

# Med School Watercooler

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

Thursday, January 11, 2024

## Meet a Med Student: Nick Vester

**Nick Vester**

**Age:** 40

**Class:** 2026

**Hometown:** Dothan, Alabama

**Undergraduate/graduate education:** B.A. in general music, University of Alabama, 2006; M.H.S. in physician assistant studies, University of South Alabama, 2015

### **What do you enjoy most about being a medical student at the Whiddon College of Medicine?**

The supportive community made up of the faculty members and my classmates. Coming from the PA program, it was a very high bar to meet in regards to how focused the staff was as well as the comradery among my peers. After the first year, I can proudly say that the Whiddon COM community has both met that bar and definitely exceeded all my expectations, dispelling any doubts I might have had in returning to school at this stage of life.

### **Are you involved in any research, organizations or other initiatives at the Whiddon College of Medicine?**

PEERS, Black Men in White Coats, MedPride and Allies, summer program assistant for DREAM and SouthMed Prep Scholars

### **What are your interests and hobbies?**

Mental health, Dungeons and Dragons, Mardi Gras, trivia, weightlifting, board/video games, and a self-proclaimed jack of all things nerdy

### **What is something unique about you?**

My paternal grandfather, dad, and myself were born on successive holidays: My grandfather was born on Christmas Eve, dad on Christmas Day, and myself on New Year's Day.



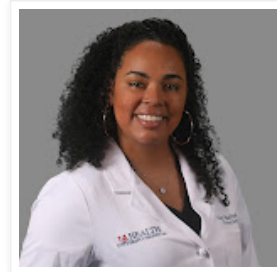
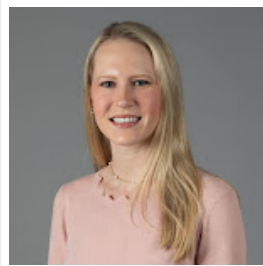


## Mobile Bay Magazine's 40 Under 40 includes multiple representatives from Whiddon COM

Mobile Bay Magazine recognized five representatives from the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine among its annual [40 Under 40 class](#). Honorees are residents under the age of 40 who demonstrate leadership, professional excellence, and a commitment to the Mobile Bay area.

This year's honorees from the Whiddon College of Medicine:

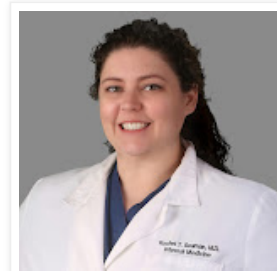
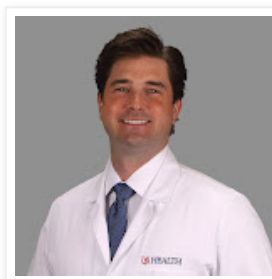
**Meghan Hermance, Ph.D.**, an assistant professor of microbiology and immunology at the Whiddon College of Medicine, is dedicated to research and mentoring student physicians and scientists. A native of Houston, Hermance has been awarded more than \$3 million in federal funding to help study ways to stop the transmission and spread of an emerging tick-borne virus in the U.S. Additionally, she is considered a local expert on advising the public about the risks of ticks and preventative strategies for tick-borne diseases.



**Ashley Williams Hogue, M.D.**, is a trauma, acute care and burn surgeon at USA Health, an assistant professor of surgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine, and the director of the USA Center for Healthy Communities. In the Augusta, Georgia-native's latest role as director, she is tasked with addressing health disparities and improving healthcare access for underserved populations. She and her husband, Antwan Hogue, M.D., a member of last year's 40 Under 40 class, co-founded Project Inspire, a multi-

week, hospital-based injury prevention program aimed to reduce youth violence in the Mobile community.

**Tyler McDonald, M.D.**, a pediatric orthopaedic and spine surgeon at USA Health and an assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine, is devoted to treating children with scoliosis and expanding their scope of care. The Grapevine, Texas-native recently created a new program that provides halo gravity traction to those with the condition. In the community, he serves as the vice president of the Mobile Chapter of AMBUCS, a national organization devoted to promoting independence in children with disabilities through adaptive tricycle use, and he regularly provides care to underserved children on mission trips.



