

Pathways to Excellence

URMC DEPARTMENT OF PATHOLOGY AND LABORATORY MEDICINE | WWW.PATHOLOGY.URMC.EDU | WINTER 2025



Innovative grassroots efforts and meeting potential learners where they are have allowed the department to continue developing pathology's future faculty and staff who will impact our communities and well beyond.

SHIFTING HOW WE REACH, TEACH FUTURE LAB WORKFORCE

During her tenure as Vice Chair of Education, Jennifer Findeis-Hosey, MD, has seen a growing focus on workforce development—a shift she's passionate about. It has required a fresh approach that refines how the department connects with its audiences and creates opportunities to attract the best and brightest talent to pathology and medicine, now and in the future.

"Learners" in this context include PhD students, fellows, and residents, but the Education mission plays a crucial role in training UR Medicine Labs staff to support patient care. Moreover, outreach efforts target students as early as high school—and even younger—some of whom may one day become the future of healthcare, possibly (hopefully!) in pathology.

EARLY OPPORTUNITIES SHAPE FUTURE

One key initiative is the Explorations in Pathology (EIP) program, hosted by the department as part of the University's pre-college

summer offerings. Open to rising high school juniors and seniors with an interest in science and medicine, the program provides three weeks of intensive, all-day instruction in pathology and laboratory medicine. Since 2017, more than 50 students have participated.

While the program's ultimate impact on many of the students' future careers is unknown, Findeis-Hosey has seen the connection with two past EIP participants who were later admitted to the Rochester Early Medical Scholars (REMS) program.

The REMS program is an eight-year BA/BS + MD pathway for students who commit to a medical career. REMS students gain early admission to the School of Medicine and Dentistry after completing their undergraduate degree and pre-med courses.

Owen Tolbert, now a second-year student at the School of Medicine and Dentistry, and Norah DeMayo, a first-year undergraduate at UR, are both former EIP participants.

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RIBBON CUTTING MARKS CENTRAL LAB EXPANSION

The recently completed 19,000-square-foot addition at Central Lab was celebrated Jan. 24. The space will enhance collaboration, streamline operations, and strengthen the department's collective impact on patient care. The expansion also will allow for continued growth and an environment in which our entire team can further thrive.



SHIFTING HOW WE REACH, TEACH FUTURE LAB WORKFORCE

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"It's rewarding to see EIP as an early step in their career journeys," Findeis-Hosey said.

The opportunity for young people to be exposed to laboratory science and medicine is what drives the program. The impact from the ripple effect it can create has far-reaching possibilities.

ATTRACTING LAB PROFESSIONALS

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that the demand for laboratory staff was outpacing the supply. As case volumes grew in labs statewide and nationwide, the need for additional staff became urgent. Compounding the challenge was the closure of many training programs that traditionally produced new clinical laboratory technicians (CMTs), phlebotomists, and histotechnologists.

In response, URM Pathology embraced its innovative spirit and the "Meliora" philosophy, leveraging its own resources to address staffing shortages.

The Advanced Certificate Program in Clinical/Medical Technology, created in 2017, has graduated over 100 students. In 2024, it earned the highest accreditation status—a 10-year reaccreditation—from the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Science.

"Achieving and maintaining national accreditation raises the program's stature both nationally and internationally," said Vicki Roberts, MS, Director of Education and Clinical Laboratory Technology Program Director. The program attracts students from across the country.

Collaborations with other institutions are also playing a crucial role in developing programs that draw learners to pathology careers. For example, a new partnership between SUNY Broome Community College in Binghamton, Monroe Community College in Rochester, and URM Pathology is expanding the pipeline through a histotechnician program set to launch in Fall 2026. The program will allow students to complete foundational coursework at Broome, take online classes through MCC, and finish with hands-on clinical training at URM.

"By the time students finish the program, our Pathology team will have had the privilege of connecting theory to practice, ensuring they're fully prepared for histotech positions, whether with UR Medicine Labs or another employer," Roberts said.

OTHER BRIGHT SPOTS

Pathology's residency, fellowship, and PhD programs continue to attract top-tier learners. However, the department is mindful of the need to adapt and find new ways to engage strong students as circumstances in society change.

