THE GAVIN HERBERT EYE INSTITUTE GROWS BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS

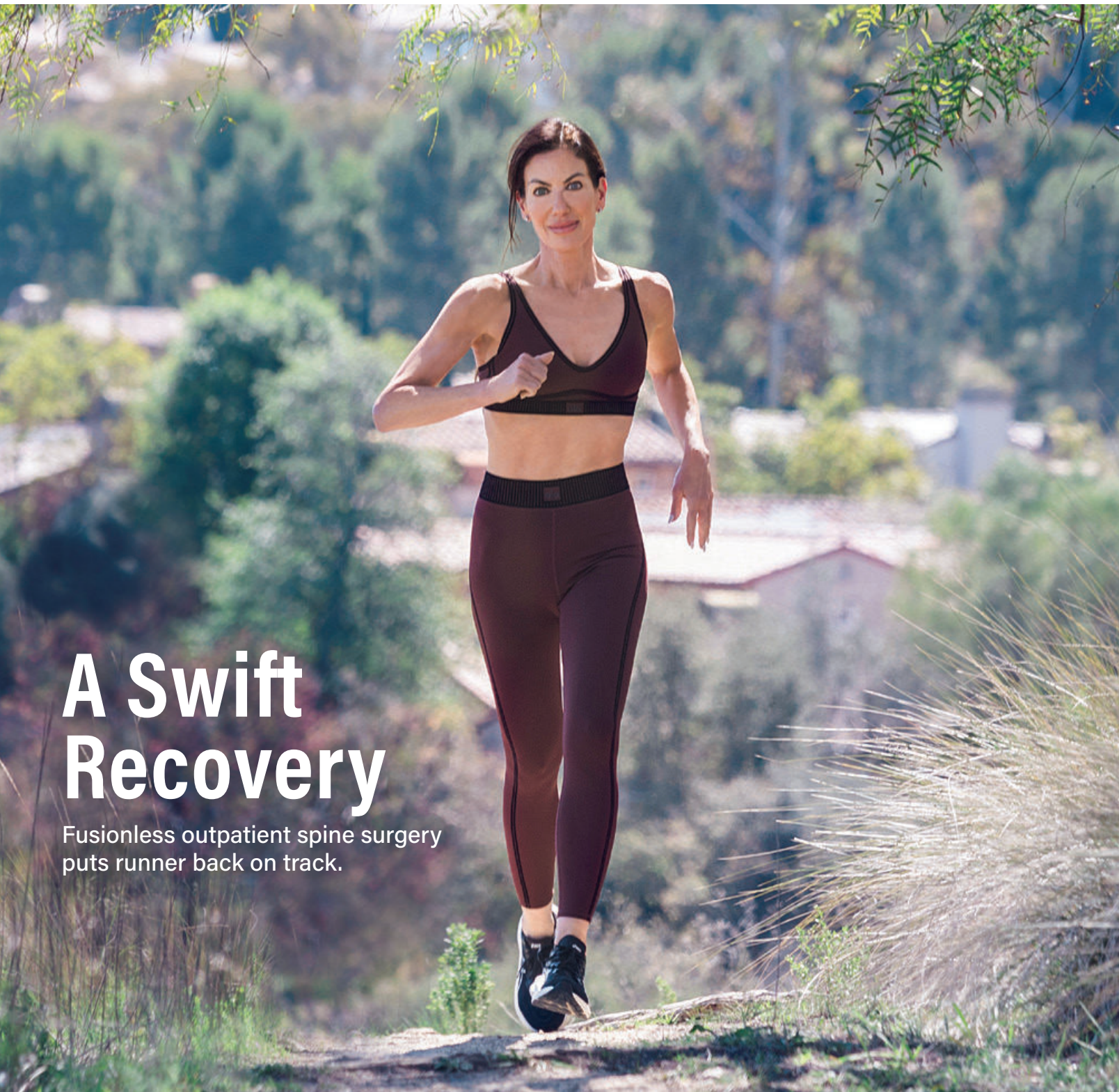
A LIFESAVING TRANSPLANT FOR A CELEBRATED CHEF

UCI Health

SPRING 2025

live well

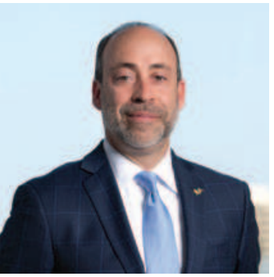
EXCEPTIONAL HEALTHCARE FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



A Swift Recovery

Fusionless outpatient spine surgery puts runner back on track.

BUILDING A HEALTHIER FUTURE



This past year has been a remarkable era of growth for Orange County's only academic health system. Our journey to elevate healthcare throughout our region and beyond is far from over. At UCI Health, we rededicate ourselves daily to delivering the most innovative, high quality, compassionate and accessible care in our region.

In this issue of *Live Well*, we highlight some of this progress. On page 6, we detail spine surgery advances pioneered by Dr. Don Park, one of a handful of U.S. orthopedic surgeons who perform ultra-minimally invasive outpatient procedures without fusion.

On page 10, please read our interview with Dr. Baruch D. Kuppermann, director of the UCI Health Gavin Herbert Eye Institute. We are incredibly proud of the innovations the institute is making to improve ophthalmic health. In recent years, they have built a neuro-ophthalmology and eye cancer program, the nation's second ocular transplant program, a pediatric vision program and a portfolio of potentially breakthrough clinical trials. It is also home to one of the world's foremost vision research centers, where scientists are making discoveries that may one day lead to cures for retinitis pigmentosa, age-related macular degeneration and other blinding disorders.

On page 3, learn how an exciting new technology uses sound waves to destroy cancerous liver tumors without damaging healthy tissue. This noninvasive procedure, called histotripsy, provides options for patients ineligible for conventional treatments. And on page 12, meet a legendary Orange County chef who is flexing his culinary muscles again after a stem cell transplant for a rare and aggressive form of lymphoma.

Achieving these clinical and research milestones requires the most technologically advanced and patient-friendly facilities. We eagerly await the opening of a state-of-the-art, acute care hospital that will complete our $1.3 billion UCI Health — Irvine medical campus. In December, it will join the Joe C. Wen & Family Center for Advanced Care and the Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center and Ambulatory Care building, which opened their doors last year. In 2026, the 52-bed UCI Health Rehabilitation Hospital will begin providing highly skilled care for patients recovering from stroke, traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, as well as burns and orthopedic surgery.

On March 27, we also celebrated the one-year anniversary of our UCI Health Community Network, formed when we acquired four community hospitals to expand our ability to care for patients. UCI Health — Fountain Valley, UCI Health — Lakewood, UCI Health — Los Alamitos and UCI Health — Placentia Linda are helping ensure that everyone in our region has unrestricted access to the highest level of care.

