

USA HEALTH

Vol. 5, Issue 1

Helen's Journey

Helen Bender Bailey
overcomes stage 4
melanoma

Research and education come together

Plans unveiled for new
medical school building

Tips for
eating healthy
while dining out





30

Andrea Green and her older brothers Alexander, left, and David swing in their backyard in March 2023. Andrea was diagnosed with Kawasaki disease at the beginning of the pandemic and treated at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital.

On the cover: Helen Bender Bailey is in remission from stage 4 melanoma with immunotherapy and guidance from Brian Persing, M.D., chair of medical oncology at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute.

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Anthony Martino, M.D., performed microdiscectomy surgery on Michael Sternberg, M.D., who experienced a ruptured disc in his back.

The University of South Alabama unveiled plans to construct a brand-new facility to house the Whiddon College of Medicine.





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Dear Friends:

In this issue, you will read about a recently announced agreement between the University of South Alabama Health Care Authority and Ascension for USA to acquire Providence Hospital and its surrounding clinics. Although the acquisition is not expected to close until fall, we are eager to welcome our colleagues at Providence into the USA Health family and to work together to serve patients in our area. Recently, we shared this sentiment at town hall meetings and received very positive feedback. We believe that this acquisition is good news for patients, employees and our entire region.

You will also meet Helen Bender Bailey of Mobile, a young woman whose journey from melanoma diagnosis to remission inspired a community to rally around her. You will read about how USA Health pediatricians uncovered the source of a mysterious illness affecting 18-month-old Andrea Green during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, you will hear from one of our own emergency department physicians about how a minimally invasive procedure called a microdiscectomy relieved his excruciating pain caused by an acute intervertebral disc rupture.

As the only academic health system on the upper Gulf Coast, we continue to improve our graduate medical education offerings. In this issue, you will read about a new urology residency program that will train physicians on how to address an array of urologic conditions in children and adults. This program is just one example of how USA Health harnesses education, research and excellent clinical care to make life better for the people of our region.

We hope you enjoy this issue of USA Health magazine.

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USA Health Care Authority enters agreement with Ascension to acquire Providence Health System



The University of South Alabama Health Care Authority has entered into an agreement with St. Louis-based Ascension to acquire Providence Hospital and its clinics in a transaction that will enhance the Mobile community's access to high-quality healthcare.

"The values shared by USA Health and Providence make the acquisition a good fit," said University of South Alabama President Jo Bonner. "USA Health and Providence have long shared a commitment to provide compassionate care to those who need it the most, and that core value will not change."

Under this agreement, Providence Hospital will join the University of South Alabama's academic health system recognized for its outstanding service to patients and the community, including operating a Level I trauma center, comprehensive stroke center, burn center, Level III NICU, center for maternal-fetal medicine, cancer institute, and also functioning as a superior research and education facility. USA Health is the only academic health system on the upper Gulf Coast.

"Ascension Providence has a legacy of serving the healthcare needs of the community that dates back to the mid-1800s. We are pleased that this strong tradition will continue as the hospital and its related services transition to USA Health, which will allow associates and physicians to

continue to serve the community through an integrated care delivery system," said Don King, president and CEO of Ascension Florida and Gulf Coast. "This transition will ensure that the Mobile community and surrounding regions have sustainable, quality healthcare access long into the future."

Continuity of care for patients is a top priority for USA Health and Ascension Providence. Both are committed to creating a smooth transition for patients, physicians, providers and associates, with no disruption in services or procedures.

"Acquiring Providence Health System will allow us to enhance our capabilities across our tripartite mission of education, research and clinical care," said John V. Marymont, M.D., M.B.A., vice president for medical affairs and dean of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. "The acquisition will create jobs and opportunities for more people across a wide spectrum to bolster Mobile and the surrounding area. It now gives Providence the benefit of local leadership and enhances our commitment to serve this community."

The University of South Alabama Health-care Authority will acquire the 349-bed Providence Hospital facility and its related sites of care, including the physician practices of Ascension Medical Group. The hospital is a full-service facility with 24/7 emergency care, a Level III trauma center, outpatient diagnostic center, and



USA President Jo Bonner discusses the acquisition of Providence Hospital at the board of trustees meeting in April.

a freestanding rehabilitation and wellness center.

The acquisition is expected to close in the fall of 2023. Until that time, USA and Providence Hospital will continue to operate independently.

"We welcome the opportunity to work with our colleagues at Providence to provide outstanding patient care," said Owen Bailey, M.S.H.A., USA Health CEO and senior associate vice president for medical affairs. "This agreement is good news for patients, employees, the Mobile community and the surrounding region."

Artificial intelligence enhances colonoscopy screenings



USA Health is the only health system in the region to offer enhanced colonoscopy screenings with the aid of the GI Genius intelligent endoscopy module. The GI Genius module employs artificial intelligence (AI) to help physicians detect polyps – making it a powerful new ally in the fight against colorectal cancer.

The GI Genius module uses advanced AI software to highlight suspicious polyps with a visual marker in real time, serving

Gastroenterologist Benjamin Niland, M.D., right, uses the GI Genius module to enhance colonoscopy screenings.

as the gastroenterologist's ever-vigilant second observer with a sensitivity rate per lesion of 99.7%. Studies have shown that AI-assisted colonoscopy can increase polyp detection rates, and every 1% increase in adenoma detection rate reduces the risk of colorectal cancer by 3%. Colorectal cancer is the third most common form of cancer diagnosed in the U.S., with almost 150,000 new cases every year.

USA Health is focused on meeting the medical needs of the community by providing its expert staff with the latest technologies and procedures. The GI Genius module is the first and only AI system for detection of colonic polyps in the United States.

Vertebral body tethering offered for scoliosis treatment

USA Health is the first health system in Alabama to offer a surgical treatment for children with scoliosis that allows the spine to remain flexible and continue to grow. The procedure, called vertebral body tethering, is an alternative to spinal fusion for some children who have not finished growing.

“Kids with idiopathic scoliosis who have growth remaining are the ideal candidates,” said Tyler McDonald, M.D., a pediatric orthopaedic surgeon at USA Health. “The idea behind the procedure is to harness the growth remaining in the growth plates of each vertebral body.”

Idiopathic scoliosis, the most common type of scoliosis, is an abnormal curvature of the spine not due to some other underlying disease. Many children or teens diagnosed with mild scoliosis do not require medical treatment or may need a brace to keep the curve from worsening. For severe cases, the main treatment has been spinal fusion, in which surgeons insert rods and screws to hold the spine in a straighter position.

McDonald said that vertebral body tethering, introduced as an alternative to spinal fusion about 10 years ago, allows for greater mobility and flexibility in the spine.

During the procedure, an orthopaedic

surgeon and general surgeon work together to make small incisions in the side of a patient's chest, and use instruments and a camera to install screws in each vertebra along the spine. The screws are then connected by a flexible cord, or tether. As the child grows, tension in the tether slows the growth on the convex side of the curve, allowing growth on the concave side to catch up.

“The idea is to grow out of scoliosis or into an improvement in the scoliosis,” said McDonald, who is also an assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

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Rectal cancer program earns national accreditation

USA Health is the first health system in Alabama and the upper Gulf Coast region to earn a three-year accreditation from the National Accreditation Program for Rectal Cancer (NAPRC), a quality program of the American Col-

lege of Surgeons. To achieve voluntary accreditation, a rectal center must demonstrate compliance with the NAPRC standards addressing program management, clinical services, and quality improvement for patients. Centers are required to establish a multidisciplinary rectal cancer

team that includes clinical representatives from surgery, pathology, radiology, radiation oncology and medical oncology.

Nitrous oxide available to laboring mothers

To help manage the pain associated with labor during

childbirth, nitrous oxide now is being offered to expectant moms delivering at Children's & Women's Hospital. Also known as laughing gas, nitrous oxide is an odorless analgesic typically administered by patients holding a small mask to their mouth and inhaling. Nitrous oxide is an option for

USA HEART Project partners with Freestanding Emergency Department

The University of South Alabama's HEART Project (Health, Empowerment and Recovery from Trauma) has partnered with the USA Health Freestanding Emergency Department to provide forensic medical exams and other support services for student sexual assault survivors.

"The proximity of the USA Health Freestanding Emergency Department to our campus serves as a perfect referral resource," said Candice Selwyn, director for the HEART Project. "Our student survivors

now have more options to seek the help they need 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. USA students are still able to go to the Student Health Center for sexual assault forensic medical services on campus during regular hours and the Freestanding Emergency Department at any time. We are grateful to be able to continue to provide options to our student survivors."

Highly skilled sexual assault nurse examiners, or SANEs, have extensive training on how to care for assault survivors in a

compassionate, respectful manner and collect evidence for possible prosecution. The partnership provides survivors with safety and dignity as they are treated following a traumatic experience.

According to the HEART Project team, this expansion is important because it will continue to provide all the resources needed in one place, which include advocacy, counseling and testing, law enforcement, and a full forensic medical team.

Surgeons discover innovative approach to treating burn survivors

Scar revision treatments, which were once only treatable by surgery, and were costly, painful and often stressful for patients, are now more tolerable and accessible to burn survivors in the Southeast region, thanks to the collaborative efforts of two USA Health physicians.

A study by Andrew Bright, D.O., an assistant professor of surgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine and medical director of USA Health's Burn Unit, and Kimberly Donnellan, M.D., a facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon, offers new promise for burn patients seeking scar revision procedures to address range of motion, chronic pain or itching caused by their healed wounds.

"We have seen improvements in patients' functional recovery not before realized.

Many of the patients who survive burn injury and transition to outpatient develop functional impairments over time," Bright said. "These impairments often relate to excessive or disorganized scar tissue. Traditionally, treatment of this problem is painful and requires anesthesia, and many of our patients would not otherwise return for this care due to inconvenience or aversion to the hospital."

The study documented the treatment of 17 burn patients referred from the Arnold Luterman Regional Burn Center at University Hospital to Donnellan's Skin and Laser Center at USA Health Midtown. Patients ranging in age from 9 to 59 years with thermal, friction, chemical and electrical burns had scars of more than 6 months old treated with newer fractionated CO2 laser

technology in an outpatient clinic setting.

"The outpatient application of this laser procedure performed by Dr. Donnellan and her team has allowed many burn patients to get laser treatments with minimal discomfort and no further need to return to the operating room with general anesthesia," Bright said. "This has greatly improved access to care and recruitment of many patients who would otherwise accept their level of physical limitation."

The DEKA SmartXide Tetra CO2 refractory laser system works by perforating dense scars and creating tiny channels in the tissue that improve tissue motion and stimulate regeneration. Within days, patients can return to normal activity.

expectant moms who want to avoid an epidural or narcotic pain medication during the childbirth experience. It also can be an option when it's too early or too late to receive an epidural.

USA Health has new tool to treat kidney stones

USA Health University Urology introduced a highly specialized procedure for very large kidney stones that results in fewer surgeries and a shorter recovery for patients. In the procedure, called mini-percutaneous nephrolithotomy, urologists

use very small instruments to access the kidney, crush the stone and suck out fragments through a tiny straw inserted in a sedated patient's back. The treatment is recommended for very large kidney stones, known as staghorn stones, that branch out into the kidney and cause significant blockage.

Blessings for new babies offered

Children's & Women's Hospital now is offering a baby blessing to each mother in the Mother/Baby Unit and neonatal intensive care unit. Chaplain Kim Crawford Meeks, spiritual care manager for USA Health, is available to perform



Workforce development celebrates inaugural graduating class

USA Health Workforce Development celebrated its first graduating class of eight students from the surgical technician program last fall. Referred to as “the great eight,” the graduates went through a 12-week education course in the classroom setting followed by 12 weeks of operating room experience.

“This group is deserving of every recognition,” said Veronica Hudson, manager of workforce development. “They are leaders and have gained the knowledge and skill set to help fulfill our mission statement,

helping people live longer, better lives.”

Each of the students accepted positions within the operating rooms at University Hospital and Children’s & Women’s Hospital.

The workforce development initiative was created to train and employ people who are looking to start a career in the healthcare field through technical programs. It offers full-time pay and benefits while training.

Workforce development currently offers two training programs: surgical technician and pharmacy technician. The goal is to

expand the programs to include medical assistant, patient care assistant, pharmacy technician, phlebotomist and sterilization technician.

If you are interested in learning more about workforce development initiatives, contact Veronica Hudson at vhudson@health.southalabama.edu.

USA Health Workforce Development celebrates its first graduating class of students, known as “the great eight,” from the surgical technician program.

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a blessing and will give families a baby blessing keepsake card of their choosing, with religious and nonreligious versions available.

Children’s & Women’s joins initiative on postpartum care

Children’s & Women’s Hospital became one of five hospitals in the nation to join a six-month initiative to better understand the inequities that exist for mothers and their babies during the postpartum period in an effort to reduce

mortality. The initiative is led by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in partnership with Merck for Mothers and aims to understand how to best support changes to clinical and administrative processes that lead to safer and more equitable postpartum care and support for all mothers.

University Hospital achieves Comprehensive Stroke Center certification

University Hospital received certification as a Comprehensive Stroke Center from DNV Healthcare USA Inc., reflecting the highest level of competence for treatment of serious stroke events. The certification

USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center named for Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D.

In recognition of his longstanding commitment to the treatment, research and education of sickle cell disease, the University of South Alabama Board of Trustees authorized the naming of the USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center as the Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center at their September 2022 meeting.

Haynes, a longtime, well-respected member of the University of South Alabama community, died Dec. 2, 2022. In addition to serving as director of the Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center since 2001, Haynes was a professor of internal medicine at the Whiddon College of Medicine, assistant dean of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and a pulmonologist with USA Health.

“Dr. Haynes has cared for most of the adults with sickle cell disease in the southern half of Alabama,” John V. Ma-

rymont, M.D., M.B.A., vice president for medical affairs and dean of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine, said at the trustees meeting. “His dedication to this community is unsurpassed. It is an honor to name the center that means so much to so many after him.”

A 1980 graduate of the Whiddon College of Medicine, Haynes completed a residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in pulmonary medicine with USA Health. He joined the faculty in 1984 as the first Black clinical and basic sciences faculty member.

