



# UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

## THE REMARKABLE WORK OF WOMEN

*During Women's History Month, we honor the extraordinary contributions of all the women in the ZSFG Department of Medicine. This issue features six outstanding women as exemplars who demonstrate remarkable achievements in the area of research, education, administration, clinical care and performance improvement.*

### Improving Women's Health

When Eleanor Bimla Schwarz, MD, MS, was a health services research fellow in the early 2000s, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force withdrew support for contraceptive counseling, saying that there wasn't enough evidence supporting its effectiveness. Dr. Schwarz recalls thinking, "If what they need is evidence, let me go do that study."

She eventually published an article demonstrating that contraceptive counseling in primary care was indeed associated with increased contraceptive use.



Bimla Schwarz, MD

"It was a point of pride when this study was cited in the recommendations informing the Affordable Care Act," said Dr. Schwarz, Chief of the ZSFG Division of General Internal Medicine and Professor of Medicine. "It recognized contraception as a core preventive health service that insurers must cover without co-pay. I like doing studies that impact my patients' lives and move policy in a positive direction."

Dr. Schwarz also helped demonstrate that women denied abortions suffer more long-term health consequences than those able to obtain one. "That study showed convincingly that abortion does not harm women," she said. "Even when desired, pregnancy is a risk to women's health, and unde-

sired pregnancy presents much greater risks."

Recently, Dr. Schwarz and her colleagues analyzed safety and effectiveness of tubal ligation compared with intrauterine devices (IUDs) among Medi-Cal patients. They found that IUDs worked at least as well in preventing pregnancy while causing fewer side effects. "This real-world data is really important for clinical decision-making," she said. "Tubal ligation should no longer be viewed as the gold standard for pregnancy prevention. Options that preserve a patient's reproductive autonomy – such as IUDs, which patients can remove themselves – are important when our goal is reproductive justice."

Much of Dr. Schwarz's research seeks to increase women's knowledge about their bodies so they can make informed decisions. In addition to studies on family planning, she has conducted extensive research on how breastfeeding impacts maternal health, finding important reductions in mothers' risk of diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.

"You can answer a lot of interesting questions on a shoestring budget if you think creatively," said Dr. Schwarz. "Whenever we get a study funded, I've enjoyed figuring out how to weave in some extra studies for the same low price." She also relishes



One-hundred twenty statues showcase women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) in the #IfThenSheCan - The Exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. For more information about the exhibit and initiative: <https://ifthenexhibit.org/>

Courtesy of #IfThen Collection, by Hannele Lahti

mentoring. "There is always something fun about helping someone else's creative excitement turn into something worth sharing with the world," she said.

### Advancing Health Equity Through Education

"I view education as an important tool to improve health equity," said Sarah Goglin, MD, Associate



Sarah Goglin, MD

Professor in the ZSFG Division of Rheumatology who serves in many educational roles including Associate Chief of Education for the UCSF Division of Rheumatology, Associate Director of the UCSF Rheumatology Fellowship Program, and Assistant Program Director in the UCSF Internal Medicine Residency Program.

For example, she and her colleagues noticed

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that textbooks and image banks mostly included pictures of patients with light skin tones, even though autoimmune diseases disproportionately affect people of color. Dr. Goglin and a mentee, Adrienne Strait, MD, systematically reviewed more than 1,000 images in several well-known resources, finding that dark skin was significantly underrepresented compared to the proportion of people of color in the U.S.

“Someone with light skin might have a lupus rash that is light pink, whereas it may be more violaceous in someone with dark skin,” said Dr. Goglin. “If you’ve never seen patients or pictures with that manifestation, you may not initially recognize it, potentially contributing to delayed diagnosis and more severe organ involvement.” Their study, published last year, helped spur the New England Journal of Medicine and American College of Rheumatology to diversify their image banks.

Another of Dr. Goglin’s mentees, rheumatology fellow Michael Thomashow, MD, is conducting a needs assessment to understand how internal medicine residents would best learn about rheumatology topics and will create online educational modules. “I hope this will be a robust curriculum residents can use when they’re [rotating] with us or studying for board exams,” she said.

