



September 2026 Newsletter



A Message from Wendy Armstrong, MD Infectious Diseases Division Head

With the start of fall and the end of one academic year and the beginning of another, there are always goodbyes and welcomes. In this newsletter, you'll see a special commemoration of Mary Bessesen's extraordinary career at the VA. Mary has been a steadying force at CU for nearly 40 years, achieving national prominence and earning many accolades. Locally, however, she has also been known for her care and advocacy for both her patients and VA faculty, as well as for her warm and wise mentorship of individuals at all career stages, from students to faculty. Fortunately, Mary is staying on as emeritus faculty, and we hope she doesn't go far.

In addition, our fellowship class has turned over, with Tommy King off to practice at Rocky Mountain Infectious Disease Specialists. Kirk Fетters and Rebecca Unterborn are staying on for research and transplant ID fellowships, respectively. We welcomed four new fellows and two new faculty members this season. Starting this week, we are fortunate to add Meredith Clement and John Huang as new members of the Division.

Meredith joins us from LSU. She is an accomplished implementation scientist in the HIV prevention and PrEP space and is deeply committed to caring for patients with HIV from disproportionately affected populations. John recently completed his ID and Transplant ID

fellowships at Emory and is joining us as a transplant ID faculty member and Associate Program Director for the fellowship.

I'm very excited about the growth of our Division, which has expanded both our opportunities and breadth, an important goal of mine. I hope you enjoy reading this summer edition of the Digest and learning about the many other exciting things happening in ID at Colorado.

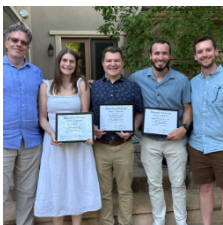


Division Happenings



Dr. Mary Bessesen's Retirement

After an extraordinary 39-year career in infectious diseases, Dr. Mary Bessesen has retired, leaving a lasting impact on the Division, the VA, and the broader infectious diseases community. Mary began her training at the University of Colorado as an infectious diseases fellow in 1987 and went on to become a respected clinician, educator, researcher, and leader. As Chief of Infectious Diseases at the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center, she played a pivotal role in advancing healthcare epidemiology, antimicrobial stewardship, HIV screening and care, and clinical trials, including critical contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic. A nationally recognized leader in the VA infectious diseases community, Dr. Bessesen has influenced generations of learners and faculty and leaves a lasting legacy through her dedication to patients, trainees, and colleagues. Congratulations, Mary. We will miss you!



2026 Fellowship Graduation

Congratulations Drs. Rebecca Unterborn, Kirk Feters, and Tommy King for completing their research presentations and graduating! Rebecca and Kirk are staying on for a third year, as well as Dr. Brandon Brummeyer who is doing the combined adult/pediatric fellowship!

2026 Faculty Promotions

We're thrilled to announce the promotion of eight outstanding faculty members, effective July 1.

Dr. Wendy Armstrong - Promoted from *Visiting Professor* to *Professor, with tenure*

Dr. Joshua Barocas - Promoted from *Associate Professor* to *Professor*

Dr. Andrés Henao-Martinez - Promoted from *Associate Professor* to *Professor*

Dr. Shannon Kasperbauer - Promoted from *Associate Professor* to *Professor*

Dr. Heather Young - Promoted from *Associate Professor* to *Professor*

Dr. Karen Wendel - Promoted from *Assistant Professor* to *Associate Professor*

Dr. Kellie Hawkins - Promoted from *Assistant Professor* to *Associate Professor*

Dr. Rachel Kuker - Promoted from *Instructor* to *Assistant Professor*



Dr. Sarah Rowan, Chief of Infectious Diseases at Denver Health

Dr. Sarah Rowan has been selected to serve as the new Chief of Infectious Diseases at Denver Health. Sarah has been an instrumental leader at Denver Health, most recently serving as Director of HIV/STD Prevention and Control at the Public Health Institute. We look forward to her leadership and vision in this new role.



