

Med School Watercooler

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

Thursday, July 23, 2020

USA Health magazine highlights College of Medicine students, faculty

USA Health magazine features stories from all facets of the health system and the University of South Alabama College of Medicine.

In the latest edition, read about senior medical students' journeys to residency and how students are exploring human anatomy through virtual reality. The magazine also highlights faculty and student research, academic achievement and community outreach.

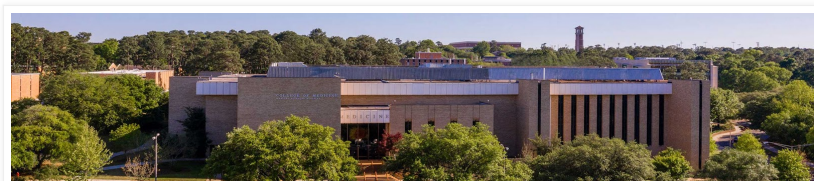
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Welcome, Class of 2024 medical students



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Next Monday, July 27, the University of South Alabama College of Medicine will welcome 74 new medical students, the Class of 2024. Because of COVID-19, their orientation will be a week like no other in the medical school's history – a mix of presentations on Zoom, small-group meetings in person and virtual social activities to break the ice.

"Beginning medical school can be a difficult transition under the best of circumstances. Starting medical school with orientation that is largely virtual due to COVID-impacted changes will be part of the history for the Class of 2024," said Kelly Roveda, M.D., associate dean for student affairs at the USA College of Medicine. "These young people have been working for several years to get here, and now 'here' may largely be their own living room or kitchen."

Roveda praised the three second-year medical students who, as orientation leaders, worked through the summer to revamp the previous orientation plan. "We have been extraordinarily fortunate that the orientation leaders from the Class of 2023 have risen to the challenge," she said.

The new plan calls for students to spend half of each day in Zoom sessions to hear a welcome and presentations on subjects ranging study strategies and financial aid to wellness and basic life support training. Students will be on campus only once during the week in small groups for training, photos and a tour, during which they will wear masks and abide by social distancing guidelines.

Orientation leaders Emily Elliot, Claire Cawthon and Kasey Grant Andrews arranged for virtual office hours during which students can join Zoom and immediately connect with an upperclassman. "Several people in the second-year class have stepped up and offered to give out their emails and phone numbers so that the M1s can contact them even into the semester," Andrews said.

Cawthon created virtual ice breaker activities so that students could get to know one another in the evenings.

"Medical school is hard enough, even in person. Being online is another barrier they will have to overcome," Andrews said. "We're trying to find ways to make the transition easier for them."

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Wednesday, July 22, 2020

USA College of Medicine research examines novel genetic pathway that could treat COVID-19



Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology, is collaborating on COVID-related research at the USA College of Medicine.

A recent discovery at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine shows

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there is a contributor in the body that helps fight viral infections. According to Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine, his team found that the body pumps a new form of transfer ribonucleic acid (tRNA) fragments into lung fluid which helps target respiratory viruses.

The team at the Borchert laboratory at the USA College of Medicine is exploring why tRNA fragments are flowing in and out of lung cells and how this flow could combat respiratory viruses, such as the novel coronavirus. The team plans to test the tRNA fragments' ability to restrict SARS-CoV2, the virus causing COVID-19.

The National Science Foundation awarded the Borchert laboratory \$200,000 for further research into the discovery. The USA College of Medicine is the only institution in the nation awarded a grant on this specific research topic.

"With this funding, our work can go further as we begin to better understand how the body naturally fights infections," Borchert said. "Once we've collected the data from testing the tRNA fragments, we can work towards more therapeutics for patients battling viral infections."

Natalie Bauer, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology; Jin Hyun Kim, DVM, Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology and immunology; graduate student Dominika Houserova; and medical student Ravi Rajendra are collaborators on the project.

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