

# Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, August 16, 2019

## New pathologist focuses research on AL amyloidosis



Luis del Pozo-Yauner, M.D., Ph.D., has devoted his professional life to the scientific research of amyloid light-chain (AL) amyloidosis, a disease that occurs when the bone marrow produces abnormal antibodies.

Del Pozo-Yauner recently joined the University of South Alabama College of Medicine faculty as an assistant professor of pathology and clinical chemistry director. In addition to teaching and training pathology residents, he serves as a pathologist with USA Health and conducts research in AL amyloidosis.

In AL patients, plasma cells in the bone marrow produce misfolded proteins called amyloids. These abnormal antibodies can't

be broken down, so they build up in tissue, nerves and organs. Over time, amyloidosis damages the tissue and interferes with its function. Severe amyloidosis can lead to life-threatening organ failure.

After earning his medical degree from Cienfuegos Medical School in Cuba, del Pozo-Yauner began specialization studies in clinical biochemistry at the Higher Institute of Medical Science in Villa Clara, Cuba. His research in Villa Clara laid the foundation for his devotion to amyloidosis and connected him with his mentor, Alan Solomon, M.D., at the University of Tennessee Medical Center at Knoxville.

"Dr. Solomon, who is presently retired, is a worldwide recognized leader in the research about the pathogenesis of light-chain-derived (AL) amyloidosis and other disorders caused by overproduction of monoclonal light chains, also known as Bence Jones Proteins," del Pozo-Yauner said. "Dr. Solomon provided me with abundant information on that subject, as well as useful advice regarding the best form to conduct my project. But he was also a decisive influence in my subsequent decision to devote myself entirely to scientific research in AL amyloidosis."

Del Pozo-Yauner went on to earn his Ph.D. in biochemistry at the Institute of Biotechnology UNAM in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. He later worked as a researcher in biomedical science at the National Institute of Genomic Medicine (INMEGEN) in Mexico City.

"While working at INMEGEN, I developed studies about the mechanism of light-chain amyloid aggregation," he said. "There, my research was funded by intramural grants and extramural grants from Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT), as well as with funds obtained from international agencies such as The Royal Society in the United Kingdom."

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Prior to joining the faculty at the USA College of Medicine, del Pozo-Yauner served as an assistant professor in the department of pathology and translational pathobiology at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center Shreveport.

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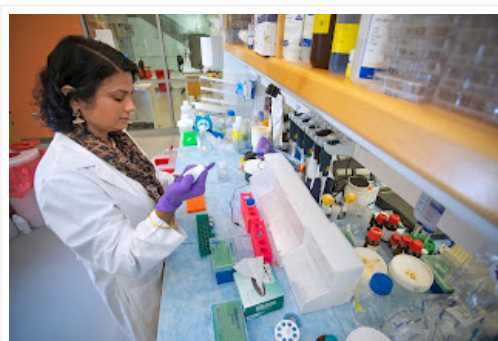
## USA researcher to study socioeconomic stress, impact on breast cancer risk for African Americans



In an effort to understand the causes of disproportionate breast cancer outcomes in women, researchers at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine will explore whether and how socioeconomic difficulties affect human biology, leading to a higher cancer risk.

The study, led by Seema Singh, Ph.D., associate professor of pathology at the USA College of Medicine, is being funded by a five-year grant of more than \$3 million from the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health. The award is one of the largest NIH R01 grants awarded to a cancer researcher based at USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute.

"African-American women are more likely to be diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer and experience greater mortality compared with women of other races," Singh said. "Differences in socioeconomic status have also long been associated with disparate health outcomes due to a lack of access to healthcare. However, emerging data is now suggesting a biological connection to health disparities, as well."



Singh hypothesizes that socioeconomic stress affects human biology, especially the immune system, in a way that supports breast tumor development and aggressive progression. This negative impact on health is theorized to be more pronounced in women who are African American.

She said the results could improve the understanding of the involved mechanisms and could lead to innovative strategies for a more accurate prediction of cancer risk, early diagnosis, prevention and/or improved personalized therapies.

"Basic research into the mechanisms and causes of cancer health disparities is

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significant and will provide new opportunities for the development of cancer prevention and therapeutic approaches," said Dr. Guillermo Herrera, chair of the pathology department at the USA College of Medicine. "Dr. Singh's success in securing this NCI funding reflects the importance of this innovative research project."

Dr. Lynn Dyess, professor of surgery at the USA College of Medicine and a breast surgeon with USA Health, said the project is looking at an aspect of breast cancer and women's health that is often overlooked. She said the findings from this research could have a long-term impact on breast cancer prevention and management.

The research will be conducted in collaboration with scientists and physicians from across USA Health, will collect survey data and blood samples from women, and conduct laboratory studies to establish sociobiological connections.

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**Thursday, August 15, 2019**

## USA medical student awarded first place at 117th NMA Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly

Zachary White, a third-year medical student at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, recently won first place in the Radiology and Radiation Oncology Medical Student Oral Presentation section of the 117th National Medical Association (NMA) Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly in Honolulu.



The research for his project, titled "Impact of ANXA7 I1 Expression on PDGFRA and MET Endosomal Trafficking in Glioblastoma Multiforme," focused on glioblastoma multiforme – the most common and malignant brain tumor that is also highly resistant to both radiation and chemotherapy treatment.

"The tumor suppressor annexin A7 (ANXA7) is a membrane-binding protein that has two different forms – I1 and I2 – with only I1 being tumor suppressive," White said. "In glioblastoma, I1 is absent or low and I2 is found in abundance."

