

# Family and Community Medicine



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231 Albert Sabin Way  
Cincinnati, OH 45267-0582

INTERIM CHAIR:  
**CHRISTINE O'DEA**

Assistant to:  
Kim Hawkins  
[Kimberly.Hawkins@uc.edu](mailto:Kimberly.Hawkins@uc.edu)  
513-558-4021

Direct newsletter comments  
to [Kimberly.Hawkins@uc.edu](mailto:Kimberly.Hawkins@uc.edu)

## CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Friends and colleagues, I am happy to announce that 2024 marks the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Department of Family and Community Medicine. Over the past fifty years, our department has been committed to improving the health of our local and global community, training the next generation of family physicians, and contributing to the growing discipline of family medicine. The Department has touched hundreds of thousands of lives, and this is our time to celebrate and reflect upon our achievements.

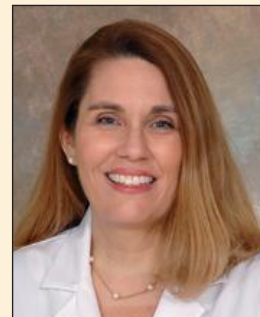
In celebrating this significant milestone, we're thrilled to announce a series of events designed to honor our rich legacy while embracing the exciting prospects that lie ahead. Save the date of Saturday, November 2, 2024, for a special day where we both look to the future of family medicine, while looking back and celebrating our rich heritage and history. We are planning an educational event during the day and an anniversary celebration dinner in the evening. Follow along the planning with us by visiting our website regularly (<https://www.ucfamilymedicineanniversary.com/>) and help us plan by completing this [survey](#).

Amidst the anniversary festivities, we also recognize the importance of continuity and evolution. I want to share an update on our ongoing search for a new Chair. The search committee has been led by Dr. Michael Thomas, the chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and includes multiple members of our department, with the support of the search firm, AMN. The College of Medicine remains committed to selecting a candidate who will lead us into the next chapter of our journey with integrity, vision, and a passion for advancing our mission. The goal is to identify a new chair by the summer or fall of this year.

Finally, I want to recognize the contributions and incredible career of our dear friend, colleague and leader, Andrew Filak. Dr. Filak will be celebrating his retirement as the Dean of the College of Medicine on June 30, 2024, completing a remarkable 47 year career in the College of Medicine. We will be looking back and honoring his career in future newsletters.

All of us who have been a part of the Department over the past 50 years have much to be proud of. Thank you to all of you, wherever you are, for your contributions. Here's to 50 years of excellence, innovation, and fellowship! I look forward to celebrating with you in November and all year long.

Warmly, Christy O'Dea, MD, MPH, FAFP, Interim Chair



**Christine O'Dea, MD**  
Interim Chair

## SPOTLIGHT:

## Mary Allot Agna, MD: Founding Visionary, UC Department of Family and Community Medicine



In Burma (now Myanmar), Mary set up vaccine clinics to fight malaria.

Our Department's history is rich and diverse. Before our first Chair, Dr. Robert Smith, there was our founding visionary, Dr. Mary Allot Agna, a graduate of UC College of Medicine and former faculty member. She was instrumental in establishing the UC Department of Family and Community Medicine and its residency program.

(continued on pg. 2)

## Mary Allot Agna, MD: Founding Visionary, UC Department of Family and Community Medicine

### *and now, the rest of the story...*

Dr. Agna was born on September 18, 1924 in Alliance, Ohio to Gwen and Guy Allott. Her daughter, Gwen Agna, wrote: "She was so proud of being their daughter - her mother was one of the first registered nurses in the state of Ohio and helped nurse many young men at Camp Sherman through the flu epidemic of 1918." Her father was the mayor of Alliance and owned the local hardware store where she worked during the Great Depression, supporting many families through a barter system. Her father became blind as an adult and Mary and her mother were his eyes, allowing him to continue to be a productive and active person till his death.

Dr. Agna attended Mt. Union College in Alliance and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a major in bacteriology. She became a physician, graduating from the University of Cincinnati Medical School in 1950, and married James Agna, MD, Class of 1949. They were married for over 65 years and led lives strongly committed to social justice and expanding healthcare access.

