



# Brigid Scanlan-Eiynck Memorial Traveling Mentorship Award



**Dr. Jennifer C. Romano, MD, MS**

Associate Professor of Cardiac Surgery & Pediatrics  
Associate Director, Pediatric Cardiothoracic ICU  
Program Director, Congenital Cardiac Surgery Fellowship  
University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital



**Stephanie Nguyen**

4<sup>th</sup> Year Medical Student  
University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston  
Class of 2019

## Unstoppable

This perfectly sums up pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon, Dr. Jennifer Romano. Not only is she an incredibly talented surgeon who makes operating on walnut-sized hearts look easy, but is also a skilled intensivist who leads a multidisciplinary team to provide the best patient care and outcomes. She has a vibrant energy that fills the room and brings out the very best in those around her. Dr. Romano is one-of-a-kind and truly is unstoppable.

As an Aussie and Texas transplant, my only experience with snow has been watching the Winter Olympic Games on television. Needless to say, Ann Arbor in February was life-changing. Each morning began the same way: trudging through the snow to the Pediatric Cardiothoracic Unit to review chest x-rays, followed by echo or ICU conference with the pediatric cardiology fellows. Attending these conferences vastly improved my fund of knowledge in echo interpretation and pathophysiology of complex congenital heart disease.



*Dr. Jennifer C. Romano, MD, MS*

On the other hand, Dr. Romano's OR schedule was far from routine. She often had multiple cases a day, ranging from simple ASD closures to the most complex neonatal repairs, some of which had been deemed inoperable. During surgery, she always made sure I had an excellent view of the field and provided commentary on the anatomy, physiology, and procedural steps. I observed a wide variety of procedures, including the Norwood/Hybrid palliation, Bidirectional Glenn, Hemi-Fontan, Arterial Switch, AV Canal repair, Tetralogy of Fallot repair, PDA ligation, balloon atrial septostomy, open/percutaneous valve replacement, VAD placement, and heart transplantation. My most memorable case was a truncus arteriosus repair in which Dr. Romano performed an aortic valve and root replacement, unifocalization, RV-PA conduit, and VSD closure. I watched on in awe as she made one anastomosis after the other; each stitch millimeter perfect, each hand constantly moving in purposeful synchrony. It became very clear why Dr. Romano is considered one of the best technical surgeons in the country.



*Assisting Dr. Romano on a Norwood procedure for a patient with hypoplastic left heart syndrome*

Outside of the OR, Dr. Romano possesses a quiet confidence and humility. She leads by example, fueled by a contagious energy and enthusiasm that is loved by all. She is genuine, down to earth, and has a witty sense of humor that makes her so much fun to be around. When introducing myself as a student rotating with Dr. Romano, I would receive the same response from people who have known her for more than a decade: "You are working with the best...you've got big shoes to fill." Thus, it has been an absolute privilege to learn from her.

Dr. Romano also provided invaluable mentorship and went out of her way to ensure that I had the best clinical experience. She introduced me to her colleagues in the Congenital Heart Center, enabling me to spend time learning in the catheterization lab, echo lab, ICU, cardiology clinic, and on the cardiac anesthesia, heart failure, and pulmonary hypertension services. I also had the privilege of scrubbing cases with her partners, two of whom had trained Dr. Romano when she was a congenital fellow at the University of Michigan. Overall, my diverse experience opened my eyes to the multidisciplinary team effort required in the management of congenital heart disease and helped me to build many friendships and future career connections.

As an aspiring pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon, I realize that it is without a doubt one of the most challenging and demanding specialties in medicine; the hours are long, the highs are high, while the lows are heartbreakingly low. Nonetheless, through her relentless work ethic, passion, and selflessness, Dr. Romano transforms the lives of her patients and families on a daily basis. What keeps her going? Receiving holiday photos of healthy, chunky kids who were once fighting for life in the hospital – that's her 'why'. I left C.S. Mott Children's Hospital feeling inspired and extremely fortunate to have a new friend, mentor, and role model in the unstoppable, Dr. Jenna Romano.



*Pictured with Dr. Romano, a wonderful inspiration and role model*



*With the friendly and hilarious Mott OR staff*

I am sincerely grateful for this opportunity and would like to thank the Scanlan family, Women in Thoracic Surgery, and the wonderful faculty and staff at the Congenital Heart Center at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital for an unforgettable experience. A very special thank you to Dr. Edward Bove, Dr. Richard Ohye, Dr. Ming-Sing Si, Dr. Peter Sassalos, Dr. Greg Ensing, Dr. Mary K. Olive, Dr. Kim Watkins, Dr. Rob Sorabella, Dr. Jiyong Moon, the OR team, Linsay Gardner, and of course, Dr. Jenna Romano. I will greatly miss my Michigan family and the snow!