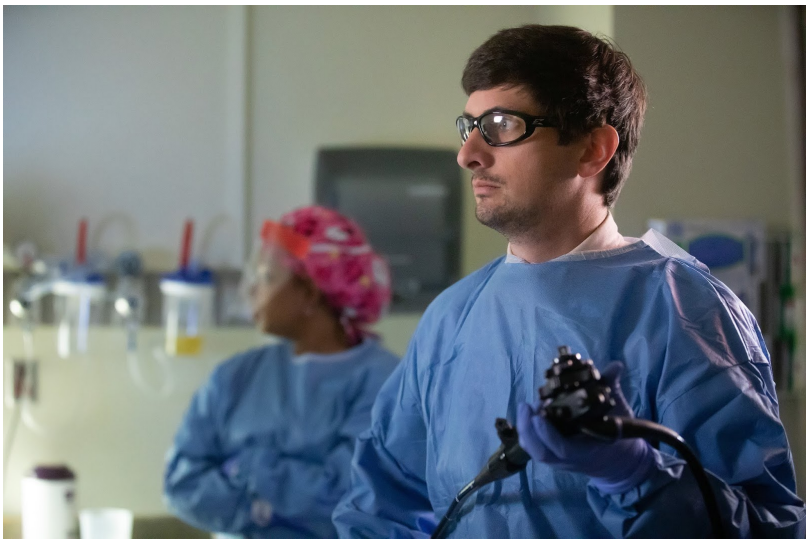
Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, August 2, 2019

Medical diagnosis led to life's work for USA Health gastroenterologist



For alumnus William Sonnier, M.D., his career as a gastroenterologist is not one he takes lightly.

"My personal experience with being diagnosed at age 17 with inflammatory bowel disease ultimately led to my interest in gastroenterology," he said. "I have a special insight into the lives of patients living with inflammatory bowel disease because I have experienced both the patient and the provider side of this diagnosis."

Currently serving as assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a gastroenterologist at the USA Health Digestive Health Center, Sonnier said he is excited to join USA Health and the USA College of Medicine faculty. "I completed my fellowship at USA Health, so I know firsthand the many great things the division is known for," he said. "My goal is to expand the care we provide to patients with complex inflammatory bowel disease through novel treatment methods and participation in clinical trials."

Sonnier earned his medical degree from the USA College of Medicine in 2013. He then completed his residency training in internal medicine at UAB, and his fellowship in gastroenterology at USA Health.

He is accepting new patients. To make an appointment, call (251) 660-5555.

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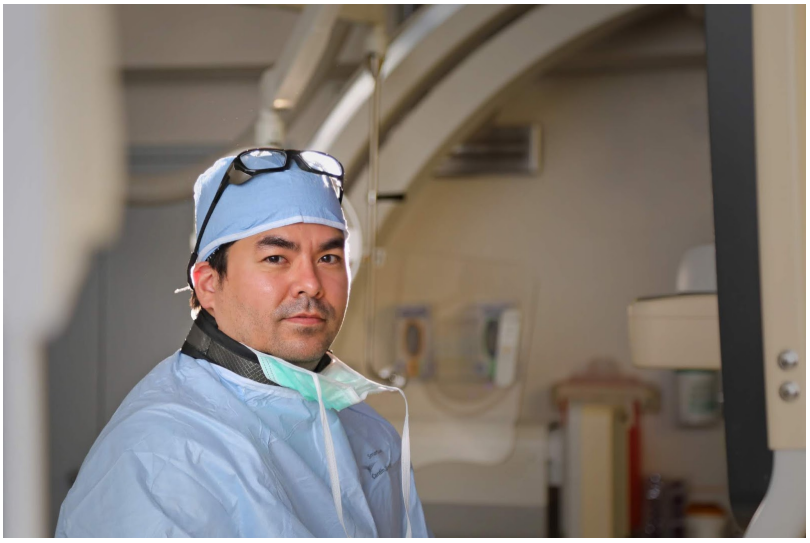
Tuesday, July 30, 2019

USA Health welcomes new interventional radiologist



Patrick Patten, M.D., has been appointed assistant professor of radiology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. Patten, an interventional radiologist, will practice at both USA Health University Hospital and USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital.

Patten previously completed his residency training in diagnostic radiology at USA Health and now returns to USA following fellowship training in vascular interventional radiology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

"USA provides world-class care to the people of the Gulf Coast," Patten said. "I am happy to join Drs. Abdul-Rahim and Hussain in providing cutting-edge minimally-invasive treatments with compassion while also training the future generation of physicians."

He added returning to Mobile also gives him the opportunity to be closer to family and friends and the opportunity to enjoy fly fishing and Mardi Gras.

