

# COMMUNITY

## *for a* CURE



### *Message from the Director*



Nurses are at the core of the exceptional patient-centered care we provide at USC Norris and Keck Medicine. They are superheroes, providing compassionate care for patients throughout their cancer journeys and making the world a better place. While our nurses deserve to be thanked every single day, National Nurses Week took place from May 6th to May 12th, and we say THANK YOU to our dedicated oncology nurses whose compassion can be as powerful as any treatment we provide. Indeed, at USC Norris, we have over 150 oncology nurses in our clinics, day hospital, procedural areas, and in-patient units coordinating the countless aspects of patient care and advocating for our patients throughout their entire cancer journey. Oncology nurses help our patients and their loved ones through and beyond their cancer diagnosis,

often forming lifelong relationships that continue years after their last treatment. We truly could not provide the exceptional level of care that we do without every one of our phenomenal nurses.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter which highlights exciting new research and stories from our exceptional clinicians, scientists, staff, oncology nursing team, and our philanthropic partners. At USC Norris, we are proud to be a magnet for the best minds in cancer research, cancer education, and delivery of patient-centered care.

*Caryn Lerman*

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



## *Honors and Appointments*

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**Congratulations to Dr. Heinz-Josef Lenz who has been appointed as the inaugural Deputy Director for Research Programs at USC Norris, effective April 1.** In this role, he works closely with Dr. Caryn Lerman and the USC Norris leadership team to realize our vision to reduce cancer burdens and disparities for all people. Dr. Lenz has provided exceptional service to USC Norris as Associate Director for Clinical Research and as the co-leader of the Translational and Clinical Sciences Program.

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**Congratulations to Dr. William (Dean) Wallace who has been appointed as the new director of the USC Norris Translational Pathology Core (TPC), effective March 1, 2022.** The TPC facilitates high-impact cancer research by providing high-quality tissue procurement, processing, and banking resources to USC Norris investigators working on all aspects of cancer research. Dr. Wallace is an expert in the field of pathology with special interests in the study of lung cancer and state-of-the-art diagnostic technologies in anatomic pathology.

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**Congratulations to Dr. Lourdes Baezconde-Garbanati, Associate Director for Community Outreach and Engagement at USC Norris, who is the recipient of the USC Joint Educational Project's 2022 Award for Community Engaged Teaching and Research.** This award honors a USC faculty member whose teaching and/or research is conducted in partnership with local communities to address their specific needs.

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**Congratulations to Ms. Joi Torrence-Hill, Chief of USC Norris Hospital Operations, who has been selected as a 2022 Women of Influence in Health Care recipient by the Los Angeles Business Journal.** Thank you for your extraordinary leadership in ensuring the delivery of high-value and high-quality cancer-related services to our patients. Read the full article here: <https://tinyurl.com/yc85mw7e>.

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**Congratulations to Dr. Evanthia Roussos Torres, member of the USC Norris Tumor Microenvironment Program, who has been awarded the Early Career Investigator Award by METAvivor** to study novel ways to improve anti-tumor immune activity and improve clinical outcomes in response to current immunotherapies for patients with metastatic breast cancer.



## Scientific Advances



### Metastatic prostate cancer is on the rise after changes to guidelines recommending decreased cancer screenings

Published in the medical journal *JAMA Network Open*, USC Norris members, Drs. Mihir M. Desai, Indi Gill, Andre Abreu of the Department of Urology and Dr. Lihua Liu of the Department of Population and Public Health Science, found that the incidence rate of metastatic prostate cancer has increased substantially for men 45 and older. This increase coincides with changes in guidelines that recommend against prostate cancer antigen (PSA) screening for all ages. Read the full publication here: <https://tinyurl.com/yc29za3z>.