This historic expansion has transformed UCI Health, powered by UC Irvine, into one of the state's largest academic health systems, serving more patients than ever before. We remain committed to investing in and building a healthier future for the people of Orange County and Southern California.

Sincerely,

Chad T. Lefteris, FACHE
President and Chief Executive Officer
UCI Health

UCI Health

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LIQUIFYING LIVER TUMORS WITH SOUND WAVES

WRITTEN BY SHARI ROAN

DISSOLVING INOPERABLE LIVER TUMORS

Histotripsy uses highly focused sound waves to destroy cancer in the liver.

1. A soft membrane containing a water-based substance is placed on the patient's abdomen.
2. Diagnostic ultrasound precisely targets the tumor.
3. Sound wave energy is directed at a single point, creating a bubble cloud that liquifies just the tumor.

Patients with inoperable liver tumors who have few other treatment options can now access a type of noninvasive ultrasound therapy at the UCI Health Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center. It is the first National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center in California to offer the technology, called histotripsy.

Histotripsy uses highly focused sound waves to precisely destroy liver tumors while sparing healthy tissue in a single outpatient procedure. Interventional radiologist Dr. Nadine Abi-Jaoudeh and her colleagues began using the technology in September 2024.

"There is no incision; that is the beauty of it," she says. "The risk of bleeding is very minimal. Patients can remain on blood thinners because we don't have to worry about bleeding or blood clots forming like we do for other procedures."

Histotripsy is being used to treat two types of inoperable liver malignancies: tumors that arise in the liver and those that originate in other organs, such as the colon, and spread to the liver. Liver tumors are typically removed using surgery, thermal ablation, chemoembolization, radioembolization and stereotactic body radiation therapy for early-stage disease.

But some patients cannot undergo any of those procedures, Abi-Jaoudeh says. That's where histotripsy comes in. "These are patients I'm now able to treat."

For cases involving a single lesion, histotripsy can be viewed as a potential cure, she says. For people with metastatic disease, histotripsy can extend life.

Ultrasound is widely known as an imaging system used to locate and target tumors for treatment. The new FDA-approved device, called the Edison System, uses ultrasound data to send focused sound waves into the tumor to destroy it. Patients receive general esthesia to keep them from moving during the procedure, but most go home the same day, Abi-Jaoudeh says.

Histotripsy is new and more data is needed on its long-term effectiveness, she says. A study published in September 2024 in the journal *Radiology* met performance goals in 95% of patients, with a low rate of major complications (7%). In the 44 cases studied, the patients had primary or metastatic liver tumors.

Abi-Jaoudeh says questions remain about whether the treatment works better on some types of cancers than others. Future studies should reveal if histotripsy is an option to remove tumors that are operable. Other studies are exploring the use of histotripsy to treat tumors in other organs.

"There is definitely a learning curve," she adds. "As researchers do studies to compare this to other modalities, histotripsy could potentially replace other treatments."

UCI Health is committed to advancing knowledge in this exciting new arena, she says. "As medicine becomes less and less invasive, this is the next frontier. Offering these kinds of innovative therapies in a patient-centric, controlled manner puts us at the forefront," she says. The cancer center offers patients a wide range of leading cancer treatments as well as access to more than 500 cancer clinical trials.

"It's important to me to give patients all the options and to explain that this is something new, and here is the data behind it," she says. "We look at patients in a multidisciplinary way so that they can make informed decisions." ■

Learn more about histotripsy at ucihealth.org/liver-cancer

CLEMONS FAMILY GIFT TO SUPPORT ADVANCED CANCER RESEARCH

The Clemons Family Foundation has pledged $11 million to support cancer research and provide capital funding for the Falling Leaves Foundation Medical Innovation Building, which is under construction on the UC Irvine campus, as well as the Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center and Ambulatory Care building at UCI Health — Irvine.

"We are profoundly grateful to the Clemons family for this remarkable gift," says Dr. Steve Goldstein, vice chancellor for health affairs. "Their commitment to advancing cancer research and vision sciences will have a lasting impact on our community and far beyond."

Of the gift, $9 million will endow a cancer research fund at the innovation building. Another $1 million is earmarked for finish construction of the facility, including naming the fifth floor the Clemons Family Foundation Terrace.

The final $1 million will enable completion of the UCI Health — Irvine medical complex. In recognition of the gift, a 736-square-foot terrace on the fourth floor of the Irvine cancer center is named the Clemons Family Outdoor Patient Infusion Area, where patients can undergo chemotherapy in a calming space overlooking the San Joaquin Marsh Reserve.

The Clemons Family Foundation is supported by a philanthropic trust of Newport Beach resident Marie Clemons and her children, V. Gordon Clemons Jr. and Anne Marie Clemons-Thomas.

Anne Marie Clemons-Thomas (left), V. Gordon Clemons Jr. and Marie Clemons' support for cancer research will be commemorated in a terrace named for their family foundation at the Falling Leaves Foundation building in the background.

MAJOR GRANT TARGETS STEM CELL RESEARCH FOR NOVEL CANCER THERAPY

Dr. Michael Demetriou's insights about abnormal sugar chains on cancer cells may lead to a treatment for all cancer types.

A UC Irvine scientist has received a $4.6 million grant for an immune system therapy with the potential to target all major cancer types. The award from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) will accelerate Dr. Michael Demetriou's work targeting abnormal sugar chains on all major cancer cell types with genetically modified CAR T cells.

Chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cells are the most potent cancer therapies in clinical use, yet the vast majority of cancer types remain untreatable due to toxic crossreactivity with normal cells. To solve this problem, Demetriou and his lab's scientists genetically modified CAR T cells to attack the abnormal sugar chains called glycans in animal models. The modified cells — named glycan-dependent T cell recruiter, or GlyTR (pronounced glitter) — attach themselves to cancer cells, triggering cancer death

"GlyTR CAR T cells have the unique potential to not only treat the vast majority of cancer types but to do it safely," says Demetriou.

The current grant award is intended to support further translational work needed to bring the novel immunotherapy to clinical trials, in partnership with the UC Irvine Sue & Bill Gross Stem Cell Research Center.

Dr. Richard Van Etten, director of the Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center, is among the doctors named 2025's Physicians of Excellence.

HOME TO MORE THAN 200 PHYSICIANS OF EXCELLENCE

Once again, UCI Health leads the way with more than 200 of its doctors named Physicians of Excellence by the Orange County Medical Association, more than any other health system in the region.