Following Haynes’ passing, Ardie Pack-Mabien, FNP-BC, stepped in to lead as the interim director of the Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center. She has served as a nurse practitioner at the center since 1997.

Memorial gifts will benefit the Johnson Haynes, Jr., M.D. Comprehensive Sickle Cell



The late Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., directed the center from 2001 to 2022.

Center. Donations can be made online at giving.usahealthsystem.com/haynes.

USA awarded \$5.45 million to enhance Primary Care Pathway program

With the goal to increase the number of primary care physicians in rural and medically underserved communities and ultimately improve the health of those populations, the Whiddon College of Medicine received \$5.45 million from the Health Resources and Services Administration to expand and enhance its Primary Care Pathway (PCP) program.

This award supplements a grant the Whiddon College of Medicine received from HRSA in September 2019. The initial grant, plus all supplemental funding, now totals \$19.8 million.

Launched in July 2020, the PCP program

is an educational track that provides medical students with four years of specialized training in primary care. The Primary Care Pathway Scholars are selected based on an interest in primary care and a willingness to commit to the practice following residency training. The program enrolls up to 10 students per class, for a total of 40 PCP Scholars.

“We provide tuition assistance, clinical, research and educational experiences in federally qualified health centers with the ultimate goal to have them enter into a primary care discipline and practice in an underserved environment,” said Allen

Perkins, M.D., M.P.H., professor and chair of family medicine and principal investigator of the project.

Perkins said the supplemental funding will enhance the educational environment of the five community health centers in which the students learn and work, as well as support full-time and community-based faculty to provide these experiences.

They also will provide space in the simulation lab for simulated patient encounters focusing on underserved and disadvantaged populations, which all medical students will be exposed to in the curriculum.

is based on standards set forth by the Brain Attack Coalition and the American Stroke Association, and it affirms that the medical center addresses the full spectrum of stroke care – diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and education – and establishes clear metrics to evaluate outcomes.

USA Health OB-GYN helps expand care in rural Alabama

USA Health is working with Franklin Primary Health Center to fill the healthcare gap in women’s primary care in rural Alabama. They are launching the area’s first OB-GYN and women’s health clinic in Evergreen. The collaboration will

enable women to take part in “whole person care,” which integrates physical, mental and reproductive health for women and their families.

Students collect menstrual products for those in need

Members of the OB-GYN and Jags Against Trafficking stu-

dent interest groups collected thousands of menstrual products for underserved women in the community. Donations totaled about 3,500 pads and liners, 2,000 tampons, 3,500 sanitary wipes, 500 pairs of underwear/diapers, 50 menstrual cups and more. The students distributed the products



Research and education come together in new College of Medicine building

As the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine celebrates its 50th anniversary, anticipation is building for the construction of a new facility to house the medical school.

John V. Marymont, M.D., M.B.A., vice president for medical affairs and dean of the Whiddon College of Medicine, said the initial plan was to renovate and expand the existing Medical Sciences Building, constructed in 1974. However, a \$60 million appropriation from U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, a \$50 million earmark from Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, and a \$30 million

gift from the University of South Alabama Foundation will allow for the construction of an all-new building.

“This project has been several years in the making,” Marymont said. “The process to get to this point has involved a lot of people and a tremendous amount of work. This new facility is well deserved for the quality of education we provide and the outstanding research we do here at the College of Medicine.”

The new Whiddon College of Medicine building will be constructed on the site of

The University of South Alabama plans to begin construction of a brand-new facility to house the medical school in 2024. One of the project goals is to bring research and education together in one building to encourage collaboration between students and faculty.

the current Alpha Hall East. Plans call for demolishing Alpha Hall East, clearing the site, and constructing an L-shaped facility to complement the Health Sciences Building, which houses the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions and the College of Nursing. Construction of the facility is slated to be completed in 2026.

One of the advantages of the new building is the opportunity to educate more students and grow the class sizes from 80 to 100 students, with capacity for 125 students per class. The project aims to bring research and education together in one building to encourage collaboration, and to provide state-of-the-art laboratory spaces that are flexible and efficient.

The nearly 300,000-square-foot facility is divided equally between education and research. The 67,563-square-foot education wing, which runs north and south, includes the gross anatomy suite, clinical skills lab, learning studios, small group rooms, a teaching kitchen, interfaith space and other community spaces.

The 67,651-square-foot research wing, which runs east and west, is designed to optimize workspace for principal investigators. Open research laboratories are adaptable and allow for a multidisciplinary approach to research. The facility also includes 26,255 square feet of vivarium space, providing an efficient and flexible layout for animal models and dedicated procedure areas.

The College of Medicine community got

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to three women’s shelters in the Mobile area that support women who are experiencing homelessness or escaping domestic violence or human trafficking. The students also led a workshop on menstruation, menopause, preventative health and mental health.

Faculty receive funding for breast cancer research

Three pathology faculty members were awarded grants from the Breast Cancer Research Foundation of Alabama as part of the organization’s \$1.3 million investment in state-based research in 2022. Debanjan Chakroborty,

Ph.D., assistant professor of pathology; Seema Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology; and Luis del Pozo-Yauner, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of pathology, will examine different aspects of breast cancer. The awards provide each researcher \$50,000 in funding per year for two years

and function as seed funding for early-stage studies, allowing researchers to generate the additional data needed to attract major national funding.

Various room naming opportunities are available by contacting the Medical Affairs Development Office at 251-445-8423.

a first look at plans for the new medical school building last fall at a town hall with the architects, New Orleans-based Eskew Dumez Ripple and global architecture firm Perkins&Will.

The two wings of the L-shaped building are “stitched in the corner with collision space,” explained Mark Ripple, principal-in-charge at Eskew Dumez Ripple, during the town hall presentation.

“This is a word that kept coming up again and again in the early workshops with stakeholders – the idea of collision,” Ripple said. “We love that word, because it’s not just casual interactions. In a collision, things happen, sparks are made, and energy is created. We are thrilled with the idea that we can create a facility where both research and education, which are often isolated by design, can come together and let the sparks fly.”

Architects drew inspiration from the university’s proximity to Mobile Bay and incorporated the concept of estuaries in the design.

“The Mobile Bay ecosystem is the reason for being in this city and ultimately this university,” said Christian Rodriguez, principal architect at Eskew Dumez Ripple. “Estuaries are this confluence of different natural features that can support an incredible degree of biodiversity. So rather than thinking about people colliding, let’s think about them coming together in really rich and productive ways.”



Labs receive grant for new flow cytometer

The Flow Cytometry Shared Resource Laboratories at the Whiddon College of Medicine recently purchased a new flow cytometer, an Agilent Novocyte Quanteon. The purchase was supported by an instrumentation grant from Lions Clubs

International Foundation. Flow cytometry is a laser-based technique used to identify and measure physical and chemical characteristics of single cells or particles. In this process, a sample is suspended in a fluid and injected into the flow cytometer instrument for the cells or particles to be analyzed.

Faculty awarded intramural grants for research

The Whiddon College of Medicine announced the recipients of the 2023 Faculty Intramural Grants Program Research Awards, which provide funds for basic science or translational research through an annual competitive program.

This year’s winners, who each received \$50,000 in funding, are Luis del Pozo-Yauner, Ph.D., assistant professor of pathology; Jin H. Kim, D.V.M., Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology and immunology; and Wito Richter, Ph.D., associate professor of biochemistry and molecular biology.



Students celebrate residency matches at Match Day

Senior medical students at the Whiddon College of Medicine gathered March 17 at the Mobile Convention Center in downtown Mobile to commemorate Match Day. They joined future physicians at medical schools across the United States and Canada to learn where they will be completing their residency training.

Ife Akisanya led the Match Day announcements for the Class of 2023. But before she walked across the stage and pinned her residency match location on a U.S. map, the Gadsden, Alabama, native opened her envelope to cheers, applause and hugs from her family and friends.

Akisanya's path to medical school began during her undergraduate studies at Auburn University. Through the DREAM

(Diversity Recruitment and Enrichment for Admission into Medicine) pipeline program, she took MCAT prep courses, continued to shadow physicians and met several students through the Whiddon College of Medicine who would later become her mentors.

"I enjoyed my experience as a DREAM student, so I couldn't think of a better place for me to go to medical school," she said.

For Akisanya and the other members of the Class of 2023, Match Day is the culmination of four years of hard work; but, for her, it's also the next step toward her emergency medicine residency at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta.

"More than anything, I am so excited to experience this day with my classmates,"

she said. "It has been a long four years, and I can't wait to see where everyone matches! I am also excited for a new chapter of my life to start and finally, finally become a physician."

After residency, Akisanya said she may consider fellowships, but overall is committed to being a leader by example to underrepresented minority students.

"I want to be heavily involved in a pipeline program that promotes diversity and inclusion for the medical school where I end up working," she said. "I also want to be a mentor to underrepresented minority students and residents who are pursuing a career in medicine."

Aidan Gilbert was working for a breast oncologist as a biostatistician when he

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Thakur leads study on keyhole approach to skull base surgery

Jai Thakur, M.D., director of minimally invasive cranial and skull base neurosurgery at USA Health, published the largest study to date on the keyhole approach to skull base surgery in conjunction with colleagues

in Santa Monica, California. Skull-based meningiomas are one of the most technically challenging diseases in neurosurgery due to the proximity of the tumor to critical neurovascular structures. The study breaks down the superior clinical outcomes and surgical techniques promoting a

minimally invasive approach to skull base surgery. This approach focuses on smaller openings, yet an expanded surgical view, with the use of sophisticated technologies and processes, but refrains from using rigid brain retraction.

Senior Bowl players visit with patients

Some of the nation's best senior football players gathered Feb. 3, at Hancock Whitney Stadium and connected to patients at Children's & Women's Hospital via iPads and Zoom. Some children interacted with the players from their hospi-



Senior medical students Ife Akisanya, Aidan Gilbert, accompanied by his wife, and Sarah Fillingim take to the stage to announce their residency matches.

realized he wanted to pursue medicine. “While working with her, I realized I liked what she was doing more than what I was doing,” he said. “She was interacting with and advocating for her patients, and I wanted to be like her.”

As Match Day neared, Gilbert said he was feeling fortunate and thankful to everyone around him who has been an integral part in shaping him into the man he is. Starting a family has been one of the defining features of his medical school career, and his children have been his inspiration and driving force behind his success, he said.

“My daughter called me Dr. Aidan Daddy Gilbert the other day and told me she wants to be a surgeon like me,” he said.

As he opened his envelope, he was elated to see that he matched in surgery at USA Health and immediately kissed his wife to celebrate.

As her family looked on, Sarah Fillingim opened her envelope with the help of her husband. She matched in dermatology at the University of Mississippi Medical

Center in Jackson – her first choice.

Fillingim spread out a puzzle on the table at Match Day for the children in her family to assemble. On the back was a yellow mark showing the location, about three and a half hours away, where the family will be relocating. “We will be able to make trips back here easily,” she said.

Fillingim said she chose to pursue medicine after working in environmental health and safety for a few years. “I wanted to serve people in a way that I am passionate about, and to show my children that their dreams can be attained through hard work and God’s grace,” she said.

Fillingim reflected on the highs and lows of the past four years, during which time she and her husband welcomed a third child, Emmy, to the family. “Every step has seemed hard at the time; but looking back, I realize just how each step was growing and maturing me,” she said. “The easiest part, taking time for vacation and somewhat resting in the knowledge of what is to come, is just now starting for me.”

tal beds, while others connected from a classroom setting. Players signed footballs that hospital staff delivered to the kids they met virtually. A few former patients met the players in person at the stadium as part of Special Spectators, a nonprofit program that matches sick and injured children with VIP athletic experiences surrounding events such as the Senior Bowl.

USA Health seeks spiritual care volunteers

To better serve patients and their families, USA Health has created a new volunteer role within the Spiritual Care Department to provide emotional and spiritual support for people of all faiths. All spiritual care extenders must complete a 48-hour Pastoral Care Education program through the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education,

2023 Match Day Results

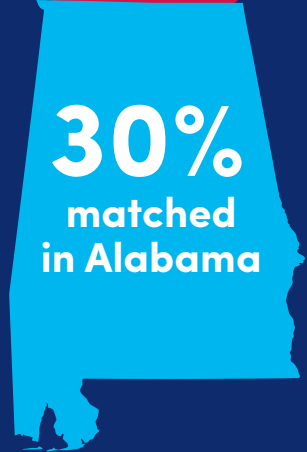


48,156 national applicants
COMPETED FOR
40,375 residency positions



73 USA medical students
24 states represented

70%
matched
out of state



30%
matched
in Alabama

10 placed in
USA HEALTH
hospitals

Study identifies potential biomarkers for earlier detection of pancreatic cancer



Ajay Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology at the Whiddon College of Medicine and leader of the cancer biology program at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute, is investigating a potential tool for pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

Scientists and physicians at the Mitchell Cancer Institute have identified unique and high-frequency mitochondrial DNA mutations in tiny vesicles isolated from the blood of pancreatic cancer patients. The findings could be useful in developing a noninvasive test for pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

Pancreatic cancer is a highly lethal malignancy with a rising incidence in the United States and other developed countries. According to the National Cancer Institute, pancreatic cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, with a five-year survival rate for patients at just 11.5%. High mortality of pancreatic cancer is largely attributed to its late-stage diagnosis, when only limited therapeutic options are available. Earlier detection of pancreatic cancer could help save many lives or extend patients' survival.

"Mitochondria are the powerhouses of the cells, and my lab has longstanding interest in understanding how their functions get altered in cancer," said Santanu Dasgupta, Ph.D., a cancer researcher at the MCI and one of the principal investigators of the project. "We are learning how pancreatic cancer cells alter the mitochondrial energy-generation programs by acquiring mutations in their mitochondrial DNA."

Dasgupta, who is also an assistant professor of pathology, said the goal is to develop a simple mitochondrial DNA-based blood test to detect this lethal disease early, before it spreads. "At the same time, we want to develop ways to target malfunctioning mitochondria as a therapeutic strategy for pancreatic cancer," he said.