**“This study is the first to document a continued rise in metastatic prostate cancer using the most up-to-date population dataset. The discovery has important ramifications for men because prostate cancer, when caught early, typically through a screening, is very treatable and often curable.**

**- Dr. Mihir M. Desai**



### New approach to non-invasive profiling of advanced prostate cancer combines liquid biopsies and radiomic imaging analysis

Published in the *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, Dr. Amir Goldkorn, Associate Director for Translational Research at USC Norris, with Drs. Tim Triche, David Quinn, and Vinay Duddalwar of the Department of Medicine, used a single tube of blood and computerized tomography (CT) scans to construct a complex cellular, molecular, and image profile of metastatic prostate cancer in real-time. Such a comprehensive cancer profile will help clinicians predict treatment response, disease progression and overall survival, leading to the development of better treatments. Read more about this study here: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8ebu4u>.

**“Having a more comprehensive picture of tumor biology provides a better understanding of disease progression and resistance mechanisms, which can lead to better therapies. Having developed these capabilities, we are now excited to clinically validate the feasibility of this new approach in a large, national phase III trial for men with newly diagnosed metastatic prostate cancer, where these techniques will help us to track cancer progression and predict clinical outcomes.”**

**- Dr. Amir Goldkorn**



### A concerning rise in early onset pancreatic cancer particularly among Hispanic and White women

To inform surveillance for a deadly form of cancer, Dr. Setiawan, co-leader of the USC Norris Cancer Epidemiology Program and Professor in the Department of Population and Public Health Sciences, led the largest study to date of trends in early onset pancreatic cancer over the past two decades. There is a concerning rise in early onset pancreatic cancer, particularly among Hispanic and White women. Responding to this rise, USC Norris members, Drs. Setiawan, Lenz, and Grossman, are developing new forms of early detection and treatment for this deadly disease. This article appeared in the March issue of the journal *Gastroenterology*.

**“This concerning rise in the incidence of early onset cancer points to a need for increased surveillance.**

**-Dr. Wendy Setiawan**



## Novel epigenetic therapy decreases immune suppression and promotes anti-tumor responses against certain breast tumors

To improve clinical outcomes with immunotherapy for breast cancer, USC Norris member Dr. Roussos Torres and her colleagues discovered that the drug entinostat decreases immune suppression and promotes anti-tumor responses against HER2+ breast tumors. This article appeared in the February issue of the journal *Cancer Immunology Research*.

**“ We are excited to share our paper describing our work showing breast tumor sensitization to immune checkpoint inhibition using epigenetic modulation. This work will aid in the development of novel strategies to improve response rates to immunotherapy of breast cancer.**

**- Dr. Evanthia Roussos Torres**



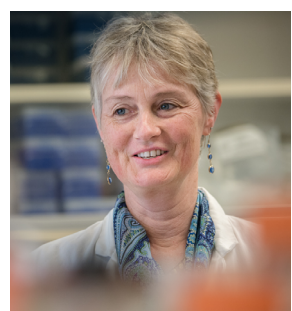
## New clinical guidance for PET imaging for prostate cancer

Published in the *Journal of Nuclear Medicine*, USC Norris member Dr. Hossein Jadvar, in collaboration with an international multidisciplinary team of experts, developed a clinical guidance document regarding the appropriate use criteria for prostate-specific membrane antigen PET imaging. This document will be incorporated nationally in the Clinical Decision Support Mechanisms as mandated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as a guide for physicians. Read the full article

here: <https://jnm.snmjournals.org/content/63/1/59.long#sec-32>.

**“ The development and use of AUC documents for advanced diagnostic imaging services is an important process in providing patients with appropriate imaging care. These criteria will be instrumental in improving patient outcomes and reducing overall cost to the healthcare system.**

**- Dr. Hossein Jadvar**



## Immortalizing human alveolar epithelial cells

Published in *ScienceDirect*, USC Norris members Drs. Ite Offringa, Dean Wallace, Rong Lu, and Crystal Marconett discovered how to reliably immortalize human alveolar epithelial cells so they can be cultured indefinitely. The cell lines and organoids can be used to model how lung adenocarcinoma develops and progresses, leading to possible strategies for prevention and/or treatment, and providing a new way to rapidly screen new drugs. Read the full publication here: <http://ow.ly/8S5q50I8G4r>.

