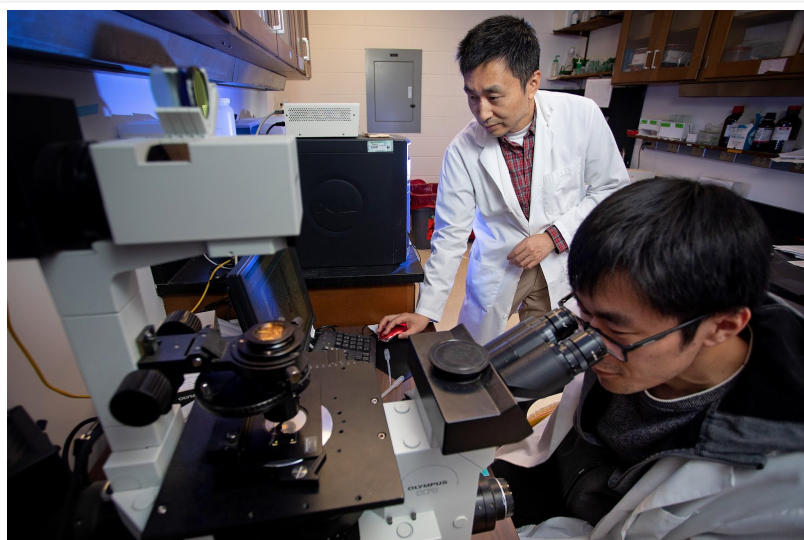


Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, November 15, 2019

Zha awarded 2019 USA COM Intramural Grant Award



Xiangming Zha, Ph.D., associate professor of physiology and cell biology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, works in the lab with Guokun Zhou, a research scholar in physiology and cell biology.

Xiangming Zha, Ph.D., associate professor of physiology and cell biology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, was one of five faculty members recently awarded the 2019 USA College of Medicine Faculty Intramural Grants Research Award. The award, which provides funds through an annual competition, targets five full-time basic science faculty members.

Zha's research, titled "Functional importance of GPR4 in brain microvascular endothelial cells," is still in the early phase, but has potential for impacting clinical care.

"The main goal of this project is to determine whether GPR4 mediates acid signaling in microvascular endothelial cells in the brain," Zha said.

Zha said this award allows his team to generate critical preliminary data on the underlying molecular mechanism, which will strengthen a full extramural R01-type application.

The USA College of Medicine provides seed funding for basic science or translational research through an annual competitive Intramural Grants Program for faculty to develop new research ideas and develop new critical preliminary data for revised extramural proposal submissions, or to provide bridge funding to enable sustained research progress between extramural grant funding periods.

[Learn more about the Intramural Grants Program.](#)

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Thursday, November 14, 2019

New interest group focuses on military medicine



A newly formed interest group at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine aims to support medical students who intend to serve in the military and engage those students in helping veterans throughout the community.

The organization, the USA Military Medicine Interest Group, has already held a network event and is establishing a relationship with Veterans Recovery Resources in Mobile, a nonprofit that provides mental wellness programs to veterans.

"Currently, we host two primary events with the group, the first involves physicians who have previously worked in the military or are currently doing so speaking at our monthly meetings to give us a better picture of what life in the military is like and how to prepare," said Jesse Stutzman, a first-year medical student and president of the group. "Second, we want to provide the opportunity for students to get engaged in our current community through volunteering with local veterans programs."

Stutzman and others formed the group with the guidance of Andrew Bright, D.O., assistant professor of surgery at the USA College of Medicine who served as a surgeon in the U.S. Navy.

The USA College of Medicine has more than 20 students, including Stutzman, who are enrolled in the Health Professionals Scholarship Program (HPSP), which offers medical education scholarships in exchange for military service. Stutzman is participating in the program with the U.S. Air Force and plans to serve for four years as a commissioned medical officer following graduation.

"Since joining the military, I am impressed more and more with the sheer magnitude of sacrifice men and women in our country make to protect and defend this nation," Stutzman said on the weekend before Veterans Day. "Seeing the willingness of those around me to give even their lives to protect our freedom and nation's values makes me very honored to serve alongside them and proud to be an American."

Second-year medical student Juan Pardo of Mobile, who serves as vice president of the interest group, was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army in January 2018 shortly before he started medical school on a military scholarship. Pardo said he chose a military career to give back.


"My family and I moved to the states from Colombia in 2000, and this country has given us everything," he said. "Being a first generation immigrant, I think it's my responsibility to serve time and pay back as a sign of gratitude. It's also a huge honor to one day be able to take care of service men and women who fight for our country."

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Pardo intends to enter a military residency after graduation in anesthesia or general surgery. "I love the OR environment and the team aspect when it comes to patient care," he said.

