



UCSF Department of Medicine

ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

Sharing a Love of Teaching: 2025-2026 Chief Residents



Neil Powe, Chief of Medicine (far left), with the new chief residents. From left to right; Tamara Sanchez Ortiz, MD, MPH, Harry Cheung, MD, Pooja Lalchandani, MD, and residency leaders Ilana Garcia-Grossman (SFPC Ambulatory Site Director) and Becky Brusca (Inpatient Site Director) not shown.

This month, we welcome our new chief residents who just completed their internal medicine residencies at UCSF. These exceptional young physicians will help educate, guide, and support the 180 interns and residents who rotate through the Department of Medicine at ZSFG this academic year. They bring a wealth of talent to their new leadership roles, including experience caring for underserved patient populations and a deep commitment to medical education.

Dr. Harry Cheung A Doctor Who Patients Can Trust

Harry Cheung, MD, grew up in Farmingdale, Maine, a small rural town where his family owned a restaurant called Cheung Lee Express. "I started working when I was barely tall enough to reach the counter," said Dr. Cheung, now one of the ZSFG co-chief residents for inpatient care. "I answered the phone, took orders, and did homework on the side. It taught me a lot

about how to talk with strangers and navigate interpersonal connections."

Even though his parents worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, the family struggled financially, relying on supports like Medicaid to get by. But their sacrifices paid off, and he and his brother were both able to attend college. Dr. Cheung graduated from Boston College. "They had a concept of a vocation, which means doing something that you're suited for, but that also makes the world a better place and helps people," he said.

He had always wanted to become a teacher. "Nothing makes me happier than working with someone who's struggling to understand something and seeing it eventually click for them," said Dr. Cheung. "It's so exciting! I found that medicine combines everything I enjoy – teaching patients and educating learners, taking care of people, and making the world a better place."

While earning his medical degree from Yale School of Medicine, he volunteered as a patient navigator, connecting immigrants and refugees with health care and social services.

"We helped them figure out their clinical needs, accompanied them to medical appointments, and ensured they got information that was language concordant," said Dr. Cheung. "We also connected



Harry Cheung, MD



them with places that could provide culturally appropriate foods and toiletries. It was a cool opportunity to meet people from different countries and help them develop their sense of community after moving to the States.”

He vividly remembers meeting a family that was afraid to have him in the room. “They didn’t like Yale and what it had done to their community,” said Dr. Cheung. “That was hurtful because, coming from a lower-income family, I never felt like I belonged to that ivory tower. I thought, ‘When I become a doctor, I want to be someone my patients feel they can trust and who has their best interests at heart.’”

Communication is Key

One of the reasons Dr. Cheung chose UCSF for his internal medicine residency was the opportunity to care for patients who speak Cantonese, his family’s spoken language. “One of the first patients I saw at my clinic at the Richard Fine People’s Clinic was an elderly Cantonese-speaking woman,” he said. “I introduced myself in Cantonese, and she said, ‘This is the first time I’ve ever had my doctor speak Cantonese with me.’ It made her feel seen and that she could trust me. She also reminded me of my grandmother, and it made me so happy to provide language-concordant care to her. That was the first time I felt like a real doctor.”

Dr. Cheung tries to explain complex medical issues in easy-to-understand terms. “That comes from having to code-switch a lot of my life,” he said. “I grew up in an area where not everyone went to college, and then went to a private university. I learned to have conversations with people from various backgrounds. So instead of telling someone, ‘There are four types of valves in your heart,’ I might say, ‘This part of your heart doesn’t work very well, and because of that, you’re feeling light-headed and dizzy.’ Before moving to San Francisco, I practiced medical terms with my mom, and she said, ‘None of your patients are going to know the fancy medical terms – just explain it to them.’ His personal experience also helps him communicate more effectively about sensitive topics.

Creating New Opportunities for Learning

As co-chief resident for inpatient care, Dr. Cheung is excited to help develop educational conferences and facilitate reports for the residents. He will also help develop intern half-



Dr. Pooja Lalchandani and Dr. Harry Cheung teaching the “Thumb Trick” to estimate the electrical axis on the electrocardiogram.

days, which are dedicated sessions focused on teaching fundamental clinical skills, and will help organize the Anti-Racism Symposium.

He also looks forward to working with site and program directors to revitalize the physical exam curriculum, and he plans to create a more robust ultrasound curriculum. “Point-of-care ultrasound can provide some critical key information at the bedside, and some of the newer devices are handheld and can plug into your phone. It’s especially helpful overnight or on weekends when it’s harder to get a formal clinical study. We want to set aside time during the clinical workday to teach these skills,” said Dr. Cheung.

Dr. Cheung plans to apply for academic jobs in hospital medicine in an environment like ZSFG. “Helping really passionate students and residents learn how to take care of people who are most vulnerable is such an awesome opportunity,” he said.

