Breast-cancer prevention research focuses on diet, exercise

Researchers are studying breast-cancer prevention from its genetic origin through its link to proper diet and exercise — the areas studied by investigators Monica Baskin, Ph.D., (right) and Dori Pekmezzi, Ph.D.

Researchers are searching for strategies to prevent breast cancer — from its genetic origin to its link to proper diet and exercise.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, excluding non-melanoma skin cancers, and it is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in women today. Worldwide, the American Cancer Society predicts about 1.3 million women will be diagnosed with breast cancer annually and more than a third will die from the disease; about 1 in 35 U.S. women die from it.

Monica Baskin, Ph.D., and Dori Pekmezzi, Ph.D., are examining the socio-cultural influence on the diets of black women in the Deep South and the effect regular physical activity can have in substantially reducing the risk for developing and dying from cancer.

Baskin, an associate professor in preventive medicine, is working with investigators and physicians in the Comprehensive Cancer Center.

“There’s growing evidence of the link between obesity and cancer, and African-American women in the Deep South have the highest rates of obesity and breast-cancer mortality,” Baskin says. “With respect to nutrition and prevention, there definitely is a history of evidence suggesting that eating lots of fruits and vegetables, reducing red meat intake and avoiding processed foods is helpful in preventing cancer.

“We know for sure that is not happening in the Deep South, particularly among black women.”

The diet factor

Cancer rates are 10 percent higher among African-Americans than Caucasians, but death rates are twice as high. Though the cause of the differences is unknown, some researchers suggest diet is the cause, but Baskin says the empirical evidence to support that claim is minimal at best.

She hopes to gather evidence by interviewing approximately 300 women in 22 counties in Alabama and Mississippi during the next three years. Women in the metro Birmingham and Hattiesburg, Miss., areas will be interviewed along with those in counties in the Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta.

“This combination of rural and urban women should give us diversity in terms of income and age,” Baskin says. “We really want to look at the social and cultural issue. After this initial, more qualitative work, we will follow up in those same counties with another set of 300 women.

We will use behavioral surveys and capture information on their dietary intake to see if what the ladies said influences their diet really does.”

Findings from the study may better explain the limited success by black women in achieving recommended dietary intake and better inform future interventions for black women at greatest risk for obesity and other health issues.

Effective Oct. 17, UAB Hospital changed the way patients receive their food during their stay. In an effort to create a better patient experience, pre-prepared and re-heated foods are out, freshly cooked and prepared to order-when-ready meals are on the menu.

“Shifting to this hotel-style room service represents a major change in the process for us,” says Charlotte Beeker, director of food, nutrition and guest services. “Previously, we were a cook and chill service, where food was cooked, flash chilled and then re-heated as needed. Now, all meals will be cooked to order.”

The change will be for all patients — even intensive-care unit patients — and each patient will have a variety of choices for breakfast, lunch and dinner. If patients are restricted to a liquid diet, they or their representatives can choose the flavor of broth.

Every patient will have a menu in their room similar to a typical restaurant menu. The patient, family member or nurse, can call 4-MEAL (4-6325) and place their order with an operator between the hours of 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. The kitchen will cook the meal made-to-order and it will be delivered within 45 minutes.

“We think this will allow for a better patient experience,” Beeker says. “Patients order what they want to eat when they want to eat it rather than have a food tray appear in their room on our schedule.”

The hotel-style room service does not add any additional costs to the patient’s stay. Beeker says there will be advantages for the patient and the hospital now that the patient is in control when they receive their food.

“If a patient has just come back to the room from a procedure, they may not want a large meal, but they might be able to eat a warm bowl of soup,” she says. “Or if they finished therapy at 4:30 p.m., they might want to wait until 6:30 p.m. to eat dinner. It should lead to less wasted food and improve our patient-centered experience.”

The shift to the hotel-style room service plan has been in the planning stage for the past two years.
Open enrollment now underway

The annual benefits open enrollment period is under way, which means that all benefit-eligible UAB employees should be making final decisions related to medical, dental, vision, voluntary AD&D insurance coverage and flexible spending accounts well before 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 29.

Open enrollment is being handled exclusively through the web. For more information on open enrollment, please visit our website at www.mhsl.uab.edu/benefits.

MBA program is one of nation’s best, says Princeton Review

UAB’s School of Business MBA program is one of the best in the nation, according to The Princeton Review’s new 2011 edition of The Best 300 Business Schools. The Princeton Review does not rank schools academically or hierarchically but compiles its list based on surveys of 19,000 students from the 300 schools profiled in the book.

