



milestones



From left, Francesca Voza, MD '20, with Dr. Joy Howell, assistant dean for diversity and student life and professor of clinical pediatrics at Weill Cornell Medicine

Mastercard Grants \$5M to Set Diversity and Mentorship Standards in Academic Medicine

JOHN ABBOTT

With the goal of establishing mentorship and inclusion standards in academic medicine and health care, a generous \$5 million grant from the Mastercard Impact Fund will fund the launch of a suite of innovative programs to foster and sustain a more diverse faculty at Weill Cornell Medicine. The Diversity-Mentorship Collaborative program will also enhance opportunities for more inclusive access to professional tracks in research and help cultivate and mentor promising candidates from populations underrepresented in medicine (also known as URiM).

“At Mastercard, we’re working hard on building a culture that celebrates what you do and how you do it, not what you look like or where you come from,” says Ajay Banga, executive chairman of Mastercard and a member of the Weill Cornell Medicine Board of Fellows. “That’s how we not only protect ourselves from blind spots, it’s how we drive inclusive innovation that responds to the communities we live and work in and supports them. But building out that culture takes time and a thoughtful approach. It is an honor to support Weill Cornell Medicine on a parallel journey

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to develop first-in-class diversity and mentorship programs that will enhance access to high quality and equitable health care for all.”

Diversity and mentorship are cornerstones of Weill Cornell Medicine’s future success, emphasizes Dr. Augustine M.K. Choi, the Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean of Weill Cornell Medicine.

“At Weill Cornell Medicine, we have established diversity and mentorship as chief priorities and fundamental pillars of our institution’s mission, developing numerous, robust initiatives geared toward increasing representation and nurturing talent in medicine,” says Dean Choi. “We are profoundly grateful to Mastercard for this generous grant, which will enable us to further cultivate generations of exemplary health care leaders whose diverse backgrounds and experiences will serve to advance patient care and medical research.”



Ajay Banga

The Diversity-Mentorship Collaborative will oversee four key faculty diversity and mentorship initiatives:

- **Mastercard Faculty Diversity Incentive Program** will offer salary support for up to two new URiM faculty recruits per year for their first two years at the institution. Faculty who are supported through this initiative will also participate in mentoring programs.
- **Mastercard Pilot Grant Program** will provide up to two years of competitive funding to URiM faculty with promising research projects – allowing them to balance their clinical responsibilities with time in the lab and providing the opportunity to collect preliminary findings for National Institutes of Health career development grants.
- **Mastercard Research Assistance for Primary Parents Program** will allow faculty engaged in research who are also primary caregivers in their household to apply for funding for research assistance. The goal of this initiative

is to help faculty members with the challenges of balancing the research demands and family commitments often felt by young, predominantly female faculty.

- **Mastercard Mentoring Program** will seek to enhance and sustain a culture of mentorship at Weill Cornell Medicine so that all junior faculty will have access to professional career-building connections.

In addition to addressing the critical need to recruit and promote more diverse faculty, the grant will also help Weill Cornell Medicine standardize and expand its faculty mentoring curriculum.

“For faculty members who are underrepresented in medicine or face challenges as the primary parent in their household, building strong mentor relationships can provide them with a model for their own career path’s potential,” explains Dr. Katherine Hajjar, senior associate dean for faculty,

Brine Family Professor of Cell and Developmental Biology, professor of pediatrics in medicine, professor of pediatrics and co-director of the new Diversity-Mentorship Collaborative. “With Mastercard’s support, these programs will allow us to recruit more diverse faculty, nurture their careers and help foster their successes in academic medicine and healthcare.”

The Collaborative will be administered jointly by Weill Cornell Medicine’s

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Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Office of Faculty Development, under the direction of Dr. Hajjar and Dr. Said Ibrahim, senior associate dean for diversity and inclusion and chief of the Division of Healthcare Delivery Science and Innovation. Together, they will convene an advisory committee that will include senior Weill Cornell Medicine faculty and a representative from Mastercard.

“These programs will level the field for all faculty, in both clinical care and research,” says Dr. Ibrahim. “We are incredibly thankful for Mastercard’s support in helping us achieve our goals.”

From Our Dean



Mentoring has always been central to our mission at Weill Cornell Medicine. Our residents and fellows gain valuable clinical skills by observing senior practitioners, discussing cases with supervisors, and honing techniques under guidance. At early stages of their careers, researchers acquire expertise by working in the labs of more established investigators. And, our medical students learn from their teachers, who glean valuable insight from their pupils.

We have also long prioritized diversity at our institution. The culture of collaboration and inclusion creates an environment that is rich with formal and informal knowledge-sharing, bringing individuals together from many backgrounds, with different perspectives and life experiences. This nurturing, pluralistic setting encourages innovative approaches to scientific investigation, and allows us to better serve and connect with our patients, who come to us from around the world.

