PULASKI COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY
News
March 2024

When you think professional, ethical, quality healthcare, think physicians of Pulaski County Medical Society.

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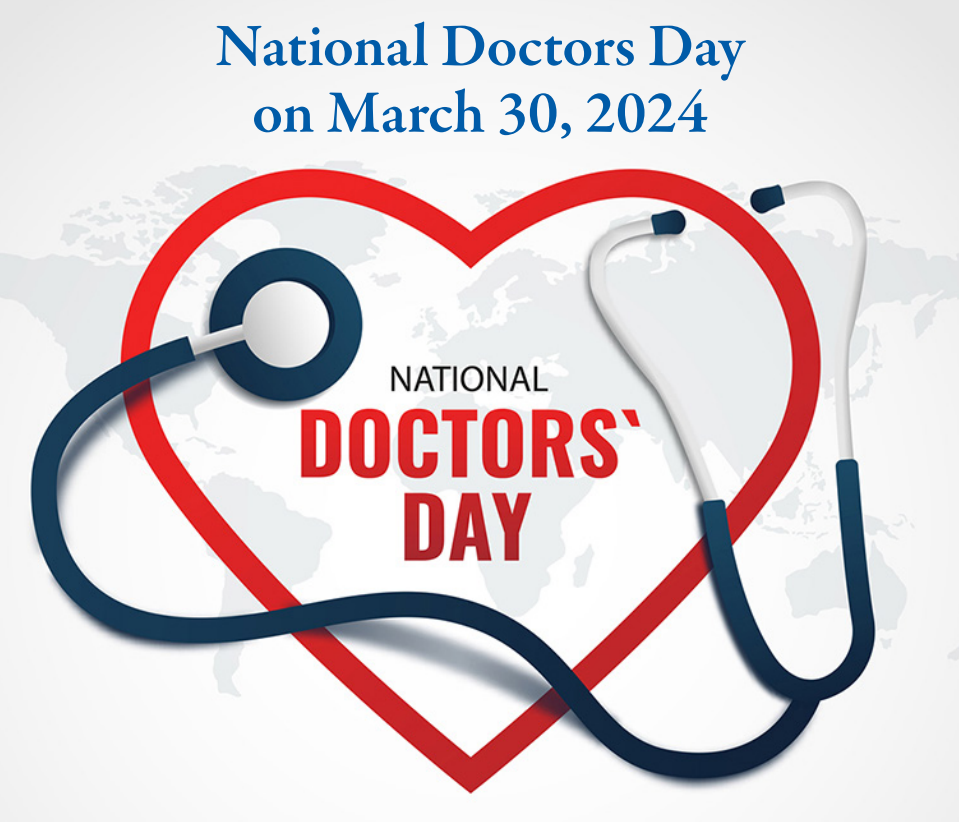
National Doctors Day on March 30, 2024



Upcoming Dates to Remember

March 16th	National Vaccination Day
March 17th	St. Patrick's Day
March 19th	National Certified Nurses Day & First Day of Spring
March 29th	National Vietnam War Veterans Day
March 30th	National Doctors Day
April 1st	April Fool's Day
April 3rd-9th	National Public Health Week
April 8th	Total Solar Eclipse

Closed Claim Analysis: Trust the Process

BRENT KINNEY, JD, CLAIMS ATTORNEY, SVMIC; REPRINTED FROM THE SVMIC SENTINEL

As an avid sports fan, I routinely hear athletes mention that they need to "trust the process." The origin of "trust the process," as used ubiquitously in sports, apparently goes back to 2013 when the Philadelphia 76ers' new general manager, Sam Hinkie, advocated an emphasis on process over outcome in his first speech with the team. The 76ers' fans coined the phrase during a rough time for their team and it essentially means, "things may look bad now, but we have a plan in place to make it better." Dr. Wexler* had to be reminded to "trust the process" when he faced his first health care liability action in the same year "trust the process" was coined by the 76ers' fans.

