UC Department of Internal Medicine
Research Newsletter January 2026

University of CINCINNATI
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

IMPRINT

Internal Medicine Progress in Research, INnovation and Translation

Chair's Corner: Advancing Research with Purpose

As I transition into the role of Interim Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine, I am inspired by the depth of scientific talent, collaboration, and innovation that define our Department. Research is the foundation of academic medicine, and this is our moment to further strengthen and align our collective efforts toward discovery that moves from the bench to bedside and back to bench, improving care and advancing health for our patients and communities.

Our shared goal is clear: to transform discovery into impact through research that advances science, informs clinical care, and changes lives.

As both a clinical trialist and outcomes researcher, I have seen how scientific rigor, collaboration, and curiosity drive meaningful improvements in patient outcomes, locally and globally. Building on the tremendous work already underway, we are enhancing our research infrastructure, expanding mentorship opportunities, and streamlining processes to support multidisciplinary, hypothesis-driven science.

We are also prioritizing population health-based science and interdepartmental initiatives, including the development of shared registries and data-driven platforms that connect clinical care with discovery science. Our department continues to lead investigator-initiated, federally funded, and multicenter clinical trials, all of which advance knowledge that shapes the future of medicine.

In addition, we are establishing an Inflammation and Immunology Research Consortium (IIRC) across all our divisions and disease states. This initiative will foster collaboration, optimize shared resources, and promote a multidisciplinary approach to advancing research, drug development, and clinical outcomes. The IIRC will serve as a unifying platform linking specialties, enhancing translational research and accelerating bench-to-bedside discovery. It will strengthen our competitiveness for federal and industry funding, support the creation of shared registries and biorepositories, and expand mentorship and training opportunities for our faculty and learners.

Together, we will continue to build a cohesive, innovative, and impactful research culture that drives excellence across UC College of Medicine, UC Health, and beyond.

Anita Afzali, MD, MPH, MHCM, FACG, AGAF
James F. Heady Endowed Chair, Professor of Medicine, Interim Chair of Internal Medicine

VC Views

On October 1, 2025, Dr. Christy Holland led the CIRCULATE workshop, an idea incubator for cardiovascular breakthroughs. Sponsored by the UC College of Medicine Center for Cardiovascular Research, the workshop brought together basic and translational researchers with clinicians to strengthen collaboration across the discovery-to-care continuum. Using a structured, facilitated approach, participants centered the discussion on

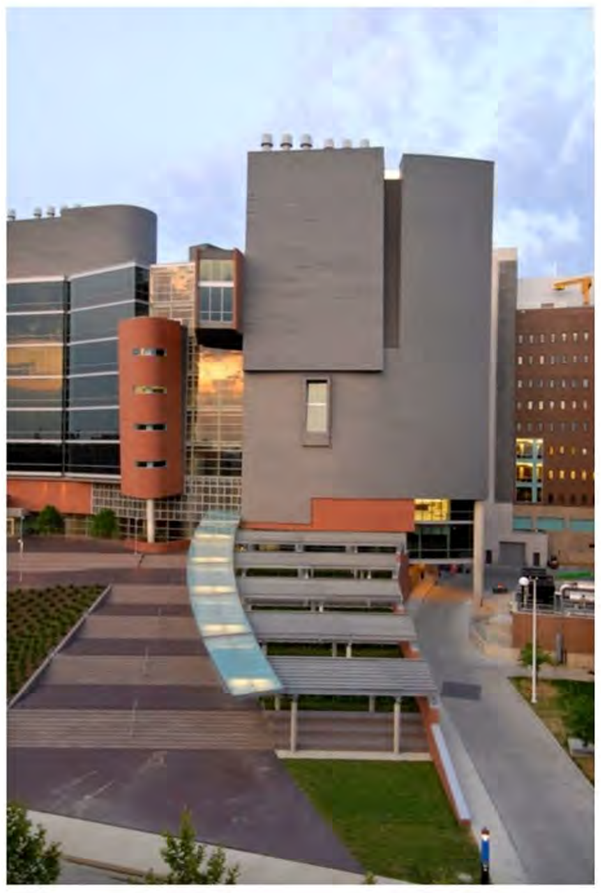
difficult, real-world clinical problems and then worked backward to clarify what is unknown, what limits current care, and where research could most meaningfully accelerate progress. By grounding conversations in clinical need while welcoming diverse scientific perspectives, the session helped create a shared language that bridged bedside realities with mechanistic and translational research approaches.

