‘A fundamental game-changer’

New center enhances patient care and educational experiences
In July, I was given the opportunity to join the leadership team at the University of South Alabama and USA Health. During the past year, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to interact and work with our students, alumni, faculty and friends. A common thread I have found among these individuals is a strong affection and regard for the USA College of Medicine and a steadfast loyalty demonstrated by their investment of their time, talents and resources at our institution. I hope you enjoy this issue of USA Medicine and reading about the individuals who make up the fabric of the USA College of Medicine. The stories you will find in the following pages speak to the many attributes that make our medical school such a special and unique place. As I continue to meet friends of the USA College of Medicine, I look forward to opportunities to connect with you.

John V. Marymont, M.D., M.B.A.
Dean, USA College of Medicine
Vice President for Medical Affairs
ON THE COVER:

The Judith Susan and Samuel Joseph Strada Patient Care Center was formally dedicated in March. The facility consolidates the University of South Alabama’s physician and subspecialists into one 133,000-square-foot building.

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‘State of the art’ facility honors dean emeritus and his late wife
hey were immersed in another culture where resources were scarce, poverty was abundant and a language barrier forced them to step outside their comfort zone. Despite these challenges, the group instantly felt at home due to the abundance of joy that radiated throughout the community.

“Kindness is a universal language,” said Kristen Schultz, a recent University of South Alabama College of Medicine graduate. “You don’t have to speak the same language to show love and compassion.”

Schultz — along with fellow classmates and attending physicians — went on a monthlong medical mission trip during her senior year of medical school to Rwanda, Africa.

The group, including 11 USA medical students and five USA physicians, spent a month working at Kibogora Hospital, a roughly 230-bed self-supported facility in southwestern Rwanda. They worked alongside Rwandan physicians in a variety of fields, including surgery, pediatrics, internal medicine, ophthalmology, obstetrics and dentistry.

According to Schultz, experiencing a shortage of supplies such as alcohol, anesthetic, bandages and sterile gowns was very common. She spent most of her time taking care of patients in surgical wards, helping out in the minor procedure room and scrubbing into cases.

Schultz said her interaction with a 10-year-old-boy who had a congenital deformity of his right leg was one of the most memorable moments of her trip. The young boy required an amputation, but the hospital was out of anesthetic. "Although the patient was already prepped and in the operating room, we could not begin the
procedure until the anesthetic arrived from the neighboring town,” Schultz said.

As they waited, Schultz thought of ways to comfort him. “He was cold and definitely scared,” she said. Schultz began showing the patient photos on her phone to take his mind off surgery. She then showed him Snapchat, using the camera to change the appearance of his face using filters. “At first, he tried to act like he wasn’t interested, but once Snapchat turned him into an old man he couldn’t help but smile and laugh,” she said.

Recent USA College of Medicine graduate Alex Kesler also participated during his fourth year of medical school. He said his hope for the trip was to serve others in need and to learn the joys and struggles of the people in Rwanda. “I also wanted to grow in my faith and have the opportunity to address the faith of the patients in Kibogora Hospital.”

Kesler said many hospital employees walked for hours to get to work each day, yet they were always seen with a smile on their face. “They love their work and the people they serve,” he said. “The most important thing I learned was that across the world there are always different struggles we face, and in the midst of the hardships there are amazing stories of faith and perseverance that can be seen through the daily actions of people.”

Recent USA College of Medicine graduate Carter Tisdale said he wants to mold his future profession in medicine around medical missions.

“Being a health care professional gives you a passport into people’s lives,” Tisdale said. “This experience was a perfect punctuation to our medical education at South Alabama, serving as a reminder of the relational aspect of patient care before we enter residency training.”

Dr. Keith Peevy, professor of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine and a neonatologist at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital, said the group’s commitment to service was unwavering. “They were a great, warmhearted group who were very supportive of each other and the larger team,” he said. “They shared the duties of living communally with no complaint and did their clinical duties enthusiastically.”

Dr. Peevy said he highly recommends that medical students and faculty members participate in medical mission trips. “The opportunity for personal growth is not something that one can foresee, but its occurrence is virtually certain,” he said. “You come back changed.”
Dr. Lamar Duffy, an adjunct professor of family medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, was appointed chief medical information officer (CMIO) of USA Health.

Dr. Duffy, who joined USA Health in 2007 as a family medicine physician, described a CMIO as “the liaison between an organization's information systems department and its physicians and other clinicians.” He says the process of converting the USA Health records from paper or partially electronic records to a completely electronic system is a “monumental task.”

“In the early stages, electronic medical record (EMR) implementation is generally an all-consuming task. We’re trying to unify medical records and work processes for two hospitals, a cancer institute and numerous outpatient venues. It’s not just a matter of technical hurdles. It’s a total re-engineering of work flow,” Dr. Duffy said.

Although Dr. Duffy understands the current limitations of EMR, he also sees the potential for EMR to dramatically improve health care and, consequently, quality of life. “When we optimize the system, patients should spend less time in the waiting room while doctors and nurses should be able to get home on time. We want to leverage what should be the strengths of an EMR such as data search and retrieval, care reminders, patient access and engagement, quality improvement, wasteful expense reduction and population health management. Those goals will never end.”

“To date, EMRs have so often been workflow impediments that we have not been able to realize their potential to make our lives better. Optimal use of the EMR system should help us move to a system where we spend money on quality, safety and positive outcomes. We need to demand that our tools be consistent, intuitive and unobtrusive,” Dr. Duffy said.

Dr. Duffy earned his medical degree at the USA College of Medicine and completed his residency training at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Gadsden, Ala. He is board-certified in family and medical informatics and has experience in electronic medical system information.

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine hosted its 43rd annual Medical Student Research Day last summer. More than 40 students presented their research projects at the event. The Clyde G. “Sid” Huggins Medical Student Research Awards were presented to Jonathon Whitehead and Connor Kimbrell. Whitehead was recognized for the best oral presentation, titled “Burn-Wound Analysis in the Far Infrared,” and Kimbrell was recognized for the best poster presentation titled “Depletion of Mitochondrial DNA: Impact on Mitochondrial Volume Density, Bioenergetics, and Ca2+ Signaling in Lung Microvascular Endothelium.”
Dr. William Gerthoffer, professor and chair of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, received the Joseph R. Rodarte Award for Scientific Distinction from the Assembly on Respiratory Structure and Function of the American Thoracic Society (ATS).

Dr. Gerthoffer was recognized in May at the 2017 ATS international conference in Washington, D.C. “I was surprised and honored by this unexpected award from my scientific peers,” he said. “This award is given by my peers who all have made important discoveries that describe how the lung functions. We are all interested in defining normal lung structure and function and learning how diseases such as asthma and COPD change the lung.”

Dr. Gerthoffer said receiving this award is a great honor because it is given to researchers who have made important contributions to respiratory physiology and medicine.

During his postdoctoral training at the University of Virginia, he reported the first measurements of myosin light chain phosphorylation in airway smooth muscle correlated with muscle shortening velocity. “Murphy’s ‘latch model’ of smooth muscle contractile system regulation was described in 1982, and I tested the generality of this model in airway, vascular and GI smooth muscle over the next 10 years,” he said. “We and others found a number of cases that the model could not explain, and I proposed that contraction might also depend on phosphorylation of actin-binding proteins, calponin and caldesmon.”

According to Dr. Gerthoffer, his lab was the first to measure these phosphoproteins in airway smooth muscle. They were also the first to describe the function of MAP kinases in airway smooth muscles, which are important enzymes that control expression of inflammatory proteins in many organs, including the airways.

“As part of that work, we pioneered the study of airway smooth cell migration, which is thought to occur during lung development and in inflammatory lung diseases,” he said. “To facilitate these studies we developed the first immortalized airway smooth muscle cell lines used by us and others in the field.”

Dr. Gerthoffer said the USA Center for Lung Biology has been an excellent environment to conduct his work in respiratory cell and molecular biology.

“The USA College of Medicine and the University as a whole deserve credit for continuing to support the influential work that goes on in labs supported by the center,” he said. “All of the work in my lab was performed over the years by a wonderful group of graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, visiting scientists and skilled technicians. Their dedication and skilled efforts are really the basis of everything that is being recognized by the Rodarte award.”

In 1974, Dr. Gerthoffer earned his Ph.D. in pharmacology from West Virginia University in Morgantown, W.Va. He completed postdoctoral training in cardiovascular sciences at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and postdoctoral training in cardiovascular physiology at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Va. He has been a member of the ATS since 1997.

The Joseph R. Rodarte Award for Scientific Distinction honors the late Dr. Joe Rodarte, a distinguished member of ATS and the Assembly on Respiratory Structure and Function.
During Solidarity Week for compassionate patient care, the University of South Alabama College of Medicine chapter of the Arnold P. Gold Humanism in Medicine Honor Society participated in several activities to remind students and employees of the importance of compassion in medicine.

“As health care providers, having compassion for our patients’ situations is paramount to providing good patient care and drives our mission to alleviate suffering,” said Emily Spurlin, a recent USA College of Medicine graduate and GHHS member at the USA College of Medicine. “It can be easy to focus on the medical details of a patient’s illness, but it does not matter if you cannot connect with the patient and establish a plan for diagnosis and treatments, taking into account a patient’s experiences and values.”

Solidarity Week is focused on encouraging medical schools and patient care facilities around the country to show the importance of kindness to patients. This past February, GHHS members participated in the “Tell Me More” campaign. After obtaining consent, medical students asked patients to tell them unique information about themselves. After patients answered questions about their strengths, how friends would describe them, and what is meaningful to them, the students crafted a poster to present to the patients. The posters were placed above their bed to showcase information like their favorite movies, nicknames or hobbies.

Jelaina Scott, a recent USA College of Medicine graduate who participated during her fourth year of medical school, discussed the many positive aspects of Solidarity Week and its impact on students, patients and medical staff. “Patients understand that we care about who they are, not just the disease they have,” Scott said. “Health care providers benefit because Solidarity Week gives them a chance to learn more about their patients and helps them better connect, while also providing an opportunity for staff to feel appreciated for everything they do for the patients and the hospital.”

Corwin McGee, another recent USA College of Medicine graduate and president of GHHS...
Earlier this year, 10 medical students, three residents and one faculty member were named to the University of South Alabama Chapter of the Arnold P. Gold Humanism in Medicine Honor Society (GHHS). The USA College of Medicine Class of 2018 selected individuals who have demonstrated leadership, excellence in clinical care, compassion and dedication.

The following USA students, residents and faculty were selected:

**STUDENTS**
- Alan Akira
- Sarah K. Cassity
- Winston M. Crute
- Darren S. Ferree
- Katherine E. Glosemeyer
- Lauren E. Nelson
- Adam M. Powell
- Ashton W. Todd
- Mary Morgan Weed
- Charles Alexander Wiles

**RESIDENTS**
- Dr. Mary Caitlin Marshall, Department of Internal Medicine
- Dr. Justin Sobrino, Department of Surgery
- Dr. John D. Byrd, Department of Internal Medicine

**FACULTY**
- Dr. Lee Grimm, Department of Surgery

New inductees were recognized at the USA College of Medicine’s annual White Coat Ceremony on June 17.

at USA, said that Solidarity Week renewed his interest in getting to know patients. “Solidarity Week puts things into perspective by making me think about how I would want members of my family to be treated if they were under our care,” he said.

This year, rising senior members were able to participate in Solidarity Week for the first time. “We decided to let them participate in Solidarity Week so they would have an idea of the work that goes into such an important yearly event,” said Karen Braswell, USA GHHS chapter adviser and coordinator of clinical education at the USA College of Medicine.

Ashton Todd learned more about the value of spending time with young patients during Solidarity Week. “Solidarity Week has shown me that it only takes little gestures to show people that they are appreciated,” she said.