Ajay Singh, Ph.D., a professor of pathology and leader of the cancer biology program at the MCI, co-led the project with Dasgupta. "Mitochondria are of significant interest for developing highly sensitive biomarkers, since typically each cell in our body contains multiple mitochondria, and each mitochondrion has numerous copies of mitochondrial DNA," he said.

"Extracellular vesicles have emerged as promising tools for cancer diagnosis in recent years," Singh added. "Since these vesicles can be traced back to their cells of origin, a test based on them could be highly accurate."

Researchers examine impact of nicotine exposure on prostate cancer

A grant from the U.S. Department of Defense will allow researchers at the University of South Alabama to study how exposure to nicotine impacts prostate cancer progression and therapeutic outcome.

Ajay Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology at the Whiddon College of Medicine, is the recipient of the \$1.16 million award and principal investigator of the project.

Tobacco use is the single most modifiable risk factor for many human diseases. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cigarette smoking causes more

than 480,000 deaths each year in the United States, including an estimated 41,000 deaths from exposure to secondhand smoke. This recognition has promoted the use of cigarette substitutes that contain nicotine to satiate addiction, while having reduced levels of other cancer-causing chemicals, Singh said.

"Doubts about this notion, however, have been raised; and it has been shown that nicotine can, in fact, affect several steps in the development of cancer," said Singh, who also leads the cancer biology program at the Mitchell Cancer Institute. "Our prelim-

inary studies make strong suggestions for a pathobiological involvement of nicotine exposure in prostate cancer aggressiveness and therapy resistance."

Researchers will use the grant funds to tease out the underlying molecular mechanisms and gather preclinical and clinical support for their experimental findings. Additionally, the lab will collect prostate tumor tissues from patients who smoke and those who don't smoke, and study nicotine-induced changes in proteins of pathological relevance.

NEWS BRIEFS

or have at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, and complete a training program provided by the USA Health Spiritual Care Department. Visit usahealthsystem.com/spiritual-care for more info and to apply.

NICU graduates, families and caregivers reunite

Some of the youngest in attendance at the Children's & Women's Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Reunion had overcome the greatest odds. Despite being born premature, underweight or ill, they – and their families and caregivers

– had reason to celebrate on April 1. The first NICU Reunion since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the 31st overall – reunited several hundred graduates of all ages, families who connected over their shared experience, and caregivers who never gave up. They enjoyed an afternoon of

food, games, raffle drawings, a photo booth, an Easter egg hunt, the Easter Bunny, trail maids and more.

Research findings could improve management of prostate cancer

Srijan Acharya, Ph.D., a postdoctoral researcher at the Mitchell Cancer Institute, serves as the lead author on a research study that offers promising potential in managing prostate cancer more effectively.

His research unveils a novel mechanism to explain contradictory actions of androgens in prostate cancer. He conducted his research in the lab of Ajay Singh, Ph.D., professor of pathology at the Whiddon College of Medicine. The work was supported by funding from the National Cancer Institute and the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Androgens, which are a group of male hormones, play a significant role in the growth of prostate cancer. “Therefore, lowering their levels or inhibiting their function remain frontline treatment options for patients with advanced or metastatic prostate cancer,” Singh said.

Although androgen-suppression therapy – also known as hormone therapy – is effective in most patients, it inevitably fails in the long term. “Interestingly, it has been

observed that androgens at high doses can also suppress prostate cancer growth, which has led oncologists to examine androgen supplementation as a therapeutic approach in clinical trials,” Singh said. “The resulting data is promising; however, the mechanisms underlying the dichotomous action of the androgens remain unclear, which could yield molecular signatures to help in prospective identification of likely responders.”

Their research identified that androgens confer their growth-promoting action by inducing the expression of a protein, MYB, which the group identified earlier to be overexpressed in prostate cancer. “Interestingly, we found that at high doses androgens suppressed the expression of MYB through induction of negative regulatory microRNA, miR-150,” Acharya said.

“Thus, we have identified MYB and miR-150 as two important functional targets downstream of androgen signaling, whose levels can be used for therapeutic planning and to monitor the response of andro-



Postdoctoral researcher Srijan Acharya, Ph.D., is studying the mechanisms underlying the contradictory actions of androgens in prostate cancer.

gen-targeted therapies in prostate cancer,” Singh added. “In addition, newer therapeutic approaches that either inhibit MYB function or enhance miR-150 levels in prostate cancer cells can be evaluated to manage prostate cancer more effectively.”

Researchers identify novel independent regulator of colon cancer angiogenesis

Researchers at the Mitchell Cancer Institute and the Whiddon College of Medicine have identified neuropeptide Y (NPY) derived from cancer cells as an independent regulator of colon cancer progression.

Neuropeptides are chemical messenger molecules that co-exist in nerve cells with smaller neurotransmitter molecules, allowing neurons to communicate with one another. NPY is one of the most abundant neuropeptides in the body, widely expressed

throughout the central and peripheral nervous systems.

The research, led by Chandrani Sarkar, Ph.D., assistant professor of pathology, recently was published in the British Journal of Cancer. Their findings provide the first evidence that NPY, through its Y2 receptor, promotes angiogenesis – the formation of new blood vessels from existing vessels – in colon cancer, thereby promoting growth and progression.

“Angiogenesis is a well-established target for treating several cancers because it is an essential process required for the growth and metastasis of many solid tumors, including colon cancers,” Sarkar said.

Using Y2R antagonists alone or adding Y2R antagonists to conventional chemotherapeutic and anti-angiogenic treatment regimens in colon adenocarcinomas that express high levels of NPY is a promising therapeutic strategy, she said.

Spanish-speaking liaison hired to address disparities in autism care

Autism services aren't as readily available to some populations nationwide, but the USA Regional Autism Network is taking steps to address barriers to care in Alabama. To address this

growing need, USARAN added a Hispanic community liaison, Veronica Valero Cervantes, to the team to help connect Spanish-speaking families to the network of autism services. USARAN, part of a statewide program that is funded through the Alabama Department of Mental Health,

is tasked with providing education and connecting autistic people, their families and service providers to the resources they need, including therapy, in-school assistance and adult support.

USA Health University Hospital recertified as Level I trauma center

Marking 14 consecutive years, University Hospital's Fanny Meisler Trauma Center received the Level I trauma center certification from the Alabama Department of Public Health. University

Scientist awarded NSF grant to study *Salmonella* survival

A grant from the National Science Foundation will help scientists at the University of South Alabama improve the ability to combat agricultural diseases and foodborne illness outbreaks caused by *Salmonella* bacteria.

Salmonella live in the intestines of animals and humans, and people commonly are infected by consuming food or water that has been contaminated by feces. Symptoms of infection include diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, antibiotic resistance is increasing in *Salmonella*, which can limit treatment options for people with severe infections.

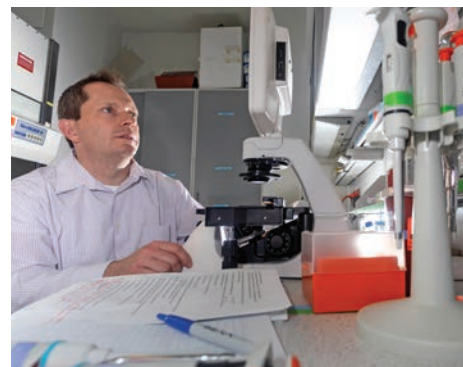
Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology at the Whiddon College of Medicine, was awarded \$998,655 to study the survival of *Salmonella* during cellular stress.

“The ability of certain species of nema-

todes, vascular plants and bacteria to survive desiccation (or extreme dehydration) for extended periods is a particularly striking example of the ability of cells to adapt to and survive even the most drastic environmental fluctuations,” said Borchert, principal investigator of the project.

Importantly, several groups have now shown that bacterial small noncoding RNAs (sRNAs) are frequently associated with stress and often contribute to survival during environmental challenges, such as desiccation or nutrient starvation, he said.

Bacteria have two principal strategies for survival during cellular stress. The first is the active expression of molecular tools capable of dealing with specific stressors. The second strategy is the generation of persister cells, which are comparatively metabolically dormant cells capable of prolonged survival



Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology, is studying the survival of *Salmonella* bacteria during cellular stress.

in harsh environments.

“In either event, mounting evidence suggests that sRNAs represent key regulators of *Salmonella* stress survival,” Borchert said. “Understanding what drives the decision between active stress resistance and persister dormancy can significantly improve our ability to combat a number of societal challenges such as antibiotic resistance, foodborne illness outbreaks and agricultural diseases.”

NIH funds study on drug-resistant bacteria that causes gonorrhea

Christopher Davies, Ph.D., associate dean for research at the Whiddon College of Medicine, was awarded a five-year, \$3.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to determine the molecular mechanisms that confer antibiotic resistance to *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

Neisseria gonorrhoeae is the bacterial species that causes gonorrhea, a sexually transmitted illness responsible for more than 800,000 infections annually in the United States and some 78 million cases worldwide. Untreated or untreatable infections, Davies said, can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility in women, gonococcal arthritis in both sexes, and an increased risk of contracting and transmitting HIV. There is

no vaccine available.

In recent decades, resistance of *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* toward multiple classes of antibiotics has increased steadily, leaving only extended-spectrum cephalosporins as recommended treatments. The cephalosporin-resistant strains have spread globally, making the need for new treatments more urgent.

The emergence of cephalosporin-resistance in *N. gonorrhoeae* is due to mutations in a protein called penicillin-binding protein 2 (PBP2), an enzyme that is essential for bacterial cell-wall synthesis. The project aims to understand how mutations in PBP2 lower reactivity with cephalosporins while preserving its essential enzymatic function.

“This is a delicate balancing act that must be negotiated by the bacteria,” Davies said. “If the mutations compromise enzyme function, the bacteria cannot grow, but if the effect of mutations on resistance is too small, then the bacteria will be killed by cephalosporins. The strains we are seeing have solved this conundrum.”

Davies’ team will work to determine the molecular structures of PBP2 from cephalosporin-resistant strains of *N. gonorrhoeae* and also examine their properties biochemically. Early indications are that mutations act by restricting the protein dynamics of PBP2 in a way that selectively discriminates against cephalosporins.

NEWS BRIEFS

Hospital is the only certified Level I trauma center in the Gulf Coast region and one of four Level I trauma centers in Alabama. The ADPH certification came to fruition while developing the Alabama Trauma and Health System, a network of care designed to get seriously injured people to the

right resources as quickly as possible without going through a lengthy transfer process.

NICU selected by NIH to study effect of antibiotics on preterm infants

Children’s & Women’s Hospital’s neonatology division was selected as a research site for

a nationwide multicenter study funded by the National Institutes of Health. The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Antibiotics and Outcomes Trial will study routine antibiotic usage in extremely premature infants and gain insight into the long-term impacts. The study began in 2020 and will

conclude in 2024. It was designed to determine whether routine antibiotic usage in extremely premature infants (fewer than 29 weeks of gestation) is linked to gut microbiota changes and results in higher adverse outcomes, such as sepsis, necrotizing enterocolitis or death.

Study to determine infection dynamics of emerging tick-borne virus

Tick-borne infections can lead to serious illnesses – and even death – in people and pets. To create effective treatments for these diseases, scientists first must figure out the basic infection biology of the ticks they study.

Researchers at the University of South Alabama plan to use a \$2.6 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to do just that, laying the groundwork for developing a way to stop transmission of an emerging tick-borne virus native to Asia.

Meghan Hermance, Ph.D., an assistant professor of microbiology and immunology at the Whiddon College of Medicine, received the five-year award to study the infection dynamics of a tick-borne bunyavirus called severe fever with thrombocytopenia syndrome virus or SFTSV. Thrombocytopenia means low platelet count.

An emerging tick-borne disease caused

by the bunyavirus, SFTSV is transmitted by the *Haemaphysalis longicornis* tick, which recently spread to the United States and beyond.

Because of its ability to cause hemorrhagic disease and lack of specific treatment strategies, SFTSV is considered a priority infectious disease by the World Health Organization.

“One major focus of this research is to understand how the bunyavirus survives the molting process between tick life stages and the timeline during which the virus disseminates between organs within the tick body,” Hermance said. “In other words, we want to determine where the virus resides in the tick body before it ends up in the tick salivary glands and ultimately gets transmitted to the next host the tick feeds on.”

A second focus of the research is to



Meghan Hermance, Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology and immunology, is studying the infection dynamics of an emerging tick-borne virus.

define the minimum amount of time an infected tick needs to feed in order to transmit the bunyavirus to a vertebrate host, Hermance said.

Scientists uncover novel insights into mitochondrial diseases

Scientists at the Whiddon College of Medicine have developed a technique to perform reverse genetic analysis of proteins involved in mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) replication. Known as the GeneSwap approach, this new technology provides novel insights into how defects in mtDNA replication cause mitochondrial diseases, which are often lethal and have only palliative treatments available.

Mikhail Alexeyev, Ph.D., professor of physiology and cell biology, is the senior author of the study.

The lack of approaches for reverse genetic analysis of mtDNA replication presented a major obstacle to better understanding mtDNA replication and, consequently, developing effective treatment strategies for

disorders caused by defects in this process, Alexeyev said.

“Only a person who knows how the car operates can fix it,” he explained. “In the same way, knowing how a disease develops – its mechanism – allows us to intervene and disrupt it.”

Classical, or “forward,” genetics starts with a trait and works to identify a responsible gene or an alteration in a gene. Reverse genetics, on the other hand, is a relatively recent development made possible by advances in molecular biology and genetic engineering.

“It works in the opposite direction: We alter, or mutate, a gene in a test tube and examine changes in this gene’s or its product’s

function,” Alexeyev said. “The advantage of reverse genetics is that it allows the generation and testing of specific hypotheses as to how a given gene or its product may work.”

The lab utilized genetic recombination systems encoded by bacterial viruses (bacteriophages) and mutant genes carried by a type of disabled mouse virus to substitute, in one step, a mutant gene for a normal one in cultured cells.

Using the GeneSwap approach, Alexeyev and the research team identified 730 conditionally permissive mutations in mitochondrial transcription factor A (TFAM), compared with fewer than a dozen that were known prior to their study.

