

# Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, December 13, 2019

## Gassman awarded 2019 Mayer Mitchell Award for Excellence in Cancer Research



Joy Mitchell Grodnick, left, and Arlene Mitchell congratulate Natalie Gassman, Ph.D., who was awarded the Mayer Mitchell Award for Excellence in Cancer Research at USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute on Dec. 3, 2019.

Cancer researcher Natalie R. Gassman, Ph.D., has been named the recipient of the 2019 Mayer Mitchell Award for Excellence in Cancer Research.

The \$10,000 award is presented annually to a promising scientist at USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute upon the recommendation of a faculty committee. The award was established in 2009 by University of South Alabama Trustee Arlene Mitchell in memory of her late husband, Mayer Mitchell, a Mobile businessman, longtime USA trustee and formative figure in the establishment of MCI.

Gassman, an assistant professor of physiology and cell biology at the USA College of Medicine and a cancer researcher at MCI, focuses her work on characterizing the influence that environmental exposures have on DNA repair and characterizing how DNA repair proteins are altered or modified in the context of cancer.

Gassman has also developed a versatile detection method that helps identify deficiencies in repair mechanisms that give cancer cells a survival edge. She hopes that the results can be applied in a clinical setting to tailor therapies for cancer patients.

"Our team is trying to find the magic formula – how much DNA damage you have and how you will respond to treatment," she said. "It's personalized medicine for your genome."

Rodney Rocconi, M.D., interim director at MCI, praised Gassman's research and leadership. "She has taken a leading role in transforming cancer research at

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MCI," Rocconi said. "She is on a sharp upward trajectory and is a large part of the cancer research momentum here."

Since joining MCI in July 2015, Gassman has submitted more than 20 scientific articles that have been accepted for publication.

Prior to joining MCI, she held post-doctorate positions at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the Wake Forest University School of Medicine. Gassman earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Michigan State University and a doctoral degree in physical chemistry from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [1:53 PM](#) No comments: 

## First-year medical students meet first patients in virtual clinic



Groups of University of South Alabama College of Medicine second-year medical students work together in the Small Group Learning Center.

On the first Monday of medical school, a team of first-year students are already meeting their first patient, a 29-year-old female specialist in the Alabama National Guard who's at risk of developing diabetes and hypertension. The professor wants to know: How can she improve her health? He also asks: Will her insurance cover it?

Welcome to the Virtual Continuity Clinic, where first-year students at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine are assigned virtual patients as part of the Foundations of Human Health class. The students will make recommendations based on medical, social and financial information and follow up throughout the academic year as if they were the patients' primary care providers.



Jeffrey Sosnowski, M.D., Ph.D., assistant dean and professor of medical education, talks to a group of medical students as they work in the Small Group Learning Center.

"We wanted to start them out with a challenge," explained Jeffrey Sosnowski, M.D., Ph.D., assistant dean for medical education. Sosnowski developed the virtual patient clinic with David Weber, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of physiology and cell biology. "This curriculum gives them a taste of what's to come," Sosnowski said.

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The virtual clinic builds upon educational changes made in 2010, when the USA College of Medicine adopted an integrated organ systems-based approach for the first two years of medical school. Professors wanted to broaden the students' education further, incorporate more active learning and equip them with the tools they need to treat the whole patient.

First-year medical student Jade Kantzler and her team considered the case of a 38-year-old man, an engineer who is married with three children and earns \$120,000 a year. He has a family history of diabetes, hypertension and lung cancer. A smoker, he also eats mostly fast food and drinks beer every day.

Kantzler and her team were excited. "I thought this project was a great idea because we were given the opportunity to practice as real doctors," she said.

Her team recommended nutritional counseling, exercise three to four times a week, support to quit smoking, health screenings and even low-cost day care for his children. "Teams were chosen to present their plans while visiting physicians commented on how to better present plans or pointed out faults," said Kantzler, of Gadsden. "I have learned that each patient I'll see will be different in their own way and that the best way to treat them is to take into consideration all of the factors that influence their health."

Professors tested the concept of virtual patients last year and continue to add nuances. Weber, a certified health coach and personal trainer, developed a grading rubric for students incorporating exercise, nutrition, stress reduction, mental health and social support, and even the impact of military service.

There is no one right answer, the professors say, as long as the teams defend their recommendations effectively. "The teams bring a variety of approaches to the table," Weber said.


