

Community for a Cure

Newsletter from the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

From the Director:



The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center (USC Norris) is one of only 51 NCI-designated comprehensive cancer centers in the nation and one of the first eight cancer centers to receive this designation in 1973. This coveted designation requires cancer centers to demonstrate high impact cancer research, education, and community outreach that is integrated with cancer care. The support provided by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) is essential in helping us achieve our vision to reduce the burden of cancer and cancer health disparities for all people. On May 26th, our Cancer Center will be reviewed for the renewal of our NCI designation during an NCI virtual site visit. Our exceptional team of scientists, educators, clinicians, and administrators have been working diligently for months to prepare for this important review. We plan to ace this!

We hope you enjoy the March/April newsletter in which we feature faculty recognitions, scientific discoveries, and a generous donor.



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

News



Dr. John Carpten elected to the 2021 class of fellows of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Academy

Congratulations to Dr. John Carpten, co-leader of the Translational and Clinical Sciences Program at USC Norris, who has been elected to the 2021 class of fellows of the AACR Academy. The mission of the AACR Academy is to recognize and honor distinguished scientists whose major scientific contributions have propelled significant innovation and progress against cancer.

“Dr. Carpten has an extraordinary record of impact and an inspiring vision to reduce cancer disparities that makes a difference in outcomes for all people facing cancer,” said Caryn Lerman, PhD, director of USC Norris. “This recognition is well-deserved, and the AACR Academy will gain substantially from the participation of such a talented, collaborative researcher.”

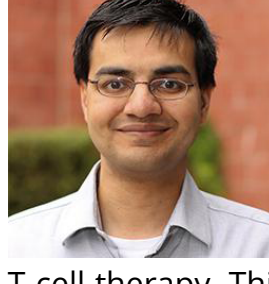
To learn more about this distinction, click below.

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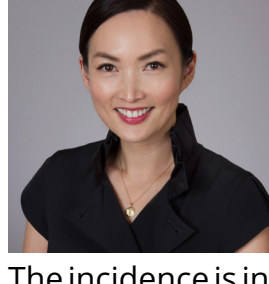
Dr. Kimberly Miller, USC Norris Cancer Control Research Program member, awarded an NCI MERIT award to study how social health might contribute to health behaviors during treatment

Social challenges are a major issue for young adult cancer patients. Impairments in social relationships and physical activity after a cancer diagnosis can lead to poorer quality of life and influence cancer outcomes. Dr. Kimberly Miller received a major grant from the NCI to study how social factors might contribute to physical activity and other health behaviors among young adult cancer patients ages 21 to 39. The results of this study will inform the development of programs to foster healthy survivorship for young adult cancer patients.



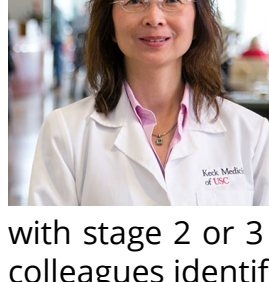
Dr. Chintan Parekh, USC Norris Tumor Microenvironment Program member, received an NCI R01 grant to support his work in developing new cancer immunotherapies

A revolutionary approach to the treatment of blood cancers, such as leukemia and lymphoma is called chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy. This therapy harnesses the patient's immune system to target their unique cancer and is associated with improved cure rates for certain blood cancers. However, this novel treatment is ineffective for some patients. Dr. Chintan Parekh received a major grant from the NCI to develop new approaches to more effectively program the patient's immune cells to improve the cure rates for all patients.



Dr. Wendy Setiawan, co-leader of the USC Norris Cancer Epidemiology Program, received an NCI U01 grant to study the determinants of endometrial cancer in African American women who suffer higher mortality from this disease

Endometrial cancer is the most common gynecologic cancer in the US. The incidence is increasing, especially for aggressive tumors with poorer outcomes that occur at a higher rate in African American women. Dr. Wendy Setiawan received a major grant from the NCI to study the unique drivers of endometrial cancer among African American women and to develop novel risk prediction tools for precision prevention and treatment. Dr. Setiawan leads this study with colleagues at Harvard University and the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.



