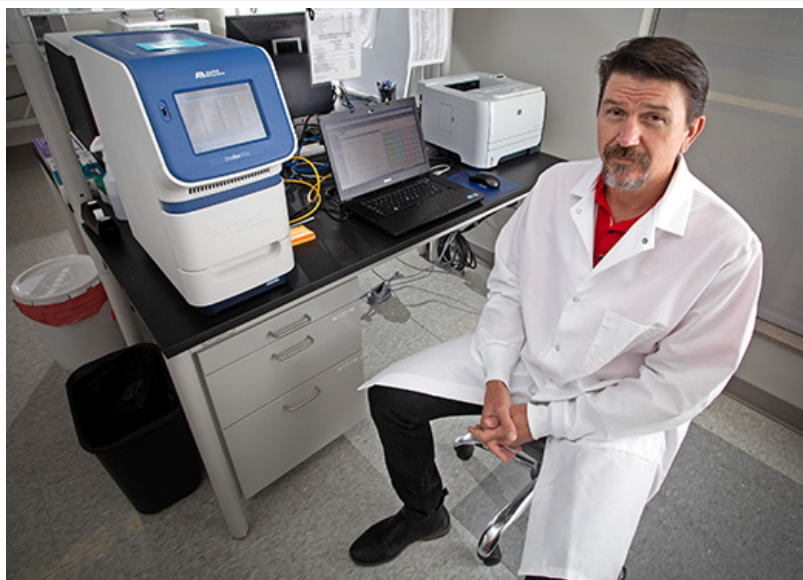


Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, July 13, 2018

USA COM Partners with MCHD to Better Monitor Mosquito-Borne Viruses



Dr. Jonathan Rayner, associate professor of microbiology and immunology and director of the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases at the USA College of Medicine

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine recently partnered with the Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) to screen mosquitoes and determine the presence of mosquito-borne viruses in the community.

With more than 50 species of mosquitoes in Mobile County, MCHD's Vector Control recently set up mosquito traps across the county to track the mosquito population. Under the new collaboration, the mosquitoes collected from the traps will now be brought to researchers at USA.

Each week, Dr. John McCreadie, an entomologist in the biology department at USA, will identify and sort the mosquitoes into pools. Using high-throughput molecular methods, Dr. Jonathan Rayner, associate professor of microbiology and immunology and director of the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases at the USA College of Medicine, will then screen the pools for viruses including dengue, Zika and chikungunya.

Both Zika and chikungunya have been introduced into the United States with localized spread observed in the states of Florida and Texas, respectively. "We know that some of the vectors that are important in the transmission of viruses like Zika and chikungunya are present in Mobile County, but no one is currently looking to determine if the viruses are here," Dr. Rayner said. "Just because the vector is present does not mean that the virus is also, but if no one is looking then we can't know for sure."

Dr. Rayner said the MCHD has supported a longstanding program in vector-borne

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Blog Archive

- ▶ 2023 (11)
- ▶ 2022 (249)
- ▶ 2021 (269)
- ▶ 2020 (191)
- ▶ 2019 (245)
- ▼ 2018 (236)
 - ▶ 12/30 - 01/06 (3)
 - ▶ 12/23 - 12/30 (2)
 - ▶ 12/16 - 12/23 (8)
 - ▶ 12/09 - 12/16 (5)
 - ▶ 12/02 - 12/09 (4)
 - ▶ 11/25 - 12/02 (4)
 - ▶ 11/18 - 11/25 (2)
 - ▶ 11/11 - 11/18 (7)
 - ▶ 11/04 - 11/11 (3)
 - ▶ 10/28 - 11/04 (4)
 - ▶ 10/21 - 10/28 (3)
 - ▶ 10/14 - 10/21 (3)
 - ▶ 10/07 - 10/14 (4)
 - ▶ 09/30 - 10/07 (4)
 - ▶ 09/23 - 09/30 (7)
 - ▶ 09/16 - 09/23 (6)
 - ▶ 09/09 - 09/16 (8)
 - ▶ 09/02 - 09/09 (4)
 - ▶ 08/26 - 09/02 (8)
 - ▶ 08/19 - 08/26 (7)
 - ▶ 08/12 - 08/19 (5)
 - ▶ 08/05 - 08/12 (4)
 - ▶ 07/29 - 08/05 (6)
 - ▶ 07/22 - 07/29 (4)
 - ▶ 07/15 - 07/22 (4)
 - ▼ 07/08 - 07/15 (6)

