

Press Release



For Immediate Release

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NREF Announces Recipients of 2025-26 Research Fellowship Grants and Young Clinician Investigator Awards

August 1, 2025 (Rolling Meadows, Ill.) – The [Neurosurgery Research & Education Foundation](https://www.nref.org) (NREF) is pleased to announce this year's recipients of the Foundation's Research Fellowship Grants and Young Clinician Investigator Awards.

"Year after year, the NREF receives applications from some of the most promising researchers in the country. The decisions were extraordinarily difficult this year. The exceptional quality of the proposals submitted by the awardees makes us optimistic for the future of neurosurgery. We are grateful for the generosity of the donors, sections, and affiliated organizations who make these awards possible." stated Gregory J. Zipfel, MD, FAANS, NREF Research Committee Chair.

As the premier funder of neurosurgical studies, the NREF provides funding for studies in basic, translational and patient-oriented clinical research for investigators in North America.

Open to residents only, the **NREF Research Fellowship Grant** provides training for neurosurgeons who are preparing for academic careers as clinician investigators. Applicants must be physicians who have been accepted into, or who are currently in approved residency training programs in neurological surgery in North America.

The **NREF Young Clinician Investigator Award** supports junior faculty who are pursuing careers as clinical investigators. Applicants must be neurosurgeons, no more than two years from the end of their clinical training, who are full-time faculty in North American teaching institutions.

The 2025-26 Research Fellowship Grant and Young Clinician Investigator Award recipients are:

Rebecca Du, MD, Northwestern University

- **Award:** 2025-26 NREF & AANS/CNS Section on Disorders of the Spine and Peripheral Nerves Sanford J. Larson Research Fellowship Grant
- **Sponsor:** Catalina Lee-Chang
- **Project Title:** TIM3 as a Therapeutic Target for Chordomas

Ashley M. Dunbar, MD, Washington University in Saint Louis

- **Award:** 2025-26 NREF & AANS/CNS Section on Pediatric Neurological Surgery Research Fellowship Grant
- **Sponsor:** Jennifer Strahle, MD, FAANS
- **Project Title:** Non-invasive vagus nerve stimulation and intraventricular hemorrhage of prematurity

Matthew W. Pease, MD, Indiana University

- **Award:** 2025-26 Academy of Neurological Surgeons Young Clinician Investigator Award
- **Sponsor:** Jamie Bradbury, MD
- **Project Title:** Deep learning approaches to prognostication in traumatic brain injury

Jennifer L. Quon, MD, MHS, The Hospital for Sick Children; University of Toronto

- **Award:** 2025-26 NREF & Academy of Neurological Surgeons Young Clinician Investigator Award
- **Sponsor:** Peter Dirks, MD
- **Project Title:** Machine learning for prediction and delineation of pediatric arteriovenous malformation recurrence after surgery

Zachary A. Sorrentino, MD, University of Florida

- **Award:** 2025-26 NREF & Academy of Neurological Surgeons Research Fellowship Grant
- **Sponsor:** Brian Hoh, MD, FAANS, FACS, FAHA, MBA
- **Project Title:** Endovascular immune-modulatory therapy for treatment of subarachnoid hemorrhage associated cerebral vasospasm and other neurological disorders

Samantha E. Spellicy, MD, PhD, Duke University

- **Award:** 2025-26 NREF & AANS/CNS Cerebrovascular Section Research Fellowship Grant
- **Sponsor:** Daniel Laskowitz, MD, MHS
- **Project Title:** IL-1 β -mediated stimulation of the adrenergic systemic and immune polarization in a mouse model of stroke

Matthew Z. Sun, MD, UT Southwestern Medical Center

- **Award:** 2025-26 NREF & Andrew T. Parsa Young Clinician Investigator Award
- **Sponsor:** Bradley Lega, MD, FAANS
- **Project Title:** Investigating the Immunomodulatory Effects of Radiation on Targeted Meningioma Immunotherapy

Xiaonan (Richard) Sun, MD, PhD, Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center

- **Award:** 2025-26 NREF & Bagan Family Foundation Young Clinician Investigator Award
- **Sponsor:** Matthijs van der Meer, PhD
- **Project Title:** Cortico-subthalamic population code in the representation of cognitive computations

The application for the 2026-27 NREF Research Fellowship Grants and Young Clinician Investigator Awards will open September 1, 2025 through the [NREF Online Grant Portal](#).

For more information about the [NREF Research Fellowship Grants and Young Clinician Investigator Awards](#) or other grant and fellowship programs, please contact NREF at (847) 378-0500 or info@nref.org.

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About the NREF

The Neurosurgery Research & Education Foundation (NREF) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization created in 1980 by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) to support research and education efforts that enhance and confirm the critical role neurosurgeons play in improving lives.

The NREF is dedicated to providing education to neurosurgeons at all stages of their careers, as well as funding research into new and existing neurosurgical treatments, in order to identify links between best practices and improved outcomes in patient care. Through voluntary public donations, corporate support, and donations from allied groups, the NREF supports endeavors that impact the lives of those suffering from epilepsy, stroke, brain tumors, spinal disorders, sports-related head injuries, lower back pain and Parkinson's disease.

For more information about NREF, please visit www.nref.org.