



OBSERVER



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MEDICAL COLLEGE
OF GEORGIA



Spring 2025

Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery



From the Chair

Dear Fellow Georgia Otolaryngologists,

Spring is here, and I hope it has brought you the same sense of renewal and optimism that I'm feeling. It's a challenging time across the nation, with significant societal shifts demanding our attention and empathy. Yet, within our otolaryngology community, there's a wellspring of hope and an unyielding commitment to bettering the world through health-care.

I am particularly excited about the bright, eager faces of our new resident candidates who will be joining us in July. Their fresh energy and dedication are just what we need as we look to the future of our field with hopeful eyes.

Please mark your calendars for our annual Porubsky Symposium and Alumni Event, Friday, June 13th and Saturday, June 14th, 2025. This is a

wonderful opportunity to earn complimentary CME credits, catch up with old friends, and celebrate our 2025 class of trainees.

In these times, when the world seems to pivot daily, our strength as a community gives me hope. We are more than just a group of medical professionals; we are a force for positive change, united in our passion and dedication.

So, let's step into this beautiful season with a sense of purpose and togetherness. I am excited to see all of you in June – ready to share stories, laughter, and maybe even enjoy a round of golf on a sunny Saturday morning.

Wishing you a wonderful Spring filled with joy and professional success.

Sincerely,

Stil Kountakis



Stil Kountakis, MD, PhD

*Edward S. Porubsky, MD
Distinguished Chair in
Otolaryngology*

*Professor and Chair,
Department of
Otolaryngology-Head and
Neck Surgery*

*Medical College of Georgia
Augusta University*



FROM THE EDITOR

Daniel Sharbel, MD

SPRING MOMENTUM: MILESTONES, GROWTH & GRATITUDE

To my esteemed colleagues,

As we emerge into a season of growth and optimism, the Department of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery at the Medical College of Georgia has much to celebrate.

From national honors and academic promotions to the arrival of exceptional new residents and fellows, our faculty and trainees continue to set a high bar for clinical excellence and scholarly achievement. We celebrate these achievements not only as milestones for the individuals recognized, but also as a reflection of the department’s enduring legacy — honoring the leadership of our senior faculty while embracing the promise and energy of the next generation.

Our match results bring exciting new faces to the residency and fellowship programs, while we also bid fond farewells to our accomplished graduates who are stepping into impactful careers across the Southeast. A warm welcome also goes out to new faculty and advanced practice providers expanding our clinical reach.

Research continues to thrive, with publications spanning skull base surgery, dysphagia, and head and neck cancer — a testament to our collaborative spirit and academic rigor. April also saw our team host a Head and Neck Cancer Screening event in recognition of Awareness Month.

We look forward to reconnecting in person at the **23rd Annual Porubsky Research Symposium & Alumni Event on June 13–14, 2025**. Until then, we hope this issue leaves you inspired and proud of the shared mission we carry forward — together.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

FACULTY



David J. Terris, MD, FACS, FACE received guest of honor for the Southern Section of The Triological Society.



Gregory Postma, MD was named one of Americas Top Doctors for the 23rd year.



J. Drew Prosser, MD was promoted to Full Professor of Otolaryngology- Head and Neck Surgery, effective July 1, 2025 and his Triological Society Thesis was accepted.



Jason May, MD submitted his Triological Society Thesis and it was accepted.



Heather Koehn, MD was promoted to Associate Professor of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, effective July 1, 2025.

RESIDENTS & FELLOWS



Rhinology Fellow: Dr. Diana Bigler received the *MCG Exemplary Teaching Award* this year from the Medical College of Georgia College of Medicine and had one poster presentation accepted for NASBS in February 2025. She also will have two poster presentations that will be presented at the COSM meeting in May 2025.

HAIL

Welcome!

NEW RESIDENTS

Each year, we have the honor of interviewing some of the best and brightest students from medical schools across the country. We are proud to announce successfully matching three exceptional candidates for residency training this year starting July 2025. **Dr. Jacob Greenway** will be joining us from the University of Alabama at Birmingham’s Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine, **Dr. Abigail Massey** will be joining us from the Medical University of South Carolina, and **Dr. David Jones** will be joining us from the East Tennessee State University James H. Quillen College of Medicine. We look forward to training these outstanding future Otolaryngologists.



