

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES CONNECTED AND ENGAGED

ISSUE 47, MARCH 2026

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

March is a time of renewal and a time for awareness. This month, we recognize Colorectal Cancer Awareness, Multiple Myeloma Awareness and National Nutrition Month.

Here in Alabama, too many of our neighbors are diagnosed with colorectal cancer at later stages, especially in rural and medically underserved communities. The good news is that colorectal cancer is one of the most preventable cancers when screening is done on time. Multiple myeloma, a blood cancer that affects Black Americans at higher rates, also requires greater awareness so that symptoms are recognized early and care is not delayed.

While screening is important, it is also important to eat a healthy and well-portioned diet and be physically active. These behaviors help reduce the risk of developing cancer and can also support getting to a healthy weight, which is known to lower cancer risk.

At the Office of Community Outreach & Engagement, we use data from across our counties and the voices of community members like you to guide where we focus our education and outreach. When we host events, share information or provide navigation support, it is because we know there is a

need. I encourage you to make your health a priority. Schedule your screenings. Talk with your provider. Encourage a loved one to do the same.

If you are in the Birmingham area in April, please join us on April 18th at the 3rd Annual Jefferson County Regional Wellness Day. It will be a day of screenings, resources and connection. Every referral to screening. Every completed appointment. Every person linked to treatment. These actions save lives and together, we are building a healthier Alabama.

Onward and upward.

-Dr. Nolan



### WHAT'S INSIDE:

What to Know:  
A Call to Action



Research Corner  
Multiple Myeloma



Upcoming Events  
2026



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O'Neal Cancer Center

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# What to Know!

## **From Awareness to Action: Strengthening Community Health Across Alabama**

March shines a light on key areas of health that impact families across Alabama, including colorectal cancer, multiple myeloma, and National Nutrition Month. While awareness is important, action at the community level is what truly drives change.

Colorectal cancer remains a major concern, but screening rates and access to care can vary widely depending on where people live. Barriers such as transportation, cost, and limited access to providers often delay screening. Community-based efforts help close these gaps by bringing education, resources, and services directly to those who need them most. Simple, noninvasive screening options are available, and increasing awareness of these options can help more people take that first step.

Multiple myeloma, a cancer of the blood's plasma cells, continues to be an area where education is critical. Because symptoms can be vague, such as fatigue or bone discomfort, many people may not seek care right away. Outreach efforts that focus on increasing health literacy can support earlier conversations with healthcare providers and improve access to timely diagnosis and treatment.

Nutrition also plays a powerful role in reducing cancer risk and supporting overall health. National Nutrition Month encourages individuals to think about how everyday food choices impact long-term health. Access to healthy foods, culturally relevant nutrition education, and community-based programs all help support healthier lifestyles. These approaches go beyond individual behavior and address the environments where people live, work, and gather.

The Office of Community Outreach & Engagement (OCO) at the UAB O'Neal Cancer Center continues to focus on connecting research, education, and community voice. Through partnerships with local organizations, faith-based groups, and community health advisors, OCO delivers programs that are tailored to the needs of each community. Whether through educational workshops, outreach events, or navigation support, these efforts aim to reduce barriers and increase access to prevention and care.

By strengthening community connections and expanding access to trusted information, OCO is helping move communities forward with knowledge and resources that support healthier lives.



# Research Corner - Multiple Myeloma

## Understanding Multiple Myeloma Risk: Exploring Disparities and New Paths for Prevention

Multiple Myeloma is the 2nd most common blood cancer in the US. The incidence of multiple myeloma is increasing and is 2- to 3-fold higher among Black compared to White populations, constituting a significant cancer health disparity. Multiple myeloma is initiated as a precursor condition known as MGUS, which carries a risk of progression to multiple myeloma of 1 percent per year with a 60 percent absolute risk of developing MM over a 20-year period.