Study examines role of enhancer DNA sequences in gene expression

Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology, was awarded a \$427,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to better understand enhancer DNA sequences and their role in

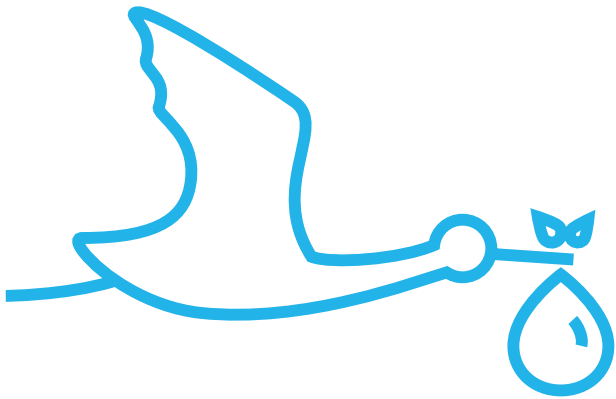
coordinating gene expression. Promoters and enhancers are both noncoding sequences of DNA that serve as gene-regulatory elements. Promoters initiate gene transcription, which is the first step in gene expression, the “turning on” of a gene. Enhancers increase the level or speed up the rate

of transcription. Understanding what drives this interaction can significantly improve our ability to treat diseases caused by gene mutations or improve crop resistance to adverse environmental conditions.

Visit usahealthsystem.com/give to make a donation in support of cancer research.

Babies, babies, babies

USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital delivers more babies annually than any other hospital in Mobile. The Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit is the region's only Level III NICU, which offers the most advanced care for premature and critically ill newborns. Here's a snapshot of the babies born in 2022.



2,577

babies born



50.2%

boys



49.8%

girls



96

sets of twins

11.5 oz.

 smallest baby

11 lbs, 2 oz.

 largest baby

972

 admitted to NICU

3

 sets of triplets



Mapp Family Campus opens in Baldwin County

USA Health celebrated in November 2022 the dedication of the Mapp Family Campus Medical Office Building, a 50,000-square-foot structure that anchors the health system's largest presence in Baldwin County.

Standing three stories tall, the facility is home to Baldwin Family Medicine and USA Health specialty care providers who are uniquely qualified to meet the healthcare needs of people in the region. Specialties include endocrinology, urology, gastroenterology, urogynecology, colorectal surgery and general surgery. Pediatric specialties include surgery, urology, gastroenterology, cardiology, endocrinology and pulmonary. The building also houses a full array of imaging technology, including X-ray, mammography, ultrasound and CT.

“Collaborating with community physicians, providers from USA Health are bringing their specialized expertise to meet the healthcare needs of people in the region,” said Owen Bailey, M.S.H.A., chief executive officer and senior associate vice president for medical affairs at USA Health. “As the only academic healthcare system in the region, USA Health continues to expand relationships with community providers and other partners as we strive to provide increased access to the care that people need and deserve.”

It's estimated that 50 percent of Baldwin County residents live within 15 miles of the Mapp Family Campus, located at the intersection of state highways 181 and 104 in Fairhope.

Within the facility, USA Health physicians and other providers incorporate health and wellness strategies for patients along with traditional medicine. A teaching kitchen is included in the building, giving patients and caregivers the opportunity to engage in healthy-eating classes with the goal of helping people lead longer, better lives.

“The Mapp Family Campus will be another important location for educating and training the next generation of healthcare providers,” said John V. Marymont, M.D., M.B.A., vice president for



Owen Bailey, M.S.H.A., and his wife, Genie, take a moment with Melinda and Louis Mapp during a tour of the demonstration kitchen.

medical affairs and dean of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. “Having this additional site also will allow USA Health to help alleviate some of the healthcare provider shortages being faced in our region.”

Louis and Melinda Mapp donated 8 acres of land for the campus – a continuation of the family's longtime investment in academic medicine. Later this year, a 24,000-square-foot ambulatory surgery center is scheduled to be completed, which will round out the campus as a powerhouse for medical services and medical education in Baldwin County.

Support the Mapp Family Campus by contacting the Medical Affairs Development Office at 251-445-8423.



Children's & Women's Hospital unveils new Mother/Baby Unit

USA Health unveiled in February a new Mother/Baby Unit designed to promote comfort and bonding for families and their newborns. The 20-suite postpartum unit is located on the fifth floor of the women's tower at Children's & Women's Hospital, the area's leader in births.

The new unit is designed to facilitate couplet care, a family-centered approach in which mother and baby are cared for in the same room by the same nurse from the time a baby is born until both are ready to go home. Research has shown that couplet care creates a stronger bond between parents and their newborns, builds a baby's immunity and increases success rates for breastfeeding.

"We want to provide care for both mom and baby at the bedside," said Vicki Curtis, M.S.N., R.N., director of women's services at USA Health. "The unit will have the amenities in the rooms that allow the babies to stay comfortable with mom."

Each of the 20 suites includes a spacious bedroom, a recliner, couch and private

bath with luxury amenities such as bidets. Each suite also incorporates a baby bath and scale, and a height-adjustable bassinet for the newborn so that assessments and other procedures can be completed at the bedside.

In addition, a new lactation space will be located within the unit, staffed by an expanded team of lactation consultants. Two private rooms for breast pumping will be available for patients, visitors and staff to use.

"We want our approach to be family-centered," said Teneshia Edwards, R.N., nurse manager for the new unit. "This is a life-changing experience for families. We only have them for a few days, so we want to make sure that their experience during those few days is great."

The new Mother/Baby Unit includes 20 postpartum suites designed to encourage bonding between parents and their newborns. *Photo by Bailey Chastang*

Take a virtual tour of the new Mother/Baby Unit



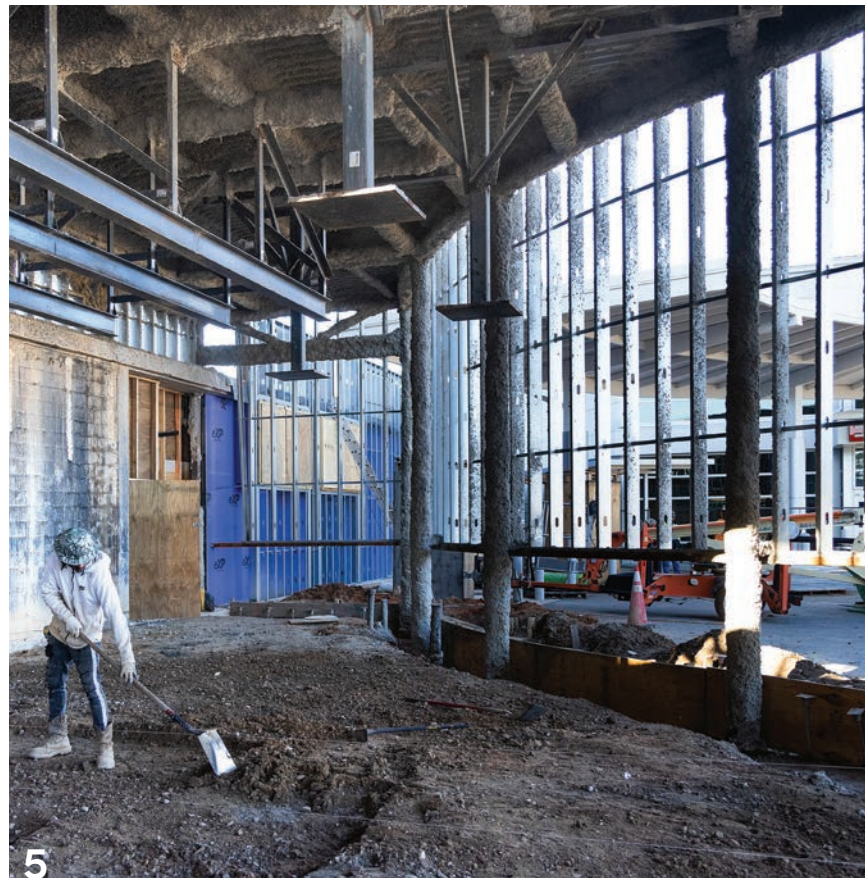
OB-GYN, pediatrics practice established at Eastern Shore Centre

USA Health Eastern Shore, which houses physicians from the departments of OB-GYN and pediatrics, is open at the Eastern Shore Centre in Spanish Fort. Providers at the new location are:

- Constance Collins Dabezies, M.D., obstetrician/gynecologist
- Melissa Goslawski, M.D., obstetrician/gynecologist
- Stephen Varner, M.D., obstetrician/gynecologist
- Perrin Windham, M.D., pediatrician
- Carey Winkler, M.D., maternal-fetal medicine physician
- Melissa R. Cochran, C.R.N.P., nurse practitioner

New and existing patients can schedule appointments at the clinic, located at 30500 Hwy 181, Suite 200. For OB-GYN appointments, call 251-415-1496. For pediatric appointments, call 251-410-5437.

Hard hats required: Areas under construction at USA Health



Numerous building projects are in progress across the health system:

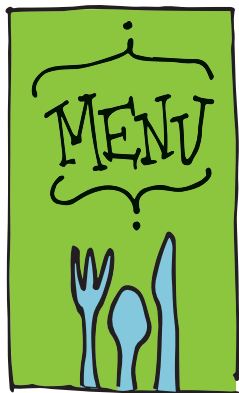
1. Construction of the ambulatory surgery center at the Mapp Family Campus in Fairhope
2. Construction of the medical office building at the USA Health West Mobile Campus
3. Renovation and expansion of the Pediatric Emergency Center at Children's & Women's Hospital
4. and 5. Remodeling of the former emergency department at University Hospital to house new operating suites

Tips to eat healthy while dining out

Making better eating choices while dining out is a challenge, but not impossible. Robert Israel, M.D., an internal medicine physician with USA Health and the director of the Integrative Health and Wellness program, offered these tips to eat healthy even when you're dining out.

Eating out can be an adventure in a great way, or it can be like walking through a minefield. It simply depends on the choices you make. Restaurant food is not always bad. For example, if it's a restaurant with real food instead of food that's passed through your car window, that's a win.

Food in a sit-down restaurant almost always has options with redeeming qualities, meaning it has some nutrients available. The key is to find the most nutrient-rich food that tastes great and has the least life-diminishing ingredients. That means avoiding added sugar, saturated fats and highly processed grains, like white bread and white rice, as much as possible.



Know the menu.

Before you arrive, look at the menu online, and make your choice or at least narrow it down. This can help you make wiser decisions from the start.

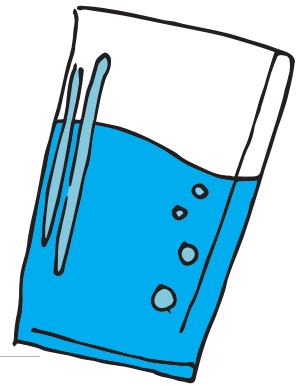


Order appetizers or sides.

If none of the entrees seem appealing or healthy, consider building your own meal. Maybe two appetizers, an appetizer and a side, or a soup and salad are better options.

Avoid sweet drinks and free bread.

Stay away from beverages other than water and wine, and turn down the bread that comes out early. It's full of empty calories!



Ask questions.

If there are a lot of sauces served with the meal, can they be left off or served on the side? Can olive oil be substituted for butter in sautéed dishes? Where did the fish come from? How is a dish prepared? Restaurant servers are accustomed to these questions, and they are willing to help.

Dessert is an option.

If you must, opt for something with fruit, but only eat a tiny bit of the custard, ice cream or cake served with it. Another choice is to share one dessert with the entire table.

Eat mindfully.

Chew and eat slowly. Put your fork down in between bites. Ask yourself how you feel when you've eaten about half of your food. Be open to responding by stopping sooner than you might otherwise.

Of course, many of these pitfalls can be avoided simply in choosing a restaurant that offers multiple healthy choices, such as hummus, roasted chicken, fish and vegetables.

Finally, don't feel guilty if you enjoy a great meal! You deserve it because you did your best and ordered well.

Recipes for the family



Tinsley Chavers, M.S., a diabetes resource coordinator with USA Health, shares simple recipes to get your kids involved in the kitchen.

Invite your kids to help with the cooking process, and they'll be more likely to take an interest in the food they're eating. Your kids may not adopt what they help make as their new favorite food, but they'll usually give it a try when they've seen it somewhere along the way before it hits their plate.

Chili Lime Chicken

Primary Ingredients:

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, thawed if frozen	1/4 teaspoon chili powder
	1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
	or 2 tablespoons taco seasoning
	1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
	Pinch of salt and pepper
	Extra virgin olive oil
	Cilantro and lime for garnish

Chicken marinade:

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon lime juice
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon cumin

Directions:

1. In an airtight bag, mix all marinade ingredients until combined. Cut chicken into bite-sized pieces and add to bag with marinade. Seal bag and shake until chicken is evenly coated. Let chicken marinate for at least 30 minutes.
2. While chicken is marinating, prepare the toppings and sauce.
3. When chicken is ready, heat olive oil in large pan over medium heat. Remove chicken from marinade (using fork/tongs; discard remaining marinade) and cook for 5-7 minutes or until chicken is 165°F.
4. Remove from heat and serve with toppings above; leave chicken as bite-sized pieces or shred. Top with cilantro and lime.

Serving tips: This recipe is versatile. Choose a base (cooked brown rice, quinoa, tortilla chips or whole wheat tortilla) and two toppings you know your family will like, perhaps a third they haven't tried before! Maybe you let your kids choose the base and use this recipe to clean out the refrigerator of half-used vegetables from other recipes.

Berry-Yogurt Popsicles

Ingredients:

1 pound fresh berries or 2 cups frozen 2 cups vanilla-flavored Greek yogurt

Directions:

1. Use a food processor, blender, or hand mash the berries to desired consistency.
2. Pour berries into large mixing bowl and add yogurt. Stir to combine, then spoon into popsicle mold and freeze until solid.

Helen's amazing journey

Faced with a scary diagnosis, Helen Bender Bailey fights melanoma with the help of immunotherapy, family and community.

By Carol McPhail

"It was the best trip of our lives."

