



# *Women in Neurosurgery*

## Fall 2024 Newsletter





## Executive Leadership



**Chair: Maryam Rahman, MD**  
University of Florida Health, Gainesville, FL



**Chair-Elect: Laura Snyder, MD**  
Barrow Neurological Institute, Phoenix, AZ



**Secretary: Kimberly Price Kicielinski, MD**  
Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC



**Treasurer: Rupa Juthani, MD**  
Neurosurgeons of New Jersey, NYU Langone, New York, New York



**Member-At-Large: Aurora S. Cruz, MD, MBA**  
University of Louisville, Louisville, KY



**Member-At-Large: Corinna Zygourakis, MD**  
Stanford Medicine, Palo Alto, CA



**Faculty Editor: Alia Hdeib, MD**  
Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH

## Additional Contributors



**Marissa Kruk, MS4**  
WINS Medical Student Committee Newsletter Coordinator

- Reyna Escalante, OMS2
- Sangami Pugazenthi, MS4
- Erin Walker, MS3

# Chair's Message

WINS at the CNS Annual Meeting demonstrated how far women in our field have come since WINS first came together. There were a record number of women at the meeting. We celebrated many “firsts” at the CNS including the opportunity to present the WINS Trailblazer award at the CNS Plenary session to Dr. Gail Rosseau. Additionally, we supported programming that has never been previously seen in organized neurosurgery such as the LGBTQIA+ breakfast which was sold out and featured honest discussion. Julie Kent, Houston Ballet director, gave an incredible talk at the WINS reception. Shortly afterwards, the WINS MSC reception was full of life and provided a great opportunity for building community. For the first time WINS sponsored a community outreach event working in the kitchen and laundry room at Beacon in Houston, serving our unhoused neighbors. All of this was possible due to generous donations and support from industry sponsors including the Glioblastoma Foundation, Stryker, Medtronic, Globus, Depuy, and Brainlab.

Building on this momentum, we have new administrative support for the robust mentorship program which will help with medical student and resident development. We have cutting-edge online educational series run by the MSC featuring neurosurgeons from diverse backgrounds. We have continued our close relationship with ASBN and the newly formed Neurosurgical Pride Alliance (NSPA). We have big plans for the AANS Annual meeting in Boston, April 2025. With Katie Orrico as the new CEO of the AANS, we have a true ally in the growth and development of WINS.

We are excited about the future of WINS and are grateful to have all of you as friends and partners in this journey.

Sincerely,

Maryam Rahman, MD  
Department of Neurological Surgery  
University of Florida

# Community Updates

## Attendings

### WINS Women of the Month & Hispanic Heritage Month Features

#### Dr. Christina Notarianni

Dr. Notarianni is a professor, director of pediatric neurosurgery, and program director at Ochsner LSU Health Shreveport. Her interest in neurosurgery developed in medical school while learning neuroanatomy, seeing a video of an aneurysm clipping during a neurovascular lecture, getting involved in research projects, and during clinical rotations. Above all, Dr. Notarianni was drawn to how neurosurgeons interact with patients during some of the most difficult times in their lives. When asked what advice she has for women interested in neurosurgery, she suggested seeking out mentors, both male and female, who promote you and your talents to others. She also emphasized the importance of surrounding yourself with other women with whom you can share ideas, difficult cases, success, and struggles. In 2025, Dr. Notarianni will serve as the first female president of the Louisiana Neurosurgical Society!

#### Dr. Nancy Epstein

With an impressive 48-year career in neurosurgery, Dr. Epstein continues to innovate as an attending at NYU Langone Hospital Long Island and spine consultant. When asked about the challenges she has faced as a woman in neurosurgery, she reflected on how the institution where she earned her MD would not hire her as a resident specifically because she was female. Some of the accomplishments she is most proud of include publishing over 400 peer-reviewed articles/chapters, serving as the editor-in-chief of Surgical Neurology International, and authoring sentinel articles in neurosurgery that brought forth concepts like intraoperative monitoring, ossification of the posterior longitudinal ligament, and operative waste in spine surgery.