The patient in Dr. Wexler's lawsuit was a 75-year-old female who had an MRI that showed a high-grade partial thickness tear of the tendon in the right shoulder. Based on the results of the MRI, Dr. Wexler recommended and performed a right shoulder hemiarthroplasty. Dr. Wexler encountered a bleeding vessel during the surgery, which he chose to tie off with a suture. There was a small amount of blood loss, but the rest of the surgery was uneventful. Dr. Wexler, per his routine, checked the patient's pulses before he left the operating room. Nursing notes that were charted immediately after the surgery recorded brisk capillary refill and strong pulses. The patient's radial pulses were also checked by the nursing staff repeatedly throughout her hospital admission following the surgery. The patient was discharged from the hospital three days following the surgery with no circulation issues documented in the medical chart.

A circulation problem was first documented twenty-eight days later, at which time the patient presented to her primary care physician, Dr. Green. Dr. Green referred the patient to Dr. Sunderland, an interventional radiologist. Dr. Sunderland ordered a CTA and angiography, which showed an occlusion of the axillary artery at the axillo-brachial junction with collaterals. Dr. Sunderland concluded that the patient had a chronic occlusion of the axillo-brachial junction and referred the patient to Dr. Castro, a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon.

Dr. Castro performed a right axillary exploration on the patient. Dr. Castro's operative note indicated that there was a large amount of scar tissue at the point of transition for the brachial to the axillary artery, and he also noted that a silk stitch was "through the artery" approximately 4 mm proximal to this. The artery was noted to be completely occluded and scarred down for approximately 1 cm. Dr. Castro performed an end-to-end anastomosis and circulation was restored by the graft. Unfortunately, the patient later developed a thrombus.

The patient then had another CTA of her right upper extremity, which showed that the right axillary artery was again occluded. To address this, Dr. Castro performed a thrombectomy of the axillo-brachial, ulnar, and radial arteries by axillary incision, and a brachial-to-brachial bypass with cryopreserved vein. Following the surgery, Dr. Castro described an excellent radial pulse.

The patient later commenced a health care liability action against Dr. Wexler alleging that Dr. Wexler deviated from the standard of care, in part, "by placing a stitch/suture in/through the axillary artery at the axillo/brachial junction with collaterals." The patient claimed she had significant loss of sensation and diminished use of her right arm and hand as a result of the alleged damage to the vessel.

Defense counsel for Dr. Wexler reported that upon first meeting with Dr. Wexler, he seemed to have the impression that he would be automatically liable simply for placing the stitch. Defense counsel discussed with Dr. Wexler that the occurrence of the complication itself does not establish negligence; instead, the circumstances of his placement of the stitch would dictate whether the placement was negligent. In other words, Dr. Wexler needed to "trust the process." Although things looked bad from Dr. Wexler's personal view, his defense counsel was already developing a solid defense plan.

It was apparent, however, that Dr. Wexler was anxious about the litigation process. Upon recommendation of defense counsel, a witness consultant was engaged to assist Dr. Wexler in preparing for his deposition and trial testimony. After first meeting with Dr. Wexler, the witness consultant noted that he was completely "crazed" about the lawsuit and that he had a hard time thinking since he was so anxious about the case. The witness consultant noted that Dr. Wexler, more than anything, needed confidence, hope, and a plan. Again, he needed to "trust the process."

The case eventually proceeded to trial. During trial, the patient's counsel attempted to prove that Dr. Wexler placed the stitch through the lumen of the axillary artery and tied down the stitch, which caused the axillary artery to occlude. Defense counsel argued that had Dr. Wexler placed a stitch through the lumen of the axillary artery and tied down the stitch, the occlusion and patient's circulation problem would have been apparent almost immediately; instead, the first documentation of any circulation problem was twenty-eight days after the patient was discharged from the hospital. The proof offered by the defense showed that Dr. Wexler encountered bleeding from a collateral branch vessel off the axillary artery that was avulsed by use of a retractor during the procedure. Defense counsel argued that Dr. Wexler, consistent with the standard of care, placed a suture around the branch vessel to control the bleeding. Defense counsel conceded that the stitch did, in fact, lead to the occlusion of the axillary artery twenty-eight days later; however, the occlusion was not due to a placement of the stitch through the lumen of the axillary artery as argued by the patient's counsel. Defense counsel argued that although the stitch may have accidentally entered a portion of the axillary artery, doing so was not a deviation from the standard of care. The source of the bleed was deep within the surgical site, visibility was limited, and the suture unfortunately encountered the axillary artery despite the best efforts of Dr. Wexler to avoid doing so. Furthermore, with the assistance of defense counsel and the witness consultant, Dr. Wexler performed admirably and confidently on the stand at trial in defending his care and treatment of the patient. The jury deliberated for one-and-a-half hours and returned a verdict in favor of Dr. Wexler.

