



School of Medicine

# 138th Graduating Class

Sunday, May 18, 2025

**The University of Pittsburgh  
School of Medicine  
announces the**

## **AWARDING OF DIPLOMAS**

**The Eighteenth of May  
Two Thousand Twenty-Five**

HOODING AND AWARDING OF DIPLOMAS  
FOR THE MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE  
FOR THE CLINICAL SCIENTIST TRAINING PROGRAM

Hooding of MS Students ..... Judy C. Chang, MD, MPH  
Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences and of Medicine  
Assistant Dean, Medical Student Research  
Director, Clinical Scientist Training Program

HOODING AND AWARDING OF DIPLOMAS  
FOR THE MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE  
AND THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE

Hooding of MS and PhD Students. .... Saleem Khan, PhD  
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Academic Affairs  
Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics

GRADUATE STUDENT ADDRESS..... Rithika Behera, PhD

GRADUATE FACULTY ADDRESS ..... Sarah E. Ross, PhD  
Professor of Neurobiology and of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine  
Director, Pittsburgh Center for Pain Research

KEYNOTE ADDRESS..... Myron Rolle, MD, MSc  
Pediatric Neurosurgery Fellow at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital  
Chairman and Founder of the Caribbean Neurosurgery Foundation  
Former NFL Player

DECLARATION OF GENEVA..... Naudia L. Jonassaint, MD, MHS, MBA  
Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
Interim Chief, Division of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition

HOODING AND AWARDING OF DIPLOMAS FOR THE  
DOCTOR OF MEDICINE DEGREE

Coordinating Diplomas ..... Alda Maria Gonzaga, MD, MS  
Associate Dean for Student Affairs  
Professor of Medicine and of Pediatrics

And

Chenits Pettigrew Jr., EdD  
Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Presenting ..... Anantha Shekhar, MD, PhD

Hooding ..... Eric S. Hager, MD  
Associate Professor of Surgery  
Advisory Dean

Evelyn C. Reis, MD  
Associate Dean for the Learning Environment  
Professor of Pediatrics and of Clinical and Translational Science

Allison E. Serra, MD, MPH  
Assistant Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences  
Advisory Dean

SENIOR MEDICAL STUDENT ADDRESS..... Erik Jaklitsch, MD  
President, Class of 2025

MEDICAL FACULTY ADDRESS ..... Kishore Vellody, MD  
Professor of Pediatrics

CONFERRAL OF DEGREES..... Anantha Shekhar, MD, PhD

ALMA MATER..... The PalPITTations

Alma Mater, wise and glorious,  
Child of Light and Bride of Truth,  
Over fate and foe victorious,  
Dower'd with eternal youth.

Crowned with love of son and daughter,  
Thou shalt conquer as of yore.  
Dear Old Pittsburgh, Alma Mater,  
God preserve Thee evermore!

RECESSIONAL ..... Windsor Brass Quintet



## Anantha Shekhar, MD, PhD

Salutation; Presenting MD Diplomas

Anantha Shekhar, MD, PhD, is senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and the John and Gertrude Petersen Dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. He is a nationally recognized educator, researcher and entrepreneur with major contributions to medicine and life sciences.

At Pitt, Dr. Shekhar leads all six health sciences schools that, for more than a century, have been educational and research leaders in their respective fields, propelling scientific discoveries and clinical innovation that advance human health. Education at the schools of the health sciences—Dental Medicine, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy and Public Health—emphasizes interdisciplinary instruction and leadership that incorporates the most advanced techniques and technologies to prepare future researchers, physicians, and health care providers and administrators for careers of leadership and service.

Dr. Shekhar's responsibilities at the University include shaping the careers of more than 6,200 faculty and staff members, as well as ensuring the academic success of approximately 5,600 students annually, all while supporting Pitt's position as a top-ranked recipient of National Institutes of Health (NIH) research dollars. He also works closely with UPMC, a \$24 billion world-renowned health care provider and insurer, to ensure that health care delivery, biomedical research and education—already among the nation's elite—continue to flourish.

Innovation, transformation and successful collaborations across the private, public and philanthropic sectors have defined Dr. Shekhar's distinguished career. His work focuses on the role of brain abnormalities that could lead to stress and psychiatric disorders. A number of grants from the NIH, private foundations and commercial collaborations have supported his research.

Overall, he has coauthored more than 200 original scientific papers published in leading basic science and clinical journals.

Dr. Shekhar's areas of expertise include basic and clinical research on the effects of stress, stress-induced psychiatric disorders and clinical psychopharmacology. His laboratory has developed several translational models for psychiatric disorders and identified novel targets for neuropsychiatric disorder treatments that are in commercial development. He is also the founder of a number of biotech companies developing novel therapies.