The medical association's Physicians of Excellence program, now in its 21st year, is regarded as having a fair, unbiased selection process for identifying physicians who have exhibited the skills, training and commitment to their patients and the community to stand above their peers. Here's what it takes to be selected as an Orange County Physician of Excellence:

- Be certified by a member board within the American Board of Medical Specialties, the American Board of Osteopathic Medical Specialties or an equivalent board recognized by the Medical Board of California or the Osteopathic Medical Board of California.
- Be in good standing with the Medical Board of California or the Osteopathic Medical Board of California.
- Have maintained their primary practice in Orange County for the last five years.
- Have practiced within their specialty for the last five years.
- Demonstrate achievements in two of the following areas: physician leadership; teaching/mentoring; medical research/ scientific advances; humanitarian service and unique community service contributions.

The list of honorees was published in the January 2025 issue of *Orange Coast Magazine*.

UCI HEALTH RECEIVES DOUBLE HONORS FOR TOP-QUALITY PATIENT CARE

For the fourth consecutive year, UCI Medical Center, the flagship of the UCI Health system, has been listed by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of its 2025 Best Hospitals for Maternity Care, reaffirming its status as a leader in providing safe, high-quality care for mothers and infants. Orange County's only academic medical center has earned the highest available rating, and it is also regularly listed as high performing in the *U.S. News* annual survey of top adult specialties.

The high-performance areas include minimizing avoidable C-sections, encouraging breastfeeding, high rates of vaginal births after previous cesarean section and a low episiotomy rate of less than 5%. UCI Health Maternity Services is also renowned for pioneering an assessment tool to better predict the risk of cardiovascular disease during pregnancy.

Two UCI Health hospitals also are recent recipients of the Women's Choice Award for Best Hospitals. UCI Medical Center and UCI Health — Placentia Linda were recognized for offering a high-quality and safe patient experience. Honorees are chosen based on "relevant clinical performance, patient satisfaction and appropriate accreditations to help women make smart healthcare choices," the organization said.

8TH ANNUAL ANTI-CANCER CHALLENGE RAISES RECORD $1.5 MILLION

The 2024 UC Irvine Anti-Cancer Challenge set new records with 4,200 participants and a fundraising total of $1.5 million. On Oct. 5 at Aldrich Park on the university campus, event participants cycled, ran and walked to raise money for critical cancer research at the UCI Health Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center.

The event brought total contributions to $6.2 million since the first ride, run and walk in 2017. To date, $4.7 million has been awarded for 123 pilot projects and numerous early-phase clinical trials.

"Breaking fundraising and participation records underscores the incredible dedication of our community in the fight against cancer," says event founder, Dr. Richard A. Van Etten, the cancer center's director.

Visit anti-cancerchallenge.org to register for the ninth annual event on Oct. 11, 2025.

Moving With Ease

Ultra-minimally invasive spine surgery ends years of pain and restores flexibility.

WRITTEN BY LAUREL DIGANGI
PHOTOGRAPHED BY REMY HAYNES

Heather Austin has always been passionate about her morning run. Running energized her and helped her balance the emotional demands of working as a clinical social worker. But three years ago, she began experiencing increasingly severe nerve pain that felt like "electric shocks" traveling from her hips to her knees and later to her ankles.

Over time, she could barely walk without excruciating pain. Running was impossible. Physical therapy offered only temporary relief. She tried steroid medications, anti-inflammatory treatments, muscle relaxants, ibuprofen and even epidurals. Each time the symptoms returned, the pain was worse, making even basic chores and activities difficult for the mother of two busy teenagers.

At age 49, Austin was diagnosed with severe lumbar stenosis — a narrowing of the lower spinal canal that puts pressure on the spinal nerves — and a vertebra that had slipped out of place. Every doctor she consulted, whether it was a neurosurgeon or an orthopedic spine specialist, recommended major surgery: a laminectomy plus spinal fusion. Fearing not only a long recovery but also how fusion would limit the physical activities she cherished, she searched for alternatives.

An accidental encounter with Dr. Don Y. Park, a UCI Health orthopedic surgeon who specializes in ultra-minimally invasive surgical techniques, gave her hope that there was another way.

A SERENDIPITOUS MEETING

One day in July 2024 while on her lunch break at UCI Medical Center in Orange, the social worker saw a text message from her husband about an "amazing doctor" who performs minimally invasive surgeries for spinal stenosis, with a photo and a link. When she looked up a few seconds later, Austin saw the man whose face was on her phone screen walking in her direction.

The Irvine resident held up her phone, asked Park if he was the man in the photo, then breathlessly introduced herself and explained her situation. Days later, she met with Park, who had already examined her X-rays and scans. He said she was a good candidate for endoscopic spinal decompression, an ultra-minimally invasive procedure without laminectomy or spinal fusion. Best of all, it could be performed on an outpatient basis.

"I was so happy, I called my mother to say I might not need fusion surgery after all."

Although Austin's symptoms were severe, spinal stenosis is fairly common — especially as people age — due to wear and tear to their spines over time, says Park, director of the new Advanced Endoscopic and Outpatient Spine Program at UCI Health and a professor at the UC Irvine School of Medicine.

Her passion for life nearly extinguished by pain, Heather Austin discovers a UCI Health surgeon who leads the way in performing fusionless, minimally invasive spine surgery.

"Typically, stenosis starts with disc degeneration, which leads to arthritis in the joints of the spine and bone spurs, as well as thickening of the spinal ligaments," says Park, an international expert in endoscopic spine surgery who was recruited from UCLA to launch the program.

"This leads to nerve compression, causing sciatic pain going down the legs, especially while walking and standing."

For patients who do not improve with nonsurgical treatments, the traditional surgical intervention is a lumbar laminectomy to remove bony arches surrounding the compressed area of the spinal canal to relieve pressure on the spinal cord.

"This requires a big incision in the middle of the back," says Park, who used to perform these standard procedures. "The surgeon then pulls back the muscles covering the spine to visualize the bones."

Open surgery carries the risk of a range of potential complications, including the chance of long-term pain after surgery.

A MINIMALLY INVASIVE OPTION

Park's minimally invasive approach, which he has used since 2020, employs an endoscope, a flexible tube with a high-powered light and a high-definition camera about 5 millimeters in diameter.

"I make a tiny incision to place the endoscope at the spine where the problem is," he says. "Then I make a second incision of about 7 or 8 millimeters to insert thin tubes with specialized surgical instruments. The endoscopic camera magnifies the surgical field 200 times, so I'm able to see and remove any pathological structures, like areas of bony overgrowth that are compressing the nerves and causing symptoms.

"I'm also able to preserve most of the patient's normal anatomy so there's very minimal tissue damage or trauma."

For some procedures, he is able to perform surgery with a single tiny incision.

Park, a pioneer in the use of augmented reality (AR), was the first U.S. physician to use the enhanced visualization tool for an endoscopic spine surgery. More recently, he performed the world's first endoscopic spinal fusion procedure using AR, which also provides computer-generated navigation information to improve precision.

Before meeting Park, Austin feared she would never again enjoy daily runs, Pilates classes and yoga.

