

A NEWSLETTER FOR
FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

Connections

SUMMER 2025

THANKS FOR SAVING MY SISTER!!



Illustration by Jackson DeBoer, 12, brother to our patient Penny, who is in remission from stage 4 high-risk neuroblastoma.

Beyond Patient Care

How our hospitals show up for siblings

page 3

2

Our Most Unique Clinic

Our new state-of-the-art clinic in the Gateway Medical Building was designed to inspire comfort and exploration for young patients with chronic conditions.

5

The Power of Medical Imaging

Hear from Raymond Sze, MD, radiologist-in-chief, about the beautiful world of radiology and how our hospitals are taking medical imaging to the next level.

9

Cal-MAP Goes Statewide

The platform gives primary care providers access to expert consultation, training and resources to help guide mental health care for young patients.



Dear Friends,

I have been part of the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals team for almost three years now. The longer I'm here, the more I appreciate the breadth and depth of the work that we do for children from the Bay Area and across the country.

Just this morning, I attended a conference at our Mission Bay campus where some of the best and the brightest researchers in the world convened to hear how experts at UCSF are working to cure heart malformations before birth. Later in the day, I heard from leaders of our school-based health clinics, who provide Oakland teens with easy access to mental health services. I spent the afternoon in our operating rooms, and it was like watching a symphony: intricate choreography carried out with remarkable precision, leading to an extraordinary result.

I am consistently stunned by how rich and vast our impact on health care is — cutting-edge research that is literally changing how medicine is practiced worldwide, excellent clinical care that is saving lives, vital community-based services that so many of our families and young people rely on. The people who do this work are firing on all cylinders, every minute of every day, to make this happen.

Philanthropy is a crucial part of that, especially now. Your engagement in our mission allows our incredible team to go beyond a baseline level of care. You allow us to dream of what's possible, to set new standards for children's health, and to give Bay Area families the quality of care they absolutely deserve.

Thank you for making this place what it is. You mean the world to all of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joan Zoltanski, MD".

Joan Zoltanski, MD, MBA
Chief Medical Officer
UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals



A Space Designed for the Whole Child

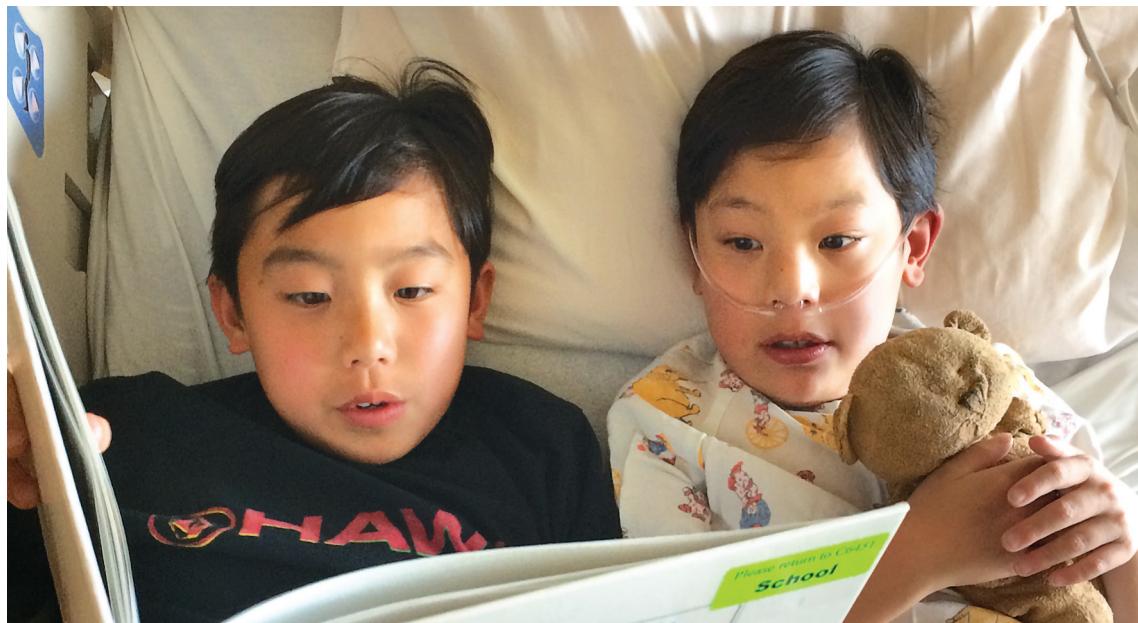
In March, UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals launched a new, state-of-the-art pediatric clinic in the Gateway Medical Building at Mission Bay, designed to inspire exploration and comfort for young patients and families facing chronic conditions. The clinic is now home to three of the nation's most innovative pediatric programs: The Stad Center for Pediatric Pain, Palliative, and Integrative Medicine; the Wellness Center for Youth with Chronic Conditions; and Pediatric Rehabilitation.