Todd was able to spend time with 8-year-old patient KeAziah Frazier at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital during the “Tell Me More” campaign, which she said brought them closer as patient and health care provider. “I was able to get to know her by asking questions like her favorite color and favorite sport,” Todd said. “I was so overjoyed to see her enthusiasm and appreciation.”

Spurlin, who also participated in the “Tell Me More” campaign at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital, said the patients had the “most remarkable attitudes.”

“To see them smile as we talked about their posters was amazing.”

The national Gold Humanism Honor Society office established National Solidarity Day for Compassionate Care in 2011 to highlight the nationwide movement promoting provider-patient relationships based on caring, personalization and mutual respect. Momentum gathered particularly after the Senate passed a resolution in 2013 and 2014 to officially recognize Solidarity Day on the national calendar, and it is now typically celebrated on or around Valentine’s Day.
Gremse serves as ABP chair

Dr. David Gremse, professor and chair of pediatrics at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a pediatric gastroenterologist with USA Physicians Group, was named chair of the board of directors of the American Board of Pediatrics (ABP).

As chair, Dr. Gremse will lead the board, providing support and directing the activities of the ABP to achieve its mission of healthy outcomes for children. According to Dr. Gremse, becoming chair of the board of directors will be beneficial to his role at USA. “The experience I will gain serving as chair of the board of directors of the ABP will foster relationships with other leaders in pediatrics that will enhance the reputation of USA in academic medicine and in the pediatric profession,” he said.

During his or her term in office, the chair, along with the president and CEO, serves as a liaison for the ABP to other pediatric organizations and as an ex-officio member of all ABP committees. Dr. Gremse’s one-year term began January 2017.

Dr. Gremse has been an active member of the ABP since 2000. He began by serving on the Maintenance of Certification Examination Committee, later serving a six-year term on the pediatric gastroenterology subboard where he also chaired the credentials committee. He was later appointed to the board of directors, where he served on the finance committee. In 2015, he was elected secretary-treasurer of the board of directors. As a USA College of Medicine alumnus and faculty member, Dr. Gremse said his appointment speaks to the quality of pediatricians at USA. “I am indebted to the USA College of Medicine for providing me the medical training to prepare me to serve in this capacity,” he said. “My accomplishments are an example of leadership opportunities that can be achieved through a career at USA. I am but one of the numerous examples of leaders in pediatrics who have been members of the USA faculty.”

Dr. Franklin Trimm, professor and vice chair of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine and a developmental and behavioral pediatrician with USA Physicians Group, is also a member of the ABP Education and Training Committee. “Dr. Gremse’s leadership within the ABP puts the USA College of Medicine on the forefront of pediatric leadership discussions, policy development and planning for the current and future well-being of children,” Dr. Trimm said. “It is a unique opportunity to increase the diversity of perspective by incorporating the insights of a department chair from the South and from our size medical school.”

Dr. Gremse earned his medical degree from the USA College of Medicine in 1983. He completed his internship and residency training in pediatrics at USA Medical Center and his fellowship in pediatric gastroenterology and nutrition at Children’s Hospital Medical Center in Cincinnati. In addition, he was a research fellow in the division of pediatric gastroenterology and nutrition at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Research Foundation. He was the first board-certified pediatric gastroenterologist in Mobile.

Elizabeth Minto named 2016 MS Leadership Class valedictorian

Dr. Elizabeth Minto, assistant professor of neurology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, was named class valedictorian of the 2016 MS Leadership Class by the Alabama and Mississippi Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. She raised more than $6,000 in donations for the fight against multiple sclerosis. In addition, Dr. Minto achieved the prestigious Golden Circle recognition by the National MS Society. Golden Circle membership is awarded to participants who raise $1 or more for each of the 4,700 people with MS in Alabama.
Giving back to and taking care of the rural community were very important to the late Dr. Ernest G. DeBakey. He was recognized by his peers as one of the pre-eminent general surgeons in the Southeast during his career, which spanned 60 years. He established the Ernest G. DeBakey Charitable Foundation (DeBakey Foundation) to benefit medical students who have the desire to practice in underserved communities. The DeBakey Foundation has provided the University of South Alabama College of Medicine more than $2 million to support scholarships for students who are committed to practicing in rural Alabama.

Dr. Gretchen Vandiver, a 2012 scholarship recipient and 2016 USA College of Medicine graduate, will forever be grateful to the DeBakey Foundation.

"It's amazing to me that I get to finish residency without debt," said Dr. Vandiver. "I really like the sense of community in small towns and the fact that you get to know your patients, get to see them at the grocery store, and get to be an active member in your community."

The scholarship has created a valuable partnership between the DeBakey Foundation and USA’s medical school that assists and guides students as they commit to practicing rural medicine.

"Receiving the DeBakey scholarship to attend USA prepared me so well," Dr. Vandiver said. "I'm extremely appreciative of the opportunities I had when I was in medical school and the training I received."

The DeBakey Foundation is taking critical steps to address the need for more physicians in our underserved communities. Marsha DeBakey, wife of the late Dr. DeBakey and head of the DeBakey Foundation, is committed to finding a way to educate young people and send them back into rural communities with few, if any, primary care physicians. The scholarship recipients must commit to spending at least five years in an underserved, rural Alabama community as a primary care provider.

By providing scholarships, the DeBakey Foundation is freeing students to choose rural medicine jobs, which are typically lower-paying.

"I think this scholarship is a way to encourage future doctors to remember to take care of the underserved community, too," Dr. Vandiver said. "We've been given a gift and the ability to become a doctor, and I am able to share this gift with those who normally might not have access to adequate care."
What’s the value of a scholarship? Quite simply, it may be a better doctor for the patient who needs one.

The cost of medical education is a burden for future health care providers, says University of South Alabama medical student Frank Foley. “Having the scholarship really puts a lot of that anxiety and pain at ease, so you can focus on what’s really important — learning the material and being the best physician you can possibly be for your future patients,” Foley says.

Foley is one of three USA medical students who are benefiting from Crampton Trust Scholarships, along with Jorden Smith and Jordan Nickols.

“Having the scholarship as something that helps with the burden of the cost really makes you, as a student, feel like you can focus more on the important things of your education — namely, learning the clinical skills and the knowledge from the basic science courses to excel as a medical student in your third and fourth years when you go to the hospital,” Foley adds.

That’s exactly the point, says Roger Cole, trust officer for the Crampton Trust at Regions Bank.

Katherine Crampton Cochrane, who endowed the trust, named it in honor of her father, noted Mobile physician Dr. Orson L. Crampton. During her lifetime, she quietly provided gifts to charities that supported health and education. At her death, she directed that her legacy be used to continue that support for health and education.

“Given Mrs. Cochrane’s interests, scholarship support for medical and nursing students is a natural fit,” says Cole.

For Nickols and his wife, the scholarship support came at a particularly valuable time. During his third year of medical school, they had a baby.

“Once I saw that first loan come through, questions did start looming up about how we were going to pay these bills and how we were going to handle raising a kid with so much debt and so many loans,” Nickols says. The Crampton Scholarship will definitely help, he says.

Smith came to medical school by the long route. She was all set for college, scholarships in hand, when her father became ill. She opted for the less-expensive community college route, staying home in Mississippi to help.

Her father was ill for seven years, she says, and doctors were baffled by his condition, not making a definitive diagnosis until after his death. When Smith did make it to USA to finish her undergraduate studies, she would drive by the Medical Sciences Building coming and going to classes telling herself: “I’m going to be there one day, I hope.”

Throughout her father’s illness, however, Smith was struck by the compassionate care provided by his physicians.

“His pulmonologist was extremely inspirational,” she says. “He stuck with us throughout the seven years of his illness. That’s one of the reasons why I feel like it’s almost a duty to pay it forward. I feel like what the care team did for our family, I should do for other families.”

Having the Crampton Trust support has been “a huge, huge relief” in helping her toward that goal.

The Crampton Trust also supports a position in gerontology and has supported the USA Medical Center and the USA Mitchell Cancer Institute.
Whether it’s the chance to have a positive impact on a young child’s life or to be part of something bigger than oneself, University of South Alabama medical students volunteering in the local community contend the rewards of giving back are immeasurable.

“Participating in community service offers our medical students the opportunity to support numerous organizations that have a significant positive impact on the Mobile area. In addition, volunteering gives students the chance to learn from the individuals who make up the fabric of our community and also allows them to develop a deeper appreciation for the real-life challenges that they face,” said Dr. Susan LeDoux, associate dean of medical education and student affairs at USA. “At the same time, students who volunteer are able to work with and learn from the talented civic-minded leaders in our community.”

First-year medical student Jazmin Scott opted to join a small group of classmates volunteering with Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Alabama and said mentoring her assigned “Little” at Forest Hill Elementary School in Mobile has been a learning experience for them both.

“My Little has had some different experiences from me, but it’s been so great to talk to her and hear things from her perspective,” said Scott, a Mississippi native who grew up near Ocean Springs.

“My Little is 9 years old, so she’s always very excited to see me and always wants to know when I’m coming back, and it just warms my heart,” she said, adding, “It’s never too early to put in anything you want and that there’s nothing you can’t achieve if you work hard, so right now I’m just trying to be a positive influence on her.”

Meanwhile, medical students Darren Ferree and James Davidson have thrown their volunteer hours toward Habitat for Humanity of Southwest Alabama.

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Meanwhile, medical students Darren Ferree and James Davidson have thrown their volunteer hours toward Habitat for Humanity of Southwest Alabama.

For Davidson, helping to provide the stability of home ownership or repairs for those who otherwise could not afford it is a longtime passion he first gravitated toward while living in Birmingham. He now serves as vice president for the local chapter and says it helps flip the script on the rigors of medical school.

“It helps to have at least one thing to remind you the world around you is still turning, to not be saturated all day, every day in medicine,” he said.

Likewise, Ferree, a third-year medical student and Huntsville native, said his decision to team up with Habitat hinged on prior experience assisting with recovery efforts following hurricanes Katrina and Gustav.

“My wife and I helped with cleanup and ended up seeing real tangible results for our work, so this is really just a continuation,” said Ferree, adding that the local Habitat chapter welcomes all ranges of experience and offers an informal, close-knit means of giving back.

“We’ve got everyone from people who have built their own houses to people who have never held a paintbrush. It’s great exercise and a really good opportunity to learn some do-it-yourself skills, but it’s also a great way to network with people in your class and the classes ahead and behind you,” he said.

First-year medical student Malik McMullin, a native of Tuskegee, Ala., said his work with Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Alabama has been immensely rewarding.

“We’re pretty similar. We’re not too lively. He’s kind of quiet like I am. He loves Legos. Usually we work on academics for half the time and play games half the time,” McMullin said of his third-grade Little, who wants to be a football player or a coach.

“The funny thing is that through our short time together he’s already realizing college needs to be a necessary part of anything he does. His teacher tells me he struggles in math sometimes, but I never see it when I’m with him. He excels at math when he has that one-on-one instruction, and I’m really looking forward to working with him throughout medical school and keeping tabs on his progress,” he said.

And honestly, McMullin said he finds respite in his visits to Forest Hill.

“I think I realized how valuable it is to get away from anything to do with medical school. It’s a great refuge and a stress reliever from the day-to-day. I think a lot of us enjoy the time of not thinking about ourselves and learning about someone else and building that relationship. It’s easy to not get out of that environment while bogged down in the books,” he said.
Philanthropy comes in all shapes and sizes, but University of South Alabama College of Medicine alumni agree their motivation for financially supporting their alma mater stems from the same place, regardless of the number of zeros attached.

Dr. Amy Boone, a member of the Class of 2014 and an obstetrics and gynecology resident at USA, said although this particular point in her professional career presents a financial crunch, it’s important to her to “recognize and give back to the people who helped me get to where I am today.”

“Of course you have to look at your budget, but the reality is even the smallest contribution makes a difference. I know I couldn’t have done it without the people who helped with my school and training, so I’ve made giving back to the USA College of Medicine a priority early,” Dr. Boone said, noting she is hopeful the practice will be deeply ingrained by the time she’s more “financially flexible” to give more.

