



# milestones



Dr. Neera Gupta with a young patient.

## Children's Health Council Boosts Pediatric Research

With the aim of advancing pediatric research, a group of families and individuals at Weill Cornell Medicine has made it their mission to improve children's health.

The Children's Health Council, founded in 2014, provides support to physicians and scientists as they pursue discoveries that tackle some of the most prevalent health issues facing children and adolescents today.

As a physician-scientist, Dr. Neera Gupta, director of research for the Pediatric Inflammatory Bowel Disease Program and associate professor of pediatrics at Weill Cornell Medicine, whose current research is in pediatric Crohn's disease, understands the importance of pediatric research in patient care.

"It's an amazing feeling when you see a child in the clinic and you know you can do something to help them," says Dr. Gupta. "The potential to be able to improve the lives of children drives my passion for caring for pediatric patients and for research. Without advancing research, we can't advance clinical care."

Dr. Gupta's patient data informs her research as well as that of other colleagues within the Department of Pediatrics, such as Dr. Amy Tsou, instructor in pediatrics at Weill Cornell, who also studies pediatric disorders,

specifically inflammatory bowel diseases. Dr. Tsou received partial funding for her research through the Children's Health Investigators Fund, an effort led by Children's Health Council members that funds pediatric research throughout Weill Cornell Medicine.

"As a pediatric physician-scientist, my goals are to utilize insights obtained at the bedside to inform my research and translate scientific discoveries at the bench in ways that directly benefit the children who inspire my work," says Dr. Tsou. "I am grateful for the Children's Health Investigators Fund and its generous support, which has allowed me to pursue my research program."

By shedding light on pediatric issues and highlighting the connection between quality research and excellent care, Council members hope to bring the need for increased funding into the spotlight, and to continue bringing the best care to patients.

"The Council will play a key role in the development of the next generation of scientists, and also serves as a way to provide people with information on advances in science and highlight work that's being done at Weill Cornell Medicine," says Dr. Gerald Loughlin, chairman of the Department of Pediatrics and the Nancy C. Paduano Professor of Pediatrics at Weill Cornell, who was a leader in the Council's formation. "Our goal is to support research to develop new therapies for illnesses that affect children."

In addition to funding research in the Department of Pediatrics, the Children's Health Investigators Fund supports researchers in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Gale and Ira Drukier Institute for Children's Health.

**"It's an amazing feeling when you see a child in the clinic and you know you can do something to help them."**

**Dr. Neera Gupta**

## Children's Health Council Boosts Pediatric Research Continued from cover

Another recent research project funded by the Council is led by Dr. Shannon Bennett, assistant professor of psychology in clinical psychiatry, Dr. Faith Gunning-Dixon, associate professor of psychology in psychiatry, and Dr. Conor Liston (MD '08), assistant professor of neuroscience and of psychiatry, experts in the assessment, treatment and neuroscience of anxiety and depression across childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. Their study is the first to utilize cutting-edge brain imaging techniques developed at Weill Cornell to identify patterns of brain network connectivity in adolescents and young adults with anxiety



Young scientists enjoy Family Science Day.

and depression. Their work may lead to innovations in the assessment and treatment of these disorders during childhood.

"The Children's Health Council is in a unique position to bring research findings and solutions directly to patients at Weill Cornell," says Dr. Augustine M.K. Choi, the Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean of Weill Cornell Medicine. "These passionate individuals and families are poised to make a beneficial impact on a wide variety of childhood ailments and diseases and benefit children for generations to come."

Beyond funding research, the Council holds several events annually to increase public knowledge of children's health topics and shed light on the importance of pediatric research. Children's Health Council Discovery Panels,

for example, provide public discussions led by top Weill Cornell physicians on a variety of topics relevant to pediatric health, ranging from immunity to sports injuries. The Council's annual Family Science Day allows families and their children to participate in hands-on activities led by Weill Cornell graduate students.

"It's empowering to be part of the discussions at these events and to hear from phenomenal researchers and doctors," says Christina Truesdale, chair of the Council. "The Council members share a passion for children's health research. It's a wonderfully warm and caring community. We hope to keep kids healthy, and if they're sick, to find the best ways to treat them."

Casey Weiss, vice chair of programming for the Council, emphasizes the importance of education at the Council's events. "We are showcasing the amazing talent of the physicians and researchers at Weill Cornell, while educating the community about the support that is necessary to make these incredible advances in pediatric research possible."

As the Council looks toward the future, members hope to continue to increase participation and widely spread awareness of the pediatric research they support, says Mara Feil, vice chair of membership for the Council. When she and her husband, Brian Feil, became parents nearly three years ago, their perspective on how they could give back changed.

"Becoming parents really opened our eyes to the importance of funding pediatric research and we wanted to be a part of that effort," says Mrs. Feil. "The Council is composed of incredible people. It's truly a group for everyone who shares a common purpose: improving the lives of children."

