

Heroes among us

Our staff delivers innovative
patient care during
the pandemic

COM pivots

Medical students adapt
amid pandemic

5 strategies for coping with stress



Top: USA Health staff test student-athletes for COVID-19 at the Jaguar Training Center on campus.

On the cover: Healthcare hero Pamela Taylor, MSN, APRN, FNP-C, a nurse practitioner in family medicine, said, "Through our dynamic healthcare system, I am able to provide life-changing health education to my patients."

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Top: The Mapp Family Campus will provide primary and specialty care in Baldwin County. Middle left: Pediatrician Melody Petty, M.D., is among USA Health's healthcare heroes. Middle right: Six-month-old Bennett Westphal received lifesaving care at the pediatric emergency department. Bottom: Matroy Browder rides his Harley-Davidson motorcycle after recovering from COVID-19.



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Dear Friends:

What an extraordinary year we have had with 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives. We see it every day at USA Health as Healthcare Heroes throughout our health system meet the needs of our community and provide education and training to the next generation of care providers under extremely difficult circumstances.

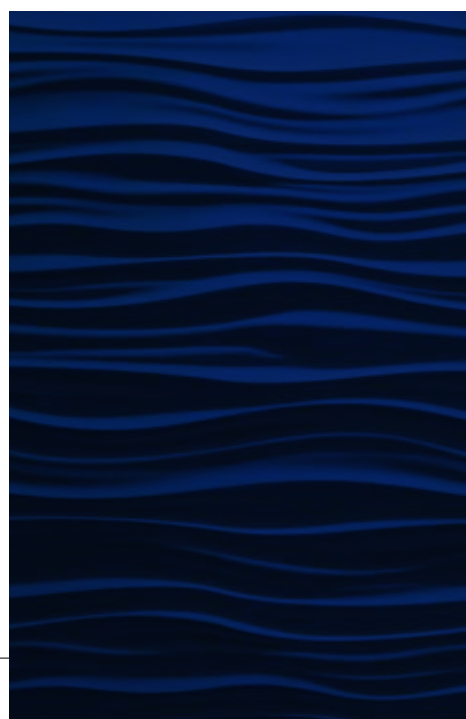
This issue of USA Health Magazine is dedicated to the tremendous efforts and successes our faculty, residents, staff, students and patients have achieved as we have worked to overcome the hurdle of COVID-19. As you read, you will gain an appreciation for what one long-time COVID-19 patient went through and the dedication of his caregivers; the extraordinary efforts of one of our physicians as he answered the call of duty to be deployed in New York as part of his National Guard responsibilities; how USA Health joined forces with the City of Mobile to provide our community with a drive-through testing center; and how the College of Medicine adapted its learning environments to meet the educational needs of our students.

Throughout these exceptional times, the constant has been the commitment from every member of our team to continue to be here to meet the needs of our community, our patients and our learners.

We hope you enjoy this issue of USA Health Magazine.

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USA Health accredited as a Level 4 epilepsy center



The USA Health Comprehensive Epilepsy Program (SouthCEP) has been accredited as a Level 4 epilepsy center by the National Association of Epilepsy Centers (NAEC) for 2020 and 2021. USA Health is one of two Level 4 centers in Alabama.

Level 4 is the highest level of accreditation awarded by the NAEC, according to Juan Ochoa, M.D., director of the SouthCEP. Level 4 epilepsy centers have the professional expertise and facilities to provide the highest level of medical and surgical evaluation and treatment for patients with complex epilepsy.

Epilepsy is a disorder in which nerve cell activity in the brain is disturbed, causing seizures. Epilepsy may occur as a result of a genetic disorder or an acquired brain injury, such as a trauma or stroke.

“Patients who live along the Gulf Coast

that require advanced care for epilepsy can be evaluated and treated here,” said Ochoa, who is also a professor of neurology at the USA College of Medicine and director of the neurology residency program. “We are the only center in the area with this level of sophistication.”

USA Health received this designation because of its ability to manage complex cases. To provide comprehensive epilepsy care, USA Health has neurologists who specialize in epilepsy management, neurosurgeons trained in epilepsy surgery, certified EEG technicians, neuro radiologists, neuro pathologists, and others involved in epilepsy care. USA Health offers epilepsy monitoring at University Hospital and Children’s & Women’s Hospital.

“Receiving Level 4 designation officially recognizes the ongoing work and services

Dean Naritoku, M.D., left, professor and chair of neurology and professor pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine, and neurology resident Peter Soh, M.D., look over a patient’s EEG in the epilepsy monitoring unit at University Hospital.

we have been providing to our epilepsy patients for the past decade,” said Dean Naritoku, M.D., professor and chair of neurology and professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine. “It acknowledges our advanced epilepsy evaluations, workups and brain surgery for epilepsy. Having this designation places us on a national registry of epilepsy centers for patients who are trying to locate these specialized services.”

To make an appointment with a physician at the USA Health Comprehensive Epilepsy Program, call 251-660-5108.

NEWS BRIEFS

University Hospital’s surge plan gets national recognition

USA Health leaders shared at a national online conference how University Hospital improved patient flow and increased the hospital’s capacity. Hosted by Vizient Inc., the conference was made up of participants from the nation’s largest academic

medical centers, community hospitals, pediatric facilities and non-acute care providers. Michael Chang, M.D., chief medical officer for USA Health, said being one of 22 healthcare organizations chosen to give a live presentation shows that the project is at the forefront on the national level. University Hospi-

tal created a multidisciplinary task force that identified a lack of systematic processes and data, and created a new surge plan. The plan put into effect new training, such as pocket cards for employees, and new practices, such as around-the-clock checklists for supervisors.

Outpatient practices earn PCMH distinction

Four USA Health practice locations – General Pediatrics, Pediatric Adolescent, Family Medicine and Stanton Road Clinic – were recognized as patient-centered medical homes (PCMH) by the National Committee for Quality Assur-

A lifesaving gift: Children's & Women's Hospital implements Cord Blood Donation Program



USA Health's Cord Blood Donation Program uses a newborn's cord blood, which is rich in blood-forming cells, to help treat diseases. Children's & Women's Hospital was the first hospital in the upper Gulf Coast region to implement the program.

The mission at USA Health is to help people lead longer, better lives. That mission is being supported at Children's & Women's Hospital with the establishment of the upper Gulf Coast region's first Cord Blood Donation Program.

According to LifeSouth, a cord blood bank and USA Health's partner in the program, the umbilical cord is rich in blood-forming cells that have the potential to treat more than 80 diseases, such as leukemia and lymphoma.

"Patients who deliver a baby at our hospital now have a chance to save their newborn's cord blood, which would otherwise be discarded, to help save a life of another patient," said Mimi Munn, M.D., professor and chair of obstetrics and gynecology at the USA College of Medicine and a maternal-fetal medicine physician at USA Health. "Patients with certain diseases could benefit from this and it's exciting that Children's & Women's Hospital is playing a significant part."

LifeSouth counsels patients about their donation. Cord blood donations collected at Children's & Women's Hospital that qualify for potential transplant are listed on the Be the Match Registry, a global leader in bone marrow transplantation.

"Cord blood units collected at the hospital are available to patients in the United States and in countries around the world," said Thomas Moss with LifeSouth. "Children's & Women's Hospital is the perfect partner for executing this program as its mission is to help people live longer, better lives."

To participate, patients should contact their obstetrician-gynecologist for more information. There is no cost to patients who choose to donate.

Vande Waa named to state coronavirus task force

John A. Vande Waa, D.O., Ph.D., professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine, is one of four infectious disease specialists serving on Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey's 18-member task force to limit the spread of the coronavirus in the state. The task force discusses developments and precautions on a routine basis and makes recommendations to the governor.

"The safety of Alabamians is paramount, and we will do everything we can to limit exposure to this illness," Ivey said. "I appreciate the willingness of these individuals, from both the public and private sector,

to serve as we do everything we can to mitigate risk for the people of Alabama and to keep the citizens of the state informed of our plans."

Board-certified in infectious disease, Vande Waa earned his medical degree from Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed both residency and fellowship training at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He serves as chief of infectious diseases in the department of internal medicine.



NEWS BRIEFS

ance (NCQA). PCMH is a model of care led by a personal provider who coordinates continuous and comprehensive care to maximize health outcomes. In this concept, everyone has a provider. The physician takes care of the whole person and care is coordinated across the complex system.

Project Inspire presented at national conference

Members of the USA Health trauma team recently shared Project Inspire, a mentorship program designed to build relationships and encourage adolescents with gun-related offenses in the Mobile community, at a national conference.

Andrew Haiflich, R.N., M.S.N., director of trauma services at USA Health, and Ashley Williams, M.D., former surgery chief resident physician at USA Health and co-founder of Project Inspire, presented virtually during the 2020 Vizient Connections Education Summit in mid-September.

USA Health creates care access department

With a focus on helping patients and referring providers gain quicker and easier access to its clinics, USA Health has created the care access department. Among the duties for the department are scheduling, registration, check-in/out, re-

Physician answers the call to treat patients in COVID-19 hotspot

In early April, when the number of people getting sick and dying from the novel coronavirus was beginning to skyrocket, Richard Menger, M.D., got a call and had to make a quick decision. Just 36 hours later, leaving behind his wife, young children and a new medical practice, he fulfilled his oath as both a military and medical professional and headed to treat COVID-19 patients in New York City, which quickly was becoming the virus epicenter in the United States.

“This is the entire purpose of military service in the reserves: to step up at the time you are needed most and to go forward and make a difference,” said Menger, chief of complex spine surgery at USA Health. “It was intense and impactful, and I’m honored to have had the opportunity to play a small part.”

As a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve Medical Corps, Menger, assistant professor of neurosurgery at the USA College of Medicine, was deployed to Bellevue Hospital as part of the Navy Medicine Support Team (NMST) with Operation Gotham.

Menger ran a COVID-19 intensive care unit at Bellevue, and most of his time was spent housed in an endoscopy suite that had been converted into an overflow intensive care unit. Normally, Bellevue Hospital has 18 medical ICU beds and 54 total ICU beds, but 150 patients needed ICU care when Menger arrived.

He worked with pediatricians, obstetricians, eye doctors, residents, nurse practitioners and physician assistants who all were doing their part outside of their primary specialty to care for the large num-



As a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve Medical Corps, Richard Menger, M.D., assistant professor of neurosurgery at the USA College of Medicine, was deployed to Bellevue Hospital in New York City as part of the Navy Medicine Support Team.

ber of coronavirus patients. For 84 days from April to June, Menger had more than 300 patient encounters, while the entire deployment cadre of the NMST treated approximately 31,000 patients.

Menger sees his time in New York as fulfilling the mission of service that those in academic medicine work for every day. He said he is thankful for the support of his partners, Anthony Martino, M.D., and W. George Rusyniak, M.D., in neurosurgery at USA Health for taking extra calls, performing extra cases, and caring for his patients while he was deployed.

“During the pandemic, Dr. Menger sacrificed time from family as well as putting his practice on hold while caring for those

in dire need,” said Martino, professor and chair of neurosurgery. “We were happy to do our part in providing the support needed for him to be absent without having to worry. This is in line with the values of USA Health and its academic calling to serve the community.”

With three young daughters at home and a son on the way, Menger said he also is thankful for the sacrifice made by his wife and family. “Without her, I wouldn’t be able to do any of this,” he said. “Her sense of duty and service are incredible.”

With Menger’s deployment, four generations of the Menger family now have served New York City as physicians.

ferral management, template and capacity management support, training, and data management support for all the clinical departments of USA Health, which will be standardized across all clinics.

YouTube channel supports medical education

A ring stuck on a swollen finger, a dislocated shoulder, a foreign body in the nose – these are a few video topics of a popular YouTube channel that goes behind the scenes of emergency medicine to support medical education. Larry Mellick, M.D.,

professor and vice chair of emergency medicine, created the channel as an additional resource to teach medical students and residents about scenarios they might encounter in the emergency department. All proceeds from the channel are donated to the Emergency Medicine Residency Program.

American Heart Association awards University Hospital

University Hospital has earned three of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association Awards designed to recognize excellence in stroke care: AHA’s Get With the Guidelines – Stroke Gold Plus Quality Achievement Award,

Medical students organize events for racial justice



USA medical students, faculty and staff participate in the White Coats for Black Lives event at Children's & Women's Hospital.

Medical students at the USA College of Medicine led events in June in support of racial justice, drawing hundreds of fellow students, faculty and staff to solemn demonstrations at USA Health hospitals where they train as future physicians.

"I hope we remember this isn't just for the sake of taking a picture to say that we held signs saying 'White Coats for Black Lives,'" said Nkemdi Agwaramgbo, a third-year medical student and a member of the USA chapter of the Student National Medical Association. "I hope that today, June 10, 2020, that we can finally take a stand."

Speaking to a crowd of more than 80 people in the courtyard at Children's &

Women's Hospital, Agwaramgbo, who is Black, wiped tears as he admitted to struggling with standing against racial injustice for fear it would affect his ambitions to become a physician, pursue a fellowship and climb the ladder of academic medicine.

"Even though I do have my own aspirations, I look at the revolutionary men and women who came before me and put their lives on the line and their careers on the line, and I ask myself, 'How can I be so selfish?'" he said. "I've made a decision on where I want to stand in this conversation, where I want to stand in history. It's never going to be two knees in the dirt, but two

feet on the ground with my head held high."

Separated by social distancing, some participants held signs, and all joined in taking a knee during a moment of silence in honor of George Floyd, the Black man killed by Minneapolis police and who galvanized an international movement for racial justice.