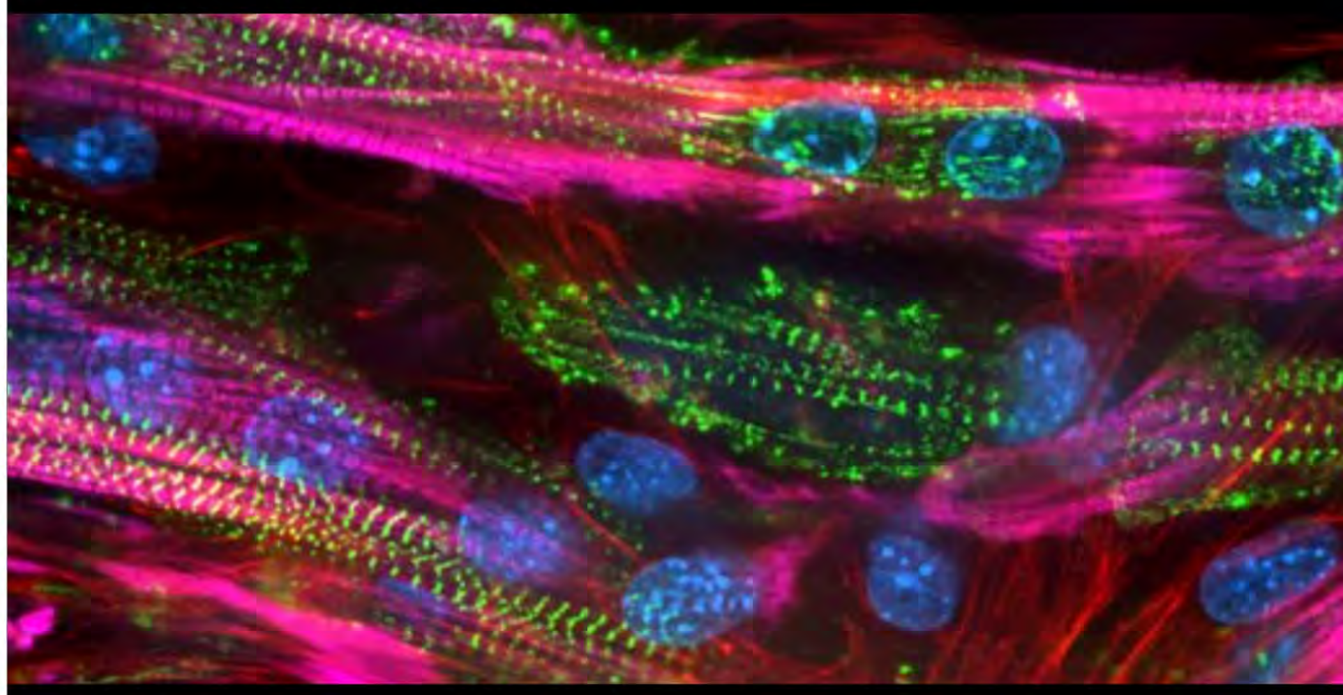
A key outcome of the workshop was converting complex clinical challenges into well-scoped, testable scientific questions that interdisciplinary teams can advance through rigorous experimentation. Participants refined problem statements, identified promising hypotheses, and outlined what data, models, samples, and cross-disciplinary partnerships would be needed to move ideas forward. Beyond generating actionable research directions, the workshop also strengthened networks between clinicians and scientists—laying the groundwork for future pilot studies, collaborative projects, and grant proposal-ready concepts that are both clinically meaningful and scientifically tractable.

Carl J. Fichtenbaum, MD
Gregory W. Rouan Endowed Professor of Internal Medicine, Vice Chair of Clinical Research

Christy K. Holland, PhD
Hanna Endowed Chair of Cardiology, Vice Chair of Basic Science Research

Kristin Hudock, MD, MSTR
Associate Professor of Internal Medicine, Vice Chair of Translational Research





Academic Research Service (ARS)

Call for Applications: JAMA Internal Medicine 2026–27 Editorial Fellowship

JAMA Internal Medicine is now accepting applications for its 2026–27 Editorial Fellowship, a yearlong immersive experience running from July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2027. Three early-career Internal Medicine faculty (within 10 years of completing postgraduate training) will be selected to join the journal's editorial team.

