

2026 Nebraska ACP Chapter Awards Announcement



Chapter Laureate Award David Gonzales, MD FACP

This award honors Fellows or Masters of ACP who have demonstrated by their example and conduct an abiding commitment to excellence in medical care, education, or research, and in service to their community, their Chapter, and the American College of Physicians

David Gonzales, MD FACP recently retired as the Chief of General Internal Medicine at Creighton University. He arrived at Creighton after a long career at the University of New Mexico serving in many roles including Division Chief, Executive Physician of Patient Safety and Quality Improvement, and Chief Medical Officer. He received his medical degree from Stanford University and completed his residency at the University of Texas- San Antonio. He received an MBA degree from the University of New Mexico.

As Chief of GIM, Dr. Gonzales led the effort to promote careers in GIM. He helped start the Primary Care Track at Creighton and the Rural Track in Kearney, NE. Dr. Gonzales has organized Proud to be GIM events for the past 5 years. Dr. Gonzales was an attending in the Resident Continuity clinic and provided clinical care to his patients. Dr. Gonzales also served as Associate Program Director of the Internal Medicine program. After 43 years of clinical care, teaching and administration, Dr. Gonzales retired in June 2026. He plans to teach part-time at Creighton Medical School.



Woman Physician of the Year Award
Lydia Kang, MD FACP

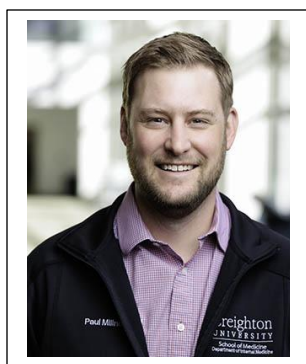
This award recognizes and honors an ACP member as an outstanding woman physician with a distinguished career in areas of exceptional patient care, medical education, and/or research.

Lydia Kang, MD FACP is an Associate Professor of General Internal Medicine at Nebraska Medicine and has been a faculty member for twenty years. She graduated from Columbia University and New York University Grossman School of Medicine, completing her residency at NYU's Bellevue Hospital in New York City, where she was Chief Resident.

Dr Kang began writing in 2005. Her poetry and essays have been published in *JAMA*, *Flatwater Free Press*, and UNO's *The Linden Review*. Her recent poem, "An Ordinary Day," published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, received the 2025 Annals Poetry Prize. She is the co-author of *Patient Zero: A Curious History of the World's Worst Diseases*, a Nebraska Book Award winner, as well as *Quackery: A Brief History of the Worst Ways to Cure Everything*, an NPR Science Friday "Best Science Book of The Year".

She is a best-selling author of adult historical mystery novels, whose plots are threaded with pandemics, chemistry, anatomy, toxicology, and opioid prescription errors. She also writes young adult fiction, including *The November Girl*, a 2018 Nebraska Book Award winner and *K-Jane*, a Kirkus Best Book of 2025. She has written for the Star Wars LucasFilm franchise, including the novel *Cataclysm*, and is currently writing an untitled upcoming novel that will be "Medical school meets 'The Pitt' meets Star Wars."

Over the years, Dr. Kang has gained a reputation for helping fellow authors achieve medical accuracy in fiction and continues to mentor physician writers at UNMC as well as nationally.



***Walter J. O'Donohue, Jr. MD Award
Dr. Paul Millner, MD FACP***

The Walter J. O'Donohue, Jr. MD Award honors a physician that embodies the qualities of our late friend and colleague, an ardent supporter of the Nebraska Chapter: great leadership, scholarship and mentoring in his/her career.

Paul Millner, MD FACP attended medical school at the West Virginia University School of Medicine. He joined the American College of Physicians (ACP) during his internal medicine residency at Creighton University and became actively involved with the Meeting Program Planning Committee early in his training. Since then, he has remained engaged with ACP through the Governor's Advisory Council and by supporting the Nebraska ACP Doctors' Dilemma competition. Outside of ACP, he works as a hospitalist with CommonSpirit Health at Bergan Mercy Medical Center and serves as an Associate Program Director for the Creighton Internal Medicine Residency Program.



