



UC Irvine Health

Volume VI  
Quarterly Report

# Department of Urology

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## Teaching Abroad: Dr. Thomas Ahlering Visits Romania

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- Prostate Cancer Project Awarded \$1.2 Million Grant
- Specialized Training and Expertise for Bladder Exstrophy

# Message from the Chair



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the Department of Urology, I'd like to wish you a happy and healthy 2017. The New Year gives us renewed enthusiasm and confidence to take on new challenges and advance our mission further than ever before.

Our team of world-renowned physicians and researchers are committed to developing novel technologies and innovative techniques to prevent and cure urologic conditions. On page 4, you can read about the \$1.2 million grant awarded by the California Initiative to Advance Precision Medicine that will allow Dr. Edward Uchio, director of clinical research in the Department of Urology, and his team to delve deeply into the factors that affect the success of prostate cancer treatments.

We are also devoted to educating the physicians of tomorrow, locally and around the world. Dr. Thomas Ahlering was recently invited to the Victor Babes Pharmacy and Medical School in Romania, where he demonstrated a complete robotic prostatectomy and educated the surgical team on safe practice of the procedure. More on his visit can be found on page 6.

Last but not least, we couldn't fulfill our mission to discover, teach and heal, without the unwavering support of our philanthropic partners. On page 5, we highlight Bill and Pat Podlich, two ongoing supporters and friends of UC Irvine Health, who recently contributed to the Department of Urology. Their gift to the Ralph V. Clayman Endowed Chair in Endourology is already making an impact on the future of minimal and non-invasive urological surgery. We are grateful for their generosity and support of our department.

As we aim for new heights, the Urology faculty, residents, fellows and staff thank you for your support. We anticipate 2017 will be our best year yet.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jaime Landman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jaime Landman, MD  
Chair and Professor, UC Irvine Health Department of Urology

## At UC Irvine Health Center for Urologic Care, we offer expert, comprehensive care for:

### Female Urology

Judy Choi, MD  
Gamal Ghoniem, MD

### General Urology Services

Michael K. Louie, MD  
M. Leon Seard, II, MD

### Kidney Stones & Kidney Disease

Ralph Clayman, MD  
Jaime Landman, MD  
Ramy Yaacoub, MD

### Men's Health

Faysal Yafi, MD

### Pediatric Urology

Kai-Wen Chuang, MD  
Irene McAleer, MD  
Antoine Khoury, MD  
Elias Wehbi, MD

### Reconstructive Urology

Judy Choi, MD  
Joel Gelman, MD  
Gamal Ghoniem, MD

### Urologic Cancers

Thomas Ahlering, MD  
Mark Jordan, MD  
Edward Uchio, MD

# Treating Bladder Exstrophy: A Rare Congenital Disorder

The term bladder exstrophy might mislead many people into thinking that this birth defect affects only the bladder. In fact, the developmental abnormality is far more extensive and complicated.

The bladders of affected babies are inside out; instead of its normal balloon-like shape, the bladder is more of a flattened plate. But that's just the start. The skin, muscle, and pelvic bones at the lower part of the belly or abdomen don't form correctly, and the genitals, whether for a boy or girl, are only half developed. Because the skin and muscles are so deficient, the bladder protrudes from the abdominal cavity at birth.

Repairing this involves long, complicated surgery by surgeons who have extensive training and experience. Those can be hard to find because, thankfully, bladder exstrophy is rare, occurring in only one of about 35,000 births, said Dr. Tony Khoury, chief of the Division of Pediatric Urology at UC Irvine Health and Children's Hospital of Orange County, and professor of pediatric urology at UC Irvine School of Medicine.

After 22 years of training and experience at one of the top centers for this surgery, the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Khoury brought his expertise to UC Irvine Health in 2008. Khoury volunteers his extraordinary expertise through team arrangements with other hospitals in the region; he performs this surgery at hospitals in Long Beach,

San Diego and Orange County, and trains other surgeons as well.

The cause of bladder exstrophy isn't entirely clear, Khoury said. Scientists believe it occurs in the first trimester of fetal development, when the affected organs and tissues are forming, and is related to a malfunction with the cloacal membrane, a temporary tissue in the belly of the developing fetus. But what no one knows is what causes problems with the cloacal membrane in the first place.

In the earlier years of this surgery, Khoury said, doctors would operate within the first 48 hours after birth. But now the surgery is usually delayed for a couple of months, in recognition of the importance of bonding time between parents and infants. Though the baby doesn't have a functioning bladder, there is no danger in waiting. "This way we give the parents and baby time together," Khoury said. "The baby has a chance to grow bigger and stronger."