This is the fifth consecutive year that the UAB MBA program has placed in the education-services company's list of nation’s best, according to The Princeton Review’s listing of best business schools for a fifth consecutive year. “The UAB School of Business is establishing itself as a destination institution, and the quality of our MBA program is just one of the many reasons why the business leaders of tomorrow are choosing a business program at UAB,” says David Klock, Ph.D., dean of the UAB School of Business. “We are proud to have UAB’s new MBA program appear in The Princeton Review’s listing of best business schools for a fifth consecutive year.”

UB Eye Care to host designer trunk show

UB Eye Care, the clinical operation for the UAB School of Optometry, will hold its annual trunk show Friday Oct. 29 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at its Optical Department. The show will feature a variety of designer frames, sunglasses, protective eyewear for sports and other optical accessories. Opticians also will be available to discuss various options and to help individuals make selections. Payroll deduction is available for UAB employees. For more information call 975-2020 or visit www.uab.edu/ubeye-care.

Stay in, step up for the No-Show Ball

Leave your ball gowns and tuxedos in the closet and grab your comfy clothes for a night in to support the UAB School of Nursing Junior Board of Visitors fundraiser in creating an endowed scholarship in pediatric nursing. The No-Show Ball 2010 on Sunday, Nov. 14 is just that — you don’t have to show up. For $100 participants receive a basket that includes dinner for four by B&A Warehouse, wine and other treats from other local businesses and will be delivered to their doorstep at some point between 1 and 4 p.m. Sunday. For more information call 975-8936 or e-mail nursealum@uab.edu.
Cold case: Bringing old murder cases back from the dead

On television, detectives can crack a murder case in less than an hour. But in the real world, criminal investigations often remain unsolved for years due to a lack of evidence, witnesses or suspects.

“In a homicide case, the first 48 hours are critical,” says UAB forensic scientist Elizabeth Gardner, Ph.D. “The more time that passes, the harder the case is to solve.” But time also can be a detective’s friend. Gardner adds. New technologies appear on the scene, such as DNA tests, and witnesses who were once silent may become willing to talk. Now students at UAB can learn to crack those so-called cold cases in a new course that Gardner teaches with instructor John Grimes. J.D. Working in teams, students conduct a mock criminal investigation modeled on a real-life case. This spring it was a homicide resulting from a drug deal gone bad in Pennsylvania in the mid-1980s. Students examined old police reports and conducted interviews with witnesses — played by members of the UAB Mock Trial Team. The students then presented their case to Grimes, the “district attorneys,” to request an arrest warrant. The course ended with a visit from investigator Rodney George, who solved the real case in 2002.

“The class exposes students to investigations and forensic science and to the process for conducting background checks, interviewing, creating a timeline and organizing a case,” Gardner says. They also hear from guest speakers with expertise in cold-case investigations.

Gardner also developed the Cold Case Project. Its first investigation: assist Homewood city detectives considering whether to reopen a 1998 case involving the death of a man gunned down in the parking lot of his apartment complex. Gardner selected three graduate students to work on the project. For 10 months, the group gathered in a designated cold-case room in the Justice Sciences department to organize police and forensic science reports, listen to witness statements and discuss the available evidence — the first steps in reopening any cold case, Gardner says.

“I think every day we could look at that case and find something new,” says student Lindsay Duty. “It took us about two months just to read it cover to cover and get familiar with all the names and people and places involved.” In May, the Homewood Police Department gave the three students a special commendation for their work.

Research Civitan Club rallies help to raise funds for Retts

It hasn’t taken very long for UAB’s Research Civitan Club to have an impact. Now research money it helped raise for the International Rett Syndrome Foundation (IRSF) will be coming to UAB.

The club, founded this past summer, spearheaded an effort to rally UAB people to vote for the Pepsi Refresh Project, which contributed to winning a $250,000 reward for IRSF. Pepsi announced the award Oct. 1, the first day of Rett Syndrome Month. That money will be matched by the Pioneer Fund of Colorado for a total $500,000 for IRSF, which funds research at UAB.

“The UAB Research Civitan Club wanted to play a huge role in drumming up support for this project,” says Susan Campbell, director for research, outreach and development for the UAB Civitan International Research Center (CIRC). “Part of that included requesting help from all of the Civitan clubs around the country. We initiated it, but I’m sure all of the Civitan Clubs around the country — and probably internationally — helped us tremendously.”

The Pepsi Refresh Project has been seeking ideas from people, businesses and non-profits that will have a positive impact on their community, awarding grants of $5,000, $25,000, $50,000 and $250,000 each month for most of 2010. Pepsi only awards two $250,000 grants each month.

