



## ALOK RANJAN, PHD

Postdoctoral Fellow

National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute Center for Cancer Research, Bethesda, Maryland

Graduate: 2017

**FOLLOWING A DREAM:** Alok Ranjan, PhD, first became interested in cancer research after completing his undergraduate degree. “I was fascinated by the power of cancer and how normal cells of the body overcome the death cycle to become cancerous.” Originally from India, Ranjan moved to the United States in 2012 to pursue graduate opportunities in cancer research. The work of Sanjay Srivastava, PhD, who became his mentor, led Ranjan to TTUHSC at Amarillo and the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

**ADJUSTING FOR SUCCESS:** The greatest obstacle Ranjan faced after moving abroad for his graduate studies was adjusting to a new environment after working for two years in an industrial setting in India. “It took me a month to balance the lab and the class work. After that, it was fine; it was very easy going forward,” Ranjan said about the cultural and academic adjustments he overcame.

Ranjan’s efforts soon paved the way for his success in breast cancer research. One of his most memorable moments at TTUHSC was receiving grant funding from the Society of Toxicology Syngenta Fellowship Award

in Human Health Applications of New Technologies. The grant provided funding to further his breast cancer research. Ranjan was also honored by the American Association of Cancer Research with the Scholar in Training Award and by TTUHSC as a co-recipient of the 2017 Outstanding Graduate Student Award.

Ranjan credits Srivastava with much of his success. “He encouraged us to do good research and to work hard,” Ranjan said about spending many hours, including nights and weekends in the lab. “He was a good source of inspiration.”

**CONTINUING THE CANCER FIGHT:** Ranjan continues his cancer research as a postdoctoral fellow in the Thoracic and Gastrointestinal Oncology Branch at the National Cancer Institute Center for Cancer Research. His long-term goal is to become an established cancer researcher with a specific interest in chemo-preventive measures to avoid cancer metastasis versus fighting it.

Behind this driving passion to expand his research and help cancer patients, Ranjan recognizes two key influencers. “I am extremely thankful to my brother, Ravi Kumar, and my family for their support during my studies. And a tribute to a great soul, my mother, who passed away in January 2017.”

BY ABBI BRICKEY



## ELY PEREA, MBA, MSMP

Chief Executive Officer

Covenant Specialty Hospital, Lubbock, Texas

Graduate: 2008, 2007 (Molecular Pathology, Clinical Lab Sciences)

**SEEING BOTH SIDES:** Now that he's working in hospital administration, Ely Perea, MBA, MSMP, can appreciate the value of starting out on the clinical side.

"There are times where the clinical side is extremely complex and has a whole set of its own issues; usually when those occur, those aren't the same things happening on the (administration) side and vice versa," he said. "Seeing both sides really helps in this role and understanding what's going on."

**FINDING HIS WAY:** Perea recalls that when he started his bachelor's degree in clinical laboratory sciences, what piqued his interest was correlating lab results with the clinical pathology he was learning in the classroom. But when he started his clinical rotations, the business aspects of the laboratory drew his attention. He began working as a medical technologist, and it wasn't long before he realized he was more interested in running the lab than running tests. Now he's in charge of an entire hospital, with all of its ins and outs.

"I enjoy the complexity and diversity of the different areas you have to be responsible for," he said. "With this job, you have the entire business: your own board, your operations, your marketing, your revenue cycle, your finances. It's a more complete picture. That makes it more complex and sometimes frustrating but, at the same time, keeps it interesting."

**THE BUSINESS OF LEARNING:** Perea recalls two specific things he learned at TTUHSC that have since become invaluable to him: scheduling and hospital composition.

"As soon as you jump into scheduling, you realize there are a lot of variables no one ever talks about: watching your overtime and hours, PTO, and coverage. It (TTUHSC) immediately taught me the importance of getting that right.

"Also, going over organizational charts on what a hospital looks like. It's very eye-opening to how big of a picture this actually is, because just starting college, it's a complete unknown. At that age, you don't even realize how much you don't know."

BY GLENYS YOUNG





## JOHN GULDE, PHARM D

Chief of Pharmacy

Thomas E. Creek VA Medical Center, Amarillo, Texas

Graduate: 2000

**DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS:** Approximately 20 summers ago, John Gulde, PharmD, arrived at a career crossroads. He could use his bachelor's degree in physics to secure a job as an analyst, consultant, teacher or technician, or he could choose a path seldom traveled by physicists. "TTUHSC was opening a new School of Pharmacy in Amarillo and it was just perfect timing," Gulde recalls. "I looked into it and thought this would be a great path for me."

**SERVING THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED:** Gulde has been with the Thomas E. Creek VA Medical Center in Amarillo since he received his PharmD in 2000. In 2012, he was named interim chief of pharmacy, a title that became permanent in early 2013. He seized the opportunity and has played a key role in improving the administrative structure and clinical functions at the VA pharmacy. In doing so, Gulde has earned the respect of his peers and supervisors. "I am trusted to be a member of so many teams and committees where my thoughts are valued," he said. "It's a great honor."

