

# Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy

THE ANNUAL MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS · 2026

## LINKED IN

*Mentor-mentee pairings, such as faculty member Lauren Aleksunes (right) and third-year PharmD/PhD candidate Chenghui Jiang, are helping students manage their lives, succeed at EMSOP and thrive in their careers.*

# Life 101

**Mentors are teaching some of EMSOP's most important lessons**

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### Rhodes Taken

“**NOT ALL THOSE WHO** wander are lost,” says **Omar Abuattieh**, quoting *The Lord of the Rings*. “I don’t know my destination, but I’m pursuing my passion every step of the way.” ■ Abuattieh, who is receiving his PharmD this spring, is the first Rutgers student since 1993 to win a Rhodes Scholarship, burlinishing a resume that includes creating a scholarship fund for displaced Gazan students; founding a non-profit basketball league; publishing a paper analyzing inconsistencies in insurance coverage criteria; and, while on rotation at a law firm, defending community pharmacies from monopolistic practices of pharmacy benefit managers. (continued on page 27)

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THE SCRIP

## Speaking from Experience

**DURING MY POSTDOCTORAL RESIDENCY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS**

Medical Center, the environment was so challenging that, at one point, I went to the Program Director, Dr. Bob Curtis, and said, “I’m no good to you, I can’t do this.” Bob said, “I’ll tell you when you’re no good. Now get back to work.” ■ That response might be considered too rough today, but it was exactly what I needed. I got back to work and became the program’s first emergency medicine postdoc in pharmacy.

■ Providing mentorship is among the most important things we do at EMSOP. In this issue, you’ll meet several of our most experienced and beloved mentors, whose styles range from offering students tough love to acting as their advocates to serving as role models. You’ll read about a program we’ve instituted in which established faculty mentor their junior colleagues — a systematic process that we expect to share across all of Rutgers Health. And you’ll be introduced to a unique dormitory in which students mentor one another. ■ My own approach as a mentor is to serve as a connector who ensures that our many talented people are sharing their knowledge with one another. Because, as I’ve learned, mentoring is a two-way street. As your mentees amass wisdom from their own experiences, they’ll mentor you and advise you. You should be open to that, regardless of how senior you might be in an organization. I bring questions to younger faculty members because they have a different view, and they know what’s going on. And I take their advice shamelessly. ■ There’s one other great thing about being a mentor. The people you advise become your colleagues and sometimes your friends. I still see and talk with Bob Curtis to this day. It’s always a pleasure. And it’s always a reminder that I need to get back to work.



**“As I’ve learned, mentoring is a two-way street. As your mentees amass wisdom from their own experiences, they’ll mentor you and advise you.”**

*Joseph Barone*

JOSEPH A. BARONE, PHARMD, FCCP  
DEAN AND DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

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Found in Translation: Stacey Zhang’s strong suit is keeping patients and practitioners well-informed

**EXCLAMATION POINT**

Teaching for Tomorrow: Mary Bridgeman is preparing students to be pharmacists in 2076, not just 2026. She credits her EMSOP mentors with shaping her approach



Photograph by John Emerson

### Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy

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### Opsha Leads IPE Efforts

**E**MSOP Clinical Associate Professor Yekaterina (Kate) Opsha has been appointed Interim Vice Chancellor for Interprofessional Programs (IPE) at Rutgers Health. Reporting directly to Vicente Gracias, Senior Vice Chancellor for Clinical Affairs & Vice President for Health Affairs, Opsha will develop and lead a structure for interprofessional education and collaboration across all Rutgers Health disciplines. ■ Opsha, EMSOP IPE Committee co-chair since 2016 and EMSOP Director of IPE since 2024, has facilitated more than 30 interprofessional education initiatives across Rutgers Health. Opsha also serves on the PharmD/MD committee, supporting the innovative dual-degree program with Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

#### PROFESSIONALLY SPEAKING

**“Standard of care laws [allow] qualified pharmacists to provide patient care services, and we need to support them.”**

— RUBY SINGH '97

### RBHS Chancellor Awards

Three EMSOP community members have been recognized for their outstanding work at Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences



**ANDREW J. GOW**, Professor, Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology, awarded the Distinguished Mentor Award “for exceptional contributions to mentoring post-doctoral and/or clinical fellows, junior faculty, staff, and/or undergraduate and graduate students”



**ARASH HATEFI**, Professor, Department of Pharmaceutics, awarded the Distinguished Innovator Award “for exceptional, sustained contributions at Rutgers Health to innovation in one or more of the mission areas”



**LAURA SCLAFANI**, Associate Dean, Academic Services, received the Emerging Leader Award for “demonstrating a high potential for success through significant contributions to Rutgers Health”

#### CHANGE MANAGER

### Pointing the Way

**RUBY SINGH '97** has been named the new **Chief Operating Officer of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA)**. “So much has changed in pharmacy,” says Singh. “Building a career today is about finding your niche and using your skills.” Singh has traveled that road. Her first job was at APhA, developing professional education. After eight years at Kaiser Permanente, she built an education team at the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy and managed AMCP’s journal. At APhA, Singh is again focused on change. “Standard of care laws are allowing qualified pharmacists to provide patient care services, and we need to support them.” Singh sees creating mentorship as another priority. “In my own career, I’ve appreciated people who’ve helped me identify barriers. Feedback is a gift.”





## He's a Good Fellow

**LUCIO VOLINO, Director of Assessment and Clinical Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice & Administration, is a recipient of the 2026-27 Cheryl Wall Faculty Fellowship. Created in memory of Cheryl Wall, Board of Governors Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English, the fellowship is given to full-time Rutgers faculty leaders for excellence in curricular redesign, service, scholarship and research, and/or leadership in innovation.**

Photograph by Bill Cardoni

### SALUTING SERVICE

## Strom By the Numbers — and More

**BRIAN STROM**, Rutgers Health's first Chancellor, has stepped down after **12 years**. During his tenure, Rutgers Health attracted **\$4 billion** in federal research funding, including **\$608 million** in fiscal year 2025. Rankings have risen, reputation has increased and new centers are strengthening New Jersey as a leader in the life sciences and ensuring that students gain hands-on experience. ■ Strom managed the **historic merger** of Rutgers and the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey, building one of the nation's most respected academic health centers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he positioned Rutgers as a **national leader** in vaccine trials, testing innovation and pandemic response. Yet he is proudest of Rutgers Health's increased focus on mentoring.



Photograph by Nick Romanenko

**“Science doesn’t end when our careers end. We want people who are smarter and better and trained in different ways to carry the fields to the next stage.”**

— BRIAN STROM

### Awards & Distinctions

Recognizing faculty and student achievement

#### **Melissa Kudlak '26**

*was awarded the EJI Excellence in Medicine Scholarship. Read more about Kudlak in the story on page 17.*

#### **EMSOP NJSHP-SSHP**

*student chapter has been recognized with an Outstanding Professional Development Project Award from ASHP.*

#### **Les Barta**

*Director, Simulation Technology Program, has earned the Certified Healthcare Simulation Educator-Advanced® credential — a milestone for Rutgers Health. Only about 130 individuals have achieved this portfolio-based certification, recognizing elite leadership, mentorship and a mastery of simulation pedagogy.*

#### **Kan Li**

*graduate student in EMSOP's Medicinal Chemistry program, has received the 2026 PhRMA Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship for Drug Discovery.*



## Judged Exceptional for Their Judgment

**E**MSOP students Margaret Donlevie (left) and Jaclyn Feingold won honors at the 30th Annual American Society of Health-System Pharmacists Clinical Skills Competition in Las Vegas. Two-person teams from 128 colleges and schools of pharmacy analyzed a challenging patient case and proposed the appropriate treatment options. Donlevie and Feingold, who are both receiving their PharmD degrees this spring, credited their success to their EMSOP training, particularly the diversity of their clinical rotations. Simulation-based pharmacy electives “taught us how to build clinical reasoning, communication skills, and confidence in working through real-life scenarios under a time constraint.”

