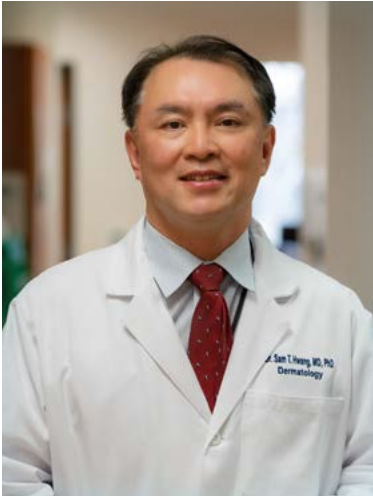


DERMATOLOGY NEWS

SUMMER 2026 | NEWSLETTER

A decade of innovation, growth and collaboration



SAM T. HWANG REFLECTS ON HIS TIME AS DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Over the past decade, the UC Davis Department of Dermatology has transformed into one of the nation's leading academic dermatology programs — expanding patient access, growing nationally recognized

research programs and developing specialty care clinics that serve patients across Northern California and beyond.

At the center of that growth is Sam T. Hwang, M.D., Ph.D., who has served as department chair since 2016 and plans to step down from the role at the end of the year. As he prepares for the transition, he says he looks forward to the fresh perspectives a new chair may bring and reflects with gratitude on his time leading the department.

"It's been gratifying to see how much the department has grown in clinical care, research and education while maintaining a collaborative and supportive culture," Hwang said.

EXPANDING CLINICAL CAPACITY AND SERVICES

Under Hwang's leadership, the department doubled its clinical volume, expanded dermatologic surgery services and increased faculty size, including growth in pediatric dermatology and dermatopathology. He also collaborated with faculty to create new specialty clinics for conditions such as hidradenitis suppurativa and vitiligo, positioning UC Davis at the forefront of subspecialty dermatologic care.

"A lot of our faculty have become world-renowned," Hwang said. "Our specialty clinics allow us to be at the leading edge of dermatology science while helping faculty grow their expertise and research programs."

At the same time, Hwang worked to address a growing national shortage of dermatologists and long wait times for patients. Through strategic hiring, expanded use of physician assistants and scribes, and streamlined workflows, the department reduced appointment wait times from several months to as little as two to four weeks for many patients.

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Former Hwang Lab fellows and friends reunite in May 2023 at the International Societies for Investigative Dermatology (ISID) Meeting in Tokyo, Japan.

“We’re growing capacity to meet the needs of our community. We serve patients from across Northern California, Reno and the Sierra region, often functioning as the closest academic dermatology center for complex care.” – SAM T. HWANG, M.D., Ph.D.

PRIORITIZING TELEHEALTH AND CLINICIAN WELLNESS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hwang led the department’s rapid adoption of telehealth and electronic consultations, strengthening access to care during a critical period. Through e-consults, primary care physicians submit photos and receive dermatology guidance within days, helping triage urgent cases more efficiently and reducing unnecessary in-person visits.

“Navigating the pandemic as a department and emerging intact is a significant point of pride,” Hwang said.

He is also proud of his efforts to prioritize clinician well-being. Recognizing the growing burden of electronic medical record documentation, he introduced medical scribes early on into

the department, significantly reducing after-hours charting for clinicians.

“That gave our faculty more time with their families, more time to teach residents and more time for academic research projects,” Hwang said.

ENCOURAGING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Research growth is another defining hallmark of Hwang’s tenure as chair. Despite limited space and resources, the department rose into the top 10-15 dermatology departments nationally for National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding among more than 120 medical schools. During that time, the department also expanded its translational research efforts by recruiting physician-scientists and strengthening collaborations in areas such as the skin microbiome, psoriasis and cancer-related skin complications.



When not working, dermatologist Sam T. Hwang enjoys spending time with his wife, two sons and their spouses.



