Now More Than Ever, Your Philanthropy Makes a Difference

During this time of global pandemic, we at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine wish our donors and friends continued health and safety. The pandemic continues to challenge all of us during this unprecedented time, and we recognize the difficulties that so many are facing. Now more than ever, we appreciate each and every gift you, our donors, generously provide in support of our medical school. By investing in our talented physicians, scientists, medical students, and trainees, you are supporting the people who ultimately make a difference in the lives of patients and families. In this summer issue of The Philanthropist, we are pleased to share stories of generosity and impact that we hope will inspire you. Please note that most photos in this issue were taken prior to the pandemic and before masks became a standard.

Senyei Gift Jumpstarts Critical COVID-19 Antibody Research

Medical alumnus and Northwestern Trustee Drew Senyei, MD, and his wife, Noni, are generously supporting the launch of Northwestern’s Screening for Coronavirus Antibodies in Neighborhoods (SCAN) study, led by Elizabeth McNally, MD, PhD, and collaborators across the university.

Lauding the American Heart Association—An Exceptionally Committed Partner in Cardiovascular Health Research

Founded in Chicago, the American Heart Association (AHA) has been an exceptionally committed partner in research with Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. We are proud to have some $22 million in active AHA awards now supporting the work of Northwestern physicians and scientists across 55 research projects.

Dr. John Bergan: Pioneering Vascular Surgeon’s Culture of Knowledge Lives On

The Division of Vascular Surgery in the Department of Surgery recently celebrated the newly endowed John J. Bergan, MD Lectureship. The lecture honors Dr. Bergan, the founder and first chief of the division who was widely considered a founding father of modern-day vascular surgery.

Lurie Cancer Center Goes Virtual to Celebrate Cancer Survivors

On June 7, the 27th Annual Cancer Survivors’ Celebration Walk & 5K, hosted by the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University, became a virtual event to applaud cancer survivors and all those who support them. More than 1,200 people participated.
Senyei Gift Jumpstarts Critical COVID-19 Antibody Research

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to hit the world hard and fast. A successful venture capitalist, Northwestern University trustee and Feinberg alumnus Andrew “Drew” Senyei, ’79 MD, has spent his career scouting emerging ideas in the life sciences to improve health. There was no doubt this concerned physician and citizen would join the fight against the coronavirus by supporting innovative research at his alma mater.

This spring Dr. Senyei and his wife, Noni, made a significant contribution to kick off Northwestern’s Screening for Coronavirus Antibodies in Neighborhoods (SCAN) study. Led by Elizabeth McNally, MD, PhD, director of Feinberg’s Center for Genetic Medicine and the Elizabeth J. Ward Professor of Genetic Medicine, this multidisciplinary study aims to uncover the extent of previous exposure to SARS-CoV-2—the virus that causes COVID-19—in high-risk and vulnerable populations. Using a novel “no contact” antibody test, the SCAN project is focused on evaluating essential workers and their households as well as skilled nursing home staff and their households and patients.

Along with Dr. McNally, the research team includes Chicago- and Evanston-based collaborators Alexis Demonbreun, PhD, assistant professor of Pharmacology and member of the Center for Genetic Medicine; Thomas McDade, PhD, professor of Anthropology at Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and of Medical Social Sciences at Feinberg, faculty fellow, Institute for Policy Research, and director of the Laboratory for Human Biology Research; Brian Mustanski, PhD, director of the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing and professor of Medical Social Sciences and of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences; and Richard D’Aquila, MD, associate vice president of Research at Feinberg, senior associate dean for Clinical and Translational Research at Feinberg, director of Northwestern University Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute (NUCATS), and the Howard Taylor Ricketts, MD, Professor of Medicine and Infectious Diseases.

“This is a brand new virus. Everything we know about it is only eight months old,” said Dr. Senyei. “Our ability to overcome it depends on us getting to know this virus intimately. Given the urgency of the pandemic, philanthropic grants offer the fastest way to empower our researchers so we can develop strategies and policies to mitigate the impact of this health crisis.”
The Power of Antibodies

While diagnostic (or viral) testing for COVID-19 remains a number one priority for controlling the spread of the disease, antibody (or serology) testing comes a very close second. Antibodies help reveal past infection. Given asymptomatic cases may account for as many as 40 percent of total COVID-19 infections, serological tests offer an important tool for looking at where the virus has been. “We believe that the amount of infection in the population has been underestimated,” said Dr. McNally. “If we learn that many more people have protective antibodies to COVID-19, that will be a good sign that we can more quickly get back to normal.”

