



Division of Rheumatology

NEW FRONTIERS

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Leading in education, therapeutic approaches and innovative research



James R. O'Dell, MD
Division Chief

A message from the chief

Dear Colleagues, Patients and Supporters,

What an incredible honor and privilege it has been to lead the Division of Rheumatology and Immunology over the last thirty plus years. Our growth from 3 to 18 faculty members has been phenomenal, but much more importantly, the quality of all those additions has been truly breathtaking. I could not be more proud of all of the folks in the picture (page 13-14). Each and every one of them is a spectacular clinician and gifted educator and many are talented researchers, who have all contributed to our core mission of education and research. A few of their remarkable accomplishments are highlighted in this publication, so please read on. Highlights this year include Dr. Ted Mikuls receiving the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) Mentor Award; Dr. Amy Cannella receiving the ACR Program Director Award; and Dr. Kaleb Michaud being named the next president of the ACR sister organization, Association of Rheumatology Professionals (ARP).

This will be my last edition of these updates as I will soon be passing on the leadership of the division to a much younger, brighter and more talented (yet to be named) division chief. I'm extremely proud of a quote in a national publication about our division from one of the true giants of rheumatology, David Wofsy of UCSF and past president of the ACR, "No other rheumatology program in the country matches the growth in outstanding faculty and superb trainees that has characterized the UNMC program during this period of time."

We owe so much to our patients and benefactors for our success and are deeply gratefully to all of you for placing your trust and resources in us. With your help we will continue to build on our solid foundation to provide an environment that will continue to produce both world-class, cutting-edge research and train the best and brightest next generation of rheumatologists, while providing cutting-edge, compassionate patient care.

Thank you all for your continuing support.

With humble appreciation,

James R. O'Dell, MD
Chief, Division of Rheumatology
Robert L. Grissom Professor of Medicine

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For additional printed copies, please contact:

University of Nebraska Medical Center
Division of Rheumatology
986270 Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, NE 68198-6270
402-559-7288

03 Rheumatology's success anchored in academia

It's no accident that the UNMC Division of Rheumatology and Immunology is an academic powerhouse.

05 Patients, learners benefit from expanded clinical footprint

The Westroads Clinic is a one-stop shop for rheumatology.

07 Multispecialty clinics enhance treatment, research

It's not uncommon for rheumatologists to handle diseases that cross paths with other specialties.

09 Leaders in education, patient care

The UNMC Division of Rheumatology prides itself on its leadership in education within the UNMC College of Medicine and the Department of Internal Medicine. Yet, it's not just about pride; the division's leadership in education is out of necessity.

11 Mentoring powers the next generation

Ted Mikuls, MD, was only the fourth physician in the UNMC Division of Rheumatology in 2002 when he came to UNMC.

13 Faculty Highlights

Back Cover Ways to support our department



The University of Nebraska Medical Center Division of Rheumatology is a national and international leader in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases that affect the joints, connective tissues, and autoimmune diseases while educating the next generation. We provide state-of-the-art clinical care, and top-notch education, and discover breakthroughs with our research of rheumatic diseases with special expertise in rheumatoid arthritis, gout, systemic lupus erythematosus, myositis, scleroderma, autoimmune lung diseases and Raynaud's phenomenon.

Private donations have been and will continue to be critical to move our work forward. One terrific example of this has been the development of the Nebraska Arthritis Outcomes Research Center (NAORC). This funding has directly supported the world renowned Rheumatology and Arthritis Investigational Network (RAIN) along with the first-of-its-kind VA Rheumatoid Arthritis Registry (VARA) to allow us to develop new ways of improving the quality of life for our patients.

With our talented and diverse faculty we are positioned well to leverage resources into the next generation of breakthroughs that will benefit our patients with rheumatic disease.

We hope you will consider supporting our efforts through a donation to the Foundation.



Rheumatology's success anchored in academia

It's no accident that the UNMC Division of Rheumatology and Immunology is an academic powerhouse.

It's been their goal — and culture — from day one.

Launched in 1980, UNMC's division is relatively young when compared to national peers. And yet, the division is known for its national footprint.

"The UNMC Rheumatology program has been on a meteoric rise during the past two decades," said David Wofsy, MD, past president of the American College of Rheumatology and professor of medicine and microbiology/immunology at the University of California San Francisco. "No other rheumatology program in the country matches the growth in outstanding faculty and superb trainees that has characterized the UNMC program during this period of time."

