

# MIND Matters

## A Transformative Gift. A Brighter Future for UCI MIND.



### SPECIAL FEATURE

On Saturday, December 6th, 2025, approximately 200 of our closest friends, faculty, staff, and trainees gathered at the elegant Balboa Bay Club for UCI MIND's annual December to Remember Gala—an evening that will be remembered for years to come. With Zack Krone once again serving as the lively emcee, guests were treated to exceptional entertainment throughout the night, including rocking performances by *The Surftones* and the inspiring and beautiful harmonies of the

*UCI Voces Chamber Ensemble*, conducted by professor and UCI MIND faculty member, Dr. Irene Messoloras.

The purpose of the evening was to recognize the leadership and generosity of the Quilter family—Ann and Charlie, Chris, Matt and Patty, and Patrick. In 2025, the Quilters made a \$50 million gift to UCI MIND, representing the most significant financial contribution in our history.

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# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Visit [mind.uci.edu/blog](http://mind.uci.edu/blog)



Dear Friends of **UCI MIND**,

UCI MIND has embarked upon an exciting new chapter, made possible by the support of our local community. The Quilter Family—Ann and Charlie, Chris, Matt and Patty, and Patrick—have made the largest donation in the history of the Institute. This gift is not only transformative, it is constructional.

The Quilters' generosity was quickly followed by similarly remarkable demonstrations of support from other UCI MIND

community members, including Harriet Harris, the Brethren Community Foundation, Laura Khouri and Michael Hayde, and Keith Swayne. The UCI School of Medicine is also a key partner and backer in a plan that is now under way to build **Ann Hutchinson Quilter Hall**. This will be the new home to UCI MIND and a beacon of hope for Orange County and beyond that UCI's best and brightest are working tirelessly to tackle the most important medical

challenges society faces today.

In the coming months and years, we'll share progress on this incredible opportunity that our community of advocates has created for UCI MIND to accelerate and amplify its mission.



*Joshua D. Grill*  
**Joshua D. Grill, PhD**  
Director, UCI MIND

## FACULTY MEMBERS

### Anatomy & Neurobiology

Aileen Anderson, PhD  
Tallie Baram, MD, PhD  
Christine Gall, PhD, Chair  
Alan Goldin, MD, PhD  
Kei Igarashi, PhD  
Gary Lynch, PhD  
Steven Schreiber, MD  
John Weiss, MD, PhD  
Xiangmin Xu, PhD

### Biological Chemistry

Wei Li, PhD

### Biomedical Engineering

Gregory Brewer, PhD

### Chemistry

James Nowick, PhD  
Xiaoyu Shi, PhD

### Clinical Pharmacy Practice

Atena Zahedi, PhD

### Developmental & Cell Biology

Grant MacGregor, DPhil  
Edwin Monuki, MD, PhD  
Ali Mortazavi, PhD  
Diane O'Dowd, PhD  
Xiaoyu Shi, PhD

### Electrical Engineering & Computer Science

Fei Xia, PhD

### Environmental & Occupational Health

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Karen Lincoln, PhD, MSW, MA, FGSA

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Daniel Gillen, PhD  
Luohua Jiang, MD, PhD  
Sunmin Lee, ScD  
Min Zhang, MD, PhD

### Health, Society, & Behavior

Leigh Turner, PhD

### Medicine

Masashi Kitazawa, PhD  
Steven Tam, MD

### Microbiology & Molecular Genetics

Emiliana Borrelli, PhD  
Alan Goldin, MD, PhD

### Molecular Biology & Biochemistry

Charles Glabe, PhD  
Andrea Tenner, PhD

### Music

Irene Messoloras, DMA

### Neurobiology & Behavior

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Jorge Busciglio, PhD  
Christine Gall, PhD  
Kim Green, PhD  
Joshua Grill, PhD  
Frank LaFerla, PhD, Dean  
Michael Leon, PhD  
Craig Stark, PhD  
Vivek Swarup, PhD  
Leslie Thompson, PhD  
Marcelo Wood, PhD, Chair  
Huixin Xu, PhD  
Michael Yassa, PhD

### Neurological Surgery

Jefferson Chen, MD

### Neurology

Tallie Baram, MD, PhD  
Maria Corrada, ScD  
David Cribbs, PhD  
Ali Ezzati, MD  
Mark Fisher, MD  
Lisa Flanagan, PhD  
Crystal M. Glover, PhD  
Claire Henchcliffe, MD, DPhil, Chair  
Brian Hitt, MD, PhD  
Haley Kristinsson, PsyD, ABPP-CN  
Albert La Spada, MD, PhD  
Ira Lott, MD  
Mark Mapstone, PhD  
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### Pathology & Laboratory Medicine