Pregnant women with rheumatic disease often face increased health risks. Another of Dr. Goglin’s mentees, rheumatology fellow Alfredo Aguirre, MD, received a Women’s Health Fellowship grant. He is developing curriculum on how rheumatic disease interfaces with family planning, preconception counseling, and pregnancy. “It’s a great opportunity to think intentionally about educating trainees about improving care delivery to women,” said Dr. Goglin.

She and her colleagues have developed a longitudinal clinic in rheumatology, designing high-quality experiences that allows residents to work with faculty over several months while caring for patients with a wide variety of rheumatic diseases.

“Even with brief interactions, finding out what your learner is interested in and letting them know you care about them advances the teaching relationship, and ultimately allows us to deliver better care for our patients,” said Dr. Goglin.

## WOMEN IN ZSFG DOM

**50%**  
of Division  
Chiefs

**54%**  
of Faculty  
**52%**  
of Staff

**63%**  
of Division  
Managers

**66%**  
of Chief Residents  
**64%**  
of Residents

**55%**  
of ACGME  
Fellows



### Adept At All Trades

Jep Poon is a Renaissance woman. Since joining the ZSFG Division of Nephrology as a unit coordinator in 1989, she has upgraded computer memory, cared for dialysis patients, and submitted medical bills to insurers for reimbursement. She continues to use all those skills and more as the division’s manager for nearly 20 years. “I’m happy that I can do both the administrative and clinical side of this work,” she said. “I hope that everyone knows they are welcome here at the General, and that they can come to me any time for help.”

Born and raised in China, Ms. Poon earned a degree in accounting before immigrating to the U.S.



Jep Poon

with her family. She has never been afraid to ask questions and learn new skills. Early on, she figured out how to change the motherboard on computers, set security passwords, and install wiring. Then she became certified as a dialysis technician and a bilingual clinician. She recalls explaining more about kidney disease to the family of a Chinese dialysis patient. “I helped them understand that the patient wasn’t contagious, and should be treated

like a normal person,” she said.

She helped develop a COVID surge plan for the ZSFG dialysis center, as well as COVID safety protocols that allowed safe dialysis care throughout the pandemic. She works closely with nephrology fellows on the inpatient service, using her clinical background and negotiation skills to find outpatient dialysis slots so hospitalized patients can be discharged. She also is a steward of finances, helping to ensure that the ZSFG dialysis center is economically sustainable by providing meticulous documentation for insurance claims related to care provided by the center.

Ms. Poon’s contributions were recognized by a Chancellor Award for Exceptional University Service in 2011, and a Department of Medicine Staff Excellence in Leadership Award in 2019.

“I’m proud that as a woman, a minority, and a Chinese immigrant, I’ve been able to grow in my division, to learn many different things, and have opportunities to be promoted,” said Ms. Poon. “I hope my efforts have touched the lives of every patient who comes through our doors. I want to give them hope through their times of greatest need and make them feel safe and welcome.”

## Meeting Patients Where They Are

"At the start of every patient encounter I ask, 'What are you hoping to get out of today's visit?'" said Michele Tana, MD, MHS, Associate Professor in the ZSFG Division of Gastroenterology. "Physicians tend to talk at patients, but it's important to find out what the patient is concerned about."

Dr. Tana sees patients in the Hepatology Clinic, performs upper endoscopies and colonoscopies, and attends on the ZSFG Gastrointestinal Consult Service. She is particularly interested in autoimmune hepatitis (AIH), a rare disease in which the immune system attacks the body's own liver cells. "Many patients feel fine, but by the time they're diagnosed they already have advanced scarring in the liver," she said. "Others have fatigue or muscle aches, and some develop severe illness leading to acute liver failure, requiring transplant."



Michele Tana, MD

She joined the ZSFG faculty in 2013 partly because of her division's relatively large cohort of AIH patients. The disease disproportionately affects women, with Black, Latinx, and Asian/Pacific Islander patients at higher risk. "The pathophysiology is still mysterious, but there seems to be a genetic component, perhaps an environmental trigger such as exposure to a drug, toxin, or pathogen, and a dysregulated immune response," said Dr. Tana.