After completing her residency at Cincinnati General Hospital, Dr. Agna and her husband joined the US Public Health Service and served in Burma (now Myanmar). Her work in Southeast Asia focused on women and children. She set up community-based inoculation centers with local health advocates in villages across the countryside. In 1958, Dr. Agna and her husband and their then four children moved to Haiti to work at the Hopital Albert Schweitzer in St. Marc.

The family returned to the US in 1959 and established their home in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Mary worked as a physician at the Yellow Springs Clinic and as a research assistant in anthropology at the Fels Institute for Human Development. Her interests in community and public health then led her to serve as the Clark County Health Commissioner. After that, Dr. Mary Agna served as the Greene County Health Commissioner where she was responsible for instituting many progressive community health practice, such as establishing the first home care program to send nurses and physical therapists into Greene County residences. During that time she also served as Clinical Preceptor for the Department of Environmental Health at the University of Cincinnati (1965-70).



*Drs. Mary and Jim Agna with their oldest daughter, Gwen, born in Rangoon, Burma (now called Yangon, Myanmar, now the largest city in Myanmar)*



*Mary with a local woman of Burma.*

In 1970, Mary and her husband Jim and now five children, moved to Cincinnati where she joined the University of Cincinnati Medical School faculty as Assistant Clinical Professor of Environmental Health and Community Medicine. During that time, Dr. Mary Agna also served as Assistant Health Commissioner for the Cincinnati Health Dept. (1970-74) and then as the Chief Health Officer for the Northern Kentucky District Health Department.





Mary and Jim Agna with 2 of their five children

Dr. Agna's vision in creating a Department of Family and Community Medicine included training physicians to practice in community settings as part of our nation's response to ensuring health care access for our ever increasing underserved individuals and families. In 1974 Dr. Mary Agna secured and administered a \$600,000 U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (now Health and Human Services) grant, one of the first of its kind, enabling fourth-year medical students to experience and learn primary care in the community offices of local family physicians, internists and pediatricians. She became Assistant Dean in the College of Medicine and an Associate Professor (1974-75) in the new Department of Family Practice, the original name of our current UC Department of Family and Community Medicine.

Dr. Gloria Walker '79 remembers Dr. Agna as a role model. "I was the only female physician in the Family Medicine program. It was new. She was very helpful in getting me adjusted to being the only female in the program. I liked Dr. Agna. She

was highly down-to-earth and approachable. She was personable. I remember she took me to a picnic to meet other female physicians. Most of them were retired or semi-retired. My experience with Dr. Agna was highly positive."

Recognizing the emergency room was often the 'defacto primary care site' for those without access, Dr. Mary Agna's husband, Dr. Jim Agna, was equally instrumental in supporting and participating in the first residency program in Emergency Medicine at UC. "My parents were determined to expand access to primary care for low-income and uninsured people as part of their commitment to a national health care system" recalls Mary and Jim's eldest daughter, Gwen Agna. Dr. Jim Agna helped establish some of the first UC-Community partnerships including that with Mrs. Dolores Lindsay, founding CEO of Lincoln Heights Health Center (now HealthCare Connection) Ohio's first community health center, to support neighborhood health centers and health care access in underserved and low-income areas of Cincinnati.

Residents from the Family Medicine program that Dr. Mary Agna helped establish did clinical rotations in these community clinical settings. Together, the work of Drs. Jim and Mary Agna became a national model with several published articles and awards.

Dr. Walker also knew Dr. Jim Agna who made a significant impact on her career as well. As a resident, she accompanied him at the West End Health Center. Dr. Walker remembered how Dr. Jim Agna spoke "of the dignity of underserved patients." Indeed, her first job after residency was working at the West End Health Center.

Dr. Mary Agna served as Acting Chair of our department from October 1974 until June 1975 when Robert Smith, MD, whom she helped recruit, became permanent chair. Dr. Smith noted in 2015 that "Dr. Agna played a critical role in creating the Department of Family Practice and its residency program at a time when family medicine departments were first beginning to be formed across the country."

Dr. Agna also served on the UCCOM admissions committee for many years where she effectively advocated for increased diversity in admissions. She and Jim left the college in 1978 when they joined the Wright State University School of Medicine faculty. There, Mary continued to serve on the Admissions Committee for over 30 years, retiring from Wright State in 2013 as Professor Emerita.

