

# COMMUNITY

*for a* **CURE**



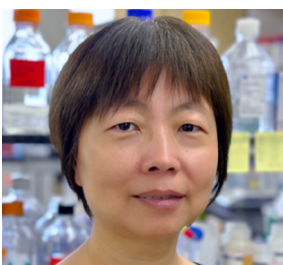
## *U.S. News and World Report Rankings*



We are proud to share that the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, as part of Keck Medical Center of USC, has been ranked among the Top 20 cancer hospitals in the country by U.S. News and World Report, rising to #15 for 2023-2024 for the first time in its history. In addition, USC Norris Cancer Hospital has been named one of the Best Specialty Hospitals in the country.

**“Receiving recognition as one of the top 20 cancer hospitals (#15) in the nation by U.S. News and World Report is a testament to our exceptional team of clinicians, scientists, and staff,”** said Dr. Caryn Lerman, Director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. **“It signifies our dedication to providing the highest standard of care for our cancer patients and transforming laboratory discoveries into new cancer therapies.”**

## *Honors and Recognitions*



We are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Yali Dou as the new Associate Director for Basic Research at USC Norris, effective July 1, 2023. Dr. Dou will foster high-impact cancer discovery research, enhance interdisciplinary collaborations that may lead to translation of basic laboratory findings, and assist with the development of vital infrastructure and processes to promote the success of USC Norris basic cancer researchers.



**Dr. Daniel Weisenberger has been appointed as the new Director for the USC Norris Molecular Genomics Core (MGC), effective July 1, 2023.** Dr. Weisenberger will provide vision and oversight of core operations and ensure efficient and effective services for NCCC members.



**Congratulations to Dr. Gabriel Zada, member of the USC Norris Epigenetic Regulation in Cancer Program and Surgical Director of the USC Brain Tumor Center, who was awarded Physician of the Year by Keck Medicine of USC.**



**Congratulations to Dr. David Cobrinik, member of the USC Norris Epigenetic Regulation in Cancer Program, who was awarded the 2023 Robert M. Ellsworth Lectureship.** Dr. Cobrinik's Ellsworth Lecture, entitled "Retinoblastoma Origins and Trajectories," was presented at the biennial meeting of the International Society for Genetic Eye Disease and Retinoblastoma, in São Paulo, Brazil. This award recognizes impactful basic, translational, or clinical research on retinoblastoma, a childhood eye cancer.

## *New Grants*



**Congratulations to Dr. Jennifer Tsui, Director for Cancer Care Delivery Research and Implementation Science at USC Norris, who was recently awarded a major grant by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities to fund research focused on assessing cervical cancer healthcare inequities in diverse populations.** Co-led by Dr. Adana Llanos at Columbia University, this study recruits from the Los Angeles Cancer Surveillance Program and the New Jersey State Cancer Registry.



**Dr. Evanthisa Roussos Torres, member of the USC Norris Tumor Immunology & Microenvironment Program, was awarded R01 funding from the National Cancer Institute to investigate how targeting myeloid suppression enhances anti-tumor immunity in breast cancer.** Her work will reveal how epigenetic modulation of myeloid suppression in breast cancers can improve response to checkpoint inhibition. Along with collaborators, she will incorporate mathematical modeling that will decipher the complex and collective mechanisms of altered suppression, as well as predict tumor response to novel therapies.

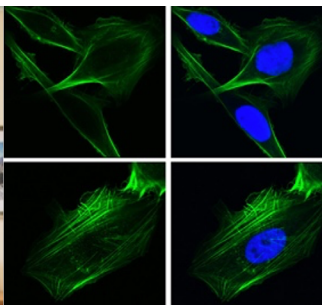


Acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) is the most common cancer in children and remains a leading cause of childhood mortality, yet we do not fully understand its etiology. **Congratulations to Dr. Adam de Smith, member of the USC Norris Cancer Epidemiology Program, who received a \$600,000 grant from the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society to identify children with the highest risk of developing ALL and lay the groundwork towards newborn screening of preleukemia and potential disease prevention.**



**Congratulations to Dr. Ahmad Besaratinia, member of the USC Norris Cancer Epidemiology Program, for being awarded a grant by the Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program to investigate the health consequences of youth vaping by characterizing disease-related molecular changes in the cells and tissues of youth who are regular users of electronic cigarettes.** This research will lead to the generation of urgently needed data, which will inform the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s regulation of tobacco products to protect youth and promote public health, as tobacco is a major risk factor for developing cancer.