Being accused of medical negligence is almost always stressful for a healthcare provider. Although the litigation process is painfully slow, it can quickly wear down a healthcare provider both mentally and physically. For Dr. Wexler, the anxiety from being sued escalated quickly as he believed he was liable simply for placing the stitch. You should be mindful, however, as defense counsel discussed with Dr. Wexler, that an injury alone does not raise a presumption of negligence. Although things seemed bad from Dr. Wexler's perspective when he was served with the patient's Complaint, his defense counsel formulated a defense plan to make things better. Ultimately, defense counsel secured a verdict in favor of Dr. Wexler because Dr. Wexler trusted his defense counsel, trusted his defense counsel's plan, trusted the witness consultant's plan, and trusted his own care and treatment of the patient – the process worked.

*Names have been changed throughout.

UAMS Establishes Institute for Community Health Innovation

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) announced today the establishment of its eighth institute, the UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation, effective March 1.

The institute will work with communities across Arkansas to conduct community-based research and deploy community-driven programs to improve health outcomes in rural and medically underserved regions of the state.

The institute, which will be based in Northwest Arkansas, will have staff and offices across the state, including in Batesville, El Dorado, Fort Smith, Helena-West Helena, Jonesboro, Lake Village, Little Rock, Magnolia, Pine Bluff and Texarkana.

"This landmark designation follows our institution's tradition of creating institutes as centers of gravity where clinical, academic and research activities are organized around a specific condition or mission, in this case, reducing health disparities through community-driven innovation," said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA.

The institute will be led by founding Director Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, who has more than 20 years of experience implementing innovative community health programs and community-based research.

"The Institute for Community Health Innovation's vision is to partner with people and organizations across to state to implement innovative research, clinical care and community-based programs outside the traditional academic walls of UAMS to meet the needs of the state's most rural and medically underserved communities," McElfish said. "If we're going to move the needle and improve health outcomes for all Arkansans, we must have innovative solutions that meet people where they live, work and play."

Director, Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA

McElfish, a professor in the UAMS College of Medicine, has been at UAMS since 2010. She is one of UAMS's most highly regarded and impactful researchers, with more than 280 peer-reviewed manuscripts and extramural grants totaling more than $200 million. She has led changes in health policy and practice, resulting in improvement in health and health care for rural communities and underserved communities. Her work — and that of the Office of Community Health and Research, where she has served as director — has integrated translational research, community-engagement, clinical care and population health in the areas of maternal and child health and chronic disease prevention and management. McElfish and her team have also been instrumental in training and advocating for community health workers and doulas.

"Achieving status as an institute within UAMS is a testament to the work our team and community partners have accomplished together over the last 10 years," McElfish said. "We are working to improve health outcomes for all Arkansans, and as an official institute, we look forward to spreading our work even further as we continue our shared mission to create a better state of health for all."

Arkansas Heart Hospital Partners with Pulaski County Special School District

Will provide heart attack risk assessments for teachers and staff

Arkansas Heart Hospital (AHH) announced on February 14th its partnership with the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD) to offer comprehensive heart attack risk assessments for teachers and administrative staff members. AHH will offer assessments tailored to the specific needs of PCSSD's teachers and staff. These assessments will include screenings for common risk factors such as high blood pressure, cholesterol levels and lifestyle habits, empowering educators to take proactive steps towards improving their heart health.

"Educators dedicate their lives to nurturing the minds of our youth, often putting their health on the back burner," said Dr. Bruce Murphy, CEO of Arkansas Heart Hospital. "With alarming statistics revealing the prevalence of heart disease among women and the impact of age on heart health, it's imperative that we provide them with the tools and resources to prioritize their well-being. This partnership is a testament to PCSSD's understanding that healthy educators lead to a better educational environment and contribute to improved outcomes for all."

