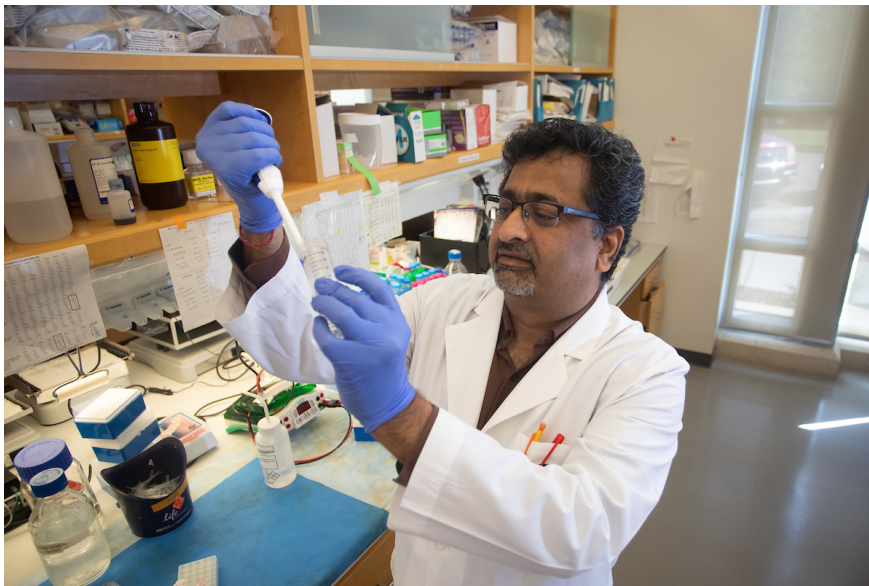


Med School Watercooler

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

Thursday, June 29, 2023

Singh awarded \$1.39 million grant to study prostate cancer disparities



Ajay Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology, is the principal investigator of a project examining race-associated health disparities in prostate cancer.

With a grant from the U.S. Department of Defense, investigators at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine and USA Health will examine the molecular causes and mechanistic underpinnings of racial disparities in prostate cancer. The grant totals \$1.39 million, which will be awarded over a three-year period.

Prostate cancer disproportionately affects Black men, who are two-thirds more likely to get the disease and twice as likely to die from it than white men. "To address race-associated prostate cancer disparities, it is important first to understand how tumors from different races differ in their biology and molecular landscape," said Ajay Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology at the Whiddon College of Medicine and principal investigator of the project.

While much emphasis has been placed on socioeconomic aspects and access to quality healthcare, a biological basis of health disparities remains poorly understood. "Through collaborative research, we are trying to understand the impact of socioeconomic factors on our biology that adversely affect health outcomes and enhance the risk of getting certain diseases, including cancer," said Singh, who also leads a program in cancer biology and cancer disparities at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Socioeconomic and psychosocial stressors, such as racial discrimination, poverty and work-related sleep disruptions, have serious consequences on health. These factors are associated with increased levels of stress hormones and inflammatory cytokines in the blood of Black individuals. "However, the significance of such

observations in enhancing the risk of cancer diagnosis, aggressive disease progression, and clinical outcomes, is not clear," Singh said.

Researchers have made several preliminary observations that provide clues for a molecular and mechanistic basis of disparate prostate tumor biology between Black and white patients. "Our proposed research will generate data to add the missing pieces in the puzzle and provide a clearer picture," Singh said. "These newer insights will guide the development of more effective and tailored strategies for prostate cancer management, and thus narrow the health disparity gaps, and improve the life expectancy of all patients."



Mohammad Aslam Khan, Ph.D., a senior research associate, developed preliminary supporting data for the project.

Singh added, "Cancer is a complex disease, and it takes a village to address complex problems."

The team includes Mohammad Aslam Khan, Ph.D., a senior research associate, and Shashi Anand, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow, who played significant roles in developing preliminary supporting data. Other team members include Seema Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology and an expert in inflammation and stress signaling; Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D., assistant professor of pathology and an expert in tumor biomarkers; Elliot Carter, M.D., professor of pathology and a board-certified diagnostic pathologist; and Christopher Keel, D.O., associate professor and interim chair of the newly created urology department.

Singh also acknowledges the Mitchell Cancer Institute and pathology leadership for their support of cancer research as well as staff members for their administrative support.

Neurologist joins Whiddon College of Medicine faculty

William Hewitt III, M.D., recently joined USA Health as a general neurologist and the Whiddon College of Medicine as an assistant professor of neurology.

"I was drawn to USA Health because of the opportunity to be part of a strong, vibrant and growing academic neurology department," he said. "I am looking forward to mentoring neurology residents, learning from my subspecialist colleagues who are experts in their fields, teaching medical students and continuing to serve our community."



As a general neurologist, Hewitt evaluates and treats patients among the broad spectrum of neurological diseases. His focus is on the initial evaluation and management of people with neurological symptoms but no specific diagnosis. He also helps patients who have multiple neurological problems manage their symptoms.

"I am best able to determine when a patient needs the expertise of a neurological subspecialist and what type of subspecialist would be most appropriate," he said.

Hewitt is originally from New Orleans and has been practicing neurology in the Mobile community for 16 years. He received his medical degree from the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson. At Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, he completed an internal medicine internship, neurology residency and clinical neurophysiology fellowship.

He is board certified in neurology and clinical neurophysiology by The American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Wednesday, June 28, 2023

Mental health conference set for July 28

The USA Office of Continuing Medical Education will present the fifth annual South Alabama Regional Conference on Mental Health: Motivational Interviewing. The conference is set for 7:45 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Friday, July 28, in the USA Student Center Ballroom.

Motivational interviewing was developed to help professionals from all walks of life improve communication, rapport and outcomes with diverse individuals ambivalent about behavior change. You'll learn easy-to-implement techniques that will lead to more efficient and impactful conversations that help individuals find their motivation to change and assist you with difficult conversations that include clients, patients and students who present as apathetic, upset, frustrated or negative. Motivational interviewing provides a collaborative framework that offers opportunities to lift the atmosphere, reduce staff burnout, improve practice culture, and improve the well-being of helpers and their clients, patients and students.

The speaker will be John Friend, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist and director of the [University Counseling and Testing Center](#) at the University of South Alabama. He earned his doctorate in clinical and counseling psychology from USA. His clinical work is driven by his interest in the application of behavioral principles to understanding topics such as purpose, meaning and values, the therapeutic relationship, and present-moment-focused work.

[Register for the conference.](#)



John Friend, Ph.D.

Tuesday, June 27, 2023

Faculty recognized for committee service



Juan Ochoa, M.D.; Lynn Dyess, M.D.; and Felicia Wilson, M.D.; were recognized for their service on a faculty committee.

The Whiddon College of Medicine earlier this month recognized three faculty members for their years of service on the Faculty Committee on Appointments, Promotions and Evaluations (FCAPE).

Lynn Dyess, M.D., professor of surgery, served as chair of FCAPE. Juan Ochoa, M.D., professor of neurology; and Felicia Wilson, M.D., professor of pediatrics; also served on the committee.

FCAPE evaluates requests for faculty appointments, promotions and tenure, and makes recommendations to the dean. In addition, it makes recommendations to the dean for new policy or policy revisions. The committee meets once a month, and members serve three-year terms.