

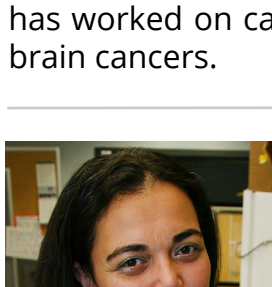
Community for a Cure

Newsletter from the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center



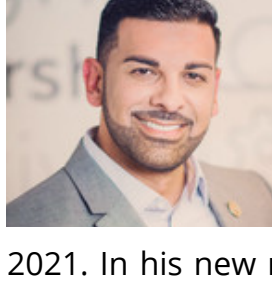
News

Honors and Appointments



Dr. Joseph Wiemels has been appointed Associate Director for Shared Resources at USC Norris

We are thrilled to announce that Dr. Joseph Wiemels has been appointed Associate Director for Shared Resources at USC Norris, effective January 19. In this role, Dr. Wiemels will oversee the operations and elevate the impact of USC Norris' NCI-supported efforts that support our members' research. Dr. Wiemels is a molecular epidemiologist whose research is focused on environmental, immunologic, and genetic approaches to understand cancer etiology, particularly childhood leukemia and glioma. He has worked on cancer etiology for more than 20 years for both hematologic cancers and brain cancers.



Dr. Bodour Salhia has been appointed as the director of the USC Norris Preclinical Shared Resource

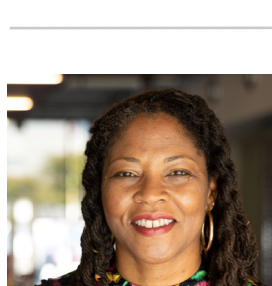
We are delighted to announce that Dr. Bodour Salhia has been appointed as the director of the USC Norris Preclinical Shared Resource, effective January 19. Fostering cancer drug development, the new Preclinical Core will support the testing of novel compounds and drug combinations in PDX, organoid, and murine models. Dr. Salhia is a translational genomics scientist with extensive knowledge and expertise in mechanisms that underlie tumorigenesis and tumor biology. She merges cutting-edge genomics/epigenomics analyses with cell biological and functional studies towards the investigation of clinically relevant problems in human cancer.



Minhaal Nathani appointed Executive Director of Development for USC Norris

We are delighted to share the excellent news that Mr. Minhaal Nathani has been appointed as the new Executive Director of Development for USC Norris. Mr. Nathani has served as the interim Head of Development Operations at USC Norris since September 2021. In his new role, Mr. Nathani will serve as a key advisor to the USC Norris Director, leading all aspects of fundraising in support of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. Additionally, he will also serve as a member of the Keck Advancement leadership team and oversee the USC Norris Director's Leadership Council.

Scientific Advances



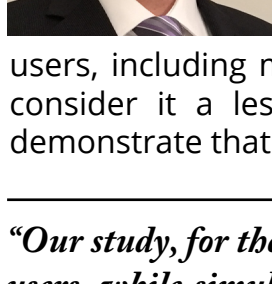
Dr. Adam Leventhal reported that adult smoking cessation rates have stalled in the United States in the past five years

Funded by the NCI Tobacco Center for Regulatory Science, Dr. Adam Leventhal and his colleagues reported that adult smoking cessation rates have stalled in the United States in the past five years and that socioeconomic and racial inequalities related to quitting smoking have persisted. Encouraging quit attempts and equitable access to smoking cessation aids are public health priorities as tobacco is a major risk factor for developing cancer.

"We are seeing a plateau in the numbers of people who are quitting smoking in America over the past decade. It is important for policymakers and the people who run national public health programs to know that what they are doing is not enough."

- Dr. Adam Leventhal

Read the full publication here: <https://bit.ly/31XDNN0>.



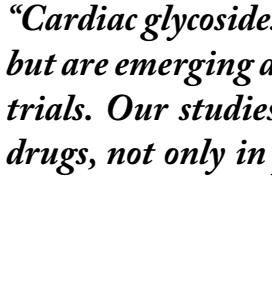
Dr. Chanita Hughes Halbert discusses basic behavioral science research priorities in minority health and health disparities

Achieving health equity for diverse and underserved populations is an urgent priority. Published in the Special Issue: Cancer Prevention and Control for a New Decade in the journal *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, Dr. Chanita Hughes Halbert, Associate Director for Cancer Equity for USC Norris, describes priorities, opportunities, and barriers to conducting transdisciplinary and translational behavioral cancer research within next generation minority health and health disparities.

"Multilevel determinants are important to health promotion and disease prevention behaviors; basic behavioral studies can provide important insights about fundamental mechanisms that are important to cancer control behaviors in disparity populations."

- Dr. Chanita Hughes Halbert

Read the full article here: <https://academic.oup.com/tbm/article/11/11/2033/6446302>.