#### Dr. Carolina Sandoval-Garcia

Dr. Sandoval-Garcia is an Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota. Her expertise spans cerebrovascular disease, pediatric trauma, and craniofacial services. When asked her advice for women interested in neurosurgery, she emphasized the importance of identifying good mentors and partners both in work and in life. Dr. Sandoval-Garcia expressed how critical it is to diversify neurosurgery from positions of leadership that can provide strong role models for people from all backgrounds to improve recruitment, retention, and promotion of underrepresented minorities in the neurosurgical discipline.

#### Dr. Eveline Teresa Hidalgo.

Dr. Hidalgo specializes in pediatric neurosurgery as an Assistant Professor at NYU Langone. She was drawn to neurosurgery because it presents interesting clinical challenges and offers innovative and effective treatment solutions. Her research interests include health disparities and barriers to access to care. Her ability to speak with families, especially with mothers about complex medical issues in their native language and with cultural competence, is a valuable addition to her neurosurgical practice. A fun fact about Dr. Hidalgo is that she applied to be an astronaut at the European Space Agency, which felt very familiar – only 15% of applicants were female!

### Spotlight on



### A Celebration of Success:

- Congratulations to **Dr. Gail Rosseau** on receiving the WINS Trailblazer Award at the 2024 CNS Annual Meeting.



- Congratulations to **Dr. Martina Stippler** on being named the CNS President-Elect for the 2025-2026 year.



- Congratulations to **Dr. Jordina Rineon-Torroella** on receiving the Jennison Endowed Rising Professorship at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

- Congratulations to **Dr. Maryam Rahman** and **Dr. Stacey Quintero Wolfe** for being featured on Becker Spine's list of women making waves in neurosurgery.

# Community Updates

*Fellows + Residents + Medical Students*

## *Congratulations*

### Corner:

- Congratulations to the Sherry Apple Resident Travel Scholarship recipient **Dr. Danielle Golub**, PGY-5 at Northwell Neurosurgery.
- Congratulations to **Dr. Nalini Tata**, PGY-4 at Weill Cornell Medicine, for being appointed to the 2024-2025 White House Fellows Class.
- Did you see our Hispanic Heritage Month post featuring the incredible Dr. Silvia Vaca? Read the summary below!



**Dr. Silvia Vaca** is a PGY-6 at Stanford University. She decided to pursue neurosurgery because of the amazing procedures, incredibly meaningful aspects of patient care, and inspiring individuals in the field. Her identities as a female and Latina in neurosurgery have allowed her to expand teams' and communities' perspectives on who and what providing high quality care to patients looks like.

## Trainee Tuesday Features

### **Dr. Lucinda Chiu**



Dr. Lucinda Chiu is a PGY-4 at Rush University Medical Center. She is interested in pediatric neurosurgery, neurotrauma, and global neurosurgery. She enjoys backpacking, marathons, EDM festivals, and food photography. Dr. Chiu feels incredibly supported by the mentors she has met along her neurosurgical journey including the faculty at Rush/Lurie's, and she continues to be inspired by her co-residents. She shares that one of the most rewarding residency experiences has been paying it forward through the mentorship of medical students, allowing them to pursue their passions and blaze their own paths.

### **Dr. Katherine Callahan**



Dr. Katherine Callahan is a PGY-4 at the University of Vermont Medical Center. Her current primary interests are functional neurosurgery and oncology/tumor, but is still in the process of deciding. As a Vermonter, Dr. Callahan is an avid skier and hiker. She is a proud "Swiftly", fantasy/thriller reader and aspiring dog-mom. Dr. Callahan would like to say thank you to all of her incredible mentors and family for their continued support.

### **Dr. Sarah Newman**



Dr. Sarah Newman is a PGY-5 neurosurgery resident at Emory University and will complete her spine fellowship at Thomas Jefferson University in 2026. Her clinical interests include neurotrauma and spine, specifically minimally invasive spine. She is particularly interested in bringing high-quality neurosurgical services across all socioeconomic classes. Dr. Newman's research interests include innovative therapies for spinal cord injury and mechanisms for osteoinduction. She would like to share that underlying her goals and interests there have been fantastic mentors along the way who have supported her as a surgeon and a woman in this field. She is extraordinarily thankful for the WINS community.