"The emotion definitely was palpable," said Gisella Ward, a second-year medical student from Mobile who has served as an officer of the SNMA chapter. Ward, who holds a master's degree in public health, said she intends to pursue a career in family medicine.

At University Hospital, about 100 students, faculty and staff knelt on the helipad for nine minutes in honor of Floyd.

"Every day, we focus on inequities of health, but we recognize now that all those things that influence patient health are much more important, such as inequities in education and economic attainment. Now we've had the curtain pulled back on inequities in criminal justice," said Errol Crook, M.D., professor and Abraham Mitchell chair of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine.

Angela Mosley-Johnson arrived at the event after a day of her clerkship rotation in internal medicine. Next year, the York, Ala., native will become the first physician in her family.

"It is important for us to build a different community where systemic racism and the ways in which it affects the health of communities of color can be openly discussed," she said. "It's an important step in improving the communities we serve."

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AHA's Target: Stroke Honor Roll Elite Plus award, and AHA Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll Award. In addition, for the third time in a row, University Hospital received the American Heart Association's Get With the Guidelines – Heart Failure Gold Plus Quality Achievement Award.

Pediatrics residents honored with Patriot Awards

Phil Nehls, M.D., and Laurie McCann, M.D., were honored with Patriot Awards for their advocacy on behalf of Elijah Fox, M.D., a third-year pediatric resident at USA Health who serves in the U.S. Army National Guard. Nehls and McCann

served as chief residents for the Pediatric Residency Program at USA Health during the 2019–2020 academic year. Fox said he nominated the two for the award because of their help facilitating mandated trainings and for their unwavering encouragement.

University Hospital recognized for COPD treatment

University Hospital was named a high performing hospital for the treatment of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD) in the latest Best Hospitals 2020–21 rankings and ratings from U.S. News & World Report. Hospitals that earned

Medical students selected as Primary Care Pathway Scholars

Ten first-year medical students at the USA College of Medicine were selected for the Primary Care Pathway Program, a new educational track that will provide four years of specialized training in primary care.

The program is funded by a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) totaling more than \$6 million. The USA College of Medicine was one of five institutions in the United States to receive grant funding from HRSA for the program.

The Primary Care Pathway Scholars are TiAriel Anderson, Jarrett Barnes, Claire Chastain, Amber Crenshaw, Kramer Crider, Meghan Dean, Tiara Dean, Isabelle Delplanche, Carey Johnson and Marley Lee.

The goal of the program is to increase the number of primary care physicians in underserved areas and ultimately improve the health of those populations, said Allen Perkins, M.D., M.P.H., professor and chair of family medicine at the USA College of Medicine.

“Growing up in an underserved area, I have a greater awareness of many significant external factors that could prevent patients from receiving the proper care they deserve such as accessibility to medical/specialty care, physical support, emotional support and financial crisis,” said Anderson of Monroeville, Ala. “I am prepared to absorb the years of wisdom from my assigned site directors to serve similar communities following my completion of this program.”

Johnson of Decatur, Ga., president of



The Primary Care Pathway Scholars are, from left, top row, TiAriel Anderson, Jarrett Barnes, Claire Chastain, Amber Crenshaw and Kramer Crider; bottom row, Meghan Dean, Tiara Dean, Isabelle Delplanche, Carey Johnson and Marley Lee.

his class, said his passion for primary care was inspired by his wife and fellow medical student, Angela Mosley-Johnson, who is in her fourth year at the USA College of Medicine. “The experiences and stories that she brought home about working to improve her patients’ quality of life was something that resonated with me on a personal level,” he said. “As a future primary care physician, I want to embody a holistic level of care for my patients.”

Perkins said the Primary Care Pathway Program also will inform primary care training across the board at the USA College of Medicine. “For the broader student body, we will have faculty members who

will be trained in population health and social determinants of health,” he said. “The instruction will be infused into the entire curriculum for all students.”

Community partners include Franklin Medical Mall, Franklin Foley Family Health Center, Franklin Loxley Family Health Center, Semmes Family Health Center, and Accordia Health in Bayou La Batre.

The USA College of Medicine has a long track record of graduating physicians who practice in the state. More than 43 percent of the college’s alumni practice in Alabama, with 36 percent in underserved areas, 27 percent in primary care disciplines, and 10 percent in rural areas.

a high performing rating were significantly better than the national average. When considering the treatment for COPD, more than 6,000 hospitals were evaluated, with only 1,075 found to be high performing, according to the magazine’s editorial staff.

Quick presented with civilian lifesaving award

Felicia Quick, CRNP, a nurse practitioner in the emergency department at University Hospital, and her husband, Mike, a paramedic, were outside a Mobile County License Commission office when a man in line dropped to the ground. As

someone called 9-1-1 for help, the Quicks performed CPR on the man. Because of their demonstration of compassion, the Mobile Fire-Rescue Department presented the Quicks with civilian lifesaving awards.

Rieske wins regional paper competition

Richard Rieske, M.D., surgery resident and postdoctoral research fellow, won the American College of Surgeons Regional Resident Paper Competition. His research examined the blood of trauma patients and discovered that those patients with elevated

Medical Student Center opens in College of Medicine



Second-year medical students Natalie Kidd, left, and Baylee Edwards study in one of the small study rooms in the new Medical Student Center.

A new 5,000-square foot space opened in November for medical students to study, collaborate, exercise or simply take a break from the pressures of medical school.

Located on the first floor of the Medical Sciences Building, the COM Medical Student Center features an open lounge area, small study rooms with floor-to-ceiling glass fronts, a room with exercise bikes, and a kitchenette break area. Medical students have 24-hour access to the center, and entry is controlled by an electronic fob system for security.

First-year medical student Carey Johnson, president of his class, eagerly anticipated the opening of the new space. “We’re all really excited,” he said. “We watched the construction progress, and now we’re finally able to get into the space.”

The Liaison Committee on Medical Education, the USA College of Medicine’s

accreditation body, has a standard that medical schools must provide sufficient space for study and relaxation. The previous space set aside for this purpose was about 800 square feet.

“This is a much larger space than we had upstairs,” Johnson said. “It’s definitely an upgrade.”

John Marymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine, said the medical students now have a multipurpose space to call their own. “A lot of work has gone into the planning, construction and opening of the Medical Student Center, so we are pleased that the students are enjoying all the different aspects of the new space,” he said.

Mary Townsley, Ph.D., senior associate dean at the USA College of Medicine, said the plan for opening the center for students had to be approved by the university’s

reopening committee to meet COVID-19 restrictions. Occupancy for each space was set to allow for social distancing, and the number of chairs in each space is limited to those occupancy numbers, she said. Masks are required, and plexiglass shields on the tables further enhance student safety.

Certain features of the center have not been implemented yet because of COVID safety precautions. For now, eating and drinking are prohibited in the center; so the coffee makers and microwaves are not in place, and the refrigerator is not in use.

“With everything going on, it just shows how much effort and thought went into making sure the students feel comfortable studying here,” said Jordan Ingram, a first-year medical student, noting the safety measures.

Ingram said the pandemic has made her particularly appreciative of being able to come together with her peers. “Sometimes it can feel isolating, so being able to come in here and see people and study together is really nice,” she said.

Sitting at one of the tables with Ingram, second-year medical student Andy Hu agreed: “It really shows that the school cares about us and our well-being.”

Hu, class treasurer, said it’s important that medical students have their own space. When he studies at Marx Library or even the biomedical sciences library, he rarely sees anyone he knows. “But, when we come in here now, we can see some of our classmates,” he said. “If you get lost on a concept or want to ask them something, it’s so much easier here, versus being by yourself.”

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DAMPs (molecules that trigger inflammatory responses via pattern recognition receptors) were more likely to die or have serious injuries. Rieske’s research highlighted the work conducted during a year spent in the lab with Jon Simmons, M.D., associate professor of surgery and pharmacology.

Food drive collects 1,500 pounds

During the month of September, USA Health employees at USA Health University Hospital, UHOP, and the Mastin and Moorer buildings were encouraged to donate non-perishable food items to the Feeding the Gulf Coast backpack program.

USA Health donated more than 1,500 pounds of food, which provided nearly 1,330 meals for the backpack program. The goal of the food drive was to help children who may be missing their school lunches during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MedPride celebrates contributions of Black activists

Members of the MedPride and Allies interest group sharpened their message for Pride Month, which celebrated the birth of the modern LGBTQ+ movement in June. In support of Black Lives Matter, they emphasized the role that Black activists

Research examines novel genetic pathway that could treat COVID-19

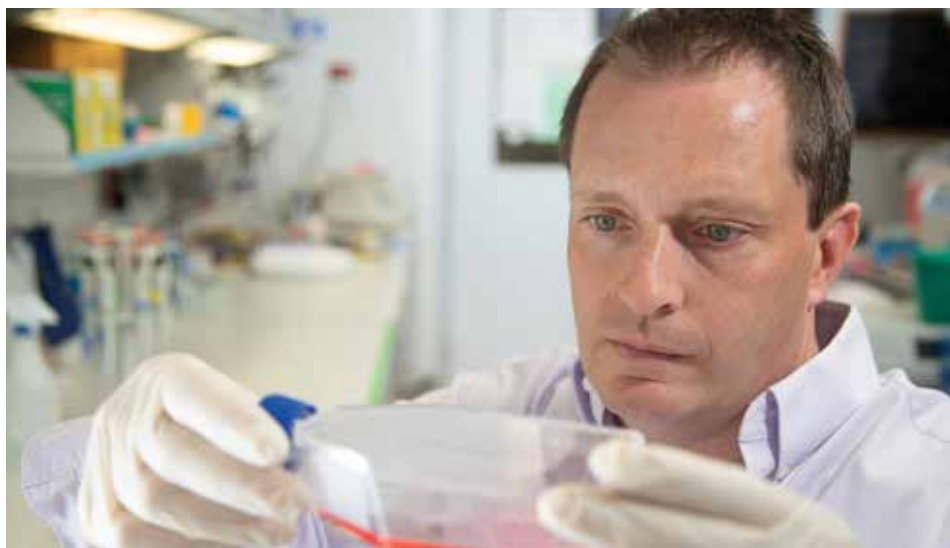
A recent discovery at the USA College of Medicine shows there is a contributor in the body that helps fight viral infections. According to Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology, his team found that the body pumps a new form of transfer ribonucleic acid (tRNA) fragments into lung fluid which helps target respiratory viruses.

The team at the Borchert laboratory at the USA College of Medicine is exploring why tRNA fragments are flowing in and out of lung cells and how this flow could combat respiratory viruses, such as the novel coronavirus. The team plans to test the tRNA fragments' ability to restrict SARS-CoV2, the virus causing COVID-19.

The National Science Foundation awarded the Borchert laboratory \$200,000 for further research into the discovery. The USA College of Medicine is the only institution in the nation awarded a grant on this specific research topic.

"With this funding, our work can go further as we begin to better understand how the body naturally fights infections," Borchert said. "Once we've collected the data from testing the tRNA fragments, we can work towards more therapeutics for patients battling viral infections."

Natalie Bauer, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology; Jin Hyun Kim, DVM, Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology and immunology; graduate student Dominika Houserova; and medical student Ravi Rajendra are collaborators on the project.



Glen Borchert, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine, and his team are examining a form of tRNA fragments that target respiratory viruses.

have played in advocating for LGBTQ+ rights. MedPride partnered with the Student National Medical Association, Rainbow Mobile and the Mobile Bevy to raise awareness about Juneteenth, which commemorates the end of slavery in Texas after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued.

Justice Initiative aims to fight racism in medicine

In response to ongoing racial unrest in the United States, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the USA College of Medicine was tasked with identifying and addressing areas for improvement in the culture and climate of both USA Health and the

USA College of Medicine. The first phase of the USA College of Medicine's response is the development of the Justice Initiative. The initiative is built on the framework developed by White Coats for Black Lives, a national organization working to dismantle racism in medicine.

Sayner seeks gender-based link in ARDS-related mortality

Sarah Sayner, Ph.D., associate professor of physiology and cell biology, is researching why men are more susceptible to acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) than women. Bacterial and viral pneumonia are common causes of ARDS.

International clinical trial examines treatment of newborns with opioid withdrawal



Richard M. Whitehurst Jr., M.D., professor of pediatrics and assistant professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine, monitors a newborn at Children's & Women's Hospital.

Use of opioids during pregnancy can result in a drug withdrawal syndrome in newborns called neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome. An analysis of the extent and costs of the syndrome found that it's rising in the United States, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. From 2004 to 2014, an estimated 32,000 infants were born with the syndrome, which is equivalent to one baby suffering from opioid withdrawal born every 15 minutes.

Richard M. Whitehurst Jr., M.D., professor of pediatrics and assistant professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine, was selected by Chiesi Farmaceutici of Parma, Italy, to lead a five-year

multi-center study spanning at least 19 clinical locations in the United States and abroad.

Whitehurst and other clinical staff in the Department of Pediatrics at USA Health have participated in previous studies with Chiesi related to neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, previously known as neonatal abstinence syndrome.

The study is a double blind, randomized, two-arm parallel study to evaluate the efficacy, safety and pharmacokinetics of a promising drug in babies with neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, said Ellen Dean, RNC, the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) research study coordinator at Children's & Women's Hospital.

This past summer, Whitehurst and NICU staff began enrolling infants who were exposed to opioids during the last month before delivery, Dean said.

