

Feist-Weiller Cancer Center



An interview with

DR. JENNIFER SINGH & DR. RUPA MAHADEVAN during the COVID-19 Pandemic

How are you conducting patient visits?

The majority of all visits are now virtual. Dr. Mahadevan explained that the telehealth visits have been really beneficial on multiple levels, as she has been able to see into the patient's kitchen and pantry and get an idea of how they live. In addition, Dr. Singh said that her cancer survivor group visits have been conducted through Zoom and that it has been encouraging and a real mood lifter to get to see everyone.

As many of you know, our Partners in Wellness program has mobile vans that go out into the rural and urban communities to provide cancer screening and education. At this time, the mobile vans have been "put to work to join the fight against COVID-19" said Dr. Singh. "One has been repurposed to go out on the road [for testing for COVID-19]" as "annual mammograms have unfortunately been postponed."

What impact has COVID-19 had on your teaching experience with the medical students?

Through Zoom technology the students have actively engaged in the culinary medicine clinic. The students have had to learn adaptability, and learn new technology, explained Dr. Mahadevan. When she was in school, her professors taught her to be a professional learner and she is passing this wisdom along to her students.

What advice can you give to us in navigating this season?

The doctors have seen anxiety in their patients. The prescriptions Dr. Singh and Dr. Mahadevan give are consistent in or out of COVID-19. They teach that food is your medicine and that you can get antioxidants and vitamin rich foods just from a well-balanced diet. Dr. Mahadevan teaches her patients mind body exercises, which

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GLENN MILLS, MD, FACP



During this COVID-19 crisis, I hope all of you are healthy and please take care of yourself. Remember the importance of hand washing, social distancing and wearing your mask. The FWCC has continued to see patients and offer new services to our community during this crisis.

First, we rapidly transitioned our Cancer Genomic Testing Lab to become a lab that offers COVID-19 testing to our region. Under the leadership of our Vice Chancellor for Research, Dr. Chris Keil and our Associate Director for Basic Science Cancer Research, Dr. Andrew Yurochko we were the first lab to offer COVID-19 testing for our region. The Emerging Viral Threat lab has developed screening tests for COVID-19 and also has developed an antibody test. Using our mobile cancer screening vans, we are offering drive up testing not only in our city, but throughout north Louisiana.

Our cancer scientists, experts in how viruses cause cancer, are now researching the COVID-19 virus so we may better understand this unique threat and how to defeat it. Cancer patients are a vulnerable population that do not do well with COVID-19 infection, just like the elderly and the minority population. We are researching why this occurs and how to counteract this deadly problem.

Your continued support to help us in this mission is vital to our ability to rapidly respond to crises such as these.

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she explains is “a great way to relieve stress and anxiety, which kicks in your relaxation system, also known as your parasympathetic system.” Muscle relaxation, deep breathing, mindfulness, and stretching are great ways to help calm down the nervous system and the survivors who continue to practice what they have been taught, have seen improvements even though they feel isolated.

Dr. Singh said that her dad is a cancer patient and that she is really encouraging him and everyone to take the virus seriously. She encourages everyone to stay home, try not to be around other people you don’t live with, and to disinfect surfaces in your home frequently and wash hands constantly

What are you personally doing during this season of Covid-19 to cope?

Both doctors are maximizing this time with assorted activities such as: animal and garden therapy, and taking advantage of free mobile apps and classes. Free online tours of museums and wellness classes are offered by Ivy League schools, such as Harvard. Other ways they have found to make the most of their time during this season is through cooking new recipes, serving others in time of need and reading.

Thank you Dr. Singh and Dr. Mahadevan for all that you are doing for the Feist-Weiller cancer patients and for the wisdom and knowledge you bring to northern Louisiana. We are grateful for you!

Dr. Jennifer Singh, MD is the Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine and the Director



of Integrative and Lifestyle Medicine Services at the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center (FWCC). She is also the Medical Director of Partners in Wellness Clinic, which is part of Feist-Weiller Cancer Center.