In order to continue providing our patients with the best possible care, we must create a robust infrastructure that fosters these essential priorities. At Weill Cornell Medicine, we do this by implementing formal mentorship programs, creating initiatives that improve equity and inclusiveness, and encouraging the exchange of knowledge between generations, along with those who are underrepresented in medicine. Our shared goal is to become a national leader in each of these areas, a place where many distinct voices are embraced and amplified within our institution and beyond, to help ensure that the medical community best represents the multicultural and diverse patient population that we serve. It is an ambitious, but necessary, endeavor.

Thanks, in part, to visionary donors like Mastercard, we have already begun to put many key elements of this critical initiative into motion. Our new Diversity-Mentorship Collaborative, featured in our cover story, will allow us to make further strides in each of these areas and provide a new platform upon which to build. By embracing an ethic of mentorship at all levels, and increasing diversity and representation among our faculty, we will be better prepared to meet the ever-changing needs of today's medical landscape.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Augustine M.K. Choi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Augustine M.K. Choi, MD
Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean, Weill Cornell Medicine
Provost for Medical Affairs, Cornell University

Gift from Board Member Igor Tulchinsky to Support Weill Cornell Medicine's Strategic Needs

With a new gift of \$2 million, Board of Fellows member Igor Tulchinsky is generously supporting strategic needs at Weill Cornell Medicine.

Mr. Tulchinsky has long championed research initiatives at Weill Cornell Medicine that utilize predictive tools and quantitative methods to deepen the understanding of genetic factors that drive disease.

Through both the WorldQuant Foundation and his company, WorldQuant, he has supported numerous institutional programs that foster expansion of Weill Cornell Medicine's medical, computational and research capabilities.

WorldQuant, a global quantitative asset management firm founded by Mr. Tulchinsky, who is also its chairman and CEO, develops and deploys systematic investment strategies across a variety of asset classes in global markets, utilizing a proprietary research platform and investment process. He has often pointed to overlaps in the fields of quantitative finance and medical genomics, with prediction a common denominator for both.

"Support for cutting-edge research initiatives can make a meaningful difference for society, including human health," says Mr. Tulchinsky. "Through several years of partnership, I have admired Weill Cornell Medicine's dedication to its mission, and to its focus to advance leading research in the medical field."

"From the start of his relationship with Weill Cornell Medicine, Mr. Tulchinsky has demonstrated a fierce commitment to our mission through impactful contributions that have the potential to improve lives on a global scale. We are profoundly grateful for his ongoing support," says Dr. Augustine M.K. Choi, the Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean. The gift will be used for priority strategic initiatives at the Dean's discretion.

In 2014, the WorldQuant Foundation established a Research Scholar Award (RSA) at Weill Cornell Medicine. RSAs are designed to provide endowed funding to

outstanding scientists who are building independent research programs. The inaugural WorldQuant Research Scholar Award in Physiology and Biophysics was granted to Dr. Christopher Mason, professor of physiology and biophysics, professor of computational genomics in computational biomedicine, and associate professor of neuroscience.

Three years later, Mr. Tulchinsky made a gift of \$5 million through WorldQuant to establish the WorldQuant Initiative for Quantitative Prediction (WQIQP) at Weill Cornell Medicine, a biomedical research initiative that functions in collaboration with scientists and physician investigators at the Caryl and Israel Englander Institute for Precision Medicine and the Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Center.

The initiative expands current strategies used in precision medicine by combining state-of-the-art molecular profiling technologies with advanced financial algorithms and computational methods, optimizing treatment for patients.

The WQIQP is co-directed by Dr. Mason and Dr. Olivier Elemento, the director of the Englander Institute and professor of computational genomics in pathology and

laboratory medicine, of physiology and biophysics, and of computational genomics in computational biomedicine.

The support from the WQIQP has led to a significant boost in productivity and increased government funding for both Dr. Mason and Dr. Elemento.

In 2018, funding from Mr. Tulchinsky enabled the Englander Institute to acquire the Hyperion Imaging System, a sophisticated

set of machines that utilize CyTOF (Cytometry by Time-of-Flight) technology for the real-time analysis of single cells. The technology is a powerful tool for identifying novel therapeutic targets and evaluating newly developed drugs – and has further elevated the research enterprise at Weill Cornell Medicine.