Jacob Greenway, MD



Abigail Massey, MD



David Jones, MD

NEW FELLOWS

In addition to our new residents, three fellows will begin their fellowship training with us in July 2025.

Dr. Ibtisam Mohamed will join us from University of North Carolina-Rhinology Research as the 22nd Rhinology and Skull base fellow.

Dr. Isabel Marie Mayorga Perez will join us from University of Puerto Rico-General Surgery Residency as the 18th Endocrine surgery fellow, and **Dr. Sophia Quinones** will join us from University of Texas Health San Antonio-Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Residency as the 19th Laryngology fellow.



Ibtisam Mohammad, MD
Rhinology



Isabel Marie Mayorga Pérez, MD
Endocrine



Sophia Quinones, MD
Laryngology

NEW FACULTY



Dr. Emad Al Haj Ali has joined the Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery as an Assistant Professor with a focus in Comprehensive Otolaryngology. Originally from Damascus, Syria, Dr. Al Haj Ali earned his medical degree from Damascus University before completing his residency in Otolaryngology at

Tishreen Hospital. He brings extensive fellowship training, including specialized experience in Endocrine Surgery, Head and Neck Surgical Oncology, and Rhinology, with advanced training at Augusta University and St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center/Tufts. Prior to joining our faculty, Dr. Al Haj Ali served as an attending otolaryngologist at Rivers Health in West Virginia and has held consultant positions internationally.

His clinical interests span general otolaryngology, endocrine surgery, and sinus and skull base disorders. We are excited to welcome Dr. Al Haj Ali back to Augusta and look forward to the many ways his expertise will enrich our clinical, educational, and research missions.



Summer Shropshire,
DNP, FNP-C



Briana Sample,
DNP, FNP-BC

Ansley Walter,
DNP

We’re excited to welcome new our advanced practice providers to our team. Their expertise enhances patient access, supports our physician faculty, and strengthens our commitment to collaborative, high-quality care. We look forward to supporting their continued professional growth within our departmental mission.

FAREWELL

Farewell Graduating Residents & Fellows

CHIEF RESIDENTS

Congratulations to our graduating residents and fellows. Their dedication, professionalism, and hard work during their time at MCG have prepared them well for successful careers in Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery. We are proud of their accomplishments and confident they will make a meaningful impact on the patients and communities they serve.



Dr. George Davies will be joining Raleigh Capital ENT in Raleigh, NC.



Dr. Nick Drury will be joining Charleston ENT in Beaufort County, South Carolina.



Dr. Savannah Stockton will be joining Brookhaven ENT Allergy and Facial Surgery in Brookhaven, Mississippi.

Congratulations!

GRADUATING FELLOWS



Diana Bigler, MD will be remaining with us as faculty in Rhinology



Nizar Tejani, MD
Laryngology



Joel Biester, MD is returning to his position at Spartanburg Regional Hospital for Endocrine Surgery practice.

APRIL - Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Month

In honor of Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Month in April, we hosted a head and neck cancer screening event on the 25th where 29 patients were screened at no charge.



CASE REPORT: RHINOLOGY – SKULL BASE SURGERY

Iatrogenic Optic Chiasm Compression Presenting as Pituitary Mass Recurrence

Diana Bigler, MD, Stilianos Kountakis, MD, Salman Ali, MD, and J Kenneth Byrd, MD

This case involves a 29-year-old female who presented to the emergency department with intractable nausea and vomiting persisting for one month, accompanied by new-onset left temporal hemianopsia. Her past medical history was significant for a pituitary macroadenoma, which was previously treated via a transsphenoidal approach (TSA) at an outside hospital three months prior. The initial surgery resulted in panhypopituitarism, left vision impairment, and right-sided blindness.

An MRI brain was obtained and revealed a heterogeneously enhancing lesion occupying the right sellar/suprasellar region, causing a mass effect on the optic chiasm, abutting the right optic nerve, and displacing the infundibulum to the left. These nonspecific MRI findings raised concern for possible mass recurrence versus post-surgical changes.