He learned the specialized endoscopic technique in South Korea from surgeons who had done thousands of the outpatient procedures since it was developed there in 2012. "This minimally invasive endoscopic approach has exploded in Europe, South America and India," he says. "By the time I learned it, the procedure was very advanced, with fully developed protocols and refined techniques."

Today, when he is not performing procedures in a surgical suite designed for his ultra-minimally invasive approaches, he teaches his technique to other surgeons, including his UCI Health colleagues. Most recently, he traveled to Tanzania to train doctors from several east African countries.

> "What's important is that we perform the right surgery for each patient."

TAILORING SURGERY TO THE PATIENT

Austin's case was particularly severe due to the length of time she had endured pain, Park says. "Many surgeons had offered spinal fusion to Heather because they probably thought they couldn't decompress the spinal cord well enough without a high risk of causing instability that could lead to further symptoms later."

Fortunately, Austin's slipped vertebra was stable — meaning it didn't move back and forth — so fusion wasn't needed. But even in cases of unstable vertebra slippage, the surgeon can perform spinal fusions endoscopically.

Park has also used the endoscopic technique to perform surgeries on the upper (cervical) spine and the mid (thoracic) spine. That said, not all patients are good candidates for the endoscopic approach.

"Traditional open surgery is necessary when you need a big correction, like scoliosis or trauma surgeries, or when there are tumors that need to be removed with clean margins," he says. "What's important is that we perform the right surgery for each patient."

For Austin, endoscopic surgery was the right choice and came none too soon. "One day at work, the pain was wrapping around my entire body," she says. "I felt like I was going to pass out. I was put in a wheelchair and my husband had to drive me home."

Austin was nervous about her upcoming surgery at the UCI Health — Irvine outpatient surgery center. "I'd never had surgery before. But the nurses, the anesthesiologist, Dr. Park and everyone walked me through the process. Overall, it was a great experience."

After surgery, Austin woke up feeling immediate relief. Later, while being taken by wheelchair to her car, she braced for a bump, expecting pain, and cried "Ow!"

"When the nurse asked if I was OK, I realized I hadn't felt any pain at all."

The next day, she and her husband went for a 20-minute walk. After two weeks of experiencing just "a little bit of soreness," she drove to her postoperative meeting and told Park that she was absolutely pain-free.

QUICKER RECOVERY, LESS PAIN

Austin's experience is typical with the minimally invasive procedure. "When they wake up after surgery, most patients tell me they don't have much pain in their back and their leg pain is gone," Park says. "Two weeks later, they're back to normal activities."

Even patients in their 80s and 90s who have been treated with the endoscopic approach are able to bounce back with minimal pain, he says.

Park envisions the new program becoming a beacon for minimally invasive endoscopic spine surgery in the United States, a world-class place where residents and fellows are trained in the most up-to-date techniques and with the most advanced technology.

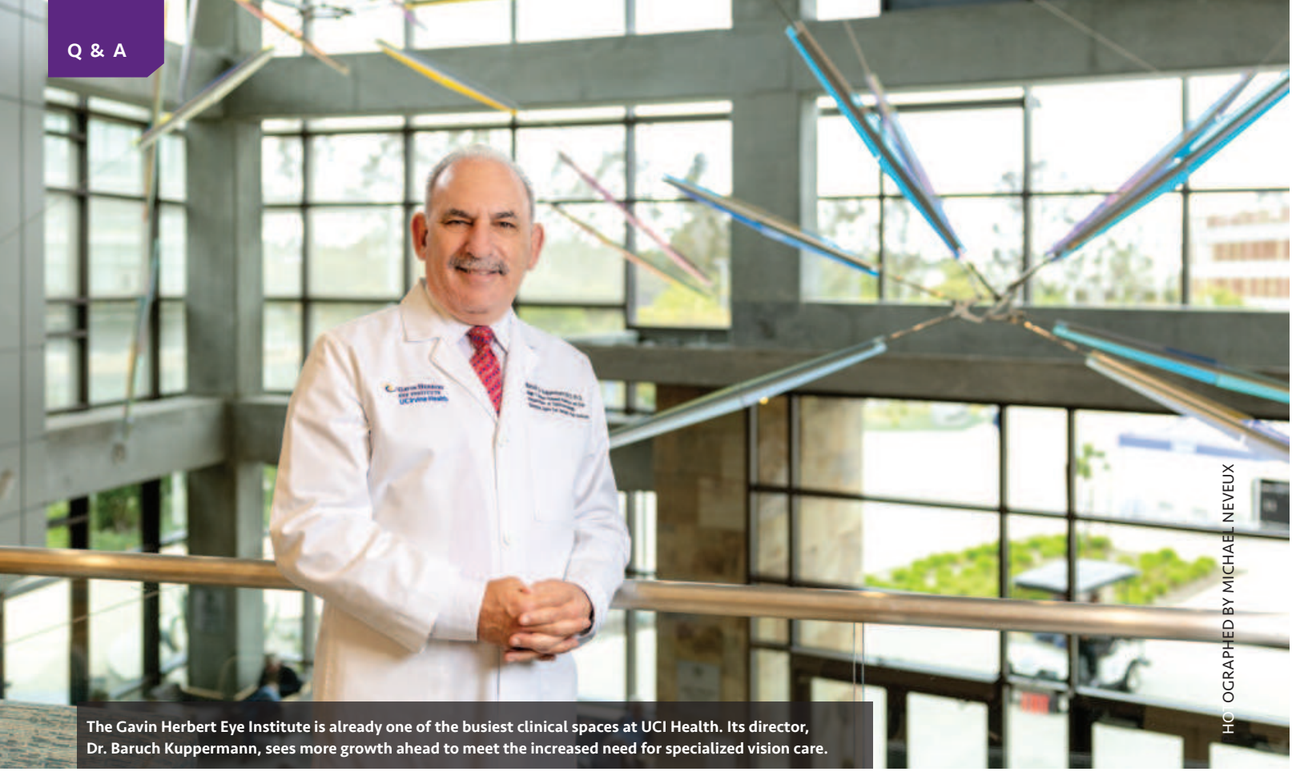
"I do this job to see the impact on patients," he says. "Especially in cases like Heather's because there was such a night-and-day difference. That is very gratifying."

Austin, now 50, is back to her 3-mile runs most mornings. She does yoga and Pilates to build her flexibility and core strength. The scars on her back "look like two little freckles," she says.

"Thanks to Dr. Park, I feel like myself again!" ■

Learn more at ucihealth.org/spine

Exercising in the dappled sunlight, Austin is grateful to have her active life back.



The Gavin Herbert Eye Institute is already one of the busiest clinical spaces at UCI Health. Its director, Dr. Baruch Kuppermann, sees more growth ahead to meet the increased need for specialized vision care.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL NEVEUX

EYE ON THE FUTURE

The Gavin Herbert Eye Institute soars in its second decade.