That's a result of visionary leaders and high expectations.

James O'Dell, MD, who has chaired UNMC's Division of Rheumatology for the past 34 years, said, "We're proud of our clinical care and care to patients, but we have always aspired to be known for our academic accomplishments. It's been our vision from day one."

And national leaders have taken note:

"The Nebraska Rheumatology Program has expanded under Dr. O'Dell's leadership to become one of the premier programs in the country," said V. Michael Holers, MD, Smyth Professor of Rheumatology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and president of the Rheumatology Research Foundation.

A plethora of teaching awards support the group's vision, and rheumatology rotations consistently rate at the top of all internal medicine rotations, Dr. O'Dell said. Faculty members engage in roles beyond the classroom, serving as leaders in the UNMC College of Medicine, as well as at regional and national levels, including with the American College of Rheumatology.

"Our vision as an academic division is broad," Dr. O'Dell said. "And it is absolutely critical in terms of obtaining grant funding and building a network so reviewers know who you are and fellows know about UNMC and want to come here for training."

The strategy has worked.

The past few years, the division has landed its top three Match Day choices. Dr. O'Dell said, noting: "We have a national reputation, and you get that by being involved, doing your job well and expanding your networks."

"With the reputation we've established nationally and internationally, the future is extremely bright and limited only by our resources."

Part of the division's success is attributed to Omaha philanthropists Ruth and Bill Scott, who helped create the Nebraska Arthritis Outcomes Research Center to better understand arthritis through detailed analysis. The center has led to dozens of publications and bolstered faculty recruitment. The Scott's funding also has been instrumental in helping support and retain talented recruits, Dr. O'Dell said.

As a result, turnover in the division is low, he said, because faculty join and stay until retirement. "We've never lost a faculty member to another job," he said. "We work hard to support them in building their career here instead of taking a lucrative job elsewhere."

He's also grateful for the philanthropic support of emeritus professor Gerald Moore, MD, to create the Gerald F. Moore Professorship in Rheumatology, which Amy Cannella, MD, currently holds; and a lupus lectureship established by Michelene Hearth-Holmes, MD.

"We're grateful for our supporters, who allow us to advance the science of rheumatology, analyze treatments for patients, and train the next generation of health care providers," he said.

Looking back, Dr. O'Dell credits various university leaders — from Dr. Moore, Mike Sorrell, MD, and Lynell Klassen, MD, to James Armitage, MD, and Debra Romberger, MD - for helping set the division's course for success.

That success includes being home to:

- a nationally and internationally known clinical research program for rheumatoid arthritis, the Rheumatology & Arthritis Investigational Network (RAIN);
- the Veterans Affairs Rheumatoid Arthritis Registry (VARA), which has produced more than 100 publications and more than 150 abstracts at national meetings since its inception in 2003; and
- FORWARD – The National Databank for Rheumatic Diseases, which is the largest patient-reported research databank for rheumatic disorders in the U.S.



Expectations are high for the division's hard-working, talented team, Dr. O'Dell said, noting with additional resources the division could continue to:

- Support early career development of promising academic rheumatologists;
- Expand training opportunities for rheumatologists; and
- Provide resources to recognize research excellence in clinical care.

"With additional philanthropic resources, we can make Nebraska the go-to place for rheumatology in the country and the world," he said.

- 1980** Michael Sorrell, MD, founded the UNMC Division of Rheumatology in 1980 (shortly after being appointed chair of UNMC's Department of Internal Medicine) and appointed Gerald Moore, MD, acting chief. Dr. Moore did most of the rheumatology consults until 1982 with some help from William Palmer, MD, who had been practicing at Clarkson Hospital since 1978.
- 1982** Dr. Sorrell recruited Lynell Klassen, MD, from Iowa to be the permanent chief of the division. Dr. Klassen set five long-term goals for the division to succeed:
 - Provide a goal-directed, objectively measured educational program for students and residents.
 - Develop a federally funded basic science and translational investigative research unit.
 - Develop a clinical investigation research unit that would emphasize new therapeutic approaches and clinical outcome study groups.
 - Develop a faculty with national reputations.
 - Become regionally known as a provider of choice for tertiary consultative care.
- 1990** James Armitage, MD, appointed James O'Dell, MD, (a 1977 UNMC graduate) chief of the division, while Dr. Klassen became vice chairman (and later chairman) of the Department of Internal Medicine. Under Dr. O'Dell's leadership, these goals have been accomplished and exceeded.