"Unfortunately, the rates are high across the nation for babies who are suffering because they are born with opioid withdrawal syndrome," Whitehurst said. "We want to find the best methods possible to help those babies through a variety of measures and protocols."

Research shows newborns with the syndrome are more likely than other babies to have low birthweight and respiratory complications. Nationally, rates of opioid use disorder at delivery caused hospitalizations to more than quadruple from 1999 to 2014, to 6.5 per 1000 births in 2014. That year, \$563 million was spent on costs for treatment of the syndrome, the National Institute on Drug Abuse reported.

Whitehurst, who begins visits with mothers as part of the prenatal care team prior to childbirth, has a long history of building successful relationships with parents before they deliver, Dean said, to help ensure the best outcomes for babies. Because of other protocols established by Whitehurst, the length of stay for newborns withdrawing from opioids and other drugs has decreased significantly in the past five years at Children's & Women's Hospital.

"We've adopted non-medication treatments, such as swaddling the babies differently, adapted the light and noise levels so they are not over stimulated, and taught parents how to care for them when they go home," Dean said.

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"Males have a 30 percent higher age-adjusted ARDS-related mortality rate compared to females," she said. "The etiology behind this gender disparity is unclear. Understanding these differences might help us to better treat patients with ARDS, since there are no targeted therapies to treat patients."

Hermance publishes research on deer tick virus pathogenesis

Meghan E. Hermance, Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology and immunology, was the lead author of a paper in PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases about deer tick virus pathogenesis. Powassan virus is a tick-borne flavivirus that

encompasses two genetic lineages, Powassan and deer tick virus. Because it's not known if deer tick virus and Powassan differ in their capacity to cause human disease, the study model could be used in future comparative pathogenesis studies, or as a platform for testing vaccines and antivirals.

USA researchers study role of genetics in pancreatic cancer

Researchers and physician-scientists from the Mitchell Cancer Institute, along with USA College of Medicine faculty, are studying how certain genetic abnormalities affect the progression of pancreatic cancer. "Poor clinical outcome of

Researcher launches COVID-19 data project

A public health researcher at the USA College of Medicine is compiling data that could provide insights into COVID-19 symptoms, the spread of the infection and its impact on Mobile-area residents.

Casey L. Daniel, Ph.D., M.P.H., assistant professor of family medicine, said patient data being collected at USA Health physician offices, hospitals and testing sites could provide critical information to policymakers and others as they respond to the pandemic.

“The project has multiple objectives,” Daniel said. “We want to inform health system coordination and policies in real time to ensure maximization of limited resources such as test kits, PPE and personnel.”

When patients request COVID-19 testing, their answers to screening questions are logged into a database. The information, which is de-identified to protect confidentiality, covers symptoms, exposures, existing illnesses, travel, and demographic information. The research group includes USA Health staff and third-year medical students.

“After they are tested, we add the results into the database along with any comorbidities such as diabetes, heart disease and autoimmune disorders that put patients at a higher risk,” Daniel said. “This data will give us a better picture about COVID-19 trends in our area, such as what ages, races and communities have been the most affected and how these compare to state and national trends.”

The project also aims to develop a protocol for following up with patients who test positive for COVID-19 to gauge length of



Casey Daniel, Ph.D., M.P.H., assistant professor of family medicine at the USA College of Medicine, is compiling data on how COVID-19 is affecting the Mobile area.

symptoms and any recurrence or complications over time, Daniel said. “We don’t know yet what the long-term outcomes will be,” she said. “Gathering this information now will be essential as we learn more about COVID-19.”

Daniel said she plans to develop both peer-reviewed articles for publication

based on the data as well as community briefings to inform local residents about what COVID-19 looks like in our area.

USA Health began testing employees and established patients in mid-March and partnered with the City of Mobile to open a testing site for the public in early April.

pancreatic cancer is mostly due to its late diagnosis and lack of effective therapies, emphasizing the need to identify novel biomarkers and therapeutic targets for effective disease management,” said Shashi Anand, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow in pathology and lead author of the study.

Gassman researches dangers of e-cigarettes

Natalie Gassman, Ph.D., assistant professor of physiology and cell biology at the USA College of Medicine and a cancer researcher at MCI, seeks answers about how electronic cigarettes cause lung injury and offers new information about

the potentially compromised immune function in electronic cigarette users. Gassman’s work examines dihydroxyacetone (DHA) – a molecule produced by electronic cigarettes. “We have shown that DHA exposure causes cell injury and impairs cell function, which may contribute to lung damage.”

MAA welcomes three new board members

The University of South Alabama Medical Alumni Association welcomed three new members to its board of directors: Sabrina Bessette, M.D., class of 2003; Ashleigh Butts-Wilkerson, M.D., class of 2012; and Nancy Wood,

New technology advances oncology research

Breakthrough technology, made possible through a grant award from the United States Army, is providing researchers at the Mitchell Cancer Institute a more precise understanding of how cancer cells grow.

The instrument, called the Seahorse XFe96 Analyzer, is used to monitor metabolic changes and mitochondrial cellular functions in patients.

According to Natalie Gassman, Ph.D., assistant professor of physiology and cell biology at the USA College of Medicine and a researcher at MCI, cancer is a metabolic disease, therefore tumors often reprogram their consumption of sugars and fats to promote growth. This process leads to changes in mitochondrial function, which promotes cell growth and alters antioxidant balance in cells. These changes can make tumors more aggressive and resistant to chemotherapy.

“It’s exciting to have this instrument as it allows us to observe the sugar consumption and mitochondrial changes in cancer cells to help us understand how to better care for patients,” Gassman said. “This instrument will give us insight on how to more precisely target metabolic changes with new drugs or supplementation strategies for patients battling cancer.”



From left, Jennifer Scalici, M.D., chief of gynecologic oncology service; Marie Migaud, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology; and Natalie Gassman, Ph.D., assistant professor of physiology and cell biology, show the new Seahorse XFe96 Analyzer at the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Jennifer Scalici, M.D., chief of gynecologic oncology service, and Marie Migaud, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine, both researchers at MCI, are the other key investigators whose projects are part of this instrumentation award.

Fast-growing uterine cancer may respond better to immunotherapy

Research completed at the Mitchell Cancer Institute suggests that aggressive uterine cancer may respond better to immunotherapy than slower growing types.

The study, led by Nathaniel Jones, M.D., a gynecologic oncologist at the Mitchell Cancer Institute, suggests that women with “high-grade” cancer of the uterus – cancer that is significantly abnormal in appearance and often fast growing – may benefit from therapy that helps the body’s own immune system to recognize and fight cancer cells.

Cancer of the endometrium, or lining of the uterus, is the fourth most common cause of cancer among women and the most common gynecologic cancer. Immunotherapy has been shown to be effective against certain cancers, including melanoma, lung and bladder cancers. It tends to produce fewer side effects in patients than traditional chemotherapy.

“When women recur with uterine cancer, many times our treatment options are limited,” said Jones, assistant professor of oncologic sciences at the Mitchell Cancer

Institute. “The good news is that most women with uterine cancer have an excellent prognosis and are cured with their initial treatment. However, women with aggressive high-grade tumors often time recur, and our research aims to expand and improve the treatments available.”

Jones said the researchers sought to identify biomarkers that could help physicians predict which uterine cancer patients may benefit from immunotherapy.

NEWS BRIEFS

M.D., class of 2007. Bessette, associate professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine, serves as chief of nephrology and hypertension. Butts-Wilkerson, assistant professor of family medicine at the USA College of Medicine, serves as the assistant residency program director and

medical director. Wood, who formerly practiced with Pediatric Associates of Mobile since 2011, recently joined Mobile’s Children’s Medical Group.

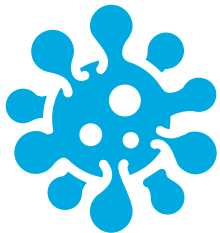
USA Alumni Association recognizes COM faculty and staff

The University of South Alabama National Alumni Association awarded its Faculty Excellence Awards and Young Alumni Award during its annual membership meeting. Natalie Gassman, Ph.D., assistant professor of physiology and

cell biology at the USA College of Medicine and a cancer researcher at the Mitchell Cancer Institute, and Angie O’Neal, an academic advisor in the USA College of Medicine’s Office of Research Education and Training, were among the five USA faculty and staff members recognized.

Testing for COVID-19

A snapshot of the number of tests performed at USA Health's testing sites from March 16 to December 18, 2020.



22,787

Total PCR drive-through tests performed



3,153

Student-athletes, coaches and athletics staff tested

19,922

Patients tested



2,285

Total positive tests

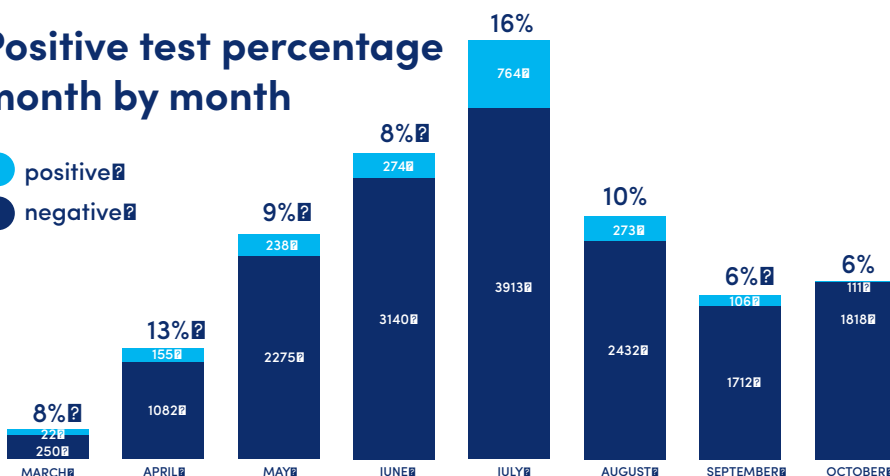


2,865

USA Health and University of South Alabama employees tested

Positive test percentage month by month

● positive
● negative



422

Rapid antigen tests performed

70

Positive antigen tests



Mapp family donates land for USA Health campus in Baldwin County

Louis and Melinda Mapp donated approximately eight acres of land in Baldwin County to the University of South Alabama. The site, just outside of Fairhope at the southeast corner of Alabama Highway 181 and Alabama Highway 104, is the future location for a new campus for USA Health.

“As an academic health system, USA Health brings unique subspecialty care to our region,” Louis Mapp said. “Melinda and I are thankful we are in a position to help Baldwin County residents gain access to this level of expertise in a convenient and easily accessible manner.”

“We cannot thank the Mapp family enough for this tremendous gift,” said USA President Tony Waldrop, Ph.D. “Their commitment to our community and their support of our health system is unwavering.”

The land is valued at approximately \$2 million.

“This gift from the Mapp family will allow us to move forward with plans to extend to the people of Baldwin County the academic health difference that is unique in our region to USA Health,” said John Ma-

rymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine. “At this location we will be able to bring together the delivery of specialized healthcare and the training of the next generation of physicians on a campus that also addresses wellness, nutrition and prevention.”

Initial plans for the site call for the development of a medical office building that will be home to primary and specialty care professionals. Additionally, a full array of imaging technologies is slated for the location. USA Health has filed a Certificate of Need application with the state to build an ambulatory surgical center on the location as well.

The campus is designed to have multiple water features, walking paths, and outdoor educational and gathering areas. Further, plans call for the campus to contain an indoor educational component that can be utilized for providing patients with nutritional and prevention strategies related to wellness. The space also will be available for USA Health to carry out its academic

healthcare mission by serving as a location to educate future and current healthcare providers.

“Through this effort, we will be able to bring to the people of Baldwin County more convenient access to the specialty care that is the hallmark of academic health systems,” said Owen Bailey, MHA, FACHE, chief executive officer of USA Health. “This is an opportunity for us to bring a number of specialty care providers to a centrally located facility that enables the people of Baldwin County to stay close to their homes and have their healthcare needs met.

“It is only fitting that a special campus like this be situated on property that has been donated by Louis and Melinda Mapp,” Bailey said. “For many years they have continually focused on ways to improve the lives of people in our region.”

Among their many contributions to USA Health, the Mapps have donated funds to establish the Mapp Child and Family Life Program at Children’s & Women’s Hospital.

Free-standing emergency department under construction in west Mobile



Looking to increase access to specialized healthcare and emergency services, USA Health is building a free-standing emergency department in west Mobile. The facility will be located on property bounded by Hillcrest and Old Shell roads, making it more convenient for people in west Mobile to receive advanced care.

West Mobile and Mobile County have seen rapid growth in residential development in recent years. “This facility will enable people to have their emergency healthcare needs met in a nearby and convenient location that is part of the region’s only academic health system dedicated to helping people lead longer, better lives,” said Owen Bailey, FACHE, chief executive officer of USA Health.

USA Health anticipates up to 15,000 patient visits per year at the location, which will house significant imaging capabilities including a CT scanner, an MRI, X-ray and ultrasound. Additionally, a helipad, as required of all free-standing emergency departments, will be located at the facility.

“When this facility is completed, the people who live in west Mobile will have easier access to some of the most advanced care in our region,” said John Marymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine. “Patients will be cared for by board-certified practitioners in a state-of-the-art facility with a full complement of imaging services.”

The new facility also will help in the training of future generations of healthcare providers. “Being located adjacent to the university campus will enhance the convenience of our healthcare learners and provide them with an additional training site,” Marymont said.

Construction on the free-standing emergency department is expected to be completed in the fall of 2021.