WRITTEN BY NANCY BRANDS WARD

The UCI Health Gavin Herbert Eye Institute's opening in 2013 ignited a decade of growth in vision research and clinical care, achieving a long-pursued goal: establishing a world-renowned eye institute in Orange County. Today the institute provides the full range of state-of-the-art ophthalmic services and conducts leading-edge research aimed at curing eye diseases and reversing blindness.

Future plans include launching new medical programs as well as expanding basic and clinical research efforts in a building under construction near the eye institute in Irvine, says Baruch Kuppermann, MD, PhD, the institute's director and the Roger F. Steinert professor and chair of UC Irvine School of Medicine's Department of Ophthalmology. *Live Well* asked Kuppermann to describe the institute's progress and what lies ahead.

What has fueled the extraordinary growth of the institute?
We have hired more top-notch clinicians to meet growing patient demand for our services. We also have recruited leading scientists who are working to discover cures for blinding diseases. As we expand our surgical and laboratory spaces, we will be doubling our capacity to treat patients as well as conduct groundbreaking research. Today our faculty includes 26 physicians and 76 researchers, up from 15 and 23 in 2013, when we opened our doors.

What are some of the newer programs that have expanded vision care?
We now have an ocular oncologist leading our first eye tumor program. We have four neuro-ophthalmologists who treat vision problems related to the nervous system. This summer we will be welcoming a fifth clinician who is developing whole eye transplants. Our new Irene and John Graether, MD, Endowed Vision Fellowship allows us to provide specialized training in pediatric eye surgeries. Our pediatric eye mobile, supported entirely by donations, continues to help save the eyesight of underserved children for a second decade.

What potential research breakthroughs are on the horizon?
One of the most exciting research areas is genome editing to restore vision in people with retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic condition that destroys the eye's photoreceptors. We are working with Ray Therapeutics on a technique that involves a single injection of bioengineered proteins that are reprogrammed to act like photoreceptors. That's the promise of gene therapy: to be "one and done." Patients with severe vision loss are being recruited for a phase 1, first-in-human clinical trial of the technology at the UCI Alpha Clinic.

How are your scientists approaching vision loss from age-related macular degeneration (AMD)?
We have developed unique ways to map the retina to better understand this disease. AMD is a type of central vision loss that affects 1 in 10 people over age 50. Our researchers are exploring the genetic underpinnings of the disease, which may lead to a cure. Here, too, we are focused on the potential of stem cells to reverse damage caused by AMD.

What other innovative clinical treatment programs has the institute launched?
We're one of only two programs in the nation — and the only one west of the Mississippi — to offer stem-cell transplants to patients with severe eye surface damage. It is usually caused by contact with chemicals or extreme heat and often occurs in younger adults. Because cells that manage the healing process were destroyed when the eye was damaged, a cornea transplant isn't possible. However, we use immunosuppressant therapy based on UCI Health kidney transplant protocols to keep the body from attacking the transplanted cells, allowing us to restore some vision in these patients.

How will lab space in UC Irvine's new Falling Leaves Foundation Medical Innovation Building help advance eye care?
The Falling Leaves building will be home to 12 high-impact, interdisciplinary ophthalmology research programs. When our Center for Translational Vision Research and its Precision Genome Editing program move into the building, we will accelerate collaboration among geneticists and eye research specialists to develop more effective sight-preserving technologies. That collaboration and the investment in research taken directly from the laboratory bench to clinical bedsides will be instrumental in making further progress toward curing blindness.

What else is in the eye institute's future?
We're excited to be providing world-class eye care for Orange County and beyond. Our work has doubled over the last seven years. We see 100,000 patients and perform 5,000 surgeries annually. Those numbers are projected to double in another five to seven years. We also will be offering eye care services at our first satellite office in Brea this summer, with plans to add more clinical locations in the years ahead. Our goal is to bring leading-edge vision care close to people in their own communities. ■

Dr. Baruch Kuppermann consults with ophthalmoligy services staff member Sookyung Farley.

BY THE NUMBERS

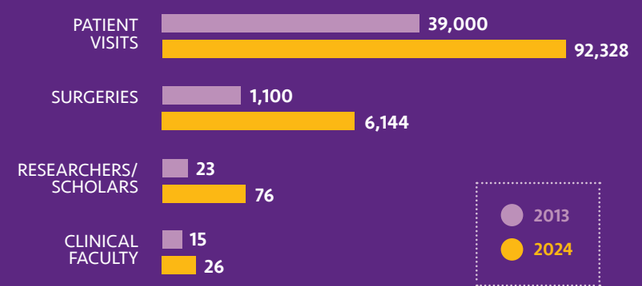
Since opening its doors in 2013, the UCI Health Gavin Herbert Eye Institute has experienced enormous growth, becoming a national leader in vision research and clinical care.

58 clinical trials since inception

$107 million total grant funding over 10 years

100,000+ patients will be seen in 2025

No. 12 in U.S. eye research funding, up from No. 32 in 2013*



** The Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research annually ranks National institutes of Health funding for research.*

Learn more about the Gavin Herbert Eye Institute at ucihealth.org/eye-care

Recipe for Success

Chef extraordinaire turns to UCI Health after his cancer treatments fail.

WRITTEN BY NANCY SOKOLER STEINER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL NEVEUX

In July 2022, Pascal Olhats was stunned to learn that his rare and aggressive type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma had recurred. The celebrated chef, then 66, had been in remission after a 2018 transplant of his own stem cells at a Southern California cancer center far from his Tustin home.

But his UCI Health oncologist, Dr. Lauren Pinter-Brown, had some good news to temper Olhats' distress over his relapse with angioimmunoblastic T-cell lymphoma. The UCI Health Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center had opened Orange County's only adult bone marrow transplant program at UCI Medical Center in Orange. Now he could undergo a second, more complex procedure close to home.

The highly skilled team with the Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant and Cellular Therapy Program is led by Dr. Stefan Ciurea, an international leader in stem cell transplantation and cellular therapies. Ciurea has pioneered using haploidentical or "half-matched" donor stem cells — from a parent, sibling or child whose cells partially match — instead of the patient's own cells or a fully matched relative. He also has developed a new approach to harness the body's own natural killer immune cells to decrease the risk of relapse after transplantation.

"We are one of the world leaders in haploidentical donation," Ciurea says. "Because it is a higher-risk procedure, many centers don't do it."

The UCI Health program has performed more than 250 lifesaving procedures since it opened in the spring 2020. The multidisciplinary team includes stem cell transplant specialists, medical oncologists, hematologists, transfusion medicine experts, radiation oncologists and many others. The team's highly experienced nurse navigators, social workers, dietitians and supportive care specialists also play an essential role, guiding patients through the intensive and lengthy process.

