

Women in Neurosurgery
Summer 2026 Newsletter

Chair's Message

Greetings!

I am so excited to assume the role of chair of WINS, a group that has been incredibly influential in my own career and growth. I am humbled but excited for the opportunity to represent this organization over the next year. It was great connecting with so many of you at AANS. The size and energy of our receptions continues to blow me away.

The WINS Executive Committee and I, along with Medical Student Section and Resident Section are hard at work planning virtual and in person events for the coming year. Look for several events throughout the year to focus on bystander training, my personal platform for the year. We will kick this off with our breakfast at CNS. I hope to deliver real tools that you can use in the inevitable sticky situations we encounter to support and advocate for yourself and those around you.

Years in the making, I'm thrilled to announce the NSPA/WINS Henry Messer Award for Advocacy in Neurosurgery has officially been established. You can head over to the CNS Foundation to donate or nominate work being done in the spirit of this neurosurgical trailblazer. We look forward to presenting the first award at the CNS 2027 Annual Meeting.

Wishing you a restorative summer,

Kimberly Kicielinski, MD, MSPH

Chair, AANS/CNS Joint Section of Women in Neurosurgery
Associate Professor of Neurosurgery
Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC



Community Updates

Attendings

WINS EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP



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



Vice President:
Rupa Juthani, MD
Neurosurgeons of New
Jersey, NYU Langone,
New York, NY



Secretary:
Rushna P. Ali, MD
Mayo Clinic,
Rochester, MN



Treasurer:
Analiz Rodriguez, MD
University of Arkansas for
Medical Sciences,
Little Rock, AR



Member-at-Large:
Lara Massie, MD
Allegheny Health
Network,
Monroeville, PA



Member-at-Large:
Angela M. Richardson,
MD, PhD
Indiana University,
Indianapolis, IN

Spotlight on



A Celebration of Success

- Congratulations to Dr. Stavropaula Tjourmakaris as the new Chair of Neurosurgery at Jefferson!
- Congratulations to Dr. Kelly Bridges for being recognized as 2026 “Best Of” Award Winner by BusinessRate for Strong Spine Patient Care Reviews
- Congratulations to Dr. Stephanie H. Chen for being awarded the CNS Foundation’s 2026 Future Women Leaders Scholarship Award!

Woman of the Month



Dr. Carolina Sandoval-Garcia, MD

Dr. Sandoval-Garcia is an Assistant Professor at University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. She fell in love with the craftsmanship and finesse of neurosurgery and finds deep fulfillment in building lifelong relationships with patients and their families. Her favorite surgical case is a posterior fossa craniotomy for tumor resection given the need for precise microsurgical technique, complex anatomy around the brainstem/cranial nerves, and utility of intraoperative monitoring. As a woman of Latin-American descent, she feels a strong responsibility to mentor and pave the way for increased diversification of the field. She is passionate about running and is currently training to run all six SuperHalves!

Community Updates

Fellows - Residents

TRAINEE TUESDAY

Check out what our trainees are saying about their residency experience below!



Dr. Kate Rosen, PGY-4

Dr. Kate Rosen is a PGY-4 at Weill Cornell. Her clinical interests are in neurosurgical oncology. Her research interests are centered on immunotherapy for meningiomas and gaining experience in clinical trial design and management. She encourages medical student applicants to focus on the “next right thing”, and to focus on the journey rather than the end point. In her free time she is an avid marathoner and plans to run the Berlin race this year!

Thanks to all who participated in our Senior Resident Course in Open Skull Base Surgery on April 10-11th!

Congratulations Corner

- Congratulations to Dr. Rebekah Langston, MD, PhD for being awarded the 2026 O'Donnell Brain Institute Sprouts Grant!
- Congratulations to Dr. Shivani Baisiwala, MD for being awarded the Southeastern Brain Tumor Foundation Award!
- Congratulations to Dr. Rachel C. Jacobs for receiving the Veena D. Mummaneni Award!

Resident Initiatives

- “Insights into Fellowship: Oncologic and Skull Base Neurosurgery” with Drs. Sophie Peeters, Stephanie Robert, and Charuta Furey was held on March 26th
- “Behind the Curtain: Demonstrating Resilience” with Drs. Andie Conching, Zoe Robinow, Emily Chapman, Boyi Li, Deb Boyett, Danika Paulo, Anja Srienc was held on May 26th



Community Updates

Medical Students

It's a Match!

Congratulations to our WINS Medical Student Committee members for matching into neurological surgery! We are incredibly proud of you and wish you the best on intern year!



Kaho Adachi
Emory University



Jade Basem
Penn State University



Alex Kramer
Tulane University



Megan Lim
Oregon Health Sciences
University



Taylor Niznik
Vanderbilt University



Reagan Shanahan
University of Pittsburgh



Allie Sinclair
University of Cincinnati



Angela Tang-Tan
Oregon Health Sciences
University

Congratulations Grads!