This year, students are choosing health insurance plans for their virtual patients. They use the virtual patient's budget and health history to select a plan that is affordable and meets the patient's needs. This concept is new for most first-year medical students, many of whom are young enough to be covered under their parents' insurance. "It was eye-opening for them. That was probably the first time they had explored healthcare.gov," Sosnowski said. "They're learning what a premium is and what a deductible is."

The Virtual Continuity Clinic can also incorporate health trends into the mix. One team developed a timeline showing the role of opioid pain medications over years and the impact that decisions by regulators and pharmaceutical companies have played in the national crisis.

"There are all sorts of different ways to go," Sosnowski said. "It's endless."

For instance, second-year medical students were assigned to "see" other students' patients in the virtual clinic – just as physicians see their colleagues' patients in a true clinic.

The professors plan to weave the virtual clinic throughout medical curricula, perhaps into the third and fourth years when students are working in hospitals and clinics. "This is just the beginning," Sosnowski said. "We're hoping to continue to develop this over time."

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**Thursday, December 12, 2019**

## First- and second-year students explore medical specialties in CLINIC rotations

Students at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine have the opportunity to learn early in their medical education what being a family physician entails as part of the Clinically Integrated Introductory Course (CLINIC).

Family medicine is just one field that medical students are exposed to in CLINIC,



Jason Valentine, M.D., a family medicine physician, talks with first-year medical student Pooja Revanna. Valentine serves as a CLINIC preceptor for the USA College of Medicine.

which provides first- and second-year students with experiences in career exploration as they rotate through various specialties. Traditionally, medical students begin clinical rotations during the third and fourth years of medical school.

"Family practice is great because you get to see a variety of patients with a wide spectrum of symptoms," said first-year USA medical student Pooja Revanna. "You can see an entire family starting from a child to their grandparent. It's a long-term relationship you keep with these patients and trust is extremely important."

Richard Jason Valentine, M.D., is a family medicine physician in private practice in Saraland, Ala. He serves as a CLINIC preceptor for USA medical students. "Being a preceptor gives me a chance to teach students the craft of being a family physician," he said. "I am able to show them the variety of care that family medicine offers – from inpatient hospital care to acute illness and injury in the clinic through chronic disease management and industrial medicine."

Valentine said students are welcomed into the office and quickly integrate into the care team, becoming the initial contact with patients on their first day of clinic.

"Dr. Valentine allowed us first go to the patient independently, and then after visiting the patient, we would go together," said Chris Johnson, another first-year medical student at USA. "It was very much like the standardized patient encounters we practice, just less formal."

The experience helped Johnson become more comfortable with gathering patient history and relaying that information to the attending physician in a concise manner, he said.

Revanna said she initially thought she would mostly shadow Valentine, "but I realized early on that I would be actually interacting with these patients one on one. I am grateful for that because I learned a great amount about how you talk to patients in the real world and the problems you'll face."

Valentine, who graduated from the USA College of Medicine in 2001, said he discovered his love of teaching during his residency at St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center in Phoenix. After returning to the Mobile area and establishing his practice, he reached out to Allen Perkins, M.D., professor and chair of family medicine, to see if the department needed any preceptors.

"I've had a student every block since the class of 2011 and have loved every minute of it, and in a way I have been paying back the opportunity given to me by others," Valentine said. "The most rewarding aspect has been helping students towards their goal of graduation and into their particular specialty, hopefully instilling them with a respect for the art of medicine, patient relationships, as well as understanding the unique and difficult role that family physicians fill."

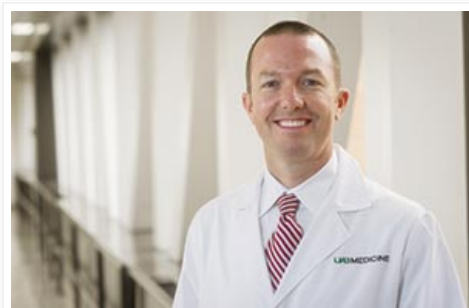


To learn more about CLINIC or becoming a preceptor, contact Candis Patterson at (251) 460-7139 or [cpatterson@southalabama.edu](mailto:cpatterson@southalabama.edu), or Elizabeth Minto, M.D., at [leminto@health.southalabama.edu](mailto:leminto@health.southalabama.edu).

