Dear UMMC Family,

Ushering in 2020 comes with reflection and reaffirming our purpose. As I look back over the last three and a half years since the Office of Diversity and Inclusion was established, I reflect on productive collaborations and partnerships, many successes and outstanding institutional recognitions. Although not exhaustive, this includes:

- Adopting the first institutional policy on diversity and inclusion;
- Developing more than 30 interactive data dashboards highlighting our compositional diversity among employees and learners, including results from diversity-themed survey items measuring sense of belonging;
- Forming an Institutional Climate Committee to assess current diversity and inclusion efforts and for recommending new initiatives designed to improve the organization’s climate resulting in action items and metrics addressing inclusion, cultural competency and organizational culture;
- Receiving recognition by the Human Rights Campaign as a “Top Performer” (2017, 2019) and as a “Leader” (2018) for inclusive care for LGBTQ populations based on the Healthcare Equality Index;
- Receiving a $40,000 grant award from the Women’s Foundation of Mississippi for TEAM Clinic, an interdisciplinary clinic specializing in LGBTQ health;
- Launching new professional development opportunities, such as unconscious bias training, “InclUsive Conversations” and the D&I Professional Development and Certificate Program to strengthen understanding of diversity, inclusion and equity across all mission areas;
- Initiating employee engagement efforts such as “Employee Engagement Coffee Talks” to foster a culture of support from institutional leaders and “Word of the Month,” both programs developed by the 100-Day Workout Diversity and Respect Team;
- Instilling new practices of promoting diversity and inclusion during new employee orientation and on-boarding;
- Establishing “The Pillars,” an annual awards program recognizing faculty, staff, students and community members for their service and efforts to improve diversity and inclusion at UMMC and elsewhere;
- Learning Dr. Michael Ryan, UMMC professor of physiology and biophysics, was named “2019 Diversity Educator of the Year,” by the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning;
- Receiving the 2019 Health Professions Higher Education in Diversity Award from Insight into Diversity magazine;
- Witnessing the UMMC Chapter of the Group on Women in Medicine and Science earn the “2019 GWIMS Leadership Award for an Organization” from the Association of American Medical Colleges;
- Implementing new technologies to highlight the patient experience to meet linguistic and interpreter needs;
- Expanding disability inclusion through Project SEARCH and American Sign Language accessibility during the annual commencement program; and
- Forming numerous diversity and inclusion committees in schools and departments to achieve improved access, equity and inclusive climates for learners, staff, faculty and patients, in addition to identifying benchmarks to measure progress.

Indeed, these accomplishments are noteworthy and we are now at a critical juncture to address diversity and inclusion strategy in UMMC’s processes, practices and decisions, and across functions. As it relates to our workforce, this will require identifying institutional goals and tactics that ensure fairness, consistency, transparency, equitable outcomes and improved diversity within our applicant pools, acceptances, opportunities for development, and advancement. For our learners, we must continue to strive for cultural proficiency and build viable talent pipelines. For our patients, we must fully support our journey toward clinical quality and health equity. Motivations to improve health outcomes for all Mississippians should also fuel our desire to move from excellence to preeminence. Therefore, with this spirit, we must effectively manage expectations.

The underlying theme of this edition of Synergy is “humanity” – defined as compassionate, sympathetic or generous behavior; the quality or state of being humane; the totality of human beings; the human race. I challenge you to acknowledge your role at the Medical Center and ask yourself, “Who will I mentor to become a better leader?” “What will I do to make my work environment more inclusive?” “How can I be an agent of change?” The clock starts now.

In closing, I would like to thank our dedicated and talented team in the Office of Communications and Marketing for producing this magazine. This team has been key to ensuring consistency of our messaging and an instrumental partner with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Greater accountability and stronger alliances across the institution are necessary to maximize the impact of diversity and inclusion for years to come. Let us continue to keep our synergy strong.

Juanycy D. Taylor, Ph.D.
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer
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A program designed to increase the involvement of males of color in the health professions championed by Dr. Juanyce Taylor, chief diversity and inclusion officer at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, is continuing to pay dividends even after its four-year term has expired.

Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation as a $150,000 equitable communities grant to UMMC from April 1, 2013 through Dec. 31, 2017, the Health Equity and Leadership Initiative sought to improve racial and ethnic disparities in the health care profession and education.

Taylor initially answered the W. K. Kellogg Foundation’s call for proposals seeking initiatives to bolster black male participation in the health sciences when she was a faculty member in UMMC’s School of Health Related Professions.

“Tayor, the 15 young men who participated in the HELI program, all proceeded to earn at least an associate’s degree and most are either in the health care workforce or in professional school. Two are enrolled in a degree program in SHRP, two more are employed at UMMC and two others are still in the health career “pipeline” – one at Jackson State University and the other at Mississippi State University – with the goal of attending medical school at UMMC. Four former HELI participants are registered nurses, including one who is in the armed forces, and another is an emergency medical technician and volunteer firefighter.

The most impressive statistic? Almost two years after the program’s conclusion, Taylor is still involved with each participant, encouraging him, supporting him, challenging him.

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The most impressive statistic? Almost two years after the program’s conclusion, Taylor is still involved with each participant, encouraging him, supporting him, challenging him.

“I know where they are, I talk with them, I mentor them in their undergraduate and professional efforts,” Taylor said. “It’s just inspiring for me to see these young people live out their dreams, getting to support their professional development.”

The importance of the HELI program as a “pipeline” for males of color into the health professional workforce could not be overstated. While many young black males in Mississippi may have an interest in science or health care, Taylor said a majority of them may not be fully aware of their career options.

Geoffrey Pratt, a first-year physical therapy student in SHRP, was a member of the HELI program’s third cohort. After graduating from Northeast Mississippi Community College, Pratt earned a degree in physical therapy.

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in kinesiology at Mississippi State University. He credited the HELI program for helping define his collegiate pathway.

“Not everybody knows the opportunities they have when they’re going through college,” Pratt said. “They don’t know the options they have as far as career choices. HELI’s hands-on exposure introduced us to different health care professions, from nurses to doctors to physical therapists and others.”

In Justin Johnson’s case, the HELI program changed his entire career plan. A biology major when he joined the program’s third cohort, he initially had his sights set on majoring in pre-med. After becoming familiar with the medical laboratory sciences profession through HELI, he found a new calling. A Coahoma Community College graduate, Johnson is now in SHRP’s MLS program.

“The HELI program wasn’t just geared toward the mainstream professions like medicine and nursing; we learned about all the other professions that went on behind the scenes,” Johnson said. “That’s what opened my eyes and brought up all my options.”

Taylor said the manner in which SHRP faculty and students embraced HELI had a dramatic effect on the participants. The HELI students said they were impressed by how readily the SHRP faculty were willing to share their knowledge and passion for their given career pursuits.

“Dr. Jessica Bailey (SHRP dean) never missed an opportunity to be with the HELI students when they were on campus,” Taylor said. “To have SHRP faculty take a special interest in them, to welcome them, to help make them feel a part of the school – and to have faculty and staff call them by name – it was very much like a family, a warm, welcoming environment.”

Will Lindsey of Jackson, a member of the first HELI cohort, received his master’s in nuclear medicine technology at UMMC. He is working as a nuclear medicine technologist at four different facilities while preparing to complete necessary prerequisite courses to apply for medical school at the Medical Center.

A student at Hinds Community College during his time in HELI, Lindsey had the opportunity to meet his future NMT faculty members in SHRP.

“HELI allowed me to learn about the program I pursued later – the nuclear medicine program,” he said. “In that aspect, it was vital. I’m where I am today because of that. It started me on the pathway I’m on today, which is medical school.”

Perhaps the secret to the short-term program’s long-term effectiveness lies in camaraderie. Taylor isn’t the only one charting each participant’s career path – for several years now, they’ve each been checking up on one another.

“I love those guys to death,” Lindsey said. “It’s amazing to be around them; they’re very inspirational, very helpful. We’ve grown to be very good friends, always trying to push each other to do better. If we can help each other out in any kind of way, we will.”

At least one critical component of the program has taken root: As the HELI participants have made their way into the world of health care, they’ve doubtlessly inspired continued interest in the health care professions by other minority males.

“I imagined that the HELI participants would end up being peer mentors, whether formally or informally, for other students like them,” Taylor said. “It raises awareness among black males that their peers have actually gained careers in health care, so they can accomplish that, too.”

Like Lindsey, Andre Funches of Jackson was in the first HELI cohort. At the time, he was attending Meridian Community College. After graduating from Meridian CC, he attended Southern University at New Orleans on a basketball scholarship, earned his degree in biology and returned to UMMC as a hospital technician in respiratory therapy.

“It was a great opportunity to meet people here, an opportunity to learn about health care career options,” Funches said. “The people here are family-oriented. They showed they care, they showed love.”

It’s a feeling Funches would like to pass along to other young African-American males interested in a health care career but not sure how to take that initial step.

“I’d like to help anybody I can,” he said. “It’s important to me. For some kids, they only see what they see on the street. You can basically show them something different, something better than they’re normally used to – a career in health care.”

The need for another program similar to HELI is apparent by the response Taylor received when her initial call for participants was distributed among community colleges throughout the state.

“I had more interest than I could support (with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant),” Taylor said. “The program was for community college students only, but I received a lot of inquiries about how other college students could enroll. Unfortunately, they were not eligible because they were at four-year institutions. But if I had the means to support them, I would have supported every last one of them as well.”

“African-American males who may be from lower-income backgrounds or maybe from lower-graded schools need to see . . . more African-American males who are successful in the health care field or any other fields they may be interested in,” Lindsey said.

While the HELI program no longer exists, Taylor said the need to encourage African-American men to pursue careers in the health sciences remains, especially in Mississippi.

“We have to be intentional about this effort,” she said. “If we want to improve health outcomes, we need to look at those populations that are at greater risk. In a state like Mississippi, there should be no second thought – it really is our obligation to think about this population in a more intentional way.”
2019-20 Vice Chancellor’s Council on Diversity and Inclusion

The Vice Chancellor’s Council on Diversity and Inclusion elevates and prioritizes matters relating to diversity and inclusion at the Medical Center. The council provides leadership and consultation on goals and metrics of the strategic diversity and inclusion action plan, including campus initiatives to enhance diversity and inclusion among students, faculty, staff and the community at large.

