

# Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, June 25, 2021

## White Coat Ceremony marks transition for third-year medical students

### USA College of Medicine White Coat Ceremony 2021



Members of the Class of 2023 at the USA College of Medicine were cloaked with white coats in a ceremony on Friday, June 25, marking the transition into their clinical training.

"There is something amazing about what we are about to enter into," said Natalie Kidd, class president, addressing her fellow third-year medical students. "We're actually going to be in the clinic working with people, serving the community, and I think it's an honor and a privilege."



Natalie Kidd, class president, addresses her fellow third-year medical students.

During the ceremony, 71 students took the Medical Student Oath, a promise to uphold the human aspects of medicine such as sensitivity, compassion and respect for patients. Lynn Batten, M.D., director of the division of pediatric cardiology and professor of pediatrics, delivered the keynote address.

Batten urged the students to fight implicit bias by learning each

patient's story beyond what is written in a medical chart. "Do you have the whole story? Be sure you present that (to your team)," she said. "Pretend the patient is standing behind you, and remember that every one of your words matter."

Last year, the White Coat Ceremony was held by Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 forced some classes at the USA College of Medicine to be held online and closed testing centers needed for students to take medical licensing exams.

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"The transition from the classroom to the clinic is, for me personally, a long-awaited milestone," said third-year medical student Sarah Fillingame. "The Class of 2023 has faced unprecedented challenges in the wake of a global pandemic, and I believe our resilience is going to serve us well as we learn to treat the whole patient in an ever-changing healthcare environment."



After receiving his white coat and posing for photos, Aidan Gilbert was excited to spend the day celebrating with his family. "This ceremony serves as an affirmation for all of the hard work the Class of 2023 has put in over the last two years," he said. "More importantly, it's a humble reminder of the career we've chosen and the responsibilities we have to our future patients and their well-being."

[View photos from the ceremony on Flickr.](#)

[Watch the video on YouTube.](#)



MengJie Hu reads the Medical Student Oath during White Coat Ceremony.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [4:01 PM](#) No comments:

## Faculty Spotlight: Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D.

### Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D.

**Academic title:** Assistant professor of pathology

**Joined the USA College of Medicine faculty:** May 2020

**What does your position in the USA COM/USA Health entail?**

Cancer research

**What is your favorite or most rewarding part of your position?**



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Developing clinical cancer research



### What are your research interests?

- Basic and translational cancer research to develop early detection and monitoring biomarkers for racial health disparities
- Genome and epigenome characterization of cervical, ovarian, head and neck, pancreatic, breast and prostate cancer health disparities
- Understanding the role of mitochondrial genetic alterations and metabolic reprogramming in cancer health disparities
- Development of mitochondria and circulating extracellular-vesicles-based biomarkers for early cancer detection, monitoring, risk assessment and therapeutic guidance

### What is your advice for medical students?

Get involved in cancer research projects and develop ways to cure this lethal disease.

### What are your hobbies/interests outside of work?

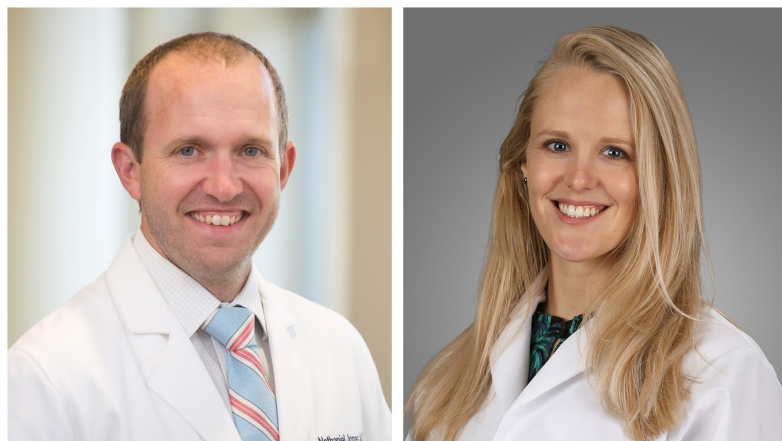
Singing, song writing and composing, patient outreach



Posted by Med School Watercooler at [10:00 AM](#) No comments:

Wednesday, June 23, 2021

## Research on uterine cancer presented at ASCO



Nathaniel L. Jones, M.D., and Annelise M. Wilhite, M.D.

Research conducted at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute recently was presented during the 2021 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncologists, the world's largest organization of cancer physicians and oncology professionals.

Nathaniel L. Jones, M.D., gynecologic oncologist and assistant professor of gynecologic oncology at the USA College of Medicine, and Annelise M. Wilhite, M.D., a researcher and gynecologic oncology fellow at USA Health, were authors on four poster presentations related to uterine cancer.

For these research projects, Jones and Wilhite worked in collaboration with Caris Life Sciences and other members of the Precision Oncology Alliance, a working group of oncologists throughout the United States.

The University of South Alabama was the first institute in the country to be granted access to the Caris Code AI insurance claims data.