“It’s not necessarily the amount you give; it’s more making a dedicated and concerted effort to thank those people who helped you as well as to provide opportunities to those who come after you and want to realize their dreams. No matter how small, it’s still worthy, appreciated and needed,” Dr. Boone said.

Since 1976, the year the USA College of Medicine graduated its first class, alumni giving by class has topped $515,000, earmarked primarily for scholarships. Dr. Boone’s young Class of 2014, for instance, has contributed a combined $10,794 to date, while the Class of 1981 has amassed $405,419 for its endowment.

Dr. Ed Panacek, professor and chair of emergency medicine at USA, said he and colleagues in the Class of 1981 started talking and realized a “critical mass of very motivated people” was interested in pursuing collective class giving.

“We decided that it was more important to have broad class participation rather than focusing on the amount donated by any one person or each person.”

Dr. Edward Panacek, professor and chair of emergency medicine at the USA College of Medicine

“It’s not necessarily the amount you give; it’s more making a dedicated and concerted effort to thank those people who helped you ...”

Dr. Amy Boone, OB-GYN resident physician at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital

“...it really takes a village, and our class was particularly close, warm and supportive. We worked together as a group rather than supporting the issue as a lone ranger,” he said.

Dr. Panacek also noted they enlisted assistance of the USA Medical Alumni Association as well as the university’s development office to “make sure we understood the applicable rules and processes we would need to follow.”

“We also spoke with the dean of the School of Medicine at the time, Dr. (Samuel) Strada, and he agreed to incentivize our efforts by offering fund matches if we set certain deadline-oriented goals and milestones,” Dr. Panacek said.

The five-year campaign netted participation from 80 percent of class members - 90 percent of those with whom contact was established.

“We decided that it was more important to have broad class participation rather than focusing on the amount donated by any one person or each person. We really wanted it to feel like a unifying class activity, so we focused less on the money and more on trying to get something from everyone,” he said, adding, “I believe that anyone who gets the benefit of a higher education should be grateful for that — particularly when you get a postgraduate degree — because you really are getting the benefit of society and the university investing in you.”
It's no secret that medical school can be a costly investment. Today, medical school graduates leave with more than just a degree and an eagerness to begin residency training – on average, they also leave with $200,000 in student loan debt.

Practicing good money habits early is important so medical school graduates can spend more time focusing on the practice of medicine and less time worrying about their personal finances.

In March, Dr. Caleb Butts, a chief surgery resident at the University of South Alabama, paid off his medical student loans in full just four years and 10 months after graduating from the USA College of Medicine.

“You have two options with student loans,” he said. “You can say, ‘I’m going to pay as little as I can for as long as I can and try student loan forgiveness,’ or you can say, ‘I don’t want to have my entire life based upon my student loans.’”

Dr. Butts and his wife chose the latter, wanting to pay them off as quickly as they could. “We knew we didn’t want to be surrounded by debt,” he said. “We wanted to be different.”

From the beginning, Dr. Butts and his wife, Tricia, made it their mission to borrow as little as they could for tuition and to pay off what they did borrow as quickly as possible. He said the key to paying off debt is to stay disciplined and to have a goal in mind.

“Our goal was to be able to have flexibility to allow our family to do the things that were important to us – things like adoption and giving back to others,” Dr. Butts said. “We realized that once we became debt free, we would have the freedom for options.”

Earlier this year, Dr. Butts presented “Real Talk about Student Loans” to current USA medical students, explaining how student loans can negatively impact their life and providing tips on how to pay the loans off early.

Dr. Butts recommends medical students address student loans early on. “I know there are a lot of things going on when you’re a medical student, but it is extremely important to be actively involved in your finances,” he said.

One survey he discussed showed that nearly half of academic attending surgeons said their educational debt still affects their quality of life and 35 percent of them said it places a significant strain on the relationship with their significant other.

“It seems daunting, but the earlier you start thinking about these things, the easier it is. Treat it as being one more thing you must learn while in medical school.”

During medical school and residency, Dr. Butts and his wife, a former teacher, made paying off debt a priority. They lived below their means, created a budget and placed extra money they earned toward the student loans.

Over time, small changes made a big impact. “Budgeting helped us find extra money to put toward the loans,” he said.

The Butts’ learned to live off of one income by keeping their living expenses low. “The average family in the U.S. makes $40,000 a year. My wife was a teacher, making about that much. If the average family could do it, we knew we could, too.”

Also during that time, the Butts’ adopted two children, Abby and Joshua. Two days after they brought Joshua home, they found out they were pregnant with their third child, Ella. “Luckily, because we learned to live off of one teacher’s salary, we had paid down my student loans and had enough flexibility within our budget to be able to afford adoptions,” he said. “By making that right decision early, we were able to do something that we really wanted to do. We put money into things we valued – like family – and we did it intentionally.”

To prepare for Dr. Butts’ next step in his medical training – an acute care surgery fellowship at Wake Forest University in Salem, N.C. – the family sold their house and decided to use that money to pay the last payment on their student loans. “It was such a relief and really awesome because we were totally debt free,” he said.

Dr. Butts suggests the following tips for medical students who want to dump their debt:

1. **Begin with the end in mind.**
   If you don’t know where you’re going, you are never going to get there. If you don’t have a goal in mind, you are never going to reach it.

2. **Budget, budget, budget.**
   If you do a zero-based budget every month, you’ll be able to do more with your money.

3. **Live within your means.**
   Don’t feel social pressures to live a lifestyle commiserate with being a physician.

4. **Be disciplined and intentional.**
   Use extra money from raises, side jobs or skills to pay down your debt.

5. **Avoid attaching your wealth to things, especially things that lose value – like vehicles – and grow into your salary slowly.**
   Most importantly, Dr. Butts said medical students should think about and always remember why they chose a career in medicine. “Money problems lead to unhappiness, and unhappiness leads to burnout. Practice good money habits so you can focus on the real things that matter – things like being a good doctor, a good mother or father, a good spouse and a good community member.”

**Dr. Caleb Butts and his wife, Tricia, pose for a photo with their children Joshua, Abigail and Ella. In March, Dr. Butts, a chief surgery resident at USA, paid off his medical student loans in full just four years and 10 months after graduating from the USA College of Medicine.**
Alumni Reunite for Weekend

The University of South Alabama Medical Alumni Association hosted its annual Medical Alumni Weekend June 9-11, 2017, at Hilton Pensacola Beach in Pensacola Beach, Fla.

The event is a multi-day class reunion held every summer that reunites USA medical graduates on the Gulf Coast. It offers Continuing Medical Education (CME) accredited courses and an alumni dinner sponsored by the association.

Several USA alumni and faculty members presented lectures during the weekend. On Saturday, Dr. Lynn Dyess (COM ’82), professor of surgery at USA College of Medicine and a breast and endocrine surgeon with USA Physicians Group, presented “Advances in Breast Cancer Treatment” and Dr. Daniel Dees (COM ’07), assistant professor of neurology at the USA College of Medicine and a neurologist with USA Physicians Group, presented “Movement Disorders: Screening and Management.” On Sunday, Dr. Sidney Brevard (COM ’87), professor of surgery and a trauma and critical care surgeon with USA Health, presented “Inside Charity Hospital During Hurricane Katrina” and Dr. Edward Panacek (COM ’81), professor and chair of emergency medicine at the USA College of Medicine, presented “Sepsis in the Time of CMS.”

During the annual meeting and luncheon of the Medical Alumni Association Board of Directors, Dr. R. Michael Culpepper, professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine, received the 2017 Distinguished Service Award.


Next year’s Medical Alumni Weekend will take place June 8-10, 2018, in Pensacola Beach, Fla.
‘I’m Tackling Medical School Like I Tackled My Opponents’

Just two days before the start of freshman orientation, Jeremy Towns’ journey to medical school at the University of South Alabama was interrupted when he was offered a contract with the National Football League. Two years later, he is now fulfilling his lifelong dream of becoming a doctor.

“I realized I wanted to help people at a young age,” Towns said. “One year, I dressed up as a doctor for Halloween. I remember asking my mom what I had to do to become a real doctor, and she told me that I had to work harder than anyone else.”

Towns took his mother’s advice to heart. He received his acceptance letter from the University of South Alabama College of Medicine shortly after earning his undergraduate degree in sports medicine from Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., where he played football as a defensive lineman.

“I received my medical school acceptance letter the day before NFL pro-day,” Towns said. “My mother opened the letter and told me the great news. We were both so excited.”

With plans to attend medical school in place, Towns traveled to Dominica for a week-long mission trip. While traveling back home, he noticed a voicemail from a Washington Redskins scout. “Since the voicemail was a week old I thought I missed my opportunity and they moved on to the next person,” he said. “To my surprise, I called them back and they wanted to send me up there to do a workout in a few days.”

Ultimately, Towns was offered a free-agent deal with the Redskins and chose to postpone medical school.

After he left the Redskins, Towns was signed by the Buffalo Bills and the Philadelphia Eagles before he made his way to the USA College of Medicine. Towns said he is thankful for the opportunity to play professionally as it prepared him for the rigors of medical school.

Towns said his approach to medical school is to meet every challenge with overwhelming force, a strategy he often utilized on the field. “Playing defense taught me that you have to get back up every time you get knocked down,” he said. “It also showed me that I can do all of the preparation in the world, but at some point I have to play the game. Now, I use that same mentality by thinking of every test as my opponent. I have to tackle it.”

As the first person to attend medical school in his family, Towns said he immediately felt at home during the interview process at the USA College of Medicine. “People suggested that some medical schools would not allow me to keep my dreads, but South welcomed me with opened arms,” he said. “I am always going to be thankful for the opportunity to be in the presence of such great people.”

Compared to professional football, Towns said the rigors of medical school are far more demanding but will be extremely rewarding. “I love that USA is very serious about medicine and every students’ success,” he said. “To be able to walk into any professor’s office for help or clarification is amazing. I can tell that this is not a job they do just for a paycheck. They genuinely love coming to work every day.”

Although his professional football career temporarily delayed his childhood dreams of attending medical school, Towns said he never lost sight of his ultimate goal in life. “I have always wanted to impact the community through medicine,” he said. “And it all started with a Halloween costume.”

Class of 2019 Students Cloaked with White Coats

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine held its annual White Coat Ceremony for the Class of 2019 on June 17, 2017. During the ceremony, rising third-year medical students were cloaked with white coats, the traditional dress of physicians for more than 100 years.

Several students in the Class of 2019 were celebrating the day alongside their parents who are members of the USA College of Medicine faculty. These faculty members — Drs. Bassam Omar, Troy Stevens, Kelly Roveda, Botros Rizk and Carol Motley — presented white coats to the 76 students at the ceremony.

USA medical student Mazen Omar said his father, Dr. Bassam Omar, has provided him a true example of what a physician should be. “I feel like by being a part of the ceremony he is giving me a chance to follow in his footsteps and one day be an example to others, too,” Mazen said.

Mazen considered medicine as a career path in high school and began volunteering at USA Medical Center. He chose to study medicine at USA due to small class sizes and the hands-on learning experience that USA offers. To him, putting on the white coat symbolizes responsibility that a physician has to his or her patients and to the community. “Wearing the white coat is a constant reminder of the responsibility of making sure your words and actions are credible because many people are depending on you and looking up to you,” he said.

Dr. Bassam Omar, professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine and a cardiologist with USA Physicians Group, said, “the white coat is perceived as a symbol of authority and professionalism, and therefore, with wearing it comes immense responsibility and honesty as to live up to its expectations.”

“I am proud of Mazen and every student who received their white coat during this astounding event.”

Dr. Bassam Omar

“I am proud of Mazen and every student who received their white coat during this astounding event. I congratulate them and their families and friends on such an admirable achievement,” Dr. Omar said.

During the ceremony, students in unison took the Medical Student Oath, a promise to uphold the human aspects of medicine, such as sensitivity, compassion and respect for patients.