infectious disease surveillance that is centered on sentinel chickens. "This program has been very effective, but the issue is that it requires the chicken to be fed on by the mosquito that transmits the virus; and the animal must then develop an antibody response that can be detected," he said. "The program is also limited in the amount of pathogens that are being screened and does not include some of today's key pathogens such as Zika."

The new collaboration allows researchers to capitalize on the mosquitoes themselves, offering a more accurate and extensive picture of what is present. "We bypass the middle man, which is the chicken, and go right to the mosquito pool to look at the genetic signatures that would indicate the presence of the virus," Dr. Rayner said.

According to Dr. Rayner, the overarching goal of this collaboration is to provide additional advanced warning to the presence of these diseases in our area, so local county health departments and officials can implement appropriate practices and measures to ensure citizens of the county are protected.

"MCHD is excited about its collaboration with USA," said Kelly Warren, director of prevention and wellness at MCHD. "In its desire to be ever more vigilant in the prevention of mosquitoes and mosquito-borne illness, this relationship will strengthen our surveillance significantly."

Implementation of this program complements current collaborations between USA's Department of Biology in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology in the College of Medicine to screen ticks in Alabama for infectious diseases, which is funded through a grant from the State of Alabama.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [8:37AM](#) No comments:

Thursday, July 12, 2018

USA College of Medicine Welcomes Dr. Valeria L. Dal Zotto



Dr. Valeria L. Dal Zotto recently was appointed assistant professor of pathology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a pathologist with USA Physicians Group.

Dr. Dal Zotto received her medical degree from the Universidad de Buenos Aires in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She completed her residency in the anatomic pathology program at the Hospital de Clinicas at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and a surgical pathology fellowship at the Sanatorio Mater Dei in Buenos Aires.

[USA COM Partners with MCHD to Better Monitor Mosqu...](#)

[USA College of Medicine Welcomes Dr. Valeria L. Da...](#)

[Register Now: South Alabama Regional Conference on...](#)

[USA Medical Students Selected as Inaugural Blue Cr...](#)

[USA Basic Medical Sciences Student Awarded ALEPSCo...](#)

[USA Welcomes Dr. Ninh Doan to Neurosurgery](#)

► [07/01 - 07/08 \(2\)](#)

► [06/24 - 07/01 \(5\)](#)

► [06/17 - 06/24 \(5\)](#)

► [06/10 - 06/17 \(6\)](#)

► [06/03 - 06/10 \(4\)](#)

► [05/27 - 06/03 \(4\)](#)

► [05/20 - 05/27 \(4\)](#)

► [05/13 - 05/20 \(4\)](#)

► [05/06 - 05/13 \(5\)](#)

► [04/29 - 05/06 \(4\)](#)

► [04/22 - 04/29 \(5\)](#)

► [04/15 - 04/22 \(5\)](#)

► [04/08 - 04/15 \(5\)](#)

► [04/01 - 04/08 \(5\)](#)

► [03/25 - 04/01 \(4\)](#)

► [03/18 - 03/25 \(4\)](#)

► [03/11 - 03/18 \(5\)](#)

► [03/04 - 03/11 \(4\)](#)

► [02/25 - 03/04 \(4\)](#)

► [02/18 - 02/25 \(3\)](#)

► [02/11 - 02/18 \(6\)](#)

► [02/04 - 02/11 \(4\)](#)

► [01/28 - 02/04 \(3\)](#)

► [01/21 - 01/28 \(3\)](#)

► [01/14 - 01/21 \(5\)](#)

► [01/07 - 01/14 \(3\)](#)

► [2017 \(231\)](#)

► [2016 \(206\)](#)

► [2015 \(205\)](#)

► [2014 \(241\)](#)

► [2013 \(232\)](#)

► [2012 \(245\)](#)

► [2011 \(262\)](#)

► [2010 \(247\)](#)

► [2009 \(88\)](#)

She also completed a surgical pathology fellowship at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn and served as an administrative chief resident at USA Medical Center.

