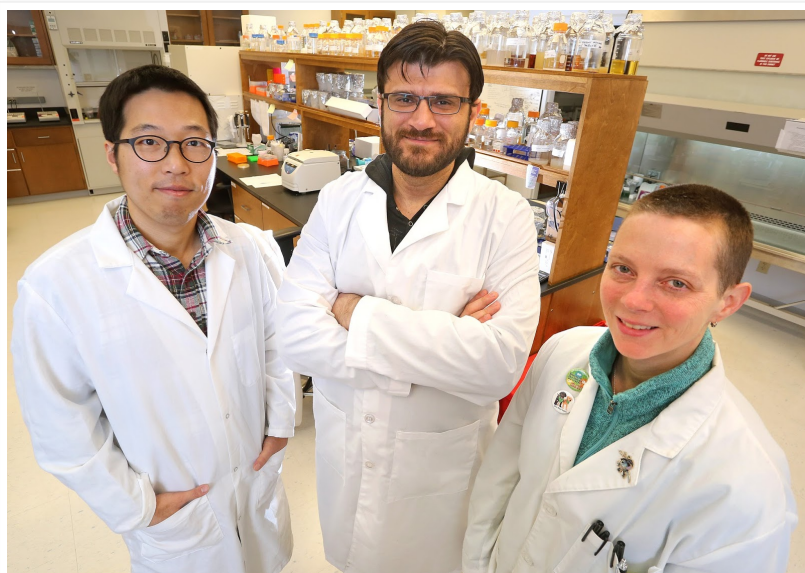


Med School Watercooler

NEWS FROM FREDERICK P. WHIDDON COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Thursday, January 21, 2016

9th Annual COM Research Forum Winners Announced



University of South Alabama College of Medicine research winners pose for a photo Jan. 12, 2016. Pictured from left are Dr. Hyeonsoo Park, Dr. Qusai Al Abdallah and Tiffany Norton.

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine hosted its 9th annual Research Forum on Dec. 4, 2015. Travel awards recently were presented to Tiffany Norton, Dr. Qusai Al Abdallah and Dr. Hyeonsoo Park for their extensive research.

Forum organizer Dr. Donna Cioffi, associate professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at USA, said the winners were very enthusiastic. "They all were very knowledgeable about their projects and answered critical questions about their research," Dr. Cioffi said.

Tiffany S. Norton, a basic medical science graduate student, won a \$1,000 travel award for best overall graduate student presentation. She was recognized for her poster presentation titled "The *Aspergillus fumigatus* Farnesyltransferase β -Subunit, Ram1, Regulates Ras Protein Localization, Conidial Viability, and Antifungal Susceptibility." Norton entered the program in Fall 2012 and is now in her fourth year of study. She chose to do her research in the department of microbiology and immunology in the lab of Dr. Jarrod Fortwendel, working with the filamentous fungus *Aspergillus fumigatus*.

Aspergillus fumigatus can cause invasive aspergillosis, a severe disease affecting immunocompromised people. "Current treatment options are frequently inadequate, and the mortality rate for invasive aspergillosis has been estimated at 60 to 90 percent," Norton said. Her study focused on inhibiting the post-translational processes that contribute to proper intracellular localization of the Ras proteins and other proteins that control *Aspergillus fumigatus*.

"I became interested in post-translational processes because my mentor

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originally worked with the Ras protein, which is a protein that contributes greatly to the filamentous growth of *Aspergillus fumigatus*," Norton said. "I wanted to back up one step from that and look at the processes that directed Ras to its proper localization in the cell, and let it do its job." She hopes research will eventually pave the way for the development of improved antifungal drugs to combat the disease.

The post-doctorate awards included co-winners Dr. Qusai Al Abdallah and Dr. Hyeonsoo Park. Dr. Park, of Dr. Steve Lim's lab in the department of biochemistry and molecular biology, presented his research project on "Mitochondria FAK Promotes ATP Generation."