*If you wish to join the Children's Health Council, please contact us at [childrenshealthcouncil@med.cornell.edu](mailto:childrenshealthcouncil@med.cornell.edu) or 646-962-9566.*

### Children's Health Council Leadership

Christina Truesdale, chair

Mara Feil, vice chair

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## Jeffrey Gural: Supporting Alzheimer's Disease Research

When Jeffrey Gural learned that the neurologist who helped resolve his leg and back pain was also involved in Alzheimer's disease research, he wanted to find a way to help.

Mr. Gural, a real estate executive, is well aware of the toll that Alzheimer's disease can take on a family. His father, who was also in real estate, suffered from the disease for the last 10 years of his life, and his gradual slipping away from the world was "heartbreaking," he says.

Dr. Matthew Fink – chairman of the Department of Neurology, associate dean for clinical affairs and the Louis and Gertrude Feil Professor of Clinical Neurology at Weill Cornell Medicine – is growing his department to address the challenges of neurodegenerative disorders and their impact on public health. He plans to recruit additional faculty who will conduct clinical research in the Department of Neurology's Memory Disorders Program, complementing the basic research currently underway at the Helen and Robert Appel Alzheimer's Disease Research Institute.

With a gift of \$1 million to endow the Jeffrey and Paula Gural Clinical Scholar Award in Alzheimer's Disease, Mr. Gural will provide support for early-career faculty members to focus on research into new treatments for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

The Clinical Scholar Award program was established in 2002 to lighten the administrative responsibilities of young faculty, allowing them to devote more attention to clinical, teaching and research activities.

"As department chairman, support for junior faculty is of critical importance," says Dr. Fink. "Only by providing our young clinician-scientists with protected time to conduct research will we be able to move toward finding cures for these terrible diseases."

Mr. Gural first met Dr. Fink last fall, when he sought a second opinion for persistent pain that radiated from his back to his leg. He was already



Dr. Matthew Fink and Jeffrey Gural

scheduled for spinal surgery at a Manhattan hospital, but Dr. Fink suggested he continue with physical therapy instead. Today, Mr. Gural is pain-free and grateful to the Weill Cornell Medicine physician who saved him from an unnecessary surgical procedure.

By making a gift to Weill Cornell Medicine in appreciation of Dr. Fink, Mr. Gural is also honoring the memory of his late father, who supported charitable giving to top-tier medical institutions and fostered in his son the importance of making a difference in the world.

"Alzheimer's disease is a public health crisis that needs to be resolved," says Mr. Gural. "I'm happy to support efforts toward finding a cure for this horrible disease."



Physicians and students help uninsured adults at the Weill Cornell Community Clinic.

# Care

## Clinic Provides Free Care to the Uninsured

*In this celebratory year marking the 20th anniversary of the renaming of Weill Cornell Medicine in honor of Joan and Chair Emeritus Sanford I. Weill, we share the stories that showcase our growth across each facet of our mission to Care, Discover and Teach.*

As Weill Cornell Medicine has expanded its range of services for patients over the past two decades, it has successfully reached an underserved population: the thousands of at-risk New Yorkers without health insurance.

The Weill Cornell Community Clinic – a student-run free clinic funded through a combination of institutional support and philanthropy – provides high-quality services in internal medicine, women’s health and mental health to adults who are unable to pay for medical care.

In recent years, the clinic staff has grown to include a team of Weill Cornell Medicine physicians who volunteer on a regular basis – as well as social work interns and nutritionists.

20<sup>th</sup>  
1998-2018  
ANNIVERSARY

The clinic also has implemented depression screening for patients as part of their annual physicals, with referrals to specialists in mental health, if necessary.

In 2017, the clinic handled about 400 visits from uninsured adults whose income was lower than 400 percent of the federal poverty limit: about \$47,000 for an individual or \$97,000 for a family of four.

The clinic is operated by Weill Cornell Medicine students who are supervised by Medical Director Dr. Pamela Charney, professor of clinical medicine and of medicine in clinical obstetrics and gynecology.

“Our ability to provide longitudinal care in three specialties makes us unique among many free clinics associated with medical colleges,” says Dr. Charney. “Many of the services we provide for patients are funded directly by donations to the clinic.”

Patients who require surgery or additional treatment from outside specialists are referred to practices that offer free or low-cost care.

“We have the financial flexibility to say, ‘Don’t worry, we can support you, we want to make sure you’re getting the care that you need,’” says Executive Co-Director Andrew Iannone, a fourth-year MD-PhD student.

“Our ability to pay for services is invaluable toward making sure that people go to their appointments without the fear of receiving a bill they might not be able to afford,” says Executive Co-Director Maria Passarelli, a third-year MD-PhD student.

