



# *Women in Neurosurgery*

Spring 2025 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**  
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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

Last year in the Chair's message, we spoke about the progress WINS has made in organized neurosurgery and how we wanted to build on our collective influence to collaborate with other under-represented groups in Neurosurgery to lift those early in their struggle for representation. In this last year, we have been able to make small steps towards this goal including multiple online interactive webinars, standing in solidarity with ASBN about DEI verbiage coming out from organized neurosurgery, a community volunteer event at the homeless shelter in Houston during the CNS meeting, and our DEI full day symposium in collaboration with American Society of Black Neurosurgeons (ASBN), Neurosurgical Pride Alliance (NSPA), and Latinos in Neurosurgery (LINS) on April 12th 2025.

We continue to ask, what should we do with our collective power? The answer to this question will continue to evolve as WINS grows and the work necessary of us changes. For now, during these tumultuous times, we find strength by coming together to learn and teach neurosurgery, share the highs and lows of our lives with each other and to advance our field for the coming generations. This is where we always find the best version of ourselves and it is what the world needs from us.

I continue to be in awe of the people on the ground doing the hard work. It has been my honor to serve as Chair of WINS for this past year and I am very excited about the future of WINS and other organizations dedicated to the cause of improving our field.

Sincerely,

Maryam Rahman, MD  
Department of Neurological Surgery  
University of Florida

# AANS 2025 *Preview*

Mark your calendars! We hope to see you in Boston, Massachusetts for the WINS Events at the 2025 AANS Annual Meeting. Attendings, fellows, residents, and medical students of all genders are welcome to attend:

*Friday , April 25th*

- Charles L. Plante Lecture, Opening Session – Gail Rosseau

*Saturday , April 26th*

- Louise Eisenhardt Lecture, Plenary II – Asma Khan
- AANS/CNS Section on Women in Neurosurgery Breakfast
- WINS Reception 5:00-6:30 PM, Commonwealth Ballroom B-C, Concourse Level

*Sunday , April 27th*

- Distinguished Advocate Award, Plenary III – Shelly D. Timmons

We are excited to share that the **Milk Stork Program** will be available at the AANS Annual Meeting this year, providing a convenient solution for breastfeeding attendees. This service allows nursing mothers to safely and easily ship or transport their breast milk home while attending the conference. With pre-labeled, temperature-controlled packaging, Milk Stork ensures that breast milk stays fresh and secure during transit. By offering this resource, we hope to support parents in balancing their professional commitments with their caregiving responsibilities, making the meeting more inclusive and accessible for all attendees.

Scan this QR code to learn about the WINS events at AANS 2025, view the WINS website, and more:



# Community Updates

## Attendings

### Spotlight on

*WINS*

#### A Celebration of Success:

- Congratulations to **Dr. Deanna Sasaki-Adams** on being named Chair of the UAMS Department of Neurosurgery.
- Congratulations to **Dr. Stacey Quintero Wolfe** on being appointed Chair of the Department of Neurosurgery and Eben Alexander Chair in Neurosurgery at Wake Forest University School of Medicine.
- Congratulations to **Dr. Shelly Timmons** for receiving the AANS Distinguished Advocate Award.
- Congratulations to all **36 Women in Neurosurgery** awarded the 2025 Castle Connolly Exceptional Women in Medicine recognition.

### WINS Women of the Month Features



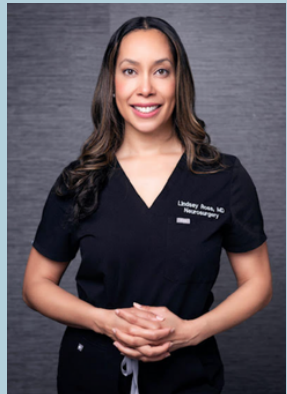
#### Dr. Joanna Gernsback

Dr. Gernsback is a pediatric neurosurgeon who specializes in congenital malformations at UT Health San Antonio. When asked what advice she has for women pursuing neurosurgery, she said: “It’s not easy, but the result is worth it. Believe in yourself and surround yourself with those who believe in you. Ignore the haters.” A fun fact about Dr. Gernsback is that she has run for 1409 days straight, as of 1/1/25, including running 3 marathons!