The International Rett Syndrome Foundation submitted a proposal that had to be voted on by the public either through a text, Facebook or through the Pepsi Refresh Project website. The UAB Civitan Research Club informed other Civitan clubs of the proposal and asked for their votes, and Campbell spoke to the panhellenic and national pan-hellenic councils, attended other student council meetings and received support from UAB fraternities and sororities.

“The money we receive from the award will provide support for the existing studies at UAB,” says Alan Percy, M.D., medical director of the CIRC. “It also will represent a pool of money from which to request funds.”

UAB’s Research Civitan Club helped raise money for the International Rett Syndrome Foundation, which will be awarded a total of $500,000. Some of the money will come to UAB to provide support for existing Rett syndrome studies, says Alan Percy, medical director of the Civitan International Research Center. Rett syndrome (RTT), a brain disorder affecting development in childhood, has been identified almost exclusively in females. It results in severe movement and communication problems following apparently normal development for the first six months of life. The characteristic features include loss of speech and purposeful hand use, repetitive hand movements, abnormal walking, abnormal breathing and slowing in the rate of head growth. No cure for Rett syndrome is known.

Current research includes clinical and basic research efforts, and Percy believes one day these will converge as treatment trials to address a fundamental cure.

“From the clinical perspective, through our Rare Disease Grant, we are examining the natural history and phenotype-genotype correlations of RTT in order to be in good position for clinical trials,” Percy says. There is a belief that Rett syndrome may hold the key to finding better treatments and cures for other neurological disorders, including autism and schizophrenia.

“The gene associated with Rett syndrome also may produce other clinical disorders resembling autism or schizophrenia without specific signs of RTT,” Percy says. “We are able to manage these behavioral issues pharmacologically to some extent. More important, perhaps, at the biological level, understanding the role of this gene (MECP2) certainly will provide important insights into these and other behavioral phenotypes.”

Upcoming meetings

The Research Civitan Club meets the third Tuesday of every month at 5:30 p.m. in CIRC Room 120. Call 996-4939 or e-mail susancampbell@uab.edu if you are interested in joining the club.

Lindsay Duty (left), Katherine Simmons (right), and Shannon Grock helped UAB forensic scientist Elizabeth Gardner (center) investigate a 1998 unsolved murder.

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eople often think of the biological clock as something that is helpful for sleep, which is one of its functions, but it does far more than that, says UAB cardiology researcher Martin Young, Ph. D. “These clocks are actually present in essentially every cell in your body,” he says. “We think that biological clocks prepare the heart before you wake up. They up-regulate the proteins that are protective and will enable the heart to function better in the morning, just like your alarm clock.”

Ongoing research shows that circadian cycles play prominent roles in health and disease. In fact, investigators have linked the biological clock to everything from heart attacks to psychiatric conditions and diet success.

The brain’s master clock is located in the hypothalamus, in a region called the suprachiasmatic nucleus. Studies have found that this internal timekeeper is involved in the regulation of many physiological processes, including body temperature and digestive tract function. It is usually synchronized to external time signals such as light and dark, but its natural cycles can persist in the absence of such signals: Hop a flight to Calcutta, and you’re likely to still feel sleepy at your normal bedtime, even if it’s high noon in your new location.

Our reactions to this jet lag are not uniform, however. Some people quickly adjust with few side-effects; others spend their vacations in a bleary-eyed netherworld between sleep and waking.

“If you’re out of synchrony with your environment, or if you have a lack of synchrony between organs, they’re all going to be telling different times — and that’s going to create problems.”

Karen Gamble is working with colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry to test a drug that could help reset sleep timing in patients with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder who also suffer from insomnia.

“Clock watching”

UAB psychiatry researcher Karen Gamble, Ph.D., specializes in the secrets of circadian rhythms. She is particularly interested in events that throw these cycles off-kilter, such as shift work. In one study, Gamble and colleagues at Vanderbilt University explored genetic and environmental predictors of adaptation in hospital nurses whose schedules called for three 12-hour day shifts, followed by four days off, and then three 12-hour night shifts. The study found that specific circadian clock genes were associated with a nurse’s typical sleep duration, alcohol and caffeine consumption, and level of sleepiness.

Nurses often live in a state of perpetual jet lag, says Gamble. “It’s like flying back and forth between Tokyo and San Francisco every three days,” she explains. Clock disruptions can greatly disrupt sleep and are a characteristic of many mental health disorders and diseases, including depression and schizophrenia, Gamble says. They also are implicated in illnesses such as the cold and flu. “There is definitely an interplay in circadian rhythms and immune function.”