He plans to spend his \$500 travel award to attend the 2016 American Society for Cell Biology Conference. "It was good to hear feedback from other researchers regarding my project, and I also enjoyed seeing what everyone else is studying," Dr. Park said.

Dr. Qusai Al Abdallah, also from Dr. Fortwendel's laboratory in the department of microbiology and immunology, presented his research on "The Post-Translational Modification of RasA by -AAAX Proteases in the Human Pathogenic Fungus *Aspergillus fumigatus*."

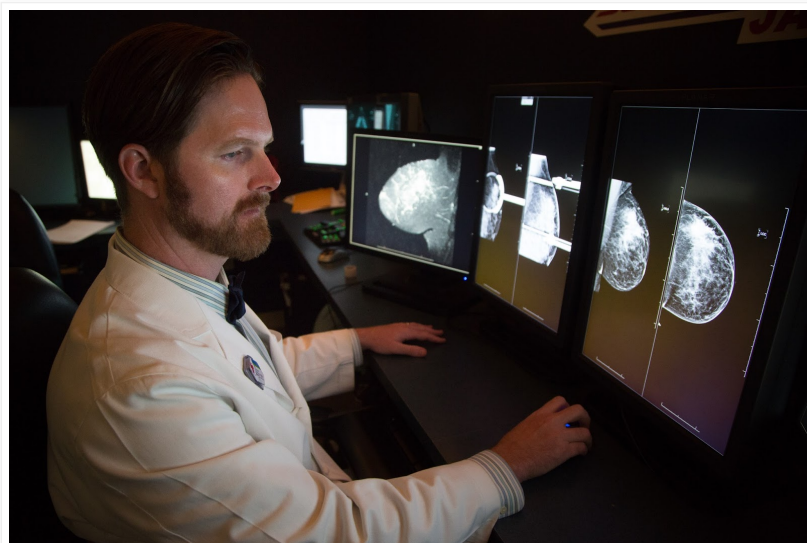
"I see this research forum as a great opportunity to introduce my research and discuss it with my colleagues," Dr. Al Abdallah said. Dr. Al Abdallah said he plans to use his \$500 travel award to attend the American Society for Microbiology Meeting or the Fungal Genetics Conference.

To learn more about participating in the annual College of Medicine Research Forum, contact Dr. Cioffi at dlcioffi@southalabama.edu.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [11:16 AM](#) No comments:

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

USA Radiologist Provides Insight on Updated Recommendations for Breast Cancer Screening



The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recently updated the recommendations on screening for breast cancer. The final recommendations say mammograms should be done every two years for women ages 50 to 74.

The recommendations, published in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* earlier this month, are mostly similar to the task force's previous guidelines but allow more leeway for women in their 40s to consider the test. The recommendations state that "the decision to start screening mammography in women prior to age 50 years should be an individual one. Women who place a higher value on the potential benefit than the potential harms may choose to

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begin biennial screening between the ages of 40 and 49 years.”

However, Dr. Joel Lightner, assistant professor of radiology at the USA College of Medicine, said the American College of Radiology still recommends that all women start screening mammograms at age 40, and the breast imaging department at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital follows these recommendations.

“We feel strongly that the data used to change the national guidelines is not as strong as the original data that created the previous guidelines,” said Dr. Lightner, who serves as a radiologist specializing in mammography at the Imaging Center at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital.

Additionally, Dr. Lightner said negative attacks on issues such as stress induced by false positives should not outweigh mortality benefit. “False positives are things that look like cancer on mammograms but are not,” Dr. Lightner said. “We work hard to eliminate as many false positives as possible but still maintain our ability to find cancer.”

In addition, the Imaging Center at USA minimizes false positive “stress and anxiety” by having rapid results. “At the USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital Imaging Center, women who visit for mammography screenings receive test results before they leave the hospital,” Dr. Lightner said. “We have a system in place that has the potential for someone to come in for a screening, have an abnormality detected, be worked up the same day and leave with an appointment to see our surgeon usually within a week.”