She partners with patients to manage the condition together. "AIH often requires taking daily medications for life, which can be challenging because there can be unpleasant side effects," she said. "Unfortunately, we're still using the same old drugs like corticosteroids that we've been using since the 1950s, since we don't fully understand the disease mechanisms." Dr. Tana credits UCSF's Relationship-Centered Communication Training with helping her develop effective relationships with patients using empathy, active listening, and clear communication. "Trust is the foundation of that relationship, and it takes a shared sense of purpose to take medications, get bloodwork done, and navigate barriers to care," she said. Her fluency in Spanish and Mandarin also helps her deepen

those connections with patients.

Dr. Tana considers this her dream job. "Working with patients who are vulnerable, diverse, and often indigent, I feel like I'm making a meaningful contribution," she said. "It's a blessing to do work that resonates with why I went into medicine. I also really respect the people I work with. From the front desk staff to the ICU attendings, I feel like I'm working alongside heroes."

## 'I Get to Serve'

Laurae Pearson, Director of Administration and Finance for the ZSFG Department of Medicine, grew up in a working-class family that sometimes struggled to put food on the table. "When I came to the General, the mission really spoke to me," she said. "There was a community here that takes care of people and helps them understand they are valuable, regardless of their circumstances."

Ms. Pearson joined ZSFG in 1994, and currently is the lead administrator of the ZSFG Department of



Laurae Pearson

Medicine, which includes about 200 faculty, 420 staff, and \$180 million in annual expenditures. She particularly enjoys coaching her team of division managers and other administrative staff. When the pandemic hit two years ago, they went into overdrive to help all office staff transition to working from home, literally overnight. They quickly pivoted to the communication platform, Microsoft Teams, to brainstorm, collaborate, and maintain close contact.

Ms. Pearson served as a wealth and hub of information, rapidly pushing out updates. "If one division manager did something really well, I'd share that with the group," she said. "Some got pro bono legal services for our frontline workers to help draft wills in case something happened [due to COVID]. Others worked with restaurants to bring in thousands of meals for our workers or identified childcare resources. I'm so impressed by our managers' compassion and creativity."

She serves as Staff Co-Chair of the UCSF Committee on the Status of Women, which recently

# TRIBUTE

## Anitha Toke, MD

Anitha Toke MD, Professor of Medicine, was a valued faculty member the ZSFG Nephrology Division, a gifted clinician and superb educator. She joined the UCSF faculty at



ZSFG in 2006, and quickly demonstrated her unusually incisive clinical thinking, diagnostic insights, and effective patient care. Nephrology fellows described her as a "formidable presence who shaped the experience of all fellows and left us astounded with her astute clinical acumen."

And most importantly, as one fellow put it: "Anitha cared deeply about every one of her patients as people and remembered each of their life stories". Dr. Toke began in nephrology when women were a small minority and was particularly inspiring for female doctors and students who saw in her an important role model. In addition to her large clinical practice and clinical teaching, Dr. Toke played an essential leadership role as Director of Outpatient Services, including Hemodialysis and Outpatient clinics. Dr. Toke succumbed to breast cancer in September 2021, and is survived by her husband, Aditya and two teenage sons, Arav and Aarya.

## Teri Liegler, PhD

Teri Liegler PhD, Professor of Medicine, was a beloved member of the HIV and scientific community. After garnering a doctorate from UC Berkeley in the late 1980s, Dr.



Liegler was inspired to help fight the HIV epidemic in San Francisco joining the UCSF faculty at ZSFG in 2005 and emerged as a national leader in clinical virology. As Director of the AIDS Virology Core lab, she provided services for our patients at ZSFG, and she played a key role in HIV cure and prevention studies. Her reach was global. She trained hundreds of laboratory investigators from around the world in virologic methods, and importantly always provided support and mentoring to young scientists, juggling and struggling to balance work and life. She travelled to Africa, training with in-country colleagues to establish sustainable lab structures in areas where 10% of persons have electricity. Everyone loved having Dr. Liegler on their team. She was smart, a listener, witty, loyal, collegial and generous with her time. Dr. Liegler succumbed to glioblastoma in September 2018. Upon her passing the Division of HIV, ID and Global Medicine established the "Teri Liegler" award – given annually to a promising young scientist that embodies Teri's treasured legacy.



submitted a report to Chancellor Sam Hawgood, MBBS, with recommendations for improving career development and productivity of women faculty and staff. "The pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, and there's an urgent need for better dependent care," said Ms. Pearson. "Women scientists were particularly impacted and were at home caring for children while trying to write papers and grants. These past couple of years have really put women behind, and it will take years to catch up."

