After more than twenty years of service, Dr. Keith Elkon stepped down from his role as Division Head but will continue to lead research efforts across the Division.

Dr. Elkon shares some reflections on his time as Division Head below.

2001: A Space (needle) Odyssey:
The year 2000 – the start of the New Millennium - was a heady time. The stock market was going through the roof and the stigmas of the past like the Berlin wall and apartheid seemed long gone; anything seemed possible. In the Northwest corner of the USA, Starbucks and Amazon were rising. Seattle, that city far away from New York, was visible on the map. So when an invitation arrived to apply for the head position in rheumatology at the University of Washington, I thought, “why not?” and I flew West. What a relief to see that Seattle had indoor toilets and fresh running water. Not that I should have worried; the outgoing division head, Mart Mannik had emigrated from New York City decades before and had stayed for 34 years! I was hugely impressed by the scholarly activities in the University and by the collegiality of the UW faculty. Yes, my wife would miss the tall buildings in Manhattan, but this could be offset by the natural beauty of the Northwest and quiet sophistication of the city. 2000 was followed by 2001 which was heralded by an earthquake in Seattle. Worse was to come: the dotcom bubble burst and 9/11 happened. But by then I was in Seattle, writing grants and recruiting new faculty.

Twenty years is a long time to summarize. What stayed the same is the Division’s excellence in clinical care and teaching. What is different in 2021 versus 2001? We expanded our faculty from about 6 to more than 30; we have 4 new professorships and an expanded endowment. We built a basic/ translational research footprint at South Lake Union as well as clinical research and clinical trials programs at multiple sites. Our fellowship program has expanded from 4 to 8 fellows and our T32 training program is secure for the next 5 years.

It’s all about the people. Without the huge collaborative efforts by the faculty, administrators, staff, and fellows, as well as the support from the Department of Medicine leadership, we could have been grounded. But we set off in 2001 and the Odyssey has been Homeric. As my spaceship docks with planet earth in 2021, I am optimistic that the Division will re-enter orbit (Bluewater? SpaceX?) under the outstanding leadership of Tomas Mustelin, Mattie Pioro and LyKheng Huot.

Bon voyage,
Keith Elkon

Dr. Tomas Mustelin appointed Interim Division Head

Tomas Mustelin, MD, PhD, has been appointed Interim Division Head. Dr. Mustelin received his MD and PhD from the University of Helsinki, Finland. He completed his postdoctoral training at the Research Institute of Scripps Clinic, La Jolla, California. Between 1991 and 2007, Dr. Mustelin had a very successful academic career, achieving the rank of full professor in just seven years (at the tender age of 38) and running a large lab of 25 scientists and 5 R01 grants. During this time, Dr. Mustelin’s team discovered the disease-predisposing variant of the PTPN22 gene, which has become a hot topic since with broad relevance in autoimmunity.

In 2007, he left academia and moved to Seattle to work as Vice President and Amgen Washington Site Head. In 2011, he moved to the East Coast to work as Vice President of Research at MedImmune in Gaithersburg, Maryland. In 2016, Dr. Mustelin returned to Seattle where he worked as the Vice President of Inflammation, Viral Immunology, and Immuno-Oncology at Gilead Sciences. During this ‘brief sabbatical’ in industry, he led the development of 24 novel therapeutics for many rheumatoid arthritides, lupus, psoriatic arthritis, and many other immune-mediated diseases. He joined the Division in 2018 as a Professor of Medicine and became the recipient of the Herndon and Esther Maury Endowed Professorship in Rheumatoid Arthritis in 2019. The Mustelin lab focuses on novel ideas about the pathogenesis of rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. The Department of Medicine will lead a national search this year to select and appoint the next permanent Division Chief.

Dr. Mathilde Pioro appointed Division Clinical Director

We are thrilled to announce the addition of Dr. Mathilde (Mattie) Pioro to our faculty! Dr. Pioro officially started in June 2021 when she was appointed to the role of Clinical Associate Professor. Additionally, she will serve as Clinical Director for UWMC-Montlake, UWMC-Northwest, Harborview Medical Center, and the Eastside Clinic in Bellevue WA.

Dr. Pioro received her medical degree from McGill University and an MSc in Epidemiology from Case Western University. She has held faculty positions at Case Western University and Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine. Most recently, she served as an Attending Physician at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation since 2016.
Dr. Christian Lood Promoted to Associate Professor

The Division of Rheumatology is excited to announce the promotion of Dr. Christian Lood to Associate Professor, effective 7/1/2021.

Dr. Lood received an MSc in Biomedicine and a PhD in Clinical Medicine from Lund University in Lund, Sweden. He first became involved with UW Rheumatology in 2013 as a Visiting Scientist. In 2017, he was appointed to Assistant Professor in the Division. Since his time in the Division, Dr. Lood has dedicated his research efforts into understanding the role of neutrophils in inflammation and autoimmunity. Though his research is primarily focused on lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, he has established several collaborations locally, nationally and internationally, to further our understanding on the role of neutrophils also in other conditions, such as myopathies, vasculitis, scleroderma, gout, respiratory diseases, as well as infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

His work has resulted in more than 60 publications, 39 while in rank. This includes 12 first-authored papers and 15 senior authorship papers published in top-tier journals including Nature Medicine, Science Translational Medicine, Journal of Experimental Medicine, PNAS, Nature Reviews Rheumatology, Blood and Arthritis, and Rheumatology. Dr. Lood has also co-authored a book chapter on ‘Innate Immune System in SLE’ together with Dr. Elkion in the prestigious Dubois’ Lupus Erythematosus and Related Syndrome book.