Given her worsening visual deficits and ambiguous imaging findings, an endoscopic endonasal approach (EEA) to the sellar and suprasellar mass was performed. The procedure revealed extensive scarring throughout the bilateral nasal cavities with a minimally patent sphenoidotomy on the left. There was diffuse scarring of the bilateral inferior and middle turbinates to the septum, along with polyposis in the sphenoid sinus. Notably, extensive surgical packing was encountered throughout the sella and suprasellar region, with no definitive evidence of persistent pituitary tumor. The optic chiasm and optic

nerves were decompressed through the removal of this packing material. Abdominal adipose tissue was used for reconstruction within the sellar defect, suprasellar defect, and sphenoid cavity.

The patient's postoperative course was unremarkable. At a recent clinic follow-up, she demonstrated improvement in her symptoms, including progressive bilateral vision recovery.

Discussion

The endoscopic endonasal approach is widely regarded as a safe and effective technique for pituitary tumor removal.¹ Although the risks of EEA include visual complications, diabetes insipidus, and hypopituitarism, these remain relatively rare. In the literature, rate of orbital complications for primary TSA are around 0.5% and rates for endocrinologic complications are around 1.5%.² This rate increases in regards to revision TSA.³

Conclusion

This case presents a novel perspective to EEA complications given that surgical packing, thought to be remnant tumor by the outside hospital, catalyzed the need for a revision surgery involving optic chiasm decompression. The findings underscore the importance of using packing sparingly to reduce risk of compression on the pituitary stalk and optic chiasm.

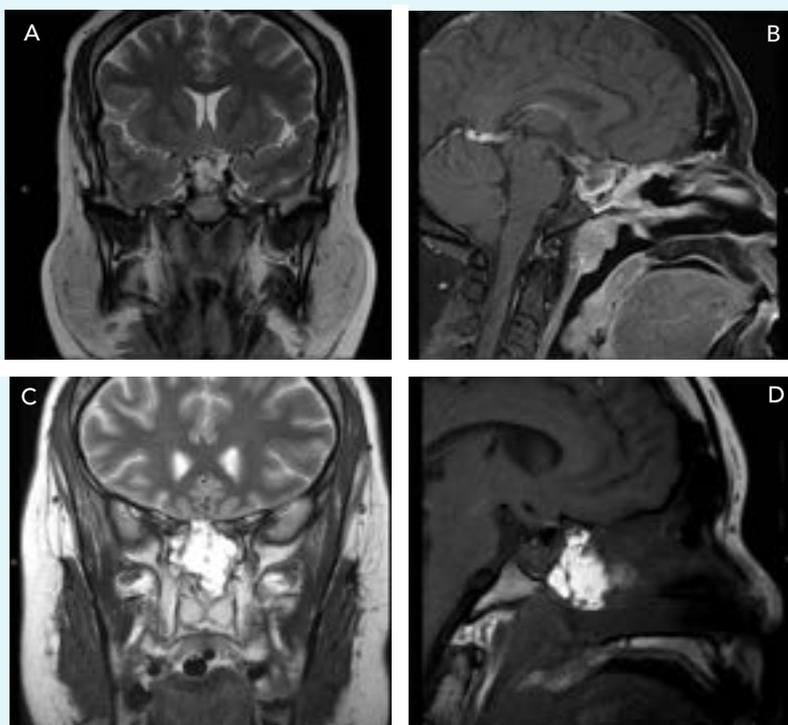


Figure 1

Preoperative Imaging. A & B

T2W Coronal (A) and T1W Sagittal (B) MRI images revealing a heterogeneously enhancing lesion occupying the right sellar/suprasellar mass measuring approximately 12 X 14 X 21 mm, causing mass effect on the optic chiasm and abutting right optic nerve and causing mass effect and displacing pituitary infundibulum to the left.

Figure 2

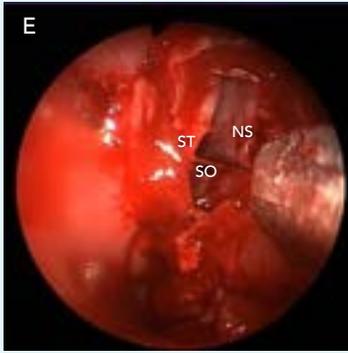
Postoperative Imaging. C & D

T2W Coronal (C) and T1W Sagittal (D) MRI images demonstrating decompression of the sella and optic chiasm following the removal of surgical packing and reconstruction with adipose tissue.