Igor Tulchinsky

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Dean Augustine M.K. Choi



Lazarus Gift Establishes Health Equity Fellowship and Awards in the Weill Department of Medicine

Michael Feldberg and Ruth Lazarus

JOHN ABBOTT

For more than 30 years, Dr. Thomas Nash, a clinical assistant professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine, cared for Charles Lazarus, becoming a family friend and an important advocate for the health and wellbeing of the founder of Toys “R” Us stores. After Mr. Lazarus passed in 2018, his daughter, Ruth Lazarus, son-in-law, Michael Feldberg, and widow, Joan Lazarus, wanted to honor Dr. Nash for his exceptional care.

“Tom was my father’s most amazing advocate for decades,” says Ruth Lazarus, whose father was also a philanthropist. “My father loved and trusted him, so we wanted to do something that was meaningful to Tom.”

Through a generous gift of \$625,000, the three donors have honored Dr. Nash by establishing a two-year Health Equity Research Fellowship and Health Equity Faculty Awards to support underrepresented minority faculty recruitment and retention within the Weill Department of Medicine.

The fellowship will allow future health care leaders to be trained and equipped with skills to implement systemic changes in institutions to promote health equity and diversity. The faculty awards will support early career development for promising young minority investigators, which has proven crucial to recruitment, retention and professional growth.

“This generous gift from the Lazarus family will make a substantial investment in the future of the Department of Medicine,” says Dr. Nash. “Advancements in health



Joan Lazarus

equity are critical to improving the quality of care for all of our patients.”

Dr. Anthony Hollenberg, the Sanford I. Weill Chair of the Weill Department of Medicine, says that the gift will help strengthen the Department of Medicine. “We’re so grateful to receive this support, which provides us with critical resources that will allow us to grow our focus on health equity and diversity,” he says.

During the COVID-19 crisis, racial and ethnic disparities in access to health care, quality of care and outcomes have become even more apparent, and addressing these issues is paramount. Health care institutions

and academic medical centers can play an important role in preventing health disparities by training and promoting underrepresented minority faculty and by elevating awareness of these issues among the staff.

“We all thought that funding this fellowship and faculty awards were incredible ways to address an important issue and have a chance to make a real impact,” says Ruth Lazarus.

“There are a lot of big needs out there, especially now,” adds Mr. Feldberg. “But addressing health disparities is a top priority. We hope that others support it as well and these initiatives continue to expand and grow.”

“During this difficult period where we’re separated and isolated, you want to help others,” says Joan Lazarus. “We are happy to be a part of something as meaningful as this.”

Generous Gifts Establish Research Endowment in Geriatric Psychiatry



Inspired by Weill Cornell Medicine's work to improve mental health in older adults, Shaiza Rizavi and her husband, Jonathan Friedland, have made three generous gifts to establish an endowed fund in support of research in geriatric psychiatry.

The Alay Zamin Rizavi Research Fund in Geriatric Psychiatry – established with the three gifts – will support work in the field. Weill Cornell Medicine's leading physician-scientists in geriatric psychiatry are Dr. George Alexopoulos, director of the Weill Cornell Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry, the Stephen P. Tobin and Dr. Arnold M. Cooper Professor in Consultation Liaison Psychiatry, and professor of psychiatry; and Dr. Faith Gunning, vice chair for research and psychology in the Department of Psychiatry and associate professor of psychology in psychiatry.

The couple's gifts will promote advances in care, research and teaching in geriatric psychiatry with the aim of pioneering new therapies. The fund is named in honor of Ms. Rizavi's late father, a prominent cardiologist who emigrated with his family from Pakistan in the 1970s to pursue a World Health Organization fellowship at what is now NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center.

Four decades after her father's fellowship, the couple began their own exploration of Weill Cornell Medicine and were particularly drawn to the institution's research in the neuroscience of aging, and the development of new treatment tools using digital technologies, including apps and video games. For the geriatric population – which is often underserved and overmedicated – these novel approaches represent an important shift in patient care, Ms. Rizavi states.

"The union between technology and health care provides hope in revealing and addressing some of the greatest challenges," says Ms. Rizavi. "The field of geriatric psychiatry has the potential to be fundamentally transformative, and the research and talent within Weill Cornell Medicine is altering the thinking about how older adults connect with the world. Observing these researchers' innovations to seek better outcomes for their patients, we begin to imagine how lives will change for the better."

Researchers at Weill Cornell Medicine are also using revolutionary MRI techniques to examine brain network abnormalities that are central to mood disorders in older adults and better understand the contributing factors that lead to elderly patients' poor response to antidepressants. The overarching goal is to develop behavioral therapies, digital cognitive interventions and non-invasive neuromodulation treatments that can successfully target this population.

"These visionary gifts from Ms. Rizavi and Mr. Friedland will fortify our ability to advance cutting-edge research in geriatric psychiatry and help us train the next generation of clinician-scientists focused on aging and mental health," says Dr. Francis Lee, chair of the Department of Psychiatry and professor of psychiatry. "We are profoundly grateful for their commitment to the field, and their dedication to improving the lives of so many older adults."