The surgery lasts 10 to 12 hours and entails a series of delicate procedures. The bladder and urethra will be closed. In boys, the surgeon will rebuild a normal-appearing penis, and in girls, reconstruct the outer sex organs. The pelvic bones and floor will be reconstructed. And for aesthetic reasons, Khoury will construct a belly button, since it is usually displaced in babies with the condition. After surgery, the baby will be in traction or a full-body cast for about three weeks.

Once the defect is repaired, patients can look forward to a healthy and robust life, and normal life expectancy. But because of the lack of expertise in many hospitals around the country, there are too many cases in which the repair is not done correctly, Khoury said, requiring complicated surgery to repair not only the birth defect, but also the damage done by previous surgeries.

"If the initial surgery is not successful, our team can still salvage it using advanced reconstructive techniques, offering the child a very reasonable quality of life," he said.

Two of those cases stand out in his mind — adolescent girls ages 14 and 17 who were still in diapers because of poor treatment earlier in their lives. They had been deprived of many of the ordinary fun of being teenagers, including dating. All of that changed after Khoury successfully repaired the damage.

"Now one of them is married," he said, "and the other is a postgraduate student at a university."



Antoine E. Khoury, MD  
Chief, Division of Pediatric Urology

# Prostate Cancer Project Awarded \$1.2 Million by State Precision Medicine Initiative

With a disease as common as prostate cancer, it would be easy to assume that there are clear protocols for treating all patients based on the type and stage of the cancer.

Yet outcomes can vary significantly based on the background of the patients themselves. Their overall health, social circumstances and the presence of other physical ailments all can affect how well patients respond to treatment.

Now a research group at UC Irvine Health has been awarded a \$1.2 million grant by the California Initiative to Advance Precision Medicine to delve deeply into these and other factors that affect the success of prostate cancer treatments. The researchers will work on replicating the results of previous studies that showed how a patient's background affects outcome, but they will add a new element: the specific genetic signature of each cancer. And then they will examine the outcomes for the various patients.

The idea is to create a registry so that doctors can customize the optimal treatment for each prostate cancer patient.

"There are many options for the treatment of prostate cancer," said Dr. Edward M. Uchio, a UC Irvine Health director of urologic oncology, who will be among the researchers involved in the project. "And each of them has its own side effects. The idea is to really tailor those treatments based on each patient."

UC Irvine Health is one of eight institutions to be awarded grants by the California Initiative to Advance Precision Medicine, which was launched by Gov. Jerry Brown to use data-driven tools to develop new diagnostics, therapies and insights into disease. This broad collaborative effort by UC Irvine is part of a multicenter effort to improve the quality of care for patients with diverse backgrounds who suffer from prostate cancer.

Researchers hope to enroll close to 1,000 patients newly diagnosed with prostate cancer. One important element of the study design, Uchio said, is that it will include patients of different ethnic backgrounds—white, Hispanic, Asian and African American. That will allow doctors to see whether outcomes differ by ethnicity, and tailor treatment accordingly.

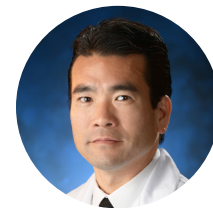
"For each patient diagnosed with prostate cancer, he would get questionnaires that would help delineate how he is functioning pre-treatment, with significant details about his physical condition," Uchio said. "That can tell you what the potential outcomes would be with each treatment, including which side effects are most likely to occur and how severe they will be.

"But we'll also have a biomarker component. We send off a section of the tumor to get the gene expression signature of the cancer. Then we correlate that with patients who do well and the patients who don't do so well from both a cancer and functional perspective."

With that data, doctors will be able to do a better job of predicting how well individual patients will respond to various forms of treatment.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men and the second leading cause of cancer deaths among men, with more than 200,000 new cases diagnosed each year in the United States. Roughly one in seven men will be afflicted during their lifetimes. Treatment options include robotic surgery, radiation, minimally invasion technologies (cryotherapy or high intensity focused ultrasound, for example), and active surveillance, sometimes called "watch and wait."

With the information in hand, Uchio said, "We can be much more precise about which treatment to choose. We can refine treatment and make it very specialized."



Edward M. Uchio, MD  
Director, Urologic Oncology

# Long-time Donors Make a Difference in Urology through Endowed Chair Gift



Pat & Bill Podlich recently contributed to the \$3 million Ralph V. Clayman Prestigious Endowed Chair in Endourology.

