

## Grant Awarded to UAB & UTHSC to Establish Research Network

By: Jessica Snyder

Moments before a dying patient was put on a ventilator, struggling to breathe from the effects of the coronavirus, he uttered, “*Who’s going to pay for it?*” In a [story reported by CNN](#), this instant was recalled by a New York City nurse as something he would never forget.

While this specific example pertains to the novel coronavirus, worries like the one above extend to nearly every area of medical care—cancer treatment, emergency care, surgery, etc.

To date, little attention has been given to how the financial consequences of a disease affect a person's emotional well-being. This is partly due to the lack of dedicated researchers in this field. “We not only need more researchers, but we need researchers from different fields of study to truly understand this topic in depth,” said Maria Pisu, PhD, professor of Preventive Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).

Dr. Pisu is collaborating with Michelle Martin, PhD, director of the Center for Innovation in Health Equity Research at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC), on a project to understand the relationships between financial burden, emotional well-being, and broader health outcomes. The two were recently awarded \$2.39 million from the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health and the National Institutes of Health Office of the Director to create an Emotional Well-being and Economic Burden (EMOT-ECON) Research Network.

The network will include researchers from different disciplines, patients and caregivers, healthcare providers, and others with personal or professional interest and experience in the research topic. Pisu and Martin’s team includes two physician scientists, David Schwartz, MD, chair of UTHSC’s Department of Radiation Oncology and Margaret Liang, MD, assistant professor in Obstetrics and Gynecology at UAB. Health communication expert Yu-Mei Schoenberger, PhD, assistant professor in Preventive Medicine at UAB is also part of the team.

The network’s pilot project program aims to not only increase the number of studies in EMOT-ECON research, but also attract new people to the field. “Our work will advance understanding of financial burden and emotional well-being and generate the body of knowledge necessary for developing interventions that minimize the impact of financial burden and enhance emotional well-being,” Dr. Martin said.

Research Patient Advocate and President of the West Valley Ovarian Cancer Alliance, Laurel J. Pracht, applauds their efforts. “It is past time to recognize the financial burden patients and caregivers bear to receive/afford treatment not only of cancer but also chronic diseases,” Ms. Pracht said. “Naturally it impacts a patient’s quality-of-life as well as well-being.”

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[The UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center \(MHRC\)](#), established in 2002, generates and disseminates research knowledge from biomedical, behavioral, and social sciences in order to reduce the health disparities experienced by vulnerable populations and disadvantaged communities locally, regionally, and nationally.

As Tennessee's only public, statewide, academic health system, the mission of the [University of Tennessee Health Science Center \(UTHSC\)](#) is to bring the benefits of the health sciences to the achievement and maintenance of human health, with a focus on the citizens of Tennessee and the region, by pursuing an integrated program of education, research, clinical care, and public service.

Offering a broad range of postgraduate and selected baccalaureate training opportunities, the main UTHSC campus is located in Memphis and includes six colleges: Dentistry, Graduate Health Sciences, Health Professions, Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy. UTHSC also educates and trains cohorts of medicine, pharmacy and/or health professions students — in addition to medical residents and fellows — at its major sites in Knoxville, Chattanooga and Nashville. Founded in 1911, during its more than 100 years, UT Health Science Center has educated and trained more than 57,000 health care professionals in academic settings and health care facilities across the state.