Each year, the USA Medical Alumni Association sponsors this event.
**Townsley takes on new role**

Dr. Mary Townsley was named senior associate dean of the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. Prior to her appointment, Dr. Townsley served in many key leadership roles in the College — most recently as interim senior associate dean.

“In addition to her vast experiences in the field of academic medicine, Mary’s commitment to our mission and deep understanding of our medical school places her in a unique position to continue strengthening our institution,” said Dr. John V. Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine.

Since joining the faculty in 1988, Dr. Townsley has served as associate dean for faculty affairs, interim chair of the department of physiology and cell biology, director of training programs for the USA Center for Lung Biology, director of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program at USA and a lead organizer for Liaison Committee on Medical Education accreditation processes at the USA College of Medicine.

Dr. Townsley earned her Ph.D. in physiology from the University of California at Davis and completed postdoctoral studies at USA. Her research interests focus on mechanisms that regulate the integrity of the alveolar septal barrier in the lung and the pathobiology that leads to the development of acute lung injury.

In 2013, Dr. Townsley, who also serves as professor of physiology and cell biology at USA, received the Leadership Award from the Pulmonary Circulation Assembly of the American Thoracic Society. Also in 2013, she was named the USA Phi Kappa Phi Scholar of the Year. Dr. Townsley was honored in 2011 by the American Heart Association’s Council on Cardiopulmonary, Critical Care, Perioperative and Resuscitation with the Distinguished Achievement Award. She was also a member of the 2000 Class of Fellows in the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine Program for Women.

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**Appointment a welcome homecoming**

Dr. Judy Blair-Elortegui’s recent appointment as director of the University of South Alabama College of Medicine’s internal medicine residency program is a homecoming story unlike most.

“I first learned about USA when I was an undergraduate and came down for a summer research program in pharmacology. I just fell in love with this place,” said Dr. Blair-Elortegui, a Chattanooga, Tenn., native, who also serves as an associate professor of internal medicine.

Indeed, after earning her bachelor’s degree from Birmingham’s Samford University, Dr. Blair-Elortegui headed south and has never looked back. She earned her medical degree in 1996 from the USA College of Medicine, performed a combined internal medicine/pediatrics residency there and left the university only briefly to practice with Greater Mobile Urgent Care while her children were younger.

“Academic medicine and teaching are what I really love, primarily because of the team environment. It’s really the people we have here that make the difference,” she said, adding, “The faculty at our medical school is dedicated to providing excellent education, and it’s just such a positive working environment with a collaborative team approach. There aren’t words to describe how rewarding it is to help students and residents learn how to sort through the complex problems that arise in this setting and how proud I am when I see my former students ready to go out and practice medicine.”

Although she is still settling in to her new administrative role following a nearly seven-year hiatus from the university setting, Dr. Blair-Elortegui is already hard at work.

“We’re working on several exciting, new things. One is developing pathways for residents when they know they want to focus on a particular area because we want to provide them extra features to help them prepare to enter that career role and to make them more competitive when they go out and apply for residency positions,” she said, adding, “As a longer-term goal, we’re also developing a global health interest group for students and residents.”
ALL UNDER ONE ROOF

‘State-of-the-art’ facility honors dean emeritus and his late wife
Collaborative interaction and increased patient access to expanded care are just two of the benefits anchoring the recently dedicated Judith Susan and Samuel Joseph Strada Patient Care Center. “This to me is a fundamental game-changer for the University of South Alabama where we consolidated a large number of our excellent physicians and subspecialists into a 133,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility,” said Dr. John Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine.

“It really brings together our physician groups and encourages collaborative interaction, and it also gives patients central access to a variety of specialties and subspecialties — everything from pediatrics and obstetrics and gynecology to neurosurgery and the new breast center,” he said.

The facility, dedicated formally in early March by USA Physicians Group, honors Dr. Samuel J. Strada, dean emeritus of the USA College of Medicine, and his late wife, Judy, a beloved supporter and champion of the school and its objectives.”
“Judy had this special place in her heart for children, so pediatrics was always very important to her. She was also very close to many of the former chairs of the obstetrics and gynecology department and volunteered at several USA Health entities throughout the years. Our physicians and facilities — the services they provided to our community — meant the world to her, so I think she would be very honored and pleased,” Dr. Strada said.

The Judith Susan and Samuel Joseph Strada Patient Care Center, the largest clinical building in the region, now houses a substantial portion of the USA Physicians Group practice, including general pediatrics, pediatric subspecialties, obstetrics and gynecology, neurosciences, orthopaedics and X-ray services.

Only one other building on the USA campus, the Frederick Palmer Whiddon Administration Building, named in honor of USA’s founding president, pays homage to the impact made by an individual during their career and life.

Dr. Marymont said the lifelong accomplishments, guidance and generosity of the Stradas warranted the honorarium.

“I can’t say enough kind words about the Strada family. I’ve been here about 11 months, so I did not know Sam’s wife, but she is dear to the hearts of many people here at USA. Sam has been a fine man to me and to this university for more than 30 years,” Dr. Marymont said.

Dr. Strada said he is “very impressed” with the new facility’s layout, equipment, patient waiting areas and general ambiance.

“This is the first time in which we’ve had a comprehensive plan to build an outpatient facility that can see all these patients in a variety of different specialties, and the openness is nice,” Dr. Strada said, adding, “Frequently you see patients crammed into waiting rooms, trying to maximize every inch of space. Here, the long hallways give the impression they can have privacy if they like, and with all the windows facing in many cases the sculpture park, they have a nice view. I think all of that will be soothing and pleasing to the patients and their families.”

Dr. Strada also admits he was “quite surprised” when he was informed of the naming honor.

“My initial reaction was, ‘You’re kidding!’ but then I realized the role my beloved wife played in their decision, and it all made sense. It’s still incredibly humbling,” he said.

Dr. Strada joined USA in 1983 as professor and chair of pharmacology. In the ensuing 33 years, he spent 12 years as senior associate dean and more than 10 years as dean of USA’s College of Medicine. During his tenure he also served as acting director of the graduate program in basic medical sciences, assistant dean for admissions, acting chair of psychiatry, and was faculty athletics representative from 1990–97.

Meanwhile, Dr. Marymont said the innovative facility will not only “allow the university to leverage our capabilities — particularly our physicians which are the core of it” — but will also aid in educating medical students and USA’s allied health providers.

“It’s a large, multi-disciplinary setting within Mobile that allows patients easy access and really consolidates a lot of our functions,” Dr. Marymont said, adding the consolidation will fuel efficiencies.

“You don’t have replication of services at multiple different clinics. You can consolidate and drive efficiencies through a central location, and I think it’s a springboard to help implement our strategic growth, particularly looking at areas to establish centers of excellence, such as pediatrics, gastrointestinal disorders and the neurosciences,” he said.
In addition to the Strada Patient Care Center, several outpatient clinic settings within USA Health have recently undergone or are nearing completion of renovations designed to improve the patient experience.

Dr. Haley Ballard, an assistant professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine who practices at the Mastin Professional Building, said the upgrades have allowed the facility to expand its staff and, likewise, care for more patients.

Specifically, the 2,000-square-foot addition opened in October 2016, touting 10 additional exam rooms, a physicians’ workroom, patient restrooms and a staff break room.

The Mastin Clinic is actually located within the former Mobile General Hospital structure, built originally in 1967 to house nursing students.

Dr. Ballard said the expansion means the Mastin Clinic now accommodates three physicians and a nurse practitioner, meaning the facility is operational “every day of the week” as opposed to the limited hours offered before.

“The upgrades essentially expanded our internal medicine care, and we’re hopeful we’ll be able to keep growing,” said Dr. Ballard, a clinical educator who oversees inpatient ward coverage for residents and clinical clerkships for medical students.

Meanwhile, Dr. Alana Schilthuis, assistant professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine, detailed the ongoing upgrades to the Stanton Road Clinic.

The remodel began several years ago and has added 12 admitting rooms; consolidated two separate waiting rooms and check-in stations; created a centralized nursing station; and added a new laboratory facility.

“We’re still looking at redoing our procedure room and X-ray facilities, but the big story here is the improved patient care,” Dr. Schilthuis said.

Although one of the 12 new patient rooms is actually dedicated to clinical psychologist, nutritionist and pharmacist services, the remaining 11 new rooms bring the complete tally to 28, decreasing patient wait time considerably.

In addition, Dr. Schilthuis said one of the new rooms is fully equipped to accommodate disabled patients.

“Our previous setup was insufficient for wheelchairs or stretchers, but now we have a room that can not only accommodate the patient and any needed equipment but also family members, a physician and nursing staff,” she said.

Clinics undergo renovations
As a trauma surgeon operating in an academic health center, Dr. Jon Simmons dedicates himself daily to providing each patient with leading-edge critical care.

He is one of five trauma surgeons that operate at the University of South Alabama’s Trauma Center — the only academic Level 1 trauma center on the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Tampa. These highly specialized trauma surgeons are also board-certified as ICU doctors.

However, Dr. Simmons, who serves as associate professor of surgery at the USA College of Medicine, adds a unique feature to the group, as he is also a physician-scientist. He balances being a trauma surgeon with an equally passionate curiosity for researching new ways to better treat severely injured patients.

Dr. Simmons was awarded a five-year, $945,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that enables him to continue exploring a puzzling question that remains largely unanswered and therefore not adequately treated: Why do patients who suffer similar traumatic injuries develop multi-system organ failure?

“One thing that intrigues me and most intensivists — whether it be a trauma surgeon or a pulmonologist — is that patients with severe infections or trauma usually do not die from the trauma or infection,” Dr. Simmons said. “These patients die from an inflammatory response that causes multiple organs to fail despite not being involved in the initial injury or infection.”

This award represents the fourth research grant recently obtained by Dr. Simmons to conduct research at the USA Trauma Center. The recent NIH award is designed to support the mentoring of physicians by more seasoned scientists, one of the core values of academic medicine. “A K08 grant is a mentored award, so you must demonstrate tremendous institutional support and have an excellent mentorship team,” Dr. Simmons said.

Dr. Simmons’ mentorship team is comprised of Dr. Mark Gillespie, professor and chair of pharmacology and a member of the Center for Lung Biology at the USA College of Medicine; Dr. William Richards, professor and chair of surgery; and several of his previously influential mentors at Johns Hopkins and Harvard.

“My role as Dr. Simmons’ mentor is to be a full partner in his research and to combine my skill set with his to make a stronger team,” Dr. Gillespie said. “I hope to provide opportunities for him to take what I know and use his enormous talents as a trauma surgeon-scientist and emerging clinician-scientist to make a transformative impact on the care of severely injured patients at USA Medical Center.”

Dr. Gillespie said basic science efforts discovered a new biomarker and provided the proof-of-concept that it might be involved in multi-organ failure. Dr. Simmons’ work ex-
tended these observations to severely injured patients, showing that the new concept was likely valid, and he is now testing a repurposed drug with a proven safety record as a means of preventing multi-organ failure. This process — of taking laboratory discoveries and extending them to human patients — is collectively called “translational medicine.”

“When Dr. Simmons has an idea that has potential to improve patient care, he is absolutely relentless about determining whether the idea has merit,” Dr. Gillespie added. “It is physician-scientists like Dr. Simmons who are often responsible in catalyzing real advances in medicine.”

According to Dr. Simmons, the research ongoing at USA holds far-reaching potential to improve trauma care by developing new diagnostic strategies and drugs to treat multiple organ system failure after severe injury. The research partnership between Drs. Simmons and Gillespie has resulted in the development of new medications and the repurposing of older ones to treat this inflammatory response.

He also added that his research is an extension of other projects ongoing at USA Medical Center, noting that “as a Level 1 trauma center at an academic hospital, we take care of the most complex cases in the region. It is our goal to never miss an opportunity to improve outcomes in this vulnerable patient population.”