The Podlich name on the UC Irvine Medical Center conference center wall reminds all who pass by that Pat and Bill Podlich have made an indelible impact on healthcare in Orange County and beyond. From Bill's decades-long service on the UCI Foundation board to the couple's transformational support for construction of UC Irvine Health Douglas Hospital, their advocacy and support for compassionate care, innovative medical education and groundbreaking research has changed lives.

In 2015, the Podlichs made a \$250,000 contribution to the \$3 million Ralph V. Clayman Prestigious Endowed Chair in Endourology. The chair was established to further the remarkable innovation in minimal and non-invasive urological surgery and advance training for future generations of surgeon-scientists for which UC Irvine Urology has been well-recognized.

"Endowing chairs either allows the university to hire additional researchers

or provides research money for existing chairs. More money equals more research. That's a good reason to endow chairs," said Podlich.

The inaugural chairholder, Ralph V. Clayman, MD, professor of Urology and School of Medicine, dean emeritus, has wasted no time in showing how others can benefit when creative thinkers are given time and resources to pursue their passions. The man who pioneered minimally invasive surgical techniques is inspiring a new generation of urologists to think differently.

Clayman is currently a mentor to Kam Kaler, MD, a UC Irvine fellow in endourology, which is a sub-specialization in less invasive urologic surgery. Every week, the two doctors brainstorm ideas to advance patient care using less invasive surgery. Kaler keeps detailed notes of these meetings, which are the seeds for laboratory investigation and subsequent clinical application.

"Anything he's ever taught me, I've written down. I call them RVC lessons," said Kaler.

Presently, the duo is working on a device that measures the amount of pressure being applied to insert a ureteric access sheath during the removal of kidney stones. Excessive pressure results in damage to the ureter. This device would indicate when the upper limit of pressure is being approached, thereby precluding an injury.

Clayman says it takes philanthropic support to develop innovative devices and move them through the U.S. Food & Drug Administration clearance.

"Over the course of my career, I've been granted 13 patents; each has been the result of research sponsored solely through philanthropy, industry grants, and other donations. Neither state nor federal grants have been a part of our research support. This has allowed me to spend 100 percent of my laboratory time working with our research team."

"The support of people from the community is essential and I am ever grateful for the generosity and vision of Pat and Bill Podlich," said Clayman.

From Podlich's perspective, local philanthropy just makes sense. As he said, "Giving to UC Irvine Health is good for the health of Orange County and it can also benefit the county's economy through the commercialization of cutting-edge research."

## Educating Future Surgeons Abroad on Robotic Prostatectomy

Dr. Thomas Ahlering is world renowned for the remarkable precision of his robotic prostatectomies and the extraordinary quality of his patient outcomes. Last fall Ahlering, who is vice chair and professor of urology at UC Irvine Health, was invited to the Victor Babes Pharmacy and Medical School in Romania to speak on the topic of neurovascular bundles preservation during robotic radical prostatectomy. He presented to the school's Department of Urology students, residents and faculty, and demonstrated a complete robotic prostatectomy on a Romanian patient. Ahlering assisted Dr. Alin Cumpanas as he performed his first robotic prostatectomy and advised him on easier and safer ways to perform the procedure — from how to position the patient to what instruments and sutures to use.

The visit was part of a new project called ROBOCAPE, which was implemented by the Romanian university more than a year ago. Initially, the scope of the project was to address pelvic cancers including rectal, gynecological and prostate cancers, all of which are in areas traditionally difficult to reach surgically. The latest technological advances have made the surgical robots more accurate and functional for better oncological performance and outcomes.

Ahlering's visit allowed the Romanian school to make progress on the research part of the project related to prostate cancer, specifically to better align, educate and prepare their surgical team.

"His presence was a very pivotal moment for the urology department in Romania," Dr. Fulger Lazăr said. "It was an important event because a world-renowned surgeon traveled such a long distance to help us in our professional development."

The event was organized in partnership with Spitalul Judetean County Hospital and the urology clinic in Timisoara, Romania.



Dr. Ahlering lectured at Victor Babes Pharmacy and Medical School in Timisoara, Romania.

Pastor John Radu underwent a robotic prostatectomy during Ahlering's visit to Victor Babes Pharmacy and Medical School in Romania. A few months later, he wrote this about his recovery:



Dear Dr. Ahlering,

Today marks the three month anniversary since my surgery. Not a single day passes by, without me thinking how blessed I am to have had you as my surgeon.

