

Community for a Cure

Newsletter from the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

From the Director:



I am proud to share with you that USC Norris at Keck Medicine of USC renewed its comprehensiveness designation by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the highest federal rank for a cancer center in the nation. This designation accompanies NCI funding of over \$33 million to support our research, training, and community outreach missions for the next five years. USC Norris has held this prestigious NCI designation continuously since it became one of the nation's first eight NCI-designated cancer centers in 1973.

The NCI review and renewal of this coveted designation was the result of an extensive grant application and review process that culminated with an NCI virtual site visit in May 2021. USC Norris earned a near-perfect overall rating (a score of 16 in a system where 10 is perfect and 90 is the weakest possible score). This is the best score in the history of USC Norris.

The renewal of this prestigious designation for USC Norris is a testament to our exceptional team of scientists, clinicians, and staff who work tirelessly to generate breakthrough discoveries that are revolutionizing how we assess risk, prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer and to our exceptional community outreach and engagement.

USC Norris has a rich tradition of collaboration across multiple USC Schools, as well as with our close partners, [Children's Hospital of Los Angeles](#) (CHLA) and Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center. Building upon this success, we will leverage our new patient care facilities to expand our life-saving clinical trials including the Norris Healthcare Consultation Center, Koreatown Clinic, and oncology clinics in Pasadena, Buena Park, and Arcadia.

For more information about USC Norris, go to <https://uscnorriscancer.usc.edu>.

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



News



Chris Draft, NFL Football Player, presented a white ribbon to USC Norris

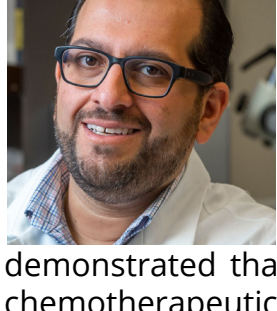
Chris Draft visited USC Norris and shared the message for the White Ribbon Project with our exceptional lung cancer clinical team and our survivors. We are proud to support his efforts to bring awareness to the need to support lung cancer research at NCI-Designated Cancer Centers across the nation.



Dr. Joseph Wiemels, member of the USC Norris Cancer Epidemiology Program, publishes new data that indicates inherited risk of early-onset cancer is higher amongst Latino, African American, and Asian/Pacific Islander families

Published in *eLife*, Dr. Wiemels and colleagues showed for the first time that family-based cancer clustering occurs more frequently among minority populations. Inherited risk of early-onset cancer was significantly higher among Latino and African American families for solid tumors, and for blood-based cancers among Asian/Pacific Islander families, compared to non-Latino white families in California. This will aid health care providers and genetic counselors in risk assessment and prevention of cancer in different ethnic/racial populations.

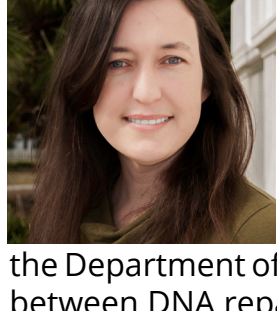
Read the full publication here: <https://bit.ly/3sZ4U3q>.



Dr. Josh Neman, member of the USC Norris Tumor Microenvironment Program, published data demonstrating that a critical enzyme can be chemotherapeutically targeted to alleviate metastatic tumor burden on pediatric patients

Published in *Cell Reports*, Dr. Josh Neman and colleagues demonstrated that an enzyme called GABA transaminase, abbreviated as ABAT, can be chemotherapeutically targeted to reduce metastatic tumor burden among pediatric patients, thereby increasing patient survival and quality of life. These findings may provide clues to new strategies for targeting deadly brain metastases.

Read full publication here: <https://bit.ly/2WkVuU1>.



Dr. Crystal Marconett, member of the USC Norris Genomic and Epigenetic Regulation Program, received a grant to investigate how a specific form of RNA affects the relationship between DNA repair and immuno-therapeutic responses

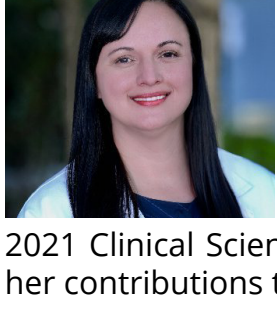
USC Norris member Dr. Marconett received a major new grant from the Department of Defense to investigate how a specific form of RNA affects the relationship between DNA repair and immune responses in lung cancer. This work lays the foundation for the development of a novel biomarker that predicts whether a tumor can be recognized by the immune system and will aid in immunotherapy treatment.



Dr. David Freyer, member of the USC Norris Cancer Control Research Program, and his colleagues discovered that adolescents and young adults are less likely to present with metastatic disease for almost every cancer

Published in *JNCI Cancer Spectrum*, USC Norris member Dr. Freyer and colleagues discovered that adolescents and young adults (AYAs) are less likely to present with metastatic disease for almost every cancer, except for breast and stomach cancer. AYAs from different minority groups are at higher risk of developing breast, kidney, and stomach cancer.