The new space was designed to meet the unique needs of children who experience chronic pain, physical disabilities, and sensory sensitivities — many of whom spend significant time with their care teams. The goal was clear: Create a setting that doesn't look or feel like a traditional medical clinic but instead fosters healing in a welcoming, engaging, and fun environment. The unique design features include a multisensory room, a digital waterfall, and a climbing wall, alongside varied therapeutic clinical services including acupuncture, massage, cooking classes, music therapy, psychotherapy, and physical rehabilitation.

"Pediatrics isn't just about fixing kids' bodies. It's about healing and wellness that encompasses their entire being," says Nicholas Holmes, MD, MBA, UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals' president. "That's why this new clinic includes wellness, pain medicine, integrative services like acupuncture and massage, and rehabilitation — because research shows that this kind of holistic approach leads to better outcomes. Programs like these, which literally transform what's possible for kids and families, only exist because of philanthropy."

BEYOND PATIENT CARE

How our hospitals show up for siblings during life's most challenging moments



Kyle (left) and Kaedyn reading together at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals.

When Kyle Quan was 12, his little brother, Kaedyn, passed away.

Kaedyn was born four months premature with pulmonary hypertension when Kyle was 18 months old. Kaedyn spent the first weeks of his life in the neonatal intensive care unit, and many days thereafter in treatment, at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals. For Kyle, the hospital halls are ubiquitous in his recollections of childhood.

Mature beyond his years, Kyle tried to do what was expected of him to make things easier on his parents. He was a diligent student, but when Kaedyn was

hospitalized, his mind would wander: Were they prepping him now? Had the surgery worked? And underneath all that poise, there was anger. Why Kaedyn? Why did this have to happen to his family?

Kyle had just started middle school when Kaedyn died. The grief was debilitating, but Kyle bottled it up so his parents wouldn't worry. His mental health deteriorated.

"It got ugly," Kyle says. "I didn't want to be here. I would put on a smile, a mask, when I was at school, when I was around my parents, but in my room, when I was alone, I was like, 'I'm the older brother. It should have been me.'"

Kyle eventually confided in his parents. He was diagnosed with depression and received treatment that helped him begin to process his unimaginable loss.

The Invisible Child

When asked to describe her work as a child life specialist at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals, Kim Ong pauses, then says, "It can be hard to describe. We just do everything we possibly can to help our patients cope.

"Being in the hospital comes with so much stress and trauma, and our job is to minimize that," she continues. "We try to help them understand what's happening, what a procedure is going to feel like. We help them

cope with all the pain. Give them outlets for processing what they're going through. It's all about trying to make the hospital a little bit more comfortable, a little bit easier.

"And everything I just described, I try to do for the siblings, too."

Watching a sibling battle a life-threatening illness can be profoundly impactful for a child, Kim says. Siblings confront prolonged periods of separation from their caregivers; experience feelings of isolation, guilt, and grief; and struggle to comprehend what's happening — both in terms of their sibling's illness and everything they're seeing and hearing at the hospital.

"Sometimes the sibling has the hardest experience," Kim says. "It's like they become invisible, an afterthought. But they have to live with what happened. All the investment and intention that we put into our patients, we need to be doing that for siblings too."