Dr. Richards said serving as Dr. Simmons’ mentor means guiding him through the process of learning how to be an independent investigator. This includes reading through his research proposals, making critical comments and advising on how to overcome hurdles that block scientific progress.

Because the competition to obtain funding from NIH has gotten very difficult, Dr. Richards said Dr. Simmons is to be heartily congratulated on his efforts and perseverance to obtain the award. “Jon has outlined a plan of study to hone his research skills during the next five years in order to compete for NIH grant funding as an independent investigator. I have every expectation that Jon will be successful and that, furthermore, his research will ultimately lead to dramatic improvements in survival.”

Dr. Simmons said the K08 grant is unique because it creates a clinician-scientist environment where the flow of information goes back and forth, accelerating the research process. According to Dr. Simmons, the grant validates the important work USA does in caring for trauma patients and is an important step in improving the care for trauma patients across the world.

**Lim investigating cell signaling with NIH grant**

Dr. Steve Lim, assistant professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, was awarded a $1.52 million four-year grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study cell signaling that contributes to atherosclerosis, a chronic vascular inflammatory disease. The Research Project Grant, or R01 grant, is the original grant mechanism used by NIH. The R01 provides support for health-related research and development based on the mission of the NIH. This is Dr. Lim’s first R01 grant, which follows up on early-stage funding from the American Heart Association.

“This award will allow us to investigate the detailed mechanisms of how focal adhesion kinase (FAK) regulates the vessel wall response to blood flow and inflammation during atherosclerosis,” Dr. Lim said.

Atherosclerosis is caused by sustained activation of nuclear factor-kB (NF-kB), a pro-inflammatory transcription factor that drives pro-inflammatory gene expression. Through his research, Dr. Lim found that FAK inhibition blocks sustained NF-kB activity, thus reducing vascular inflammation in atherosclerosis.

“The goal of our study is to better understand the relationship between FAK and NF-kB in atherosclerosis, in the hope of identifying new therapeutic options,” Dr. Lim said. “Millions of people are affected by atherosclerosis in the United States, and it is the underlying problem in most cardiovascular diseases.”

Preventative approaches to reduce conventional risks — such as drugs that lower cholesterol and blood pressure — help slow down the progression of atherosclerosis, but do not eradicate the abnormal vessel wall response to environmental factors that drive atherosclerosis. As an “anti-inflammatory” therapy for atherosclerosis remains elusive, Dr. Lim’s research into FAK-mediated inflammation during atherosclerosis is considered to have high potential in finding a new therapeutic target.

“The research supported by this grant could advance current atherosclerosis therapies from preventative to treatable,” Dr. Lim said. “A FAK inhibitor that stops atherosclerosis progression — as opposed to merely delaying it — would be very beneficial to patients.”

Dr. Lim said the grant will help to establish his research program, expand the research team and upgrade the quality of the current research.

He gave special thanks to his fourth-year graduate student, James Murphy, for his work on the grant. “This R01 grant expands upon James’ graduate project, in which he seeks to find the molecular mechanism of FAK mediated NF-kB regulation in the vascular wall.”

Dr. Lim’s collaborative research team is comprised of USA College of Medicine researchers Dr. Richard Honkanen and Dr. Robert Barrington; Dr. Hanjoong Jo at Emory University; and Dr. Yabing Chen at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.
The University of South Alabama College of Medicine held its Anatomical Gifts Memorial Service on April 21. The service provided an opportunity for families to meet with the medical students impacted by their loved one’s donation and for the students to express their gratitude.

Bodies donated to the USA Anatomical Gifts Program are not only used to train medical students learning anatomy during their first year of medical school, but also to train practicing physicians learning new medical procedures and to aid in physician research. The bodies are treated respectfully and professionally by students and physicians alike.

The donors are introduced to the medical students as their first patients, allowing them to learn human anatomy in greater detail than learning from a textbook alone. “During the first year we learn the human anatomy from the neck down in roughly four weeks, which is arguably one of the most challenging months in our medical school journey,” said Ben McCormick, a first-year medical student at the USA College of Medicine. “I cannot emphasize enough how educationally enriching the time spent with our donor was. Gross anatomy lab is an integral rite of passage in becoming a physician and a crucial didactic opportunity for medical students.”

McCormick, who also helped organize this year’s memorial service, said the donors provided him with many invaluable first experiences. “I will always remember the first time I held a human heart,” he said. “Working with the donors truly made us consider the transiency of our time in this world.”

Another first-year medical student at the USA College of Medicine, Whitney Smith, also helped organize the memorial service. “I think it is important for students to express their gratitude to the families because the donors have impacted our careers in a way the families may not know,” she said. “The anatomical gifts program allowed me the opportunity to not only learn the anatomy, but to forever have a visual representation of all the organ systems, nerves and vessels in a three-dimensional image.”

Smith said she chose a career in medicine because she wanted to do more for others than she did for herself. “The donors are a prime example of selflessness and giving to further someone’s education,” she said. “I hope to carry that mindset throughout my career with every single patient.”

During the service, second-year medical student Matthew Robson thanked the family members of participants in the Anatomical Gifts Program. The following is a portion of his presentation:

“Not only did the donors teach us anatomy, but they also taught us about respect, compassion and reminded us to give wholeheartedly. We were honored to have your loved ones as teachers. Physically, they taught me about the beauty and fragility of the human body. Educating my classmates and I on the most intricate details and allowing for experiences that no book, computer screen or interactive software will be able to replicate. Experiences that will last a lifetime and make each of us better health care providers.

Through their sacrifice and gift, they taught us skills that will ultimately give others life. They also taught us a second lesson — a lesson about compassion and serving selflessly. With their donation they gave up their most personal possessions — themselves — hoping that they would be able to make a positive impact on the future. Upon reflection, it is extremely humbling to take part in this experience and be given the trust of our first patient so eagerly and so entirely.

Thank you for lending us your loved ones so that they could teach us. We hope to honor their gift with a lifetime of altruistic and compassionate care.”

The USA Anatomical Gifts Program holds a memorial service every two years to honor the lives of donors. If you are interested in becoming a donor or would like more information, visit usahealthsystem.com/AnatomicalGiftsProgram-3911
Cash leads USA Digestive Health Center

Dr. Brooks D. Cash, professor of internal medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a gastroenterologist with USA Physicians Group, was named chief of the division of gastroenterology and director of the USA Digestive Health Center.

“My role is to ensure the smooth operation of our clinical services and to maintain the highest standards of care for patients with digestive diseases or disorders who seek care with us,” he said.

Dr. Cash, who joined USA Health in 2013, said his short-term goals for the division are to enhance the offerings in multiple clinical areas and to achieve greater regional and national recognition for the division’s quality of care and academic achievements.

“I want our division to continue to pursue and enhance its already excellent research and educational initiatives, not only from a discovery point of view, but also from a practice improvement and regional leader position,” Dr. Cash said. “We have resources at our disposal that most practices in the community do not, and we have an obligation to improve our patients’ quality of life.”

Dr. Cash also has extensive long-term goals, including working with USA leadership and colleagues to develop a fully functional and integrated Digestive Diseases Center of Excellence. “The center would be comprised of providers and researchers from multiple diverse specialties, located in close proximity to each other to maximize effective and coordinated patient care, enhance the education of our trainees and foster collaborative research initiatives,” he said.

Dr. Cash served in the U.S. Navy for 24 years, retiring in 2013. “The transition from the socialized form of medicine that we practice in the military to the larger world of medicine has been an eye-opener for me,” Dr. Cash explained. “The essential practice of medicine and definitions of quality are the same everywhere, and these are two of the areas where USA really shines.”

Dr. Cash earned his medical degree from the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md. He completed his internship, residency and fellowship training in gastroenterology at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

EDWIN R. HUGHES AWARD

Basic medical sciences graduate program student receives honor

Barnita Haldar, a student in the University of South Alabama Basic Medical Sciences Graduate Program, received the Edwin R. Hughes Memorial Award last August. The award is named in memory of Edwin R. Hughes, who served as director of the program from 1978 until 1990. The award recognizes the student with the best performance in the curriculum. Haldar is completing her graduate studies under the direction of Dr. Donna Cioffi, associate professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at USA.
MOBILE-AREA PEDIATRICIAN DR. MATTHEW CEPEDA TALKS WITH USA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE MEDICAL STUDENT MARIA SIOW.
Intensive classroom and laboratory instruction undoubtedly sets the rigorous tone for University of South Alabama College of Medicine students, but the hands-on clinical experience gained as they progress through the curriculum helps bridge the gap between theory and real-world practice.

“I think a big benefit is to get first-year students out of the classroom — seeing patients — and actually involved with the health care delivery system. It’s our chance as mentors to get them excited about what they’re going to be doing with the rest of their lives instead of sitting in a lecture,” said Dr. Matthew Cepeda, a pediatrician with Children’s Medical Group in Mobile and a 2003 USA College of Medicine alumnus.

Maria Siow, an Alabaster, Ala., native and first-year medical student, performed her clinical rotation with Dr. Cepeda during the spring 2016 semester and said the opportunity to interact directly with patients and take complete histories gave her perspective and helped her ease into the practical application of what she’s internalizing on the classroom side.

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions when you don’t know. It’s OK not to know. You’re just a first-year,” Siow, an aspiring pediatrician herself, said to future classes.

The flip side, she said, is that the clinical experience helped her realize how much training she was actually retaining and, in turn, boosted her confidence with every outing.

“You actually know a lot more than you realize,” Siow said, recalling her ability to identify readily a molluscum rash and knowing immediately the benign viral skin rash should not alarm anxious parents.

In addition, she said Dr. Cepeda was good about quizzing her during her rotation on material he knew her classroom instruction covered, as well as new material.

“He always made sure I knew the basic science behind the different cases we saw,” said Siow, who plans to request another pediatric rotation in the fall and possibly neonatology in the spring.

It’s the often overlooked human interaction side of medicine, however, that Dr. Cepeda said sets the clinical rotation apart.

“Maria got to knock on the door of a patient’s room, walk in and see a happy, bouncy child run up to her. She gives that child a big hug, and she picks that child up onto the table and proceeds to find out what that child needed. It’s an invaluable experience for a student,” he said.

The experience for Siow and her classmates is made possible by the USA College of Medicine’s CLINIC 1 program, connecting first-year medical students with family medicine, pediatrics and internal medicine practitioners. The program stresses patient-centered care and partners with medical professionals with a penchant for physician development and education.

Birmingham native and first-year medical student Taylor Bartlett spent her first-year clinical rotation with Dr. Megan Missanelli, a second-year obstetrics and gynecology resident and Class of 2015 USA College of Medicine alumna.

“CLINIC 1 just makes everything you’re learning on the classroom side come to life, and I really enjoyed being able to take histories on the patients and present that to the residents who were there. It’s a neat experience to be able to play a part in actually taking care of a patient,” said Bartlett, noting OB-GYN is the specialty that interests her most.

“I was able to find a baby’s heartbeat with the Doppler ultrasound, and that was just the coolest thing ever,” she said.

For her part, Dr. Missanelli called the CLINC 1 program “wonderful” and said students such as Bartlett are “leaps and bounds clinically above where (my class was) at the same point in our education.”

“They’re getting a lot more exposure to the clinical setting than we did, and it shows. By the time I see these students in their second and third years, they are extremely comfortable talking to patients, getting full histories and just interacting in a very natural way,” she said.

Of Bartlett in particular, Dr. Missanelli said: “Taylor is really good. She was very calm with the patients and very, very thorough. She was ready to get in here and start helping me without any prompting, and that is huge. It’s incredibly difficult to give direction while in the midst of seeing all these people, but it never fazed Taylor. She was very much at ease and did a great job with every single patient she saw. Her demeanor was so even-keeled and analytical it was striking, and she had a strong understanding of the disease processes, so she was interested and very well-prepared.”

Bartlett said there’s no question the learning curve between classroom and clinical setting can be steep, but you simply have to “make the most of your time there.”