Sam T. Hwang, M.D., Ph.D., catches up with April Armstrong, M.D., M.P.H., former UC Davis Health faculty member and current chief of dermatology at UCLA Health, at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Group for Research and Assessment of Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis (GRAPPA).

“Our researchers deserve tremendous credit,” Hwang said. “It’s an incredibly competitive grant environment, and they continue to succeed because of their dedication and collaboration.”

Fostering a collegial and welcoming culture has also strengthened the department’s academic training programs, with nearly 500 medical students applying to its residency program each year. Although accreditation limits have kept residency classes capped at five residents annually, the department has earned a strong reputation under Hwang’s leadership for exceptional clinical training and mentorship.

Even as he steps down as chair, Hwang is not slowing down. He plans to remain with the department as a faculty member, caring for patients in his psoriasis clinic and initiating new research on pyoderma gangrenosum – a rare, non-contagious autoinflammatory skin condition. He also hopes to mentor physician-scientists internationally and support the department’s future through philanthropy and faculty recruitment.

“Our faculty are wonderful colleagues who always step up when needed,” Hwang said. “I’m grateful to them for making these last 10 years such a rewarding experience.”

Sasha Shafikahi advances infection control and wound healing



AT THE INTERSECTION OF MICROBIOLOGY, immunology and translational medicine, Sasha Shafikahi, Ph.D., is reshaping how scientists understand the relationship between the human body and the microbes it hosts. His work addresses key challenges in modern health care, including chronic wounds, infection control and antibiotic resistance.

As a professor in the UC Davis Department of Dermatology and director of Microbiome Research, he studies how the immune system and microbiome interact to influence infection and healing, bridging disciplines to better connect microbial biology to human disease.

“Bacteria have evolved alongside humans for tens of thousands of years, and by studying how they interact with and manipulate our cells, we can learn a great deal about our own physiology and genetics,” Shafikahi said.

One of his laboratory’s main focuses is improving healing for chronic diabetic wounds, which are prone to infection and slow to heal. His research has identified problems in the body’s early immune response, including immune cells that fail to properly reach the wound site and inflammation signals that become unbalanced, disrupting the healing process. By correcting these immune defects, his team has demonstrated that it is possible to restore antimicrobial defenses and significantly improve healing in experimental models.

“These wounds can have devastating consequences and once amputation occurs, a patient’s five-year survival rate drops dramatically,” Shafikahi said. “We’re working to shorten the time it takes for people living with diabetes to mount an immune response and heal their wounds.”

Additionally, his laboratory is exploring how bacteria interact with tissues and how the body distinguishes between normal and harmful bacteria.

“Our tissues already have mechanisms to recognize those differences, and we want to understand whether we can strengthen or accelerate those responses,” Shafikahi said. “By better engaging the immune

system, we may be able to improve the body’s ability to control infection and even explore new approaches for treating cancer.”

Beyond chronic wounds, Shafikahi’s laboratory is also tackling the global health threat of antibiotic resistance. While antibiotics have long been a cornerstone of infection control, their widespread use has contributed to the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

In response, Shafikahi is developing innovative, antibiotic-free therapies that enhance the body’s natural defenses. In preclinical studies, these therapies have proven to be as effective, and in some cases more effective, than traditional antibiotics in combating dangerous pathogens such as *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

“The immune system plays a major role in making bacteria vulnerable to antibiotics. We’ve learned that antibiotics can activate the immune system and together they help fight infection,” Shafikahi said. “That is why immunocompromised patients often have a much harder time controlling infections.”

His laboratory has received several grants to study immunomodulators, medications that alter the body’s immune

response, to determine whether they can help train the immune system to better fight infection. Shafikahi said these therapies could one day help prepare patients for procedures such as knee replacement surgery, where infection remains the leading complication.

“We’re halfway through a grant project studying these medications. We’re almost pre-clinical as the data looks good in animal models and the next step is studying them in human subjects,” Shafikahi said.

Ultimately, the goal of Shafikahi’s work is not only to understand the fundamental biology of host-microbe interactions but also to translate those insights into real-world treatments.

