

# USA HEALTH

Fall 2019

## *Restoring the Spirit*

Lelia Otts found lifesaving  
care close to home

5 tips for beating  
the seasonal blues

## *Meet Dr. JYP*

Oncologist uses podcast  
to demystify cancer





Top: Work continues on the expansion of the Fanny Meisler Trauma Center at University Hospital in Mobile. Opposite page, clockwise: Researchers at the Mitchell Cancer Institute received a \$3 million grant to study if socioeconomic stress is a cancer risk factor; new lab technology rapidly identifies pathogens for improved patient outcomes; the Mitchell Cancer Institute hosted the 11th annual Celebrate Hope on Nov. 21.; USA College of Medicine professor completes 51 marathons during and after treatment for leukemia.

On the cover: Lelia Otts, who was hospitalized for 11 days with osteomyelitis, plays in her backyard on a recent afternoon.

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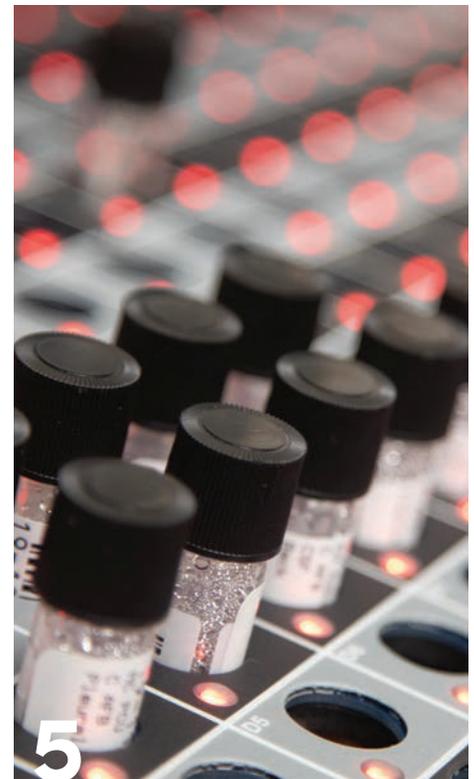
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**D**ear Friends:  
 The growth we have seen during the past two years is nothing short of remarkable. By partnering with established community providers, we have been able to dramatically increase our ability to bring the quality, value and expertise of academic healthcare to more people in the Gulf Coast region. Further, we have been able to increase our capacity at University Hospital by more than 20%. We have extended our clinical education reach through a relationship between our new emergency medicine residency program and first responders in Baldwin County. All the while, our researchers continue to create the new knowledge that is helping us transform medicine – in how it is practiced, taught and researched.

At the same time, we have integrated our approach to accomplishing our mission to help people live longer, better lives. The creation of USA Health signifies the commitment we have to tell the unified story of the extraordinary efforts and achievements that occur at each of our facilities daily. This magazine is a significant part of that storytelling. This is the first issue of our new USA Health Magazine, which is designed to bring together the stories from Children’s & Women’s Hospital, the Mitchell Cancer Institute, University Hospital, the College of Medicine and our physicians group so that we can better tell the world what makes USA Health such a special place.

We hope you enjoy what you read and learn something about USA Health.

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# USA HEALTH

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# New lab technology rapidly identifies pathogens for improved patient outcomes

USA Health is the first and only healthcare system on the Gulf Coast with the technology to identify pathogens in as little as 40 seconds. Advances in microbiology translate to improved patient outcomes, as physicians can now implement proper antibiotic therapies, among others, more quickly and effectively.

A new microbiology system at University Hospital – integrating the BD BACTEC blood culture system, BD Phoenix automated identification and susceptibility test system and BD Bruker MALDI biotyper – is much more sensitive and provides rapid and highly accurate test results.

After culturing and isolating bacteria and fungi from patient specimens, the organisms are identified and tested to determine which drugs will inhibit or stop their growth. In the past, patients and physicians had to wait up to a week to identify organisms that caused infections in patients.

“This is personalized microbiology,” said James Elliot Carter Jr., M.D., director of clinical laboratories and a pathologist with USA Health. “Imagine what that means for patient care. Instead of wasting high-powered antibiotics that may not do any good and increase antibiotic resistance, the patient can now be started on the right antimicrobials or antifungals immediately.”

Carter, who also serves as a professor of pathology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, said the new lab equipment will also help patients and physicians outside USA’s health system. Laboratories previously had to send hard-to-identify organisms to the Alabama Department of Health in Montgomery for identification. “Now, labs can send those cases to USA Health,” he said.



Kristie West, medical technologist, uses the BD BACTEC blood culture system – a new microbiology system at University Hospital.

## Trauma surgeon helps enact new law

In an effort to make our local community safer, USA Health trauma surgeon Jon Simmons, M.D., saw an opportunity to reduce injury and improve safety. Working with local police and legislators, he and his team were able to push for

a new law enacted in September that requires all hospitals in Alabama to report gunshot wounds to law enforcement.

## Insider keeps employees informed

USA Health Insider launched this summer to provide employees with news and

updates. The blog and its companion newsletter include information about benefits, upcoming employee events, letters from USA Health leadership, and recognition for employees who have gone above and beyond their duties.

## USA hosts OB/GYN Conference

The 28th Annual University of South Alabama Obstetrics and Gynecology Conference was held Oct. 10-11. Numerous USA faculty and special guests presented at the conference. Topics included maternal early warning systems, trauma-informed maternal healthcare,

# Small baby unit, the Cove, opens at Children's & Women's Hospital



A ribbon-cutting ceremony in June 2019 marked the opening of the Cove, a small baby unit inside the Level III Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Children's & Women's Hospital. Research shows babies born before 28 weeks gestation have better health outcomes in a program in which a specially trained team provides 24-hour care.

The Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Children's & Women's Hospital opened a small baby unit in June known as the Cove, where infants born at 28 weeks gestation or sooner and who weigh 1,000 grams or less (2.2 pounds) receive specialized care.

The unit is one of nine in the United States and the only one caring for micro-preemies along the upper Gulf Coast. The closest small baby unit is located in Tennessee more than six hours away, said Cathy McCurley, a registered nurse who helped develop the unit at USA Health. Separated from the rest of the Level III NICU with sliding doors that stay closed when not in use, the unit can accommodate up to 22 newborns.

Research shows babies born before 28

weeks gestation or weighing less than 1,000 grams have better health outcomes in a program where a specially trained team provides around-the-clock care.

The Cove staff is comprised of a multidisciplinary team of highly trained neonatologists, nurse practitioners, nurses, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, lactation consultants and pharmacists who have undergone advanced education. Because Children's & Women's Hospital is part of USA Health, the only academic medical center in the region, members of the care team already are tracking progress and conducting research on outcomes of those in the small baby unit and will receive ongoing training to stay up to date on best practices for caring for

severely premature infants.

The neonatal intensive care unit, and now the small baby unit, offers an exceptional team of social workers and nurses trained as parent educators who help with everything from dealing with the challenges of having an infant in the NICU to home health needs and specialized follow-up care.

The NICU at Children's & Women's Hospital has a long history of helping the smallest babies thrive. In a two-year period from 2016 to 2018, more than 96% of the babies born at 26 weeks gestation survived. The survival rate for babies born at 22 weeks during the same time period at Children's & Women's Hospital was just under 70%. Typically, 1,000 babies a year "graduate" from the neonatal intensive care unit.

"I never knew a place like this existed until I needed it," said Camilla English, the mother of a baby born at 23 weeks gestation nearly 19 years ago, who was cared for in the Children's & Women's NICU. Her son graduated from high school in May 2019. "My husband went to visit the NICU while I was still in recovery all those years ago and I remember him telling me everything was going to be fine."

Holding a graduation photo of her son to show his nurses, English attended the small baby unit opening event. English said her son enjoyed a normal childhood, playing baseball from preschool through 12th grade. He graduated with honors from Baldwin County High School, she said. He was at work and couldn't attend the event with her.

maternal mortality, fertility-sparing surgery in gynecologic oncology, interstitial cystitis/bladder pain syndrome, and cardiac disease in pregnancy.

## Urology participates in quality registry

University Urology is participating in a national urologic

disease registry designed to measure and report health-care quality and patient outcomes. Designed by the American Urological Association, the Quality Registry (AQUA) is a powerful tool for urologists to observe the course of a disease, understand variations in treatment and outcomes, and

examine factors influencing prognosis and quality of life.

## USA Health celebrates advanced practice providers

USA Health honored more than 150 advanced practice providers during activities Sept. 30–Oct. 4. Advanced practice providers refers to

nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants and midwives. They were treated to a dinner at Red or White Wine & Gourmet Center in Mobile, where they heard from guest speaker Julee Waldrop, FNP, PNP.

# Innovative imaging agent improves bladder cancer detection

University Urology now offers Blue Light Cystoscopy (BLC) with Cysview for use in the detection of non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer.

When symptoms and blood tests suggest that a patient may have bladder cancer, doctors perform a visual inspection of the interior wall of the bladder using a cystoscope – a thin tube with a light and video camera on the end – in a procedure called a cystoscopy.

With BLC with Cysview, doctors use a cystoscope equipped with both white and blue light. Before the procedure, Cysview (hexaminolevulinate HCl) is instilled into the bladder. Cysview makes the cancer cells

glow bright fluorescent pink in blue light and stand out against the blue of the healthy tissue. This results in improved visualization and detection of non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer lesions.

“Bladder cancer is difficult to detect and has a high rate of recurrence. An inaccurate diagnosis can result in incomplete treatment, which may lead to serious complications and a lower chance of survival for patients with potentially aggressive tumors,” said William Terry, M.D., a urologist with University Urology and an adjunct assistant professor of surgery in the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. “Blue Light Cystoscopy with Cysview is an

important advancement in diagnostic technology, enabling a more accurate diagnosis of non-muscle invasive bladder tumors compared to the standard technique.”

White light cystoscopy has long been the gold standard for detecting suspicious lesions during transurethral resection procedures on bladder tumors. Often bladder cancer lesions are hard to see and can be missed.

BLC with Cysview gives urologic surgeons the ability to evaluate, identify, and remove hard-to-see tumors more accurately. By seeing more lesions, the stage and grade of the tumor can be more accurately determined and appropriate management and treatment offered.

# University Hospital recognized for stroke and heart failure patient care

University Hospital received the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association’s Get With The Guidelines Target: Stroke Honor Roll Elite Plus Gold Plus Quality Achievement Award for 2019. The award recognizes the hospital’s commitment to ensuring stroke patients receive the most appropriate treatment according to the latest nationally recognized, research-based guidelines shaped by scientific evidence.

In addition, University Hospital received the AHA’s Target: StrokeSM Elite Plus award. To qualify for this recognition,

hospitals must meet quality measures developed to reduce the time between the patient’s arrival at the hospital and treatment with the clot-buster tissue plasminogen activator, (tPA), the only drug approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat ischemic stroke.

University Hospital also earned the American Heart Association’s Get With The Guidelines-Heart Failure Gold Plus Quality Achievement Award and is recognized on the AHA’s Target: Heart Failure Honor Roll for 2019. University Hospital has received the Gold Plus Quality Achievement for two

consecutive years and is the first hospital in Alabama to achieve the Heart Failure Gold Plus with Target: Honor Roll Award recognition level.

The Gold Plus Award is an advanced level of recognition that acknowledges hospitals for their compliance with the quality measures within the Get With The Guidelines Heart Failure program. The award recognizes the hospital’s commitment to ensuring heart failure patients receive the most appropriate treatment according to the latest nationally-recognized, evidence-based guidelines.

## NICU nurses present in New Zealand

Three nurses from the Level III Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital presented information about the family-bonding programs to delegates from 21 countries at the 2019 Council of

International Neonatal Nurses (COINN) conference in New Zealand. USA Health nurses Courtney Thomson RNC-NIC, BSN; Amy Campbell RN, BSN, IBCLC; and Bridget Moore RNC-NIC, DNP, discussed the support programs available to families of infants who are admitted to the NICU.

## USA Health sponsors Summer Scrubs

For three days this summer, dozens of teens visited Children’s & Women’s Hospital, Mitchell Cancer Institute and University Hospital to learn about various aspects of patient care. Summer Scrubs aims to help rising high school

seniors interested in healthcare gain real-world experiences in hospitals and other health-care settings.

## Hospital teachers recognized

The Mobile County Public School System teachers in the Class Act Program at Children’s & Women’s Hospital

# Encouraging a diverse physician workforce



Alana Fortune of Dillard University and Trentyn Shaw of Alabama State University are participants in the USA College of Medicine's SouthMed Prep Scholars and DREAM programs, respectively. The programs provide a comprehensive learning experience for under-represented premedical students.

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine's Office of Diversity and Inclusion is committed to ensuring that all students feel welcome. The group has programs to address the documented lack of physician diversity.

The Diversity Recruitment and Enrichment for Admissions into Medicine (DREAM) and the SouthMed Prep Scholars, are exceeding that goal. The highly competitive medical school preparatory programs are designed to provide a comprehensive learning experience for under-represented premedical students prior to their senior undergraduate year.

Two students, in particular, are feeling the impact of the programs. Trentyn Shaw of Alabama State University and Alana Fortune of Dillard University, in DREAM and SouthMed Prep Scholars respectively, are taking advantage of the opportunities the initiatives provide.

The undergraduate seniors, both biology majors, said rave reviews from other students drew them to USA's programs and

made it an easy choice for them to take part.

"I've always felt like South wanted me to come here versus just being another applicant," said Shaw.

DREAM program director, Jeffrey Sosnowski, M.D., Ph.D., and assistant dean and professor for medical education, said the program reflects the medical school's commitment to a diverse student body. "African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans make up 20% of the incoming class of 2023," he said. "It's only 6% in other programs across the country."

According to Sosnowski, 12% of the class of 2023 are students who have graduated from the DREAM and SouthMed Prep Scholars programs, the largest combined group ever to enter the University of South Alabama College of Medicine.