"We saw this during the COVID pandemic, which drastically altered how people approach training and education," Findeis-Hosey said. "We must continue to be thoughtful and responsive to the evolving needs of trainees as they make career decisions. It is exciting to adapt with them - they are our future."

Case in point: The shift to virtual interactions during the pandemic. Residency interviews, which historically were held in person, with tours of facilities and meetings with faculty, were moved to Zoom due to visitor restrictions. And now, as in so many sectors of professional life, virtual interviews are increasingly the norm. They offering some advantages, like the ability to interview more candidates and easier scheduling without travel, as well as challenges, such as the lack of in-person conversations and the challenge of conveying the department's culture via a computer monitor.

Yet the increase in virtual communication has not impacted the caliber of candidates in the least.

DEPARTMENT SUPPORT

Findeis-Hosey is grateful for the continued support from Pathology leadership and faculty members. "It's not the buildings, it's the people," she said. "Our collective strengths complement each other, making us greater than the sum of our parts."

"I genuinely enjoy education and supporting the department's mission. Our education initiatives showcase the incredible people in Pathology, who are consistently generous with their time and expertise as they share their passion for the specialty with those considering a career in medicine."



Christa Whitney-Miller, MD

*Chair, Department of Pathology
and Laboratory Medicine*

*The Frieda Robscheit-Robbins
Professor*

There is no doubt the winter season has arrived here in Upstate New York and it's colder and more snowy than we've seen the past several years. Yet its beauty is extraordinary. Fluffy flakes, expansive white fields, opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities or stay inside with a good book and a warm fire. Do you ever miss it?

Our department is poised for another exciting year of growth and progress. January brought with it a formal celebration of our Central Lab expansion and renovation. A ribbon cutting was attended by Medical Center leadership, department faculty and staff, and affiliate partners from throughout the region. Guests toured the 19,000-square-foot, second-floor addition, home now to our Surgical Pathology and Cytology teams. The beautiful, cutting-edge space, so different from their previous labs, remains a daily source of joy for staff.

We continue with initiatives to attract new, talented faculty. The time devoted to recruitment in 2024 proved well worth our efforts and we're on track to continue expanding our faculty group. We welcomed two senior-level pathologists mid-academic year and at least four more will start with us this summer.

This month we look forward to connecting again with alumni and friends at USCAP. We have many faculty and learners presenting so I hope to cross paths with many of you along the way. And please plan to attend our annual alumni reception, which I'm hosting the evening of March 24 at the Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport (*details on page 6*). Let's catch up!

ALUMNI NOTES

We want to hear from you!

Share your good news – professional achievements and personal accomplishments – with fellow URM Pathology alumni and faculty.

Send details to karin_christensen@urmc.rochester.edu.

COLLEAGUES HONOR DEAN ARVAN, FORMER LAB LEADER AND ACTING CHAIR



Dean A. Arvan, MD, twice acting chair of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and longtime leader of the clinical laboratories, died Jan. 14. He is remembered for visionary leadership, kind mentorship, and innovation.

Dr. Arvan's long and accomplished career at URM began in 1977 when he became clinical laboratories director—a role he held for 20 years. He served as acting chair of the department from 1997-98 and 2002-04.

Dr. Arvan changed the way laboratories functioned within a hospital, going from a decentralized model of small testing labs to an operation where specialized tests were done in a centralized setting with equipment capability to do multiple tests in one place.

He brought new technologies into everyday workflow, helping the medical center operate more efficiently. This raised the profile of lab medicine from “a nascent specialty” to one more respected, said former chair and mentee, Eileen (Dan) Ryan, MD.

“Each area in Medicine – like Nephrology, Surgery – had labs right there,” Ryan said. “Dean’s major achievement was to bring them all together, centralize them so you have the ability to automate and innovate across boundaries. Dean made it happen here.”

When Dr. Arvan first arrived, lab results were handwritten on paper and sent via tube system within the hospital. This fragmented, archaic process looks nothing like today’s structure, which performs a high volume of patient tests under one roof.