Dr. Ahmad Besaratinia and his USC Norris colleagues Drs. Stella Tommasi and Kimberly Siegmund reported that critical gene networks are dysregulated in both tobacco and e-cigarette users

In the journal *Scientific Reports*, USC Norris members Drs. Ahmad Besaratinia, Stella Tommasi, and Kimberly Siegmund reported that critical gene networks are dysregulated in both tobacco and e-cigarette users, including mitochondrial and immune response genes. Many users of e-cigarettes consider it a less harmful alternative to regular cigarettes; however, these findings demonstrate that is not the case.

"Our study, for the first time, investigates the biological effects of vaping in adult e-cigarette users, while simultaneously accounting for their past smoking exposure. Our data indicate that vaping, much like smoking, is associated with dysregulation of mitochondrial genes and disruption of molecular pathways involved in immunity and the inflammatory response, which govern health versus disease state."

- Dr. Ahmad Besaratinia

Read the full publication here: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-01965-1>.



Dr. Amy Lee and her colleagues revealed a new function of cardiac glycosides

In the journal *Neoplasia*, USC Norris member Dr. Amy Lee and her colleagues revealed a new function of cardiac glycosides (CGs), medications used to treat the heart and related conditions, as an inhibitor of stress induction of GRP78, a glucose-regulated protein. These findings support further investigation into CGs as a potential novel therapeutic option for cancers that depend on GRP78 for growth and survival.

"Cardiac glycosides have been traditionally used for decades for the treatment of heart ailment but are emerging as promising anti-cancer agents with several completed and ongoing clinical trials. Our studies provide further groundwork for the future development of this class of drugs, not only in pancreatic cancer, but for other cancers that depend on stress induction of GRP78 for growth and resistance."

- Dr. Amy Lee

Read the full publication here: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34768108/>.



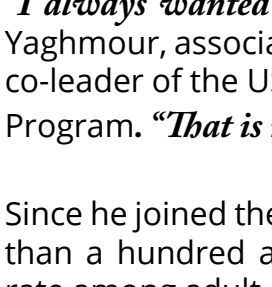
Dr. Albert Farias and his USC Norris colleagues revealed Asian ethnic subgroup disparities in delays of surgical treatment for breast cancer

Published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute (JNCI) Cancer Spectrum*, Drs. Albert Farias, Lihua Liu, and Caryn Lerman reported that time from breast cancer diagnosis to surgical treatment is greater for certain Asian ethnic subgroups than for non-Hispanic White patients.

"Surgical treatment outcomes are not equal for all Asian breast cancer patients and more work is needed to address these otherwise masked disparities."

- Dr. Albert Farias

Read full publication here: <https://academic.oup.com/jncics/article/6/1/pkab089/6484641>.



Dr. Fumito Ito identified a critical pathway for the generation of various types of conventional dendritic cells from human induced pluripotent stem cells

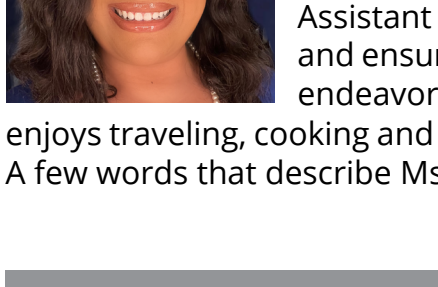
Conventional dendritic cells (cDCs) are a type of antigen presenting cells that are crucial in the induction of immune responses to pathogens and tumors. Published in the *Journal for Immunotherapy of Cancer*, Dr. Fumito Ito, co-leader of the USC Norris Translational and Clinical Sciences program, reports new data on the promise of using human induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) for the generation of unlimited numbers of cDCs.

"This study is the first to identify a critical pathway for the generation of various types of cDCs, aiding in future development of personalized treatment with unlimited numbers of patients' own cDCs from human iPSCs in the clinic."

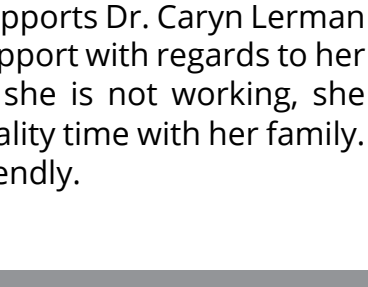
- Dr. Fumito Ito

Read the full publication here: <https://jitc.bmj.com/content/10/1/e003827>.

