

Med School Watercooler

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

Thursday, July 22, 2021

Faculty Spotlight: Walker Plash, M.D.

Walker Plash, M.D.

Academic title: Assistant professor of emergency medicine

Joined the USA College of Medicine faculty: August 2020

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

I have several roles at USA. I am one of the moderators for Emergency Medicine Residency Program weekly didactics. I am also the well-being coordinator for the residency – organizing well-being events and education for our residents. Lastly, I am the associate director of wilderness medicine for our department. I help run the wilderness medicine student elective for USA COM fourth-year medical students, our resident elective, and an adventure CME course for local physicians. Oh, and I take care of patients in the emergency department at University Hospital and Children's & Women's Hospital!



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

There are two things that really stand out amongst the many things I love about my job. Firstly, I love taking care of patients on their worst day. There is no other field that impacts so many people during challenging times across such a breadth of medicine. I also love helping residents and students grow. It is so rewarding to coach a learner through a first-time procedure and then watch them do it on their own the next time, or help teach them the art of resuscitation, and ultimately watch them flawlessly run multiple resuscitations at the same time.

What research or other initiatives are you involved in?

I am involved in research on snake envenomations, especially copperheads. I also am involved in curriculum design, both for emergency medicine education and wilderness medicine.

What is your advice for medical students?

Find a niche within whatever specialty you ultimately choose. Taking care of patients day in and day out is rewarding but also can be hard. If you have an area of interest you can pursue outside of patient care, that can help you recharge and make your life even more enjoyable.

What are your hobbies/interests outside of work?

I enjoy backpacking, hiking, hunting and fishing. I also love cooking and eating new foods, and I dabble in bread baking.

faculty spotlight

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Tuesday, July 20, 2021


Student-Run Free Clinic seeks volunteer preceptors



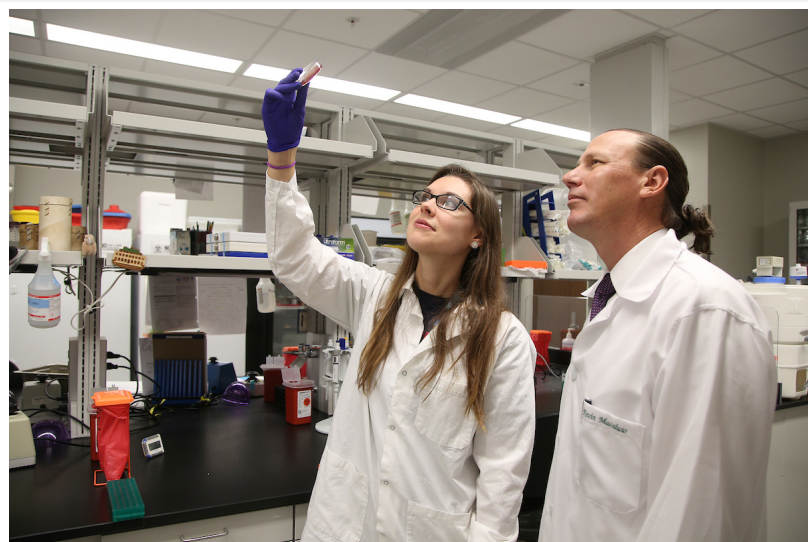
The University of South Alabama Student-Run Free Clinic (SRFC) is looking for volunteer preceptors for the months of August and September. The clinic plans to see patients every Friday afternoon from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Salvation Army clinic site.

The responsibility of the volunteer preceptor is to supervise clinical care at the SRFC. Student volunteers from various medical disciplines see patients and then report their findings to volunteer preceptors, who then validate the students' assessment and plan for the patient and sign off on the patient's chart.

If you are interested in volunteering as a preceptor, please fill out the [Volunteer Preceptor Interest Form](#).

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USA COM graduate researcher examines relationship between bacteria and their vectors



Hanna Laukaitis, a graduate researcher, and Kevin Macaluso, Ph.D., professor and chair of microbiology and immunology, work in the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases in this file photo.

With an ultimate goal of developing more effective ways to stop the spread of certain diseases, Hanna Laukaitis, a graduate researcher at the USA College of Medicine, has compiled a comprehensive review of the relationship between bacterial pathogens and their vectors.

"[Unpacking the intricacies of Rickettsia–vector interactions](#)" is being published through Trends in Parasitology, a high-impact journal that examines medical and veterinary parasites. Laukaitis' review is available on ScienceDirect.com. The research was supported by the National Institutes of Health.

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Bacteria belonging to the Rickettsia genus causes human diseases through transmission by blood-feeding arthropod vectors, such as ticks, fleas and lice. Both Rocky Mountain spotted fever and murine typhus are prominent examples of such diseases that can be transmitted to humans by these parasites.

"The prevalence of vector-borne pathogens identified in nature is rapidly increasing," Laukaitis said. "In addition to the pathogens that we work with in our lab that are associated with historical diseases, others are considered emerging."

Laukaitis' review, which was co-authored by Kevin Macaluso, Ph.D., professor and chair of microbiology and immunology, focuses on the relationships between Rickettsia bacteria and their arthropod vectors. By gaining a better understanding of their interplay and vector transmission, more efficient ways of preventing the spread of rickettsial diseases can be explored.

"Different vectors can feed on the same animal, so one tick feeding on an animal does not limit another tick or flea from also feeding on that same host," Laukaitis said. "This is one way bacteria can use arthropod vectors to spread to different hosts, which is a problem, because most of the vectors are not picky about which host they bite next. It is a very complicated but efficient way for bacteria to spread throughout the population."

Laukaitis is originally from Pennsylvania, where she earned bachelor and master's degrees in biology at Shippensburg University in Shippensburg, Pa. She began work for her Ph.D. at Louisiana State University in 2017. Two years later, she relocated to Macaluso's Lab at the USA College of Medicine.



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Monday, July 19, 2021

Meet a Med Student: Alana Fortune

Alana Fortune

Age: 23

Class of: 2024

Hometown: Missouri City, Texas

Undergrad/grad institution: Dillard University

Degrees earned: Bachelor of Science in biology

Interests, hobbies: In my free time I enjoy music, traveling, reading, cooking, shopping, and writing poetry.

Something unique about me:

I've been to five countries, spanning two continents, and my goal is to eventually go to every continent.

Three of my favorite things: I love finding new artists/music, my amazing parents, and spending time with my 10-week-old puppy, Boudreaux.


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

I most enjoy the family atmosphere of the USA College of Medicine. Every



student and member of the faculty and staff has your best interest at heart,
making learning so much easier.



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