

Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, July 16, 2021

Neonatologist Bianca Vamesu, M.D. joins pediatrics faculty



Known for her passion for caring for premature infants, Bianca M. Vamesu, M.D., joined the staff of USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital this month as a neonatologist working in the region's only level III neonatal intensive care unit.

As a faculty member of the only academic health system on the upper Gulf Coast, Vamesu also will serve as an assistant professor of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine.

"I really enjoy working with residents, fellows and medical

students," Vamesu said. "It keeps me up-to-date on the latest advances in neonatal medicine, which ultimately improves outcomes for our young patients."

USA Health's exceptional outcomes for premature infants treated in the NICU was a big part of why she joined the staff. Helping infants born too soon was another.

"Neonatology is challenging and rewarding," she said. "And I love working with babies."

Typically, about 1,000 babies a year are cared for in the NICU. In 2019, a small baby unit known as "The Cove" opened inside the intensive care unit where extremely premature infants born at 26 weeks gestation or weighing less than 2.2 pounds are grouped together for better outcomes.

A native of Romania, Vamesu attended Ovidius University of Constanta, in Constanta, Romania, followed by a residency in neonatology at the Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology in Bucharest, Romania. After working at hospitals in France and England, she moved to the United States in 2015 for a position at Driscoll Children's Hospital in Corpus Christi, Texas. In 2018, she began a three-year perinatal/neonatal fellowship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham that ended in June 2021.

Vamesu is certified by the American Board of Pediatrics and is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She is fluent in English, French and Romanian.

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Thursday, July 15, 2021

Researchers recognized for article on effects of DHA exposure

The Environmental Mutagenesis and Genomics Society recently recognized investigators at the USA College of Medicine as the "Editor's Choice" for their article on exposure to dihydroxyacetone (DHA). DHA is a simple ketone sugar that is the active ingredient in sunless tanning products and a by-product of electronic cigarette aerosols.

Authors of the study were Natalie R. Gassman, Ph.D., a cancer researcher and assistant professor of physiology and cell biology; Marie E. Migaud, Ph.D., a cancer researcher and professor of pharmacology; Manoj Sonavane, Ph.D., a postdoctoral researcher; and Raj Mehta, an undergraduate student at the University of South Alabama.



The article, titled "Exogenous exposure to dihydroxyacetone mimics high fructose induced oxidative stress and mitochondrial dysfunction," originally was published in the January 2021 issue of Environmental and Molecular Mutagenesis.

As exposure to DHA increases through skin absorption in sunless tanning lotions and inhalation and absorption through mucous membranes from e-cigarettes, the researchers note there is cause for concern as DHA exposure effects are not fully understood.

"Potential exposure effects of systemic DHA could place significant stress on cellular reduction and oxidation pathways, mitochondrial function and metabolism," the authors stated. "Chronic, long-term DHA exposure may act similarly to high-fructose diets and induce metabolic reprogramming that reduces glucose uptake, changes glucose tolerance and alters metabolic dependence of tissues."

Studies have shown that DHA is rapidly absorbed into cells and phosphorylated – the chemical process in which a phosphate group is added to an organic molecule – to dihydroxyacetone phosphate (DHAP), integrating into nine different metabolic pathways in cells.



Raj Mehta, a biomedical sciences major, worked with College of Medicine researchers as part of the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship.

"DHAP produced from DHA exposure can impair lipid metabolism, similar to fructose exposures, and contribute to increased adipose tissue content, higher body weights, blood pressures, and plasma triglyceride concentrations in exposed individuals," the study concluded. "Such DHA exposure outcomes can impact the development of chronic illnesses like insulin resistance."

In January, USA received a \$1.1 million grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences to fund research on electronic cigarettes for the next five years. Gassman, Migaud and Sonavane's work is supported by the grant.

Mehta, a rising junior who is majoring in biomedical sciences, worked in the lab alongside Gassman, Migaud and Sonavane as part of USA's 2020 Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program.

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"Initially, the thought of composing this article seemed slightly overwhelming as this would be my first attempt at a publication," Mehta said. "However, I was lucky to be surrounded by excellent mentors who guided me throughout the entirety of the process."

After completing his undergraduate degree, Mehta intends to apply to the USA College of Medicine.

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Meet a Med Student: Rachel Emig

Rachel Emig

Age: 23

Class of: 2024

Hometown: Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Undergrad/grad institution: Mississippi State University

Degrees earned: Bachelor of Science in biomedical engineering

Interests, hobbies: Collecting vinyl records, reading, exercising and spending time with friends.


Something unique about me: I have two adopted siblings.

Three of my favorite things: A good cup of coffee, my pets and riding roller coasters!

What I enjoy most about being a student at the USA College of Medicine:

All of the great friendships I have made so far and getting to live life alongside such wonderful people!



Posted by Med School Watercooler at [9:20 AM](#) No comments: 

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

Faculty Spotlight: Lynn A. Batten, M.D.

Lynn A. Batten, M.D.

Academic title: Professor of pediatrics; associate professor of internal medicine; division director of pediatric cardiology, physiology and cell biology

Joined the USA College of Medicine faculty: 2014, but I have been an adjunct faculty member while in private practice since 2000.

What does your position in the USA COM entail?

Taking care of kids with heart problems, but also teaching students and residents about pediatric cardiology and hopefully how to be a more caring doctor. I also sing cardiology versions of Post Malone and Lizzo songs and make [Dr. Fun's Dance Party USA](#) dance videos for our [YouTube channel](#).

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

Three things: when a parent wants to take a picture of me with their baby, when a toddler stops crying because they're mesmerized by my throwing their shoe back and forth to a resident/student (though one time I got hit in the head when I wasn't expecting the shoe to come back), and when learners have an "Aha!" moment during class or clinic.

Are you involved in research or other initiatives in the College of Medicine?

After seven years of doing free ECG screenings through Heart for Athletes (over 2,600 students served), I finally submitted the research paper on June 7! I'm also working with Amy Cockrell and the administration of Children's & Women's to become a Project ADAM affiliate and help area schools be better prepared to deal with sudden cardiac arrests on their campuses.


What is your advice for medical students?

The old me would immediately say suck it up and crack open a book! (I wanted to print a version of that on a T-shirt for CVR, but Dr. Taylor wouldn't let me.) I now realize that students haven't read textbooks in years. I still feel that you have to build your foundation of knowledge from something before you start ripping through question banks and flashcards, so my advice is to put in the time reading and understanding the material. Chew it up and swallow it instead of simply memorizing associations that you'll forget in a couple of weeks. The best way to learn something is to give a lecture on it. Also, take time for fun every chance you get. Medicine should not be your entire life, or you'll be a pretty boring (and burned-out) person.

What are your hobbies and interests outside of work?

Reading old medical textbooks ... I'm kidding! I knit and sew a fair amount of the clothes I wear, and I'm addicted to my NordicTrack. I did a Tough Mudder and a Spartan race in my 40s, and I am working up to my first half-marathon this fall. I also enjoy dancing.



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