

COMMUNITY

for a **CURE**



Message from the Director



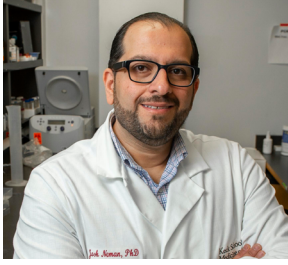
In recognition of **National Doctors' Day** on March 30th, we say THANK YOU to the extraordinary clinicians at USC Norris who work tirelessly to reduce the burden of cancer for our patients and their families. Working closely with our renowned scientists at USC Norris, our health care providers pioneer new cutting-edge technologies, such as liquid biopsies, and develop innovative therapies to improve survival and quality of life for our patients. To all of our exceptional clinicians and scientists, who give our patients and their families more time together, WE SALUTE YOU!

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 Recognitions



We are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Josh Neman-Ebrahim as the new Associate Director for Cancer Research Training and Education Coordination (CRTEC) at USC Norris effective July 1, 2023. Dr. Neman-Ebrahim will create and oversee cancer research education and training initiatives across the continuum from pre-collegiate to faculty training. Supported by the National Cancer Institute, CRTEC's mission is to prepare the next generation of basic, translational, clinical, and population scientists, with a focus on convergent minds, inclusion, and diversity. We are grateful for the exceptional leadership of Dr. Yves DeClerck who served in this role since 2018 and will be stepping down to spend more time with his family. We truly appreciate all of his contributions to USC Norris.



Congratulations to Dr. Lourdes Baezconde-Garbanati, Associate Director of Community Outreach and Engagement at USC Norris and Associate Dean for Community Initiatives at Keck School of Medicine, who has been appointed as a Distinguished Professor of Population and Public Health Sciences by the University of Southern California for her outstanding work in Hispanic/Latino health and socio-determinants of community health disparities.



Dr. Hossein Jadvar, member of the USC Norris Translational and Clinical Sciences Program and a tenured Professor of Radiology with joint appointments in Urology and Biomedical Engineering, has been appointed to the Board of Directors for the American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM). ABNM provides certification and recertification examinations for physicians in nuclear medicine.



Congratulations to Joi Torrence-Hill, Chief of USC Norris Hospital Operations, who has been named one of the 2023 **149 black healthcare leaders to know** by Becker's Hospital Review. The individuals highlighted on this list are fostering positive patient experiences, paving the way for the next generation of leaders, and promoting health equity.



Dr. Heinz-Josef Lenz, Deputy Director for Research Programs at USC Norris, has been selected as one of Los Angeles Business Journal's Leaders of Influence: L.A.'s Top Doctors of 2023 in the oncology category. Health care practitioners were selected based on their professional achievements, community leadership, milestones, and notable accomplishments during the pasts 12-18 months.

New Grants



We are excited to announce that USC Norris is collaborating with Auransa Inc. on a phase I clinical trial to evaluate a new kind of treatment for cancers of the liver and solid tumors with liver dominant disease. Dr. Anthony El-Khoueiry, Associate Director for Clinical Research at USC Norris, will lead the phase I clinical trial of the novel drug AU409. Learn more [HERE](#).



Congratulations to Dr. Chanita Hughes Halbert, Associate Director for Cancer Equity at USC Norris, who received the prestigious American Cancer Society Professorship Award. Dr. Hughes Halbert will develop, implement, and evaluate innovative solutions to address primary drivers of lung cancer disparities, with a sharp focus on social determinants of health.



Dr. Jesse Berry, member of the USC Norris Genomic and Epigenomic Regulation Program, received a grant from the Children's Oncology Group to fund her work using the aqueous humor liquid biopsy method in the molecular characterization of retinoblastoma, an eye cancer that begins in the back of the eye (retina), most commonly in children.

Scientific Advances and Discoveries



Surgery proves effective alternative to chemotherapy and radiation for early metastatic testicular cancer

Published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, USC Norris member Dr. Sia Daneshmand, a urologic oncologist with Keck Medicine of USC and lead investigator of the clinical trial, demonstrated in a multi-institutional clinical trial that removing the affected lymph nodes in the area behind the abdomen lining called the retroperitoneum is an effective alternative to chemotherapy and radiation with fewer long-term side effects for patients with early metastatic testicular cancer. Learn more by clicking [HERE](#).



