

Pediatrics Monthly Newsletter



July - August 2026

Ask people around the department how they feel about research, and you'll get a variety of answers. Some light up talking about their latest study. Others — especially those working through required scholarship — treat it more like a hurdle: something to get through on the way to the career they actually signed up for. Both reactions make sense.

Research is slow, often frustrating, and rarely provides the immediate feedback that clinical work can. But that binary — love it or tolerate it — misses what research does for academic medicine. It's the reason evidence-based medicine has evidence to be based on: the trials, the mentorship, the data pipelines, the grant applications, the papers that turn a single patient encounter into something that changes care for thousands. It's not the work of a few labs operating in isolation, but an army of faculty and trainee investigators, staff, and administrators. Whether or not it's in a job title, most of our department is involved in research.

But research offers more than evidence, it extends your reach. In clinic, you improve the lives of each patient you see. Research lets you multiply that: a publication can hand a practitioner in an under-resourced region the tools to treat something they couldn't before. A single article can spark another researcher's inquiry that eventually leads to treatment. And when you notice a pattern in clinic and wonder if it's a trend — that instinct is often where major change starts.

That's the reframe. Research doesn't need to be loved to matter, and it doesn't run on any one group's enthusiasm or expertise alone. It runs on the structure connecting all of it — clinical and non-clinical, required and chosen, senior and early-career — with no piece of work drifting too far from the patients it's meant to help.

Jennifer G. Andrews, PhD
Associate Professor
Director of Research



Way to go, Dr. Theodorou!

When it rains, it pours—and this is certainly something to celebrate! Dr. Theodorou recently received a call from the NIH about the opportunity to restart adult All of Us enrollment across the Banner system for the next two years, with an additional \$3.5 million in funding (\$1.75 million annually), on top of the \$3 million already supporting pediatric enrollment this year.

The initiative will focus on reaching key populations, including individuals with chronic disease, rural communities, and Hispanic populations—many of whom were already well represented among the adults enrolled through the Banner system.

This opportunity is a tremendous reflection of the impact of Dr. Theodorou's leadership and the strength of the work being done right here in Arizona. Congratulations, Dr. Theodorou, on this well-deserved recognition and exciting opportunity!

Fun fact: Dr. Theodorou was featured in the news back in 2018, highlighting the University of Arizona as one of the early participants in the NIH's All of Us Research Program. Nearly a decade later, his continued leadership in this work is helping position our institution for an even greater impact.



UA in national study for precision health care
Would you like to be sure you get just the right medical treatment? The University of Arizona is a leader in a national study designed to achieve just that.
9 KGUN 9 Tucson News / May 4, 2018

Last Day Tomorrow, 8/19/26: VOICE Survey

Your voice matters! Tomorrow, Aug. 19, is the last day to complete the VOICE Survey. Your feedback on workplace culture, leadership, engagement, and organizational support helps Banner identify opportunities to improve the employee experience.

Check your Banner email for your confidential survey invitation and take a few minutes to share your feedback.

Don't forget that departmental incentive funds are dependent on the number of responses!



UArizona Work Location & Schedule: UA Faculty & Staff Only

UArizona faculty and staff only: You may have seen the information below in the MedCat Connect message from Dean Abecassis dated Aug. 9. All UArizona faculty and staff are required to complete this module by Sept. 15.

This requirement does NOT apply to Banner employees or DCCs. Please use [UAccess](#) to access and complete the module.



Faculty: Share Your Voice on Education

Faculty only: Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts on the Department of Pediatrics' strengths and opportunities in education. Your feedback will help shape the Education breakout session at our upcoming Faculty Retreat.

[Click here to complete the survey.](#)

The survey will close in two weeks. Thank you for your time and thoughtful participation!



\$25,000 Translational Medicine Concept Award

Applications are now open for the 2026–2027 ABRC Translational Medicine Concept Award, supporting innovative research that moves discoveries from bench to bedside—or bedside back to bench. Postdoctoral fellows, clinical fellows, and early-stage faculty (within five years of their first independent appointment) are eligible to apply for \$25,000 in direct costs. Projects must represent a new collaborative translational research effort and include at least two UA faculty mentors.

 Application Deadline: September 15, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. MST

 Questions: [Sarah Truxillo](#)

Please see the RFA for complete eligibility and application details.



Pediatrics in the news



[Hyundai Hope on Wheels gives \\$100K for pediatric cancer research in Tucson](#)



E-bikes and scooters are everywhere, but are they safe for kids? Ashley Tian, MD, a pediatric neurosurgeon breaks down what parents need to know before handing over the keys. Click the [here](#) to hear more!



[Subaru donates blankets and care kits to Diamon Children's Medical Center](#)



[Banner - University Medicine Sports Medicine provided more than 620 no-cost school physicals to student-athletes from 40+ schools and educational organizations](#)



[Banner Children's at Thunderbird Medical Center had a "Christmas in July" visit](#)

 **Banner Health.**

One mom's journey through fetal surgery
Hear Mayela share her story in her own words [here](#).

