

# Med School Watercooler

Thursday, July 25, 2024

## Mark your calendar for upcoming Watermark Faculty Success workshops

Watermark Faculty Success is an online tool for maintaining your faculty activities. The Office of Faculty Affairs and Faculty Development will host two upcoming Watermark workshops for faculty interested in learning more about this resource.

Wednesday, Aug. 7  
9:30 – 10:30 a.m.  
Medical Sciences Building (Main Campus)  
Third-floor multipurpose room



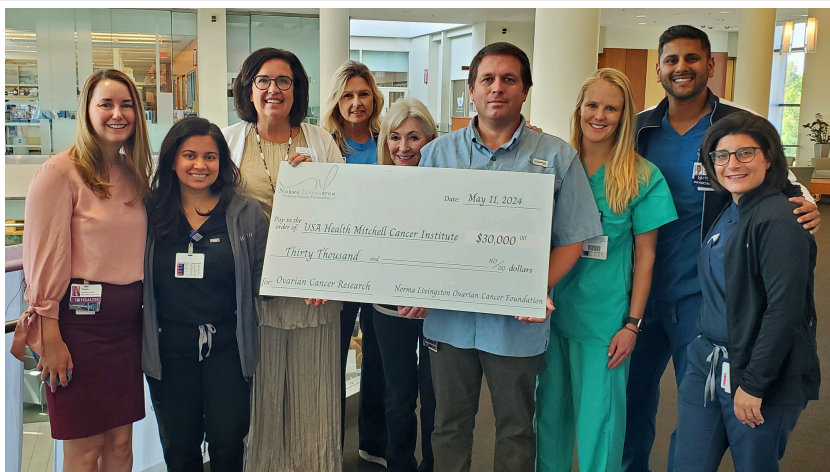
Wednesday, Aug. 14  
7:30 – 8:30 a.m.  
Strada Patient Care Center  
Room 1101

For more information or questions, contact Jeanna M. Smith in the Office of Faculty Affairs and Faculty Development at [jmsmith@southalabama.edu](mailto:jmsmith@southalabama.edu).

Posted by Med School Watercooler at 2:34 PM



## MCI researchers receive gift from Norma Livingston Foundation to study ovarian cancer



Ashley Thompson of the Norma Livingston Ovarian Cancer Foundation, third from left, presents a donation to researchers at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute, including Kevin Lee, Ph.D., center, and Jennifer Scalici, M.D., right.

Researchers at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute have been awarded \$30,000 from the Norma Livingston Ovarian Cancer Foundation to continue studying ovarian cancer, the deadliest of the gynecologic cancers.

Jennifer Scalici, M.D., director of the Gynecologic Oncology Research Laboratory and a professor of interdisciplinary clinical oncology at the MCI, said the funds will be used to study how ovarian cancer develops. Kevin Lee, Ph.D., assistant professor of research at the MCI, is collaborating with Scalici on the project.

Ovarian cancer ranks fifth in cancer deaths among women, according to the American Cancer Society, accounting for more deaths than any other cancer of the female reproductive system. Only about 20% of ovarian cancers are diagnosed at an early stage, when it is more treatable.

"Ovarian cancer currently is very difficult to screen for, or identify, at early stages; therefore, it's really important to understand how it develops and what drives it," Scalici said. "This project can help us understand that process at a metabolic level, and perhaps predict response to treatment."

The Norma Livingston Foundation, based in Birmingham, aims to raise funds for ovarian cancer research; increase awareness about the risks, symptoms and treatment of the disease; and provide assistance to those undergoing treatment. The foundation was established in January 2004 by Lori Livingston, who lost her mother, Norma, to ovarian cancer.

"We are honored to have the continued support of the Norma Livingston Foundation," Scalici said. "I am also proud to say that the funding and the research are 100% local to the state of Alabama."

Since joining the MCI in 2012, Scalici has led research on ovarian cancer carcinogenesis and chemoprevention, as well as the active DNA damage and repair mechanisms and the metabolic changes underlying gynecologic cancers. Scalici was named the recipient of the 2021 Mayer Mitchell Award for Excellence in Cancer Research, which includes a \$10,000 award. Her work also has been supported by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Defense.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [11:36 AM](#)



## New chief of adolescent medicine joins pediatrics faculty

To better meet the healthcare needs of teenagers, Kristin Rager, M.D., MPH, recently joined USA Health Pediatrics as chief of adolescent medicine and a professor of pediatrics at the Whiddon College of Medicine. She will see patients between the ages of 12 and 25.

"I chose the specialty of adolescent medicine because I truly believe that the time between being a child and becoming an adult is the most significant time in our lives," Rager said. "There are so many choices that we are faced with that can affect our future health, happiness, and success. The choices teens and young adults are faced with daily may have a ripple effect for their whole lives."

She is double board certified by the American Academy of Pediatrics in pediatrics and adolescent medicine. Rager was elected as a fellow of the academy in 2015.