Early metastatic seminoma has a very high survival rate; however, if treated with chemotherapy and radiation, the cure can come at a high cost. Surgery gives patients both the opportunity to be cured and experience a high quality of life post-cancer.”

– Sia Daneshmand, MD

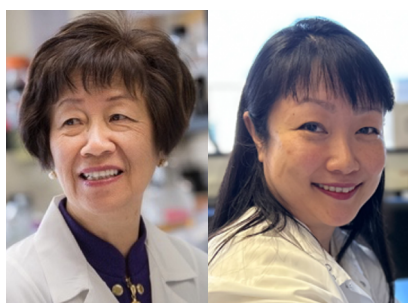


Differential trends in rising endometrial cancer incidence by age, race, and ethnicity revealed

Published in *JNCI Cancer Spectrum*, Dr. Wendy Setiawan, co-leader of the USC Norris Cancer Epidemiology Program, discovered striking differences for demographic and tumor characteristics as well as racial/ethnic patterns and time trends in endometrial cancer incidence between early-onset and late on-set endometrial cancer. To read the full publication, click [HERE](#).

“Increases in early-onset endometrial cancer incidence rates, especially among non-White women, mirror similar observations in other cancers pointing to a possible link with the rising obesity epidemic in younger generations.”

– Wendy Setiawan, PhD



Drs. Amy Lee and Vicky Yamamoto demonstrated a new approach to combat cisplatin resistance in patients with head and neck cancer

Published in *Frontiers in Oncology*, Dr. Lee, member of the USC Norris Genomic and Epigenomic Regulation Program, and Dr. Yamamoto demonstrated a new approach to combat resistance to cisplatin, a commonly used chemotherapy, using a newly discovered cancer drug YUM70 targeting the 78-kD glucose-regulated protein. They found that co-treatment of

YUM70 with cisplatin reduces viability of cisplatin-resistant head and neck cancer. Read the full publication [HERE](#).

“Resistance to Cisplatin is a major cause for relapse and mortality in patients diagnosed with head and neck cancer. This study provides a fresh approach to combat cisplatin resistance through the use of a newly discovered cancer drug YUM70 targeting GRP78 for patients with head and neck cancer.”

–Amy Lee, PhD

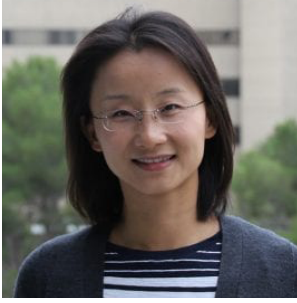


Novel connection between lipid metabolism and outcome of chemotherapy treatment identified

Published in the journal *eClinical Medicine*, Dr. Heinz-Josef Lenz, Deputy Director of Research Programs at USC Norris, demonstrated a novel connection between lipid metabolism and the outcome of bevacizumab-based chemotherapy treatment in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer. These findings support a possible role of the lipid metabolism pathway in contributing to resistance to anti-VEGF treatment. To read the full publication, click [HERE](#).

“We identified that targeting the lipid metabolism may be a new promising pathway to treat colon cancer.”

–Heinz-Josef Lenz, MD



Leukemic mutation linked to potential disease development

In a new study published in *Blood*, Dr. Rong Lu, co-director of the USC Norris Flow Cytometry and Immune Monitoring Core, and her team discovered a mechanism that linked a leukemic mutation to varying potentials for disease development—a discovery which could eventually lead to a way to identify patients with the mutation who are most at risk. To read the full publication, click [HERE](#).

“ Our study suggests that a leukemia-associated genetic mutation could trigger different levels of production of myeloid cells. These findings could be used to better stratify which patients are at the highest risk, and also present intriguing possibilities for developing future therapies that target aberrant RNA splicing in preleukemia phases.”