Heart disease remains a leading cause of death in the United States, and educators, particularly women, face unique risks. According to data from Zippia's data science team, of the over 3,842,796 teachers currently employed in the U.S., 74.3% are women, with an average age of 42. Age and gender are significant factors impacting heart health, making it crucial for educators to proactively assess their risk factors.

"We are incredibly thankful for the opportunity to collaborate with Arkansas Heart Hospital in promoting the health and wellness of our team members," said Dr. Charles McNulty, superintendent of PCSSD. "Our educators devote themselves wholeheartedly to their students, and we must support them in prioritizing their well-being. We look forward to seeing the positive impact these assessments will have on the overall health of our staff."

Arkansas Heart Hospital and PCSSD are committed to fostering a culture of health and wellness within the education community, and this partnership marks a significant step towards achieving that goal. By providing accessible and comprehensive heart attack risk assessments, both organizations aim to empower educators to lead healthier lives and continue making a difference in the lives of their students.

Baptist Health College Little Rock Names New President

Baptist Health College Little Rock is pleased to announce that Joel Hicks, EdD, RT(R), is the college's new president, effective Feb. 5.

"We are thrilled to have Joel Hicks at the helm of our college, which for over a century has trained the next generation of health care professionals in nursing and allied health programs," said Mike Perkins, president of Baptist Health Medical Center-Little Rock. "His decades of experience, not only in education but in hands-on medical practice as well, make him a great fit for its next chapter."

Prior to joining Baptist Health College Little Rock, Hicks had served since July 2021 as the dean of the College of Nursing and School of Allied Health at Northwestern State University, based in Natchitoches, Louisiana. There, he oversaw all certificate, undergraduate and graduate programs within the nursing and allied health programs divisions across four campuses.

Joel Hicks, EdD, RT(R)

Hicks additionally served as associate dean in 2020 and as the School of Allied Health

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UAMS Research Team Discovers Potential Alzheimer's Drug

A potential new drug to prevent Alzheimer's disease in people with the so-called Alzheimer's gene has been discovered by a University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) research team led by Sue Griffin, Ph.D.

The findings were published Jan. 8 in *Communications Biology* and include discoveries of a druggable target and a drug candidate, made by Meenakshisundaram Balasubramaniam, Ph.D., the paper's first author.

An estimated 50-65% of people with Alzheimer's disease have inherited the Alzheimer's gene, Apolipoprotein E4 (*APOEε4*), from one or both parents. About 25% of people have one copy of *APOEε4* and are three times as likely to develop the disease. Those with two copies (one from each parent) make up 2-3% of the population and are 12-15 times as likely to develop Alzheimer's.

Griffin said her team appears to be the first with the new drug-related discoveries just as it was first in 2018 to show how *APOEε4* prevented brain cells from disposing of their waste products, known as lysosomal autophagy.

Such disruption of autophagy in those who inherit *APOEε4* is responsible for the formation of plaques and tangles in the brain that are hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease. That groundbreaking discovery was published in Alzheimer's and Dementia, the Journal of the Alzheimer's Association.

"Our series of discoveries related to *APOEε4* and its detrimental role in Alzheimer's pathogenesis are among the most impactful of my 50 years as a research scientist," said Griffin, a pioneer in the study of neuroinflammation and co-founder of the Journal of Neuroinflammation, based at the UAMS Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging. "No other research team has found a potential drug specifically for blocking the harmful effects of inherited *APOEε4*."

Griffin is the Alexa and William T. Dillard Chair in Geriatric Research and a distinguished faculty scholar in the College of Medicine and director of research at the Institute on Aging. She is also a professor in the college's departments of Neurobiology & Developmental Sciences, Internal Medicine and Psychiatry. Notably, she is a winner of the Alzheimer's Association's Lifetime Achievement Award and inductee of the Arkansas Women's Hall of Fame.

Most Alzheimer's research nationally has focused on treatments that can clear away the brain's plaques and tangles associated with the disease, but that approach has yielded unimpressive results. Griffin notes that people with mild Alzheimer's symptoms have already lost about half or more of the neurons responsible for memory and reasoning, which has led to her focus on prevention.

Griffin's team is advancing its innovative work with a recent five-year, $2.35 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The team will conduct larger-scale preclinical research on the drug candidate, CBA2, as well as test other potential drug candidates.