Dr. Shekhar is an elected member of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine's Forum on Drug Discovery, Development and Translation. Dr. Shekhar, who was born in India, earned his medical degree at St. John's Medical College, Bangalore, and PhD in neuroscience at Indiana University.



## Myron Rolle, MD, MSc

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Myron Rolle is a Harvard/Massachusetts General Hospital-trained neurosurgeon serving as the current pediatric neurosurgery fellow at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital. He is a Rhodes scholar, best-selling author, former All-American Florida State University football player and former NFL player for the Tennessee Titans and Pittsburgh Steelers. He published the Rolle Scoring System – a public health rating scale used to determine a developing country's governance around helmet safety to prevent traumatic brain injury. He has been recognized by the Congress of Neurological Surgeons for demonstrating the best operative technique in the reconstruction of upper extremity motor function using intercostal nerve transfers after a traumatic brachial plexus injury.

In his hometown of Orlando, Florida, Dr. Rolle serves on the board of directors for Aspire Health Partners – the leading mental health organization in central Florida. He runs voter registration drives for college students at the University of Central Florida, along with food drives for immigrant families experiencing economic hardship and food insecurity. He builds home libraries and supplies books and book bags for under-served children at the West Lakes Early Learning Center. He runs a head trauma prevention program for pedestrians in high-risk areas of Orlando. He serves as the Low-Income Person's Advocate on the Orange County Affordable Housing Advisory Board. He volunteers at the Orlando Fisher House for families of hospitalized military veterans. He advocates for improved health equity as a member of the State of Medical City Health Committee.

Globally, Dr. Rolle is the chairman of the Caribbean Neurosurgery Foundation, a not-for-profit that houses capacity-building and health system-strengthening initiatives for improved neurosurgical care in the Caribbean. His foundation has impacted over 3.5 million people in the Caribbean through the upscaling of policy, service delivery, research and education.

He is the best selling author of "The 2% Way: How a Philosophy of Small Improvements Took Me to Oxford, the NFL and Neurosurgery."

Dr. Rolle holds a Doctor of Medicine from Florida State University College of Medicine, a Master of Science in medical anthropology from the University of Oxford and a Bachelor of Science in exercise science from Florida State University.

Dr. Rolle is married to pediatric dentist Dr. Latoya Rolle. Together, the two are the proud parents of two sets of fraternal twins: Zora, Zayed, Zanzi and Zafar.



## Abbas Hyderi, MD, MPH

Master of Ceremonies

Dr. Abbas Hyderi is the vice dean for education and professor of family medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He oversees accreditation/continuous quality improvement; admissions and financial aid; diversity, equity, and inclusion; graduate and medical education; international experiences; medical student research; and student affairs.

Previously, Dr. Hyderi was the founding senior associate dean for medical education at the Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine (KPSOM), where he led curriculum development, faculty development, and served as the Liaison Committee on Medical Education faculty accreditation lead for preliminary, provisional and full accreditation stages. A leader in medical education and in LGBTQ+ and HIV+ health care, he holds national roles with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), American Medical Association (AMA) Change Med Ed Consortium, and AMA-National Board of Medical Examiners Advisory Committee for Health Systems Science.

Dr. Hyderi has authored more than 150 peer-reviewed presentations and publications including writing and advocating for Oregon's opt-out HIV testing law. He has received numerous teaching awards, including the prestigious 2024 AAMC Alpha Omega Alpha Robert J. Glaser Distinguished Teaching Award.

Prior to joining the faculty at KPSOM, Dr. Hyderi served as associate dean for undergraduate medical education and associate program director of the family medicine residency at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine (UIC COM).

Dr. Hyderi graduated with honors from Harvard University and received his MD from UIC COM. Upon his graduation, the school created the Abbas Hyderi Leadership Award, which is still given annually to two students per class. Dr. Hyderi completed his residency in the combined family medicine and preventive medicine program at Oregon Health and Science University. He also earned an MPH in health administration and policy from Portland State University in 2005.



## Naudia L. Jonassaint, MD, MHS, MBA

Declaration of Geneva

Dr. Naudia L. Jonassaint is a transplant hepatologist. She is a native of Cleveland, Ohio, and attended Johns Hopkins University and then the Yale School of Medicine. She graduated from Yale and completed all of her training at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and then joined the Pitt faculty in 2014. Her research explores disparities in liver transplantation. She currently serves as the interim chief of the Division of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition and the associate dean for clinical affairs.



