

# Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, February 16, 2018

## USA GHHS Members Participate in Solidarity Week, Highlight Compassionate Patient Care



Members of the USA College of Medicine Gold Humanism Honor Society participate in Solidarity Week, a national initiative designed to remind students and employees of the importance of compassion in medicine.



USA fourth-year medical students and GHHS members Christina Antz and Jonathon Whitehead pose for a photo with Ariel in her hospital room at USA Children's & Women's Hospital Thursday, Feb.15, 2018. Students asked patients to tell them unique information about themselves, which they used to craft posters and display above their beds.

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His friends describe him as stoic and outspoken and if there is a problem – especially mechanical – he can fix it. These are the details Stephen wants his health care team at USA Medical Center to know about his life outside of the hospital.

This week, members of the University of South Alabama College of Medicine Chapter of the Arnold P. Gold Humanism in Medicine Honor Society participated in Solidarity Week, a national initiative designed to remind students and employees of the importance of compassion in medicine.

For the past three years, the “Tell Me More” program has served as the centerpiece of Solidarity Week. Led by GHHS members, the goal of “Tell Me More” is to engage patients in conversations that focus on important aspects of their lives rather than their illness. After obtaining consent, medical students asked patients to tell them unique information about themselves, which they used to craft posters and display above their beds.

Students also distributed Mari Gras beads to patients in celebration of Mardi Gras, which originated in Mobile, Ala.

Hilda Watkins, a third-year student at the USA College of Medicine and GHHS chapter member, said Stephen’s eyes lit up as she entered the room with the poster. Watkins handed Stephen and his wife, Cathy, Mardi Gras beads before hanging his poster above the bed.

According to Cathy, the compassionate care they have received at USA Medical Center is unmatched. “We have received an abundance of kindness here and I think we were spoiled,” she said. “The poster is great. Since we were here during Mardi Gras we weren’t able to attend any parades, so the beads were the perfect treat.”

Watkins said the “Tell Me More” program fosters relationships and provides the opportunity to relate to patients in ways other than their clinical diagnoses. “They were very willing to answer the questions and let me learn more about them,” she said. “Despite the hardships the patient and his wife have experienced, they were very thankful and smiled the entire time.”

Alexander Wiles, a fourth-year student at the USA College of Medicine and GHHS chapter president for the Class of 2018, said Solidarity Week is fun for patients and medical students alike. “Solidarity Week allows GHHS students to interact and get to know each other better,” he said. “We hear amazing stories about patients’ lives, and ‘Tell Me More’ is a great way to encourage our providers to remain engaged in the humanistic side of patient care. I love seeing the happiness we bring patients by learning more about them.”

Jonathon Whitehead, a third-year student at the USA College of Medicine and GHHS member, had the opportunity to learn more about Ariel, a pediatric patient at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital. “Ariel has a big heart for dogs and cats,” he said. “I tried my best to draw a few animals on her poster to make it special for her.”

Ariel and her grandmother admired her poster as Whitehead taped it to the wall. “It’s perfect. I wouldn’t add anything else,” she said. “I’m going to show it to everyone as they come in the room, and I want to frame it when I get home.”

“Practicing medicine is not just addressing the patient’s physical ailments,” said Christel Bowman, a third-year student at the USA College of Medicine and GHHS chapter member. “Sometimes a patient needs encouragement, advice or just a hand to hold. By being compassionate, we help them heal.”

While visiting patients, GHHS members distributed snacks to each nurse’s station to express their appreciation. They also hung a banner in the lobby of the Medical Sciences Building to motivate and encourage the second-year students as they prepare to take the United States Medical Licensing Examination Step 1 – the first of three licensure exams that assess their ability to apply knowledge, concepts and principles, and to demonstrate fundamental patient-centered skills.

“This project impacted me personally, and I did not realize what an impact a

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simple 'thank you' can have," Bowman said. "When we delivered goodie baskets to different departments, we were met with smiles, hugs and appreciation."

[Click here](#) to view more photos from Solidarity Week at USA.

