about what they go through. The staff have been so supportive, and answered all my questions,” she said.

She also cultivated relationships with dialysis clinics they refer patients to. “It’s always been important to me to engage my stakeholders,” said Ms. Loya. She drove to each clinic, met her counterparts at each site, and toured the facilities. She was mindful of maintaining relationships fostered by her predecessor, Jep Poon. “When she retired, I wanted to maintain that level of leadership and connection that she worked for years to establish,” she said.

Growth in All Directions

Ms. Loya is particularly energized about shepherding the expansion of dialysis services at ZSFG. The current ZSFG Renal Center, housed in an aging facility in Building 100, is scheduled to relocate to Building 5, where it will nearly double the number of dialysis stations and include more modern equipment. “That is going to have such a huge impact on patients’ day-to-day lives – it’s really exciting,” she said.

She also spent time this past year connecting with staff and supporting them in improving workflows. “I asked each person to write out their processes and put them in OneNote,” said Ms. Loya. “That’s become our living, breathing procedure manual. I want to cultivate subject matter experts who can explain processes from beginning to end. I also met with each staff member one on one to ask what they enjoy about their job, their goals for the next two to five years, as well as what’s time consuming, what are the challenges, and their ideas for making processes easier.” Those meetings have helped her team streamline patient referrals and billing procedures.

“Knowledge is power, and the more we all know, the better we are as a division,” said Ms. Loya. “I see continued growth from here forward, in all directions. The ZSFG Division of Nephrology is such a cohesive, collaborative team which is dedicated to patient care, research and education. The clinical staff are so dedicated to their patients, from providing day-to-day care to donating a rotisserie chicken from Costco every holiday season for each dialysis patient. And my administrative team is amazing – they’re extremely helpful, resourceful and dedicated.”

In addition to her leadership at ZSFG, Ms. Loya is currently on the ballot to serve as president-elect for the Administrators of Internal Medicine Council of the Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine. “My colleagues at AAIM helped guide me when I transitioned into this role, and I want to give back through mentoring others,” she said. “Building those networks and connecting people who can support others is huge.”

For Ms. Loya, the work of ZSFG has personal resonance. Her biological father struggled with drug addiction, and while she did not live with him growing up, as an adult she witnessed his journey through the health care system. “It was hard to watch the stigma he experienced when he went to the hospital without insurance, a job, or a place to live,” she said. “From my core, I align with the General’s commitment to providing compassionate care to vulnerable patients, regardless of their socioeconomic status.”

Ms. Loya is very happy in her new role. “I have learned so much, and this is exactly what I hoped to do,” she said. “It’s been an amazing journey so far, and I’m so thankful for this opportunity.”

**Serena Lee, MS
Manager, Division of Occupational,
Environmental and Climate Medicine
Stepping Up to Support Healthy Workplaces,
Homes and Communities**

“Our division looks at the environmental impacts of things that are all around us on a daily basis, but that we may not think about,” said Serena Lee, MS, Manager of the Division of Occupational, Environmental and Climate Medicine.

Ms. Lee began her current position, working with division chief Gina Solomon MD, MPH, in January 2024, and helps oversee a division that spans all three sites – ZSFG, UCSF Health, and

the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center (SFVAMC). It includes Occupational Health Services at ZSFG, which provides medical screenings, vaccinations, and other job-related care for City and County of San



Serena Lee, MS

Francisco (CCSF) employees, as well as clinics at Mount Zion and SFVAMC which diagnose and treat harmful exposures at work or home to chemicals, mold, burn pits, and other hazards. The division also helps ensure safety at CCSF worksites, such as the Port of San Francisco and Hetch Hetchy Reservoir.

The division also includes a robust research portfolio, including faculty investigating the health impacts of wildfire smoke on air and water quality, the ergonomics of poultry and pork processing plants, and the impact of extreme heat on farmworkers in the Central Valley. Others carry specially outfitted backpacks into Bay Area music festivals, comparing how the air quality inside and outside those events varies depending on the amount of exposure to tobacco and cannabis products.

“Because we’re a multi-site division and encompass such a wide band, we’ve been focusing on helping our division be more collaborative and cohesive,” said Ms. Lee. “That includes helping staff from different research groups interface with one another.” Recently she organized a luncheon for all research staff to help build community. “It was rewarding to see staff from different research groups interact, and we actually found out that three people from two different research groups were applying to the same MPH program,” she said. “It was nice to build that connection.” To help foster these connections across sites, she also helps coordinate a quarterly newsletter to share updates and highlight various researchers.