## Rithika Behera, PhD

Graduate Student Address

Rithika Behera, PhD, received a Bachelor of Technology in biotechnology from Vellore Institute of Technology in 2017. Subsequently, she received her master's degree in biotechnology from the University of Pennsylvania. Today, she will receive her PhD from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Dr. Behera is a dedicated researcher whose work focuses on systemic sclerosis, a complex autoimmune disease. Dr. Behera's research during her doctoral studies contributed to a deeper understanding of the disease and potential therapeutic approaches. Her commitment to advancing this field has been recognized with a prestigious fellowship from the National Scleroderma Foundation, underscoring the impact of her work. She has also presented her research at international conferences and won accolades for her research, further demonstrating her contributions to the global scientific community.

Beyond her research, Dr. Behera has demonstrated outstanding leadership and advocacy for the graduate student community. She served as the vice president of community outreach for the Biomedical Graduate Student Association and later as the president of the Graduate and Professional Student Government. In these roles, she championed pressing issues such as graduate student housing and increased funding to support graduate life at the University of Pittsburgh. Due to her dedicated efforts, the graduate student stipend was successfully increased across disciplines at the University, improving financial support for students.

Following graduation, Dr. Behera will begin her role as a scientist in autoimmunity and rare diseases at AstraZeneca, where she will continue her work in advancing treatments for complex diseases.

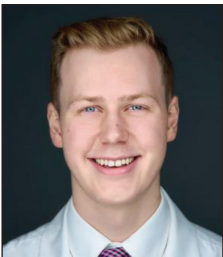
Dr. Behera's journey is a testament to resilience, innovation, and the power of advocacy in both research and student leadership. Today, as she addresses the graduating class, she brings a message of perseverance, the importance of scientific inquiry, and the lasting impact of using one's voice to drive meaningful change.





**Sarah E. Ross, PhD**  
Graduate Faculty Address

Sarah Ross, PhD, is the director of the Pittsburgh Center for Pain Research and a professor in the Departments of Neurobiology and Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. She earned her Bachelor of Science in physiology from the University of Western Ontario in Canada and completed her PhD in physiology at the University of Michigan, where she was awarded the Distinguished Dissertation Award for her discovery of signaling pathways that regulate fat cell development. As a Jane Coffin Childs Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard Medical School in the lab of Michael Greenberg, Dr. Ross identified a transcription factor essential for the survival of spinal neurons that inhibit itch. Since establishing her independent lab at the University of Pittsburgh in 2011, Dr. Ross has combined two-photon calcium imaging, viral tracing, molecular genetic manipulation and behavioral approaches to investigate the neural circuits underlying pain and itch. Her research has led to landmark discoveries, with publications in high-impact journals such as *Science*, *Neuron* and *Cell*. Her work has been consistently supported by numerous National Institutes of Health grants, private funding and prestigious fellowships. Dr. Ross is also a dedicated advocate for trainees and has received multiple awards recognizing her outstanding mentorship.



**Erik Jaklitsch, MD**  
Senior Medical Student Address

Erik Jaklitsch, MD, is president of the Class of 2025 and considers it his greatest privilege to have served his peers as president throughout medical school. Dr. Jaklitsch received a Bachelor of Science in bioengineering from Northeastern University in 2021. Today, he will receive his MD from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Dr. Jaklitsch is passionate about leveraging technology to improve skin cancer outcomes. He has authored numerous publications relating to skin cancer and engineering, received grants from the Melanoma Research Foundation and the Henry L. Hillman Foundation, and presented at more than 20 scientific meetings. He recently led a prospective clinical trial for a skin cancer detection device that has since become the only Food and Drug Administration-approved tool for evaluation of all three major types of skin cancer.

Dr. Jaklitsch has been a longtime mentor through the Partners for Youth with Disabilities program. He also organized a city-wide initiative for melanoma awareness in Pittsburgh and co-led the 2023 brigade to Honduras to provide dermatology care to those without access abroad.

Following graduation, Dr. Jaklitsch will complete his intern year at the Arnot Ogden Medical Center before training in dermatology at Yale New Haven Hospital.



## Kishore Vellody, MD

### Medical Faculty Address

Dr. Kishore Vellody completed his medical degree at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine and his pediatric residency at the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. He was recruited to UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in 2005 to establish the evening hospitalist program. In March 2009, he became the medical director of the Down Syndrome Center (DSC) of Western Pennsylvania. This DSC is among the busiest in the country, with more than 1,200 clinic visits annually. Dr. Vellody previously served as president of the National Down Syndrome Congress. Dr. Vellody has spoken at a variety of local, regional, national, and international meetings on the care of children with Down syndrome as well as the care of hospitalized children.

Dr. Vellody is a professor of pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He is longitudinal educator in the Three Rivers Curriculum and was in the inaugural class of faculty who served in this role. He is also the Pediatric and Adolescent Interest Group faculty advisor, where he works to gently nudge medical students into becoming future pediatricians.

Dr. Vellody became a pediatrician in large part because of his relationship with his older brother, Das, who is smart, funny, caring—and also has Down syndrome.