

# Med School Watercooler

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

Thursday, July 27, 2017

## SouthMed Prep Scholars Present Research



The University of South Alabama College of Medicine Office of Diversity and Inclusion recently hosted SouthMed Prep Scholars (SMPS) Research Day. Through partnerships established with Dillard University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Tuskegee University and Xavier University, a group of highly competitive students from these institutions are given the opportunity to engage in one or two summer research experiences at the USA College of Medicine.

During the summer, seven undergraduate students gained invaluable research experience and presented their summer research projects.

Dr. John Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine, said partnerships with historically black colleges and universities are designed to enrich the diversity of the physician workforce and enhance educational experiences. "Our SouthMed Prep Scholars Program provides students with exposure to the university and prepares them for the rigors of medical school, while supporting the growth of a community that is underrepresented," he said.

Nkemdi Agwarambo, a 2017 graduate of Xavier University, recently completed the program. As the first graduate of the program, Agwarambo served as a mentor scholar to the students, assisting them with summer orientation, mock interviews, and preparing for their research presentations. He opened the event by offering helpful advice, as research day marked the first time presenting research for many students.

Agwarambo said the experiences offered by the program led him to see "the gem that USA is," and influenced his decision to attend USA College of Medicine this fall.

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Sydney Brown, a rising junior at Dillard University, summer project focused on the "Formation of Endothelial Cell Networks." Together, Brown and her principal investigator Dr. Sarah Gebb, assistant professor of cell biology and neuroscience at the USA College of Medicine, studied angiogenesis.

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"Programs like SouthMed Prep Scholars are especially important for minorities because it gives us opportunities that we may not have had before," Brown said. "I chose to participate in this program to prepare myself for medical school and to help me become a more competitive applicant when applying to medical school."

"The SouthMed Prep Scholars Program serves to facilitate the preparation of highly qualified students who aspire to become physicians and complement the USA College of Medicine recruitment of underrepresented groups," said Dr. Johnson Haynes, assistant dean of the office of diversity and inclusion, professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine and director of the USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center.

According to Chante' Hendrix, diversity coordinator for the office of diversity and inclusion and the SMPS program director, the program is important as it helps students navigate a successful path into medical school. "Students are exposed to research, shadowing, mock interviews, simulation experiences, mentoring and networking with College of Medicine faculty, staff and students," she said. "The program's objective is to help strengthen more diversity in the physician workforce and build solid relationships with our partners at five historically black colleges and universities as they help support our presence and growth."

"Looking at how much the program has grown and how much growth remains in the future, I am excited and proud to say that I was the first to complete the SouthMed Prep Scholars Program," Agawarambo said. "I was once told that when you walk through a door you have two options: you can either close that door for others behind you or you can hold it open. I am confident that with the help of Dr. Haynes, Mrs. Hendrix and my SouthMed Prep Scholars family, the door will remain open."

Like the majority of SMPS, this was Alesha Westbrook's first research experience. A rising sophomore at Spelman College, Westbrook was quite nervous about transitioning to a new environment and the expectations surrounding research. However, she notes that her principal investigators Dr's. Silas Leavesley and Tom Rich gave her such an ease into learning about her project on Cyclic Adenosine Monophosphate. She said she was presented daily with an article to read related to research and or her topic, she practiced seeding cells, sterilization, conducting microscopic experiments, running and analyzing data, and making movies from the data that she analyzed. Westbrook adds, "I was also able to gain insight on preparing for medical school through this program."

The ODI staff is grateful for the enthusiasm and support offered by the USA College of Medicine principal investigators and staff. "A special thank you to Dr. Troy Stevens, Dr. Michael Francis, Dr. Silas Leavesley, Dr. Tom Rich, Dr. Sarah Gebb McMurtry, Dr. Jon Audia and Dr. Sarah Sayner," Hendrix said. "Opening their labs to our scholars provided an enriching and rewarding experience."

Both Dr. Haynes and Hendrix are also very thankful for the rewarding shadowing experiences that the scholars were provided by faculty at USA Medical Center. A special thanks goes to faculty in the Medical Intensive Care Unit, Family Medicine Department, Emergency Medicine Department and Internal Medicine Department.

For many of the scholars this was their first time shadowing. Kiara Carmichael, a student at Tuskegee University, describes her overall SMPS summer as "one of the most eye-opening experiences" that she has had in college. Further, she says shadowing allowed her to network with doctors and residents and gave her the opportunity to see "what really goes into being a doctor." For Carmichael, exposure to the SMPS program has "confirmed that medicine is the career path" that she definitely wants to take.

SouthMed Prep Scholars is a pre-medical school enrichment program comprised of a select number of academically competitive freshman and sophomore students. The program continues through the students' senior year of college and

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is designed to enhance medical school access and success through two eight-week summer sessions that focus on research, MCAT preparation and the interview process.

View more photos from SouthMed Prep Research Day [here](#).

To learn more about SouthMed Prep, click [here](#).

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [9:14 AM](#) No comments: 

## Med School Café- Expert Advice for the Community



Dr. Brooks Cash, professor of internal medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a gastroenterologist with USA Physicians Group, presented the June Med School Café lecture titled "Advanced Capabilities of the USA Gastroenterology Division."

During the talk, Dr. Cash — who also serves as chief of the division of gastroenterology and director of the USA Digestive Health Center — discussed hepatology, irritable bowel disease, clinical trials, PillCam COLON and other unique treatment options offered by the division of gastroenterology at USA.

