

# MILESTONES

MAY | 2020

## CHAIR'S CORNER

Several months ago, I was sitting around a table with our department's leadership and campus partners discussing plans to develop this newsletter for you. At the time, I never could have anticipated writing this introduction alone, working remotely and apart from my team, while social distancing in response to the SARS-Cov-2/COVID-19 pandemic. Our timing in preparing this new communication tool was truly inspired.

More than ever, we are focused on new ways to interact, communicate and support one another and our goals. Particularly, we recognize the value of "together." Additionally, we understand that communicating remotely does not have to be an impersonal exchange of information. Perhaps through necessity, we are learning to build relationships, foster culture and collaborate regardless of our distance to one another. I cannot imagine a better context in which to offer this inaugural newsletter to you. More than just sharing data, with every issue of Milestones we are inviting you to be part of our team and contribute to our purpose of being "Together for Kansas Children. Forever."

My hope is that these stories and images help you feel connected, valued and inspired to join our continuing effort to serve the children and families of our state. I'll let the content we've chosen stand on its own, however, I would like to specifically share my deep gratitude for the support of so many of you this past February during "One Day. One KU." Together, we raised about \$23,950 to support our clinical programs, child advocacy, research and teaching missions. Without your support, we just couldn't do all the things the children we are devoted to require from us. Thank you for joining with us and for trusting us.

With that, I hope you enjoy this first edition of Milestones and will let us know what you think about it. Thank you for reading it and helping us close the social distance between us.

Sincerely,



## The face of a program: Interview with Guthrie Bear of B.E.A.R.S. 4Kids

Kirsten Bjorkman, M.D., pediatric hospitalist, was able to catch up with Guthrie Bear in March at a special event celebrating the new B.E.A.R.S. 4Kids program through KU Wichita Pediatrics.

**Kirsten:** Good evening, Mr. Bear.

**Guthrie:** Please, call me Guthrie!

**K:** Alright, I will. Speaking of names, tell us about your namesake.

**G:** Ah yes, the venerable Richard Guthrie, M.D., and his wife, Diana Guthrie, Ph.D. When I first met them and learned of the legacy I am carrying through his name, I was very humbled. Dr. Richard Guthrie was the first chair of the Pediatric Department here at KU Wichita. In fact, he was a driving force in establishing our medical school here! His main focus, I believe, was diabetes research, and pediatric endocrinology. But people around Wichita know him for his kindness and compassion, as well as his commitment to the health of children.

**K:** I have heard a lot about him. His legacy will continue for generations to come. How will you be carrying his legacy?

**G:** Well, I have been honored to represent the department in our B.E.A.R.S. 4Kids initiative: Bears Enabling Advances in Research and Support for Kids. My role is to bring comfort and a face of kindness, just like the Guthries did through all their years of practice! The goal is for us all to work together to help and support kids through comfort and research.

**K:** How will you do this?

**G:** Anyone can purchase a clone of me. "Guthrie" will then be matched with a child receiving treatment and the funds will go to support pediatric research at KU School of Medicine-Wichita, so it stays in our community!

**K:** That's wonderful! Anything else you would like to add?

**G:** Be kind to one another and continue to make Wichita awesome.



# GRADUATING PEDIATRIC RESIDENTS

## QUESTIONS:

1. What are your plans after you graduate?
2. What is some advice for incoming interns?
3. What has been the best part of being at KU Wichita Peds?

## NANDHINI SEHAR

1. I plan to go back to my home country of India.
2. Get your procedures as soon as you can and try to read something everyday.
3. Hands down, the people. I have had the pleasure of making great friends and learning from great mentors!



## SARAH CARLSON

1. Plans are unknown at this time.
2. My advice is to not stop having normal family life in residency. It may look different block to block, but take time to see family, visit and don't put off big life decisions like having a baby, buying a house or running that marathon! These will help ground you and make you a better doctor.
3. I love KU Peds for the clinicians I've learned from and the wide spectrum of care I've been able to participate in.