Partners in Wellness (PIW), is an outreach of FWCC that conducts cancer screenings—mammograms, pap smears, pelvic, prostate and lung cancer screenings. PIW has mobile vans that go into the community. Areas of expertise: Nutrition, Preventive Medicine, Mind Body Medicine, Culinary Medicine, Lifestyle and Integrative Medicine, cancer survivorship, medical education, curriculum development, and stress management. Dr. Singh specializes in taking care of cancer survivors where she teaches healthy habits and helps survivors deal with side effects from cancer and treatment.

Dr. Rupa Mahadevan, MD, FAAP is the Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine



at the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center and the Medicine—Pediatric Division at LSUHS. She works with Dr. Singh on the shared medical visits for cancer survivorships. Dr. Mahadevan is also on the faculty

in the medicine pediatric division, where she does primary care for pediatric patients two times a week. She also runs a weight management program for children. Her areas of Expertise: are Weight Management, Nutrition, Preventive Medicine, Mind Body Medicine, Culinary Medicine, Lifestyle and Integrative Medicine, Pediatrics, survivorship, curriculum development, and stress management. She is passionate about educating patients to cook healthy, low-cost meals. She has a unique interest in food as medicine and tries to incorporate food prescriptions in all her patient encounters. Her research interests include mindfulness-based therapies for stress, nutrition in medical education, and pet therapy.



MY JOURNEY TO UGANDA

The hours were long, the experience was very rewarding....

The month of January 2020 was spent in Karuma, Uganda, a small village in the bush, training and volunteering at the Restoration Gateway hospital, where I took care of patients with sickle cell anemia and other blood diseases.

Restoration Gateway is a mission community located on 700 acres along the Nile River, with a 180- bed hospital, an orphanage, empowerment program and ministry in a war-torn area of northern Uganda. Feist-Weiller Cancer Center sent me to offer service to their patients. This trip helped initiate an international collaboration between the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center and Uganda.

It was an experience I will never forget.

—Ton Jeh Bah

Medical missions were always one of my dreams. When I found out about Restoration Gateway and their need for a blood/sickle cell specialist, I felt this was my chance to do what I have always wanted—to humbly serve and teach others. My desire was to learn from the Ugandans. I wanted to learn how they practice medicine with limited resources. My goal was to serve and educate the patients and staff about sickle cell anemia and its management. I love little tricks — I wanted to teach them the tricks on how to stay healthy.

Most of my time was spent serving in the Restoration Gateway hospital. Our day started at 7:30 am with morning devotions for the patients and was led by one of the staff. After devotions, we rounded on the patients and then headed to the outpatient clinic, which served as our ER and clinic. Patients travelled long distances and waited many hours to be seen. Clinic ended after all the patients were seen. The hours were long, but the experience was very rewarding.

One of the “Miracles” I witnessed while I was in Uganda was with a little 3 year old girl named Daniella. She was admitted for sickle cell pain crisis the week before I came to Uganda. She was very sick and we were not sure she would make it. Her mother (who was a widow before Daniella turned one) was at her bed just waiting to lose another child. When I tried to inquire about how she ended up in the hospital, the mother told me she had 11 children, 7 had died from sickle cell and she was just waiting on Daniella to die. Listening to her story broke my heart. I gazed at her, gave her a gentle touch and in my heart I said this simple prayer, “Please God heal her daughter.” Together with the team, we made changes to her treatment plan and as days went by, Daniella dramatically improved. She was eventually weaned off oxygen and discharged home with her mother. She had to learn to walk again, because she had been bed ridden for almost two weeks. Her mother was happy to go home with her daughter.