**“ Our research team determined how to reliably immortalize human alveolar epithelial cells so they can be cultured indefinitely. The cell lines and organoids can be used to model how lung adenocarcinoma develops and progresses, leading to possible strategies for prevention and/or treatment, and providing a new way to rapidly screen new drugs.**

**- Dr. Ite Offringa**





## New consensus report from the National Academies of Sciences provides comprehensive review of patterns of use and health effects of premium cigars

Dr. Adam Leventhal, member of the USC Norris Cancer Control Research Program, served as a committee member on a new consensus report from the *National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine* that finds the ingredients in premium cigars make them inherently as harmful as cigarettes and other types of cigars and links cigars to a variety of health risks including cancer. This report will guide future federal research and regulations on premium cigars. To read the full report, go here: <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26421/premium-cigars-patterns-of-use-marketing-and-health-effects>.

“This report provides a comprehensive review of decades of science on premium cigars, including research on the link between cigar smoking and cancer. The information in this report can help public health officials develop policies and programs that mitigate the adverse impact of cigar use on the community.

- Dr. Adam Leventhal



### Comedy and Cancer



Congratulations to the USC Norris Adolescent and Young Adult Program whose project Comedy and Cancer was awarded a grant by the USC Arts in Action, part of USC Visions and Voices. In collaboration with the USC School of Dramatic Arts Comedy Program, this project brings together patients, hospital staff, caregivers, and alumni to cope with illness through laughter. In April, they began hosting weekly comedy-focused workshops that include improv, sketch comedy, and stand-up to promote self-empowerment, community building, and provide tools to deal with the heavy burden of illness. For workshop details, contact [shuli@usc.edu](mailto:shuli@usc.edu).

## Faculty Spotlight



### Casey O'Connell, MD, member of the USC Norris Translational and Clinical Sciences Program, and Associate Professor in the Jane Anne Nohl Division of Hematology at the Keck School of Medicine

Dr. O'Connell is a clinical researcher with expertise in cancer-related blood clotting and in myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) and myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPNs), which are pre-leukemic bone marrow cancers. Dr. O'Connell aims to optimize the role of epigenetic, anti-inflammatory, and immune therapies in enhancing patients' quality of life and preventing these disorders from evolving into acute myeloid leukemia (AML).

As director of the GEHR CURES Myeloid Malignancy Program, established at USC Norris and Keck School of Medicine in 2016, Dr. O'Connell has maintained a nationally recognized "MDS Center of Excellence" here at USC Norris. She leads clinical trials of novel therapies for the treatment of MDS and MPNs which include

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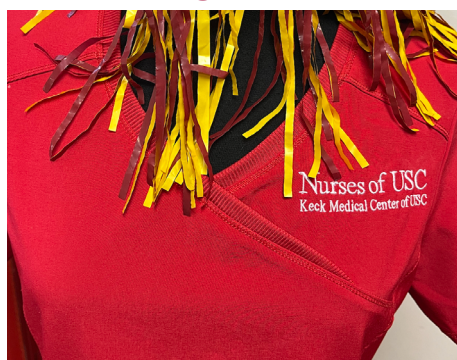
Polycythemia Vera, Essential Thrombocythosis, and Myelofibrosis. With funding and collaboration from the Van Andel Institute-Stand Up to Cancer (VAI-SU2C)-funded Epigenetics Dream Team, she led a recently completed pivotal trial utilizing immune therapy to enhance standard treatment for MDS. **“This trial took a concept from the lab to the clinic and our discoveries are now going back to fuel new efforts in the lab. This is a dream for a clinical-translational researcher,”** said Dr. O’Connell.