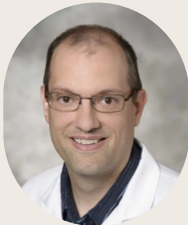
Congratulations!



Congratulations to **Rachael Harvey**, our **Q4 Employee of the Quarter!**



Rachael is a true team player who brings kindness, organization, and a can-do spirit to everything she does. From supporting site visits and recruitment to navigating complex QGenda changes and last-minute requests, Rachael consistently goes above and beyond to support our teams and keep things moving. We are so grateful for all that she does!



Congratulations to **Drs. Rachel Cramton, Nathan Price, and Andrew Terranella** on their appointment to the **2026–2028 Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AzAAP) Board of Directors!** We are proud to see our faculty represented in leadership roles that help advance pediatric care and advocacy across Arizona. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition!



Congratulations to **Dr. Walaa Elfar** on her appointment as the new **Director of the Pediatric Gastroenterology Fellowship Program!**

Dr. Elfar succeeds Dr. Fayez Ghishan, who has provided outstanding leadership of the program. We look forward to Dr. Elfar's leadership and continued growth of this important program!

Congratulations to **Denisse Sternberg, RN, BSN,** on her promotion to **Associate Director of the NICU!**



We are excited to recognize Denisse for this well-deserved advancement and look forward to her continued leadership and contributions to our NICU team.

Read more about the team [here!](#)

Congratulations to **Casey Nelson**, on earning her **Master of Human Resource Management** through the University of Arizona Global Campus!



We're proud to celebrate this incredible accomplishment and all the hard work and dedication it took to reach this milestone.



June

Katherine Whitney, Developmental NP

August

Dr. Tynisha Koenigsaecker, Neonatology
Claire Watson, NP, Developmental
Dr. Camille LeBlanc, Gen Peds
Marissa Brown, Neonatal NP
Ella Stephan, MPH Student Intern

September

Dr. Claudia Cardenas, Hospitalist
Dr. Vanessa Ford, Critical Care

Happy Milestone Work Anniversary

15 Years

Dr. Connor Kelley 08/2011

10 Years

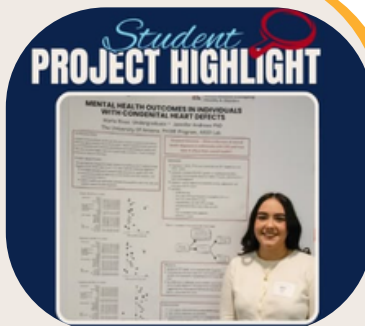
Dr. Heather Cassell 08/2016
Dr. Irshad Ali Sheikh 08/2016



Congratulations to **Grace Zhang**, a BASIS Tucson North student and member of the **ARID Lab**, on completing her Senior Project, "Beyond Expression: The Effects of Art Therapy on Caretakers of Autistic Children," and graduating with an Honors Diploma! Grace's dedication to research and commitment to exploring meaningful ways to support families of autistic children are truly inspiring.

Congratulations to **Marla Rivas**, a Neuroscience & Cognitive Science student and member of the **ARID Lab**, on completing her research project, "Mental Health Outcomes in Adults with Congenital Heart Defects"!

Marla explored how mental health impacts adults with congenital heart defects using Arizona health data, reflecting her interest in healthcare research and understanding factors that influence long-term health outcomes. We're excited to see where her passion for research and healthcare/data science takes her next.



Meet Dr. Zarraga National Immunization Awareness Month

Dr. Zarraga is a general pediatrician in the Department of Pediatrics who cares for children and families across all stages of childhood. In recognition of National Immunization Awareness Month and the upcoming school year, she shares her perspective on vaccines, parenting, and keeping children healthy.



What inspired you to become a pediatrician?

"I was inspired to become a pediatrician through the joy of working with children and their families, along with the incredible mentorship I received during my pediatric rotations at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. During my residency, I realized how much I loved general pediatrics because it allows me to build lasting relationships with patients and families—from a baby's very first visit through the teenage years—while caring for a wide variety of medical needs."

What's something parents should give themselves more credit for?

"Parents are their child's biggest advocates. If your gut tells you something doesn't seem quite right—whether it feels like a big concern or a small one—don't hesitate to bring it up with your pediatrician. We'll work together as a team to determine whether you need reassurance or the next steps for evaluation and treatment."



What's one thing that helps children have a healthy, successful school year?

"In honor of National Immunization Month and Back to School, ensuring your child is up to date on their vaccinations will keep your child healthy for the school year."

A glimpse into your day that is informative, with a little fun mixed in!

"Each day as a general pediatrician involves seeing a variety of patients whether it is the newborn coming for their first appointment, a child with an ear infection, or seeing a teenager for their sports physical. I also have the wonderful opportunity to teach the future generation of pediatricians in our resident-run continuity clinics!"