"If you had asked me 10 years ago where we'd be now, I'd say, 'wow, I never thought we'd expand that much and have that large of a footprint.'"

Dr. O'Dell's leadership philosophy

James O'Dell, MD, has a remarkable track record for hiring and retaining faculty.

His secret?

"You hire the right people, give them a niche within their power and passion, provide the resources they need to be successful and then get out of their way."

It's been his philosophy since being named chief of the division in 1990. And it's worked.

His rheumatology colleagues pursue their passion whether that's building the fellowship program (Amy Cannella, MD), leading the VARA registry (Ted Mikuls, MD), building registries and databases (Kaleb Michaud, PhD) or becoming one of the foremost authorities in the world on specialized radiographic interpretation (Alan Erickson, MD).

- Additional advice from Dr. O'Dell on:
- Research – "As an academician, it's important to have something you're doing or building that's your own," said Dr. O'Dell, who has published extensively in the area of rheumatoid arthritis.
 - Teaching – "Teaching is its own reward," said Dr. O'Dell, who served as internal medicine's residency program director for 33 years. "Have fun with your students and don't miss the opportunity to learn from them. Sometimes it takes a while to see the fruits of your efforts — sit back and enjoy the tremendous ripple effect of your teaching."



Expansion of services benefits patients

The Village Pointe Clinic is slated to undergo renovations in 2024.

Those changes would make the clinic at 175th and Burke Streets similar to the one-stop shop at the Westroads Clinic.

In addition to gaining more space, X-ray services will be installed on site, said Marcus Snow, MD, associate professor in the Division of Rheumatology. The clinic also will offer increased ability to do ultrasound, he said.

“It’s exciting to be out here,” Dr. Snow said. “We have basically 95% of what exists on main campus and we can offer a lot of services out here that we haven’t been able to historically.”

In the past few years, staff at the clinic has grown to include three full-time rheumatologists and two physician assistants, said Michael Feely, MD, assistant professor in the Division of Rheumatology.

The clinic is especially convenient, he said, for Nebraska patients coming from cities like Lincoln, Fremont, Columbus and York.

“It’s been a great option,” Dr. Feely said. “It’s becoming a mini medical center. It’s wonderful for access and much easier for patients to get in and get out.”



Patients, learners benefit from expanded clinical footprint

The Westroads Clinic is a one-stop shop for rheumatology.

Patients can see their rheumatologist, have labs drawn, get X-rays or infusion treatments, all without leaving the building.

And the clinic, which was acquired in 2022, adds to the UNMC Division of Rheumatology’s portfolio of clinics.

Growing the rheumatology clinic footprint has expanded opportunities for patient care as well as education and research, said James O’Dell, MD, chief of the UNMC Division of Rheumatology.

“By incorporating this in the right way, it is a win-win,” Dr. O’Dell said.

The Westroads Clinic — formerly known as Westroads Rheumatology Associates — was

acquired by Nebraska Medicine following the 2021 death of William Palmer, MD, the first board-certified rheumatologist in Omaha.

The Westroads location is the division’s second offsite rheumatology clinic, in addition to Village Pointe. Rheumatology services also are offered on the UNMC campus.

“Expansion, which has included adding providers at clinic sites, comes at a time when there’s a national shortage of rheumatologists,” Dr. O’Dell said. The need for rheumatology services has made it easy to add providers.

Expansion — and growing the team of providers — has been exciting, but it also offers the opportunity for additional education and research.

“We are training the next generation of physicians. But, if we also end up getting students to pick our specialty, who wouldn’t have otherwise done so, that’s a tremendous win.”

— Amy Cannella, MD

Trainees get the valuable experience of practicing in different environments and treating varying patient populations, Dr. O’Dell said.

Transition of the Westroads Clinic is complete, with the Village Pointe Clinic undergoing a remodel in early 2024. Both sites are managed by Ellie Stull, nurse manager.

Stull helped to oversee the transition at the Westroads Clinic, along with the staff growth and the complete remodel of the physical space.