Universities and private industry have raced to introduce SARS-CoV-2 antibody tests, with the most accurate typically requiring blood drawn in a healthcare facility. Fears of infection in the clinical setting, though, have made testing difficult. Overcoming this challenge, Dr. McNally and a diverse team of scientists across Northwestern’s Chicago and Evanston campuses created a new at-home antibody test. Building off the pioneering dried blood sampling method of Dr. McDade, the test requires a simple finger prick to generate a single drop of blood. Dried on a special filter paper, the blood sample is then mailed to the lab for analysis.

Although evidence of COVID-19 antibodies offers hope for preventing re-infection with the virus, it is not currently known for certain whether having these antibodies truly offers any protection. Additionally, not all antibodies provide the same level of immunity—a detail not lost on the SCAN team. “Our test uniquely looks for a particular part of the virus that is most likely associated with the development of protective antibodies known as neutralizing antibodies,” said Dr. McNally.

The SCAN project will evaluate 5,000 individuals for seroprevalence by testing them once this summer and then a second time in about six months. The study plan calls for correlating health status with seroprevalence at the two testing time points to determine if the antibodies offered any immunity. Thanks to the support of the Senyei family, the SCAN project will be able to perform a total of 10,000 antibody tests. “The generosity of the Senyeis literally made this project possible,” said Dr. McNally.

“The virus is redefining our socioeconomic environment and dramatically changing the way we interact in all areas of our lives,” said Dr. Senyei. “Anyone who can help support how we adapt and eventually defeat this virus with a vaccine can make a significant difference.”

For more information about supporting the SCAN study and other COVID-19 projects, please contact Tiffany Scaparotti at 312-503-3088 or tiffany.scaparotti@northwestern.edu.
Lauding the American Heart Association—An Exceptionally Committed Partner in Cardiovascular Health Research

Heart disease and stroke are the two leading causes of death worldwide. The American Heart Association (AHA) is the largest voluntary health organization in the country dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. Awarding more than $4.5 billion in research dollars during its 96-year history, the AHA comes second only to the National Institutes of Health in grant funding. To date, the American Heart Association has funded more research on these diseases than any other US nonprofit.

Founded in Chicago, the AHA has been an exceptionally committed partner in research with Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

“The AHA and Northwestern Medicine have a longstanding relationship rooted in a shared commitment to excellence,” said Lisa Hinton, executive director and senior vice president at the AHA.

“Through science, innovation, and collaboration at every level, our institutions seek to improve the health of our communities. Together, we are uniquely positioned to have a lasting impact on the health of our world and the patients we serve,” she said.

In May 2019, Northwestern and the AHA celebrated a significant milestone when Feinberg became the top recipient of AHA active awards totaling nearly $17 million—a feat that no other institution in the nation had ever achieved. A little over a year later, Northwestern is humbled and proud to be in the same number one position with some $22 million in active AHA awards now supporting the work of Northwestern physicians and scientists across 55 research projects.

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“Wow, we are honored and humbled to again be No. 1 in the receipt of AHA supported research. We embrace the enormous responsibility but also the remarkable opportunity to better inform cardiovascular health and disease. With this investment from the AHA, we will continue to make good things happen,” said Clyde W. Yancy, MD, MSc, the Magerstadt Professor of Medicine, chief of the Division of Cardiology, vice dean for Diversity and Inclusion at Feinberg, and associate director of the Northwestern Medicine Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute.

The Impact of Strategically Focused Research Network Awards

Northwestern Medicine’s AHA funding includes competitive grant awards known as Strategically Focused Research Network centers that are part of a national consortium. Uniquely aligning groups of investigators toward addressing key cardiovascular health issues, these strategic networks gain momentum through a collective spirit of discovery.

