Radiation Oncology CONNECTIONS

Winter 2025/2026

Department of Human Oncology
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

>> PATIENT CARE
>> RESEARCH
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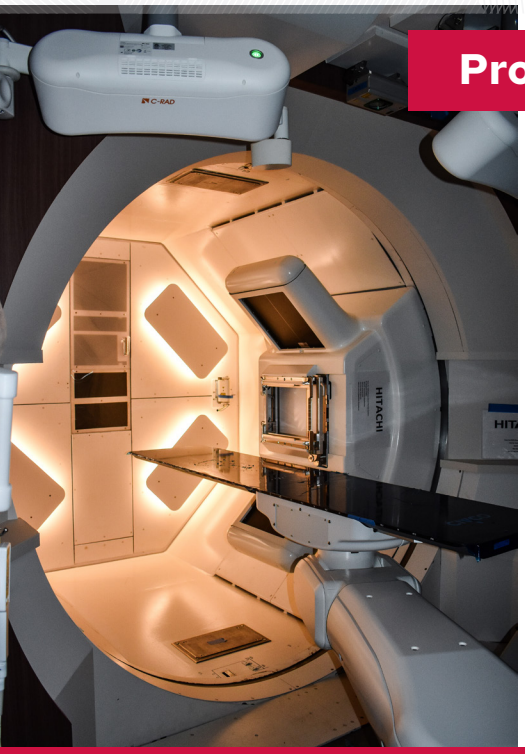
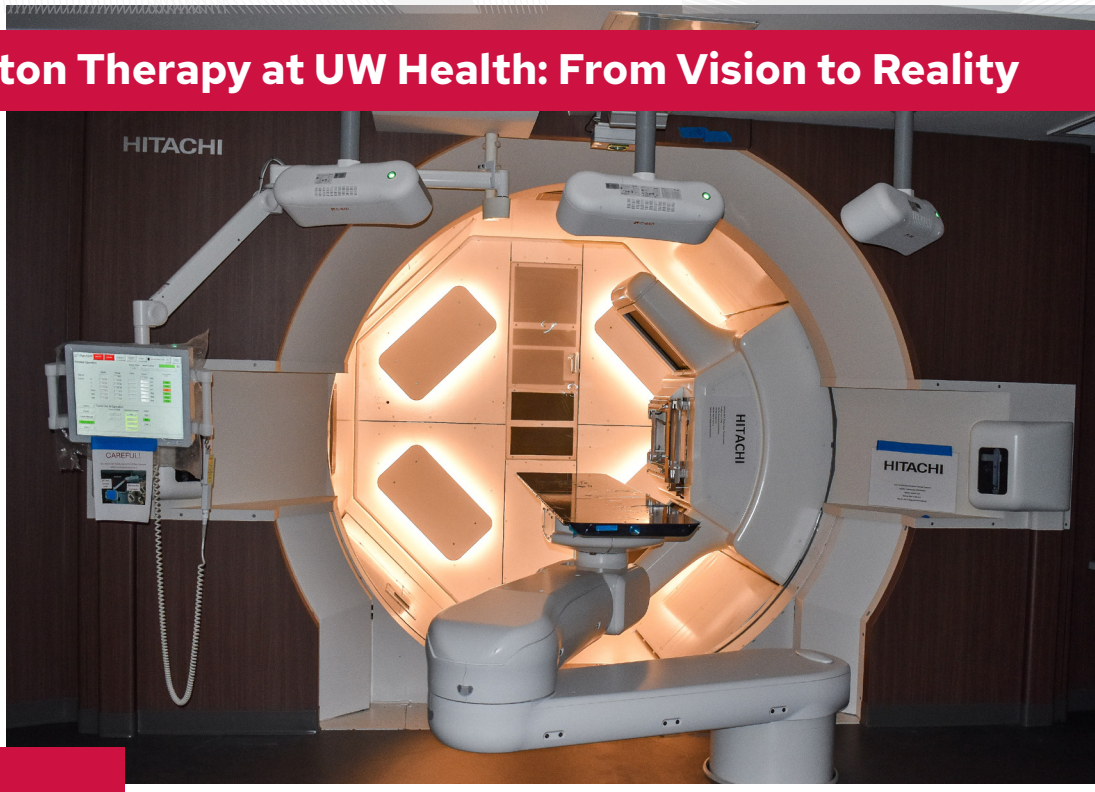


Proton Therapy at UW Health: From Vision to Reality



"We've built something truly state-of-the-art that will make a difference in people's lives."