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [12:01 PM](#) No comments: 


## Cardiology grand rounds to focus on atrial septal defects

Marc Cribbs, M.D., director of the Alabama Adult Congenital Heart Disease Program and director of the Comprehensive Pregnancy & Heart Program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, will present at an upcoming cardiology grand rounds.



His lecture, "Atrial Septal Defects," is set for noon on Tuesday, Dec. 17, in the cardiology conference room at University Hospital. He will outline the types, review the physiology, and discuss the management of atrial septal defects.

For more information, contact Angela Hunt at [arhunt@health.southalabama.edu](mailto:arhunt@health.southalabama.edu) or (251) 471-7923.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [11:08 AM](#) No comments: 

## Darbin to discuss age-related Parkinsonism at neurology grand rounds



Olivier Darbin, Ph.D., assistant professor of neurology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, will present at an upcoming neurology grand rounds.

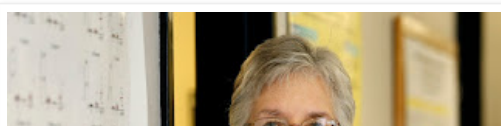
His presentation, "Age-related Parkinsonism," is set for 8 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 17, at USA Health University Hospital conference center. Darbin will address atypical Parkinsonism in elderly patients.

Neurology grand rounds take place each Tuesday at 8 a.m. The lectures are open to USA faculty, staff and students. A light breakfast, coffee and beverages are provided.

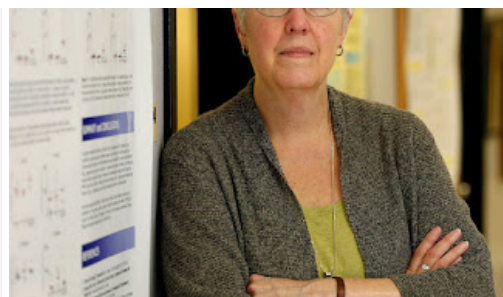
For more information, call (251) 445-8262 or email [scabral@health.southalabama.edu](mailto:scabral@health.southalabama.edu).

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## Townsley to present at OB/GYN grand rounds



Mary Townsley, Ph.D., senior associate dean at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, will



resentation, "Resources and  
0 a.m. Friday, Dec. 13, in the  
s Hospital.

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the department.

7:30 a.m. The lectures are open

Contact Nicole Hure at (251) 415-1505 or [nhure@health.southalabama.edu](mailto:nhure@health.southalabama.edu) for more information.

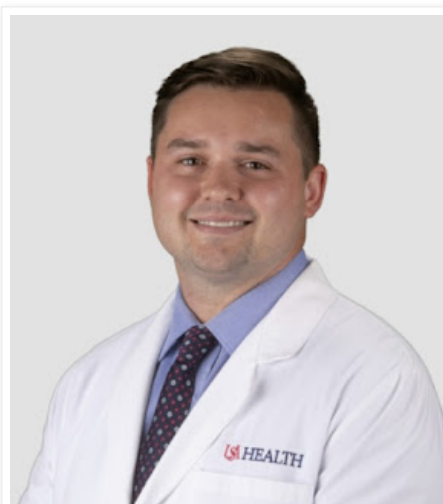
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## Clay to discuss sports injuries at Med School Café

The January Med School Café will feature Brad Clay, M.D., assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a sports medicine orthopaedic surgeon with USA Health. He will discuss sports injuries, surgeries and prevention tips.

The lecture will be held Friday, Jan. 10, in the Strada Patient Care Center first-floor conference room. Lunch is served at 11:30 a.m., and the presentation begins at noon.

The Med School Café lecture and lunch are provided free of charge, but reservations are required. For more information or to make reservations, contact Kim Partridge at (251) 460-7770 or email [kpartridge@health.southalabama.edu](mailto:kpartridge@health.southalabama.edu).



Med School Café is a free community lecture series sponsored by USA Health. Each month, faculty and physicians share their expertise on a specific medical condition, providing insight on the latest treatment available.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [10:27 AM](#) No comments:

**Monday, December 9, 2019**


## Pathology to host Research Seminar Series

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine and the Department of Pathology will host a Research Seminar Series at noon Thursday, Dec. 12, at the Strada Patient Care Center conference room.

Sophia Ran, Ph.D., professor of microbiology, immunology and cell biology at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and director of the graduate program at Simmons Cancer Institute, will present "Mechanisms of Generation of Tumor Lymphatic Vessels that Promote Metastasis."



Lunch will be served. All are welcome, and no reservations are required.

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