#### SPECIALTY CHAIR

**Anita Siu, Clinical Professor, Pharmacy Practice & Administration; Vice Chair for Teaching & Learning in that department; and Director of Faculty Mentoring at EMSOP, is the 2026 Chair of the Board of Pharmacy Specialties. She is the first Rutgers faculty member appointed to that office.**

# 1<sup>ST</sup>



COVER STORIES

**N**avigating a pharmacy career today takes more than aptitude, talent and perseverance. Students, educators and practitioners must keep pace with a field that continues to rapidly evolve and change. Recognizing that no one should go it alone, EMSOP is creating a culture of mentorship, both in and out of the classroom, in which faculty, students, administrators and alumni draw on each other's knowledge and experience. While this effort has no formal name,

# it could easily be called Life 101



# Words from the Wise

Profiles in Mentoring, EMSOP-Style

By Merri Rosenberg

Photographs by John Emerson

**S**tudents at EMSOP face high-stakes decisions from day one. Research or clinical? Retail pharmacy or community health center? Many juggle a demanding course load and a job — and, for some, family responsibilities as well. ■ EMSOP faculty and administrators have walked that path. They extend themselves as mentors through office hours and conversations that may begin in the hallway and continue for years. Their styles and advice vary, but their shared goal is to develop and empower the next generation of independent-minded pharmacists and researchers. Here are some of their stories.

## The Talent Scout: Michael Toscani

“Never say no to anyone who needs help.”

“**T**o understand my mentoring style, you have to understand my personal background growing up,” says Michael Toscani.

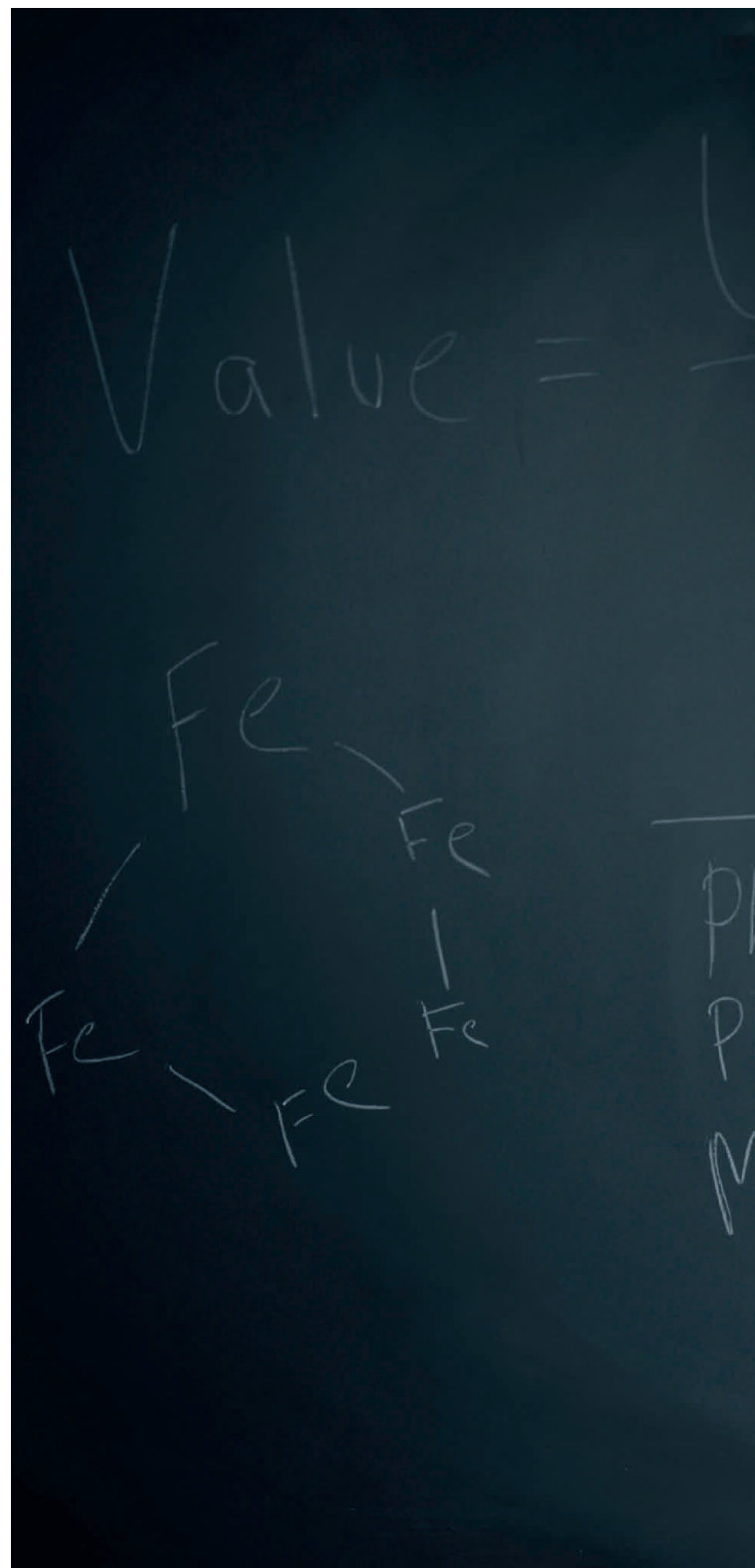
Toscani was a teenager when his parents passed. The support and guidance of great teachers helped him through that time.

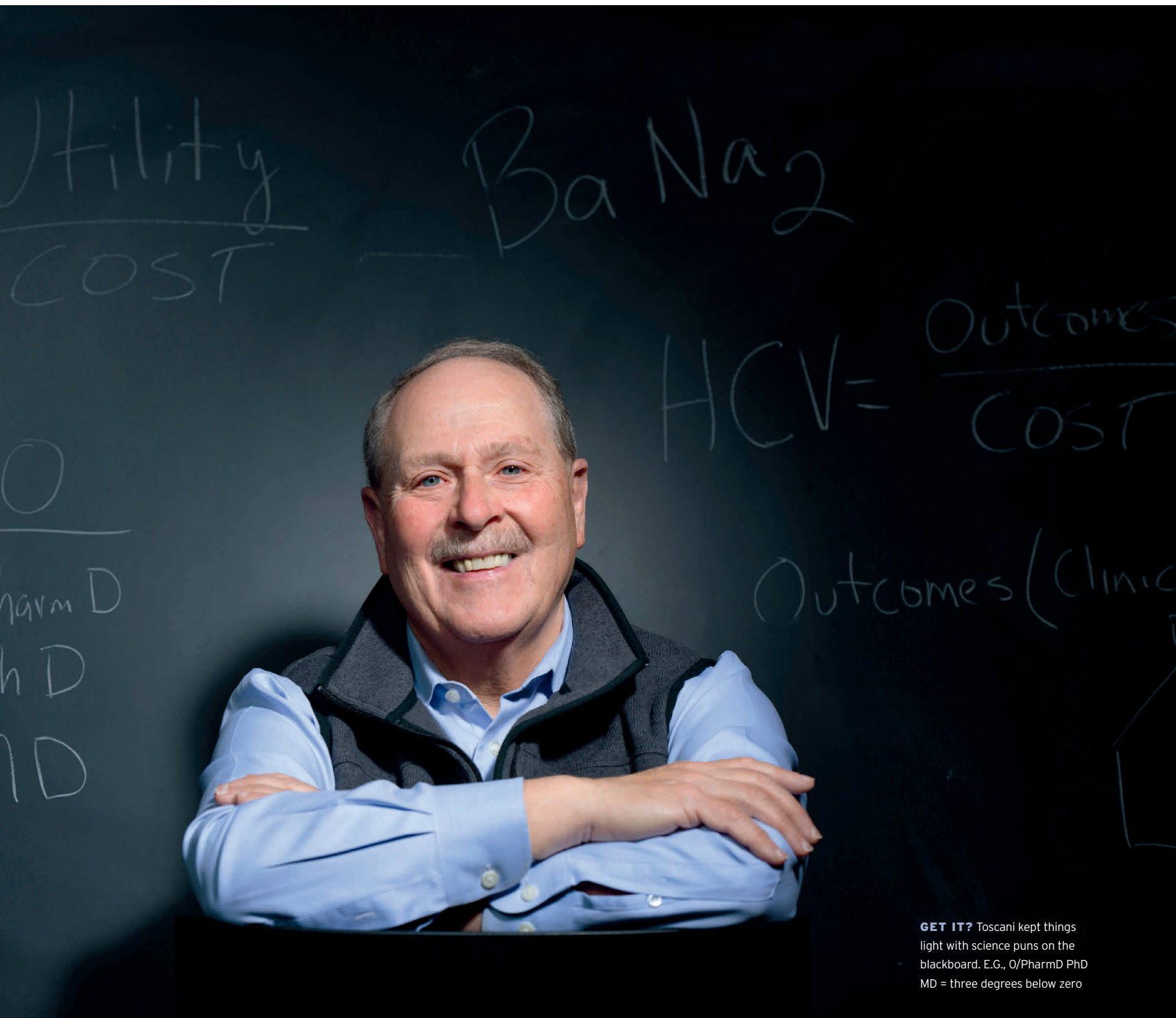
“I’ve never forgotten what their encouragement meant,” he says. “For the rest of my life, there’s been a little birdie telling me, ‘Never say no to anyone who needs help.’”