- Dr. Benjamin Durkee, Medical Director of Proton Therapy

After years of planning, design, and construction, the UW Health Proton Therapy Program is preparing to welcome its first patients in 2026—marking a transformative step forward in cancer care for Wisconsin and beyond.

Located at the Eastpark Medical Center, the new Proton Therapy Center represents a major milestone for the Department of Human Oncology. This highly specialized treatment uses precise proton beams to target tumors while minimizing radiation exposure to healthy tissue—a breakthrough particularly important for pediatric patients and those with cancers near critical organs.

From First Beam to First Patient

The "first beam," achieved earlier this year, was a key milestone indicating that the proton therapy technology is fully installed and operational. The next phase is focused on rigorous testing, calibration, and clinical readiness. "Spring 2026 is our go-live target for the gantry treatment room," said Dr. Benjamin Durkee, Medical Director of Proton Therapy. "That's when we expect to treat our first patient. The fixed-beam room will follow a few months later."

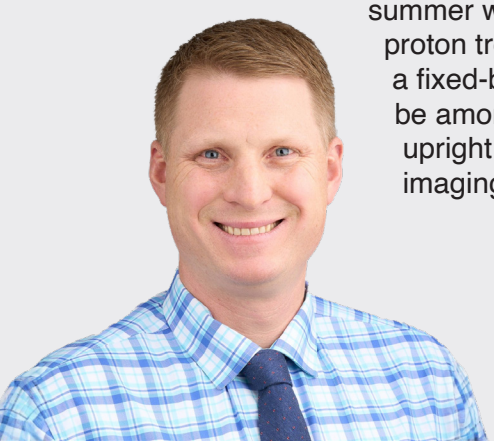
(continued on page 3)

Inside this issue

Message from the Chair // *Zachary Morris, MD, PhD*

I hope this edition of **CONNECTIONS** finds you enjoying life and sharing laughter and love with friends and family over the holiday season! The past year has been filled with amazing achievements by our remarkable faculty, staff, and trainees in the Department of Human Oncology. In the midst of a period of considerable growth, this group has risen to the challenge and hit it out of the park!

Last year we opened our clinic at UW Health's Eastpark Medical Center (EMC), equipped with three LINACs, two HDR vaults, CT and MRI simulators, and beautiful clinic space. Our proton center, with a state-of-the-art gantry room, pencil beam scanning, and advanced motion management capabilities will open at EMC this spring. In the late summer we will open a second proton treatment room using a fixed-beam and what will be among the first integrated upright proton treatment and imaging facilities globally.



Incredibly, the solar panels on the roof of the EMC parking garage will provide for the power consumption of our proton therapy center – a first among proton centers anywhere to my knowledge.

Our department's mission is to provide the highest quality care and state-of-the-art treatment for today's patients, to educate trainees, colleagues, and communities for the benefit of tomorrow's patients, and to innovate through research that advances the field of oncology globally. Philanthropy is increasingly critical to our ability to effectively pursue this mission.

With philanthropic support like yours, we envision a future where through compassion and innovation, we are global leaders in developing, advancing, and delivering curative and palliative treatments for patients with cancers. If you would like to support us in this mission or share a story of how the department has impacted you, please reach out using the QR code or contact information below.

Please email comms@humonc.wisc.edu or visit humonc.wisc.edu/make-a-gift/.

- Zachary Morris, MD, PhD
  Chairman of the Department of Human Oncology

(*Proton Therapy - continued from page 1)*

Each milestone represents a complex and rewarding partnership between UW Health, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and international engineering teams.

“The handoff from Hitachi to UW Health marks the transition from construction to operation,” Durkee explained. “We’re now ensuring every system meets the highest safety and performance standards.”

Expanding the Team and Capabilities
To support the new program, UW Health has added 14 specialized positions, including radiation therapists, medical dosimetrists, and a child life specialist to assist pediatric patients through treatment. The center will treat both adult and pediatric patients, with the pediatric program led by Dr. Brett Morris.

“From the start, we wanted to make sure our youngest patients have a supportive, family-centered experience,” Durkee said. “The addition of a child life coordinator is a big part of that.”

What Makes UW’s System Unique
While proton therapy is becoming more widely available, UW Health’s system stands out for its precision and technology integration. It features real-time surface guidance, motion management, and full onboard 3D imaging—including diagnostic-level imaging on the upright system.