Future directions for Dr. O’Connell and her team include studying the effect of natural agents, such as vitamin C and curcumin, earlier in the course of MDS and MPNs to reduce inflammation, enhance the immune system, and slow progression toward more overt blood cancers.

**“Many patients are already taking these seemingly non-toxic remedies on their own, and I think we should be looking at them with a scientific eye to determine the correct dosing and beneficial or adverse effects,”** stated Dr. O’Connell. She is pursuing collaborations with members of the USC Norris Translational and Clinical Sciences Program to study the role of the immune system in the progression of blood cancers.

**“I emphasize arming patients with an understanding of their disease,”** said Dr. O’Connell. **“This includes educating them on the disease or condition, how to find more information and how our recommended treatments will work toward alleviating the symptoms or the disease itself. This gives them the tools to be empowered to make choices in the most educated manner possible.”**

## *Celebrating Our Nurses*



Our nurses are at the heart of the care provided to our cancer patients, and at the helm, you will find Awa Jones, RN, the Chief Nursing Officer for USC Norris. Ms. Jones has been at USC Norris since April 2011, when she first joined as the nursing director. In her current role as Chief Nursing Officer, she provides leadership to the USC Norris oncology nursing team and interfaces with all areas that provide patient care at USC Norris. Oncology nurses can be found in all clinical areas within Norris – the clinics, day hospital, procedural areas, and in-patient units – where they coordinate the countless aspects of patient care; assess and monitor our patient’s physical and emotional status; safely administer medications, fluids, and cancer treatments; navigate patients through complex treatment protocols; manage symptoms and treatment side effects; and advocate for our patients throughout their entire cancer journey. In addition, she oversees nurse leaders, nurse researchers, nurse educators, and clinical nurse specialists.

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**“I may no longer personally provide direct nursing care to patients, but I’m in charge of nurses who provide that care and want to make sure I support them and provide them the resources needed to take care of our beloved patients and their families,” said Ms. Jones. “In my role, I want to remove barriers and make sure that our nurses have the resources and equipment to help our patients through their cancer diagnosis and treatment. Our oncology nurses are full of compassion, and you have to be, given the type of patients we take care of. They connect with the patients on a personal level and make an extraordinary impact because most have a personal calling to the profession.”**

The field of oncology is one of the most challenging and rewarding fields in nursing. For our cancer patients, it is the oncology nurses that are at their side, educating, navigating, and encouraging them through the highs and lows of their cancer journey. A few of our phenomenal nurses are highlighted below.



**Rachel Settani, RN**, is a nurse in the in-patient HemOnc Bone Marrow Transplant unit of USC Norris and has been an oncology nurse at USC Norris for about 10 years now. Ms. Settani always wanted to pursue a career that would allow her to help others. She was inspired to pursue nursing after witnessing the incredible impact her aunt, who is a nurse as well, makes on her patients.

**“It is rewarding to know that at the end of the day, I’m making a positive impact on people’s lives in some of their most difficult times,”** Ms. Settani replied when asked what the most rewarding aspect of her work is. **“I am so inspired by the resiliency that our patients demonstrate during their cancer journeys.”**

**Alain De Leoz, RN**, comes from a family of healthcare workers that includes roughly 16 nurses and three doctors. From a very young age, Mr. De Leoz knew that he wanted to pursue nursing and help patients in the same way he saw so many of his family members do before him. After witnessing family members battle cancer themselves, he knew he wanted to pursue oncology nursing. Mr. De Leoz has been an oncology nurse at the USC Norris Day Hospital for five years now.



**“I have been a nurse for almost 12 years now, and the most rewarding aspect of my job is the relationships I build with my patients and their families as well as my co-workers,”** said Mr. De Leoz. **“They are my second family.”**



**Sally Golingay, RN**, grew up in a small town in the Philippines and was inspired by her relatives, who were nurses, as they were able to travel and see faraway places. When she came to the United States, she was assigned to oncology and oversaw the care of a breast cancer patient who tragically lost her battle with cancer. This experience was life-changing for her and inspired her to pursue oncology nursing. Ms. Golingay has now been a nurse at the USC Norris Day Hospital for 25 years.