#### Dr. Alexa Canady

Dr. Canady is a true pioneer in neurosurgery and a testament to excellence, dedication, and persistence. When reflecting on the accomplishments she is most proud of, she discussed treating all patients, partners, services, and residents with respect. Dr. Canady also described her work in creating a Hydrocephalus Group and working very closely with pediatric patients. She believes that being a person who is motivated to do the best and most thorough job they can every day makes an exceptional neurosurgeon.



#### Dr. Lindsey Ross

Dr. Ross is an attending neurosurgeon at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. A former White House Fellow, she is the clinical leader of the Cedars-Sinai Health Equity Council and chairs the Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee for Graduate Medical Education. Her favorite cases to perform are spinal canal tumor resections – they require precision, creativity, and a deep understanding of both spinal and neurological anatomy, which make them particularly rewarding.



#### Dr. Sonia Eden

Dr. Eden specializes in minimally invasive spine surgery at Semmes Murphy Clinic Oxford. She decided to pursue neurosurgery after observing brain surgery during a high school summer research program and never looked back! Her advice to women pursuing neurosurgery is to follow your passion, actively seek mentorship from practicing male and female neurosurgeons, establish robust networks with women in the field, and stay focused on achieving your goal.

# Community Updates

*Fellows + Residents + Medical Students*

## Trainee Tuesday Features



### Dr. Canada Montgomery

Dr. Canada Montgomery is a second-year resident at Penn Medicine. As an African American woman coming from a low-income background and the first in her family to go into medicine, she takes pride in how a multitude of identities have shaped her experience in neurosurgery. A fun fact about Dr. Montgomery is that her goal is to travel to a foreign country each year – so far, she has been to South Africa and Japan!



### Dr. Deveny Franklin

Dr. Deveny Franklin is a first-year resident at the University of North Carolina. When asked how her identities shaped her career in neurosurgery, she reflected on having difficulty finding mentors early on. Organizations like ASBN made it possible to connect with mentors with similar identities and pushed her to create the Neuro Mentoring Matters program for medical students with similar struggles. Her advice for women pursuing neurosurgery is to stay true to who you are and your goals. A fun fact about Dr. Franklin is she had the same vocal coach as Justin Bieber and Usher in high school!



### Dr. Caroline Davidson

Dr. Caroline Davidson is a sixth-year resident at University of Nebraska. Her clinical interests are mostly within the realm of Neurosurgical Oncology. Her research interests lie in exploring liquid biopsy for disease diagnosis and progression. When she is not training, Dr. Davidson loves tapping into her creative side through ballet, costume design and creation, as well as learning new languages.



### Dr. Lily Kim

Dr. Lily Kim is a fifth-year resident at Stanford. Her surgical interests include tumor and skull base. Dr. Kim's research currently focuses on exploring cancer immunology and immunometabolism pertaining to glioblastoma and skull base tumors. She would like to share that she is constantly inspired by trailblazing female role models in the field, and she is passionate about empowering future generations of female neurosurgeons!



### Dr. Stephanie Ihezic

Dr. Stephanie Ihezic is a fourth-year resident at Dartmouth. She is interested in functional neurosurgery, neuromodulation for spinal cord injury, pain, and expanding access to neurosurgery to those in minoritized and geographically limited and or socioeconomically limited groups. She would like to share with the WINS community that she is a: child of God, lover of humans, and Disney enthusiast. She wants to share that she is working on honing her Spanish, embracing opportunities and cherishing the small and big things in life: showing gratitude and being better today than yesterday.

## Congratulations

### Corner:

Congratulations to the MS4 WINS Medical Student Committee members who successfully matched into Neurosurgery!



