



# KIDney Notes

The ASPN Newsletter

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



**Meredith Atkinson, MD, President**

Happy Summer! Hoping this message finds you looking forward to some rest and relaxation over the next few months. It was wonderful to see so many of you in Toronto for our Annual Meeting in May. I was truly honored to have the famous ASPN gavel passed to me by **Jodi Smith** and am looking forward to all the work our society will continue to do over the next two years. At our Business Meeting, I expressed our profound

gratitude to Jodi for her exceptional leadership as president from 2022-2024. Her steadfast dedication to advancing our society, with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, has left an indelible mark. Under her guidance, we have seen remarkable progress in supporting our members across clinical care, research, and advocacy.

I would like to extend special thanks to **Michelle Denburg** and the entire Program Committee for organizing an outstanding program this year. The sessions were so well-attended that some rooms were standing-room only! **David Selewski** also deserves recognition for his efforts in coordinating the successful Pediatric Critical Care Nephrology Pre-Course which was attended by more than 200 people, and I look forward to next year's Pre-Course focused on transplantation. Additionally, **Stuart Goldstein** arranged a memorable member gathering at an Irish Pub, honoring the legacy of **Pat Brophy** and celebrating his contributions to our community and the patients and families we serve.

To ensure that our Annual Meeting continues to meet the needs of all our members, we launched a survey in May. If you haven't already, please take a moment to complete it when you receive the email. Your insights are invaluable as we strive to evolve and improve our programming.

Looking ahead, Katherine Dell and the 2025 Program Committee have been diligently planning our next Annual Meeting in beautiful Honolulu, HI, from April 24-28.

## CONTENTS

ASPN Leadership  
Corporate Liaison Board  
ASPN Foundation  
JELF Scholars Updates  
ASPN History Project  
ASPN Member of the Month  
ASPN GO  
ASPN Multidisciplinary  
Symposium  
ASPN Upcoming Events

## Follow Us



We anticipate an enriching scientific program in a stunning setting, and promise that the ASPN headquarters hotel will be beachside! The ASPN Foundation, under the leadership of **Larry Greenbaum**, is actively fundraising to support travel grants for trainees attending the meeting.

I must also acknowledge the innovative leadership of **Bruder Stapleton**, outgoing Chair of the ASPN Foundation, whose dedication has been instrumental in expanding the foundation's support for initiatives such as the ASPN Go Mobile app. This app, a priority identified in our Strategic Planning Member Survey, offers archived webinars, news updates, and group chat capabilities for committees and interest groups. If you haven't already, I encourage you to download it and explore its features:

[ASPN Go Mobile App - American Society of Pediatric Nephrology \(ASPN\) \(aspneph.org\)](https://www.aspneph.org)

There are many other exciting initiatives underway within ASPN. Our Public Policy Committee has played a crucial role in advocating for the transitional pediatric ESRD add-on payment adjustment (TPEAPA), ensuring fair reimbursement for pediatric dialysis care. We are also launching the **ASPN Pediatric Chronic Dialysis Task Force** to assist dialysis directors in accurate cost-reporting and other priorities in chronic dialysis management, and are grateful to **Kiri Bagley** and **Mahima Keswani** for spearheading this.

As we continue to focus on strengthening our workforce, I look forward to updating you on initiatives to support our international medical graduate (IMG) trainees and faculty, foster community among trainees, and promote innovative clinical practices.



Meredith Atkinson, MD, President



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## ASPEN Leadership

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## Trainee Travel Grant Challenge

Please consider helping the ASPN Foundation provide additional funding for trainees to travel to the 2025 ASPN Meeting in Hawaii and the 2025 IPNA Meeting in South Africa.

Scan this code to make a contribution:



Click here to see the progress towards our goal: [2024 Trainee Travel Challenge - American Society of Pediatric Nephrology \(ASPN\) \(aspneph.org\)](#)

## Named Travel Grant Opportunity

ASPN Foundation offers the opportunity for naming trainee travel grants to educational meetings related to pediatric nephrology.

Trainee travel is a major educational initiative of the ASPNF. Donors who share our commitment to future nephrologists and wish to commit to the trainee travel initiative may establish an annual award:

- in their name
- in the name of someone whom they wish to honor.

A named travel award may be established for a contribution of either \$3000 to provide a three-year trainee award or \$5000 to support a five-year trainee award. These tax-deductible donations may be given in total at the initiation of the named award or through a pledge of annual giving during the life of the award.