“These AHA grants are remarkable drivers of discovery as the composition is multidisciplinary, with basic science, clinical science, and population science all incorporated and thematic. They also are interconnected with other institutions so that we can share ideas and seek answers to pressing questions. Importantly, a major aspect of these grant awards is training the next generation of cardiovascular investigators; that’s important as we at Northwestern are deeply invested in the education and research training of the next generation of cardiovascular specialists,” said Dr. Yancy.
In the six years that the AHA has awarded these grants, Northwestern has excelled by receiving the most of any institution in the country. In 2019, Feinberg received its sixth (of 11 total such AHA networks nationwide) award for a new center focused on genetics/genomics in cardiovascular disease. This newcomer joins five other Northwestern centers that target prevention, health disparities, peripheral vascular disease, atrial fibrillation, and children’s health.

A Stronger Partnership through Volunteerism and Leadership

While research to improve cardiovascular health is a shared mission between Northwestern and the AHA, so is volunteerism and leadership. On July 1, Donald Lloyd-Jones, MD, the Eileen M. Foell Professor and chair and professor of Preventive Medicine, began serving as president-elect of the American Heart Association. He joins three past-presidents from the medical school faculty: the late Oglesby Paul, MD; Robert Bonow, MD, the Max and Lilly Goldberg Distinguished Professor of Cardiology; and Dr. Yancy.

“It is a rarified group of individuals who have led the AHA and at the same time increased the visibility of our home institution: Northwestern,” said Dr. Lloyd-Jones, who, in 2017, became one of three Feinberg faculty members to receive the organization’s prestigious Physician of the Year award. “I am proud to join them and look forward to helping the AHA bend the curve toward keeping people healthier longer across the lifespan.”

An AHA volunteer since 1997, Dr. Lloyd-Jones has passionately given his time, energy, and leadership at the local, regional, and national levels for a wide array of health initiatives. In Chicago, for example, he helped support an impactful campaign to implement a sweetened beverage tax in Cook County in 2016.

“The organization has incredible resources and some 35,000 professional volunteers,” said Dr. Lloyd-Jones. “What is so gratifying about volunteering for the AHA is that you see results from your work and know that you and many other volunteers are making a difference.”

For more information about supporting cardiovascular research at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, please contact Kathleen Praznowski at 312-503-0762 or kathleen.praznowski@northwestern.edu.
This March, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine's Division of Vascular Surgery in the Department of Surgery celebrated the newly endowed John J. Bergan, MD Lectureship, named after the founder and first chief of the division. In 2013, the division established this notable annual event to honor the legacy of Dr. Bergan—widely considered a founding father of modern-day vascular surgery, a surgical subspecialty focused on managing diseases of the arteries and veins throughout the body.

“We felt it was important to recognize Dr. Bergan’s remarkable contributions to our specialty and exceptional commitment to Northwestern,” said Mark K. Eskandari, MD, ’01 GME, the James S. T. Yao, MD, PhD, Professor of Vascular Surgery and chief of Vascular Surgery. He and Dr. Yao, former division chief as well as former chair of Surgery, spearheaded the effort to endow the lectureship and made their own philanthropic commitments to make it possible. “Not only did Dr. Bergan help launch the division, but he also created the earliest vascular surgery fellowship in the nation and our annual Northwestern Vascular Symposium, now in its 45th year."

In 1959, Dr. Bergan joined the medical school faculty after completing his general surgery residency at Chicago Wesley Memorial Hospital (now Northwestern Memorial). Five short years later, he would perform the first kidney transplant at Northwestern and help develop the emerging organ transplantation program. He recruited Dr. Yao to the medical school in 1972 and the two vascular surgeons became instrumental in building the division from the ground up. Nationally and internationally renowned, Dr. Bergan served as president of numerous professional societies, including the Society for Vascular Surgery. The pioneering surgeon left Northwestern and the Chicago area in 1988 to develop a practice in California caring for patients with venous disease. He passed away at the age of 87 in 2014.

“Lectureships allow us to invite prominent experts to campus so our trainees and faculty can learn the latest innovations in the field,” said Dr. Yao, professor emeritus of Surgery in the Division of Vascular Surgery. “Naming a lectureship after Dr. Bergan was very appropriate. He was an excellent teacher and speaker who knew his subject matter well, and also knew when to tell a good joke.”

For Dr. Bergan, a lifelong learner, inspiring bright young minds to make a real difference in the field was the most rewarding aspect of his storied career. “Fortunately, Dr. Bergan was in attendance for the inaugural presentation in 2013 and had the opportunity to have dinner with family, our faculty, alumni, friends, and most importantly the new integrated residents and fellows in our program,” said Dr. Eskandari.