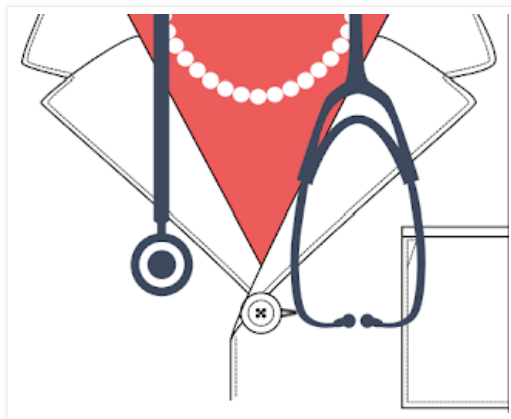
Other officers for the interest group include these first-year medical students: treasurer Mary Margaret Vansant, Navy; secretary Trista Phelps, Army; and community service chair Meg Lyons, Army.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [9:33 AM](#) No comments: 

Tuesday, November 12, 2019

Networking event to connect female physicians and medical students

With the goal of bringing together local women in medicine, the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, in conjunction with the Medical Society of Mobile County, is hosting the first Women in Medicine Social. The event – open to female physicians, residents and medical students – is set for 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 22, at the Strada Patient Care Center.



"There have been social events for the female physicians in Mobile on a few occasions in recent years, but this is the first that will focus on networking to include medical students and residents," said Elizabeth Minto, M.D., assistant professor of neurology and director of clinical skills at the USA College of Medicine. "An event like this one will help to foster relationships and a culture of support for the women in medicine in Mobile County, and we hope this event will be the first but not the last of its kind."

Megan Hood, a second-year medical student, serves as the president of USA's chapter of the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) and initiated the event-planning efforts.

"The women at USA College of Medicine are so lucky to have incredible physicians in every specialty in our community, and having these role models plays a huge part in helping us become the kinds of doctors our communities can be proud of," Hood said. "The social should be a fun way to build relationships between students and the doctors we look to for mentorship."

As the event took shape, Hood reached out to Minto and Lynn Batten, M.D., associate professor of pediatrics, for guidance. Minto and Batten, who have both served on the board of the Medical Society of Mobile County, helped to facilitate an event sponsorship from the society. Within a little over a week, the Women in Medicine Social also had the support of the USA Medical Alumni Association, the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, and several local businesses.

Minto and Hood said the event will give students the opportunity to ask physicians questions that all medical students have, such as how to choose a specialty and what is involved in the residency interview process. But, more specifically, it will provide a setting where they can feel comfortable discussing these issues as they relate to women.

"Women in medicine often feel fragmented by their need to be dedicated to both their patients as well as to the other roles females frequently serve in society," Minto said. "Nationwide, women are underrepresented in leadership roles in academic and private institutions, with numerous underlying causes being well articulated in scientific and popular literature."

Hood noted that women are often compared to one another, creating a sense of competition. "For this reason, it is critical for women in medicine to understand that there is room for everyone here," she said. "Everyone does better when we take the time to get to know each other and form meaningful connections to the people around us. Having a community of women who support and encourage each other during medical school is the best way to ensure that we are all successful. It is my hope that AMWA can be a starting place for women to find support and connection here at USA College of Medicine."

The Women in Medicine Social will provide food, drinks and live music. Attire is "snazzy professional." To RSVP, call (251) 476-9494 or email frontdesk@msomc.org.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [3:16 PM](#) No comments: 

Monday, November 11, 2019

Bauer among faculty awarded 2019 intramural grants



Natalie Bauer, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, talks with a group of graduate students and medical students in her lab.

Natalie Bauer, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, is one of five faculty members to receive the 2019 USA College of Medicine Faculty Intramural Grants Research Award. The award, which provides funds through an annual competition, targets five full-time basic science faculty members.


Bauer's research, titled "Mechanisms of Extracellular Vesicle Signaling," seeks to understand how extracellular vesicles interact with target cells and deliver their messages – good or bad.

"In each of us every day, both when we are healthy and when we are sick, we have circulating extracellular vesicles that are released from our cells," Bauer said. "These tiny vesicles play important roles to keep our blood vessels healthy and functioning. During various diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and pulmonary hypertension, these vesicles change and can cause damage."

According to Bauer, this research is important as many individuals and companies are attempting to develop extracellular vesicles as drug delivery vehicles, but we don't yet know how they target certain cells nor how they are processed once they reach the cells. "Without this vital information, we will not be able to use them as valuable resources," she said. "On the flipside, understanding how they signal inside cells will help us design ways to inhibit the detrimental effects of the dangerous extracellular vesicles."

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[Learn more about the USA College of Medicine Intramural Grants Program.](#)

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USA medical student mentors fellow veteran students



"Everybody reacts to trauma differently," said Zack Aggen. He reacts by helping.

Aggen knows a lot about trauma. As a U.S. Army medic during two combat tours in Iraq, he saw terrible wounds, heard horrifying screams of pain and worked desperately to save the lives of the fellow soldiers who had become, in his word, "family."