"It's a very exciting opportunity for us," Wilhite said. "This database includes molecular profiling on more than 200,000 tumors and allows researchers to

evaluate the association between molecular profiles, treatment and outcomes on a large scale.”

Jones said that much of their molecular profiling database research had been limited due to a lack of clinical correlates. “This database allows us to explore associations between molecular features of rare tumors, treatment modalities and survival, which we hope ultimately will translate to personalized treatment modalities and improved outcomes for our patients,” he said.

The poster presentations at ASCO included:

- “Molecular determinants of response to immune-oncology therapy in uterine carcinosarcoma”

Researchers sought to identify immunogenic markers in uterine carcinosarcoma (UCS), a subtype of endometrial cancer with an aggressive behavior and poor prognosis. They used next-generation DNA sequencing and explored treatment response to immune-oncology (IO) therapy.

The researchers concluded that microsatellite instability (MSI) and tumor mutational burden (TMB) are markers of improved overall survival in patients with uterine carcinosarcoma. MSI tumors have a distinct molecular profile compared with microsatellite stable (MSS) tumors, and they appear to be more immunogenic, which could contribute to improved survival in patients who received immune-oncology therapy.

- “Exploring molecular profiles of uterine carcinosarcoma with alterations in the chromatin remodeling pathway”

Researchers found that mutations in the KMT2C gene correlated with improved overall survival in uterine carcinosarcoma (USC) and that KMT2C-mutated tumors have distinct molecular profiles from wild type tumors, which suggests a potential role for immune-oncology therapy. This improved outcome remained true in a sub-analysis of microsatellite stable (MSS) tumors. More study on the impact of such therapy in the cohort is warranted, as this may contribute to the overall survival of these patients.

- “Association of the presence of estrogen and progesterone receptors in uterine carcinosarcoma with improved survival and increased immunogenicity”

Researchers found that expression of estrogen receptors (ER) and progesterone receptors (PR) in carcinosarcoma was associated with improved survival compared to ER- and PR-negative tumors. Because of this finding, they investigated molecular differences between tumors that had ER/PR expression and those that did not. Results demonstrated that hormone-receptor-positive tumors have many molecular differences compared with their hormone receptor negative counterparts.

The researchers concluded that hormone-receptor-positive tumors appear more immunogenic, suggesting a possible benefit with immune-oncology therapy. More data is needed to determine if hormone receptor status is a marker of a response to immune-oncology therapy.

- “Immune response markers and actual response to immune-oncology therapy in uterine serious sarcoma”

Researchers sought to characterize the immune profiles of uterine serous carcinoma, another very aggressive subtype of endometrial cancer, and investigate treatment response to immune-oncology therapy.

The researchers concluded that immune-oncology therapy was associated with a median survival benefit of more than two years in patients with uterine serous carcinoma. microsatellite instability (MSI) and tumor mutational burden (TMB) were low in serous tumors, but they found that the PD-L1 protein is present in nearly 20 percent of cases. Further study is warranted to determine whether they are predictors of a response to immune-oncology therapy.



## USA medical students, alumnus win at regional emergency medicine conference



USA College of Medicine faculty, medical students and resident physicians participated in the American College of Emergency Physicians' Emerald Coast Conference in Destin, Fla.

Students from the USA College of Medicine won two of the top awards at the American College of Emergency Physicians' Emerald Coast Conference, held earlier this month in Destin, Fla.

The USA College of Medicine and the Department of Emergency Medicine sponsored a group of medical students and resident physicians in the 10-state regional poster competition.

"This is a first for us, as we have never won so many awards at this annual conference," said Michael Sternberg, M.D., professor of emergency medicine and medical student clerkship director, who has taken multiple students to the competition in the past 10 years. "We were competing against emergency medicine programs from Oklahoma, UAB, LSU, Kentucky and Vanderbilt; and we excelled."

Fourth-year medical students Lily Brooks and Christopher Evers won first place in the medical student category for their poster presentation titled "My Neck Hurts." The case dealt with a patient who, while riding a small motorcycle at a backyard party, struck his neck on a clothesline and required emergency intubation and surgical intervention.



Medical students Christopher Evers and Lily Brooks won first place for their poster.

"The patient's voice was very hoarse, and air was rapidly expanding under the skin along the neck, a warning sign for serious neck trauma," Evers said. "We thought this was a great case because the general consensus on how to treat neck trauma has shifted over the years, so we were able to highlight the newer recommendations."

Evers said the conference was a great opportunity for medical students to practice presenting cases. "One of the responsibilities that comes with being a physician is being an educator," he said. "We are expected to drive medicine forward and share our discoveries and techniques with others, so that we all can provide the best care possible. The best educators are also compelling and

effective communicators. That's why I think this case was successful; it tells a great story."

Evers acknowledged Sternberg for his guidance on the case: "We couldn't have done it without him."

Alicia Hereford and Anna Wright, both fourth-year students, were runners-up in the medical student category for their poster presentation titled "A Rare Cause of Pneumonia." The case involved a patient with Churg-Strauss syndrome, also known as eosinophilic granulomatosis with polyangiitis, a rare disease that causes inflammation of the blood vessels. This inflammation can restrict blood flow and cause serious, sometimes permanent, damage to organs and nerves.