### **Dr. Deborah Boyett**



Dr. Deborah Boyett is a PGY-5 neurosurgery resident at Columbia University with an interest in open and endovascular neurosurgery. Her clinical research focuses on pioneering and evaluating new endovascular techniques for intra-arterial drug delivery aimed at treating vascular and neuro-oncologic conditions. Outside of the hospital, she is an avid reader of women's literature (check out Elena Ferrante or Sigrid Undset), and an open water swimmer, embracing the freedom and challenge it offers. When she can get away, she also loves to travel – she is halfway toward filling every page in her passport!

### **Dr. Melissa Meister**



Dr. Melissa Meister, MAJ, USAF, MC, is a PGY-7 at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Her clinical interests are spine and trauma. Dr. Meister's research interests include traumatic brain injuries and she is working toward the development of tools that can be used downrange to identify differing levels of traumatic brain injury when imaging modalities are not available. She is a Major in the US Air Force, an avid runner, and a proud cat mom.

### **Dr. Elhaum Rezaei**



Dr. Elhaum (Elli) Rezaei is a PGY-3 at the University of Nebraska Medical Center with an interest in spinal deformity and minimally invasive spine surgery. Her clinical and research interests have ranged from spinal oncology and radiation, to novel techniques for CSF leak repair, to improving gender disparities in the neurosurgical workforce. Dr. Rezaei was recently appointed as the Membership Chair of the WINS Resident Executive Committee. Outside of neurosurgery, she enjoys hip-hop dance, cooking (especially Persian cuisine), travel, and spending quality time with her husband and daughter.

# CNS 2024 *in Review*

We were so thrilled to see the engagement and excitement of the WINS community at the 2024 Congress of Neurological Surgeons Annual Meeting! Read more about the WINS events held this year in Houston, Texas:

## **WINS Executive Committee Meeting**

The WINS Executive Committee Meeting, an exciting start to our series of events at CNS, was held on Sunday, September 29th. Dr. Maryam Rahman, current WINS Chair, led the discussion summarizing the ongoing success of our organization and plans for the remainder of the year. She was accompanied by WINS Section Officers Dr. Laura Snyder, Dr. Kimberly Kicielinski, Dr. Rupa Juthani, Dr. Corinna Zygourakis, and Dr. Aurora Cruz. Dr. Nora Kim and Erin Walker, WINS Resident Committee and WINS Medical Student Committee Co-Chairs, provided updates on the major accomplishments of both groups. We were honored to be joined by so many passionate members of the WINS community, from past chairs to medical students just beginning their pursuit of neurosurgery.

## **WINS Resident Social**

The WINS Resident Social was held at Day 6 Coffee Co. on Sunday, September 29th. What an opportunity for our resident community to connect and unwind – with coffee, pastries, and great conversation, of course!

## **WINS Volunteering Event**

On the morning of Monday, September 30th, the WINS Medical Student Committee joined The Beacon Homeless Services for our annual volunteering event. WINS members helped serve breakfast, distribute coffee, and prepare dinner for those in need.

## **WINS Reception**

The WINS Reception was held on the evening of Monday, September 30th. The program featured Julie Kent, American ballerina and Artistic Director of the Houston Ballet. Her discussion drew parallels between dance and neurosurgery – lifelong pursuits that require dedication to continuous improvement, overcoming challenges, and self-discipline. Thank you to our event sponsors Brainlab and Glioblastoma Foundation!

## **WINS Medical Student Social**

On Monday, September 30th, the next generation of the WINS community gathered at the WINS Medical Student Social. Students enjoyed refreshments, a raffle with great prizes, and a bingo game to learn more about each other.

## **WINS and LGBTQIA+ Breakfast**

The WINS and LGBTQIA+ Breakfast was held in collaboration with the Neurological Surgeons Pride Alliance on Tuesday, October 1st. The panel discussion allowed LGBTQIA+ neurosurgeons to share their experiences and sparked great conversation about how programs can authentically show support.

## **Dorothy Nash Lecture**

This year's Dorothy Nash Lecture featured former Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern. The event was held on Tuesday, October 1st. Arden shared her perspective as a champion of women's empowerment, strong leader, and passionate advocate for environmental rights. She was joined by Dr. Ellen Air and Dr. Laura Snyder.

