

Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, October 7, 2022

Hewes to present 'Spanish in Medicine'

The USA Medical Alumni Association will host a virtual CME lecture at 6 p.m. Monday, Oct 24, via Zoom.

Amy Hewes, M.D., assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Whiddon College of Medicine and an OB-GYN with USA Health, will present "Spanish in Medicine."

A 2013 alumna of the Whiddon College of Medicine, Hewes will discuss the benefit of being bilingual and how the Spanish in Medicine program offered at USA enhanced her career. She will also share her experiences working with the Hispanic community in Mobile.

Join the Zoom at <https://southalabama.zoom.us/j/99447308644>.



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Thursday, October 6, 2022

USA awarded NSF grant to study role of enhancer DNA sequences in gene expression

The National Science Foundation has awarded the University of South Alabama a \$427,000 grant to better understand enhancer DNA sequences and their role in coordinating gene expression.

Promoters and enhancers are both noncoding sequences of DNA that serve as gene-regulatory elements. Promoters initiate gene transcription, which is the first step in gene expression, the "turning on" of a gene. Enhancers increase the level or speed up the rate of transcription.



Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology, is the grant recipient and principal investigator of the project.

"Interestingly, numerous genome-wide association studies attempting to link genomic mutations with various traits and/or diseases have repeatedly found that more than 90% of disease-associated mutations lie within the noncoding portions of the genome," said Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. "Even more strikingly, most of these mutations lie within regions of the genome thought to function as enhancers rather than promoters."

A promoter is a region of DNA upstream of a gene where proteins bind to initiate gene transcription by producing an RNA copy of the gene sequence. Borchert, who is principal investigator of the project, said, "Promoters can be very complex and typically work together with other DNA regions known as enhancers to ensure specific, robust gene transcription."

Despite their complexity, promoters are readily identifiable, as they generally correspond to the 100 to 1,000 base pairs (bp) immediately upstream of a gene. "This has allowed a massive number of detailed promoter characterizations to be performed, stretching back decades," Borchert said.

Enhancer characterizations, however, have proven much more challenging. Like promoters, enhancers are typically short 100 to 1,000 bp DNA sequences that serve to markedly upregulate gene transcription; but, unlike promoters, an enhancer can be found up to 1 million bp away from the gene it influences.

"How do enhancers work across such large distances? In short, genomic DNA bends, bringing an enhancer and promoter in close proximity to initiate transcription," Borchert explained.

"Despite their importance, to date, we still have a very limited ability to define enhancer sequences," he said, "and major gaps in our understanding of their mechanisms of action and targeting determinants remain unanswered."

Understanding what drives this interaction between promoters and enhancers can significantly improve our ability to treat diseases caused by gene mutations or improve crop resistance to adverse environmental conditions via gene modulation, Borchert said.

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Wednesday, October 5, 2022

Send us your stories of gratitude

Whiddon College of Medicine alumni, students, residents, faculty, staff and retirees, we want to hear from you! Send us your stories of gratitude to be featured in Med School Watercooler's "Thankful" feature next month.

"With the upcoming holidays, and particularly at Thanksgiving, we have the collective opportunity to reflect and honor those who have made a meaningful impact in our lives and express our gratitude," said Meg Laubinger, development officer for the Whiddon College of Medicine. "We invite everyone in our COM community to submit a shout-out, sharing their gratitude for a colleague, classmate or faculty/staff member that they'd like to recognize."

If you would like to recognize someone from our medical college community, please email your brief story (photos are also encouraged) to mlaubinger@southalabama.edu.



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Tuesday, October 4, 2022

Alumni and students invited to tailgate Oct. 15

During the University of South Alabama Alumni Reunion Weekend, Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine students and alumni are invited to join us for a tailgate on Saturday, Oct. 15, in front of Hancock Whitney Stadium before the Jaguars take on the Louisiana-Monroe Warhawks.

The tailgate will start at 2 p.m., and kickoff is at 6 p.m.

RSVP at

<https://forms.gle/4qVSia7q6nWuThgXA>.



Monday, October 3, 2022

New hospitalist joins internal medicine faculty

Sumit Chhetri, M.D., recently joined the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine as an assistant professor of internal medicine and USA Health as a hospitalist and internal medicine physician.

"I am interested in a combination of both academic and clinical medicine, and USA Health has a nice balance of both," she said.

In her role as a hospitalist, Chhetri cares for patients admitted to the hospital. As part of her academic and clinical duties, she leads rounds with groups of physicians-in-training as part of their medical education.

"I enjoy seeing the progress of the residents and medical students as they move along in their rotation, along with the satisfaction that the patients exhibit while they are being treated at the hospital and at the time of discharge," she said.

Prior to joining the upper Gulf Coast's only academic health system, Chhetri was an assistant professor at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, Georgia.

She earned her medical degree from Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences in Dhulikhel, Nepal. She completed residency training in internal medicine at MedStar Health Internal Medicine Residency Program at Baltimore, which is affiliated with MedStar Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Board certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine, Chhetri is a member of the American Society of Nephrology and the American College of Physicians.



In addition to English, Chhetri is fluent in Nepali, Hindi and Urdu.

Faculty invited to 'Lunch & Learn: Promotion and Tenure'

The Office of Faculty Affairs invites Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine faculty to a Lunch & Learn session on "Promotion and Tenure."

Please join us on Wednesday, Oct. 12, from noon to 1 p.m. in the first floor conference room at the Strada Patient Care Center.

Please email Jeanna Smith at jmsmith@southalabama.edu to sign up for this session.



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