One of the center’s most remarkable features is its true pencil-beam scanning capability. “A number of centers have pencil-beam scanning, but in many cases the beam is closer in size to a paintbrush,” Durkee explained. “Ours truly is the size of a pencil—allowing us to sculpt radiation around tumors with extraordinary accuracy. That’s the same level of technology used at all top institutions.”

Looking Ahead
As UW Health’s proton therapy program moves from concept to clinic, it will significantly expand treatment options for patients across the Midwest. “This is where all the planning pays off,” said Durkee. “We’ve built something truly state-of-the-art that will make a difference in people’s lives.”

Stay tuned for updates as UW Health approaches its first patient treatment in 2026—a moment years in the making and one that reaffirms the institution’s commitment to advancing cancer care through precision, compassion, and innovation.

Proton Therapy at a Glance

- ☑ ***Construction Complete:*** Eastpark Medical Center’s Proton Therapy facility is fully built and transitioning from installation to patient-ready operation.
- ☑ ***First Beam Achieved:*** Testing milestone reached in 2025 — marking the first successful delivery of proton energy.
- ☑ ***Precision Technology:*** True pencil-beam scanning — one of only a handful of systems nationwide with this level of accuracy.
- ☑ ***Team Growth:*** 14 new positions added, including radiation therapists, dosimetrists, and a child life specialist.
- ☑ ***Pediatric Focus:*** Pediatric treatments to begin from day one, with leadership from Dr. Brett Morris.
- ☑ ***First Patient:*** Target go-live for the gantry room — Spring 2026. Fixed-beam room to follow later that year.
- ☑ ***Technology Partner:*** Built in collaboration with Hitachi and Leo Cancer Care — bringing cutting-edge therapy to the Midwest.

Upright treatment chair from Leo Cancer Care - located in the fixed beam room, opening in 2026

Badger Challenge: Celebrating 10 Years of Impact

This year marks a major milestone for Badger Challenge, the signature cycling, running, and walking event that has united Wisconsin's community in the fight against cancer for a decade. What began as a small, cyclist-focused fundraiser has evolved into a statewide movement that has raised more than $5.4 million for groundbreaking cancer research at the University of Wisconsin.

Founded by Dr. Deric Wheeler and Dr. Paul Harari, the event began with a simple but powerful idea: to create a community-driven experience that fuels cancer research right here in Wisconsin. Inspired by successful events at other cancer centers and Madison's vibrant cycling culture, the duo launched what was originally known as The Ride. Within a few years, the event expanded to include 5K and half marathon options, welcoming runners, walkers, and families alike. In 2022, it was renamed the Badger Challenge to better reflect its mission and local pride.

"The 5K walk and run really opened the door for families and people of all ages to get involved," said Wheeler. "It's the fastest-growing part of the event because it's so accessible — and that's what community looks like."

One of the most defining features of the Badger Challenge is that every dollar participants raise goes directly to cancer research in Wisconsin. Registration fees cover operational costs, and corporate sponsorships — from partners like Shine United, Accuray, and Floricity — support event logistics. "Transparency is key," Wheeler emphasized. "We want people to know exactly where their money goes — and to see its impact in our community."

That impact is visible in the Badger Challenge Scholars Program, which provides funding to researchers across UW–Madison's departments. Each year, individual and program grants support innovative studies, helping scientists generate crucial data needed for future federal grants. "Our goal is to amplify early-stage research," Wheeler explained. "These funds give scientists the momentum they need to reach the next level."

The event's growth mirrors its purpose. What started with a few hundred cyclists now brings together thousands of participants from 30 states and six countries, supported by more than 300 volunteers. Families, survivors, and supporters gather for a day that blends fitness, remembrance, and hope. "You'll see kids in strollers, grandparents, cancer survivors — it's an incredible mix," said Wheeler. "It's not just a race; it's a celebration of resilience."

In 2025, the Badger Challenge took place for the first time at the UW Health Eastpark Medical Center, creating a meaningful backdrop for participants. "We wanted people to see where the research happens," Wheeler said. "When someone comes here for treatment later, they'll remember this place — the energy, the purpose — and know they're in the right hands."

Looking ahead, Wheeler's goal is ambitious but clear: 5,000 participants and $5 million raised annually. With continued community support, dedicated sponsors, and the passion that has defined the past decade, that vision feels within reach.