Gamble hopes to leverage her circadian research into new treatments. She now is working with colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry to test a drug that could help reset sleep timing in patients with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder who also suffer from insomnia.

“Time to eat”

UAB research has also identified a role for biological clocks in diet and weight gain. In a recent study, Young and epidemiologist Molly Bray, Ph. D., fed two types of meals to mice. Those who ate a carbohydrate-rich diet in the morning and consumed a high-fat meal at the end of the day saw increased weight gain, adiposity, glucose intolerance and other markers of metabolic syndrome. Mice who received a high-fat meal in the morning showed little change.

“Fat intake at the time of waking seems to turn on fat metabolism very efficiently, and it also turns on the animal’s ability to respond to different types of food later in the day,” says Bray, the study’s lead author. “The first meal we eat appears to program our metabolism for the rest of the day.”

Young, and nutrition scientist Barbara Gomer, Ph.D., are now working on a first-of-its-kind study in human populations.

Entering the Twilight Zone

Circadian cycles extend beyond the 24-hour window. Young notes, in fact, our bodies note the passing of weeks and seasons. There is a complex interconnection between the time of day and serious cardiac events. For example, heart attacks are most likely to occur first thing Monday morning, in winter. “During the week, you often follow a routine — get up at the same time every morning, eat, get dressed and head into work,” Young says. “Then on the weekend, you’ll stay up later, eat different foods later at night and sleep in. You disrupt your rhythm. Then Monday morning, you try to wake up early again, but your body clock is out of sync.”

Winter is hard because of the accompanying decline in ambient temperature and the seasonal nature of our body clocks, which run slower in the cold-weather months. “That’s important for hibernating animals because during winter the clocks dampen down, an integral component of the hibernation process,” Young says. Whether you’re a human or a bear, “we’re all slaves to our biological clocks,” he adds. “That’s the truth, unfortunately.”

Rest time

Imbalances in circadian rhythms can cause serious trouble, says Susan Harding, M.D., director of UAB’s Sleep/Wake Disorders Center. The most common are delayed sleep phase and advance sleep phase, Harding says.

People who experience delayed sleep phase typically have trouble falling asleep before 2 a.m. and then difficulty waking up and functioning early in the morning. “This is a disorder more likely to occur in adolescents and young adults,” Harding explains. “Their clock is shorter; they tend to go to bed and wake up later than their parents.” Harding notes that adolescents and young adults, and it can be made worse by exposing yourself to light at night, such as watching television or playing on the computer,” Harding says. “Those emit a lot of blue light, and that’s what the body uses to re-sync itself every morning.”

Delayed sleep phase is usually treated with bright light early in the morning and avoiding light after 4 p.m. Often this is achieved with special glasses. Another treatment involves taking melatonin, which helps regulate sleep and wake cycles, at certain times of the day — including a few hours before a scheduled bedtime.

Advance sleep phase is the opposite of its sister condition. Primarily, it affects people ages 70 and older, who tend to go to bed and wake up earlier than usual. “Their clock is slower; they go to bed at 8 p.m. and wake up at 3 or 4 a.m.,” Harding says. “Many people with this disorder complain they want to stay up longer, usually to participate in social activities, but they can’t.” Treatments include use of bright blue light at specific times of the day.

Most circadian rhythm sleep disorders are determined genetically, Harding notes. Many therapies are available, and diagnosis often can be made in a single visit with the help of sleep diaries, she says. To learn more or to schedule an appointment, call 930-7114.

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Dancing with the Silver Stars fundraiser to benefit CFA

More than 76 million American children were born between 1945 and 1964—the era known as the Baby Boom. And on Jan. 1, 2011, the first of those Baby Boomers turn 66 years old.

The Boomers make up the largest group of people born in a 20-year period in history and as they age, they will need specialized geriatric care. While the number of Baby Boomers is high, the number of geriatrics available to care for them is low, and there is concern the aged population will not receive the focused care needed unless more health-care providers are properly trained.

UAB’s Center for Aging is a world leader in improving the health and well-being of older adults and their families, and it is committed to training a new generation of health providers to care for the unique needs of older adults.

The center is hosting the “Dancing with the Silver Stars” fundraising event Monday, Nov. 1 at The Club to raise funds to help recruit and train geriatric care specialists. Professor and dean emeritus Mary Lynne Capilouto, D.M.D., and Doug Tilt, M.D., professor of internal medicine, are two of the local celebrity dancers for the event. Alacare Home Health & Hospice and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama are primary sponsors. Visit http://medicine.uab.edu/76388/ to buy tickets.