Planning for a Strong Year Ahead

The Pediatric Rheumatology team recently came together for a weekend of collaboration, goal-setting, learning, and meaningful discussion as they mapped out priorities for the year ahead. By taking time to connect, reflect, and plan together, the team is strengthening the care, research, and support they provide to children and families. We look forward to seeing all they accomplish in the year ahead!

(Left to right: Melissa Benavidez-Jauregui, RN BSN; Roshelle Davies, RN BSN; Marci Macaraeg MD MSc; Bryanna Padilla, RN BSN; Stephanie Ortega, Pharmacy technician)



Thanks a Bunch



Giving Back Beyond the Lab:

A special thank you to Lucy Pelayo-Katsanis, PNP, and her family for volunteering with Courtney's Courage by preparing a meal for families staying at the Ronald McDonald House. Their generosity and service reflect the compassionate spirit of our Pediatrics community.

Also, thank you to Courtney's Courage for their Christmas in July event!



Arizona Elks:

The Arizona Elks continue their incredible support of Arizona's children!

From Christmas in July/August celebrations with lodges across the state—including Chandler, Kearny, Kingman, Tempe, Tucson East, and beyond—to the recent Arizona Elks Major Projects Tour, their commitment to pediatric care and research remains strong.

For more than **30 years**, the Arizona Elks have supported pediatric research. Dr. Harijith, Dr. Peethambharan, and Nancy, BSN, RNC-NIC, also joined the recent tour. We are grateful for this incredible, longstanding partnership!



Kids of Steele:

A big thank-you to James, a Kids of Steele family member, for helping make the rock garden at the Wilmot Clinic shine! We're so grateful for families who continue to give back to our department in such meaningful ways.



Upcoming Events



Faculty Retreat

September 25th and 26th at Starr Pass
RSVP [here](#) or scan the QR code:



Deadline to RSVP: 8/25/2026



Healthcare Provider Training Information

Tuesday, September 1st 09:15 - 10:15 am

Banner University Medical Center

Facilitated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Continuing Education (CE) Credits Available

[Virtual Option Available](#)



Cystic Fibrosis Education Day

September 12th, 9am - 12pm

For those with CF and those that cannot attend in person; please join on Zoom by scanning the QR code at the time of the event.

RSVP or questions? Contact Kerri Dominguez at 520-329-1431



Fit & Fun Run 5k

2026 Banner Health Fit & Fun Run 5K dates have been officially set!

Tucson: October 10, 2026 Brandi Fenton

Phoenix: October 11, 2026 Freestone Park, Gilbert



The College of Medicine – Tucson's Community Engagement & Partnerships Office offers several ways to take a break, recharge, and connect with our campus community!

Wellness Wag — Need a little stress relief? Stop by and spend some time with some furry friends! Petting dogs can be a simple way to pause, reset, and brighten your day.



Yoga — Take some time to stretch, breathe, and recharge with campus yoga sessions.



Farmers Market — Browse fresh, local offerings and enjoy a little time outside while supporting our community.



Check the [calendar for upcoming dates and make wellness part of your week!](#)

Don't forget / Upcoming action items:

Traveling on University or CME Funds?

If you are planning to travel using University or CME funds, please notify **both** your UA Administrator and Banner OC as early as possible (45-60 days prior) to ensure appropriate approvals and arrangements are completed.

- When traveling, please note there are distinct differences based on funding source. Check with Banner OC or UA Admin to ensure compliance.

What's Up, Doc?

To help streamline communication, department updates will follow a consistent monthly schedule:

- 1st Tuesday: Rotating Faculty / All Department Meeting
- 2nd Tuesday: "What's Up, Doc?" email update
- 3rd Tuesday: Department Newsletter
- 4th Tuesday: "What's Up, Doc?" email update

Please continue reviewing department communications so you don't miss important updates and opportunities.

Recognize a Colleague

Has a faculty member, staff member, resident, fellow, or colleague gone above and beyond?

- We encourage you to recognize outstanding work and contributions. Submit your recognition to the individual's direct supervisor, who can then forward it to Casey Nelson at caseycastle@arizona.edu for department-wide recognition.



Open positions
in Pediatrics:

Banner:
[Click here!](#)

UA:
[Click here!](#)



Upcoming Conferences

September	October	November
1. <u>LEAD</u> 2. <u>Midwest Society for Pediatric Research</u> 3. <u>Pediatric Potpourri</u> 4. <u>Fetal & Neonatal Cardiac Symposium</u> 5. Section on General Academic Pediatrics (SGCMC)	1. <u>AAP National Conf.</u> 2. <u>NASPGHAN</u> 3. <u>ID Week</u> 4. <u>NACFC 2026</u> 5. CPAE meeting	1. <u>American Heart Assoc.</u> 2. <u>SITC 2026</u>

Thank you for reading!

For suggestions or additional recipients that should receive this newsletter, please contact:

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medicine.arizona.edu/pediatrics