Fellows will participate in all aspects of editorial decision-making, receive longitudinal mentorship from JAMA Internal Medicine editors, and contribute approximately 4 hours per week in addition to scheduled meetings. A small stipend will be provided.

The program welcomes applicants from diverse backgrounds and is well-suited for faculty pursuing careers in academic medicine, though extensive research experience is not required.

Applications are due March 2, 2026. More information and application instructions are available at: https://jamanetwork.com/pages/jama-internal-medicine-editorial-fellowship.

Email questions to: jamainternalmed@jamanetwork.org

Hold the Date: 15th Annual Department of Internal Medicine Research Symposium

Mark your calendars! The Department of Internal Medicine will host the 15th Annual Research Symposium on Thursday, March 12, 2026. The day will feature trainee activities, poster presentations, an awards ceremony, and a keynote address by Demetre C. Daskalakis, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer at Callen-Lorde Community Health Center and former CDC Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. More details to come.

SPOTLIGHT

Francis X. McCormack, Jr., MD

Gordon and Helen Hughes Taylor Professor of Internal Medicine and Director of the Division of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine

Congratulations 2025 College of Medicine Daniel Drake Medalist!

The Vice Chairs asked Dr. McCormack to share a few lessons learned over several decades in research, which led to this prestigious honor at the University of Cincinnati. Dr. McCormack reflected on key lessons from a career shaped by curiosity, patient partnerships, and purpose-driven science:

"I have been so fortunate in my career and found work as a physician–scientist that is deeply meaningful to me, even if my path has been atypical. After more than a decade studying lung protein structure and function, I realized I wasn't convinced of its clinical relevance. Meeting a patient with lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM) changed everything. As Scientific Director of the LAM Foundation, I learned the key clinical questions and helped build the peer-review and funding systems needed to support trials."

"When no external group would take on a trial of a promising therapy, we organized investigators across North America and Japan to launch the MILES study, which showed that sirolimus stabilizes lung function. That work ultimately led to global regulatory approval, and nothing has been as rewarding as caring for patients who benefit from that therapy."

"My lab now focuses on monogenic lung diseases where the path from mechanism to treatment is clearer. In pulmonary alveolar microlithiasis (PAM), we discovered that the lung recruits osteoclast-like cells to degrade the calcium phosphate stones that accumulate in the airspaces. That finding pointed us toward three therapeutic strategies—boosting osteoclast activity, correcting the underlying transport defect with inhaled mRNA, and using chelation to dissolve microliths."

"These insights also helped us understand how particulate exposures drive fibrosis, and they revealed that biodegradable hydroxyapatite might serve as a safer pleurodesis agent than talc. Our next steps include pursuing an FDA IND and preparing for clinical trials during my sabbatical."

"Rare diseases allow us to study mechanisms from a clear molecular starting point and offer lessons that apply to much more common disorders. Impact—not publications or grants—is the true goal. I've been fortunate to sustain our work over 35 years through diverse funding sources and a strong sense of purpose."

"Being a physician is one of the greatest privileges on earth, surpassed only by that of being a physician scientist, with the potential to make a difference on a scale that is larger than daily patient care. It's a hard road that few now choose, because of educational debt, an extended training period, a steep learning curve, concerns about atrophy of clinical skills and returns that often take years to be realized. But when it goes well, there is no more rewarding and fulfilling vocation than to have ideas emerge from patient care that could potentially improve outcomes, assemble a team to help you pursue the best ones, and to see them through to patient benefit."

I wish I were better at expressing what a wonderful career it can be, and could convince more young physicians to consider it.

The success of our trainees and mentees is our legacy, and as mentors we need to embrace the solemn responsibility we have to ensure that the physician scientist remains the tip of the spear for future medical advances.

The formula is clear but not always simple to navigate: 1) Identify curiosity and talent in our trainees, provide abundant encouragement and support, help them choose questions that matter and scientifically sound mentors with the capacity for professional generosity. 2) As they develop their niche we need to amplify their best ideas, give due credit, promote them to peers and get out of their way as they launch their independent careers. As an artist once said, 'The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.' "