The management of sickle cell in the United States has evolved over the years. The patients in the US used to die before their teenage



Dr. Tonjeh Bah with Dr. and Mrs. Tim and Janice McCall

years, but with the advent of folic acid, penicillin and hydroxyurea, they have a better survival rate. These medications have drastically improved life expectancy and quality of life in patients with sickle cell. One of my patients here at the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center clinic will be turning 60 years old soon, while my oldest patient in Uganda was only 21 years old. Hydroxyurea costs about \$200-\$400 a month depending on the patient's dose. This amount is equivalent to 6 months household income in Karuma, Uganda.

I think we can do something to help these patients. Supplying the hospital with the right medication will make all the difference for their sickle cell patients — between life and death. If we had sponsors, we could give these patients the gift of life — a chance to live into their 30's or 40's, which would be the greatest gift they could ever ask for.

There are great opportunities for research that will improve the health of the Ugandans. In our sickle cell population, we can study the changes in admission and death rate after starting hydroxyurea or after compliance on folic acid and penicillin. There were some rare forms of other anemia that I saw while I was in Uganda. If we have appropriate funding to run specific labs and data, we can study these patients and eventually determine the right treatment necessary to improve their overall health.

At Feist-Weiller Cancer Center, we are well trained to take care of patients with any form of anemia. We are



Dr. Bah with Daniella and her mother

a center specialized in sickle cell patient care and we see patients from every part of Louisiana and some even come from Texas. Going to Uganda to take care of their patients with anemia and sickle cell was just a continuation of my day to day life at the FWCC. The Feist-Weiller Cancer Center gave me a strong foundation in management of patients with sickle cell.

The lessons I learned during my time at Restoration Gateway are to be thankful for every new day. Sometimes I take for granted the fact that I have a roof over my head, a comfortable bed to lie on and food to eat. Seeing patients going to bed without food was so heart breaking. Never underestimate your blessings.

Daniella with Dr. Bah and her mother after she recovered



Tonjeh Mary Stella Bah, MD is a clinical fellow in hematology oncology at the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center. She is the Chief Fellow at FWCC for 2019-2020.

FEIST-WEILLER CANCER CENTER is currently enrolling patients in the national **Tomosynthesis Mammographic Imaging Screening Trial (TMIST)**



The Trial

TMIST is a randomized breast screening trial that will help researchers learn about the best ways to find breast cancer in women who have no symptoms. It compares two types of Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved digital mammography: standard digital mammography (2-D) and a newer technology called tomosynthesis mammography (3-D). 2-D mammography takes pictures from two sides of the breast to create a flat image. 3-D mammography images are taken from different angles around the breast and then built into a 3-D-like image.

The goal of breast cancer screening is to find breast cancer early when it may be easier to treat. Researchers are doing this trial because they do not know if 3-D is better than 2-D mammography for breast cancer screening.

Another important aspect of the trial is to build a tissue bank for future research. All women who join the trial will be asked to submit tissue samples, such as blood and swabs of cells from inside their mouths. Researchers hope that the information from these tissue samples will help personalize the way we screen for breast cancer in the future by taking a person's genetics and other personal risk factors into account.

Goals of TMIST

Even though some 3-D mammography machines are FDA-approved, no one knows if 3-D mammography is better than 2-D at finding breast cancers before they become more difficult to treat. Therefore, the main goal of TMIST is to measure and compare the rates of newly diagnosed breast cancer that meet certain criteria. These criteria include:

- Tumors that are at least as big as a nickel (20 millimeters or larger)
- Tumors larger than 10 millimeters and HER2-positive
- Tumors larger than 10 millimeters and triple-negative
- Cancer has spread from the breast to at least one nearby lymph node
- Cancer has spread from the breast to distant organs in the body

Researchers are also looking at whether 3-D mammography might help certain groups of women. Questions they are trying to answer include:

- Among the women who receive 3-D mammography, will there be fewer harder-to-treat cancers in certain groups, such as those with dense breasts, African Americans, premenopausal women, and women on hormone replacement therapy?
 - Will there be fewer false-positive test results in the entire study group or among certain groups?
 - Is there a link between certain findings from the mammograms and the most aggressive breast cancer
- Trial Collaborators

Who Can Enroll in TMIST

Women ages 45 to 74 who are planning to get a routine screening mammogram are eligible for this trial. Women can also contact a participating site to ask about joining the study.

