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The **Women's Health Innovation Fund (WHIF)** provides critical resources to physicians and expert researchers who are pursuing ambitious scientific research on women's health and how to continuously better their care. The recipients ranged in expertise from obstetrics and gynecology to urology and surgery, and their specific work is highly diverse and encompasses the dynamic needs of women. Your generosity ensures that this transformative work is possible and that we can offer women and their families the highest quality of care.

Molly J. Stout, M.D., the Morton R. Lazar Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology Innovation and the section head of the Maternal Fetal Medicine Division, was awarded additional funding from the WHIF to advance the project "Progress in predicting preterm birth." Since receiving this transformative funding, Dr. Stout and U-M medical school student **Joshua Goyert**, reported that the team is now enrolling patients and gathering data as the **only team in the United States** with the ability to numerically quantify how hard or soft the cervix is to better predict preterm birth. The team measures cervical tissue changes and tests those changes with bacterial and viral communities to solve the mystery of how to know when someone is going into labor. Additionally, the team is capturing patient voices to understand the motivations, hesitations, and opinions about participating in this type of research. Dr. Stout states that the team **"looks forward to being national leaders in addressing the problem of preterm birth, which affects far too many families in Michigan and the United States."**

Samantha Schon, M.D., assistant professor of reproductive endocrinology in obstetrics and gynecology, used WHIF funding to understand the lived experiences of those with infertility who are also living with obesity. Dr. Schon was able to interview **40 women across the United States** to gain personal patient experience, and her findings were shocking. Most women who have obesity are not even able to access fertility care, are often told to "lose weight and come back in three months," and their provider does not even begin to try to understand the fertility issues of the woman and her partner. **"Patient voice has been completely missing from this literature until now,"** stated Dr. Schon as she explained her goal to analyze the data and present it at a national conference to educate other health care teams. **"The things we say and how we say them have a tremendous impact on our patients."**

Alex Friedman Peahl, M.D., assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, is an expert in the field of high-value prenatal care. Support from the WHIF brought to life **Stay Home, Stay Connected (SHSC)**, a virtual service-learning program for improving support and education in pregnancy. Modeled after the



successful components of group prenatal care, SHSC overcomes the logistical barriers that pregnant people experience for in-person groups (for example, physical space challenges and lengthy commutes) and offers group education, peer support, patient engagement, and other types of support from U-M obstetricians, gynecologists, midwives, and family medicine physicians. Group discussions include topics like the discomfort of pregnancy, infant feeding, newborn care and family planning, and postpartum check-ins. SHSC has served over 45 patients this year. **Providers are able to offer personalized and thoughtful experiences with their pregnant patients and now have members returning for their second pregnancies.** Funds have also supported a new birth class led by a Michigan Medicine midwife and doula to prepare pregnant individuals and their support people for labor and delivery and the postpartum period. To date, over 150 pregnant people and their support people have participated in the 2.5 hour in-person class. The curriculum is being converted into an online video series to further expand its reach.

Daphna Stroumsa, M.D., MPH, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, worked with third-year medical school student Bori Lesser-Lee to use funding from WHIF to support trans learners and clinicians at Michigan Medicine through a pilot support program. Across the country, trans people are significantly underrepresented among health care providers and face bias that results in burnout. Through focus groups and anonymous surveys, **Dr. Stroumsa and their team are gathering data on the specific problems trans people face in the clinical setting and will identify actions that can be taken to improve inclusivity at U-M Health.** Findings will be reported to Michigan Medicine leadership, and the team plans to expand this project into a national survey of trans clinicians and learners.

Hannah McLaughlin, M.D., a 2022-2025 gynecologic oncology fellow here at Michigan Medicine, established a designated chemotherapy clinic in 2023 in partnership with the department of obstetrics and gynecology that had full chemotherapy services as well as curated patient information for care plan decision making. **Because of the WHIF, Dr. McLaughlin was able to launch the Virtual Care Pathway through the chemotherapy clinic for patients with gynecologic cancer.** “Patients that are considered low risk should be offered the option to do the pre-chemo visits virtually,” said Dr. McLaughlin. This option allows patients to limit the number of visits they make to the hospital during their cancer treatment. When they travel to us, the dedicated clinic allows them to spend less time in the hospital and more time at home doing what is important to them. **By giving patients the virtual option for pre-chemo visits, the clinics are able to run more efficiently and help even more patients than before.**

Marie Bangura, M.D., female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery fellow, **Payton Schmidt, M.D.**, clinical assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, and **Emma Lawrence, M.D.**, clinical assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, are working together to implement a vaginal surgical training simulation in Ghana. As a **part of our global mission to serve all women**, the project will **improve patient care for women in Ghana** by educating residents on the use of vaginal surgery rather than abdominal surgery, which is the primary surgical approach in Ghana. Vaginal surgery is a minimally invasive surgical option which is associated with shorter recovery times as well as lower risk of major and minor complications. Drs. Bangura, Schmidt, and Lawrence have recruited **36 residents** to participate in this research. All have completed timed tasks using the simulation model and will practice using the model themselves. The team has also recorded videos that provide step-by-step instructions to share with the residents if they need additional guidance. Poster presentations on this incredible research will occur at the **American Urogynecologic Society** national meeting and the **International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics** meeting.

Courtney Streur, M.D., assistant professor of urology, and **Monica Rosen, M.D.**, clinical assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, are using their WHIF funds to create an online sexual, reproductive, and general adolescent health curriculum for adolescent girls who have physical disabilities. Drs. Streur and Rosen have been working with a disability artist to develop the video content for the website. Additionally, they have recorded more than 40 interviews of multidisciplinary health care providers, therapists, and people living with physical disabilities for use on the website. Dr. Streur also interviewed more than 20 clinical experts and people living with spina bifida on topics including relationships, dating advice, and HPV vaccines. **“Adolescents and women as well as parents described how affirming it was to see someone who made them feel represented because the pictures ‘look like them,’”** said Dr. Streur after receiving positive feedback from users during their testing. This project will offer much-needed knowledge and inspiration that **will help girls prepare for healthy and fulfilling adult lives.**

Thank you for supporting the Women’s Health Innovation Fund and for advancing research, awareness, and critical programs **for women** and women’s health. We look forward to all that we will accomplish, together.

