

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES CONNECTED AND ENGAGED

ISSUE 42, MAY 2025

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Happy May! This month, we recognize both Brain Cancer Awareness Month and Mental Health Awareness Month — a powerful reminder of how deeply physical and mental health are connected. At the O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center, we remain committed to supporting whole-person health through evidence, education and partnerships that empower communities.

We're also thrilled to announce that registration for the 2025 Community Dissemination Institute will open soon! This year's Institute will take place August 24–26, 2025, in Mobile,

Alabama. It's a unique opportunity to connect with community leaders, researchers, and partners to explore how we share knowledge and turn science into action for the communities we serve.

Thank you for being an essential part of our mission. Your continued engagement and collaboration help us improve cancer outcomes across Alabama and beyond.

Here's to a month of awareness, action and good health.

- Dr. Nolan



**MAY IS
BRAIN
TUMOR
AWARENESS MONTH**

- Brain tumors occur in adults and children
- Brain tumors can be cancerous or non-cancerous
- Symptoms can include headaches, vision, hearing or balance problems, numbness, facial paralysis, seizures, or memory loss
- Keep in mind that these symptoms can happen with other conditions that are not brain tumors
- If you have any signs or symptoms, be sure to see your doctor

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2025



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Cancer Awareness Focus

Brain Cancer Awareness: Hope Through Early Action and Advanced Care



While brain cancer remains a serious diagnosis, advances in research, treatment and awareness are bringing new hope to patients and families every day. In 2025, approximately 24,000 adults in the U.S. are expected to be diagnosed with brain cancer. Thanks to growing awareness and innovative therapies, outcomes are improving and patients have more options than ever before.

Although there are no routine screening tests for brain cancer, recognizing early signs — such as frequent headaches, vision changes, or unexplained mood shifts — can lead to earlier diagnosis and better outcomes. Being proactive about your health and talking with your doctor about persistent symptoms is a powerful first step.

While some risk factors, such as exposure to high-dose radiation, cannot be controlled, living a healthy lifestyle offers protective benefits. Regular physical activity, nutritious eating, avoiding tobacco and reducing exposure to environmental toxins all support brain and overall health.

Treatment options for brain cancer continue to expand. Today, many patients benefit from personalized care that may include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and targeted treatments. Exciting innovations like tumor treating fields (TTF), which use electrical fields to disrupt cancer cells, are offering new paths forward. Every treatment plan is customized, giving patients the best chance at recovery and quality of life.

With ongoing research and support, there is more hope than ever for those facing brain cancer. To learn more, visit the American Cancer Society at cancer.org or the CDC at cdc.gov/cancer.

**GO GRAY
THIS MAY
FOR BRAIN
CANCER
AWARENESS**

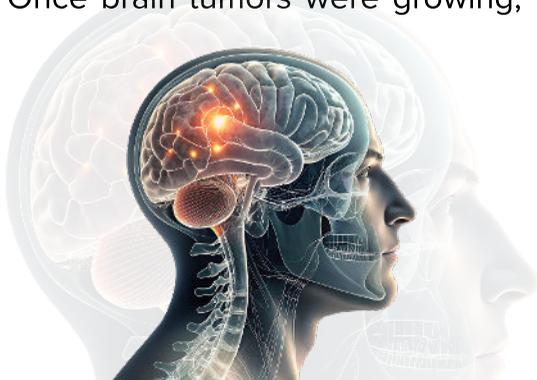
Neuro-Oncology Highlight

The Neuro-Oncology Program seeks to understand and develop better therapies for adult and pediatric patients with brain cancer. The most common type of brain cancer is called glioblastoma. Dr. Braden McFarland, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Cell, Developmental and Integrative Biology and Co-Director of the UAB Undergraduate Cancer Biology Program, researches glioblastoma in her lab.



Dr. McFarland's research group seeks to develop new treatments for glioblastoma by understanding how gut bacteria affect the brain. This gut-brain

axis is well known to affect hunger, mood and stress, and has recently been shown to affect how cancers grow. The McFarland laboratory found that bacteria in the gut could change how glioblastoma responds to treatment: some bacteria help the immune system work better to fight cancer. To do this study, patients allowed UAB researchers to use samples of their feces containing bacteria. The human gut bacteria were placed into the gut of mice, which were later injected with glioblastoma cells. Once brain tumors were growing, mice



were treated with a therapy designed to improve the ability of the immune system to recognize and kill cancer cells (anti PDL-1 immunotherapy).

The McFarland laboratory identified groups of bacteria that increased the ability of the immune system to fight cancer and other groups of bacteria that did not. They also found that many drugs like steroids and antibiotics that are used in cancer care impact the amounts and types of gut bacteria. The information suggests that the gut-brain axis could be changed during cancer care and that increasing levels of some types of bacteria in the gut, for example by adding probiotics to your diet, may improve cancer patient outcomes.

The Neuro-Oncology Program is organizing the UAB FamilyStrong Meeting for Brain Tumor Patients and Caregivers which will be held in person or online Friday May 16, 2025 at the Hill Center. This meeting seeks to inform brain tumor patients and their caregivers about clinical care as well as cutting edge basic and translational research. Check-in begins at 9:30 a.m., with the meeting going from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Register Here: uab.edu/familystrong



American
Brain Tumor
Association®



SAVE THE DATE

COMMUNITY
DISSEMINATION
INSTITUTE

2025

AUGUST 24 – 26

RENAISSANCE MOBILE RIVERVIEW PLAZA HOTEL
64 SOUTH WATER ST. | MOBILE, AL 36602

**REGISTRATION
OPENS MAY 5!**

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 Comprehensive 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!



A DISCUSSION ON BRAIN & MENTAL HEALTH

Join the UAB O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center's Office of Community Outreach & Engagement for an insightful webinar exploring brain tumors and mental health. This session will raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of brain tumors while addressing common misconceptions about mental illness. Our goal is to shed light on the "gray areas" surrounding both conditions, fostering understanding and reducing stigma.

**MAY
13**

6 PM - 7 PM

Register now at go.uab.edu/brain
Or scan the QR code



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US AT 205-975-0003 & coeinfo@uab.edu

