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USC Norris Comprehensive
Cancer Center
Keck Medicine of **USC**



Community for a Cure

Newsletter from the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

From the Director:



Welcome 2021! Last year was a year like no other. People around the world continue to feel the destructive impact of COVID-19. We continue to witness the devastating effects of systemic racism within Black and Brown communities as well. However, this year we also discovered the power of banding together to confront these challenges to achieve societal transformation. Though it will not happen immediately, we will not cease in our efforts.

While being ever mindful of these challenges, we must not hesitate in advancing the frontiers of cancer science and practice for our cancer patients. Our dedicated clinicians continue to work tirelessly to provide exceptional patient care, while confronting the challenges imposed by the pandemic. Our extraordinary investigators are making breakthrough discoveries that will change the paradigm of this care. These breakthroughs will revolutionize how we assess risk, diagnose, and treat cancer in the years to come.

We hope you enjoy this January Newsletter which includes the scientific discoveries of USC Norris members and inspiring stories from USC Norris cancer survivors and patients.

I hope 2021 is filled with peace, joy, and love for you and your loved ones.



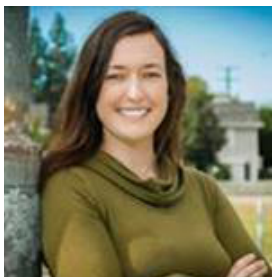
Caryn Lerman, PhD
Director, USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center
Associate Dean for Cancer Programs
H. Leslie and Elaine S. Hoffman Cancer Research Chair



NCCC investigators publish multicenter immunotherapy trial in cervical cancer patients

A multicenter phase I therapeutic trial for cervical cancer patients was recently completed at USC Norris. The results showed that chemoradiation therapy combined with ipilimumab immunotherapy produced immune-modulating activity in women with locally advanced cervical cancer and may be a promising treatment option for this population at high risk for recurrence and metastasis. Several key immune biomarkers were identified that were associated with clinical responses. The trial was led by Drs. Diane Da Silva and W. Martin Kast in collaboration with Dr. Koji Matsuo in the USC Norris Cancer Control Program and colleagues from the Keck School of Medicine. The results of this trial were published in November 2020 in the journal Clinical Cancer Research.

[LINK TO PUBLICATION>>](#)



Dr. Crystal Nicole Marconett awarded Research Scholar Grant from the American Cancer Society to support her research

Dr. Crystal Marconett, member of the USC Norris Genomic and Epigenomic Regulation Program, has been awarded a Research Scholar Grant from the American Cancer Society to support her research “The therapeutic role of lncRNA-mediate DNA repair in Lung Cancer.” Dr. Marconett is part of a very select group of scientists and healthcare professionals who have received grants from the American Cancer Society over the past 70 years.

There are over 150,000 deaths from lung cancer in the US each year. This study aims to answer fundamental questions about how lncRNA, RNA molecules with a length of more than 200 nucleotides that do not encode proteins, regulates DNA damage pathway activation and the consequences on tumor mutational burden and patient response to therapy. This research could inform development of novel therapies to improve survival for patients with lung cancer.



Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC) Awards W. Martin Kast and his team the Team Science Award

On November 14, 2020, the Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer held its 35th annual meeting. Every five years, this society awards prestigious team science awards. This year such an award was given to a team that includes Dr. W. Martin Kast, a Professor of Molecular Microbiology & Immunology, Obstetrics & Gynecology, Urology and Otolaryngology and co-leader of the USC Norris Tumor Microenvironment Research Program. This award is for the team’s research on cancer vaccines that started in the late 80s and continues within multiple cancer clinical trials.



Viewing Life through a Survivor's Lens

Whether flying a glider over the Elsinore Mountains, climbing to the top of a mountain peak, or traveling all over the world, Jim Martellotti has never passed up the opportunity to marvel at the beauty of life that surrounds him. A beauty he appreciates even more now as a cancer survivor.

As a child, he was fascinated with all aspects of flight and loved creating model airplanes. This fascination grew into a passion as he began flying gliders in the 1970s at the Skylark Field at Lake Elsinore, reaching altitudes up to 13,000 feet. "I love being a part of the air," said Jim when asked what his favorite aspect of flying is. Throughout the 29 years Jim flew, he went on to fly single-engine planes and obtain his commercial license and his flight instructor rating for flying gliders.