The updated space eliminates the need for patients to travel to multiple locations for their care, improving patient experience as we bring all the services under one roof, Stull said.

“It was never the plan to have a set number of rheumatologists,” Dr. O’Dell said. “That’s not our number one goal. Our number one goal is to be the very best division for education and research. And at the same time, provide the very highest quality clinical care.”



Multispecialty clinics

enhance treatment, research

It's not uncommon for rheumatologists to handle diseases that cross paths with other specialties.

Patients with lupus, dermatomyositis, psoriatic arthritis, and other conditions all need the expertise of both dermatologists and rheumatologists.

Connective tissue diseases often are seen in a subset of pulmonary conditions known as interstitial lung diseases, requiring both a rheumatologist and a pulmonologist.

The ability to leverage UNMC's broad expertise to "superspecialize" in these diseases led James O'Dell, MD, chief of the UNMC Division of Rheumatology, to work with the UNMC Department of Dermatology and Division of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine to create multispecialty clinics.

"The joints, obviously, are what people think of when they think 'rheumatology,'" Dr. O'Dell said. "But we're much broader than that. Many of our diseases involve the lungs, the skin or the kidneys. It's challenging to take care of a patient who may have a rheumatological disease that is targeting their lungs. Even I'm not an expert on evaluating all the intricacies, or how lung tests may be changing and so on."

Daniel Hershberger, MD, associate professor of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine, is such an expert. So when he and Bryant England, MD, associate professor of rheumatology, approached Dr. O'Dell to start the Interstitial Lung Disease Clinic, the division chief recognized the possibilities.

"These are often challenging clinical cases to manage and diagnose," Dr. England said. "Frequently, patients would see pulmonology, then later they'd see rheumatology or vice versa. Where there's still uncertainty as to 'What's the diagnosis, what's the best treatment,' it can be challenging for patients as they wait for different provider opinions."

"Our goal was that — in one day — a patient could get all the testing needed, see both a rheumatologist and pulmonologist and, in the same room, discuss the diagnosis and walk out fully understanding the treatment plan or next steps."

Interstitial lung disease is a relatively rare group of diseases, and connective tissue diseases is an even smaller subset, Dr. Hershberger said.

"The joints, obviously, are what people think of when they think 'rheumatology', But we're much broader than that. Many of our diseases involve the lungs, the skin or the kidneys. It's challenging to take care of a patient who may have a rheumatological disease that is targeting their lungs. Even I'm not an expert on evaluating all the intricacies, or how lung tests may be changing and so on."

— James O'Dell, MD

"As a result, there's not a lot of expertise out there. We wanted to create an increased degree of expertise in this area. Managing some of the major immunosuppressive medicines, like rituximab, cyclophosphamide and IVIG, are out of my normal scope of practice. Pairing with rheumatology, bringing expertise in management of those medicines to help the lung, allowed us to really be aggressive with patients and their management, which is to their benefit."

Dr. O'Dell and Ashley Wysong, MD, past chair of the UNMC Department of Dermatology, had discussed a multidisciplinary clinic even before Dr. Wysong was hired to revive the new dermatology department at UNMC. The first rheumatology/dermatology clinic opened in 2018.

"Lupus patients, dermatomyositis patients, psoriatic arthritis patients, all need the expertise of both dermatologist and rheumatologist," Dr. O'Dell said.

The clinic has grown by "leaps and bounds" since its opening, said Ashley Wysong, MD, founding chair of the UNMC Department of Dermatology.

"The complexity of patients we're seeing and care we're delivering has grown," she said. "Our reputation has grown regionally, as well. We're seeing patients from a seven- or eight-state region."

The initial clinic, headed by rheumatology's Jennifer Medlin, MD, and dermatology's Megan Arthur, MD, has proven so successful that the departments are now offering another multispecialty clinic, led by dermatologist Sarah Lonowski, MD, and rheumatologist Brent Luedders, MD, that will specialize in psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.

"These are the type of multidisciplinary relationships we want to see in a big academic health science center like UNMC," Dr. Wysong said. "Not only do we get to take care of the most complex patients,



but it's also an outstanding way for learners of all levels to see these complex patients, to see physicians from different disciplines approach the same problem."

Of course, all agree that patients are the primary focus.

