

PCD NEWSLETTER

SPECIAL EDITION: NEW DIVISION EMPLOYEES

Director's Corner

Dear members of the Division of Precision and Computational Diagnostics (PCD),

Welcome to the 21st issue of our Divisional Newsletter. As vaccines become widely available, the prospect of "normalcy," after a year of remote work and social distancing, seems within reach. Health system operations, as well as our own lab operations have returned to normal thanks in large part to the tireless efforts of our division members.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only presented our division with challenges, but opportunity for *growth*. With a university-wide focus on testing, we now operate two new labs dedicated to COVID -19 testing. This comes as a relief to our Molecular Pathology staff and faculty who bore a significant proportion of the burden for testing for the better part of the last year, which was a herculean feat. With the acquisition of the new COVID Saliva and COVID Swab labs, our division has grown by more than 60 members. In this Special Edition issue, we invite you to learn more about each of them as we welcome them and their talents with open arms.

We're not out of the woods yet, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Despite obstacles, your commitment to patient care and the work we do never faltered. I cannot thank you enough and look forward to the work that lies ahead.

Kojo Elenitoba-Johnson, MD



Division expands, adding two new COVID labs and hires over 60 new employees!

With COVID cases continuing to rise and the University eager to bring students back to campus for in-person classes, the decision was made to open up two new laboratories dedicated to COVID testing. This project became known as Project Quaker. To make the labs a reality, an operational team was developed to comb through the logistics, one of those being how to staff the sites which would need both lab assistants and technologists. Those involved decided to team up with the West Philadelphia Skill Initiative (WPSI) to fulfil the numerous open lab assistant positions. The Skills Initiative connects Philadelphians who are under- or unemployed to the region's major employers, in an effort to move city residents into higher-wage, secure careers, from which they have been historically disconnected. In addition to lab assistants, over a dozen medical technologists were hired to staff the labs.

Many of those hired through WPSI had no previous lab experience and would undergo a training period in cohorts of 15-20 trainees. Upon completion of their training they'd officially be members of the division and start their employment in one of our COVID labs. Division members Joe Milano, Jen Smith, Robyn Sussman, Salvatore Priore, Jacquelyn Roth and Samantha DiPompeo joined forces with other members of Path and Lab Med to design a curriculum. The model consisted of a condensed, two-and-a-half-weeks of self-paced, classroom content and small group work sessions, paired with about 40 hours of hands-on technical experience. Various members of our division prepared and presented sections of training including Joe Milano, Robyn Sussman, Sarah Herlihy, Alicia Carlin, Emilie Rabut, Corey Rogers, Vivianna Van Deerlin and Jen Smith. Within two weeks members of the training cohorts learned everything from lab regulations to how to handle patient samples to the virology behind SARS CoV-2 and more.

Since those hired through normal channels as medical laboratory technologists or lab assistants had various levels of lab experience (from none to multiple years), they would still need job specific training to keep up with the high volume COVID testing. A course was designed with detailed presentations on lab workflows and assay specifics so the staff would be prepared. Division members Sarah Herlihy, Gary Tang, Amanda Silveira, Caren Gentile, Robyn Sussman, Joe Milano, Vivianna Van Deerlin, Amanda Oran, and Corey Rogers took part in designing and presenting the critical information.

The new COVID Saliva lab, led by manager, Alice Murphy, utilized temporary space in Stemmler Hall starting in December. During that time the dedicated lab space in Rittenhouse underwent construction as it was configured for optimal workflow; equipment was bought and validated and a DAAC inspection completed. The Rittenhouse Saliva Lab went live on March 22nd and has since been testing upwards of 16,500 samples per week! Finally, COVID Swab testing, led by manager, Linette Johnson, which had up until this point been done by Molecular Pathology, went live at Rittenhouse on April 5th. This came as a relief to Molecular Pathology who are now able to resume much of their normal testing.

In this issue, we take a look at the names, faces and backgrounds of those who made our new COVID labs a reality. Read on to "meet" our new division members.

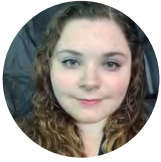


Penn Medicine laboratory assistant Vanessa Dicks prepares a sample to be tested for the SARS-CoV-2 virus. She was hired this past fall through the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) program.