**FACING THE CHALLENGES:** Gulde believes there are many roles for pharmacists to play in improving patient care. He says the VA supports that position by recognizing pharmacists as critical members of its health care team and by giving its pharmacists the latitude to practice to the full extent of their education and training.

"That pioneering spirit helps to create opportunities to serve in many areas, from ambulatory care and anticoagulation to specialties such as hepatitis, mental health and oncology. Our profession is constantly evolving, and what we do as pharmacists today and how we do it will not be the same throughout our entire careers. So we must have a mindset to embrace these changes as opportunities."

BY MARK HENDRICKS

**JENNIFER OWEN, MD**

Gynecology and Women's Health

Owen Health Group, Lubbock, Texas

Graduate: 2001

**JEFF OWEN, MD**

Family Medicine

Owen Health Group, Lubbock, Texas

Graduate: 2005



NEAL HINKLE

**BLAZING A TRAIL:** When siblings Jennifer Owen, MD, and Jeff Owen, MD, started thinking about opening a small family-run health clinic, they knew they would be breaking industry trends. However, their strong desire to get back to the basics in providing health care for their patients is what kept them forging ahead.

In July 2017, Owen Health Group opened its doors to patients. From a fireplace nestled in the lobby, to the soft music and homey decor throughout, their personal touch is woven into every square inch. “We spent a lot of energy and time on the building to make it a unique experience,” Jeff said.

**CONQUERING FEARS:** The siblings faced many obstacles as they prepared to leave their successful practices and venture out on their own. For Jeff, navigating the unknowns of construction and setting up the business side of the clinic were some of the greatest challenges. “He has done a lot of research—his business mind is what led us,” said Jennifer, concerning the trust she placed in her brother to overcome these hurdles.

Jennifer’s greatest test was moving on emotionally from her 12 years in obstetrics. “Being a part of someone’s baby coming into the world is indescribable,” she said, as she recounted her resolve to savor every last moment with her expecting mothers. But her new venture has also given her joy. “We have patients crying and hugging us, thanking us for giving them their lives back,” Jennifer added. She was the first physician in the region to offer the Votiva device, a new vaginal rejuvenation treatment for women.

**WHY IT WORKS:** There is no denying the camaraderie, love and respect the Owen siblings have for each other. “We love working side-by-side—we really complement each other well,” Jeff said. “She comes with a happy smile, and it reflects on the entire practice.”

As the Owen Health Group prepares for their first anniversary, the brother and sister team are humbled by the support of their family, patients and a team of employees that are emotionally invested in their vision. “We have absolutely zero regrets,” Jeff said.

BY ABBI BRICKEY





## ANTHONIA “ADA” ABANOBI, NP, BSN

Orthopedics/Trauma Nurse

Hermann Memorial Hospital, Houston, Texas

Graduate: 2003

**BEST OF BOTH WORLDS:** As a student athlete, physical activity and fitness were normal for Ada Abanobi, NP, BSN. While she completed her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in nursing, she continued her workout schedules, always finding time to visit the gym. She has taken that dedication to another level, competing in national bodybuilder and physique competitions. She has placed in the top three of most of her competitions and holds a pro card in the fitness division for Fitness Universe with Musclemania. Additionally, she was a member of the Houston Texans Cheerleaders in 2006.

She now brings her passion for fitness and healthy eating to her patients. “As a nurse, I am in a unique position to talk to my patients about their health and recovery,” she said. “As a part of their recovery from a surgery or an injury, many patients are wanting to be more active and eat better. I show them they can do it. As we age, mobility becomes priceless. I am finding ways to show my patients how they can increase their mobility and maintain function. I lead by example and have the opportunity to directly impact these patients.”

**NURSING, A FAMILY AFFAIR:** Nursing runs in the blood of the Abanobi family as her mother, Beatrice, (Nursing ’93) and sister, Cornelia, (Nursing ’04) are registered nurses and graduates of the TTUHSC School of Nursing as well. Abanobi began her nursing education thinking she would apply to medical school after graduation.

“I realized how much I loved nursing and how much of an impact I could make. I received a great education at TTUHSC and knew I was in nursing to stay. I am developing a plan to combine my dedication to teaching patients about fitness and my practice as a nurse practitioner. This will be a new avenue for me, one that will directly impact them.”

BY JO GRANT LANGSTON



## KRISTINA FLORES, MS

Medical Student, Class of 2022

Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, El Paso, Texas

Graduate: 2018 (TTUHSC El Paso)

**HEAD MEETS HEART:** Kristina Flores, MS, carved her own path to medical school. While she knew from a young age she wanted to be a doctor, an artistic gift led her to an undergraduate degree in painting. “Though it was more work to balance art classes with pre-med, I wanted to pursue both passions.”

The loss of her parents as a child taught Flores to make the most of all opportunities life has to offer. Her father, a Gulf War veteran, returned home from deployment with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that was never diagnosed. “I lost both of my parents because of a disease that went undiagnosed and untreated—a lot of my interest in medicine stems from that.”

**PEOPLE FIRST:** As part of TTUHSC El Paso's inaugural class in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Flores saw an opportunity to unite the university's three schools. In her first year, she was nominated as senator for the Student Government Association (SGA); in her second year, she was named SGA vice president of communications, collaborating with the medical school on events such as the Students United Para Nuestra Salud Health Fair and Texas Two-Step CPR trainings.