“We're excited about the opportunity it gives us to promote the Center for Aging and bring awareness to the short supply of specialists in geriatric care nationwide and in our community,” says Richard Allman, M.D., director of the Center for Aging. “National estimates cite approximately 7,000 geriatricians certified to care for a rapidly growing Boomer population, with more than 20,000 needed to accommodate the increasing demand for specialized care.

“The support from the “Dancing with the Silver Stars” event will make a tremendous impact on our ability to work with providers with the tools and resources required to improve the health and well-being of older adults in our community and beyond,” Allman says.

Complex needs

The number of people age 65 and older will double between 2010 and 2050, with the number of those 85 and older increasing four-fold.

Because 90 percent of older people have at least one chronic condition (i.e. lung or heart disease, diabetes, hypertension) and 25 percent of those have four or more chronic diseases, it is critical to have health-care specialists with expertise related to aging and age-related issues, including transitions of care, medication management, family support and care environment.

“In geriatrics, if you’re going to have outstanding doctors caring for older people and their complex problems, you need people who understand medicine, have the skills to be able to talk with families, other team members in the community and work with family members to develop a plan to optimize a person’s health,” Allman says. “You need the best family/internal medicine doctors who have outstanding medical skills, and you need people who know how to interact with others, negotiate a team process and work with the team to develop a plan to enable an older adult to be independent. That’s why we need the best and brightest students in geriatrics.”

Allman says the need for specialized caregivers for geriatrics extends beyond doctors, and the Center for Aging stresses the need for a teamwork approach that includes nurses, therapists and community caregivers.

“Doctors alone don’t deliver geriatric care,” Allman says. “You’ve got to have a team to optimize the quality of life for older people. We’re recruiting students who are dentists, physical and occupational therapists, nurses, optometrists, psychologists and a number of other disciplines.”

Allman says there is no public policy issue of greater importance than aging. The problem, he says, is that people don’t want to talk about it. Allman says part of his mission — and the Center for Aging’s mission — is to make discussing aging mainstream.

“There is institutional and cultural ageism, and people don’t want to talk about it. Allman says. “They think of aging as dying and not living. That’s not what we’re about. We’ve got to change the culture and get people embracing the fact that aging is a good thing. If you're aging, you're still alive, and we really want to emphasize that people can live with high levels of function and Start. The more well-trained geriatrics we have, the more possible it is to make this a reality.”

Breast Cancer prevention

Continued from page 1

chronic conditions

Baskin also directs a recently awarded U54 grant from the National Cancer Institute to work with the Deep South Network for Cancer Control — headed by Comprehensive Cancer Director Edward Partridge, M.D. — to determine if community strategies to supplement an individual weight-loss program will lead to greater success among overweight rural African-American women.

“To date, there are no published studies of multi-level weight-loss interventions for black women residing in rural communities,” Baskin says.

Co-investigators on the grant include Jimmy Aril, M.D., assistant professor of nutrition sciences, and James Shikany, Dr. P.H., associate professor of preventive medicine.

“Both research projects focus on a social- ecological model of health behavior,” Baskin explains. “That examines whether it’s a function of you as an individual and your biological makeup and how your health behaviors are influenced by your family, community, the larger environment and policies. Each of these levels contain some potential influence on health behavior.”

Exercise is medicine

While diet plays a key role in cancer prevention, research shows regular physical activity can substantially reduce the risk for developing and dying from cancer. The strongest evidence, says Pekmezzi, exists for breast and colon cancer, with possible associations for prostate, lung and endometrial cancer.

Pekmezzi’s American Cancer Society Institutional Research grant looks specifically at black women, who report particularly high rates of sedentary behavior. Pekmezzi’s research team conducted six focus groups this past summer to assess the physical activity barriers and facilitators for black women in the Deep South.

“We heard some interesting responses from women on what gets in the way of exercise, ranging from household and childcare responsibilities to how they don’t want to mess up their hair,” Pekmezzi says. “We’ve collected this data, and we’re going to use it to form an intervention that specifically addresses the barriers to physical activity and cancer prevention for African-American women in the Deep South.”

Three of the focus groups were with community health advisors from rural counties and three focus groups were with community health advisors in urban counties. As expected, many of the barriers were different for each area.

For example, people who lived in rural areas said it’s tough for them to exercise because there are no fitness clubs close to where they live. Women in urban areas like Jefferson County said crime and safety in their neighborhoods often can be an issue.

“Overall the women described busy, inflexible schedules that might make attending center-based programs difficult and suggested that a home-based approach may be more appropriate for this target population,” Pekmezzi says. “We certainly want their input and want to know what would be helpful and how we could work around the issues they face.”