To learn more about Solidarity Week, [click here](#). Share your own posts and photos using the hashtag #SolidarityWeek.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [3:11 PM](#) No comments:

## Multicenter Meta-Analysis Reveals Sepsis Patients can be Risk Stratified at the Time of Diagnosis Demonstrating Potential to Improve Critical Care Medicine on a Global Scale



Why do some people die after they develop a severe infection while others with similar risk factors survive? Sepsis, which is defined by a life-threatening dysregulated host immune response to infection, is a leading cause of in-hospital deaths in the United States. However, physicians still lack accurate tools that predict moderate risk patients who will die from sepsis from those that will not.

To satisfy this major healthcare need, 24 scientists from across the world collaborated on a community approach to derive gene-based models that can accurately predict 30-day mortality in patients with sepsis at the time of patient enrollment. The project was led by scientists from Sage Bionetworks, the University of South Alabama, Duke University and Stanford University, and the results were published today in Nature Communications.

"Sepsis is a heterogeneous disease contributing to half of all in-hospital deaths in the United States and is a leading cost for our health care system," said Dr. Raymond Langley, Assistant Professor at the University of South Alabama and one of the senior authors on the publication.

"Despite dozens of clinical trials, there are no pharmacologic treatments specific for sepsis that have been successfully utilized in clinical practice," he said. "Patient treatment still focuses on general management strategies including source control, antibiotics and supportive care. With improved accuracy in sepsis prognosis we can hopefully improve critical care through appropriate matching of patients with resources."

For this study, the team identified a large collection of both public and privately-held gene expression data from clinical sepsis studies at the time of diagnosis to study molecular changes in immune cells, also known as leukocytes. The patients were enrolled in the emergency department or the intensive care unit from



hospitals and universities around the world; such as the United States, Spain, England and Sydney, Australia.

These highly valuable datasets have been published publicly so others can perform independent analyses. Three scientific groups were then invited to build algorithmic models to predict 30-day mortality. Four different prognostic models, which had widely different predictive features (genes), were then evaluated utilizing independent external validation cohorts composed of patients with either community-acquired sepsis or hospital-acquired infections.

The research comprehensively revealed that patients with sepsis can be risk-stratified based on their gene expression profiles at the time of diagnosis.

"One the major strengths of this paper is that the data were subjected to analysis by several different groups of scientists using different methods. This allows us to suggest that the accuracy of the models we derived is unlikely to be beaten by other groups looking at similar data" said Timothy Sweeney, MD, PhD, lead author of the study and a researcher at Stanford at the time the work was performed. "Our focus here was explicitly to derive a highly predictive gene expression 'fingerprint' that could someday become a clinical tool. For that reason, our focus was on improving accuracy more than understanding biology."

Still, said Dr. Langley, "These gene expression models reflect a patient's underlying biological response and could potentially serve as a valuable clinical assay for prognosis and for defining the host dysfunction responsible for sepsis. These results serve as a benchmark for future prognostic model development and as a rich source of information that can be mined for additional insights. Our community approach identified a large number of genes associated with sepsis mortality that may point to underlying biology."

Dr. Langley said the data from this study holds far-reaching potential to improve critical care medicine on a global scale.

"A very sick patient could be diverted to ICU for maximal intervention, while patients predicted to have a better outcome may be safely monitored in the hospital or even discharged early," he said. "More precise estimates of prognosis would also allow for better discussions regarding patient preferences and the utility of aggressive interventions, while better molecular phenotyping of sepsis patients has the potential to improve clinical trials."

The study was funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) as a DREAM Challenge initially tasked to determine resiliency. DREAM Challenges, powered by Sage Bionetworks, allow for a community approach to determine solutions to complex health problems to improve translational medicine.

To view the data published in Nature Communications, visit <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-03078-2>.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [9:40 AM](#) No comments:

**Thursday, February 15, 2018**

## Internal Medicine to Host Multi-Departmental Grand Rounds on Feb. 22



The department of internal medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine will host a multi-departmental grand rounds on Feb. 22, 2018, at 8 a.m. in the conference room on the second floor of USA Medical Center.