Toscani has clearly lived by those words. In December, at his retirement as Director of the Rutgers Institute

for Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowships, more than a hundred former fellows inscribed tributes in a special Kudos Book.

Created by EMSOP Dean Emeritus John Colaizzi and current Dean Joseph Barone, the fellowships place qualified pharmacy and medicine





**GET IT?** Toscani kept things light with science puns on the blackboard. E.G., O/PharmD PhD MD = three degrees below zero

postdocs with pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical companies for one to two years of additional training.

In 2011, when Toscani became program director after a career in drug development, contract research and consulting, just a few companies were accepting fellows. This year, 28 compa-

nies are hosting over 300 fellows from nearly 60 institutions. By far, the greatest number of fellows come from Rutgers. The program's 1,800-plus alumni have forged careers in industry (many at the pharmaceutical companies where they trained) as well as government, academia and clinical practice.

"It's a juggernaut," Toscani says. "The secret sauce is that it's become a long-standing talent pool for companies that recognize the value of well-trained doctors of pharmacy and physicians."

Others would argue that Toscani, along with the other Fellowship

**(continued on next page)**

continued from page 7

program leadership, has been the X factor. Together, they have expanded the program to include companies across the United States, physician fellowship training and monthly leadership training for chief fellows. They have also paired fellows and faculty with current EMSOP students to work jointly on research projects and instituted weekly research rounds. Hundreds of fellows and EMSOP students have presented research posters at scientific meetings.

Toscani is looking forward to retirement, but he's not cutting ties with Rutgers. The Fellows program has asked him to speak at its graduation certificate dinner this spring.

Of course, he said yes.

**1,800+** alumni of the Rutgers Institute for Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowships have forged careers in industry, government, academia and clinical practice.



**HAPPY MENTEE:** John Cho '25 has worked closely with Toscani

## The Cheerleader: Lauren Aleksunes

**“I might suggest new directions, but they’re the ones making the decisions.”**

**“M**entoring student researchers is like being a cheerleader,” says Lauren Aleksunes, Professor, Pharmacology & Toxicology. “You celebrate their wins and remind them that the things they call failure are needed to test their work.”

There have been plenty of wins to cheer about.

PharmD student Julia Yang had never done bench research before coming to Aleksunes’ lab. This spring, at the annual Society of Toxicology conference, she presented her work measuring gene expression changes in mouse models before and after cancer treatment.

Third-year PharmD/PhD student Chenghui Jiang likens Aleksunes’ mentoring to “personalized medicine. She tailors her guidance to each student’s experience.”

Jiang, who once planned to go into retail pharmacy, explores a mechanism that transports different metabolized substances into placenta cells during pregnancy. “The shift to how drugs work in the body has been a big change for me, so I’ve probably needed more guidance than others in the lab.”



### RESEARCHERS IN THE MAKING

Julia Yang (top) and Chenghui Jiang have flourished in Aleksunes’ lab



**SPARKED BY CURIOSITY** Aleksunes credits faculty who mentored her as an undergraduate for awakening her interest in research. Read about her work on page 24.

Dr. A gives me space, but I check in with her weekly to share details of my project.”

Jiang expects to publish an epidemiological study this year, co-authored with Aleksunes. Ultimately, she hopes to work at a pharmaceutical company.

Aleksunes herself was “bitten by the research bug” as an un-

dergraduate at the University of Connecticut, where her mentors awakened her “innate curiosity” to pursue questions of “how does that work.” She strives to spark that same curiosity in her students. While not all her students publish their work, Aleksunes says, “I’ll train anyone who’s excited about doing clinical research, whether

they’re PharmD/PhD candidates, medical students, or going into veterinary medicine.”

The payoff is watching students begin to steer their own careers. “Initially, I’m in the driver’s seat. But ultimately, I’m taking a nap in the back seat. I might suggest new directions, but they’re the ones making the decisions.”

#### WISE WORDS

**“I’ll train anyone who’s excited about doing clinical research, whether they’re PharmD/PhD candidates, medical students, or going into veterinary medicine.”**

– Lauren Aleksunes, Professor, Pharmacology & Toxicology



**MOTIVATED**

**Gow says he gets fired up “when a student who is really interested in a question has that Eureka moment that makes all the hours worthwhile.”**



**ON TRACK** For Jakub Nikscin (top) and Tony Hu, Gow has struck the right balance of independence and guidance

**The Facilitator: Andrew Gow**

**“You have to have an interaction with a mentor that works, and it has to work in both directions.”**

**W**hen he was younger, Andrew Gow played rugby and trained teams for the London marathon. Such pursuits might seem like detours for a future Professor of Pharmacology & Toxicology, but Gow sees the connections: Today, his lab investigates lung disease and injury.

Mindful of his own journey, Gow tries to understand “what fires students up about research.” He himself gets fired up “when a student has that Eureka moment that makes all the hours worthwhile.” For fourth-year toxicology student Tony Hu, Gow allows just the right degree of freedom. “I enjoy the independence he grants, but I’ve also walked into his office and ambushed him into an impromptu hour-long meeting.”

Gow recognizes that his approach isn’t right for every student. “You have to have an interaction with a mentor that works, and it has to work in both directions. It’s a question of style.”

Gow’s style has clearly worked for P3 PharmD/PhD student Jakub Nikscin. “I barely passed prerequisite courses. Then I took my intro to research elective with Dr. Gow. He made science cool, and my academic standing improved.”

Nikscin is now in the Honors Thesis Research Program and serves on the EMSOP Research Committee. He does bench research, attends academic conferences and helps supervise incoming students.

“At first, many of my experiments were failing. But Dr. Gow just laughed and asked me, ‘Are you having fun yet?’ I realized that I was, and that my career goal was to become a great scientist like him.”





