

# Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

## ODI staff to discuss health disparities and equities

The University of South Alabama Archaeology Museum will host speakers from the Whiddon College of Medicine at 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 3.

Franklin Trimm, M.D., assistant vice president for medical affairs and associate dean for diversity and inclusion, and Tiquera Hall, M.P.A., education and training specialist in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, will present "Where is the Parity: Exploring the Gap Between Health Disparities and Health Equities."



The USA Archaeology Museum is located 6050 USA South Drive.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at 9:22 AM



Thursday, March 21, 2024

## Whiddon College of Medicine welcomes new associate dean for finance and administration

Following a national search, Maya Mirzoeva, MBA, was named associate dean for finance and administration at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine.

In her new role, Mirzoeva focuses on budget preparation, financial reporting, strategic financial analysis, and ensures compliance with all accrediting bodies. She oversees the Whiddon College of Medicine's business office and supports the



associate deans and department chairs with key financial and operational activities.

Mirzoeva said she was drawn to the University of South Alabama because of its strong institutional presence in the United States and its impact in numerous areas of research and education.

"The Whiddon College of Medicine has made a great impression on my family with its achievements and research in many medical fields," she said. "But I must say that the Whiddon College of Medicine employs simply amazing people who really care and help everyone in our communities."

Prior to joining USA, Mirzoeva worked at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, Florida. She served as the assistant director of business operations for the Lutgert College of Business before becoming the assistant director of shared services operations for the university. Previously, she served as the business manager for academic affairs at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia.

Mirzoeva received a bachelor's degree in accounting from Kabardino Balkarian State University in Nalchik, Russia. She earned a Master of Business Administration from Indiana State University Scott College of Business in Terre Haute, Indiana. She also received certificates in HR essentials and women in leadership from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Mirzoeva said she has enjoyed her first month living in Mobile with her husband, Tim, and their two sons, Adam and Allen.

"We had a heartwarming welcome to the Mobile community," she said. "Southern hospitality creates an inviting and welcoming atmosphere for anyone who crosses its path. It already feels like home in our new residence and at my place of work. Mobile's nature is so beautiful and peaceful that it makes me want to be outside and enjoy it."

Posted by Med School Watercooler at 1:08 PM



## Special OB-GYN grand rounds to focus on Black maternal mortality

The health crisis of maternal death among African American women after childbirth can feel like a foreign concept – until it happens to someone you love.

Research shows that new mothers are often at risk for serious – and sometimes life-threatening – complications after giving birth.

But minority populations, specifically African American women, are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



To offer a personal perspective on this alarming issue, Anthony Wallace Jr., who lost his wife, Chaniece Wallace, M.D., from a pregnancy complication, will address USA Health staff and medical students during an OB-GYN grand rounds presentation at 7:30 a.m. Friday, March 29, in the Atlantis Room at Children's & Women's Hospital.



Anthony Wallace Jr.

The lecture, sponsored by the Mobile Metropolitan Medical Society (MMMS), will specifically address Black maternal mortality.

Chaniece Wallace, M.D., grew up in Mobile and earned a medical degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2017. As the pandemic gripped the U.S., she was named chief resident in pediatrics at the Indiana University School of Medicine in the fall of 2020. Two days after the birth of her daughter in October that year, the 30-year-old wife and new mother lost her life to preeclampsia, a condition some pregnant women develop causing high blood pressure that can threaten the kidneys, brain, liver, and other vital organs. That year, the pediatrician was one of 700 women in the U.S. who died from pregnancy-related complications.

"We are honored that Mr. Wallace agreed to travel to Mobile to share his story with our residents, medical students and healthcare teams," said Eddrice McMullan, M.D., a USA Health physician and president of the MMMS, a service organization of female physicians of African descent. "It's so important for us to continue to raise awareness about the serious health issues and disparities in maternal mortality so we can save more women."

While there is no charge to attend, guests are asked to [sign up on the Google sheet](#) so there will be enough chairs and breakfast available for everyone.

For those who cannot attend in person, they may [register for the lecture on Zoom](#).