Dr. Lood is a highly appreciated mentor within the Division and has mentored more than 15 students and staff, including undergraduate students, medical students, fellows, and postdoctoral scholars. He also serves on mentorship committees for several additional fellows and junior faculty. Additionally, he is a member of the steering committee for the Juvenile Myositis Center of Excellence at Seattle Children’s Hospital.

Welcoming AY 21-22 ACGME Rheumatology Fellows

The Division welcomes four new ACGME fellows who will graduate in June 2023.

Dr. Sogol Amjadi, DO attended medical school at Touro University and completed her residency at Bingham Memorial Hospital in Bingham County, ID.

Dr. Trent Dondero, MD attended medical school at the University of California, San Francisco and completed his residency at the University of California, Davis.

Dr. Mary Ezeanuna, DO attended medical school Lincoln Memorial University-Debusk College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed her residency at Skagit Valley Hospital in Mount Vernon, WA.

Dr. Bryanna Mantilla, MD, PhD, MPH attended medical school at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and completed her residency at George Washington University.

Dr. Gardner Presents on Division history of work with American Indian Tribal Clinics as part of DEI Lecture Series

On May 4th, Dr. Gregory Gardner gave a presentation on the Division of Rheumatology’s long-standing relationship with local Native American tribes and nations in the Puget Sound. Starting in the early 1970’s, Dr. Robert Wilkens began visiting the Yakama Nation Clinic in Toppenish Washington to treat patients, many of whom suffered from rheumatoid arthritis. Dr. Wilkens recruited many others to join him, including fellows, students, residents and junior faculty. This team often treated up to 100 patients a day. During this time, both Dr. Gardner and Dr. Wener became involved with the clinics and would later spearhead the efforts. Additional partnerships were formed with the Makah Nation Clinic in Neah Bay, the Lower Elwha Klallam Clinic in Port Angeles, and clinics in the Tulalip Bay serving the Tulalip people. Dr. Gardner and Dr. Ingeborg Sacksen are the primary physicians serving these clinics, with some help from fellows. In an article by Dr. Gardner on this work, he wrote, “Our Native American neighbors have a considerable rheumatologic disease burden and often have poor access to rheumatology care. They are kind, grateful, and welcoming. Those of us who have had the privilege of involvement in this effort cherish the opportunity.” If you would like to read the rest of his article, it can be found on our website at https://rheumatology.uw.edu/news/history-division-rheumatology-and-native-american-health.

A New Teams Approach to Disease Research

One outcome of a December 2021 Division retreat and strategic planning session was the decision to embark on a new approach to foster research collaborations and to create new opportunities for those who are interested in participating in discovery. We call it the “Teams” approach. The idea is to gather all who have an interest in a specific disease area to share their ideas and specific areas of interest, to look for common themes and ideas that could be developed into new research projects, and then initiate these projects and/or seek funding for them. The hope is that we will: a) do more cross-disciplinary research with a greater impact on rheumatology; b) engage more of our faculty and fellows in exciting research; d) publish more papers with more co-authors (essential for timely faculty promotions); c) qualify for larger grants, which will allow us to do bigger and better research with an even greater impact on rheumatology.

We have now initiated an SLE Team and an RA Team, and other disease-centered Teams may soon follow. There was no lack of ideas and topics to address in the first meetings of the SLE and RA Teams! Together, we can tackle some of the most important open questions in these diseases.

Thank You to Our 2021 Donors

Richard A. Cabe Jr., Gordon A. Starkebaum, M.D., Irene N. Takeuchi, Patricia A. Neubert, Herbert B. Lindsay, M.D., Wayne H. Tsuji, M.D., Thac Phung Nguyen, M.D., Maurice D. Skeith Jr., M.D., Kenneth P. Perko, M.D., Leap For Lupus Foundation, John Wallace Purvis, John L. Baldwin, M.D., David A. Martin, M.D., United Way of King County, and The Blackbaud Giving Fund.
Division Awards & Grants

Keith Elkon, MD
- $1,963,460 from NIH for “Research Training in Rheumatology”
- $207,614.48 from Bristol-Myers Squibb for “Research Training in Rheumatology”
- $485,375 from NIH for “CGAMP as an immunomembrane of the interferon response to UV light”

Bobby Han, MD
- $258,666 from Eli Lilly for “A Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled, Phase 2 Study of LY3471851 (NKTR-358) in Adults with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus”
- $152,931 from UC伯 for “A randomized placebo-controlled, Phase 3 study to evaluate the efficacy and safety of dapirolizumab pegol in study participants with moderately to severely active systemic lupus erythematosus”

Christian Lood, PhD
- $312,707 from Pfizer, Inc. for “Targeting Formyl Peptide Receptor 1 in Inflammatory Diseases”
- $561,270 from GlaxoSciences, Inc. for “Mitochondrial DNA-mediated inflammation in systemic lupus erythematosus pathogenesis”
- $2,941,066 from NIH for “Role of mitochondria in SLE and its cardiovascular complications”
- $526,619 from NIH for “Extracellular mitochondria in Inclusion Body Myositis”

Tomas Mustelin, MD, PhD
- $485,375 from NIH for “Does the disease allele of PTPN22 drive neutrophil dysfunction in ANCA-associated vasculitis?”

Recent Division Publications