Since the clinic’s founding in 2006, donor support has been critical to its success. Over the past 12 years, the facility has raised close to \$1 million – a portion is directed to an endowment fund that will allow it to become financially stable. The clinic also relies on an annual fundraiser to bring in donations for patient services.

In addition, gifts to the clinic help fund original research conducted by students and published in academic journals.

“Our clinic provides a rare opportunity for donors to engage in all three parts of Weill Cornell Medicine’s mission: Care, Discover, Teach,” says Mr. Iannone. “There’s something to like about our clinic, no matter what your priorities are.”

*If you wish to help fund the clinic’s important community services, please contact us at [development@med.cornell.edu](mailto:development@med.cornell.edu) or 646-962-9476.*

## We Are Weill Cornell Medicine

*The We Are Weill Cornell Medicine campaign highlights our unique Weill Cornell Medicine community and introduces many of the people and achievements that make this institution the world-class place that it is. To learn more about this campaign, and to read more stories like this one, please visit [news.weill.cornell.edu](http://news.weill.cornell.edu).*

### Dr. Douglas S. Scherr, Clinical Director of Urologic Oncology Ronald P. Stanton Clinical Scholar in Urology, Professor of Urology

Dr. Douglas Scherr always knew he wanted a career in medicine, but after earning a bachelor’s degree in government from Cornell University in 1989, he chose to delay medical school for a year to teach English in Shenyang, China. His desire to “see the world,” he says, provided him with a wider human perspective.

“I spent a year in Shenyang in order to do something unrelated to what I ultimately would do,” says Dr. Scherr, who is the clinical director of urologic oncology, the Ronald P. Stanton Clinical Scholar in Urology, and professor of urology at Weill Cornell Medicine. “In that time, I learned more about human beings than I could ever learn in medical school.”

This patient-focused mindset has driven Dr. Scherr’s embrace of robotic surgery for treating urologic cancers — in 2002, he performed the first robotic surgery at Weill Cornell Medicine for prostate cancer. The minimally invasive, robotic surgery uses a few small incisions, compared to the single, large incision typically used in traditional surgery, with less pain and blood loss, often resulting in a shorter hospital stay. The technique has become the standard of care for prostate cancer and is becoming more frequently used in bladder cancer surgeries, Dr. Scherr says.

For bladder cancer, robotic surgery provides the same cure rate as traditional surgery, but with nearly 40 percent fewer complications and a faster return to normal activities. These improvements are crucial for Dr. Scherr’s bladder cancer patients, many of whom are in their 70s and 80s and are often more frail than younger patients. To best prepare patients, Dr. Scherr says managing expectations is key.

“I think it’s important to be realistic with patients, both from a survival and oncological outcome perspective, but also from what impact the surgery may have on their quality of life,” Dr. Scherr says. “Before I perform surgery, I have a discussion with patients and their family members regarding those issues.”

Some urologic cancers don’t respond to treatment and Dr. Scherr uses what he learns from those cases to discover new treatment methods. He is currently collaborating with Dr. Juan Cubillos-Ruiz, an assistant professor of microbiology and immunology in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, to develop new treatments that target mutations in tumors.

Federal support for urologic cancer research can be difficult to obtain because the disease occurs



Dr. Douglas S. Scherr

less frequently than some other cancers, Dr. Scherr says. The generosity of donors has provided critical support for experiments that has led to grant funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In particular, Dr. Scherr credits Dr. David Gluck (MD ’57), with providing critical funding for his research. His work has also received support from Peter Nadosy, through the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and Jeffrey L. Weiss.

“We’re fortunate to live in a city like New York where philanthropy is really ingrained within the culture,” Dr. Scherr says. “We’ve been able to harness some of that generosity to support our research.”

**#WeAreWCM**



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# From Our Dean



At Weill Cornell Medicine, our donors and friends have always been paramount in our efforts to provide world-class healthcare to our patients, advance scientific discoveries and shape the physicians and scientists of tomorrow. With your ongoing leadership and support, and the expertise of our faculty and staff, our institution is a driving force in academic medicine.

As our cover story on the Children's Health Council highlights, a new generation of dedicated supporters is now joining our efforts to advance discoveries and improve patients' lives. Like the many donors who have helped mold Weill Cornell today, these committed individuals have forward-thinking ideas and understand that synergy between researchers and clinicians is vital to fueling successful new treatments – and essential to our ongoing growth. I am moved by this ever-growing Weill Cornell family. It is, in part, because of you that we have accomplished so much – and there is great promise on our horizon.

I believe what most inspires many of our supporters – and our faculty, staff and students – is our strong commitment to our mission. At the heart of this charge are innovation, discovery, education and a passionate belief that our diverse group of patients – from infants to seniors – deserve the very best in medicine and healthcare. As we look toward the future, we remain committed to this philosophy, which guides our work every day and our path forward.