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Edwin Monuki, MD, PhD, Chair  
Mari Perez-Rosendahl, MD  
William Yong, MD

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Virginia Kimonis, MD  
Ira Lott, MD

### Pharmaceutical Sciences

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### Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation

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Brian Cummings, PhD

### Physiology & Biophysics

Kevin Beier, PhD  
Alan Goldin, MD, PhD

### Psychiatry & Human Behavior

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Cameron Carter, MD, Chair  
Joshua Grill, PhD  
Christy Hom, PhD  
Gary Lynch, PhD  
Bryce Mander, PhD  
Joan Steffan, PhD  
David Sultzer, MD  
Leslie Thompson, PhD  
Michael Yassa, PhD

### Radiation Oncology

Charles Limoli, PhD

### Statistics

Daniel Gillen, PhD, Chair  
Bin Nan, PhD

# A Gala for the Ages *Honoring the Quilter Family*

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**In a momentous announcement, it was revealed that the Quilter family's generous donation was the lead gift in a campaign to construct a new state-of-the-art research facility for UCI MIND on the UC Irvine campus.**

The new facility will enhance collaboration, spur innovation, and amplify the vital work being done at UCI to advance dementia research and care. The new home for UCI MIND will be named ***Ann Hutchinson Quilter Hall***, after the incredible advocate who has supported UCI MIND for more than a decade and who initiated the first piece of what would become a massive family gift.

The spirit of philanthropy resonated throughout the evening, as Zack Krone led an exciting auction featuring exclusive trip packages, two coveted dinners at Nirvana by Chef Lindsay in Laguna Beach, and a Fund-a-Need opportunity.

## **UCI MIND'S COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS STEP UP**

The Quilter family's gift, while remarkable on its own, also catalyzed major additional support necessary to see the vision of a new building become reality. Guests at the gala learned that due to the incredible generosity of Michael Hayde and Laura Khouri, Harriet Harris, The Brethren Community Foundation, and Keith Swayne, who all made 7-figure



*From left to right: Chris, Matt, Patty, Patrick, Ann and Charlie Quilter.*

commitments, the building campaign has reached an astounding \$80 million. We are deeply grateful for these visionary supporters whose commitment will shape the future of UCI MIND for generations to come.

Thank you to all who attended and supported the December to Remember Gala. Your generosity and commitment continue to drive UCI MIND's groundbreaking work forward. As UCI MIND reflects on a remarkable year and looks ahead to the future, we are filled with gratitude for our incredible community of supporters who make our mission possible. Together, we are building something truly extraordinary.

*Thank You*

# GALA IN PICTURES



*Attendees hold up bid cards for the live auction*



*Trainees Jack Sahargun and Dr. Claire Butler pose for the camera.*



*Master of Ceremonies Zack Krone engages attendees during the paddle raise.*



*Dr. Daniel Gillen attends the gala with his wife, Lilli*



*Members of the UCI Voces Chamber Ensemble sing for the gala attendees*



*Ann Quilter (left) high fives another gala attendee*



*Dr. Joshua Grill speaks at the podium*



*Festive gala group poses for the camera*



*The UCI MIND team who supported the gala*



Casey Vanderlip (center left stands with Dr. Jayanta Bhattacharya (center) and other UCI graduate students at the January 14th campus event.

## The NIH Director Visits UC Irvine

On January 14<sup>th</sup>, NIH director Jayanta Bhattacharya, MD, PhD, visited UC Irvine to learn about the translational research being done on our campus. UCI MIND faculty member and Professor and Chair in the department of statistics, Daniel Gillen, PhD, was invited to give a talk on *Recognizing and Overcoming Problems with Real World Data* as part of a symposium in which Dr. Bhattacharya was the keynote speaker.

Professor and UCI MIND Director, Joshua Grill, PhD, was invited to meet with the NIH director and present the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center and the extraordinary work being done at UCI MIND. To conclude the visit, several talented trainees, including MD/PhD student in Dr. Craig Stark's Lab, Casey Vanderlip, had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Bhattacharya and describe their research.



## Can We Prevent Alzheimer's Disease? What the Science Says

- Valerie Tung

**A**t the Alzheimer's Orange County Brain Health Conference on January 23, Dr. Joshua Grill delivered a presentation titled "Can We Prevent Alzheimer's Disease?" He opened with an important reminder: age remains the greatest risk factor for dementia, and as the population grows older, the number of individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias will continue to rise.