"The Badger Challenge has always been about more than just one day," Wheeler reflected. "It's about the lives we touch, the research we fuel, and the community we build together. That's what keeps us riding, running, and walking — year after year."

Visit badgerchallenge.org to learn more about this year's event and join us Sunday, September 27 for next year's Badger Challenge.

Dr. Zac Labby Named AAPM Fellow

Zac Labby, PhD, DABR, FAAPM, associate professor in the Department of Human Oncology, is a 2025 Fellow of the American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM). He received the honor July 27 during AAPM's 67th annual meeting in Washington, D.C. Dr. Labby, a longtime member, was also elected to AAPM's Board of Directors by the North Central Chapter.

The Fellows program recognizes significant contributions to medical physics through research, service, education, and leadership. Only 33 members earned the FAAPM designation this year, joining about 800 Fellows among AAPM's 9,000 members worldwide. Founded in 1958, AAPM sets standards and advocates for the profession. "To be considered a trusted senior member of this association is an honor that fills me with pride," said Dr. Labby.

Dr. Labby joined AAPM in 2008 as a graduate student and became a full member in 2014. He has served as North Central Chapter president, journal reviewer, and finance committee member, helping manage AAPM's publications since 2017.

At UW–Madison, Dr. Labby has held key leadership roles since joining in 2014. He directed the Physics Residency Program from 2016 to 2022 and received the Clinical Physics Educator Award in 2019. Since 2020, he has served as Director of Clinical Physics, ensuring safe, accurate radiation therapy delivery. He also leads the stereotactic radiosurgery (SRS) program, which targets small brain lesions with minimal toxicity and is expanding to treat benign conditions.

His research focuses on improving treatment accuracy and reducing uncertainty in SRS. He practices at Eastpark Medical Center, home to future proton therapy in Madison, and played a major role in opening the facility last year. "It's inspiring to work alongside colleagues who embody excellence in medical physics," he said.

Dr. Mahadevappa Mahesh, AAPM President (left), congratulates Dr. Zac Labby (right) on being named Fellow during the 2025 AAPM Awards Ceremony.

Accuray and UW-Madison Partner to Advance Adaptive Radiotherapy

Accuray Incorporated and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health have signed a memorandum of understanding to advance online adaptive radiotherapy (OART) using Accuray's helical radiation platform.

The collaboration will focus on clinical research, education, and technology development to improve personalized cancer care. UW-Madison pioneered the TomoTherapy® System, which revolutionized precision radiation treatment.

Accuray continues to enhance this platform for greater accuracy and efficiency. This partnership aims to make OART more accessible to clinical departments of all sizes, supporting better outcomes and quality of life for patients.

ACCURAY

UW–Madison to Launch Nation's First BNCT Cancer Therapy Center

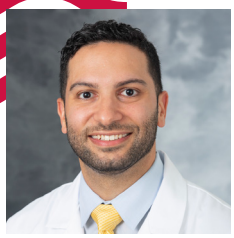
The University of Wisconsin–Madison and TAE Life Sciences have signed an agreement to establish the first U.S. accelerator-based Boron Neutron Capture Therapy (BNCT) center.

BNCT is a cutting-edge treatment that targets cancer cells while sparing healthy tissue, offering hope to patients with difficult-to-treat tumors, such as those in the brain or head and neck regions.

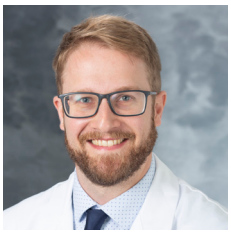
The collaboration includes installing TAE's Alphabeam system and advancing boron-10 drug research through clinical trials. This initiative leverages UW's expertise in oncology, theranostics, and particle therapy, aiming to revolutionize cancer care with shorter, minimally invasive treatments and improved outcomes.