UC College of Medicine Dean and SVP for Health Affairs, Andy Filak, MD, remembered Dr. Mary Agna well; "Dr. Agna was instrumental in creating the family medicine residency at UC and her legacy lives on. She was committed to caring for the underserved and had a strong interest in global health. She instilled these concepts into the fabric of the Department and they continue to



Dr. Mary Agna with Dr. Jim Agna, her husband

exist today. Although she left UC at about the time I arrived for my Family Medicine residency, her presence was very much alive at that time and we owe much to her for her vision and her commitment to providing care for those most in need."

Dr. Mary Agna was a lifetime member of the American Academy of Family Practice, member of the Greene County Medical Society, the Ohio Academy of Family Practice, the Ohio Public Health Council (1974-81 and 1989-96) and Phi Beta Kappa. She served in many volunteer community roles in Cincinnati and in Yellow Springs, Ohio including as the chair of the Board of Trustees of Friends Care Center Long Range Planning Committee and the national Professional Advisory Committee of Coordinated Home Care. She was instrumental in making sure the elderly nationwide had the option of living out their final days in their homes, where she did. She volunteered at Planned Parenthood clinics, reflecting her commitment to reproductive rights and advocacy for low-income and underserved women. She and Jim were lifelong members of Physicians

for National Health Care Program, committed to universal health care for all. She was an avid reader of books and of the New York Times, The Nation, and The New Yorker.

#### **CURRY NOT COOKIES**

Gwen Agna said her mother wasn't the kind to stay home and bake cookies but will be remembered as "someone who always delighted in other people's company and for her joie de vivre (she loved the French language too)." Mary was so kind, warm and humble. She did not suffer cruelty or hypocrisy. Over the years she and Jim loved to entertain family and friends with Burmese curry dinners and cook-outs. She was a lover of nature, opera, and all things Native American. Her great lifelong passion was horses. She grew up with them, remembering all by name and personality. Her last horse was Kizzie (Kismet), a Tennessee Walker. Mary rode every day through her early 80's. She taught many to ride and to respect horses, most especially her children and grandchildren. Mary's professional and volunteer accomplishments were legion. But by far her and Jim's greatest achievement, in their eyes, was their family."

#### **Now you know the rest of the story...**

Thank you to Gwen Agna, Tom Marantz, MD, Andrew Filak, MD, Gloria Walker, MD and Richard Puff for their contributions to this article.

#### *Author's note:*

*I had the privilege of knowing the Agna Family while I was in high school. It was in their home I saw my first JAMA journal, tasted curry and met physicians (married to each other!) who discussed and cared deeply about the inadequacies and inequities of our health care system. Drs. Mary and Jim Agna had a lasting impact on my career.*

*This article is written with admiration, gratitude and deep respect.*

*Barbara Bowman Tobias, MD*



Mary and Jim Agna in later years



## DIVISION UPDATE:

**URBAN, UNDERSERVED AND GLOBAL HEALTH***Joseph Kiesler, MD, Interim Director*

Greetings friends of the Division of Urban, Underserved and Global Health. I am excited to be taking on the role of Interim Division Director. We have a wonderful team and all of us wish to thank Chuck Schubert for his friendship and leadership. We hope he and his family are enjoying the rewards of retirement (e.g. more grandchild-sitting). Thanks, Chuck! Stay close.

**Joseph Kiesler, MD**

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**2023 Empowering Health Care Heroes**

One of our big initiatives this year is our 2023 Empowering Health Care Heroes campaign to raise \$30,000 for the UC Family Medicine Global and Underserved Health Fund. This fund supports the work of our faculty, residents, staff, students and community partners caring for communities here in Cincinnati and in Guatemala. Our goal is \$15,000 by December 31 and \$30,000 by March 31.

Our partnerships with Wuqu' Kawoq, Cincinnati Health Network Healthcare for the Homeless, Cincinnati Health Department, Refugee Health and Santa Maria Social Services allow us to engage and serve at-risk populations both here and abroad while inspiring and training our learners to serve vulnerable populations anywhere.

