Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, December 2, 2022

USA mourns the loss of Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D.

We are deeply saddened to share the news of the passing of Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., a longtime, well-respected member of the University of South Alabama community. He passed away the morning of Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, at his home.

Dr. Haynes will be remembered as an excellent clinician and scientist who was passionate about his patients, and a trailblazer who paved the way for young African Americans to follow in his footsteps and become physicians. His legacy lives on in the countless students, faculty, staff and patients he impacted throughout his tenure.

He served as a professor of internal medicine at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine, assistant dean of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, director of the USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center, and a pulmonologist with USA Health.

A 1980 graduate of the Whiddon College of Medicine, Dr. Haynes completed a residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in pulmonary medicine with USA Health. He joined the faculty in 1984 as the first African American clinical and basic sciences faculty member.

Since August 2001, Dr. Haynes led the USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center and cared for most of the adults with sickle cell disease in the southern half of Alabama. In September 2022, the USA Board of Trustees authorized the naming of the center as the Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center in recognition of his longstanding commitment to the treatment, research and education of sickle cell disease.

Throughout his career, Dr. Haynes was a champion for diversity and representation in healthcare and medical education. In 2011, he established the USA Office of Diversity and Cultural Competence, which was renamed the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in 2014. In addition to coordinating DREAM and SouthMed Prep Scholars programs, the office provides support for and

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recognition of student clubs to promote safe spaces, group activities and educational activities that promote diversity and inclusion. Dr. Haynes also served as the faculty sponsor for the Whiddon College of Medicine's newly established chapter of Black Men in White Coats, which aims to increase the number of Black men in the field of medicine.

Dr. Haynes served as principal investigator or collaborator on more than three dozen research grants. He also authored or co-authored countless publications, book chapters, newsletters, abstracts and reports.

His life's work has been recognized through numerous awards, including the National Research Service Award, America's Top Doctor, the Edith Mitchell Health Initiative Academy of Achievers Perseverance Award, and a Distinguished Alumni Award from the USA National Alumni Association and Medical Alumni Association.

Arrangements for Dr. Haynes are as follows:

Visitation:
Thursday, Dec. 8, from 1 to 7 p.m. and Friday, Dec. 9, from 8 to 9:30 a.m.
Small's Mortuary, 950 S Broad St., Mobile, AL

Service:
Friday, Dec. 9, at 10:30 a.m.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 4051 Old Shell Road, Mobile, AL

Burial:
Saturday, Dec. 10
Garden Hill Cemetery, 1218 Frederick Road, Opelika, AL 36801

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D. Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center, 650 Clinic Drive, TRP III Ste. 1500, Mobile, AL 36688. Donations can be made online at giving.usahealthsystem.com/haynes.

Thursday, December 1, 2022

Charles M. Baugh Lectureship set for Dec. 8


Karin Peterson, Ph.D.

The Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine will host the Charles M. Baugh Lecture in the Basic Medical Sciences at 4 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 8, in the Medical Sciences Building first-floor auditorium. The lecture will also be available via Zoom: https://southalabama.zoom.us/j/99901977833

The lecture, hosted by Meghan Hermance, Ph.D., is sponsored by the Department of Microbiology and Immunology.

The distinguished speaker is Karin Peterson, Ph.D., chief of the Neuroimmunology Section of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Rocky Mountain Laboratories. She will present "Pathogenesis of the California Serogroup of Orthobunyaviruses," an emerging group of mosquito-borne viruses that can invade the central nervous system and cause severe neurological disease.

Learn more about Peterson and her research.

Pathology research seminar to focus on community-based cancer screenings

Karan Singh, Ph.D., M.S., professor and chair of epidemiology and biostatistics at The University of Texas at Tyler School of Medicine, is December's guest speaker

for the Department of Pathology's Research Seminar Series.

He will present "Community-Based Cancer Screening: The Lessons Learned" at noon on Thursday, Dec. 8, in the Strada Patient Care Center conference room. Lunch will be served.

For more information, contact Patrick Carlisle at 251-471-7753 or pcarlisle@health.southalabama.edu.

Karan Singh, Ph.D., M.S.

Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Whiddon College of Medicine faculty recognized as 'Top Profs'

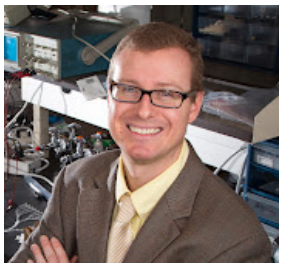
The Sally Steadman Azalea Chapter of the Mortar Board Senior Honor Society recently highlighted professors at the University of South Alabama at the 19th annual "Top Prof" ceremony. This year, Mortar Board members selected five faculty members from the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine as their top professors.

John Thomas Goodman, a biomedical sciences major, honored **Natalie Bauer, Ph.D.**, associate professor of pharmacology. "Dr. Bauer has taken me under her wing as my research mentor and has dedicated a ton of her time toward helping me achieve my goals," Goodman said. "She has served as a source of advice and has truly had a huge impact on my time here at South."