"Based on the qualities of progression in this disease, early intervention and treatment are critical to prevent irreversible end-organ damage," Hereford said. "In most cases, Churg-Strauss responds very well to glucocorticoids, with our patient showing great improvement in symptoms within two days."

Christopher Musselwhite, M.D., a second-year emergency medicine resident and a 2019 USA COM graduate, was runner-up in the resident poster category. His presentation, titled "The Good, the Bad, and the Spleen," was about a man who was pursued by a bounty hunter. The man was shot by a bean bag round, resulting in a grade 5 splenic laceration that required an emergent splenectomy.

"Presenting a case presentation poster makes you take a deeper dive into a topic, obtaining a better understanding by stepping back and looking at the literature," Musselwhite said. "Conferences allow you to break out of your local bubble and hear different perspectives on various topics."

Faculty presenters at the conference included Edward Panacek, M.D., M.P.H., professor and chair of emergency medicine; Larry Mellick, M.D., professor and division chief of pediatric emergency medicine; and Blake Briggs, M.D., assistant professor of emergency medicine.

Sternberg has served as president of the Alabama Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians. He was re-elected to the board of the directors at the conference.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [10:49 AM](#) No comments: 

**Tuesday, June 22, 2021**


## Video online: 'Eosinophilic Esophagitis in Children'

Ananthasekar Ponnambalam, M.D., professor of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine and a pediatric gastroenterologist with USA Health, presented "Eosinophilic Esophagitis in Children" at a recent Med School Café.

[Watch the full presentation on YouTube](#) or below.

### Med School Café - Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EoE) in Children



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

**Monday, June 21, 2021**

## Faculty Spotlight: Rosa Vidal, M.D.

### Rosa Vidal, M.D.

**Academic title:** Associate professor of pediatrics

**Joined the USA College of Medicine faculty:** May 2002

#### **What does your position in the USA COM/USA Health entail?**

I am the medical director of the Pediatric Critical Care Unit at Children's & Women's Hospital. This is a medical surgical unit that serves the children of the Gulf Coast. We take care of critically ill children from birth to 18 years of age. This includes children with cancer, trauma, burns and medical illnesses such as sepsis and respiratory failure.



I am also the medical director for the Pediatric Sedation Service. This is a unique service that provides deep sedation for many types of procedures such as MRI and other radiologic interventions, burns and wound care, and placement of special lines, to name a few.

I am very interested in quality improvement projects and am involved in various initiatives as team leader or member. This includes Pediatric VTE, Pediatric Discharge process improvement in Cerner, Alarm Fatigue in the PICU, development of a nitric weaning pathway in the PICU, and implementation of a delirium screening in the PICU.

Our PICU also has several midlevel providers, and we have developed a comprehensive training program as their in-service (onboarding) to the PICU.

We also have a simulation program for the residents that includes partial task training activities for the interns, and simulation scenarios for the residents. I have written 39 scenarios which have been used by the residents and nursing staff.

I am involved in multiple hospital and university committees.

#### **What is your favorite or most rewarding part of your position?**

Working with patients and their families. Making a difference in their lives. We meet families at the worst possible moment in their lives, when their child is critically ill and sometimes a child dies. It continues to amaze me how strong these families are and with what graciousness they interact with us. I love working with our nurses that give so much of themselves to these families and with all my medical colleagues that work to provide the best care.

I enjoy the teaching component of my job, which is why I have always worked in academics. It is a good thing to teach residents. It keeps one current and there are always challenges to keep things interesting for them. Hopefully I can make a positive impact for their future and help them become better doctors.


#### **What research initiatives are you involved in?**

QI projects have some research linked with them, most of which are in conjunction with the residents. I'm involved in several retrospective projects.

#### **What is your advice for medical students?**

If you love what you do, the time goes by very quickly. Find the specialty that makes you happy and keeps you excited and interested. Medicine is a difficult but very rewarding field if you put the patient first. Remember, a human life is potentially in your hands, and that is a special and unique position to be in.

## faculty spotlight

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [2:28 PM](#) No comments: 

### Meet a Med Student: Lauren Mussell



**Lauren Mussell**

**Age:** 23

**Class of:** 2024

**Hometown:** Birmingham, Ala.

**Undergrad/grad institution:** The University of Alabama (freshman year), Auburn University

**Degrees earned:** Bachelor of Science in biomedical sciences, Bachelor of Arts in Spanish

**Interests, hobbies:** Working out, Spanish, any outdoor activity, collecting vinyl records, and finding new experiences!

**Something unique about me:** A couple years ago, I became interested in living more sustainably. It has been a difficult commitment during medical school, but it is a fun challenge, and I have had some small triumphs along the way. For example, I haven't purchased a roll of paper towels in over a year!

**Three of my favorite things:** Nestle Tollhouse cookie dough, a fresh cup of coffee, and quality time with Callie, my 19-year-old cat.



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