Juanyce D. Taylor, Ph.D.
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer

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Director, Employee Relations
Department of Human Resources

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Assistant Professor of Family Medicine
School of Medicine
President, Group on Women in Medicine and Science (GWIMS)

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Director, Institutional Equity and Partnerships
Office of Diversity and Inclusion

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Carrie Cooper
Director, Student Financial Aid

Lisa Didion, M.D.
Associate Professor of Pediatrics
School of Medicine

Tom Fortner
Chief Institutional Advancement Officer

Terri Gillespie, D.N.P.
Chief Nursing Officer, University Hospital

Gracie Hubacek
UMMC Pride
School of Medicine Class of 2022

Katie McClendon, Pharm.D.
Assistant Dean for Student Services
Department of Pharmacy Practice (UM)

Shirley Pandolfi
Cultural Competency and Education Manager
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Scott Rodgers, M.D.
Chair, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior

Brian Rutledge, Ph.D.
Chief of Staff, Office of the Vice Chancellor

Susana M. Salazar, Ph.D.
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Department of Biomedical Materials Science
2019-20 President, Faculty Senate

Mandy Scott
Director, Diversity Assessment and Programs
Office of Diversity and Inclusion

Cathy Smith
Chief of Human Resources, UMMC Health System

Patrick Smith, M.D.
Chief Faculty Affairs Officer
Professor of Family Medicine
School of Medicine

Doris Whitaker
Director, Pastoral Services

Other Members

LouAnn Woodward, M.D. (ex-officio)
Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs

Kevin Cook (ex-officio)
Health System CEO

Ralph Didlake, M.D. (ex-officio)
Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Chief Academic Officer

Blake Johns
Associated Student Body President
School of Medicine Class of 2020

Susan Shands Jones (counsel)
Associate General Counsel

Charles O’Mara, M.D. (ex-officio)
Associate Vice Chancellor for Clinical Affairs

Jimmy Stewart, M.D.
Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education
Professor of Medicine

Richard Summers, M.D. (ex-officio)
Associate Vice Chancellor for Research
UMMC’s Institutional Diversity and Inclusion Policy

UMMC will continuously encourage and engage in ongoing and focused processes, operations and communications that reflect our commitment to diversity and inclusion and a positive workplace culture. This includes fair and equitable practices in recruitment; selection; hiring; promotion and tenure; and career development and advancement opportunities of underrepresented groups in employment categories or classifications where there is underrepresentation. Student admissions, retention programs and enrollment management functions should also be free of implicit and explicit barriers that may impede the success of qualified applicants and enrolled students.

Mission of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Mississippi Medical Center guides strategies for integrating diversity and promoting inclusive excellence into UMMC’s three mission areas – education, research and health care. The office fosters a climate of inclusion throughout UMMC’s workforce and student body, where respect for different points of view, backgrounds and cultures are seen as strengths that enable the academic health center to benefit from each individual’s unique talent and perspective.

In-person training

Office of Diversity and Inclusion team members and experienced trainers offer year-round training to departments, committees and workgroups on the following:

- Cultural Competence in health care
- Diversity and sensitivity in the workplace
- Foundational learning on unconscious bias
- Unconscious bias in the clinical/health care setting
- Unconscious bias in the learning environment
- Unconscious bias and stigma with LGBTQ populations
- Unconscious bias in recruitment and selection processes

Topics may also be customized to fit specific departmental needs.

In 2019, trainings were offered to the following UMMC departments and constituent groups:

- School of graduate studies in the health sciences students, fellows and post-doctoral students
- School of Health Related Professions – D.H.A. Program Admissions Committee members
- School of Dentistry Admissions Committee members
- School of Medicine Department of Family Medicine staff
- School of Medicine Office of Faculty Affairs P&T Committee members
- School of Medicine Professional Development Series attendees
- School of Nursing faculty and students
- School of Nursing Tri-State Nurse Educator Conference attendees
- University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy faculty and preceptors
- University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy Phi Lambda Sigma Student Leadership Retreat attendees
- Children’s of Mississippi occupation therapy/physical therapy staff
- Department of Pediatrics Leadership Program participants
- All of Us Research Program staff
- Center for Advancement of Youth staff
- UMMC Grenada staff
- Rowland Medical Library – Academic Information Services staff
- Clinical Lab - Administration staff
- UMMC Community Care Clinic, Belzoni staff
- Office of Clinical Trials staff
- Office of Enrollment Management staff

For more information, visit: https://bit.ly/UMMC_unconscious_bias_training
Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff members covered a multitude of topics during a roundtable discussion in December 2019 that focused on their ongoing initiatives, their individual passion for ODI’s objectives and the office’s plans for the coming decade.

SYNERGY: An office of diversity and inclusion at an academic health sciences center has more responsibilities than similar offices at institutions focused solely on health care or academia. What are some of the unique challenges you face in covering health care, research and education at one institution?

Mandy Scott: From our perspective, diversity and inclusion is really important on this campus because it promotes our most important mission, which is providing the best quality of care for all of our patients. That starts with educating our students and creating a climate of inclusion that fosters a much better learning environment. Diversity of thought is important in the academic setting, because it promotes a higher degree of learning for our students, which translates into better health care for our patients.

Shirley Pandolfi: We’re investing in training for research study coordinators under the direction of the Office of Clinical Trials, because when they’re conducting clinical trials, we want them to bring more diverse groups into these studies. We can complement their efforts to discover how to attract diverse populations to participate and their impact in research discovery and new advances.

Dr. Rashanda Booker: It’s important for diversity and inclusion to exist in academic medicine on a macro level, especially when you consider the systemic oppressive nature of medicine and education, historically. It’s imperative for our office, in the course of training, to dismantle and educate, because there have been systemic stigmas and exclusiveness in health care and in education. Our office is a resource to assist in making our institutional environment more welcoming. It’s not ODI’s sole responsibility.

SP: Because we’re developing a patient-centered culture, which focuses on what is best for patients and families, it’s important to bring cultural competence, diversity and inclusiveness to all the levels where you have competencies: to UMMC academics, health care and research.

SYNERGY: With this in mind, what are some of the major initiatives the Office of Diversity and Inclusion has scheduled for 2020 and beyond?
**RB:** Our priorities for the coming year are to strengthen internal and external partnerships; to accelerate diversity within our mission areas (education, health care and research); to increase learner proficiency and engagement through education and training, whether online or face-to-face; and to identify diversity benchmarks to incorporate a long-term strategic planning process.

**SYNERGY:** Established in 2016 at UMMC, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is relatively new. How has the office engaged the campus community?

**MS:** We’ve had a wonderful response from faculty, students and employees. We have monthly “InclUsive Conversation” sessions and we get really great feedback on our speakers. We have a yearly recognition program called “The Pillars,” and faculty, students and staff nominate wonderful candidates for those awards. When we host the Pillars awards event in January, we get 100-150 people from all over the campus. It’s a wonderful time to gather together and get to know each other better, but it’s also a great way to celebrate diverse, inclusive activities that happen all over this campus. They don’t just emanate from this office.

**SYNERGY:** What activities are you most passionate about individually? What initiatives are you looking forward to embracing in the coming years?

**Dashunda Bunton:** I get to assist members of this office with their individual programs. I’ve been here since the office was established and I’ve seen Dr. (Juanyce) Taylor’s vision come to life. I’ve seen the hard work, the dedication of each one of these ladies, including Dr. Taylor. I’m most passionate about the work that is being done around campus, seeing how we’ve been able to help field questions from students and faculty, make them feel comfortable coming to us and asking us things they might not be able to ask other departments, and dismantle stigmas around campus.

**DB:** I’m most passionate about my role on the Diversity and Respect Team, helping to coordinate projects like Word of the Month and Coffee Talks, and how we’re planning to engage mid-level managers in Coffee Talks 2020. Previously, only Executive Cabinet members were asked to lead sessions, but mid-level managers work more directly with staff and have greater interaction with them.

**SYNERGY:** Can you explain the concept for the Word of the Month program?

**DB:** The words of the month were chosen by the Employee Engagement 100-Day Workout Diversity and Respect Team. They all center around diversity and inclusion. It’s a way for employees to have a dialogue about the word – what’s their perspective on “integrity,” for example, or what’s their perspective on “unconscious bias.” Sometimes you have an opinion about what the word means, so this is a chance to interact and see what other people think about those words. Maybe we can change the way you’re thinking or looking at that word. And I’m always excited about what the word is going to be.

**DB:** We offer a diversity and respect Word of the Month Toolkit on our webpage every month that gives a definition of the word and provides quotes from employees around campus about their definition of the word, what it means to them. The toolkit also has videos and articles that can be shared with other employees that provide a more in-depth knowledge of the word. By having more clinical and academic staff participate in the Word of the Month, by having their staff members participate, they can form an intimate dialogue with their employees.

**SYNERGY:** Today (Dec. 4, 2019) is a landmark day in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Can you explain?
RB: Today marks the one-year anniversary of new UMMC employees taking the Inclusive Policies Module online as part of their onboarding: 2,003 employees have taken the training module, and we have had a 94 percent completion rate, which is an excellent number. It’s also good to be able to speak during New Employee Orientation every Monday. It shows that UMMC values diversity and inclusion when, on the employees’ first day of work, they hear from a representative of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. It sets the tone for new employees.

Synergy: How does the office reach UMMC’s potential workforce?

RB: The Workforce Diversity Drive-in Program is scheduled to launch in March 2020. We need our community to know we are here. As one of the largest employers in the state, it’s important for UMMC to understand our community and to have its staff be a reflection of our community. By being transparent, opening our doors, answering questions and teaching interested candidates how to navigate our systems, we’re not just saying, ‘We have jobs available,’ but we’re also saying, “We want you to work here and this is how we’re willing to help you.” It’s not just for hospital jobs; it’s for all types of jobs from every level. Participants will hear from managers about what they’re looking for, they’ll hear from the Department of Human Resources about how to navigate the system, we’ll give them tips on how to master their interview, what’s required for coming to interview for a job and, if they land a job, what’s required to work here. We’re giving them a toolkit for success.

Synergy: What other training opportunities are available?

SP: My passion is cultural competence, and I have the opportunity to do training and education regarding cultural competence – How to develop programs and systems that are effective for all. UMMC’s goal is to create a healthier Mississippi. That includes everybody. So the training interaction with faculty, students and clinicians is very important to me, because, when we talk about health, it’s not just giving medication to somebody. Every individual is complex, and their culture, the way they see the world, is going to influence how they see their health, how they see death, how they see life. To be able to heal, you have to work with the patient. So it’s very important for health care professionals to have an open mind and to understand that not everybody is going to think the way they do. We have to incorporate cultural competence factors where we want to grow our services in diverse populations.

Synergy: How are training opportunities expanding in 2020?

SP: We began offering a Diversity and Inclusion Champion and Professional Development certificate program. It’s a very comprehensive curriculum with a six-month commitment. It’s provided online so participants can learn at their own pace. It is only offered to UMMC employees, but moving forward in 2020, because so many people have requested it, we’re hoping to offer a similar program to all students.

SP: Another project we have for 2020 is to develop a program that offers medical interpreter certification at UMMC for professionals. We’re considering offering training to our bilingual staff who want to become interpreters. Being bilingual doesn’t automatically make you an interpreter: Interpretation is a profession, you have a code of ethics, you have training and there’s a methodology behind it. The state of Mississippi doesn’t require you to be certified; it requires that you be trained. UMMC goes an extra step: Currently, all of our interpreters are certified. That’s a gold standard. And health care providers have to be trained how to work with an interpreter. Sometimes, you don’t have a face-to-face interpreter. You have to know how to work with technology and the regulations regarding the use of remote interpretation.

Synergy: How does your office help the institution keep track of diversity and inclusion efforts?

MS: We publish on our website every year dashboards that present the compositional diversity of our student body, our
workforce and our faculty. We publish dashboards that also highlight the climate of inclusion on our campus among those three different groups. We publish more than 30 dashboards, so they’re really comprehensive, and the technology we use allows the user to drill down and really investigate what our faculty and student workforce looks like and how they feel welcome on this campus. Now that we’ve been publishing these dashboards for a couple of years, we’re really starting to develop a picture of UMMC and who we are. In 2020, we’re going to start promoting the use of the dashboards more widely to help leaders address gaps and develop interventions to improve representation of diverse populations, to identify more funding to support ODI’s work and to reinvest funds to support UMMC’s mission areas.