Members of the COVID Saliva lab get together for a group photo.

Introducing Our Newest Division Members



Zoe Lee

My name is Zoe. I am a lab tech for the Swab lab, but I was a student at Fairleigh Dickinson University before working here. Outside of work, I like to spend my free time reading books and writing stories



Mudra Patel

I am the new Lead Medical Tech on the swab side along with Taylor. I worked at Eurofins before Penn as a Microbio Lab Analyst. I also graduated from Temple University (2019). Outside of work, I love to paint and draw. I am currently learning how to use procreate to create digital art.



Jannatul Ferdaus

Hi, My name is Janna, and I am currently working for the COVID swab lab as a medical technologist. Before I started this position, I was attending Temple University for my Bachelor's of Science in Biology. I am currently in the process of getting my Master's from the University of Pennsylvania. Some things I enjoy doing outside of work are going out with friends to eat at restaurants around the Philadelphia area, watching horror movies, and binge-watching comedy shows like Friends or How I Met Your Mother.



Marylinn Mach

My name is Marylinn and I am one of the lab assistants over at the swab lab. Currently, I just work here and attend classes at Peirce College. Prior to this, I mainly served, and managed for a little bit, at different restaurants in the city. Outside of work, I really enjoy cooking, I love coming across and learning new recipes, trying new things. A few random facts, I grew up here in Philly, am trilingual, a Harry Potter nerd, and will never turn down a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.



Jessica Rainey

Hi, I'm Jess! I am the lead tech of the COVID swab lab, and before working for Penn, I studied Biology at the University of Delaware. I concentrated in cell and molecular biology, and I did a senior thesis using quantitative PCR to study metabolism in protists. In my free time I enjoy running, crocheting, and hanging out with my cat, Scooter!



Savannah Desiderio

Hello! My name is Savannah. I recently graduated in December from West Chester University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forensic Science and Toxicological Chemistry. I aim to further my education and receive my Masters degree in Forensic Medicine, toxicology or a related field within the next couple years. When I am not at work I really enjoy baking and decorating cakes, cupcakes, cookies etc. It started as a hobby and now it's a mini side business. I also have a very clingy Australian cattle dog named Taz!



Marquetta Deleon

Hi my name is Marquetta Deleon and I am a new Lab Assistant. Before this position I worked as a PCA worker working with children ages 3-5 in a school based environment who have some behavior struggles and developmental delays. When I am not working I am home spending time with my 3 children who range from ages 4-13. I also enjoy spending time with friends and taking trips whenever time allows it!



Taylor Dobson

My name is Taylor. I am a lab tech (soon to be lead tech on May 2nd) in the saliva lab. I worked in the swab lab in molecular before moving over to the saliva lab, and I am a recent graduate from Rowan University, where I worked for Rowan Campus Rec and did ecological research. Outside of work, I enjoy riding my bike, drinking coffee at my favorite coffee shop, and spending time with my puppy, Duncan!



Vanessa Dicks

My name is Vanessa. Before working as a Lab Assistant in the Swab Lab. I was a hairstylist and a Youth Pastor. When I'm not at work I enjoy spending (Facetime) with my three children, assisting the Pastor with church duties and organizing community events especially during Covid. During my downtime I enjoy watching documentaries about social justice.



Ashwin Suvarna

My name is Ashwin Suvarna, and before working in the Penn Medicine Swab Lab as a Professional Medical Technologist I received a bachelor's degree in Biomedical Engineering at The College of New Jersey. This Fall, I will be continuing my education by pursuing a M.S. in Bioengineering at the University of Pennsylvania. When I'm not working, I like to make music with my friends, catch up on tv shows and movies, and play tennis with my family.



Aisha Little

My name is Aisha. Before working as a Lab Assistant (swab), I worked at CSL Plasma as a floor supervisor. I graduated from Colorado Technical Institute with an AA in business Admin. When I'm not at work I like to relax with the kids, and workout. I also binge watch Hit The Floor.



Margaret Tawedrous

My name is Margaret. I am professional medical technologist in COVID lab - Rittenhouse. I worked before in Quest Diagnostics and Fresenius Medical care - north America. My very first degree was in computer and control engineering and that was the field I worked in for almost 16 years then I switched gears and studied science. I love the lab work and feel it is important for our patients. When not working, I love to spend quality time with my teenager kids.