# WINS Legacy Interview

*Featuring Dr. Isabelle Germano*

**Professor of Neurosurgery, Neurology, Oncological Sciences  
Ichan School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NYC**

## **How would you describe your journey in neurosurgery?**

My journey in neurosurgery has been a fascinating blend of challenges and rewards. Throughout my training, I encountered rigorous academic demands and intense hands-on experiences, which shaped my skills and resilience. The journey is ongoing, filled with continuous learning and a commitment to advancing the field. It's a privilege to be part of such a dynamic and critical field.

## **Throughout the course of your career, what are some of the accomplishments you are most proud of?**

The four accomplishments listed to follow reflect my commitment and passion for making a difference in patients' lives and the field as a whole. Innovation and outcomes: Successfully performing complex surgeries and helping patients recover and improve their quality of life has been the main focus of my career. To further this, I have pioneered and performed several first-in-human procedures. Research contributions: As a funded NIH R01 Principal Investigator, my brain tumor translational laboratory received funds from NIH/NCI, FDA, foundations, and industry. I have authored over 170 peer-reviewed papers and 6 books. Diversity advocacy: Working towards increasing representation and inclusivity in neurosurgery has been one of my top goals. Community engagement: Involving myself in outreach programs to educate our Harlem community about neurological health and surgery has allowed achieving a positive impact beyond the operating room.

## **As a trailblazing woman in neurosurgery, what are some of the challenges you faced? How did you overcome them?**

I encountered skepticism about my abilities, which made me work even harder to demonstrate my competence and dedication. Believing in myself and building a strong support network was crucial. Additionally, I focused on honing my skills and seeking out challenging cases that showcased my capabilities. Over time, I found that persistence and excellence helped break down barriers.





I WANT TO BE  
A NEUROSURGEON



### **What does the “Spirit of WINS” mean to you? How have you embodied that throughout your career?**

The "Spirit of WINS" embodies empowerment, collaboration, and the pursuit of excellence in the field. To me, it represents the idea of lifting each other up, breaking down barriers, and fostering an inclusive environment where all voices are heard. I've embodied this spirit throughout my career by actively mentoring young women in neurosurgery, sharing my experiences, and encouraging them to pursue their passions.

### **What are your aspirations for the future of WINS and the field of neurosurgery as a whole?**

My aspirations for the future of WINS and neurosurgery are rooted in inclusivity, innovation, and collaboration. Ultimately, my vision for WINS and neurosurgery is one of empowerment, where everyone has the opportunity to contribute, innovate, and make a difference in patient care and the broader community.

### **What words of wisdom would you like to share with WINS members?**

Embrace collaboration and support one another; it fosters innovation and growth. Stay curious and open to learning, as each experience contributes to your journey. Celebrate your achievements, no matter how small, and keep pushing boundaries. Together, you can create meaningful change and inspire others. Keep shining!

### **What is your most cherished WINS memory?**

All the WINS moments of connection and growth were the most impactful, creating lasting bonds and inspiring future endeavors, including creating the children's book: "I want to be a neurosurgeon" (<https://nref.org/The-Next-Generation-of-WINS/>). I was very humbled and honored to serve as WINS President and delighted to have collaborated in building this organization, including bringing it to the recognition of an AANS/CNS joint section. The plaque received by WINS in 2018 to honor me as Mentor Leader stands out as one of my most cherished career recognitions.

*Dr. Germano, we sincerely thank you for your insight and advice!*

# *WINS* from Past to Present

The history of Women in Neurosurgery highlights the significant progress the organization has made in promoting gender equality in neurosurgery since its inception. The decision to form WINS was made on November 1, 1989, when a group of female neurosurgeons, including Drs. Deborah Benzil, Karin Muraszko, and Gail Rosseau, recognized the need for an organized network to support women in the field. WINS officially held its first meeting on October 22, 1990, during the CNS Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, marking the beginning of its commitment to fostering communication, mentorship, and professional development for female neurosurgeons.

In its early years, WINS focused on increasing female representation in neurosurgery, addressing the lack of female mentors, and overcoming gender bias in the field. Despite the initial hesitation of some women to join the group publicly, WINS gradually gained visibility, and by 1994, it had received official endorsement from the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS). The organization played a key role in increasing the number of female neurosurgeons and supporting their advancement through mentorship programs, scholarships, and leadership opportunities.