**“Cancer diagnosis has no boundaries,”** said Ms. Golingay. **“As an oncology nurse, I can apply my knowledge and experience to help cancer patients explore all kinds of therapies appropriately for the healing of both body and soul, from diagnosis to cure or end of life. This is different from other nursing fields.”**

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To further celebrate our nurses, Jennifer Cannon, RN, and Melinda Mayorga, RN, two nurses at USC Norris, set up a beautiful tribute honoring our oncology nurses in the Paulette and Henry Matson Conference Room that was on display from May 6th to May 12th in honor of Nurses Week. The tribute displayed photos of our nurses at their graduation, capping, and pinning ceremonies; old nursing textbooks; nursing uniforms; and other nursing-related items. In addition, Dusty Whitted and Anne Warren were recognized for “Most Years of Nursing Service.” Dusty Whitted has served as a nurse at USC Norris for 39 years now. Anne Warren has been a nurse since 1969, with 23 years at Norris serving our patients and their families. For Anne, the patients she cares for and their resiliency in the face of a difficult diagnosis inspire her to continue nursing.



**Nursing is a work of heart**, and the care that every single oncology nurse at USC Norris provides to our patients is invaluable. Today and every day, we celebrate their commitment, resilience, compassion, determination, empathy, and hard work.



We wanted to thank all the phenomenal volunteers at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center for their dedication, compassion, and time. Your volunteer work makes an extraordinary impact on the lives of our cancer patients and their families. To check out a highlight of our incredible volunteers, click here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeJw1j\\_rxBc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeJw1j_rxBc).

## Why Your Gift Matters



In September 2010, Gloria Borges, an attorney and Duke and Stanford Law alum, was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer at the age of 28. In response to her diagnosis, she launched [www.WunderGlo.com](http://www.WunderGlo.com), a blog in which she detailed all of her experiences throughout her aggressive colon cancer treatment to combat and beat the disease, inspiring thousands along the way with her positive attitude and creating a strong community. The blog's name was derived from the word “Wunder” which means miracle in German to honor her physician at USC Norris, Dr. Heinz-Josef Lenz, and “Glo” to represent her first name. She became known as WunderGlo and her blog was read in over 125 countries and had over 100,000 unique visitors. A year later, she launched The WunderGlo Foundation, a foundation that strives to save lives and support cancer warriors everywhere by raising funds for colon cancer research, promoting awareness about the prevention of and treatment for colon cancer, and encouraging healthy lifestyle choices. Through its efforts, The WunderGlo Foundation seeks to empower and inspire those fighting the disease and those finding ways to eradicate it.

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Sadly, on January 5th, 2014, due to familial blood-clotting complications that were magnified by colon cancer, Gloria passed away. Her mother, Rebecca Keller, continues to carry on the mission of the foundation as the President and Executive Director. In honor of Gloria and the incredible legacy she created, and in the absence of her physical presence, Rebecca felt that it was prudent to add Gloria's name as the foundation's doing business as: The Gloria Borges WunderGlo Foundation.



**“Gloria created this organization; this is her brainchild,” said Rebecca. “When she passed, she left the shoes beside my bed, and I have the courage to put them on every day and carry on her legacy to fund curative colon cancer research and support the patients she and I care so much about.”**