-Rong Lu, PhD

Community Outreach and Engagement:



Resource Fair and Classic Car Show

Our Office of Community Outreach and Engagement provided educational materials on cancer, focused on colon and prostate cancer, to the community in East Los Angeles (LA) on Saturday, March 18, at the Resource Fair and Classic Car Show that took place at the East LA College Prep High School.

NCCC Translational Research Conference - From Patients to the Laboratory: Technologies for Cancer Biomarker Discovery



At USC Norris, we aim to transform our discoveries of the underlying causes of cancer and disease progression into new treatments and clinical trials for our patients. On March 10, 2023, USC Norris hosted the Translational Research Conference: From Patients to the Laboratory: Technologies for Cancer Biomarker Discovery. Organized by Drs. Vasiliki Anest, Chief Innovation Officer, and Amir Goldkorn, Associate Director for Translational Research, the goal of this conference was to foster collaborative relationships and accelerate the discovery of new cancer biomarkers.

continued on page 6 ...

The morning session started with Dr. Tim Triche, Co-Director of the Children's Hospital Los Angeles' Center for Personalized Medicine, presenting his real-world experience developing OncoKids, a genetic testing platform for pediatric cancers, in collaboration with ThermoFisher. Next, was a series of faculty presentations focused on their technology and analysis solutions for cancer biomarker discovery (spatial genomics and transcriptomics, digital pathology, immune monitoring, liquid biopsy, radiomics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data integration) and critical core resources such as the USC Norris Biospecimen Repositories, the Translational Pathology Core, and the Population Research Core.

“We created a platform for USC Norris researchers, clinicians, and industry partners to come together and share their expertise, experiences, and technological advances to foster relationships and drive innovation,” said Dr. Goldkorn. **“Through a combination of presentations and networking opportunities, we aimed to create an environment that would facilitate meaningful discussions and spark new collaborations.”**

The afternoon session included six industry presentations focused on their differentiated technology solutions for cancer biomarkers and their active collaborations with USC Norris members. The afternoon ended with industry roundtables where USC Norris members had the opportunity to connect, build relationships, and gain valuable insights into various solutions for cancer biomarker discovery.

“Collaboration and communication between academia and industry are essential for unlocking new opportunities for innovation and advancing towards new treatments. We were honored to have Caris Life Sciences, ThermoFisher Scientific, 10x Genomics, RareCyte, Adaptive Biotechnologies, and Akoya Biosciences participate in our afternoon session and contribute to the stimulating scientific dialogue. The level of engagement and enthusiasm from all participants was truly inspiring,” said Dr. Anest

Here at USC Norris, we sincerely appreciate our industry partners' continued support. We look forward to expanding our long-standing relationships while building new ones to help us advance our collective mission. To achieve this, USC Norris partners with the MESH Business Development and Industry Relations (BDIR) team at the Keck School of Medicine of USC that provides a personalized service to connect USC researchers with industry and establish collaborations and strategic partnerships. The MESH BDIR team will follow up with the companies and faculty that attended the conference to explore shared interests.

THANK YOU!



THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

In honor of National Volunteer Week, we wanted to thank all the phenomenal volunteers at USC Norris for their dedication, compassion, and time. Your volunteer work makes an extraordinary impact on the lives of our cancer patients and their families. To learn more about volunteering at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, contact Diana Mekel at Diana.Mekel@med.usc.edu.

Faculty Spotlight



Gino K. In, MD, MPH, member of the USC Norris Translational and Clinical Sciences Program

Dr. In is a medical oncologist who specializes in cutaneous oncology, which include melanoma and other aggressive skin cancers, with a focus on the development and conduct of clinical trials to further the use of novel oncology therapeutics and combinations. Dr. In completed his fellowship training in hematology and oncology at the University of Southern California, Keck School of Medicine, where he was the chief medical oncology fellow. He subsequently joined the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, and now serves as Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine in the Division of Oncology and Assistant Professor of Dermatology at the Keck School of Medicine. In addition to his role as a clinical trialist, he leads the multi-disciplinary melanoma and skin cancer tumor board.