“Dad loved the ‘aha’ moments of teaching—that moment of total understanding that leads students to never forget a concept,” shared his daughter, Betsy Barrett.
Division of Vascular Surgery faculty members attend the annual Bergan Lecture. Left to right: Heron Rodriguez, MD, ‘01 GME, professor of Surgery (Vascular Surgery) and Radiology; Karen Ho, MD, interim co-vice chair of Research in the Department of Surgery and assistant professor of Surgery (Vascular Surgery); Tadaki Tomita, ‘08 MD, ’15 GME, assistant professor of Surgery (Vascular Surgery); Dr. Eskandari; Ashley Vavra, MD, ’12, ’14 GME, assistant professor of Surgery (Vascular Surgery); and Andrew Hoel, MD, associate professor of Surgery (Vascular Surgery).

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—Dr. Mark Eskandari

Endowed lectureships provide funding in perpetuity for these unique learning opportunities and promote as a whole the educational mission of the medical school. Notably, the endowment of the Bergan Lectureship came almost entirely from gifts made by former and current faculty and alumni of the division’s training programs. Said Dr. Eskandari, “This generosity is a testament to the positive experiences of alumni who benefited from the culture of knowledge that Dr. Bergan established in the division.”

Also donors to the endowment fund, the Bergan family could not be more thrilled at the response to give back and pay forward all Dr. Bergan brought to Northwestern.

“We are incredibly touched by the fund’s many contributors,” said daughter Margaret Davis. “From the moment I saw a film of dad in his 30s performing a historic vascular surgery operation, I knew he had a genius that would benefit the health of many patients worldwide. Now future faculty and trainees will have an opportunity to continue learning from the best in the field.”

For more information about supporting the Bergan Lectureship and the Division of Vascular Surgery, please contact David McCreery at 312-503-6099 or david.mccreery@northwestern.edu.
“While COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on all of us, we cannot let it stop us from continuing our hard work...”
—Dr. Leon Platanias

On June 7, not even a worldwide pandemic could prevent hope, love, and support from flourishing in the fight against cancer. Celebrating together while safely apart, the 27th Annual Cancer Survivors’ Celebration Walk & 5K, hosted by the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University, pivoted quickly to become a virtual event to applaud cancer survivors and all those who support them.

Nearly 1,200 participants and 125 teams in 33 states took part in this first-ever virtual rendition of the Lurie Cancer Center’s signature annual event, held on National Cancer Survivors Day. Honoring cancer survivors and celebrating milestones, the successful event raised close to $200,000 to help Lurie Cancer Center’s physicians and scientists at Northwestern Medicine translate discoveries into new therapies and better outcomes for patients.

“The Walk is an incredible community event that has endured for 27 years to honor and celebrate cancer survivors. No way were we going to cancel this important tradition,” said Leonidas Platanias, MD, PhD, director of the Lurie Cancer Center and the Jesse, Sara, Andrew, Abigail, Benjamin and Elizabeth Lurie Professor of Oncology in the Departments of Medicine and of Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics. “While COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on all of us, we cannot let it stop us from continuing our hard work to improve the lives of patients and find a cure for cancer.”

This year in addition to supporting cancer research initiatives, donors had an option to fund COVID-19 research and prevention efforts that may benefit cancer patients and others at increased risk of complications.
Virtual Impact

The brainchild of Dr. Platanias, the virtual celebration began to take shape in late April. Participants would celebrate in their own special way on National Cancer Survivors Day no matter where they were in the world. Safely apart, they would all share in this impactful experience together.

In the Chicago area, the weather cooperated with blue skies and ample sunshine on the day of the event. From walking and running to yoga and gardening, participants gave it their all with many posting their thoughts, images, and videos to a *Lurie Cancer Center Virtual Dedication Wall*. Posting a video, Christine Runkle celebrated one year of being cancer-free: she and her husband, Nick, walked near the lakefront on Northwestern’s Evanston campus. Meanwhile, her mom, “Mo,” walked for Christine in Woodbury, Minnesota, and her aunt and uncle walked in Lake Bluff, Illinois. Meredith and Jeff Waters walked with their dogs, Lily and Mac, in Scottsdale, Arizona. And in Chicago’s northern suburbs, Dr. Platanias donned this year’s Lurie Cancer Center Survivors’ Celebration Walk & 5K T-shirt and a mask to walk on this beautiful day.