**SYNERGY:** What have the dashboards revealed about diversity and inclusion at UMMC?

**MS:** This is the first year we’ve been able to compare different sets of data. We’ve seen some improvement in climate, which we’re very pleased to see. The diversity data has remained relatively unchanged over the past two data sets, which was not unexpected. Hopefully as we move forward, these dashboards can be a great tool to help leaders fill some diversity gaps in their staffs or student bodies.

**SYNERGY:** What are some other ways your office supports institutional programs and objectives?

**MS:** We’re an excellent resource on this campus. We’ve applied for a grant from the Women’s Foundation of Mississippi and have received very generous funding that’s helped put the TEAM Clinic, the medical clinic sponsored by the UMMC Center for LGBTQ Health, on the map. It’s been in existence, but now, with help from the grant, it actually has a physical presence at the Jackson Medical Mall.

**RB:** We also offer in-house resources. We’ve released information about how to engage, recruit and retain a diverse population.

**In 2020,** **we will be releasing our “Guide to Fostering a Climate of Inclusion for Faculty and Staff”**. We want to make sure we are providing each individual at UMMC an opportunity to be empowered as a champion for diversity and inclusion. In ODI, we are champions for diversity and inclusion, but we are not the diversity and inclusion police. It is imperative that everyone be mindful and be champions for diversity and inclusion. It’s everyone’s responsibility.

**SP:** With our D and I Champion and Professional Development Certificate Program, we encourage each employee to be a champion of change within their own programs. Doing the small things, like being able to pronounce everyone’s last name correctly in your office, can really make a difference if all of us put in the effort to be a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

**SYNERGY:** How has the Office of Diversity and Inclusion made a tangible impact on the Medical Center community?

**MS:** We worked with the Office of Institutional Advancement to create a wonderful video called “A Constant Light: Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Mississippi Medical Center,” that celebrates our diversity. It underscores why a climate of inclusion is important here at UMMC. It’s an excellent resource for the recruitment of students and faculty. People emailed me and said, “The whole staff gathered around to watch it and everybody was crying.”

**RB:** When we unveiled it, people were tearful. People who had been here a long time, people who had just started working at UMMC – it was a really emotional experience for everyone. It’s a very powerful video.

**DB:** It leaves you wanting to know more. It was emotional. It makes you ask yourself, what can I do to make this a better place, to make this a more diverse and inclusive place?
2019-20 Fall Enrollment Data

School of Medicine
Founded in Oxford: 1903
Established in Jackson: 1955
New Students: 164
Total Students: 620
Dr. LouAnn Woodward, Dean

School of Nursing
Established: 1958
New Students: 374
Total Students: 624
Dr. Julie Sanford, Dean

School of Health Related Professions
Established: 1971
New Students: 210
Total Students: 479
Dr. Jessica Bailey, Dean

School of Dentistry
Established: 1973
New Students: 62
Total Students: 205
Dr. David Felton, Dean

School of Population Health
Established: 2016
New Students: 22
Total Students: 34
Dr. Bettina Beech, Dean

School of Graduate Studies in the Health Sciences
Established: 2001
New Students: 131
Total Students: 209
Dr. Joey Granger, Dean

School of Pharmacy (Jackson Campus)
Founded in Oxford: 1908
Jackson Campus Established: 1970
New Students (UMMC): 116
Total Students (UMMC): 216
Dr. Leigh Ann Ross, Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs

2018-19 Graduation Data: Degrees Awarded

John D. Bower School of Population Health: 3
Nursing Certificates: 9
School of Dentistry: 55
School of Graduate Studies in the Health Sciences: 99
School of Health Related Professions: 183
School of Medicine: 147
School of Nursing: 363

To learn more about our 36 degree programs, please visit the academic bulletin at: www.umc.edu/bulletin
Communities and Hospitals Advancing Maternity Practices will be launching breastfeeding education modules across all seven of the University of Mississippi Medical Center’s health professions schools, thanks to a grant from the Bower Foundation.

The interprofessional education unit on breastfeeding will contain video segments featuring real-life scenarios, such as a prenatal clinic appointment, an in-hospital breastfeeding assessment and a postpartum breastfeeding support group. The first IPE unit to be implemented across all UMMC schools, it is scheduled to be a part of the academic curriculum by fall 2020.

The educational modules will be instrumental in sharing the benefits of breastfeeding across medical disciplines, said Dr. Ralph Didlake, UMMC chief academic affairs officer.

“Interprofessional education has become a critically important tool in helping to prepare future clinical providers for a team-based approach to patient care,” Didlake said. “The fact that breastfeeding has been chosen as our first major IPE unit reflects the importance we place on this activity, which conveys so many lifelong health benefits to infants.”

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UMMC faculty from each school will act as content experts from their respective schools, while CHAMPS will be responsible for creating the scenarios and providing breastfeeding expertise.

The University of Mississippi Medical Center has received a 2019 Health Professions Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from Insight into Diversity.

UMMC is among 44 institutions nationally to receive the award from the organization, the oldest and largest diversity magazine and website in higher education.

The UMMC Office of Diversity and Inclusion submitted the application to Insight into Diversity on behalf of the Medical Center.

According to Dr. Juanyce Taylor, UMMC chief diversity and inclusion officer, UMMC’s award application “covered campus climate initiatives, underrepresented recruitment and retention of faculty and students, community outreach, financial support and scholarships, events and celebrations, social justice and activism, policies and strategy, and innovative diversity education.”

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CHAMPS has worked in Mississippi since 2017, helping hospitals across the state gain the Baby Friendly designation.

The goal for the IPE is to help sustain the current momentum of breastfeeding in Mississippi, where 25 percent of hospitals – including UMMC – have gained the World Health Organization’s Baby Friendly title. More hospitals in the state are seeking the designation.

“This is fantastic,” said Alice Chaney Herndon, nurse manager of the Mother Baby Unit of the Winfred L. Wiser Hospital for Women and Infants at UMMC and lactation program director. “The more health care professionals know about the benefits of breastfeeding, the more they can educate their patients in the future.”
Medical school dream no longer haunts ground-breaking student

On the day Christina Wallace said goodbye to her friends at the Choctaw Health Center, they brought out a cake glazed with stethoscope-and-lab-coat frosting.

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They gave her a real stethoscope and a writing pen, both decorated with Native American hand-beaded designs.

“They filled a bowl with notes written on sheets of paper – ‘prescriptions for success,’” Wallace said.

Everything that day served as a reminder of where she came from or where she was going.

Four years after her send-off to medical school, Wallace graduated in 2019, apparently as the first member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to earn a medical degree from the School of Medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

“It took me several years to get here,” she said, “and it couldn’t be better.”

Last March, her desire to stay in Mississippi as a practicing physician received a boost during the School of Medicine’s annual residency Match Day ceremony, when anxious, graduation-bound medical students found out, and publicly announced, where they’d been accepted for specialty training.

“My family and I were too nervous to attend,” Wallace said. “I was afraid we were going to have to move away for my residency.”

So, while most of her fellow students in the Class of 2019 were mounting the stage at Jackson’s Thalia Mara Hall, Wallace was at her home in Neshoba County’s Edinburg community waiting to learn her fate by email.

“When the notification came,” she said, “we screamed with joy.”

The verdict: a residency in medicine-primary that started this past summer at UMMC.

“I’m ecstatic to be here,” she said. “I love it here.”

And it shows, said Dr. Lyssa Weatherly, UMMC assistant professor of medicine.

“Christina already knew as a [first-year student] that she wanted to be a primary care physician,” said Weatherly, who specializes in internal medicine and geriatrics. “She asked me at that time what she could do to be more competitive, and she did it.

“She’s going to be a force to be reckoned with in this state.”

For most of her life, this state has been Wallace’s home. In Tucker, one of eight Choctaw Indian Reservation communities in Neshoba County, she didn’t know any Native American physicians while she was growing up there. But she did know a “traditional healer.”

“He was my grandfather,” Wallace said. She had watched with pride as members of the tribal community came to him for comfort and help.

“It showed me that he was a figure of respect,” she said. “That’s something I’ve always remembered.”

That same type of regard, she noticed, was paid to her mother, Barbara Willis, who, until her retirement last February, was a registered nurse for years at the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Jackson.

Before that, for more than a decade, Willis worked in a Phoenix, Arizona, hospital, sometimes accompanied by her only, very observant, child.

“As a single mom, she worked extremely hard,” said Wallace, who moved back with her mother to Mississippi from Arizona in 2001.

“I saw how she interacted with her patients, and it intrigued me at a young age.

“I believe I really learned from my mom that the way to treat people is with compassion and respect.”

She did, said Dr. Michelle Horn, UMMC associate professor of medicine.

“Christina is one of the most deeply caring medical students and people that I have encountered during my career,” Horn said.

Wallace’s compassion for patients and colleagues was publicly recognized last May 3 during the School of Medicine’s Awards Day, when she and her fellow class member R.J. Case were presented with the 2019 Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award.

“She has an innate ability to make patients and their families feel at ease and is able to explain things to them in such an easy-to-understand manner,” Horn said. “Even for physicians it’s sometimes difficult to achieve this skill, but with Christina, it’s a part of her nature, and patients certainly respond to that and to her.”

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Wallace would eventually draw inspiration from other role models, including Weatherly.

“She is amazing,” Wallace said. “When you see Dr. Weatherly with her patients here, you say, ‘This is the type of physician I want to be.’”

Apparently, though, there aren’t many physicians who share Wallace’s heritage. Mississippi is home to only a handful of American Indian or Alaska Natives who practice medicine. There were only 15 as of 2014, reports the Association of American Medical Colleges’ “Diversity in the Physician Workforce.”

That’s 0.3 percent of the total number of physicians in an ethnic group, accounting for about 0.5 percent of the state’s population.

When Wallace’s class graduated last May 24, she became only the seventh Native American Indian known to have earned a medical degree from the School of Medicine at UMMC, according to the Office of Student Records and Registrar, which doesn’t track individual tribes.

Phyliss J. Anderson, tribal chief of the 10,000-member Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, congratulated Wallace for being “the very first Mississippi Tribal member to earn her Doctor of Medicine degree.”

Several members of the Choctaw tribe have earned degrees from other schools at UMMC, including nursing and health related professions. One of Wallace’s cousins, an R.N., graduated from the School of Nursing.

But even across the country, physicians who reported as American Indians-Alaska Natives alone – and in combination with another race – made up only 4,099 of the estimated 727,300 active physicians in 2016, the AAMC reported in October 2018.

Because minorities’ access to health care usually suffers compared to that of their white counterparts, the AAMC recommends more diversity in the workforce as one antidote.

Wallace said she wants to be part of that remedy in her home state.

“I plan to practice in Mississippi and stress to my patients the importance of preventive care,” she said. “At some point, I want to get back to my community.”

Because it’s also about that, and family.

“I’ve been around certain family members who became ill and had questions about their medical condition,” she said. “I wanted to be able to explain what certain lab results meant, to be able to let them know what medical counseling was available.”

Four years ago, she applied to medical school, braced by a tribal scholarship and by encouragement and advice from members of her community, including Dr. Gregory Gordon, a psychiatrist with the Choctaw Health Center and a member of the Mohawk tribe.

During her residency, Wallace commutes the 60-plus miles from her home to Jackson, but during some “tough” months, she plans to stay overnight occasionally with her mother in Jackson. This was her pattern in medical school.

“My husband often took care of the kids alone,” she said. “A lot of credit goes to him.”