“Take advantage of every single opportunity that comes your way,” she said. “Be willing to volunteer to do whatever, no matter how small the procedure or physical exam, even if it’s a specialty you’re not particularly interested in. The experience is invaluable.”

**Maria Siow, an Alabaster, Ala., native and USA medical student**

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions when you don’t know. It’s OK not to know.”

**Taylor Bartlett, USA medical student**
Researchers have long recognized that African-American patients suffer more dire outcomes from various types of cancer, but delving into why one race fares worse statistically than another is only one of myriad medical mysteries the University of South Alabama seeks to solve via its Translational Research Service Center (TRSC).

The USA College of Medicine is one of only 11 Southeastern institutions — including five academic medical centers — tapped in late 2016 to support the University of Alabama at Birmingham’s Clinical and Translational Sciences Award (CTSA) from the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Mark Gillespie, CTSA site principal investigator and professor and chair of the USA College of Medicine’s pharmacology department, said work such as that of Dr. Rodney “Rod” Roconi at USA’s Mitchell Cancer Institute regarding genetic markers as they pertain to race and clinical outcomes epitomizes the next-level work the award was designed to facilitate.

“Translational research is simply that: research directed toward translating discoveries made in the lab to clinical applications. And as (the Gulf Coast’s) only academic medical center, USA is uniquely positioned to leverage its state-of-the-art medical research laboratories and clinics to identify those real-world applications,” Dr. Gillespie said.

Specifically, the TRSC team offers USA researchers access to expertise in informatics; statistical analysis and research design; clinical research support; and community engagement resources. Those collaborative tools are intended, Dr. Gillespie said, to foster targeted research that accelerates discoveries to improve human health, especially those discoveries that further the NIH grant’s central mission: addressing disparities and diseases disproportionately represented within the Deep South.

“When we talk about better meeting the needs of underserved populations, we typically mean targeting those populations who are socioeconomically deprived that don’t have adequate access to or information about health care. That lack of access means they are at risk of developing chronic diseases, some of which are immediately life-threatening and all of which are — over time — life-threatening because they never receive proper care,” Dr. Gillespie said.

In turn, he encourages all students, fellows, residents and faculty to bring their research concepts to the TRSC because its team of basic and clinical science researchers and administrators exists solely to provide research support services while also facilitating training, professional development and collaboration.

Specifically, Dr. Gillespie said, the TRSC provides everything from statistical consultation and assistance with gaining board approval for conducting human trials to guidance on genomics and bioinformatics, or the mining of large genomic data sets.

“We can also provide consultation on drug and device development and help (researchers) navigate the grant process, so pretty much the entire range of things that go into being a medical scientist,” he said.

And because improved patient care is the ultimate goal of translational research, Dr. Gillespie said commercialization avenues for the ideas generated are certainly possible, but scientific advancement is the true objective.

“Occasionally (commercialization) will be germane — say, to the drug development process, when you’re trying to take something to human clinical trials — but sometimes it’s just about developing a better diagnostic strategy or identifying a drug target based on studies performed on human subjects. Sometimes it’s examining the effect of a repurposed drug on human subjects. It’s about taking the research as far as it goes, and the more collaborative you are in that approach, the further it takes you,” he said.
Dr. Mikhail Alexeyev, associate professor of physiology and cell biology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, was awarded a research grant from the National Institutes of Health to study mitochondrial diseases caused by mutations in mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA).

Dr. Alexeyev is using the award to gain insight into the mechanisms of mitochondrial disease by developing experimental models of mitochondrial disorders. “Mitochondrial disorders are the most common metabolic diseases,” Dr. Alexeyev explained. “They can be severe, affect multiple organs — especially the nervous, musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems — and are often fatal.”

Dr. Alexeyev said mitochondrial disorders have been recognized for approximately 30 years, but still remain poorly understood. Mitochondrial diseases caused by mutations in mtDNA are a significant source of morbidity and mortality, yet only supportive care is available to affected patients.

“The lack of effective therapies for mitochondrial diseases is directly attributable, at least in part, to the lack of experimental models,” Dr. Alexeyev said.

USA has developed a method for controlled mutagenesis of animal mtDNA and has generated the world’s largest collection of animal cell lines with mutations in mtDNA. Dr. Alexeyev is combining the expertise developed at USA with that of Dr. Douglas Wallace, director of the Center for Mitochondrial and Epigenomic Medicine at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), for the project.

Dr. Wallace’s lab is one of only two in the world that has expertise in moving mutant mitochondrial DNA from cultured cells into the models.

Dr. Alexeyev said combining the mtDNA mutagenesis expertise at USA with the trans-mitochondrial expertise at CHOP to produce new experimental models of mitochondrial disease will be instrumental in developing a better understanding of the disease process and testing new drugs.
The 2017 Gumbo Chili Showdown was held April 8 preceding the University of South Alabama Jaguars Spring Game at Ladd-Peebles Stadium. Approximately 500 people came to the event — sponsored by the USA Medical Alumni Association — to enjoy gumbo and chili prepared by 23 teams.

“This is a student-led initiative that speaks to the character of our students,” said Dr. John Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine. “They came together to support an important cause at the College of Medicine — the Regan Robinson Young Scholarship — and the event was a huge success. It was an honor to take part in such a meaningful event.”

The Gumbo Chili Showdown supports a scholarship at the USA College of Medicine created in memory of Regan Robinson Young, a medical student at USA who lost her battle with colon cancer before graduating. The scholarship provides assistance to a rising senior medical student who embodies Regan's spirit and character. This year the event raised more than $8,000 for the Regan Robinson Young Scholarship.
Sickle Cell Center addresses gap in care as patients grow up

Nearly nine months after the University of South Alabama Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center unveiled its Learning Resource and Development Center, Dr. Johnson Haynes contends the innovative program is already addressing a longtime gap in the continuum of care: the successful transition from pediatric to adult care.

“We’re helping ease that rite of passage to adulthood by helping our clients understand the importance of having health care access and then helping them learn how to access the health care system when it’s no longer in their parents’ hands,” said Dr. Haynes, a professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine and director of USA’s Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center.

Specifically, the LRDC — equipped with laptops, educational materials and informational seminars — targets participants, age 13 to 19, who are interested in learning life skills intended to help them transition to adulthood when so much of their lives to date have been directed and managed by their caregivers.

Dr. Haynes said the LRDC is intended to bridge that gap by offering everything from SAT prep and financial literacy to resume writing and health care system tutorials.

“This isn’t just a local issue. It’s a national trend where we’re seeing a clearly defined increase in morbidity and mortality among sickle cell (anemia patients) in late adolescence and young adulthood because they are not accessing the care that is available. We hope to bridge that gap,” he said.

The LRDC is part of the Sickle Cell Center’s Pediatric to Adult Care Transition, or PACT, program and currently serves 47 clients with a rallying motto of “Empowering and Enabling Excellence Together.”

“While we’re in our infancy, we’ve done extraordinarily well with very limited resources,” Dr. Haynes said, adding, “It’s a dynamic process. We’ve learned in just a few months the only way this process can be successful is if we do more for our clients on the front end, and that means engaging parents early in the process, so they’re with us every step of the way moving forward.”

The process, he said, has proved to be as educational for the parents and caregivers as the clients, themselves.

“This is not unique to sickle cell. Any-time a parent has a child with a chronic illness, certain relationships are established to help them feel secure, so it can be understandably difficult for a parent to let the child be an adult. It comes from a place of caring and compassion that we understand, but it can certainly be a disservice when you have a 19-year-old client come in, and the parent tries to answer the questions we’re asking,” he said, adding, “We are focusing on life skills, and that means working very closely with parents who are very protective of their sick child in a way that grants the child a natural independence and autonomy.”

The resources available from PACT and the LRDC complement services provided by the community-based sickle cell organization, the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America Mobile Chapter. In addition to the 47 clients actively being served by the LRDC, Dr. Haynes said 36 clients have successfully transitioned to adult care since 2012.

“What the LRDC provides is assistance with things so many of us take for granted. We are here to provide the support these clients need — whether that’s access to computers to do schoolwork or to apply for college — to be successful in their career paths and in managing their health. Whether it’s coping with the disease itself or understanding how Medicaid is viewed differently in terms of what it provides for the adult population vs. the pediatric population, we’re here to help them become whole adults,” he said.
USA physicians board-certified in epilepsy

Dr. Dean Naritoku, professor and chair of the neurology department at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, and Dr. Juan Ochoa, associate professor of neurology, recently received board certification for epilepsy by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

According to Dr. Ochoa, specializing in a narrow field such as epilepsy is beneficial because it equips physicians with in-depth knowledge about a specific problem or disease. “About 1 percent of people have epilepsy,” Dr. Ochoa said. “It is a very complex disease that requires a high level of expertise. We definitely have a great advantage at USA.”

Dr. Ochoa said being one of only two physicians certified in epilepsy in the region is very rewarding. “I have now become a point of reference for complex cases,” he said. “When traditional treatment options fail them, patients from surrounding areas often get referred to me because of my level of expertise in the field.”

Dr. Naritoku earned his medical degree from the Chicago Medical School in Chicago in 1981 and completed an internship in internal medicine at the University of Illinois in Chicago. He then completed his residency training in neurology, and a fellowship in neuropharmacology and epilepsy at Washington University in St. Louis.

Dr. Naritoku is also board-certified in neurology, clinical neurophysiology and pharmacology, and he currently serves as president of the Southern Epilepsy and EEG Society.

His clinical interests include comprehensive epilepsy management, clinical neurophysiology and sleep. His research interests include developing new therapies for epilepsy, studying brain mechanisms of seizures and dysautonomia. He has active laboratory, translational and clinical research programs and has received research funding from the NIH and the Epilepsy Foundation of America.

Dr. Ochoa earned his medical degree from the Universidad Javeriana Medicine in Bogota, Colombia, in 1988. He completed his residency training in family medicine at Jamaica Hospital in New York and his residency training in neurology at the State University of New York at Brooklyn. In addition, he completed a fellowship in clinical neurophysiology and epilepsy at Montefiore Medical Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bronx, N.Y., and a fellowship in medical education at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Fla.

He is also board-certified in both neurology and clinical neurophysiology by the ABPN. Dr. Ochoa is the director of the neurology residency program at the USA College of Medicine and director of the SouthCEP Comprehensive Epilepsy Center at USA Medical Center. His clinical interests include clinical neurophysiology and epilepsy surgery evaluations, and his current research interests include advance seizure source localization and high-frequency brain activity associated with seizures.
Panacek receives ACEP honor

Dr. Edward Panacek, chair and professor of emergency medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) for his many years of service as a prolific educator, researcher and leader in emergency medicine.

Dr. Panacek has been very actively involved with ACEP since joining in 1986. Over the years, he has chaired several committees, task forces and the research section of the organization.

His work with ACEP led to a course he created called Emergency Medicine Basic Research Skills (EMBRS) taught at ACEP headquarters in Dallas, Texas. He has been the course director since its inception 20 years ago. EMBRS typically enrolls 30 students per year, teaching early career physicians the research skills needed to succeed in academic medicine. “Educating the next generation of academicians to replace us, while facilitating their scholarly activities that move the field forward is very fulfilling for me,” Dr. Panacek said.

Dr. Panacek has served as chair of emergency medicine at USA since 2015, dedicating himself to the advancement of the department and the College of Medicine. “A more academic department of emergency medicine is a positive move in the right direction for both the health system and the university,” he said.

Dr. Panacek is grateful for the recognition he received. “When you enter medical practice or academics, you don’t go into it to win awards. However, when your accomplishments are recognized by respected colleagues and also reflect positively on the work we do at USA, it is a great feeling.”