Donors, if so interested, are encouraged to meet and mentor the trainees who receive their grant. Individuals interested in establishing a tax deductible named trainee travel award can contact

[Connie@aspneph.org](mailto:Connie@aspneph.org).



# JELF SCHOLARS UPDATE

Another year has flown by for the JELF Scholars. We want to highlight our virtual Hill Day on February 29th, where scholars had the unique opportunity to ask their representatives to increase NIH funding, continue to fund the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program, and appropriate funds for HRSA's OPTN modernization, including language to prioritize pediatric transplant patients and their families. This year's sessions ranged from learning about the Business of Medicine to learning directly from parents and patient advocates on how to do better.

During the last twelve months, our new scholars (Julia, Leonela, and Kera) have met with their mentors to drive their advocacy efforts. Our senior scholars (Carlos, Hostensia, and Lieuko) have completed their advocacy projects and are ready to continue advocating for our children struggling with kidney disease. As the year ends, we reflect on what drove us to advocacy and how JELF has helped us in our journey. We briefly share a few of our stories to remind you that inspiration comes from various places, and any effort matters.

## Julia LaMotte: First Year JELF Scholar (2023-2025 Scholar)



Growing up, I vividly remember watching my mom on our local TV station after she was elected to our town's planning board. Being the only woman amongst men, I recall that while her physical stature was petite, her voice was powerful. She ensured access to affordable housing – something of incredible

importance in our Boston suburb. At the time, I don't think I realized the magnitude of her efforts – or that the majority of my peers were not tuning in to watch their parents on public access television.

It's hard to disentangle my upbringing from who I am today and the ways in which I have centered justice in my career. As a pediatric psychologist, I work at the intersection of physical health and emotional/mental well-being. For pediatric kidney disease, this means providing evidence-based care for the health & behavior needs associated with managing a chronic health condition. For many, I am the first interface with the mental health care system. This is reflective of the model we have chosen – one that destigmatizes access and normalizes the unique emotional needs that come along with pediatric renal diseases.

Through the JELF program, I hope to gain the advocacy skills needed to ensure that all pediatric patients with kidney disease receive the mental healthcare services to promote improved quality of life. Channeling my mom, I am eager to hone the craft of convincing those in positions of power to work towards justice together.



Figure 1. JELF scholars & mentors participating on Virtual Hill Day! Advocating for: NIH funding, Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Forgiveness, and supporting the OPTN Initiative (February 2024)

## Leonela Villegas: First Year JELF Scholar (2023-2025 Scholar)



Advocacy is one of the main reasons I went into the medical field and my main driver includes my family member's experience with the healthcare system. My parents immigrated from Peru as young adults; however, had to balance immigration status, language barriers, isolation, and navigating the available social supports. Going through training,

I have witnessed undocumented pediatric patients require levels of chronic care that extend beyond a clinical focus, including disruptions in school, family, and mental health – which are difficult to address in a 20-minute visit and assistance varies by state- and national- policies. My experiences have shaped my dedication to pursue a career that integrates my clinical, community health research, and advocacy interests within pediatric chronic kidney disease.

I started my first Attending position at Connecticut Children's in 2022 and was fortunate to find colleagues and organizations who are dedicated to the improvement of care for uninsured families. I joined the healthcare provider subcommittee in the Husky 4 Immigrants coalition to support and ensure all CT residents have appropriate access to healthcare irrespective of immigration status. Our role as providers is to bring our personal & professional

## JELF SCHOLARS UPDATE, cont.

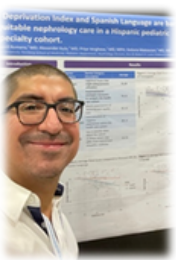
experience to our legislators while creating networks across the state to lay the foundation for further change.

The JELF family has been instrumental in guiding me through the process of understanding how to be the best advocate for our kidney disease patients. I look forward to continuing to learn amongst our enthusiastic and passionate team!



Figures 2 & 3. Dr. Villegas speaking at a press release in the CT State Capitol for CT Medicaid expansion for undocumented patients up to the age of 18 years old. Upcoming expansion from 12 to 15 years old starting on July 1st, 2024.

### Carlos Cesar Becerril Romero: Second Year JELF Scholar (2022-2024 Scholar)



Early during my fellowship career, it was striking to learn that among all age groups, adolescents and young adults have the highest risk of graft failure, irrespective of age at transplant. I wondered, if the science has progressed every year, why have we not made any progress among adolescents and young adults? As I interacted with my dialysis and transplant patients, I noticed those with poor medication adherence, leading to worse health outcomes, were also struggling with mental health concerns (an association that has been well documented in the literature).