"If patients can get to a place where both doctors are talking together in real time in the care of that patient, it breaks down all the barriers of communication," Dr. O'Dell said. "Better decisions are made. And patients benefit — not only by the doctors coming up with a therapy that's going to be the best answer for both conditions, but they benefit from the confidence of seeing their physicians interacting with each other — standing together and giving a unified message."



Leaders in education, patient care

The UNMC Division of Rheumatology prides itself on its leadership in education within the UNMC College of Medicine and the Department of Internal Medicine. Yet, it's not just about pride: the division's leadership in education is out of necessity.

"We are growing colleagues," said Alan Erickson, MD, associate professor and assistant dean of student affairs. "These aren't just our medical students. These are people who soon will be our colleagues."

Colleagues who will be taking care of patients. As a result, rheumatology's emphasis on education is patient-focused. The division aims to provide the best education to ensure the best care for patients. It attracts students to its specialty to produce more rheumatologists to care for patients.

"We have a looming and scary workforce shortage," said Amy Cannella, MD, Moore professor of rheumatology, and the division's fellowship director.

Through its emphasis on education, the division attacks the problem with positivity.

The tone is set at the top by division chief James O'Dell, MD, who also serves as Grissom professor of internal medicine and vice chair for education in UNMC's Department of Internal Medicine. "He tells me our job is to dream it, and he will give us the resources," Dr. Cannella said.

"I have been division chief since 1990," Dr. O'Dell said. "One of the things I look for in every faculty hire is someone who has a passion for education. Not only do they have to be superb rheumatologists, they also have to be great educators."

And, they must have a strong work ethic and a can-do attitude.

"Nobody says no," Dr. Cannella said of the education efforts within the division. "Everyone says yes. Rheumatology says yes."

Dr. Cannella continues to do so, and the array of teaching awards on her wall reflects that. Each tells the story of a team effort, she said.

Occasionally, it has crossed her mind to spend less time teaching. But then it hits her: "I'm exactly where I need to be."

Dr. O'Dell, who was Dr. Michael Sorrell's first chief resident, knows exactly how she feels.

"I continue to do what I do because I love it," he said. "My faculty could do other things and make more money in private practice, but they are here because they love who they work with and can make a difference ... the way to have a ripple effect is to be involved with students and residents who will have an impact on students and residents and patients for the rest of their careers."

"Education has a huge return on investment," he said.

The division's emphasis on education includes presence within the department, the dean's office, and regional and national organizations. This helps rheumatology have a voice in policy and curriculum ... and again, helps recruit students to the specialty.

For years, Gerald Moore, MD, now emeritus senior associate dean for academic affairs, held this role on behalf of the division. In recent years, Dr. Erickson has begun to accept the mantle as assistant dean of student affairs in the UNMC College of Medicine, as well in roles with the Association of American Medical Colleges and other entities.

Within medical education, "our roles have really expanded over the years to include working with all aspects of a student's life, academically, professionally and personally," Dr. Erickson said.

He and others within the division take the opportunity to serve as "ambassadors to our students" on behalf of rheumatology. The result, hopefully, is more rheumatologists to take care of more patients.

One of those ambassadors is Kaitlyn Brittan, MD, assistant professor of rheumatology. She has had a holistic view of the process, having served the division as a student, resident, fellow "and now on the flip side," she said, "as faculty."

The enthusiasm for teaching and learning within the division is readily apparent, she said. And, in her case and she believes others, it is a major factor in students choosing the specialty.

"Whether bedside teaching on rounds, going on a trip to the cadaver lab to practice hands-on procedures, or playing the gamified EscapeRheum, there is an abundance of interactive and engaging opportunities to learn and to have fun along the way," Dr. Brittan said.

Attracting more medical students to rheumatology is a win-win.

"We're the happiest specialty," Dr. Cannella said. "We love our jobs; we have great patients. When a patient says, 'Thank you, you gave me my life back,' what's better than that?"

Other educational initiatives

The UNMC Division of Rheumatology is engaged in additional educational initiatives, including:

Enhanced Medical Education Tracks (EMET) offer medical students an opportunity to perform an in-depth study of an interdisciplinary field of medicine that enhances the required curriculum without extending the time needed to graduate from medical school. Tracks consist of longitudinal activities in which students work closely with faculty mentors, residents and advanced students. The tracks are challenging for students and address specific topics in greater depth than is available through the required curriculum. Although participants must maintain good academic standing, applicants are selected for the enhanced tracks based on their interest in the topic and their motivation to complete work above and beyond the primary MD curriculum.