Top: A rendering shows the proposed free-standing emergency department, which is under construction on Hillcrest Road in west Mobile. Above: The construction crew works on preparing the site for the free-standing emergency department.



University Hospital administrator Sam Dean and gastroenterologist Benjamin Niland, M.D., tour the new endoscopy lab.

University Hospital opens new GI Endoscopy Lab

University Hospital recently opened a new Gastroenterology Endoscopy Lab, reducing wait times, expediting patient care and utilizing leading-edge technology. The 8,000-square-foot space boasts Fujifilm equipment and includes five procedure rooms. “The division of gastroenterology has experienced huge growth over the past few years,” said Sam Dean, administrator of University Hospital. “This growth has been instrumental in the success we have seen not only as a hospital but also as a health system. It soon became clear to us that the original space was not adequate to meet our volume, nor did it have the newest equipment that our providers needed for our patients.”

With that in mind, a team of dedicated people took on the project to determine where to create a new gastroenterology lab and how best to utilize the space available.

“We had two goals in mind,” said Benjamin Niland, M.D., interim program director of the division of gastroenterology and assistant professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine. “First, we want to ensure our patients have an excellent clinical experience. We also want to create the best environment for our care providers to deliver the highest quality of care possible.”

New practices join health system

USA Health welcomes the following new practices:

Family Practice Associates/USA Health

2270 Hillcrest Road | Mobile, AL 36695 | 251-666-2213
 Charles H. Bryars III, M.D. Frank A. Hall, M.D.
 Bryan C. DeLaney, M.D. Elizabeth Mathison, M.D.

Semmes Primary Care

7885 Moffett Road, Suite 102 | Semmes, AL 36575 | 251-660-5840
 Karen Jimenez, M.D.

USA Health Endocrine & Diabetes

28260 U.S. 98, Suite B | Daphne, AL 36526 | 251-660-6300
 Nina Jo Hibbard, MSN, CRNP Judson Menefee, M.D.

West Mobile Primary Care

2423 Schillinger Road South, Suite 103 | Mobile, AL 36695 | 251-660-5950
 Jonathan Campbell, M.D. John Houston, M.D.

USA Health increases access to colon cancer screening

With a growing primary care base within USA Health, the Digestive Health Center instituted an open-access endoscopy approach for patients in need of colon cancer screenings.

“The new service is coordinated by our advanced practice providers,” said Benjamin Niland, M.D., interim program director of the division of gastroenterology and assistant professor of internal medicine at the USA College of Medicine. “They will perform a phone interview with the patient to determine their fitness for open-access endoscopy. In this way, the patient can be prepared and scheduled for their colonoscopy procedure with a telehealth phone visit.”

The new open-access endoscopy service saves patients a trip to the doctor’s office and is reflective of a meaningful collaboration between the Digestive Health Center and USA Health Mobile Diagnostic Center, proving beneficial for patients and providers alike.

“In the past, patients would have to go to the clinic to have the procedure explained and then go to the lab to have the procedure completed,” said James Walker, M.D., an internal medicine physician at USA Health Mobile Diagnostic Center. “Now, when we refer patients for a colonoscopy, an advanced practice provider from gastroenterology calls them to explain the procedure, arranges the prep to be sent to their pharmacy, and lets them know when to show up for the procedure. This new method for colon cancer screening improves efficiency and saves patients a tremendous amount of time.”

Talk with your primary care provider about preventive screenings as part of your health and wellness plan. To make an appointment with the Digestive Health Center, call 251-660-5555.

New physician specializes in pediatric epilepsy

USA Health expanded its epilepsy treatment capabilities with the addition of Asri Yuliati, M.D., a neurologist specializing in pediatric epilepsy. She joined the neurology team at USA Health and is an assistant professor of neurology at the USA College of Medicine.

“It is important for children with epilepsy to see a pediatric epileptologist who is familiar with the different types of epilepsy syndromes so they can have the appropriate evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis and treatment,” Yuliati said. “The earlier we intervene, the better the neurodevelopmental outcome will be. Epilepsy is one of the most treatable conditions in neurology.”

Many children grow out of their epilepsy while other cases are more complex, requiring comprehensive evaluation such as genetic testing and pre-surgical evaluation, as well as different types of treatments

including anti-seizure medication, epilepsy surgery and vagus nerve stimulation.

Yuliati received her medical degree from Sun Yat Sen University in China. She completed a pediatric residency at Flushing Hospital Medical Center in New York, followed by a child neurology residency at Wayne State University in Michigan and an epilepsy fellowship at the UCLA Medical Center in California.

In addition to epilepsy, Yuliati treats autism, headaches, concussions, traumatic brain injuries, brain tumors, vascular malformations and cerebral palsy, with a special interest and research focus on neonatal seizures, neurocritical care and epilepsy surgery.

Yuliati is accepting new patients at her office located at the Strada Patient Care Center. Call 251-660-5108 to schedule an appointment.



Asri Yuliati, M.D., a neurologist who specializes in pediatric epilepsy, analyzes a patient's EEG.

USA Health receives state approval for University Hospital renovation

USA Health has received permission from the Alabama Certificate of Need Review Board to renovate two floors of University Hospital, adding more than 60 much-needed beds to the facility.

“As the region's only Level I Trauma Center and home to the only regional burn unit and first comprehensive stroke center, it is so important that we have capacity to meet the growing needs of our community,” said Owen Bailey, MHA, FACHE, chief executive officer of USA Health. “These additional beds will ensure our capacity to provide our unique services to the people who come to us for care, even during public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.”

USA Health will renovate the 10th and 11th floors of University Hospital, creating at least 30 medical/surgical and critical care patient suites on each floor. This bed complement will include on each floor two isolation rooms, four American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant patient rooms, and associated nursing stations and common areas.

The estimated cost of construction and new equipment is approximately \$15.2 million.

“This will enable us to upgrade the mechanical systems, including HVAC units and electrical controls, throughout University Hospital,” said Sam Dean, administrator for the hospital. “The completion of this project makes a total of 111 the number of new beds we have put into operation since October of 2017, creating enhanced access to the services we provide that are so critically needed by our community.”

Construction has started and is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2021.

Asthma and allergy specialists join USA Health

Two fellowship-trained physicians have joined Mobile Diagnostic Center to treat pediatric and adult patients for asthma and allergy conditions. Keerthi Reddy, M.D., and Robert Albright Greer Jr., D.O., are accepting new patients.

Greer graduated from William Carey University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Hattiesburg, Miss. He completed residency and fellowship training at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Miss.

Reddy earned a degree in medicine from American University of Antigua College of Medicine in Osbourn, Antigua. She completed residency training at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tenn., and fellowship training at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Miss.

Reddy and Greer treat conditions including environmental allergies, sinusitis and rhinitis, asthma, chronic cough, hives, swelling, anaphylaxis, eczema, contact dermatitis, food and drug allergies, and insect sting allergies.

Tests and treatments offered by the new USA Health physicians include allergen skin testing, food and drug allergy testing, allergy shots, allergen sublingual immunotherapy, complete pulmonary function testing, spirometry, biologic medications for asthma and allergic diseases, patch testing for contact dermatitis and oral food challenges.

The practice is located at USA Health Mobile Diagnostic Center, 6701 Airport Blvd. Suite A101, in Mobile. For more information, call 251-633-8880.



PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY CARE IN THE TIME OF COVID

BY LINDSAY LYLE

The Westphals traveled to Gulf Shores, Ala., in early September for what was supposed to be a relaxing vacation at the beach with their families. The getaway went awry when their 6-month-old baby developed a life-threatening condition that required immediate emergency treatment.

Originally from Lafayette, La., the young family lives in Columbus, Ga., where Lance Westphal is stationed in the U.S. Army and Elizabeth Westphal works as an emergency room nurse at the regional hospital.

“The morning after we arrived in Gulf Shores, Bennett was extremely lethargic, not drinking his bottles – just not himself,” Elizabeth Westphal recalled of her son’s symptoms.

She and her husband took Bennett to the nearby emergency department at South Baldwin Regional Medical Center in Foley, Ala. There, he was diagnosed with intussusception, a condition in which part of the intestine “telescopes” into itself, causing a bowel obstruction. Based on the complexity of Bennett’s condition, the hospital referred him emergently to Children’s & Women’s Hospital in Mobile, about a 50-minute drive from Foley.

Being a nurse herself, Elizabeth Westphal understood the seriousness of her son’s illness. “It was really hard for me to let go of control in an emergency situation,” she said. “I had a lot of questions. I was really scared. I had to take off my nurse hat and just be his mom. I cried and prayed the entire way to Mobile.”

At 6 months old, Bennett Westphal experienced an episode of intussusception, a life-threatening condition that caused a bowel obstruction and required emergency treatment at Children’s & Women’s Hospital.

Photo credit: A&E Caro Photography



The ambulance took Bennett to the pediatric emergency department of Children's & Women's Hospital, while Elizabeth Westphal entered through the main hospital entrance to be screened for COVID-19. As someone who cares for COVID patients regularly, she respected the safety measures that were in place; but as a mother, it didn't make being separated from her son any easier.

"In the moment," she said, "I definitely thought, 'This is the worst day of my life.'"

Adding to the challenges, nationwide safety protocols during the pandemic stipulated that only one caregiver could be with Bennett in the hospital.

"I trust the precautions that we have to take right now," Elizabeth Westphal said. "That said, it was really hard with my husband not being able to come inside; because Bennett needed both of us, and I really needed my husband for support."

Shelby Sheffield, RN, a nurse in Chil-

dren's & Women's emergency department, was among the providers who cared for Bennett. She said the staff understands the anxiety that COVID restrictions add to an already stressful situation for patients and their families. With that in mind, they keep the caregivers informed and updated as much as possible, so the caregivers can share that information with the rest of their family.

"When you try to imagine yourself in the caregiver's position, it allows you to treat others how you would want to be treated," she said.

Once Elizabeth Westphal made it to the emergency department, Bennett's health-care team already had sprung to action. Larry Mellick, M.D., chief of USA Health's pediatric emergency medicine division, explained Bennett's treatment plan, while Elizabeth Westphal FaceTimed her husband, the technology allowing him to "be in the room" and ask questions.

Mellick said most episodes of intussusception in children are idiopathic, meaning they occur spontaneously without any pathologic cause. Intussusception, the most common abdominal emergency in early childhood, can lead to complications such as vascular compromise, bowel necrosis and even death.

When a patient presents with a possible surgical or life-threatening emergency, Sheffield said, it is crucial for the staff to properly assess and evaluate the patient, so orders and treatment can be initiated in a timely manner. "This timeliness can make a huge difference in the outcome of the patient's emergent situation," she said.

"Every minute felt like an hour to me, so I really appreciated how efficient and confident they were. They knew what they were doing," Elizabeth Westphal said. "Even though Bennett wasn't fixed yet, I knew he would be with them."

Radiology confirmed Bennett's diagnosis



with an ultrasound and prepared him for a barium enema. During this procedure, a tube is inserted into the patient's rectum to introduce a contrast material into the large intestine. This creates pressure within the intestine and "un-telescopes" the intussusception while relieving the bowel obstruction.

Because Bennett was dehydrated from not eating or drinking, he stayed overnight at Children's & Women's Hospital for more fluids and monitoring in case the intussusception recurred. The next day, Bennett was discharged from the hospital, and the Westphals rejoined their families at the beach to try to make the best of their remaining vacation.

Five days later, once they were back home in Georgia, Bennett experienced intussusception again. The recurrence necessitated another visit to the ER and a four-night stay at the children's hospital in Atlanta. This time, the intussusception corrected itself without treatment, but Bennett stayed in the hospital because of complications from a severe stomach virus.

"We went to four ERs in a week's span, and Children's & Women's was definitely the best," Elizabeth Westphal said. "We still talk about the staff all the time and how great they were."

Sheffield said she appreciates families like the Westphals for being patient and understanding with the hospital staff as they work together during the pandemic. "We understand that it is not easy during this challenging time, but we do appreciate the teamwork that it takes to provide high-quality care for our patients," she said.

Elizabeth Westphal expressed her gratitude to everyone involved in Bennett's care for making her family feel comfortable and in capable hands. "They truly saved Bennett's life," she said, "and we are very, very grateful for them."



Opposite: Elizabeth and Lance Westphal and their son, Bennett, were vacationing in Gulf Shores, Ala., when Bennett needed emergency treatment for intussusception.

Top: Bennett Westphal, 6 months old, was treated in the pediatric emergency department at Children's & Women's Hospital.

Left: Larry Mellick, M.D., chief of USA Health's pediatric emergency medicine division, and Shelby Sheffield, RN, a nurse in the pediatric emergency department, were among the providers who cared for Bennett.

Healthcare HEROES emerge in fight against virus

PHOTOS BY BILL STARLING

"Seeing a very sick patient recover from COVID-19 gives us the courage and strength to continue to fight this battle, to be the voice for the patients."

*Maegan Tapia, BSN, RN
COVID-19 Unit*



The global pandemic has impacted every facet of USA Health. Employees have demonstrated flexibility, ingenuity and dedication as USA Health continues to navigate this healthcare crisis in real time.

"Stressful times bring out the true character of individuals," said Owen Bailey, MHA, FACHE, chief executive officer of USA Health. "We could not be prouder of our USA Health family and how each member continues to perform at the highest of levels to meet the health needs of our community."

Meet some of USA Health's healthcare heroes who are serving on the front lines and behind the scenes.