Along the way to her degree, she has tried to serve as an example, maybe even a recruiter, in a community whose members are spread across 10 Mississippi counties.

A few years ago, in Red Water, Wallace shared her experiences with her daughter’s second-grade class. A couple of years later, she was a Career Day speaker at Choctaw Central High School.

“I would hope that some tribal members see a Choctaw woman attaining a medical degree and would be inspired,” she said.

Chief Anderson should put her mind at ease about that.

“I have had the great pleasure of watching Christina Wallace grow in her career, pursue her dreams and continuously raise the bar over and over again,” she said. “She is certainly an inspiration and source of great pride for all Choctaws as she is paving a new path for our young Chahta girls.”

On commencement day, during a reception her family hosted for her, Wallace wore a traditional, hand-sewn Choctaw dress made by her mother. Celebrating with her that day were two potential medical school prospects – a daughter who now wants to be an artist, and a son who loves all things military.

When they were younger, though, they were “surgeons.”

“They pretended to do surgery on me,” Wallace said, “after they pretended to fly to me on a plane.”

So Wallace had a plan. Before graduation, she took her children on a tour of a place that symbolizes her long-awaited accomplishment: the School of Medicine – where you don’t have to get on a plane to soar.

This beaded writing pen is among the gifts Wallace received during her send-off party at the Choctaw Health Center.
Darryl Adams sees many uninsured patients who aren’t likely to get an appointment with a physician who specializes in infectious diseases.

But if they suffer from Hepatitis C, a viral infection that attacks the liver and can lead to serious liver damage, the nurse practitioner wants to help them immediately, especially with medications that offer a cure.

“We need to have the ability to treat them where they are, so that they don’t have to go miles and miles down the road and so they don’t have to wait for the referral process,” said Adams, who practices at Coastal Family Health in Bay St. Louis.

Adams is able to remove those roadblocks for Hepatitis C patients through Project ECHO, a national telehealth initiative that uses interactive video technology to connect community providers and specialists for real-time collaborative discussions.

The goal is to educate primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, registered nurses and physicians’ assistants on how to recognize and treat Hepatitis C in their communities. In turn, those providers can help ensure that patients get high-quality treatment locally – from people they know and trust – without delays.

Adams is one of the Mississippi caregivers getting medical advice and Hepatitis C education from expert facilitators taking part in Project ECHO, which stands for “Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes.” Project ECHO is offered via national hubs. UMMC’s Center for Telehealth coordinates Mississippi’s participation with Centro San Vicente’s hub in El Paso, Texas.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers the infection epidemic nationwide. The CDC estimates 2.4 million Americans are living with Hepatitis C, with infections rising because of the opioid crisis, increasing the urgency for diagnosis and treatment.

The ease of Project ECHO and the opportunity it gives providers to improve care is invaluable, said Patricia Gallegos, Centro San Vicente’s director of strategic initiatives. She is assisting Albrecht and the Center for Telehealth in taking part in the initiative.

“Providers log on and learn how to treat and recognize Hepatitis C in their own primary care setting,” Gallegos said. “Everyone learns from each other in collaboration with infectious diseases specialists.”

For most patients, Hepatitis C treatment consists of a once-daily medication in pill form for either eight or 12 weeks.

“Hepatitis C is completely curable,” said Dr. Svenja Albrecht, UMMC associate professor of infectious diseases medicine. “Well over 95 percent of patients respond, and if not, there are still other medications that can work.”

Hepatitis C antiviral drugs, however, are costly: Just one daily sofosbuvir pill costs $1,000, and a full 12-week course of treatment with the same drug costs $84,000. Insurance coverage varies, depending on the carrier.

Through Project ECHO, Adams said he’s learned that a patient visit might need a little adjusting to ensure a hepatitis screening.

“There’s so much going on in that little bit of time we have for an office visit,” he said. “I try to make sure I address it on a visit where it makes sense, like an annual wellness check.

“The more we screen, the more we will find. That means more people will be cured.”
Mississippi has a shortage of pediatric geneticists to treat young patients with sometimes life-threatening diseases that are rare or difficult to diagnose.

But through the Center for Telehealth at UMMC, children statewide have access to those services through remote, two-way, live audiovisual conferencing.

“It can be the difference between a child getting a genetic workup and parents knowing what is going on with their child, or not,” said Tearsanee Carlisle Davis, a family nurse practitioner and the center’s director of clinical and advanced practice operations.

A recent accreditation awarded by a national nonprofit organization to the UMMC Center for Telehealth is affirmation of such high quality of patient care delivery.

The honor comes from the Utilization Review Accreditation Committee, an independent leader in promoting health care quality through leadership, accreditation, measurement and innovation. URAC helps organizations transform by developing national standards to improve quality, protect consumers and improve health outcomes.

“It’s an important way of showing that we meet a certain bar related to the programs that we implement through telehealth,” said Dr. Alan Jones, professor and chair of the UMMC Department of Emergency Medicine and interim director of the Center for Telehealth. “It shows that there are policies, procedures and standards in place for the way that we apply telehealth.”

URAC accreditation is a symbol of excellence for organizations to showcase their validated commitment to quality and accountability its leaders say. URAC requires applicants to submit policies, procedures and other organizational information. A primary reviewer is assigned and coordinates all aspects of the review until a decision on accreditation has been determined.

“By earning Telehealth Accreditation from URAC, the University of Mississippi Medical Center’s Center for Telehealth is operating on the cutting edge of health care delivery,” said Shawn Griffin, URAC president and CEO, in a statement. “Independent accreditation demonstrates UMMC can provide value-based care to more people while meeting performance standards conceived by a broad array of telehealth stakeholders.

“As technology becomes more critical in achieving population health goals, UMMC blazes a trail that others follow.”

The Center for Telehealth allows UMMC providers to examine and treat patients using live, two-way audiovisual technology, store-and-forward technology, and remote patient monitoring programs on computers, tablets and smartphones. UMMC is filling a void by providing telehealth through partnerships with community-based hospitals, critical-access hospitals, clinics, community mental health clinics, community health centers, businesses, schools and colleges.

Remote patient monitoring provides in-home care and health education to patients who cope with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart failure and hypertension.

UMMC provides teleemergency services in some of the state’s rural and critical access hospitals, connecting their emergency rooms in real time to emergency medicine physicians in the Medical Center’s Emergency Department. Those on Mississippi’s state health insurance and employees in some corporate settings can take advantage of UMMC2You telehealth urgent care.

UMMC earned the URAC accreditation on its first attempt. Davis said the accreditation is “all about” quality of care and “the organization itself.

“We’re not a freestanding organization. We’re part of a larger health system. We’re able to provide a higher level of continuity of care, and transition of care, because of that affiliation. That sets us apart.”

One example: If a telehealth provider sees a patient through UMMC2You urgent care, the provider might detect additional problems that need attention.

“That patient may or may not have ever been seen at UMMC,” Davis said. “We have the ability to make connections and referrals for that patient and help that patient navigate through the health care system.

“We can build that relationship.”

Patients with some medical challenges aren’t candidates for telehealth. But for those who are, “our goal is to recreate the in-person exam as much as possible and maintain that same or better standard of care,” Davis said.
UMMC opens state’s first primary care clinic for LGBTQ community

As a gay man in Jackson, Wes McComas wants what many in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning community desire: A doctor who understands his medical needs.

No judgment, regardless of his gender identity or sexual orientation. Primary care for his hypertension and everyday ills delivered in a welcoming environment.

“I’ve been ‘out’ since 1986, but many times, I wouldn’t let my provider know it,” said McComas, a social worker. “I was afraid it would affect the care I received.”

His “safe place” is UMMC’s TEAM Clinic at the Jackson Medical Mall Thad Cochran Center. TEAM stands for “Trustworthy, Evidence-based, Affirming and Multidisciplinary” care.

Sponsored by UMMC’s Center for LGBTQ Health, the TEAM Clinic is the state’s first multidisciplinary LGBTQ health clinic and one of the few in the region. Its mission is to ensure every Mississippian has access to accepting, high-quality and holistic primary health care, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.

“We want to provide a supportive, welcoming and affirming environment, because there’s often fear about opening up and revealing things about yourself to your doctor,” said Dr. Scott Rodgers, UMMC professor and chair of psychiatry and human behavior. “By being open and welcoming, we can help patients who need to talk and to be honest with their doctor about their sexual orientation or gender identity.”

That patient-provider relationship can mean everything to McComas and other members of the LGBTQ community. On a recent visit to Jim Miller, a nurse practitioner at the clinic, McComas discussed his weight – the scales showed he’d dropped a few pounds – and strategies for keeping his blood pressure in check.

“It’s a little high today,” Miller told McComas after gently chastising him for eating a fast-food lunch that day. “How’s your salt intake? I’d really encourage you to stop eating salt.”

“I can do better,” McComas told him.

“It’s a process,” Miller reassured him, advising McComas to walk for exercise and ordering bloodwork to gauge his potassium level.

The clinic also offers wellness visits, endocrine and hormonal treatment, “gender-affirmative” medicine, sexually transmitted disease screening and treatment, behavioral health/psychiatric services and medication management, among other services. The care team includes specialists in family and internal medicine, pediatrics, psychology and psychiatry.

Rodgers and Dr. Leandro Mena, UMMC professor and chair of population health science, are cofounders of the Center for LGBTQ Health. Mena serves as medical director of the TEAM Clinic. Also on the Center for LGBTQ Health’s leadership team are Dr. Alexandria Delozier, UMMC instructor in psychiatry and human behavior, who serves as the center’s director of research and TEAM Clinic associate medical director; and Reid Black, a third-year student in the UMMC School of Medicine, who serves as the center’s education director.

Rodgers’ department also staffs an LGBTQ specialty clinic that provides mental health services. That clinic, which opened in 2015 at the medical mall, offers psychiatric care and psychotherapy.

As the specialty clinic gained momentum, Rodgers said “we were getting questions about primary care issues that we couldn’t handle in psychiatry. We needed a multidisciplinary approach to care.”

Rodgers and members of his department began meeting monthly with pediatricians, obstetrics and gynecology faculty, and internal and family medicine providers to discuss care that goes beyond mental health services.

While the specialty clinic will continue to offer mental health services, the TEAM Clinic gives patients day-to-day medical treatment and help with managing chronic conditions, such as diabetes, with referrals to specialists when needed.

“We have a group of experts who do this as an interdisciplinary team, and that’s important because this can be a high-risk population,” Delozier said.

She said feedback on the clinic so far “has been great.

“Patients feel like they have a safe space. A lot of providers have been really supportive. Some have felt they’re not trained to take care of this population. Knowing that we are here takes a burden off people’s minds. We’ve had patients who just want to come in to establish care.”

“I can ask things that won’t surprise them,” McComas said. “As an older gay man, I feel better knowing that my provider will know the questions to ask me.”
Living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) may be hard enough, but coping with substance abuse on top of that has been a heavy burden for Rosemary Hall.

“I was at a younger age, going through things with my father’s death,” Hall said. “That’s when the alcoholism and drug use began. When I was a street person, I contracted HIV.”

The Jackson resident said she sought treatment, “but they never seemed to help me. They gave me pills, but that wasn’t helping me mentally.”

Hall finally found the support she desperately needed at the University of Mississippi Medical Center Adult Special Care Clinic. She is among more than 60 patients receiving treatment for substance abuse disorders at the clinic for patients living with HIV.