## *Scientific Advances and Discoveries*



### **Study finds new, unexpected mechanism of cancer cell spread**

Published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Dr. Amy Lee, member of the USC Norris Epigenetic Regulation in Cancer Program and professor of biochemistry and molecular medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, and her team discovered

that when cancer cells are under stress, a key protein known as GRP78, which helps regulate the folding of other proteins inside cells, can travel to the nucleus and reprogram the cells to migrate and become more invasive. The findings could represent a paradigm shift for cell biology and have implications for cancer therapeutics research. Learn more by clicking [HERE](#).

**“ When it comes to the basic mechanisms of cancer cells, this is something novel that, to my knowledge, no one has observed before. To our big surprise, we found that the key genes being regulated by GRP78 in the nucleus are mainly involved with cell migration and invasion. The protein itself is the soldier that does the job, but now we’re thinking it’s not just about the soldier, but also where the soldier is deployed.”**

**–Amy Lee, PhD**



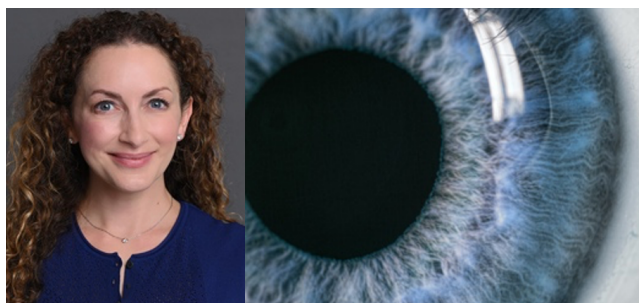
## FDA Approval Marks New Era for Preventing Cisplatin-Induced Hearing Loss

On Sept. 20, 2022, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved sodium thiosulfate as the first treatment to reduce the risk of hearing loss in children given cisplatin, a common chemotherapy agent used to treat several types of pediatric cancer.

Dr. David Freyer, member of the USC Norris Cancer Control Research Program, led the pivotal phase 3 trial that demonstrated that sodium thiosulfate reduced the incidence of cisplatin-induced hearing loss in children by more than 50% that led to FDA approval. Moreover, Dr. Etan Orgel, member of the USC Norris Cancer Control Research Program, recently completed a phase 1/2 trial of another antioxidant, N-acetylcysteine, to see if it protects hearing during cisplatin therapy. Learn more by clicking [HERE](#).

“ This is truly a shared achievement. It’s a testament to the dedication of so many people—preclinical scientists, laboratory technologists, clinical trialists, the National Cancer Institute, which funded the trial, the FDA, the manufacturer of sodium thiosulfate, and especially the parents and patients who signed up for these trials. When we all work together, we can accomplish amazing things.”

–David Freyer, DO, MS



## USC Norris member discovers the potential of aqueous humor as a liquid biopsy for uveal melanoma

Uveal melanoma (UM) is the most common primary intraocular cancer in adults. Published in the *International Journal of Molecular Science*, Dr. Jesse Berry, member of the USC Norris Epigenetic Regulation in

Cancer Program, discovered that the aqueous humor can serve as a liquid biopsy for uveal melanoma. This paper continues the conversation on the role and potential clinical utility of this liquid biopsy platform for ocular cancers. Read the full publication [HERE](#).

“ We are showing that the aqueous humor, which has been a blockbuster for the pediatric eye cancer retinoblastoma, may have a similar ‘knock it outta the park’ role for uveal melanoma, a rare eye cancer in adults. A liquid biopsy approach is easier, safer, and more repeatable than a direct tumor biopsy. Also, some patients with UM have very small tumors that are not amenable to biopsy due to risk of bleeding and vision loss — but they can absolutely have a liquid biopsy.”