The SouthMed Prep Scholars program exclusively partners with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), which is why Fortune chose it. "I like that SouthMed Prep is helping give black students a space

here," she said. "When I came to South, I knew this was the place for me."

The SouthMed Prep Scholars program is led by Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., assistant dean of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, professor of internal medicine and a pulmonologist with USA Health. Fortune credits Haynes for pushing her to never give up.

For Shaw and Fortune, the road to a medical education started when they were children. Both say they have never been treated by minority physicians and wanted to see change. However, the aspiring medical students said family history is what initially sparked their interest.

"When I was a child, my dad had a defective heart valve, and he wasn't supposed to make it to 24," said Shaw. "Money for my dad's surgery was the biggest worry, but he finally got it. After the surgery, the doctor paid my father's medical bills and that really stuck with me. What that doctor did for my dad not only saved his life but mine as well. I want to help others in the same way."

For Fortune, it's her parents' roots that guided her to medicine. "I'm a first-generation American. My parents are from the country Grenada. When I go back, I see many people there who don't have access to healthcare. I want to go to Third World countries and help for free," she said.

After the students complete their programs, a ceremony is held in their honor. Sosnowski spoke at the event and left his students with an important message. "Diversity among colleagues in medical school produces better doctors, which produces greater care for patients. The sense of feeling like you belong is critical in healthcare," he said.

were awarded golden apples and featured on the WKRQ-TV for their work teaching patients and keeping them on track with school. The award is a community partnership with area businesses designed to honor teachers who make the classroom a fun and safe place for learning.

## Hospital ambassador announced

Landen Sylvester was selected to represent Children's & Women's Hospital as the Children's Miracle Network Champion for 2019-2020. His face is emblazoned on donation cards posted at local Publix grocery stores plus Walmart

locations and other businesses who support specialized care for sick and injured children in our community.

## Jaguar Athletes wear teal for GYN cancer awareness

During September, the South Alabama Jaguars wore teal ribbons on their helmets in

honor of Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month. Several gynecologic oncologists from the Mitchell Cancer Institute, along with the Catranis family, longtime GO Run sponsors, were recognized on the field at the Sept. 14 Jaguars football game.

# Four students at USA College of Medicine awarded Blue Cross Blue Shield scholarships

Four medical students at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine will each receive \$60,000 scholarships from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama as part of a \$1.2 million initiative aimed at improving access to healthcare in medically underserved areas of the state.

Angela Mosley-Johnson, Hannah Brooks, Kimberly McWilliams and Samantha Lee, all third-year medical students and Alabama natives, will receive \$30,000 a year, which covers tuition for the final two years of medical school. Following their residency training in a primary care specialty, the four will commit to practicing in underserved communities in Alabama for a minimum of three years.

“Serving the healthcare needs of Alabamians has been a long-standing tradition for our graduates,” said John V. Marymont, M.D., MBA vice president for medical affairs and dean of the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. “These four students are answering the call to take their skills to areas that lack sufficient access to healthcare. They are continuing in this important tradition.”

Compared with graduates from all other allopathic medical schools in the nation, graduates from the USA College of Medicine rank in the 89th percentile for the percentage of alumni who practice in rural areas and the 99th percentile of all medical schools for the percentage of alumni who practice in underserved areas.

In 2018, Blue Cross and its charitable organization, The Caring Foundation, awarded \$60,000 to three students at the USA College of Medicine as part of the five-year scholarship initiative.

Mosley-Johnson was raised in the small town of Cuba, in Sumter County, but said she wasn’t familiar with the issue of health disparities until she took a health psychology course as an undergraduate at Vanderbilt University. She changed her major from clinical psychology to medicine after completing a thesis on health disparities among African Americans.

She said she intends to become an obstetrician-gynecologist. “It is my hope to provide exceptional medical care to women, but to also advocate for women’s health at a local and federal level,” Mosley-Johnson said. “I would love to one day establish a clinic in Cuba or York, or partner with a nearby hospital to provide care to women in the community.”

Brooks said the scholarship will help her fulfill her long-term



From left, Angela Mosley-Johnson, Samantha Lee, Kimberly McWilliams and Hannah Brooks chat during a break in clinical rotations at University Hospital. The third-year students at the USA College of Medicine have been awarded scholarships from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama as part of an initiative to improve access to healthcare in underserved areas of the state.

goal to serve her hometown of Mobile. “For me, the most compelling aspect of medicine has always been the physician’s role as servant,” Brooks said. “Personally, I feel that the physician’s role of servant is most prominent in primary care, which is one of the reasons why I have always felt drawn toward pediatrics. This scholarship is for students who want to do just that.”

McWilliams, a native of Alexandria, said she intends to focus on family medicine and psychiatry. “My ultimate goal is to open several nonprofit clinics that focus on preventive care and help change the perception of medicine in the community,” McWilliams said. “I hope to facilitate an atmosphere that provides patients with both the educational means and physical opportunities to take charge of their mental and physical well-being.”

Lee, a native of Mobile County, said she applied for the scholarship because she had already planned to stay near home and close to family in Theodore and Wilmer. “I was honored for the opportunity to apply to a program that would help me to increase the quality of primary care in a community that has helped me become who I am today,” Lee said. “My long-term career goal is to ultimately bring more mental health awareness and preventive care to my community.”

## UHOP grand opening

Nearly 200 USA Health employees – representing a variety of departments including the business office, charge services, accounting, billing, compliance, centralized insurance verification, centralized authorizations, cost reimbursements and revenue

cycle and the Mitchell Cancer Institute Health Information Management – recently moved into USA Health Office Park.

## Preparing for the first gynecology visit

Amelia Hewes, M.D., an obstetrician-gynecologist with USA Health and assistant

professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the USA College of Medicine, spoke with the media about what young women should expect when going to the gynecologist for the first time. Hewes said girls should see their gynecologist between the ages of 13 and 15 years old. She said

unless the girl is having issues, the first visit will usually consist of a conversation and not an exam.

## Students screen for skin cancer

Students at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine gained experience

# HPV-related cancer rates affect vaccine uptake, says study

USA Health researchers studying human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination rates in Alabama discovered that counties with higher rates of HPV-related cancers in unvaccinated adults had higher rates of HPV vaccinations among adolescents, according to research presented at the Society of Gynecologic Oncology's Annual Meeting on Women's Cancer.

"The main takeaway is that perception of high cancer risk may overcome traditional disparities that can affect HPV vaccine uptake," said Jennifer Young Pierce, M.D., who heads Cancer Control and Prevention

at the Mitchell Cancer Institute. "We theorized that if you or someone you know has had an HPV-related cancer, you're more likely to vaccinate your children against HPV."

The research was one of 12 studies by MCI researchers accepted for oral or poster presentations at the 2019 national meeting.

The study sought to explore reasons why HPV vaccination rates vary so widely among counties in Alabama, ranging from 33 percent to 66 percent. Researchers wanted to understand why parents chose to vaccinate their children against HPV

and whether they encountered obstacles in gaining access to the vaccine.

The data showed little difference in HPV vaccine uptake between urban and rural counties, or between affluent or poor ones. The seven counties with the highest HPV vaccination rates were both rural and low income, Pierce said.

"We believe that the higher vaccination rates could be similar to the increase in measles vaccination following the recent outbreak," Pierce said. "If you think you're at a higher risk, you are more likely to protect yourself and your family."

# \$3 million grant seeks to uncover if socioeconomic stress is cancer risk factor



Seema Singh, Ph.D., associate professor of pathology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, hypothesizes that socioeconomic stress affects the human immune system in a way that supports the development of breast cancer.

In an effort to understand the causes of disproportionate breast cancer outcomes in women, researchers at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine will explore whether and how socioeconomic difficulties affect human biology, leading to a higher cancer risk.

Seema Singh, Ph.D., associate professor of pathology at the USA College of Medicine, is leading the study, which is funded by a five-year, \$3 million grant from the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The award is one of the largest NIH R01 grants given to a cancer researcher based at the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Singh hypothesizes that socioeconomic stress affects human biology, especially the

immune system, in a way that supports breast tumor development and aggressive progression. This negative impact on health is theorized to be more pronounced in African American women.

The research will be conducted in collaboration with scientists and physicians from across USA Health, who will collect survey data and blood samples, and conduct lab studies to establish sociobiological connections.

"Basic research into the mechanisms and causes of cancer health disparities is significant and will provide new opportunities for the development of cancer prevention and therapeutic approaches," said Guillermo Herrera, M.D., professor and chair of the pathology department at the USA College of Medicine.

screening participants for skin cancer at the 12th Annual GO Run on Sept. 28. The five student volunteers worked under the supervision of Mobile dermatologist Kathryn Dempsey, M.D., at a skin screening tent organized by the Mitchell Cancer Institute. The GO Run 5K and 1-Mile Fun Run raises

dollars for local gynecologic cancer research at MCI.

## Lights of Love tree lighting Dec. 3

Children's & Women's Hospital will celebrate the joy and wonder of the holiday season with a tree lighting on Dec. 3. The free community event features

choirs, games and treats on the campus at 1600 Center St.

## NICU Reunion welcomed graduates

More than 500 former patients and their families gathered at Children's & Women's Hospital on Oct. 20 to reunite with the physicians, nurses and other

caregivers who helped them thrive during the annual NICU Reunion. The Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Children's & Women's is the only Level III in the region, caring for the most premature babies.

# Research grants for \$3.5 million will be used to improve care of injured patients



Two USA Health researchers have received a total of \$3.5 million in National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding to study the relationship between multiple organ failure and massive blood transfusions in severely injured patients.

Mark Gillespie, Ph.D., South Alabama Medical Science Foundation-Locke professor and chair of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, and Jon Simmons, M.D., chief of the division of trauma and acute care surgery at the USA College of Medicine and trauma medical director at University Hospital, received the two grants.

At University Hospital – the region’s only Level I Trauma Center – Simmons said an average of one trauma case per week requires a massive blood transfusion. And, while massive transfusions save lives, Gillespie said a small percentage of

patients experience serious complications.

One of the discoveries the research pair made was that fragments of the mitochondrial genome accumulate in the blood of severely injured patients requiring massive transfusions and that the fragments appear to predict whether patients will experience complications as a result of the transfusion. This discovery served as a catalyst for the research led by Gillespie and Simmons, which is a two-pronged approach to address the problem. The first – developing a drug to repair the mitochondrial genome so it doesn’t shatter in the first place – and the second – to use an older, repurposed drug to degrade the mitochondrial DNA once it accumulates in the blood.

This collaborative research is a prime example of the far-reaching impact an academic medical center, such as University Hospital, can have on patient care.

Jon Simmons, M.D., at right, and Mark Gillespie, Ph.D., left, discuss information on a genome browser displaying mitochondrial DNA damage-associated molecular patterns fragments. The researchers have received two National Institutes of Health grants totaling \$3.5 million to study the relationship between multiple organ failure and massive blood transfusions in severely injured patients.

Gillespie describes this project as “bedside-to-bench-and-back again” research. “Jon started with a clinical observation and we back-translated it into a laboratory experiment that then led us to go forward and translate it back into patients,” he said.

Simmons said he is excited to have the opportunity to improve the care in the future for patients with traumatic injuries. “It’s more than taking great care of patients we encounter today,” he said. “We are researchers looking at new ways to help patients around the world.”

## Nurse team encourages mother-baby bonding

Children’s & Women’s Hospital has added a team of nurses dedicated to the bonding between mother and baby. The team works with mothers who’ve had a Cesarean section by helping mother and baby connect through skin-

to-skin contact and breastfeeding.

## Pathology residents present nationally

Resident physicians in USA Health’s pathology residency program presented a total of 19 posters at the American Society for Clinical Pathology

and the College of American Pathologists annual meetings in September.

## Chalhub lectures on developmental delay

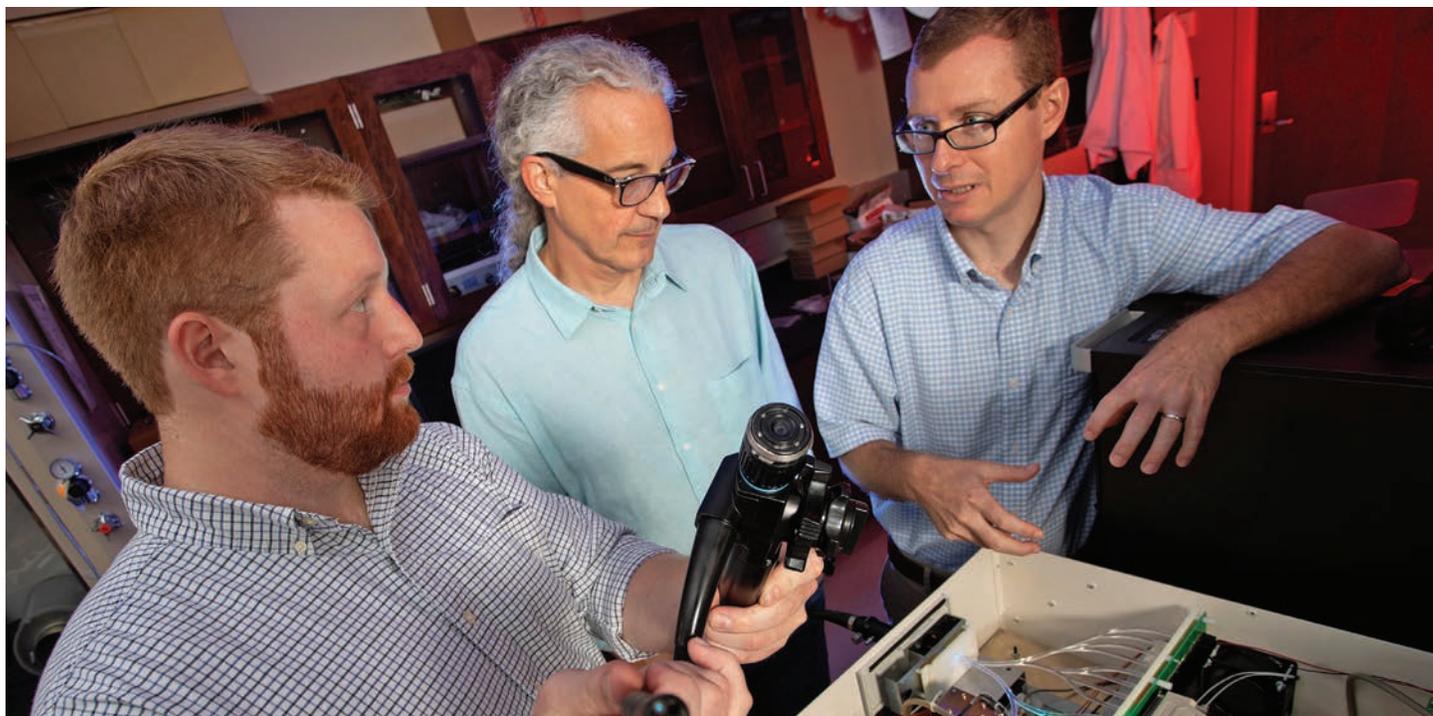
Elias Chalhub, M.D., a neurologist with USA Health and professor of neurology at the University of South Alabama

College of Medicine, presented “My Child Is Delayed” as part of the Pediatric Neurology Lecture Series in October.