That's the way Helen Bender Bailey of Mobile describes traveling to Italy with her parents and her older sister in May 2022. There's a photo of the 26-year-old beaming at the camera as she strolls down a cobblestone street with her arms around her sister and father.

"We bonded so much," Bailey recalled. "We had always been close, but we got closer."

During the 10-day journey, she tried to set aside worries about her health. During her annual checkup, her doctor noticed something on her lungs. Bender worried that melanoma, a skin cancer diagnosed and treated years earlier, had returned. Still, she convinced her doctor to postpone further tests for a few days.

During the trip, Bailey kept the news to herself. The only sign of a problem was an unusual bump on her jawline. "I pushed it to the back of my mind and decided to go enjoy the trip," she said. "My parents were so excited."

Two days after they returned, Bailey had a CT scan and went home to her apartment to await the results. The doctor's office called and asked her to come in immediately. "I knew it was something bad," she said. "I didn't want to scare my parents just yet, so I went by myself."

The scans revealed that Bailey's melanoma had returned and had spread to her chest and abdomen. Melanoma, the most aggressive form of skin cancer, had appeared on her shoulder during her teens but had been removed. Hearing the bad news years later was surreal. "I remember the whole room blacking out," she recalled. "I could kind of see the doctor's face and knew what he was saying but didn't (fully) understand it."

She immediately called her then-boyfriend, Alec Bailey, who joined her to review the next steps with the doctor. She and Alec Bailey had known each other since attending Catholic schools near each other and had worked together at The Booth at the University of Alabama. "That was the saddest part, seeing his reaction," she said. "You're giving everyone you love the worst news ever. Obviously, it wasn't my fault, but you hate that you're causing them so much trauma."

Next, Bailey had to find a way to break the news to her family. Somehow, that task felt scarier than receiving the diagnosis herself.

The doctor called her dad, John T. Bender, who was seeing an eye doctor in Baldwin County. Bailey's mother and sister were in New Orleans, but when they arrived home, her father met them at the door. "He said, 'Helen's cancer is metastatic, and it's either stage 3 or 4,'" her mom, Andie Bender, recalled. "I felt like I was going to pass out. It was truly the





worst news I've ever gotten in my entire life."

Soon, they would learn more about Bailey's diagnosis. A PET scan, which uses a radioactive tracer to show organs and tissues, revealed tumors in 16 places in her body.

"Crazy day. I felt like I was just floating along while people were scanning me and testing me," Bailey recalled. "Once I got the diagnosis, there were so many people who were taking care of me and making sure I was OK. Everybody was taking me along with them."

Bailey and her family made an appointment with Brian Persing, M.D., chair of medical oncology at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute. "We had only had a day to sit with the news and were so scared to hear what options we had," she recalled.

Persing chose his words carefully and took his time explaining Bailey's cancer. "Information and education are two of the most important tools with which we arm our patients, their friends and their families," he said. "The unknown leads to anxiety and, at times, more fear. The better our patient understands their cancer, the more control they have over the situation and the greater autonomy they have in the decisions that they are able to make."

At the family's request, Persing connected them with an oncologist at MD Anderson in Houston, but he also wanted to stay in touch throughout Bailey's journey. "He gave us three separate ways to contact him, including his personal phone number," Bailey said. "He is a true treasure."

"Fighting cancer and Houston traffic at the same time!" her mom, Andie Bender, wrote on Facebook on June 3. The family was heading home from Houston after more scans, a biopsy and genetic testing to help determine the best treatment option.

In the meantime, Bailey had been taking injections in her abdomen to prepare for freezing her eggs prior to cancer treatment, which can affect fertility. The hormones caused mood swings, and the process was painful but successful. "I have nine healthy eggs that someday I can hopefully do something with," she said proudly.

After the evaluation at MD Anderson, it was decided that Bailey would receive infusions of ipilimumab (Yervoy) and nivolumab (Opdivo) every three weeks for three months, then transition to just Opdivo. The entire ordeal would take about two years, doctors told her.

Bailey wanted a "last hurrah" before she started treatment, so she and her sister, Virginia Bender, made plans to go to Hang-

out Fest, a beachside music festival that attracts tens of thousands of people to Gulf Shores each spring. They also summoned the courage to reach out to one of her favorite artists, Zedd, a Grammy-winning electronic music producer and DJ, who was slated to perform at the event.

"We messaged him and said, 'I'm about to start chemo, and I don't know what my life looks like from here. If we can meet you, whatever you can do to make this experience better, we would love it. We are huge fans,'" she said. "In eight minutes, he replied, and we had backstage passes."

What Bailey thought would be a meet-and-greet turned into much more. As a crowd of thousands looked on, Zedd gestured to Bailey to join him on stage. He asked fans to hold up their phones to light the darkness and introduced her. "This is my friend Helen. She's going through a hard time, and let's give her some love," Zedd called through the microphone.

Soon, the crowd was chanting, "Hel-EN! Hel-EN!"

Zedd kicked off one of Bailey's favorite tracks, his electronic dance remix of "Alive" by Empire of the Sun. Those thrilling moments, captured on Vimeo, show a pig-tailed Bailey bobbing to the music and hugging the artist as tears streamed down



her face. “That should have absolutely been the darkest time of my life,” she recalled. “But that made the whole weekend from beginning to end fill with joy and excitement.”

For the first two months of her treatment, Bailey suffered from constant fever and violent shaking – the side effects of immunotherapy. Then doctors enrolled her in a clinical trial that tests the use of a rheumatoid arthritis drug to reduce those symptoms. Thanks to the trial, she was able to tolerate the treatment much better.

In mid-July, following an infusion, Bailey wanted to attend a wedding in California, but her friends begged her to come home. She was suspicious of their insistence until one of them hinted that they were holding a surprise cancer benefit for her at a house on Dog River.

The day of the party, she prepared for the surprise. As Alec Bailey followed her across the yard of the river house, she was greeted with a completely different surprise. He tapped her on the shoulder, dropped to one knee and opened a jewelry box containing an engagement ring.

Bailey was ecstatic.

Hiding in the bushes, Virginia Bender captured the joyous moment on video when her sister threw her arms around

Alec Bailey, and he lifted her off the ground in a tight embrace.

The couple were married on April 15 at St. Joseph Chapel on the campus of Spring Hill College in Mobile, with a reception at the Ezell House on Conti Street.

Although Bailey continues to have doctor appointments at MD Anderson, she and her family asked to schedule her infusions at the Mitchell Cancer Institute in Mobile so they could remain close to home as much as possible. “We also wanted the opportunity to continue our relationship with Dr. Persing,” her mom said. “We are so grateful for the doctors, and we believe that God has guided them.”

By fall, all of Bailey’s tumors were shrinking, providing hope that she could reach remission sooner than the expected two years. When the good news was posted on her Facebook blog, “Helen Bender’s Journey,” friends and family from across Mobile weighed in with hundreds of comments and words of encouragement. “Everywhere I go, people come up to me – even people I’ve met once or twice – and say, ‘I’m on my knees every morning praying for you that God brings you strength,’” Bailey said. “It makes me appreciate where I’m from.”

The family has received an outpouring of support – constant calls, prayer cards,

prayer blankets, meals and more – “lots of really sweet, thoughtful gifts,” her mom said. “The community has been unbelievable.”

Bailey describes herself as “dangerously optimistic” and upbeat, a point driven home in old video footage posted on Facebook. In the video, a preschool-age Bailey in a pink hair bow grins playfully at the camera as she sweeps her arms back and forth, asking, “You’re about to smile, aren’t you?”

Despite everything, grown-up Bailey is still smiling and trying to get others to smile, too.

And, now she is in remission from stage 4 melanoma.

“It’s crazy that I went from being told I might die to feeling fine and doing great,” she said. “You definitely have that feeling of, ‘Why am I here? Why has God allowed me to have that second chance?’ I’m living a normal life but hoping I can do something big with it someday.”

2022 was a roller coaster of a year for Helen Bender Bailey with a cancer diagnosis, a difficult treatment regimen, care coordinated by Brian Persing, M.D., and a marriage proposal. Now Bailey is in remission.



UROLOGY LOOKS TO FUTURE WITH NEW RESIDENCY PROGRAM

By Carol McPhail

If you live in the South, you likely have experienced the excruciating pain of a kidney stone, or you know someone who has. The southern half of the country is known as the Kidney Stone Belt, recognized for its high incidence of kidney stones, hard deposits in the kidneys that cause patients to seek the care of a urologist.

In the heart of the Kidney Stone Belt, USA Health has been steadily laying the foundation to become a regional leader in the care of all urologic disorders, not just kidney stones. With a newly created academic department of urology at the Frederick P.

Whiddon College of Medicine, USA Health is poised to take the next logical step for an academic health system – launching a program to train future practitioners in the field.

The five-year urology residency program, recently approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, will launch in July. Two residents – a first-year resident and a second-year resident – have been accepted to the program through the National Urology Match. Residents will spend time training in general urology/surgery, robotics, pediatric urology, female pelvic medicine and reconstructive sur-

gery, trauma and urologic oncology at USA Health.

“Training the next generation of physicians is one of our responsibilities as the region’s only academic health system,” said John Marymont, M.D., M.B.A., dean of the Whiddon College of Medicine and vice president for medical affairs at the University of South Alabama. “This new residency program will enhance our ability to provide state-of-the-art comprehensive care to the people of Alabama and the upper Gulf Coast.”

Owen Bailey, M.S.H.A., chief executive officer for USA Health, said the new program

will help meet the growing healthcare needs of people in the region. “We now will be able to further expand our advanced urological services while carrying out our missions of research and education,” he said.

All of the components for the residency program are in place, having been developed methodically over the past few years – an impressive feat considering that urology is one of the most competitive specialties for residency applicants.

“We’ve made incredible progress expanding our practice and fulfilling our mission as part of an academic health system,” said Christopher Keel, D.O., interim chair of the department of urology and director of the new residency program. “We are now proud to broaden our educational offerings to include residency training.”

Keel, a board-certified urologist who trained at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, came to USA Health University Urology in 2019, joining a practice that had relocated to a high-profile office building along I-65 near Dauphin Street. University Urology has grown to comprise 11 providers including seven physicians and four advanced practice providers. Today, it’s the only urology group on the upper Gulf Coast to offer comprehensive care not just for kidney stones, but for all urologic diseases, providing all standard-of-care options.

Keel explains it this way to patients: “It means we can be your one-stop shop for all of your urologic care needs, saving you the time and effort of visiting multiple practices.”

One of his colleagues, Lorie Fleck, M.D., became the first female urologist to practice in Mobile in 1995. Fleck focuses her practice on female urology, a growing field that addresses issues of the genital tract, bladder and bowel such as female urinary or bowel incontinence, pelvic pain, urologic injuries and pelvic organ prolapse. She is board certified in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery.

“I want women to know that they don’t have to ignore issues such as an overactive bladder or urinary incontinence or pelvic floor dysfunction,” said Fleck, who also serves as an associate professor of urology at the Whiddon College of Medicine. “These are conditions that can be treated, sometimes with diet, exercises and lifestyle changes.”

Fleck said many of her female patients are relieved to discover that they can share their concerns with a female urologist. “Dr. (Kristie) Burch and I are ready to listen and see how we can help improve their quality of life,” she said.



Opposite: USA Health University Urology comprises seven physicians and four advanced practice providers.

Above: Lorie Fleck, M.D., and Christopher Keel, D.O., perform a kidney surgery at University Hospital.

University Urology is also the only group in the region to employ eCoin neurostimulation to address urinary leakage and is an InterStim Center of Excellence, a prestigious designation for treating overactive bladder and incontinence.

Meanwhile, providers at University Urology have demonstrated their interest in quality initiatives by participating in the American Urological Association Quality Registry, a national urologic disease registry. The robust database can help urologists describe patient care patterns, monitor safety and harm, and enable them to review and compare data with their peers.

In July 2022, USA Health became the first health system in the region to purchase the da Vinci SP (single port), a robot-assisted system that allows for a single point of entry for prostatectomies, removal of part or all of the prostate gland, and other surgeries, with the potential for less pain and shorter hospital stays. The da Vinci SP uses three multi-jointed wristed instruments and a camera that all operate through a single cannula.

“In the past, if my patients wanted access to this surgery, they would either have had to travel several hours to another institution or have a different procedure that required additional incisions and more downtime,” Keel said.

University Urology also offers the iTind procedure, a new minimally invasive treatment to provide fast and effective relief for enlarged prostate symptoms. It’s estimated that prostate enlargement, benign prostatic hyperplasia, affects about 50% of men between the ages of 51 and 60, and up to 90% of men older than 80.

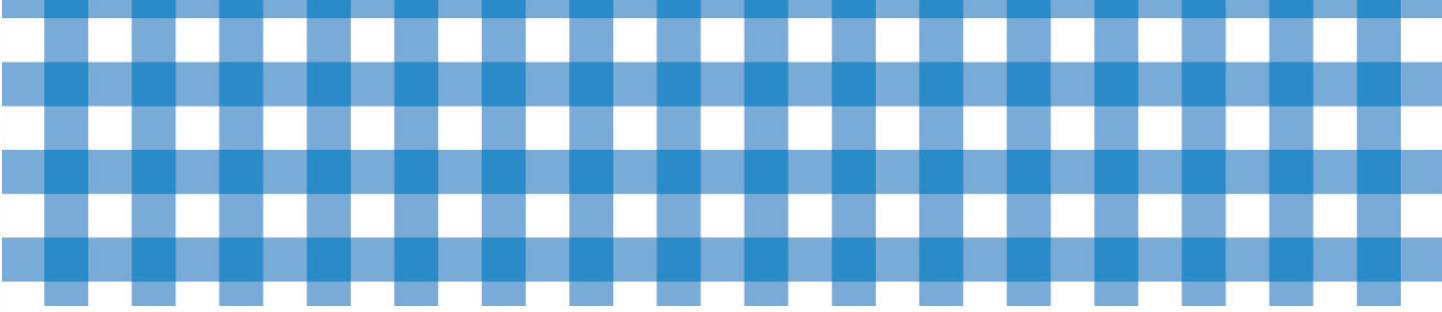
As USA Health has added new technology and the latest advancements in treatment, it also has introduced urologic care specifically for children and teens, with easy access to care in Mobile and Baldwin counties.

