

# USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

Keck Medicine of USC

February 2021 | Issue 4



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**NCI**

**Comprehensive  
Cancer Center**

A Cancer Center Designated by the  
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## Community for a Cure

Newsletter from the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

### From the Director:

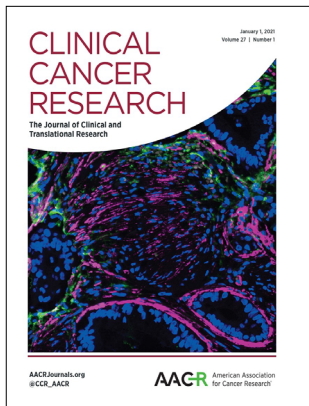


The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center (USC Norris) is an innovative leader in the cancer field, setting a global standard for cutting edge research to prevent, detect, and treat cancer. We are proud to be a magnet for the best minds in cancer research, cancer education, and delivery of patient-centered care.

We continue to foster team science at USC Norris through the new Team Science Accelerator Program. The goal of this new \$8M initiative is to encourage new teams of scientists and clinicians to come together to change the paradigm of cancer discovery, innovation, and cancer care. So far, we have funded two exemplary teams, one focused on new treatments for colorectal cancer and one focused on a new immune therapy approach to treating multiple cancers.

We hope you enjoy this February newsletter which includes the scientific discoveries of USC Norris members, a new faculty member spotlight, resources for patients and their loved ones, and an inspiring story from a USC Norris cancer survivor and patient.

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



### **Dr. Amir Goldkorn, USC Norris Associate Director for Translational Research, publishes results from a national phase III trial in Clinical Cancer Research: “Baseline circulating tumor cell count as a prognostic marker of PSA response and disease progression in metastatic castrate sensitive prostate cancer”**

Prostate cancer is the most common malignancy and the second most common cause of cancer death in U.S. men. Hormone therapy can extend the survival of many patients with prostate cancer, but for some, the disease continues to progress. In a phase III randomized trial for men with newly diagnosed metastatic prostate cancer, Dr. Goldkorn and his colleagues identified circulating tumor cells from a single tube of blood and found that they could predict which patients will respond to hormonal therapy and continue to respond two years later, and which patients will experience disease progression. This is the very first discovery of a blood-based biomarker that predicts the success of hormonal therapy for prostate cancer and lays the foundation for its use in the clinic.

**[LINK TO PUBLICATION>>](#)**



### **USC Norris member Shannon Mumenthaler receives National Cancer Institute (NCI) R01 funding for her project to develop a micro-engineered colorectal cancer-on-a-chip model**

The 5-year survival rate for metastatic colorectal cancer (CRC) remains at 11% despite the availability of new therapies. USC Norris member Dr. Shannon Mumenthaler received an NCI R01 to develop a micro-engineered colorectal cancer-on-a-chip model, which is a 3D model that reflects the biological activities and responses of tumor cells. Mumenthaler and colleagues will use this novel laboratory model to identify factors that influence the behavior of tumor cells and how they respond to different treatments, providing new data to inform drug development for this disease. This project is in collaboration with Drs. Heinz-Josef Lenz, Dan Ruderman, and Scott Fraser.



### **USC Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer (AYA@USC) Program**

According to the NCI, about 89,000 adolescents and young adults, aged 15-39, are diagnosed with cancer in the United States each year. As cancer in young people is more rare, there are many unique challenges facing those patients throughout their cancer journey. It is important to find the right doctors and hospitals that not only specialize in the treatment of AYA cancer, but also provide holistic and multidisciplinary care to address psychological and social concerns for patients.

**STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...**

To address these challenges, the AYA@USC Program was established in 2013 in a joint effort by USC Norris, the USC Norris Cancer Hospital, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, and Los Angeles County Hospital. The AYA@USC team consists of Co-Medical Directors Drs. David Freyer and James Hu, who are specialized in pediatric and adult oncology, respectively. Additional team members are Jan Huynh, clinical social worker; Elaine Vieira, nurse navigator; Dr. Aura Kuperberg, special project administrator; and Shu Li, program administrator. The AYA@USC Program addresses the psychosocial needs for cancer patients and survivors to improve their health outcomes and quality of life through clinical care, research, education, and community outreach. Moreover, this program aims to establish a dynamic AYA cancer peer support community in Southern California and beyond through psychosocial support, advocacy, education, community outreach, and partnership.

The AYA@USC Program provides a support group online on the first Thursday of every month for young adults with cancer as well as quarterly caregiver support groups. Additionally, there are monthly online educational workshops that address relevant topics in AYA oncology. Topics include oncofertility, sexual health, pain management, occupational therapy, nutrition, mindfulness, and alternative therapies. Moreover, the AYA program hosts social networking activities with art, music, games, comedy, cooking, and virtual tours.

The services offered by the AYA@USC Program are free to not only young adults treated at the USC Norris Cancer Hospital, but also young adults nationwide. For more information, visit <https://aya.usc.edu> or contact Shu Li, program administrator, at [shuli@usc.edu](mailto:shuli@usc.edu).

**LEARN MORE>>**



## **USC Norris receives a new gift to provide genetic testing at no cost for patients without insurance coverage**

In the spring of 1996, Judy Goldberg, an LA native still in her forties, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. In an effort to advance the development of new treatments, her husband

Richard Kronish, PhD, founded the Research Foundation for the Treatment of Ovarian Cancer. With the critical and enduring support of the North Atlantic States Council of Carpenters (NASRCC), the foundation has distributed well over a million dollars to ovarian cancer researchers.