A Novel Program

Sibling support has always been a key role of our child life specialists, but around the time that Kyle and Kaedyn were boys, a child life specialist saw a need for more and began advocating for additional organized support. The team established a Sibling Committee, which launched a sibling carnival — a day for

brothers and sisters to let loose and have fun — and created a library of books for siblings on coping and grieving.

Today, siblings are encouraged to take advantage of the full range of child life services available to patients, including art and music therapy, animal-assisted therapy, the playroom, and the hospital school program — all of which are funded through philanthropy.



The committee provides a sibling welcome bag with developmentally appropriate items, including an activity book that introduces the hospital and offers strategies for emotional expression. There's also a coupon for a parent-sibling date at a local restaurant.

But Kim says there is a serious need for additional staff with the training and expertise to facilitate more targeted sibling interventions, such as support groups, bereavement counseling, and the dedicated one-on-one interactions that she feels so passionate about.

"The relationship building is my favorite part of what I do," she says. "It is essential to making our work impactful. But it's challenging to keep up with the workload. It takes time to develop these trusting and therapeutic relationships. And we're just very understaffed."

Pushing Forward

Kyle is now 19. He wears a dog tag around his neck with Kaedyn's name on it. "So I always kind of have him with me," he says.

He keeps the memories close to the surface now. He remembers playing Uno and Wii with Kaedyn, who would change the rules so he could win; how his little brother put a smile on everyone's faces, particularly the nurses; the sound of Kaedyn's high, raspy voice and infectious laugh wafting down the hospital hallways.

When life gets hard and Kyle feels down, he pushes forward for Kaedyn, who will never get to follow his own dreams. Now a freshman at the University of Oregon, Kyle hopes to pursue a career in medicine, to pay forward the care his family received during Kaedyn's life.

"I've always felt like, despite that unlucky hand we were dealt, we were fortunate to have people in our corner, some really great doctors, some really great people, who were always good to us. Who were good to Kaedyn. I want to have an impact like that."

Beauty and Vision

Exploring the power of medical imaging with our new radiologist-in-chief



Source: American College of Radiology

Pediatric radiologists partner with nearly every hospital department and make crucial diagnoses by helping their colleagues see much more than meets the eye. We recently caught up with Raymond Sze, MD, radiologist-in-chief, to learn more about the beautiful world of medical imaging and how UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland is taking its radiology program to the next level.

What inspired you to pursue a career in radiology?

I actually dropped out of medical school after my first year. I wasn't sure medicine was the right career choice for me, so I took a leave of absence. First, I hiked across Europe, then, I decided to go to art school. I spent a year drawing and painting and sculpting the human form, studying under some of the best art instructors in New York City. It was phenomenal.

But I missed science, so I went back to medical school. After graduating and completing my internship in Hawaii, I decided to combine my art and medical training and become a medical

illustrator. My goal was to travel around the world, meet the most exciting and innovative people in medicine and surgery, and then translate what they do into beautiful educational images.

It was around that time that I finally discovered medical imaging while looking for references for my art. Medical art is about depicting what can't be seen, but with diagnostic and interventional imaging, you can literally peer directly into the body. So I was actually using CT scans and MRI and ultrasound as references for my art. That's how I got the radiology bug! I went back and did my residency in radiology, and then a fellowship in pediatric radiology.

How did your time as an artist influence your medical practice?

I've always understood things visually. I teach visually. I draw pictures to help the residents understand diseases. I draw diagrams to help families understand their children's diagnosis. My premise is, if you can't visualize it in your mind, or if you can't draw it, you don't really understand it.

Radiology is all about visualizing the structure and function of the human body. It's about seeing anatomy, seeing diseases, seeing complex relationships, and seeing change over time. Diagnostic imaging is the vision of health care.

Even though I'm working with sick children, I never forget that there is a certain beauty in this ability to see a disease clearly — and that we can use that beauty to cure a child.

Why did you choose to specialize in pediatrics?

To be honest, I would never have become a pediatric radiologist if it wasn't for my wife, who

is a pediatrician. This is why it's so important to surround yourself with people who are smarter and more empathetic than you!