Amanda Silveira

My name is Amanda and I am one of the newest members of the Genomic Development Specialist team! Before this, I was getting my PhD in Toxicology at University of California, Berkeley as well as working in the Innovative Genomics Institute's COVID-19 testing lab. I recently got married in October and we are expecting our first baby this June. When not in the lab, you can find me on the soccer field (pre-COVID), covered in flour in the kitchen, or sipping California wine (when not pregnant). My dog (pictured) journeyed home with me from Guatemala in 2016!



Brenda Ojeda-Alarcon

My name is Brenda Ojeda-Alarcon and I am a new Professional Medical Technologist for the Molecular Pathology department. I graduated from Seton Hall University and started pursuing my Masters of Biomedical Sciences. I am a high energetic individual, so anytime I am with my great coworkers, it is always an enjoyable time. I also love spending time with my two wonderful pups.



Tyisha Hundley

My name is Tyisha Hundley. Before working as a medical technologist here at the Covid lab, I was a research technician at university of Pennsylvania. I graduated from Delaware State University in 2012 with a bachelors in chemistry. I like to read on my kindle and just watch Netflix in my room.



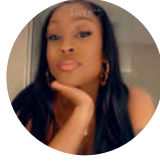
Dre Watson

Hello, my name is D'Andre Watson, but most people call me Dre. I was recently hired as a Professional Medical Technologist for Molecular Pathology (swab lab). Prior to working as a technologist, I worked as a Security Officer at Penn Medicine since July of 2012. I graduated from Cheyney University in May of 2011, earning my bachelor's degree in Biology. When I'm not at work I enjoy spending time with my family and friends, reading, listening to great music, and cooking. My favorite hobbies are to DJ and watch documentaries.



Micah Horowitz

My name is Micah. Before coming to work in the lab I was a stay at home dad for my son Quinton, before that I was in software sales. I have a BA in Political Science and Philosophy from West Chester University and I enjoy cooking and building legos with my son.



Latisha Thomas

I am a lab assistant in our swab lab. Prior to working for Penn I was also working in the medical field in a long/short term nursing facility where I was a receptionist and admission assistant. My goal is to become a nurse within the next few years. I would consider myself to be very goal oriented and I love to learn new things! I am a mommy to an adorable 2 year old! In my spare time I love to try new activities, visit new restaurants and travel! Oh & I love coffee!



Kayla Roseboro

My name is Kayla Roseboro! I recently graduated with my Bachelor of Science degree in Biology. I am currently working full-time as a Medical Technologist in the Covid Saliva Lab for the University of Pennsylvania Health System. Before obtaining this position, I worked in the retail and restaurant industries part-time while also going to school. In my free time, I enjoy dancing, playing ukulele, and watching tv.



Kamillah Burnett

I am currently a Lab Assistant for our saliva lab. Before this I was working in a Nursing home. I graduated college May of 2020 and I start my accelerated BSN program in January of 2022. I enjoy taking trips and trying new restaurants.



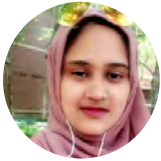
Recia Jubilee

My name is Recia, I enjoy being a laboratory assistant for Penn Medicine and I am currently pursuing my Nursing degree. My previous work experience, I was a Certified Nursing Assistant which is my passion. I truly enjoy helping others in need, and by being a laboratory assistant, I feel that I get the same experience by assisting others in need, just indirectly.



Jessica Sexton

Hi! My name is Jess, and I am a Medical Technologist in the COVID Saliva lab. Before working at Penn Medicine, I worked at Quest Diagnostics in their Forensic Toxicology lab. I graduated from Saint Joseph's University in 2017, and I'm now studying for the GRE to pursue my masters. When I'm not at work I love to go on hikes, travel, read, try new restaurants, and binge watch Netflix. Besides being a plant parent, I am also a dog parent to my fur baby Reggie, who is a dachshund



Syama Disa

My name is Syama Disa, currently I'm working as a lab assistant, with the COVID swab lab team. Before this job, I worked for hospice pharmacy and as a pharmacy technician for 8 years at CVS pharmacy. I studied neuroscience at Temple University, and my career goal is to become a professional clinical research coordinator. Besides school and work, most of my time is spent with my one-year-old. He is a champ, and we are learning new things every day and exploring with him! I love to travel with my family as well as cook for them.