Located in the Jackson Medical Mall Thad Cochran Center, the clinic hosts the Helping HAND program, or “Helping to Advance in New Directions,” a federal grant-funded initiative that’s fast becoming an integral part of the clinic.

Helping HAND “has been wildly successful,” said Dr. Deborah Konkle-Parker, UMMC professor of infectious diseases medicine. “You can really see that lives are changed.”

Konkle-Parker said she and the clinic team saw a need for Helping HAND as a way to help those with HIV keep that disease in check. Helping HAND received initial support in 2017 and patient screening began a year later. The clinic also offers care for patients with Hepatitis C.

“Our take on it was that if we can increase viral suppression in people living with HIV, then we would decrease transmission in the community,” Konkle-Parker said. “People with substance abuse disorders are much more likely not to be virally suppressed.”

“The rising rates of opioid use disorder are affecting Mississippi as they are the rest of the country, and substance abuse disorders have an impact not just on health, but patients’ ability to manage their chronic illnesses,” said Dr. Ben Brock, UMMC assistant professor of infectious diseases medicine and the clinic’s medical director.

The clinic team includes infectious disease physicians and nurse practitioners, psychologists with expertise in substance abuse, registered nurses and licensed clinical social workers. The team introduces patients who are at very high risk for HIV and dependent upon drugs or alcohol to the Helping HAND program.

Those who choose to enroll receive substance abuse treatment that takes place at the clinic, eliminating their need to travel to a different location for services, and referrals for mental health care, if needed.

Dr. Jefferson Parker, UMMC professor of psychiatry and human behavior, provides individual substance abuse treatment to Helping HAND patients, referring those who need it to psychiatry for medication-assisted treatment or therapy for depression, anxiety or other mental health challenges. He said patients generally fall into one of three categories.

“One is a patient who is completely overwhelmed with substance abuse and their life is falling apart,” he said. “My first role is to get them into a structured residential rehabilitation program. Before I start working with them, I might refer them to Harbor House, or detox and then Harbor House.

“Another group is individuals who perhaps are using both cocaine and marijuana. They might be having problems with the cocaine now, but not with marijuana. I work with them to first become abstinent from cocaine.”

Such a patient would receive motivational treatment, earning a gift card for a negative drug screen for cocaine, the value increasing with each negative screen. Because the screenings are a regular part of most appointments, “we know what’s going on with them,” Parker said.

Parker’s third group consists of patients who have gotten off drugs or alcohol but need the tools to prevent relapse, such as developing a support system and avoiding people, places and things that would lead them down a bad path.

Brock said the clinic takes a holistic approach to care.

“We do routine substance abuse and mental health screenings for the issues identified that aren’t normally addressed in the health care setting in a lot of clinics,” he said. “And even in the non-HIV population, substance use disorder and other mental health illnesses are commonly present together.”

The clinic takes part in the federal Ryan White HIV/AIDS program, meaning the staff is committed to providing care to people living with HIV, regardless of their ability to pay.

“This kind of intervention – screening and treatment for substance abuse disorders in primary and subspecialty care – that’s where the future is,” Parker said. “This is innovative and powerful.”
To understand why some people born in rural communities in the South live shorter, less healthy lives than their counterparts elsewhere in the same counties and across the country, researchers from the University of Mississippi Medical Center and partner institutions have announced the launch of a new longitudinal cohort study aimed at combating this issue.

The Risk Underlying Rural Areas Longitudinal Study will allow researchers to learn what causes the high burden of heart, lung, blood and sleep disorders in Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana and offer clues regarding how to alleviate them.

With funding from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and led by Boston University, the six-year, $21.4 million multisite prospective cohort study will include 50 investigators from 16 institutions.

Researchers plan to recruit and study 4,000 multi-ethnic participants from 10 of the most economically challenged rural counties in the Southern Appalachia and Mississippi Delta regions.

"We are going to look at a rural population cohort – a cohort that’s never been successfully studied at this scale," said Dr. Ervin Fox, UMMC professor of medicine and principal investigator for the Mississippi sites. "We plan to draw participants from throughout these communities and be able to identify solutions for a group of people who have been overlooked by previous research efforts because of their geography."

The RURAL study is a collaboration between 16 research institutions. After finalizing protocols and securing Institutional Review Board approval, the transdisciplinary RURAL team plans to use a combination of tools, such as a mobile examination unit, wearable activity monitors and smartphones to assess familial, lifestyle, behavior and medical histories, including risk for HLBS disorders.

In addition to considering environmental and economic factors, the team also will study standard and novel risk factors for HLBS disorders.

Additional RURAL investigators in Mississippi include Dr. Frances Henderson, former Jackson Heart Study deputy director and dean emeritus of the Alcorn State University School of Nursing; Dr. Sandra Carr-Melvin, chief operating officer of the Open Arms Healthcare Center in Jackson; Dr. Bettina Beech, dean of the John D. Bower School of Population Health at UMMC; and Abril Grant, research specialist for the UMMC Division of Cardiology.

The main hypothesis of RURAL is that exposure to adverse social and environmental factors creates greater wear and tear on the body, affects psychosocial well-being and impacts lifestyle choices that influence HLBS risk. Furthermore, increased genetic predisposition, greater economic challenges and non-white status may all exacerbate HLBS risk in the South.

Dr. Javed Butler, UMMC professor and chair of medicine and Patrick Lehan Chair of Cardiovascular Research, said he is excited that the Medical Center will participate in RURAL.

“Rural communities may face unique challenges with respect to environment, health care infrastructure, health habits and disease risks and characteristics,” Butler said. “The study holds promise in understanding these unique aspects of drivers of disease and outcomes in the diverse rural communities in the United States.”
JHS findings link heart disease, stroke to HTN

About one-third of heart disease and stroke cases in African-Americans are related to high blood pressure, according to research by UMMC physicians.

The study, which uses data from the Jackson Heart Study, was published in JAMA Cardiology’s Oct. 23, 2019 issue.

According to Dr. Donald “Trey” Clark, UMMC assistant professor of medicine and lead author of the study, several factors contribute to the risk of heart disease and stroke, such as type 2 diabetes, smoking and high cholesterol. But hypertension, or high blood pressure, is the top risk factor for these events.

“It is well-established that hypertension is a leading contributor to cardiovascular disease, and we felt that is was important to gauge the impact of hypertension in this population,” Clark said.

Researchers studied the health records of more than 12,000 African-American adults from the Jackson Heart Study and the Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke study. During follow-up, about one in 10 participants had a cardiovascular event during the study.

Researchers found 32.5 percent of these cardiovascular disease cases were related to high blood pressure. In black adults under the age of 60, more than half of overall CVD events were linked with hypertension and 69 percent with stroke, specifically.

“This tells us that the burden of stroke in this younger population is largely attributed to hypertension,” Clark said.

The JHS is a collaboration between UMMC, Jackson State University, Tougaloo College, the Mississippi State Department of Health, the National Institutes of Health and Jackson-area participants. Its goal is to better understand the reasons for the high burden of heart disease in African Americans and develop strategies to promote heart health.

The research was funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities; the National Institute of General Medical Sciences; and the American Heart Association.

UMMC to join UAB in expanding HIV research

UMMC and partner institution the University of Alabama-Birmingham have received a seven-year, $7 million award from the National Institutes of Health to continue and expand their work studying HIV in the Southeast.

The award is part of the fusing of two legacy studies of HIV – the Women’s Interagency HIV Study and the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study – into an MACS/WIHS Combined Cohort Study, also called MWCCS.

“WIHS started with a focus on understanding HIV in women and the associated comorbidities,” said Dr. Deborah Konkle-Parker, UMMC professor of medicine who has led the WIHS site in Jackson since the study site’s creation in 2013.

Since 1993, WIHS has enrolled nearly 5,000 women with and without HIV, including more than 200 in the Jackson and Birmingham areas, in order to study the progression of HIV.

“The focus now is on people who are living and aging with HIV,” Konkle-Parker said.

Like other viruses, HIV can lead to a state of chronic inflammation, where the body produces cells and proteins to fight off an infection. This increases the risk of heart disease, kidney disease and cancers. Cardiorenal disease is more prevalent among older adults with HIV than those without, Konkle-Parker said.

“It’s also very important to understand how HIV treatments impact lives, as well as the double impact of both HIV infection and long-term treatment with antiretroviral therapy,” Konkle-Parker said.

The main study objectives include identifying biomarkers of increased risk for chronic disorders in people living with HIV; determining how antiretroviral therapy affects other medical conditions; developing more effective interventions and treatments; and learning how chronic immune activation and inflammation due to HIV may affect other health conditions.

Grant boosts HIV care access throughout SE

Patients in the Jackson metro area need more than medical services to keep their HIV-positive status in check and their health at its best.

The 2,000-plus people living with HIV treated by UMMC’s infectious diseases team need a long-term support system that makes getting health care less of a struggle. That’s especially true for the HIV-positive population, a group that might not have money for food or medicine, don’t have reliable transportation, lack child care, or are unemployed or financially insecure.

UMMC is one of three program grantees supported by HIV Care Connect, a $7 million, five-year initiative established by the Merck Foundation to help reduce disparities in access to care and improve health outcomes for persons with HIV living in vulnerable and underserved Southeastern U.S. communities.

“In this day and age, a large number of people with HIV know that they are infected and know where they can get care, but they’re not getting it,” said Dr. Leandro Mena, UMMC professor and chair of population health science. “UMMC shares a significant responsibility to make sure that individuals living with HIV in Mississippi receive quality care.”

Merck is providing funding to UMMC, Care Resource of Miami and Medical Advocacy and Outreach of Montgomery, Alabama. The HIV Care Connect grant will allow UMMC to create a central point in Jackson for care coordination with other organizations. UMMC will co-locate a new low-barrier access clinic within Express Personal Health “so that no one will be left behind,” Mena said.
The Office of Research at the University of Mississippi Medical Center recognized UMMC faculty members for their achievements in gaining outside funding during its annual Excellence in Research Awards Oct. 25, 2019, in the Norman C. Nelson Student Union.

The award levels – platinum, gold, silver and bronze – are based on the cumulative amount of extramural funding received by the investigator for his or her original research during their career at UMMC.

The 18 medallion recipients, including two platinum, five gold, nine silver and two bronze, contributed to UMMC’s 302 grants and awards for fiscal year 2019.

**Platinum Medallion – $5 million**

**Dr. Susan Buttross, professor of pediatrics-child development**

Medical director of the Center for Advancement of Youth, Buttross is principal investigator of the Child Health and Development Project, which seeks to measurably improve health and development outcomes for young children through screenings and interventions in child care centers, doctors' offices and other locations.

**Dr. Deborah Konkle-Parker, professor of medicine-infectious diseases**

Konkle-Parker served as PI for the UMMC cohort of the Women’s Interagency HIV Study and serves in the same capacity for the study’s successor, the MACS/WIHS Combined Cohort Study. She is also PI for a substance abuse treatment program called Helping HAND (Helping to Advance in New Directions).