She has been a member of the American Society of Clinical Pathology, College of American Pathologists and United States and Canadian Academy of Pathology since 2013. She also has been a member of the Argentinean Society of Pathology since 1996.

Dr. Dal Zotto received two awards for the research project "Utility of Detection of Anti-neutrophil Cytoplasmic Antibodies in Different Pathologies" in Buenos Aires: the Casasco Laboratory Annual Scientific Award and the Roemmers Laboratory Annual Scientific Award.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [2:05 PM](#) No comments:

Register Now: South Alabama Regional Conference on Mental Health

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine Office of Continuing Medical Education will host the South Alabama Regional Conference on Mental Health from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. July 27, at the USA Student Center. Physicians, nurses, medical students and anyone interested in the topic are invited to attend.

The goal of the event is to bring together experts to share their research, experience and interventions surrounding ADHD, anxiety and depression. Participants will learn to recognize when behavior modification is no longer effective and how to implement specific tools and strategies to assist individuals with ADHD. Experts will also teach ways to manage or overcome issues preventing academic, personal or social success.

The conference will feature Dr. Daniel Preud'Homme, director of adolescent medicine for USA Health; Dr. James Wiley, CEO of Focus-MD LLC; and Jennifer Wilke-Deaton, a licensed behavioral health therapist.

Registration is \$35. Breakfast and a lunch buffet will be provided.

To register, call (251) 414-8080, email scanford@southalabama.edu or [register online](#).

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

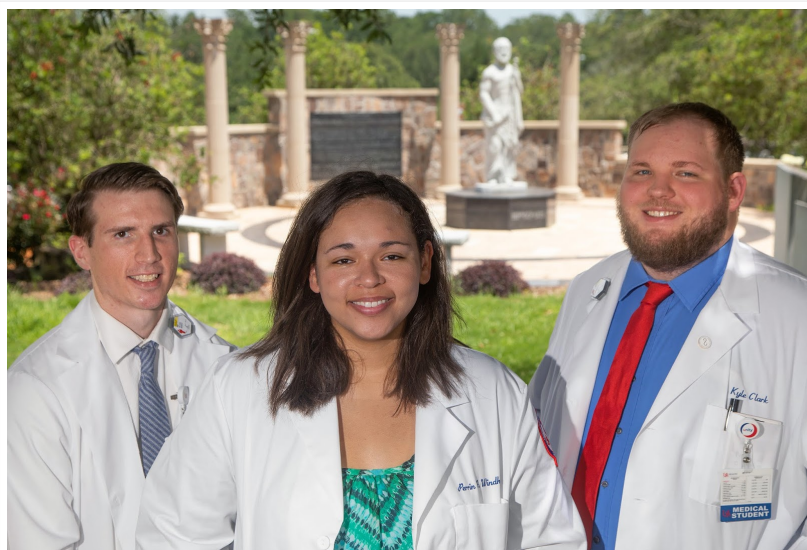
Wednesday, July 11, 2018

USA Medical Students Selected as Inaugural Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama Scholarship Recipients

Three medical students from the University of South Alabama College of Medicine are the recipients of a scholarship from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, a new initiative aimed at expanding access to quality health care for all Alabamians.

Perrin Windham, a fourth-year medical student, and Kyle Clark and Michael Marfice, both third-year medical students, each received a \$60,000 scholarship, which covers the costs of their last two years of medical school. After completing their residencies, the scholars will commit a minimum of three years to practicing as primary care physicians in medically under-served areas of Alabama.