10th annual COM Research Forum winners announced

The 10th annual University of South Alabama College of Medicine Research Forum was held in November on USA’s main campus. The forum consisted of a morning session with nine oral presentations and an afternoon session with 35 poster presentations. Ed Crockett, a basic medical science graduate student, received an award for best overall graduate student presentation. The postdoctorate award was presented to Nathaniel Holton for his research project. This is the second year that the research forum is offering $1,000 travel awards that are to be used to travel to national or international meetings or workshops.
Hundley appointed assistant dean

Dr. T.J. Hundley was appointed assistant dean for medical education and student affairs at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine.

“Dr. Hundley is an outstanding clinical educator and mentor for our students,” said Dr. Susan LeDoux, associate dean of medical education and student affairs at USA. “He is consistently recognized with teaching awards both individually and for the Internal Medicine Clerkship, which he directs. Additionally, he has played an important leadership role in our curriculum redesign as chair of the Clerkship Directors Subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee.”

Dr. Hundley, who also serves as associate professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine and associate program director for the internal medicine residency program, will be responsible for overseeing the curriculum for the third year of the undergraduate medical education program as well as assisting in curriculum development across the entire four-year program.

“I hope to continue to develop and implement innovative educational strategies in the third year of medical school. Our goal is to continue to prepare students to be successful as they move into residency,” Dr. Hundley said. “I look forward to working with students and faculty as we continue to prepare students to be successful lifelong learners and leaders in today’s health care environment.”

Last summer, Dr. Hundley was honored with a teaching award at the TeamUSA Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) annual celebration of success for his accomplishments with the TeamUSA QEP. Dr. Hundley participated in USA’s initial launch of the TeamUSA QEP in 2012.

Dr. Hundley earned both his bachelor of science degree in biomedical sciences and his medical degree from USA. In addition, he completed residency training in internal medicine at USA, where he served as chief medical resident. Dr. Hundley joined the USA faculty in 2008 as an assistant professor of internal medicine and was later promoted to associate professor.

Dr. Hundley said he was very fortunate to have been a student and resident at USA. “The education and mentorship were excellent, and it has played a pivotal role in being where I am today,” he said. “I am excited about the opportunity to help serve the institution that has been generous to me and my family. Moving forward, I hope to help students the way faculty helped me.”

Trimm named APPD president

Dr. R. Franklin Trimm, professor and vice chair of pediatrics at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a pediatrician who specializes in developmental-behavioral pediatrics with USA Physicians Group, was named president of the Association of Pediatric Program Directors (APPD).

Dr. Trimm served in the organization for 25 years before his appointment as president and describes it as “a professional development organization for individuals involved with residency graduate education programs.” APPD assists pediatric programs across the nation by leading the advancement of education to ensure the health and well-being of children. It includes approximately 800 fellowships and more than 200 pediatric programs in the United States.

“It’s been a professional home. It’s a reminder why we do what we do,” said Dr. Trimm, who has directed the pediatric residency training program at USA for approximately 23 years. He credits APPD for its extensive networking opportunities and for fostering leadership skills in graduate medical education professionals. He personally helped shape the organization’s approach to leadership training when APPD selected him to manage a team tasked with designing a leadership training curriculum for residency program directors. He also assisted with evaluating the effectiveness of other trainers.

As president, Dr. Trimm plans to continue shaping the organization with his vision for the future. In addition to serving as chair of the board of directors and spokesman for APPD, he is directly responsible for fulfilling the organization’s strategic plan. “One of four points in our strategic plan is to prepare pediatricians to work within a new health care system. We want to lead the way to define the future of pediatricians,” he said.

Dr. Trimm will continue developing APPD’s role as a professional home where networking and leadership skills create new opportunities. He describes the USA College of Medicine as a medium-sized organization and residency program. “Typically, leadership comes from larger institutions. As the USA College of Medicine continues to gain national recognition, it will continue to gain recognition as an institution able to serve that leadership role.”
Forty-five senior medical students at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine recently participated in Transition to Residency, a course designed to enhance students’ knowledge and skills to prepare for their upcoming residency training.

The course provides capstone information on topics such as medical economics, medical ethics, legal aspects of medical practice, basics of leadership and translational research during residency.

Dr. Benjamin Estrada, assistant dean for medical education and professor of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine, said the purpose of the course is to offer students information that they can use while developing their long-term educational, professional and financial goals.

“At the end of their fourth year, students are at a point in their professional development in which they have accumulated enough clinical experience and exposure to different clinical environments,” Dr. Estrada said. “This allows them to begin exploring legal and business aspects of the profession, as well as to begin the implementation of their leadership skills.”

Caroline Miller, a recent medical school graduate at USA, said of all the topics covered in the course, she most enjoyed the law and medicine week. “A health law attorney walked us through the details of malpractice insurance and physician employee contracts,” she said. “After hearing these lectures, I have a better understanding of the liabilities we will face as physicians and how to protect against them.”

Dr. Estrada said most of the learning activities for this course include conferences and small group exercises held at the Strada Patient Care Center. Dr. John Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine, is among the lecturers providing expert advice. He recently gave a lecture to the senior medical students titled “Job Hunting — What to Ask and Know.”

Dr. Marymont discussed key aspects students should be aware of when searching for a job, such as the nature of the group and opportunity, practice environment, contracting and financials. “We have evolved this course to better equip our medical students with knowledge that extends beyond patient care to support the development of well-rounded students that are prepared to handle every aspect of their future training,” Dr. Marymont said.

The class started in 2014 by a recommendation from the USA College of Medicine curriculum committee. “The course has evolved over time based on faculty and student input following national trends,” Dr. Estrada said. “This year, with input from the medical school leadership and support from Dr. Marymont, additional emphasis has been placed on the business aspects of medicine. The course discussed topics such as searching for an optimal job, health care financing, medical practice management, physician compensation and patient-centered high-value care.”

Miller said gaining an understanding of the practicalities of medicine and personal finance are beneficial at any point in one’s career. “The curriculum pushed me to start thinking about the choices I will need to make in the next several years and how those choices can potentially affect my long-term career and lifestyle,” she said.

Although the course is currently an elective, Dr. Estrada said the Transition to Residency course will be a requirement for all fourth-year medical students beginning in 2018.
Brenden Ingraham is heading north from South. Shortly after receiving his medical degree in May, Ingraham headed for the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., to begin his residency training in internal medicine.

Learning that he’d been selected for the prestigious post was a highlight of Match Day at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine — the day in March when graduating medical students all across the country learn where they’ll be doing their residency training and in what specialty.

“Match Day is the most important day in a medical student’s career,” said Dr. Susan LeDoux, associate dean of medical education and student affairs at the USA College of Medicine.

“I was elated to match into internal medicine at Mayo-Rochester,” Ingraham said. “Their balance between patient care, resident education and research seemed ideal. Mayo is one of the biggest and most reputable models for providing patient-centered care, so the thought of spending the next three to eight years training there is extremely exciting.”

He knows the Minnesota weather will be cold compared with Mobile, but he’s ready for that challenge, too.

His classmate, Candice Holliday, will stay much closer to home. She matched in the obstetrics and gynecology program at USA — where her twin sister is a member of the faculty.

Originally the twins followed separate career paths. While twin Nicolette went to medical school, twin Candice went to law school. Only after launching a law career did Candice
decide her sister — now an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at USA — had made a better choice.

So Candice went back to school to follow her sister’s path. As graduation neared, Candice again had to choose a direction.

“I looked long and hard at the places where I interviewed, and while some were very exciting and seemed like a great match for me, in the end what it came down to was family,” said Candice.

“Not just the fact that I would be working with my twin sister and only an hour away from my mother, but that the department of obstetrics and gynecology at USA operates like a family — from our attendings, residents, nurses and scrub techs, to our administrative staff. That ideal of a USA family similarly captured my sister for med school, residency and ultimately guided her career path as an attending (physician).

“Yes, I worry about the big shoes I have to follow, but I know that everyone is cheering for me individually, too — because that is what families do. So while I know that residency will be difficult, I know that I will have the best people surrounding me: my family, both literal and figurative.”

“Medical students at our medical school consistently perform well in the Match — a reflection of their academic achievement and character,” said Dr. John V. Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine. “Student performance in this highly competitive process also reflects upon the outstanding training and mentoring they receive from our medical school faculty.”

USA’s 70 graduating physicians are headed for residency programs across the country. A third will stay in Alabama, including 12 who will stay at USA Health. The 69 percent who will be heading out-of-state are bound for 22 different states.

Nearly half the graduates, some 44 percent, will pursue primary care specialties — internal medicine, family medicine and pediatrics. Seven more each are beginning residencies in emergency medicine and obstetrics and gynecology, while 11 students will begin residencies in general surgery.

James Lee West IV is one of those aiming for a career in general surgery. The Mobile native is the son of an orthopaedic surgeon, but opted for general surgery instead. “You get to practice many kinds of medicine in general surgery, and you are like the Swiss Army knife of healthcare with all the tools you learn from it,” West quipped.

Also following in a father’s footsteps is Hannah Schrubbe. Her father practices family medicine in Daphne, and she has chosen a family practice residency, matching at Florida State University in Fort Myers. “I am most looking forward to taking care of my own patients and growing into a competent physician during my residency,” she said.

Nicholas Tinker, a former University of Alabama football player, is headed to an obstetrics and gynecology residency at USA.

“After long hours studying and being in the hospital, it feels wonderful for all of us to have jobs that will truly make a difference in people’s lives,” Tinker said. “Match Day is the light at the end of a long tunnel we have been chasing for four years.”

With a long history of training physicians, USA Health provides graduate medical education in 19 fully ACGME-accredited residency and fellowship programs. Residents and fellows in USA’s training programs are integrated into USA Health with the majority of their training centered at USA Medical Center, USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital, USA Mitchell Cancer Institute and the USA Physicians Group practice.

“That an academic health center provides unique services that are not found in community hospitals,” said Dr. Samuel McQuiston, assistant dean of graduate medical education and associate professor of radiology at the USA College of Medicine, “This learning environment is one of the many strengths of the Graduate Medical Education programs at USA.”

With 247 housestaff, the USA GME training programs are mid-size programs when compared to other institutions. “This means that we are small enough to allow residents to form a community of peers but large enough to provide diversity in their clinical experiences,” McQuiston said. “The acute and critical-care aspects of training in the hospitals combine with the various outpatient clinics to provide exposure to the full spectrum of training in our GME programs.”

“In particular, the trauma, stroke and heart centers at USA Medical Center; the evaluation center, the women’s imaging center, the maternal-fetal specialists, and the neonatal and pediatric ICUs at USA Children’s and Women’s Hospital; and the diagnostic and therapeutic aspects of the USA Mitchell Cancer Institute provide incredible experiential opportunities for residents and fellows in numerous specialties,” McQuiston added.

This year, USA recruited its new residents and fellows from 36 different schools — with the largest representation coming from USA. Other top contributing schools include the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine in Dothan, Ala., The University of Arkansas at Little Rock in Little Rock, Ark., and the University of Louisville in Louisville, Ky.

Dr. McQuiston said USA Health plays a critical role in supplying competent physicians for Mobile and the adjoining region. “During the past five years,” he said, “the largest number of our graduates practice in the state of Alabama and in other nearby communities along the Gulf Coast.”
NEW FACULTY MEMBERS AT THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

DR. OSAMA ABDUL-RAHIM was appointed assistant professor of radiology and serves as an interventional radiologist with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Abdul-Rahim earned his medical degree from Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia. He completed his residency training in diagnostic radiology at Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia, and a fellowship in interventional radiology at the University of Miami.

DR. STEPHEN BOWDEN was appointed assistant professor of emergency medicine and serves as an emergency medicine physician at USA Medical Center. He earned his medical degree from USA and completed postgraduate training in surgery at USA Medical Center.

DR. KEVIN BRADLEY was appointed adjunct assistant professor of radiology and serves as a radiologist with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Bradley earned his medical degree from the University of Florida College of Medicine in Gainesville, Fla. He completed his internship at the Keesler Medical Center in Biloxi, Miss., then went on to complete his residency training in emergency medicine at the University Medical Center in Jackson, Miss. He later completed his residency training in diagnostic radiology at USA, where he served as chief resident.