–Jesse Berry, MD

## Community Outreach and Engagement:



This past month our CaRE2 Community Scientist Research Advocacy Program organized multiple immersive activities for its community scientist trainees, giving them the chance to visit cutting-edge laboratory units at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. The community scientist trainees were able to witness firsthand the groundbreaking work of our cancer researchers in their daily lab operations. Throughout the visit, the trainees actively engaged with project leaders, asking them thoughtful questions regarding their research in pancreatic, prostate, and lung cancers. They also had the opportunity to view tumor tissues under microscopes and experience the pipetting process, making it a truly hands-on experience!



The USC Norris Cancer Survivorship Advisory Council (CSAC) recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. CSAC is a volunteer group of recently diagnosed cancer patients, longtime survivors, and family members who have cared for loved ones with cancer. The event brought everyone together at the Edmonson Faculty Center on the Health Sciences Campus, and celebrated the history of the program, included inspiring testimonials from cancer survivors, and even music performed by one of the council members.

CSAC members advise clinicians and researchers on issues bearing on the quality of patient care, actively support advancements in cancer research, and help identify and address areas where the unique patient perspective is most needed. The council meets on the second Wednesday of each month. New members are welcome. If you are interested in learning more about CSAC, please go to: <https://uscnorriscancer.usc.edu/csac/Default.aspx>, or email [mary.aalto@med.usc.edu](mailto:mary.aalto@med.usc.edu).

## Faculty Spotlight



### Jennifer Tsui, PhD, Director for Cancer Care Delivery Research and Implementation Science (CCD/IS) at USC Norris, member of the USC Norris Cancer Control Research Program

As a health services researcher with training in cancer epidemiology, mixed methods, and implementation science, Dr. Tsui's research focuses on reducing inequities in cancer care access, quality, and outcomes through implementation of evidence-based strategies in diverse communities and health care settings. Dr. Tsui received her M.P.H. in epidemiology from the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University and her Ph.D. in Health Policy and Management from the Fielding School of Public Health at UCLA.

**"I witnessed first-hand all the social barriers that could be faced by diverse communities in receiving health care that is linguistically and culturally appropriate while also high quality,"** said Tsui. **"During my MPH program, I was exposed to the field of cancer epidemiology and while I was drawn to addressing the multiple factors that impact cancer care and outcomes, it was the health care delivery and community access side that led me to focus on addressing system and structural barriers to cancer prevention and control."**

Dr. Tsui joined the USC Norris faculty in June 2020 as an Associate Professor of Population and Public Health Sciences. She was recently appointed the inaugural NCCC Director for Cancer Care Delivery Research and Implementation Science (CCD/IS). In this role, Dr. Tsui is responsible for fostering research that improves patient, clinician, and organizational factors that influence cancer care delivery and facilitates the uptake of evidence-based practice and research into regular use by practitioners and policymakers. She will expand NCCC's outreach to Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), health systems, and other organizations throughout the catchment area, and develop training programs that will foster CCD/IS research. The efforts of CCD/IS will be critical to the NCCC strategic priorities of addressing cancer disparities.

**"I am excited to engage with cancer center members and other collaborators across the USC campus and beyond to come together and lead innovative ideas for addressing disparities in cancer care delivery,"** said Tsui. **"Implementation science is a crucial field that can address cancer equity, as we possess tools that can prevent, detect or effectively treat cancers; however, persistent disparities across different groups still exist. I aim to inspire individuals from diverse disciplines to unite and champion significant ideas that could tackle the issues of cancer equity."**

Her research also focuses on advancing the use of evidence-based strategies and providing guideline-adherence care in safety-net health care settings. Since the introduction of HPV vaccines, Dr. Tsui has led and contributed to research that examines multi-level factors associated with HPV vaccine uptake at the local, state, national, and international levels. Her recent work also utilizes cancer registry information, population-based surveys, geographic/spatial data, and Medicaid claims to understand multilevel influences on patterns of care and care quality for cancer patients. She has worked in cancer prevention and control at the local, national, and international levels, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization. Dr. Tsui is currently principal investigator of a multi-year NCI-funded study to examine stakeholder experiences with HPV vaccination and implementation of evidence-based strategies for HPV vaccination in safety-net clinics. She also co-leads a new NIMHD-funded study to address healthcare inequities related to cervical cancer treatment and survivorship.

continued on page 7 ...