Dr. Tony Waldrop, president of USA, said the Blue Cross scholarship program speaks directly to the university's efforts in four areas of priority: "our mission to improve student success and access; our efforts to enhance research and graduate education; our delivery of excellence in health care; and our engagement with a community partner – in this case, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama – to strengthen the positive impact we collectively make throughout



From left, Michael Marfice, Perrin Windham and Kyle Clark are the inaugural recipients of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Scholarship.

our region."

According to the Alabama Rural Health Association, 54 of Alabama's 56 rural counties are entirely or partially classified as primary care and mental health care shortage areas. To help meet this need, Blue Cross partnered with the USA College of Medicine to offer \$1.2 million in scholarships, over a five-year period, to deserving USA medical students.

"Forty-five years ago, our medical school was founded with a core mission to train physicians who, in turn, would serve the health care needs of the citizens of our state," said Dr. John V. Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine. "This tradition continues today as evidenced by our Blue Cross and Blue Shield scholars who have answered a calling to practice medicine in one of Alabama's under-served areas."

Compared with graduates from all other allopathic medical schools in the country, Dr. Marymont said, graduates from the USA College of Medicine rank in the 75th percentile for physicians practicing in state, 81st percentile for practicing in primary care, and 99th percentile for practicing in under-served areas.

Caring for vulnerable populations is part of what motivated Clark, a native of Ozark, Ala., to apply for the scholarship. "Growing up in a small town, my family is very country," he said. "There's a lot of heart disease, diabetes and obesity in my family. It's important to have a rural doctor there to help people understand that the choices they're making are not going to help them live a happier life down the road."

Clark had the opportunity to do summer research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, an experience that helped him realize he has no desire to live or work in a big city. He said receiving the Blue Cross scholarship solidified his decision to serve in a rural community.

Windham of Daphne, Ala., said the scholarship served as a reinforcement for her career path as well. She initially intended to specialize in oncology, the result of losing her father to cancer at a young age. But, once she went through the pediatrics rotation during her third year of medical school, Windham realized her vocation was working with children.

"Being able to see kids, even when they were sick, made me so happy," she said. "I loved going to work every day."

Since primary care encompasses pediatrics, Windham said, "I could apply for the scholarship and still do what I want to do with my life – and give back in the way that I want to give back."

Marfice of Grand Bay, Ala., had frequent doctor visits as a child, due to a benign

tumor in his ear. He acknowledged the burden it placed on his parents to travel regularly for the primary and specialty care he received. His childhood medical history, coupled with his grandparents' health struggles, led to a "strong pull to go into medicine."

"I'm actually in the position now to be able to deliver care to other people's grandparents," Marfice said. "I feel like I can do the most good by going into primary care."

Marfice said the Blue Cross scholarship helps to relieve a tremendous amount of financial stress, allowing him to focus on his studies and patient care as he begins clinical rotations this year.

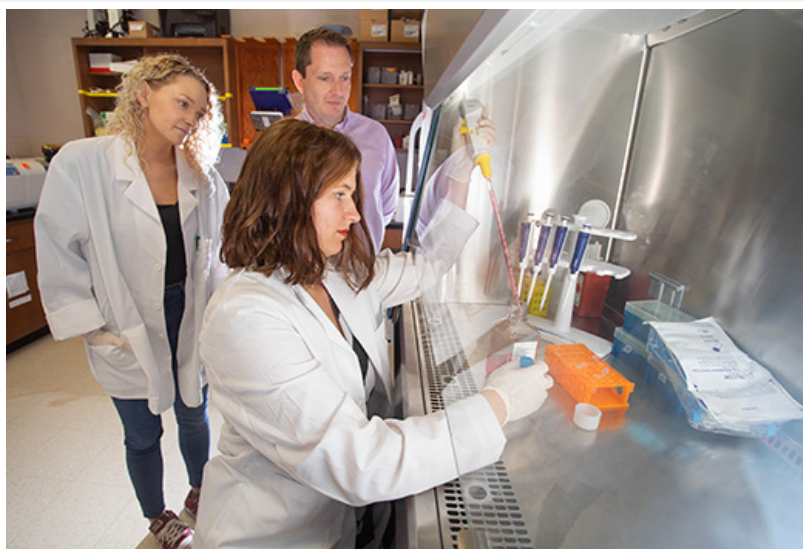
"I want to be able to practice medicine, to practice medicine," he said. "So, being able to focus primarily on work doesn't just help me. It helps the patients as well, because I can be there completely for the patients, as opposed to paying off the next student loan bill."