## ESTHER KING

1. I have been accepted for Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine Fellowship at University Medical Center in Burlington, Vermont.
2. Learn to be efficient, proactive and to ask all your questions while you have someone to teach you. Utilize all your resources that you're given to advance your knowledge.
3. The best part of KU Wichita Peds is becoming a family with great lifelong friendships. We all work hard during residency, and at times I spent more time with my colleagues at work than with my personal family. They were there when I needed them to watch my little one at the last minute and supported me through challenging days at work.



## MAZAHIR ALI

1. I plan on being a general pediatrician at Columbus Regional Hospital in Columbus, Indiana, for a few years and then do a hem/onc or hospital medicine fellowship.
2. Residency is like having kidney stones - it will pass but it will be painful - but you wouldn't want it any other way. It's an amazing experience with a very steep learning curve. It's going to be tough but there will always be people around you to help and support you.
3. The people - I have made some really good friends here - Wasay (we have adopted him), KT (a diva and a workhorse combined) and Fatima (the silent driving force).



## CATHERINE BSHOUTY

1. I'm Planning on practicing in Canada as a general pediatrician and am in the works of opening my own clinic.
2. My best advice is not to be hard on yourself the first year. Understand that this is a completely different environment and you will need to adjust in a timely manner. There's a steep learning curve, but it is definitely achievable and in no time you will start to feel at ease. You are never alone during this phase of your training; it is not a one-man task but a team effort. It is not solely your responsibility to fulfill the task at hand, so don't be afraid to ask for help. You will feel anxious and overworked; just know that once you've reached that point, it is important to take some time for yourself to re-energize. The main thing is not to lose yourself during this journey.
3. The best part of being at KU Wichita Peds is the friendships that I have gained with my fellow co-residents and with some of my attendings.

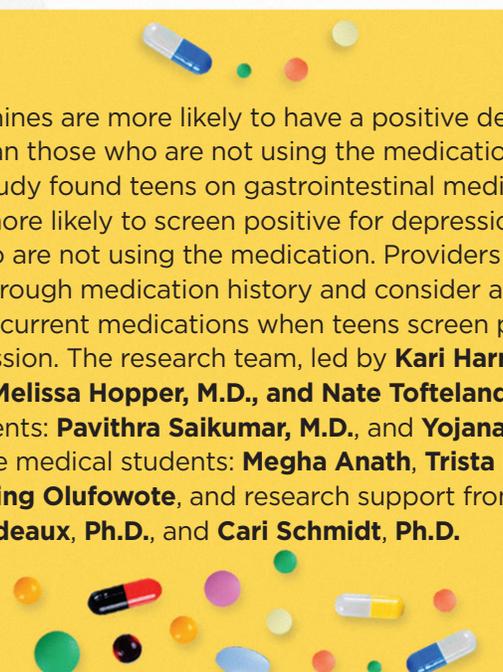


## 2019 Scholarly Activity Recap

Last year was record breaking for scholarly activity in the Department of Pediatrics. For the first time ever, program and research grants totaled over 1 million dollars. Faculty, residents and staff had 27 regional and national presentations, compared to our yearly average of 17. In addition, there were 11 peer-reviewed professional publications, with another nine under review at the close of the year. Each issue, one or two of these important scholarly projects will be highlighted, beginning with those below.

Two collaborative projects examined medication use and its impact on positive depression screens in teens. Both used retrospective data to identify whether use of certain medications could be related to screening scores on the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) depression scale. Findings from the first study suggest teens on oral

antihistamines are more likely to have a positive depression screen than those who are not using the medication. The second study found teens on gastrointestinal medications are also more likely to screen positive for depression than those who are not using the medication. Providers should take a thorough medication history and consider adverse effects of current medications when teens screen positive for depression. The research team, led by **Kari Harris, M.D.**, included **Melissa Hopper, M.D.**, and **Nate Tofteland, M.D.**; two residents: **Pavithra Saikumar, M.D.**, and **Yojana Sunkoj, M.D.**; three medical students: **Megha Anath, Trista Dugan** and **Blessing Olufowote**, and research support from **Julian Dedeaux, Ph.D.**, and **Cari Schmidt, Ph.D.**



# Goldendoodle Carl knows how to ease fears, sadness for children and parents at Wesley

By Brian Whepley

A relatively new staffer at Wesley Children's Hospital intuitively knows what patients and families need, whether soothing an agitated youngster as surgery approaches or helping a mother handle a devastating diagnosis about her child.