Your support of the Global and Underserved Health Fund will help us to fund a volunteer physician salary in Guatemala, support medications for patients at the Race Track clinic and in Guatemala, buy screening supplies for a community partner health fair, and fund transportation for patients to hospital appointments. All of these are examples of how your contribution can help improve the health of our Global community and train the next generation of physicians to care for it. Please scan

the QR code or follow this link to donate: [Global and Underserved Health Fund](#).



Thank you for your past support and consideration this year, Joe and Christy

Joseph Kiesler, MD  
*Interim Division Director*

Christy O'Dea, MD  
*Interim Chair, Department of Family and Community Medicine*

*Dr. Evan Onusko with a patient and her baby at Clinica Miller in Chocoma, Guatemala*

## DIVISION UPDATE:

## CANCER SURVIVORSHIP AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

*Administrative Director: Dr. Elizabeth Shaughnessy*

*Medical Director: Dr. Melissa Erickson*

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PROGRAM  
COORDINATOR  
Jennie Martin  
@uc.edu  
513-600-5613

The Oncology Primary Care Clinic at the UC Cancer Center was started in November 2019 and was the region's first and only program dedicated to providing primary care services to cancer survivors. We are pleased to announce that this program has continued to grow, with Dr. Sara Kleinschmidt, MD joining the group in the spring of 2023. Her specialized training in palliative care and her passion for teaching has truly helped the program flourish. In July of 2023, we were excited to welcome Dr. Rynita Bohler and Dr. Emily Furnish, who are the program's first-ever participants in a combined palliative care and oncology primary care/survivorship fellowship. Dr. Bohler and Dr. Furnish spend time each week in our clinic and have didactics dedicated to cancer survivorship. Additionally, we have several Family Medicine residents who are doing a longitudinal rotation in oncology primary care. Finally, our program has partnered with Cincinnati Children's Hospital to offer primary care services to patients with a cancer predisposition mutation. These patients require specialized screening, and we are thrilled to be offering this much needed service!

## Summer of Survivorship: A Guided Experience Toward Wellness

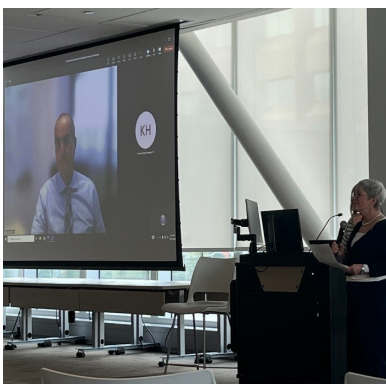
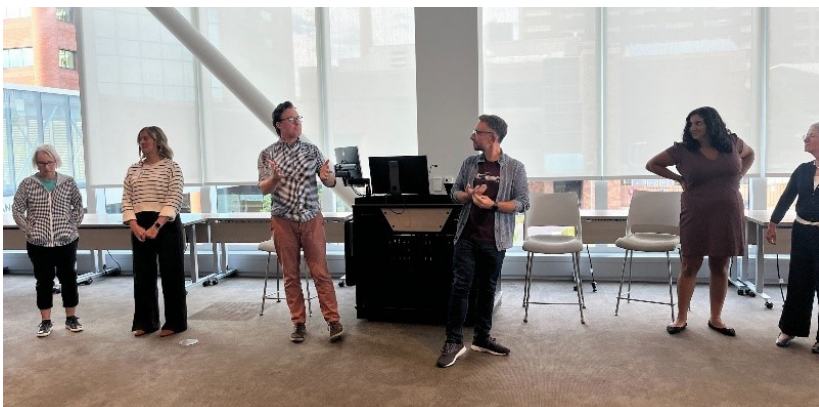
Cancer Survivorship and Supportive Services began this summer with our "Summer of Survivorship." A "Guided Experience Toward Wellness" with Ishan Shivanand taught aspects of yoga breathing techniques to reduce stressors associated with cancer treatment and sequelae in a virtual setting. We tapped into our inner rock star in the Summer Drumming HealthRhythms sessions hosted by Arlene DeSilva that increases the activity of Natural Killer cells in fighting cancer! Our monthly series **Flourish**, based on the Harvard social studies establishing six main domains for individuals to thrive, is ongoing. November brings Barbara Walker addressing Happiness and Life Satisfaction with **Creating a Toolkit for Mental Wellness: Finding Peace and Awe in Every Day** (hybrid, and at UCGNI), and December promises to be fun and yummy with a participatory event focused on Mental and Physical Wellness, with Mindfulness—a great stress releaser as we combine mindfulness & movement with Tina Walter, C-IAYT, and Victoria Morgan, MFA, with the nourishing benefits of healthy holiday suggestions and hands-on food preps and samples coached by Pamela Sharpe, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, and trained chef with nutritionist Tammy Ward, RD, CSO, LD. **Come Heal this Holiday Season...Move, Meditate,**