The lecture, titled "The Microbiome: A Multi-Organ System Dynamic Interaction," will feature contributions from numerous departments of medicine at USA. The lecture is designed to present an understanding of the vast role of the microbiome in clinical illness.

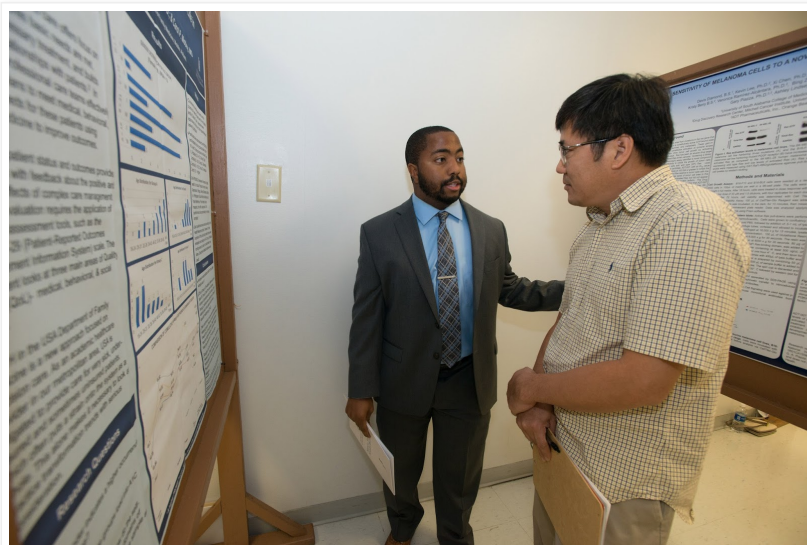
Presenters include Drs. Andrew Berry, a third-year internal medicine resident; Robert Wildman, a fourth-year neurology resident; Mohammed Berrou, a pulmonology and critical care fellow; and Benjamin Niland, a gastroenterology fellow.

The event is open to all USA faculty, staff and students.

For more information, contact Jacqueline Niles at (251) 471-7900.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [9:00 AM](#) No comments:

## Summer Research Proposal Deadline Approaching



The deadline to submit proposals for the 2018 Medical Student Summer Research Program is Feb. 28, 2018.

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine's Summer Research Program is a 9-week program (May 30 through July 27, 2018) that pairs medical students with faculty mentors. The program is open to entering medical students and rising second-year medical students in the USA College of Medicine.

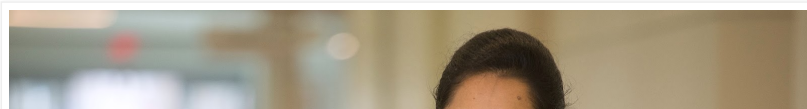
Through this program, students develop an appreciation of how research contributes to the knowledge and the practice of medicine. The summer experience includes hands-on research related to basic science and/or clinical medicine; a seminar program that focuses on various scientific and clinical topics; and student presentations at Research Day.

The Medical Student Research Proposal form and the Research Compliance Checklist for the Summer Research Program can be found [here](#). Please submit these forms to Marcina Lang, the program coordinator, at [marcinalang@southalabama.edu](mailto:marcinalang@southalabama.edu). Research proposal guidelines and example proposals are available online to assist you with proposal preparation. Please follow the format provided.

For more information, call (251) 460-6041.

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## USA Welcomes Dr. Preethi Marri



Dr. Preethi Marri recently was appointed assistant professor of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine and serves as a pediatric hematologist and oncologist with USA Physicians Group.

Prior to her appointment at USA, Dr. Marri served as chair of pediatrics and as a pediatric hospitalist at Providence Hospital in Mobile, Ala. She also previously served as an instructor in pediatric and adolescent medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Dr. Marri earned her medical degree from SVS Medical College - NTR University of Health Sciences in Andhra Pradesh, India. She earned a master's in hospital administration from the University of New Haven in New Haven, Conn. Dr. Marri later went on to complete an internship in pediatrics at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich., a residency in pediatrics at Texas A&M, Scott and White Children's Hospital in Temple, Texas, and a fellowship in pediatric hematology and oncology at the Mayo Clinic.