Through the JELF program, I received one-on-one mentorship from Dr. Sarah Swartz. She helped me focus my advocacy efforts on assisting our adolescent and young adult patients. If our patients are not taking their medications due to anxiety or depression, no scientific

efforts will help us improve their medical outcomes or quality of life unless we address their mental health. Yet, psychosocial support for patients with a chronic illness remains lacking. Through JELF, I learned that advocacy means sharing stories and gained the confidence to shine a light on issues that affect our patients. The mental health support I received during my journey with kidney disease was zero. I am now in a privileged position to raise my voice for other patients like me. We must do better to support the mental health needs of our patients.

As pediatric nephrologists, it is important to ask patients how they are coping and work with our multidisciplinary team (i.e., social workers, nurses, child life, psychologists, etc.) so we can maximize efforts to support patients and families. I plan to use the skills I learned through the JELF program to instigate others to increase mental health support for our patients.



Figure 4. Editorial published on ASN Kidney News highlighting mental health needs of adolescents and young adults with kidney diseases.

# JELF SCHOLARS UPDATE, cont.

## JELF Update

Hi ASPNephers, it's Lieuko again (2nd year JELF fellow), joined by Kera (first year JELFer)! We're here with an update on our recent JELF activities.

Kera is among the 3 new 1st year scholars this year and couldn't be more excited to be a part of this amazing group! Big Thank You to everyone who support JELF scholars financially, academically, emotionally! And thanks for your interest in our updates here. Some of us JELFers had a chance to chat over an informal virtual Happy Hour recently. It was a great platform to share what we are involved in; discuss collaborative advocacy work; and of course, a chance to get to meet our colleagues on a personal level.

On a didactic level, wow, we have had some great talks over the past few months with topics including "The Business of Medicine" and "All Things OPTN" from experts in our field. On a practicum level, Lieuko joined a listening session with CMS re: Dialysis Facility Care Compare (DFCC, previously called DFC). Dr. Zubin Modi, former JELF scholar and Lieuko offered a pediatric perspective to the requested feedback to DFCC quality measures and the use of "star ratings" for dialysis facilities on Medicare.gov. Though its application seems limited in our pediatric world, it was important for CMS to hear again what matters to patients and providers in pediatric ESKD care.

Continuing with the pediatric theme, Dr. Kiri Bagley, former JELF scholar and Kera presented a webinar on the recent changes to the CMS Dialysis Cost Report. This includes specific pediatric reporting and the importance of how that information will be used to determine reimbursement for pediatric ESKD care in the future.

Scholars are also able to advocate with the ASPN at a great virtual Hill Day in early March. The goals were to insist pediatric language and representation be included in FY 2025 Appropriations related to HRSA OPTN Modernization Initiative and NIH budgeting as well as to fund the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment (PSLR) plan. We had 8 teams of ASPN advocates divided geographically. President Jodi Smith, Lauren Hawkins, Gina-Marie Barletta and Lieuko met with Congressional staffers from Washington, Arizona, and California. Julia LaMotte (another first year JELF scholar), Neha Pottanat, and Kera met with staffers from Indiana and Michigan. Great questions were asked and productive conversations were held. Staffers heard how critical pediatric inclusive language is as the House and

Senate appropriate funds for FY2025. And we can all agree that while no one overlooks pediatrics on purpose, it happens anyway (e.g. refer to Dr. Michelle Rheaults @rheault\_m tweet #NephMadness). We spent Hill Day reminding the House and Senate and Appropriations Committee Members the need for pediatric inclusion and specifically how to implement this. It would be detrimental if children were not represented and the process to rectify that in the future would be even more time consuming. Recognizing the importance and uniqueness of pediatric subspecialty care also included our advocacy for loan forgiveness. Expressing the workforce shortage and wage discrepancies was a key point in our discussions.

The next major event is AAP Legislative Day. We are looking forward to working alongside our JELF colleagues in person then!

Lieuko Nguyen, MD  
JELF Scholar 2022-2024  
Kera Luckritz, DO, MPH  
JELF Scholar 2023-2025



# ASPN HISTORY PROJECT

## Moments in ASPN History

From the beginning of the ASPN the society was ahead of the times and recognized the contributions all members could provide. The society emphasized the need to promote inclusion of a variety of members. Young pediatric nephrologists were particularly encouraged to join the society. While the founders acknowledged younger persons may not immediately achieve excellence, their contributions were valued. Among the first group of 62 members, 6 were women (ages not available).