“We’re at the frontier of conducting new experiments that no one else has done, and that is a big reason we have been successful in securing grants,” Shafikahi said. “It is an incredible feeling to know that our work has a translational impact and could ultimately lead to new therapies that benefit the public and improve the lives of people who are suffering.”



Members of the Shafikahi Lab join UC Davis Health faculty and Shafikahi at the 2025 Wound Healing Society Annual Meeting in Texas.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Peggy A. Wu, M.D., M.P.H.

Uncovering the causes of contact dermatitis

PATCH TESTING HELPS PATIENTS AVOID SKIN ALLERGENS

Having navigated the challenges of eczema herself, Peggy Wu understands firsthand the physical discomfort and emotional toll that skin conditions can take. Her experience motivated her to pursue a career in dermatology, joining UC Davis Health in 2018 to help patients find answers, effective treatments and relief from complex skin diseases.

As a professor of clinical dermatology and executive vice chair of the Department of Dermatology at UC Davis Health, Wu enjoys combining visual assessment with diagnostic testing to identify the underlying causes of skin problems.

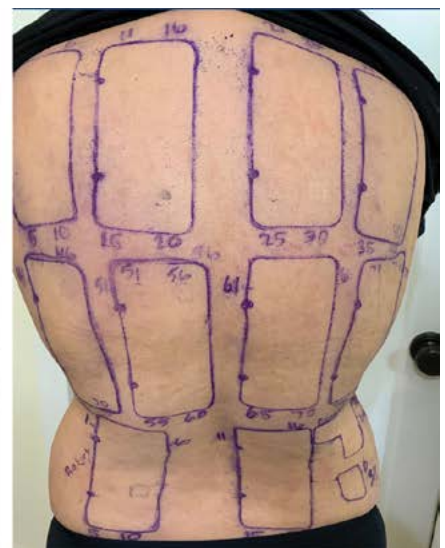
“There’s a great deal of detective work involved in understanding why a rash develops, why it appears in certain areas of the body and why it occurs when it does,” Wu said.

Wu created a special clinic focused on allergic contact dermatitis, a delayed hypersensitivity reaction that can be

difficult to diagnose without specialized testing. Patients are typically referred to the clinic after struggling with persistent or unexplained rashes.

Through a structured process, Wu conducts comprehensive patch testing by applying panels of common and customized allergens to a patient’s back over several days. By monitoring reactions over time, she can identify which substances are triggering inflammation.

“When someone has a positive reaction, we then look at all the



An example of the patch testing process, from initial application through the 48-hour and 96-hour readings.

ingredients in the personal care products they use, or other sources of potential contactants,” Wu said. “This gives people more context and control by having an understanding of the sources of their triggers.”

Such knowledge has been transformative for Wu’s patient Frances Mentzer, who underwent patch testing after years of struggling with inflamed, itchy skin on her arms and legs.

“I had other allergy tests, saw several different dermatologists and tried various steroids, but my skin just kept getting worse,” Mentzer said. “It wasn’t until after Dr. Wu did the patch test and found my contact allergens, which I then was able to avoid, that my eczema began to improve.”

Mentzer’s patch test revealed multiple allergies, including a strong reaction to a preservative commonly found in soap, lotion and detergents. Even more striking, Mentzer discovered she was allergic to a topical steroid that other dermatologists had prescribed to treat

her condition – ironically worsening her symptoms rather than improving them.

Based on the patch test results, Wu reviewed Mentzer’s personal care products and developed a personalized plan to help her avoid her specific allergens. The plan included guidance on safe products and resources such as an online database to help her navigate ingredient lists.

While making such lifestyle changes required effort and adjustment, the results spoke for themselves. Within a couple of months, Mentzer’s skin began to clear significantly.

“Dr. Wu changed my life and I will always be grateful to her,” Mentzer said. “I hope that more eczema sufferers will be able to find out about her and be helped.”