According to White, some signaling molecules that are involved on a cellular level in routine processes, such as EGFR, PDGFRA and MET, are normally activated in cases where you may have a wound and your body needs to grow new cells in order to heal. "However, these molecules are over-activated in cancers such as glioblastoma, which causes the cell to grow at an uncontrollable rate," he said.

By better understanding how ANXA7 I1 impacts PDGFRA and MET signaling, White's research has far-reaching potential to impact patient care. In cancers such as glioblastoma, receptor tyrosine kinases (RTKs) are mutated and this results in overgrowth of the tumor. In the research, he found that ANXA7 I1, specifically, causes a reduction in RTKs, which can result in a decrease in tumor growth.

"If we understand more about how I1 down-regulates RTKs, this could potentially lead to targeted therapy to cause a reduction in tumor growth in patients with glioblastoma," he said. "When restored, ANXA7 I1 has the potential to downregulate the signals of tumor growth and reduce tumorigenicity. Ultimately, we hope to improve therapy options for patients with glioblastoma."

White credits the experiences presented by the USA College of Medicine for preparing him for the convention. "I can't thank the USA College of Medicine

enough for supporting their students to achieve success in scientific research," he said.

Attending the conference also enabled White to network with various physicians across the nation in the fields of radiation oncology and radiology.

"The highlight of my experience was listening to the lecture on 'Navigating a Career in Academic Medicine' given by Dr. Iris Gibbs, M.D., professor of radiation oncology at Stanford University," he said. "As a medical student with a goal of becoming an academic physician, the lecture was both insightful and inspiring."

Each year, African American physicians and other health professionals from across the country convene to participate in the scholarly exchange of medical advances, discuss health policy priorities, and to share experiences through networking opportunities at the National Medical Association's Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly. The convention serves as the nation's foremost forum on medical science and African American health. Through NMA's 26 Scientific Specialty Sections, the Convention attracts the broadest spectrum of African American physicians, academicians and scientists in the country.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [12:03 PM](#) No comments: 

**Tuesday, August 13, 2019**

## A seamless transition: from fellow to faculty



For Benjamin Niland, M.D., choosing a career in medicine was an innate decision. "Ever since I was a young child, if you asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up I would have told you that I was going to be a doctor," he said. "It was just something that was a part of me from the beginning."

Now, Niland is living his dream as he recently completed his gastroenterology fellowship at USA Health. Serving as an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a gastroenterologist with USA Health, he is excited to build his career at the place he now calls home.

"I am thrilled to serve as an active participant in the continued advancements of USA Health and its role in our medical community," he said. "As both a division and health system, we are currently experiencing great growth in our ability to care for our community."

Niland says his fellowship training at USA Health offered him the opportunity to seamlessly build upon relationships and partnerships he initiated during his fellowship training – an opportunity he wouldn't have elsewhere. "My time as a fellow also allowed me to establish a patient base which I look forward to continuing to build," he said. "I have great confidence in the GI fellowship training program at USA Health and feel well prepared to have a successful career in gastroenterology."




Niland said his interest in the medical field extends far beyond the careers intellectually stimulating and rewarding nature. "Being a physician also provides great opportunities for humanitarian service, both on an individual and community scale," he said.

A Louisiana native, Niland earned his medical degree from Louisiana State University in New Orleans. He then completed his residency training at the Medical University of South Carolina and a gastroenterology fellowship at USA Health.

He is a member of the American College of Gastroenterology, the American Gastroenterological Association, the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, and the Medical Society of Mobile County.

His clinical interests include esophageal disease, GI physiology and functional disease, and inflammatory bowel disease.

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

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**Monday, August 12, 2019**

## Petty selected to participate in national pediatrics teaching program



Melody Petty, M.D., right, assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a pediatric hospitalist at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, talks with doctors-in-training during rounds on a recent afternoon at USA Children's & Women's Hospital.

Melody Petty, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a pediatric hospitalist at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, has been selected for the Advanced Pediatrics Educator Excellence (APEX) Teaching Program.

A hospitalist is a physician who typically is not in private practice and instead focuses his or her attention on caring for patients within a hospital.

The 12-month pediatrics educator program, which accepts a limited number of applicants each year, is co-sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Hospital Medicine (SOHM) and the Academic Pediatric Association (APA).

Interactive learning opportunities are offered to foster an ongoing exchange of ideas and best practices among a class of 24 participants and mentors. Petty's

mentor will be Franklin Trimm, M.D., associate dean for diversity and inclusion at the USA College of Medicine. The first session was held July 25-28, 2019, in Seattle.

"Those treated within academic medical centers such as USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, benefit from collaboration among physicians who work together to find the best individualized care plans for patients," said Trimm. "Serving as a mentor to a talented young faculty member such as Dr. Petty is a great example of how such collaboration benefits our physicians and the community we serve."


Goals of the national teaching program include learning educational theory and specific skills to apply at a participant's home institution with direct observation of teaching by their mentors.

Participants are expected to build a group of peer educators from institutions across the United States and together develop educational workshops for national presentation. Previous groups have had more than a dozen workshops accepted at national meetings, including the annual Pediatric Hospital Medicine (PHM) conference.

"I want to bring ideas back to our program and help our medical students, residents and faculty," Petty said. "I love teaching, inspiring other learners and helping to build a person's knowledge base."

Petty is a member of the USA Program Evaluation and USA Pediatric Residency committees. She is also a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She completed a residency in pediatrics at USA Health, where she was recognized as the Residency Core Curriculum Scholar. Petty earned a medical degree from the University of Mississippi School of Medicine.

Petty said she knew when she entered medical school she wanted to work in primary care with a focus on pediatric medicine in underserved populations. "You can take care of newborns and teenagers in the same day," she said. "The variety in the disease processes and figuring out what's wrong with a patient is very rewarding."

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