### The Advocate: Dean Nancy Cintron

“The relationship doesn’t end when they graduate.”

**A**s a first-generation college student, Nancy Cintron navigated the challenges of higher education on her own. Through her founding and leadership of the Educational Opportunity Fund at EMSOP, Dean Nancy, as she’s universally known,

has since helped hundreds of first-generation students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds to flourish in school and in their careers. (See story on page 28.)

For Cintron, Senior Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity,

Inclusion & Student Affairs, mentorship begins with “authentic conversations” about what brings students “the joy and fulfillment to go beyond the prescribed trajectory.” She assigns homework that includes mapping out possible career paths and sampling them through experiences such as partnering with a faculty member on a research project.

“I wait for when a student might say, ‘I hadn’t thought of that,’ and plans their next steps, whether shadowing a professional or just having a conversation.”

As President of EMSOP’s Pharmacy Governing Council, Katie Zheng ’27 has worked closely with Cintron, who is an advisor to the Council. Together, they created a Kindness Week to strengthen the community and promote compassion among students and faculty.

“Dean Nancy has always been willing to listen, offer guidance and help me see even discouraging moments as opportunities for growth,” says Zheng. “This has transformed me from a student to an empowered leader equipped with skills for the real world — communication, resilience and adaptability.”

That last asset may be the most important of all because, as Cintron notes, new opportunities and challenges arise and “students pivot and change.”

At whatever stage of their careers, Cintron has continued to act as a resource: “The relationship doesn’t end when they graduate.”

## She’s Listening

*“Dean Nancy has always been willing to listen, offer guidance and help me see even discouraging moments as opportunities for growth.”*

— Katie Zheng



**TRANSFORMER** With Cintron, Zheng created EMSOP Kindness Week

BIG HEART

**“Dr. J puts her whole heart into helping us. She tells you, ‘You should apply for this award; you should go to this conference.’”**

— Kevin Ozkuyumcu



**The Motivator: Laurie Joseph**

**“I want to make them an even better version of themselves.”**

**L**aurie Joseph is not shy about challenging students’ ideas.

“Effective writing and critical thinking skills are important,” says Joseph, Associate Research Professor, Pharmacology & Toxicology. “I want students’ focus at EMSOP to be not only on their studies but on meaningful interactions as well. I want to make them an even better version of themselves.”

Her firm but encouraging approach reflects Joseph’s desire to spare students the obstacles and discouragement she endured as a woman entering STEM in the early 70s. She also wants to “give them what I didn’t get”: a partner in charting their paths who can provide the occasional gentle nudge when they’ve lost their way.

Or when they haven’t quite found it yet. Through the Liberty Science Center’s Partners in Science, high schoolers spend summers in Joseph’s lab, learning data collection, scientific writing and presentation skills. She emphasizes these

same skills with newly arrived EMSOP students. Kevin Ozkuyumcu, a 2023 PharmD graduate and fourth-year PhD student in toxicology, recalls Joseph pulling him aside during his first year in her lab and saying, “Do you want to learn how to do research?”

If the implication was that he hadn’t yet, the stronger message was that he absolutely could. “Dr. J puts her whole heart into helping us,” Ozkuyumcu says. “She tells you, ‘You should apply for this award; you should go to this conference.’”

Joseph also encourages students to explore different possibilities. “I have a handshake contract with them. If you’re working hard and doing the right things, success will follow.”

When Olympia Su ’26 struggled academically, Joseph connected her with an EMSOP alum and helped her get an internship at BASE. “If it weren’t for Dr. J’s support, I would not be graduating this May,” Su says. “She believes in her students, even when we don’t always believe in ourselves.”

**REALIZING HE COULD** Kevin Ozkuyumcu credits Joseph with making him believe he could do research

## The Change Agent: Anita Siu

“Learning is most effectively retained when it occurs collaboratively rather than in isolation.”

“Throughout my education and training, people have mentored me by modeling the way,” says Anita Siu, Clinical Professor, Pharmacy Practice

& Administration. At EMSOP, Siu is applying that philosophy in helping faculty mentor one another. As school-wide Director of Faculty Development &

Mentoring, and Vice Chair of Teaching and Learning in the Department of Pharmacy Practice & Administration, she has instituted a process comprising new faculty orientation and opportunities for new faculty to join a mentorship program.

These efforts are moving the needle. “The mentoring program has been transformative, fostering professional growth and a genuine sense of community and further empowering me in making a meaningful impact on others’ development,” says Deepali Dixit, Clinical Professor and Vice Chair, Pharmacy Practice.

Siu also represents EMSOP on the Rutgers Health Faculty Development Council, where she has shared her research on the quality of mentoring at EMSOP.

This fall, Siu will launch A Dose of Mentorship, a micro-badging program, unique

within Rutgers Health and nationwide, aimed at promoting achievement, career development and continuing education through:

■ Communication. “Clarity makes mentor-mentee relationships meaningful and productive,” Siu says.

■ Aligning and revisiting expectations “to help mentor and mentee understand their roles, responsibilities and desired outcomes.”

■ Fostering independence “based on a mentee’s career stage, experience and goals. A mentor helps identify those, and responsibility shifts as the mentee grows.”

■ Supporting and prioritizing professional development relevant to mentees’ goals so mentees can recognize opportunities and continue to grow.

“Learning is most effectively retained when it occurs collaboratively rather than in isolation,” says Siu.

### MODELING THE WAY

**“The mentoring program has been transformative, further empowering me in making a meaningful impact on others’ development.”**

– Deepali Dixit, Clinical Professor, Vice Chair, Pharmacy Practice & Administration



# Living *and* Learning Together

A community within the community  
for female students

By Patricia Lamiell

Fall 2024, during her first semester in EMSOP's PharmD program, Ceylin Ozdemir struggled with a required general biology course. "If some miracle didn't happen," she recalls, "I was going to fail it."

Earlier that fall, Ozdemir had joined the Douglass Pharmacy and Nursing Living-Learning Community, 40 women in the pharmacy and nursing programs who live together on Busch Campus. One day while she was meeting in Allen Hall with third-year PharmD student Nora Abdelfattah, then the Community's peer pharmacy coordinator, the two began discussing phospholipids, a topic that Abdelfattah, too, had struggled with. When Abdelfattah's official office hours ended, she joined Ozdemir on the bus to the College Avenue campus.

"Mentorship is important,"

Abdelfattah says. "You show up when you're needed, not just on the clock."

With Abdelfattah's help, Ozdemir passed general biology and has since passed every course she's taken.

Living and learning communities (LLCs) existed in the colonial era but disappeared during the 1940s, when colleges began housing burgeoning student populations in large dormitories, separate from academic life. LLCs reemerged during the 1960s, and today there are more than a dozen interest-based LLCs on the Rutgers New Brunswick campus.

The Pharmacy and Nursing Living-Learning Community was created in 2023, spearheaded by Lydia Prendergast, Associate Dean of Women in Science & Engineering at Douglass Residential College, the historic women's college at Rutgers.

Participants receive academic, social and professional support from more senior female students in the same programs. They also share experiences and give each other moral support as they contend with being first-generation college students, navigating a higher-ed environment, and playing catch-up in certain subject areas. To facilitate collaborative study, students in the Community are enrolled in the same sections of Science and Technical Writing, a required first-year course for all Pharmacy and Nursing majors.

"LLCs do a good job of fostering connections among students in smaller groups," says Laura Sclafani, Associate Dean, Academic Services at EMSOP. "And we do a good job at EMSOP at making a big school like Rutgers feel smaller."

Support also comes from outside the Community.

Tutors come frequently to the LLCs from the Rutgers Learning Center to help students with their coursework in tough subjects such as biology and chemistry. "We bring tutors to the residence hall in the evenings," Prendergast says. "Students can walk down the hall in their jammies and get help with their coursework."