"Our hope is that people who have one or two copies of *APOEε4* will one day take the drug regularly throughout

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Baptist Health College Little Rock Names New President

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director from 2017-2020. He also taught at Northwestern State starting in 2010, and was a tenured associate professor within the School of Allied Health.

Before working in higher education, Hicks served for almost two decades in health care, primarily in diagnostic and cardiac imaging. The majority of this clinical time was spent in a heart catheterization lab.

"Working with multiple health care disciplines, in a high-stress situation, has greatly influenced my ability to build strong working relationships in higher education," said Hicks. "I look forward to furthering the mission of Baptist Health College Little Rock and building upon the high-quality education offered to students."

Hicks earned a certificate in radiologic technology in 1994 from LSU Health Sciences Center. He continued his education over a decade later, earning a Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Sciences in 2006 from Northwestern State and a Master of Science in Radiologic Technology in 2009 from Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. Then, in 2016, he completed a Doctor of Education in Developmental Education at Grambling State University in Grambling, Louisiana.

UAMS Research Team Discovers Potential Alzheimer's Drug

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their life and significantly reduce their risk of developing Alzheimer's disease," Griffin said.

Balasubramaniam, co-principal investigator on the NIH grant with Griffin, said UAMS built the first known full-length structure of *APOEε4* protein in 2017, which he created using bioinformatics and computational modeling techniques. This foundational work led to the discovery of the druggable site on the *APOEε4* protein, ApoE4. (*APOEε4* refers to the gene, and ApoE4, without the epsilon symbol and no italics, is the protein.)

Balasubramaniam's unique skills and curiosity, Griffin said, were the catalyst for the discoveries.

"I don't know of anyone else in the world but Dr. Balasubramaniam who can do the work that's in this paper," Griffin said of the assistant professor and Inglewood Scholar in the Department of Geriatrics.

While most institutions still manually screen drug compounds, which can take years, Balasubramaniam oversees a computational biology suite with high-performance GPU servers that he used to screen about 800,000 compounds in two days.

His computer-simulated findings on ApoE4-targeted drug actions were validated in various in vitro and in vivo model systems.

The collaborating researchers include:

- Srinivas Ayyadevara, Ph.D., associate professor, Department of Geriatrics
- Steve W. Barger, Ph.D., professor, departments of Geriatrics, Neurobiology and Developmental Sciences, and Internal Medicine
- Peter Crooks, Ph.D., D.Sc., professor, College of Pharmacy Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Simmons Chair in Cancer Research
- Robert J.S. Reis, Ph.D., professor, departments of Geriatrics, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and Pharmacology and Toxicology.

A provisional patent has been awarded on the CBA2 drug candidate, and full patent approval is pending.

The research grant of $2,351,655 reported in this news release is funded by the NIH National Institute on Aging, award number 1R01AG084472-01.

UAMS Accepting Applications for Youths Interested in MASH, CHAMPS Summer Programs

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) is accepting applications for two summer enrichment programs that introduce high school students to career opportunities in health care.

The Medical Applications of Science for Health (MASH) program is a statewide summer day camp for students entering grades 11 and 12. Participants gain exposure to health careers through hands-on activities, tours of health care facilities and interaction with medical professionals.

Most of the camps run for two weeks, but several sites plan to host "Mini MASH" camps that condense their activities into a single week.

MASH camps will be held at UAMS Regional Campuses or at local hospitals or colleges. The program will be offered this summer in Blytheville, Conway, Crossett, DeWitt, Dumas, El Dorado, Fayetteville, Fordyce, Fort Smith, Harrison, Hot Springs, Jonesboro, Lake Village, Magnolia, Malvern, Monticello, Paragould, Pine Bluff, Rogers, Texarkana, West Memphis and Warren.

Students entering grades eight through 10 are invited to participate in the Community Health Applied in Medical Public Service (CHAMPS) program, which features three- to five-day camps with many of the learning opportunities provided by MASH. CHAMPS will be offered in Crossett and Fayetteville.

These programs are made possible by a partnership between UAMS Regional Campuses and the Arkansas Farm Bureau. The MASH concept was piloted in 1988 by the UAMS South Central Regional Campus in Pine Bluff. The Farm Bureau recognized the value of these MASH camps in helping rural communities develop their own health care providers, and when initial grant funding ended, the Farm Bureau stepped up to ensure continuation and expansion of the programs. Over the past 35 years, more than 10,000 Arkansas students have participated in MASH or CHAMPS.