Pekmezzi is awaiting word for funding of a new grant to test the physical activity intervention that specifically addresses the barriers for African-American women in the Deep South. The intervention plan was informed by the focus group research.

In order to help reduce risk for diseases like cancer, Pekmezzi says it’s important for all men and women, regardless of race, to exercise regularly — even if it’s nothing more than walking.

“You really need to avoid inactivity as much as possible,” she says. “All you need is 30 minutes most days of the week, and it can be moderately intense. It can be a brisk walk. There are numerous health benefits from brisk walking.”

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Marshall brings servant’s heart to Hematology/Oncology

Benjamin Beck had done all he could do. He was wrapping up his doctorate research and preparing his public presentation for critique. He was doing this as he was bringing a newborn baby home. Low on money, energy and time, Beck was going to have to skip hosting a reception after his presentation — a common practice where students provide finger foods, answer questions and engage in general chit-chat.

Gwen Marshall wasn’t going to let that happen. Marshall, program coordinator in the Division of Hematology/Oncology, heard about Beck’s difficulties and planned, hosted and arranged for payment for a reception after his dissertation defense.

“Words can’t describe how grateful I was,” Beck says. “This is the exact selflessness and caring that embodies UAB.”

Co-workers echo those sentiments, saying Marshall is knowledgeable, efficient, extremely positive and someone who can be relied upon to complete any task before her — all traits that make her October’s Employee of the Month.

Marshall says her gesture toward Beck was just a way to say congratulations to an excellent student who had worked hard to achieve his goal.

“We don’t have that loving kindness that we had years ago,” Marshall says. “We all need someone in our corner who’s going to be kind and gentle. That was my thought in that for Ben. He was an excellent student, a great person and such an intelligent man. It was just that generosity that comes forth when you care for people. That’s all.”

Co-workers say that generosity shines forth from Marshall daily. Her lists of responsibilities are numerous. She assists five principal investigators, ordering supplies for their labs and assisting with research documentation and budgets. Marshall also manages the Shared Resources Facility for common equipment, which requires maintenance of contracts and service calls, preparation and maintenance of Shared Equipment Invoices and Accounts and billing the PIs for shared costs. She coordinates the Hematology/Oncology Research Conferences that bring together clinicians, principal investigators, staff and guest to hear presentations on current cancer treatments and cell biology-related research. Then there is the grant writing with which she assists investigators, wrapping up the detailed budgets, preparing required grant-specific documentations and ensuring each is submitted on time. That doesn’t include the other tasks she willingly undertakes, whether or not they are part of her job description.

“Gwen is always my first choice to call for assistance because I felt I could rely on her to get the job done, and I knew of her amazing attitude to always help beyond her job description because she is the ultimate team player,” says Linda Irwin, business officer in Hematology/Oncology.

Many co-workers point to the Division’s move from Wallace Tumor to the Shelby Building as an example of Marshall’s dependability. The move was necessary because of the renovation of Wallace Tumor. The majority of the division’s researchers moved to the Shelby Building in December 2008, which meant equipment and chemicals had to be transported. Marshall immediately stepped up when overcrowding issues arose in the Shelby Building and agreed to take on the responsibility of common equipment maintenance and billing for multiple departments even though the responsibility was not hers. She worked closely with other administrative personnel and has kept a database of active account numbers to split the cost of equipment upkeep and maintenance — all while keeping the shared equipment running efficiently for more than a year.

“Gwen continuously builds and maintains collaborative bridges across department lines, nourishing an atmosphere of unity and cooperation,” Zayzafoon says. “Always smiling, she is the epitome of a person who appreciates others and one who enjoys serving. It will be unfortunate to see her go once West Pavilion facilities are renovated, since she has become a friend and a positive mainstay of Shelby.”

Many co-workers mention Marshall’s desire to serve others, and it’s not by coincidence.

“I consider myself a customer service specialist,” Marshall says. “The one thing I really dislike is to call someone and get an answering machine where there is an electronic voice. When people call me, they will hear a real human being. They can talk to me about their problems and their needs and I’ll do whatever I can as quick as I can to take care of it. That’s what I do.”

She extends that help to her PIs and beyond, as LaVene Croom, an administrative assistant in Hematology/Oncology learned after transferring into the division.

Marshall was one of the first people she met, and she volunteered to give her a tour of the area where she worked, introducing her to the staff.

“I could tell immediately that she loved what she did and that she cared for the people that she worked with,” Croom says. “She encouraged me to contact her if I had any questions or needed any information about the Division, and she would often check in to make sure I was doing well in my job. She went out of her way to make sure I felt comfortable.”