From the first day I met you I felt very comfortable with you. It is very rare that you get to see a world renowned surgeon like yourself having this kind of genuine care for the average patient. I could tell that you have a great passion for your patients and the work you do every day. I never felt rushed when talking to you about my condition.

My recovery exceeded every expectation I had. After the surgery I was basically pain free and only took one Tylenol tablet! I was able to walk at length couple of days after the surgery. I did not even feel weak as one expects after the surgery.

Thank you very much for giving me another shot at life! Words cannot express how grateful I am for what you have done for me!

Sincerely,  
Pastor John Radu

To read the entire letter, visit [urology.uci.edu](http://urology.uci.edu)



Gamal Ghoniem, MD  
Vice Chair, Department  
of Urology

## Dr. Ghoniem Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

The Society for Urodynamics, Female Pelvic Medicine & Urogenital Reconstruction (SUFU) – the premier specialty society for female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery – awarded Dr. Gamal Ghoniem, professor of Urology, their 2017 SUFU Lifetime Achievement Award. This recognition is given to an individual who has made continuing and progressive contributions that have a significant and lasting impact on the field. The award will be presented to Ghoniem by Dr. Gary Lemack, SUFU president and chair of the award committee, on March 2 at the SUFU 2017 Winter Meeting in Scottsdale, Ariz.

As the honoree, Ghoniem will deliver the Blaivas Lecture, titled “This is My Journey; What’s Yours?” Ghoniem joins a select group of international members recognized for their leadership and involvement in the organization.

“Our department is proud to practice amongst one of the most transformational specialists in his field. Dr. Ghoniem has provided superb leadership, the highest levels of clinical expertise, and made incredible contributions to female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery. We couldn’t agree more with how deserving he is of this distinguished honor,” said Dr. Jaime Landman, chair of UC Irvine Health Department of Urology.



Alexandre Motttrie,  
MD, PhD

## International Visiting Professor: Alexandre Motttrie, MD, PhD, to visit UC Irvine Health

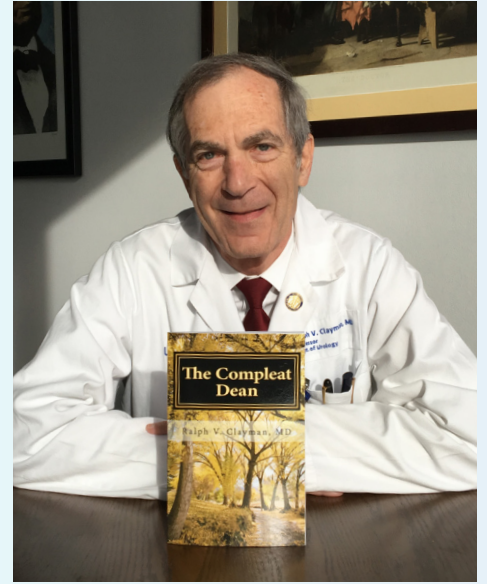
Dr. Alexandre Motttrie will be visiting from OLV Clinic Aalst, Belgium, Thursday, May 18 through Saturday, May 20, 2017. With more than 3,500 robotic procedures, Motttrie is one of the most experienced in the robotic field. His visit will include a three-day course that incorporates specialty specific lectures and hands-on surgical training.



Faysal Yafi, MD

## Fired Up for Men’s Health

Dr. Faysal Yafi, director of Men’s Health, visited and spoke to Anaheim Fire & Rescue employees about men’s health issues during an educational lecture in Anaheim. Yafi provided firefighters with important facts about men’s health issues and debunked myths about certain conditions and treatments.



## *The Compleat Dean: A Guide to Academic Leadership in an Age of Uncertainty*

Dr. Ralph V. Clayman, professor of Urology at UC Irvine Health and dean emeritus of UC Irvine School of Medicine, recently published *The Compleat Dean: A Guide to Academic Leadership in an Age of Uncertainty*. The book contains a wide range of leadership topics, both general and specific to academic medicine, and it’s based on input from more than half U.S. medical school deans and vice chancellors of health who most recently served in those roles for more than five years. In addition to leaders of medical schools, *The Compleat Dean* has been useful for chairs of departments, medical school faculty and deans of other schools. The book is available at Amazon.com in soft cover and Kindle editions.



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## Join Our Team!

Our department is growing and we are actively recruiting faculty. If you are interested, visit our recruit website at <https://recruit.ap.uci.edu/apply>

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