“In the past, we did not have effective treatments for patients with melanoma and other advanced skin cancers,” said Dr. In. **“However, there have been incredible breakthroughs in this field over the last 10 years, and ultimately it is my goal to make sure that all of our patients have access to these important, life-saving therapies.”**

As lead melanoma principal investigator at our institution, Dr. In oversees the multi-disciplinary melanoma and skin cancer program and portfolio of therapeutic clinical trials for all cutaneous malignancies, including investigator-initiated studies and industry-sponsored studies, as well as those conducted in coordination with cooperative groups, including the Southwest Oncology Group (SWOG), California Cancer Consortium (NCI-CTEP), Alliance, and the ACCRU Network. In this role, Dr. In has played a pivotal role in several clinical trials, including studies of oncolytic virus/intratatumoral therapy and autologous tumor infiltrating lymphocyte (TIL) therapy. Furthermore, he has a specific interest in rare skin cancers, having been the lead investigator for studies of desmoplastic, mucosal, and acral lentiginous melanoma, among others.

“My primary research focuses on conducting clinical trials for melanoma and skin cancers, whereby we have the opportunity to offer patients the latest and most advanced novel therapies,” said Dr. In. **“This is especially important for our patients, many of whom have run out of other options. It’s very exciting to see how clinical trial research can lead to quick progress and improvements in the treatment of these diseases. And it is even more rewarding to see this research make such a difference in the lives of our patients as well!”**

The Survivor Art Series, featuring Rhett Murray



Originally from Springville, Utah, Rhett E. Murray showed a passion for art at an early age. From a young age, Rhett frequented an art museum in Springville called Art City, where he walked through the halls covered in remarkable artwork, captivated by the extraordinary talent surrounding him. He spent hours observing the paintings, intrigued by the detail behind every piece of art. His passion for art never diminished. He graduated from Southern Utah University (SUU) with a B.A. in Art Education and later returned to SUU to complete a Master of Education. Rhett is an art professor and teaches

continued on page 8 ...

drawing and painting for the Clark County School District. Rhett is also an accomplished illustrator and has provided artwork for books and publications.

In 2021, Rhett was diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent prostate surgery in July of that year. However, three months later, he began experiencing fatigue, and on November 7, 2021, he was diagnosed with metastatic extragonadal primary choriocarcinoma of the liver, a rare and aggressive cancer. Rhett began a five- days- per- week chemotherapy regimen, which he completed in February 2022, and then subsequently underwent three stem cell transplants at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. Rhett continues to live with cancer and recently returned to teaching. His positive outlook is evident in his artwork.

“You’ve just got to take it one day at a time,” said Rhett. **“I do have sad days and dark days, those are unavoidable, but you got to fight through that. Every day you are given 24 hours, appreciate everything you have been given and try and enjoy every moment, that’s what I’ve tried to do. Do the best you can, and whatever comes will come.”**

Rhett and his phenomenal artwork were recently featured in *The Survivor Art Series*, a USC program showcasing the artwork of artists diagnosed with cancer. Patients, families, faculty, staff, students, and the community at large are invited to attend, and this series is offered at no cost to the public.

“I am so pleased and honored that *The Survivor Art Series* gave me an opportunity to showcase my artwork, as well as inspire and provide insight to other patients who are going through their own diagnosis. It was truly humbling,” said Rhett.



Why Your Gift Matters



but he is also a lymphoma cancer survivor.

Whether he was teaching at the Nihon University in the city of Mishima, Japan, or his English classroom at Pasadena City College (PCC), Alan Lamson’s passion for teaching and learning permeates all he does. He began his teaching career in the summer of 1968 at PCC as an English professor and continued there until his retirement in 2004. With education and traveling at the core of his passions, Alan is a citizen of the world, and has embraced many nuances of every culture he has visited along the way. Alan Lamson is many things, an English professor, a lifetime learner, a husband, and a world traveler,