Olhats would need all their expertise. His relapse posed several hurdles. This time, he couldn't use his own stem cells. But no suitable matching donor emerged from the National Bone Marrow Registry, and his brothers were too old to donate. His oldest daughter enthusiastically volunteered, but she lived in France.

"This was a special situation," Ciurea says. "We knew we had a haploidentical donor but she was in Europe. The team had to coordinate the collection of her stem cells in Belgium and arrange their overnight transport to UCI Medical Center."

Chef Pascal, as he is known professionally, faced an exhaustive process. But the award-winning French-born culinary pioneer — who launched the farm-to-table movement in Orange County with his critically acclaimed restaurants, Tradition, Café Jardin and Pascal's Tea Garden Creperie — knew how to push past obstacles.

First came intensive chemotherapy to kill Olhats' immune system so his body would accept donor cells. This meant a long hospital stay to avoid exposure to any pathogens. In March 2023, he was infused with his daughter's healthy stem cells and remained in isolation several more weeks to allow his new blood cells and immune system to rebuild. Next came many months of regular tests and infusions to support his new immune system.

Throughout the process, he says, "I was so well taken care of. I was treated as a person, not a number. I was there so long, it was like a second home."

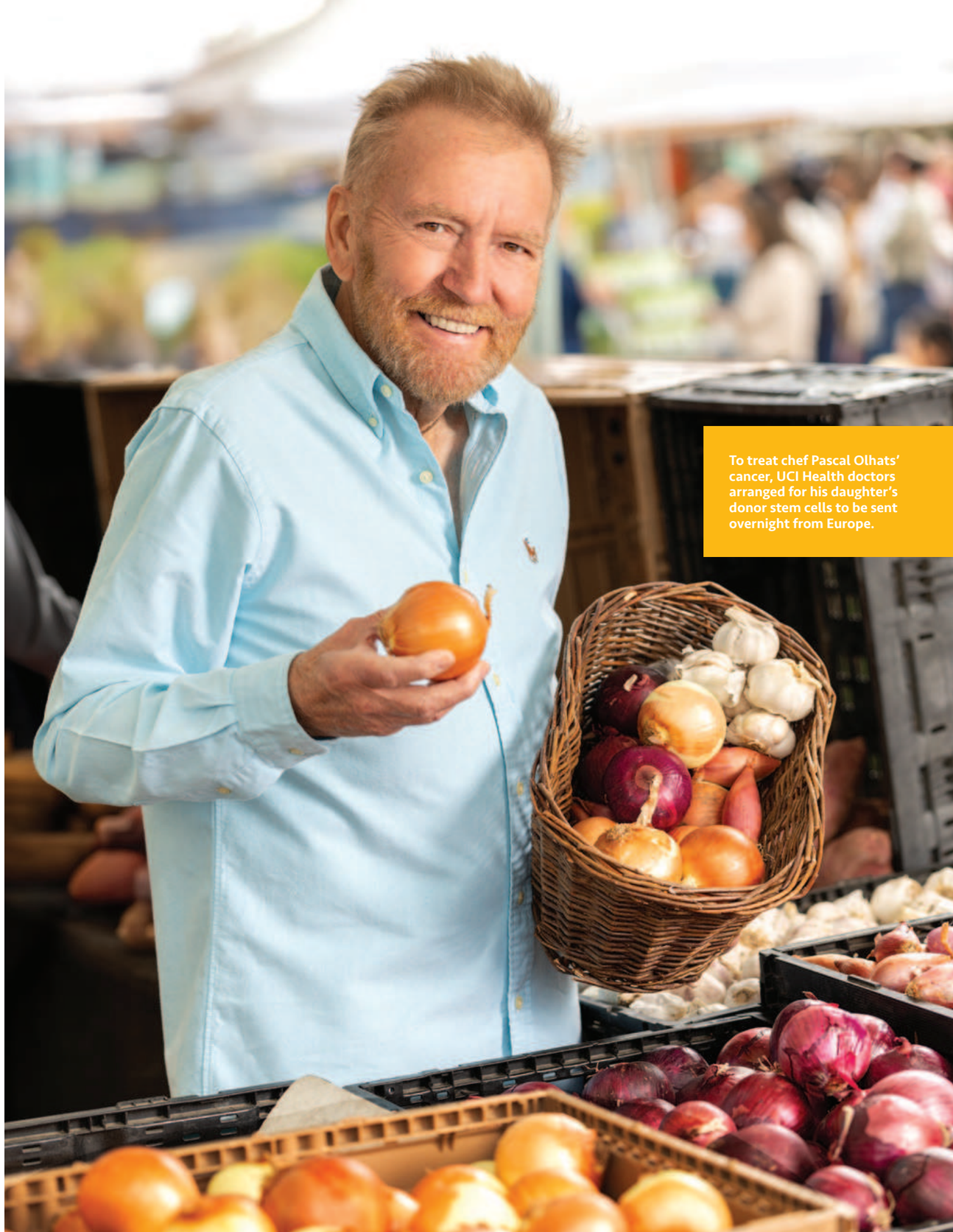
Two years later, Olhats, now 69, has had no recurrence and he's feeling stronger than he has in years. He may not be ready to stand 12 hours a day as a full-time chef, but he is teaching culinary arts at Saddleback College in Mission Viejo again and he will lead a river cruise this spring to share the wines and unique cuisines of Burgundy and Provence with travelers.

Olhats' doctors are optimistic. "The further away he is from his transplant, the less chance it will recur," says Pinter-Brown. " Adds Ciurea, "Data show that after two years, the likelihood of relapse is really low."

He haunts local farmers markets and is working with a San Diego County organic farm known for its wide variety of mushrooms, grateful to be doing what he loves.

"I wake up every day thanks to probably the best medical care in the world," Olhats says. "Not only the transplant team but the other nurses, specialists, reception and pharmacy staff, even the valet staff. This village of hardworking people made me feel I was getting the best treatment possible. I wouldn't go anywhere else." ■

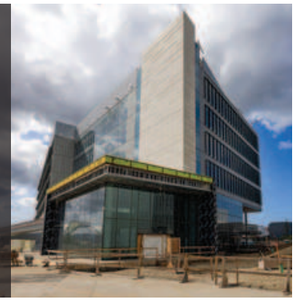
Learn more about cellular cancer treatments at ucihealth.org/stem-cell-transplant



To treat chef Pascal Olhats' cancer, UCI Health doctors arranged for his daughter's donor stem cells to be sent overnight from Europe.

The new acute-care hospital under construction at UCI Health — Irvine takes its place on the skyline, centered between the Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center and Ambulatory Care building, at left, and the second of two parking structures at the medical campus.

Sparks fly as a worker trims a metal beam inside the new hospital.