TOP LEFT: *Chibuzo Ilonze, MD, MPH | Pediatric Oncology* **TOP RIGHT:** *Alexandra Williams, RN | Endoscopy*
BOTTOM LEFT: *Kristopher Haskins, RN | COVID-19 Unit* **BOTTOM RIGHT:** *Janel Lowman, MHA | Community Outreach*



“Tough times have proven that we are even tougher at USA Health.”

*Philip Almalouf, M.D.,
Internal Medicine/Pulmonology*



“In a strange but positive way, COVID-19 has made me become more emotionally present for my patients.”

*Emily Geha, RN, BSN
Interventional Radiology*

“I make sure that we keep a clean and sterile environment for our patients as well as employees.”

Adriane Moore, Surgical Services



TOP LEFT: Darryl Taylor | Environmental Services
TOP MIDDLE: Miranda Carr, RN, MSN | Post-Anesthesia Care Unit
TOP RIGHT: Andrew Williams | Facilities Management
CENTER LEFT: Lisa Howard, RN, CNOR | Neurology
CENTER: Kim Thompson-Yates, M.Ed. | Mapp Family and Child Life
BOTTOM LEFT: Stacy Motykiewicz | Endoscopy Lab
BOTTOM MIDDLE: Rebecca Threlkeld | Trauma
BOTTOM RIGHT: Sharon Evans | Facilities Services



“The screening process plays a vital role in the reduction of COVID-19. It allows us to provide continued safe, quality care to our patients.”

*Mattie Brooks, RN, MSN
Quality and Safety Management*



“Collectively, the pandemic has been a learning experience that has made us better at caring for our patients and our community.”

*Benjamin Estrada, MD
Pediatric Infectious Disease*

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT: *Lisa Kirksey, RN | Nursing Informatics* **TOP RIGHT:** *Zach Keith, RN, BSN | Pre-Operative/Pre-Anesthesia Care Unit* **BOTTOM LEFT:** *Timothy Dexter | Facilities Services* **BOTTOM RIGHT:** *Teresa S. Barnett | Clinical Laboratory*



After 30 days on life support, patient beats COVID-19

By Casandra Andrews



On Sunday, March 29, at 6:10 a.m., Matroy Browder called his wife, Sylvia, to tell her his health was not improving. He needed to be placed on a ventilator because of complications from COVID-19.

“It’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do,” he said. “I basically had to say goodbye.”

A day earlier, Sylvia Browder drove her husband – a retired U.S. Border Patrol agent and U.S. Marine – to the emergency department at University Hospital. Diagnosed with COVID-19 at an urgent care clinic a few days before, Matroy’s condition had rapidly deteriorated.

“We were trying to fight it at home,” Sylvia said. When he began having difficulty breathing, they quickly sought medical attention.

All told, her husband spent 47 days in the hospital, with 30 of those days on a ventilator, a machine that breathed for him because he couldn’t breathe for himself. It was the longest the couple, married for almost 30 years, had ever been apart.

Because of restrictions placed on Alabama hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic, no visitors or caregivers were allowed in the critical care unit where Matroy spent more than a month. The Browder family had to rely on physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists and other staff to help them stay in touch.

Sylvia said hospital staff would hold an iPad close to his bed so that she and their children could talk to him, offering encouragement and prayers. They also prayed for everyone involved in his care.

“The medical team was outstanding,” Sylvia said. “They allowed us to Facetime. We called four times a day to check in because we had to know how he was doing. They did not hesitate to help.”

While Matroy was on life support, hospital staff took other steps to speed his recovery. They received photos of his family by email that were printed out and placed

on the walls of his room. A colorful sign above his bed announced: “Who’s a fighter? This guy.”

His fight for life spanned more than a month. About two weeks into his hospitalization, Sylvia received a call to discuss end-of-life plans for her husband. At that point, his prognosis appeared grim.

“I told them, ‘not on my watch,’” she said, shaking her head. “I knew my husband had a story, and he would recover. That night, we all prayed for him and the whole team.”

Later, she learned that evening was when her husband began to improve: “There were some highs and lows, but we never gave up,” she said.

Maegan Tapia, B.S.N., R.N., an interventional radiology supervisor at University Hospital, served as Matroy’s primary nurse. A member of the serious infection disease team, Tapia volunteered to leave her regular post and exclusively care for those battling COVID-19.

“Seeing him slowly begin to make progress was the encouragement we all needed,” Tapia said. “I remember the day he was extubated (taken off a ventilator). We stood outside his door holding hands and praying. It was me and other nurses in the unit along with the primary attending. Tears streamed down our cheeks as we saw just how well he was doing. It was a day I will never forget.”

On May 15, as Matroy waited to be discharged, he talked with those who helped him battle the novel coronavirus and welcomed his wife to his room. Her arms open wide, she leaned over his bed and hugged him tight, whispering in his ear through a medical mask.

“It really brought our family and friends together,” Matroy said of his illness. “People were praying for us from Georgia to California.”

Kristopher Haskins, BSN, RN, a nurse manager who oversees the Arnold Luteran Regional Burn Center, the wound center and critical care unit for COVID-19

Matroy Browder, and his wife, Sylvia, at home in August, say they are grateful for the outstanding care he received during his 47-day stay while battling COVID-19.



Top left: The Browders pause for a photo before getting in the elevator to leave. *Middle left:* Matroy Browder leaves the hospital to cheers from the staff. *Bottom left:* Sylvia Browder opens her arms while social distancing to give her husband's physician an 'air hug.' *Top right:* After a months-long recovery from COVID-19, Matroy was finally strong enough to ride his motorcycle again. *Bottom right:* On the day of his discharge, Matroy prays for members of his care team at University Hospital.

patients at University Hospital, led the effort to ensure Matroy had a jubilant send-off.

As word spread of his departure, clinical staff began visiting Matroy's fifth-floor hospital room. Some even came in on a day off to wish him well.

"You are a gift to every single one of us," said a nurse clad in a mask and blue scrubs, raising her arms and cheering after she entered his hospital room.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, Matroy told them how grateful he was for the excellent care he received. The group formed a semicircle around him, bowing their heads and clasping hands. He began to pray, his voice strong and clear: "I want to thank you, father God, for bringing us together. I ask that you create a permanent bond between us, since what you did for me was so spectacular."

After 47 days hospitalized, he needed to regain the strength to walk again without assistance. As paramedics arrived to take Matroy to a rehab center by ambulance, dozens of hospital staff gathered, standing at least six feet apart, to line the fifth-floor hall for his departure.

"His recovery has given many of us in the unit hope, strength, and courage," Tapia said. "It has given us the courage and strength to continue to fight this battle, to be the voice for the patients, to continue to advocate when others begin to lose hope."

For much of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Mobile County led the state in the number of cases and deaths reported. When Matroy was released from University Hospital, Mobile County had recorded 1,559 cases of COVID-19 with 97 deaths from the illness, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health.

As Matroy was rolled into the hallway on May 15, joyful cheering erupted. A nurse handed him a pom-pom that he waved as he was pushed toward the elevators. When he exited the emergency department downstairs, he was surprised by a large crowd of family members gathered in the parking lot, including his children and grandchildren, who clapped and cried when they saw him.

Less than two weeks after leaving University Hospital, Matroy departed rehabilitation and finally headed for home in west Mobile. A few days later, on the last Saturday in May, he was surprised with a parade in front of his home that included border patrol agents, members of area Harley-Davidson groups, friends from church, his family and staff from University Hospital.

Two local television stations aired stories of his homecoming, showing a beaming Matroy, his wife, children and granddaughters waving to those who drove by.

"This is a testament and I want people to have hope," Sylvia said of her husband's illness and recovery. "We want to share hope with other people."



A lifeline between patients and families

Maegan Tapia, BSN, RN, an interventional radiology supervisor at University Hospital, volunteered to care exclusively for those battling COVID-19 beginning in March 2020.

A member of the serious infection disease team at USA Health, Tapia was the primary nurse for Matroy Browder, a patient hospitalized for 47 days as he battled COVID-19. He spent a month on life support before gradually getting better.

Because of statewide restrictions banning most visitors and caregivers in Alabama healthcare facilities during the COVID-19 global pandemic, hospital staff members such as Tapia have become a lifeline between patients and their families.

"We are all they have each and every day," Tapia said. "I've never before had to rely on an iPad to be the main means of communication between a family and patients. We've been fortunate to have the electronic devices for our patients and their families to communicate with each other."

Often, a family member helps support a patient and his or her caregivers.

"Someone being at the bedside is pertinent," she said. "They give us insight into who our patients are, and they offer encouragement for us to keep doing what we love, which is caring for others."

The Browders, she said, are an amazing family who never lost faith during Matroy's hospitalization.

"I would regularly tell Troy that they may not be there physically holding his hand, but they were always holding his heart from afar."

The Browder family called the critical care unit four times a day to check on Matroy.

At one point, Tapia was talking with Sylvia Browder by phone to go over her husband's care directives, which guide the medical staff on his wishes for end-of-life care and other matters. He was making progress, responding well, and doing so much better overall, she said.

That's when Tapia told Sylvia her husband was still technically considered a "no chest compression" patient if his heart stopped and resuscitation was needed.

"I'll never forget her response," the nurse recalled.

"She said, 'Maegan, we made that decision when he was really sick because we did not want to risk the virus exposure to the staff caring for him.' I couldn't help but be touched by the idea of them making such a selfless sacrifice for the well-being of people they had never met before."



Need for COVID testing leads to innovation in patient care



On March 12, 2020, just as COVID-19 was beginning to emerge in Mobile, two USA Health staff members pulled on protective gear, tore open test kits and approached motorists waiting in their cars who were experiencing symptoms of the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

Natalie Fox, DNP, chief nursing officer for USA Health Physicians Group, and Brittany Brown, RN, MSN, director of operations for internal medicine at USA Health, performed the first tests for the academic health system in the back parking lot of Stanton Road Clinic. The next day, on March 13, the Alabama Department of Public Health announced the state's first confirmed case of COVID-19 in a state resident.

At the time, USA Health had a limited supply of tests provided by Assurance

Scientific Laboratories, one of the health system's partners based in Birmingham, Ala. After testing a handful of patients on Thursday, March 12, even more tests were needed on Friday, March 13.

"It became very clear to me, as we tested nine people in a flurry that Friday afternoon, that wasn't going to work," said Fox, who also serves as assistant administrator at USA Health. "We were going to have to come up with an operational process to get these COVID tests done."

Like others in hotspots around the nation, Fox and Brown were pioneering drive-through testing in a new era of healthcare. Calling on their USA Health colleagues in information technology, quality management, family medicine and other departments, they formed a small group to quickly launch a COVID-19 testing operation in

just 48 hours.

They shouldered a huge task – establishing a mini clinic in a parking lot that gave them the capability to answer phones, make appointments, track patients and access medical records, all while keeping testers and patients safe. "We never did drive-through testing before," Fox said, "but we had to learn from other organizations and each other to adapt our processes."

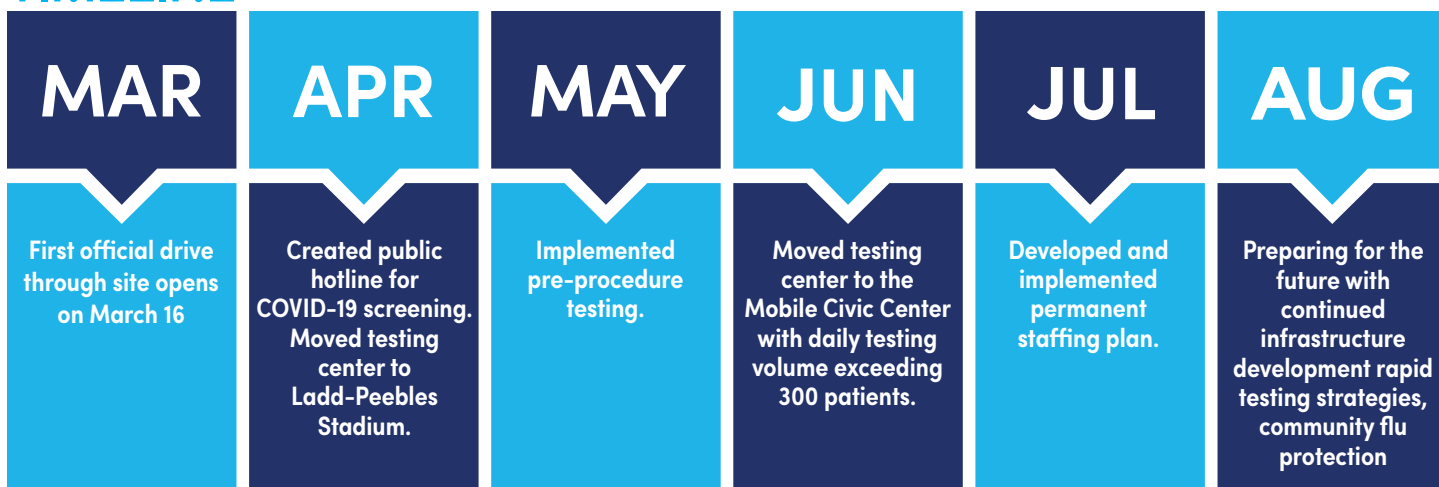
Repurposing the Center for Healthy Communities

One person called on to help was Louis Wright, director of technology and IT infra-

Top: In early April, USA Health opened a drive-through testing site at Ladd-Peebles Stadium.

Bottom: USA Health staff test patients for COVID-19 in the Mobile Civic Center arena.