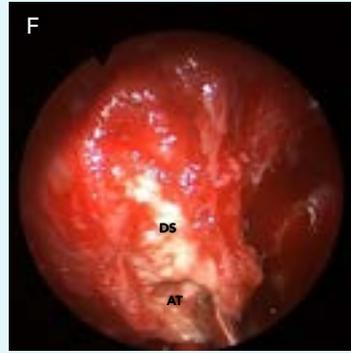
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Figure 3

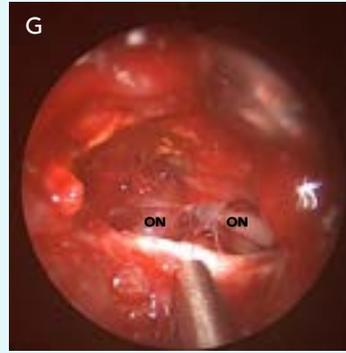
Intra-Operative Endoscopic Findings E, F, G, H



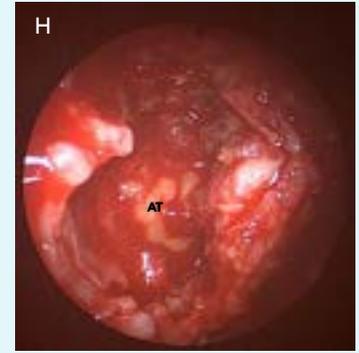
Extensive scarring of nasal septum (NS), remnant superior turbinate (ST) and scarring of sphenoid os (SO)



Incision into the dural substitute (DS) within the sella revealed extensive packing with adipose tissue (AT) and surgical



Packing was removed from the suprasellar to achieve optic nerve (ON) and chiasm decompression



Adipose tissue (AT) was carefully packed to avoid compression of optic chiasm and used to fill sphenoid

References:

1. Cappabianca P, Cavallo LM, Solari D. Endoscopic Endonasal Surgery of the Skull Base. Springer, 2015.
2. Krings J, Omay SB, Moliterno J, et al. Complications of Endoscopic Endonasal Transsphenoidal Surgery: A Systematic Review. *J Neurosurg.* 2018;128(3):1203-1211.
3. Li J, Wang Z, Xu J, et al. Short-term Outcomes of Transsphenoidal Surgery for Pituitary Adenomas: A Multicenter Retrospective Study. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab.* 2017;102(8):2855-2862.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

■ Acree L, Compton EC, Byrd JK, Johnson C, Postma GN. Intractable Aspiration Treated With Laryngectomy After SLAD-R Surgery: A Case Report. *Laryngoscope.* 2024 May 13. doi: 10.1002/lary.31510. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 38738808.

■ Ali, MS; Byrd, K; Vale, F. Functioning Adenoma with Cavernous Invasion—Managing Cavernous Sinus Disease as New Faculty. *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B: Skull Base; Issue S 01, 2025*

■ Ali, MS; Byrd, K; Vale, F. Spheno-tuberculo-planum Meningiomas—Technical Nuances. *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B: Skull Base; Issue S 01, 2025*

■ Ali, MS, Reyes, C, Byrd, K; Vale, F. Trigeminal V2 Schwannoma—Staged Endonasal and Endoscopic Trans-orbital Tumor Resection *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B: Skull Base; Issue S 01, 2025*

■ Ali, MS; Byrd, K; Vale, F. Endoscopic Endonasal Transclival Approach for Pontine Tumor Resection *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B: Skull Base; Issue S 01, 2025*

■ Ali, MS; Byrd, K; Vale, F. Optic Apparatus Decompression of Excessive Suprasellar Packing—Operative Video. *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B: Skull Base; Issue S 01, 2025*

■ Ali, MS; Byrd, K; Vale, F. Spheno-Tubercular Planum Meningiomas with Vision Changes: Importance of Optic Nerve Decompression in Optic Canal *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B: Skull Base; Issue S 01, 2025*