Noel Godang, a biomedical sciences major, recognized **Glen Borchert, Ph.D.**, associate professor of pharmacology. "As a college freshman, I remember when I first walked into his office, and he immediately invited me to tour his lab," Godang said. "As a research mentor, Dr. Borchert has taught me both resilience and basic lab skills in both biomedical bench work and bioinformatics. I'd like to thank him immensely for guiding me and giving me feedback on my Goldwater Scholarship application, as he is always there to support and ensure every student's academic success."

Brianna Mitchell, a biomedical sciences major, selected **Meghan Hermance, Ph.D.**, assistant professor of microbiology and immunology. "Dr. Hermance has been my biggest supporter in my journey here at South, especially with my decision to apply to grad school," Mitchell said. "Thank you, Dr. Hermance, for all of the support, knowledge and experience you have given me over this past year and a half; and know that without you, I would not be where I am today."

Josephine Jalkh, a biomedical sciences major, acknowledged **Thomas Rich, Ph.D.**, professor of pharmacology. "Dr. Rich acts as my service mentor, and he has really upped my confidence, whether that's in my presentation skills or in my ability to be a researcher," Jalkh said. "He really wants to see anybody that he interacts with succeed. I really would not be here without Dr. Rich. It's his help and his guidance that have gotten me to this point."



Waleed Saoud, a chemical engineering major, recognized **Silas Leavesley, Ph.D.**, professor of pharmacology who has a dual appointment in the College of Engineering. "Dr. Leavesley is my research mentor, but he is beyond a research mentor. He has taught me many skills that translate to many aspects of my life," Saoud said. "When I was writing my abstract, Dr. Leavesley taught me how to stay calm and collected during times of stress and that everything would work out in the end."

Mortar Board is a premier national honor society recognizing college seniors for outstanding achievement in scholarship, leadership and service to the campus community. The Sally Steadman Azalea Chapter of Mortar Board was founded at USA in 1969.

Study identifies potential biomarkers for earlier detection of pancreatic cancer

Ajay Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology at the Whiddon College of Medicine and leader of the cancer biology program at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute, is investigating a potential tool for pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

Scientists and physicians at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute have identified unique and high-frequency mitochondrial DNA mutations in tiny vesicles isolated from the blood of pancreatic cancer patients. The findings could be useful in developing a non-invasive test for pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

Pancreatic cancer is a highly lethal malignancy with a rising incidence in the United States and other developed countries. According to the National Cancer Institute, pancreatic cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States with a five-year survival rate for patients at just 11.5%. High mortality of pancreatic cancer is largely attributed to its late-stage diagnosis,

when only limited therapeutic options are available. Hence, an earlier detection of pancreatic cancer could help save many lives or extend patients' survival.

Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D., assistant professor of pathology, is a cancer researcher and one of the principal investigators of the project.

"Mitochondria are the powerhouses of the cells, and my lab has longstanding interest in understanding how their functions get altered in cancer," said Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D., a cancer researcher at the MCI and one of the principal investigators of the project. "We are learning how pancreatic cancer cells alter the mitochondrial energy-generation programs by acquiring mutations in their mitochondrial DNA."

Dasgupta, who is also an assistant professor of pathology at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine at the University of South Alabama, said the goal is to develop a simple mitochondrial DNA-based blood test to detect this lethal disease early, before it spreads. "At the same time, we want to develop ways to target malfunctioning mitochondria as a therapeutic strategy for pancreatic cancer," he said.

Ajay Singh, Ph.D., a professor of pathology and leader of the cancer biology program at the MCI, co-led the project with Dasgupta. "Mitochondria are of significant interest for developing highly sensitive biomarkers, since typically each cell in our body contains multiple mitochondria, and each mitochondrion has numerous copies of mitochondrial DNA," he said.

"Extracellular vesicles have emerged as promising tools for cancer diagnosis in recent years," added Singh, who has more than 20 years of experience in pancreatic cancer research. "Since these vesicles can be traced back to their cells of origin, a test based on them could be highly accurate."

The University of South Alabama filed a provisional patent application based on these findings to protect the intellectual property rights. Dasgupta, Singh and their team are working to generate additional supporting data from larger cohorts of patients and develop an assay that could work in clinical settings. They are also investigating if their approach could be expanded to other cancers.

Contributing authors from the MCI and the Whiddon College of Medicine are Kunwar Somesh Vikramdeo, Ph.D., a postdoctoral researcher; Shashi Anand, Ph.D., a postdoctoral researcher; Mohammad Aslam Khan, Ph.D., a senior research associate; Martin Heslin, M.D., M.S.H.A., a surgical oncologist and director of the MCI; and Seema Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology and a senior member of the cancer biology program. Moh'd Khushman, M.D., formerly a medical oncologist at the MCI and currently an associate professor of medicine in the division of hematology-oncology at Washington University in St. Louis, also contributed to this research.

The study was recently published in Scientific Reports, a peer-reviewed journal from the Springer Nature Group that publishes original research from across all areas of the natural sciences, psychology, medicine and engineering.

Read the full article in Scientific Reports.