The Community first-year students also get early exposure to labs and area pharmaceutical companies. Pharmaceutical executives and researchers are also brought to campus to speak with students in the Community and help them make recruitment contacts. These activities

**THERE WHEN SHE'S NEEDED** Former LLC peer coordinator Nora Abdelfattah (standing) with mentee Ceylin Ozdemir





are designed to help address gender parity issues in the pharmacy profession. For example, even though women account for more than 60 percent of all pharmacists in the United States, their salaries lag their male peers by about 2 percent. The Community enhances participants' ability to form mentorships and professional relationships that can help advance their careers.

Students in the Community also benefit from de-stress activities sponsored by Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) that are designed to teach concepts or skills that they will need in their professional lives. In one session, students created scented liquid soaps to learn the basics of compounding. In another, they learned how to take blood pressure readings. A session on making mocktails provided a festive atmosphere for practice in mixing solutions.

Third-year pharmacy student and current Community mentor Andrea Manoilova, who grew up in a bilingual family in North Macedonia and came to Rutgers in 2023, says she found the de-stress activities "helpful, not only for building professional and academic skills, but for encouraging conversation with fellow students, which has improved my English."

But the most important benefit of all may be the bonds students form with one another. "The goal is to foster relationships that continue through students' time in the program," says Prendergast. "And, ideally, throughout their careers."

# Mentoring's *Happy Returns*

Four EMSOP Rising Stars are Making Their Mark

W

HAT YOU PUT IN IS WHAT YOU GET OUT.

■ It's the rule of thumb in most areas of life, but with mentoring, you often get more. Inspired by something as simple as a single profound idea or as all-encompassing as a relationship that lasts a lifetime, mentees can go on to pursue careers, tackle questions and work miracles that neither they nor their mentors could ever have imagined. The contributions of the four EMSOP rising stars featured on these pages range from improving patient safety to broadening the range and inclusivity of pharmacy itself. Here are their stories.

## A Voice for Inclusion

### Humberto Jimenez

Whether at the HIV clinic or on a medical mission abroad, Humberto Jimenez takes EMSOP PharmD students outside of their comfort zone.

"I aim to provide students with opportunities to directly engage with marginalized or under-resourced communities, whether on rotation or medical mission," says Jimenez '03, Clinical Associate Professor, Pharmacy Practice & Administration and HIV/Ambulatory Care Pharmacist.

Through his practice at St. Joseph's University Medical Center in Paterson, NJ, Jimenez brings EMSOP students on



**SUPPORTING CAST** Cintron has helped Jimenez fulfill his charge



**PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE** Kong helped Kudlak navigate the pandemic's isolation



rotation to engage with patients, staff and providers at the Comprehensive Care Center, which is part of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program. He has also brought students to the Dominican Republic and Uganda, missions that are coordinated through

**“Social determinants like housing and transportation can be significant barriers to better clinical outcomes. We need to embed that knowledge in our curriculum.”**

— Humberto Jimenez

Waves of Health, a nonprofit he co-founded in 2007. “They see, firsthand, how social determinants of health, like housing and transportation, can be barriers to better clinical outcomes. We need to embed that knowledge fully in our curriculum and rotations.”

On a broader level, since 2019, with the support of Nancy Cintron, Senior Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) & Student Affairs, Jimenez has taken a similar approach in working to promote greater equity and inclusion, both at Rutgers and in patient care.

“As both a student and a faculty member, I have felt that efforts to provide a space where all feel included or seen have not always been intentional,” he says. “Dean Nancy has opened doors across Rutgers, leading to numerous opportunities to meet individuals doing ‘the work’. Her sponsorship has led to invitations to join the Leadership Council on Faculty and Staff Engagement and a collaborative with the BIG 10, providing opportunities for professional development and a seat at the table.”

Jimenez has also developed what

he calls “bidirectional” mentoring relationships with peers, junior faculty and students. He and fellow EMSOP professors Navaneeth Narayanan and Christine Parikh regularly team up to teach and do research about infectious diseases and health equity.

Jimenez has also stepped up his efforts to include students in his research projects, from conceptualizing research ideas and developing Institutional Review Board proposals to identifying how conclusions fit into the current scientific literature.

Describing Jimenez as “busy” is clearly an understatement, but he doesn’t see it that way. “Change happens through education,” he says. “That’s my passion.” — **Joe Levine**

### **When Peers Know Best** **Melissa Kudlak**

**F**aculty members haven’t cornered the market on mentoring. Witness the tale of Melissa Kudlak and Joyce Kong.

Kudlak and her peers entered EMSOP just as the global pandemic was forcing learning online, preempting opportunities for students to interact personally with faculty and one another. For a first-generation college student like Kudlak, the American-born daughter of a Colombian mother who had dreamed of a career in nursing, entry to higher education became even more daunting.

To combat the isolation, she applied and was accepted to the professional sorority Lambda

**(continued on next page)**

**“Joyce took me under her wing. I was able to integrate into the university, even though we were working online.”**

— Melissa Kudlak

**LIVING THE DREAM** Kudlak is realizing opportunities her parents never had





**THERE FOR HER** Feudo and Bell met weekly after Bell's father died

Kappa Sigma. Through that channel, she met Kong '24 online; a year would pass before the two would meet in person.

"Joyce took me under her wing," recalls Kudlak. "She made suggestions about various clubs and projects she thought I should apply to. Because of her, I was able to integrate into the university even though we were working online. She really put things in perspective for me."

Thanks to Kong, Kudlak says, "I realized I was interested in patient safety issues such as medication side effects and matching patients with the most appropriate drugs for their treatment. That led me to pursue the field of toxicology and the assessment of safe exposure limits. When we finally came back on campus, I immediately got involved in doing research."

A Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine rotation in oncology at the start of her sixth year reinforced Kudlak's intent to delve deeper into toxicology.

Inspired by Kong, Kudlak, too, has counseled younger classmates interested in toxicology. But perhaps Kong's greatest gift to her is the one she will bring back home.

"My parents nurtured my interest in science and supported me every step of the way so that I could have the opportunities they never had," Kudlak says. "When I walk across that stage in May, I'll be doing it for them as well as me." — **Steve Giegerich**

### Learning When to Lean

## Alexandra Bell

**A**lexandra Bell has always been a self-starter who prides herself on handling life's challenges. At EMSOP, aided by the Dr. and Mrs. Arnold W. Karig Endowed Scholarship, she has

paid her own way. By the beginning of her first professional year, she'd already decided to focus her pharmacy career on clinical pharmacy, and she knew precisely which rotations she needed to take. The sudden death of her father just five days before the start of the 2023 Spring semester only strengthened her resolve. Three days after his memorial service, Bell was at EMSOP when classes began. "Taking time off never felt like something I wanted to do," she says. "It just wasn't an option."

Still, as resilient as she was, Bell knew

**"Accepting help was hard for me. It's something I'm still working on. But Dean Feudo was there for me, making sure I was staying on top of my work and doing everything I needed to do."**

— Alexandra Bell

that her world had been rocked, and that this wasn't a time to go it alone. "I knew I had to do the right thing for myself."

Bell had no advisors or mentors she could turn to, but as student ambassador and vice president of the EMSOP chapter of the American Pharmacists Association, she'd worked closely with the school's administration. One day, at the end of a meeting with Donna Feudo, Associate Dean for Experiential Education & Clinical Affairs, she asked if she could stay to talk "to kind of get back on my feet."

The conversation initiated a standing weekly appointment. "There was an academic sense to it, but Dean Feudo was also just being there for me, making sure I was staying on top of my work and doing everything I needed to do."