## Bell ringing marks end of treatment

Nine former pediatric patients marked the end of their cancer treatments with a bell

# Faculty development award allows for breakthrough in pulmonary research



The 2019 University of South Alabama Center for Lung Biology Murray Bander Faculty Development Award – which is given to one or two investigators each year – seeks to foster innovative discoveries in pulmonary research and promote faculty development.

This year, Silas Leavesley, Ph.D., professor of chemical and biomedical engineering at the University of South Alabama, and Thomas Rich, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, received the award for their novel research that holds far-reaching potential for improving patient care.

According to Leavesley, who holds a joint appointment in the USA College of

Medicine in the department of pharmacology, their project seeks to develop a hyperspectral clinical imaging endoscopy platform to more effectively diagnose and treat abnormal tissues in the airway.

Endoscopes are used in pulmonary medicine to diagnose and monitor a wide variety of conditions such as cancers, cysts, environmentally induced damage or airway blockages. Currently, visual inspection is performed using a standard color camera for imaging, which provides images in red, green and blue (RGB).

“Our research seeks to develop a next-generation endoscope that provides images in many different colors, referred to by their characteristic wavelength,” he said.

Craig Browning, a doctoral student in the science systems engineering program at the University of South Alabama; Thomas Rich, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine; and Silas Leavesley, Ph.D., associate professor of chemical and biomolecular engineering at USA, work in an engineering lab.

“This technique of imaging at many wavelengths of light has previously demonstrated the ability to provide accurate detection of certain types of abnormal tissues such as cancers.”

Leavesley said this new technique is much needed, as traditional white light imaging with an RGB camera only provides limited wavelength data for detecting cancers and other diseases.

ringing ceremony at Children’s & Women’s Hospital on Sept. 25. The young patients and their families were treated to a magic show and given engraved silver bells to commemorate the milestone.

## Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center conducts research

The Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center is conducting the Sickle Cell Trevor Thompson Transition Study, ST3P-UP. Funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, this structured education-based program

requires the Pediatric and Adult clinics to work together to implement the Six Core Elements of Health Care Transition. Implementing the elements provides a standard process for clinics to support patients with sickle cell disease as they transition from pediatric to adult care.

## Simmons’ research published

University Hospital’s Trauma Medical Director Jon D. Simmons, M.D., had an article titled “Plasma Transfusion Products are Contaminated with Cellular and Associated Pro-Inflammatory Debris” published in the Journal of the American College of Surgeons.

# Anti-cancer compound developed in Mobile shows promise in two new studies

USA Health cancer researchers are trying to unravel a mystery that has perplexed oncologists and their patients for decades – how to stop cancer in its tracks.

An anti-cancer compound developed at the Mitchell Cancer Institute is showing promise in preclinical studies – one involving pancreatic cancer and the other involving breast cancer. The compound, MCI-715, was developed by Gary Piazza, Ph.D., and his lab team at the Drug Discovery Research Center at MCI.

The preclinical studies were conducted in Australia and Alabama.

Researchers at Curtin University in Western Australia studied MCI-715's effectiveness against pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma (PDAC), a highly aggressive cancer for which chemotherapeutic drugs provide limited benefits and are associated with severe toxicities.

In addition, University of Alabama at Birmingham researcher Clinton Grubbs, Ph.D., found that MCI-715 was effective in a preclinical model of breast cancer prevention to a level comparable to tamoxifen. Tamoxifen is widely used to prevent the progression of breast cancer in high-risk patients but is also associated with severe side effects.

Piazza said the results from the two independent labs, along with studies at MCI, provide “compelling evidence that MCI-715 has promising anti-cancer activity.”

“These results support the need for further preclinical studies to further assess the efficacy and safety for the prevention or treatment of cancers,” Piazza said.



Gary A. Piazza, Ph.D., leads the Drug Discovery Research Center at the Mitchell Cancer Institute, where he and his team are developing several anti-cancer compounds, including MCI-715. That compound is now being researched in preclinical studies.

The article highlighted several years of research funded by the American College of Surgeons and the National Institutes of Health.

## USA Health launches new website

Earlier this year, USA Health relaunched its website to

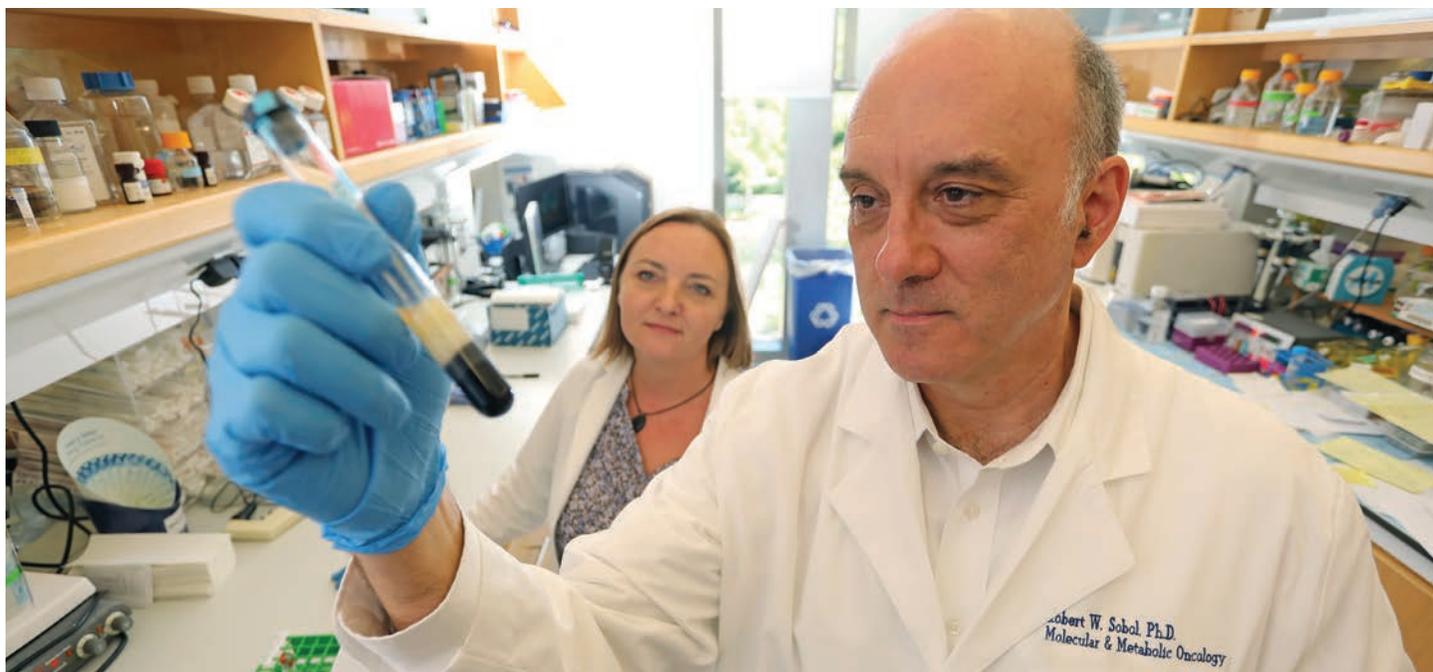
better suit patients and referring providers. The new site features high-quality photographs and videos, and it provides easier access to USA Health's clinics and providers. USA Health added online patient appointment requests and provider referrals. After finding the provider and/or

location where they would like to receive care, patients can send their requests through the private, secure platform. The new site is located at [usahealthsystem.com](http://usahealthsystem.com).

## Patient relations director named

Kim Waren has been named director of patient relations for USA Health. In her new role, she will be responsible for leading patient relations at University Hospital and Children's & Women's Hospital. “Our primary responsibility is

# USA Health utilizes community-engaged approach to conduct research study



Together, the University of South Alabama College of Medicine's Center for Healthy Communities and the Mitchell Cancer Institute are conducting a research study to measure the capacity of human cells to repair their DNA.

The overarching goal of the project is to quantify the average amount of DNA damage in the cells of living people in the area surrounding University Hospital.

The project, titled "DNA Healing and Disease Prevention," utilizes a community-engaged approach by incorporating feedback from a study advisory board that gives advice on ways to incorporate community considerations within the study process – a unique characteristic. The project will evaluate the capacity of the cells to

repair the damage and evaluate changes in DNA repair capacity as a person ages.

Robert W. Sobol, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine and principal investigator on the study, said there are many substances around us that can harm DNA and cause it to malfunction.

According to Sobol, who also serves as program leader of the Molecular and Metabolic Oncology program at Mitchell Cancer Institute, damaged DNA has the ability to repair itself. "But if the cell is unable to fix the DNA, it could result in cell death or in the replication of damaged cells," he said. "When damaged cells are duplicated, patients can be at risk for medical conditions such as cancer. We hope this

Robert W. Sobol, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and principal investigator of the project "DNA Healing and Disease Prevention," and Jennifer Clark, instructor of pharmacology, study a sample in his lab.

work will advance our capacity to examine human populations for genome damage and genome repair capacity."

This research also has potential to provide more opportunities for both precision medicine – finding specific treatment options for individual patients – and precision prevention – finding ways for individual people to keep from developing a disease.

to ensure that patients and their families leave the hospital feeling satisfied with their care," Waren said. "Delivering exceptional patient care is at the center of our mission, vision and values at USA Health."

## Maternal-fetal medicine providers speak at Alabama Baby Coalition

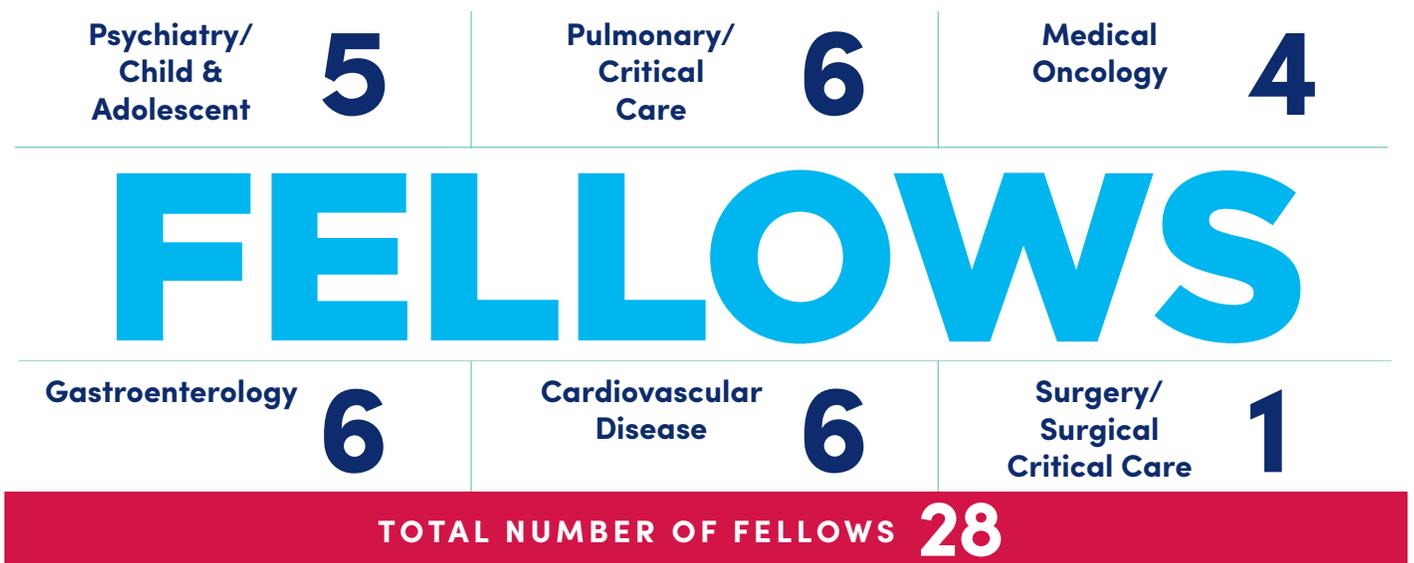
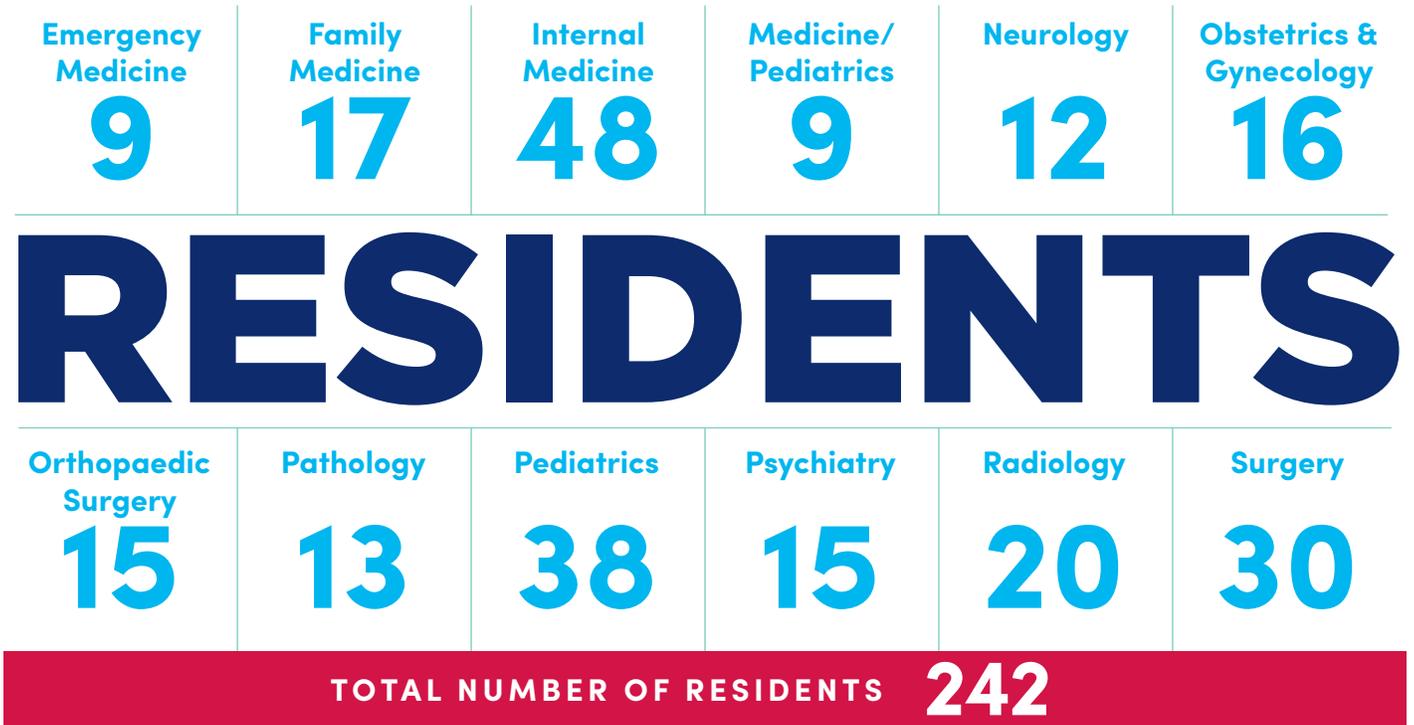
Carey Winkler, M.D., a maternal-fetal medicine physician with USA Health and assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, and Casey Armi-