### Sangami Pugazenthi

MSC Executive Co-Chair  
Matched at: University of Pittsburgh



### Megan Bauman

MSC Events Co-Chair  
Matched at: WashU Medicine



### Marissa Kruk

MSC Newsletter Coordinator  
Matched at: Case Western Reserve University



### Charlotte Michaelcheck

MSC Features Liaison  
Matched at: Mount Sinai



### Liliana Ladner

MSC Research Liaison  
Matched at: Medical University of South Carolina



### Hannah Black

MSC Marketing  
Matched at: Harvard BWH



### Alexandra Demetriou

MSC National & Regional Events  
Matched at: University of Southern California



### Pooja Venkatesh

MSC Match Series Coordinator  
Matched at: Emory University



### Logan Muzyka

MSC Research  
Matched at: University of Washington

# WINS Legacy Interview

*Featuring Dr. Susan Pannullo*

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

Challenging, rewarding, and richly textured. When I first expressed interest in neurosurgery during medical school, I was told “women don’t do neurosurgery,” which was pretty much true at the time. I did an entire neurology residency and a fellowship in neuro-oncology prior to starting my neurosurgery residency at New York Hospital/Cornell. I was the first woman to complete a neurosurgical residency program at Cornell and possibly the first who did not play squash. I was for sure the first in our program to be pregnant (see WINS Newsletter from Spring 2008, “[The Pregnant Neurosurgeon: Not an Oxymoron](#)”). After completing my final year of postgraduate training (PGY-10), I paused for 18 months before taking my first neurosurgery job. My journey then took me into a variety of neurosurgical environments — I started in a “privedemic” practice, then moved into safety net resource-challenged hospitals in the South Bronx. In 2002, I was recruited back to Cornell to build programs in neuro-oncology and radiosurgery; that work was impactful and gratifying. Woven into the tapestry have been joyful opportunities to teach/mentor, perform clinical trials and other research, and serve in a variety of leadership positions.

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

Clinically, I am very proud of the care I have provided to thousands of patients and the meaningful relationships I have made with many. I am board certified in both neurology and neurosurgery and am really proud of the work I have done to earn and maintain these certifications.

As an educator, I am proud of my long-term commitment to education and mentorship of our future healthcare workforce. I have served as an endowed “Education Scholar” at Cornell and contributed to development of a successful Weill Cornell Medicine MD/MEng program. I co-founded the Brain and Spine Group, a national education organization that has grown from a tiny local concept to a national neuro education force with tangible scaled-up programs. After a series of escalating leadership positions at The Washington Center in Washington, DC, I was elected unanimously to serve as Board of Trustees Chair (and recently re-elected to a second term). I am proud of the impact I have had on education from this position, particularly as it relates to national healthcare policy.

As a researcher, I am proud of the many years I spent as chair of Cornell’s Cancer Institutional Review Board, helping others advance their science and protecting research integrity. In my own work, I am also proud of my contributions as PI and Co-PI on scores of clinical trials, particularly in the brain tumor space.

As a vocal advocate locally and nationally, I am proud of my history of standing up for Quality and Patient Safety and access to care as well as for clinician wellness and rights. Specifically related to neurosurgical advocacy, I am proud of the work I have done and will continue to do in collaboration with specialty organizations such as the AANS, the National Brain Tumor Society, the Brain Tumor Foundation, The Radiosurgery Society (and WINS!). There is still so much more to do. All neurosurgeons should be encouraged to extend themselves in this meaningful volunteer work. The benefits outweigh any burden, although that is not always obvious at the start.

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

In real time, during years of training and beyond, I never thought of myself as a trailblazer. However, looking back through that lens, I can see there were some challenges. Some are best left to discuss over a cup of coffee, but some others I can highlight here. It has been challenging to find mentors and role models, but I have found some great ones, both within and outside of neurosurgery, and both women and men. My husband, Joe, has been my best mentor and sponsor; I am most proud of the fact that he has stuck with me by my side since we met in ninth grade. Joe has provided us with critical life perspective and balance. With respect to WINS, I’ve always considered myself to be a neurosurgeon, not a “female neurosurgeon” — my husband has helped me recognize and embrace the fact that men and women are different.



You might expect me to say that it was tough to be the mother of four boys born and raised at different points in my career, but the truth is that my children made my career less challenging, not more. The joy they have brought to my life far outweighs stresses induced by the never-ending imbalance of all the places a neurosurgeon (not just a female one) needs to be. Children and partnership remain among the most complicated aspects of leading a balanced life as a woman in medicine, and in neurosurgery in particular.

When I first became active in “organized neurosurgery,” there were few women in leadership positions. It was challenging to have access to these opportunities, but WINS leaders and other valued supporters paved a path before me and pushed me to step up when they had cleared the way. Then, when I advanced as a neurosurgical leader, my job became to encourage other women and men to pursue opportunities (and most importantly excel!) when given a chance. Equally critical was to recognize strategically when it was not the optimal time for my mentees to take on these roles, and to counsel them accordingly.

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

The Spirit of WINS is about connections – connecting women, connecting generations, and connecting the broad spectrum of members of our neurosurgical community.

I have spent my career creating meaningful connections with my patients, my clinical partners, my research collaborators, my co-inventors, my mentees and members of teams that I lead. At this point in my own career, I'm realizing how many others I have been honored to have an impact on — notably, not all women. In the Spirit of WINS, I am lucky that women and men have felt comfortable enough to approach me, and I am committed to continue to live my life in an accessible and approachable manner.

