Fall 2025

VUMC Quarterly

Vanderbilt Health News Digest for the Federal Policymaker

Compiled by the Office of Federal Relations

HONORING A HERO

Allan Williams remembered for dedicated service to Vanderbilt LifeFlight, patients and collegues

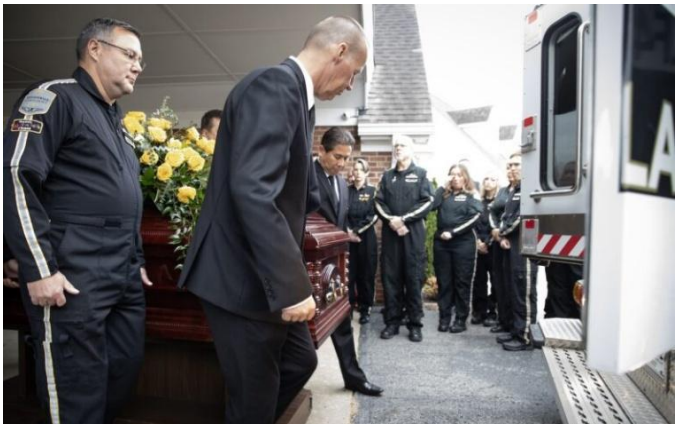
Read the full story by Jill Clendening on VUMC News

Allan Williams, MSN-Ed, RN, CFRN, EMT-P, flight nurse/paramedic for Vanderbilt LifeFlight, 55, died Nov. 8, during his service as a member of LifeFlight 1, based in Gallatin, Tennessee. The LifeFlight helicopter went down in an unpopulated area in Wilson County, Tennessee.

Williams is remembered as a devoted father, loving husband, loyal friend and highly skilled medical flight crew member. His Vanderbilt LifeFlight team — including more than 500 nurses, EMTs, paramedics, pilots, mechanics and communications professionals — was his extended family, and he was proud to serve the community and patients for whom he provided lifesaving care.









VANDERBILT ADVANCEMENTS IN PATIENT CARE

VUMC to acquire Tennova Clarksville hospital from Community Health Systems Inc.

Read the full story by Rebecca Warren on VUMC News, photos courtesy of Community Health Systems Inc.

VUMC plans to acquire full ownership of Tennova Healthcare-Clarksville from subsidiaries of Community Health Systems Inc, following regulatory review. Since 2021, VUMC has held a 20% minority interest in the 270-bed hospital, freestanding emergency department and related physician practices. During this partnership, Tennova Healthcare-Clarksville and VUMC created an OB-GYN hospitalist program, radiation oncology services, and a Level II Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). The Clarksville hospital strengthens VUMC's ability to serve patients with high-quality care in more convenient and lower cost community settings. With a strong record of investment in its three other Regional Hospitals, residents of Clarksville and the surrounding region can expect that VUMC will bring a host of adult and pediatric services to the area. *(10/31/25)*





Clinicians, patients cheer DAX, the AI 'ear' in Vanderbilt Health exam rooms

Read the full story by Bill Snyder on VUMC News

Clinicians and patients at VUMC are praising an artificial intelligence "scribe" program that streamlines notetaking for patient encounters. The program, called DAX Copilot, relieves clinicians from entering data into the electronic health record during patient visits. Clinicians report they are able focus more fully on patients and the quality of their notes have improved. What began as a pilot project was expanded this year to include all health professionals in outpatient clinics and ED settings. Expansion to inpatient clinicians is next. *(8/25/25)*



New device collects data to measure gait, inform physical therapy programs

Read the full story by Matt Batcheldor on VUMC News

Children with gait abnormalities are typically evaluated by having a physical therapist observe them as they walk. However, the thin gray mat that 5-year-old Hoyt Summerville bounded down during a recent evaluation was something entirely new to Monroe Carell's Pediatric Rehabilitation Services based at the Vanderbilt One Hundred Oaks facility. A donor gifted the device, called the GAITRite, which takes precise measurements about gait. Therapists use these data to inform their physical therapy program and even design custom orthotics, a new form of precision and personalized therapy. *(11/17/25)*



PATIENT STORIES – What It's All About

'Miracle baby' born at 1 pound, finally home after nearly a year in the hospital

Read/watch the full story by Mandy Harch on Fox 13 Memphis, photo courtesy of the Golden family