The UNMC Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP) is a collaboration between UNMC departments, institutes, colleges, student services and graduate specialty areas to provide summer opportunities for undergraduate students to become members of research teams and discover first-hand the broad spectrum of research activities occurring at UNMC. Each summer there are 80 to 100 positions available for talented undergraduate students mentored by awarded faculty. These full-time research positions are primarily in research laboratories where students work with team members on an ongoing research project.

UNMC's Rheumatology Fellowship is a two-year program that prepares physicians for successful rheumatology careers in private practice or academics. Since the program was accredited in 2005, rheumatology fellows have had the opportunity to pursue a wide variety of clinical and research opportunities. The experienced faculty have allowed fellows to graduate and be comfortable in clinical, academic or research pursuits. The program's footprint has grown from four to six fellows, thanks to further investment by UNMC's primary clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine and the Omaha VA.

National service and leadership in professional organizations.



Mentoring powers the next generation

Ted Mikuls, MD, was only the fourth physician in the UNMC Division of Rheumatology in 2002 when he came to UNMC.

Since then, the division has seen an upward trajectory that boasts 16 rheumatologists, two faculty with PhD degrees, one with a dual MD/PhD degree, and a nationally renowned, sought-after fellowship program that's been in existence for 20 years.

It's largely due to the outstanding mentors who continue to nurture the next generation of providers, said Dr. Mikuls, who is the Stokes-Shackleford professor of rheumatology.

He credits such individuals as James O'Dell, MD, Lynell Klassen, MD, and Gerald Moore, MD, "who mentored me and are passionate about helping others reach their goals," Dr. Mikuls said.

Positive mentoring experiences continuing to the next generation of physicians is exemplified in the career of Bryant England, MD, PhD, an associate professor in the division, who credits the mentorship of Dr. Mikuls and Dr. O'Dell for helping him realize his goals.

"Our mentors share their resources, professional connections, experiences and skills, which are essential to new fellows who are just getting a foothold in the field," Dr. England said.

When Dr. England started his two-year fellowship in 2015, Dr. Mikuls helped him get ingrained into a productive research network, navigate funding opportunities and encourage his interests.

"Without any of that I wouldn't be in academic medicine, and I certainly wouldn't be doing research," Dr. England said.

Now, Dr. England is paying it forward by mentoring others.

And the division continues to grow because of it.

Research doesn't happen in isolation, Dr. England said.

"It takes a critical mass of people doing work and when more people start mentoring younger people, they in turn are more successful, more productive and produce more papers," he said.

Rheumatologists must be excellent clinicians able to learn about changes in the literature, as well as in research and know what to apply to their practice, said Kaleb Michaud, PhD, professor and director of the rheumatology fellowship research program in the UNMC Division of Rheumatology.

"You don't want a drug rep telling you why you should prescribe a drug or introduce a new treatment into your practice based on their interpretation of the latest research," Dr. Michaud said. "You want to judge for yourself what makes sense."

The division's Enhanced Medical Education Track is designed to teach medical students and fellows just that.

"For medical students, the track reinforces the importance of evidence-based medicine, as well as understanding the intersection between the bench and bedside," said Geoffrey Thiele, PhD, Umbach Professor of Rheumatology and an immunologist in the division. "To learn how to apply that sort

of thought process to clinical problems is imperative for their medical career."

For example, when a patient comes in, students are taught how to do a differential, which is similar to coming up with a hypothesis in the research laboratory, he said.

Next, he explained, they have laboratory procedures performed to help in their diagnosis, which is similar to conducting experiments in the basic laboratory setting to test their hypothesis. Finally, the data generated results in their diagnosis and treatment of the patient. As part of the Enhanced Medical Education Track, all students must spend 10 weeks in a research lab working on ongoing projects related to

either autoimmune or inflammatory diseases, Dr. Thiele said.

And, because it would be nearly impossible to split their time between clinical training and research, the students spend 10 weeks over the summer working in the lab.

Rheumatology fellows, however, have slightly different requirements, Dr. Michaud said.

They must, at a minimum, create an abstract submission, write a research manuscript and get it published in a peer review journal before their two-year fellowship is done.