How to Enroll in TMIST

The trial is taking place in mammography clinics around the United States, with a few sites in Canada and Argentina. Eventually, there will be over 100 clinics taking part in the trial. When women call one of these participating clinics to schedule a routine mammogram, they may be asked to take part in TMIST.

Researchers plan to enroll nearly 165,000 women.

**Are you interested in enrolling in T-Mist
at Feist-Weiller Cancer Center?**

**If so, please contact Harriet Johnson
at (318) 813-1403.**

Celebrating

Memorable Art by a Memorable Artist



Dr. Dennis O'Callaghan. Frances left behind much beautiful art after her passing last year. The Arts in Medicine (AIM) program at the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center is especially proud of the nine pieces she drew for cancer patients to paint during their chemotherapy treatment at the cancer center.

Frances contributed nine unpainted drawings to AIM, "more than any other volunteer artist," announced Dr. Glenn Mills, Director of the FWCC, during the afternoon assembly. "We are proud to honor Frances's memory, her generosity, and her wonderful contributions to the arts program benefitting our patients," continued Dr. Mills as Dr. O'Callaghan accepted a gift of several sets of colorful note cards showing his wife's AIM paintings. AIM Coordinator Julie Burton added her appreciation and memories of working with Frances and stressed the importance of art projects to help cancer patients deal with stress.

Dr. O'Callaghan attended along with his son, the Honorable Judge Brady O'Callaghan, wife Amy and their sons Logan & Marshall. Many O'Callaghan friends, artists, colleagues and well-wishers enjoyed the gathering showcasing the colorful paintings. After the reception, the paintings moved to the Health Sciences Library at LSU Health Shreveport, where they will be on temporary display before returning to the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center.

A favorite painting of the patients is the one of Frances's twin grandsons. "Twins" normally hangs in the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center along with all of Frances's paintings except for two pieces which are now in private collections.

Due to COVID-19, volunteering is currently on hold, however, as soon as it is safe, volunteering with Arts in

Medicine will be more important than ever.

Our program has been helping patients cope with illness for over 20 years by providing them with fun, easy, painting projects during chemotherapy treatments at Feist-Weiller Cancer Center and hospital stays at Ochsner LSU Health Shreveport - Academic Medical Center. This would not be possible without our wonderful volunteers. Volunteer artists collaborate with us by drawing and color-coding artwork to be painted. Not artistic? No problem! We need volunteers that will take painting projects to patients during their treatments. This involves paint tray set up, water changes, and friendly conversation. For many patients this time to create is the highlight of their day. So what are you waiting for? Plan to Volunteer with us in the future and spend that time doing something truly rewarding.

Can't volunteer but still want to get involved? Art supplies and monetary donations are always appreciated. Or have your pet's portrait drawn by one of our Arts in Medicine artists, and painted by a patient at Feist-Weiller Cancer Center. Dog, cat, lizard, bird—whatever your heart fancies. All we need is a photo and \$150. For volunteer and pet portrait information, contact Julie Burton at (318) 813-1483 or jburt4@lsuhsc.edu. For donations, please contact Krista Gaston at (318) 813-1423.



VIRTUAL CONCERT OFFERED TO FRIENDS OF FWCC

The Healing Power of Music at the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center is holding a virtual concert to bring hope, peace and joy to your home. Nikki Renee Daniels, a Broadway actress and soloist is our performer. Nikki has been in acts such as *Hamilton* and *Les Miserables* and also has ties to Shreveport! The link to the concert is: www.lsuhs.edu/fwcc. This link is only active for a limited time. If you have not given us your email address, please email Krista Gaston at: kgaston@lsuhsfoundation.org, so that we can get you on the email list. To learn more about Nikki please go to: <https://nikkireneedaniels.com>.



**Feist-Weiller
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