

# Progress Notes

The quarterly newsletter of UC Davis Children's Hospital

WINTER ISSUE | 2026

## Happy 2026!

Happy new year to you and your family!

As we start the new year, we look forward to all that 2026 will bring — including new faculty, staff and residents who will join our team. A big welcome to those who have recently joined us — including new faculty from pediatric GI, pediatric hematology and oncology and neonatology. We are happy to have you!

A big welcome also to the new pediatric colorectal and GI patients who are joining us as we establish a California Children's Services (CCS) designated pediatric colorectal center at UC Davis Health, under the leadership of Payam Saadai.

We are also eager for upcoming events that will be taking place on our campus this year. One example: our Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) will host an inaugural PICU Bootcamp for Senior Fellows on Feb. 18–20, 2026, at our Simulation Center. Our team is collaborating with Johns Hopkins and Children's Wisconsin and will be the third national site. PICU fellows from the West Coast including Stanford, Loma Linda, UC San Diego, CHOC and UC Davis will be participating. The bootcamp will be over 2 ½ days of simulation and procedural skills focusing on high yield but relatively low occurrence topics including difficult airways, ECLS and communication skills. UC Davis Health faculty from different specialties as well as PICU nurses, respiratory therapists and ECLS specialists will be participating in this educational experience for PICU fellows.

So many good things to come!

Thanks,

Satyan, Diana and Brenda



From left to right: Brenda Chagolla, Satyan Lakshminrusimha and Diana Farmer.

## UC Davis NICU launches groundbreaking bedside ultrasound program

[UC Davis Children's Hospital](#) has launched a pioneering Point-of-Care Ultrasound program in its [Neonatal Intensive Care Unit \(NICU\)](#), led by internationally renowned neonatologist [Yogen Singh](#). The program, known as POCUS, puts UC Davis Children's Hospital at the forefront of innovative neonatal care in the region and among a select few institutions nationwide.



POCUS uses portable ultrasound at the hospital bedside to provide diagnostic imaging and guidance for procedures. It quickly assesses critical conditions. The technology is being applied to assess cardiac function, lung status and central line placement, which are key areas in managing critically ill newborns.

Singh, who joined UC Davis Health in 2024, brings extensive experience with POCUS from [Cambridge University](#) and in his leadership role as chair of the Cardiovascular Hemodynamics Section and POCUS Working Group for the [European Society of Paediatric and Neonatal Intensive Care](#). He is the lead author of the world's first [international evidence-based guidelines for pediatric POCUS](#), published in 2020. The guidelines are widely adopted across multiple countries.

"Seeing is believing," Singh said. "POCUS empowers clinicians to make rapid, informed decisions at the bedside, especially in critical situations where every second counts." [READ MORE](#)

## Powne receives national fetal nurse award

[Amy Powne](#), a pediatric surgery nurse practice manager with UC Davis Health, was honored with the [2025 Lori J. Howell Excellence in Fetal Nursing Award](#) at this month's [North American Fetal Therapy Network](#) (NAFTNet) meeting.

In her role in the [Fetal Care and Treatment Center](#), Powne guides families through the challenges of prenatal diagnosis, fetal intervention and planning for complex postnatal care for their children.

"This is an extraordinary and deeply well-deserved honor," said [Payam Saadai](#), interim co-chief of the [Division of Pediatric General, Thoracic and Fetal Surgery](#) in the [UC Davis Department of Surgery](#). "Amy's commitment to our patients, families, and pediatric surgery and fetal team elevates our program every day. Amy, we could not be more proud of you."

This international award is given to an individual who embodies the level of excellence in fetal nursing that Lori J. Howell brought to the field as recognized by their physician colleagues. Howell, who died last year, was a nationally known leader and mentor who defined the currently known role of fetal nurse coordinator. This award honors nursing colleagues in the field of fetal diagnosis and treatment.



- Excellence in patient care
- Access to care
- Innovation
- Commitment to nursing

Award nominations are reviewed by NAFTNet's physician board of directors, which includes maternal fetal medicine specialists and fetal surgeons.

