

Med School Watercooler

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

Thursday, April 4, 2019

Dr. Richard Honkanen appointed chair of biochemistry and molecular biology



Dr. Richard Honkanen has been appointed chair of the department of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. Previously, he served as professor in the department.

"Dr. Honkanen is a world-renowned educator, researcher and basic scientist," said Dr. John V. Marymont, dean of the USA College of Medicine and vice president for medical affairs. "He has helped to draw global attention to the innovative research being done at the USA College of Medicine. Dr. Honkanen brings leadership, knowledge and expertise in his new role as department chair."

In addition to his administrative duties as chair, Dr. Honkanen will serve as the liaison between the biochemistry and molecular biology faculty and the dean of the College of Medicine. He also plans to recruit additional faculty.

"The mission for the department is to continue to improve both graduate and medical student education," Dr. Honkanen said. "We will also focus on the further development of a vibrant and productive research environment. This research effort will be devoted understanding the biochemical and molecular basis of biology and disease, with an emphasis on strict application of scientific methods to ensure robust experimental design, methodology and analysis, coupled with unbiased interpretation and reporting of results."

Dr. Honkanen will continue his active externally funded research efforts. Currently, he is one of 11 top researchers from around the world chosen to take part in a research project to study PPP2R5D gene mutation in children. PPP2R5D is a gene involved with cellular growth and development throughout the human body, especially the brain and neurodevelopment. Dr. Honkanen was selected for the project due to his extensive knowledge of protein phosphates.

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One of these phosphatases (PP5) was even launched into space, as part of the SpaceX Commercial Resupply Services (CRS) mission to the International Space Station. PP5 is an enzyme that acts as a phosphatase and is considered a validated target for anti-tumor drug development.

Among the research grants he has been awarded, Dr Honkanen received an NIH Directors Transformative Research Award for his project "Methods to Enable Cholesterol Catabolism in Human Monocyte Derived Macrophages." Patents related to technology developed under this award have recently been licensed to Repair Athero, Inc, a start-up biotech company based in Texas.

Dr. Honkanen joined the USA faculty as an assistant professor in 1993. He earned his Ph.D. in microbiology from the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. He completed a postdoctoral research fellowship in biochemistry at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, Georgia, followed by postdoctoral research in molecular oncology at the Cancer Research Center of Hawaii in Honolulu.

He is a member several scientific and professional societies, including the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the International Society on Toxicology.

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USA Health nurse practitioner enters Duke-Johnson & Johnson Leadership Program



Beth Huffmaster, a longtime nurse practitioner with USA Health University Hospital's Level 1 Trauma Service, has been selected as a fellow for the Duke-Johnson & Johnson Nurse Leadership Program.

The program is a one-year professional development experience between Duke University School of Medicine, Duke University School of Nursing, and Johnson & Johnson. The program was created in 2013 to provide leadership development for advanced practice nurses. Selected fellows start the program in April 2019. They are expected to take part in three leadership retreats, participate in monthly distance-based learning activities, and complete a health leadership project.

"The selection process was quite competitive and we are honored that Beth was chosen," said Dr. Jon D. Simmons, trauma medical director at USA Health University Hospital and associate professor of surgery at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. "Our health system is committed to actively supporting continuing education and developing leaders in all aspects of health care. We are delighted Beth will have this opportunity."

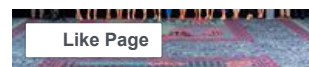
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The goal of the program is to provide participants with the leadership and management skills required to effectively address the needs of their communities, especially those of vulnerable populations, and to become agents of change within their practice settings and health care in general.

Huffmaster will complete a leadership project that aims to measure predictors and outcomes related to post-traumatic stress disorder in severely injured patients.

As a nurse practitioner with the trauma surgery team, Huffmaster has spent years providing a high level of care to severely injured patients. "Although our trauma care is among the highest quality in the nation, I began to notice patients exhibiting signs and symptoms of psychological and emotional scars from their traumatic experiences," she said. "I chose my research project to quantify the number of patients experiencing these symptoms and to identify and allocate resources to alleviate their silent suffering."

USA Health University Hospital is the only Level 1 trauma center in the region, which includes the Alabama Gulf Coast, portions of northwest Florida and southern Mississippi. Level I is the highest level of care a center can provide. To maintain this excellent level of care, University Hospital employs board-certified trauma surgeons who are in-house 24 hours a day, every day. Every patient with traumatic injuries is assigned a designated team that includes a trauma surgeon, emergency physician, surgical residents, trauma nurse coordinator and emergency department nurses among others.

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