Pediatrics is hard. It can be emotionally challenging to work with sick children and families who are overcome with anxiety and stress. So at first, I was like, "No way! Kids are messy!" And my wife, who specializes in pediatric integrative medicine, said, "Honey, you say that, but when you talk about your patients and what you're doing, your eyes light up, you get excited." And I realized she was right. I just love working with kids.

You've led radiology departments all over the country. What made you decide to join UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals?

I realized early in my career that what I want to do is make health care better. At every hospital where I've worked, time and time again, you have all these wonderful, smart, compassionate people working in environments that seem to make it harder, rather than easier, to take care of patients.

And that's what brought me to Oakland. I want to make this place awesome! You have such amazing people here, this incredibly compassionate staff that cares so much about children. But what we haven't traditionally had is enough investment in the advanced equipment and technology we need to take this work to the next level. You need accurate, modern technology to see clearly what's going on inside the child's body, to diagnose them properly, to provide them with the right treatment, and to achieve the best outcomes — that's what I'm determined to do here.

The good news is that the UCSF radiology department is one of the best in the country and the world, it just hasn't traditionally been a major player in pediatric imaging. We have this extraordinary expertise at UCSF, combined with this vibrant, proud community hospital in Oakland, and everyone is committed to



I never forget that there is a certain beauty in this ability to see a disease clearly – and that we can use that beauty to cure a child.

– Dr. Raymond Sze

building a world-class pediatric radiology department. I have complete confidence that we can create something really special here.

What are you most excited about?

Interventional radiology. I want to give this institution an awesome interventional radiology department.

When most people think of imaging, they're thinking of diagnostic imaging — X-rays, CT scans, ultrasound, MRI — the ability to see disease, to diagnose it accurately.

Interventional radiology is the ability to do image-guided therapy. To put catheters or wires or coils or balloons into the body to treat disease. And unlike open surgery, where you have these big scars, it's typically done with a tiny incision that's only about 2 or 3 millimeters. And you can treat everything from aneurysms to abscesses to cancers. It's extraordinary.

What's the role of philanthropy in that effort?

Philanthropy has been so crucial to everything I've done in my career, whether it's improving patient and family experiences, creating a new clinical imaging service, or driving innovation, and it will be central to what we're doing here in Oakland. I am so determined to turn this program into something really special for our community and to make this vision a reality.

To date, Moment by Moment Photography has captured the love, hope, and determination of more than 8,000 brave, young patients like Scarlett.



ONCOLOGY

Scarlett's Magical Moments

Scarlett was diagnosed with B-cell acute lympho-blastice leukemia when she was just 3 years old. The treatment experience was debilitating, and Scarlett often bore the pain and distress in silence.

For Scarlett's mother, Dawn, one of the most incredible things about children battling cancer is that underneath all the pain and fear and discomfort, they're still children.

"They still want to play, they want to dress up. They want so desperately to have what all kids have: that time to be the sole focus, to just laugh and play and be a child. And there just are not that many opportunities for a child who's living in the hospital to have normal experiences."

Dawn says that the care she received at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals from the pediatric oncology team and the nursing staff were second to none. "But medical treatment was just one piece of the healing puzzle," she reflects. "Child life, music and art therapy, gave Scarlett these precious, magical, simple moments of joy and laughter that were just amazing."

In addition to delighting in child life activities – many of which are not covered by insurance – another opportunity for joy came through Moment by Moment Photography, a local nonprofit organization that has been volunteering at our hospitals for the past two decades, providing free portrait sessions to families of children with life-impacting illnesses.

When Scarlett heard that she was going to have a photo shoot, the exhaustion of treatment gave way to the thrill of getting camera-ready. Scarlett prepared a dazzling outfit featuring her most sparkly accessories and practiced poses in the mirror.

"It was an opportunity for her to be seen as a subject of joy and beauty and not a triage patient all the time. And the photos are just a beautiful testament to her joy and her strength."