stead, a clinical nurse, spoke at the Alabama Baby Coalition, a Mobile County program that discusses fetal and infant mortality. Winkler spoke about substance abuse during pregnancy and Armistead's presentation focused on post-traumatic stress and burnout among healthcare workers.

**For the latest in USA Health news, log on to [usahealthsystem.com](http://usahealthsystem.com).**

# Physicians in training

A breakdown of USA College of Medicine programs recognized by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.



**Top 3 Feeder Schools**

University of South Alabama College of Medicine

**42**

Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine

**18**

American University of the Caribbean

**8**



# Construction continues at University Hospital



## USA Health welcomes dermatologist Fred Bodie, M.D.

This summer, USA Health added a dermatology practice to its expanding healthcare system. Fred Bodie, M.D., and the practice he founded in 1980, Springhill Dermatology Clinic, joined USA Health to become USA Health Dermatology. The location at 4300 Old Shell Road will remain the same. Bodie is accepting new patients.

“It’s a tremendous honor for me to join USA Health,” he said. Through innovative clinical research and a passion for treating patients, Bodie has spent nearly four decades helping people look and feel their best.

“We put patients first,” he said. “People who are sick want to be heard and want to understand their treatment options. We strive to do that every day.”

With a successful history as an innovator in skin care on the Alabama Gulf Coast, Bodie is certified to practice by the American Board of Dermatology and the American Board of Pediatrics. He trained in dermatology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Beginning in 2009, Bodie became a principal investigator for a local clinical trials



Bodie is accepting new patients at USA Health Dermatology, 4300 Old Shell Road, in Mobile. For appointments, call 251-342-7880.

group, helping to determine the impacts of biologics and other drugs.

“Research is so important because it helps us understand what works and what doesn’t work,” he said. “It can help protect patients from harmful side effects.”

After completing a residency in pediatrics in the 1970s, Bodie said he shifted his focus to the study of skin conditions.

“I enjoy this work because I can alleviate discomfort and help people gain confidence,” he said. “It’s so rewarding to help someone with a condition such as psoriasis. There are medicines now that can help so much. It can be life changing.”

## All under one roof

Earlier this year, USA Health Mobile Diagnostic Center at University Commons underwent renovations to expand both clinic and therapeutic space for patients.

Originally home to a handful of primary care physicians, the new space now also boasts four rheumatologists, an endocrinologist and a state-of-the-art test kitchen. The test kitchen, located on the west side of the building, will host healthy-eating cooking classes for patients and employees alike.

### USA HEALTH | MOBILE DIAGNOSTIC CENTER

#### Internal Medicine Physicians:

Payton Statekewicz, M.D.  
Theresa Yarbrough, M.D.

#### Endocrinologists:

Judson Menefee, M.D.  
Alexandria Hellmich, Ph.D., CRNP

#### Rheumatologists:

Gino DiVittorio, M.D.  
Teresa Oglesby, M.D.  
Thomas C. Myers, M.D.  
Yanming Xing, M.D.

To make an appointment, call 251-660-5787



With contributions of \$4 million from the state and a private donation of \$5 million from local businessman and philanthropist Bert Meisler, ground was broken on the Fanny Meisler Trauma Center in December 2018. The construction and renovation will expand and modernize the current space, enhancing USA Health’s ability to accommodate patients with traumatic injuries and respond to mass casualty situations in the region. Plans call for completion in summer 2020.

# 5 Ways to Beat the Holiday Blues

For some people, the holiday season is a time of joy and excitement. For others, this time of year can bring about feelings of sadness, loneliness, depression or anxiety.

“The holiday season can be difficult for many people,” said Susanna Cheatham, LPC, a clinical counselor in the University of South Alabama department of family medicine. “People can feel very lonely, perhaps more so than at other times of the year. It is paramount that we normalize these experiences to help others understand that they are really not alone.”

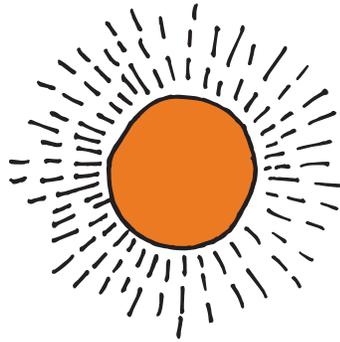
Cheatham offers these five tips to beat the holiday blues:



## Utilize your smartphone

Cheatham recommends several apps on your phone that can help you calm anxiety, meditate, and navigate a crisis.

- *Breathe2Relax* can help calm anxiety by using diaphragmatic breathing exercises.
- *Headspace* offers a three-minute guided meditation that can provide a rest in stressful times.
- *Shine* is a meditations and mindfulness app that offers a series of motivations, daily texts, audio clips and longer-term projects, all of which focus on self-reflection.



## Get your Vitamin D

According to Cheatham, seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression related to the change in seasons, is very common. As the days get shorter and the nights get longer, we no longer have enough sunlight to function well. “This can be helped by sitting in front of specialty lights for short amounts of time or by sitting in the sunlight for about 30 minutes a day,” she said.

## Don't be afraid to reach out for help

According to Cheatham, people struggling with mental illness in general can feel lonely and isolated and often like they don't belong. “Ideally, a family member or support person would reach out and check on people who struggle during the holidays because it can be extraordinarily hard to pull oneself up by the bootstraps,” she said. “If you don't have someone to look out for you and you are struggling, talking with someone such as clergy, a counselor, a helpline like 211, or even online support groups can be helpful.”



## Prepare for mental flare-ups

Cheatham said that like chronic illnesses, mental illness requires more attention because flare-ups have a direct correlation with increased stress. Preparing family meals, visiting family members and giving time or money can be stressful situations brought on by the holiday season.

“People see commercials for happy family gatherings and intimate times together, which can cause those with mental illness to feel lonely, isolated or as if they don't belong,” Cheatham said. “For people who have already been diagnosed with anxiety or depression, it is important to continue your medications as you are prescribed.”



## Focus on self-care

Self-care is very important, but can pose additional challenges when we are in a less than positive place. “There are a lot of expectations placed on people during the holiday season,” she said. “Expectations to attend all family functions, buy gifts for extended family members, and travel to see family can be stressful. For people with mental illness, this becomes almost suffocating. To help combat these feelings, I encourage my patients to give themselves about 15 minutes of focused self-care – such as take a nap, soak in the tub, listen to the birds chirp, read, turn off all electronics and sit in the quiet, read a meditation book, practice mindfulness – each day,” she added.

# Healthy Holiday Menu Options



Phyllus Justice, MPH, RD, CDE, a diabetes resource coordinator with USA Health Mobile Diagnostic Center, offers her favorite healthy holiday recipes that are low in fat and calories but high in flavor.

## Roasted Sweet Potatoes with Thyme and Rosemary

Cook time: 40 minutes  
Serves 4

### Ingredients:

2 pounds sweet potatoes  
Handful of thyme  
Handful of rosemary  
Olive oil to coat

### Preparation:

1. Peel the sweet potatoes and slice into cubes.
2. Coat with olive oil.
3. Chop rosemary and thyme fairly fine and toss with sweet potatoes.
4. Put in roasting pan in oven at 400 degrees 40-45 minutes, or until they are tender to fork.

## Double Layer Pumpkin Pie

Serves 8

### Ingredients:

4 ounces light cream cheese, softened  
1 tablespoon milk  
1 tablespoon Splenda  
1 ½ cups thawed Lite Cool Whip (or fat-free)  
1 reduced-fat graham cracker pie crust  
1 (12-ounce) evaporated skim milk, cold  
2 packages (4-serving size) sugar-free Jello vanilla instant pudding  
1 (16-ounce) can pumpkin  
2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice

### Preparation:

1. Mix cream cheese, 1 tablespoon milk and Splenda in large bowl with wire whisk until smooth. Stir in Cool Whip. Spread on bottom of crust.
2. Pour evaporated skim milk into bowl. Add pudding and beat with whisk 1 to 2 minutes until well blended. (Mixture will be thick.) Stir in pumpkin and spice with whisk. Mix well. Spread over cream cheese layer. Refrigerate at least 3 hours.

# Healing and talking CANCER

BY CAROL MCPHAIL

Headphones on, gynecologic oncologist Jennifer Young Pierce, M.D., leans into the microphone and explains what motivates her every day.

“The patients,” she says simply. “I usually spend a lot of time with my patients early on to learn as much as I can about them, whether that’s someone trying to make it to a wedding or become a Mardi Gras queen or see a child graduate from high school.

“Their goals become my goals.”



Pierce, a gynecologic oncologist, performs surgery at Children’s & Women’s Hospital.

With patients as her motivator, Pierce, 44, wears several hats at USA Health: gynecologic oncologist, professor of interdisciplinary clinical oncology, leader of Cancer Control and Prevention, and OB/GYN residency program director. She’s also the host of *The Cancering Show*, a locally produced podcast that aims to “demystify” cancer for everyone touched by it.

“New things give me energy. You learn new skills in one arena that really help you in another,” she says. “I’m a better doctor because I do these things.”

During a podcast recording at a Mobile recording studio, Pierce – known as “Dr. JYP” to listeners – opens up about a game-changing moment several years ago. “There was a patient – she and I were about the same age, and she had a mass on her ovaries,” she recalled. “She got married but had delayed her honeymoon to have surgery.”

The diagnosis was ovarian cancer. “She lived the last eight weeks of her life in the hospital,” Pierce says. “I sat on her bed every day, and we looked at her wedding photos when they came in and watched her life slip away. I was not allowed to tell her that she was dying.”

Pierce also wasn’t in a position to make decisions that would have allowed the patient to go home rather than undergo more treatment in the hospital. “That was the moment I knew I wanted to do this, and I wanted to do it better,” she said.

Medicine wasn’t her first career choice. Pierce earned a degree in chemical engineering at the University of Virginia before switching to medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina.

Her studies took her through an internship and residency at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston — and a detour through South Africa.

“During my residency, I worked with a GYN oncologist who was South African, and she was screening women (for cervical cancer) in shipping containers,” Pierce said. “I thought it was just amazing what she was accomplishing in these shanty towns outside of Cape Town.”

Pierce said she asked the doctor: “How could I be more like you?”

“You need a master’s in public health,” she recalled her saying. “And second, she said, I needed to work in my own community.”

So, it was back to UVA for a master’s in public health and a fellowship in gynecologic oncology, then on to MUSC for

clinical and academic pursuits.

A few years ago, Pierce saw an opportunity to join friend and fellow GYN oncologist Rodney Rocconi, M.D., at the Mitchell Cancer Institute (MCI), where she could split her time between physician duties and cancer prevention and outreach.

“Dr. JYP is a passionate individual who essentially excels in everything she does,” said Rocconi, interim director at MCI. “Whether it’s clinical care of patients, education of medical students, residents or fellows, or her research/outreach endeavors for HPV vaccination, she always goes above and beyond the call of duty.”

In 2017, Mobile became Pierce’s new community, which she embraced wholeheartedly.

“Unfortunately, lower Alabama and the Southeast, in general, have some astronomical cancer rates, and there are so many opportunities to care for people better, help them survive longer and prevent the cancer from even happening,” she says.

On the air, Dr. JYP is open about her personal life, which centers on husband Chris, a certified financial planner, and two daughters, ages 7 and 5. She describes her arrival at home this way: “There’s usually a lot of artwork and tiny toys, and possibly a doll in the mouth of our golden retriever, Ellie.”