Dr. Alay Zamin Rizavi, at left, during his medical training in the early 1960s in the United Kingdom.

Dean's Council Fall Meeting

The Dean's Council, co-chaired by Board of Fellows members Sanford Ehrenkrantz and Leonard Harlan, hosted its fall meeting virtually on Wednesday, December 2. The meeting featured a panel presentation on "Brain and Behavior: Transforming How We Treat Mood Disorders" with Dr. Faith Gunning, vice chair for research and psychology in the



From left, Dr. Conor Liston (MD '08), Dr. Faith Gunning and Dr. Francis Lee

TRAVIS CURRY

Department of Psychiatry and associate professor of psychology in psychiatry; Dr. Francis Lee, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry; and Dr. Conor Liston (MD '08), associate professor of neuroscience and of psychiatry. The presentation covered the future of mood disorder medicine and highlighted how Weill Cornell Medicine faculty are leveraging technology-based approaches to improve access to interventions and advance highly personalized, more effective treatments across the lifespan. The panel was moderated by Board of Fellows member and Dean's Council Executive Committee member Dr. Mitchell Blatt who also serves as clinical assistant professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine.

Friedman Center Seminar Series Inaugural Lecture

Dr. Jeffrey Gordon, a preeminent nutritional biologist, was the keynote speaker at the inaugural lecture of the Friedman Center for Nutrition and Inflammation Seminar Series on January 25. The webinar focused on the development of microbiota-directed complementary foods for the treatment of childhood undernutrition.

A world-renowned expert in nutrition science, human microbiota and global health, Dr. Gordon is the Dr. Robert J. Glaser Distinguished University Professor

and director of the Edison Family Center for Genome Sciences and Systems Biology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

The Friedman Center Seminar Series brings distinguished speakers from around the world to address the complex relationship between diet, nutrition, the microbiota and the development of inflammatory diseases. It is co-directed by Dr. David Artis, director of the Jill Roberts Institute for Research in Inflammatory Bowel Disease, director of the Friedman

Center for Nutrition and Inflammation, and the Michael Kors Professor of Immunology at Weill Cornell Medicine; and Dr. Deborah Fowell of Cornell University in Ithaca.

The Friedman Center for Nutrition and Inflammation was founded in 2018 with the support of Board of Fellows Vice Chair Barbara Friedman and her husband, Stephen. Researchers work to develop treatments and preventive strategies for such illnesses as cancer, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and inflammatory bowel disease.

Meyer Cancer Center Director's Roundtable



Dr. Cantley

Dr. Altorki

Dr. Barbieri

Dr. Formenti

Dr. Landau

Dr. Varmus

In January, the Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Center launched a virtual monthly series offering an insider's view of the most exciting developments in cancer research and treatment. "Director's Roundtable: Conversations from the Frontlines of Cancer Research" is hosted by Dr. Lewis Cantley, Meyer Director of the Meyer Cancer Center and professor of cancer biology in medicine, and features conversations with Weill Cornell Medicine's top physicians and researchers in the field.

Programs in the series include:

- "The Next Phase of Cancer Research: Where We Are Headed and How to Get There," held on January 13, featured Dr. Cantley in conversation with Nobel laureate Dr. Harold Varmus, the Lewis Thomas University Professor of Medicine.

- "In Pursuit of New Breakthroughs: Piloting Bold Ideas," held on February 9, featured Dr. Dan Avi Landau, associate professor of medicine and assistant professor of physiology and biophysics, and Dr. Christopher Barbieri, the Walter B. Wriston Clinical Research Scholar in Urology and associate professor of urology.

- "Investigator-Initiated Clinical Trials: The Quest to Change Standard of Care," presented on March 10, featured Dr. Nasser Altorki, chief of the division of thoracic surgery, the David B. Skinner, MD Professor of Thoracic Surgery and professor of cardiothoracic surgery; and Dr. Silvia Formenti, chairman of radiation oncology, the Sandra and Edward Meyer Professor of Cancer Research and professor of medicine and of radiation oncology.

- "Precision Medicine and Cancer Treatment: Technologies Leading to Customized Cancer Care," to be held on April 12, will feature Dr. Olivier Elemento, director of the Englander Institute for Precision Medicine, professor of computational genomics in pathology and laboratory medicine, professor of physiology and biophysics, and of computational genomics in computational biomedicine; and Dr. Massimo Loda, chairman of pathology and laboratory medicine and the David D. Thompson Professor of Pathology.

- "In Search of Cures: Why Invest in High-Risk, High-Reward Initiatives?" to be presented on May 4, will feature a conversation with philanthropists and Weill Cornell Medicine donors Mindy and Jon Gray.

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