

NEWS

FALL 2025

HONORING 40 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP IN NEUROTRAUMA

This year marks the **40th anniversary of the AANS/CNS Joint Section on Neurotrauma and Critical Care**. For four decades, our Section has united neurosurgeons, scientists, and educators with a shared mission: to improve the care of patients with traumatic brain and spinal cord injury.

In this special feature, we share reflections from several past leaders with whom we had the pleasure of speaking. Their voices represent the wisdom, perseverance, and passion that have defined our Section. While we were only able to personally speak with those highlighted below, we take this opportunity to honor **all the distinguished chairs who have guided the Section since its founding**.

VISION AND GROWTH

From the very beginning, leaders recognized the need to establish trauma as a central discipline within neurosurgery. Dr. Lawrence Pitts recalled the uphill challenge of convincing colleagues and institutions that trauma care was fundamental to the specialty.

“Our goal was to formalize the importance of trauma within neurosurgery, develop evidence-based guidelines, and ensure that patients nationwide had access to the best care.” —Lawrence Pitts

He emphasized that establishing neurotrauma guidelines through the Brain Trauma Foundation was not only a scientific necessity, but also a way to define neurosurgery’s role in public health.

“It was a constant push to meet the needs of the country, but producing and defending the first set of guidelines gave us a nucleus for organized conversation and advocacy.” —Lawrence Pitts

Similarly, Dr. Raj Narayan described the landmark effort to create the **first Traumatic Brain Injury Management Guidelines in 1995**. Despite skepticism and political hurdles, their eventual adoption transformed the field.

“These were the first guidelines published in any surgical discipline, and despite initial resistance, they gave clinicians a framework to deliver consistent, high-quality care. Once incorporated into trauma systems worldwide, their impact was enormous.” —Raj Narayan

He added that one of his proudest achievements was helping to dispel therapeutic nihilism in severe TBI.

“Convincing clinicians that outcomes could indeed be improved was essential. Over the decades, we’ve seen survival and function improve because of better trauma systems, timely surgery, and critical care.” —Raj Narayan



In this Issue...

Honoring 40 Years of Leadership in Neurotrauma	1
Vision and Growth	1
Mentorship and Collaboration	2
Looking Ahead	2
Progress Through Science and Advocacy	3
A Legacy and a Promise	3
Honoring Our Leaders	3
Neurotrauma & Critical Care at CNS 2025	4
Introducing the Odette Harris Lecture	5

The views reflected in this newsletter are solely the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions or positions of either the AANS or the CNS.

MENTORSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Many leaders highlight that the Section's true strength lies in its community. For Dr. Julian Bailes, the relationships built through Section involvement remain among the most meaningful parts of his career.

"The Section challenges you to get involved, and in doing that you meet so many accomplished and wonderful people. Those relationships have been a cherished and very important part of my career." —Julian Bailes

As treasurer and chair, Bailes also helped establish the fundraising committee and gain support for the mission of the section.

"We were at a natural disadvantage in neurotrauma, with fewer industry partners than other sections. Establishing fundraising created opportunities for lectureships, studies, and initiatives we otherwise could not have supported." —Julian Bailes

He also shared advice for young faculty:

"Define your focus within a subspecialty. Find an area where your skills align with making an impact and commit to mentoring others. Ask yourself: how do you want to contribute?" —Julian Bailes

Dr. Michael Fehlings echoed the importance of mentorship and collegiality, while also pointing to the Section's role in nurturing international collaborations.

"The greatest thing I have valued is the friendships and the spirit of collegiality. Remember to pay it forward—mentor others as you have been mentored, and lead by example." —Michael Fehlings

He noted that research awards, partnerships with the Society of Neurotrauma, and international outreach all helped cultivate the next generation of leaders.

"It has been wonderful to see the evolution of brain and spine trauma care, the establishment of awards that inspired young investigators, and the expansion of the Section into a global community." —Michael Fehlings

LOOKING AHEAD

As they reflect on the future, our past leaders offered both encouragement and caution.

- **Focus and contribution:** Dr. Bailes urged young neurosurgeons to identify their niche and develop expertise through experience and research.
- **Collaboration:** Dr. Pitts pointed to the necessity of large-scale, multi-institutional studies as the future of neurotrauma science.
- **Innovation:** Dr. Narayan highlighted the need for new neuroprotective drugs, better monitoring devices, and global dissemination of practical guidelines.
- **Resilience:** Dr. Fehlings reminded us of the difficulty and meaning inherent in this work:

"We deal with some of the most critically ill patients in our society—the work is very hard, but it is also deeply meaningful." —Michael Fehlings

PROGRESS THROUGH SCIENCE AND ADVOCACY

The Section's impact has extended beyond research into advocacy and professional representation. Dr. Alex Valadka reflected on a pivotal era when trauma surgeons were redefining their specialty through the birth of acute care surgery.

