

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES CONNECTED AND ENGAGED

ISSUE 46, JANUARY 2026

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

January invites reflection and resolve. As the first month of a new year, it gives us space to set intentions for our health and our collective future. It is also Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, an important reminder that prevention and early detection are among the most effective tools we have to reduce cancer burden. Cervical cancer is highly preventable, yet screening gaps and delayed follow-up persist across our communities. Research helps us understand where and why those gaps exist, and community partnership helps us close them.

As we look toward a more wellness-focused 2026, wellness must be grounded in evidence. Routine screening, HPV vaccination, healthy movement, restorative rest and connection to care are not just recommendations; they are strategies supported by science and strengthened when adapted to the realities of our catchment area. When research reflects the lived experiences, assets, and challenges of the communities we serve, it becomes more relevant, more trusted and more impactful.

"Stronger Together" reflects the foundation of our work in the Office of Community Outreach and

Engagement. Research does not live in isolation. It is strongest when community members help shape the questions, when findings are shared back in accessible ways and when evidence informs programs, policy and practice. Catchment-relevant research allows us to move beyond awareness toward action, ensuring that discoveries translate into improved access, earlier detection and better outcomes close to home.

As we begin this year, my call to action is clear. Prioritize your own wellness, support cancer prevention and screening, and engage with research that is designed for and with our communities. Together, through shared knowledge and commitment, we can make 2026 a year to extend OCOE's the Es (Evidence, Education and Empowerment) to three Ps (Prevention, Partnership and Progress)!

Warm regards,

Dr. Nolan



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Cervical Cancer - What to Know!



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Together, We Can End Cervical Cancer

Our cervical cancer research program focuses on eliminating cervical cancer by strengthening prevention, early detection and treatment. Through the Cervical Cancer SPORE, we are developing and testing therapeutic vaccines that help the immune system fight HPV-infected cells, targeting HPV-related pre-cancer and cancer.

We also address gaps in care. Many patients are lost to follow-up after abnormal screening results, increasing cancer risk. Our team creates solutions to bring these patients back sooner and removes barriers to clinical trial participation so all patients can access the latest treatments.

Our work has three priorities:

1. Increasing HPV vaccination
2. Improving cervical cancer screening
3. Ensuring timely follow-up and treatment

Prevention: One prevention initiative, funded by the National Cancer Institute, trains high school students to design HPV vaccine campaigns in their schools. In Chambers County, where cervical cancer rates are highest in Alabama, student-led efforts

boosted HPV vaccination completion to 81% at one school and 65% at another. We developed a toolkit so other schools can have the same success statewide.

Follow-up & Treatment: We are developing solutions to find patients who miss follow-up care after abnormal screening results and bring them back sooner — preventing pre-cancer from turning into cancer. At the same time, we work to remove barriers to clinical trial participation so all patients can access the newest and most promising treatments.

Statewide Impact: Our research and community partnerships helped launch OPERATION WIPE OUT, a statewide plan to eliminate cervical cancer in Alabama (www.operationwipeout.org). This effort unites healthcare providers, public health leaders, schools and community organizations to make prevention, screening and follow-up care accessible for all Alabamians.

Together, these initiatives move us closer to a future where cervical cancer is no longer a threat to women and families in our state.

Research Corner - Cervical Cancer

Implementation of a Provider-Focused Intervention for Maximizing HPV Vaccine Uptake in Young Cancer Survivors Receiving Follow-Up Care in Pediatric Oncology Practices: A Cluster-Randomized Trial

Childhood cancer survivors are at high risk for developing new cancers (such as cervical and anal cancer) caused by persistent infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). An effective vaccine exists that can prevent these cancers, but uptake of the HPV vaccine is low among young cancer survivors. (Fewer than one in four have received the vaccine).

Lack of a healthcare provider recommendation for the HPV vaccine is the most common reason that cancer survivors fail to get the HPV vaccine. Strategies that are most successful in increasing HPV vaccine uptake in the general population focus on improving healthcare provider knowledge about the HPV vaccine, enhancing the skills that

healthcare providers need to effectively recommend the vaccine to young people and their parents and reducing barriers to receiving the vaccine.

This research study is evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of an evidence-based intervention, adapted for use by healthcare providers in pediatric oncology clinics, to increase the uptake of HPV vaccine among young cancer survivors (9 to 17 years of age and at least one year off-therapy). If effective in improving and sustaining increased uptake of the HPV vaccine in young cancer survivors, this study will provide the foundation for testing the widespread use of the intervention in pediatric oncology practices.



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WEBINAR

From Family Tree to Family Health:
Understanding Cancer Risk and Lynch Syndrome

FEB. 23, 2026 @ 6PM

Lynch syndrome is the most common inherited cause of colon and uterine cancers. Learning about it early can save lives.

Join the Office of Community Outreach & Engagement along with our team of experts to learn what Lynch Syndrome is, who may be at risk and why genetic testing and early health care are so important.



Register Here:
go.uab.edu/lynchsyn2026

3RD ANNUAL REGIONAL WELLNESS DAY

Saturday,
April 18, 2026
10:00AM - 2:00PM

Get Screenings & Information

- Breast mammograms
 - Free for uninsured
- Cervical exam
- Prostate exam (blood work)
- On site referrals for colorectal & lung screenings
- Biometric Screenings:
 - Weight
 - Cholesterol
 - Blood Pressure
 - Blood Sugar

Birmingham CrossPlex | 2340 CrossPlex Blvd. | Birmingham, AL 35208

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SAVE THE DATE

COMMUNITY
DISSEMINATION
INSTITUTE 2026

AUG. 23 - 25

Renaissance Birmingham Ross
Bridge Golf Resort & Spa

For More Information: 205-975-0003 or coeinfo@uab.edu

UPCOMING EVENTS!

Support Our Patient Assistance Fund: Your Donation Makes a Difference

We invite you to join us in supporting the Patient Assistance Fund through the Office of Community Outreach & Engagement at the UAB O'Neal Cancer Center. Your generous donation will provide critical resources to patients facing financial hardships, helping them access essential cancer care, medications and transportation services.

Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a tangible impact on the lives of those in need. Together, we can ease the burden for patients and their families during their cancer journey.

To donate or learn more, please scan the code below or contact our office directly.

Thank you for your support!