In 2022, two fellowship-trained pediatric urologists joined USA Health to provide these specialized services. Robert Mevorach, M.D., who trained at the University of California San Francisco, and Mariarita Salvitti Fermin, M.D., who trained at the University of Miami, focus their practice on patients with conditions such as undescended testicles, hernias and circumcision problems. They see patients at University Urology in Mobile and at a new office located at the Mapp Family Campus in Baldwin County.

“With the addition of our pediatric subspecialists, we can offer a full range of care to meet all the urologic needs of families who live in our region,” Keel said. “Now, as we prepare to bring in residents to train, it’s time to share that knowledge and expertise with the next generation of physicians.”

The Angella and Dr. Christopher E. Keel Urology Endowment Fund was established in 2022 to support the Department of Urology. Contact the Medical Affairs Development Office at 251-445-8423 for more information on how to contribute.





Dedication and detective work solve mysterious medical quandary

by Nedra Bloom

Spring of 2020 is a time most of us would rather forget. The lockdowns, the separation from friends and family, the terror of COVID all around with no way to protect ourselves.

But David and Cristina Green have vivid memories of those days. Dozens of photos of their daughter's inexplicable symptoms still live on their cell phones, along with numerous text messages seeking advice from knowledgeable friends and reassuring one another that all would be well.

It was April of 2020, and Christina Green was concerned about 18-month-old Andrea. She had a fever and didn't seem herself. On the third day, her tongue appeared unusual. At that time, it was hard to get a doctor's appointment if you had a fever.

So, Cristina Green, a teacher at Bayside Academy in Daphne, snapped a photo with her phone and shared it with a doctor friend who said it looked like strawberry tongue, probably wasn't too serious, and recommended waiting until the following day to see her pediatrician.

By Monday, April 20, her older son, David, had developed swollen lymph nodes. Cristina Green took the two children for tests, and both were positive for strep.

By now, though, Andrea was worse – waking from naps and having difficulty holding her head up. “I’m thinking meningitis,” Cristina Green recalled. But when Andrea started waking up with swollen eyes, she started sending pictures again to expert friends. Her neurologist friend thought an MRI might be wise.

“By Friday, I guess all this time I had been holding her and not paying attention that she had not been moving much. She woke up from a nap, and we took her outside. The boys were playing on the playground,” Cristina Green said. Usually, Andrea could climb with no problem, but when she tried that Friday afternoon, she couldn't do it. “I said, ‘That’s a problem that’s brain-related. There’s something wrong,’ I put her down and asked her to walk, and she couldn't walk. She was crying.”

Alarmed, Cristina Green called her husband. David Green hurried home from work and videoed Andrea's tearful struggle to walk.

At 6 p.m. on Friday, she called her doctor friend, who advised her to go straight to USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital in Mobile.

One sick child, two other children, two parents and an emergency. David Green's memory is of people shuffling. His sister was on her way to visit them when the crisis erupted. They met in the Winn-Dixie parking lot in Loxley. His sister took the boys to her home in Magnolia Springs, while he dropped his wife and Andrea at Children's & Women's Hospital. He couldn't go in, of

Andrea Green and her older brothers David, left, and Alexander play in their backyard in March 2023. Andrea's parents, David and Christina Green, knew something wasn't right when their daughter didn't want to join her brothers on the playground in the spring of 2020.



course, because of COVID protocols. After hours in the parking lot, he went to their place in Daphne to avoid, if possible, carrying whatever Andrea had back to the rest of the family.

Children's & Women's Hospital was familiar, at least. Just a year earlier, their son Alexander, now 8, had the first of two surgeries there after a broken bone in his face caused unexpected ramifications. The family remembered the care as excellent.

As familiar as the hospital was to the Greens, treatment during COVID was uncharted territory – for patients, for parents and for the hospital itself.

There were no quick COVID tests available at the time, but the hospital immediately instituted strict isolation procedures. Andrea and Cristina Green had a room but couldn't leave it – not to stretch their legs, get a snack or see a friendly face.

While there was no immediate way to confirm COVID, blood tests did show markers for inflammation, and her blood pressure was up, which at least began to explain why young Andrea couldn't walk and move her head properly. Her joints were so inflamed that it hurt to move anything.

Cristina Green offered high praise for three physicians – pediatric hospitalist Maria Renee Roca Garcia, M.D., pediatric

Andrea Green enjoys being pushed on the swing by big brothers Alexander, left, and David.

infectious disease specialist Benjamin Estrada, M.D., and pediatric cardiologist Lynn Batten, M.D. – for their expert care of Andrea, their expertise in explaining issues to parents, and their amazing ability to calm and reassure her.

David Green, unable to visit and getting all his information secondhand, was stressed. But in a phone call on the second day, Cristina Green mentioned meeting with all three doctors. "The tone of her voice brought so much peace," he said. "It comforted me because she clearly conveyed that we were in the right place."

David Green had the chance to talk by phone with Estrada; after that, he said, he understood his wife's level of confidence and comfort.

"I'm not a medical professional, but it seems that infectious disease specialists are like complex problem solvers," said David Green, a lawyer and general contractor who owns a disaster recovery firm. "Many people in many professions can take the pieces of the puzzle and place them together to try to solve the problem. My evaluation is that infectious disease specialists like Dr. Estrada will never stop until every piece of the puzzle is discovered and placed properly to

“I’m not a medical professional, but it seems that infectious disease specialists are like complex problem solvers. It’s like (they have) a relentless pursuit in their DNA.”

- David Green

tell the story. It’s like (they have) a relentless pursuit in their DNA.”

The pediatricians’ confidence gave the Greens confidence, too.

By now, everyone agreed that Andrea needed an MRI, but that required a negative COVID test – and tests still had to be sent out for processing. Test results suggested Kawasaki disease, but she didn’t have all the symptoms.

As David Green typed Kawasaki into his browser, he learned that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others were reporting a sudden uptick in multi-system inflammatory disease (MIS-C) in children who had had COVID. But she didn’t have all the symptoms for that either.

Finally settling on Kawasaki, the doctors treated her with intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG), and immediately she began to do much better. Tests showed enlarged arteries, but all agreed that baby aspirin could prevent a heart attack and Andrea could go home.

Home at last on April 29.

But the following morning, Andrea woke up lethargic, napping on the sofa not long after getting up. During another four days in the hospital, she was treated with another round of IVIG and again released.

During the summer, the Greens were sent to the University of Alabama at Birmingham for heart follow-up, and the enlarged arteries were back to normal.

Today, Andrea is a happy, healthy 4-year-old, running, jumping, climbing and playing with her brothers.

“Only God can heal,” David Green said, but for all that can be handled by medical care: “We were in the right hands.”

Putting the puzzle pieces together

The Green family isn’t alone in its vivid memories of Andrea’s inexplicable illness. Her caregivers – pediatric hospitalist Maria Renee Roca Garcia, M.D., pediatric infectious disease specialist Benjamin Estrada, M.D., and pediatric cardiologist Lynn Batten, M.D. – recalled Andrea and those early COVID days full of puzzles and complex questions.

Roca was the first to see Andrea – a child with multiple issues but no obvious diagnosis. A lumbar puncture showed a virus but didn’t seem to answer all the questions. Markers for inflammation were very high.

So many different problems at once makes a pediatrician think of Kawasaki disease, she said. Even though Andrea didn’t have the set of five criteria that would clinch a diagnosis, she called in Estrada for his infectious disease expertise.

“It was confusing at first,” said Estrada. “Inflammation, fever we see in Kawasaki disease.”

Still trying to pinpoint a diagnosis, the team called for an echocardiogram.

“The echo was the lightbulb,” Batten said. Kawasaki can cause inflammation of coronary arteries. Some kids have the disease without artery problems, but when the echo showed Andrea’s dilated coronary arteries, there was the diagnosis.

“Boom! That’s the answer,” Batten said.

Just as they were struggling to help Andrea, word began to spread in the pediatric medical community about a new disease – multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children or MIS-C – which was showing up in children a couple of weeks after they had COVID-19.

“The clinical picture of that disease process is almost identical to Kawasaki disease,” Estrada said. The question then became, did she have Kawasaki disease or MIS-C? Tests showed that Andrea had no COVID antibodies, confirming that she had Kawasaki.

“It was probably the first case in which we had this diagnostic dilemma – never in our lives had we had that dilemma, because COVID was not present,” Estrada said. Now COVID brings something that looks like Kawasaki, and the team had to learn to discern which was which.

Since then, of course, they’ve treated many, many children with Kawasaki or MIS-C. “After two years, I’ve lost count,” Estrada said.

While that first experience helped them prepare for what was to come, they also reflected on the lessons learned that helped Andrea make a full recovery. “Don’t make decisions too early,” Estrada said. “It’s a diagnostic challenge when you’re trying to figure out about a young child with symptoms that can be part of many different things. If you feel that something isn’t right, keep looking. That’s what I tell my students.”

And never forget the patient’s history, Roca added. Fever is key to diagnosing Kawasaki, and Andrea was fever-free when she came to the hospital. But looking back over information provided by the attentive parents, Roca remembered that Andrea had a fever for 10 days before the hospital trip.

One more lesson: At the time, medical advice said IVIG could be effective against Kawasaki and its potential heart damage if it were administered in the first 10 days. But Andrea was already past the 10 days covered in the study. Reviewing the literature, the team learned that no one reported ill effects of administering IVIG after 10 days; no one had studied it. It seemed the best option, and fortunately it worked.

The best news, Batten noted, is that Andrea – and her coronary arteries – are back to normal.

HEALING

one of our own

By Lindsay Hughes

Michael Sternberg, M.D., works 12-hour shifts as a physician in the emergency department at USA Health University Hospital, taking care of patients on some of their worst days. One morning, in March 2022, he was on the other side of that scenario.

After several days of dull low-back pain, Sternberg was getting ready for an emergency room shift, when he experienced an acute onset of debilitating pain that radiated from his back down his right hip and to the lower leg. He tried raising his leg to see if it would help ease the pain. It didn't help.

"Within a few minutes, I was lying down on the floor," he said. "The pain was so exquisite, it caused nausea, something that some patients express but that I have not experienced personally. The pain was so severe, it was the only time that my wife of 25 years has seen me cry."

His wife, Maure Sternberg, took him to the USA Health Freestanding Emergency Department that had recently opened near the University of South Alabama campus. There, he received an MRI scan and was diagnosed with an acute rupture of the L3-L4 intervertebral disc in his lower back.

Anthony Martino, M.D., was the neurosurgeon on call. He told Sternberg he wanted to see him in his office as soon as possible.

"With disc ruptures, we try to do conservative measures first – physical therapy, anti-inflammatory drugs, muscle relaxers, possibly epidural injections," said Martino, professor of neurosurgery at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. "But if they have intractable, unrelenting pain, that's when we start thinking about surgery."

Over the course of several weeks, Sternberg received two epidural steroid injections and L3-L4 selective nerve root blocks, but they did not alleviate his pain. "I was unable to stand, sit or walk, and could only tolerate lying on my left side in bed. It was like having a charley horse that never stopped," he said. "I lost about 20 pounds,

mostly muscle mass, and I had no appetite."

For the previous 30 years, Sternberg, professor of emergency medicine and director of student education at the Whiddon College of Medicine, had enjoyed his physically demanding job in the emergency department while teaching medical students and training resident physicians. He came to USA Health as an intern himself in 1989 before joining the faculty of the newly established Department of Emergency Medicine in 1992. Being confined to bed and unable to work was panic-inducing for the usually active physician.

"I'm the main provider for my family," said Sternberg, father of three children – two in college at Auburn University and one a senior at McGill-Toolen Catholic High School. "I was lying there thinking, 'If I can't work, what are we going to do?' It's a really bad feeling. If I go down, my whole family goes down."

After conservative approaches to therapy failed to relieve his pain, Sternberg was scheduled for surgery. Martino used a minimally invasive technique called a microdiscectomy to remove the fragments of herniated disc tissue impinging the L3 and L4 nerve roots. Sternberg showed some immediate improvement after the first surgery. He woke up in the recovery room without pain in his back, lateral hip or upper leg.

At clinic follow-up one week later, Sternberg was having some residual symptoms of lower leg pain. Martino conducted a repeat microdiscectomy during which a previously hidden disc fragment was found distorting the L3 nerve root. Sternberg awoke post-surgery pain free. "Dr. Martino completely alleviated my leg pain and had me up and walking again within one day and back to work within two weeks," he said. "I just have a small scar on my back from the incisions, and a little numbness and weakness that have since resolved."

Martino said most patients with herniated discs can be treated with more con-

servative therapy, but a small percentage of cases require surgery. "This is a major operation, but it's not as complex as many of the surgeries we do at USA Health," Martino said, adding that 85% of patients have a positive outcome like Sternberg. "He's done remarkably well."

The minimally invasive procedure was not an option three decades ago when Sternberg experienced his first herniated disc. He was a resident at USA Health when his L5-S1 disc ruptured, causing severe back pain and debilitating muscle spasms. "I was just lying on the floor for weeks," he recalled. "I got four epidural steroid injections over a period of six to eight weeks, and it took about two to three years to completely overcome."

Sternberg is grateful that USA Health Neurosurgery offers the microdiscectomy procedure when indicated. "I'm just super appreciative to Dr. Martino – he's really amazing – Haley Kirby, the patient navigator who took great care of me, and the whole staff," he said. "I also appreciate that the university was so supportive. All of the other faculty in our department pitched in and covered my shifts without any complaint at all."

As an ER doctor, Sternberg sees many patients with back pain, the fourth most common presenting complaint to the emergency department. He said this experience with a ruptured disc has further educated his approach to treating patients in severe pain.

"From now on, if I see anyone in the emergency room with an acute disc rupture, I'll appreciate more acutely their situation and significant pain," he said, "because if they're hurting anything like I was, I'm just going to give them a big hug and whatever immediate care and comfort that I can provide."

Michael Sternberg, M.D., has a follow-up appointment with Anthony Martino, M.D., after microdiscectomy surgery for a ruptured disc.