Taking on tasks like managing the upkeep of equipment, guiding Croom through the early days of a new job or assisting one of her PIs in the lab comes partly from the 30 years Marshall spent on the bench herself in Clinical Toxicology, conducting research in the areas of virology, cancer and immunology with a focus on AIDS research. She knows what it’s like to have to rely on others for help, and she wants her co-workers to know she is someone they can count on.

“I have been on the dark-side where I worked in the lab and I had to beg for pens and pencils and beg others to order supplies and assist me — I can turn that around,” she says. “I’ve been in that position where I had to have others help me. I know how it feels when you can’t do an experiment because you can’t get an antibody in. When my PIs give me an order, I get it done that day. And if I have to expedite it or track it, I will do that.

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” Marshall says. “That’s the really the bottom line. What I do, I want it to be for real. I don’t want to see for show.”

Marshall, program coordinator in the Division of Hematology/Oncology, heard about Beck’s difficulties and planned, hosted and arranged for payment for a reception after his dissertation defense.

“We can all use somebody in our corner. For those in Hematology/Oncology, that person is Gwen Marshall. Co-workers and students alike say kindness radiates from her daily. Add efficiency, knowledge and a positive attitude and you have October’s Employee of the Month.”

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ROOM SERVICE

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Lunch and dinner options include soups and salads, entree salads, deli and grilled sandwiches and numerous sides and desserts, including sugar free offerings. Entrees include golden crusted chicken breast, lemon baked shrimp and homestyle beef pot roast and gravy among other choices.

The menu also is marked to note heart-healthy menu items and the number of carbohydrates in certain offerings. The system also is set up so patients or their family members won’t order something inappropriate if the patient is on a restricted diet.

“We are the largest hospital in the country that is going to hotel-style room service across the board for all patients that we know of,” Beck says. “We hope to expand these services to Highlands soon as well. Other hospitals that have done this are smaller or only do it for certain patient groups, such as new moms. We hope this will make our patients and their families more comfortable and satisfied during their stay.”
Search committees work to identify next vice provost, dean

Searches are under way to identify candidates for the newly restructured position of vice provost for Student and Faculty Success and also dean of the School of Optometry. Greenwood/Asher and Associates has been hired to help the search committees identify the new vice provost, whose responsibilities will include libraries, academic services and administrative and student life units. The complete job description and details regarding the new vision and structure are available at www.uab.edu/provost.

Bob Rich. M.D. is chairing the search committee for the vice provost for Student and Faculty Success. Members include Chief Human Resources Officer Alesia Jones; Fred Olive, Ed.D.; Gabe Rios; Mark Hickson, Ph.D.; Mundy Lalor, Ph.D.; Andy Marsch; and students Anne Bet and Brad Warrin.


Trustees appoint Thannickal to Branscomb Chair

The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees appointed Victor J. Thannickal, M.D., to the Ben Vaugh Branscomb Chair of Medicine in Respiratory Disease in the UAB School of Medicine at its meeting Sept. 17. Thannickal earned his medical degree from Oral Roberts University School of Medicine and joined the UAB faculty in July 2009. He is known for his novel and pioneering work exploring mechanisms involved in acute lung injury and interstitial lung disease.

Five honored at 10th annual UAB NAS lunch

The UAB National Alumni Society bestowed honors for professional achievement and philanthropy to five people Thursday, Sept. 23, at the 10th annual Alumni Leadership Recognition Awards and Scholarship Luncheon at The Club. Those honored were Charles Watkins, Ph.D.; Marquita Davis, Ph.D.; Andrew Marsch III; Zack Cloud; and Earl Fount.

Four appointed professor emeritus

During its Sept. 17 meeting, the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees appointed Krishn Chawla, Ph.D.; professor emeritus of materials science and engineering; Cleveland Kinney, Ph.D.; M.D., professor emeritus of psychiatry; Murat Tanju, Ph.D.; professor emeritus in the department of accounting and finance; and Charles Watkins, Ph.D., professor emeritus of chemistry.

Business endowment established

The UAB School of Business has received a $100,000 endowment gift from Sanjay K. Singh, Ph.D., and his wife Dora Eugenia Pineda-Rivera. The Dora and Sanjay Singh Endowed Research Fund will support faculty research, student scholarships and student activities within the Information Systems program in the Department of Management, Information Systems and Quantitative Methods. Singh is an associate professor of information systems, teaching primarily in the Master of Business Administration program, and is the vice president of business development at Birmingham's Computer Technology Solutions (CTS).