TIMELINE



structure for USA Health. A request came in for assistance setting up computers, laptops and telephones for a testing site. A Louisiana native, he had been following the news about COVID-19 closing schools and filling hospitals in New Orleans. “I thought, ‘Wow. This is really coming,’” he recalled.

An IT project manager known for his can-do attitude, Wright met with Fox. They had the weekend to get things set up. He told her, “not a problem.”

Wright and his support staff showed up at the USA Health Center for Healthy Communities at 211 Catherine St. on a Saturday morning. With the help of the telecommunications department from the University of South Alabama, they set up four phones and a centralized number for callers to request appointments.

Electronics were hard to find in stores in the early days of the pandemic, so they received approval to pull laptops and a TV monitor from other projects to install so nurses at the Catherine Street location could track incoming patients in real time. The call center also had to connect to two electronic medical records systems.

“Since it was on our network, we were able to do it in 48 hours,” Wright said.

At the same time, Fox and Brown mapped out a process so that callers – USA Health employees and established patients – could call to request appointments and be added to the queue. When patients arrived, they would be directed to park in spaces at the Catherine Street lot and show a driver’s license from their cars. Nurses verified the information and carefully took nasal swabs through half-opened windows.

During the first full week that began March 16, the team tested up to 30 patients a day. At that time, the average turnaround for test results was five days with a maximum of 12 days wait time.

Just 10 days after launching the COVID-19 testing center, its success set the stage for a much larger operation – a partnership with the City of Mobile to establish a site that would be open to the public.

Retooling Ladd-Peebles Stadium

On March 26, during a Friday news conference, Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson and USA Health Chief Medical Officer Michael Chang, M.D., announced that they were partnering on the new testing site at Ladd-Peebles Stadium, located near downtown Mobile, and slated to open just 10 days later on April 6.

Ladd-Peebles presented new challenges. Although there was plenty of space for parking and tents, a computer network needed to be established.

As IT staff from the city and USA Health walked through the site, they discovered an active network at the 72-year-old stadium and that USA still had wireless infrastructure from its football ticketing system. The only problem was that some needed equipment had been removed in anticipation of the opening of the new on-campus football stadium.

Healthcare workers performing testing also needed phones. Using stock from another project and working with campus telecommunications and a private vendor, the group was able to set up 14 internet-

based phones at the stadium. iPads and a TV monitor were added. City trucks were brought on site to relay an internet signal.

“It had to happen,” Wright recalled. “We are the heartbeat of Mobile to provide this service to our community. Everybody just pitched in.”

Late that Friday before the Monday, April 6 public opening, Wright and the team discovered that they would also need to provide a call center to accommodate people seeking testing. Now they needed 12 phones configured. For Catherine Street, they had ordered 20 extras just in case, he said. “It was a good thing we did.”

Wright and an engineer returned to Catherine Street to set up the new call center. He ordered Bluetooth headsets from Best Buy and picked them up so that employees would have their hands free to enter information while on the phone. Another support worker jumped in to help configure the phones. Three nurses, three schedulers and two managers were reasigned to staff it.

By Monday, April 6, everything was in place. “The city’s test line opened up at 8 o’clock,” Wright said.

Football stadium turned COVID-19 testing site

The public testing site at Ladd-Peebles stadium connected USA Health with Mobile, Ala.-based Synergy Laboratories, which expanded testing capacity and drastically improved the average turnaround time on test results to 12 to 24 hours, down from five to 12 days, Fox said.

To assist USA Health in opening testing up to front line workers and the public, the City of Mobile provided traffic control, infrastructure support and personal protective equipment.

In the first week of April, healthcare workers at Ladd tested 425 people for COVID-19. Fox was able to return to her role as assistant administrator at USA Health, leaving the day-to-day operations of the testing site to Sarah Kahalley, a data coordinator in the quality department.

At Ladd, USA Health established a hotline for public access to screening and testing, 1-888-USA-2650. Staff also collaborated with the city to test first responders including police and firefighters, and eventually staff from the city's jail. In early April, the site averaged between 70 and 100 patients a day.

Also in April, a call for help from a local nursing home to assist in testing employees moved USA Health into another sector of remote-site COVID-19 testing. A pathway was immediately established, Fox said, to perform testing at the nursing home site while maintaining operations and capacity

at the football stadium.

A COVID-19 outbreak at Mobile Metro Jail in early May led to more off-site testing for USA Health. At the city's request, more than 200 employees received screenings, medical evaluations and tests in a 48-hour period through a remote unit USA Health established outside the jail.

Wild weather leads to relocation of testing site

In early June, as summer approached, severe weather damaged tents and other equipment at the Ladd stadium location. After consulting with city leaders, the USA Health testing site was moved to the Mobile Civic Center arena that features a seven-story dome where patients can continue to conveniently drive in for COVID-19 testing then drive back out without ever leaving their cars.

Following Memorial Day weekend, as COVID-19 continued to spread along the Alabama Gulf Coast, USA Health staff exceeded 300 patient tests a day. By July, a permanent staffing plan was designed and

implemented for the testing center.

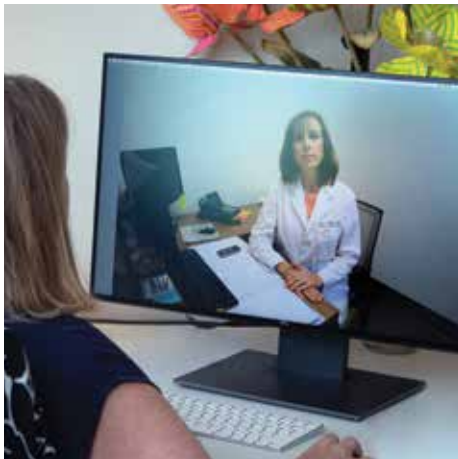
After a lull in late summer 2020, the number of positive COVID-19 tests began climbing in much of the United States, including at the USA Health testing center. The percentage of positive tests each month has ranged from a low of 6 percent to a high of 16 percent, Fox said. More than 22,700 tests have been administered since March.

Testing for the novel coronavirus continues on weekdays at Expo Hall off Lawrence Street.

"With respiratory season upon us, it is important to continue COVID-19 testing in order to assure we are treating symptoms and illnesses appropriately," said Haley Kirby, MS, Ed., operations coordinator for the USA Health testing center. "We need to continue to encourage community awareness as we are still in the midst of an international pandemic."

The goal of the testing center, Fox said, is to continue to offer testing to the community until it's no longer needed.

Virtual visits ensure safe, continuous care



When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Alabama, USA Health providers looked for a way to continue to provide patient care while keeping all parties safe from exposure. A pilot program for virtual visits in the neurology department quickly evolved into a system-wide method of seeing patients without the risk of close contact.

"Providing virtual visits was part of our commitment to our patients: that we strive to take care of them irrespective of whatever is happening," said Dean Naritoku, M.D., professor and chair of neurology at the

USA College of Medicine and a neurologist with USA Health.

In March, USA Health set up virtual visit capabilities for patients with basic medical needs, such as consultations, post-operation follow-ups, and other health needs that do not require an in-person visit. Virtual visits are patient appointments conducted by using audio-visual technologies that allow a patient and a healthcare provider to interact without physical contact.

For Katie Guerrieri, the option for virtual visits allowed her daughter, Karis, to continue routine contact with her medical providers. Karis is on a ventilator and has a tracheotomy, so regular appointments allowed her care team to stay on top of her complex medical needs.

"Karis cannot be exposed to really any kind of virus. It would be detrimental and possibly even fatal," Guerrieri said. "Virtual visits allowed her to continue her baseline quality care while keeping her safe from exposure."

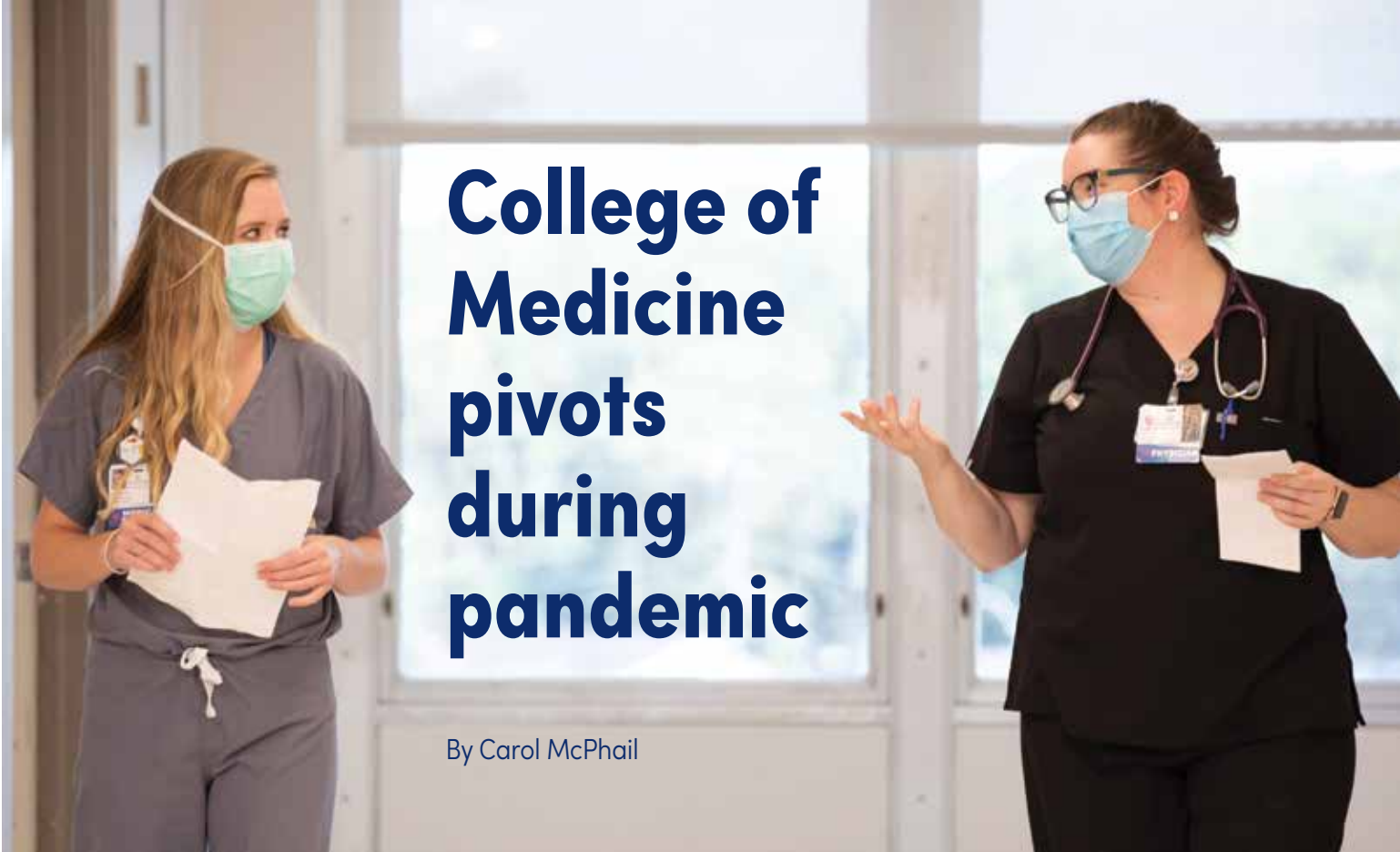
Early in the pandemic, Paul Unterweger, father of Jonathan, had trouble reaching Jonathan's neurologist at another facility to get refills on a seizure medication. He

reached out to USA Health neurology and was able to get a virtual appointment with Naritoku and, subsequently, the seizure medication refill his son needed.

The virtual visit prevented them from having to drive from Pensacola to Mobile. "You can't get a better win-win than that," Unterweger said.

From March 18 to Oct. 31, USA Health providers saw 15,782 patients virtually through the Physicians Group practices and the Mitchell Cancer Institute. At the peak in April, USA Health providers saw up to 35 percent of patients virtually.

"We believe that now that it's available and now that we've been able to use it on a large scale, we will find more patient acceptance, and we will be able to use it for areas we had particularly not addressed before," said Naritoku, who also is chief medical information officer for USA Health's ambulatory services. "This may result in our improved ability to provide access to people in rural areas and people who must remain in isolation for whatever reason. It also allows us to extend tertiary services to areas that could not access us previously because of distance and transportation."



College of Medicine pivots during pandemic

By Carol McPhail

In March, when Zachary White learned that his medical education would be disrupted by COVID-19, he was in the middle of his surgery clerkship. “I thought to myself, ‘How am I possibly going to get the most from my surgery rotation at home?’” said White, now a fourth-year medical student at the USA College of Medicine.

White and other surgical clerkship students discovered they would continue their team-based learning using Zoom, a technology new at the time to them and the faculty. Even though they were separated by distance, they viewed lectures and collaborated on case studies based on clinical scenarios under the oversight of William Richards, M.D., F.A.C.S., professor and chair of surgery.

“Throughout the online surgery experience, it was very helpful to have constant learning opportunities from the surgery faculty,” White said. He continued his studies from his hometown of Birmingham, where he spent time with family and celebrated his brother’s graduation from high school.

Embracing new technology quickly was one way that students and faculty at the USA College of Medicine adapted to the many changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. By the start of the fall semester, the faculty had a formal, sustainable game plan – dividing first-

second-year classes into three groups that would take turns attending lectures online and in person.