Frances Mentzer, Patient

Helping patients regain control of their skin health is one of the most rewarding aspects of Wu’s work. Seeing the impact that a diagnosis and personalized treatment plan can have on a patient’s quality of life motivates her every day.

“The patients are the best part. Seeing people over time and seeing their skin improve is so rewarding,” Wu said.



At Mentzer’s first appointment, she had a rash on her scalp, arms, legs and back. Mentzer’s skin cleared after patch testing identified the ingredients she needed to avoid.

ALUMNI CORNER

Faranak Kamangar, M.D.

Using artificial intelligence (AI) and social media to advance dermatology



DRIVEN BY A PASSION FOR PATIENT CARE AND INNOVATION, FARANAK KAMANGAR, M.D.,

is a leading voice in dermatology, advancing treatments for complex skin diseases while pioneering the use of artificial intelligence and social media to shape a more efficient and patient-centered future.

A natural problem-solver with a talent for building systems, she nearly pursued a different path. As both a biotechnology engineering student and medical student at UC Davis, she initially set her sights on a career in otolaryngology. However, a pivotal fourth-year dermatology rotation reshaped her trajectory.

“I fell in love with the people,” Kamangar said. “We had incredible professors who were deeply inspiring, and the program itself was exceptionally comprehensive.”

Her interest deepened as she discovered dermatology’s unique blend of patient connection, procedural skill and intellectual challenge. She completed her dermatology residency at UC Davis in 2016, followed by a fellowship in complex inflammatory skin disease at UCSF. She has since risen to become chair of dermatology at Palo Alto Medical Foundation and president of the San Francisco Dermatological Society. She plans to launch her own private practice, Kamangar Dermatology, in August.

“By the end of my residency at UC Davis, I felt completely prepared across every area of the field, from cosmetics to complex medical dermatology. We were exposed to incredibly unique cases, advanced procedures and hands-on experiences that set the program apart. It truly is the perfect place to train.”

These days, Kamangar focuses on treating inflammatory skin diseases such as psoriasis and eczema, with particular expertise in biologic immunotherapies and laser treatments. She is deeply committed to advancing these therapies and helping patients navigate the systemic barriers that often limit access to care, such as administrative hurdles and insurance challenges.

“The field comes with many practice management challenges, and I enjoy solving the problems that can prevent physicians from delivering care. I’m passionate about finding ways to make patient care work within an insurance-driven system where a 10-minute visit can generate hours of follow-up administrative work,” Kamangar said.

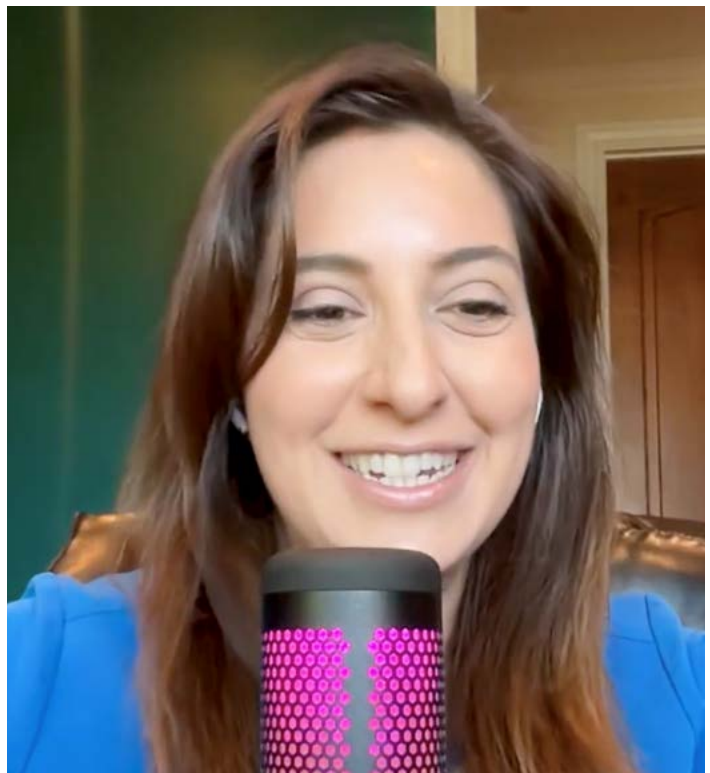
Her engineering background and desire to improve systems have positioned her as a leader in integrating artificial intelligence into dermatology. She co-developed DermGPT, launched in 2023, as a tool to help streamline clinical workflows and support dermatologists with time-consuming administrative and non-patient-facing tasks.