Although approaching just 2 years old, Carl the service dog — a goldendoodle who arrived in November — has the innate sense of compassion many dogs seem to.

"He goes in and checks on every person in the room, just to see who needs that hug, that loving. He will kind of attach to the one person having a harder time and give that comfort," says Casey Carr, child life coordinator.

Carl's become not only a favorite of patients and families but also of staff, including one doctor who never imagined any canine worming its way into his heart.

Carl has three volunteer handlers. Nicole Kuhns, pediatric nurse manager, is the one Carl lives with, while Carr and child life specialist Megan Gerber are the ones he spends most of his workday with.

A \$25,000 Kansas Children's Foundation grant brought Carl to the hospital. About \$20,000 of that paid for Carl, while the rest covered travel and a week of training in Georgia last fall for his handlers. Before his handlers met Carl, he had been raised on a leash and spent time in public places and a children's hospital to grow accustomed to strangers and kids.

"When we went to camp it was more us getting trained than Carl getting trained," Carr said. "He started training at 7 weeks old, so he already had 1,200 hours before we even met him. He was well ahead of us and still is."

The training was designed to build bonds between Carl and his handlers. "He reacts to us because of the bond we have," Kuhns said. "He wants to do things not because we're commanding him to but because he wants to please us."



Carl was raised by Canine Assistants, a nonprofit in Milton, Georgia, that trains one-on-one service dogs. It also supplies service dogs like Carl to children's hospitals. When a dog is bought for a hospital, the organization is able to "pay it forward" and supply a service dog to someone who cannot afford one.

Carl comes to work with Kuhns about 7:30 a.m. weekdays, though coronavirus precautions have kept him at home, too. Usually he begins his day in the pediatrics outpatient surgery unit, where his job is to help set nervous kids at ease. He's there to pet or distract as an IV goes in or vitals are taken.

Wesley recently had a blind 10-year-old girl with verbal delays in for surgery. "The longer she sat there on the bed, the more agitated she was," Carr said. "Her parents were constantly trying to get her to stay there. I was providing toys she typically likes at home, and none were working. So I took Carl over and he got two paws up on her bed and once she felt him and knew it was a dog, she literally put her head down and hugged him. It was the coolest thing because Carl loves hugs. She literally grabbed his head and just laid on the bed and actually smiled."

After a morning in pre-op, Carl goes to the main pediatrics floor and pediatric intensive care. There he doesn't roam free, but instead focuses on children who might particularly benefit, such as regulars with cancer or seizures.

"It's more the high-priority patients, whether they're here for a long time or they are post-op from surgery and need an incentive to get out of bed and walk," Carr said. "They can help walk Carl somewhere. Or just bringing Carl into their room brightens their day."



"He is here for the patients and families, but he also offers support to the staff," Kuhns said. "We hear often that 'it doesn't matter what's going wrong or what stressful things are going on, he just always makes me smile.'"

Dr. Mazahir Ali, a third-year KU pediatrics resident, grew up in Pakistan unaccustomed to dogs as pets. Exposure to the therapy dog Penny — whose handler is Dr. Kathy Melhorn — started easing his discomfort, but Carl sealed the deal. "Carl is the first time I was actually exposed to a decently sized active dog. I was a bit hesitant, but then because of how comfortable he is around people, especially kids, I started to loosen up a little bit."

"I am sure Carl has a therapeutic effect on patients, but personally he had a therapeutic effect on me," Ali said. "I remember one time Carl gave me a hug — it was such a different experience. I am so comfortable around dogs now that I am thinking of having my own dog."

Active or calm as needed at the hospital, Carl is busy in his off hours, whether rolling in snow in every bit of Kuhns' yard or living up to his retriever bloodline.

As Kuhns' well-developed throwing arm can attest, Carl has varied interests. Like tennis balls. And soccer balls. And footballs. Or anything approaching round.

"If Carl could stay outside no matter the weather and play ball, he would do that 24/7," Kuhns said.