Med School Café is a free community lecture series sponsored by the USA Physicians Group. Each month, faculty from the USA College of Medicine share their expertise on a specific medical condition, providing insight on the latest treatment available.

Watch the video below to view the lecture in its entirety.



### June Med School Cafe - Advanced Capabilities of the USA Gastroenterology Division

USA Health

1:17:03

June Med School Cafe - Advanced Capabilities of the USA Gastroenterology Division from USA Health on Vimeo.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [8:00 AM](#) No comments:

**Tuesday, July 25, 2017**

## Natalie Fox Appointed Director of Nursing for USA Physicians Group



Natalie Fox, pediatric nurse practitioner and manager of clinical operations for pediatrics at USA Physicians Group, recently was appointed director of nursing for USA Physicians Group.

"Natalie's enthusiasm, openness and willingness to dig in and focus on patient care and patient outcomes, coupled with her experience in measuring clinic performance, makes her uniquely suited to help USA Physicians Group continue to make advances in patient care and customer service," said Brian Norris, administrator of ambulatory services for USA Health.

Fox joined USA in 2011 and during the past six years has provided outstanding leadership and clinical oversight for the department of pediatrics.

In her new position, Fox will manage and mentor members of the clinical team and oversee the analytical functions necessary to support quality initiatives like patient centered medical home. She will also provide leadership in an effort to continuously improve patient-centeredness, patient equity and timeliness of health care delivery to physician practice patients.



"Being a provider at USA, Natalie understands the great job our staff does in serving our patients," Norris added. "Conversely, she knows what challenges our staff—particularly our clinical staff—experience in meeting patient and faculty needs. With that knowledge, she will be a great asset for our clinical staff and our patients."

According to Fox, her overarching goal as the director of nursing is to use a dynamic shared leadership approach to inspire clinical staff to continuously aim to improve the health of patients seen at USA Physicians Group through the delivery of high-quality services that are patient-centered, effective, efficient and timely.

As she begins her new role, Fox said she will continue to see patients. "I believe it is important to stay engaged on the front lines to understand the processes that affect our patients, staff and providers," she said. "Plus, I really like connecting with my patients and challenging my clinical side."

Fox earned both her bachelor of science in nursing and master of science in nursing from USA. She is also currently completing her doctorate of nursing practice degree at USA. She is a member of Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society and the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners.

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**Monday, July 24, 2017**

## Dr. Di Palma Marks 30 Years with USA College of Medicine



Dr. Jack Di Palma holds a red fish he caught offshore of Happy Jack, La.

"When I review fellowship applications, they always have a personal statement. Someone always says they're here to save the world," said USA gastroenterologist Dr. Jack Di Palma. "I have never said that, but I am passionate for medicine because it gives me the opportunity to perform a service that is a blessing."

Dr. Di Palma, program director of the division of gastroenterology and professor of internal medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, recently celebrated 30 years at USA as a medical educator and physician.

Dr. Di Palma joined the USA College of Medicine in 1987 after completing gastroenterology fellowship training at Wilford Hall USAG Medical Center in San Antonio, serving on faculty for four years as assistant chair of gastroenterology.

"When I started at USA, there was no formal gastroenterology program at the university. I was fortunate enough to recruit faculty and start a fellowship program to develop research in teaching and to develop our patient care programs," Dr. Di Palma said.

Dr. Di Palma served as director of gastroenterology until October 2016, when Dr. Brooks Cash took over as director of gastroenterology. "Dr. Cash is an experienced clinician, administrator and educator who is well-poised to be the next generation's leader in the gastroenterology division," Dr. Di Palma said.

Dr. Di Palma is passionate about teaching students and fellows training in the gastroenterology program. "I always remind students to cherish the blessing of practicing medicine," he said.

When he's not busy mentoring and creating curricula for fellows in the gastroenterology department - during which time he recently welcomed the division's 50th fellow - Dr. Di Palma looks forward to another kind of mentoring. He is the team faculty advisor for the USA Bass Fishing Club.

Dr. Di Palma said, "We could joke and say that I'm the designated grown-up for the team, but since my children are now 38 and 33, it's been fun to be a mentor again to young adults."


An avid outdoorsman for many years, Dr. Di Palma has enjoyed fishing in the many fresh and salt waters that are available to citizens in our region. When the advisor position for the USA Bass Fishing Club came up, he immediately jumped aboard.

"Programs like the USA Bass Fishing Club are important because we all need to be well-rounded individuals and move away from our jobs every now and then. It helps to expand ourselves, relax, reflect and be more productive," he said.

Dr. Di Palma supports his team, who has qualified for and will be competing in a national tournament Oct. 10-11, 2017, on Lake Bemidji in Bemidji, Minn. "We are fortunate to have superb athletes on the USA Bass Fishing Team," Dr. Di Palma said.

After 30 years of service at USA, Dr. Di Palma believes that the mentoring of medical students, fellows and members of the USA Bass Fishing Team are important parts of his career. "I am so pleased to have had the opportunity to mentor and teach medical students, athletes, and at least 50 young gastroenterologists who are scattered all over the country."

As far as the future, Dr. Di Palma is excited to have recruited an excellent leader in Dr. Cash and looks forward to continuing what he calls a blessing - that of being an academic physician.

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