Aggen also remembers a quieter but still agonizing trauma: feeling "lost and hopeless" as he transitioned from the structured intensity of his military career to a baffling civilian life where none of the skills he'd learned seemed of any use.

"When I first got back," he said, "I went from putting in chest tubes and bandaging amputations to the only job I could find, which was as a patient care tech at St. Vincent's hospital in Birmingham. I went from saving people's lives to changing bedpans."

Now a second-year medical student at the University of South Alabama, Aggen managed to find his way to a future he envisioned on his hardest days. A little guidance from someone who had been where he'd been would have made it a lot easier.

So that's what he now provides. He tutors and mentors a half-dozen South undergraduates as part of a national program called Peer Advisors for Veteran Education. PAVE, which began as a pilot program in 2012, operates out of the University of Michigan. It now has 46 partner campuses. In September 2019, South became the first in Alabama.

Joshua Missouri, South's coordinator of veterans affairs (and a Navy veteran himself), runs South's PAVE program. The University has about 350 students who are veterans or service members. When Missouri proposed that South sign on with PAVE, he said, "We got institutional support almost immediately. We got funding. That shows the commitment from the University to serve veterans."

PAVE is a low-key, all-volunteer program. Aggen is one of a half-dozen or so peer advisors at South. They're military veterans who have already experienced at least a year or two of campus life. They're trained to support incoming veterans who are just starting college.

Aggen tutors in math and science, listens if the undergrads want to talk, gives them tips about campus services and outside organizations that might be a good

fit and even recommends babysitters and local schools. Whatever they need.

As a med student, he's paired with undergraduates in health fields. Two-thirds are women. To them, he represents someone who understands. Even now, 11 years after leaving the Army, "There are very few people I will talk to things about," he said. "Mostly it's other service members. It's hard to open up to people who aren't service connected in some way."

He makes sure to check in regularly. "The thing I'm really sensitive to is veteran suicides. I've had several friends who have killed themselves. And so being another advocate for guys who may be struggling, that's what's important to me."

Aggen spent four and a half years with the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, which was based in Germany during his service. In 2004-05 and 2006-07, he was deployed to Iraq. In 2007, as part of the increase in troop strength known as "the surge," his battalion suffered the most combat deaths of any Europe-based U.S. military brigade in Iraq.

After he left the Army in 2008, he lived down the street from a police station in Birmingham. "Every time their siren would kick off, it would make a sound like an incoming mortar," he said. "I would freeze. It went on for a year before I finally got used to it."

He started college that year at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and graduated in 2011 with a degree in molecular biology. He had already taken a couple of college classes while in the service. He squeezed the rest into three years because GI Bill education benefits end after 36 months.

At UAB, he met the woman who became his wife. Dr. Ashlen Aggen is now a family medicine physician in Bayou La Batre, a half-hour south of the USA campus. The Aggens have three children, boys who are 11 and 5, and a 1-year-old girl.

After Ashlen's graduation from UAB, South accepted her into medical school and, later, residency. Zack took advantage of an Alabama program that fast-tracks high school teaching certificates for holders of college math or science degrees. He taught for seven years, supporting his wife through her medical training.

Then it was his turn. Aggen, now 34, finally has an opportunity to fulfill a promise he made to himself during his medic days to learn everything he can about medicine. He and his wife would like to work together to meet the medical needs of an underserved community like Bayou La Batre. They haven't figured out all the details.

"She does family medicine, so she can do the cradle-to-the-grave care," Zack said. "So things that I might do are obstetrics or general surgery or something else that's needed out there. I don't know yet, really."

Meanwhile, he's helping with the PAVE program. And organizing rural healthcare initiatives. And carrying out the duties associated with being president of his class. And coaching a special needs baseball team. And helping care for his three kids.

"I'm just one of those people who can't take his foot off the gas," he said.

And what keeps him from crashing and burning, like too many other combat veterans? "The honest answer is my wife. She met me when I was still recovering from that experience and chose to stay with me even though I was a mess. She's still supporting me as I get through my medical training. I wouldn't be where I am without her."

Most veterans don't have an Ashlen. Most who go to college don't fit in with students just out of high school. Missouri, South's veterans affairs coordinator, gives an example: People fresh out of the military tend to speak directly, even bluntly.


"They mean well," he said. "But it's not interpreted that way sometimes. So they

need help with those soft skills.”

And when they need help with academic skills, Aggen said, “It’s tough to sit there and be tutored by some 19-year-old kid with no life experiences. It’s hard to relate.

“But if you’ve got this gruffer, tatted-up old dude who happens to be good at whatever you’re struggling at, it helps. Then it’s like, I don’t feel so different.”

For information about programs for veterans at South, call 251-460-6230 or email joshuamissouri@southalabama.edu. For information about Peer Advisors for Veteran Education, visit m-span.org/pave.

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