Pierce says she avoids drawing a distinct line between work life and home life – a line that some physicians consider uncrossable. “I feel like there’s no point in the 21st century when work has access to us 24/7. I feel like you have to have a better blend,” she explains. “I have been known to go to a school event before work, and I’ve also taken the kids on hospice visits.”

Asked about her role as a mentor to women entering medicine, Pierce said, “I feel it’s so important for young women to have someone to talk to about the fact that you don’t have to give up one thing for another.”





# Marathon MAN

**A professor of anatomy at the USA College of Medicine, Phillip Fields completed 51 marathons in 47 months during and after treatment for leukemia.**

BY CAROL MCPHAIL

**I**n 2009, avid runner Phillip Fields, Ph.D., started the race of his life. He committed to running a marathon in every state and Washington, D.C.

Problem was, time was short. Fields had just been diagnosed with leukemia and was told that he had five to seven years to live. The doctors were advising against more running.

However, Fields, a professor of anatomy at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, was not ready to give up the sport he loved. "I could not procrastinate with my goal," he said. "I felt I had to accomplish this by December 2012."

What followed was a difficult and sometimes grueling struggle to finish 51 marathons in 47 months as he fought through fatigue, chemotherapy and side effects from the treatment.

Fields' journey is told in a new, self-published memoir titled "The Long Road Back to Boston: Running Marathons with Leukemia." The undeniable main character of the story is his passion for running. Cancer plays second fiddle.

The takeaway from the book is to "never give up," he explains. "There's a quote that says what we do with terrible news defines who we are. If you find your passion and stay with it, your diagnosis is not going to be life shattering; it will only be life changing. And the diagnosis will not mark the end of life, but the beginning."

In the book, Fields describes in detail the sudden-onset shortness of breath at age 60 that eventually led to a trifecta of bad news: the leukemia diagnosis at the Mitchell Cancer Institute, the grim prognosis and the advice against running to protect his spleen and prevent hemorrhage.

An oncologist providing a second opinion at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center suggested exercise that would be less stressful because of the fatigue that would set in during chemotherapy due to a low blood cell count and low hemoglobin. Just taking out the trash would prove exhausting, the doctor said.

That was the hardest part for Fields.

"For me, not being able to run was the worst of the three pieces of bad news," he said. "Now, more than ever, it is why (and how) I

have been able to manage the diagnosis of leukemia, life expectancy numbers, chemotherapy and everything else tossed my way.”

Fields followed the oncologist’s advice for almost three months and then made a brave decision. “To hell with a five-to-seven-year prognosis. To hell with ‘outcome.’ If leukemia is going to kill me, let me at least die doing what I love, running. It is who I am,” he recalls in the book.

Fields discovered his love for running in high school, when he recognized that it granted him the solitude he sought as an introvert. It wasn’t until age 37 that he signed up to race in the Pleasure Island Marathon in Gulf Shores. “After that, I was hooked,” he recalls.

Fields describes himself as a decent runner – “not an elite runner, not even a good runner” – but his passion and perseverance helped him qualify at age 47 for the Boston Marathon, the most prestigious challenge for runners, on its 100th anniversary in 1996. “Just like the song ‘Over the Rainbow,’ dreams do come true,” he writes in the book.

But he knew that it would be much harder to run – and finish – any marathon with leukemia. During the Pensacola Marathon in 2009, Fields recalls almost laughing at the fatigue as he climbed a hill. “My legs felt like someone had strapped an anvil to each of them,” he recalls. “My brain commanded them to move, but they were not responding.”

But when he reached the tops of hills, he felt exhilarated. His mind and body battled, but he finished the race – as he would many others.

Fields chose medical oncologist Thomas Butler, M.D., and the Mitchell Cancer Institute for his chemotherapy treatments. He began a routine of three days of chemo every 21 days for a total of six treatments. Fields found himself very sick for four days following treatment, but better quickly thereafter.

Two weekends after each of the six treatments, Fields ran a marathon in a different state. He found that running kept his mind off of treatment.

“I strongly supported his running,” Butler said of his patient. “It allowed him to endure the things he’s gone through in his life. He’s living his life to the fullest.”



The doctor said that he would occasionally receive texts from Fields giving him an update from a race. “I would live vicariously through his running,” he said.

As he logged more races, Fields continued to visualize the road back to the Boston Marathon.

Fields wouldn’t return to Boston until after he had completed his goal of racing in the 50 states. In 2015, he entered the marathon through one of the Boston charities, the ALLY Foundation. The next time occurred three years later, when he entered through the Dana Farber Cancer Institute.

Returning to Boston brought back the exhilaration of running past hundreds of thousands of spectators in the final two miles of the 1996 Boston Marathon on the way to the finish line. “It’s amazing,” he recalled. “You want to kiss the ground.”

In his office at the USA College of Medicine, Fields displays colorful ribbons collected from the races he finished. Second-year medical students drop by to request a copy of the new book and an autograph.

Recently, “The Long Road Back to Boston” was even accepted for inclusion in the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s suggested reading section of its website.

“Leukemia has been a blessing that I thank God for every day,” he said. “Because of that diagnosis, I have seen every state and hiked in every major national park in the U.S. and Canada.”

Despite heart damage from chemotherapy, Fields continues to run marathons. He has completed the Canadian Provinces



Left: Fields takes a daily run at a campus in Mobile. Top: Fields displays an assortment of medals at his office at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. Above: He competes in a marathon in Banff in the Canadian province of Alberta in 2014.

and is only four races shy of completing the states a second time. He encourages his students to never give up trying to get where they want to be in life as long as they enjoy the journey.

“I think back on what I’ve seen and been able to do,” he said. “You find that if you really want to, you can reach a lot deeper than you ever thought possible.”

*“The Long Road Back to Boston” is available for purchase on Amazon.com (\$6.99 for Kindle and \$15.65 for paperback).*



# An amazing treasure for Mobile

Local family forever grateful for the lifesaving care their daughter received at Children's & Women's Hospital

BY CASANDRA ANDREWS

Sarah and Robert Otts vividly remember arriving at Children's & Women's Hospital on a warm September day three years ago with their 5-year-old daughter. They were searching for answers.

For more than two weeks, their daughter, Lelia, had been suffering from a mystery illness that puzzled her pediatrician and other specialists. She began clutching her right arm to her side, and complaining of intense pain. Bloodwork and X-rays showed nothing out of the ordinary. An aspiration of the area showed fluid, but no sign of infection.

A few weeks earlier, the little girl had contracted a mild case of salmonella. The illness ran its course, and the spirited child began to bounce back. Then, on her fifth birthday, she didn't get excited about doughnuts with sprinkles for breakfast.

"Lelia was practically emotionless with no appetite," her mom said, recalling the day. "She begged to be at school that day to be with her friends on her birthday, but I spent a tearful morning feeling guilt and despair knowing that there was still something going on that we could not label."

A few days later, Otts took her daughter to see an orthopaedist for a second time. Her arm was still glued to her side, but otherwise, she was extremely active. That night, Otts said, Lelia grew warmer and developed a fever. The next day, she visited the pediatrician for more bloodwork.

"This time, Lelia was not bouncing off the walls," Otts said. "She slept while I explained I was becoming seriously worried." The doctor agreed and sent her home to rest while the family waited for the results.

Soon after, her phone rang. The test results showed a severe infection. The pediatrician told her to pack their bags and go straight to Children's & Women's Hospital.

"That afternoon, Lelia was admitted, giving us all relief and confidence that we were not only going to get some answers, but we were going to get our vibrant girl healthy again."

To help determine the exact cause of the infection, Lelia underwent a sedated MRI the next morning. "The staff in radiology was so wonderful and helpful," Otts recalled.

Eventually, the Otts family found

out their daughter had a severe bone infection known as osteomyelitis. It had settled in the bone of Lelia's right elbow following the salmonella. The infection can be fatal if left untreated. Surgery was scheduled for the next morning.

"Her arm was septic," Otts said. "I didn't think about it at the time, but she could have lost her arm. They put in a PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) line and started IV (intravenous) antibiotics and told me we would be there for eight weeks."

## A powerful impression

Otts said she is eager to share her daughter's hospital experience because of the profound impact it has had on her life.

"Those days made a powerful impression on my heart, and I want everyone to know what an amazing treasure we have in our own backyard and why people leave Children's and Women's singing its praises."

Otts said what struck her the most

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Lelia Otts, who was hospitalized for 11 days with osteomyelitis, plays in her backyard on a recent afternoon.



were all of the details, big and small, that go into supporting a young person's spirit during a hospital stay.

As they walked to her daughter's room on the day they arrived, Otts said she took in the atmosphere of the hospital.

"There were seriously sick babies and children taking my breath away in all of these rooms, reminding me how much worse this could be," she said. "But in the halls and the lobby there were smiling faces greeting my daughter and playfully getting to know her."

The welcoming tone is by design. The Mapp Family and Child Life Program at Children's & Women's Hospital aims to normalize the hospital experience for children. The program uses child life specialists, recreational therapists and teachers who specialize in education, preparation and support activities. These specialists strive to minimize stress and help children and families cope with their healthcare experience. Sometimes, it means parties to attend, movies to watch and puppies to snuggle. It can also mean wagon rides across campus and through a whimsical park.

On their first day, someone pulled a red wagon into Lelia's room. Rides around the hospital with an IV pole in tow became a staple of their hospital routine. "She would load up with lovies and blankets, and we would pull her around the hospital, to the treehouse to rent a movie, or to watch the fish tank, or go outside to see the sculptures and get fresh air."



Top: Lelia Otts and her younger brother, Sonny, play with a wagon in the courtyard during her hospital stay. Top left, Lelia holds her younger sister, Josephine, in her arms on a recent afternoon. At left, Lelia gets creative with markers before surgery to remove infection from her arm.

After a few days, a second surgery was required to re-clean the area where infection had set in. While they were told they may have to spend two months in the hospital, Lelia was able to go home after 11 days. She continued IV antibiotics for several more weeks at home.

During Lelia's care, Benjamin Estrada, M.D., a pediatric infectious disease specialist and professor and vice chair of pediatrics at University of South Alabama College of Medicine, explained to the Otts family how uncommon the condition was for children.

“

**After only a few days, it became clear to me that the people who make this whole thing happen are just as dedicated to maintaining a child's whimsical spirit as they are their health. And, with a child as spirited as our Lelia, that meant the world to me.**

– Sarah Otts

”

USA Health physicians who work at Children's & Women's Hospital hold the distinction of being part of the only academic medical center in the region. The highly trained specialists have the unique ability to create new knowledge, translate that into new medical care and then educate the next generation of care providers on this advanced medical practice.

Patients benefit from a team approach because as medical educators, USA Health physicians and other advanced providers stay up-to-date on treatment options and therapies that translate into better care.

After just a few days back at home, Lelia's mom said her daughter began to miss certain things about the hospital and looked forward to the weekly checkups.

“Childhood is something that lasts only a few years, but collects a magnitude of permanent impressions, memories and influences,” Otts said. “This hospital understands that significance and caters to their little wondrous souls that still need adventure and excitement when they are confined to a hospital bed.”



# Donating art with heart

Sarah Otts, a talented local artist, said she walked away from the experience of her daughter's mystery illness and hospitalization with an adjusted heart.

“Because my way of creating art has a lot to do with the contents of my heart, my paintings have been a reflection of the way the time surrounding her illness affected me,” she said. “Almost everything I created in the months following Lelia's stay incorporates a little bit of the sentiment I felt from that circumstance and the time we spent here.”

Inspired and grateful, Otts painted several pieces of art to donate to the hospital. The artwork now hangs prominently where visitors, patients and staff can enjoy the peace and beauty it offers.

“Children's & Women's is truly a compassionate community aiming to give joy and health back to patients and their families,” she said. “I wanted to thank them, not only for all that they were for us, but for honoring my family and allowing me to use my love of art to bring this whole experience full circle.”

# Surgery gives USA Health employee renewed passion for life

BY LINDSAY MOTT



Jeremy Adcock never thought that he would be described as a runner. But, at 44 years old, a decision made to improve his health has changed his life and turned him into just that. He's completing 5K races locally in the top of the field, setting personal records and is now training for a half marathon.

"With my health history and my family's health history, just *finishing* is winning," said Adcock, quality data/credentialing specialist for the quality management department at University Hospital. "I never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would be into running. I went from being a couch potato to running in 5Ks."

What changed for Adcock? In July 2018, he decided to make a decision for his health and had a vertical sleeve gastrectomy performed by William Richards, M.D., professor of surgery at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and chair of surgery at USA Health. Adcock said he saw a reversal in symptoms almost immediately.

All his life, he had experienced weight issues, trying many diets along the way. He was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes and began taking medication with the dose increasing steadily over the years. In addition, he was taking three different medicines to manage his blood pressure. Even the week before his surgery, he said his A1c was elevated to 7.5, and it took all his energy just to move around his house. The normal range for A1c is between 4 and 5.6, and normal blood glucose levels are under 100.

Now, all of that has changed. He's lost 114 pounds, but beyond that, his numbers that were trending in a negative direction toward poor health have been completely reversed. Besides the pounds lost, Adcock said his blood glucose is now under 110 and his last A1c was 4.9 without having to take any medication.

Since the surgery, he began going to the gym three times a week with a personal trainer to keep up his muscle tone. He said he now wears a size large shirt – instead of big and tall.

"I am eternally indebted to Dr. Richards for adding quality and, hopefully, many years to my life," Adcock said. "If I hadn't had the surgery, I truly feel I was going down a path for an early end to my life."

He completed his first 5K in Baldwin County in April, finishing third in his age group, and has continued to run and break his personal records. He now is training for a half marathon in Pensacola as well as the Pensacola Double Bridge Run in February 2020. Adcock said he is now addicted to running and has joined the Run Mobile running club. His next big fitness goal after the races in Pensacola is to compete in a triathlon.