***LeeRoy Meyer Dedicated Teaching Award
Jill Zabih, MD***

The LeeRoy Meyer Dedicated Teacher Award honors a physician that exemplifies the talent, enthusiasm and professionalism demonstrated in medical education by Dr. Meyer.

Jill Zabih, MD attended medical school at the University of Nebraska Medical Center followed by residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Wisconsin where she served as Chief Resident. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Hospital Medicine at UNMC where she enjoys working with students and residents at all levels of training. Her particular area of focus is on the transition from medical student to resident physician. She serves as a longitudinal mentor for students interested in Internal Medicine and is the Course Director for the Residency Preparatory Course - a month-long simulation-based course for all graduating medical students.

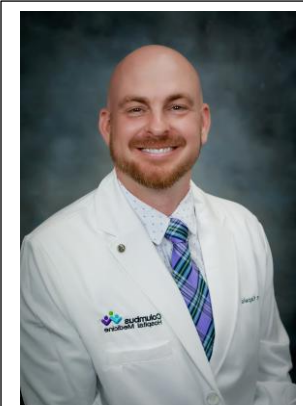


Chapter Advocacy Award
Venkata Sowjanya Kanakadandi, MBBS MD FACP

This award is given to a physician in appreciation for their service in health care and public policy and in working in the political arena at the local, state, and national level

Venkata Sowjanya Kanakadandi, MBBS, MD, FACP, is a board-certified Internal Medicine physician serving as a Hospitalist, Chair for the Division of Medicine, and Stroke Medical Director at St. Francis Medical Center in Grand Island, Nebraska. She is dedicated to delivering high-quality, patient-centered care while advancing healthcare through physician leadership, advocacy, and public policy.

Dr. Kanakadandi earned her MBBS from Manipal University in India and completed her Internal Medicine residency at UPMC Pinnacle in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She served as a Chief Resident at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School/Trinitas Regional Medical Center and completed a fellowship in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. She is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians (FACP). She has represented Nebraska physicians during the American College of Physicians Leadership Day in Washington, D.C., meeting with members of Congress to advocate for policies that improve patient care and strengthen the practice of Internal Medicine. She serves on the Nebraska Chapter ACP Governor's Advisory Council and the Chapter's Hospitalist Committee, helping shape chapter initiatives and advance hospital medicine throughout the state.



Hospitalist Award
Kurt Kapels, MD, FACP

The Hospitalist Award is given to a chapter Member, Fellow or Master that has performed the duties of a full-time inpatient Internal Medicine specialist, or "hospitalist", with expertise and dedication, as demonstrated leadership in quality improvement and education, has consistently delivered high-value and evidence-based care, provided in a patient-focused manner and exemplifying the highest standards of professionalism.

Kurt Kapels, MD, FACP, is a native of Creston, NE with a passion for rural medicine and care of fellow Nebraskans. Dr. Kapels is a member of the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Medicine class of 2011 and completed Internal Medicine Residency at UNMC, earning the Senior Internal Medicine Resident award. Upon completion of training, Dr. Kapels returned to Columbus where he joined Columbus Hospital Medicine as a Board-Certified Hospitalist in 2014, soon after becoming Clinical Director for the group. He is currently active in various roles at Columbus Community Hospital including Medical Staff President, member of

the CCH Board of Directors, Chair of the Board Quality and Compliance Committee, and several other vital committees. Dr. Kapels also practices throughout the Heartland as a telehealth Hospitalist for Teledigm Health, providing Internal Medicine care to underserved rural communities throughout the region as well as assisting with in-person coverage at several other rural hospitals. He is a proud member of the LifeBridge Nebraska Physician Wellness Program Advisory Committee as well as the ACP Nebraska Hospital Medicine Advisory Committee.