“Healthcare, and cancer care in particular, is complex,” said Tsui. “Medically underserved communities don’t always receive the same access to high-quality, evidence-based care as other groups. However, when effective tools such as the HPV vaccine, cancer screenings, and efficient treatments are available, it becomes imperative and a matter of social justice to ensure their equitable availability—especially for groups disproportionately burdened by cancer. My research aims to concentrate on enhancing access for communities and advancing the implementation of effective cancer prevention tools and treatments within settings serving the most in-need groups. This can be achieved through both healthcare delivery, community-based participatory, and policy research.”

Recently, Dr. Tsui and her colleagues, in partnership with the Los Angeles Chinatown Service Center, were awarded a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant to establish one of 11 nationwide community health service centers to address disparities among underrepresented minorities in life-saving cervical cancer screenings, referrals, and treatment.

### *The Patient Voice: Jared Lipscomb*



As his career as a make-up artist was taking off in 2019, Jared Lipscomb began feeling tremendously ill. To figure out the root of the problem, he spent months going to doctors, specialists, urgent cares, and emergency rooms. Finally, he was admitted, and a doctor recommended a bone marrow biopsy, which revealed the unimaginable. At 31 years old, Jared was diagnosed with an aggressive form of Acute Myeloid Leukemia.

“I had no idea how to move forward,” said Jared. “Just two months earlier, my life was moving fast in so many directions and then...it just stopped. While trying to navigate this diagnosis, I had only one question: ‘Am I going to live?’ I think I asked everyone.... from my parents, to nurses, to doctors, to the CNAs helping with my room. I was so scared, and things happened so fast.”

Once diagnosed, he started an aggressive treatment of chemotherapy that required a 30-day hospital stay. One month later, Jared received the news that every cancer patient yearns to hear, he was in remission. However, an aggressive mutation of the cancer would put his remission at risk. He needed an allogenic stem cell transplant. After conducting research on the USC Norris Blood and Marrow Transplant and Cell Therapy Program and meeting with Dr. George Yaghmour, he began his treatment at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Five months later, while in the hospital during a routine monthly chemotherapy session, Jared’s doctor delivered the joyous news that a match had been found for his allogenic stem cell transplant. On March 13, 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic took hold, and countries and cities around the world went into lockdown, Jared arrived at the USC Norris Cancer Hospital to receive his stem cell transplant.

“Thanks to the tireless efforts of USC Norris and Be The Match (a bone marrow donor registry), the global shutdown didn’t affect my treatment plan,” said Jared. “However, this time the doctors and nurses would play an even more instrumental role in my recovery - a makeshift family - as no visitors were allowed due to coronavirus precautions. I will always be so appreciative to my transplant team, Dr. Yaghmour, and the many nurses who are still my friends to this day.”

continued on page 8 ...

Thankfully, due to the care he received by Dr. Yaghmour, the transplant team, and all the nurses and staff at USC Norris, Jared has remained fully in remission. There are a multitude of things that have helped Jared get through his cancer diagnosis and treatment, one of them being the incredible support system surrounding him made up of family and friends.

**“I quickly learned that in order to survive, it meant I would need to lean on the amazing people around me to get through each day,”** said Jared. **“I relied on the expertise of the doctors and nurses who knew what to do when I had 104-degree fevers. I relied on my brother doing yoga with me in the hospital when I felt like I could barely move. I relied on my mom singing pop songs with me so I would exercise my lungs. I relied on my dad to walk the halls to build up my strength, and I relied on visits with friends to get me through some of the loneliest times. I learned quickly that I was not alone and that I had not only a village, but an entire city of support surrounding me, ready to help me survive.”**



He also joined the USC Norris Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Program that put him into contact with other young adults who had received a cancer diagnosis. Together, they support one another and help each other process what they are going through. The USC Norris AYA Program, established in 2013, aims to improve health outcomes and quality of life of adolescents and young adults with cancer through supportive care and research that address the medical, physical, psychosocial, spiritual, financial, and legal aspects for these patients.