Dr. Marri is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Society of Pediatric hematology/oncology, and the Mobile Pediatric Society of Alabama. Her research in pediatric hematology and oncology has been published and presented extensively.

Dr. Marri practices at the Strada Patient Care Center, located at 1601 Center St. in Mobile. To make an appointment with her, call (251) 410-5437.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [8:40 AM](#) No comments:

## USA Center for Healthy Communities Receives 2018 Health and Human Services Award



From left: Dr. Martha Arrieta, director of research at the USA Center for Healthy Communities; Dr. Errol Crook, Professor and Abraham Mitchell Chair of Internal Medicine at the USA College of Medicine and director of the USA Center for Healthy Communities; and Dr. Roma Hanks, co-core director of community outreach at the USA Center for Healthy Communities.

Three faculty members at the University of South Alabama Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) recently received the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Health and Human Services Award from the People United to Advance the Dream Mobile, Inc. (PUAD) – a local nonprofit organization that encourages unity and promotes peace and harmony in the community.

The CHC is the lead entity within the USA College of Medicine for coordinating community education, research, public service and health activities to help eliminate health disparities, foster access to health care for underserved populations and enhance the capacity of individuals to better participate in decision making about their health.

Dr. Errol Crook, Professor and Abraham Mitchell Chair of Internal Medicine at the USA College of Medicine and director of the USA Center for Healthy Communities; Dr. Martha Arrieta, director of research at the USA Center for Healthy Communities; and Dr. Roma Hanks, co-core director of community outreach at the USA Center for Healthy Communities, were presented the award at the PUAD Second Annual Black Tie Gala – an award ceremony recognizing individuals in the Mobile community for their dedication and service to enrich the lives of others.

According to Dr. Crook, the Health and Human Service Award – presented to individuals and organizations who work to address health disparities through research and community engagement – represents the mission and values of CHC.

“CHC focuses on health in a holistic sense by promoting fair opportunities for everyone to pursue happiness, be safe and live a healthy lifestyle,” Dr. Crook said. “CHC allows people throughout the greater Mobile area that are civic minded and have a specific interest in pursuing a healthy way of life to link with others who are like minded. When they come together, their efforts are additive and impactful, causing synergistic effects throughout the community.”

Dr. Arrieta said the award holds tremendous value as it provides a new impetus and renewed commitment to continue the Center for Healthy Communities’ work to move the needle in the direction of health equity. “It also validates our effort to create a meaningful connection with the residents of the USA Medical Center service area,” she said. “Based on participatory research principles, we have engaged community leaders, stakeholders and community members as partners in research studies and as leaders of projects aimed at improving community health. The award tells us that we have made progress toward earning a measure of trust and respect from the community through our 14 years of dedicated effort.”

Dr. Hanks credits her life stage for giving the award a deeper meaning. “I can remember watching TV as the events of Dr. King’s life and leadership unfolded,” she said. “Being part of this honor from a group committed to keeping Dr. King’s dream alive gives me great hope for the future. We need to continue to raise issues and to make sure that voices are heard.”

According to Dr. Hanks, the award also speaks to the dedication CHC has to community outreach. Community Health Advocates (CHA) – volunteers who work with the CHC to support the fight against health disparities and to promote a healthy lifestyle to those in need – assist their communities by bringing awareness and education to specific health issues.

“The CHA program has taught me what true commitment to health and community looks like in action,” Dr. Hanks said. “Our CHAs give tirelessly to ensure that their communities have accurate, relevant and culturally competent health messages. Whether they are conducting a health fair, giving a lecture, or building a community garden, they are fully engaged in the process and outcome.”

Dr. Crook said a long-time CHA, Dr. Bobbie Holt-Ragler, nominated CHC for the award. “Bobbie, who received the award in 2017, has been with us for over a decade,” he said. “It was incredibly heartwarming that one of our partners recognized our value and thought we were worthy of this award.”

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