1.) That the Society be perpetual but not self-perpetuating. The infusion of new people into areas of responsibility should be an aim.

2.) That the interest, background, ages and experience of these people should be varied. For example: younger people should be encouraged wherever possible to assume an active role. Their ideas and approaches, though not always excellent, are usually challenging and stimulating and best contribute to the vitality of the organization. Involvement breeds their interest in the broad scope and needs of pediatric nephrology rather than the more narrow interest of one's own area. Responsibility also provides an additional training ground for these younger inexperienced men.

# ASPEN MEMBER OF THE MONTH

The Communications Committee is excited to announce the most recent Members of the Month, highlighting different ASPEN members and recognizing the amazing work that they are doing to support ASPEN and the larger nephrology community. We hope you enjoy getting to know your fellow members a little better!

## Dr. Mahmoud Kallash (June/July 2024)

### Current Position

Associate Professor  
Division of Nephrology and Hypertension  
Nationwide Children's Hospital  
The Ohio State University  
College of Medicine  
Columbus, OH



### Fellowship

Louisiana State University Health Science Center  
7/2010-6/2013

### Clinical and research interests

I am interested and engaged in clinical and translational research studies regarding nephrotic syndrome and glomerulonephritis.

### Biggest accomplishment(s) of the past year

This is tough- I would say establish and starting multidisciplinary clinics with Endo (type 2 DM clinic), hypertension clinic (with cardiology) while continue to expand on my clinical and translational research and being the PD of a large and active fellowship program.

### Current/future ASPEN involvement and/or how ASPEN has supported your career

I am a member of the educational committee of ASPEN and participate regularly in the board review courses.

### Fun fact

I am originally from Aleppo, Syria  
I love soccer (Go Barcelona and Man City) and table tennis.

### Social media handle(s)

I am only on Facebook, not a fan of social media however and rarely use it

## Dr. Meredith Harris (July/August 2024)

### Current Position

Assistant Professor,  
Ann & Robert Lurie  
Children's Hospital of  
Chicago

### Residency and Fellowship

Cincinnati Children's

### Clinical Areas of Interests

aHUS and Immunologic kidney diseases, Genetics of Renal Disease, CAKUT and Fetal Care, AKI

### Biggest accomplishment(s) of the past year

Receiving and invitation to the ISN aHUS International Forum and having the opportunity to meet leaders in the field of aHUS.

### Current/future ASPEN involvement and/or how ASPEN has supported your career

I am currently in the ASPEN Leadership Development Program where I have the opportunity to be mentored by top leaders in pediatric nephrology. The members of my cohort are very inspiring, and I am learning a lot about leadership style and goals.

### Fun fact

As a COVID hobby, I set the goal of running a marathon. It stuck, and I am running my 5th marathon in June

### Social media handle(s)

On X and Instagram: meelha88



Meredith Harris (right) guest starring one of her favorite pediatric nephrologists, Ellen Cody (left)



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The ASPN GO mobile app is now live! 🎉  
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The official American Society of Pediatric Nephrology (ASPN) app is your year-round connection to a wealth of resources and opportunities. Designed for ASPN members only, this app provides seamless access to events, curated content, and collaborative tools, fostering a dynamic community within the field of pediatric nephrology.



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# 12th Annual ASPN Multidisciplinary Symposium

Save the Date!

**NOVEMBER 7-8, 2024**

\*The program will take place virtually.





# ASPN UPCOMING EVENTS



## ASPN Webinars

Date: Tuesday, July 30th, 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm EDT Subject: [ASPN Small Group nephrologists – Immune Complex GN- Updates and Case Discussion](#)

Date: Monday, August 5th, 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm EDT  
Subject: [ASPN Radiology Webinar](#)

Date: Monday, September 2nd, 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm EDT  
Subject: [ASPN Pathology Webinar](#)

Date: Monday, September 23rd, 4:00 pm – 5:00pm EDT  
Subject: [Acute Care Nephrology Interest Group – Dysnatremias in CRRT](#)

## Committee and Interest Group Meetings

Date: Wednesday, July 24th, 4:00 pm – 5:00pm EDT  
Subject: [ASPN Advanced Practice Providers SIG Quarterly Meeting](#)

Date: Friday, August 9th, 2:00 pm – 3:00pm EDT  
Subject: [Transplant Interest Group Meeting](#)

Date: Tuesday, August 20th, 5:00 pm – 6:00pm EDT  
Subject: - [ASPN Division Head Meeting](#)

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