New Members of the Team in 2025

Radiation Oncology Residents



Mustafa Basree, DO
Post Graduate Trainee 5

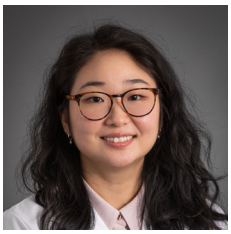


Bradley Eckelmann, MD, PhD
Post Graduate Trainee 5

S. Carson Callahan Jr, MD, PhD
Post Graduate Trainee 4

Trevor Wilson, MD
Post Graduate Trainee 3

Ryan Ingebritsen, MD
Post Graduate Trainee 2

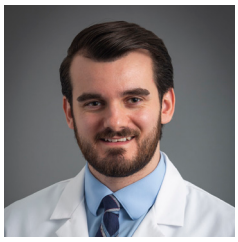


Sue Yi, MD, PhD
Post Graduate Trainee 2

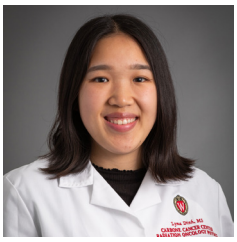
Physics Residents

Laura Bennett, PhD
2nd Year Physics Resident

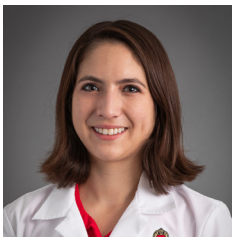
Elissa Khoudary, MS
2nd Year Physics Resident



Nicholas Lynch, PhD
2nd Year Physics Resident



Lyna Dinh, MS
1st Year Physics Resident



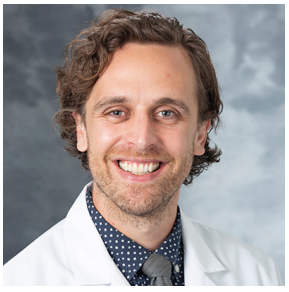
Jocelyn Jackson, PhD
1st Year Physics Resident

Jainam Valand, MS
1st Year Physics Resident

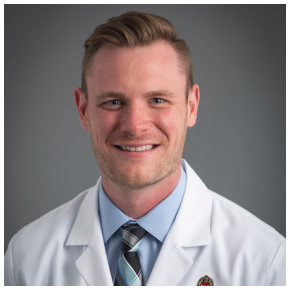
Fellows, Faculty, Staff Physicists

LeMoyne Habimana-Griffin, MD, PhD
Bentson Translational Research Fellow

Claire Baniel, MD
Assistant Professor



Colin Harari, MD
Assistant Professor



Eric Wallat, PhD
Assistant Professor

Carolyn Eckrich, MS
Staff Medical Physicist

Read about his research plans

Notable Achievements - 2025

Kristin Bradley, MD

President Elect
2025 - 2026

ABS American Brachytherapy Society

Nicholas Lynch, PhD

Best Oral Abstract Award 2025 (Physics)

Abstract Title: *A novel delivery method enables ultra-high dose rate treatment for left breast DIBH irradiation within a single breath hold*

Residency Programs Launch 2025/2026 with New Leadership

The University of Wisconsin Department of Human Oncology's radiation oncology and radiation oncology physics residency programs are off to a strong start this year. With five new residents joining the clinic and research labs—and several faculty taking on new leadership roles—the programs are poised for another year of growth and innovation.

Michael Bassetti, MD, PhD
DIRECTOR

Jessica Schuster, MD
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

RADIATION ONCOLOGY
RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Radiation Oncology Residency Program

New Program Director: Dr. Michael Bassetti

Michael Bassetti, MD, PhD, has been named Director of the Radiation Oncology Residency Program. A past recipient of the department's Educator of the Year award, Dr. Bassetti is known for his outstanding mentorship and dedication to trainee development. Program priorities this year include strengthening clinical and research independence for residents and exploring new collaborative opportunities such as bundled lectures and in-person journal clubs.

Thank You, Dr. Kristin Bradley

Associate Director Dr. Jessica Schuster and Dr. Bassetti extend heartfelt thanks to Dr. Kristin Bradley, who led the program for the past ten years. "The department is so grateful for Kristin's leadership and mentorship," said Dr. Schuster. "Her commitment continues to inspire residents long after graduation."

Abby Besemer, PhD, DABR
DIRECTOR

Alison Arnold, MS, DABR
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

RADIATION ONCOLOGY PHYSICS
RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Radiation Oncology Physics Residency Program

New Associate Director: Alison Arnold

Alison Arnold, MS, DABR, joins Program Director Dr. Abby Besemer, PhD, DABR, as the new Associate Director. "Alison's dedication to mentorship and program improvement has been exemplary," said Dr. Besemer. "Her experience will help guide efforts to enhance resident independence and clinical engagement."

Thank You, Dr. Jordan Slagowski

Dr. Besemer also recognized Dr. Jordan Slagowski, PhD, DABR, for his three years of service as Associate Director. "Jordan's thoughtful leadership, mentorship, and commitment have greatly enriched our residents' experiences," she said.

With strong new leadership and continued focus on education, both programs are well-positioned for an exciting year ahead.

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