A second opportunity to hear Wallace speak will be on Thursday, March 28, when he will offer a presentation for University Hospital staff and College of Nursing students at a brown bag lunch event in the 2nd floor conference room at University Hospital.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [11:52 AM](#)



## Meet a Med Student: Kramer Crider

### **Kramer Crider**

**Age:** 26

**Class:** 2024

**Hometown:** Bremen, Alabama

**Undergraduate education:** B.S. in biological sciences, University of Alabama in Huntsville

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

I love the opportunities med students have to get hands-on clinical experience early into the medical school curriculum. Also, the small class size allows students to feel like more than just a number. Because of the size of our classes, we are also able to have lots of one-on-one time with attendings, professors, and administration, enriching the mentorship experience offered at South.

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

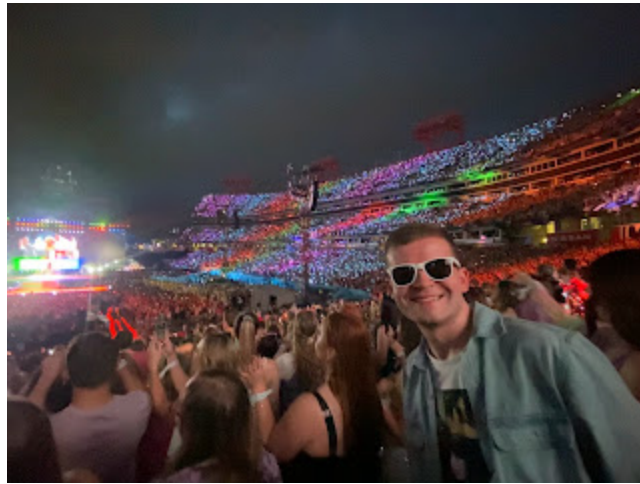
OB/GYN Interest Group vice president; MedPride and Allies vice president; Family Planning and Reproductive Rights clinical liaison; College of Medicine SGA senator; Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Medical Student Advisory committee member; research with Dr. Candice Holliday (OB/GYN faculty)

**What are your interests and hobbies?**

I enjoy taking care of my 13-year-old dog, Milli, and my two cats, Tigger and Morty. I also like taking spontaneous trips to NOLA since it's so close to Mobile. Other things I like to do include working out, playing pickleball, going out with friends, eating good food, and traveling. Most importantly, I love all things Taylor Swift.

**What is something unique about you?**

I am hands-down the world's biggest Swiftie!







Posted by Med School Watercooler at 10:19AM



## USA investigators identify potential biomarker for early pancreatic cancer diagnosis



Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D., assistant professor of pathology, is principal investigator of the project.

Cancer researchers at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute and the University of South Alabama have identified the TOMM22 protein as a potential biomarker for early diagnosis and prognosis of pancreatic cancer as well as a potentially useful therapeutic target.

“Pancreatic cancer is a very aggressive disease that spreads rapidly, and its early diagnosis is very challenging,” said Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D., an assistant professor of pathology at the Whiddon College of Medicine and principal investigator of the project. “Moreover, due to the lack of curative treatments at advanced stages, the survival of patients is short. Thus, we urgently need to find ways to detect pancreatic cancer early along with a new line of treatment.”

The team’s research was recently published in *Molecular Cancer Research*, a journal that features articles describing novel basic cancer research discoveries. Mary O. Haastrup, M.D., Ph.D., who earned her doctoral degree in basic medical

sciences from the Whiddon College of Medicine in 2023, is the lead author of the article.

Mitochondria are small organelles in our cells that host about 1,500 proteins. Using these proteins, mitochondria control cellular metabolism, stress, and cell death. Cancer cells wisely use mitochondria to fulfill their high-energy demand, manage stress, and avoid death. The majority of the 1,500 proteins that mitochondria harbor are imported from the cytoplasm into the mitochondria through a unique protein import system. This import system works primarily through proteins known as translocases of the outer mitochondrial membrane (TOMM).

"We discovered that TOMM22, the central outer mitochondrial membrane translocase, is abundantly expressed in patients diagnosed with pancreatic cancer," Dasgupta said. "When we engineered pancreatic cancer cells to express high amounts of TOMM22, they became more aggressive, indicating that TOMM22 promotes cancer growth and spread. We observed that TOMM22 abundance increased mitochondrial energy production, thereby supporting the aggressive growth of the pancreatic cancer cells."

On the other hand, when researchers blocked the TOMM22 function, the aggressiveness of the pancreatic cancer cells reduced drastically. "We discovered that when the TOMM22 gate is locked, many essential proteins associated with energy generation and management of stress could not enter the mitochondria of the cancer cells," Dasgupta said. "As a result, cancer cells experienced stress and became helpless."