# UC Davis launches major study on language development in children with Down syndrome



5-year, \$5.5 million NIH-funded project aims to build a roadmap for communication support

UC Davis researchers are leading a major \$5.5 million study to better understand how children with [Down syndrome](#) develop expressive communication — the skills used to share what we want, think or feel.

[Angela John Thurman](#), a professor in the [Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences](#) and the [UC Davis MIND Institute](#), is leading the research. The five-year project is funded by a grant from the [National Institutes of Health](#).

"Most children with Down syndrome have delays in developing expressive communication," Thurman explained. "We know these delays are common and that children develop at different speeds, but we still don't know enough about how their communication skills change and grow."

The researchers will collaborate on the project with colleagues at Colorado State University, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Massachusetts General Hospital and the University of Pennsylvania. [READ MORE](#)



## Study finds higher risk of chronic illnesses among young cancer survivors

UC Davis joins multi-institutional study revealing long-term health challenges for young cancer survivors

[UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center](#) joined a first-of-its-kind study conducted by researchers at multiple institutions in California to study adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer patients. The research found that young cancer survivors face significantly higher risks of developing chronic medical conditions compared to their peers without cancer.

The [findings were published in Cancer](#), the journal of the [American Cancer Society](#). Results underscore the urgent need for long-term survivorship care and proactive health management in this growing population.

The study analyzed data from 14,917 patients from [Kaiser Permanente Northern California](#) and [Kaiser Permanente Southern California](#) aged 15 to 39 who survived at least two years after being diagnosed with one of 11 common cancers between 2006 and 2020. These survivors were compared to a cohort of 149,164 individuals without cancer, matched by age, sex, calendar year and Kaiser Permanente location.

Researchers found that by five years post-diagnosis, the cumulative incidence of chronic conditions was highest for thyroid issues (17.4%), respiratory problems (6.6%) and cardiovascular (5%) and liver (4.8%) disease. At the 10-year mark, nearly 40% of cancer survivors had developed at least one chronic condition, compared to 26% in the non-cancer cohort. [READ MORE](#)

## Teens in distress turn to tobacco but need more help to quit



UC Davis study shows stronger support and guidance is needed to prevent tobacco use among vulnerable youth

A new study based on the 2022 [National Youth Tobacco Survey](#) has uncovered a concerning gap in how health professionals support young people dealing with mental health challenges and tobacco use.

The published research by UC Davis found that nearly half of middle and high school students reported experiencing some psychological distress — such as feeling anxious or depressed — in the past 15 days. These students were more likely to be asked about tobacco use during visits to doctors, nurses or other health professionals. However, they were not more likely to receive advice to avoid tobacco, despite being at higher risk of using it. [READ MORE](#)

# High risk of metastatic recurrence among young cancer patients

UC Davis research highlights urgent need for tailored survivorship care

A new study of adolescents and young adults (AYAs) with seven common cancers reveals that nearly one in ten patients diagnosed with non-metastatic disease later develop metastatic recurrence — a condition associated with significantly worse survival outcomes. **Metastasis** is when cancer cells spread from the initial or primary site to other parts of the body.



**UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center** scientists led the research. The findings highlight the urgent need to identify and address survivorship needs for young cancer survivors.

“As treatments improve survival, young patients with cancer face unique challenges,” said Ann Brunson, UC Davis research analyst and the study’s lead author. “Our research deepens understanding of survivorship and the impact of metastatic recurrence, using statewide data to reveal trends and guide future studies.”

The research, based on data from more than 48,000 AYAs in California, was published in **JAMA Oncology**. It is the first study of its kind to examine metastatic disease in this population.

Researchers analyzed data from the **California Cancer Registry** linked with statewide health care records from the **California Department of Health Care Access and Information** (HCAI). The study group included AYAs aged 15–39 diagnosed with cancer between 2006 and 2018, with follow-up through the end of 2020. Metastatic recurrence was identified by specific diagnosis codes HCAI or cancer cause of death.

The median follow-up time was 6.7 years and the median age at diagnosis was 33. Most patients were non-Hispanic white (48%) or Hispanic (32%), lived in high socioeconomic status neighborhoods (43%) and had private or military insurance (76%).