### LIFESTYLE RISK FACTORS: WHAT WE CAN DO NOW

Dr. Grill's talk focused on the available evidence for protecting brain health across the lifespan. Many risk reduction strategies overlap with overall heart and vascular health and include behaviors such as staying physically active, eating a brain-healthy diet, managing blood pressure and cholesterol, avoiding smoking, maintaining social connection, and practicing good sleep hygiene. Dr. Grill emphasized that these recommendations should be freely available to the public and do not require expensive programs or paid subscriptions. At the same time, he noted that while research findings are promising, no study has definitively proven that any single or combination lifestyle intervention can prevent dementia; underscoring the need for continued prevention-focused clinical trials.

### PSEUDOMEDICINE AND SUPPLEMENTS

Dr. Grill also addressed the growing "brain health" marketplace, warning that many products promoted directly to consumers make claims that are not

backed by high-quality evidence. He stressed two key points: there is no FDA-approved drug to prevent Alzheimer's disease, and there is no evidence that dietary supplements can reduce Alzheimer's risk, let alone prevent it. Indeed, his presentation outlined important differences between supplements and medicines prescribed by physicians, including the striking differences in federal regulation, and the need

for rigorous clinical trials before new medicines can be marketed, compared to no such requirements for supplements.

This message closely aligns with a recent comment shared by UCI MIND faculty member and UCI neurologist Brian Hitt, MD in *The New York Times*: "The supplement industry is essentially unregulated, so you're basically taking a gamble any time you're taking one of those products," said Dr. Hitt.



### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Dr. Grill closed with a clear call to action: be cautious of misinformation, rely on trusted sources, and support legitimate prevention research. UCI MIND remains committed to advancing Alzheimer's prevention science and equipping the community with accurate, evidence-based guidance. For reliable brain health resources, Dr. Grill encouraged attendees to visit the websites and materials generated by trusted organizations such as the National Institute on Aging, the Alzheimer's Association, AARP, Alzheimer's Disease Centers, and UCI MIND.

## UCI MIND recently welcomed a new team member and said goodbye to a few others



**L**upe Morales brings a multidisciplinary background in organizational development, community engagement, and lived experience to her role as Community Engagement Specialist. Working closely with Dr. Crystal Glover, she is embedded within both the Outreach, Recruitment & Engagement (ORE) Core team and the Clinical Core Operations team.

Her role is intentionally designed to stimulate research curiosity through education, particularly among historically under studied populations across Orange County. Drawing from her experience as a caregiver, research participant, and national aging and brain health advocate, she helps bridge clinical research and community voices. Lupe is committed to advancing brain health equity and fostering meaningful, informed participation in aging and brain health research.



**Dr. Michelle McDonnell** joined UCI MIND in the Fall of 2020 as a neuropsychologist for the Clinical Core. Her role included cognitive testing for research participants, rendering research

diagnoses and case conferencing, meeting with families to discuss diagnoses, and supervising clinical psychology practicum students. She also gave talks in the community and was often featured on MINDcast and lectured for the Beall Scholar Program.



**Crystal Yu** was with UCI MIND since 2023 as the clinical research coordinator for the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center.

She coordinated study visits, research data, and was a valued team member working on the Longitudinal Study.

*We wish Dr. McDonnell and Crystal the best of luck in their future endeavors.*



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The BenfoTeam clinical research trial aims to increase the amount of thiamine (Vitamin B1) in the brain to slow cognitive decline in people with Mild Cognitive Impairment and mild Alzheimer's Disease

The trial is designed for people who are age 50-89, and experiencing significant memory concerns, or who have already been diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) or mild Alzheimer's disease (AD). This stage of the disease, MCI through mild AD, is also known as early AD.



### Basic Eligibility Criteria

- Aged 50-89
- Diagnosed with early AD, including Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) or mild dementia (with blood test confirmation at screening)
- Stable on current FDA-approved acetylcholinesterase inhibitors (with or without memantine) for at least three months prior to screening
- Living in the community (not in a long-term care nursing facility)
- Willing to participate in the BenfoTeam study for up to 18 months

### What happens during the BenfoTeam Study?

Trial participation will take up to 18 months. Potential participants will first go through the screening process to see if they are eligible to take part in the clinical trial. Half of the participants are given the study drug, benfotiamine, and half are given an inactive pill (called a placebo) to take twice daily.

Screening includes: Memory and thinking tests, blood tests, EKGs (a look at your heart rhythms), and MRI scans (a picture of your brain that shows changes related to AD).

For more information or to volunteer, please contact:

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