The increased risk of multiple myeloma in Black populations is due to an excess of MGUS. However, despite the increased risk of multiple myeloma, the 5-year survival is similar by race, suggesting that underlying differences in early driver events establish a trajectory that predisposes Black populations to develop MGUS at a proportionally higher rate. Multiple myeloma is the most common blood cancer in Black populations, arising from the high

prevalence of MGUS. However, our current understanding of MGUS is almost exclusively based on that from multiple myeloma and from patients of European origin resulting in a critical gap in knowledge of the underlying events driving the disparity.

O'Neal's Elizabeth E. Brown, in partnership with New York University's Perlmutter Cancer Center, is currently characterizing how contextual environmental exposures can modify T-cell immune responses and gene function on the risk of MGUS and progression to multiple myeloma. Findings may enable the identification of persons at the highest risk of transitioning from a healthy state to MGUS and multiple myeloma, provide a rationale for the disparity in MGUS and multiple myeloma risk, and reveal modifiable risk factors that may lead to novel interception strategies to improve the lives of persons at risk for this blood cancer.



### Elizabeth E. Brown, PhD MPH

- UAB Endowed Professor, Cancer Pathobiology
- Associate Director, Population Sciences, O'Neal Cancer Center
- Director, Integrative Molecular & Genetic Epidemiology Laboratory
- Department of Pathology | Heersink School of Medicine
- The University of Alabama at Birmingham

**MULTIPLE MYELOMA**  
A RARE BLOOD CANCER

If you have a family history of multiple myeloma, talk to your primary care physician to determine your risk.

**UAB MEDICINE**  
O'Neal Cancer Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[coeinfo@uab.edu](mailto:coeinfo@uab.edu) [www.onealcanceruab.org](http://www.onealcanceruab.org) (205) 975-0003

# UPCOMING EVENTS!

**UAB MEDICINE**  
O'Neal Cancer Center

## 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](mailto:coeinfo@uab.edu)



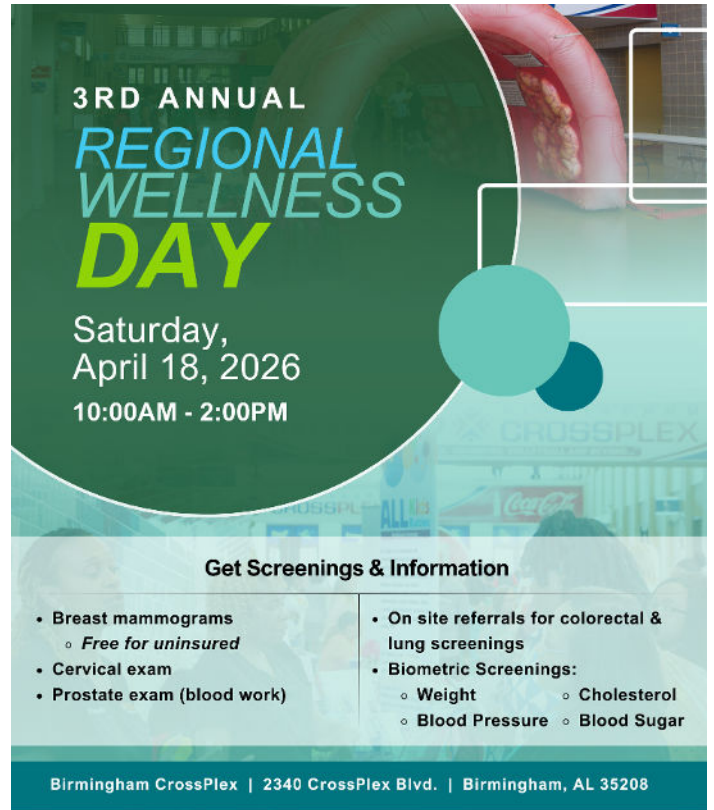
## 3RD ANNUAL REGIONAL WELLNESS DAY

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
  - Blood Pressure
  - Cholesterol
  - Blood Sugar

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



## 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!