Dasgupta said the lab is working on developing suitable drugs that can block TOMM22. Thus, TOMM22 could be a feasible target to overcome therapeutic inadequacy in pancreatic cancer.

Further, the scientists observed a remarkable increase in the expression of TOMM22 protein from pre-invasive to invasive pancreatic lesions, while it was barely detectable in normal cells. The steady increase in TOMM22 expression was associated with the worst prognosis of pancreatic cancer patients. Strikingly, the progressive increase of TOMM22 expression in these patients turned out to be a better prognostic indicator than tumor grade, Dasgupta noted.

"These findings are very encouraging and necessitate analysis of a large number of patients to establish TOMM22 as a useful biomarker for early diagnosis and prognosis," he added.

The MCI study is the first to unravel the role of the mitochondrial protein import system in promoting pancreatic cancer. "We have just begun to understand how cancer cells hijack this unique import machinery to achieve their benefits," Dasgupta said. "A comprehensive characterization of this import pathway in various other cancers may lead to the development of better disease management strategies to ultimately improve the overall survival of cancer patients."

Additional authors of the study from the Mitchell Cancer Institute and the University of South Alabama include Kunwar Somesh Vikramdeo, Ph.D.; Shashi Anand, Ph.D.; Mohammad Aslam Khan, Ph.D.; James Elliott Carter, M.D.; Seema Singh, Ph.D.; and Ajay Pratap Singh, Ph.D.

Read the abstract in Molecular Cancer Research: "Mitochondrial translocase TOMM22 is overexpressed in pancreatic cancer and promotes aggressive growth by modulating mitochondrial protein import and function."

Posted by Med School Watercooler at 8:29 AM



Tuesday, March 19, 2024

## The Final Countdown: Doc Rock is Thursday Night



Doc Rock is this Thursday night at Soul Kitchen in downtown Mobile. The show starts at 7:30 p.m.

Doc Rock is a night filled with electric energy and upbeat music, topped off with a meaningful purpose. Proceeds support USA Health critical clinical needs.

Buy your tickets now for just \$25.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at 11:35 AM



## DiPalma honored at 19th annual Distinguished Alumni & Service Awards

The University of South Alabama National Alumni Association honored alumni, scholarship supporters, a USA Health physician and the USA Foundation during the 19th annual Distinguished Alumni & Service Awards gala on March 14 at the MacQueen Alumni Center on campus.

"We are delighted to have the opportunity to recognize the achievements of our alumni, friends and supporters," said Margaret Sullivan, vice president for development and alumni relations. "These individuals have shown outstanding leadership in their respective career fields, to the University and in their communities."

The ceremony took place as the USA National Alumni Association celebrates its 50th year.

"The Distinguished Alumni & Service Awards is an opportunity to pause and recognize alumni and friends who are passionate about the University of South Alabama," said Kim Lawkis, president of the National Alumni Association. "It's a celebration of both their professional accomplishments and their personal commitment to the success of our University."

Jack Anthony DiPalma, M.D., is the recipient of this year's William J. "Happy" Fulford Inspirational Achievement Award. DiPalma, a native of Brooklyn, New York, arrived in Mobile in 1987 to establish the Division of Gastroenterology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. DiPalma established the division's clinical research program and the gastroenterology fellowship training program. In the classroom, he draws such respect that students bestowed on him the Red Sash teaching award for 13 consecutive years.

DiPalma has been a valuable member of the University's Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine for more than three decades. He has brought national and international acclaim to the University and USA Health as a result of his work and leadership in organizations such as the American College of Gastroenterology, of which he is a former president, and the World Gastroenterology Organization Foundation. Locally, he has served on, and as a leader of, the Board of Censors of the Mobile Medical Society, the Mobile County Board of Health, Leadership Mobile and the Mobile Botanical Gardens. He has been invited to lecture and teach in several countries around the globe.

DiPalma and his wife, Ann, are longtime, multi-sport season ticket holders and generous donors to Jaguar Athletics. In his spare time, he serves as the faculty advisor for the University's bass fishing team.

The DiPalmas have two children, Elizabeth and Sister Mary Michael, and reside in Mobile.

[Read more about this year's Distinguished Alumni & Service Award honorees.](#)