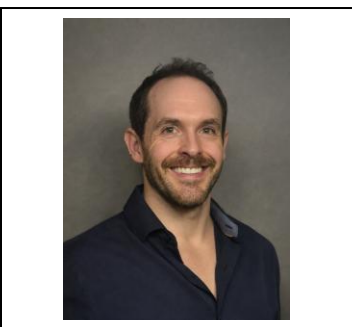


***Early Career Physician Award
Melissa Hernandez, MD, FACP***

The Early Career Physician Award recognizes an ACP member that has been a major contributor to the American College of Physicians, either locally or nationally, and is within sixteen years of medical school graduation.

Melissa Hernandez, MD, FACP, is the recipient of the Early Career Physician of the Year award. She graduated from UNMC Medical School and completed her residency through the UNMC Internal Medicine program. For the past ten years, Dr. Hernandez has served as an outpatient primary care physician at the Methodist Physicians Clinic Regency location. She was elected to Fellowship in the American College of Physicians in July 2024.

Deeply committed to the professional health of her colleagues, she is currently halfway through a three-year program to become the Nebraska Chapter's newest ACP Well-being Champion. She also currently serves as the Wellness Committee Chair for the Nebraska ACP chapter. Dr. Hernandez lives in Omaha with her husband, Hernan, a colorectal surgeon at Methodist, and their two children, Miguel and Myra.



***Resident of the Year Award
Samuel Wesley Berg MD, MS***

This award is given to a resident/fellow member who demonstrates professionalism and leadership in his/her residency program, the medical profession, and the community. The recipient is identified as going above and beyond what is required of a resident.

Samuel Berg, MD, MS is a third-year Internal Medicine resident with Creighton University, and part of the budding rural medicine program. He completed the first half of internal medicine training at Bergan Mercy Hospital in Omaha before transitioning to Kearney where he will complete the rest of his training at Good Samaritan Hospital. This fall he is applying for gastroenterology fellowship with the hopes of matching in the Midwest. He is originally from Northeast Iowa and attended the University of Northern Iowa where he obtained

his undergraduate and graduate degree in biology. Prior to attending medical school, he instructed biology courses and worked at the county and state level in ecologic preservation projects. In his free time, he loves spending time with his dogs, cooking, going to the gym, riding horses, and traveling.



Resident of the Year Award
Lauren Jacobsen, MD

This award is given to a resident/fellow member who demonstrates professionalism and leadership in his/her residency program, the medical profession, and the community. The recipient is identified as going above and beyond what is required of a resident.

Lauren E. Jacobsen, MD, is an Internal Medicine resident at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). She earned her medical degree from UNMC, where she is part of the Primary Care Program. During medical school, she served as the student co-chair representative on the ACP board and helped restart the ACP Student Council. She finds fulfillment in supporting fellow students through programs such as UNMC's Peer Success Leaders.

Dr. Jacobsen is excited to continue her involvement in mentorship and medical education while growing as a physician and caring for adult patients throughout residency. Outside of medicine, she enjoys spending time with friends and family, traveling, and scuba diving. She loves staying active and rarely passes up an opportunity to play volleyball or pickleball!



Medical Student of the Year Award
Cinthiya Chander

This award is given to a medical student member who has demonstrated excellence in scholarship, interest in Internal Medicine, community service and outreach, and who has participated in Chapter and other Internal Medicine-related activities.

Cinthiya Chander is a third-year medical student at Creighton University School of Medicine. She earned her undergraduate degree in Biochemistry from the University of California, Los Angeles, where she developed a strong foundation in biomedical sciences and research. Raised in Puducherry, India, and later moving to Fresno, California, she developed a deep commitment to serving underserved communities. She is interested in preventive medicine, cardiovascular health, oncology, rural health, and expanding access to quality healthcare. Through her leadership roles in Mini Medical School, the American Medical Association, and the American College of Physicians, she is committed to advancing health equity through health education, community engagement, and advocacy.