**Gold Medallion – $1 million**

**Dr. Fan Fan, assistant professor of pharmacology and toxicology**

Dr. Bernadette Grayson, associate professor of neurobiology and anatomical sciences

Dr. Michael Hall, associate professor of medicine-cardiology

Dr. Bradley Walters, assistant professor of neurobiology and anatomical sciences

Dr. Licy Yanes Cardozo, associate professor of cell and molecular biology

**Silver Medallion – $500,000**

**Dr. Denise Cornelius, assistant professor of emergency medicine**

Dr. Charlotte Hobbs, associate professor of pediatrics-infectious diseases

Dr. Sally Huskinson, assistant professor of psychiatry and human behavior

Dr. Michael Roach, associate professor of biomedical materials science

Dr. Joshua Speed, assistant professor of physiology and biophysics

Dr. Frank Spradley, assistant professor of surgery

Dr. Kedra Wallace, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology

Dr. Junming Wang, professor of pathology

Dr. Keli Xu, assistant professor of neurobiology and anatomical sciences

**Bronze Medallion – $250,000**

**Dr. Seth Lirette, assistant professor of data science**

Dr. Zhen Wang, assistant professor of physiology and biophysics

**Discovery Awards**

**Early Career Investigator**

Dr. Denise Cornelius, assistant professor of emergency medicine

**Meritorious Research Service – Faculty**

Dr. Vani Vijayakumar, professor of radiology

**Meritorious Research Service – Staff**

Ashley Johnson, scientist, pharmacology and toxicology

Gloria Minniefield, accounting manager, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Post-Award

**Outstanding Achievement in Clinical Research**

Dr. Shou-Ching Tang, professor of medicine and director of clinical and translation research, UMMC Cancer Center and Research Institute

Addressing the researchers in attendance, Summers added, “Your hard work has accomplished this, not the Office of Research. We are just your cheerleaders and facilitators, and we are very excited about the direction our mission is going.”
Dr. Susan Buttross, left, and Dr. Deborah Konkle-Parker received platinum medallions during the Excellence in Research Awards ceremony.

Dr. Richard Summers, right, associate vice chancellor for research, and Dr. Leslie Musshafen, executive director of research, congratulate Gold Award recipients, from left, Dr. Fan Fan, Dr. Licy Yanes Cardozo, Dr. Bernadette Grayson and Dr. Michael Hall.

Dr. Shou-Ching Tang receives the Outstanding Achievement in Clinical Research Award.

Ashley Johnson, left, and Gloria Minniefield each receive the Staff Meritorious Research Service Award.

Dr. Vani Vijayakumar receives the Faculty Meritorious Research Service Award.

Dr. Denise Cornelius receives the Early Career Investigator Award.

Dr. Richard Summers, right, and Musshafen, left, congratulate Bronze Award recipients, from left, Dr. Zhen Wang and Dr. Seth Lirette.

Summers, left, and Musshafen, right, congratulate Silver award recipients, from left, Dr. Sally Huskinson, Dr. Michael Roach, Dr. Joshua Speed, Dr. Charlotte Hobbs, Dr. Denise Cornelius, Dr. Keli Xu, Dr. Kendra Wallace and Dr. Frank Spradley.

Dr. Denise Cornelius receives the Early Career Investigator Award.
2019 UMMC workforce

Source: UMMC DIS Core

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Male</th>
<th>Total Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>73</td>
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Total Employees: 10,525

Manager: SYNERGY | P22 | UMMC OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
Dr. Manisha Sethi Malhotra, a 1998 University of Mississippi School of Medicine graduate, knew from the time she was 4 that she wanted to be a doctor, so she took a bit of a running start.

Sethi completed her degree at Millsaps in three years, walked for her college graduation and then, a few weeks later, got to walk with her graduating high school class, too. She started medical school when she was 18.

“I had to work hard, and everyone was out to be number one. I’m grateful for the opportunity that UMMC created, and I was fortunate enough to have lectures by Dr. [Arthur] Guyton,” Sethi said, referring to the legendary physiologist and professor.

Sethi completed medical school in the traditional four years and stayed at UMMC to do her residency in combined internal medicine and pediatrics. During her internship, her niece, Tori, at just 5 months old, got very sick, developing a hole in her stomach. She was sent to the pediatric emergency room at UMMC.

Once Sethi realized what the issue was, she found her way to the OR, discovered her beloved mentor Dr. Richard Miller there and took him directly to the ER.

Miller, a renowned pediatric surgeon who died last August, performed the operation, but Tori still ended up in the PICU for two months. Sethi spent every minute she could by her side and was often sent to the Ronald McDonald House on campus to sleep. She was sent to the pediatric emergency room at UMMC.

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Miller, a renowned pediatric surgeon who died last August, performed the operation, but Tori still ended up in the PICU for two months. Sethi spent every minute she could by her side and was often sent to the Ronald McDonald House on campus to sleep. Her niece is perfect now, she said.

“It’s because of people like Dr. Miller, the PICU team, pediatricians and subspecialists, everyone who pulled together to help her recover,” Sethi said. “It’s an important component of who I am now. Enduring the illness of a family member changes who you are as a physician.

Changes how you see the world, how you deal with patients.”

When Sethi was chief resident, once again she experienced a life-changing moment. Her sister, the victim of a devastating car accident, was airlifted to UMMC.

“The Adult Orthopaedic Department put her back together,” Sethi said. “I learned at a different stage in my physician development more lessons in compassion and in caring for family members and being vulnerable as a patient.”

After finishing residency, Sethi worked at UMMC and the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Jackson, while building her own clinic, Internal Medicine and Pediatric Associates in Ridgeland.

She managed to open her clinic doors when she was 29, just in time for the two-week checkup for the grandchild of a fellow board member of the Ronald McDonald House.

“When I opened the practice, I don’t think I realized what an investment and risk I took, because I was so young,” she said. “I just knew I wanted to do it and failure was not an option. Never entered my mind.

“I wanted to help a lot of people. That’s why I chose my specialty, because I could touch a lot more people than someone who restricted themselves to just one population.”

Her patients range in age from newborn to 100 every day. Often she sees each member of a family. The people who have helped her along the way are now her patients.

“It’s been a labor of love,” she said. “I had no patients when I opened, but I had faith. God has always been with me. I believe that keeps me grounded and straight and keeps me providing the care that I am supposed to provide.”

Lilly Hart, 9, gets her ears checked by Dr. Manisha Sethi, her family physician.
Each month, a meaningful, positive word is posted throughout the Medical Center campus, underscoring UMMC's values. The “Word of the Month” is a visual reminder of the institution’s standards when it comes to the promotion of a respectful and inclusive environment. Words are posted in elevators and on bulletin boards. Managers are encouraged to post the word in their departments or units and to use the word as a “talking point” to stimulate dialogue with employees.

### 2019 Words of the Month

- April: Collaboration
- May: Culture
- June: Respect
- July: Diversity
- August: Stereotype
- September: Equality
- October: Acceptance
- November: Unconscious Bias
- December: Integrity
Gold Humanism celebrates ‘other half’ of being a doctor

This is how you find out you’re in the Gold Humanism Honor Society:
You get bushwhacked with a balloon. Cornered with bag of candy.
Hailed with a handshake or even a hug.

That’s how you know you’ve made it – with balloons and bags that come in gold, the color of warmth and compassion, good fortune and wealth, because, in a way, this is like winning it all.

Not that you get a lot of money – or any – but, for people like Dr. Lyssa Weatherly, the distinction is, well, the “gold standard” for physicians and future physicians who value kindness in patient care.

“It’s my favorite award of recognition I’ve ever received,” said Weatherly, UMMC assistant professor of medicine in geriatrics, whose faculty profile lists more than 20 accolades since she arrived at the University of Mississippi Medical Center as a student in 2008.

Another 21 rising fourth-year medical students and seven residents officially joined her in the Gold Humanism ranks during an induction ceremony witnessed by the physician for whom the School of Medicine chapter is named: Dr. Jeanette Pullen.

“I believe becoming part of this is maybe the greatest honor you can have,” said Pullen, UMMC professor emeritus of pediatrics and former long-time director of pediatric hematology-oncology.

The society, a program of the Arnold P. Gold Foundation, identifies students, residents and faculty known for treating patients and their families with empathy and respect, and who communicate with them well and honestly. It acknowledges them as role models, mentors and leaders.

“People are starting to recognize now that the relationship with the patient matters,” said Dr. Ralph Didlake, UMMC professor of surgery, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs and director of the Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities.

“Especially for my generation, these qualities were not emphasized,” said Didlake, who has been practicing medicine for about 40 years. “It was all about technical competency. But Gold Humanism is not just a feel-good thing. It has real impact on patients.

“Year after year, among the top three root causes of sentinel events are those involving communication and human factors.”

Sentinel events are unexpected incidents that cause harm to patients, such as falls or being on the receiving end of the wrong procedure. Which suggests that, to avoid such mistakes, physicians and other caregivers would do well to, among other things, listen to their patients.

“In reality, I’ve never had a patient ask me what my class ranking was or what I made on an exam,” Weatherly said. “No one ever thanks me for being ‘so smart.’

“They will thank you for being sweet or showing that you care.”

The New Jersey-based Arnold P. Gold Foundation, started by the late Dr. Arnold Gold and his wife, Dr. Sandra Gold, and others, created the award in 2001 to “perpetuate the tradition of the caring doctor.”

During the celebration, the students received a certificate, a lapel pin and a medallion they’re asked to wear on another red-letter day in their lives – graduation. But the rejoicing actually began, more or less, in March, with a tradition that started here: Tap Day – the day of balloons and candy.
Dr. Michael Ryan, professor of physiology and biophysics at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, has received the 2019 Diversity Educator of the Year Award from the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning.

“It is a great honor to receive this prestigious award,” Ryan said. “It is truly the highest compliment that I could receive in my career.

“I am thankful to have a platform where I can make a small amount of progress.”

Ryan received the award for his efforts to promote diversity in the biomedical sciences, which span the educational spectrum from grade school to junior faculty.

“When we speak about diversity and inclusion at UMMC, we are speaking about excellence, quality and that we are better and stronger when we have diverse voices at the table,” said Dr. LouAnn Woodward, UMMC vice chancellor for health affairs. “Dr. Ryan is a remarkable role model for young scientists and a shining example of excellence.”

Largely through Ryan’s leadership as UMMC associate dean for student affairs, the School of Graduate Studies in the Health Sciences and its outreach programs are more diverse and inclusive than ever before. The number of Ph.D. students from minority groups has doubled, and the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience program has increased its minority enrollment from 12 to 35 percent.

Ryan is principal investigator of the Mississippi Diversity in Hypertension and Cardiorenal Researchers program, a National Institutes of Health award that has supported more than 40 college students from underrepresented minorities.

Ryan also organizes outreach programs, such as Discovery U and Physiology Understanding Week, which introduce K-12 students in Jackson-area schools to the biomedical sciences.

On a national level, Ryan serves on National Institutes of Health and American Physiological Society committees that seek to enhance diversity in the biomedical sciences.

As a scientist, Ryan studies the mechanisms of hypertension in autoimmune diseases, such as lupus and in preeclampsia. His work is funded by the NIH and Veterans Affairs.

Ryan’s trainees have been approximately 75 percent women and include several minority students, many of whom have received their own extramural funding and advanced to faculty positions.

Ryan joined the UMMC faculty in 2004 following his doctoral studies at the University of Buffalo and a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Iowa.

In 2019, Ryan also received the APS A. Clifford Barger Underrepresented Minority Mentorship Award and the UMMC’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion’s Beacon Award.
The Jackson Free Clinic is the recipient of the 2019 Governor’s Initiative for Volunteer Excellence Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Care Access.

The Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service presented a total of 13 GIVE Awards to organizations or individuals during a ceremony in Jackson. This is the 25th year of Volunteer Mississippi and of the awards ceremony.

Launched by the Office of the Governor and Volunteer Mississippi, the GIVE Awards recognize outstanding contributions to communities through service, advocacy and outreach to benefit Mississippians.

The nonprofit Jackson Free Clinic is run by students in the University of Mississippi Medical Center’s School of Medicine with the support of local physicians and community leaders.

Established for Jackson-area residents who do not have adequate access to medical care, the clinic offers free, non-emergency care, including examinations, treatment, education, referrals and other services.

Licensed dentists supervise students from the UMMC School of Dentistry who provide oral cancer screenings, oral hygiene instruction, extractions, X-rays and other services.

Occupational therapy and physical therapy students from the UMMC School of Health Related Professions, overseen by licensed therapists, provide rehabilitation care.

Dr. Joyce Olutade, UMMC assistant professor of family medicine and medical director of Student and Employee Health, first proposed a student-run health clinic for the poor and homeless in Jackson in 2000.

Dr. Loretta Jackson-Williams, vice dean for medical education, and Logan Ramsey, M4, hold the GIVE Award presented to the Jackson Free Clinic by Volunteer Mississippi.

Volunteer MS honors Jackson Free Clinic with Governor’s Award

The Champion Professional Development and Certificate Program is a comprehensive curriculum presented in 10 incremental modules. The program equips UMMC employees with the knowledge and skills to work professionally with a diverse group of employees, patients and clients.

The first cohort of 72 participants engaged in online learning, consulted with leaders and subject matter experts, and received important tools to support their job functions to build and sustain a more inclusive climate.

The participants who completed all 10 levels of the online component received digital credentials to highlight professional development competency levels, continuing education credits for qualified professionals, and a certificate of completion at a graduation ceremony.

Eight participants went on to complete the mastery level credential, which requires a new workplace application, practice, or initiative designed to influence change within the institution. Participants who achieve the mastery level are recognized at the Pillars annual institutional awards ceremony.

For more information, visit: https://umc.edu/odi-champion
To honor its employees and students who are combat-wounded veterans, the University of Mississippi Medical Center has provided six designated Purple Heart parking spaces in Lot 3 on the UMMC campus.

“My dad’s been hurt, he’s coming to UMMC, and they say he might not make it.”

The nurse wanted the chance to tell him goodbye, but she was almost two hours away, preparing to drive her elderly mother to Jackson. Harcharik long-distance-wrapped her arms around her coworker and made it happen.

She walked to the injured man’s bedside and held her cell phone to his ear. His daughter was able to give him her love.

“It was hard for me to do that, but she trusted me with the most precious gift that I could give her,” said Harcharik, the first recipient of UMMC’s DAISY Nurse Leader Award.

It was a highlight of the Medical Center’s celebration of its 10th year of awarding DAISY recognition to exemplary nurses and the national DAISY program’s 20th anniversary. Until 2019, only a handful of UMMC unit nurses or nursing teams each year received a DAISY, which stands for “Diseases Attacking the Immune System.”

Going forward, one DAISY Nurse Leader Award will be presented annually so nurses who make a difference in a leadership role also can be recognized, said Patrice Donald, magnet program manager in UMMC’s Office of Nursing Quality and Development.

“They exhibit trust, compassion, mutual respect and ethical behavior,” Donald said of the 15 2019 nominees. “They promote and enhance the image of nursing in the workplace, the community and the profession.”

Established in 2000 by members of the family of former patient Patrick Barnes, the California-based DAISY Foundation presents the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses to the unsung heroes of the profession. Winners are nominated by anyone in their organization and by patients or patient family members.

About 1,700 health care facilities in all 50 states and in 11 other countries honor their nurses with the DAISY Award. The DAISY Committee at UMMC reviews nominations every two months and selects up to two winners each cycle who meet the criteria for going “over and beyond” the expectations of a nurse.

The DAISY Team Award is presented once annually, and several School of Nursing students and faculty members also receive the award each year. The DAISY Award program will soon spread to the ambulatory setting.

During the last decade, Medical Center nurses have received 11,734 DAISY Award nominations; some in that number more than once, said Terri Gillespie, chief nursing executive and clinical services officer for the UMMC Health System. Of the 121 nurses receiving the award, 66 still work at UMMC.

During milestone year, UMMC’s Daisy Awards extend recognition scope

Purple Heart parking spaces debut on Veterans Day 2019

Patrice Donald, left, magnet program manager in the Office of Nursing Quality and Development, and Terri Gillespie, right, chief nursing executive and clinical services officer for the UMMC Health System, present the 2019 DAISY Nurse Leader Award to LeAnn Harcharik, nurse manager in the Winfred L. Wiser Hospital for Women and Infants.
The Pillars 2019 award recipients

The Pillars is an institutional award that honors individuals who have made meaningful contributions that broaden diversity and promote the climate of inclusion in the UMMC community and elsewhere. Each year, an honoree is selected from the following categories:

- **The Excellence Award** honors a student, resident, or fellow from any UMMC school who demonstrates an outstanding commitment to the institution’s goals to promote diversity and inclusion within the institution and through service to the community.
  
  **Recipient:** Edgar R. Meyer, ASB president and member of the School of Graduate Studies in the Health Sciences Class of 2019

- **The Inclusion Award** recognizes a full-time or part-time executive/administrative, professional, secretarial and clerical, service and maintenance, skilled crafts, or technical and paraprofessional staff member who does not have a faculty position for showing outstanding leadership in expanding diversity and inclusion in the workplace.
  
  **Recipient:** Doris M. Whitaker, UMMC Pastoral Services director

- **The Beacon Award** honors any clinical or non-clinical faculty member with an academic designation or rank who demonstrates inclusive excellence in teaching, instruction, research or clinical practice at UMMC.
  
  **Recipient:** Dr. Michael J. Ryan, UMMC professor of physiology and biophysics

- **The Lifetime Achievement Award** acknowledges an alumni who has made a significant contribution to improving health outcomes in diverse communities in the state of Mississippi.
  
  **Recipient:** Dr. Demondes Haynes, UMMC professor of medicine (pulmonary)

- **The Inspiration Award** recognizes a community member or an organization outside of UMMC that helps advance diverse and/or underrepresented communities through servant leadership in the areas of fairness and inclusion.
  
  **Recipient:** Dr. John J. Jackson, UMMC professor emeritus, department of preventive medicine

- **The Esprit De Corps Award** acknowledges a team, department or office that demonstrates successful collaboration on efforts to improve outcomes of diverse communities in any of UMMC’s mission areas of education, research, and health care. This award category was introduced in 2020.

GWIMS earns AAMC’s national women in medicine award

The University of Mississippi Medical Center’s chapter of the Group on Women in Medicine and Science has received the 2019 Association of American Medical Colleges GWIMS Leadership Award for an Organization (Emerging Leader). The chapter was recognized at the AAMC’s annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona.

Since presenting the first national award in 1955, the AAMC has bestowed it upon just 19 women-in-medicine programs and 24 individuals.

2019 GWIMS award recipients

- **LouAnn Woodward, MD Authentic Leadership Award** - Dr. Loretta Jackson-Williams, vice dean for medical education, School of Medicine

- **Helen Barnes, MD, Diversity and Inclusion Award** - Dr. Felicia Tardy, associate professor of medical laboratory science, School of Health Related Professions

- **UMMC GWIMS Innovation Award** - Dr. Barbara Alexander, professor of physiology and biophysics, School of Graduate Studies in the Health Sciences

- **UMMC GWIMS Resilient Spirit Award** - Dr. Julie Schumacher, professor of psychiatry and human behavior, School of Medicine

- **UMMC GWIMS Emerging Star Award (student/residents/fellows)** - Dr. Erin Taylor, instructor in physiology and biophysics, School of Medicine

- **UMMC GWIMS Rising Star Award (early career)** - Dr. Felicitas Koller, assistant professor of surgery (transplant)

- **UMMC GWIMS Shining Star Award (mid-career)** - Dr. Jennifer Sasser, associate professor of pharmacology and toxicology, School of Medicine

- **UMMC GWIMS Trailblazer Award (male)** - Dr. Alan Jones, chair of emergency medicine, School of Medicine

The UMMC Chapter of the Group on Women in Medicine and Science won the “2019 GWIMS Leadership Award for an Organization” by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC).
Patient care ideas and input, shared over a sandwich supper, are helping shape the patient and family experience at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

Monthly meetings of Children’s of Mississippi’s Family Advisory and Support Team bring parents and caregivers together for an exchange of information in the evening. A neonatal intensive care version, N-FAST, meets during the day and near the NICU. Both groups, meeting at times convenient for families, are sharing information, listening and improving experiences. The concept is spreading to University Hospital, where the Patient and Family Advisory Council is being formed to enhance the delivery of care that is centered on adult patients and their families, said Skye Stoker, director of UMMC’s Office of Patient Experience.

“The voice of the patient needs to be on the agenda and in the conversation in every institutional decision,” Stoker said. “If I’m the patient, I want to trust that everyone is working on my behalf. I want to understand what’s going on and that people are listening to me.”

She said patient-centered care is an approach that is respectful of, and responsive to, individual patient preferences, needs and values, while ensuring those values guide health care decisions. FAST includes parents and other care providers of children who have been Children’s of Mississippi patients within the past year.

Last April, FAST members discussed plans for UMMC’s pediatric expansion that’s now under construction. Input from patient families went into the planning phase of the seven-story hospital tower, and Medical Center leaders are still listening. Input from patients and their families is a gift that improves care, Stoker said.

“Sometimes patients give very thoughtful feedback from perspectives their caregivers haven’t considered,” she said. “They want us to be stronger as an institution and believe that if they get involved, they can make a difference.”

Frances Anne Fortner died on May 17, 2018, at age 18. Her passion for the arts and her compassion for others had brightened the lives of everyone who knew her.

In 2019, the Medical Center dedicated its Healing Arts Program to the daughter of UMMC’s Tom Fortner and artist Laurilyn Fortner.

Overseen by the Office of Patient Experience, each offering in this series of creative and performing arts events will be staged periodically as an interlude of emotional and cultural fulfillment to benefit patients, families, caregivers, visitors and employees. It will be known as “Franny’s Hour.”

UMMC dedicates ‘Franny’s Hour’ arts program as time to heal
Cleaning the teeth of an elementary school student who has never been to a dentist before. Forming, fitting and making dentures for cancer patients and others who need them. Doing fillings, sealants and other work on veterans who don’t have dental benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

These are a few examples of the work that goes on during Dental Mission Week, a massive undertaking by the University of Mississippi School of Dentistry.

Last February, dental and dental hygiene students provided free dental care to 1,444 underserved children, adults and veterans under the supervision of faculty – about 100 more patients than the previous year. Volunteers from the Schools of Pharmacy, Medicine, Nursing and Health Related Professions helped with filling prescriptions and assessing patients’ health before they went to the dental chair.

The event serves a dual purpose: dental and dental hygiene students receive invaluable education and service experience, and community members who need it the most receive quality dental care.

The weeklong service event kicked off with the 13th annual Give Kids a Smile Day. School of Dentistry students saw 410 children from elementary schools in Jackson.

Dr. Maureen Malingkas, a dental resident, worked with other residents to treat students with special needs. By about 11 a.m. on the first day, she had seen seven students already, some of whom had cavities and hadn’t been to a dentist in a while.