A closer view of the hospital exterior. At left, light streams through the many windows of this as yet unfinished hallway.

PHOTOS FOR UCI HEALTH

A TALL ORDER TAKING SHAPE

Construction of the nation's first all-electric hospital is entering the home stretch at UCI Health — Irvine.

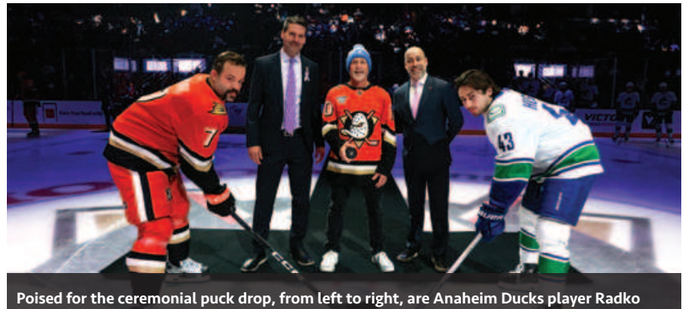
The seven-story, 350,000-square-foot acute-care hospital will merge the most advanced technologies with environmentally sustainable, patient-friendly healing spaces, setting the template for inpatient hospitals of the future when it opens in December 2025.

With the exterior mostly finished, construction teams are now completing work on the hospital's 144 rooms, each one equipped to provide the highest level of acute care and patient comfort; 10 operating suites outfitted with the most advanced surgical technologies; and the 24-hour emergency department, which will have 20 state-of-the-science treatment rooms.

HOCKEY FIGHTS CANCER NIGHT

UCI Health patient and prostate cancer survivor Steve Mellem is honored by the Anaheim Ducks on Hockey Fights Cancer Night at the Honda Center in Anaheim.

Steve Mellem, at right, and his delighted grandchildren cluster around Ducks mascot Wild Wing.



Poised for the ceremonial puck drop, from left to right, are Anaheim Ducks player Radko Gudas, team President Aaron Teats, honoree Steve Mellem, UCI Health President and CEO Chad Lefteris and Quinn Hughes of the Vancouver Canucks.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANAHEIM DUCKS

Left to right, Kent Clayton, UCI Health — Los Alamitos CEO; Dr. Ramandeep Brar, chief of staff; Chad T. Lefteris, UCI Health president and CEO; Dr. Prakash Narain, board chair; Tatyana Popkova, UCI Health chief strategy officer, and other leaders celebrate the one-year anniversary of the UCI Health Community Network.

Fountain Valley CEO Randy Rogers, center, marks the occasion with his team of healthcare professionals.

Placentia Linda CEO Fred Valtairo, center, presents the anniversary cake to his energetic team of co-workers.

Lakewood CEO Virgis Narbutas, center, proudly displays their anniversary cake with his delighted group of co-workers.

UCI HEALTH PHOTOS

STRONGER TOGETHER

Cake, cookies, photo booths, pet therapy dogs and much fanfare marked the first anniversary celebrations for the UCI Health Community Network — created by the historic acquisition of four community hospitals.

The acquisition on March 27, 2024, transformed UCI Health into one of the state's largest academic health systems with 1,317 beds. Since then, UCI Health has provided access to more care than ever, with its number of patients soaring nearly 200% and visits to outpatient locations jumping 77%.

"We are investing in building a healthier future for people that harnesses the power of advanced medicine with the convenience of care available close to home," said Chad T. Lefteris, president and chief executive officer of UCI Health, who celebrated with network leaders and co-workers at UCI Health — Los Alamitos.

Lefteris also honored co-workers at the three additional pillars of the network: UCI Health — Fountain Valley, UCI Health — Lakewood and UCI Health — Placentia Linda.

"By working together, our co-workers and clinicians are strengthening our culture of innovation and service excellence, ensuring our patients receive the best possible care close to home," added Los Alamitos CEO Kent Clayton.

The UCI Health pet therapy dogs also helped celebrate the anniversary. Meg, a Newfoundland, cheerfully poses with two Los Alamitos co-workers.

HEALTH CLASSES

Our classes can help improve your well-being and prevent disease. Nearly all are free, but some do have fees. Registration is required. Most classes are held online via Zoom.

Visit ucihealth.org/events or call 657-282-6357 for more information.

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES
May 6, June 3, July 1, Aug. 6 | Noon–1:30 p.m.

BARIATRIC SURGERY & WEIGHT LOSS
May 20, June 17, July 15, Aug. 19 | 6–7 p.m.

DIABETES OVERVIEW
May 28, June 25, July 30, Aug. 27 | 3:30–4:30 p.m.

HEALTHY LIVING
May 6, 20; June 3, 17; July 1, 15, 29; Aug. 12, 26 | 3–4 p.m.
Call 714-456-3739 to register.

LIVING WELL WITH HEART FAILURE
May 12, July 8, Sept. 9 | 3:30–4:30 p.m.

NEWBORN CARE
May 8, June 12, July 10, Aug. 14 | 6–9 p.m.

PRENATAL BREAST FEEDING
May 1, June 5, July 3, Aug. 7, Sept. 4 | 6–9 p.m.

PRENATAL PELVIC FLOOR WORKSHOP
May 1, June 5, July 3, Aug. 7, Sept. 4 | 1–2 p.m.

PREPARING FOR SURGERY — MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT
May 5, June 2, July 7, Aug. 4 | Noon–1 p.m.

PLANT-BASED COOKING WORKSHOP
Aug. 4 | Noon–1 p.m.

STROKE PREVENTION
English: May 28, July 30, Sept. 24 | 4–5 p.m.
Spanish: May 27, July 29, Sept. 23 | 4–5 p.m.
To register, call 866-STROKE-3 (866-787-6533).

MEDICARE BASICS

Learn about new 2025 Medicare rules, plan changes and UCI Health offerings at one of our free informational classes. Classes will cover basic Medicare, Medicare Supplemental plans and Medicare Advantage PPO plans.

May 2, June 12 | 5–6:30 p.m.

For questions or to register, call 714-456-2210. Registration is required to receive the Zoom link. All classes are hosted by a UCI Health representative.

EVENTS

UCI Health and UC Irvine are proud to sponsor community events and lectures on a variety of health issues.

"MEDICINE IN OUR BACKYARD" NEWPORT BEACH LIBRARY LECTURES

April 28 | Managing memory loss
Brian Hitt, MD, UCI Health cognitive and memory disorders specialist

May 19 | Treating melanoma and other skin cancers
Janellen Smith, MD, and Jessica Shiu, MD, UCI Health dermatologists and skin cancer specialists

Presentations begin at 7 p.m. at the Newport Beach Central Library, 1000 Avocado Ave., Newport Beach. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. A Q&A will follow the doctor's lecture. Visit nbplf.foundation/programs/medicine-in-our-backyard to register for these free talks.