This was no easy task, but his leadership and natural curiosity laid the foundation for the wide-reaching enterprise that became UR Medicine Labs—which now provides access to patients at nearly 40 lab locations and processes millions of outpatient and inpatient tests every year.

“Dr. Arvan was always a gentleman, could often be seen smoking his pipe in his office as he busily assembled the beginnings of the clinical laboratories empire,” wrote former department chair Bruce Smoller, MD, in his department history *A Pathway to Excellence*.

He is remembered by many as a deeply curious and supportive mentor.

“When I arrived almost 20 years ago, Dr. Arvan was already the former chair, but he took time to stop in and meet me, ask probing questions, and over the months he would return, checking up on me, providing wisdom as I settled into a leadership role in a wholly new environment,” said W. Richard Burack, MD, PhD.

Former chair Steven Spitalnik, MD, arrived as a resident and credits the “warm, mentoring culture” and quality of the division with his decision to choose transfusion medicine. Dr. Arvan gave him the opportunity to learn how to review a scientific manuscript and provided invaluable guidance.

“Dr. Arvan was always there for me every step of my career as a physician-scientist. I will miss him greatly.”

Neil Blumberg, MD, was recruited by Dr. Arvan in 1980 to be the first full-time director of the Transfusion Medicine/Blood Bank. “He single-handedly assembled a group of physician and medical scientist faculty that constituted the first organized laboratory medicine division in the history of URM,” Blumberg said.

HELENE MCMURRAY APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF HLA LAB



Helene McMurray, PhD, associate professor of Pathology, has been named director of the Tissue Typing Lab.

McMurray joined the department nearly a decade ago after making substantive contributions in cancer, basic science, and other areas of the Medical Center. She takes the

Helene McMurray, PhD reins from Myra Coppage, PhD, associate professor of Pathology, who has served as lab director for 35 years.

Coppage oversaw the transformation of the Tissue Typing Lab, shepherding it from a Surgery-based program entirely dependent on immunologic methods, to a Pathology-based program that routinely reports matches based on next-gen

sequencing and other high-dimensional analyses.

Coppage’s insightful focus on the lab’s long game when she recruited McMurray has resulted in a seamless transition, said Chair Christa Whitney-Miller, MD.

“Myra realized the complexity of the emerging program would benefit from Helene’s expertise and talent and, unbeknownst to Helene, handpicked her with the intention of the future leadership role,” Whitney-Miller said.

McMurray continues in her many roles, including director of the Pathology Graduate Program. Coppage will serve as an associate director of the lab until later this year.



Myra Coppage, PhD

REMEMBERING NEUROPATHOLOGY DIRECTOR MAHLON D. JOHNSON



Faculty member Mahlon D. Johnson, MD, PhD, professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and director of Neuropathology, died unexpectedly Feb. 3. He was 70.

He joined URM in 2006. Dr. Johnson was nationally recognized for his extraordinary expertise in neurosurgical pathology and neurodegenerative

disorders. He studied leptomeningeal diseases, particularly meningeal neoplasia.

Throughout his 44-year career, he published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and authored numerous book chapters, notably more than 150 publications. His passion for the profession and his stellar neuropathology diagnostic skills and knowledge were unparalleled and widely recognized, having received referrals for consultation from across the U.S. Accolades included numerous teaching and research awards.

Chair Christa Whitney-Miller, MD, shared: "He will be remembered as our friend and colleague, and neuropathologist extraordinaire. He exhibited a level of devotion to which most of us could only aspire but never achieve."

Plans for a tribute at the medical center will be shared subsequently.

Neuropathologist Rajnish Bharadwaj, MBSS, PhD, had the pleasure of working with Dr. Johnson for the past six years.

"He was an outstanding pathologist, held in high regard by his fellow neuropathologists and clinicians for his diagnostic skills and academic contributions. His dedication to patient care, academic excellence, and persistent learning was

inspirational," Bharadwaj said. "He was a great mentor and a generous colleague, as well, never hesitating to help anyone in need. He will be deeply missed by all who knew him."

Kevin A. Walter, MD, chief of Neurosurgery at Highland Hospital, remembers Dr. Johnson as a dedicated colleague who made time for whatever anyone needed.