**HANDLING THE CHALLENGES** Bell, a super achiever, has learned to accept help

**ABOVE AND BEYOND** Philips' impact on Jackson-Clark went beyond clinical care



Bell is receiving her PharmD this spring and is headed to University Health San Antonio for postgraduate training as a clinical hospital pharmacist, with an eye toward specializing in infectious disease or emergency medicine. But the most important lesson she learned at EMSOP may have been about the importance of kindness to those who are at a painful juncture in life.

“Accepting help was hard for me. It’s some thing I’m still working on. But Dean Feudo and the faculty at EMSOP showed me that asking for it is okay.” — **Steve Giegerich**

### Teaching the Lessons He Learned Marquell Jackson-Clark

**A**s the son of a phlebotomist and a health insurance official, Marquell Jackson-Clark '23 always knew he was going to work in health care. The question was, in what capacity?

Jackson-Clark toyed with the idea of becoming a physician but concluded he couldn't commit himself to a decade of education, internships and specialized training. Instead, in 2017, he enrolled in EMSOP's six-year PharmD program and confronted the next set of choices. Should he pursue clinical research? Public health? Pharmaceuticals? Retail or hospital pharmacy?

His epiphany came in year two: “I realized I wanted to become a teacher.”

As a first-generation college student, Jackson-Clark sought guidance and found it at the hands of Ashmi Philips, Clinical Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Practice & Administration. Philips is an accomplished practicing pharmacist whose specialties include

acute care, HIV and geriatrics, but for Jackson-Clark, her impact has extended well beyond clinical care.

“Professor Philips modeled how to meet students where they're at and help them build from there,” he says.

Jackson-Clark continued to tap Philips' wisdom throughout his postgraduate hospital residency and again while he was preparing to interview for his dream job: being a faculty member at EMSOP. Her mentorship proved invaluable. This past fall, Jackson-Clark joined Philips as a colleague, with the same title as her own: Clinical Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Practice & Administration.

His teaching load has included an introductory course for incoming students and courses in women's health and foundational pharmacology, but he, too, has sought to impart lessons in mentorship itself.

“My goal is not only to provide students with knowledge but also to give them the tools to pass that knowledge along to one another as they learn, just as Professor Philips did with me,” says Jackson-Clark, who was named a 2026 faculty “Rising Star” by the EMSOP Educational Opportunity Fund. For him, that work is avowedly personal. “I look at them and think, ‘That was me eight years ago.’” — **Steve Giegerich**

**“My goal is not only to provide students with knowledge but also to give them the tools to pass knowledge along as they learn, as Professor Philips did with me.”**

— Marquell Jackson-Clark



## It Starts at the Top

EMSOP's dean invokes James Bond, Santa Claus and The Godfather to teach leadership

BY JOE LEVINE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
JOHN EMERSON

**A**MONG THE MANY HIGHLIGHTS of EMSOP Dean Joseph Barone's leadership course, a particular favorite is the James Bond leadership lecture – an object lesson in how to productively buck the system.

“It's not about Aston Martins and martinis,” says Barone, who co-created the course more than 30 years ago and has taught it ever since. “Bond is a character who usually goes against authority. The lecture is about how to achieve an

objective in an environment that might not be supportive.”

Throughout the semester-long elective course, Barone, aided by a rotating cast of guest speakers, imparts practical knowledge that has stood the test of time, such as how to give an interesting presentation. He also addresses concerns of the present moment, such as how to make the best use of social media and how to create personal branding. But perhaps the biggest challenge facing any leader, he tells





**“James Bond** productively challenges authority. Santa Claus takes care of his elves. The Godfather takes care of business by whatever method it takes to win.”

— DEAN JOSEPH BARONE



**THE DEAN KEEPS IT KEEN:** Enrollment has remained steady over three decades thanks to Barone’s sense of humor and ability to keep material relevant.

students, is to promote mentorship at all levels of an organization.

“You can encourage people to be mentors, but you can’t force them,” he says. “Not everyone is cut out for it. You have to like to do it and you have to have something to give. Above all, you have to be genuinely invested in your mentee’s success.”

With guidance, though, many people can become effective mentors. To that end, Barone draws on texts such as Eric Harvey’s *The Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus* and *The Mafia Manager: A Guide to the Corporate Machiavelli* (by an anonymous author known only as “V.”), which outline very different leadership strategies.

“Santa runs a good workshop,” Barone says. “He takes care of his elves. The Godfather delivers whatever it takes to win. Students compare and contrast the two approaches and decide which one suits them. We get some pretty interesting answers.”

Students must submit a written

essay to apply to the leadership course, which is open to PIs and above. About 50 are accepted each year, and enrollment has never flagged. “Dean Barone is such a dynamic speaker,” says Erica Dankiewicz, who has co-taught the James Bond lecture with Barone since 2011, when she was a Rutgers Pharmaceutical Industry Fellow. “He’s so comfortable being his true self, funny and engaging while always thoughtful. He takes what could be a dry topic and makes it something that students can relate to. It’s always a treat to watch him.” Dankiewicz, who earned her pharmacy degree at the University of Rhode Island and is Director of Medical Content Review for Canopy Life Sciences, calls the course “a really special elective opportunity that EMSOP gives to students.”

Thirty years is a long time to teach any course, but Barone continues to derive inspiration from new generations of learners. “We learn a lot from them,” he says. “Students tell us which lectures they liked and how to keep them fresh, and which ones they think we should get rid of. In that sense, they’re already acting as leaders themselves.”

IT’S A FACT

**30**

**That’s how many years Dean Barone has been teaching his leadership course. Enrollment hasn’t flagged.**

# Making Breakthroughs Work Better

Treating the treatments ■ BY JOE LEVINE



A new generation of groundbreaking drugs is transforming the treatment of many diseases, but challenges remain that limit their effectiveness. EMSOP's **Bozena Michniak-Kohn** and **Lauren Aleksunes** are employing innovative strategies to help ensure that patients receive maximum benefit.

## SKIN IN THE GAME

*Bo Michniak-Kohn is developing new drug delivery approaches*

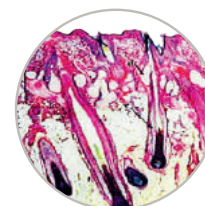
**B**IOLOGICS ARE REVOLUTIONIZING the treatment of cancer, autoimmune disorders and other conditions. Because these drugs mimic naturally occurring substances in the body, they can home in on specific therapeutic targets, reducing side effects. Usually, biologics are given subcutaneously, using injections into the fatty tissues below the skin. They can also be given in specialized transdermal patches, including those containing microneedles thinner than a human hair.

“If you swallow a drug, it goes into the GI tract and gets uptaken by the liver,” explains Bozena Michniak-Kohn, Professor of Pharmaceutics. “Nature put the liver there, and if the liver thinks it’s bad for you, it may chew up three-quarters of the drug before it reaches its target in other parts of the body.” Skin delivery, in contrast, goes straight to the bloodstream, enabling lower doses and reducing gastrointestinal side effects.

Delivering large-molecule drugs through the skin was once considered impossible. “In the dead cells of the stratum corneum, skin’s outermost layer, lipids, proteins and water are organized very well and shield us from environmental toxins,” says Michniak-Kohn. “But they also act as a barrier to the delivery of many drugs.”

Employing chemical and physical approaches, Michniak-Kohn has helped develop methods that can penetrate the skin barrier.

The chemical approach supplements drugs with agents that cause lipids in the

**FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE**

In the dead cells of the skin's outermost layer, the organization of lipids, proteins and water shields us from environmental toxins but also acts as a barrier to the delivery of many drugs. Employing chemical and physical approaches, Michniak-Kohn has helped develop methods that can penetrate the skin barrier. These include "microneedles" and tiny bubbles called nanospheres.

stratum to move, creating windows for large-molecule drugs. The lipids then revert to their protective state.

