

From: [NREF](#)
To: [Joanne M. Bonaminio](#)
Subject: NREF Newsletter | Spring 2026
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Dear Friends & Colleagues,

My term as chair of the Neurosurgery Research & Education Foundation (NREF) comes to an end next month. Witnessing the enthusiasm of the neurosurgical community in support of the Foundation's mission over the past three years has been a humbling and gratifying experience. The generosity of our donors, industry partners and affiliated organizations make it possible for the NREF to continue providing innovative **education**, merit-based **research** funding and support for **outcomes** studies and clinical registries.

- **INDIVIDUAL DONORS:** The [Cushing Circle of Giving](#) recognizes elite embers who've demonstrated a profound commitment to the future of neurosurgery through their charitable donations. In the past three years, the Cushing Circle has added 25 new members bringing the total number to 209.
- **INDUSTRY PARTNERS:** Partnerships with industry are critical to the advancement of technology, research and education in neurosurgery. The NREF recognizes the corporate supporters who have demonstrated a sustained commitment to the neurosciences.
- **AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS:** Collaboration with groups within organized neurosurgery, such as the American Academy of Neurological Surgery, the Neurosurgical Society of America and the Society of Neurological Surgeons, as well as private foundations like B*CURED and the Chuck Noll Foundation, is critical to the discovery of tomorrow's neurosurgical breakthroughs.

Support from the greater neurosurgical community translated to an NREF investment of **\$2,095,000** in research and educational programs in Fiscal Year 2026.

While we are proud of all that NREF has helped support over our 45 year history, we know there is more to achieve in support of the surgeon-scientist. To that end, next month, the Foundation will announce the launch of a major research program during the [AANS Annual Scientific Meeting](#) in San Antonio, Texas, May 1-4, 2026.

With this program, we are poised to deliver an investment in the next breakthrough in neurosurgical research. Stay tuned.

In June, this message will come to you from **Michael Y, Wang**, MD, FAANS, who will assume the Chair's role in May, and lead the Foundation as we continue to expand our research and educational initiatives. Our future success depends upon the contributions of each and every one of us. I hope you will join Mike and the NREF leadership on the journey.

Your passion, your commitment and your enthusiasm is contributing to the advancement of our profession.

Let us continue to do great things together.

My sincere thanks for including NREF in your philanthropy and extend my best wishes for your continued success.

I look forward to seeing you in San Antonio!

Sincerely,



Adam S. Arthur, MD, MPH, FAANS

NREF Chair

Additional Updates from the NREF



Cushing Circle of Giving Welcomes New and Elevated Members

The **Cushing Circle of Giving** was established by the NREF as a lifetime giving society to recognize donors who support the Foundation's research and education efforts. The NREF extends its gratitude to: **Society of Neurological Surgeons (SNS)**, the newest philanthropists to have made a substantial commitment to the future of neurosurgery by joining the Cushing Circle. To become a member, visit our secure **Donate** page, email info@nref.org or call 847.378.0500 for more information.



In Memoriam: Merwyn Bagan, MD, MPH, FAANS(L)

The NREF mourns the passing of **Merwyn Bagan**, MD, MPH, FAANS(L), a distinguished neurosurgeon, past president of the **American Association of Neurological Surgeons** (AANS) and dedicated philanthropist. In January 1995, Dr. and Mrs. Bagan moved to Kathmandu, Nepal, and began their volunteer work at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, establishing both a neurosurgical ward and training program. By 2000, with two fully qualified Nepalese neurosurgeons and a strong program firmly in place, Dr. Bagan returned to Nepal annually until Covid in 2020. As a Platinum member of the Cushing Circle of Giving, Dr. Bagan and his beloved wife, Carol, established a fund within NREF to support an annual research grant. His work received wide recognition, including Boston University's Distinguished Alumnus Award and the AANS Humanitarian Award. Merwyn Bagan left behind a profound legacy of service to the field of neurosurgery. Our deepest condolences go to his family, colleagues and the neurosurgery community.

NREF Honor Your Mentor Funds Announce Awards



Honor Your Mentor (HYM) Funds recognize the incredible people who have advanced neurosurgery. Each mentor fund has a specific purpose, and donations fund a chosen research or educational endeavor in the mentor's name across a variety of subspecialties. The following HYM funds have recently made award disbursements: **A. Leland Albright, Charles Kuntz, Christopher I. Shaffrey, David Kline, David L. Kelly, Ed Benzel, Karin M. Muraszko, Kevin T. Foley, Richard G. Fessler, Sanford J. Larson, Shelly D. Timmons, Todd Albert, Ulrich Batzdorf and Veena D. Mummaneni**. NREF congratulates all award recipients and offers our best wishes for their continued success.



Harvard Med Student Receives MSSRF Best Abstract Award

The NREF congratulates **Cameron Hill** from **Harvard Medical School** on being selected as the 2025 NREF Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship Best Abstract Award recipient. Ms. Hill has been invited to present "Mapping CD4⁺ T Cell Landscapes in Glioblastoma Reveals Effectors and Bystanders" during the 2026 American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) Annual Scientific Meeting in San Antonio, Texas. For information about the **NREF Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship**, please contact NREF at info@nref.org.



