



Summer 2024 Newsletter



Staff Spotlight

Honoring Bryna Block

After over 22 years of dedicated service, Bryna Block is retiring from her roles at SD CFAR and the UC San Diego HIV Institute. Her exceptional commitment and contributions have significantly impacted the field and our community. She has been a cornerstone of SD CFAR and The UC San Diego HIV Institute, bringing passion and expertise to her work every day. As Bryna embarks on her next chapter, let us collectively express our deepest gratitude for her immeasurable contributions and wish her a retirement filled with the same warmth



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excellence, compassion, and genuine camaraderie. She will be missed dearly, but her influence will endure in the heart of our centers.

Thank you, Bryna, for your extraordinary service and unwavering commitment to SD CFAR, The UC San Diego HIV Institute, and the broader community. Your work has made a lasting difference, and you will be greatly missed.

Investigator Spotlight

The HIV Institute greatly appreciates UC San Diego's hardworking, dedicated research scientists accelerating the field. The Investigator Spotlight gives us an opportunity to acknowledge our leading investigators and to share with the community how they are pursuing life-changing discoveries.



Megan Lau, MD

Internal Medicine Physician,
UC San Diego

Tell us a little about yourself.

I grew up in San Francisco, CA, and I attended the University of Chicago for college. I've been living in San Diego for the past seven years now, and I can't imagine ever leaving. I primarily work as an internal medicine physician caring for patients who have been hospitalized. When I'm not working in the hospital, some of my favorite things to do in San Diego include beachfront yoga, running along the ocean or bay, and wandering through our many farmers' markets.

Fun fact: The summer after my first year of medical school, I lived in Peru for two months where I stayed with a host family, took intensive Spanish classes, and completed a four-day hike on the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu.

What attracted you to this field?

During my residency training, I have been incredibly lucky to work with and learn from patients at the UC San Diego Owen Clinic. I have also had the opportunity to

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collaborative nature of caring for patients with HIV, and I appreciate all the opportunities to learn from different members of the healthcare team.

How did you land in San Diego and/or start working at UC San Diego?

I attended UC San Diego School of Medicine, and I was lucky enough to be matched into the UC San Diego Internal Medicine residency program afterward. This year, I will continue my training with a one-year fellowship in hospice and palliative medicine.

What are the major issues facing HIV researchers today?

Unfortunately, I think that our current political climate presents a large challenge for our populations most impacted by HIV. As a result, this affects the ability of these populations to safely interact with community groups, researchers, and clinicians. This in turn creates a cycle in which key populations continue to be underrepresented or misrepresented in the healthcare and research fields. Representation matters, and we need to continue to promote diversity and inclusivity in our research.

What are some of your research interests and/or what are you working on right now?

I am particularly interested in providing palliative and end-of-life care for patients with chronic medical conditions. I have been fortunate to work on several projects to bring primary care providers into inpatient goals of care conversations and to use telehealth to conduct advanced care planning conversations with residents in skilled nursing facilities.

What are some of your favorite or most important projects?

I have just completed part one of my most important project to date. Last year, a patient interaction in a geriatrics clinic inspired me to learn more about the process of initiating gender-affirming hormone therapy in older individuals. I did some brief searches online, and I discovered that not a lot of information or research exists about the older transgender population. With a

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to hold listening sessions for older transgender individuals living with and susceptible to HIV to learn more about their gender affirmation concerns. It was an incredibly powerful experience to work with the community and provide a safe place for individuals to share their concerns about a variety of topics, including undergoing gender-affirming surgery later in life, adverse effects from gender-affirming hormone therapy, and future worries about looking for caretakers and housing. Part two of this project will consist of compiling the list of topics and themes from our listening session and sharing them with transgender care providers across the United States for ranking and re-ranking in a process known as a community-based, participatory research enhanced modified Delphi approach. Ultimately, our goal is to generate a ranked list of clinical research priorities for older transgender persons that can be shared with the greater research community at large.