Clairice Pearce
WINS MSC Newsletter Coordinator

Additional Contributors:

Vidhatri Raturi
WINS MSC Senior President
Anna Kimata
WINS MSC Junior President

Emilija Sagaityte
Immediate Past
MSC Events Co-Chair

Medical Student Initiatives

Our WINS Medical Student Committee members are sharing their words of wisdom after the cathartic Match! Check out the latest below!



"Post-Match Panel 1: Applicant Type" was held with several of our recently matched M4s on April 20th. Medical students were able to gain a glimpse of what it takes to be a successful applicant with respect to each speaker's unique background!



"Post-Match Panel 2: Beyond Eras" was our second panel involving our recently matched M4s on April 27th. For this session, our panelists discussed how they navigated the Match process while considering family, location, and under-representation.



"Neurosurgery Sub-Internships: Beyond the Textbook" with Kathy Guzman and Drs. Molly Lafuente, Kaho Adachi, Megan Malueg was held on May 11th. Rising M3's got tips and tricks on how to shine during their away rotations.



"Navigating Neurosurgery: Work-Life Harmony" with Drs. Natalie Limoges, Kara Parikh, Erin Miller was held on May 18th. Here, we took a step back to examine how to strike balance in this very demanding career path!



Neurogenesis Leadership Program Update Alexa Lauinger

Serving as an ambassador for the WINS Neurogenesis program allowed me to successfully build my skills in communication, networking, and event organization while offering concrete opportunities to my classmates and peers. Through the program, I learned a great deal about leadership and mentorship from the peer seminars organized by the amazing student leadership team. I was able to immediately incorporate these insights into developing a "Preparing to Match Neurosurgery" hybrid online and in-person session at the Carle Illinois College of Medicine. It was incredibly rewarding to execute this event and hear firsthand from attendees how it helped them plan their medical careers and connect with neurosurgeons in the field.

Thanks to all who participated!

AANS 2026 Review

It was a blast getting to reconnect with the WINS community at the last AANS meeting! Read on to see what our team was able to achieve!

Attendings, fellows, residents, medical students, and other neurosurgical trainees gathered in San Antonio, Texas, for AANS 2026 from May 1st–4th to learn, share research, and strengthen the connections that advance our field. At the WINS Breakfast and Louise Eisenhardt Lecture on May 2nd, attendees heard from Hailey Mullican, JD, who provided practical insights into physician contracts and litigation. Through both her lecture and a discussion with Dr. Laura Snyder and WINS leadership, Mullican emphasized the value of approaching legal and business conversations with confidence, preparation, and a strong foundation of knowledge. Her message highlighted the importance of empowering neurosurgeons with the tools needed to navigate every aspect of professional practice.



A highlight of the weekend was the continued success of the Mentorship in a Minute program, where 10 residents met one-on-one with 15 medical students. These conversations provided aspiring neurosurgeons with personalized guidance, encouragement, and perspective while fostering connections that may continue well beyond the meeting. For many participants, the program offered a unique opportunity to engage with mentors who could help illuminate pathways forward in training, research, leadership, and clinical practice.



The spirit of community and collaboration continued at Saturday evening's WINS Reception, where attendees connected with colleagues, mentors, mentees, and friends from across the country. Through Icebreaker Bingo, lively conversations, and shared experiences, participants built new relationships and strengthened existing ones. The evening concluded with a raffle featuring prizes generously donated by companies and small businesses that support and/or are led by women. Prizes ranged from hospital attire and Greenberg's Handbook of Neurosurgery to self-care items.

As AANS 2026 came to a close, attendees left with new knowledge, meaningful connections, and renewed enthusiasm for the future of neurosurgery. Through mentorship, education, and community, WINS continues to foster opportunities for growth, support, and leadership development, helping to inspire the next generation of neurosurgeons while strengthening the field as a whole.



Scan this QR code to learn about the WINS events at AANS 2026, view the WINS website, and more:



ASSFN 2026 Review

The WINS x Resident Reception at ASSFN was a tremendous success, providing trainees with valuable opportunities to connect with peers, fellowship directors, and leaders in the field of functional neurosurgery. Attendees benefited from insightful career guidance and mentorship from faculty representing a broad range of career stages, including invited speaker Dr. Aviva Abosch, ASSFN President Dr. Julie Pilitsis and incoming ASSFN President Dr. Ellen Air. Their perspectives on career development, leadership, and professional growth fostered meaningful discussion and engagement among participants.