## VOLUNTEER FACULTY: Bassem H. El-Nabbout, M.D.

**KU faculty member cares for children and adolescents with neurological disorders**

**Bassem El-Nabbout, M.D.**, fulfilled his childhood dream of becoming a pediatric neurologist. Now he helps children and their parents deal with a variety of complex neurologic conditions, including epilepsy, autism, cerebral palsy, migraine headaches and Tourette disorder. He is board certified in pediatrics, pediatric neurology and headache medicine.

He is also a volunteer faculty member at KU School of Medicine-Wichita, delivering lectures and hosting residents and students at his new east-side practice.

“I like teaching residents and students,” he said. “I always have a resident or student here with me at the clinic. Teaching is an intrinsic part of being a physician.”



Staff member of the Kansas Pediatric Neurology Center (l-r): Marc Bakhache, Diane Ward, Reina El-Nabbout, Dr. El-Nabbout, Gonzala Martinez and Molly Swander.



A native of Lebanon, El-Nabbout earned his medical degree from the American University of Beirut. He did his pediatric residency at the University of Massachusetts, then completed a fellowship in pediatric neurology at Duke University Medical Center in North Carolina.

“I was very much interested in pediatric neurology because it is a broad field encompassing many complex medical conditions,” El-Nabbout said. “It is very gratifying to be able to help these brave children and their families and make a difference in their lives.”

El-Nabbout worked for five years at Arkansas Children’s Hospital in Little Rock where he was the director of the Cerebral Palsy, Neurofibromatosis and Headache Clinic. He moved to Wichita in 2009, largely to be near family and friends.

In September 2019, he opened his own practice, Kansas Pediatric Neurology Center, at 10111 E. 21st St. N. El-Nabbout and his staff of eight treat neurologically impaired children and adolescents from birth to 18 years of age. He also operates a satellite clinic once a month at the Hutchinson Clinic.

El-Nabbout is married and has three children, Natalia, Leanna and Liam. His wife, Reina, an adjunct professor at Butler Community College, is also involved in managing the new clinic. When he is not working at the clinic, El-Nabbout enjoys fishing, running and biking with his family.

## NEW FACULTY: MELISSA JEFFERSON

KU Pediatrics would like to welcome **Missy (Melissa) Jefferson, M.D.**, and her family as she joins both the KU Wichita Pediatrics Hematology & Oncology and KU Wichita Pediatrics Wesley Newborn Hospitalist teams.



Jefferson was born and grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, where some of her fondest childhood memories include spending time outdoors at her grandfather’s hunting camp in central Pennsylvania. She attended Grove City College where she graduated magna cum laude before moving to and graduating from Michigan State University College of Human Medicine where she was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society.

Jefferson was prompted to become a physician because she enjoys people and enjoys being challenged by the academic aspects of medicine. After graduating medical school, Jefferson attended the pediatric residency program at the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio followed by completing the pediatric hematology oncology fellowship program at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. Jefferson’s father passed away from cancer, which helped guide her toward working in hematology and oncology. She also appreciates developing the close, long-term relationships with the families, as well as the challenges of taking care of patients with more serious illnesses.

As she has transitioned to Wichita and her new positions, Jefferson has especially enjoyed getting to know her colleagues, residents and medical students. She has found it to be a very welcoming environment.

Joining Jefferson in Wichita are her husband, Wayne, and their four children (ages 9, 8, 6 and 6 weeks). They all enjoy being outdoors, including camping and traveling. Jefferson particularly enjoys gardening and baking.

Her advice to residents and medical students is to “have grace for yourself and those around you.”



# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ROBERT WITTLER

By Brian Whepley

## Bob Wittler: Pediatric infectious disease specialist has long been Wichita's one-man detective squad



When **Bob Wittler** came to KU School of Medicine-Wichita, he was the city's only pediatric infectious disease specialist. That hasn't changed in a quarter century.

"For him being the only one, it has meant a huge sacrifice," said Kathy Melhorn, M.D., a longtime colleague. "He never told anyone not to call him. He would deal with what needed to be dealt with, and that's huge for this community."

Wittler emphasizes the positives: "That's been OK because I have had a lot of opportunities to help people."

He enjoys playing detective, of diagnosing conditions that elude others. "It's always continuous change. Even though we're in Wichita we get cases of malaria and other unusual things, like tick-borne illnesses, particularly tularemia (rabbit fever). Sometimes we get Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Those are interesting because they're not the first thing other physicians think about. Because I'm the only one, they tend to cluster toward me."