"I am most proud of maintaining our role in trauma and representing neurosurgery's interests at a critical time."
—Alex Valadka

Serving simultaneously as Section Chair, chair of the neurosurgery specialty group in the American College of Surgeons, and a member of the Washington Committee, he worked to ensure neurosurgery's voice was heard in policy and trauma system development.

Valadka also offered advice on career sustainability and the importance of embracing opportunities:

"Find a practice setting that allows you to thrive, but don't be afraid to embrace new technologies or new roles. The best jobs are often unplanned."
—Alex Valadka

Looking forward, he sees great promise in biomarkers and better classification systems for TBI.

"We need to move beyond broad categories like mild, moderate, and severe TBI. Biomarkers such as GFAP and UCHL-1 may help us tailor treatment and clinical trials more effectively." —Alex Valadka

Dr. Fehlings added that advocacy also meant shaping scientific priorities. He recalled the Section's role in promoting research like the STASCIS trial and the "time is spine" concept, which emphasized the urgency of early surgical intervention in spinal cord injury.

A LEGACY AND A PROMISE

The story of the Joint Section on Neurotrauma and Critical Care is one of perseverance, progress, and people. From establishing trauma as a core discipline, to publishing landmark guidelines, to building an enduring culture of mentorship and collaboration, our Section has shaped the care of neurotrauma patients across the globe.

As we honor 40 years of leadership, we celebrate our past, take pride in our present, and look forward with optimism. Guided by the wisdom of those who came before us and inspired by the passion of the next generation, we remain committed to advancing patient care, research, and education in neurotrauma for decades to come.

HONORING OUR LEADERS

In recognition of this 40th anniversary, we honor all the distinguished chairs of the AANS/CNS Joint Section on Neurotrauma and Critical Care, whose leadership has guided the Section through four decades of innovation, mentorship, and service.

Chairs of the Joint Section on Neurotrauma and Critical Care

1985–1986: Donald P. Becker	2006–2008: P. David Adelson
1986–1988: Lawrence H. Pitts	2008–2010: Michael G. Fehlings
1988–1990: Thomas A. Gennarelli	2010–2012: Shelly D. Timmons
1990–1992: Thomas G. Saul	2012–2014: Geoffrey Manley
1992–1994: Raj K. Narayan	2014–2016: Jamie S. Ullman
1994–1996: Jack E. Wilberger	2016–2018: Daniel Michael
1996–1998: Charles H. Tator	2018–2020: Julian Bailes
1998–2000: Brian T. Andrews	2020–2022: David Okonkwo
2000–2002: Ross Bullock	2022–2024: P.J. Raksin
2002–2004: Donald W. Marion	2024–2026: Martina Stippler
2004–2006: Alex B. Valadka	

40
YEARS OF LEADERSHIP IN NEUROTRAUMA

NEUROTRAUMA & CRITICAL CARE AT CNS 2025

Join us in Los Angeles, October 11–15, 2025, for an outstanding lineup of **Neurotrauma and Critical Care programming** at the CNS Annual Meeting. This year's offerings include sunrise science sessions, interactive debates, section sessions, and the **40th Anniversary Symposium** celebrating the history and future of our field.

Below is a day-by-day schedule to help you plan your meeting experience and ensure you don't miss a single Neurotrauma highlight.

DAY	TIME	SESSION / COURSE	TYPE / TRACK
Saturday, Oct 11	8:00 AM–4:15 PM	SYM04: Spine & Trauma Bundle	Symposium (<i>Neurotrauma + Spine</i>)
	8:00 AM–12:00 PM	SYM04A: Case-Based Education in Neurotrauma for the Practicing Neurosurgeon & Oral Board Prep	Symposium (<i>Neurotrauma</i>)
	12:45 PM–4:15 PM	SYM04B: Surgical & Postoperative Management of Spinal Trauma	Symposium (<i>Neurotrauma + Spine</i>)
Sunday, Oct 12	8:00 AM–4:15 PM	SYM09: <i>Shaping the Future of Neurotrauma—40th Anniversary Symposium</i>	Symposium (<i>Neurotrauma + Innovation</i>)
Monday, Oct 13	7:00–8:30 AM	Sunrise Science Session—Neurotrauma & Critical Care	Sunrise Session
	12:20–1:50 PM	M08: Advances in Diagnosis, Management, & Treatment of NPH	Luncheon Seminar (<i>Neurotrauma</i>)
	2:50–4:20 PM	Section on Neurotrauma & Critical Care 1: <i>Disparities in Neurotrauma</i>	Section Session
	4:30–6:00 PM	Interactive Session 1: <i>Crossfire Debates on Neurotrauma</i>	Concurrent Session
Tuesday, Oct 14	7:00–8:30 AM	Sunrise Science Session—Neurotrauma & Critical Care 2	Sunrise Session
	2:50–4:20 PM	Section on Neurotrauma & Critical Care 2: <i>So the Acute Trauma is Over, Now What?</i>	Section Session
	4:30–6:00 PM	Interactive Session 2: <i>Biomarkers—An Epidemiological & Clinical Perspective</i>	Concurrent Session
Wednesday, Oct 15	7:00–8:30 AM	Guidelines Session V: <i>Brain Trauma Foundation—Management of Penetrating TBI (2nd Edition)</i>	Special Course (<i>Neurotrauma</i>)
	7:00–8:30 AM	Sunrise Science Session—Neurotrauma & Critical Care 3	Sunrise Session
	12:20–1:50 PM	W19: Chronic Subdural Hematoma Management	Luncheon Seminar (<i>Cerebrovascular + Neurotrauma</i>)

INTRODUCING THE ODETTE HARRIS LECTURE

We are proud to announce the establishment of the **Odette Harris Lecture**, a new annual lectureship of the AANS/CNS Joint Section on Neurotrauma and Critical Care. This lectureship will debut at the CNS Annual Meeting in Los Angeles this October and will serve as a lasting platform to advance dialogue, collaboration, and progress across the neurosurgery and neurotrauma communities.

Purpose

The **Odette Harris Lecture on Healthcare Disparities and Health Equity in Neurotrauma** recognizes and amplifies the voices of experts who have made significant contributions to understanding and addressing disparities in access, outcomes, and equity in neurotrauma. Each year, a distinguished lecturer will be invited to deliver a keynote address focusing on healthcare disparities in traumatic brain injury and related conditions.

Honoring Dr. Odette Harris

The lectureship is named in honor of **Dr. Odette Harris**, Professor of Neurosurgery at Stanford University School of Medicine, Director of Stanford's Brain Injury Program, and Deputy Chief of Staff for Rehabilitation at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System. Dr. Harris is a pioneer in neurotrauma care, education, and equity.

The second Black woman in the United States to hold a professorship in neurosurgery, Dr. Harris has dedicated her career to advancing the treatment of traumatic brain injury and to championing equitable care for all patients. Her groundbreaking work and exemplary leadership have earned her numerous awards, including the National Medical Fellowships' *Excellence in Academic Medicine Award*, the *AANS William P. Van Wagenen Fellowship Award*, and the *Stanford Medicine Alumni Association RISE Award*. In 2022 and 2024, Stanford recognized Dr. Harris as one of 13 history-making alumnae.

SEE YOU IN LOS ANGELES!

The CNS 2025 Annual Meeting promises to be an inspiring and memorable gathering for our community. We encourage all members of the Joint Section on Neurotrauma and Critical Care to attend these sessions, connect with colleagues, and celebrate 40 years of leadership and innovation in the field.

We look forward to seeing you in Los Angeles this October—and to building the next chapter of neurotrauma together.

Born in Jamaica, educated at Dartmouth and Stanford, Dr. Harris has become an international leader in neurotrauma, serving as a role model and mentor to a new generation of physicians and scholars. Naming this lectureship in her honor not only recognizes her achievements, but also reflects her enduring impact on equity and excellence in medicine.

Selection Criteria

Nominees for the lectureship will be evaluated based on:

- **Expertise and Impact** in advancing knowledge and solutions in healthcare disparities and neurotrauma.
- **Relevance and Timeliness** of their work to current challenges in access, care, and outcomes.
- **Interdisciplinary Perspective**, bringing clinical, research, public health, policy, or community approaches to the field.

Nominations will be solicited annually following the CNS meeting and finalized by January of the lecture year. The officers and members of the AANS/CNS Neurotrauma Section will serve as the selection committee.

Impact

The Odette Harris Lecture is designed to stimulate dialogue, raise awareness, and inspire collaborative action to address disparities and improve outcomes for individuals with traumatic brain injury. In addition to the lecture, an abstract award will also be presented annually to a researcher whose work advances understanding of healthcare disparities in neurotrauma.

I had the honor of discussing this lectureship with Dr. Harris. During this conversation she reflects on her journey in neurosurgery with a perspective shaped by courage, curiosity, and gratitude. As an immigrant, she describes how her path instilled in her a willingness to take risks and a resilience less bound by fear and always mindful of the sacrifices others made to create opportunities for her. Mentorship has played a defining role in her career, teaching her both the power of guidance and the responsibility to nurture the next generation. She emphasizes the importance of respectfully challenging the status quo: asking questions, receiving feedback openly, and even celebrating failure as part of growth. *"If you don't ask, you don't know,"* she reminds, underscoring the value of inquiry and humility. For Dr. Harris, progress in neurosurgery depends on honoring nuance, understanding the needs and importance of subpopulations, and ensuring that science and care remain accessible to all. Her approach to patient care and research combines intellectual rigor with empathy, and her leadership continues to inspire others to pursue excellence while advancing equity in neurotrauma. We are thrilled to hear her lecture and to learn more from her at CNS and for years to come.

To learn more about Dr. Harris, please visit:

<https://med.stanford.edu/neurosurgery/news/2025/cns-harris>