“I am incredibly proud of our faculty and staff,” said T.J. Hundley, M.D., associate dean of medical education. “The sudden transition of our courses could not have happened without an immense collaborative effort between module directors, clerkship directors and the Division of Medical Education.”

Students proved resilient as they coped with new academic methods while having their social, emotional and spiritual lives upended. “In addition to their studies, some of our students became full-time caregivers for family members and full-time teachers as they homeschooled their own children during the day, forcing their own studies until late in the evening,” said Kelly Roveda, M.D., associate dean of student affairs.

Mark Taylor, Ph.D., director of the graduate program and associate professor of physiology and cell biology, put it this way: “The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted or redirected almost every aspect of our education mission, including how we train the next generation of biomedical researchers.”

The doctorate program welcomed seven new students as it continued to emphasize adaptability as a crucial tenet of the program. “In the end, new challenges inspire

novel problem-solving strategies, and I look forward to watching this new generation of scientists take on the challenges to come,” Taylor said.

For students in the second semester of medical school, the disruption from COVID-19 eliminated the chance for them to gain important summer research experience to add to their residency program applications. But for second-year students, it was worse. The COVID-19 pandemic exploded just as they were preparing to spend four to eight weeks studying for the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) Step 1, an important factor for the residency application process.

Test centers closed throughout March and April, and, once they reopened, exam slots filled up quickly. “When our exams were canceled due to social distancing requirements and testing centers closed, it was nearly impossible to find new exam dates before the start of our third year,” said third-year medical student Lexie Hensley. “It was awful being in what we all called ‘Step purgatory’ because we were studying so hard with so much uncertainty on when we would actually be able to take the test.”

Fourth-year-medical student Macy Vickers, left, rounds on the fifth floor of University Hospital with Anna Foust, M.D., assistant professor of internal medicine and pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine.



day you are in.”

For fourth-year medical students Amanda Atkins and Macy Vickers, focusing on the present meant launching a drive for protective personal equipment to donate to frontline healthcare workers. After discussing needs with USA Health leadership, they recruited other medical students to volunteer and began contacting local businesses around Mobile for donations.

They gathered 735 face masks, 28,550 pairs of nitrile gloves, 120 homemade masks, 84 N95 masks, 20 face shields and eight gallons of bleach.

Vickers said she was motivated to help

“

You’re entering a workforce in a society faced with significant challenges due to a pandemic unprecedented in modern times,” he said. “Embrace this challenge, and, as Nike says, ‘Just do it.’ Do it with compassion, dignity, honesty, respect and resilience.

– John Marymont, M.D., MBA

”

The domino effect of the delays caused more than half of her class to defer a month of their third-year clerkship rotations. They will then use the beginning of what is traditionally the fourth year to make up the clinical time, which could bump into sought-after away rotations for some students. “Essentially, it has been extremely stressful having so much uncertainty surrounding such an important exam,” Hensley said.

During a virtual white coat ceremony, Hensley and her classmates donned their white coats and took the Medical Student Oath, a promise to uphold the human aspects of medicine such as sensitivity, compassion and respect for patients.

Meanwhile, third-year medical students returned to their clerkships to find the healthcare environment significantly changed. Everyone was required to answer screening questions and wear masks before entering the buildings. Social distancing requirements were implemented at all facilities.

“There is more separation in the work environment,” said Anna Foust, M.D., assistant professor of internal medicine and pediatrics who oversees medical student rotations. “Learning how to talk with people to coordinate care while socially

distancing is a new arena in education. Students are inventive, and I hope that they take this and teach us some innovative ways to communicate.”

Foust said that she believes that the practice of medicine will be forever changed by the pandemic and will open a doorway to utilizing more virtual visits and changing the way healthcare providers accomplish daily tasks. “I hope that our students see this not as a negative change but a step forward with technology as our aid,” she said.

As the challenges of COVID-19 rolled through the spring semester, faculty members offered help for struggling students. Marjorie Scaffa, Ph.D., health and wellness counselor at the USA College of Medicine, moved counseling online and suggested writing prompts to help the students cope with their emotions through journaling.

“It’s okay not to be okay,” she wrote in an essay. “It is important to understand that in this time, grief is a normal and acceptable reaction.”

Scaffa challenged the students to allow themselves to experience their emotions and turn their attention to things they can control. “Focus on the present, not when on-campus classes or clerkships will start again,” she said. “Focus on the present – the

partially out of gratitude to the physicians, nurses and staff at USA Health who had taught her so much during her time as a medical student. “It has been so meaningful to have something to do to help those who are in the field that I will soon join,” she said.

Wellness Wednesdays, launched before the COVID-19 pandemic, proved beneficial for doctoral students in the Basic Medical Sciences Graduate Program and post-doctoral fellows. A weekly email covered a variety of wellness topics, provided resources, and kept the students connected and engaged.

Most of the basic medical science graduate students participated in online learning, though some were considered essential workers based on their roles in the lab or ongoing experiments.

“Scientists in general have to be resilient,” said academic adviser Angie O’Neal. “A major part of research is failing and trying another approach. Our BMS students have adapted to the new learning environment and are making necessary adjustments.”

For fourth-year medical students, the changes from COVID-19 resulted in the loss of important traditions. In-person Match Day and Honors Convocation – both defining events in the lives of aspiring

physicians – were canceled because of restrictions on large gatherings. Students could not be with their classmates to open their envelopes and celebrate their residency matches.

“We did not realize at the time that our last day of class was the last day,” said Patrick Steadman of Mobile, who is now in residency training in internal medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. “There was a grieving process associated with the end of school just sort of fizzling out.”

As the students awaited the end of the semester and the transition to their residency training, some took solace in activities with family and friends – fishing, hunting, reading and practicing yoga.

“Just like everybody else, I’m doing the best I can,” said Sippy Sridhar of Birmingham, as she awaited the start of her residency training in internal medicine at LSU Health in New Orleans. “I’ve gotten to spend time with family, which has made social distancing easier.”

In early May, the 66 members of the 45th graduating class became the first at the USA College of Medicine to take the Hippocratic Oath and the military oath by Zoom. Typically, both oaths are taken during Honors Convocation, the ceremony when graduates are recognized for their academic achievements and are awarded doctoral hoods.

On that day, John Marymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine, addressed a mosaic of faces shown on two large TV monitors. “You’re entering a workforce in a society faced with significant challenges due to a pandemic unprecedented in modern times,” he said. “Embrace this challenge, and, as Nike says, ‘Just do it.’ Do it with compassion, dignity, honesty, respect and resilience.”

Class president Ben McCormick, one of the many faces on the screens, took the Hippocratic Oath surrounded by close family and friends at a beach house on the Fort Morgan peninsula. He conceded that the experience was unique, but added that the meaning of the oath remained the same. “The dedication to being ‘loyal to the profession of medicine’ and to the ‘good of the sick to the utmost of (our) power’ carries even greater weight,” he said.

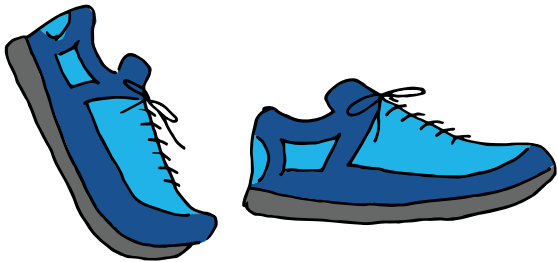


Opposite: Franklin Trimm, M.D., associate dean for diversity and inclusion at the USA College of Medicine, greets first-year medical student Trentyn Shaw at orientation. Top: U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Andrew Bright, D.O., assistant professor of surgery at the USA College of Medicine, leads the oath for members of the class of 2020 who matched in the military. Above: A group of first-year medical students gathers in front of the Medical Sciences Building during orientation.

Five strategies for coping with the stress of COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact society, it's important to recognize and understand how to most effectively deal with the stress, anxiety and depression that can stem from fear of the unknown and ongoing social distancing orders related to the novel coronavirus.

Ron Franks, M.D., a psychiatrist with USA Health and chair of the department of psychiatry at the USA College of Medicine, points to these strategies to help strengthen our resilience in uncertain times.



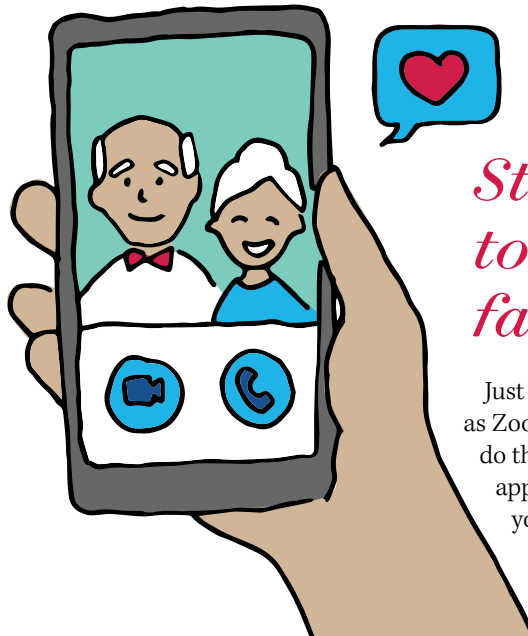
Make time for exercise and other healthy habits each day.

Getting fresh air, eating healthy and exercising are important to ensuring a healthy body and mind. Encourage those in your household to join you for a morning or evening walk.



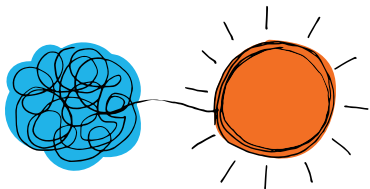
Maintain healthy routines.

To keep your immune system and mind strong, Franks said it's important to get a sense of control. One way to do that is by keeping a routine: Get enough sleep, go to bed and wake up at the same time, limit alcohol intake, and avoid risky behaviors.



Stay connected to friends and family.

Just like we use digital meetings such as Zoom to conduct business, we should do the same with our loved ones. Set appointments for weekly calls with your children and grandchildren if you aren't able to visit and maintain social distance.

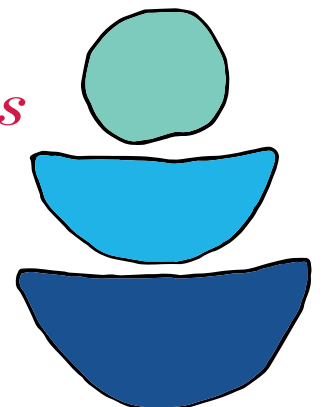


Seek help when you need it.

If you feel more stress than you can handle, it's a good idea to talk to a healthcare provider. If you aren't comfortable doing that, Franks suggests confiding in someone you trust.

Practice mindfulness through meditation.

Use a free app to get started, such as Headspace or Calm, if you are unsure about how to meditate. Stress can weaken the immune system. When your immune system is weak, you're more susceptible to infections and viruses.



High fiber, easy cleanup



Brooke Gacek, MS, RDN, LD, a clinical dietitian with USA Health, shares a recipe for a delicious and nutritious breakfast or snack that is high in fiber and beta-carotene. These flourless pumpkin muffins are prepared entirely in the blender, making cleanup a breeze.

Pumpkin-Oat Muffins

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons ground flaxseed, plus 6 tablespoons water
1 ½ cups rolled oats
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
¼ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup unseasoned pumpkin puree
¾ cup packed dark brown sugar
3 tablespoons grapeseed or canola oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
⅓ cup mini dark chocolate chips or chopped dried cranberries
⅓ cup chopped walnuts (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a muffin pan with cooking spray.
2. Prepare flax “eggs” by combining ground flaxseed with water; mix well with fork and set aside for a few minutes to thicken.
3. Pulse oats in a blender until finely ground. Add baking powder, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda and salt; pulse once or twice to blend. Add flax eggs, pumpkin, brown sugar, oil and vanilla; puree until smooth. Stir in chocolate chips (or cranberries) and walnuts (optional).
4. Fill the prepared muffin cups two-thirds full.
5. Bake the muffins until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 15-17 minutes. Cool in the pan on a wire rack for 5 minutes, then turn out to cool completely.

Medical students find new ways to serve



Greg Overbeek, president of the USA Student-Run Free Clinic, collected face masks and other essentials to be distributed to community organizations.

In January, Greg Overbeek, a medical student at the USA College of Medicine, was just starting his term as president of the Student-Run Free Clinic when news emerged of a novel coronavirus spreading half a world away.

By March, the virus had reached the United States, prompting colleges, including USA, to transition to online instruction. This also meant that students no longer would be able to gain real-world experience by volunteering at the clinic, located at the Salvation Army.

“It was very frustrating because we chose this profession to help people, but at the time, we were not able to be in the clinic. It was

essential personnel only,” Overbeek said, though he agreed that closing was the right decision. “We looked for another way we could help out.”

The students poured their energy into helping the community in different ways – donating supplies, making hand sanitizer, and even launching a GoFundMe page to provide for other needs.

“Since March, the students haven’t stopped serving,” said Alison Rudd, clinic director. “Even though the clinic doors were closed, the hearts of South Alabama students remained open. They have continued to care for the most vulnerable and support those who are on the front lines.”

Franklin Primary Health Center could see the clinic’s patients, but workers at the Salvation Army needed masks and hand sanitizer to safely provide meals and groceries for its residents and the homeless. USA medical students collected supplies to be distributed to various community organizations.

“We immediately emptied the Student-Run Free Clinic of anything staff and patients could use – PPE, Clorox wipes, hygiene supplies, socks, coffee, snacks and more,” Rudd said. “I wish you could have seen the look on the face of the lady working at the front desk at the Salvation Army when I handed her several new masks and a big bottle of hand sanitizer.”