In addition, WINS continued its scrub cap fundraiser during the meeting, raising an additional \$200 to support future initiatives and programming. We extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. Rushna Ali (ASSFN Scientific Program Chair) and Dr. Sharona Ben-Haim (ASSFN Board Member) for their outstanding efforts in organizing and coordinating this event. Their dedication and leadership were instrumental in creating a welcoming and impactful experience for trainees and faculty.



WINS Legacy Interview

Dr. Julie Pititsis

Professor and Chair, Department of Neurosurgery, University of Arizona
Program Director, Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery Fellowship
Program Director, Pre-Residency General Neurosurgery Fellowship Program
Physician Executive for Functional Neurosurgery, Banner Health System



How would you describe your journey in neurosurgery?

My journey in neurosurgery has been one of continual evolution—clinically, academically, and personally. I entered medicine through a combined BS/MD program and quickly gravitated toward neuroscience because it brought together complex problem-solving, innovation, and the ability to profoundly impact patients' lives. I pursued both a PhD during my neurosurgical residency, eventually specializing in functional neurosurgery and neuromodulation.

What has made the journey especially meaningful is that it never followed a single path. I have been fortunate to serve as a practicing neurosurgeon, NIH-funded researcher, educator, department chair, dean, and national leader within organized neurosurgery. Throughout each phase, mentorship and education remained central themes. I have always believed that advancing neurosurgery means investing in the people coming behind us and feel this will be my legacy.

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

While I am proud of our scientific and clinical accomplishments, including NIH-funded research, patents, publications, and the development of novel neuromodulation technologies, the achievements I value most involve mentorship and building programs that create opportunities for others.

Over the years, I have mentored hundreds of students and trainees ranging from high school students to postdoctoral fellows. I helped establish mentorship initiatives through Women in Neurosurgery, the North American Neuromodulation Society, and the American Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery. Creating educational pipelines—from Brain Bee programs for high school students to national mentorship initiatives for medical students—has been incredibly meaningful to me.

I am also proud of helping expand departments and institutions through my leadership roles including the development of the Junior Faculty Development Program in Albany which still continues. Whether increasing research productivity, growing residency and fellowship programs, or building collaborative academic environments, my focus has always been on creating systems that allow others to thrive.

Perhaps most rewarding is seeing former mentees become leaders themselves. Watching students and trainees grow into neurosurgeons, researchers, educators, and faculty members is truly the greatest legacy any educator could hope for.

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

When I entered neurosurgery, there were very few women in the field and even fewer in leadership positions. In many spaces, I was the only woman in the room. At times, that meant confronting assumptions about whether women belonged in neurosurgery, whether we could lead departments, conduct high-level research, or balance career and family life.

One of the most important lessons I learned was the value of building strong networks of mentors and peers—both women and men. Support systems matter tremendously in neurosurgery. I was fortunate to have mentors who believed in me, challenged me, and opened doors.

I also learned the importance of authenticity. Early in my career, there was pressure to conform to traditional leadership models. Over time, I realized that effective leadership does not require becoming someone else. Empathy, collaboration, mentorship, and transparency are strengths—not weaknesses.

Most importantly, I tried to channel challenges into opportunities to improve the environment for the next generation. That philosophy shaped much of my involvement with WINS and mentorship initiatives throughout organized neurosurgery.

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

To me, the Spirit of WINS represents community, mentorship, advocacy, and lifting others as we climb. WINS created spaces where women in neurosurgery could find mentorship, encouragement, and practical guidance at a time when those opportunities were limited.

I have tried to embody that spirit by remaining accessible to students and trainees, creating mentorship structures, and advocating for opportunities that broaden participation within neurosurgery. During my years directing the WINS mentorship program, one of my priorities was ensuring that students—especially those without home neurosurgery programs or female mentors—had meaningful access to guidance and support.

The Spirit of WINS is also about paying it forward. Every generation benefits from those who came before them. We have an obligation to continue building a culture where future neurosurgeons feel supported, empowered, and inspired.

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

I hope WINS continues evolving from an organization focused primarily on support into one that also helps shape the future direction of neurosurgery through leadership development, advocacy, research collaboration, and innovation. WINS already has made progress in many of these arenas.

For neurosurgery more broadly, I hope we continue building a culture that values excellence alongside humanity. The future of our field depends not only on technological innovation, but also on how well we support our trainees, promote wellness, foster inclusion, and create sustainable career pathways.

I am also excited about the future of neuroscience and neuromodulation. We are entering an era where technologies such as focused ultrasound, advanced neurostimulation, AI-driven analytics, and precision medicine will fundamentally change patient care. I hope future neurosurgeons embrace both scientific rigor and interdisciplinary collaboration as we move forward.

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

First, remember that there is no single “correct” path in neurosurgery. Careers evolve over time, and opportunities often emerge in unexpected ways.