Patten is originally from University Place, Washington. He attended medical school at Tulane University in New Orleans and completed a residency in family medicine at Tulane-East Jefferson General Hospital in Metairie, Louisiana. He has also previously practiced as a hospitalist in Metairie.

"I love interventional radiology because it uses imaging technology to guide minimally invasive procedures that have lower risk and faster recovery time for patients, such as those facing dialysis or liver or kidney cancer," Patten said.

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Research study focuses on precision medicine, prevention

Together, the University of South Alabama College of Medicine's Center for Healthy Communities and USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute are conducting a research study to measure the capacity of human cells to repair their DNA.

The project, titled "DNA Healing and Disease Prevention," seeks to quantify the average amount of DNA damage in the cells of people living in the area surrounding USA Health University Hospital. It will also evaluate the capacity of the cells to repair the damage. Finally, it will evaluate changes in DNA repair capacity as a person ages.

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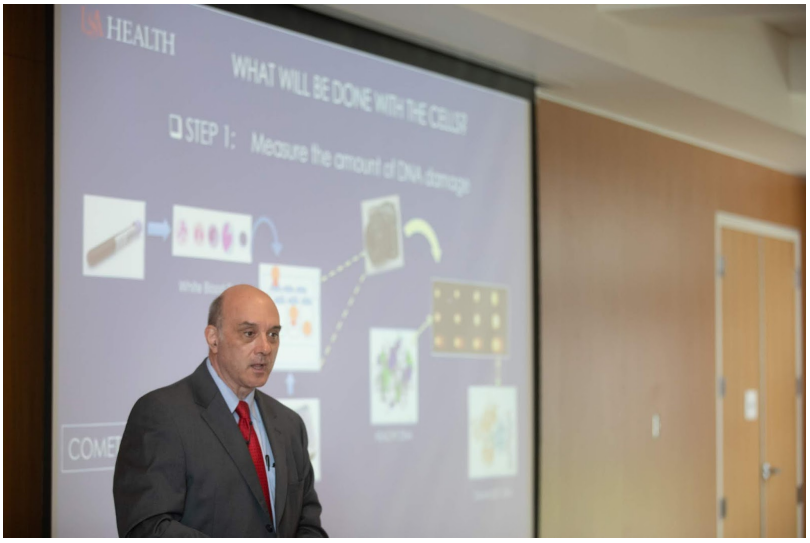

Robert W. Sobol, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and principal investigator of the project 'DNA Healing and Disease Prevention,' presents the project at a recent luncheon.

The project, funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), is part of a nationwide effort to facilitate the translation of the knowledge gained in the laboratory to applications at the population level. This research has potential to provide more opportunities for both precision medicine – finding specific treatment options for individual patients – and precision prevention – finding ways for individual people to keep from developing a disease.

Robert W. Sobol, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and principal investigator on the study, said there are many substances around us that can harm DNA and cause it to malfunction. Damaged DNA has the ability to repair itself, but if the cell is unable to fix the DNA, it could result in cell death or in the replication of damaged cells. When damaged cells are duplicated, patients can be at risk for medical conditions such as cancer.

"We hope this work will advance our capacity to examine human populations for genome damage and genome repair capacity," said Sobol, who is program leader of the Molecular and Metabolic Oncology program at USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute. "The long term goal is to develop strategies for 'personalized prevention' – that is, identifying those at high risk for disease and advising targeted screening measures."

An important characteristic of the study is its community-engaged approach. The study advisory board is composed of 10 community members who give advice on ways to incorporate community considerations within the study process.

"Their recommendations have shaped the development of recruitment materials and processes" said Martha Arrieta, M.D., Ph.D., director of research at the USA Center for Healthy Communities and co-investigator on the study. "Community Advisory Board members have also openly discussed the environmental stressors that operate in the communities that host the source population for the study. They have expressed their hope that the study will generate information which could eventually lead to effective ways to protect future generations from the effects of environmental toxins."

Given the study of DNA integrity is not yet part of the usual processes of patient care, participation in the research will not provide immediate benefits to the personal health care of those who enroll. However, "people who decide to take part in the study will be directly helping shape the future of health care," Arrieta said. "Because of their selfless decision, researchers will have the opportunity to better understand DNA health and its ability to heal, and possibly develop procedures for disease prevention or treatment."

Participants in the study will be asked to:

- Answer general questions about their health

- Have body measurements taken
- Provide a blood sample
- Provide their contact information
- Return for study visits every two years
- Receive a phone call every six months to check if the contact information is current
- Provide contact information for three relatives or friends who can get in touch with participant in case of changes in phone number or residence during 2019-2023

As an additional option to help with future studies, participants may volunteer to allow:

- Freezing and storage of their white blood cells
- For the white blood cells to be immortalized, where cell lines are grown in the lab indefinitely

To learn more about the study, call (251) 414-8001.

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