

ASU dean earns national recognition for work at intersection of medicine, engineering

Dr. Sarah H. Lisanby elected to American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering

By Amanda Goodman, ASU News
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Well before she developed brain stimulation therapies, [Dr. Sarah H. Lisanby](#) sat with patients whose conditions had no effective treatments. In high school, it was children with neurodevelopmental disorders. In college, it was adults in the depths of serious mental illness.

Then, during her medical training, Lisanby witnessed something that stopped her in her tracks. A patient with catatonia — a severe, life-threatening condition — received [electroconvulsive therapy](#) and recovered with remarkable speed.

“I was awestruck by the power of that treatment, and equally captivated by how much we didn't yet understand about why it worked, and how we might build upon it to develop safer, more precise device-based therapies. From that moment, the intersection of engineering and medicine became my life's work,” Lisanby said.

From publications to patents, the founding dean of the [ASU John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering](#) has spent her career advancing innovative medical devices from early laboratory research through human trials, and ultimately, to FDA approval. That work, which continues in earnest at ASU — bridging medicine and engineering — has led to pioneering treatments for depression that have changed people's lives.

It's this specific intersection of expertise that has earned her a new prestigious accolade. Lisanby has been elected to the [American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering College of Fellows](#).

The organization advocates for biomedical engineering innovation through public policy, uniting academia, industry, government and scientific societies into a highly influential community, all working toward solutions that benefit society.

“To be welcomed into this community of innovators — people who are expanding the boundaries of what is possible in human health — is both validating and energizing. These fellows represent the best of what happens when science and engineering unite in service of humanity. I am proud to stand among them, and more determined than ever to push that frontier forward,” Lisanby said.

She is joining distinguished company. Fellows include Nobel Prize and Presidential Medal of Science winners, and represent the top 2% of medical and biological engineers.

“For Dr. Lisanby to be recognized by this organization as a physician is a huge honor and well-deserved,” said [Sherine Gabriel](#), executive vice president of [ASU Health](#). “She has partnered with engineers her whole career because she knows that engineering and medicine are most powerful when they work together. Now, as founding dean of the Shufeldt School, she can champion and train students who embody both.”

This national recognition, Lisanby says, sends a powerful signal to the students who will walk through the doors of the Shufeldt School: The future of medicine belongs to those who refuse to accept artificial boundaries between disciplines.

“For students who are drawn to both the human side of health care and the problem-solving rigor of engineering, I want them to see that those instincts belong together. You don't have to choose. The most important breakthroughs in medicine — the ones that will define the next century of human health — will come from people who can hold both. That is exactly what we are training our students to become. And this fellowship is, I believe, a signal to our students that the world is ready for them,” she said.

People across the state will benefit from this new generation of physician-engineers who will care for the communities here for decades to come. By attracting and developing faculty who are leaders in their fields, the university is raising the ceiling of what is possible for health care in the state. After all, the research, the school, the fellowships exist for one reason: to improve people's lives.

“For Arizona families, I want that connection to feel real and close, not abstract. Mental health touches virtually every family in this state. Depression, anxiety, treatment-resistant illness — these are not distant problems. They are present in our communities, in our households, in the people we love. The research recognized by this fellowship — developing new treatments for conditions that have resisted everything else — represents hope for those families. It represents the commitment that we will not stop looking for answers,” Lisanby said.

In the summer, the Shufeldt School will welcome the first class of physician-engineer students who will carry that commitment forward.

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