Joy Arthur

My name is Joy Arthur. I am a Professional Medical Technologist for the saliva lab. Before coming to Penn I worked for Virtua health as a Operating Room Tech. I am from Baltimore, Maryland. GO Ravens!! I will be graduating with my Masters in Forensic Science in May!! In my spare time I enjoy knitting, reading, watching true crime documentaries on Netflix, spending time with my husband, going on Vacations, and i love Chic Fil A!



Adrienne Jones

Hi my name is Adrienne Jones before working as a lab assistant I was a residential manager for a group home for adults with mental disabilities. In my spare time I love going to the casino and spending time with my children.



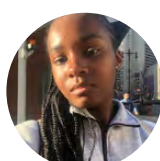
Zolene Williams-Bey

My name is Zolene Williams-Bey I'm a Laboratory Assistant in the COVID swab lab at HUP. Previous to working at HUP I worked in banking a little over 6 years as a Teller. When I'm not at work I enjoy spending time with my family and friends. I enjoy online shopping and going out to dinner... trying new foods is a hobby of mine that I love.



Vincent Czepiga

My name is Vince. Before working as a medical technologist in Molecular Pathology, I was the Senior lab tech in Antigen Optimization for an in-vitro diagnostics company in Bridgewater, NJ. I graduated from Rutgers University in 2006 with a BS in Biotechnology. When I'm not at work, I'm busy being a husband and father. In my spare time, I'm currently restoring my father's old car, a 1960 MGA.



Mecca Watson

Hello! My name is Mecca and I've been working as a laboratory assistant for almost four months. I truly enjoy my job. I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to work in a field that I am eager to pursue! I used to be a seasonal intern for a councilman in the city of Philadelphia where I assisted with constituent services. I have a passion for helping others, and I am currently in school to pursue a degree in nursing!



Felicia Ellis

I'm an assistant in the saliva lab, I was a preschool teacher to 2-5 yr old children for 14+ years. I decided to try a new career after being furloughed from the school when COVID began last year. I enjoy spending time with my 4 grandchildren whenever I'm not at work or sleeping.



Moira Campbell

My name is Moira Campbell, and I am a lab tech in the saliva lab. I just started on 4/26, and I came from a toxicology lab which I was at for 8 years. Outside of work I spend a lot of time with my niece and three nephews. I also love watching any Philly sports games.



Alice Murphy

I'm Alice Murphy, the Technical Manager for the Saliva COVID Laboratory. Before taking on this role, I was the Laboratory Supervisor of Central Specimen Processing and Outpatient Phlebotomy. My background is in Medical Laboratory Science and Health Care Management and I am currently pursuing my PhD in Health Policy with an anticipated graduation date of December 2021. Most of my free time is spent taking too many photos of my dogs, Harley and Ivy, and getting to the beach whenever I can to relax and see my mom. I love doing makeup as a hobby and have even done a few of my friend's makeup for their weddings recently. I cannot wait to finally be done school and be able to focus on more fun projects.



Dolores Brown

I'm a lab assistant in the Molecular Pathology Saliva Lab at Rittenhouse. I enjoy working for UPHS. I received my Associate Degree in Applied Science from Community College of Philadelphia. I worked at Rhone Poulenc as a Lab Technician after completing my Associate Degree. Also, I attended Temple University majoring in Chemistry. Before Covid-19 I was working for Maturity Works/SCSEP which is a Senior Community Service Employment Program for 55+ individuals and taking classes. SCSEP furloughed all employees on March 13 due to the pandemic.

WELCOME



Parnett Nal

Hi my name is Parnett. Before working as a lab assistant for the Saliva Lab, I was a pharmacy technician. I graduated from La Salle University in 2015 with a major in Science. When I am not at work, I enjoy playing board games and walking around the park with my dog, Blu. I'm also a foodie, I not only enjoy trying new foods, but I very much enjoy cooking as well.