## Nourish!

We welcomed Dr. Sara Kleinschmidt to our team, as she joined Dr. Melissa Erickson part-time in Oncology Primary Care, and currently welcome Meg Cone, MSN, MHSA, as our incoming nurse navigator!

Below are photos from our recent October Flourish Program. Featured

are Arash Asher, MD, the Survivorship Director of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, who virtually discussed the importance of humor and close social relations. Following his presentation, Jeremy Dubin and Justin McCombs of the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company led an improvisation experience involving the audience.





## DIVISION UPDATE:

## WEST CHESTER FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Bruce Gebhardt, MD, Director



Left to right: Eugenia Yoo, MD - Resident; Nathaniel Harris, MD - Attending Physician; Forest Gries, DO - Resident



Learning together is fun with Drs. Lindsay Fanella, Bruce Gebhardt, Eugenia Yoo.

Our Department's new residency program has opened!! The inaugural class of started this July and we could not be happier with our group.

Dr. Alan Beigarten-Ohio University COM

Dr. Lindsay Fanella-Pikesville COM

Dr. Forest Gries-A. T. Still COM

Dr. Emily Kim-UC COM

Dr. Aaron White-UC COM

Dr. Eugenia Yoo-UC COM

This class sets the foundation and builds the culture of the program along with the faculty. The faculty members include Dr. Bruce Gebhardt (Program Director), Dr. Jeffrey Ushupun (Associate Program Director), Dr. Manoj Singh, Dr. Nathaniel Harris, Dr. Sri Murthy, and we recently welcomed Dr. Aruna Puthota who will lead the behavioral health curriculum. Jeani Berglund's work as Program Coordinator for a new program has been heroic. Thank you, Jeani.

West Chester Hospital and campus is just a great place for Family Medicine training. Most of the residents' three years can be completed on the WC campus—either in the hospital or in the close by UCH specialist offices and of course the Family Medicine Practice. But we also have great community partners for needed experiences. Primary Health Solutions and Planned Parenthood in Hamilton and Butler County DOH have graciously welcomed residents into their offices.

There could be no program without the support of the Department, many UCH specialists, and CCHMC. I want to specifically thank the UC hospitalist group, UC OB/GYN, UC Sports Medicine, UC Surgery, and the WCH Nursery docs, for their flexibility and help during our first year. We could not do this without them. I'll thank Dr. Jackie Knapke and Dr. Sri Murthy for their help with resident interviews.

We will be welcoming the Department's new LGBTQ+ Fellow in July, 2024 and UC's Palliative and Geriatric Fellowships will start at WC in 2025.

We are already recruiting for next year's class—as Ferris Bueller says “life moves pretty fast.” We are recruiting two new faculty members and as we grow, preceptors for the Family Medicine Practice will be needed. If you would like to give a lecture—contact Nate Harris at harrisn3@ucmail.uc.edu.

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PROGRAM  
COORDINATOR

Jeani Berglund  
Jeani.Berglund@  
UCHealth.com



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University of Cincinnati College of Medicine  
**Department of Family and Community Medicine**  
Medical Sciences Building 4012  
231 Albert Sabin Way  
PO Box 670582  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45267-0582

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*Join us November 2, 2024*

**TO CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI DEPARTMENT  
OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEDICINE**

50 Years Past, 50 Years Forward: Celebrating the  
Power of Family Medicine in Community

- CME Event
- Dinner + Reception
- More information to come



Please fill out our quick survey to help us plan for the event: [Family Medicine 50th Anniversary Survey](#)