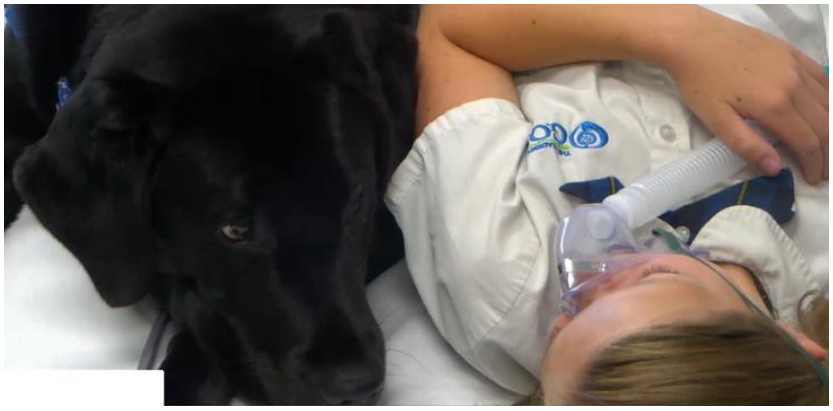




Gabriel Golden was born September 30, 2024, at just 22 weeks and weighing one pound one ounce. He spent 350 days in neonatal intensive care units, including 8 months at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. Doctors warned his chances were slim with pneumonia and severe trouble breathing. On September 15, 2025, nurses and doctors lined the hallway at Monroe Carell, playing a graduation march as Gabriel left the hospital wearing a tiny cap and gown. *(9/16/25)*

'He helps me': 4th grader shows classmates how Squid the dog helps her through hospital treatments

Read/watch the full story by Dryden Quigley on WSMV 4, Photo courtesy of WSMV 4



Hospitals and surgeries can be stressful for anyone, but especially for children. Squid, a 7-year old black Labrador, works at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt to keep young patients calm. 10-year old Niah Carver was born with a rare heart defect, and Squid's impact has been life-changing. Squid, and Niah's stuffed animal version of Squid, help her through stressful moments like heart tests and school field trips. *(9/24/25)*

Related *Tennessean* article: "Sit, stay, heal: Meet the facility dogs of Vanderbilt University Medical Center"

Wheelchair bound and blessed

Read the full story by Lane Curlee on TullahomaNews.com, photo by TullahomaNews.com



A motorcycle accident in 2009 upended 20-year-old Kurt Jackson's life. Overnight, he was paralyzed from the waist down. The accident also resulted in leg swelling and chronic open wounds. After years of non-healing wounds and no relief, it was suggested Mr. Jackson visit the Wound Center at Vanderbilt Tullahoma-Harton Hospital. "I had been to another facility for five years with the same wound and no progress. After a short time at Vanderbilt, they diagnosed the issue, implemented a treatment plan and now the wound is healed. They treat me like family," said Jackson. *(10/19/25)*

Innovative cancer therapy offers hope to Nashville father

Read/watch the full story by Amanda Chin on Fox 17 Nashville, photo courtesy of Kyle Stephens



Kyle Stephens was diagnosed with stage four diffuse large B-cell lymphoma in 2022. After a year of remission following chemotherapy, Stephens' cancer returned. Doctors at VUMC offered a new hope with CAR T-cell therapy, which re-engineers a patient's immune cells to target cancer. Just 30 days later, Stephens was back in remission. "We've done many clinical trials on this treatment... about half of those that get it are cured, but right off the bat, 85 to 90% of them really, really, they're very good, durable response from this treatment," said VUMC oncologist Olalekan Oluwole, MBBS, MD. *(10/23/25)*

Macon County father's voice restored following oral cancer surgery

Read the full story by Jill Clendening on VUMC News

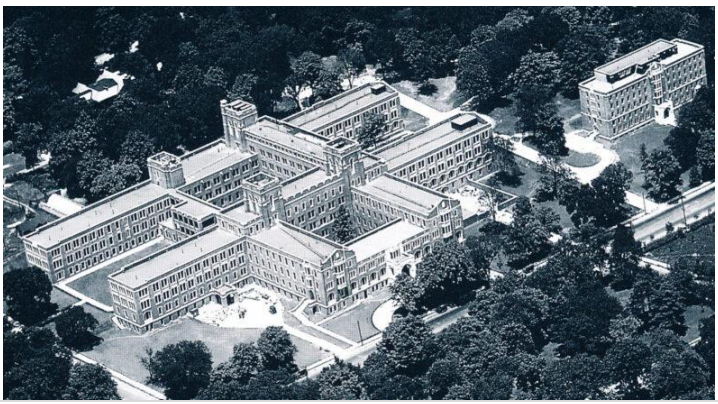


Eating, speaking and breathing easily are essential functions we often take for granted, and Nick Schrock of Macon County, Tennessee, admits he did, too. Then, he noticed a small bump inside his mouth that soon grew to the size of a golf ball, causing pain when yawning and eating. Surgery to remove the tumor left a hole in his mouth that made it hard to speak, so VUMC clinicians created a custom prosthetic that enabled him to speak again. *(10/27/25)*