**“Survivorship is not one size fits all,”** said Jared. **“Personally, I haven’t felt like my pre-cancer self in a long time; I’m not sure I ever will. However, I’m confident that being a survivor means taking it one day at a time. No matter what ‘it’ is. It’s very easy to focus on the sad and scary, rightfully so. It’s easy to focus on what we’re losing: our hair, our career, our life as we know it. But we can’t stay in the loss. We can visit it, but we can’t stay there. At least I know I can’t. I have to take each day as it comes and accept the good and the bad.”**



In June, Jared spoke as a cancer survivor at the 33rd Festival of Life, hosted by USC Norris. His words of strength and resilience were an inspiration to all in attendance.

**“I know survivorship is a gift not everyone receives,”** said Jared. **“But I do believe the moment we get that diagnosis we become survivors. Getting through a single round of chemo or radiation makes us a survivor. Being able to hold on one more day makes us survivors. If this community has taught me anything, it is that strength can be found when you least expect it. I’m Jared Lipscomb and I am a Cancer Survivor.”**



## Why Your Gift Matters



A common tool that physicians use to contextualize the severity of a cancer diagnosis is the “five-year survival rate.” While prostate cancer, when caught in its earliest stage, can have a 99% five-year survival rate, it is especially impressive to meet someone who was treated in their sixties and is now on their seventh five-year stretch post-diagnosis!

At ninety-two years young, Gary Herman Sr. is a testament to what can be achieved by combining a life well lived with world-class medical care. Born to generations of farmers in Minnesota in 1930, before making his way out to California at seventeen. After a deployment in 1950 took him to Japan and South Korea, Gary Sr. returned to Los Angeles, married his sweetheart Beverly, and became a father to three sons. Alongside a growing family and busy career, Gary Sr. earned his BS and MBA from USC.

As a proud member of the Trojan community, Gary Sr. received his medical care from USC-affiliated doctors who were at the forefront of using a cutting-edge diagnostic screening known as the prostate-specific antigen test (PSA), that is now an incredibly familiar marker for patients, their families, and caregivers. When his levels quickly jumped from 4 (in-range) to 18 (very high), he knew he needed the best cancer care there was. At first, he thought he would need to go out of state, looking into treatment through Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and MD Anderson in Houston. He was relieved when his doctor told him that the best in prostate cancer care west of the Mississippi was right there at his alma mater – the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. Gary Sr. received treatment thirty-three years ago and has not had a health problem since (except, he admits, a few issues with his back).

He still makes his way into the office every day and serves as President of SD Herman Co., an industrial & commercial real estate brokerage firm, where he started in 1955 and today works alongside his three sons and oldest grandson. When asked to what Gary Sr. attributes his longevity, he says that “you have to stay active.” He works, exercises, travels, enjoys time with family, volunteers with his church, and is deeply committed to his volunteerism and philanthropy. He counts USC Norris among the worthwhile causes he is happy to invest in. In true Trojan spirit, Gary Sr. is the embodiment of what it means to **“Fight On!”**



**With your help, we can make cancer a disease of the past.**

[\*\*GIVE NOW >>\*\*](#)

## Upcoming Events

### Cancer Center Grand Rounds, featuring Drs Abdulla Ladha, Willian Dean Wallace & Crystal Marconett

#### *Shared Resources*

September 12, 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 Abdullah Ladha, MD

September 26, 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 George Yaghmour, MD

October 10, 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 Dr. Stephen J. Chanock, MD

#### *Integrating Epidemiology and Genomics to Investigate Radiation-related Consequences of the Chornobyl Accident in 1986*

October 24, 2023, 12-1 pm

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

## **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>