Koskinen’s new book examines daughters of “King Lear”

UAB Department of Theatre Associate Professor Karla Koskinen has co-written a book analyzing the characters of the three daughters in Shakespeare’s play “King Lear.” Koskinen says she proposed a study of “King Lear” to counteract the ongoing critical demonization of Goneril and Regan and idealization of Cordelia. Re-Visioning Lear’s Daughters: Testing Feminist Critique and Theory, published by Palgrave Macmillan, was released in August 2010. Koskinen researched and wrote the book with DePaul University Professor of English Lesley Gorecki, Ph.D. Koskinen has worked with Gorecki, a dramaturg, on professional Shakespeare productions. “Throughout my directing career, I have benefited from the work of scholars and critics who have induced me to encounter plays in new and exhilarating ways,” Koskinen says. “In particular, feminist criticism, a long-time source of inspiration for my interpretations, profoundly influenced many of my productions and led me to pursue a collaborative book project.”

The book is offered by Amazon, Barnes and Noble and is available at libraries and online book sellers, Koskinen says.

Nanda honored by Indian College of Cardiology

Navin C. Nanda, M.D., was honored as an Honorary Fellow of the Indian College of Cardiology in August 2010 for his “vast contribution to the growth of cardiology all over the world and in India particularly.”

This is the first time that the college has conferred an honorary fellowship to an overseas cardiologist, according to Rajan Joseph Manjum, M.D., president of the Indian College of Cardiology.

First alumni art exhibit with guest artist David Sandlin set

The Department of Art and Art History will hold its first UAB Alumni Open Exhibition, with guest artist and UAB alumnus David Sandlin, Friday, Oct. 15 through Saturday, Nov. 6 at The Gallery at UAB. A closing reception for the exhibition is planned for 5 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 4 in The Gallery. Admission is free and open to everyone. Call 934-0815.

The exhibition will include works by graduates from UAB’s bachelor’s of arts and bachelor’s of fine arts degree programs. Sandlin, class of 1979, is one of the most successful artists to have graduated from UAB’s program, says Department of Art and Art History Chair Erin Wright. In addition to being a practicing professional artist, Sandlin is the thesis coordinator of the MFA Illustration Program in the School of Visual Arts, New York.

A limited edition print by Sandlin will be available for purchase at the closing reception and all sales will benefit the gallery. A work by Sandlin will be featured in the exhibition, and Sandlin will attend the show and conduct a printmaking workshop for students.

Change in date for Saag lecture at ASC

The date for a lecture by Michael Saag, M.D., director of UAB’s Center for AIDS Research, has been moved back one week. “The Plague That Thundered” was originally scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 2, but instead will be delivered at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 9 in UAB’s Alys Stephens Center. The lecture is free and open to the public. Call 975-2787 or go to www.AlysStephens.org.

Saag will talk about the center’s ongoing work and its extensive efforts at the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia.

Chair of Physiology & Biophysics Benos dies Oct. 7

Dale Benos, Ph.D., noted scientist and chair of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics, died suddenly of natural causes Oct. 7. He was 60.

Benos joined UAB in 1985 as associate professor of Physiology and Biophysics; he was named professor in 1987 and appointed chair of the department in 1996. He also held professorships in Cell Biology and Neurobiology and was a senior scientist with UAB’s Gregory Fleming James Cystic Fibrosis Research Center, the Nephrology Research and Training Center, UAB Center for AIDS Research, UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center, Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Center, Center for Computational and Structural Biology, Center for Biophysical Sciences and Engineering and Vision Science Research Center.

“Dale’s leadership both at UAB and internationally, as well as his contributions to the body of scientific knowledge and to the training of future scientists, garnered the utmost respect from his friends and colleagues. He will be greatly missed.”

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Awards Tribute Dinner
Benefiting the UAB Center for Aging

Monday,
November 1, 2010
6-6:30pm Reception · 7pm Dinner
The Club
1 Robert S Smith Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

Local Star Dancers

Bonnie Bailey
William A. Bell, Sr.
Mayor, City of Birmingham
Mary Lynne Capilouto, DMD
Jan D. Hunter
Jack Schaeffer, OD
Schaeffer Eye Center
Jane Selfe
James Spann
ABC 33/40
Douglas C. Tilt, MD
UAB Camellia Medical Group

Professional Dancers

Fabian and Jackie Sanchez
Dancing with the Stars veteran
Owners, Fred Astaire Studios, Hoover

Special Exhibition
The Sugar Babies

Awards Tribute Saluting

John G. Beard
Esther Schuster
United Way of Central Alabama

Tickets: $100 · Reserved tables for 8: $1250

For more information, call 205.975.5659 or visit www.uab.edu/dwtss

UAB CENTER FOR AGING