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF VUMC

The building that is now called VUMC Medical Center North opened on Sept 16, 1925, and for many decades *was* VUMC. As recently as 1977, the hospital beds, outpatient clinics, operating rooms, nursery, pharmacy, emergency department, research labs, library, cafeteria and more — was, with a few exceptions, all inside the walls of Medical Center North. Significant advances in medicine took place in Medical Center North. In 1933, Alfred Blalock, MD pioneered the first cardiothoracic surgery for infants with "blue baby syndrome." The techniques to mass produce vaccines for smallpox, typhus, and yellow fever were developed in the 1930s by Ernest Goodpasture, MD. In the 1950s, Mildred Stahlman, MD, was the first to use respiratory therapy for infants with damaged lungs. Read More

In 1925, Medical Center North became a literal home for the first 12 "residents," with the second floor dormitory where they could get some rest before rushing to the next patient. VUMC's graduate medical education program has grown to include more than 1,200 early career physicians, with more than 170 highly competitive residency and fellowship programs. Read more





LEADING EDGE RESEARCH

Vanderbilt's new drug combo revolutionizes kidney cancer treatment

Read/watch the full story by Heather Newman and Amanda Chin on Fox 17



VUMC oncologist Biran Rini, MD, led a groundbreaking clinical trial testing a novel combination therapy to treat advanced kidney cancer. Results, recently published in *Nature Medicine*, found significant increases in overall survival, with some patients potentially cured. The combination is now the gold standard treatment for advanced kidney cancer. Bob Kinkead is a Nashville area talent agent who was given just four months to live. Since joining the clinical trial, Kinkead is now in remission. "I may live another ten, 20 years, I'm hoping," said Kinkead. *(10/15/25)*

Vanderbilt ALS center launches license plate campaign to fund research

Read the full story by Nate Rau on Axios Nashville



The Vanderbilt ALS Research Center (VARC) is launching a specialty license plate campaign to help fund research into treating and curing the debilitating disease. VARC was launched in early 2024, in part with funding from the State of Tennessee. The license plate campaign needs at least 1,000 pre-orders by June 30, 2026 to produce the new license plate and generate contributions to support VARC. *(10/27/25)*

Vitamin Supplement Linked to Reduced Risk of Skin Cancer

Read the full story by Hannah Millington on Newsweek



A new study by VUMC researchers in JAMA Dermatology of more than 33,000 veterans over 25 years and found that those who regularly took nicotinamide (a form of vitamin B3) supplements had a 14% lower risk of developing skin cancer. When nicotinamide was started after a first skin cancer diagnosis, the risk of a second skin cancer decreased by 54%. Nicotinamide is thought to reduce skin cancer risk by improving DNA repair, thus slowing DNA damage from new sun exposure. This study was supported by funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs. *(9/17/25)*

New sepsis therapy developed at VUMC edges closer to the clinic

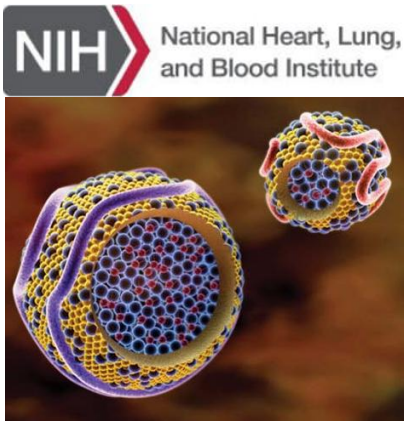
Read the full story by Bill Snyder on VUMC News



Each year, 1.7 million Americans develop sepsis, a serious bacterial blood infection. Current therapies for sepsis can be ineffective, as an estimated 350,000 Americans die from sepsis every year, and survivors have increased risks of heart disease and cancer caused by severe inflammation. A recent VUMC-led study in *Frontiers in Immunology* found "Peptide Genomic Therapy" (PGT, small immune signaling protein fragments) greatly enhanced the immune system of mice to clear bacteria while reducing inflammation. These promising results open the possibility of advancing to clinical trials. The Department of Veterans Affairs provided funding for this study. *(10/22/25)*

Genetic variation impact scores: A new tool for earlier heart disease detection

Read the full story by Bill Snyder on VUMC News



An international consortium co-led by VUMC scientists mapped the impact of more than 17,000 genetic variants associated with developing premature heart disease. The study, in *Science*, will help improve early diagnosis and treatment of familial high cholesterol. The protein Low Density Lipoprotein Receptor (LDLR) is known to play an important role in high cholesterol, but the significance of the thousands of individual genetic variants were not previously understood. The consortium created a high-throughput cell culture assay to create 17,000 variants of the LDLR protein and measure how the mutations impacted its function. VUMC researchers involved in the study were funded by the National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute. *(10/30/25)*