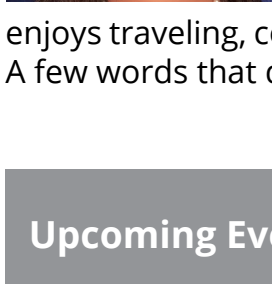
Community Outreach and Engagement:



During the holiday season, the Office of Community Outreach and Engagement worked together with our community partners to bring joy to the children in our local community. On December 18, 2021, the staff of the USC Norris Office of Community Outreach and Engagement hosted its Toy Give-Away at the Clinica Monseñor Óscar Romero. A total of 133 toys were distributed, bringing smiles to the faces of the children in the local community. Additionally, on January 6, the office of Community Outreach and Engagement partnered with the WunderGlo Foundation to distribute toys for children of cancer patients and survivors from both our hospital and our community-based programs in honor of Día de Reyes. Eleven families and 24 children were nominated and selected. The patients came from the Lazarex Program, the Lippin Program, the Trojans Adelante Program, The Sailors Project, and the USC Norris Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Program.



Faculty Spotlight



George Yaghmour, MD, member of the USC Norris Translational and Clinical Sciences program, member of the Clinical Investigations Committee, and Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine at the USC Keck School of Medicine

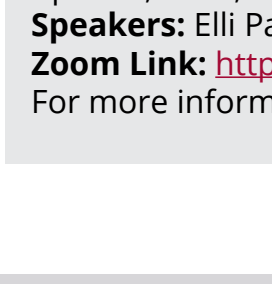
Dr. George Yaghmour is a physician scientist, educator, and mentor with a special interest in hematologic malignancy, stem cell, and immunotherapy. He focuses on building state-of-art care, applying his focus on developing a comprehensive understanding of molecular, epigenetic pathways, drug development, and translational clinical research trials in hematologic disease and malignancies. Additionally, his clinical research focuses on improving outcomes for adolescents and young adults with acute leukemia and developing novel approaches to bone marrow transplant and immunotherapy.

"I always wanted to work towards curing cancer, especially hematologic cancers," said Dr. Yaghmour, associate director of the USC Norris Blood and Marrow Transplant Program and co-leader of the USC Norris Blood and Marrow Transplant and Cellular Therapy Outpatient Program. *"That is my passion, to help as many people as possible."*

Since he joined the Jane Anne Nohl Division of Hematology in 2016, he has conducted more than a hundred and ninety (190) allogeneic stem cell transplants with the best survival rate among adult allogeneic transplant programs in the nation, according to the Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research (CIBMTR) report in 2020, with survival outcomes above 87 percent. In the last two years alone, Dr. Yaghmour has conducted 123 bone marrow transplants. He has also been highly productive in disseminating his research, clinical studies, and case series in scholarly venues, publishing 20 papers in high-quality peer-reviewed journals, in addition to 5 manuscripts that are accepted for publication. The published papers have impact, as they have been cited 189 times since 2016.

"My focus is always on providing my patients with treatments that are less harmful and less toxic and still achieve the same or better outcomes. I want to make this important curative procedure and treatment accessible to as many patients as possible, from all different races and ethnicities. Every person on this earth is a potential cure for someone else. Our transplant outcomes in the last two to three years are the top in the nation, and that is a result of the efforts from the Cancer Center as a whole."

Staff Member of the Month



Mechell Epps, Executive Assistant to Caryn Lerman, PhD, Cancer Center Director

Ms. Epps has worked for the Cancer Center since 2019. As the Executive Assistant to the Cancer Center Director, she supports Dr. Caryn Lerman and ensures that all areas of administrative support with regards to her endeavors are managed successfully. When she is not working, she enjoys traveling, cooking and trying new recipes, and spending quality time with her family. A few words that describe Ms. Epps are honest, empathic, and friendly.

Upcoming Events

Cancer Center Grand Rounds: RAKT Degradation Reveals that Aurora Kinase B is an AKT Substrate

March 1, 2022, 12-1 pm
Speakers: Ramon Parsons, MD, PhD
Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/96194316269>
 For more information, click [HERE](#).

Special Norris Cancer Center Seminar: The Role of the Woman in the Occurrence and Progression of Breast Cancer

March 4, 2022, 2-3 pm
Speakers: Marc E. Lippman, MD, MACP, FRCP
Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/91298808836>

Mindfulness: The Art of Reducing Stress and Managing Pain

March 9, 2022, 6-7pm PST
Facilitators: Haiza Martinez, MSW & Roxanna Ayala, MSW
Register here: <https://bit.ly/3JvYzZM>
 For questions, please contact Elena Nieves by emailing Elena.Nieves@med.usc.edu or calling (323) 409-5358.

Cancer Center Grand Rounds

March 22, 2022, 12-1 pm
Speakers: Ming Li, PhD/ David Birtwell
Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/914325049029>
 For more information, click [HERE](#).

Cancer Center Grand Rounds: Improving the Use and Effectiveness of Treatments for Nicotine Dependence

April 5, 2022, 12-1 pm
Speakers: Robert Schnoll, PhD
Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/91775022630>
 For more information, click [HERE](#).

Cancer Center Grand Rounds

April 19, 2022, 12-1 pm
Speakers: Elli Papaemmanuil, PhD
Zoom Link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/91432750790>
 For more information, click [HERE](#).