DR. JENNIFER COLE was appointed adjunct assistant professor of pediatrics and serves as an attending physician in the general pediatrics residency clinic. Dr. Cole earned her medical degree from USA and completed her residency training in pediatrics at Cook County Children’s Hospital in Chicago.

DR. STEVE CORDINA was appointed associate professor of neurology and serves as an interventional neurologist with special interest in stroke and aneurysm treatment. Dr. Cordina earned his medical degree from the University of Malta in Msida, Malta. He completed his residency training in neurology at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey’s Department of Neurosciences in Newark, N.J., followed by a vascular and critical care neurology fellowship as well as an endovascular surgical neuroradiology fellowship at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

DR. LINDA DING was appointed assistant professor of surgery and serves as a surgeon with USA Health. Dr. Ding earned her medical degree from the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. She completed both her residency training in general surgery and a fellowship in surgical critical care at the University of Rochester Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, N.Y.

DR. JOHN GOSCHE was appointed adjunct professor of surgery and serves as a pediatric surgeon with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Gosche earned his medical degree from the University of South Florida in Tampa, Fla. He earned his Ph.D. in cardiovascular physiology from the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

DR. CHARLES HANES was appointed adjunct assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology and serves as a urogynecologist with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Hanes earned his medical degree from Tulane University Medical School in New Orleans. He completed postgraduate training in general surgery at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and his residency training in obstetrics and gynecology at Emory University in Atlanta.

DR. CHARLES HARTIN JR. was appointed associate professor of surgery and serves as a pediatric surgeon with USA Physicians Group. He earned his medical degree from USA. He completed an internship in general surgery at Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine in Roanoke, Va. Dr. Hartin completed his residency training in general surgery at the State University of New York at Buffalo in Buffalo, N.Y. He completed his research fellowship in pediatric surgery at Women & Children’s Hospital of Buffalo in Buffalo, N.Y. He also completed his pediatric surgery fellowship at Baylor College of Medicine at Houston.

DR. PHILLIP HENDERSON was appointed assistant professor of internal medicine and serves as a gastroenterologist and hepatologist with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Henderson earned his medical degree from Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences College of Osteopathic Medicine in 2009. He then completed his residency training in internal medicine and a fellowship in gastroenterology at USA. He went on to complete fellowship training in transplant hepatology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

DR. ANTWAN HOGUE was appointed assistant professor of internal medicine and serves as a hospitalist at USA Medical Center. Dr. Hogue earned his medical degree from USA in 2012. He then completed his residency training in internal medicine at Palmetto Health Richland Hospital in Columbia, S.C., where he served as chief resident and was named Resident Teacher of the Year.

DR. JOHN HUNTER was appointed assistant professor of surgery and serves as a surgeon with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Hunter earned his medical degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he also completed his residency training in general surgery. He then completed a fellowship in minimally invasive
surgery at UAB and a fellowship in colon and rectal surgery at the University of Texas Houston Colon and Rectal Clinic.

**DR. CHRISTOPHER JONES** was appointed assistant professor of orthopaedics and serves as a sports medicine orthopaedic surgeon with USA Physicians Group. He earned his medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C. He completed his residency training in orthopaedic surgery at State University New York System at Stony Brook, N.Y. He completed a fellowship in orthopaedic sports medicine at the American Sports Medicine Institute in Brook, N.Y. He completed a fellowship in orthopaedic surgery at State University New York System at Stony Brook, N.Y. He completed a fellowship in orthopaedic surgery at UAB and a fellowship in colon and rectal surgery at the University of Texas Houston Colon and Rectal Clinic.

**DR. MARKUS LAMMLE** was appointed assistant professor of radiology and serves as a neuroradiologist with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Lammle earned his medical degree from the University of Saarland in Homburg, Germany. He completed his residency training in diagnostic radiology and a two-year fellowship in neuroradiology at the Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology, Washington University in St. Louis, Mo.

**DR. KATIE MALOZZI** was appointed as a full-time staff physician for the University of South Alabama Student Health Center. She earned her doctor of osteopathic medicine degree at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Philadelphia and completed a family medicine internship and residency at Naval Hospital Pensacola in Pensacola, Fla., where she served as chief resident.

**DR. WADAD MNEIMNEH** was appointed assistant professor of pathology. She earned her medical degree from Saint Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon, and completed her residency training in anatomic pathology at Hotel-Dieu de France Hospital in Beirut. She then completed a fellowship in anatomic pathology focusing on gastrointestinal, liver, thoracic and hematopathology in France. After moving to the United States, Dr. Mneimneh completed her second residency training in anatomic and clinical pathology at Albany Medical Center in Albany, N.Y. She then completed a fellowship in surgical pathology with a focus on gastrointestinal and liver pathology at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis and a fellowship in pulmonary and surgical pathology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

**DR. ELIZABETH PARK** was appointed assistant professor of radiology and serves as a radiologist specializing in mammography at the Strada Patient Care Center. Dr. Park earned her medical degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in Birmingham, Ala. She completed her diagnostic residency training and breast imaging fellowship at the Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C.

**DR. SCOTT PATTERSON** is assistant professor of surgery at the USA College of Medicine and serves as a burn, trauma and critical care surgeon with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Patterson earned his medical degree from Pikeville College School of Osteopathic Medicine in Pikeville, Ky. He completed a general surgery internship and residency training in general surgery at USA. He then completed a fellowship in surgical critical care, trauma and burns at USA.

**DR. KAMAL SHARMA** was appointed assistant professor of pediatrics and serves as a pediatric critical care physician at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital. He earned his medical degree from B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan, Nepal. He completed his residency training in pediatrics at The Brooklyn Hospital Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., and a fellowship in pediatric critical care at Miami Children’s Hospital in Miami, Fla.

**DR. SUPATIDA TENGSUPAKUL** was appointed assistant professor of pediatrics and serves as a hospitalist and pediatric infectious diseases specialist seeing patients at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital. She earned her medical degree from Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand. She completed her residency training in pediatrics at The Brooklyn Hospital Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., and a fellowship in pediatric infectious diseases at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

**DR. MARIOSE TRIMMIER** was appointed assistant professor of family medicine and serves as a family medicine physician with USA Family Medicine Center. Dr. Trimmier earned her medical degree from USA. She also completed her residency training in family medicine at USA, where she served as co-chief resident.

**DR. CURTIS TURNER** was appointed professor of pediatrics and medical director of the primary care division of the department of pediatrics and serves as a pediatrician with USA Physicians Group. Dr. Turner earned his medical degree from the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, S.C. He completed his residency training at Louisiana State University in New Orleans and a fellowship in pediatric hematology, oncology and bone marrow transplantation at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Fla.

**DR. JAMES WEST** was appointed adjunct associate professor of orthopaedics and serves as a part-time orthopaedic surgeon with USA Physicians Group. Dr. West earned his medical degree from the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, Ga. He then completed his residency training in orthopaedic surgery at USA Medical Center, and a fellowship in scoliosis and spinal reconstruction surgery at Twin Cities Scoliosis Research Center in Minneapolis.
Greek community, USA dedicate Hippocrates Park

Last summer, the University of South Alabama and Mobile’s Greek community organization dedicated Hippocrates Park at the USA College of Medicine.

The American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) and USA collaborated to create the park. Representatives of AHEPA spoke at the ceremony, as well as USA President Dr. Tony Waldrop and Dr. Samuel J. Strada, dean emeritus of the USA College of Medicine.

“This wonderful statue and these attractive surroundings serve as a living link to Hippocrates, considered the father of Western medicine, and the traditional principles expressed in the Hippocratic Oath,” said Dr. Strada. “The tradition at the USA College of Medicine and at most medical schools is for students to recite this ancient oath during graduation ceremonies, thereby promising to uphold its professional and ethical tenets during their interactions with patients and their families.”

The specially commissioned Hippocrates statue is a donated gift from the Mobile 310 chapter of AHEPA and is the focal point of the park between USA’s Medical Sciences and Health Sciences buildings. Donors are recognized with an inscription in various formats throughout the park.

“One of the missions of AHEPA is education,” said Dr. Hercules Panayiotou, chair of the AHEPA 310 Hippocratic Foundation. “Through this donation of the Hippocrates Park and statue, we hope to connect past, present and future physicians to the origins of this honorable profession.”
College of Medicine mourns loss of several colleagues

**DR. ANGUS McBRYDE**, former professor and interim chair of the department of orthopaedics at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, passed away on Oct. 4, 2016. Dr. McByrde served as professor and chair of orthopaedics at USA from 1991-96 and returned to the USA College of Medicine in 2015. Dr. McBryde earned his medical degree from Duke Medical School. From there he completed a general surgery internship and junior residency at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. McBryde then served two years in the U.S. Navy, including a year in Vietnam as well as a year at the Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego. He completed his residency training in orthopaedics at Duke Medical Center in 1971.

**DR. ROBERT KREISBERG**, former chair of the department of internal medicine, former dean of the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and vice president for medical affairs, passed away on Aug. 21, 2016. In 1973, as the USA College of Medicine was beginning its operation, Dr. Kreisberg joined the faculty as professor and founding chair of internal medicine, a position he held until 1987. From 1976 to 1980, he chaired internal medicine while also serving as dean of the medical school during an early reorganization of the college’s administrative structure. In 1987, Dr. Kreisberg returned to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he served as professor and vice chairman of internal medicine until 1994, when he became director of the internal medicine residency program at Baptist Health Systems in Birmingham. In 1999, Kreisberg returned to USA as associate vice president for clinical affairs, chief of staff for the USA Hospitals and chief executive officer for the Health Services Foundation. In 2000, he began his second stint as dean and vice president for medical affairs following the death of his friend, Dr. Charles M. Baugh. After retiring in 2006, he was appointed professor emeritus of internal medicine in honor of his many contributions to USA, the medical profession and the field of internal medicine.

**DR. RANDALL POWELL**, retired professor of surgery and pediatrics, passed away on July 25, 2016, at the age of 70. In 1991, Dr. Powell was promoted to professor of surgery and pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine and served in that role until his retirement in 2009. While at USA, Dr. Powell was also director of the division of pediatric surgery and professor of physician assistant studies. He served on numerous committees including the Resident Evaluation Committee, the Surgical Case Review Committee at USA Medical Center, the USA Faculty Senate, the College of Medicine Admissions Committee, and chairman of the Medical Student Research Committee. Dr. Powell, a native of Richmond, Va., earned his bachelor of science degree from Hampden-Sydney College in Hampden-Sydney, Va., and his medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, Va. He completed residency training in general surgery at Naval Hospital in San Diego and his fellowship in pediatric surgery at Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Prior to joining USA in 1984 as assistant professor of surgery and pediatrics, Dr. Powell served at Northwestern University Medical School, Naval Hospital in San Diego, and University of California San Diego School of Medicine in San Diego. Dr. Powell touched the lives of countless medical students, residents and patients through his work as a faculty member and pediatric surgeon at the USA College of Medicine. Throughout his career, he invested considerable time and effort in the education, mentoring and training of both medical students and residents.

**DR. HERBERT H. WINKLER**, professor emeritus of microbiology and immunology and former vice chair of microbiology and immunology, passed away on Aug. 2, 2016, at the age of 77. Prior to joining USA in 1978 as professor of microbiology and immunology, Dr. Winkler was both an assistant and associate professor of microbiology at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Va. The research initiated by Dr. Winkler helped to establish USA’s Select Agent Program centered on rickettsia. This motivated colleagues to obtain NIH funds for the construction of a new research lab, the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases Building in USA’s Technology and Research Park. The building more than doubled the Biosafety Level 3 research capability at USA. Dr. Winkler was one of five USA researchers in the institution’s history who received the prestigious NIH MERIT Award. Dr. Winkler, a native of Michigan, earned his Bachelor of Arts in biology from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, and his Ph.D. in physiology from Harvard University in Boston. He completed postdoctoral work at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.