Outside of medicine, Dr. Cheung runs 20 to 30 miles weekly, enjoys playing basketball and cheering on the Boston Celtics, and spending time with his wife, Maddie Salah, a lawyer for the City of Palo Alto.

Dr. Pooja Lalchandani Empowering Different Learners

“I try to bring empathy and a person-centered approach to all my interactions,” said Pooja Lalchandani, MD, ZSFG co-chief resident for inpatient care.

Dr. Lalchandani, a lifelong Bay Area resident of Santa Clara County, saw medicine as a way to combine her interest in science with the opportunity to help people. “Being a doctor was a nice overlay between those two things,” she said.

While earning her bachelor’s degree from UC Berkeley, she worked with a student-run nonprofit, Project RISHI. Its mission is to promote Rural India Social and Health Improvement. In collaboration with local doctors, Dr. Lalchandani and her colleagues helped run health camps



Pooja Lalchandani, MD

and establish a water filtration system in a small village in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

"We didn't want to just show up, do something, and then leave, so working with doctors who knew the language and the local population really well was really meaningful," she said. "We spent a lot of time there, and I was part of the group for all four years of college.

She chose UCSF for medical school, a good fit for her interest in inpatient care. "UCSF is the birthplace of hospital medicine," said Dr. Lalchandani. "As a hospitalist, I get to see the integration of medical issues across different organ systems. I also like being a patient's primary doctor in the hospital, and the person who knows the family and patient the best. Hospital medicine also allows me to talk with all the specialists."

The COVID-19 pandemic hit midway through her time in medical school. She co-founded the UCSF COVID-19 Student Aid Taskforce, partnering with local nonprofits to connect medical students to volunteer opportunities such as grocery deliveries, food bank staffing, and support calls to older adults during the early days of the pandemic. She was recognized for this work in 2021 with the UCSF Dean's Commendation for Exceptional Volunteerism and Community Service.

A Love of Teaching

Dr. Lalchandani has always had a passion for education. As a medical student, she was an instructor and program coordinator for the Health of the Incarcerated Group, teaching women inmates in the San Francisco County Jail about sexually transmitted infections, fertility, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. "It was a special experience to help empower folks who may not have stable access to healthcare," she said.

She stayed at UCSF for her internal medicine residency, where she chose the Health Professions Education pathway. "It's important to figure out where someone might be getting confused and understand their questions. It's important to take the time to use different styles to re-explain material to them," said Dr. Lalchandani.

As co-chief residents at ZSFG for inpatient care, she and Harry Cheung, MD, will share

opportunities to teach medical students and residents, help run case conferences, and attend six to eight weeks each year on the resident hospital medicine teams.

Dr. Lalchandani will lead some cases for interns and residents at the Simulation and Clinical Skills facility and coordinate a spring symposium, which helps interns successfully transition to becoming residents who then lead medical teams. She will also serve as chief resident for Women in Leadership Development (WiLD) and co-chief resident for wellbeing. "I'm grateful that our program values wellbeing and makes time for it in the curriculum," she said. She has helped convene holiday celebrations, happy hours, and music events as part of those efforts.

She is excited for the year ahead. "It's very meaningful to be part of the support system for residents, and to have so much exposure to teaching, leadership, mentorship, and hospital medicine," said Dr. Lalchandani. "San Francisco General draws a certain type of person who is dedicated to serving the most vulnerable patients. That makes the community feel really special, even when things are chaotic."

Dr. Lalchandani plans to dedicate herself to a career in academic hospital medicine and leadership roles in medical education. Outside of medicine, she enjoys hiking, watching movies, and hearing live music with her partner.

Dr. Tamara Sanchez Ortiz Excitement of Primary Care and Prevention

Tamara Sanchez Ortiz, MD, MPH, had a very international childhood. She was born in Mexico City and grew up in Nicaragua, Canada, and Detroit before finishing high school in Mexico.

"When I was young and went to the pediatrician, my family and I weren't comfortable communicating in English, and there weren't any interpreters or written information in Spanish," said Dr. Sanchez Ortiz. "Later, as a medical student and resident, I saw how healthcare ought to look, but how that's not the case for some

groups. Both those experiences made me angry and fueled my passion for serving underserved populations."

In high school, she spent a week shadowing a family friend who was an endocrinologist. "I watched him be so caring with his patients, and the way he educated them about their health issues," she said. "I loved it – it was perfect for me."

Dr. Sanchez Ortiz attended New York University Abu Dhabi, which had recently opened. "Everyone was from all over the world, and the focus was very much on a global education," she said. NYU Abu Dhabi required all students to spend time abroad, and Dr. Sanchez Ortiz chose to spend that time at the New York City campus of NYU, where she worked in biology labs.

She then earned medical and master of public health degrees at Washington University in St. Louis, where role models affirmed her longstanding interest. "I had always wanted to serve mostly non-English speaking patients, immigrants, and other marginalized communities."