Adcock was hesitant about the surgery

“

**I never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would be into running. I went from being a couch potato to running in 5Ks.**

– Jeremy Adcock

”

at first, but some research into the health benefits and what to expect, as well as understanding the small risk of side effects, helped calm his fears about the procedure.

"My hospital experience couldn't have gone any better," he said. "My surgery was on Wednesday, and I could have gone back to work the next day. That's how great I felt. There was no pain."

He did go home the next day, and after the surgery, Adcock said the weight started melting off, and he would feel full from small amounts of water and food.

Beyond his improved health and starting an exercise routine, his surgery has impacted another important area of his life: playing the organ. He is currently the organist/choirmaster at Trinity Episcopal Church. His undergraduate degree is in organ performance, but he said that playing the organ was getting increasingly harder for him before the surgery.

"It wasn't easy to move on the bench and accurately play passages on the pedals," he said. "I got winded very easily. Post-surgery the organ console is a completely different animal. I don't have to work as hard to make the music now. There is less of me to get in the way!"

Adcock said that his long-term goals are to continue keeping up with his new healthy lifestyle and to keep the weight off and be

able to stay off diabetic medications.

"Jeremy has had excellent results," Richards said. "I've changed his biology to enable him to be successful, and he's been able to utilize what the sleeve has given him. He's been good at doing the right things."

A vertical sleeve gastrectomy is a surgery done to help with weight loss. During the surgery, the surgeon removes a large portion of the patient's stomach. The smaller stomach size limits the amount of food that the person can now eat while also lowering the amount of the appetite hormone ghrelin that tells the brain the body is hungry. This causes patients to not feel as hungry as they did prior to surgery. Patients also begin to feel fuller on smaller amounts of food, which allows them to have better portion control when eating. This combination of factors allows patients to lose weight and be successful long-term.

"People may not understand the impact that a sleeve gastrectomy procedure can have on their life," Richards said. "The benefits go beyond weight loss and can impact many areas of a patient's health, as we have seen in Jeremy's case. He has done exceedingly well since the surgery and has taken his newfound health to a high level of activity."

Richards has been performing these types of laparoscopic surgeries for about 20 years and said the procedure is a technically challenging one. There are approximately 10 randomized clinical trials showing that the vertical sleeve gastrectomy – along with laparoscopic gastric bypass surgery – is a more effective technique than medical therapy for treating Type 2 diabetes. After both one and five years, patients participating in the trials showed more control of their diabetes with less medications and less hypertension.

"There's now a surgical treatment for Type 2 diabetes – two excellent ones in fact. Level one evidence shows that, for well-selected patients that are obese with Type 2 diabetes, you will be better off at one to five years after one of them," Richards said.

Jeremy Adcock is the organist and choirmaster at Trinity Episcopal Church. Since his surgery, he said, playing the organ, and exercising regularly, are much easier to accomplish.



# Medical student hangs up her gloves for scrubs

BY CARLIE SHIVELY

“

## I want to use my experiences to empower others. I would like to leave this world and my field better than I found it.

- Paige Farley

”

**A** force to be reckoned with inside the ring and the classroom, Paige Farley credits her mental toughness to a full-contact combat sport. “Mixed martial arts prepared me for medical school by instilling a level of discipline in me that’s required to succeed,” she said.

Farley, a second-year student at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, faced many hardships during her childhood. In search of an outlet, she gave MMA a try. It became one of the most crucial decisions of her life. “I found the control I had so desperately sought,” she said. “I gained self-esteem and confidence, which gave me the ability to focus on helping others instead of myself.”

Now, a decade later, she is a medical student, a self-defense teacher and a coach. Farley also launched her own nonprofit organization in Birmingham, teaching self-defense skills to women from rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters and the community.

Mixed martial arts pushed her to limits she had never experienced. “You never really know what’s inside of you until you have to confront it,” Farley said. “I figured out that I’m capable of pushing through just about anything and facing my own fears.”

In 2017, Farley began medical school at the USA College of Medicine, a dream she had wanted to pursue since the age of 13. Soon after, she realized she had to choose between continuing to compete and completing medical school.

Ultimately, medical school won. “I think the idea of having a skill that was absolutely necessary appealed to me. I always had a knack for understanding scientific principles,” she said. “MMA requires weight cutting, which is not conducive with taking exams. The possibility of having black eyes and being in the gym two to four hours a day ended up not being manageable with the workload of medical school.”

Her decision was based on which career would be the best use of her time and talents.

Farley said MMA taught her the importance of consistency and a strong work ethic: “You have to be able to push through when things get hard and be able to set your life up in a way that makes success more likely.”

Six years of research in emergency medicine and trauma surgery before medical school led Farley to focus on the path to becoming a trauma surgeon. “I fell in love with the lifestyle of trauma, the mission statement and the personality types that gravitate toward that specialty,” she said. “I can’t think of a more rewarding way to spend my life.”

Farley said MMA will forever be a part of who she is: “I want to use my experiences to empower others,” she said. “I would like to leave this world and my field better than I found it.”

Medical student Paige Farley demonstrates self-defense moves with Mobile Police Officer Mike Barnett.



# Program provides families a bridge to peace

BY LINDSAY LYLE





When Lindsey Brabner was 22 weeks pregnant, she and her husband, Reynolds, received the news no expecting parents want to hear.

Their baby, Hartley, had a heart defect, cystic hygromas on the back of her neck, and cysts on her brain. A sample of Brabner's amniotic fluid, called an amniocentesis, confirmed that these three anomalies added up to a genetic disorder. The diagnosis was Trisomy 18, a chromosomal abnormality that often results in stillbirth or death within the infant's first year.

Brabner's introduction to the Bridge Program started with that grim revelation but turned out to be "a light on a very dark path."

While working as a nurse in the Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), Rene Sprague, MSN, recognized that patients like Brabner needed special support. In 2017, Sprague, along with Brian Brocato, D.O., a maternal-fetal medicine physician, established the Bridge Program at Children's & Women's Hospital.

"It started with me following anomaly babies through every appointment. Then I started getting consults on every high-risk pregnancy, and I realized these patients needed a support system in place before and after delivery," said Sprague, who serves as the Bridge Program coordinator.

The program supports pregnant patients struggling with fetal anomalies, which are conditions that impact a fetus and may be fatal or cause ongoing health issues after birth. These conditions include fetal heart defects, skeletal dysplasia, chromosomal abnormalities, and brain/neural tube defects. The goal of the Bridge Program is to ensure that families are fully educated on their infant's diagnosis and the associated risks, what a NICU stay entails, and, if necessary, end-of-life plans.

"We want them to be able to make educated decisions regarding their children's care and to be able to advocate for their children when they leave here," Sprague said.

Brabner's care team included Brocato, her regular obstetrician-gynecologist, and Bridge nurses Sprague and Meredith Isom, RN, who worked closely with her throughout her pregnancy. Because baby Hartley had a heart defect, Brabner also saw Lynn Batten, M.D., a pediatric cardiologist with USA Health.

In the Bridge Program, the nurses attend each high-risk appointment with the mother, arrange counseling, connect patients and families to community support resources, and help create a plan for delivery and infant aftercare. They attend the patient's delivery and remain a source of support throughout the hospital stay and beyond.

Due to the uncertainty of Hartley's viability outside the womb, Brabner said they made no preparations at home. "We didn't set up a nursery, because we didn't know what was going to happen," she said.

Lindsey and Reynolds Brabner soothe their daughter Hartley in the Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Children's & Women's Hospital.



“From the moment Lindsey and Reynolds found out that Hartley would be born with Trisomy 18, they started making impossibly hard decisions,” Sprague said. “They unselfishly chose to let Hartley truly live without worry and without pain. They did all of this while living in fear of losing her every minute of every day.”

Brabner carried Hartley for 38.5 weeks before being induced. “It’s very hard to carry Trisomy babies to term,” Brabner said. “They struggle in the womb, and a lot of them pass away before birth. But, I wanted to try to go as long as I could with her, because I wanted her to have as much of a chance as possible.”

On the day of Hartley’s birth, the Brabners were surrounded by family. Their two older children, Harper and Holden,

awaited the arrival of their baby sister. The family’s priest prepared to baptize Hartley in the delivery room.

“Hartley Louise was born without a sound on Dec. 30, 2017,” Sprague remembered. “After several seconds, many silent prayers and a little medical support from me, she took her first tiny breath; and her momma and daddy took a big breath with her.”

Brabner recalled that moment of joy. “It was the best moment ever, just hearing her cry,” she said. “My husband and I cried. Everybody in the room cried.

“We didn’t know how long we would have her. We were just so excited to have her those hours.”

After Brabner was discharged from the hospital, the family moved into the NICU,

where Hartley spent the next 10 days. Hartley was tiny and struggled to eat. Her body temperature was constantly low, and it was difficult to keep her warm. But, before they could leave the hospital, the nurses made certain the Brabners knew how to care for Hartley at home.

“We had unbelievable nurses – making sure we understood everything,” Brabner said. “We had to learn how to put her

Top left: Baby Hartley was born with Trisomy 18, a chromosomal abnormality. Bottom left: The Brabner family celebrates Hartley’s first birthday. Top middle and right: Kendra Coppoletta, RN, and Mary Robinson, RN, hold Hartley in the NICU. Middle: Harper Brabner holds her sister, Hartley, during the Christmas holiday. Bottom: The Brabner family presents a check to the NICU in honor of their daughter.

nasogastric (NG) tube in, make sure it was placed correctly, how to gradually increase her feedings. We had to check her breathing – just learn how to take care of a special-needs baby.”

The nurses set up hospice to help care for Hartley after she was discharged from the hospital. They visited regularly and became the Brabners’ close friends.

Sprague continued to accompany the Brabners to appointments and support meetings. When Hartley was 9 months old, Sprague traveled to Birmingham with the family for the baby’s heart surgery. But her heart levels were too severe to follow through with the operation. When they came home, Hartley started receiving full-time oxygen.

The family celebrated Hartley’s first Christmas and first birthday in December 2018. In the new year, her heart was starting to fail, and she was having trouble breathing. As she grew older, she started to pull the NG tube out of her nose, which made feeding her difficult.

When she was 13 months old, she underwent surgery to have a gastrostomy tube (G-tube) inserted in her stomach, so she could get the nutrition and medicine she needed. Hartley made it through surgery, but she passed away from complications that evening – on Feb. 5, 2019.

The Brabners are grateful to the care team at Children’s & Women’s Hospital for being with them through every step of the journey and for loving Hartley as their own.

“This amazing and dedicated group of physicians and nurses is the reason we were able to enjoy 402 miraculous days with our sweet baby,” Reynolds Brabner said. “Through education and emotional support they were able to provide us with the tools we needed to give our sweet Hartley a chance to change the world. And that she did.”

Sprague said she always will cherish Hartley’s “sassy personality and sweet spirit.”

“In my 20-year career, my greatest honor has been being present when that sweet angel was born and being able to hold her when she took her last breath,” she said. “The fact that Reynolds and Lindsey trusted me in those most precious of moments is something I will carry with me forever.”

Three days before Hartley’s G-tube surgery, Lindsey found out she was pregnant. “It’s almost like Hartley knew what was going to happen,” she said.

Brabner gave birth to a healthy baby girl on Oct. 1, 2019.

“Her name is Hollis Rene,” Brabner said. “We named her after Rene.”



## Bridge suite helps families feel at home

The Bridge Program recently received a \$60,000 donation from Pilot Catastrophe Services employees to help complete the construction of a suite on the high-risk obstetrics floor of Children’s & Women’s Hospital. The suite, which is larger than regular patient rooms, officially opened Oct. 30 with a dedication ceremony.

“This suite will be used by families experiencing a lethal anomaly birth and allow them to spend as much time as possible with their baby in a homelike environment,” said Rene Sprague, MSN, Bridge Program coordinator. “The Pilot Catastrophe employee donation will be used directly to help finish building this suite.”

The donation for the Bridge family suite came from Adjusters Give Back, a nonprofit organization that is funded solely by Pilot employee donations. Children’s & Women’s Hospital holds special significance for the Pilot family, who experienced loss firsthand earlier this year. Nikki Pilot Carlisle, granddaughter of the company’s founders, was diagnosed with breast cancer while pregnant with her third child and passed away in February shortly after the baby’s birth.

“Pilot was first introduced to the Bridge Program in 2017 by an employee who nominated Bridge as a recipient for our annual giving campaign,” said Curtis Pilot, president of Pilot Catastrophe Services and Carlisle’s father. “Since then, we have seen firsthand the value of this program, first with our employees and their families, most recently with our daughter and granddaughter. It is important to our family and our employees to support local programs like the Bridge so it can continue to thrive and serve families during times of need.”

Maury Carlisle, Nikki’s husband, said, “What makes this such a beautiful initiative is that it hears the cry of a family asking for some step towards normalcy or greater proximity in the midst of life-threatening adversity.

“I am so thankful that Pilot, being a family company, has chosen to perpetuate Nikki’s legacy as a mother by partnering with Rene’s vision for the Bridge Program,” Carlisle added. “And it is the natural thing for us to do because this project embodies Nikki’s motherly heart, but also because we want to communicate our gratitude to people like Rene Sprague and all of those at USA who went beyond normal protocols to fight for Nikki’s life and for her connection with her children.”

Bridge Program coordinator Rene Sprague, MSN, gives Maury Carlisle and his children a tour of the new Bridge suite at the dedication ceremony. The suite provides a home-like environment for families experiencing a fatal anomaly birth.

Reynolds and Lindsey Brabner established the Hartley Brabner Memorial Fundraiser for the Bridge Program. The campaign raised nearly \$33,000 for the Bridge Program in March 2019. The Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo raised an additional \$5,000 in Hartley’s honor for the program.

To donate to the Bridge Program, contact the Children’s & Women’s Hospital Development Office at [cwhdevelop@southalabama.edu](mailto:cwhdevelop@southalabama.edu) or call (251) 415-1636.

# A Healthy Dose of Academic Medicine

Med School Café is a free community lecture series presented by USA Health. Each month, faculty from the USA College of Medicine offer insight into specific medical conditions.