Among her many honors, Ms. Pearson has received the Holly Smith Award and the Chancellor Award for Exceptional University Management.

"I've had the greatest fortune to have strong allies and sponsors who saw my potential and helped me build a dream career here at the General," said Ms. Pearson. "I try to be that kind of sponsor for my division managers, and anyone who needs assistance. I get to serve every day, and there's no other place I'd rather be."

### Harmonizing Primary and Specialty Care

If San Francisco safety net patients need to see a specialist such as a rheumatologist or cardiologist, Delphine Tuot, MD, MAS, and her team help ensure they can access that care promptly. "We want to ensure that our specialties are available to patients at the right time, in the right way, in the best available manner," she said.

Dr. Tuot, Associate Chief Medical Officer for Specialty Care and Diagnostics at ZSFG, and her dyad partner Rosaly Ferrer, RN, MSN, Nursing Director of Specialty Care at ZSFG, lead efforts

to improve access to specialty care. That includes in-person appointments, video and phone visits, and patients corresponding with specialists via MyChart. They also help primary care physicians obtain expert guidance from specialists through eConsult, an electronic consultation and referral program pioneered at ZSFG. "We want primary and specialty care to communicate effectively and determine together how patients can be best served," she said.

She also advocates for adequate space to deliver care, and is guiding the upcoming move of some specialty clinics into the new ambulatory care center in Building 5. In addition, Dr. Tuot leads Epic implementation efforts in the outpatient domain, working with clinicians and Epic analysts to tailor the electronic health record system to better support excellent patient care.

Dr. Tuot also leads quality improvement efforts. In response to the pandemic, she has worked with



Delphine Tuot, MD

frontline staff to optimize workflows for COVID testing, vaccinations and boosters, and helped ramp up the use of telehealth. She and her colleagues often employ the Lean strategy of "going to the gemba" – physically going

into clinics to observe how patients move from the waiting room to registration and clinic, and how workflows can be improved.



Christos Georgiou / Shutterstock

"Innovations like telehealth require a fair amount of piloting, trial and error, and refining, and are much more nuanced than I would ever have thought two years ago," said Dr. Tuot. "Learning from frontline staff and partnering with everyone on the care team is so much more effective than a group of providers just thinking about it." She also helps disseminate successful innovations in one specialty area to another.

Dr. Tuot feels privileged to work with such mission-driven staff and providers. "It's like a big symphony with lots of different moving parts, and everybody plays an important role," she said. "It's teamwork in the highest sense of the word."

Elizabeth Chur

Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson, Brooks Bigart

## ZSFG WOMEN IN RESEARCH - CHAN ZUCKERBERG BIOHUB INVESTIGATORS

Oanh Nguyen, MD, MAS

Division of Hospital Medicine

"The Silicon Valley Guaranteed Income Pilot (SV-GIP) is a collaboration between the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative and Dr. Nguyen's Health Outcomes and Policy Evaluation (HOPE) Lab at ZSFG. The SV-GIP is a randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of guaranteed income on improving housing stability, ending homelessness, and improving health and well-being among 300 families experiencing homelessness."



Isabel Rodríguez-Barraquer, MD, PhD

Division of HIV, ID, and Global Medicine

"Understanding the dynamics of infectious diseases is fundamental to design and implement effective control strategies. Recent advances in molecular tools (next-generation sequencing and high throughput serology) have the potential to transform public health surveillance. My research aims to leverage these technologies to develop robust pipelines for pan-pathogen surveillance and seroepidemiology."



Sara Suliman, PhD, MPH

Division of Experimental Medicine

"The Suliman lab aims to develop and validate affordable and scalable point-of-care tests to detect individuals at high risk of tuberculosis (TB) and define the immunological correlates of risk and protection from disease following infection with Mtb. The lab is also studying the immunological interaction between the two deadliest pathogens: Mycobacterium tuberculosis and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome of the Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2)."