“We now have about 5,000 dermatologists using the system, and that growth has been entirely organic without any marketing or sales efforts,” Kamangar said. “We also launched a newsletter focused on AI literacy and education that has grown to more than 23,000 subscribers. It’s allowed me to connect with physicians across the country, learn about their workflows and collaborate with institutions interested in improving how dermatology care is delivered.”

Committed to education and outreach, Kamangar also hosts The Future of Dermatology podcast, which now spans

more than 130 episodes. It has become one of the leading dermatology-focused podcasts, reaching both clinicians and the broader public.

In addition, she serves as co-chair of the UC Davis Department of Dermatology Alumni Society, where she helps strengthen alumni connections, foster mentorship opportunities and support residents as they train to deliver leading-edge dermatologic care.



On her podcast, The Future of Dermatology, Kamangar interviews experts and thought leaders about the future of dermatologic care and research.

Looking ahead, Kamangar sees a period of major transformation on the horizon for dermatologists. She believes the field will increasingly embrace technology-driven care models and more efficient, fully integrated clinical workflows that improve both patient care and the physician experience.

“Like in any field, the people who invest the time to learn and use these tools are going to be far ahead of the curve,” Kamangar said. “I’m excited to open my own practice where I can pursue innovation and move more quickly, because I truly believe the way we practice dermatology will look very different over the next five to 10 years.”



Kamangar presents at the American Academy of Dermatology’s Annual Meeting.

2026 Residency Graduation and Staff Awards

Faculty, staff, residents and research scholars gathered at Vizcaya Sacramento on June 6 for the department's annual celebration honoring graduating residents and recognizing the staff whose dedication helps keep the Department of Dermatology running smoothly.

RESIDENCY GRADUATES:



Samantha Mesko, M.D., M.B.A.



Josephine Hai, M.D.



Alexander Hou, M.D.



Tracy Ngo, M.D.



Jeffrey Rajikumar, M.D.

MICROGRAPHIC SURGERY AND DERMATOLOGIC ONCOLOGY FELLOWSHIP GRADUATE:



Cameron Zachary, M.D.

FACULTY OF THE YEAR AWARD:

- Volunteer Clinical Faculty: **Susan Boone, M.D.**
- Clinical Faculty: **Peggy Wu, M.D., M.P.H.**



Susan Boone, M.D.



Peggy Wu, M.D., M.P.H.

STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARDS:

- Dermatopathology Service: **Roberta Tippett and Julie Her**
- Clinic: **Petya Monova and Scottie Victorian**
- Research: **Salsala Nasim**





Your Support Makes Progress Possible

With federal funding becoming increasingly uncertain, private support is more critical than ever to sustain our work and accelerate progress. Your gift today can make an immediate difference in advancing our mission and supporting those who depend on us.

To learn more or discuss giving opportunities, please contact Reese Scherber at 916-291-5775 or tmscherber@health.ucdavis.edu.

Meet our 1st Year Residents as of July 1, 2026



Claire Abbott, M.D.

Undergraduate: San Diego State University, San Diego, CA (B.S.)

Medical School: University of Oklahoma College of Medicine (M.D.)

Transitional Year: Northwest Healthcare



Austin Hwang, M.D.

Undergraduate: Rice University, Houston, TX (B.S.)

Medical School: Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine (M.D.)

Transitional Year: Kaiser Permanente Oakland Medical Center



Kristiana Jordan, M.D.