WINS has grown significantly over the past three decades. One pivotal moment in the organization's history came in 2008 with the publication of "The Future of Neurosurgery: A White Paper on the Recruitment and Retention of Women in Neurosurgery." This document outlined strategies to increase the representation of women in neurosurgery and addressed the barriers they faced in recruitment, training, and career advancement. The white paper emphasized the importance of mentorship, gender equality in hiring practices, and creating a more inclusive culture within the field.

As WINS continued to expand, it reached international levels, launching initiatives such as the WINS International Outreach Program and hosting symposiums and leadership development courses. By 2013, WINS achieved the status of a joint section with the AANS and CNS, further establishing its influence within the neurosurgical community. Today, WINS is recognized for its ongoing efforts to create an inclusive environment in neurosurgery, support the professional growth of female neurosurgeons, and advocate for gender diversity in the field.

## *Remembering* Dr. Frances Conley

Dr. Frances Conley, a trailblazing neurosurgeon and the first female tenured professor in neurosurgery in the United States, passed away at age 83 in August 2024. Throughout her career at Stanford University, Conley was known for her innovative work in spinal surgeries and carotid artery procedures, as well as her research on brain tumors. In addition to her clinical excellence, Conley fiercely advocated for gender equity, famously challenging sexism in academic medicine with a bold protest in 1991 that ignited national debate. Her legacy endures through her contributions to neurosurgery and her unwavering dedication to equality.



# Stay in the Loupe



Read the latest update on WINS social media initiatives and events:

## **#WINSxResearchMonday**

The WINS Outreach team continues to share recent research papers on our social media pages using the hashtag #WINSxResearchMonday. In “Where Are the Women in Spine Surgery? A Demographic Study of the Range of Gender Disparity in Academic Spine Hospitals in the United States”, Bratescu et al. found that women represent only 9% of spine surgeons at academic hospitals, which continues to lag behind present day demographics of training programs. This finding emphasizes the need for both individuals and institutions to support progress in gender disparity research.

We also recently shared a study by Apache et al. titled “In-State Retention Rates of Female Neurosurgery Graduates”. The authors highlighted that medical schools that retained more female neurosurgery graduates had a larger number of female neurosurgery attendings. In “Concerns, Perceptions, and Career Considerations of Female Medical Students Interested in Neurosurgery: A Qualitative Case Study”, Wong et al. described three key themes that emerged: sense of belonging, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy. These themes reflect the complex interplay of passion, challenges, and aspirations that shape individuals’ career decisions in the neurosurgical field.

Smith et al. found that there was a 5.5% increase in matched female applicants from 2010 to 2019 in “Fueling the Future of Neurosurgery: Increasing Trends in Female Enrollment Expanding the Neurosurgical Workforce from 2010 to 2019”. Furthermore, “Women in Neurosurgery: breaking barriers” by Yoh et al. highlights the incredible progress women in neurosurgery have made. As of 2022, 24% of neurosurgery residents in the United States are female, an increase from just 13% in 2010. In addition, 10% of practicing neurosurgeons are female – a significant rise from 6% in 2008. While there is still work to be done, the future of neurosurgery is certainly becoming more inclusive and diverse.

Are you conducting research related to diversity, health equity, and novel science in neurosurgery? Share your work with our WINS team by adding #WINSxResearchMonday to your posts!

## **WINS Medical Student Committee Residency Match Series**

The WINS Medical Student Committee continues to break down barriers for aspiring neurosurgeons through its empowering Residency Match Series. Recent events include "Acing the Interview" on October 14th, led by Dr. Carolyn Quinsey, offering strategies for a strong interview performance. On September 18th, Dr. Mahua Dey and Dr. Justin D. Hillard shared insights on "How to Frame Research Experiences" to enhance applications. Earlier, on August 28th, Dr. Josiah Ornia, Dr. Sharona Ben-Haim, and Dr. Grace Mandigo provided a detailed walkthrough of the ERAS process in "Inside ERAS." These events offer invaluable information, ensuring students are well-prepared and building confidence for Match success.

## *How to Get Involved*

Are you passionate about equity, diversity, and representation in neurosurgery? Would you like to stay connected with the WINS community? Become a member of WINS! Attendings, fellows, residents, and medical students can follow these instructions to become an official member of the WINS roster:

<https://neurosurgerywins.org/membership/>