After the passing of his wife, Dr. Kronish became concerned about potential inherited cancer risks for the children of ovarian cancer patients. As a result, he reached out to Ms. Julie Culver MS, a genetic counselor at USC Norris, whose program provides a concerned family with a comprehensive evaluation to identify inherited cancer risks as well as describe appropriate options for cancer screening and prevention.

Deeply impressed by Ms. Culver's efforts, Dr. Kronish made a generous donation on behalf of the foundation to the Cancer Genetics Program at USC Norris. This donation will enable USC Norris to offer genetic testing at no cost for patients without insurance who are diagnosed with ovarian or other gynecologic cancers. Genetic testing is vital for patients to make informed decisions about prevention and screening based on their personal risk levels. Additional services that will

**STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...**

be covered by this gift include genetic testing for at-risk relatives, testing for tumor mutations to help identify hereditary conditions, and genetic testing on the tumor of a deceased relative for the purpose of clarifying hereditary risk.

For questions regarding this service, or to refer a patient, please contact Ms. Culver at [jculver@med.usc.edu](mailto:jculver@med.usc.edu) or call **323.865.0911 ext. 3**.

## Patient Stories



### **Always Have Hope. As Long as You Live, There Is Hope.**

Deborah Coleman was diagnosed with renal cell adenocarcinoma (also known as kidney cancer) in June 2011. Deborah's initial prognosis was grim as the cancer was located towards the center of both her left and right kidneys. Before coming to USC Norris, her physician had told her that both kidneys would need to be removed, which would have left Deborah in need of dialysis and a kidney transplant. Thankfully, she was directed to Dr. Inderbir Gill at USC Norris, who is an internationally recognized leader in the field of robotic and laparoscopic surgery for urologic cancers. Dr. Gill and his exceptional team were ultimately successful in saving 65 percent of Deborah's left kidney function and 60 percent of Deborah's right kidney function.

"I am confident in USC Norris and I thank God for directing me there because I have found that not every medical facility and not all physicians treat patients with the utmost care and respect that I received at USC Norris," said Deborah.

Roughly a year later in August 2012, Deborah began experiencing pain in her lower back. Consequently, a bone marrow examination was performed by Dr. Casey O'Connell. The test revealed that Deborah had light chain multiple myeloma, cancer of plasma cells. Though many patients receiving this news would be devastated, Deborah found comfort in her faith in God. "No matter what I go through in my life, I know God will never leave me nor forsake me," says Deborah. "He is with me every day throughout my entire life's journey, whether it be through my happiness or my struggles. Only He knows what that journey is and how long my life will be." Her treatment was overseen by Drs. Sikander Ailawadhi and Kevin Kelly, both experts in the treatment of hematologic malignancies, which are cancers that affect the blood, bone marrow, and lymph nodes.

With hope and faith in God, positivity, laughter, support from her loved ones, and her church family, Deborah faced both her cancers head on and never gave up. Happily, due to the care she received from all of the exceptional medical professionals that treated her at USC Norris, Deborah is a cancer survivor who has been in remission for nearly nine years for kidney cancer and nearly eight years for multiple myeloma.

"Hold on to hope, be positive, and laugh. Laughter is medicine for the soul and is healing for the body," says Deborah.

Deborah continues to get exceptional care at the USC Norris Cancer Center. "When I go for an appointment at the Larry and Judy Freeman Day Hospital at USC Norris, it's like visiting friends and family," says Deborah. "Everyone has shown me love. I say love because it is love. They do their work with love and care, and that is what makes USC Norris so special."

## New Faculty Spotlight



### Mohamed Abou-el-Enein, MD, PhD, MSPH

Dr. Mohamed Abou-el-Enein joined USC Norris, the Keck School of Medicine, and Children's Hospital Los Angeles on January 4, 2021, as the inaugural Executive Director of the joint USC/CHLA Cell Therapy Program. He is also the Medical Director of the new cGMP facility for cell and gene therapy that is under construction in the Harlyne J. Norris Research Tower, scheduled for completion in 2022. Through these roles, Dr. Abou-el-Enein will work closely with institutional leadership to provide vision and to oversee the development of a "one-stop-shop" translational platform that aims to assist investigators in bringing their basic work in cell and gene therapies into clinical testing. Dr. Abou-el-Enein most recently served as Head of the Clinical Development Platform and Head of the Translational Research Unit at the BIH Center for Regenerative Therapies and the Berlin Center for Advanced Therapies, respectively, both at the Charité Medical University in Berlin. Dr. Abou-el-Enein has extensive training and expertise in the area of cell and gene therapy development. His publications reflect global leadership in translational development of cell and gene therapy products in top-tier journals such as Cell Stem Cell, British Medical Journal, Lancet Oncology, Molecular Therapy, Nature Biotechnology, and Nature Reviews Clinical Oncology.

## Upcoming Events

### Grand Rounds: Genomics of Racial Disparities in Childhood Leukemia

March 2, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Jun Yang, PhD

Zoom link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/92999635953>

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

### Grand Rounds: Investigation of How ECM Stiffness Mediates Chemoresistance in Pancreatic Cancer

March 30, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Reginald Hill, PhD

Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/99266525084>

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

Have something to contribute to Community for a Cure? Send it to [Hinde.Kast@med.usc.edu](mailto:Hinde.Kast@med.usc.edu)

Please contact Robert Weiner, Assistant Vice President of Development, at [Robert.Weiner@med.usc.edu](mailto:Robert.Weiner@med.usc.edu) to learn more about giving to USC Norris.

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