Dr. Lightner said to keep in mind that the new guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force only apply to women of average risk. Hence, women with family or personal history of cancers have overall increased risk, and discussions should be had with a physician to determine the most effective way to screen for cancer.

[Click here](#) for more information on the new recommendations. Dr. Lightner also recommends reading a [recent editorial](#) from his mentor, Gilda Cardenosa, on the subject.

To schedule a mammogram, call your primary care provider or OB-GYN. You can also call the USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital Imaging Center at (251) 415-1660.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [11:48 AM](#) No comments:

Students, Residents and Faculty Named to USA Chapter of Arnold P. Gold Humanism Honor Society



Front row, from left: Dr. Brian Jones, Dr. Michael Polcari and Dr. Roy Michael Culpepper. Second row, from left: Corwin McGee and Jelaina Scott. Third row, from left: Brian McGrath, Emily Spurlin and Meagan Thomas. Back row, from left: Jacob Sexton, Carter Tisdale and Kiyoshi Scisum. Not pictured: Peter Soh, R. Grant Willis and Dr. Geami Britt.

Ten medical students, three residents and one faculty member recently were named to the University of South Alabama Chapter of the Arnold P. Gold Humanism in Medicine Honor Society.

The USA College of Medicine Class of 2017 selects individuals who have demonstrated leadership, excellence in clinical care, compassion and dedication.

This year, each member of the Class of 2017 received at least one nomination from their peers for membership in the Gold Humanism Honor Society. According to Dr. Susan LeDoux, associate dean of medical education and student affairs at USA, this is a first in the history of the College of Medicine. "This class is an outstanding group of future physicians," Dr. LeDoux said. "Their nominations speak to the character of the Class of 2017."

Each member of the Class of 2017 completes a ballot with statements such as "the classmates who have shown exceptional interest in service to those in need in our community" and "the classmates you would like to have work at your side during a medical emergency or unforeseen disaster." Each student is asked to name two students from their class who would best fit the situations described.

Recently, the following USA students, residents and faculty were selected:

Corwin McGee- student
 Brian McGrath-student
 Kiyoshi Scisum-student
 Jelaina Scott-student
 Jacob Sexton-student
 Peter Soh- student
 Emily Spurlin- student
 Meagan Thomas- student
 Carter Tisdale- student
 R. Grant Willis- student
 Dr. Roy Michael Culpepper-faculty, department of internal medicine
 Dr. Geami Britt-resident, department of obstetrics & gynecology
 Dr. Michael Polcari- resident, department of medicine/pediatrics
 Dr. Brian Jones-resident, department of surgery

This year's class officers are Corwin McGee, president; R. Grant Willis, treasurer/secretary; and Jelania Scott, social coordinator.

The honorees will be recognized at the annual White Coat Ceremony on June 19, 2016, at 2 p.m. at the USA Mitchell Center.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the Gold Humanism Honor Society.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [9:28 AM](#) No comments:

Tuesday, January 19, 2016

Jan. 21 DSS to Feature Dr. Mary Jane Thomassen

This week's Distinguished Scientist Seminar at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine will feature Dr. Mary Jane Thomassen, professor of medicine in the division of pulmonary, critical care and sleep medicine at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C.

The lecture, titled "Pulmonary Alveolar Proteinosis: A Disease of Mice and Men," will take place Jan. 21, 2016, at 4 p.m. in the first floor auditorium of the Medical Sciences Building on USA's main campus.



Dr. Thomassen earned her undergraduate degree in

microbiology from the University of Maryland and her doctorate in microbiology from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Her interests include pulmonary defense mechanisms, macrophage activation, sarcoidosis and adult respiratory distress syndrome.

The lecture series is comprised of distinguished scientists from other academic institutions who are invited by the USA College of Medicine basic science departments to present a seminar showcasing their latest research findings. Faculty, staff and students are strongly encouraged to attend.

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