Kiana Oruska

My name is Kiana. Before working as a lab assistant on the saliva side for Penn Medicine, I was a well-being specialist for a community umbrella agency through the Department of Human Services. When I am not at work, I enjoy spending quality time with my children and grandchildren. I am also a Notary Public.



Niketa Patel

My name is Niketa (Nikki) and I'm currently a Laboratory Technologist for the Molecular Pathology Covid saliva lab. Prior to working for Penn Medicine, I gained my experience at Jefferson University Hospital and found my love for microbiology. I gained an opportunity to become a Lead Medical Technologist in microbiology at Hahnemann University Hospital and worked with my new Hahnemann family till it's unfortunate closure. During the pandemic we welcomed the most adorable and loving cavapoo, Mr. Mylo Jaden Patel, to our family.



Darius Thomas

My name is Darius Thompson and I am a medical laboratory technologist in the saliva lab. I graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 2017 and then earned a master's from Drexel University College of Medicine prior to working here. When I am not working you can find me jogging along the Schuylkill, critically survey Netflix cinematography, or having a jam session with friends in Clark Park.



Michael Rhoades

My name is Michael. Before working as a lab assistant I was a stagehand in the I.A.T.S.E Local 8. When I'm not at work I enjoy spending time at home with my Fiancé and Daughter.



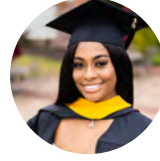
Man Luong

My name is Man. I am a lab tech in the Saliva Lab. I came from Vietnam. I'm a recent graduate from Thomas Jefferson University in 2019. This is my first job as a lab tech at UPHS and I am very excited to work here. When I am not at work, I like taking care of my fish pet and gardening my yard.



Rebecca Lobrovich

I currently work as a Professional Medical Technologist on the Saliva side of the COVID-19 Lab. Before this position, I was working as a Research Specialist in the Neuropathology Department at the University of Pennsylvania. There, I would mostly work on histology and immunohistochemistry for human brain samples diagnosed with the FTD spectrum of dementia. Outside of work, I am involved in animal rescue and I love spending time outdoors with my dog, Izzy, and catching up on reality tv with my cat. Conti!



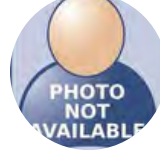
Alexis Quinn

My name is Alexis. I am currently a Medical technologist in the Saliva lab. I graduated from Alvernia University in May of 2020. Outside of work I like to make cosmetic products such as body butters, body scrubs, lip balms, etc.



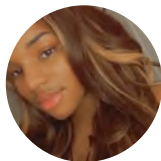
Vaishakhi Patel

My name is Vaishakhi Patel. Before working as a Molecular Lab Technologist, I was a Formulation Scientist in a Pharmaceutical company. I have completed my masters in biosciences from Thomas Jefferson University.



Phuthy Nop

My name is Phuthy Nop. I am a graduate from Rutgers University New Brunswick and currently pursuing a masters degree at Wilmington University. When I have free time I like to work on cars or go fishing and hiking.



Nya Hazel

My name is Nya. Before working as a lab assistant for Penn Medicine, I was working as a customer's service associate at Kohl's. I also was pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice at Community College of Philadelphia. When I am not at work I like reading books about astrology and watch documentaries



New employees who did not submit picture or bio:

Dekontee Banto
Tameka Cason
Bria Blount
Joycelyn Felder
Ayanna Harris-Pitts
Shalee Hill
Albert Hua
Jayda Jackson
Rasheeda Jackson
Thierry Kouassi
Dao Luong

Shruti Kaul
Faith Little
Maureen Manzoni
Lorna Mclean
Abigail Munroe
Emani Presley
Myeesa Thompson
Viktoriya Trunnikova
Tyreeq Williams
Anthony Young

**No picture, but
learn these
names.**

**These are your
coworkers!**

Wanted: Newsletter Volunteers

We are in search of some volunteers to help out with the Divisional Newsletter. If you have any interest in writing or design and want to an outlet to express your talents please email Samantha DiPompeo: Samantha.Dipompeo@penmedicine.upenn.edu or Scott Weidamoyer: Scott.Weidamoyer@penmedicine.upenn.edu

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