[Check out photos from the press conference on Flickr.](#)

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [10:57 AM](#) No comments:

Tuesday, July 10, 2018

USA Basic Medical Sciences Student Awarded ALEPSCoR Fellowship



Victoria Pickle, left, and Dr. Glen Borchert look on as Dominika Houserova, sitting, works in the lab.

Dominika Houserova, a second-year student in the University of South Alabama Basic Medical Sciences Graduate Program, recently received a one-year Alabama Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (ALEPSCoR) Graduate Research Scholars Program (GRSP) fellowship award to study small non-coding RNAs in *Salmonella*.

Victoria Pickle, who is earning her master's degree in biology at USA, also received the award. Both Houserova and Pickle are graduate students in the lab of Dr. Glen Borchert, assistant professor of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. Both students will conduct EPSCoR-supported research in Dr. Borchert's lab through grants from the National Science Foundation.

"These fellowships are extremely competitive," Dr. Borchert said. "This marks the second time Dominika has received the award and the first for Victoria."

Houserova said the fellowship will allow her to devote 100 percent of her time to scientific pursuits. "Moreover, it enables us to allocate more funds towards purchasing materials and solvents used in my experiments, as well as covering

costs related to traveling to various annual conferences and workshops," she said.

Her research focuses on identification of novel, small non-coding RNA (sRNA) found in Salmonella in an attempt to understand how these bacteria survive in unfavorable environments such as high heat, antibiotic treatment and oxidation. "This work will hopefully lead to the identification of not only numerous new genes in this pathogen, but also lead the way for identifying countless similar genes across an array of other medically relevant bacteria," she said.

According to Houserova, sRNAs are molecules known to be potent genetic regulators in both eukaryotes and prokaryotes. "Despite their recently appreciated roles in eukaryotic cell regulations, only a handful of sRNAs have been identified in bacteria," she said. "I chose this project because there is still so much we do not know about genetics and many related metabolic process. Here we strive to identify and characterize novel sRNAs in Salmonella enteric to help define various mechanisms behind their regulatory abilities. These new genes may represent novel therapeutic targets for treating these pathogens and offer new alternative to current antibiotic-based treatments."

Pickle said her research aims to provide new insights for clinically valuable therapeutic or prognostic targets for lung cancer. "Small nucleolar RNAs (snoRNAs) were first described in the 1960s and have been thought to function almost exclusively in basic cellular maintenance for more than 50 years," she said. "However, recent studies have now called for a reassessment of the function of snoRNAs after genetic searches for tumor-suppressor genes have revealed miss-regulations associated with prostate, breast and lung malignancies."

The GRSP – a state investment in Alabama's universities to expand research output – is unique among national EPSCoR programs, as few states have committed major resources toward the sponsorship and development of its next generation of researchers, scientists and innovators. The award offers research opportunities to graduate students under the guidance of some of Alabama's finest research scientists.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [3:02 PM](#) No comments:

USA Welcomes Dr. Ninh Doan to Neurosurgery



Dr. Ninh Doan recently was appointed assistant professor of neurosurgery at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and serves as a neurosurgeon with USA Physicians Group.

Dr. Doan received his medical degree and Ph.D. from the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago. He then completed a post-doctoral research fellowship at Northwestern University in Chicago and completed his residency

training in neurosurgery at the Medical College of Wisconsin. His clinical interests include neuro-trauma, general neurosurgery, spinal surgery and neuro-oncology.

Dr. Doan has received over \$100,000 in research grants, and his research has been published in many academic medical journals.

To make an appointment, call (251) 665-8290.

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