

# Researchers Adapt to Telework, Grant Recipients Announced



Doctoral student Alex Haber working in the pancreatic cancer research laboratory before the pandemic.

Can pancreatic cancer research continue during a global pandemic? For the Jefferson Pancreas, Biliary and Related Cancer Center within the Department of Surgery, the answer has been a resounding “yes.” Graduate students Samantha Brown and Angelo Montenegro, and Drs. Charles J. Yeo, MD, and Jonathan Brody, PhD, share how Jefferson has made that happen in “Rules for scientific progress while living with the COVID-19 Pandemic: from ‘benchside’ to ‘fireside,’” in *Cancer Biology & Therapy*.

Here are the four strategies the Jefferson team outlines for navigating the uncertainty without compromising the science.

**Strategy #1:** Create a plan for essential lab work, wrapping up any existing experiments, terminating any non-essential work and limiting how many people must go in for animal work and other necessary ongoing experiments. With the list of essential research identified, build clear action plans to maintain morale and productivity.

“Our research teams designed a plan assuming that the pandemic could bring long-lasting changes to how and where we work,” said Dr. Yeo. “Having a clear structure has helped everyone develop new routines and adapt to new ways of working.”

**Strategy #2:** Set up and integrate a web-based communication infrastructure. This infrastructure needs to include tools for real-time updates and focused discussion, as well as video conferencing capabilities for “face-to-face” meetings. Zoom has been used extensively.

**Strategy #3:** Make the most of “found” time outside the lab. The authors note, “As bench scientists we often get caught

up in the minutiae of physical lab work (i.e., chasing after that piece of exciting data); however, now we can take this opportunity to spend work time catching up on the literature, learning about cutting-edge trends in the field, and allocating time for manuscripts, reviews and grants.” For the Jefferson team, that approach included shifting from weekly lab meetings to daily sessions of up to two hours via Google Hangouts.

**Strategy #4:** Use this opportunity to strengthen internal and external collaborations. As the article explains, “We aren’t in this alone. Many of our colleagues and peers around the globe are facing similar restrictions to [their] everyday lives.” To date, they have included some current collaborators in their sessions, as well as clinicians who have helped provide a clinical/translational perspective and basic science experts who have helped enhance the rigor of the lab’s work.



## Elizabeth Mishler

Elizabeth “Liz” Mishler has worked as Administrative Assistant to the Enterprise Chair of Surgery, Charles J. Yeo, MD, FACS, since December 2017. During the COVID-19 outbreak, she took on an additional role: “Chief Zoom Officer” for the Department of Surgery.

“When COVID happened and everyone had to scramble, I quickly taught myself how to use Zoom,” Mishler says. “We’ve been using it for anything that used to be a meeting or a phone call. It has been fun teaching others, and I’m really proud of how much everyone learned.” To date, she has helped migrate fellowship interviews, Mortality and Morbidity Committee meetings, mini Grand Round presentations and numerous other gatherings to the digital communications platform.

Under “normal” circumstances, Mishler spends most of her time managing calendars, handling the Department’s appointments and promotions, and supporting Dr. Yeo in preparing a variety of written communications. Her focus is more academic than clinical, though she occasionally covers the phones when the Department’s clinical coordinators are busy with other tasks. Mishler, who joined Jefferson in 2015 as one of the hospital’s first telehealth coordinators, also supports clinicians with telehealth visits (those are not conducted via Zoom).

Outside work, Mishler enjoys spending time with her fiancé and two rescue pups, Charlie and Gus. She laughingly notes that Charlie is a female and was adopted before she came to work for Dr. Yeo aka “Charlie” to friends and family! She also enjoys hiking, dining out and shopping and looks forward to being able to resume those activities soon. And she loves spending time at the New Jersey shore – especially Long Beach Island, where she lived for most of her childhood before moving to Media, PA.

## Saligman Family Surgery Pilot Project grant recipients announced

One sign that research is truly forging ahead—in May, the Department awarded grants for Saligman Family Surgery Pilot Projects. This program, funded in part by philanthropy, encourages faculty members, residents and fellows to apply for grants of up to \$15,000 per year to pursue independent research.

This year, six grants were awarded:

**Adam Bodzin, MD** – Using the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients Database to Evaluate Primary Non-function of Liver Allografts.

**Karen Chojnacki, MD, and Team** – Challenges to and Solutions for Resident Recruitment.

**Tyler Grenda, MD** – Evaluating Variations in Lung Cancer Surgical Outcomes Along Referral Pathways.

**Melissa Lazar, MD, and Alliric Willis, MD** – Outcomes and Appropriate Treatment Regimen for Breast Cancer in Women over 70.

**Babak Abai, MD** – Telemonitoring of Stent or Bypass Graft Patency Using Miniaturized Implantable Ultrasound Device.

**Wilbur Bowne, MD** – Developing a Syngeneic Mucinous PMP Tumor Model to Study Nanocarrier-delivered Immunotherapeutics.

“These projects reflect the diverse work underway in the Department of Surgery,” said Hien Dang, PhD, Director of the Dang Laboratory, who sat on the selection committee. “We look forward to reviewing the findings of these projects and building on them in future research.”

To learn more about supporting surgical research at Jefferson, please contact Kelly Austin in the Office of Institutional Advancement at 215-955-6383 or [Kelly.Austin@jefferson.edu](mailto:Kelly.Austin@jefferson.edu).