Kristin Rager, M.D., MPH

A member of the North American Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, she was elected a fellow of that group in 2011.

Rager was previously the owner of Rager Adolescent Health in Nashville. She earned her medical degree from the University of Louisville School of Medicine and completed an internship and residency at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston and a fellowship at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center's Division of Adolescent Medicine. She also earned a Master of Public Health degree from The Ohio State University College of Public Health in Columbus, Ohio.

"I love having conversations to empower teens to make the healthiest choices they can," she said. "And a bonus for me, having conversations with teenagers all day is always interesting and always fun."

She treats various conditions including acne, ADHD, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, gynecological concerns, and sexually transmitted infections.

Rager will be accepting new patients beginning July 29 at USA Health Adolescent and Young Adult Health, located at 4300 Old Shell Road in Mobile. For an appointment, call 251-634-4589.

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



## Ramani visits Guatemala as part of international clinical trial

Seeking to improve health outcomes for newborns in developing countries, Manimaran (Maran) Ramani, M.D., division chief of neonatology and medical director for the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, recently visited Guatemala as part of an international initiative to determine if repurposing an antibiotic can help babies potentially born with brain injuries thrive.

Ramani, who is also a professor of pediatrics at the Whiddon College of Medicine and serves as chief medical officer for Children's & Women's Hospital, traveled to the NIH-funded Global Network Site in Guatemala as part of his clinical trial funded by the Thrasher Research Fund. His study is investigating whether azithromycin can be repurposed as a neuroprotective against birth asphyxia-induced brain injury in developing countries.

"I had a unique opportunity to work with an amazing team of nurses, midwives, nutritionists, pediatricians, social workers and psychologists," Ramani said, "and witnessed the excellent clinical care they provide to the children who live in remote mountains of Guatemala."

Part of his journey took him on a home visit with the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama team to houses in remote villages near Antigua, Guatemala. Ramani and his team evaluated malnutrition among vulnerable Guatemalan children living in mountain areas using anthropometric measurements.



Maran Ramani, M.D., second from left, evaluates a child who lives in a remote area of Guatemala.



In 2022, Ramani was awarded a three-year grant from the Thrasher Research Fund to conduct a multinational clinical study, known as the Azithromycin Brain neuroprotection for Children study, to determine whether a single oral dose of the antibiotic azithromycin can be repurposed to have neuroprotective benefits for infants who suffer a lack of oxygen to the brain before or during birth.

The study is ongoing in five countries: India, Pakistan, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Guatemala. Through the grant, Ramani is working with a team of physicians and scientists from those countries to improve the health outcomes for infants born in low-resources settings.

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [11:08 AM](#)



Wednesday, July 24, 2024

## Finding career paths – and love – in graduate program



Madeline Stone and Killian Brewer, both Ph.D. students in the Basic Medical Sciences Graduate Program, married June 28 at the Whiddon College of Medicine, followed by a honeymoon in Savannah, Georgia.

Maybe love can't be created in a lab, but it can certainly bloom in one.

In August 2021, Madeline Stone of Spanish Fort, Alabama, and Killian Brewer of Atlanta attended orientation for the Basic Medical Sciences Graduate Program at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

To get to know one another, the students shared their hobbies and interests. Stone and Brewer bonded over their affinity for books, became quick friends, and started dating three weeks into the program. Uncertain whether they were breaking any rules, the couple kept their relationship quiet for some time.

"But of course it became rather evident to our cohort of friends and colleagues who were all positive and supportive," Stone said.

Over the next few years, they stayed focused on their research. Stone progressed in the graduate program's lung biology track, working in the lab of Sarah Sayner, Ph.D., professor of physiology and cell biology. Meanwhile, Brewer worked in the lab of Robert Barrington, Ph.D., associate professor of microbiology and immunology.

"Neither of us envisioned meeting our significant other when joining the program," Stone said. "We both came into this pretty serious about science and focused on paving our career paths, so when feelings began evolving, it was pleasantly unexpected."

During a trip to Orange Beach in the summer of 2023, Brewer surprised Stone with a proposal on the beach at sunset. With the help of Connie Land, an

accountant at the Whiddon College of Medicine, the couple married on June 28, 2024, in the Student Affairs office in the Medical Sciences Building. Land, who is also a notary, was the only one present for their simple, private ceremony.

For their honeymoon, they stayed in a “haunted” inn in Savannah, Georgia. They plan to host a reception with family and friends soon.

As they enter their fourth year, Stone and Brewer are busier than ever, working toward publishing papers and making plans to complete their doctoral degrees by next summer. After graduation, they hope to secure post-doc positions at the same university.



“The College of Medicine will always hold a special place because it has changed our lives in more ways than one,” Stone said. “We came here to become masters in medical research, but didn’t realize the college also stood as the ultimate matchmaker. Who better to understand the science and challenges of a Ph.D. program than your life partner? We could not have asked for a better happenstance.”