What is the most important lesson you have learned during your tenure at UC San Diego?

As a physician caring for patients across a number of UC San Diego hospitals and affiliate locations, including La Jolla, Hillcrest, and the VA, I care for an extremely diverse population. No patient is the same, even if they share similar symptoms or disease processes. Research often begins with a question or an interest that a clinician or researcher may have, but I've learned that the questions that my patients have may be drastically different from the research questions that I may have. In working with my mentors Drs. Jill Blumenthal and Maile Young Karris both in clinic and in research, I have been very lucky to learn how to listen to my patients in order to provide them with the best possible care.

Save the Date

Upcoming Events

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SD CFAR Annual Research Day

Friday, September 20, 2024, 9am-4pm

NextGen HIV Research: Tackling Critical Issues Head On

Join the San Diego Center for AIDS Research on September 20, 2024 for a full-day symposium showcasing discoveries profoundly changing the study, treatment, and prevention of HIV throughout the world!

Registration launching July 15, 2024.

For up-to-date information visit the [SD CFAR Website](#).

Call for Abstracts

Submission Deadline: July 15, 2024

Investigators who focus on HIV/AIDS clinical, behavioral, public health, or laboratory research are invited to submit abstracts to the 2024 SD CFAR Research Day. Preference will be given to emerging investigators and to those whose research has been supported by SD CFAR core services or grant funding. Grant funding includes Developmental grants, International Pilot grants, Administrative Supplements, Community Research Kick Start grants, HWSPH, PROPEL, and Next Generation grants. Individuals with preliminary or in-progress grant status are encouraged to apply. This opportunity can be especially advantageous for those currently assembling the components of their funded deliverables. For more information visit the [SD CFAR Website](#).

Seminar Series Updates



We are busy scheduling some exciting seminars for the fall. Visit [The HIV Institute](#) website for updates.

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- **Ending the HIV epidemic in New York City through a status neutral approach- Dr. Sarah Braunstein**
- **Beyond REPRIEVE, Cardiovascular Disease in Persons Living with HIV- Dr. Celestine Wanjalla**
- **Evolutions in research and career trajectory- Dr. Laramie Smith**

Program Updates

Trainee Support Fund

The HIV Institute is pleased to announce our new initiative aimed at supporting HIV-focused T32 trainees. The HIV Institute has several funding mechanisms, including endowed funds, that will be leveraged to support UCSD-affiliated T32 postdoctoral trainees in any aspect of HIV research including, but not limited to clinical, epidemiological, virological, immunological, and socio-behavioral.

Congratulations to this year's recipients of The HIV Institute Trainee Support fund:

Katie Bailey, PhD

Renee El-Krab, PhD

Jesse Goldshear, PhD

Jessica Frankeberger, PhD

Lizzy Hastie, MD

Nicole Kelly, PhD



SD CFAR Transgender/Nonbinary Community Advisory Board (TCAB)

The Transgender/Nonbinary Community Advisory Board (TCAB) works to provide fair and equal community representation in the scientific efforts, operation, and activities of the San Diego CFAR, particularly for the transgender and nonbinary community.

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conducting community events.

CAB meetings are the second Thursday of every month (no meeting in July and December) via Zoom.

The next meeting is **Thursday, August 8 from 5:30-7:00pm.**

If you would like to be added to the TCAB list serve please email HIV@ucsd.edu

Profoundly changing the study, treatment and prevention of HIV throughout the world.

Since the 1980s, HIV/AIDS research at UC San Diego has been at the forefront of discoveries that shape care and treatment standards on a global scale. We are internationally recognized as a place that combines the art of healing with the science of medicine and serves not only San Diego, but communities around the world.

For 29 years [The HIV Institute](#) has served as an umbrella organization to UC San Diego's many HIV-related activities. We work within and across departments, in multidisciplinary programs, and with many other collaborators to translate new discoveries from our laboratories to patient care.



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Pablo Picasso

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