Dr. Janice Lu, USC Norris Translational and Clinical Sciences Program member, published the results of a new clinical trial for women with stage 2 or 3 breast cancer

“Neo-adjuvant” therapy is a cancer treatment delivered prior to surgery in order to reduce tumor size. In the multicenter I-SPY2 trial in women with stage 2 or 3 breast cancer who received neoadjuvant therapy, Dr. Janice Lu and her colleagues identified a biomarker to determine which patients will have the lowest rates of recurrence. The NCI-funded I-SPY2 Program is developing novel treatment approaches and biomarkers to improve the outcomes for women with breast cancer.

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Why Your Gifts Matter:



The San Pedro Peninsula Cancer Guild

The San Pedro Peninsula Cancer Guild, originally known as the San Pedro Harbor Guild, was founded in 1984 by eight remarkable women with a common goal of raising funds to support cancer research. In 1995, the Guild partnered with USC Norris to support Dr. Lenz in his research to improve treatments for gastrointestinal (GI) cancers. Over the last 20 years, the Guild has donated over \$1.8 million to USC Norris.

“The San Pedro Guild has been essential to the USC Norris GI Oncology Program,” says Dr. Lenz, USC Norris Associate Director for Clinical Research. “Thanks to the donations received from the Guild, the USC Norris GI Oncology Program was one of the first to launch personalized oncology care more than 20 years ago. There is no doubt that as a result of the Guild, the survival of patients with GI cancer across the nation has significantly improved.”

Every November, the Guild hosts its major fundraising event *An Affaire to Remember* which raises between \$80,00 to \$115,000, with all proceeds benefitting gastrointestinal research at USC Norris. The event includes a boutique, luncheon, and a designer fashion show with an average attendance of roughly 500 people. Though COVID-19 impeded the Guild from hosting an in-person event in 2020, its supporters still donated an impressive \$85,000 last year for cancer research.

“I admire the work that we accomplish with the Guild,” said Yvonne Bogdanovich, five-time past president and member of the USC Norris Director's Leadership Council. “I feel that we are truly making a significant difference in someone's life with the funds we raise for cancer research.”

If you are interested in becoming a member, or would like to learn more about the San Pedro Peninsula Cancer Guild, please call Jeannine Shearing, membership chairman, at 310.505.5437 or go to the website by clicking below. If you are interested in attending the Guild's annual event in the future, please contact Yvonne Bogdanovich at yvbogs@me.com to be added to the event's mailing list.

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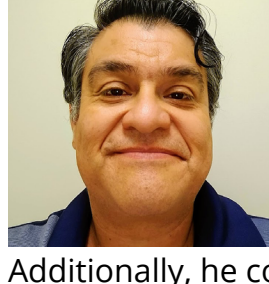
New Faculty Spotlight



Ming Li, PhD

Ming Li, PhD joined USC Norris and the Keck School of Medicine in January 2020 as the new Director of the USC Norris Data Science Shared Resource. Prior to joining USC, Dr. Li was an associate professor in the Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences and a faculty biostatistician at the Center for Proteomics and Bioinformatics at Case Western Reserve University. Dr. Li's research interests include proteomic data analysis, cancer biostatistics, statistical and bioinformatics methods for high dimensional data, and statistical education and consulting.

Staff Spotlight



Alfred Ascencio, USC Norris Facilities Manager

Mr. Alfred Ascencio has served as the facilities manager for USC Norris since September 2009. His roles include key distribution, badge access, room renovations, room re-locations, equipment management, updating building floor plans to reflect departmental moves and personnel moves, and conducting annual space and equipment surveys. Additionally, he coordinates with principal investigators and researchers to make sure that labs have the appropriate facilities for their research and research equipment. Mr. Ascencio is currently earning his master's in Project Management at USC's Bovard College. When he is not at USC Norris or studying, he can be found at Dodger Stadium, his favorite place in the world, cheering on his favorite team or singing and playing with his two-year-old grandson. We are grateful to Mr. Ascencio for his exceptional work, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Upcoming Events

Grand Rounds: Contemporary Risk-Based Care of Pediatric Hodgkin Lymphoma Survivors

May 4, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Kevin Oeffinger, MD

Zoom link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/94977476378>

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

Grand Rounds: PI3-Kinase and Cancer Metabolism

May 18, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Lewis Cantley, PhD

Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/94748199675>

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.