Camp dates and application deadlines vary based on location. For more information and to apply for these summer programs, go to UAMS.info/MASHCamps.

Baptist Health Foundation Receives $50,000 Donation From Family of Heart Transplant Recipient

Baptist Health Foundation recently announced a $50,000 donation from Bob and Jeanne Fitzgerald in honor of their son, Dr. Ryan Fitzgerald, a heart transplant recipient.

"This is a very special and exciting day for our family. We have the opportunity to help in an area that means so much to us," the Fitzgerald family said. "We know that your extraordinary heart team will put this money to good use in helping other families through the tough times. Arkansas is so fortunate to have the heart program at Baptist Health and the caring team that truly gave us hope."

Dr. Ryan Fitzgerald, of Radiology Consultants at Baptist Health, serves on the Baptist Health Foundation Board and the Arora Board.

The Heart of Faith Fund donation comes 20 years after his transplant, and was also fittingly presented during American Heart Month on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14 – a holiday synonymous with all things heart-related.

"We are deeply grateful to the Fitzgerald family for believing in Baptist Health," said Lena Hayes, chief development officer for Baptist Health Foundation. "Their generous gift will help our Heart Transplant Institute's team of experts keep more hearts beating and save the lives of more Arkansans."

Around 10 years old, Dr. Fitzgerald was diagnosed with a coarctation of the aorta, meaning a portion of his aorta was narrower and restricting blood flow to the rest of his body. After a corrective surgery at age 11, he continued living without any limitations to his lifestyle.

Years later, while in medical school, a blood pressure increase indicated a recurrence of the coarctation and doctors again decided that he would need to undergo a repeat corrective surgery. Due to a surgical complication, Dr. Fitzgerald's condition worsened to the point that he would need a heart transplant. He was at Arkansas Children's, which did not have a suitable device to fit his body at his age, so he was transferred by ambulance to Baptist Health.

While at Baptist Health, Dr. Fitzgerald received a heart transplant. Performing the heart transplant was Dr. John Ransom, a cardiovascular surgeon at Baptist Health. Dr. Steve Hutchins, a transplant cardiologist at Baptist Health, supervised following the surgery.

Dr. Fitzgerald's experiences served as further inspiration for him to continue in his medical studies.

Baptist Health Foundation's Heart of Faith Fund supports patients who are facing heart failure, need a Left Ventricular Assisted Device (LVAD) or need a heart transplant. The fund helps to cover travel and hotel expenses, equipment for their treatment, prescriptions and other medical and non-medical needs. It also assists with the operational cost of Baptist Health Heart Failure and Transplant Institute.

UAMS To Host Girlology Puberty Event April 7

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) is bringing back its popular Girlology puberty session April 7 to help girls face puberty with greater confidence.

Held from 2-4:30 p.m. in the 12th floor auditorium of the Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, the event is for girls ages 8-14, accompanied by a parent or other caregiver.

During Girlology, attendees will learn about growth and development; bras and bra shopping; hygiene and hair management; nutrition and growth; menstruation and menstrual hygiene; respect for self and others; moods and emotions; and internet safety and curiosity.

The 2.5-hour course will be taught by UAMS physicians from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology — Nirvana Manning, M.D., department chair and professor; Laura Hollenbach, M.D., associate professor; and Kathryn Stambough, M.D., assistant professor in the department's Division of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology who sees patients at Arkansas Children's.

"Discussions about puberty can be very daunting for parents and children, this program makes it easy to start these important conversations," Manning said. "With Girlology, we create a safe space where the girls and adults receive medically accurate information from physicians. Ultimately, we hope that the lessons learned here can help families communicate better in the future."

Our goal is to have physicians provide medically accurate information, create a shared experience, and keep the lines of communication open in the future."

The cost is $30, although scholarships are available for those who cannot afford it.

For more information or to register for the event, visit uams.health/girlology.

UAMS held its first Girlology session in August 2022. Approximately 220 girls and their accompanying adult attended the inaugural event. Since then, several more sessions have been held and more than 1,000 families have attended.

"We are so excited that the program continues to grow," said Manning.