Stepping Stones for Leadership Development

Ms. Lee has spent her entire career at UCSF. After earning her bachelor’s degree in business administration from Saint Mary’s College, she served as an administrative assistant for the ZSFG Division of General Internal Medicine.



She then became an Administrative Assistant and Research Services Analyst at the SFVAMC while earning her master's degree in health care administration from California State University, East Bay. She went on to work for the UCSF Division of Infectious Diseases as a Research Finance Analyst, also serving as their Interim Division Manager for four months.

"Stepping in as the Interim Division Manager was a huge learning experience for me," said Ms. Lee. "It exposed me firsthand to everything a Division Manager would be doing. I supervised staff for the first time, dealt with labor and employee relations, was exposed to clinical finances, and interfaced with the Division Chief in a different way than I had been used to. It was really challenging, but I learned the most I've ever learned in my career. It also helped me pace myself and served as a stepping stone for where I am now."

To help her gain the skill set to become a full-time Division Manager, Ms. Lee eventually served as Assistant Division Manager for the UCSF Division of General Internal Medicine. "My Division Manager was more of the front-facing person, but I was her right-hand person, doing some of the analyses and work she needed to make decisions," she said. "She looped me in on her thought process, and it helped me have a better understanding of the role."

Ms. Lee then served as Program Manager for a research group, which helped her realize that she missed interfacing with a larger group. "I like being a go-to person for faculty members and staff, and getting to be involved with the administrative, HR, finance and clinical aspects of an entire division," she said.

Taking on New Challenges

In her current role as Division Manager, she oversees the overall division budget, HR, administration, and other duties. She leans heavily on her previous experience managing research grants at UCSF. "The University has certain systems and a million acronyms, and my research administration background has been helpful in making sure that grant spending is aligned with policies and guidelines, as well as preparing budget projections for expenditures," said Ms. Lee. "It helps me ask more questions, and make sure that things are the way they're supposed to be."

From her previous experiences, Ms. Lee recognizes how important communication is to leadership. "If there's a change, I try to let everyone know at the same time and make it very clear," she said. "In bigger groups where jobs may overlap, it's important to be very transparent about each person's duties." As Assistant Division Manager for the UCSF Division of General Internal Medicine during the pandemic, she led a team in onboarding several new faculty. "Different staff handled different parts – one person ordered their white coats and name plates, another ordered their desks and helped set up their offices," she said. "We had weekly meetings to coordinate logistics and timelines. I really valued what everyone had to say, because they were the experts in what to do and how long it would take."

Over the years, Ms. Lee has received numerous SPOT Awards as part of UCSF's STAR Program, and in 2022 received the Division of General Internal Medicine's Robert H. Crede Award for Excellence in Academic Administration.

One of the most helpful things for her career development has been volunteering for new challenges, as she did for the Interim Division Manager position. "If something is interesting to you, put yourself out there," said Ms. Lee. "Ask to be part of projects, even if it's not within your normal scope, because that will expose you to something to see if you like it. It also gets your name and face out to different groups that can guide and direct you. Don't necessarily expect compensation for that – just take them as learning experiences to support your growth."

Ms. Lee is excited about the future. "I look forward to our division growing, and bringing more of the climate piece of our division to light," she said. "I'm not a doctor or a researcher, but what brings me joy is knowing that I'm helping my division, faculty and staff advance health and research. At San Francisco General in particular, we serve a particularly vulnerable population, and that's really impactful. I love being part of the mission of UCSF and ZSFG, and the work that we do. It's really important, and I'm proud to be a part of it."

-Elizabeth Chur

Editors: Neil Powe, Leonard Telesca, Ali Cunningham

SPOTLIGHT

[Laurence Huang, MD](#), Division of HIVIDGM, received the [Distinction in Mentoring Award](#) from the UCSF Academic Senate.

[Serena Loya](#), Division of Nephrology, has been appointed president-elect of the [Administrators of Internal Medicine Council of AAIM](#).

[Jaya Mallidi, MD](#), Division of Cardiology, received the [Distinction in Teaching Award](#) from the UCSF Academic Senate.

Congratulations to our 2025 Master Clinician!

[Sarah Goglin, MD](#), Division of Rheumatology



Samanta Tello, *Silenced Voices of Everyday Heroes*, 2019