Lindall Smith, M.D., pediatric intensivist at Wesley Medical Center, came to Wichita about the same time as Wittler. "He brought with him a wonderful knowledge about pediatrics in general, and about pediatric infectious disease especially."

"He is always willing to get in the trenches with you when struggling with difficult diagnoses," Smith said.

"He has been extremely helpful with some amazing cases, such as malaria, botulism, naegleria fowleri (brain-eating amoeba), flesh-eating streptococcus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, toxic shock and Kawasaki's disease, just to name a few. His help in the cases was quite significant, and he rarely takes the credit for the amazing assistance he brings to the patient's bedside."

Raised in the Golden State, Wittler was an undergraduate there ("People probably never would believe that I went to UC Berkeley and had long hair - or even that I had hair."). He attended medical school at Creighton University and did his pediatrics residency at Letterman Army Medical Center in San Francisco, followed by a fellowship at Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii. His interest in infectious diseases was spurred by his residency director, a specialist in the field. Wittler spent over a decade in Army service before being recruited to KU in 1995.

"It's not a specialty that a lot of people are going into right now," he said. "When you have a big student loan, infectious disease is not the best way to pay them off, but I wouldn't have picked anything different."

Family is important — among his five children he has two granddaughters and a grandson so far — and so is his faith. His wife, Colleen, is active in their Catholic parish, and they take communion to a nursing home monthly, "an amazing experience." His kids attended KU and along the way he became a Jayhawks basketball fan, recounting being there

when Mario Chalmers hit "the shot" and KU won the 2008 national championship.

He's 64, so questions of retirement come — from doctors, writers, his wife. "We just got our mortgage paid off, and that's a nice feeling. We really enjoy Wichita and I like the job and the people I work with. I'll retire someday, but I'd like to do it in phases."

Over the years, he's won teaching awards and served in many roles: medical clerkship director, department chair, residency program director among them. He teaches in a number of venues. Pediatrics and internal medicine/pediatrics residents rotate with him for many months, as do fourth-year medical students doing an infectious disease elective. He consults on the pediatrics floor and works with family medicine residents in the process. "I learn a lot from students. Sometimes they clarify things for me. That's good."

Wittler splits facilitation of a case-based collaborative learning group of first-years with Brian Pate, M.D., pediatrics department chair. "You get them pretty early in the process and get to see them grow. We're facilitators, so most of the talking is done by the students. We're there mostly to steer them in certain directions or to get every student involved."

"He's humble and that's his way when teaching. He doesn't come across as knowing everything," Melhorn said. "He lets residents, students, even colleagues put their thoughts out there. What are you thinking about this case, why do you want to order this test? He's so good at that teaching aspect."

Melhorn said she's always amazed Wittler can pull research results from his memory bank and cite them. "He doesn't give up. He just doesn't quit until he finds an answer."

Wittler also has a deft human touch. "He has the ability to talk to families in a very factual but reassuring way," Melhorn said. "He can guide their worry. When your child has some infection, you're thinking the worst, but he can put it in perspective."

"He is a natural teacher, to families, medical students, residents and attending physicians alike," Smith said. "And he practices what he preaches, so is a great example to students and residents."

Teaching and, by extension, patient care are important to him.

"You are really a magnifier. If you can make certain points with students and then they can make it with others, then you've done your job," Wittler said. "Hopefully then they feel that same joy from teaching others. None of us got here by ourselves."

"A lot of it is about the science of medicine, but hopefully the interaction with patients, the human part of it, impacts students as well," Wittler said.

"I get great joy when someone comes up to me at Dillons or someplace and says, 'Hey, Dr. Wittler, remember you took care of my daughter or son?' and they're grateful. That's about as great as you could ever feel," he said.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## **Resident Graduation**

June 5, 6:30 p.m. • Hotel at Old Town

## **AHA Virtual Heart Walk**

June 13, 8:30 a.m.

Join our team or create your own

## **Haley's Scramble**

Aug. 3 • Terradyne Country Club

## **The Wichita Open**

Sept. 21-27 • Crestview Country Club



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