## What Is Urogynecology?

Many women are unaware of what a urogynecologist does or when they should see one. Charles R. Hanes II, M.D., a urogynecologist with USA Health, enlightened the audience at the August Med School Café on his subspecialty of urogynecology, which is dedicated to the diagnosis and treatment of women with pelvic floor disorders.

The pelvic floor is the group of muscles and ligaments that support the organs in the pelvis, including the bladder, rectum and uterus. Pelvic floor disorders occur when these muscles and ligaments weaken as the result of childbirth, hysterectomy, obesity, trauma to the pelvic region, or activities resulting in chronic increased abdominal pressure.

The most common problems are urinary incontinence, constipation, discomfort during intercourse, pelvic pain, and pelvic organ prolapse. Prolapse is a condition in which the uterus, bladder and bowel may protrude into the vaginal canal.

Urogynecologists are experienced in treating pelvic floor disorders, both surgically and nonsurgically. For example, urinary stress incontinence may be treated with the placement of a pessary or a mid-urethral sling. Pelvic organ prolapse may be corrected surgically through sacrospinous ligament suspension, which lifts the top of the vagina and holds it in place, or through a sacral colpopexy, which places a synthetic mesh bridge from the ligament in front of the sacrum to the top of the vagina.



## Men's Health Issues: Hypogonadism, Testosterone and Prostate Cancer

Getting screened for prostate cancer is an important part of men's health. Christopher Keel, D.O., a urologist with University Urology, discussed prostate cancer and other men's health issues at the October Med School Café.

Testosterone is the most important circulating hormone in males. Besides being essential for the development of male characteristics and sexual organs, it also has effects on most of the major organs, such as the brain, muscles, kidney, liver, bone, bone marrow and skin.

Hypogonadism is a reduction in testosterone production. The incidence of hypogonadism in men increases with age. Males with symptomatic hypogonadism may be candidates for testosterone replacement therapy, although the Food and Drug Administration now recommends against treatment of age-associated hypogonadism.

Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer in men behind skin cancer, and African American men are at higher risk. Most men do not experience any symptoms until the disease is advanced, which is why it is important to get screened for early detection.

Keel recommends men start getting tested at age 55, or between ages 40 and 50 if they are high risk. Screening for prostate cancer is twofold: a simple blood test for the level of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) in the blood and a digital rectal exam.

Treatment depends on a number of factors, such as the PSA level, the stage and aggressiveness of the cancer, and the age and general health of the patient. Treatment options include active surveillance, surgery, radiation therapy, hormone therapy and chemotherapy.

Keel specializes in minimally invasive and robotic surgery to treat prostate cancer.

## Gene Therapy: The Promise of a Cure for Sickle Cell Disease

In September, a standing-room-only crowd listened intently to new details about breakthroughs in gene therapy regarding a debilitating and deadly disease that has stumped researchers for decades. Felicia Wilson, M.D., professor of pediatrics at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a pediatric hematologist/oncologist with USA Health, gave a talk on promising cures for sickle cell disease using gene therapy.

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a group of inherited red blood cell disorders. Healthy red blood cells are round, and they move through small blood vessels to carry oxygen to all parts of the body. In someone with SCD, the red blood cells become hard and sticky and look like a C-shaped farm tool called a sickle. Wilson discussed a new approach to helping sickle cell patients – a gene therapy that appears to offer the same benefits as a bone marrow transplant, without the risk of rejection.

Researchers have been working on two strategies to treat sickle cell disease with gene therapy. Both initiatives involve genetically altering a patient's own stem cells, which are cells in the bone marrow that divide and specialize to produce different types of blood cells.

One strategy is to remove some of a patient's hematopoietic stem cells, replace the mutated gene in these cells with a healthy copy of the gene, then transplant those cells back into the patient. The other idea is to genetically alter another gene in a patient's hematopoietic stem cells so they boost production of fetal hemoglobin — a form of hemoglobin produced by babies from about seven months before birth to about six months after birth.



## Uterine Artery Embolization to Treat Fibroids

Women who suffer from uterine fibroids, which are noncancerous growths in the uterus, but want to avoid surgery, may be candidates for a less invasive procedure.

Osama Abdul-Rahim, M.D., assistant professor of radiology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and an interventional radiologist with USA Health, presented the July Med School Café lecture on Uterine Artery Embolization: A Treatment Option for Symptomatic Fibroids.

Uterine artery embolization is a minimally invasive treatment for uterine fibroids. In uterine artery embolization, a physician uses a thin tube to inject small particles into the uterine arteries, which supply blood to fibroids and the uterus. The goal is to block the fibroid blood vessels, starving the fibroids and causing them to die.

Uterine fibroids can cause severe symptoms in some women, including heavy menstrual bleeding, pelvic pain and abdominal swelling. Uterine artery embolization typically destroys fibroid tissue and eases the symptoms. It also provides an alternative to surgery to remove fibroids.

Uterine artery embolization usually is performed by an interventional radiologist or a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology who has training in uterine artery embolization.

Those who may be candidates for uterine artery embolization are women who are premenopausal and have severe pain or heavy bleeding from uterine fibroids; those who want to avoid surgery, or for whom surgery may be too risky; and those who want to keep their uterus.

## Save the Date for Upcoming Med School Café Lectures

### 01.10.20

Brad Clay, M.D.

Sports Medicine Orthopaedist  
Assistant Professor of  
Orthopaedic Surgery

“Sports injuries, treatment  
and prevention tips”

Strada Patient Care Center  
First floor conference room

11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

### 02.21.20

B. Frederick Bodie, M.D.

Dermatologist  
USA Health Dermatology

USA Faculty Club

11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

### 03.27.20

Richard Menger, M.D.

Chief of Complex Spine Surgery  
Assistant Professor of Neurology

Strada Patient Care Center  
First floor conference room

11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

RSVP:  
kepartridge@  
health.southalabama.edu  
251-460-7770

# Six local teens complete USA Health Project Inspire mentorship program



Members of the Project Inspire mentorship program look on as surgery residents Charles Cox, M.D., (far left) and Ashley Williams, M.D., (center) round with Christopher Kinnard, M.D., assistant professor of surgery. Project Inspire is a three-week, hospital-based injury prevention program for local teens previously involved in the Mobile County Juvenile Court system.

In July, University Hospital welcomed six teenagers from the local community who were previously involved in the Mobile County Juvenile Court system to participate in Project Inspire, a mentorship program designed to build relationships with these teens and impact their lives for the better. In the few months since graduating, one obtained a job, one enrolled in a nontraditional high school after not being in school, and four have stayed in school.

Project Inspire, a three-week, hospital-based injury prevention program, uses exposure and mentorship to inspire participants to become the best version of themselves. It gives the participants a chance to explore the Level I Trauma Center at University Hospital while also interacting with mentors – both healthcare and community professionals. Each day included four hours of shadowing and one hour with a featured speaker. This year's participants were able to shadow staff in

both clinical and administrative areas of the hospital.

They also participated daily in career planning activities such as ACT/GED preparation, résumé development, mock interviews, training in Basic Life Support and Stop the Bleed, as well as two community service projects. The career-planning sessions were designed to give participants the chance to formulate a vision for their future careers and develop an action plan.

Project Inspire was an idea that Jon Simmons, M.D., trauma medical director and chief of trauma and acute care surgery at USA Health, had after previously witnessing a “scared straight” type of program. Ashley Williams, M.D., chief surgery resident physician at USA Health and co-founder of Project Inspire, participated in a similar program before coming to USA, and the two decided to collaborate.

“Previously, I have seen youth violence prevention programs attempt to reduce

recidivism by showing the tragedy and disability that accompany gun violence, but I thought these types of programs were missing a critical element, one that inspired the participants to change their lifestyle,” Simmons said. “After some initial brainstorming with Williams, she was able to put together a program that contained elements providing inspiration, confidence, and strong mentorship.”

Project Inspire began in the summer of 2018 with four participants completing the program. In the past year, none of the 2018 graduates have been negatively involved with law enforcement. One participant stayed enrolled in high school while one graduated high school, and two others received their GEDs while working. One participant in the same class was struggling with drug addiction but is now drug-free.

“Traumatic injury is the leading cause of death for all people aged 1 to 44,” Williams said. “Intentional or violent injury is a national and a local public health crisis. In my opinion, the best way to address this issue is through prevention. Project Inspire aims to reduce violence by offering exposure and mentorship to teenagers in our very own community.”

Project Inspire works in collaboration with the Mobile County Juvenile Court system, which is specifically designed to address criminal activity among young people. Although successful in its own right, the addition of Project Inspire has radically improved the outcomes for the children in both initiatives. The participants are identified by the court system as candidates who stand to get a lot out of the program.

“You’ve taken them out of a dangerous situation and given them the building blocks to move forward with their lives in a positive way,” said Edmond G. Naman, Mobile County Circuit Court judge and head of Mobile County Juvenile Court. “I know that Williams and the staff at University Hospital have had a big impact on doing just that, along with what we do with our probation staff.”

# USA Health partners with Crichton community

University Hospital has a close connection to the Crichton community that extends beyond providing care for people who live near the hospital. During the past two decades, University Hospital has built relationships with neighborhood groups, schools and local churches in ways that reflect a true partnership.

According to Warren Greene, assistant administrator at USA Health, community engagement is an essential element of corporate stewardship. “How we engage with people is equally important,” he said. “We are a large organization. I see our role as being a catalyst in the community rather than dominating projects and activities.”

Greene points to one highly visible project – the Mobile Street beautification effort – as an example of how University Hospital approaches its community engagement efforts.

“When we became interested in improving the landscaping along Mobile Street, rather than pushing forward alone, we took

the time to partner with community leaders, local representatives and community action groups like the Crichton Community Action Group in planning and rolling out the project,” he said. “It’s our gateway to the hospital and a travel corridor for our employees and patients, but we also understand and appreciate that for citizens in the neighborhood, it’s where they live.”

The benefits of community engagement activities stretch beyond specific projects. “We have built strong relationships, trust and advocates for our health system,” Greene said. “In addition, we have created a sense of community pride and connection for our employees, who continue to work with local organizations to improve the area where we work and they live.”

For several years, USA Health has partnered with volunteers from the University of South Alabama, the city of Mobile, Crichton Community Action Group and others to transform Mobile Street.



# Student groups provide care to Latino immigrant population

The University of South Alabama College of Medicine’s Medical Spanish Interest Group and the USA Student-Run Free Clinic (SRFC) have partnered with the community organization BELONG, (a nonprofit organization that helps immigrants adjust to life in America) to provide free health screenings to a Latino immigrant group in Semmes, Ala.

Under the supervision of preceptors Eduardo Calderon, M.D., associate professor of internal medicine, and Amanda Robinson, M.D., a local family medicine physician and USA College of Medicine alumna, the team of first- and second-year medical students provides exceptional care to this disadvantaged population.

“The Latino population in Mobile faces unique challenges that must be met with unique solutions,” said Elizabeth Hernandez, a second-year medical student and president of the Medical Spanish Interest Group. “While the Student-Run Free Clinic already provides free healthcare on Friday afternoons at the Salvation Army, this population in particular finds it difficult to take off of work, to find transportation to this location, and most importantly to communicate with the staff there. An ambulant clinic with native Spanish-speaking staff was the perfect solution.”

According to Hernandez, more than 15 adults and children were seen at a recent clinic that day, some of whom presented



USA College of Medicine first- and second-year students provided free health screenings to a Latino immigrant group in Semmes, Ala.

with health issues that may have otherwise gone undetected and caused greater issues later.

“The Medical Spanish Interest Group and the SRFC look forward to a continued partnership with BELONG and hope to reach many more Latinos of the Mobile area,” Hernandez said.

## Medical student secures more than 2,000 pairs of socks to help vulnerable population

Corey Phillis, a student at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, applied to the Bombas socks giving program in an effort to make sure patients who are cared for at the USA Student-Run Free Clinic (SRFC) could leave their visit on solid footing with a new pair of socks. As a result of her effort, Bombas donated 2,250 pairs of socks, valued at approximately \$25,000, to the clinic.

Alison Rudd, director of the USA SRFC, explained the significance of Bombas' donation. "Many of our patients are homeless, and it can be a challenge for them to maintain proper foot care," Rudd said. "Our patients may walk several miles or more each day. High-quality socks are a highly successful way to prevent health conditions – from bacterial infections and frostbite to blisters and diabetic complications."

USA's SRFC is located at the Salvation Army of Coastal Alabama in Mobile. Every Friday afternoon, students in USA's health professions – under the supervision of medical professionals – visit with patients at no charge.

"We work to cover the patients' immediate medical needs in a comprehensive way through the cooperation of all of the health programs at South," Phillis said. "Student volunteers are training in different disciplines, and they bring their backgrounds from different medical specialties into the clinical care setting. The collaboration gives the students a great chance to work as a team as they



Medical student Corey Phillis gives a pair of Bombas socks to Byron Champion at the USA Student-Run Free Clinic.

grow as healthcare providers in an authentic clinical setting. It also provides the patient with access to just about every facet of their care in one location at no cost."

## Monthly car seat safety checks held at Children's & Women's Hospital

One meaningful way USA Health is transforming healthcare on the Gulf Coast is by providing free inspection of children's car seats once a month at Children's & Women's Hospital in Midtown Mobile.

National statistics show that up to 90% of all children's car seats are installed incorrectly. During a local car seat check in September, USA Health technicians recorded only two properly installed car seats of more than 100 seats inspected.

As the region's leader in births, the hospital employs 15 staff members who are nationally certified child passenger safety technicians.

Research shows that child seats installed correctly can reduce the risk of fatal injury of infants and children. During USA Health car seat inspections, all improperly installed car seats are removed and reinstalled correctly. Expiration dates also are checked.



A car seat is reinstalled during a community safety inspection by Alex Williams, RN, certified car seat safety tech.

# USA Health residents focus on giving back



John Anaya, M.D., a second-year internal medicine resident, helps Olivia Hendrix bag food items at Feeding the Gulf Coast.