## GIVING BACK

### Jack's Urban Eats raises funds for Children's Hospital

A big shout out to **Jack's Urban Eats** and their customers and employees for raising \$27,288 for UC Davis Children's Hospital. Twenty-five percent of every purchase on Aug. 7 was donated from nine different locations to support hospital programs, patient care, equipment and research.



## VIDEO SPOTLIGHT



### ‘Little Lessons’ series launches with teen skin care tips

Teen skincare and acne prevention don't have to be complicated. In this first episode of Little Lessons, UC Davis pediatrician **Lena van der List** shares how to create a simple, effective skincare routine for teens and pre-teens that actually works. She explains the real causes of acne — hormones, oil production, bacteria, and genetics — and how to treat them with proven ingredients like benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, and adapalene gel. She also shares how a healthy diet with low added sugar can help reduce breakouts and improve overall skin health. [VIEW ONLINE](#)

# Two years after epilepsy surgery, 8-year-old is seizure-free and medication-free

“Unstoppable.” That’s how UC Davis Health pediatric epileptologist [Trishna Kantamneni](#) describes her 8-year-old patient, Savon Maina. Kantamneni leads Savon’s team of specialists and directs pediatric epilepsy care in the [Comprehensive Epilepsy Program](#).



Kantamneni first met Savon several years ago. At that time, he frequently visited the emergency department with injuries from falls during seizures. Even though he took high doses of medication for his epilepsy, Savon experienced up to 10 seizures a day. He was stuttering and had nausea, vomiting and constipation.

“There were four different medicines, and they impacted him very negatively,” said Francis Kageche, Savon’s father. “He was aggressive to his brother. He would pinch, scratch, and in some cases, bite him.” Savon also experienced attention and speech difficulties. Savon’s family and care team attributed these troubling effects to many factors, including medications, uncontrolled seizures and a prior brain injury. So, Kantamneni initiated Savon’s evaluation for epilepsy surgery. This surgery would offer him the chance of a seizure-free life without medications.

Evaluation included a stay of several days in the UC Davis [epilepsy monitoring unit](#), or EMU, in the hospital. There, Savon’s seizures were monitored in real time and recorded for analysis. [READ MORE](#) [WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

## Hospital teams decorate doors for trick-or-treating fun

While many children spend Halloween in the hospital, it doesn’t mean that they don’t get the chance to trick or treat.

More than a dozen hospital teams participated in the Halloween fun by decorating a door and providing treats for all patients who knock.

This year, the Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy Department made it a contest and one teen patient from Davis 7 judged the top team for the best themed door.

- The Pediatric Surgery and Fetal Care team came in first with their Coco-themed masterpiece!
- The honorable mention went to Davis 3/Tower 3 for their creative Super Mario Bros design.

“There was so much creativity that filled our halls today,” said Katie Holmes, programming supervisor in the UC Davis Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy Department. “This was our first year awarding a door champion. We hope to make this an annual tradition!”

## McCarthy construction crew hides ‘Where’s Waldo’ cutout for pediatric patients

Pediatric patients are enjoying a fun distraction, thanks to McCarthy Building Companies. While crews work on the new California Tower, they’ve turned the construction site into a real-life “Where’s Waldo” game.

The team hides two large Waldo cutouts — complete with his signature red-and-white striped sweater and beanie — around the tower, relocating him to new spots every few days. From hospital windows, pediatric patients and their families join the hunt, scanning the site to spot the world traveler.

“This was just something we wanted to do for the children and the patients who come into the hospital every day,” said Anmol Gill, safety manager at McCarthy Building Companies. “Our crew regularly plans and moves Waldo to keep the game exciting.”

Gill said the goal is to brighten the days for the young patients staying at the hospital and provide a playful challenge.



# Celebrating baby's first Halloween in the NICU

These NICU cuties are making a splash in their ocean-inspired costumes!



**Get social** — like us, follow us, share with your networks!

 [facebook.com/ucdavischildrenshospital](https://www.facebook.com/ucdavischildrenshospital) has **15,919** likes!

 [instagram.com/ucdavischildren](https://www.instagram.com/ucdavischildren) has **5,840** followers!



Share your patient story!