**Rachel Seaman, M.D.**, fills multiple leadership roles at USA Health. The chief quality officer, program director of the internal medicine residency program, and director of the academic hospitalist program also serves as an associate professor of internal medicine at the Whiddon College of Medicine. A member of the hospital peer review and safety committees, the Grand Bay, Alabama-native is passionately dedicated to quality, safety, and patient satisfaction across the USA Health system. Her community involvement includes

leading workshops and classes to improve health literacy on topics including smoking cessation.

**Jai Deep Thakur, M.D.**, a neurosurgeon at USA Health and an assistant professor of neurosurgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine, is the director of minimally invasive cranial and skull base neurosurgery and director of neurosurgery education. The Panchkula, India-native is often praised for his ability to put patients at ease, even in challenging circumstances. Thakur's research has been extensively published in peer-reviewed journals, and he shares his expertise by mentoring medical students. He also is working to create a neurosurgical residency program at USA Health.



Posted by Med School Watercooler at [8:40 AM](#)



Wednesday, January 10, 2024

## USA Health dedicates newly expanded Pediatric Emergency Center at Children's & Women's Hospital

USA Health formally dedicated the new Pediatric Emergency Center at Children's & Women's Hospital, the only healthcare facility in the region offering specialized care 24 hours a day to best meet the needs of sick and injured children. Plans call for the center to open later this spring.

The expansion more than doubled the size of the former emergency department from 9,000 square feet to nearly 19,000 square feet, and the facility expanded from 14 treatment areas to more than 30 areas, including 25 private treatment rooms.

At Children's & Women's Hospital, board-certified pediatric emergency medicine physicians and pediatric nursing staff work together to offer specialized, quality care. Other hospitals in the area transfer their sickest pediatric patients to Children's & Women's Hospital for treatment. In recent years, USA Health has recorded about 40,000 patient visits a year to the pediatric emergency department.



"We anticipate that number will grow when we move into the new state-of-the-art facility," said Owen Bailey, M.S.H.A., FACHE, chief executive officer for USA Health and senior associate vice president for medical affairs. "We are excited to increase access to the unmatched services we provide as we continue to meet the healthcare needs of children and their families in the upper Gulf Coast region."

The newly expanded center provides more space for parents and caregivers to be with their children and offers sensory strategies to help calm and support patients during their emergency visit. For example, a sensory room is designed to support multiple sensory needs while providing the opportunity for children to develop effective coping skills. The center also includes two behavioral health rooms and a private space dedicated to pediatric sexual assault patients.

"We understand that bringing a child or adolescent to the emergency department can be an overwhelming experience. That's why we focus on offering family-centered care to make sure patients and their caregivers receive the support they need," said Deborah Browning, M.S.N., RN, CENP, chief executive officer for Children's & Women's Hospital. "We also know that children are not little adults."

They have unique physical and emotional needs. This new center was designed to better meet the needs of all children who come through our doors.”

In addition to highly trained pediatric emergency staff, child life specialists are on hand to help minimize patients’ anxieties and normalize the emergency department experience. These specialists are certified by the Association of Child Life Professionals and trained to support the developmental and psychosocial needs of children undergoing medical experiences. Additionally, social workers are available to connect children and their families with community resources, provide crisis intervention, and collaborate with families and medical staff to ensure the highest level of care is provided.

“The new Pediatric Emergency Center also strengthens the educational and training opportunities of future healthcare providers, including emergency medicine residents, medical students, nurses and nurse practitioners, physician assistants and other allied health professionals,” said John V. Marymont, M.D., M.B.A., vice president for medical affairs and dean of the Whiddon College of Medicine. “Now we have a leading-edge facility and equipment that matches our high-quality healthcare providers.”

USA Health broke ground on the project in fall 2021. The cost of the renovation, construction and equipment is \$19 million, with USA Health having raised \$14.2 million through donations and state appropriations.

Fairhope-based Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects is the architectural firm for the facility. MJ Harris Construction out of Birmingham is the general contractor for the project.

[View more photos from the dedication and ribbon-cutting on Flickr.](#)