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

I would be happiest if it became completely unremarkable to be a woman in neurosurgery. Until that happens, though, WINS must continue to provide a mechanism to encourage women (and others who are not “usual”) to choose neurosurgery as a career, and to be able to stick with it.

Neurosurgery needs to continue to attract the “best and brightest” for the sake of our specialty and, most importantly, the patients we serve. I reflect often on the WINS White Paper commissioned by the AANS and penned by WINS leaders while I was a pregnant WINS President (see *The future of neurosurgery: a white paper on the recruitment and retention of women in neurosurgery*, *Journal of Neurosurgery*, Sept 2008).

From this and subsequent related and unrelated policy and advocacy work, I have learned to appreciate how important this engagement is to the future of neurosurgery. My hope is to continue to infuse and inspire fellow neurosurgeons with enthusiasm for these crucial and challenging — but also meaningful and joyful — efforts.

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

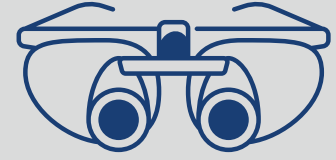
The very first WINS meeting I attended — I believe it was in San Antonio, many years ago — when I didn't think I “needed” WINS. I was tough and independent. But I sat with these early WINS leaders, each one so interesting, smart, and strong, and said “wow, now I get it.” I realized that in fact WINS, although not “required,” was, and still is, great to have, like a big neurosurgical hug.

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

When the dreams you're dreamin' come to you  
When the work you put in is realized  
Let yourself feel the pride  
But always stay humble and kind  
Don't take for granted the love this life gives you  
When you get where you're going don't forget to turn back around  
And help the next one in line  
Always stay humble and kind  
- Tim McGraw

*Dr. Pannullo, thank you for your insight and leadership!*

# Stay in the Loupe



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

## #WINSxResearchMonday

Each week, the WINS Outreach Team highlights groundbreaking neurosurgical research using the hashtag #WINSxResearchMonday, bringing attention to innovative studies and critical issues in the field. One recent post featured “Effects of Gender and Country of Training on Perceived Access to Opportunities for Neurosurgical Research and Gender-Concordant Mentorship” where Odonkor et al. found that women across the globe had limited access to female mentors. In “Designing an Inclusive Operating Room: For All and By All”, Shah et al. draw parallels between the lack of gender inclusivity in NASA’s spacesuit design and ergonomic challenges in surgical settings. The authors emphasize how designing accessible OR equipment and promoting diverse leadership will yield better performance and better outcomes. Kabangu et al. raise awareness of significant gender disparities in financial interactions between neurosurgeons and medical device companies in “Gender disparities in industry payments to neurosurgeons: a comprehensive analysis of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Open Payment data”. The study showed that industry payments between 2016-2022 totaled over \$388 million, with female neurosurgeons receiving only 0.91% of payments.

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

## WINS Medical Student Committee Events

The WINS Medical Student Committee continues to host events that empower students by providing valuable insights into career development, diversity, and research in neurosurgery. On January 8th, "Navigating Neurosurgery: Family Planning and Parenting" featured Drs. Doris Wang, Jennifer Strahle, Jackie MacDonell, and Sarah Merrill discussing how to balance neurosurgical careers with family life. On January 25th, "Pioneering Neurosurgery Across the Globe" highlighted the experiences of Drs. Mabel Banson and Juliet Sekabunga Nalwanga in advancing neurosurgery worldwide.

Focusing on career development, "Becoming a Neurosurgeon-Scientist: Advice and Valuable Insights" on February 7th featured Drs. Linda Bi and Melanie Hayden Gephart, who offered guidance on integrating research into neurosurgical careers. In celebration of Black History Month, Drs. Holly S. Gilmer, Tiffany Hodges, and Olabisi Sanusi led a discussion on February 10th on diversity and representation in the field.

On March 6th, medical students Aden Mendoza, Danielle Wishart, and Logan Muzyka presented "Data to Delivery: The Essentials of a Great Research Talk," providing key strategies for effective scientific communication. The events culminated on April 12th with "United by Diversity: Embracing Intersectionality in Neurosurgery," a collaborative DEI symposium co-hosted by WINS, ASBN, NSPA, and Latinos in Neurosurgery, fostering conversations on inclusivity in the field.

## 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/>