UCI HEALTH — FOUNTAIN VALLEY COMMUNITY LECTURE

May 14 | Stroke treatment and prevention
Nirav S. Patel, MD, medical director of the Stroke Program for UCI Health — Fountain Valley, and UCI Health — Los Alamitos

This free, in-person lecture will be held at 11 a.m. at the Founders Village Senior & Community Center, 17967 Bushard St., Fountain Valley. Registration is required. Call 714-593-4446 for more information.

UCI HEALTH — PLACENTIA LINDA COMMUNITY LECTURE

May 21 | Managing lower back pain: What's right for me?
David W. Lee, MD, UCI Health musculoskeletal and pain medicine specialist

This free, in-person talk will be held at 6 p.m. at the Yorba Linda Public Library Community Room, 4852 Lakeview Ave. Registration is required. Please contact Christine Turmala at cturmala@hs.uci.edu for more information.

SUE & BILL GROSS STEM CELL RESEARCH CENTER COMMUNITY LECTURES

May 6 | Harnessing adaptive immunity for tissue regeneration in neurodegenerative diseases
Craig Walsh, PhD

These free in-person seminars are held at Gross Hall, 845 Health Sciences Road, Irvine. Presentations begin at 7 p.m. To register, email stemcell@uci.edu or call 949-824-3990.

GAVIN HERBERT EYE INSTITUTE COMMUNITY LECTURES

May 13 | Treatment updates in glaucoma management
Austin Fox, MD

June 3 | Headaches: Perspectives from both sides of the optic nerve
Crystal Jicha, MD, and Samuel Spiegel, MD

July 15 | What is double vision and how is it treated?
Donny Suh, MD

Visit ophthalmology.uci.edu/events to register for these free online lectures, which begin at 7 p.m. Email ghei@uci.edu or call 949-824-7243 to learn more.

SUPPORT GROUPS

To learn more about our support groups, call the numbers listed or visit ucihealth.org/events

ADVANCED HEART FAILURE & VAD
714-456-7514

BARIATRIC SUPPORT GROUP
alisont3@hs.uci.edu

BURN SURVIVORS
714-456-7437

CANCER NUTRITION SUPPORT GROUP
agebhar1@hs.uci.edu

CHRONIC LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKEMIA
tevans@cllsociety.org

DEMENTIA CAREGIVERS
949-814-4793

DIABETES SUPPORT GROUP
zhangaq@uci.edu

FACIAL PAIN ASSOCIATION
octnafpa@yahoo.com

INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE
714-456-7057

KOREAN WOMEN'S CANCER SUPPORT GROUP
714-875-4658

LIVER DISEASE SUPPORT GROUP
714-456-7624

MASTECTOMY SUPPORT GROUP
949-518-5124
vbassili@hs.uci.edu

MEN'S CANCER SUPPORT GROUP
714-456-5812

MULTIPLE MYELOMA
800-452-2873, ext. 233

NEW MOTHER SUPPORT GROUP
855-226-3744

OSTOMY ASSOCIATION OF ORANGE COUNTY
714-637-7971

PANCREATIC CANCER
949-814-4784

PARKINSON'S DISEASE
blagasse@hs.uci.edu

STEM CELL TRANSPLANT
714-335-8439

STROKE SUPPORT GROUP
866-STROKE-3 (866-787-6533)

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY
dseto@hs.uci.edu

YOUNG ADULT CANCER
caps@hs.uci.edu

Inspired by his own medical care, Prince Simmons aims to open a home healthcare business.

PHOTO BY KIMBERLY PHAM

FROM BEDRIDDEN TO BEDSIDE

For many years, Prince Simmons worked for pest control companies, eventually starting his own business while honing his public speaking skills with Toastmasters and supporting young men from disadvantaged backgrounds. In January 2024, however, the Lakewood man experienced a searing headache and was taken by paramedics to UCI Health — Los Alamitos, where he was admitted for a brain bleed. It took him a month to recover from a life-threatening COVID-19 infection, two aneurysms and a hemorrhagic stroke caused by abnormal blood vessel connections in his brain. After surgery and supportive treatment, Simmons, now 60, went home a changed man, feeling a profound need to help other people struggling with health problems.

Learn more about UCI Health — Los Alamitos at ucihealth.org/losalamitos

"In December 2023, I began having headaches. I made a doctor's appointment, but before I could get in to see him, I woke up at about 2 a.m. on Jan. 8, feeling like someone hit me in the head with a sledgehammer. I told my wife to call paramedics. I didn't think I was going to make it.

Testing showed I had COVID-19 and pneumonia, two aneurysms and an atrial venous malformation (AVM) in my brain that had caused a hemorrhagic stroke. The doctors put a coil into my brain in a minimally invasive procedure to stop the brain bleed, but I still had the AVM and aneurysms. I improved from the pneumonia, but then my blood pressure began to peak and my kidneys were functioning at only 40%. Eventually, I was stabilized enough by Jan. 17 to have surgery to fix the AVM and aneurysms.

This was a tough journey. I felt weak. I couldn't see due to the strokes. I couldn't do my physical therapy. I wondered if I would ever be functional and normal again. I give thanks to the nurses and my wife for being ever-present. The nurses were right there at all times, making sure I was OK. They were absolutely amazing!

During my recovery, I shared a room with a man who was very ill and anxious. I told him, 'It's OK; we're here,' and he began to calm down. I asked him, 'How are you doing? What's your name?' He asked me to pray for him, so I did. One day, I thought to myself, 'Is this a new direction for me to go?' — because I enjoyed helping him. I said, 'Lord, is this a new path you want me to go on? If so, how do I get started?'

When I was finally discharged on Feb. 3, I couldn't go back to my old job. But I wondered if there was something I could do to help people like me who were getting out of the hospital. I just felt overcome with this passion to help people.

Today, I'm close to getting my certification to open a home health agency. I'm doing volunteer spiritual care work at two hospitals and I'm honored to serve on the UCI Health — Los Alamitos Patient Experience Council.

Physically, I'm 98% recovered. I don't ever want to go through that pain again, but I would not trade my experience for anything. I have this peace now."

— Prince Simmons

UCI Health

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Bernard A Birnbaum, MD Quality Leadership Top Performer 2024 vizient

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ucihealth.org

RIDE, RUN OR WALK

TOGETHER AGAINST CANCER!

On Saturday, Oct. 11, enjoy a 5K run/walk, various road bike routes or a mountain bike route with your community at the UC Irvine campus. Every participant-raised dollar supports critical cancer research at the UCI Health Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center aimed at advancing prevention efforts, innovative treatments and potential cures that save lives.

Register today at anti-cancerchallenge.org

UC Irvine
Anti-Cancer Challenge