



Aloka L. Patel, MD

The Glore Family Professor of Neonatology

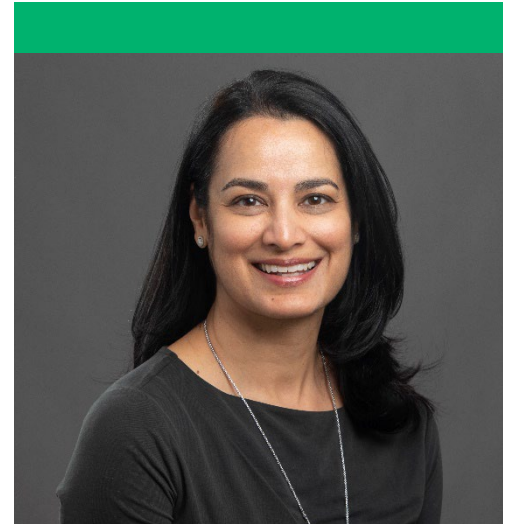
Advancement of Medicine

I continue to serve as multi-principal investigator with Tricia Johnson, PhD, a professor in the Department of Health Systems Management, for two National Institutes of Health R01-funded studies. This work will determine if the removal of economic costs associated with providing breastmilk for hospitalized preterm infants is associated with longer and greater provision of breastmilk (which is known to provide health benefits to both infants and their mothers) and to directly measure these longer-term outcomes until 2 years of age. This year, we received additional funding to conduct a study to understand the role and influence of Black grandmothers and other maternal matriarchs on Black mothers of preterm infants in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and their decision to provide milk for their infants.

Also, I partnered with faculty in the Rush Department of Obstetrics and their fellows to study a new model of postpartum care that is provided when mothers visit their infants in the NICU. The goal of this study is to increase compliance with postpartum care for mothers, who often neglect their own health care when they have an infant in the NICU. This study is ongoing and will provide pilot data that will serve as a foundation to a larger trial of this novel health care model.

Research

Funds from the Glore Family Endowment have been used to provide research assistance to the Division of Neonatology by supporting a full-time clinical research coordinator and by providing funds to enable research conducted by junior faculty members Esther Lee, MD, MPH, and Suhagi Kadakia, MD, as well as our neonatal-perinatal medicine fellows. Dr. Lee received support from the Glore Family Endowment for her global health research investigating the incidence of and strategies to reduce retinopathy of prematurity worldwide. Dr. Kadakia is studying the impact of a storybook,





which provides safe sleep education to reduce the risk of sudden infant death, as an educational tool for parents of hospitalized preterm infants.

Glore Family Endowment funds also supported the purchase of software to catalog our growing research biosample repository, as well as to support faculty, advanced-practice neonatal nurse practitioners, and research team members in attending clinical and research conferences to improve clinical practices and present our research findings. Also, funds have been used to support publication fees and printing presentation materials for faculty and fellows.

Community Outreach and Education

In 2023, I embarked on community outreach by partnering with Pickard Elementary School (part of Chicago Public Schools) and the Rush Education and Career Hub, or REACH, program to provide “Mother’s Milk and Mammals” science education to fifth-grade students. Despite the many advantages of breastfeeding and national initiatives to increase breastfeeding rates, a racial disparity persists with Black mothers providing breastmilk to their babies less frequently and for shorter durations relative to other mothers. This disparity is thought to be multifactorial in nature and reflects the importance of social determinants of health — not only poverty or access to resources, but also cultural norms. Generations of Black women were raised with few breastmilk-feeding role models and little exposure to breastmilk feeding. This innovative program provides breastmilk-feeding education during science class, using mammals as examples. The program’s goals include helping future generations realize breastmilk feeding is the norm for all mammals, including humans, and reducing racial and ethnic disparities in breastmilk provision.

I have been invited to present our research and community outreach efforts at several national conferences this year.

Grants

In 2023, Glore Family Endowment funds supported activities resulting in my receiving three grants from the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health (NIH-NIMHD). Also, Dr. Lee was enabled to serve as principal investigator for a study funded by the Charles J. And Margaret Roberts Fund for Preventive Medicine.



Publication Highlights – Abbreviated

- “When does the time go? Temporal patterns of pumping behaviors in mothers of very preterm infants vary by sociodemographic and clinical factors.” *Frontiers in Nutrition*. 2024.
- “Impact of COVID-19 on perinatal outcomes and birth locations in a large U.S. metropolitan area.” *Healthcare*. 2024.
- “Dilemmas in initiation of very preterm infant enteral feeds — when, what, how?” *Journal of Perinatology*. 2023.
- “The role of work as a social determinant of health in mother’s own milk feeding decisions for preterm infants: A state of the science review.” *Children*. 2023.

Invited Presentations

- “Disparities in Breastmilk Feeding Rates in Preterm Infants After Discharge from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).” Oral presentation at Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine 28th Annual International Meeting, Chicago, 2023. Also, at the Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC) Symposium, San Diego, 2023.
- “The Importance of Optimizing Human Milk and Lactation Support to Prevent NEC.” Invited session: Necrotizing Enterocolitis Focus Group. Pediatric Academic Societies, 2023.
- Our group was invited to present five research topics during a NEC Focus Group session at the Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting, Washington, D.C., 2023.

The Year Ahead: 2024 and Beyond

I will continue to provide broad research support to the neonatology faculty through our Clinical Research Core (CRC) and funding to the fellows for their research. Future plans include two years of support to junior faculty member Leslie Harris, MD, to enable her to develop her research interests and apply to the NIH for a Research Career Development Award.



With Gratitude

I am extremely grateful for the support of the Glore family, which allows the Division of Neonatology to support our multiple missions: excellent clinical care, education and research. The endowment is critical to supporting junior faculty investigators and trainees as they embark on their careers in neonatology. The endowment has provided the faculty with protected time to develop research ideas and obtain pilot data that will be critical to their paths toward becoming independent investigators.