However, flying is not his only passion. Jim also has a calling for photography that began at ten years old with the purchase of his first camera for \$3.50. As Jim traveled for his work, he captured the splendor he viewed around him through the lens of his camera. Whether it's a spider beautifully hanging on a blade of grass surrounded by droplets of rain in Taipei or the vibrancy of a flower in full bloom in Joshua Tree National Park, Jim saw the intricacy and beauty of the world,

a world many of us take for granted.

Jim is many things, a father, the second-born out of nine, a pilot, a world traveler, a mountaineer, an avid hiker, and an extraordinary photographer. But he is also a cancer survivor. In October 2001, Jim was diagnosed with prostate cancer after going to a routine check-up. When looking for a place to receive his treatment, he decided on the USC Norris Hospital as he recognized the high quality of specialists available. "I recognized the hospital as a place that specialized in the problem that I had," said Jim. "The people that were there were specialists, and I was very comfortable there and made myself very well-known there."

As Jim shared his photographs with people at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, his work inspired them. "The cancer was a catalyst to say: if you want to take beautiful pictures and share the beauty of the world, now is the time to do it," said Jim. His photographs are now on display throughout the Cancer Center, the Rainbow Café, and the Jennifer Diamond Library.

Furthermore, his work was featured in the Survivor Art Series, which is part of the Patient Perspective Series, a year-round program at USC Norris featuring cancer survivors who are authors, artists, academics, and motivational speakers. Not only was his work featured in the the Survivor Art Series, but also Jim made an extraordinary donation of \$25,000 to support the program. His generous



STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

donation made it possible for other cancer patients and survivors to share their talents. The series was renamed “The Jim Martellotti Survivor Art Series” to honor his contribution.

If you are interested in supporting the USC Norris Cancer Survivorship Program, please contact Bob Weiner at Robert.Weiner@med.usc.edu.



Gene and Dodie Gregg Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund

Gene Gregg has been a part of the USC Keck community for over 20 years, serving as trustee of two substantial trusts supporting research at Keck. He was a corporate and mergers and acquisition law partner at Hahn & Hahn, LLP and he and his wife, Dodie, live in Pasadena, where they raised their family. In December of 2018, Gene Gregg was diagnosed with Stage 4 metastatic pancreatic cancer, which was a sudden shock to Gene and Dodie and their entire family. “When I received my diagnosis, Dr. Heinz-Josef Lenz was recommended to me,” said Gene. “When Dodie and I met Dr. Lenz, we immediately felt we had a connection with him and decided he should be in charge of my care. In hindsight, it was a great decision.”

Gene soon learned that, unlike many other strains of cancer where breakthroughs in treatment and cure have occurred over the last ten years, pancreatic cancer has had no such breakthroughs. With Dr. Lenz, and the entire team at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center (USC Norris) at his side, Gene has survived over two years under his current chemotherapy regimen, well past the typical prognosis of five to six months. In reflecting on the time since his original diagnosis in 2018, Gene remarked “The physicians, nurses, technicians and the staff at Norris have been wonderful and have gone above and beyond.”

In early 2020, Gene and Dodie reflected on what they could do to help with this terrible disease. “We realized that, while research into the treatment and cure of pancreatic cancer may not produce results in time to help me, we still wanted to do something that may help pancreatic cancer patients in the future.” To further their goals, Gene and Dodie created the Gene and Dodie Gregg Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund at USC Norris. “Pancreatic cancer has no cure, the treatments are rough and rarely work for long,” said Dodie Gregg. “It is our goal that this fund will work to help find effective treatments and a cure, as well as give hope to others impacted by this disease.”

Thanks to the donations made so far to the Gene and Dodie Gregg Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund, Dr. Lenz and his team have launched research initiatives applying novel approaches to discover effective treatments and a cure for pancreatic cancer. To date, the Fund has helped support these initiatives in a number of ways including the expansion of lab personnel and equipment to help Dr. Lenz and his team’s success in pursuing this essential research.

To learn more about Gene and Dodie’s journey and Dr. Lenz’s efforts to find solutions to this terrible disease, please visit the website by clicking below.

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

Upcoming Events

Grand Rounds: The Origins of Tumor Aggressivity

January 12, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Paul Boutros, PhD

Zoom link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/91208090983>

For more information, click [HERE](#).

Grand Rounds: Translating Cancer Biology into Cancer Therapy

January 26, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Dan Theodorescu, MD, PhD

Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/92230620819>

For more information, click [HERE](#).

Have something to contribute to Community for a Cure? Send it to Hinde.Kast@med.usc.edu

Please contact Robert Weiner, Assistant Vice President of Development, at Robert.Weiner@med.usc.edu to learn more about giving to USC Norris.

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