This year, the University of South Alabama internal medicine residency program raised more than \$6,500 for Feeding the Gulf Coast's Backpack Program, which benefits students at Holloway Elementary School.

As a partner in education with University Hospital, the resident-led program helps meet the needs of children with food insecurities by providing them with nutritious and easy-to-prepare food to take home from school on the weekends.

Keniel Pierre M.D., chief resident in internal medicine at USA Health, has led the service project for the past two years. The original goal was to collect enough money to sponsor one or two children for the school year. Instead, they have been able to sponsor 43 children and distribute 550 bags of food.

"Everyone from the medical students, interns, residents, attending physicians, and administrators donated," Pierre said. "Some even gave twice!"

# Back-to-school block party raises vaccination awareness



This past August, more than 450 people took part in a back-to-school block party at City Drugs of Grove Hill, a town of less than 1,500 in Clarke County, Alabama. Amid the face painting, school supply raffle, shaved ice and inflatables, the event sought to fill a real need in the county – to get more children and youth vaccinated against the human papillomavirus (HPV) and other diseases.

Two weeks later, researchers found that 84 vaccinations, including 28 against HPV, were administered as a result of the party.

"The event was a great opportunity to do something special and fun for the community while offering extremely important vaccines and education," said Casey L. Daniel, Ph.D., a cancer researcher and assistant professor of family medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine.

Daniel organized the event as part of the kickoff to a pilot study to increase rates of HPV vaccinations. Her team partnered with a local community pharmacy, City Drugs, which joined Vaccines for Children, a federally funded program that provides vaccines at no cost for children whose families are unable to pay. Almost 70% of children in Clarke County are Medicaid-eligible.

"Clarke County has the lowest HPV vaccination rate in the state," Daniel said. "Through our work on this study we have created a new, local access point where these children can be vaccinated, which is so important because the HPV vaccine can protect adolescents against six different cancers."

# A Night Honoring Heroes benefits Fanny Meisler Trauma Center



USA Health hosted A Night Honoring Heroes on Oct. 15. The sold-out event honored the triumph and courage of the heroes who make survival possible when a traumatic and unexpected event occurs. The stories of trauma patients – Tyler McLeod and Jeffrey Miles Frank – were highlighted during the event, underscoring the lifesaving impact made by those who care for patients with traumatic injuries.

The presenting sponsor for the 2019 A Night Honoring Heroes was the Mapp Family Foundation. Event co-chairs were Nick Sellers, vice president for the Mobile Division of Alabama Power Co., and his wife, Julie.

# 11th annual Celebrate Hope benefits cancer research projects



The Mitchell Cancer Institute hosted the 11th annual Celebrate Hope on Nov. 21. The gala showcased signature dishes from local chefs paired with craft beer and wine. Prior to the main event, sponsors attended an exclusive tasting with Chris Hastings, a James Beard Award-winning chef from Birmingham.

Proceeds will support two research projects, one targeting ovarian cancer and the other focused on breast cancer. Over the past decade, Celebrate Hope has raised \$3.1 million for cancer research and technology. The USA Foundation was the presenting sponsor.

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# USA Health *Faces*



## **Boudreaux new associate dean for graduate medical education**

Known as a passionate mentor to students, Carole Boudreaux, M.D., was appointed associate dean for graduate medical education at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine.

“This is a vital position in our academic health system,” said John Marymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine. “Dr. Boudreaux will provide leadership for USA Health’s 22 residency and fellowship programs, including more than 240 physicians in training,” he said.

Boudreaux has extensive experience in graduate medical education, and served in the same position at USA Health from April 2011 to May 2013. During that time, she achieved the institution’s five-year cycle of accreditation and was commended for demonstrating substantial compliance with regulations.

With a long career as a pathologist, Boudreaux also served for many years as the pathology residency program director, where her hard work, careful attention to the complex and changing rules, and genuine and deep concern for the residents produced great success for that program.

Boudreaux received a medical degree from Louisiana State University School of Medicine in Shreveport. She completed a residency in anatomic and clinical pathology at the USA College of Medicine. She is certified by the American Board of Pathology with an added certification in cytopathology.



## **Whaley named chief operating officer for USA Health**

As the new chief operating officer for USA Health, Alan Whaley, D.B.A., works in a dyad relationship with Chief Medical Officer Michael Chang, M.D.

Whaley collaborates with leadership to plan and develop operational budgets and strategic initiatives that support USA Health’s mission, vision and values with well-balanced clinical, academic and research programs. Whaley and Chang work with the management team and physician leadership to reduce costs, enhance revenues, achieve quality goals and objectives, conduct service line planning and achieve efficient and effective use USA Health resources.

Whaley spent 22 years with Infirmiry Health System, eventually serving as executive vice president and chief strategy officer.

“The duo of Alan and Mike working with system and physician leadership is a powerful mechanism as we continue to transform medicine in the Gulf Coast region,” said Owen Bailey, CEO for USA Health. “Alan’s expertise in the efficient operation of a healthcare system and Mike’s understanding of providing medical care in an academic health setting create a significant opportunity for enhancing the care we provide to our region.”

Whaley earned his bachelor’s degree from Georgetown College in Georgetown, Ky., before earning master’s degrees in healthcare administration and business administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati. He earned his doctor of business administration from the University of South Alabama.



## **Macaluso named USA College of Medicine chair of microbiology and immunology**

Inspiring a new generation of scientists drew Kevin R. Macaluso, Ph.D., to a career as an educator and scientist. He joined the University of South Alabama College of Medicine as a professor and Locke Distinguished Chair of Microbiology and Immunology in August.

He previously served as the Mary Louise Martin Professor in the department of pathobiological sciences at Louisiana State University (LSU) and as director of the veterinary student Summer Scholars Program at LSU, supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Macaluso’s research focuses on the interplay between Rickettsia and arthropod vectors, resulting in transmission of the bacterial pathogens to vertebrate hosts. This can include tick- and flea-borne spotted fever agents. His studies on transmission models of rickettsioses have been supported by funding from the NIH since 2001, with NIH funding for his research extended through 2020 by a number of awards including an NRSA K22 Career Development Award, two NIH R21 awards and two current R01 awards.

Since 2009, Macaluso has served on the NIH-NIAID Vector Biology study section, Military Infectious Disease Research Program peer review and as ad hoc reviewer for other organizations including the Wellcome Trust. His laboratory has published more than 60 papers in peer-reviewed journals. Since 2015, he has served as the subject editor for the Journal of Medical Entomology.

# Achievements



## Munn named chair of obstetrics and gynecology at USA College of Medicine

Mary B. "Mimi" Munn, M.D., considers it an honor to work with dedicated clinicians at USA Health to make a difference in the lives of women in the community.

She was appointed professor and chair of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. In addition to her administrative leadership for the department, Munn, who is a maternal-fetal medicine physician, will provide specialty care for women with high-risk pregnancies at USA Health.

Munn completed her undergraduate degree from Spring Hill College in Mobile. She earned her medical degree from Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans. Following medical school, Munn completed her residency training in obstetrics and gynecology at Children's & Women's Hospital and her fellowship in maternal-fetal medicine, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Prior to joining USA, Munn served as an associate professor in the department of obstetrics and gynecology, division of maternal fetal medicine at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. At UTMB, she served as director of ultrasound and prenatal diagnosis as well as chair of the quality care committee.

Munn is board certified in obstetrics and gynecology and the subspecialty of maternal-fetal medicine by the American Board of Obstetrics & Gynecology. She is a member of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine, International Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology, and the International Society for Prenatal Diagnosis.



Third-year medical student Zachary White of Birmingham, blends his passion for technology and his desire to help others to fuel his curiosity to find better ways to care for cancer patients.

## Laser-focused on radiation oncology

Inspired by his mother's battle with breast cancer, Zachary White has a singular focus for his career: radiation oncology.

The third-year medical student at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine says the field is a perfect blend of technology and medicine. "I love technology, and I love having the opportunity to care for people," he said.

The president of the Class of 2021, White has been recognized nationally for his interest and achievements in cancer research.

This year, he became one of nine students in the nation to receive a 2019 Medical Rotation for Underrepresented Populations Award from the Conquer Cancer Foundation of the American Society of Clinical Oncology. The award allowed him to complete a four-week research and clinical rotation in radiation oncology at the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

In August, White won first place in the Radiology and Radiation Oncology Medical Student Oral Presentation section of the 117th National Medical Association Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly, held in Honolulu. His research focused on glioblastoma multiforme, the most common malignant brain tumor that's highly resistant to radiation and chemotherapy.

While a second-year student, White became one of two students in the U.S. to receive the 2018 ASTRO Minority Summer Fellowship Award. The award enabled him to complete eight weeks of basic science research and gain clinical exposure at the O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

White's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery, radiation and chemotherapy when he was in third grade. "She's a 17-year survivor now," he said.

## Wright receives Edwin R. Hughes Memorial Award

Griffin Wright, a second-year student in the basic medical sciences graduate program at the University of South Alabama, is the recipient of the Edwin R. Hughes Memorial Award for the 2018-2019 academic award year.

Wright graduated with a bachelor of science degree from Auburn University College of Agriculture in 2017. He is now concentrating on cancer biology in the Basic Medical Sciences Program at USA and is working with Natalie Gassman, Ph.D., at the Mitchell Cancer Institute studying the response of DNA repair pathways following environmental exposures.

The award is named in memory of Edwin R. Hughes, who served as director of the

Basic Medical Sciences Graduate Program at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine from its inception in 1978 until 1990. The award recognizes the student with the best academic performance in the program's core curriculum.

### **USA Health resident receives scholarship to attend national surgery meeting**

Ashley Williams, M.D., chief resident of surgery at USA Health, was awarded an American Association for the Surgery of Trauma (AAST) Research and Education Foundation Scholarship to attend the 78th annual meeting of AAST and Clinical Congress of Acute Care Surgery in Dallas in September.

Williams received one of the 19 scholarships awarded to medical students, residents and in-training fellows across the country to attend the annual meeting. Awardees are selected by a committee of well-respected trauma surgeons from within the AAST.

"The AAST resident scholarship is a very prestigious scholarship," Williams said. "It is an honor and a privilege to be amongst the current leaders and innovators in the field of acute care surgery. This is a place to learn and network."

Jon Simmons, M.D., trauma medical director and chief of trauma and acute care surgery at USA Health, wrote the letter of recommendation for Williams' scholarship application.

"The AAST is the premier trauma organization and having Williams receive this scholarship speaks to the quality of our trauma center and the outstanding surgical

residency program at USA Health," he said. "I have no doubt that Williams will be a future leader in our field by giving a voice to those without access to healthcare and by reducing trauma recidivism via programs like Project Inspire."

### **Melody Petty, M.D., selected for national pediatrics teaching program**

Melody Petty, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a pediatric hospitalist at Children's & Women's Hospital, was selected for the Advanced Pediatrics Educator Excellence (APEX) Teaching Program in 2019.

The 12-month program, which accepts a limited number of applicants annually, is co-sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Hospital Medicine (SOHM) and the Academic Pediatric Association (APA). Interactive learning opportunities are offered to foster an ongoing exchange of ideas and best practices among a class of 24 participants and mentors. Petty's mentor is Franklin Trimm, M.D., associate dean for diversity and inclusion at the USA College of Medicine.

"Those treated within academic medical centers such as Children's & Women's Hospital, benefit from collaboration among physicians who work together to find the best individualized care plans for patients," Trimm said. "Serving as a mentor to a talented young faculty member such as Petty is a great example of how such collaboration benefits our physicians and the community we serve."

Goals of the national teaching program

include learning educational theory and specific skills to apply at a participant's home institution with direct observation of teaching by their mentors.

### **Liles honored for compassionate patient care**

Spencer Liles, M.D., surgical oncologist and assistant professor of surgery, was voted into the USA Chapter of the Arnold P. Gold Humanism in Medicine Honor Society (GHHS) by the University of South Alabama College of Medicine class of 2020 students. He was pinned in June.

Liles was also voted this year, by the College of Medicine class of 2019, to receive the GHHS Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award in May 2019 at the Honor's Convocation ceremony. The award is presented by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation to the senior student and to the faculty member nominated and selected by the senior class who have demonstrated outstanding compassion to patients and their families.

The GHHS is a national society that celebrates compassionate and patient-centered care. Each year, a select group of students, residents and faculty members are named to GHHS. Through a peer-nominated process, GHHS membership recognizes those who are exemplars of compassionate patient care and serve as a role model, mentor and leader in medicine. The society currently has 30,000 members in training and practice.

The Arnold P. Gold Foundation sustains the commitment of healthcare professionals to provide compassionate, collaborative and scientifically excellent patient care.

## *Retirements*



### **USA Health honors retiring reproductive endocrinology staff**

The USA Health Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology celebrated the retirement of three longtime members of reproductive endocrinology: Botros Rizk, M.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a reproductive endocrinologist with USA Health; Ruth Kennedy, clinical nurse practitioner; and Julie Hazelton, research technologist.

A reception was held in their honor in August at Children's & Women's Hospital.

Collectively, Rizk, Kennedy and Hazelton devoted more than 85 years of service to USA Health.

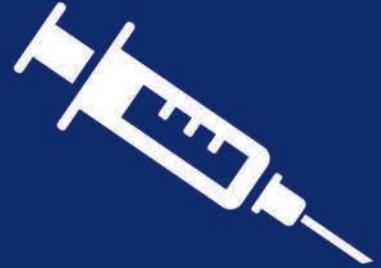
From left to right: Julie Hazelton, research technologist; Botros Rizk, M.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine; and Ruth Kennedy, clinical nurse practitioner.



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Two USA College of Medicine programs, DREAM and SouthMed Prep Scholars, are providing opportunities for under-represented premedical students to learn more about medicine and gain access into medical school. Mary-Elizabeth Whalum (left) and Jaliyah Spann (right) are two students excelling in the programs. Read stories of other students impacted by the programs on page 8.