Dr. Andrés Henao-Martinez, Associate Vice Chair for Global Health in the Department of Medicine

Dr. Andrés Henao-Martinez was appointed Associate Vice Chair for Global Health in the Department of Medicine. Andrés will provide strategic direction for the department's global health initiatives, advancing international research, education, clinical service, and partnerships. He will work closely with campus and global collaborators to strengthen global engagement, foster sustainable partnerships, and expand the department's impact and reputation in global health. We are incredibly fortunate to benefit from his expertise, vision, and dedication, and we look forward to seeing him continue to lead and advance our global health efforts.

2026 5280 Magazine's Top Doctors List

Congratulations to our faculty recognized in the annual 5280 Magazine's [Top Doctors list](#).

Dr. Bob Belknap

Dr. Thomas Campbell

Dr. Lakshmi Chauhan

Dr. Chuck Daley

Dr. Margaret Fitzpatrick

Dr. Katherine Frasca

Dr. Brian Grundy
Dr. Andrés Henao-Martinez
Dr. Misha Huang
Dr. Timothy Jenkins
Dr. Steven Johnson
Dr. Shannon Kasperbauer
Dr. Nancy Madinger
Dr. Brian Montague
Dr. Lindsay Nicholson
Dr. Larissa Pisney



Grant Funding



Dr. Suzhao Li, SPARK Colorado

Dr. Suzhao Li has been selected for [Cohort 9 of SPARK, a CU Anschutz Innovations program](#) supporting promising translational discoveries. Suzhao's project, *Bi-functional Miniproteins as First-in-Class Cytokine Storm Therapy*, focuses on a novel biologic that activates IL-37 anti-inflammatory signaling to control hyperinflammation without broad or prolonged immune suppression. Dr. Li is one of nine faculty innovators chosen for this highly competitive cohort.

- **Dr. Kristine Erlandson** and her research group received funding for RECOVER 2.0, continuing to investigate Long COVID. **Elen Feuerriegel** and **Marisa Brightman** are critical components of the ongoing work.
- **Dr. Kristine Erlandson** received a NoA for SMASH-CVD, investigating the safety and efficacy of low dose semaglutide after initial weight loss for CVD benefits in people with HIV.



Invited Lectures & Traveling Physicians

- **Dr. Alyssa Castillo** was the recipient of the Forward Thinking Speaker Award at the 2026 SHEA Spring Meeting held in April.
- **Drs. Rebecca Unterborn, Jonathan Yu Huang, and Chia-Yu Chiu** presented at the American Transplant Congress in June. Drs. Unterborn and Huang each gave one presentation, and Dr. Chiu delivered three talks, including “Building the Safety Net:

Vaccination, Prophylaxis, and Monitoring for HBV in Transplantation,” which drew a very large audience.

- **Dr. Julianne Randlemon** and **Eleanor Walker**'s abstract "Creation of a Public Health Curriculum for the APP Learner" was accepted for a Program/Research Showcase Session at the Public Health in the Rockies Conference.



Other Updates:

- Welcome new Fellows!
 - Adult Infectious Diseases: **Drs. Sum Park Sarmadi, Gavi Roda, Shanmukha Peddireddy, & Caroline Bashour**
 - Pediatric Infectious Diseases: **Drs. Matthew Harris & Breanna Brown**
 - Neuro-Infectious Diseases: **Drs. Dylan Kirschenbaum & Rachel Marshall**
- **Dr. Grace Kulik** successfully defended her PhD on July 23 and will remain with the Division as a postdoctoral researcher.
- **Dr. Joshua Barocas** joined the Injury and Violence Prevention Center (IVPC) as Deputy Director on June 1.
- **Dr. Joshua Barocas** served as a Member of the Arapahoe County Public Health, Chronic Disease Advisory Committee.
- **Dr. Whitney Miller** is a newly inducted member at the level of teaching associate in the Academy of Medical Educators at the School of Medicine.
- **Denver Health** was selected as a site for a large, multicenter, cluster-randomized trial. The Combating Related Epidemics in HCV through Simplified Testing and Treatment (CREST) trial will evaluate point of care HCV RNA, HBV, and HIV testing with same-day HCV treatment compared with standard of care. This will take place in the Denver Health Outpatient Behavioral Health Service (OBHS) clinic.
- The CDC requested activation of the **Denver Health** biocontainment unit (BCU) on July 6 to evaluate and care for a patient with fever after returning from the Democratic Republic of Congo with possible Ebola exposure. This was an exciting opportunity for the team that runs the BCU, led by **Dr. Heather Young**, to put to use their many hours of drills and training. The activation went extremely well and the team should be proud. The patient was ultimately diagnosed with and treated for falciparum malaria.
- The **Colorado Poverty and Health Initiative (COPHI)**, led by **Dr. Joshua Barocas**, released their [first newsletter](#) in July. The newsletter details the Initiative's many opportunities, so give it a read and [subscribe here](#).
- **Dr. Carolee Estelle** welcomed her baby, Leilani Noor Yael Estelle, on April 23, 2026.
- **Dr. Katy Bowman** welcomed her baby, June Oakes Bowman Farley, on June 5, 2026.
- **Dr. Martina King** welcomed her baby, Kilian Kazuo Carter, on June 22, 2026.
- **Dr. Hayato Mitaka** welcomed his baby, Rei Mitaka, on July 16, 2026.



Recent Publications:

*Abdo M, Kunisaki KM, Morris A, Stosor V, Chang D, D'Souza G, Crothers K, Abdel-Maksoud M, DiGiuseppi C, Brown TT, MaWhinney S, **Erlandson KM**. Frailty, Physical Function Impairment, and Pulmonary Function in Aging Men With and Without HIV from the Multicenter AIDS Cohort*

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-Drs. **Samantha Kaplan**, **Lakshmi Chauhan**, **Martin Krsak**, and **Daniel Pastula** are co-

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News Features

School of Medicine

‘I Would Not Panic’: What To Know About the ‘Explosive Diarrhea’ Cyclosporiasis Outbreak

CU Anschutz infectious diseases expert **Michelle Barron, MD**, talks about the infection that causes severe diarrhea.

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Department of Medicine

‘A Quite Fascinating Problem’: A Renowned CU Anschutz Scientist Helps Unlock HIV’s Secrets

Mamuka Kvaratskhelia, PhD, of the Division of Infectious Diseases has spent decades searching for long-lasting treatments for the virus.

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CNN

Early, intense West Nile season may signal a severe year for the mosquito-borne illness, CDC says

There are no specific treatments for West Nile virus, **[Daniel] Pastula** said. Several vaccines have been licensed for horses, and vaccines for humans have been studied in early-stage clinical trials that had promising results, but none has entered late-stage human trials.

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Scientific American

Why hantavirus takes so long to show symptoms and what that means for containment

Hantaviruses are a broad family of viruses, and different types can have varying incubation periods, says **Daniel Pastula**, chief of neuroinfectious diseases and global neurology at the University of Colorado Anschutz.

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PBS News

Medical epidemiologist explains what to know about the cruise ship hantavirus outbreak

Article by **Daniel Pastula**, professor of neurology, medicine (infectious diseases) and epidemiology at the University of Colorado Anschutz: I'm a medical epidemiologist - here's what you need to know about the virus and how the outbreak is playing out.

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Medical Daily

West Nile Virus Is Entering Peak Transmission Season, and 2026 Is Already the Worst in Over 20 Years

Dr. Daniel Pastula, chief of neuro-infectious diseases and global neurology at the University of Colorado-Anschutz and the Colorado School of Public Health, told CNN he would be taking mosquito bite prevention seriously – particularly for anyone in Arizona or around Phoenix.

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9News

As cyclospora surges in parts of U.S., number of cases in Colorado is typical for time of year

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“We do see cases of cyclospora infection in Denver,” said **Dr. Kap Sum Foong**, “but we are not seeing an increased number of cases in Denver - or, in fact, in Colorado.”

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Have news for the next *ID Digest*? Send your submissions to eleanor.shields-ramirez@cuanschutz.edu.

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