Project Inspire celebrates its third graduating class

USA Health University Hospital celebrated its third class of Project Inspire “graduates” in December. A mentorship and training program for at-risk youth, Project Inspire seeks to curb gun violence in our community while preparing teens for success after high school.

Last year, after a two-year hiatus because of the pandemic, University Hospital welcomed five new Project Inspire participants from the local community, who were identified by the Mobile County Juvenile Court system as candidates who stood to benefit the most from the program.

“This program is so much more than an anti-violence program; it’s a youth development program,” said Edmond G. Naman, Mobile County Circuit Court judge and head of Mobile County Juvenile Court.

During the 10-week program, students toured Bishop State Community College and learned about the many opportunities available to them through the various departments. They also participated in career planning activities such as ACT/GED

preparation, resumé development, mock job interviews, and training in Basic Life Support and Stop The Bleed.

The career-planning sessions are designed to encourage participants to formulate a vision for their future careers and develop an action plan. After completing the sessions, the five students identified interests in real estate, truck driving and medicine. One student interviewed for a job and was hired while completing the program.

Antwan Hogue, M.D., a senior hospitalist at University Hospital, worked with the participants and focused on teaching them financial literacy, how to obtain financial freedom, and how to invest in real estate.

“If we can impact one member of our community, we’ve made a huge difference,” said Ashley Williams Hogue, M.D., a trauma

The third class of participants in USA Health’s Project Inspire, a mentorship and training program for at-risk youth, graduated from the program last December.

surgeon and Project Inspire founder. “If, then, that person has a positive impact on another, we’ve doubled our progress. We’ve ignited change. Our participants will be the ambassadors of change in our community.”

Established in 2017, Project Inspire is USA Health’s multi-week, hospital-based injury prevention program. Through an ongoing partnership with the Strickland Youth Center, Project Inspire aims to help participants to see themselves through a different lens – one of empowerment.

Make a gift. Change a life.

Please support Project Inspire’s ongoing efforts in the community by donating today: giving.usahealthsystem.com/uh-trauma





Return to Rwanda: Medical students, faculty serve on medical mission

For the first time since the pandemic, a group from the Whiddon College of Medicine and USA Health embarked on a month-long medical mission trip to Rwanda in February.

Led by the Christian Medical Ministry of South Alabama, 12 senior medical students and more than 20 clinical faculty members, residents, advanced practice providers and support personnel served on the mission. The volunteers worked alongside the physicians and staff at Kibogora Hospital, a rural referral hospital in southwest Rwanda.

The hospital is so remote, drones deliver blood products needed for transfusions. During the mission, the team caught the packages of lifesaving blood as the boxes parachuted safely to the ground.

Chris Johnson was among the fourth-year medical students on the trip, which is an elective course for senior medical students. In the absence of an official radiologist, he helped perform and interpret X-rays and ultrasounds – a role he was well prepared for thanks to his upbringing, education and training.

Johnson learned to interpret images from his mother, Leigh Ann Cashwell, M.D., a 2001 graduate of the Whiddon College of Medicine and a practicing radiologist. As a medical student, he spent three months in USA Health's interventional radiology department with Zeiad Hussain, M.D.,

assistant professor of radiology. Under Hussain's guidance, he participated in ultrasound-guided biopsies and vascular accesses.

These proved to be useful skills at Kibogora Hospital. One of the hospital's patients had been assaulted and stabbed by attackers with needles, which had broken off in her pelvis and flank. She had three prior surgeries, but they were not able to find all the foreign bodies.

"I went to surgery with her and used ultrasound-guided needle localization to find all the foreign needles. Once I'd find one, they'd prep and use my needle as a guide to remove the foreign object," Johnson explained. "We repeated that until we got them all."

He added, "It was very impactful to truly make a difference in a patient's care and actually be vital to the patient's outcome."

Kasey Grant Andrews, a fourth-year medical student and future pediatrician, served in varying capacities on the trip. For example, she worked in the post-anesthesia care unit, assisted in the minor procedure room, and went on home visits to check on paralyzed patients who were unable to travel to the hospital for regular check-ups.

"As a medical student at the Whiddon College of Medicine, I have learned the value of helping in any manner that is beneficial to the team, which made me very comfortable with switching positions day to day,"

she said. "Additionally, having been exposed to many different hospital settings prepared me to adapt to a setting that was unfamiliar and a group of patients I struggled to communicate with."

Andrews cultivated many relationships on the trip, including one she cherishes with a 3-year-old burn patient and her mother. "Being an elementary school teacher, her mother spoke English well, which allowed us to communicate throughout her treatment," Andrews said. "While she was inpatient, I was able to check on her every day; and when she went home, I was still able to participate in dressing changes every other day."

She continues to receive regular updates from the patient's mother via WhatsApp messages.

Andrews said she models her patient interactions after how USA Health providers treat their patients. "Watching several of the physicians and residents care for patients day in and day out with passion and humility has helped me cultivate how I try to treat each patient regardless of who they are or what brought them to seek care," she said.

A group from the Whiddon College of Medicine and USA Health traveled to Rwanda for the medical mission trip.

Medical student Chris Johnson uses needle localization on a patient at Kibogora Hospital.

A Night Honoring Healers highlights remarkable patient stories

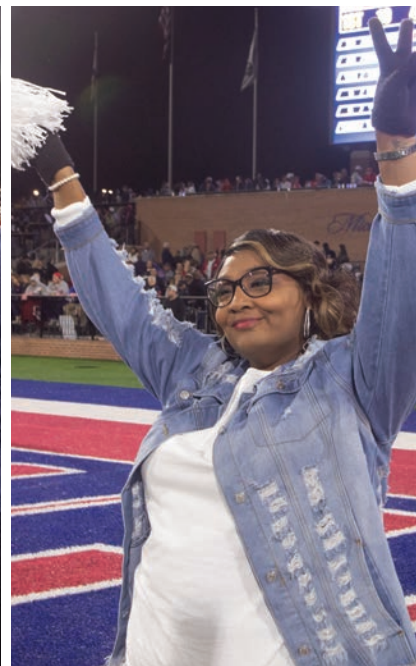


A Night Honoring Healers focused on the incredible stories of our USA Health care team members in action as they provided exceptional, compassionate care to patients Layla Jamison and Cullen Potter. Presented by The Mapp Family Foundation, the event was held Oct. 13, 2022, at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center.

Save the Date
Thursday, November 16
usahealthsystem.com/healers


A NIGHT HONORING
HEALERS

Employees cheer on the Jags at USA Health Game Day



Employees and their families were among the sold-out crowd at Hancock Whitney Stadium on Oct. 20, 2022, as the South Alabama Jaguars took on the Troy University Trojans for USA Health Game Day. During the third quarter, representatives from USA Health and the Whiddon College of Medicine were introduced on the field.

GO Run supports GYN research at the Mitchell Cancer Institute



Save the date



run

SEPTEMBER 16

[usahealthsystem.com/
events/go-run](https://usahealthsystem.com/events/go-run)

Hundreds of runners and walkers helped raise awareness and funds for gynecologic cancer research at the 15th Annual GO Run, held Sept. 17, 2022, in a new location on the USA campus. Proceeds from the GO Run, presented by the Catranis Family Charitable Foundation, support revolutionary research happening at the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Second annual Doc Rock raises \$57,000 for USA Health



Supporters packed the Soul Kitchen in downtown Mobile for the second annual Doc Rock on March 23. The battle-of-the-bands event raised more than \$57,000 for research and critical patient needs at Children's & Women's Hospital, University Hospital, and the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

USA Health *Faces*



Scaturro



Fox



Blair-Elortegui



Ramani



Pearson



Persing



Bouska



Williams



Broome

Scaturro named health system chief operating officer

Shannon Scaturro, M.S.H.A., M.S.N., was named health system chief operating officer for USA Health.

In his new role, he plans and develops strategic initiatives and operational performance that support USA Health's mission, vision and values. He has oversight of all acute-care facilities, the Freestanding Emergency Department and Imaging Center, the upcoming Baldwin County Ambulatory Surgery Center and rural sites of care, and works closely with the senior leadership team in developing physician strategy.

Scaturro most recently served as administrator of University Hospital and assistant vice president for medical affairs. Before joining USA Health in January 2022, he was vice president of operations at Ascension St. Vincent's Birmingham.

He earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of South Alabama and a Master of Science in Nursing with a concentration in nurse anesthesia from the University of Tennessee. He later received a Master of Science in Healthcare Administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Fox named chief physician enterprise officer

Natalie Fox, D.N.P., was appointed chief physician enterprise officer for USA Health. She works with senior leadership on overall strategy, performance and operational effectiveness of the physician enterprise.

In her previous role as executive director of USA Health's academic physician practices, Fox was responsible for the operational and financial management of the physicians and advanced-care providers.

Fox, who joined USA Health in 2011, earned her doctorate degree in nursing from the University of South Alabama in 2017. She also earned both her Master of Nursing in Pediatrics and Bachelor of Nursing from USA, and she maintains adjunct faculty appointments at the College of Nursing and the Whiddon College of Medicine.

Blair-Elortegui appointed DIO for USA Health

Judy Blair-Elortegui, M.D., was appointed the designated institutional official for USA Health and associate dean for graduate medical education at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

She served as internal medicine residen-

cy program director since 2016 and was the internal medicine-pediatrics residency program director from 2005 to 2011.

As the interim DIO, Blair-Elortegui guided USA Health through its most recent graduate medical education program and institutional review cycle. USA Health, which has 13 residency and 13 fellowship programs, maintains full accreditation as a sponsoring institution by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

She received her medical degree from the Whiddon College of Medicine and completed a residency in internal medicine and pediatrics at USA Health. She is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine and the American Board of Pediatrics.

Ramani leads neonatology division and NICU

Maran Ramani, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.H.A., M.S.H.Q.S., joined USA Health as the division chief of neonatology and medical director for the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at Children's & Women's Hospital. He is also a professor of pediatrics at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

Previously, he was the associate fellowship program director for the Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine Fellowship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and

director of the neonatal neuro intensive care unit at UAB. He also holds an honorary professorship at UAB.

He earned his medical degree from Madras Medical College in Chennai, India. He completed a pediatric residency at Texas Tech Health Sciences Center in Lubbock, Texas, and a fellowship in neonatology at UAB. In addition to medical training, Ramani earned master's degrees from UAB in healthcare administration and in hospital safety and quality.

Ramani is board certified in general pediatrics and neonatal-perinatal medicine by the American Board of Pediatrics. His research interests include global health and neurodevelopmental outcomes of prematurity and birth asphyxia.

Pearson named chief of pediatric neurosurgery

Matthew Pearson, M.D., joined USA Health as chief of pediatric neurosurgery and an associate professor of neurosurgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

He previously served as an assistant professor of pediatric neurological surgery at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. During his tenure at Vanderbilt, Pearson developed the pediatric neuro-oncology program and the multidisciplinary pediatric surgical epilepsy program. He also developed the comprehensive pediatric neurosurgery program at Sacred Heart Children's Hospital in Pensacola, Florida.

Pearson earned a medical degree from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland. After an internship in general surgery at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, he completed his residency in neurological surgery at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. His fellowship in pediatric neurosurgery was completed at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

He is certified by the American Board of Neurological Surgery and the American Board of Pediatric Neurological Surgery.

Persing named division director at the MCI

Brian E. Persing, M.D., was named division director of hematology/medical oncology at the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

A board-certified medical oncologist and hematologist, Persing is also the Arlene and Mayer Mitchell Chair of Medical Oncology. He joined the MCI in 2020 after more than a decade of experience treating cancer patients.

Persing earned his medical degree from the University of South Dakota School of Medicine. He completed an internship and residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in hematology/oncology at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson.

His research interests include lung cancer, physician-patient communication and cancer screening.

Bouska selected as chief of anesthesia services

Gregory W. Bouska, M.D., M.P.A., was named chief of anesthesia services for USA Health. He previously served as chair of the department of anesthesiology at Huntsville Hospital.

Bouska earned a bachelor's degree in pre-med studies and a Master of Public Administration from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, before earning his medical degree from the University of Washington. He completed his anesthesiology residency at Brooke Army Medical Center in Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

In addition to his positions in the private workforce, Bouska served in the Air Force National Guard for 15 years before retiring in 2003.

Williams named assistant dean for institutional, academic success

David S. Williams, Ph.D., was named the assistant dean for institutional and academic success at the Whiddon College of Medicine. In this role, he collaborates

with colleagues to enhance the academic support the college provides to its students.

Williams most recently was the assistant director of course development at the University of South Alabama Innovation in Learning Center. He previously served as a distance learning and assessment analyst at the center. He is an adjunct professor at USA.

He earned a bachelor's degree in social science from the University of Mobile, a Master of Public Administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and a doctorate in instruction design and development from USA.

Broome appointed assistant administrator at Children's & Women's Hospital

Allen Broome, Pharm.D., was named assistant administrator at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital. In his new role, he oversees laboratory, radiology, respiratory and pharmacy, and also serves as a liaison for anesthesia.

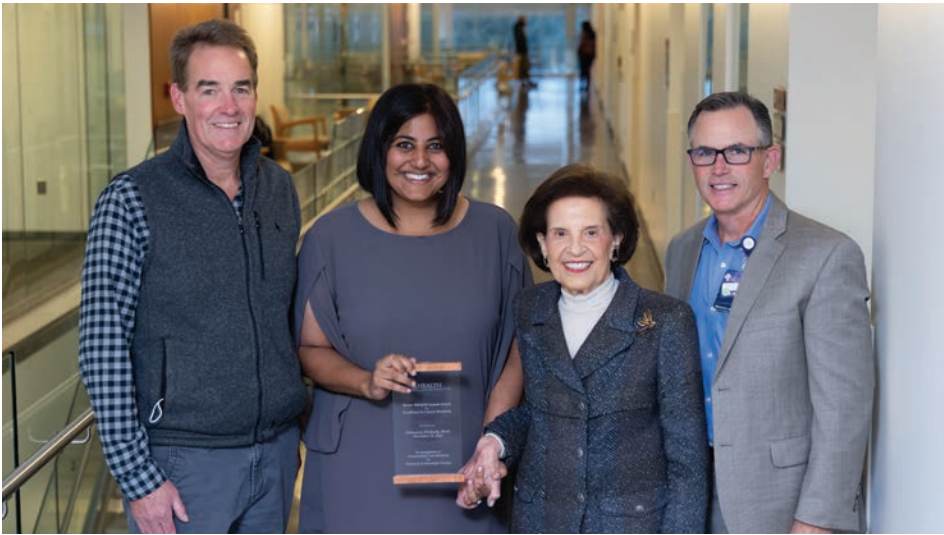
Broome joined USA Health in July 2020 as director of health system pharmacy, where he oversaw clinical and financial operations for USA Health pharmacies at University Hospital, Children's & Women's Hospital and the Mitchell Cancer Institute. He has worked to improve the health system's fiscal and clinical utilization of medications, developed culture and accountability for pharmacy, and worked to improve processes to provide safer pharmaceutical care.