Van Wagenen Fellows Host 3rd Annual Hockey Tournament

The **William P. Van Wagenen Fellowship** provides neurosurgical residents interested in studying abroad a unique opportunity with a program designed to give freedom in scientific development without the restrictive limitations imposed by many research grants and fellowships.

The 3rd Annual **Van Wagenen Hockey Tournament**, hosted by Dr. **Andrew Grande** and former Van Wagenen Fellows, was held Sunday, January 25, 2026. The event was a great success, with 40 players participating in a thrilling competition at the 3M Mariucci Arena in Minneapolis. The Long Island Ducks claimed victory over the Peterborough Patriots in a thrilling final.

The tournament raised over \$40,000 in support of the prestigious William P. Van Wagenen Fellowship.

Special thanks to our sponsors: **Medtronic, Peter Lazic, Scientia Vascular, Kaneka, Mitaka** and **Mizuho** for their partnership.

Donations to the Van Wagenen Fellowship Fund are still welcome [via this link](#).



Save the Date for 21st Annual Charity Softball Tournament

The **21st Annual Neurosurgery Charity Softball Tournament**, hosted by Columbia University, will be held in New York City's Central Park on Saturday, June 6, 2026, to raise funds for brain tumor research. The tournament will feature a field of 56 teams from across the U.S and Canada. For more information regarding the 2026 tournament, please contact Dr. **Ricardo J. Komotar** (rkomotar@med.miami.edu) or

Dr. Jeffrey N. Bruce (jnb2@columbia.edu).

The Eternal Quest – A Poem by Timer Banerjee, MD, FAANS(L)

The Eternal Quest

The desire in men to be admired by their father can drive them to go mad
Progeny of Secretariat or that of Einstein were possibly sad.
There is a lot of frustration if such lofty goals are not met
Einstein's son likely had overwhelming feelings of deep discontent.
The agony of unfulfilled desire expresses itself despite efforts to suppress,
Ill repressed hostility, schizophrenia or depression, a mind unwilling to confess.
Not everyone can be Sir Tim Berners Lee
Son of a scientist, grew up as an Anglican
Had the courage to become a member of Unity
Honoring the gods of others and spiritual progression
He was stertorous about compassion
'Cause he knew the value of the fard and renunciation.
The prodigal son, honoring the independence and boundaries
The apprehension of Kirsanov waiting for educated son, Arkady
The demise of filial piety and struggles of Dimitri in Karamazov brothers
Accepting the views of youth lovingly despite the generational differences.
Our last words clarify what we really missed as we get ready to face the mud
After all his successes, the hero of Orson Welles, asked for the Rosebud!

NREF Advances Educational Mission

NREF offers free courses to provide advanced resident and fellow educational training in topic areas not always covered within neurosurgical residency. While spaces at the **in-person courses** are invitation-only, there are **courses and webinars** available online, free of charge, to neurosurgical residents around the world.

Here is the 2026 NREF Course Calendar:

MIS and Emerging Technologies for Senior Residents and Fellows

Course Directors: Dr. Praveen Mummaneni and Dr. Juan Uribe

Dates/Location: July 31-August 2, 2026 / BNI (Phoenix, AZ)

Spinal Deformity for Residents

Course Director: Dr. Daniel Sciubba

Dates/Location: September 18-20, 2026 / Bioskills Educational Center (Lake Success, NY)

Endovascular & Vascular Techniques Course for Senior Residents

Course Directors: Dr. Mark Bain and Dr. Andrew Grande

Dates/Location: October 8-10, 2026 / MERI (Memphis, TN)

Neuroendovascular Surgery Techniques Course for Fellows

Course Directors: Dr. Mandy J. Binning and Dr. Lucas Elijevich

Dates/Location: November, 13-15, 2026 / MERI (Memphis, TN)

Thanks to our valued individual donors and corporate supporters, the NREF has funded over 90 courses attended by more than 2,000 residents and fellows, with thousands more viewing presentations online.

Success Story - NREF Awardees

Two NREF grant recipients, Dr. **Adam Sonabend** (2012–13) and **Mark Youngblood** (2022–23), are among the authors of a newly published study highlighting a non-invasive method to predict chemotherapy response in glioblastoma.

Published in *Nature Communications*, the research examines how advanced imaging and molecular analysis may help physicians better determine which patients are most likely to benefit from chemotherapy. This work represents an important step toward more personalized and effective care for patients facing one of the most aggressive brain tumors.

You can read the full article [here](#).

In a [video testimonial](#), Dr. Youngblood discusses the findings from his fellowship research project, shares the current status of that work and explains how NREF support helped shape his goals as a neurosurgeon-scientist.

Support the future of neurosurgical research with a tax-deductible [donation](#) today.

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