Second, invest deeply in relationships. Mentors, colleagues, trainees, collaborators, and friends will shape your career and your life more than any title or accolade ever will.

Third, do not underestimate the power of persistence. Neurosurgery is demanding, and setbacks are inevitable. What matters most is resilience, adaptability, and maintaining perspective.

Finally, support one another. Success is not diminished by helping others succeed. In fact, the strongest departments, societies, and teams are built by people who actively elevate those around them.



What is your most cherished WINS memory?

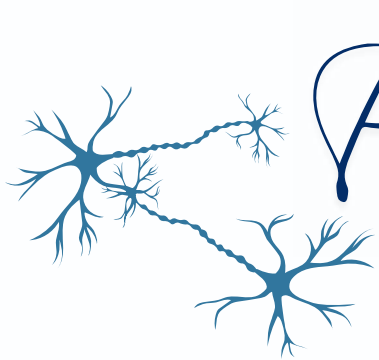
One of my most cherished memories is seeing the growth of the WINS mentorship program and watching students who once sought guidance become mentors and leaders themselves. There is something incredibly powerful about seeing the next generation gain confidence and realize they belong in neurosurgery.

I also treasure the sense of camaraderie that developed through WINS over the years. Some of the most meaningful moments were not formal lectures or meetings, but rather conversations in hallways, mentorship breakfasts, and honest discussions where women shared challenges, celebrated successes, and supported one another.

Those moments reinforced that WINS is more than an organization—it is a community.



Dr. Pilitsis, thank you for sharing your journey and inspiring the next generation!



Pathways to **SUCCESS**



Clinical Pearls and Day-In-The-Life Tips for Budding Neurosurgeons



Dr. Molly Lafuente

University of Texas - San Antonio

Dr. Lafuente is a PGY-5 at University of Texas - San Antonio. Her clinical interests include open cerebrovascular and endovascular neurosurgery. When she's not in the OR, there's a good chance she has a coffee in her hand!

My biggest advice to incoming residents is not to spend your last summer studying before PGY-1. Take the trip, spend time with family and friends, and enjoy the freedom. You will not get that time back.

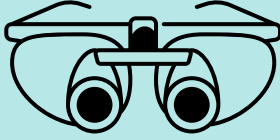
During residency, especially on call-heavy rotations, sleep whenever you can, but also protect your post-call time. Make it a point to do something you enjoy, whether that's spending time with family, seeing friends, exercising, or simply getting outside. Otherwise, life can quickly become a cycle of work and sleep.

One habit I strongly recommend is keeping a detailed case log. Record not just the procedure, but what you learned, technical pearls, interesting anatomy, and areas for improvement. Different attendings approach problems differently, and over time you'll develop your own style by learning from each of them.

Seek out mentors early and often. Your attendings will be some of your most important mentors, but don't overlook peer mentors and mentors outside your institution. WINS has been a great way for me to connect with women neurosurgeons across the country, gain new perspectives, and build relationships that have been invaluable throughout training

Most importantly, remember that you are the best advocate for your own education. The papers you read, the research you pursue, the cases you stay for, and the questions you ask are what shape you into a surgeon. Residency is a long seven years that somehow goes by very quickly, so make the most of every opportunity.

Stay in the Loupe



Read the latest update on WINS social media initiatives and events

#WINSxResearchMonday

Keep your finger on the pulse with our #WINSxResearchMonday features that highlight some of the hottest breakthroughs in neurosurgery!

“How strategic engagement with programs drives neurosurgery match success” by Kashlan et al. shows how away rotations yield the highest likelihood of match success and interview offer, followed by program signaling and geographic connection. These findings suggest that since the transition of USMLE 1 to P/F, applicants mainly gain more from targeted connections than from objective metrics. “Patient gender preferences in neurosurgical care: A cross-sectional study with operational modelling” by Lawson McLean et al. showed that physician-gender preferences were common but balanced. Emotional context rather than physician gender was shown to drive preference expression, indicating providers should aim to address patient situational anxiety and provide high-quality communication in neurosurgical care. Finally, “Health literacy, healthcare access, and self-perception of health among intracranial tumor patients: an analysis of the National Institute of Health (NIH) “All of Us” research program” by Amasa et al. showed significant disparities in health literacy, patient-reported health status, and healthcare access exist among intracranial tumor patients across racial and socioeconomic groups. Thus, literacy-sensitive communication, financial navigation support, and targeted equity-focused interventions within neurosurgical care pathways must be pursued.

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!

Upcoming WINS Events:

- **Residents:** We'll let the new interns get settled into their new roles for the summer. Keep an eye out for the exciting events at the upcoming CNS Meeting!
- **Medical Students:** Not sure where to start on your residency application personal statement? Stay tuned for our virtual “Residency Match Series”!

Are you passionate about 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:



