



2026

OHSU
Innovation
Awards

Each year, Oregon Health & Science University celebrates the faculty, clinicians, staff, trainees and students whose creativity and determination advance science, technology and health care. The 2026 OHSU Innovation Awards honor those turning bold ideas into solutions that improve the health and well-being of Oregonians and people beyond our state.

This year's awardees reflect the full spectrum of innovation at OHSU. From pioneering therapies and digital health tools to breakthroughs in drug development and biotechnology, their work demonstrates how discovery, collaboration and entrepreneurship come together to create real impact. These efforts help grow Oregon's emerging bioscience and health innovation ecosystem, creating opportunities across the state while returning value to OHSU to invest in our people, infrastructure and mission.

The awards also recognize the broader OHSU innovation community. Every day, faculty, clinicians, staff, trainees and students bring forward new ideas, develop scalable solutions and partner with industry leaders, showing that creativity and problem-solving are central to OHSU's mission of excellence in education, research, clinical care and community service. Through intellectual property, spin-off companies and collaborations, OHSU is advancing science and discovery while building a thriving and growing innovation ecosystem.

Congratulations to this year's awardees and everyone contributing to our vibrant innovation community. Together, we are fostering a culture where every member can contribute, and Oregon is strengthened by a network of innovators advancing health and science. We look forward to the continued impact our OHSU innovators will make in 2026 and beyond, helping fulfill our vision of making Oregon a leader in innovation.



Travis Cook, M.S., M.B.A., CLP

SENIOR DIRECTOR, TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Aditi Martin, Ph.D.

SENIOR DIRECTOR, COLLABORATIONS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

CREATORS OF LICENSED TECHNOLOGIES

P. Holland Alday

Luiz Bertassoni

Berit Blume

Diana Brewer

Kim Burchiel

Joseph Stone Doggett

Craig Dorrell

P. Barton Duell

Christopher Eide

Andrew Emili

Jack Ferracane

Markus Grompe

Yukun Guo

Leslie Hammer

Matt Hansen

Jon Hennebold

Dylan Heussman

Masahiro Horikawa

David Huang

Trang Huynh

Yali Jia

Don Kain

Jane Kelly

Knight Cancer Institute
BioLibrary

Rajan Kulkarni

Stephen Kurtz

Yuexin Li

Sanjay Malhotra

Louise Merkens

Roberto Meza-Romero

Hiroyuki Nakai

Xiaolin Nan

Aaron Nilsen

Oregon Hearing Research
Center

Carmem Pfeifer

Scott Prah

Michael Riscoe

Teresa Riscoe

Lolis Rocha

Carsten Schultz

Sunil Sundalam

Dhanir Tailor

Jeffrey Tyner

Arthur Vandenbark

Jie Wang

INVENTORS OF ISSUED U.S. PATENTS

Daniel Bottomly

Young Hwan Chang

Michael Cohen

Jordan Devereaux

Joseph Stone Doggett

Brian Druker

Khashayar Farsad

Joe Gray

Matt Hansen

Scott Hansen

David Huang

Yali Jia

Yifan Jian

John Kaufman

Stephen Kurtz

Nicola Long

Shannon McWeeney

Aaron Nilsen

Louis Picker

Michael Riscoe

David Sheridan

Sunil Sundalam

Cristina Tognon

Elie Traer

Erik Tucker

Jeffrey Tyner

Hua Xie

INDUCTEES IN THE OHSU CHAPTER OF
THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF INVENTORS

Michael Cohen

John Kaufman

NEW COMPANIES BASED ON OHSU TECHNOLOGY

Molecular Tools, Inc.

Sapient Clinician LLC

NeoSakura BTX, Inc.

EARLY CAREER INNOVATOR



Yasmeen El Sawaf, M.D.

RESIDENT PHYSICIAN, POSTGRADUATE YEAR 5,
NEUROLOGICAL SURGERY, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The Early Career Innovator Award is presented to an OHSU early career member, such as a student, postdoctoral fellow or medical resident, who possesses a passion for innovation and for developing technologies to solve real-world problems. They work closely with the innovation ecosystems within and outside of OHSU to prepare their innovations for commercial success.

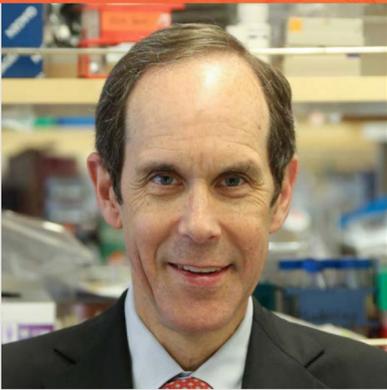
Yasmeen El Sawaf is developing an implantable intracranial catheter-based monitoring platform to address a critical need in managing shunted hydrocephalus.

Hydrocephalus is caused by abnormal cerebrospinal fluid buildup in the brain, leading to high pressure and serious neurological complications. It affects about 1 in every 500 to 1,000 live births in the U.S. and can also result from hemorrhage, tumors, trauma, infection or other brain conditions. Implantable shunts are the primary treatment, but they fail in up to 50% of cases within two years and up to 80% over a patient's lifetime. Despite advances in surgery, reliably monitoring shunt function remains a challenge, often requiring hospital visits, invasive procedures or repeat imaging.

El Sawaf's platform enables continuous monitoring with wireless data transmission to mobile devices. The technology supports real-time intracranial pressure monitoring in both everyday and hospital settings. By providing ongoing data on shunt performance, the platform aims to reduce diagnostic uncertainty, decrease hospital visits and improve decision-making in hydrocephalus care.

Despite the demands of neurosurgical residency, El Sawaf secured a competitive Biomedical Innovation Program grant to meet key prototyping milestones. She collaborates with Peter Jacobs, Ph.D., and an engineering team to refine the platform's design. Her work exemplifies clinically driven innovation, with a strong intellectual property and commercialization strategy, positioning the technology for future clinical use.

CAREER INNOVATION EXCELLENCE



Brian J. Druker, M.D.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, KNIGHT CANCER INSTITUTE

PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE, DIVISION OF HEMATOLOGY/
MEDICAL ONCOLOGY, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The Career Innovation Excellence Award is presented to an OHSU member who has shown themselves to be an accomplished inventor and entrepreneur over the course of their career. They have demonstrated a true passion for innovation, been successful in engaging and cultivating partnerships with industry, and worked tirelessly to translate their discoveries into solutions for real-world problems and the benefit of society.

Brian Druker transformed cancer treatment through laboratory research and clinical trials that led to Gleevec, the first drug to specifically target cancer cells while leaving healthy cells unharmed. In 2026, the 25th anniversary of Gleevec's approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the drug has turned chronic myeloid leukemia, a once fatal cancer, into a manageable condition. His work established proof of principle for targeted therapies, inspiring the development of more than 100 kinase inhibitors for cancer and other diseases and helping launch the era of precision medicine.

A prolific inventor, Druker is a creator of 41 disclosed technologies and as an inventor on 14 patent families, many of which have been licensed. He co-founded the OHSU startup MolecularMD, later acquired by ICON Specialty Labs, and co-founded Blueprint Medicines. He also has led major collaborations, including the Beat AML partnership, which generated critical clinical and research data that advanced innovative cancer therapies.

Druker helped secure \$1 billion in philanthropic support, half from Phil and Penny Knight, enabling early cancer detection research and patient care initiatives. In 2025, following an additional \$2 billion donation from the Knights, he became inaugural president of the newly independent Knight Cancer Group, leading a vision to transform cancer care through coordinated care, expanded access to clinical trials and enhanced patient support.

His groundbreaking discoveries, entrepreneurial leadership and commitment to translating science into life-saving therapies exemplify the impact of clinically driven innovation.

NEW INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR



Becca Spain, M.D., MSPH

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF NEUROLOGY,
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

CO-DIRECTOR, MS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE WEST,
PORTLAND VAMC

The New Innovator of the Year Award is presented to an OHSU member who has recently disclosed their first technology to OHSU. They demonstrate a true passion for advancing technology development and collaborating with various innovator ecosystems within and outside of OHSU. They demonstrate an eagerness to see their discoveries translate into tangible solutions for societal benefit.

Becca Spain is leading efforts to develop novel therapies for progressive multiple sclerosis (MS), a debilitating condition affecting nearly half of the one million people in the U.S. with MS. Progressive MS causes gradual neurological decline in strength, sensation, balance, mobility, cognition, bladder and bowel control, energy and mood. Once the disease enters a progressive phase, current therapies approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration offer limited benefit, underscoring the urgent need for new treatment options.

Working with colleagues Priya Chaudhary, Ph.D., Aaron Nilsen, Ph.D., and Sky Ferrara, Ph.D., Spain is developing brain-penetrant dithiolane antioxidants, or BPeDs, derived from lipoic acid as a potential neuroprotective treatment. Lipoic acid, a well-tolerated supplement, is thought to counter neurodegeneration through anti-inflammatory and antioxidant mechanisms. In phase 2 clinical trials, Spain and her team demonstrated reductions in brain atrophy, supporting its therapeutic potential.

Supported by a 2024 Biomedical Innovation Program award, Spain's work focuses on testing and screening BPeDs to enhance their drug-like properties. She is being mentored by OHSU Entrepreneur-in-Residence Dick Rylander to develop a commercialization strategy and secure follow-on funding.

With encouraging clinical results and strategic partnerships with OHSU Innovates, Spain's work has the potential to provide a breakthrough therapy for progressive MS, an area with few viable options. Her leadership continues to advance the project as a promising and urgently needed solution.

PARTNERSHIP EXCELLENCE AWARD



Jamie Lo, M.D., MCR

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY,
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The Partnership Excellence Award is presented to an OHSU member who demonstrates an entrepreneurial spirit and works closely with the OHSU Innovates commercialization network to foster and encourage collaborations. They demonstrate a successful track record of establishing and developing new partnerships to advance innovative research.

Jamie Lo is co-director of PMedIC, the Pacific Northwest Biomedical Innovation Co-laboratory at OHSU, a partnership with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory that has advanced biomedical discovery since 2018. Since joining PMedIC's leadership in June 2023, Lo has focused on fostering collaborative research between the two institutions. PMedIC has supported more than 50 projects, produced more than 100 publications and achieved a return on investment more than five times its initial value.

Lo's research spans reproductive and translational health. Her major publication areas include mechanistic discovery, therapeutic intervention, advanced imaging techniques and multi-omics, spatial and multimodal integration. She studies how maternal and paternal environmental exposures, particularly substance use, affect reproductive health, placental biology and child health outcomes. Her research also examines the impact of iron deficiency in pregnancy and amniotic fluid biology. Her studies have informed strategies to reduce reproductive health and pregnancy complications linked to substance use, helping shape prevention strategies and clinical guidelines.

Lo is committed to mentoring early-career investigators and to creating programs and collaborations that foster scientific excellence, skill development, grant success and leadership. Her mentorship extends across PMedIC and other initiatives, helping train the next generation of biomedical researchers.

Through her work, Lo fosters an innovative, collaborative environment at OHSU, accelerating scientific discovery and strengthening interdisciplinary partnerships that advance human health.

NAI SENIOR MEMBER



Summer L. Gibbs, Ph.D

PROFESSOR OF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING AND OHSU
KNIGHT CANCER INSTITUTE, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

DOUGLAS STRAIN ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIP

Senior members of the National Academy of Inventors are recognized for their innovation and demonstrated success in patents, licensing and commercialization, producing technologies that have or aspire to bring tangible societal impact. Selection as a senior member highlights rising academic inventors who foster creativity and mentorship within their communities while advancing translational innovation.

Summer Gibbs has been named a 2026 Senior Member of the National Academy of Inventors in recognition of her innovation in fluorescence-guided surgery and molecular imaging. Gibbs has disclosed 24 inventions and holds five issued U.S. patents and several pending applications, many of which are licensed.

Her work has advanced first-in-class near-infrared nerve-specific fluorescent imaging agents developed to help surgeons identify nerves in real time. In December 2025, Trace Biosciences, an OHSU startup she co-founded, received FDA approval for its investigational new drug application for LGW16-03. The therapy is the first near-infrared nerve-specific fluorescent agent to advance to first-in-human clinical studies, which will evaluate its safety and performance during surgery.

At OHSU, Gibbs leads a highly productive research program focused on translating new chemical and imaging technologies into potential clinical applications. She has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed publications and mentors students, postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty in invention disclosure, patent strategy and translational research.

Gibbs also develops imaging tools to study cancer characteristics, metastatic disease and how therapies are distributed in the body. Through her research, commercialization efforts and commitment to training the next generation of inventors, she exemplifies the qualities recognized by NAI Senior Members: innovation with practical impact, leadership in translating discoveries and fostering a culture of invention and mentorship.

NAI FELLOW



Yali Jia, Ph.D.

PROFESSOR OF OPHTHALMOLOGY AND BIOMEDICAL
ENGINEERING, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

JENNIE P. WEEKS PROFESSOR OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

Fellows of the National Academy of Inventors (NAI) are recognized for their prolific spirit of innovation in creating or facilitating outstanding inventions that have made a tangible impact on quality of life, economic development and the welfare of society. Election to NAI Fellow status is the highest professional distinction accorded solely to academic inventors.

In 2025, Yali Jia was elected as a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors in recognition of her role in pioneering optical coherence tomography angiography, or OCTA, a noninvasive imaging technique that has transformed retinal diagnostics. Jia developed the split-spectrum amplitude-decorrelation angiography algorithm, known as SSADA, which helped move OCTA from a research tool to a widely adopted clinical method for visualizing retinal microvasculature in vivo. This innovation has significantly advanced the detection and monitoring of blinding diseases, including diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration and other retinal conditions.

Jia holds 23 issued U.S. and international patents, 12 of which have been licensed to leading ophthalmic companies. Her work has directly contributed to FDA-cleared OCTA devices installed in thousands of clinics worldwide. At OHSU, Jia serves as principal investigator for several NIH and industry-funded research grants, advancing the field of ophthalmic imaging.

She has authored more than 240 peer-reviewed publications, which have been cited more than 20,000 times. Jia has received numerous honors, including recognition from the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology, or ARVO, and Optica. A fellow of AIMBE, ARVO and Optica, Jia is also a co-founder of iFocus Imaging LLC, a company dedicated to advancing ophthalmic imaging technologies. Her work has helped shape the future of retinal diagnostics and provided critical insights into eye health worldwide.

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