She found her public health coursework eye-opening. "I was shocked when I heard that health is basically 20 percent medicine and 80 percent everything else," said Dr. Sanchez Ortiz. "I thought, 'Wow, we're really missing the boat, since we're only addressing some of these things in clinic.' Working with patients is absolutely necessary for grounding the work, but if we're going to push the needle, we have to take a public health lens."

That public health perspective took on extra urgency when she earned her MPH during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Everything we learned had an immediate parallel," said Dr. Sanchez Ortiz. "It was an interesting live case study."

She also participated in impactful advocacy days, meeting with state legislative staffers and advocating for causes such as expanding Medicaid coverage for pregnant women from six weeks to a full year after they gave birth. "Sometimes it was a little contentious," said Dr. Sanchez Ortiz. "In general, they were less moved by numbers we quoted than by hearing stories from a constituent, which helped highlight mutual ground."



Tamara Sanchez Ortiz, MD, MPH

Quality Improvement and Primary Care

For residency, she chose the San Francisco Primary Care (SFPC) Internal Medicine Program, where she found kindred spirits who shared her love of caring for underserved populations.

"It was a small, close-knit community that is very mission-based," said Dr. Sanchez Ortiz. "We had so many opportunities to gain exposure to different environments, from working with the Street Outreach Services (SOS) medicine van to having a clinic at San Quentin Prison or San Bruno Jail. Our guest speakers were down-to-earth, even though they're some of the most highly regarded people in the country for HIV care or addiction medicine."

As an intern, she was inspired by the love of her ambulatory chief resident and SFPC program directors. "They were essentially our 'work moms,'" said Dr. Sanchez Ortiz.

She helped lead several quality improvement (QI) projects, including improving communication between residents and nursing staff in the hospital, as well as optimizing the handoff process for discharging hospitalized patients to skilled nursing facilities.

Dr. Sanchez Ortiz has always enjoyed mentoring. As an undergraduate volunteer, she educated middle school students about how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies. As a medical student, she mentored

undergraduates, sharing strategies for applying to medical school and providing feedback on their essays. Throughout her medical training, she mentored people underrepresented in medicine through the Latino Medical Student Association and the Student National Medical Association.

As chief resident for ambulatory care at ZSFG, she looks forward to teaching residents, recruiting a diverse group of interns, engaging in Women in Leadership Development (WiLD) and Anti-Racism and Equity Symposiums, and continuing to care for her primary care panel, which includes many Spanish-speaking patients. "As a new intern, I remember feeling overwhelmed when patients came in with 10 problems, but as I continued to see them and build relationships, we slowly were able to address their issues," said Dr. Sanchez Ortiz. "As they began to trust me, they started to take my advice about lifestyle changes or medications. What makes me excited about primary care is being that central person who keeps the whole person and all their organ systems in mind, plus working on preventative health."

Dr. Sanchez Ortiz plans to pursue a career in both outpatient and inpatient medicine, while continuing to teach trainees and lead QI efforts. Outside of medicine, she enjoys running, hiking, Latin dancing, and playing volleyball at Ocean Beach.

-Elizabeth Chur

Editors: Neil Powe, Leonard Telesca, Ali Cunningham



Farewell to the 2024-2025 Chief Residents. From left to right; Ilana Garcia-Grossman (SFPC Ambulatory Site Director), Rebecca Berman (Internal Medicine Residency Program Director), Chief residents Ellena Popova, Madison Wilson & Rob Short, Becky Brusca (Inpatient Site Director) and Neil Powe (Chief of Medicine)

SPOTLIGHT

Congratulations!

Rebecca Brusca, MD and Nicholas Iverson, MD, both in the Division of Hospital Medicine, have been selected as Kaizen Promotion Office Fellows at ZSFG.

CEO of ZSFG, Susan Ehrlich, MD has been named one of Becker's Hospital Reviews Health System Presidents & CEOs to know

David Chia, MD has been appointed the director of the Health Professions Education Pathway for UCSF GME.

Matt Durstenfeld, MD, MAS received an Early Career Research Excellence Award from the UCSF-Bay Area Center for AIDS Research.

Welcome, New Faculty!

Neil Zhang - Cardiology - Assistant Professor

Kristine Gu - Endocrinology & Metabolism - Assistant Professor

Rena Mai - Gastroenterology - Assistant Professor

Haiyan Ramirez Batlle - General Internal Medicine - Assistant Professor

Jorge Salazar - HIV, ID & Global Medicine - Assistant Professor

Diana Funk - Hospital Medicine - Assistant Professor

Robert Gallo - Hospital Medicine - Assistant Professor

Mohammed Hussain - Hospital Medicine - Assistant Professor

Anu Ramachandran - Occupational, Environmental, and Climate Medicine - Assistant Professor

Angela Suen - Pulmonary & Critical Care - Assistant Professor

Nora West - Pulmonary & Critical Care - Assistant Professor

Kristen Mengwasser - Rheumatology - Assistant Professor