

Med School Watercooler

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

Tuesday, December 20, 2022

Thakur presents at North American Skull Base Society Annual Meeting



Jai Thakur, M.D., second from left, assistant professor of neurosurgery, discussed several aspects of skull base surgery at the annual meeting.

Jai Thakur, M.D., director of minimally invasive cranial and skull base neurosurgery at USA Health, was invited to deliver lectures at the North American Skull Base Society Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, earlier this year.

Thakur, who is an assistant professor of neurosurgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine, gave three lectures during the meeting covering different aspects of skull base surgery:

- Skull Base Complication Avoidance: Lessons Learned in the First Year of Practice
- Far Lateral Approach for Skull Base Pathology
- Open Approaches to the Anterior Skull Base – Nuances and Pearls

D. Nikki Chason, CRNP, a nurse practitioner at USA Health Neurosurgery, accompanied Thakur to discuss a procedure they performed together. The duo used an eyebrow incision to successfully remove a large skull base meningioma that had invaded the patient's optic canal, resulting in near blindness.



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Thakur said this technique is an innovative approach that has yet to be published.

Founded in 1989, the North American Skull Base Society is a professional medical society facilitating knowledge exchange and innovative discussion between surgeons and students worldwide and serves as the most popular platform in the world for skull base surgeons in neurosurgery, ENT surgery, neuro-ophthalmology and oncology.

Faculty Development Grand Rounds to begin Jan. 13

The Whiddon College of Medicine's Office of Faculty Affairs and Faculty Development is pleased to announce the launch of Faculty Fridays: Faculty Development Grand Rounds. These one-hour meetings will be available to all faculty via Zoom each month on specific Fridays at noon. The topics will be focused on the needs and desires of the faculty.

The inaugural session is scheduled for Friday, Jan. 13, 2023, at noon. Binata Mukherjee, M.D., M.B.A., assistant dean of faculty and professional development and associate professor of internal medicine at the Whiddon College of Medicine, will present "Resilience: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."

Visit the [Office of Continuing Medical Education CME tracker](#) to sign up to attend.



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Basic Medical Sciences students graduate, move on to new labs



Hanna Laukaitis, one of this year's BMS graduates, is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Maryland-Baltimore.

Seven students in the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine were awarded their Ph.D. in Basic Medical Sciences during the fall 2022 commencement. This

doctoral program encourages highly motivated scientists to use innovative approaches in their chosen field of research. Its interdisciplinary curriculum and tailored mentorship help students build cutting-edge skills and critical thinking essential to advancing medical breakthroughs.

Concentrations in five research tracks are available: Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Biology; Molecular, Cell and Cancer Biology; Infectious Disease and Host Defense; Neuroscience; and Biomedical Engineering and Bioinformatics.

These targeted areas allow students to absorb knowledge from experts in their field and make professional connections to further their careers in academia, industry, government and more.

Alexander Coley translated his research in cancer genomics to a position with a biotechnology company that uses one of the world's largest libraries of data to drive personalized patient care, while fostering discovery and development.

"I have begun work as a translational research solutions scientist for Tempus Labs Inc., where I work with pharmaceutical companies to plan and execute bioinformatics projects using Tempus' real-world cancer patient data," he said. "I work fully remote, currently residing in Mobile with my wife and three children. I had a great experience at South and in the Borchert lab where I gained the subject matter and technical expertise to get hired into a great role by a biotech company."



Krit Jirakanwisal with his major professor, Kevin Macaluso, Ph.D.

Hanna Laukaitis, another of this year's graduates, is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Maryland-Baltimore. "The lab focuses on understanding the different factors that are influenced by a tick bite at the skin interface as well as the biological changes that occur when ticks consume a bloodmeal," she said. "As for my future, I plan to stay in academia to continue studying vector-borne diseases."

Krit Jirakanwisal has his sights set on a slightly different path. "Currently, I am pursuing an infectious disease postdoctoral fellowship focused on neuroinflammation and neuroinfectious diseases at The University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas," he said. "My goal after completing my postdoctoral fellowship is to establish an independent research program. I'd like to extend my gratitude to my mentor, as well as the faculty and staff of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, and the BMS program for their support on my journey to attaining my Ph.D."

Sirin Saranyutanon is traveling the longest distance among her fellow graduates. "I'm following my goal and going back to my home country, Thailand, to serve as a university lecturer and researcher in the field of medical science, molecular biology and biochemistry," she said.

Her research explored the effect of nicotine on the immune response, progression of prostate cancer and treatment outcomes. "When I was at South, I had the opportunity to interact with astonishing scientists in my field, and I am always learning and growing from my interactions with faculties, postdocs, academic advisers and fellow students," Saranyutanon said. "Moreover, I also had a lot of fun and friendships there with my classmates and people around me. Studying abroad at the University of South Alabama was one of the best decisions that I ever made."



Sirin Saranyutanon will continue her research in Thailand.

The seven BMS graduates are:

Abigail Grace Boyd

Dissertation: Role of Type 4 Phosphodiesterases in Thermoregulation and Salivation in Mice
Major professor: Wito Richter, Ph.D.

Alexander Bishop Coley

Dissertation: Novel Regulators of Human Gene Expression
Major professor: Glen Borchert, Ph.D.

Md Ibrahim

Dissertation: Replication Associated Base Excision Repair Regulates Replication Stress Induced PARP1/PARP2 Activation and Impacts PARP and PARG Inhibitor Resistance
Major professor: Robert Sobol, Ph.D.

Krit Jirakanwisal

Dissertation: Interaction of Rickettsia felis and Wolbachia Endosymbionts in Cat Fleas, Ctenocephalides felis
Major professor: Kevin Macaluso, Ph.D.

Hanna Joan Laukaitis

Dissertation: Infection and Transmission Determinants of Flea-Borne Rickettsioses
Major professor: Kevin Macaluso, Ph.D.

Mary Kate McConnell

Dissertation: The Role of PARP1 and NAD⁺ Bioavailability in Base Excision and Single-Strand Break Repair
Major professor: Robert Sobol, Ph.D.

Sirin Saranyutanon

Dissertation: The Effect of Nicotine on Immune Suppression and Prostate Cancer Pathogenesis
Major professor: Ajay Singh, Ph.D.

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