"The more the fellows do this, the more likely they are to become an expert in their area of research," Dr. Michaud said.

"Mentoring is the best part of what I get to do," Dr. England said. "I get to work with fellows who have great ideas and aspirations for their careers."

"A productive career in academics doesn't happen without effective mentorship," said Tate Johnson, MD, an assistant professor in the division. "Working with faculty mentors like Drs. England and Mikuls is the sole reason for any research productivity I've experienced and has been instrumental in my decision to stay at UNMC throughout my training and on faculty. It's also a large part of what makes my job here so enjoyable."

"Tate is an example of how we've grown our own faculty through mentorship," Dr. Mikuls said.

Dr. Johnson, who hails from North Bend, Nebraska, just finished his first year on faculty and already has received a career development award from the Rheumatology Research Foundation, Dr. Mikuls said.

"It takes a critical mass of people doing work and when more people start mentoring younger people, they in turn are more successful, more productive and produce more papers."

—Bryant England, MD, PhD

In turn, he said, the research footprint of the division has grown by "leaps and bounds over the years."

The mentor/mentee relationship has led to more publications, more research areas of interest and more grants.

Most of the academic faculty have some sort of funding, Dr. Mikuls said, which allows them to offer more research experiences.

"Through Dr. O'Dell, we are heavily involved in rheumatoid arthritis research, but increasingly, with new faculty coming on board, we are now also involved in gout-related research, and basic immunology of autoimmune disease."

With that transition to more rheumatic and autoimmune focus, those same faculty are involved on the clinical side offering their expertise to patients.

"Senior faculty who trained in our program and, after a time in private practice, came back offering subspecialty rheumatology care in scleroderma and myositis," Dr. Mikuls said.

Combined, he said, it helps attract talented individuals who see opportunities to grow as clinicians and develop their own research interests rather than go anywhere else in the country.

"I can confidently say, you absolutely do not need to go somewhere else," Dr. Mikuls said.

Recent Faculty Highlights



Kaitlyn Brittan, MD

- House Officer of the Month, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2020)
- Government Affairs Committee (FIT), ACR (2020-2021)
- RheumPAC Committee, ACR (2022-2024)
- Chair, RheumPAC Committee, ACR (2024-Present)



Amy Cannella, MD, MS, RhMSUS

- UNMC College of Medicine Golden Apple award (2022)
- UNMC College of Medicine Hirschmann award (2022)
- Named Gerald F. Moore Professor in Rheumatology (2022)
- UNMC Innovation in Education Award (2024)



Carolyn Coyle, MD

- Associate Professor, Rheumatology (2023)



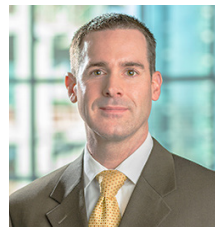
Bryant England, MD, PhD

- New Investigator Award, COM, UNMC (2020)
- Fellowship Top Teacher, UNMC (2022)
- Innovation Award, UneMed (2021)
- Publication of the Quarter, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2021)
- Top Teacher, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2021)
- Clinical Research Award, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2022)
- Promoted to Associate Professor, UNMC (2022)
- Faculty Inductee, AOA (2022)
- Gilmore Distinguished New Investigator Award, UNMC (2022)
- Inductee, Gold Humanism Honor Society (2023)
- Faculty Research Mentoring Award, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2024)
- Co-PI RA Integrative Treatment Guideline, ACR



Alan Erickson MD, M.ED, FACP, FACR

- Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, COM, UNMC
- Immediate Past chair, Group on Student Affairs, Central Region, AAMC



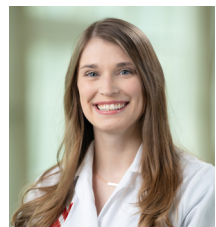
Michael Feely, MD

- UNMC Fellowship Top Teacher Award (2021, 2022)



Michelene Hearth-Holmes, MD, M.ED, RhMSUS

- Certificate of Excellence, E-Learning Innovator in Education, UNMC (2022)
- Spanish for Healthcare Professionals certificate, UCSD, (2022)
- Assistant Course Director and Mentor, USSONAR (2022-present)



Lindsay Helget, MD

- Internal Medicine Fellow Research Award (2021)