Broome holds a Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. He completed Lean coaching and training at Virginia Mason Institute.



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Achievements



Prakash receives 2022 Mayer Mitchell Award

Cancer researcher Aishwarya Prakash, Ph.D., was named the recipient of the 2022 Mayer Mitchell Award for Excellence in Cancer Research. Prakash is an associate professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the Whiddon College of Medicine and heads the structural biology facility at the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

The \$10,000 award is presented annually to a promising scientist at the Mitchell Cancer Institute upon the recommendation of a faculty committee. The award was established in 2009 by University of South Alabama Trustee Arlene Mitchell in memory of her late husband, Mayer Mitchell, longtime USA trustee and formative figure in the establishment of the MCI.

Since joining the MCI in 2016, Prakash has focused her lab on environmental agents that induce DNA damage and their impact on cancer formation and progression. Supported by grant funding from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Prakash conducts structural and functional studies of DNA repair complexes in the mitochondria. She also studies gene-environment interactions that drive cancer progression in individuals with Lynch syndrome, a DNA repair deficiency syndrome that puts people at a much higher risk for certain cancers.

Prakash also collaborates with researchers at the University of Arizona to uncover the genetic and environmental causes of

lupus, a project that is also supported by the NIEHS.

Williams Hogue named Future Trauma Leader

Ashley Williams Hogue, M.D., a trauma surgeon at University Hospital, was selected as a Future Trauma Leader (FTL) through the American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma. As one of the highest honors for a junior trauma surgeon, the recognition was given to only five surgeons nationwide this year.

Her area of expertise is injury prevention and community wellness. She seeks to learn various ways to advocate for the underserved and to provide resources that will positively impact the communities in which her patients live and work.

Through the FTL program, Williams Hogue will receive an in-depth training and mentoring opportunity from the Committee on Trauma. She will also have the opportunity to participate in a disaster management and emergency preparedness course, trauma system design and implementation training, and a rural trauma team development course.

Menger wins Young Neurosurgeon Award

USA Health neurosurgeon Richard P. Menger, M.D., M.P.A., was awarded the Samuel Hassenbusch Young Neurosurgeon Award from the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) for his research on how



Left: Aishwarya Prakash, Ph.D., received the Mayer Mitchell Award for Excellence in Cancer Research. She is pictured with Richard Honkanen, Ph.D., Arlene Mitchell and Martin Heslin, M.D., M.S.H.A.

Above: Ashley Williams Hogue, M.D., was selected as a Future Trauma Leader.

variations in Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement among the states affect access to healthcare.

The award is given to the top socioeconomic abstract selected among the thousands of abstracts submitted to the Congress of Neurological Surgeons annual meeting. This research is in collaboration with the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

Menger, chief of complex spine surgery at USA Health, is an assistant professor of neurosurgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine. He focuses on complex spinal reconstructions for spinal deformity in children and adults. He performs minimally invasive spinal procedures and has a special expertise in the entire spectrum of state-of-the-art surgical and conservative management of complex spinal deformity and scoliosis.

Macaluso recognized by rickettsiology society

Kevin Macaluso, Ph.D., was recognized during the American Society for Rickettsiology's 31st annual meeting for his dedication and distinguished service for leading the group as president for an extended

period – 2019 to 2022 – during much of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor and Locke Distinguished Chair of Microbiology and Immunology at the Whiddon College of Medicine, Macaluso has served on ASR's executive council for the past 10 years. He joined the faculty of the University of South Alabama in 2019.

His 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.

USA Health included in Mobile Bay's 2023 40 Under 40 class

Mobile Bay magazine named five representatives from USA Health to its 2023 Class of 40 Under 40. Each year, the magazine recognizes individuals who demonstrate leadership, professional excellence and a commitment to the Mobile Bay area.

Ahmed Abdalla, M.D., a medical oncologist and an assistant professor of interdisciplinary clinical oncology at the Mitchell Cancer Institute, is renowned as a gastrointestinal medical oncology expert in the Gulf Coast region. He has established multiple clinical trials that provide local patients access to the latest cancer treatment therapies. In addition, Abdalla's published studies and extensive research allow his expertise to reach a much wider audience.

Phillip Henderson, D.O., is an assistant professor of internal medicine and surgery at the Whiddon College of Medicine and the medical director of liver transplantation at USA Health. He completed his residency training and a fellowship at USA Health/Whiddon College of Medicine. He spearheaded the partnership between the University of South Alabama and the University of Alabama at Birmingham for a joint transplant hepatology liver clinic in Mobile that also provides care for transplant patients who have surgeries in Birmingham.

Antwan J. Hogue, M.D., a physician and assistant professor of internal medicine at the Whiddon College of Medicine, is also an alumnus. The Mobile native, who returned to his hometown after completing his residency, has become a decorated faculty member, earning a Red Sash Award



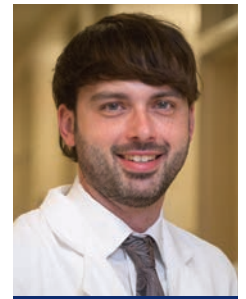
Menger



Macaluso



Abdalla



Henderson



Hogue



Zeidan



Collins



Sternberg

for outstanding teaching efforts and other honors. Hogue and his wife, Ashley Williams Hogue, M.D., cofounded Project Inspire, USA Health's hospital-based injury prevention program designed to curb youth gun violence.

Kristen Roberts, C.P.A., is the assistant vice president of finance and administration for the University of South Alabama. She manages the financial statements for the university and USA Health, and she is the youngest person in university history to do so. Roberts is part of USA's Leadership South program and represents the university on multiple committees, including the Human Resources Task Force.

Melody Zeidan, J.D., M.D., is a resident physician in general surgery at USA Health. Zeidan earned her medical degree from the Whiddon College of Medicine, where she was a member of the Gold Humanism Honor Society and earned the Dean's Achievement Scholarship for all four years of medical school before graduating in 2022. She is a member of Junior League of Mobile and the Mobile Arts Council, and she volunteers as a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Collins named president of ACEH Alabama chapter

Chad Collins, M.H.A., director of operations at USA Health, was named president of the Alabama chapter of the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE). He served on the Alabama chapter's board

for the past three years, including as vice president. As president, he collaborates with other executives on the national Chapter Leaders Committee to address challenges within today's healthcare system, including staffing shortages and burnout; diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace; and financial hardship stemming from the pandemic.

Sternberg appointed to local medical leadership positions

Michael Sternberg, M.D., recently was appointed to two medical leadership positions in Mobile. He is an emergency medicine physician at University Hospital and serves as a professor and director of medical education in the department of emergency medicine at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

Sternberg was elected chairman of the Mobile County Board of Health, which meets monthly to review Mobile County Health Department activities and to provide guidance to Alabama's oldest public health agency.

He also was appointed vice president of the Mobile County Medical Society, of which he has been a member since 1992. Comprising physicians practicing medicine in Mobile County, the society aims to promote and develop the science of medicine, conserve and protect public health, and promote the betterment of the medical profession.

USA Happenings



USA celebrates 60th anniversary

The University celebrated its 60th anniversary May 5 at the USA Student Center, kicking off a year of events that will commemorate the University's May 3, 1963 founding, while looking ahead to the future and some significant projects on the horizon, including a new home for the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine and a new performing arts center. Additional information regarding anniversary events will be announced as they are finalized.

Apply for online MSN program

The USA College of Nursing Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree program helps students prepare for opportunities for specialization in a variety of fields. Nurses build on their academic and practical credentials, using this knowledge to identify and solve patient care issues, leading to better health outcomes for individual patients and for society as a whole. Leadership, administrative, and quality improvement skills are incorporated throughout the program.

All MSN degree coursework is offered online. Students may continue to work while completing degree requirements. As with all South online programs, faculty members are available to support students via phone, email or other forms of technology.

Visit southalabama.edu/con for more information and to apply.

School of Marine and Environmental Sciences named for Stokes

With a passion for both the environmental beauty of our region and the University of South Alabama, Steven Stokes, Ph.D., and his wife, Angelia, recently gave \$2 million to the USA School of Marine and Environmental Sciences. In total, the Stokes have contributed over \$6.8 million to the University.

The announcement was made after the most recent USA Board of Trustees quarterly meeting, where it passed a resolution naming the school the Angelia and Steven Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences.

"We are confident this will be the premier environmental center on the Gulf Coast. With financial support, Dr. Sean Powers and the outstanding faculty, grad students and undergraduates will continue their vital work," Stokes said.

Powers is director of the school and the Angelia and Steven Stokes Endowed Professor in Environmental Resilience. The school, part of the College of Arts and Sciences, opened in fall 2022. In total, the Stokes have contributed over \$6.8 million to the University.



South Alabama football season tickets on sale now

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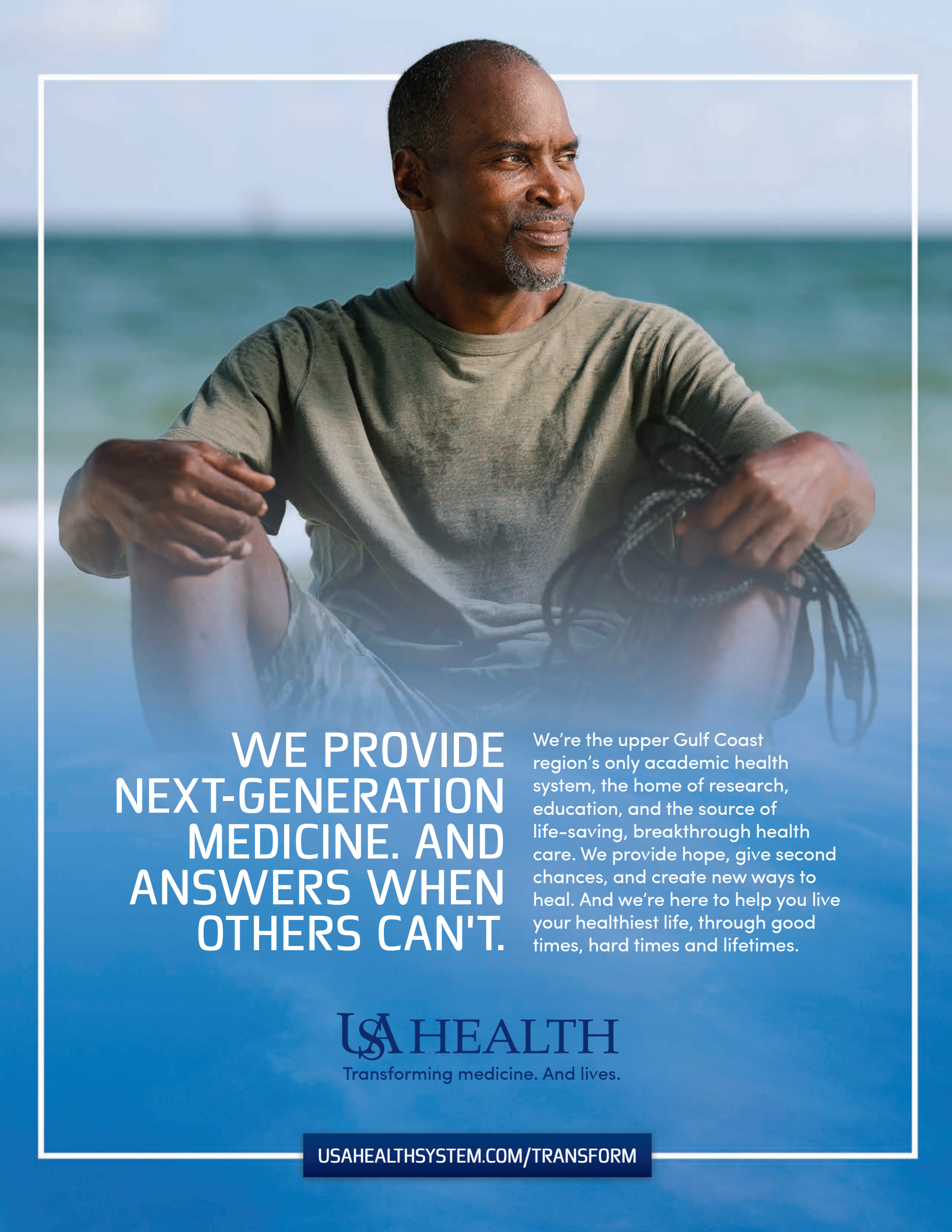
'Descendant' film receives honors

"Descendant," co-written by Kern Jackson, Ph.D., director of African American studies at USA, earned spots on the shortlist for both an Oscar nomination and an NAACP Image Award after winning the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award: Creative Vision at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival.

The film tells of the last known ship to carry enslaved Africans to the United States, the *Clotilda*, and follows the personal stories of its descendants and the history of the Africatown community north of downtown Mobile. The remains of the ship were discovered in 2019.

Jackson, a folklorist and assistant professor of English, co-wrote and co-produced "Descendant." Mobile native Margaret Brown directed and co-wrote the film.

Jackson, Brown and descendants who participated in the film recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. They also participated in a panel discussion and a film screening of the documentary at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History. Netflix purchased its worldwide rights; Higher Ground, President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama's production company, is presenting the film alongside Netflix.



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The Whiddon College of Medicine Class of 2023 gathers outside of the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center for Match Day on March 17.