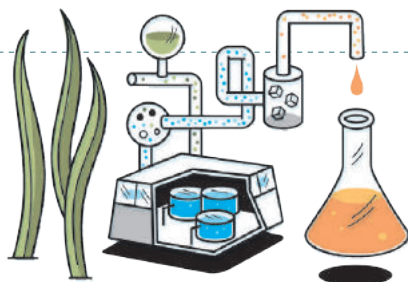
The physical approach involves the creation of drug-coated microneedles. Metal, silicon, and glass microneedles pierce the stratum corneum, while needles made of sugar dissolve, enabling more sustained and controlled drug delivery.

Microneedles have yet to reach the market because "people are worried that making holes in the skin might cause infection," Michniak-Kohn says. "But the skin is elastic and the holes close." Several companies have also solved scaling-up issues and are now testing microneedles for different conditions.

Michniak-Kohn has also developed

and used tiny bubbles called nanospheres to treat acne by delivering drugs such as adapalene to hair follicles. In recently published work, the nanospheres produced better outcomes than marketed topical formulations.

"I like doing work so clearly targeted to helping people," says Michniak-Kohn. "Skin is universal; there's always something new to work on."



**Michniak-Kohn** explains that "if you swallow a drug, it goes into the GI tract and gets uptaken by the liver," which may chew it up before it can reach its targets elsewhere in the body. Skin delivery goes straight to the bloodstream, enabling lower doses and reducing side effects.

**TEACHING TOMORROW:  
MARY BRIDGEMAN**

(continued from back cover)

**W**e give them a skill set to carry them throughout a career, for practice in what could be 2076 and beyond. Most of a professional's life is spent in continuing professional development, and EMSOP supports you throughout your career." ■ Preparation for the unknowable is central. "Technologies are coming that we can't imagine. Students will need to adapt. We teach metacognition

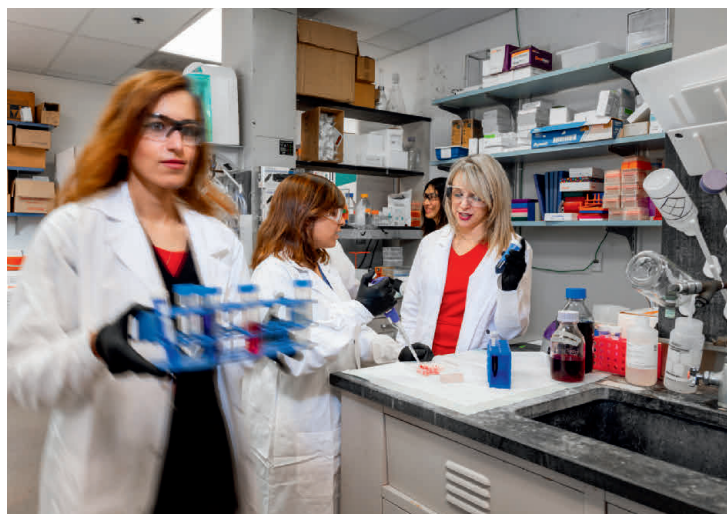
to create self-aware professionals who can identify their goals, assess their performance and determine tools they need."

■ Through iPASS (Integrated Pharmacotherapy Assessment Skills Series) and LEAP-AHEAD (Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Awareness of Self and Professionalism: Assessment of Health Education Awareness Development), reflection is now a core EMSOP competency.

(continued on page 27)

**Sidelining the Side Effects**

Lauren Aleksunes helps identify safer drugs



**TEAM ALEKSUNES** In her lab, Aleksunes (far right) gives her students prominent roles.

**N**ew drugs that dramatically improve immune system response are transforming treatment of melanoma, lung cancer, head and neck cancer, Hodgkin's lymphoma and other cancers.

"Our bodies constantly make cancer cells, but our immune systems zap them," says Lauren Aleksunes, Professor of Pharmacology & Toxicology. "Tumors can make immune systems inefficient, but these new drugs turn the immune system back on to attack the tumor."

Amping up the immune system can trigger lupus-like side effects and other complications that can require hospitalization or halt treatment. Aleksunes is dedicated to addressing such issues. "I hate that we have to tell patients, 'We've cured

your cancer, but now you have to be on dialysis.' We can do better."

In recently published work with Melanie Joy at the University of Colorado, Aleksunes shares how she genetically engineered mice with human-like immune systems. "Normally, immunotherapies don't affect mice, because mouse immune systems won't recognize them. But in our mice, we can see the drug do its job and we observe its toxicities."

At the Cancer Institute of New Jersey (CINJ), Aleksunes' PharmD students gather blood and urine from patients undergoing immunotherapy and ask patients about side effects they're

experiencing. The CINJ collaboration is part of EMSOP's effort to strengthen training for PharmD/PhDs. "These students love the idea of being pharmacists, but they've also been bitten by the research bug."

Aleksunes knows what that's like. At the University of Connecticut, she was mentored by Steven Cohen and José Manautou, two internationally known leaders in toxicology. "Before then, I didn't know I could be a scientist." She became UConn's first and only PharmD/PhD graduate and EMSOP's first PharmD/PhD hire in toxicology.

"As a practicing pharmacist, I can help hundreds of people, but through research, I might reach thousands or millions. It comes down to curiosity. I want to train anyone excited about learning and inquiry."




**"I hate that we have to tell patients, 'We've cured your cancer, but now you have to be on dialysis.' We can do better than that."**

— **LAUREN ALEKSUNES,**  
**PROFESSOR OF PHARMACOLOGY & TOXICOLOGY**

# Community Marketer

For New Alumni Council President Lisa Pilla, Connectivity Is Top Priority

**I** F YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE, ask a busy person. ■ Case in point: EMSOP's new Alumni Association president, Lisa Pilla. ■ During her 30 years as a pharmaceutical executive, Pilla (EMSOP '85, RBS '92) led cross-functional teams at Pfizer, Ipsen and Novartis, including the latter's U.S. Neurology/Psychiatry Business Unit. She currently runs a consulting business while commuting between her places in New Jersey and San Diego. ■ And those were just her day jobs. Pilla also has volunteered with the Healthcare Businesswoman's Association, the Alzheimer's Association, her children's

colleges, and in previous Alumni Association roles at EMSOP. ■ Her style has been to convene and connect, an approach she's applying to leading the Council. "My passion is to create more connectivity with students. They want mentoring and a network to find jobs, but they don't know what our alumni do, where they work or how to reach them." ■ Pilla asked Pharmacy Governing Council student liaisons Mazia Ahsan and Nitya Angadala to build an alumni networking database, which went online in February. Shivani Gupta '20, Vice President, Student Support, is piloting alumni-student mentoring by tapping into the database. 



## Fresh, Direct

**"My passion is to create more connectivity with students. They want mentoring and a network to find jobs, but they don't know what our alumni do, where they work or how to reach them."**

## Alumni & Friends

### Community Marketer

ALUMNI IN THE FIELD: LISA PILLA

Pilla also wants to increase alumni recognition. Led by Ally Quinn '94, the Council's Awards Committee is creating new honors for rising stars and distinguished alumni. "We have loads of people doing great things, and recognizing them builds pride in EMSOP," Pilla says.