AI tools could shorten 'diagnostic odyssey' for patients with rare diseases

Read the full story by Leigh McMillan on VUMC News



Artificial intelligence tools successfully identified diagnoses for patients in the Undiagnosed Diseases Network (UDN), according to a VUMC-led study published in *JAMA Network Open*. The study included 90 UDN cases diagnosed between November 2016 and April 2024; the average age at symptom onset was 7.6 months, and the average time to diagnosis was 7.6 years. The AI tools achieved diagnostic rates of 13.3% (ChatGPT-based) and 10.0% (Llama-based) in seconds, compared to the historical clinical review rate of 5.6%; they also provided next steps to evaluate the suggested diagnoses. This research was made possible with funding from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. *(9/5/25)*

Vanderbilt-developed AI platform validated for molecular mapping of tissues

Read the full story by Tom Wilemon on VUMC News



A study in *Nature Methods* demonstrated that iSCALE, an AI platform developed at VUMC, can transform how scientists and clinicians visualize and analyze complex tissues on a high-resolution map of gene expression across entire tissue sections. Existing platforms are constrained by high costs, long turnaround times, low resolution, and small tissue capture areas. This technology has potential to open new research avenues for many types of diseases including cancer, neurological disorders, digestive disorders, developmental disorders, and more. Funding from the National Institutes of Health and Department of Defense supported this research. *(9/18/25)*

Studies find connection between impaired musical rhythm abilities and developmental speech-language disorders

Read the full story by Evan Dorian on VUMC News



In a recent *Nature Communications* paper, VUMC researchers found a correlation between musical rhythm abilities and developmental speech-language disorders. The study also identified genetic variants that were associated with rhythm, speech, and reading abilities. This study was funded by the National Institutes of Health. *(9/30/25)*

COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

Made in the Shade … Tree Clinic. Medical student-run clinic celebrates two decades of transforming lives

Read the full story by Jill Clendening on VUMC News

The Shade Tree Clinic is a Vanderbilt University School of Medicine (VUSM) medical student-run clinic that provides free, high-quality care to uninsured individuals in Nashville. Since 2005, the Shade Tree Clinic has provided comprehensive medical care and connections to community resources for more than 4,000 uninsured patients. VUSM medical student volunteers spend more than 10,000 hours annually leading the clinic's operations, and more than 90% of all medical students volunteer in some form at the student-run clinic during their years at VUSM. Medical students collaborate with an interdisciplinary group of nursing, pharmacy, dietetic, social work, law and genetic counseling students, and faculty who also put in considerable hours providing care and consultations at Shade Tree Clinic. *(9/25/25)*







Orthopaedic Outreach Day 'resets the soul' for patients and volunteers

Read the Full story by Danny Bonvissuto on VUMC News

The 9th annual Orthopaedics Outreach Day was held at the Vanderbilt Surgery Center in Franklin. Thirteen patients received free orthopaedic surgeries, including five sports cases, six hand/upper extremity cases and, for the first time, two foot and ankle surgeries. More than 60 VUMC staff members donated their time, including Julie Donovan, RN, CNOR, circulating nurse at the Vanderbilt Surgery Center in Franklin, who has participated since the event's inception. "Orthopaedics Outreach Day is special to me because it's an opportunity to use my expertise and give back to our community." said Donovan. *(9/23/25)*



Program shows students that distracted driving can take many forms

Read the full story by Jesica Pasley on VUMC News

Be In The Zone (BITZ) is a teen driver safety program at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, which teaches students that any distraction can not only be dangerous, but deadly. Dialing a phone number while driving increases a teen's risk of crashing by six times, and texting while driving increases the risk by 23 times. Nine Middle Tennessee High Schools participated in this year's program, which includes peer-to-peer education on safe driving practices, awareness campaigns, hands-on events, and a day-long program that included a simulated emergency department trauma case at Monroe Carell. *(10/30/25)*



TSU, VUMC Agreement Creates Clinical Training Pathways for HPSS Students

Read the full story by Alexis Clark on TSU Newsroom, photo courtesy of TSU

Tennessee State University and VUMC announced a new agreement to provide TSU Human Performance and Sport Sciences (HPSS) students with direct access to clinical training opportunities at VUMC. The agreement creates a clear path for students interested in athletic training and other areas of sports medicine. VUMC will host semester-long clinical immersions designed to give athletic training students hands-on experience that prepares them for their careers. TSU students will benefit from specialized advising and guidance to strengthen their preparation for admission into Vanderbilt's highly competitive program. *(9/4/25)*



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