



Aug. 31, 2021

To the UMB Community:

Every fall, we dedicate one week to commemorating the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) rich history and celebrating the future we're building together. Among the highlights of Founders Week is recognizing the extraordinary work of our faculty and staff with awards that signify outstanding accomplishment in one facet of our mission.

This year, we also are celebrating student excellence with the inaugural Student of the Year Award, an honor recognizing UMB students for their leadership efforts, academic achievements, and commitment to the University's diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice values.

I'm delighted to announce the recipients of our 2021 Founders Week Awards:

**DAVID J. RAMSAY ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR**

**Vincent Njar, PhD**

*School of Medicine*

Professor, Department of Pharmacology

Dr. Njar is a leading medicinal chemist and oncopharmacologist who has made significant discoveries in the development of novel therapeutics for breast, prostate, and pancreatic cancers. He is head of the medicinal chemistry section in the Center for Biomolecular Therapeutics at the Institute for Bioscience and Biotechnology Research at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM). He is an inaugural Distinguished University Professor, the highest appointment bestowed on a faculty member at UMB.

Dr. Njar's significant contributions to science include the design, discovery, and clinical translation of the CYP17 inhibitor galeterone for the treatment of cancer. Because of its clinical efficacy, galeterone and subsequent variants continue to be developed as novel therapeutics. Dr. Njar's most recent National Institutes of Health R01 grant focuses on the development of next-generation galeterone analogs for prostate cancer.

Dr. Njar founded two startup companies — Terpene Pharmaceuticals, LLC and Isoprene Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (IPI), a cancer therapeutic company — and has served as president and board member of both. IPI recently was awarded a two-year, approximately \$2 million grant from the National Cancer Institute for a translational project to develop a novel therapeutic for triple negative breast cancer.

Dr. Njar has secured 34 issued patents, more than 30 pending patents, and numerous active intellectual property and licensing activities at UMB. He is the lead inventor of these technologies. He obtained his PhD in organic chemistry from University College London in the United Kingdom. Except for a brief stint at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, he has worked at UMB for almost 20 years.

## **RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR**

**Ronna P. Hertzano, MD, PhD**

*School of Medicine*

Professor, Department of Otorhinolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery

Dr. Hertzano is a highly respected otolaryngologist, surgeon, educator, and researcher who holds a secondary appointment in UMSOM's Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology and is an affiliate faculty member of the school's Institute for Genome Sciences.

With significant grants from the National Institutes of Health and other sources, her research is focused on developing new therapeutics to prevent and treat genetic and acquired hearing loss. Dr. Hertzano's lab has three main focus areas: cell-type specific molecular pathways in inner ear development; sex differences in hearing and the molecular basis of acquired hearing loss; and tools for sharing, visualizing, and analyzing multi-omic data.

As a clinician, she focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the ear, with an emphasis on hearing restoration. She also has a strong interest in mentorship, and her research team includes undergraduates, graduate students, medical students, residents, audiologists, and postdocs. She is a member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery, American Neurotology Society, American Otology Society, Association for Research in Otolaryngology, Collegium Oto-Rhino-Laryngologicum Amicitiae Sacrum, Maryland Society of Otolaryngology, and the Society for Neuroscience.

Dr. Hertzano was born in Israel and received her medical degree and PhD in human molecular genetics and biochemistry from Sackler School of Medicine at Tel Aviv University. She completed her residency in otorhinolaryngology-

head and neck surgery at UMSOM before joining the school as an instructor in 2011. She was promoted to assistant professor in 2012, associate professor in 2016, and professor in 2021.

## **PUBLIC SERVANT OF THE YEAR**

**Joshua M. Abzug, MD**

*School of Medicine*

Associate Professor, Departments of Orthopaedics and Pediatrics

Dr. Abzug is a pediatric orthopaedist who has completed specialty training for pediatric upper extremity problems and treats fractures throughout the body. In addition to his roles at UMSOM, he is director of pediatric orthopaedics at the University of Maryland Medical Center; director of the University of Maryland Brachial Plexus Practice; and deputy surgeon-in-chief at the University of Maryland Children's Hospital. He serves as president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore's Faculty Senate.

Dr. Abzug founded Camp Open Arms in 2015 with six children and held activities over two days. The camp, which he also directs, allows children with limb differences such as brachial plexus birth palsy and congenital/traumatic deformities to enjoy a carefree experience. In its seventh year, the program in Monkton has grown into a weeklong camp with activities such as hiking, arts and crafts, and visits from musicians, entertainers, and zoo animals. Camp Open Arms provides a safe and supportive environment for kids to engage in traditional summer camp activities with their specific physical and emotional needs in mind.

Dr. Abzug's research is focused on identifying and optimizing surgical and nonsurgical treatments that will enhance a child's ability to conduct vital self-care tasks.