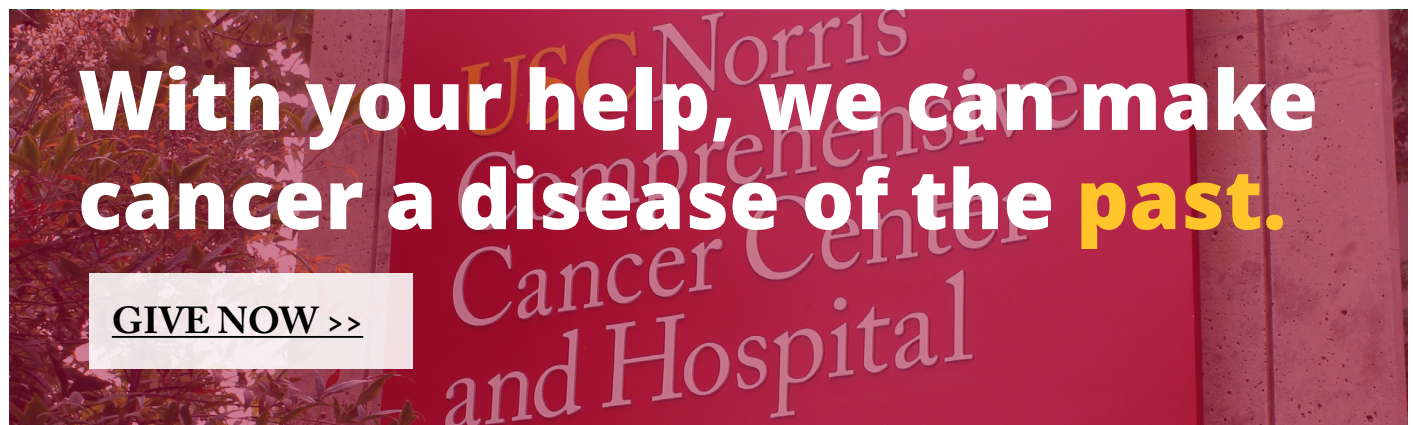
After feeling lingering discomfort and pain in his lower abdomen, Alan’s primary physician recommended he get a CT scan to investigate the root of the pain. Hours after the CT scan was taken, an abscess was found in his lower colon area and he was admitted to the hospital. Following the procedure, further observation revealed lymphoma cancer cells present in the abscess. At this point, he was recommended to an oncologist at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center.

continued on page 9 ...

After healing from the surgery, Alan immediately began his chemotherapy as he had an aggressive form of lymphoma. He received six infusions starting in December 2017. Thanks to the care and treatment received from his physicians, nurses, and staff at USC Norris, he was deemed cancer-free in 2018 and continues to be cancer-free to this day. Alan and his wife remain grateful for the compassionate and passionate care he received from USC Norris and philanthropically support his oncologist and the Cancer Center.

“I am just thankful. Thankful to be alive,” said Alan. **“If I hadn’t gotten that CT scan where they discovered that abscess and gone to the wonderful physicians and nurses at USC Norris, I don’t know if I would be cancer-free today. We needed to give something back to help the oncology team care for others - like me - now, and in the future. It was a no-brainer in a way.”**

Thanks to Alan and his wife’s thoughtful gratitude, USC Norris has been able to utilize their support to do a myriad of things, such as continuing cancer education, and accelerating innovative cancer research and treatments that will help us conquer the most challenging cancers for our patients and their families for years to come.



Upcoming Events

Endometriosis and ovarian cancer: Translational opportunities through studies of dysregulated gene expression in understudied gynecologic diseases

May 2, 2023, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Kate Lawrenson, PhD

Location: Grand Rounds will take place **in person** in the Aresty Auditorium, Harlyne J. Norris Research Tower.

Cancer Center Grand Rounds, featuring Graduate Students Presentations

May 16, 2023, 12-1 pm

Location: Grand Rounds will take place **in person** in the Aresty Auditorium, Harlyne J. Norris Research Tower.

Cancer Center Grand Rounds, featuring Cigall Kadoch, PhD

June 13, 2023, 12-1 pm

Location: Grand Rounds will take place **in person** in the Aresty Auditorium, Harlyne J. Norris Research Tower.

Cancer Center Grand Rounds, featuring Postdoc Presentations

June 27, 2023, 12-1 pm

Location: Grand Rounds will take place **in person** in the Aresty Auditorium, Harlyne J. Norris Research Tower.

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Contact Us

Have something to contribute to Community for a Cure? Send it to 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

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