Read the full publication here: <https://bit.ly/3z5KWXC>. To learn more about the USC Norris AYA Program, go here: <https://aya.usc.edu>.



Dr. Juliet Emamaullee, member of the USC Norris Tumor Microenvironment Program, has been awarded the 2021 Clinical Science Development Award

Congratulations to Dr. Juliet Emamaullee who has been awarded the 2021 Clinical Science Development Award by the American Society of Transplantation for her contributions to the field of transplantation and the society.

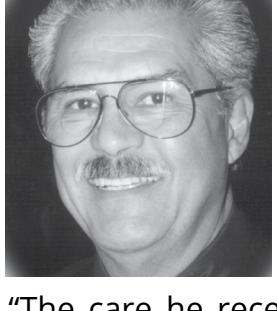
Staff Member of the Month



John Johnson, Research Lab Tech III/Supervisor

Mr. Johnson has served as a research lab tech and supervisor at USC Norris since 1995. His job responsibilities include managing multiple laboratories, managing the BioReagent facility, supporting the Cancer Center Administration team, assisting the facilities manager, and overseeing room reservations within the Cancer Center. When Mr. Johnson is not at work, he enjoys spending time with his family and friends. Three words that would best describe Mr. Johnson are perceptive, dependable, and trustworthy.

Why Your Gifts Matter:



In 1998, David Muñoz's father, Augustine Muñoz, known by family and friends as "Augie," was diagnosed with a rare form of pancreatic cancer. After visiting multiple cancer hospitals, the Muñoz family decided to have Augie treated at USC Norris. Though the cancer progressed quickly, and Augie passed away, David and Kirsten Muñoz will never forget the exceptional and compassionate care both Augie and the entire Muñoz Family received from the physicians, nurses, and staff at USC Norris.

"The care he received at USC Norris and the consideration that was given to the family was so immense," said Kirsten Muñoz. "It was unlike anywhere else we went."

To honor Augie and support pancreatic cancer research, David and Kirsten Muñoz founded the Augustine L. Muñoz Cancer Research Fund in 1999 with a group of David's childhood friends. For the last 23 years, the Muñozes, along with family and all proceeds, host an annual golf tournament fundraiser, with all proceeds benefiting pancreatic cancer research at USC Norris. The event includes a fun afternoon of golf followed by entertainment, cocktails, and dinner. To date, the tournament has raised over \$300,000 in funding for pancreatic cancer research at USC Norris. David and Kirsten are members of the USC Norris Director's Leadership Council.



"We have visited USC Norris over the years and have seen the advancements that have been made in cancer research," said David Muñoz, executive director of the Augustine L. Muñoz Cancer Research Fund. "We feel like we have had a part in funding that."

For the last two years, the Muñoz Family has not been able to host the annual golf tournament due to Covid-19. However, this coming October, they will be hosting "An Evening in Monte Carlo: Casino Night and Texas Hold 'Em Poker Tournament" on October 23, 2021, at 5 PM at the San Gabriel Country Club. All proceeds from the event will benefit pancreatic cancer research at USC Norris. This event will include presentations from Dr. Caryn Lerman, director of USC Norris, and leading scientists in pancreatic cancer research. To register for this event, go to www.AugieMunoz.org or please call 323.855.0048. More details on the event are forthcoming.

In the United States, pancreatic cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths, and often by the time a symptom appears, the cancer has already spread to other organs or parts of the body. Donors like David and Kirsten Muñoz are vital in advancing cancer research forward. Thanks to their support, USC Norris will continue to generate groundbreaking research that will help countless patients and their families for years to come, while honoring Augie's legacy.

Upcoming Events

Cancer Center Grand Rounds

September 14, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Steven Grossman, MD

Zoom link: <https://uscm.zoom.us/j/95144996434>

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

Virtual Patient Perspective Series: A Conversation on Empathy, Loss, and Friendship

September 16, 2021, 12-1 pm

Speaker: Sigrid Nunez, New York Times bestselling author; Dr. Sunita Puri, USC medical director of palliative care and author

Registration Link: <https://bit.ly/3yJ3FYb>

For more information, contact Mary Aalto at mary.aalto@med.usc.edu.

An Evening in Monte Carlo: Casino Night and Texas Hold 'Em Poker Tournament

October 23, 2021, 5 pm

Speakers: Dr. Caryn Lerman, director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center; two leading scientists in pancreatic cancer research at USC Norris

Registration at: www.AugieMunoz.org or 323.855.0048

Have something to contribute to Community for a Cure? Send it to Hinde.Kast@med.usc.edu

Please contact Minhaal M. Nathani, Senior Director of Development, at minhaaln@usc.edu to learn more about giving to USC Norris.