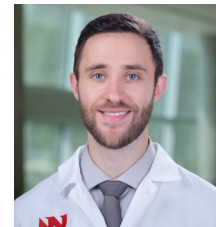
Tate Johnson, MD

- Fellows in Training Subcommittee, ACR (2020)
- Marshall J. Schiff Memorial Fellow Research Award, RRF (2021)
- Literature Review Team, Rheumatoid Arthritis Integrative Treatment Guidelines Working Group, ACR (2021)
- Mini Sabbatical Funding Award, Great Plains IDEA-CTR, UNMC (2021)
- Fellow Research Award, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2022)
- Best Oral Presentation, GME Graduate Research Symposium, UNMC (2022)
- Early Career Investigator Subcommittee, ACR (2022)
- Portfolio Review Panel, RRF (2022)
- Research Committee, Ultrasound School of North American Rheumatologists (2022)



Lynell Klassen, MD

- Emeritus
- Founder of Rheumatology Division



Brent Luedders, MD

- Best Fellow Poster, IM Research Poster Session, UNMC (2022)
- Hired Assistant Professor, Rheumatology, UNMC (2023)



Tina Mahajan, MD

- Staff Physician, Autoimmune Lung Clinic, UNMC
- Rheumatology representative, Internal Medicine Social Media Committee, UNMC



Jennifer Medlin, MD

- UNMC Fellowship Top Teacher, UNMC (2020, 2021, 2023)
- PI Lupus CAR-T cell program



Kaleb Michaud, PhD

- Rheumatology Research Foundation Scientific Advisory Council
- Association of Rheumatology Professionals (ARP) Executive Committee Member, Research Liaison
- ARP President's Award Recipient (2022 & 2023)
- ARP Distinguished Lecturer, ACR Convergence (2023)



Ted Mikuls, MD, MSPH

- Research Mentor Award, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2020)
- Distinguished Scientist, Research Leadership Award, UNMC (2020)
- Named Stokes-Shackleford Professor (2021)
- Top Teacher, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2020-2023)
- Member, Board of Directors, Rheumatology Research Foundation (2020-present)
- Chair, Scientific Advisory Council, Rheumatology Research Foundation
- Faculty Career Excellence Award, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2023)
- Biomedical Laboratory R&D Service Clinical Investigator Award, VA (2024)



James O'Dell, MD, MACR, MACP

- Distinguished Service Award, U of Nebraska Alumni Association (2020)
- Presidential Gold Medal Award, ACR (2020)
- Platinum Top Teacher Award, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2021)
- Publication of the Quarter, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2022)



Marcus Snow, MD

- Chair, Nebraska Rheumatology Society (2018- present)
- Promoted to Associate Professor, UNMC (2023)
- Chair, American College of Rheumatology Committee on Rheumatologic Care (2020-2023)
- Member at Large, American College of Rheumatology Board of Directors (2023-present)



Geoffrey Thiele, PhD

- Named Umbach Professor in Rheumatology (2022)
- Medical Student Block Certificate of Appreciation, COM, UNMC (2023)
- Top Teacher Award, Internal Medicine, UNMC (2023)
- Elected to 4th 3-year term, Faculty Senate, UNMC (2024)



Austin Wheeler, MD

- Marshall J. Schiff MD Memorial Fellow Research award (2023)
- Rheumatology Research Foundation Scientist Development Award (2024)



University of Nebraska Medical Center
Division of Rheumatology
986270 Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, NE 68198-6270

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Ways to support our division

Developing new clinical programs, innovative education strategies and cutting-edge research protocols depend on support from our philanthropic partners. Grateful patients and community partners have expressed an interest in learning more about our program as well as opportunities to enhance the impact we have made across Nebraska. It is our vision to become a national leader in treatment, physician training, and outreach.

If you would like to learn more about private gifts and partnerships in these or other areas, we welcome the chance to share them with you. We are grateful for every gift, as well as each person who would like to be a part of the team serving our rheumatology community.

We have immediate needs in the following areas:

1. Research Start-up Fund
2. Education Funding – Resident Education Fund, Medical Student Research Scholarships, Endowed Research Fellowship
3. Endowed Faculty Sponsorship

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For more information please contact:

1. Division of Rheumatology at 402.559.7288
2. The University of Nebraska Foundation:

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