“I think it’s great to give back to the community,” Malingkas said. “Even if they (the students) have been exposed to a dentist before, it’s good to have it reinforced.”

For some children, however, it’s the first time they have seen a dentist. Those children usually have significant decay or other oral problems and their parents receive a referral for follow-up treatment.

The service is particularly needed in Mississippi, a state which ranks at the bottom in oral health. A 2013 survey found 63 percent of third graders had experienced at least one cavity, 31 percent had untreated tooth decay and 5 percent were in need of urgent dental care, according to the Mississippi Department of Health.

Throughout the rest of the week, dental students also worked with faculty in the Department of Care Planning and Restorative Sciences to make 22 sets of dentures – worth up to $5,000 each – for patients in three days. The patients spent up to 10 hours in the chair during the course of four days, and students spent countless hours in the clinic and lab, but the results were well worth it.

Patricia Hubbard of Flowood came to the school a month before the event to get the mold set for her dentures. After initially thinking she wouldn’t receive the final product for several months, she got a call from the School of Dentistry asking if she’d be interested in having them made during Dental Mission Week.

“I told them ‘yes!’” she said. Dental student Kyle Walker sanded down her dentures to make sure they fit perfectly. It’s a tedious process that involves lots of adjustments and attention to detail. Walker had labored for hours in the clinic and in the lab making those teeth.

“‘If I drop this thing, you’ll all see a grown man cry,’” he joked.

“A grown woman too!” Hubbard replied.

But Walker didn’t drop them – he got them to fit just right with the help of Dr. David Felton, dean of the UMMC School of Dentistry and professor of care planning and restorative sciences. When Hubbard first saw herself in the mirror with her new teeth, she cried. Then she began singing hymns – “Oh Happy Day” and “Amazing Grace,” to name a few.

Michael Evans of Monticello received an advanced type of dentures called an obturator. Evans, a veteran of the U.S. Army who was stationed in Germany during the Vietnam War, had oral cancer. Radiation left his sinus open to the oral cavity, and he was not able to get any surgery to correct it.

The obturator closes the opening and replaced the missing part of his left maxilla, or upper jaw, said Dr. Firas Mourad, UMMC professor of dentistry in the Department of Care Planning and Restorative Sciences.

Evans, along with 240 other veterans without dental benefits who needed dental care, were seen during Dental Mission Week’s “Veterans Day.”

Evans said he’d had dentures before that he’d wear to church when he had to read, but they hurt badly and he always ended up having to take them off.

“A dentist once told me I’d never be able to wear dentures again,” he said. “I can’t wait to go show him.” Dental student Taylor Bolland made the teeth under the supervision of Felton and Mourad.

“Thank God for the crew here,” Evans said, flashing his new smile. 😊
A decade before its current students were even born, the Base Pair program started as a modest collaboration between the neighboring campuses of the University of Mississippi Medical Center and Murrah High School with a simple goal: to foster intellectual curiosity and advance science, technology, engineering and math education.

Today, Base Pair is a shining example of partnership done right, earning the University of Mississippi Excellence in Community Engagement Award. Presented by the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, the $5,000 award recognizes outstanding accomplishments in community-engaged research, learning, service or scholarship based on collaboration between University of Mississippi-associated institutions and the community.

Base Pair and the other Community Engagement Award recipients were publicly recognized at the 2019 Celebration of Service at the Inn at Ole Miss.

Started in 1992, Base Pair is an elective, two-year biomedical sciences course. After a period of orientation, enrolled juniors and seniors are paired with research mentors in UMMC’s basic and clinical science departments. They receive hands-on training in the scientific method, laboratory techniques, and data analysis and presentation.

“We serve the community by providing a pathway for students to begin a journey of exploration towards a stronger science identity,” said Dr. Rob Rockhold, UMMC deputy chief academic officer and director of Base Pair.

By science identity, he’s referring to the way people perceive themselves in their relationship with science and within the scientific community. This is something Base Pair tracks thoroughly, Rockhold said.

According to Jeff Stokes, lead teacher for Base Pair at Murrah High School, the program’s 220 alumni boast a 100-percent high school graduation rate and 99-percent college matriculation rate. At least 25 students have earned medical degrees including five physicians that have practiced at UMMC.

Last year’s class alone received more than $3 million in scholarship offers. “Throughout the years, we’ve had students accepted at all eight Ivy League colleges, as well at MIT, Vanderbilt and Stanford,” Stokes said.

“Base Pair’s success is entirely dependent on our UMMC faculty members who serve as mentors,” Rockhold said. “They are essential in this program.”

During 2018-19, 11 faculty members worked with 13 students.

“It really has made a big difference in a lot of lives,” said Dr. Stephen Stray, UMMC associate professor of microbiology and immunology. “We’ve had students who’ve come through this program who are now practicing as dentists and as physicians and doing other things that they may have never even considered as career opportunities because they got this exposure.”

In collaboration with their mentors, students produce academic posters, abstracts and occasionally full peer-reviewed papers that become part of the scientific literature and their science identity.

“These are accomplishments that stay with the student for the rest of their professional lives,” Rockhold said.

Stokes said the program will likely use the award money to support student travel to conferences, including registration fees and transportation, where students have the opportunity to further build on their accomplishments and network with area scientists. It also affords them a mechanism to showcase their own work and practice communicating science to the public, a major goal of the program.

While Base Pair’s immediate mission is science education, Rockhold said its impact goes beyond its 220 students and alumni and helps build a healthier Mississippi.

“Our fundamental mantra in Base Pair is that we are meeting UMMC’s mission by improving education, and improving education is a key factor in improving the health of a population.”

“SYNERGY | P32 | UMMC OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
Every morning, many people in Mississippi wake up hungry. Some begin their day by eating breakfast. Others don’t. But it might not be by choice.

“For the eighth year in a row, Mississippi is the hungriest state in the country,” said Dr. Bettina Beech, professor of population health science, pediatrics and family medicine and dean of the John D. Bower School of Population Health at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

“I believe we can do better.”

Twenty-two percent of Mississippians live with food insecurity, which means they lack reliable and consistent access to affordable and nutritious food. They might wonder where the next meal is coming from. It’s a pervasive problem, but three institutions are coming together to provide an opportunity to combat hunger and at the same time promote wellness.

EversCare, a social program of UMMC’s Myrlie Evers-Williams Institute for the Elimination of Health Disparities, opened a food pantry last February in partnership with the Mississippi Urban League and the Mississippi Food Network, the state’s sole food bank.

UMMC patients referred by their medical teams can visit the EversCare Pantry to receive non-perishable, healthy foods.

“We are not trying to be their food source,” Beech said. “It’s an emergency stopgap.”

For the poor and those who live in the state’s rural corners, hunger and scant access to healthy food “can be a matter of life and death,” Beech said.

“The No. 1 reason for readmission of our senior citizens to the hospital is that they don’t have enough food at home,” said Beech, the institute’s executive director. “Food is nature’s medicine, and it’s hard to heal when you are hungry.”

The EversCare Pantry is housed at the Mississippi Urban League, formerly the Mississippi Roadmap to Health Equity, in Jackson.

Those visiting the pantry will receive a blue reusable canvas shopping tote containing a four- to seven-day allotment of non-perishable goods. It could include staples such as peanut butter, cereal, canned fruits and vegetables, oatmeal and pasta, said Darryl Jefferson, project administrator at the Institute.

The Mississippi Urban League provides volunteers during the regular workweek in the event community members need emergency assistance beyond food pantry hours.

Assisting in distribution will be community volunteers and UMMC students who will receive a “real-world experience” allowing them a glimpse into social disparities that can lead to hunger, Jefferson said.

“Volunteering is a learning opportunity in and of itself,” Beech said. “It lets you see what food insecurity looks like. Having a learning community within the food pantry is definitely something for the future.”
Justin Eastwood can make a mean salad with boiled eggs, fresh spinach, blue cheese crumbles, spicy chicken and a plethora of other tasty toppings.

You can find him at the salad bar in the University Hospital cafeteria, holding court as one of the youngest retail employees at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

“I like the salad bar, and I like just working here, meeting new people and seeing a lot of people,” said Eastwood, 19, a Brandon High School senior. “Some of them are my regulars.”

Eastwood is one of nine young adult interns who graduated May 17 from Project SEARCH, a national initiative designed to help students with disabilities obtain competitive, community-based employment skills. Begun at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital in 1996, Project SEARCH operates at more than 500 sites across the country and in a number of sites internationally.

In August 2018, Project SEARCH expanded to central Mississippi through a collaboration of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, UMMC and the Rankin County School District. The Mississippi Council for Developmental Disabilities is also providing assistance.

Dave Estorge, UMMC Health System chief of staff, said he wasn’t surprised by the “natural partnership” that formed between these organizations to make Project SEARCH happen.

“We are all on the same team, and we all want to change lives,” Estorge told the students, families and other attendees at the graduation.

The intent of the 10-month program is for interns to work in a business setting that will give them a teaching and learning experience and the chance to gain skills that make them attractive to employers, including UMMC.

“These graduates have been a gift to us,” Estorge said. “They are funny, loyal, hard-working, and light up the workplace every single day. And they are on time every day!”

Project SEARCH nets top employer award

The University of Mississippi Medical Center was recognized by the state Department of Rehabilitative Services for the Medical Center’s Project SEARCH program.

UMMC received the department’s Employer of the Year Award, given to an individual, firm or group of employers in recognition of outstanding achievement in improving employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The award salutes UMMC for its participation in Project SEARCH.

“We’re so proud to have the opportunity to add such dedicated and loyal employees to our ever-growing workplace,” said Casey Bridges, category manager in supply chain management and the UMMC program’s director. “These interns have truly blessed UMMC with their talent and love for our organization and mission.”

Winners also are chosen based on promotion of employment for individuals with disabilities above and beyond what is required by local, state or federal laws. Businesses also are beneficiaries: They gain access to a diverse talent stream with skills that match labor needs; get the chance to make a positive, lifelong difference for someone with special needs; and have the opportunity to impact their workplace culture.
The University of Mississippi Medical Center’s Inclusive Excellence Fund supports activities/programs that promote diversity, foster a culture of inclusion, and reinforce the value of our differences in carrying out the institution’s mission of excellence in education, research and patient care.

Areas of particular interest include:

- Professional development scholarships for students, staff and faculty
- Initiatives that encourage and support diversity in the student body, faculty and staff
- Programs that train leaders on how to build a culture of collaboration and respect
- Education and training opportunities related to diversity and inclusion

Give online today at:
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Participating in a groundbreaking for the state’s first skilled nursing facility for Children’s of Mississippi patients with medically complex conditions Dec. 10, 2019 are, from left, Regina Qadan, nurse practitioner; Dr. Alfred Rankins Jr., Mississippi commissioner of higher education; Deontay Isaac, Children’s of Mississippi patient; Dr. Mary Taylor, pediatrics chair; former Mississippi First Lady Deborah Bryant; DeAsia Scott, Children’s of Mississippi patient; former Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant; William Currie, Children’s of Mississippi patient; Dr. Guy Giesecke, Children’s of Mississippi CEO; Wesley Smith, nurse manager; Ellen Hansen, chief nursing and clinical services officer; Willow Cannan, Children’s of Mississippi patient; James Ingram, executive vice president and CIO of Hertz Investment Group; and Dr. Christian Paine, division chief of pediatric palliative medicine.