“The virtual event was a great success thanks to everyone’s enthusiasm and participation,” said Dr. Platanias. “While we couldn’t be all together in person—which we definitely prefer and hope to do next year—this year’s celebration was as meaningful and heartfelt as always.”

For more information about supporting Lurie Cancer Center, please contact Nicole Langert at 312-503-6743 or nicole.langert@northwestern.edu.
Dr. Jerry Stamler Celebrates 100th Birthday

The 100th birthday of renowned Feinberg physician, Dr. Jeremiah Stamler, MD, emeritus professor of Preventive Medicine, was hosted by Feinberg’s Department of Preventive Medicine last October. The founding chair of the preventive medicine department at Northwestern in 1972, Dr. Stamler has had tremendous influence on the understanding of diet and cardiovascular health. He’s considered the founding father of preventive cardiology. In honor of Dr. Stamler’s prolific career, it was announced that generous donations from grateful colleagues and friends funded the Jeremiah Stamler, MD Endowed Research Fund for Young Investigators.

Photo: Teresa Crawford

Medical Student Scholars Thank Our Donors

Every April, the medical school hosts the Commitment to Scholarships luncheon to celebrate our medical student scholars and give them the occasion to meet and express their gratitude to the generous alumni, faculty, and friends who support their scholarships. Though the celebration was canceled this year because of the worldwide COVID-19 outbreak, our medical students and leaders still send their heartfelt appreciation to these donors in our web article a Special Thank You to Our Scholarship Supporters. Many scholarship recipients took the time to share selfies with their personal expressions of thanks. Since the launch of We Will. The Campaign for Northwestern Medicine, the medical school has raised $100 million through the remarkable support of individuals and groups that care deeply about our students and their bright futures. Prestigious scholarships help students to alleviate the burden of educational debt, while also helping the medical school to compete nationally for top students.
Special Event Honoring LGBTQ Pride
On June 23, our Medical Alumni Association (MAA) hosted more than 80 attendees including medical alumni, friends, and donors for its first in a series of virtual events. The MAA partnered with the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing (ISGMH) at the medical school to honor LGBTQ Pride. Brian Mustanski, PhD, director of ISGMH and professor of Medical Social Sciences and of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences along with Francesca Gaiba, PhD, associate director of ISGMH, shared how Northwestern has taken a leadership position in improving the health and wellbeing of sexual and gender minority populations. Drs. Mustanski and Gaiba hosted nearly 80 attendees and enjoyed a lively Q and A. View the event recording.

COVID-19: Where We Are Now and What’s Next
Nearly 250 alumni, friends, and donors joined the Medical Alumni Association on July 15 as it partnered with the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine Institute for Global Health to present a special virtual event: “COVID-19: Where We Are Now and What’s Next.” Robert L. Murphy, MD, ’81 ’84 GME, executive director of the Institute for Global Health, the John Philip Phair Professor of Infectious Diseases, director of the Center for Global Communicable Diseases, and professor of Medicine and Biomedical Engineering, and Robert J. Havey, ’80 MD, ’83 ’84 GME, deputy director of the Institute for Global Health, director and founder of the Global Health Initiative Fund, and clinical professor of Medicine in the Division of General Internal Medicine and Geriatrics, hosted an exclusive virtual conversation about the latest information on the global effects of COVID-19. View the event recording.

The Interface of Technology and Dermatology
On August 12, Amy Paller, MD, ’83 GME, hosted the webinar “The Interface of Technology and Dermatology.” Dr. Paller serves as chair of the Department of Dermatology and the Walter J. Hamlin Professor of Dermatology. She is also a professor of Pediatrics and directs the Skin Biology and Diseases Resource-based Center. During her presentation, Dr. Paller proudly shared that the Department of Dermatology is consistently ranked No. 2–5 in the nation in the receipt of National Institutes of Health research funding. She also informed the audience that 1 in 3 people in the US suffer from skin disorders that can potentially be life-altering and disfiguring. She and her colleagues are using technologies, such as augmented intelligence, sensors, and tape strips for biomarkers, to personalize approaches to patient care with targeted new therapies and devices to measure skin lesions and properties. View the event recording.