He earned his medical degree from Penn State College of Medicine and completed his residency in orthopaedic surgery at Drexel University College of Medicine. He has held fellowships in pediatric orthopaedics at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children and Shriners Hospitals for Children, and in hand surgery at Thomas Jefferson University Hospitals, all in Philadelphia.

## **EDUCATORS OF THE YEAR**

**Renaissance Curriculum Team**

*School of Medicine*

In June 2018, UMSOM embarked on its first major curriculum revision in 25 years. After speaking with education colleagues at 20 institutions and studying curricula and best practices across the country, the Renaissance Curriculum

Team recognized the importance of identifying the environment and values that contribute to making UMSOM excellent in biomedical education, basic and clinical research, and quality patient care and service.

The new curriculum incorporates the information learned from other institutions with UMSOM's strengths and values according to its faculty and students. The goal of this major revision is to train the Renaissance Physician: lifelong learners who are clinically excellent and possess humanism, professionalism, scholarship, leadership, critical thinking, and attention to social justice and diversity.

The team of 10, working with more than 100 core educators in UMSOM, spent countless hours brainstorming and implementing new methodologies and incorporating adult learning theory into the curriculum. Then the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted clinical care and medical education. The team rose to the challenge of quickly and thoughtfully implementing changes to meet the needs of students, balancing education with the responsibility to protect health and safety. The members of the team, many of whom are also front-line providers, developed a new COVID-19 course that encompasses the epidemiology and public health response, the pathophysiology, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of the disease.

The Renaissance Curriculum was launched for first-year students in August 2020.

The team members are: Philip Dittmar, MD; Olga Ioffe, MD; Constance Lacap, DO; Joseph Martinez, MD; Donna Parker, MD, FACP; Devang Patel, MD; Sandra Quezada, MD, MS; Norman Retener, MD; Nirav Shah, MD; and Kerri Thom, MD, MS.

## **STUDENTS OF THE YEAR**

### **Jazmin Jones**

*School of Dentistry*

Class of 2022

A fourth-year student at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry (UMSOD), Ms. Jones is the Class of 2022 president and has helped lead students through the COVID-19 pandemic's challenges by fostering communications among students, faculty, and staff. As president, she leads a diverse team of officers and organization representatives who work to ensure students have an effective and fulfilling dental school experience.

Ms. Jones co-founded the UMSOD Global Health Student Association and served as vice president of the chapter. She also holds leadership roles in

numerous other organizations including the UMSOD chapters of the Hispanic Dental Association, American Student Dental Association, and Maryland Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

She is a member of UMB's Diversity Advisory Council, serving on a subcommittee that offers insights on how the University's schools can promote diversity within their curricula, and she participated in the UMB President's Student Leadership Institute, with concentrations in effective leadership and inclusive leadership.

Because of her strong academic achievement, she was recognized as a member of the Gorgas Odontological Honorary Society, the Gamma Pi Delta Prosthodontics Honor Society, and selected to participate in a pediatric dentistry clerkship during her senior year at UMSOD. She also is conducting research on treatment outcomes of silver diamine fluoride application on primary and mixed dentition for the Department of Pediatric Dentistry.

Ms. Jones attends dental school on a full U.S. Army Health Professions Scholarship. After graduation, she will start four years of obligated Army service beginning with the rank of captain. She is a 2017 graduate of the University of California, San Diego, earning bachelor's degrees in human biology and theater.

**Emily M. Smith**  
*Graduate School*  
Class of 2022

Ms. Smith is a PhD candidate in the Graduate Program in Life Sciences in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology with a concentration in bacterial pathogenesis. She arrived at UMB in 2016 after graduating with a bachelor's degree in biology from James Madison University.

Ms. Smith works in the laboratory of Eileen Barry, PhD, in UMSOM's Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health and has developed strong research skills during her graduate work to complement her undergraduate and postbaccalaureate experiences. She has presented her work at international, national, local, and institutional conferences and published manuscripts in top-tier journals. Ms. Smith also has led research collaborations pivotal to her work and served in laboratory mentoring and teaching roles for undergraduate, graduate, and medical students.

She has been active in the Graduate Student Association since 2017, first as a program representative, then vice president, and president from May 2020 to June 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. In that role, she advocated for

students coping with ongoing issues involving health and safety, tele-education, transportation, and financial and academic support.

Committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), Ms. Smith led hands-on activities and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) career discussions for female high school students from underrepresented groups through opportunities at UMSOM. She also helped write student policy documents on DEI and advocated for hiring a chief equity officer within the Graduate School and at the University level. She served on a student committee that met candidates for the UMB position and promoted the inclusion of a graduate student on the selection committee.

I'm so grateful that we have Founders Week to showcase these remarkable individuals and their tremendous achievements. I offer each winner my heartfelt thanks and congratulations.

To learn more about our Founders Week events, including the Gala on Saturday, Oct. 23, visit *The Elm* and *Founders Week* websites in the weeks to come.

Sincerely,

**Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**  
*President*

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This note was authorized for distribution to the University of Maryland, Baltimore community by the Office of the President.

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