■ Ali, MS; Byrd, K; Vale, F. Expanded Endoscopic Endonasal Approach for Skull Base Chordoma Resection—Perspective from New Skull Base Faculty. *Journal of Neurological Surgery Part B Skull Base 86(S 01):S1-S576.*

■ Brown J, ... Postma G, Howell R: Surgical Nonresponders in Zenker Diverticulum and Lower Esophageal Pathology (POuCH Collaborative) *Laryngoscope,* 134:4897-4902, 2024. Doi:10.1002/lary.31619

■ Drury NB, Sorensen N, Sharbel DD, Byrd JK. Atypical Regional Metastasis to the Parotid Nodal Basin in HPV-Associated Oropharyngeal Squamous Cell Carcinoma. *Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg.* 2024 Jul;171(1):303-304. doi: 10.1002/ohn.705. Epub 2024 Mar 14. PMID: 38483036.

■ Wandell GM, Swartwood JG, Brar AS, Postma G, Belafsky PC: Safety of a Novel Upper Esophageal Sphincter Balloon Dilator. *The Laryngoscope,* 135:66-72, 2025. doi.org/10.1002/lary.31634

CLINICAL SPOTLIGHT: Building Momentum in Otology at MCG

The Otology and Neurotology division at the Medical College of Georgia is experiencing a season of meaningful growth and programmatic renewal — one rooted in patient-centered care, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a renewed emphasis on surgical education.

Cochlear implant volume has doubled since 2023, reflecting both increased regional access to care and rising demand for comprehensive auditory rehabilitation. This is in large part to utilization of the Center of Excellence Grant which has funded both retrospective and prospective studies investigating our cochlear implant pathway to implement a more streamlined process. Faculty and trainees continue to represent the institution across local, regional, and national stages, contributing to academic conversations in implantable hearing technologies, chronic ear disease, and lateral skull base pathology.

Recent educational expansions include the establishment of an audiology externship, providing robust training in a collaborative environment and further integrating audiologic care within the academic mission. Meanwhile, hands-on surgical education continues to evolve: the department is preparing for the dedication of its newly named temporal bone laboratory, and has committed to doubling the frequency of its resident temporal bone course — now offered twice annually to ensure early and sustained exposure to temporal bone anatomy and otologic technique.

These initiatives underscore MCG’s ongoing investment in a high-functioning, academically engaged otology program — one that supports clinical excellence, scholarly productivity, and resident and fellow education. For those in the community or in academic practice with an interest in collaboration, teaching, or future growth, the environment continues to expand with purpose and promise.



Jason, May, MD



Sarah Hodge, MD



**Sarah King, AuD, CCC-A, FAAA
Director of Audiology**



**Lauren Bush, AUD, CCC-A, FAAA
Audiologist**



**Alex Dawson, AUD, CCC-A, FAAAA
Audiologist**



**Kristie Wilson, AUD, CCC-A
Audiologist**



SOCIAL MEDIA

is a great opportunity to keep alumni, referring physicians and friends, updated on some of the developments in our department. Over time we will be adding patient education posts as well. We would love to hear from alumni. If you have interesting pictures or stories, please send them to Rachel Elvis at relvis@augusta.edu.

@mcgotolaryngology



JOB OPENINGS

To apply and receive additional information, please send a curriculum vitae to **Dr. Stil Kountakis at skountakis@augusta.edu**.

FACULTY, FULL-TIME POSITIONS, RANK COMMENSURATE WITH EXPERIENCE

Otologist/Neurotologist

We are seeking an individual at the Assistant or Associate Professor level with fellowship training in Otolaryngology/Neurotology. This is a full-time position at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University and Wellstar MCG Health. Excellent resources are available and rank is commensurate with experience.

Rhinologist

We are seeking an individual at the Assistant or Associate Professor level with fellowship training in Rhinology, Sinus, and Skull Base Surgery. This is a full-time position at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University and Wellstar MCG Health. Excellent resources are available and rank is commensurate with experience.



23rd ANNUAL PORUBSKY SYMPOSIUM AND ALUMNI EVENT

June 13-14, 2025



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Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery



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