Perhaps the Council's biggest challenge is to create an identity within the Rutgers universe. "We're a small fish in a big ocean," Pilla says. "But we have an opportunity to expand our reach by responding to alumni requests for programming outside of New Jersey, in other states where we and the other RU colleges have large concentrations of alumni — California, Florida, New York." Sanam Jaswal Patel '08 and Anjali Belani

### Expand

**"We're a small fish in a big ocean. We have an opportunity to expand our reach by responding to requests for programming outside of New Jersey ..."**

'09, co-chairs of the Events Committee, are leading this effort. Groundwork for Pilla's agenda was laid by her predecessor, Tyler Redelico '15, who reinstated the annual reunion, raised and distributed over \$20,000 in student support, and expanded the Association's social media presence. Their combined efforts are moving the needle: For example, alumni response to a recent Council survey exceeded expectations and sparked enthusiastic interest in the Council. "Alumni want to work with us but haven't known how," Pilla says. "Now people who have never contacted us before are saying, 'Tell me what I can do.'"

— Joe Levine

### FAMILY FRIENDLY

#### SATURDAY IN THE PARK

A May outing brought together alumni, their families and friends at New Jersey's Readington Brewery and Hop Farm. Toasting to old times were, from left, Lauren Igneri '10, Natasha Advani '11 and Sanam Jaswal Patel '08.

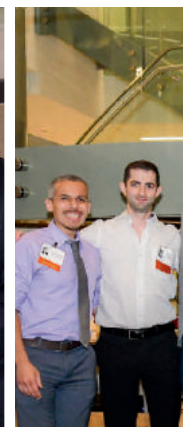
"It was a beautiful day, and we engaged in vibrant, thoughtful discussions. I'm looking forward to hosting more alumni at future events like this!"

— NATASHA ADVANI '11



### ALUMNI REUNION '25

## A Classy Reunion: They came, they saw, and they had a



## Rhodes Taken: Omar Abuattieh

CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER

**A** recipient of the prestigious Truman Scholarship for his commitment to public service, Abuattieh recently completed a rotation in Arizona at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center, serving tribal nations with high rates of substance abuse.

■ Abuattieh says he's been driven by *not* having role models. "Because Muslims have been demonized since 9/11, we haven't been widely involved in politics or communities." ■ Why has Abuattieh chosen to pursue a career in pharmacy? ■ "The United States is the world's richest nation, but with some of the worst health outcomes. We need to demand more." ■ At Oxford, Abuattieh says that he will likely focus on healthcare policy and health. After that, he says, he's thinking about going to law school and, further down the road pursuing a career in politics. ■ He has no illusions about the challenges, but believes passion can drive success: "It takes hope to create a better world."



great time



### OLD FRIENDS ARE THE BEST FRIENDS

EMSOP's September reunion drew 150 alumni and friends. From left: Smiling faces; the Class of 1975 reunited; Dean Joseph Barone, Anjali Belani '09 (left), Shivani Gupta '20; Class of 2015 attendees Marcus Flores, Andrew Schwartz, Tyler Redelico, Isabel Liberato, Bowie Reilly, Ruben Patel, Sheldon Nguyen, Karan Raja, Theodore Ray, Maria Xu, Melanie Stewart

## TEACHING TOMORROW: MARY BRIDGEMAN

(continued from page 24)

**A**fter their clinical experiences students can answer: What did I hope to gain? What were my preconceptions? What did I learn about my identity as a pharmacist?

■ Bridgeman, an Internal Medicine Pharmacy Specialist at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, brings her clinical experience to teaching. "When COVID hit, we were told on Friday to have our classrooms online by Monday and ensure a comparable practice experience for students. I had a second grader and a kindergartener at home and my husband was working in the Emergency Department. Nothing fazes me now." ■ Well, almost nothing. Recently, Bridgeman began working toward a master's degree at Rutgers Graduate School of Education. "Deadlines hit you differently when you're the student. But I can empathize better with my own students." — Joe Levine

BIG NUMBER

# 211

students were expected to graduate from EMSOP this spring, one of the largest graduating classes in recent years.



### Opportunity Knocks

An EMSOP program helps first-generation college students succeed in school and life

**W**hen students and alumni name key mentors and experiences at EMSOP, they often cite “Dean Nancy” and “EOF.” ■ “Dean Nancy” is Nancy Cintron, Senior Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Student Affairs. EOF is the Educational Opportunity Fund, a state-funded program offered at numerous educational institutions throughout New Jersey. Cintron founded the EOF program at EMSOP 35 years ago to help first-generation students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. ■ “We assist many students from areas where schools are less well funded,” she says. “They have many hurdles to overcome at EMSOP, where the academic

program is among the most demanding at Rutgers. Being first in their families to attend college, they have no one at home to say, ‘Here’s what you need to know about being in college.’” ■ As a first-generation student herself at Rutgers, Cintron lived those same experiences. ■ “I’d been a high achiever in high school, but when I got here, I was a fish out of water,” she recalls. “I was also often the only woman of color in my dorm.” ■ EOF first-year students attend a five-week “pharmacy boot camp” where they take rigorous courses

and hear lectures and panel discussions featuring EOF alumni, many of whom become mentors and key contacts. EOF also provides tutoring and advising throughout their undergraduate years. ■ Under Cintron’s leadership, over 400 EOF students have graduated from EMSOP. Alumni include pharmaceutical industry leaders, owners of community pharmacies, hospital pharmacists, physicians, physician assistants, and EMSOP faculty. ■ “It’s a joy to see them complete our program and go on to successful careers,” says Cintron. “Programs like EOF don’t take away something from others; they enhance the student experience. We have been able to demonstrate that given the opportunity, anyone can achieve great things.”

#### THE BIG NUMBER

# 400

**Under Cintron’s leadership, over 400 EOF students have graduated to become pharmaceutical industry leaders, community and hospital pharmacists, physicians, physician assistants, and EMSOP faculty.**

## IN MEMORIAM Mourning Professor Kong

**A** **H-NG TONY KONG,** Distinguished Professor and Program Director, Pharmaceutics, passed away in early February. ■ Kong, who held the Glaxo Endowed Chair in Pharmaceutics, was an expert in a wide range of areas, including dietary factors in cancer prevention and chemoprevention of colon cancer and prostate cancer. Kong authored or co-authored more than 350 publications and was an elected Fellow of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists in 2004 and an elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2016. He received the Rutgers RBHS Chancellor’s Excellence in Basic Sciences Research Award in 2023. Kong was also widely beloved at EMSOP as a mentor to many students and alumni.



## Found in Translation: Stacey Zhang

**WHEN STACEY ZHANG'S** father was hospitalized with COVID in 2020, she helped explain his treatment protocol to her family. Inspired by a pharmacist who counseled her then, Zhang, who will receive her PharmD this spring, has since applied her communication skills to a pharmacy career. As EMSOP's student body president, she advocated for peers. Now, through a postdoctoral industry fellowship with Daiichi Sankyo's oncology medical affairs team, she'll communicate scientific and clinical information to the medical community. Posting on LinkedIn, friends and colleagues say they anticipate the amazing things she'll do. We're betting no translation will be necessary.

— Annie Saenger



### On Script

Whether with family, fellow students, patients or caregivers, Stacey Zhang is getting her message across.

## The Exclamation Point

# Teaching Tomorrow

**MARY BRIDGEMAN'S FATHER GRADUATED** from Rutgers College of Pharmacy in 1973 and recently retired after 53 years as a practicing pharmacist. ■ "Pharmacy practice today is a different world," says Bridgeman '06, Clinical Professor, Pharmacy Practice & Administration. "I've seen that transformation through my dad's experience and my own." ■ "It would be a disservice to prepare our students exclusively for pharmacy practice in the year 2026," adds Bridgeman, who co-coordinates EMSOP's continuing education and professional development programs.

(continued on page 24)

### JUGGLING ROLES

Her day job is preparing students for the changing world of pharmacy, but Mary Bridgeman also creates mosaics from — what else — medicine bottle caps like the ones that are airborne here. Some of her work is on display in the Mannino Community Pharmacy Lab.

Photograph by Bill Cardoni