With gratitude,

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

## Save the Date: Alumni Reunion 2018

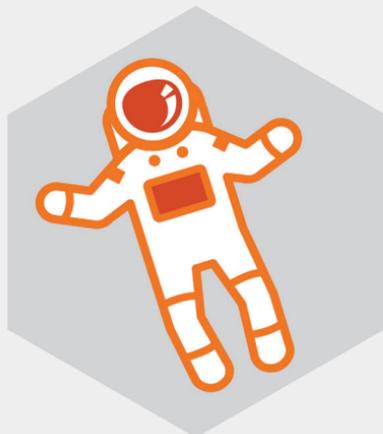
The Weill Cornell Medicine Alumni Reunion will take place Friday, October 5 through Saturday, October 6. Class years ending in '2, '3, '7 and '8 are celebrating milestone reunions and all alumni are invited back to campus to commemorate another year since graduation. The weekend will offer panel discussions, institutional tours, class get-togethers and a gala dinner dance at The Plaza.

### Featuring a Conversation with Mae C. Jemison, MD '81

In this not-to-be-missed exclusive interview, Weill Cornell Medicine alumna and the first African-American woman to travel into space, Dr. Mae Jemison (MD '81), will reflect on her remarkable career as an American physician, engineer and NASA astronaut.

We hope to see you there!

For more information, visit:  
[alumni.weill.cornell.edu/reunion](http://alumni.weill.cornell.edu/reunion)



## Inaugural Weill Award Dinner

The inaugural Weill Award Dinner was held at the Mandarin Oriental, New York on March 7 and celebrated the 20th anniversary of the renaming of the institution in honor of Joan and Overseer Chair Emeritus Sanford I. Weill. Weill Cornell Medicine celebrated the milestone and presented the inaugural Joan and Sanford I. Weill Exemplary Achievement Award, established in the couple's honor to recognize physicians and scientists whose work enhances health and healthcare worldwide.



The event venue: The Mandarin Oriental

The event honored Dr. Jean William Pape (MD '75) with the award, which carries a \$50,000 cash prize, for his achievements in global health. A 1975 graduate of Weill Cornell Medicine, Dr. Pape



From left: Overseer Chair Emeritus Sanford I. Weill, Dr. Jean William Pape (MD '75), Joan Weill and Dean Augustine M.K. Choi

is the founder and director of GHESKIO, Weill Cornell Medicine's partner clinic in Haiti, and the Howard and Carol Holtzmann Professor in Clinical Medicine in the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Department of Medicine. Dr. Pape has also been a leader in the development of the Center for Global Health and the Division of Infectious Diseases at Weill Cornell Medicine.

## Gale and Ira Drukier Prize in Children's Health Research

Weill Cornell Medicine awarded the third annual Gale and Ira Drukier Prize in Children's Health Research to Dr. Vijay Sankaran, a physician-scientist who investigates the molecular underpinnings of pediatric genetic blood disorders.

Dr. Sankaran is a pediatric hematologist and oncologist at Dana-Farber/Boston Children's Cancer and Blood Disorders Center, and an assistant professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School. He was recognized for his innovative research on red blood cell disorders, using genetic studies to understand how blood cell production occurs normally and how it goes awry in disease. His findings have led to promising new therapeutic approaches for these disorders.

The Drukier Prize honors an early-career pediatrician whose research has made important contributions toward improving the health of children and adolescents. Dr. Sankaran received the award and spoke about his research at a seminar that took place on February 27.

"Dr. Sankaran is a talented physician-scientist whose steadfast commitment to pediatric research and clinical care epitomizes the mission of the Gale and Ira Drukier Prize in Children's Health Research," said Dr. Augustine M.K. Choi, the Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean of Weill Cornell Medicine. "His research and his work to translate those findings into new treatments have provided hope to children suffering from these diseases and their families."



From left: Overseer Ira Drukier, Jennifer Birnbaum, Dr. Gale Drukier, Dr. Vijay Sankaran and Dr. Virginia Pascual



## Dean's Council Spring Meeting

The Dean's Council, co-chaired by Overseers Sanford Ehrenkranz and Leonard Harlan, hosted a lecture on obesity, inflammation and cancer risks at its spring meeting, held on April 25 in the Weill Greenberg Center. Speakers Dr. Louis Aronne, founder and director of Weill Cornell Medicine's Comprehensive Weight Control Center and the Sanford I. Weill Professor of Metabolic Research, and Dr. Andrew Dannenberg, associate director of cancer prevention at the Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Center and the Henry R. Erle, MD-Roberts Family Professor of Medicine, presented on new discoveries and provided practical advice on maintaining a healthy weight to reduce inflammation.

From left: Dr. Louis Aronne, Overseer Leonard Harlan and Dr. Andrew Dannenberg

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