

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES CONNECTED AND ENGAGED

ISSUE 49, JULY 2026

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

There is something special about summertime in Alabama. It is a season filled with family reunions, backyard cookouts, church homecomings, and long conversations with the people we love. As we gather to share stories and make new memories, I encourage you to take a few moments to ask about something that could make a lasting difference for your family's future: your family health history.

Many of us know who makes the best potato salad or who tells the funniest stories, but do we know which health conditions have affected our parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles? Those conversations may not always be easy, but they can provide valuable information that helps you and your healthcare provider make informed decisions about cancer screening, prevention, and overall health.

In this issue, you'll find practical tips to help you start those conversations and understand why your family's health history matters. I hope you'll use this summer as an opportunity to learn something new, share what you discover, and

encourage your loved ones to do the same.

Thank you for allowing us to be your partner in building healthier families and stronger communities across Alabama. Together, we can create a legacy of health that lasts for generations.

- **Dr. Nolan**



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Family Health History

Why Your Family Health History Matters

Your family health history is more than a list of illnesses. It is one of the most valuable tools for understanding your personal risk for cancer and helping your healthcare provider make informed decisions about your care.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), knowing your family's health history can help determine when you should begin cancer screenings, whether you need to be screened more often, and if genetic counseling or testing may be appropriate. It can also guide conversations about steps you can take to reduce your cancer risk.

Family history is especially important for cancers such as breast, colorectal, ovarian, prostate, pancreatic, and uterine cancer. When talking with relatives, remember to ask about both your mother's and father's side of the family. Also, find out what type of cancer was

diagnosed and how old the person was at diagnosis. Cancers diagnosed at younger ages or multiple cancer diagnoses within a family may suggest an inherited cancer risk.

While most cancers are not inherited, the American Cancer Society estimates that about 5% to 10% of all cancers are hereditary, meaning they result from inherited gene changes passed from parent to child. Knowing your family history gives you and your healthcare provider important information to personalize your care.

The more you know about your family's health history, the better prepared you can be to make informed decisions about screening, prevention, and early detection.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); American Cancer Society (ACS).



Family Reunions: More Than a Celebration

Every summer, families gather around dinner tables, at church homecomings, and during family reunions to celebrate their shared history. They laugh over childhood memories, flip through old photo albums, and reconnect with relatives they may not see often. While you're sharing stories about the past, consider asking another question that could help protect your family's future:

"Has anyone in our family ever had cancer?"

It may seem like a simple question, but the answers can provide valuable information for you and your healthcare provider. Knowing your family health history can help identify patterns that may increase your risk for certain cancers and determine whether you should begin screening earlier or consider additional preventive measures.

When discussing cancer history, don't stop at the diagnosis. Ask how old your relative was when they were diagnosed. A cancer diagnosed at a younger age may suggest an inherited risk and could be important information for your healthcare provider.

It is also important to learn about both sides of your family. Many people focus only on their mother's side, but your father's family history is just as important. Cancers on either side of the family can influence your personal risk.

While most cancers are not hereditary, about 5 to 10 percent are linked to inherited gene changes that can be passed from one generation to the next. Understanding your family's history does not mean cancer is inevitable. Instead, it gives you and your



healthcare team the information needed to make informed decisions about screening; prevention; and, when appropriate, genetic counseling.

After your family gathering, write down what you've learned and bring it to your next medical appointment. Your family's story could help shape your healthcare plan and benefit future generations.

Start the Conversation

- ▶ **Has anyone in our family been diagnosed with cancer?**
- ▶ **What type of cancer did they have?**
- ▶ **How old were they when they were diagnosed?**
- ▶ **Has anyone had more than one type of cancer?**
- ▶ **Has anyone received genetic testing?**
- ▶ **Has anyone died from cancer?**
- ▶ **Which side of the family was it on (mother's or father's)?**
- ▶ **Are there other health conditions that run in our family?**

Tip: Write down what you learn and share it with your healthcare provider. Even small details can help guide screening and prevention recommendations.

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

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!