Now 6, Scarlett recently celebrated one full year in remission. "What's amazing is that despite all the trauma she went through, she holds on to the attention and care she received. We couldn't be more grateful," Dawn says.

OUR BUNDLE OF JOY

"She was hilarious," reflects Tim Fitzgerald of his daughter, Leia. "The literal definition of a bundle of joy."

That was Leia at age 2: a happy, energetic toddler whose laughter and dance moves captivated her parents. She loved to dress up — complete with props and hats — and put on silly performances for her adoring parents.

In December 2023, everything changed. Suddenly, Leia was exhibiting frightening symptoms. She seemed spacey, even unresponsive at times, and experienced sudden and extreme bouts of agitation. When the symptoms worsened, Tim and Lokelani Montero, Leia's mom, brought her to urgent care, thinking that perhaps their daughter was suffering from an ear infection.

But Leia's diagnosis was much worse: anti-NMDAR encephalitis, a rare disease that causes the immune system to attack parts of the brain, leading to seizures, movement disorders, and changes in behavior. Within days of her diagnosis, Leia, who had been so full of energy and life, lost her ability to walk, talk, and eat independently.



Leia Fitzgerald

"It's jarring and life-altering, and you're like, 'OK, this is happening to us,'" Tim says. "It just throws your whole life for a loop."

Lokelani tracked down the doctor who discovered the condition back in 2007, and he immediately recommended UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals as the best place for Leia. "He said UCSF was a powerhouse when it comes to rare conditions like these, especially autoimmune encephalitis," Lokelani recalls.

The family spent four months living at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland, where Leia received treatment and eventually progressed to the Rehabilitation Center, which worked diligently to help the once-lively little girl get well enough to return home.

"Without the rehab team, we would have been lost," Tim

says. "There's a light at the end of the tunnel for her, a path to recovery, and we wouldn't know how to be on that path without them."

That road to recovery will be long — two years at least. But just a few months after returning home, there were signs of progress: Leia began to look at her parents again, track objects with her eyes, and watch the pages of a book turn, one by one. A year later, Tim and Lokelani report that Leia, now 3, is growing more curious by the day.

As Tim and Lokelani continue to support their child's healing, they have also dedicated themselves to giving back to the hospital that gave them so much. In addition to Lokelani's professional role in philanthropy with Bank of America, which had made gifts to support UCSF even before her family needed care, the family is participating in the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals' patient ambassador program to help raise awareness of children like theirs.

"I never realized how resilient Leia and we, as a family unit, could be," says Lokelani. "When donors give to these hospitals, they really help give her a chance to live a thriving life."

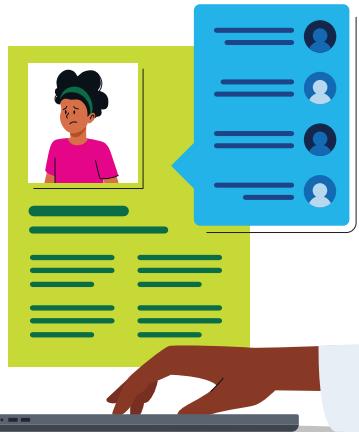
Mental Health Portal for Kids and Young Adults Goes Statewide

Primary care providers can access expert consultation, training, and resources to help guide treatment for patients under age 26.

Forty percent of high school students say they feel sad and hopeless, and 20% have seriously considered suicide. A chronic shortage of mental health experts has made the problem worse, but UCSF has created a way for all California youths to access quality mental health care.

UCSF child and adolescent psychiatrist Petra Steinbucchel, MD, directs the California Child and Adolescent Mental Health Access Portal (Cal-MAP), formerly known as the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Portal (CAPP), which we introduced readers to in our Winter 2024 issue. The resource allows primary care providers to consult with UCSF psychiatrists and psychologists for advice on treating young patients with mental health concerns. In late 2024, the portal expanded to licensed providers statewide.

Steinbucchel explains how the portal has evolved in addressing the state's youth mental health crisis and what comes next.



Who is the portal for?