Overbeek and other students began making masks and gathering them from the community. They donated 140 masks to the Salvation Army and 200 to the Dumas Wesley Community Center. “We looked up a recipe online for hand sanitizer that conformed to CDC guidelines and collected money to buy the supplies,” he said.

The students’ GoFundMe page raised more than \$1,100 toward the effort. The money helped to supply the Salvation Army with blood pressure cuffs and basic hygiene products such as soap, wet wipes, deodorant, toothbrushes and toothpaste to distribute.

Dumas Wesley distributed the students’ donations to seniors and families at the Sybil Smith Family Village, which provides transitional housing for homeless families.

USA Health offers innovative student volunteering opportunities

Challenged by visitor restrictions designed to support safety at USA Health facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, USA Health’s volunteer services had to rethink how to support volunteer opportunities this past summer for 65 teenage volunteers from Mobile and Baldwin counties’ high schools. The solution was to offer an innovative hybrid volunteer program.

Volunteer services already had a number of student volunteers signed up for the summer session when the pandemic hit. The hybrid volunteering concept was

developed to allow students to give back to the community and earn service hours in a safe environment.

“We are making lemonade out of lemons for these amazing students,” explained Belinda Baggett, director of volunteer services at USA Health. “Our goal is to make this a meaningful and positive experience, leaving them with good memories during a time of great challenge.”

Baggett said a recently vacated clinic provided the volunteers space to work on patient-focused projects in a safe way:

masked, socially-distanced, and supervised at all times.

Students in the program worked on projects such as no-sew fleece blankets, patient distraction and comfort kits, art, letters and cards for patients, virtual storytelling and music lessons, gripper socks for patients to prevent falls, motivational chalk art messages, and washing the exterior of ambulances. Hospital staff also made brief visits to the remote site to share healthcare career stories and answer student questions.

USA Health *Faces*



Petty champions the prevention of e-cigarette use in children

Melody Petty, M.D., MPH, FAAP, assistant professor of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine and a pediatric hospitalist at Children's & Women's Hospital, was selected as the e-cigarette champion for the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). In this role, she is an advocate for the prevention of childhood use of nicotine products such as electronic cigarettes.

E-cigarettes are devices that heat a liquid to produce an aerosol, or vapor, that the user inhales, commonly referred to as "vaping." Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, the addictive drug also found in regular cigarettes and other tobacco products.

"We are delighted Melody has committed her time and energy to represent our health system and state," said David A. Gremse, M.D., FAAP, Hollis J. Wiseman Distinguished Professor and Chair of Pediatrics. "E-cigarettes pose a serious health risk to our nation's youth. As pediatric physicians, we play a vital role in protecting children from such dangers."

As a state pediatric champion, Petty is tasked with leading local advocacy and educational initiatives related to youth e-cigarette prevention and addiction support. She will learn strategies to address e-cigarette use with youth and families in Mobile and across the state.



Rosler named health system's first chief human resources officer

Andrea Rosler is USA Health's first chief human resources officer.

She came to USA Health from Huntsville Hospital Health System, where she had been vice president for human resources since 1994. Huntsville Hospital is the state's second largest health system, with 15,000 employees.

"USA Health's growth the past few years has been extraordinary," Rosler said. "To be part of such a vibrant organization that has as its mission helping people live better, longer lives is energizing. I look forward to working with the rest of the leadership team that has been so carefully assembled, so we can further advance academic healthcare throughout the region."

Rosler has extensive experience in staff and leadership development within the healthcare setting. She established the Huntsville Hospital Corporate University and led human resource integration efforts during the growth of the Huntsville Hospital health system.

Rosler earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Millsaps College in Jackson, Miss., before earning a master's degree in business administration and a master's degree in hospital administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She also is a Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR), which is the highest human resources certification.



Lee receives AAST research scholarship

Larry Lee, M.D., assistant professor of surgery at the USA College of Medicine, was awarded an American Association for the Surgery of Trauma (AAST) Research and Education Fund Trauma Critical Care Scholarship for the 2020-2021 academic year.

The \$50,000 award supports Lee's research project "Immunomodulatory effects of cellular contamination in plasma products for transfusion."

"Our project seeks to better understand how the white blood cells in plasma that are routinely given to patients affects their immune system," said Lee, who is also a trauma surgeon at USA Health. "Through our research we hope to gain a deeper appreciation of the spectrum of effects – both immediate and delayed – of blood product transfusion, and use our findings to improve transfusion practices."

Lee is one of three physicians across the United States to receive the scholarship for 2020-2021. Awardees are selected through a competitive process by a committee of well-respected trauma surgeons from within the AAST.

"I'm incredibly honored to be selected for this award, not just for the financial support that will help me further my research efforts, but also the recognition of the work we're doing here at the USA College of Medicine and USA Health," Lee said.



Katrina Roberson-Trammell, M.D.



Roma Stovall Hanks, Ph.D.

Trammell and Hanks honored with community health leadership awards

The Mobile Medical Museum hosted the first Mobile Community Health Leadership Awards in August to recognize local leaders in education, awareness and action surrounding Mobile’s most urgent community health issues.

Among the 2020 honorees were Katrina Roberson-Trammell, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at the USA College of Medicine and a pediatrician with USA Health; and Roma Stovall Hanks, Ph.D., co-director of the Community Engagement Core at the USA College of Medicine’s Center for Healthy Communities.

“It is truly an honor for me to be one of the recipients of the Mobile Community Health Leadership Award. I have always had a passion to give back to my community, and I strive to be a mentor to others and promote health wellness and awareness,” Trammell said. “My pediatric practice at USA Health for over 20 years has allowed me to stay engaged with community activities, teach students, as well as provide leadership in our regional Medicaid-managed care program. I am truly grateful that

I can play a fundamental role in the children of our future. Receiving recognition for my contributions in the Mobile medical community is very rewarding.”

Hanks, who also is professor and chair of USA’s Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, said, “I am so grateful to be recognized by the Mobile Medical Museum as a community health leader and for the privilege of working with healthcare educators, researchers, providers and advocates to address health inequities in our community.”

“The current pandemic has made us keenly aware of the disparities that result in poorer health outcomes for black and brown communities and communities with high rates of poverty,” Hanks added. “But broader current events also have shown that it is possible for people from all backgrounds to come together in support of justice. Committed individuals like the Community Health Advocates of the USA Center for Healthy Communities are creating change. They are the true leaders.”



Stover appointed chief financial officer

In a newly expanded role, Benny Stover is responsible for coordinating all departments within the health system’s finance division as chief financial officer (CFO) for USA Health.

“Benny brings a wealth of valuable knowledge, and system-wide and business development experiences to USA Health,” said John Marymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs at USA Health and dean of the USA College of Medicine.

A certified public accountant with more than two decades of hospital administration experience, Stover previously served as CFO for Mercy Health Jefferson in Crystal City, Mo. He served on a team that led strategies to develop healthcare service lines. Among his responsibilities were leading initiatives involving clinical benchmarks, staff education and performance, cost savings and revenue enhancements.

Prior to his role at Mercy Health, Stover was senior manager of healthcare services at Arnett & Foster in Charleston, W.Va., a regional accounting and consulting firm. He also served as hospital chief financial officer at Essent Healthcare in Nashville and at Health Management Associates in Naples, Fla.

Stover earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration from West Virginia University in Morgantown, Va., and an MBA from John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Ark.



Daniel receives alumni award from UAB Public Health

Casey L. Daniel, Ph.D., MPH, received the 2020 University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health Early Career Achievement Alumni Award.

Daniel, assistant professor of family medicine at the USA College of Medicine, works in the cancer control and prevention program at the Mitchell Cancer Institute. She was chosen for the award for demonstrating excellence in public health as an alumna of the UAB School of Public Health.

In her role at MCI, Daniel conducts epidemiological and intervention research and mentors undergraduates, graduate students and medical students. Her research focuses on the prevention of human papillomavirus-associated cancers, particularly improving adolescent HPV vaccination in rural and underserved populations. She has led initiatives that engage partners in pharmacy, dentistry, oncology, education and policy.

Daniel's research is funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health, the National Cancer Institute, the Breast Cancer Research Foundation of Alabama, the Health Resources & Services Administration, the Alabama Department of Public Health and other organizations. She has authored numerous scientific articles and is a frequent presenter at national and international meetings.



Broome directs health system pharmacy

Allen Broome, Pharm.D., was named director of health system pharmacy for USA Health. He oversees clinical and financial operations for the pharmacies located at University Hospital, Children's & Women's Hospital and the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

"We welcome Allen and the leadership experience he provides as USA Health continues to grow to meet the healthcare needs of the people in our region," said Owen Bailey, MHA, FACHE, chief executive officer of USA Health. "His enthusiasm and proven ability to build successful teams will play a significant role in our successful future."

Prior to joining USA Health, Broome served as senior director of pharmacy at Erlanger Health System in Chattanooga, Tenn. He led numerous projects that focused on improving patient safety and creating efficiencies, including implementation of an automated medication delivery process.

At USA Health, Broome plans to expand the specialty pharmacy, focus on formulary development and team design. "This is a tremendous organization with an amazing leadership team," he said.

Broome earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He went on to complete his doctorate of pharmacy degree at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, followed by a pharmacy practice residency at Methodist Hospital. He is enrolled in an MBA program at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.



Wilson appointed associate dean of faculty affairs and faculty development

Emily Wilson, Ph.D., joined the USA College of Medicine as associate dean of faculty affairs and faculty development. She also is a professor in the department of physiology and cell biology.

"The continued development of our faculty, including implementing a sustainable faculty mentoring program, enriches the educational environment for students, residents and fellows in our academic healthcare system," said John Marymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine. "In this newly created role, Dr. Wilson will have the responsibility of organizing and growing faculty development initiatives across our college, ensuring an optimal experience for faculty members and those we educate."

Prior to joining .USA, Wilson served as associate vice president of faculty development at Texas A&M Health Science Center. She also served as the associate dean for faculty development in the Texas A&M University College of Medicine in College Station, Texas, where she also was a professor in the department of medical physiology.

Wilson received a master's degree in biochemistry from Utah State University in Logan, Utah. She earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Emory University in Atlanta, followed by postdoctoral studies at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.



Bauer named member of NIH Research Study Section

Natalie Bauer, Ph.D., associate professor of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine, recently was selected to join the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Respiratory Integrative Biology and Translational Research Study Section – a prestigious and unique opportunity allowing her to contribute to the biomedical research effort on a national level.

“This appointment reflects positively on Natalie’s outstanding reputation in the scientific community,” said Mark Gillespie, Ph.D., SAMSF-Locke professor and chair of pharmacology at the USA College of Medicine. “As a standing member of the study section, she will be part of the group that reviews nearly all grants focusing on pathophysiologic and translational aspects of disorders directly or indirectly impacting the pulmonary circulation.”

Bauer said this recognition speaks to the caliber of faculty at the USA College of Medicine. “The work we are doing here is held in high regard on both a national and international level,” she said. “It reflects that what we are doing is impactful and recognizes the value of our contributions to a greater field of science.”

Bauer’s primary research interests are extracellular vesicles, also known as exosomes, and pulmonary arterial hypertension.



Travers oversees healthcare information technology

As chief information officer (CIO) for USA Health, Steve Travers, Ph.D., oversees all aspects of information technology for the health system, including computer systems, databases, network and telecommunications.

“Steve’s breadth of experience in information technology within the healthcare environment has been extremely valuable as we navigate unprecedented changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Owen Bailey, MHA, FACHE, chief executive officer of USA Health. “Steve has the ability to rapidly assess a situation and develop a meaningful and lasting solution.”

Travers said expanding telehealth capabilities and improving users’ experience with the electronic health record system were among his highest priorities.

Travers has extensive healthcare consulting experience from his previous management roles at Ernst & Young, CapGemini, and Accenture. In 2009 he founded Travers Consulting, which provided management consulting services for software development, electronic health records operations, and IT support outsourcing for the healthcare industry.

Travers received a master’s degree in biology from the University of South Alabama and a master’s degree in business administration from Millsaps College. In 2018 he earned a Ph.D. in management from USA.



Grete leads USA Health’s legal efforts

William Grete joined USA Health as the senior in-house legal counsel executive. He also works with University of South Alabama’s Office of General Counsel.

“It is a pleasure to welcome Bill to our health system,” said Owen Bailey, MHA, FACHE chief executive officer of USA Health. “In his more than 30 years’ experience in healthcare law, Bill has developed expertise in the legal aspects that are so valuable to a growing healthcare organization like USA Health.”

Most recently, Grete worked at Brunini, Grantham, Grower and Hewes, PLLC, in Jackson, Miss. He led Brunini’s healthcare practice, focusing on healthcare systems, hospitals, insurers and physicians groups. His work on behalf of clients included the development and implementation of hospital/physician arrangements, mergers and acquisitions, healthcare regulatory compliance, health system governance and related legal issues involving the operation of healthcare providers.

“This is an exciting time to join USA Health,” Grete said. “The health system has made tremendous progress recently and I look forward to working with the leadership, physicians and staff to sustain the momentum.”

Grete spent 18 years with Mississippi Baptist Health System, Inc., in Jackson, as vice president and chief general counsel. During the final six years of his tenure, he also served as vice president for regional network development.

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Workers assemble scaffolding on the west side of University Hospital. The scaffolding will help facilitate the remodeling and construction of the hospital's 10th and 11th floors.