Undergraduate: University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA (B.A.)

Medical School: University of California, Davis, School of Medicine (M.D.)

Transitional Year: Kaiser Permanente Oakland Medical Center



Rachel Lin, M.D.

Undergraduate: University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA (B.A.)

Medical School: University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine (M.D.)

Transitional Year: Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center



Rebecca Yamamoto, M.D.

Undergraduate: University of California, San Diego, San Diego, CA (B.S.)

Medical School: Georgetown University School of Medicine (M.D.)

Transitional Year: University of Hawaii Preliminary Medicine



Micrographic Surgery and Dermatologic Oncology Fellow as of August 1, 2026 **Briana Halle Brady, M.D.**

Undergraduate: Claremont McKenna College, Science and Management (B.A.)

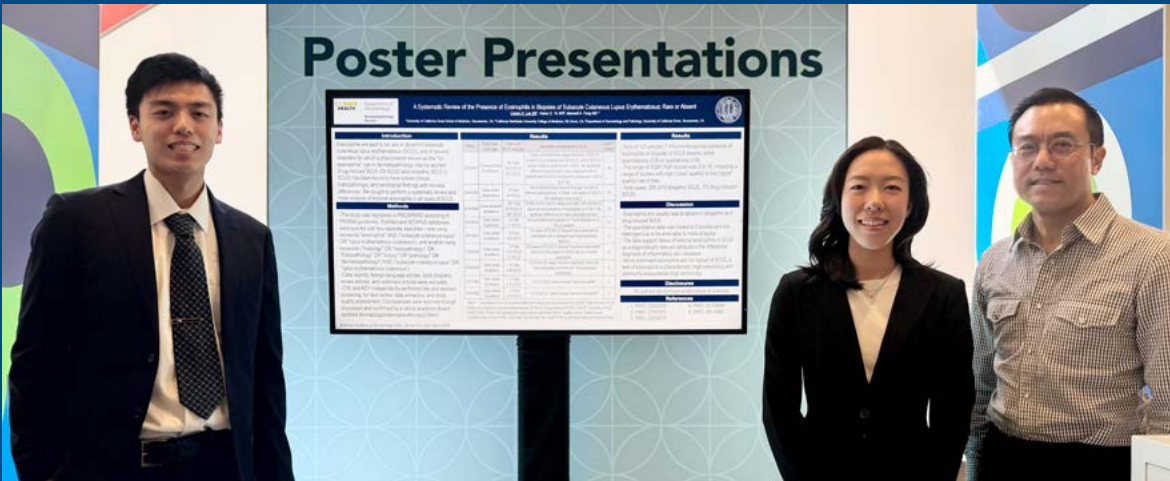
Medical School: Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

Internship: Scripps Mercy Hospital

Residency: University of California, Irvine, Department of Dermatology

American Academy of Dermatology ANNUAL MEETING

Members of the UC Davis Health Department of Dermatology attended the American Academy of Dermatology Annual Meeting from March 27-31 in Denver, Colorado. The annual conference draws dermatology experts, researchers and industry partners from across the nation to exchange knowledge, showcase innovations and discuss emerging advances in skin health.



UC Davis Dermatology Physicians Named 2026 “TOP DOCTORS”

Congratulations to the following
UC Davis Health Department of Dermatology
physicians for being voted among
Sactown Magazine’s 2026 Top Doctors:

★ Oma Agbai

★ Jayne Joo

★ Smita Awasthi

★ Maija Kiuru

★ Alain Brassar

★ Caitlin Peterman

★ Daniel Eisen

★ Marc Silverstein

★ Victor Huang

★ Danielle Tartar

★ Samuel Hwang

★ Peggy Wu

This recognition reflects their exceptional patient care, clinical expertise and unwavering commitment to excellence in dermatology. Honorees are selected through a peer-to-peer survey of local physicians, making the distinction especially meaningful because it is based on the respect and confidence of fellow medical professionals.

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