It's for the primary care doctor in a rural area where there are limited specialists, or the nurse in an urban area where it's difficult to get an appointment to see a psychologist. More broadly, it's for any outpatient primary care provider in California who wants immediate support in addressing mental health and substance-use disorders in a patient age 25 or younger. It's free, and insurance status doesn't matter.

Why is it needed?

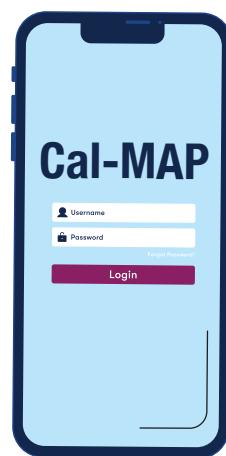
Fifty percent of all lifetime mental illnesses start by age 14, and 75% start by age 24, and there can be up to a 10-year lag time between the onset of symptoms and diagnosis and treatment. It's crucial to address mental and behavioral health problems when they first emerge to prevent more severe and chronic problems later. There's been a national shortage of experts to treat children's mental health for decades, coupled with a decline in youth mental health since COVID-19. One-third of California counties have no child psychiatrists at all.

This means that pediatricians, family doctors, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants are on the front lines of diagnosing and treating mental health conditions, often with little support or training. We help the children and families by supporting their primary care clinicians.

What services does it provide?

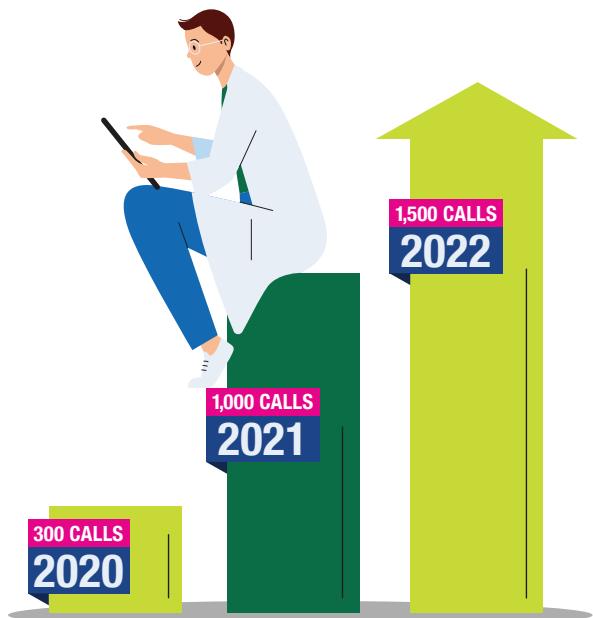
We offer guidance and coaching by telephone so primary care providers can address mental health concerns. We'll be offering secure emails and texts soon. We also have free training that primary care and school-based clinicians and staff can access for continuing-education credit, and guidance on outside resources and referrals, which any licensed California clinician can use.

Education is at the heart of what we do. Providers gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to address a wider range of mental health challenges on their own, and eventually they consult us less frequently. Each one sees thousands of patients during their careers, so we're creating a real ripple effect that impacts many youths over time.



How did the portal start?

UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland received a generous \$15 million gift with the goal of expanding mental health services for children and adolescents. Part of this gift went to creating Cal-MAP in 2019, including recruiting psychiatrists to help staff it.



How has Cal-MAP grown over time?

In 2020, our first full year, we received about 300 consult requests through the portal. By late 2024, we had registered more than 3,000 primary care providers in 47 counties and had provided more than 4,500 consults.

When we first launched, we enrolled primary care providers within UCSF and our affiliated providers. We then expanded to a four-county region in the Bay Area, followed by the Central Valley and Northern California. Now, in partnership with the state Department of Health Care Services, Cal-MAP is available to all 58 counties in the state.

Moving forward, we will continue to expand our partnerships with additional sites across California so primary care providers can consult with mental health experts from their own geographical area.



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"We made a legacy gift to UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals because our daughters received the best care here and it is a comfort knowing our grandkids also have access to world-class pediatric care. These hospitals are a gem in our community."

– Nancy and Craig Shibata,
grateful grandparents and legacy donors

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