“What I really like about TTUHSC El Paso is that we're a very tight-knit community. The faculty and staff show us every day that they care about us and want to see us achieve our dreams.”

**A NEW EXPERIENCE IN A FAMILIAR PLACE:** Now a first-year student in the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, Flores is excited to be a step closer to her dream. “I picked Paul L. Foster because I am a native El Pasoan, and my passion is to be a practicing doctor here one day.”

With four grueling—yet exciting—years ahead of her, Flores hasn't made up her mind about a specialty. But she has her eye on psychiatry, hoping to one day work with children and adults suffering from PTSD.

In the meantime, she still makes time to paint. “I try to paint five to six hours per week. I have about four paintings in progress right now.”

BY RACHAEL PAIDA





### HANI ATALLAH, MD

Adult Psychiatry

Family Health Centers of San Diego, San Diego, California

Graduate: 2013

### KATRINA DELEON, MD

Geriatric Medicine

Scripps Clinic, San Diego, California

Graduate: 2013

**THE RIGHT FIT:** No one knows where fate will lead, but for Hanan Atallah, MD, and Katrina DeLeon, MD, it seems like destiny steered them to join the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine's (PLFSOM) inaugural class in 2009. In addition to being home to a new medical school with a unique, community-based curriculum, El Paso had a natural draw. "I fell in love with El Paso. It just felt like a warm, beautiful place," said Atallah, a native of Lebanon.

For DeLeon, coming from a family of nurses put health care at the forefront, and the decision to move to El Paso from Lubbock—where she grew up and earned an undergraduate degree in cell and molecular biology at Texas Tech University—was intuitive. TTUHSC El Paso's philosophy of caring for people, and not just treating diseases, made El Paso stand out.

**MUTUAL SUPPORT:** While the demands of medical school are notorious for putting a damper on social lives, the long hours spent studying brought Atallah and DeLeon closer.

Their friendship, combined with the support of TTUHSC El Paso's Student Affairs staff, and the enthusiasm of faculty like Henry Weisman, MD, associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry, helped them push through many sleepless nights.

In their last year of medical school, the two decided to apply for a couples match through the National Resident Matching Program and were fortunate to match to programs in Los Angeles—Atallah to psychiatry and DeLeon to internal medicine.

**SERVING THE UNDERSERVED:** Now married and practicing in San Diego, Atallah and DeLeon are living the PLFSOM's philosophy of service, working mostly with underserved—and often marginalized—immigrant communities. With patient communication being one of the major challenges in her chosen field of geriatrics, the exposure to medical Spanish she received at the PLFSOM has been invaluable, said DeLeon.

"Going to med school in El Paso brought out the passion for caring for the underserved in both of us," said Atallah. "I come from that population. I remember getting my shots from a community clinic in Lebanon as a kid. I can really relate."

BY RACHAEL PAIDA

**RICARDO PEREZ, BSN, RN**

Registered Nurse

Progressive Care Unit, Providence Memorial Hospital, El Paso, Texas

Graduate: 2013

**ANGELICA PEREZ, BSN, RN**

School Nurse

Desert Wind Elementary and Middle School, El Paso, Texas

Graduate: 2013



TOMMIE MORELOS

**FINDING SOMETHING MORE:** Angelica Perez, BSN, RN, wanted to be a nurse since she was a little girl watching her grandmother work as a nurse in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. For Ricardo Perez, BSN, RN, interest in the profession came later in life. He earned an undergraduate degree in business management and marketing, but a few years working in the business world left him looking for something more. After a friend in the medical profession introduced Ricardo to nursing colleagues, he found his calling.

"I decided I was done with the business world," Ricardo said. "I knew I wanted to get into health care, into making people feel better physically."

**REWARDS:** Angelica and Ricardo said the family-like atmosphere at the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing (GGHSON) helped them through their education. Working as nurses has been different than they expected, but "the rewards are a lot better than you think," Angelica said.

"Sometimes you have days when you want to cry, but then there is always at least one patient who says, 'Thank you,' or somebody tells you that you really helped them," she said. "It really makes you feel like you are doing good, like this is your calling. I really enjoy it."

"Every day, we are reminded that we are fragile beings, and that at some point, we're all going to pass away," Ricardo said. "But the things that we do while we're here are what make this world a better place. I want to help people. I notice that the nurses who are only there for the money don't last. The ones that are there with heart and want to make a difference, they stay 20, 30 years."

**INSPIRATION:** Ricardo and Angelica said they are grateful to the GGHSON for putting them on the right path. "They gave us the opportunity to better our lives," Ricardo said. "Going through their nursing program made a difference in our lives, and allows us to make an impact in our community."

Ricardo is now in his final year of the MSN Family Nurse Practitioner program at TTUHSC, and Angelica plans on starting her advanced degree soon.

"I enjoy being a nurse; I didn't want to be a nurse practitioner," Angelica said. "But watching Ricardo go through the FNP program inspired me. Now I want to do it, too."

BY JAY KOESTER