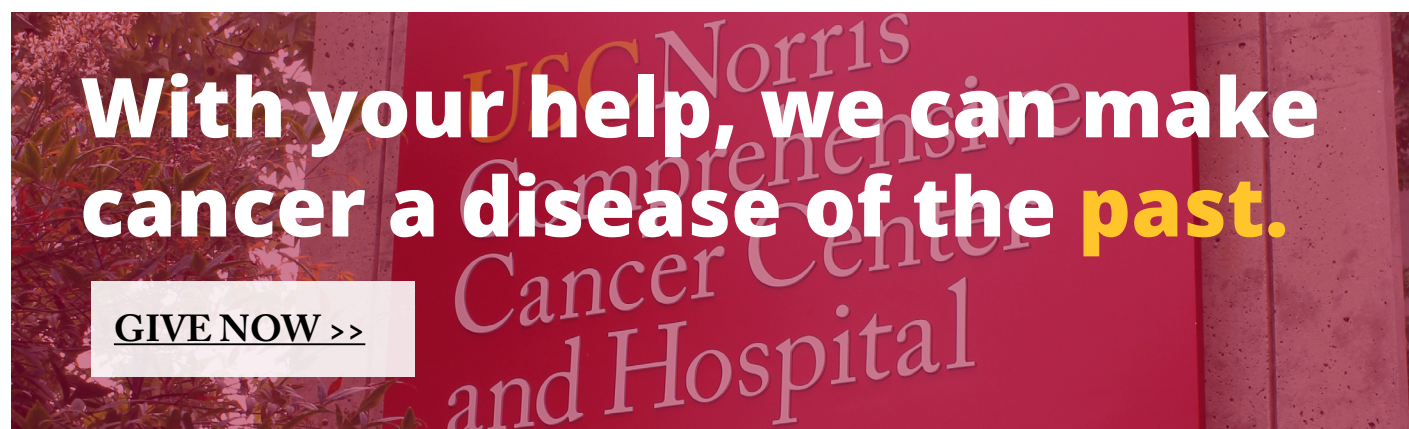
Every year on December 8th, The Gloria Borges WunderGlo Foundation donates funds to Dr. Lenz and his colon cancer research in honor of Gloria's birthday. Dr. Lenz is an internationally recognized clinical investigator, translational scientist, and physician expert in gastrointestinal cancers. Moreover, he was Gloria's trusted physician. To date, The WunderGlo Foundation has donated over \$1.475 million to Dr. Lenz and the G.I. Oncology Program at USC Norris and by this year's end, the foundation is in line to gift another \$200,000 to his colon cancer research, placing The Gloria

Borges WunderGlo Foundation's total research funding mark close to \$1,750,000, overall. His transformative research focuses on the genetic underpinnings of drug resistance and therapeutic response among patients with colorectal cancer.

**“Dr. Lenz is a relentless champion for the patient. He's brilliant, he's devoted, he's dedicated to the cure, and he's got his finger on the pulse of the next best thing in colon cancer research and treatment,” said Rebecca. “For these reasons, The WunderGlo Foundation has always trusted our funding to Dr. Lenz. We are his greatest champion, as he is ours.”**

The Gloria Borges WunderGlo Foundation, now in its 11th year, continues to keep Gloria's legacy, passion, and commitment to the cure alive. To learn more about The Gloria Borges WunderGlo Foundation and its various programs which empower and support colon cancer patients and their loved ones, go to:

<https://wunderglofoundation.org>.



## Upcoming Events

**TUESDAY**  
**JUNE**  
**14**

**Grand Rounds: Obesity & Adipocytes: New Approaches to Targeting Chemoresistance in ALL**

12-1 pm

**Speaker:** Etan Orgel, MD

**Zoom link:** <https://usc.zoom.us/j/95757561551>

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

## FOLLOW US ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS!

To learn about the latest discoveries and news from USC Norris, please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. To connect with us, open your phone's camera app, face it towards the QR code, click on the link that appears, and click the "Follow" button located at the top.



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## Contact Us

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

To learn more about giving to USC Norris, please contact Minhaal M. Nathani, Executive Director of Development, at [Minhaal.Nathani@med.usc.edu](mailto:Minhaal.Nathani@med.usc.edu)

Learn more about the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center on our website:  
<https://uscnorriscancer.usc.edu>