

TV CORE

August 2025

Monthly Newsletter



GEMMA CABALLERO

Gemma's journey to our lab began in Manila, Philippines, where she earned her degree in Chemical Engineering. Her career has taken her across industries and continents—working as a QC Technician in food manufacturing, as a Chemist in a Sonoma County winery, and even living in Japan as a Navy wife. Later, she joined a biotech company as a Compound Management RA before finding her way to our team.

Gemma first arrived at the lab as a volunteer, supporting sequencing needs. Just three weeks later, her talent and dedication earned her a permanent position. Fourteen years on, she has grown into her current role as RA IV. She credits her professional growth to the training she received from former technicians and is especially grateful to Karole Ignacio for her guidance and support.

In her work, Gemma is known for her independence, efficiency, and reliability. She ensures tasks are completed on time, improves workflows to make processes faster and more effective, and is always ready to help troubleshoot experiments.

Outside of the lab, Gemma's passions are just as varied and vibrant. She enjoys singing at church, watching K-dramas, and sewing. A traveler at heart, she looks forward to her upcoming trip back home to the Philippines.

We're proud to highlight Gemma not only for her technical expertise but also for the energy, care, and commitment she brings to our team every day.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

<https://doi.org/10.1093/infdis/jiaf413>

The article **"Every Body Has Value: Ending Discriminatory Restrictions on Anatomical Donations"** argues that current U.S. body donation programs unjustly exclude individuals with HIV or viral hepatitis from donating their bodies to science, despite decades of progress in treatment, prevention, and biosafety protocols. These restrictions, which persist in over 80% of programs, are rooted in outdated fears from the early HIV epidemic rather than scientific evidence. The authors highlight that universal precautions, vaccination, and post-exposure prophylaxis already protect medical students and staff, making such exclusions unnecessary.



Beyond being scientifically outdated, these policies perpetuate harmful stigma, implying that people with HIV or hepatitis are less valuable even in death. Excluding these donors also represents a lost opportunity for scientific discovery, as programs like our Last Gift study have shown the immense value of studying HIV persistence at the end of life. The article calls on medical schools and research institutions to revise donor eligibility criteria, involve infectious disease experts in policy-making, and prioritize inclusion and dignity. Ultimately, the authors stress that every person deserves the right to make a final contribution to science and that body donation should not be restricted by fear or outdated stigma.

QUOTES FROM "THE COST OF SILENCE: A CALL TO PROTECT THE FUTURE OF HIV RESEARCH AND CARE"

"We know what happens when HIV work is deprioritized. We've seen it before. Silence becomes policy. Budgets shrink. Programs disappear. And people die." — **Orbit Clanton**, Long-Term Survivor and Community Advocate

"Imagine my chagrin when, on the precipice of defining the mechanism of exceptional HIV control, these draconian cuts to funding for research halt this important discovery and derail the development of new strategies to reduce or eliminate the need for toxic medications over the life span of PWHs now and of future generations." — **Loreen Willenberg**, Exceptional Elite Controller and Community Advocate

TRY SOMETHING NEW

Festivals & Community Events

- Del Mar Wine + Food Festival (Sept10-14) – A culinary celebration with parties, dinners, pickleball, and a Grand Tasting at Surf Sports Park.
- San Diego Restaurant Week (Sept14-21) – Explore over 100 restaurants across neighborhoods offering special menus for a great dining experience.
- Taste of College Area (Sept28) – Food crawl around SDSU's neighborhood featuring international eats and an afterparty.

Music, Sports & Cultural Celebrations

- CRSSD Festival Fall '25 (Sept27-28) – Electronic music fest at Waterfront Park
- Savannah Bananas – A quirky baseball experience at Petco Park.
- San Diego Wave & Padres Games – Cheer on Wave FC at Snapdragon Stadium (Sept7, 12, 26) and catch Padres home games all month.

Festivals & Outdoor Fun

- San Diego Bayfair (Sept12-14) – High-speed hydroplane racing with family-friendly atmosphere at Mission Bay.
- Adams Avenue Street Fair (Sept20-21) – Southern California's largest free music festival with live bands and local vendors.
- San Diego International Dragon Boat Race (Sept27-28) – Exciting races, lion dances, performances, and a lively vendor village at Mission Bay.

Back-to-School Activities

Looking for meaningful, school-ready events?

- Ultimate Back-to-School Bash (Sept14) – At Nobel Athletic Fields; fun, "pay-what-you-can" with activities for students in grades 4-12.
- What's Happening by SDCOE – A monthly newsletter/community resource for families, educators, and students offering low- or no-cost educational opportunities, contests, and grants.



SAVE THE DATE

The 2026 Department of Medicine Research Day is scheduled for April 29, 2026. This year's topic will focus on "Discovery to Delivery: Real-World Impact of Translational Research".

This is the 4th annual DOM Research Day and you will not want to miss it. Stay tuned for more details and we hope to see you there!

LAB PICNIC AT THE BAY: PHOTOS



COMING UP!

**2025 Research Day**
September 11, 2025
**Resilience in HIV Research and Treatment:
Progress and Possibilities**



Thursday, September 11, 2025
9:00 am – 4:20 pm Research Day Events
UCSD La Jolla Campus--MET Upper Auditorium

Join the San Diego Center for AIDS Research for a dynamic full-day symposium highlighting groundbreaking discoveries that are transforming the landscape of HIV research, treatment, and prevention. Lizzy and Mattia will be presenting.

BIRTHDAYS

Sara Gianella Weibel's birthday is coming up on September 17th!

AWARENESS DAYS

It is National African Immigrants and Refugee HIV and Hepatitis Awareness Day on Sep 9th

It is National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day on Sep 18th

It is National Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on Sep 27th