"I particularly remember he was an avid 'gym rat,'" Walter said. "When we would call him for a frozen section at odd hours, he would usually reply that he was just lifting weights in the gym and would be right over. He was ready to drop whatever he was doing and come help us out. He always came into the OR in person to discuss his findings with us, which was extremely appreciated."

His impact in life, and the sudden loss, has been felt beyond the University.

"Dr. Mahlon Johnson was revered at the Monroe County Office of the Medical Examiner," said Nadia Granger, MD, county medical examiner. "His tranquil countenance and soft-spoken voice hid his wealth of knowledge and his wry sense of humor. He made a positive impact on every member of our staff who encountered him. His work with this office and in the world of neuropathology allowed our medical examiners to stand confidently and testify in some difficult cases."

"On a personal note, Dr. Johnson was neuropathology for me," said the former UR Pathology resident. "He taught me most of what I know. He was always kind and understanding. But as wise and knowledgeable as he was, he never made me feel inferior. The Monroe County Office of the Medical Examiner, the University of Rochester, and the neuropathology world at large has lost a well-respected and stalwart member. He will be sorely missed."

FOCUS ON FACULTY

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for challenging-to-classify lesions. For instance, DNA methylation profiling is gaining significant attention in the soft tissue field for both diagnosis and prognosis.

What is one thing you believe could help bring more young people to the field of pathology? Early exposure in medical school to the diverse roles of pathology—through tumor boards, frozen sections, and its collaborative impact on patient care—might help attract more physicians to the field. Additionally, mentorship from enthusiastic pathologists with dedicated teaching time would provide meaningful guidance and inspiration.

What do you do in your free time? I enjoy skating, hiking, paddleboarding, and kayaking. This winter, I hope to try cross-country skiing. I also love spending time with friends and family.

HOMETOWN

Plopieni (PH), Romania, and London (ON), Canada

FAMILY

My family is spread across different places—my parents and extended family live in Romania, while my sister, an actor, producer, musician, and CPA/CMA, resides in London, ON. My husband is a professor of Biomedical Engineering at RIT, and we share our home with two Canadian cats. ;)

EDUCATION

MD-University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Carol Davila" Bucharest, Romania

PhD- Western University, London, ON, Canada

FOCUS ON FACULTY VERONICA ULICI, MD, PHD



What brought you to Upstate NY... to URM? My husband has been a faculty member at RIT since 2014, so I pursued a faculty position at an academic institution in Upstate New York that best aligned with my goals. Fortunately, I found URM to be a great fit—a welcoming environment with supportive leadership, incredibly helpful colleagues, and numerous opportunities to engage in research, both in Anatomic Pathology

and through basic science collaborations within the Center for Musculoskeletal Research.

What do you do in your free time? I absolutely love to bake and watch documentaries on just about anything. However, with two toddlers, most of my time is spent baking with play dough and watching cartoons, which I secretly and thoroughly enjoy.

What about your specialty excites you? Many aspects of Bone and Soft Tissue Pathology are fascinating, but what excites me most is its collaborative nature. I especially value working closely with surgeons, oncologists, and musculoskeletal radiologists, particularly in the diagnosis and management of bone and soft tissue tumors.

Was there one moment, or individual, that showed you pathology was your chosen field? I had many great mentors throughout my training, but Dr. Richard Loeser, my research mentor at UNC Chapel Hill, was one of the first to recognize my potential for a career in pathology. With my background in histology, I helped set up histology processing and microscopic evaluation for several projects in his lab, where he recognized and appreciated my microscopy skills and passion for histology. Additionally, URM's Dr. Brendan Boyce was among the first pathologists to encourage my pursuit of a career in the field and supported me along the way, including arranging a shadowing experience at the Medical Center. He has been a valued mentor ever since.

What prepared you most for your career? My extensive research experience before starting Pathology Residency played a crucial role in preparing me for my career. The hands-on histology work—processing, embedding, and cutting my own samples, along with the microscopic evaluation of bone and cartilage—proved invaluable during residency and continues to enhance my understanding of cases as an attending.

Where is your specialty going in the future? It is heading toward greater molecular integration, particularly in diagnosing new bone and soft tissue entities and guiding management, especially

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