Special Program for High School Students
The Conquest of Cancer and the Next Generation of Cancer Researchers
AACR Conference on The Science of Cancer Health Disparities
Atlanta, GA

Speakers



Brian M. Rivers, PhD, MPH
Director, Cancer Health Equity Institute
Executive Director, Georgia Cancer Health Equity Research Center
Executive Director, Health Equity Research Career Advancement Program
Professor, Community Health and Preventive Medicine
Morehouse School of Medicine
Atlanta, GA

Dr. Rivers is Professor and Director of the Cancer Health Equity Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM). Dr. Rivers is nationally and internationally recognized as a thought leader in health disparities research and a retired appointed member of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Advisory Council on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NACMHD). Dr. Rivers is a committee member and co-author of the recently released report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), *Unequal Treatment Revisited: The Current State of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare*. Dr. Rivers is an active member in the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) community and has served in several leadership capacities, such as the steering committee for the inaugural AACR Cancer Disparities Progress Report, Chairperson for AACR Minorities in Cancer Research Council, Conference Co-Chair for the 11th AACR Conference on Cancer Health Disparities, and Co-Chair for the AACR Think Tank on Cancer Health Disparities. Dr. Rivers also serves as Co-Chair for the Georgia Cancer Control Consortium (GC3), a state-funded entity responsible for developing the state's cancer plan and maintaining the cancer prevention and control infrastructure. Dr. Rivers serves on the American Cancer Society's National Prostate Cancer Roundtable and Chair of the Georgia Prostate Cancer Roundtable, the only state-level roundtable focused on prostate cancer in the United States. Most recently, Dr. Rivers was invited by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to serve on the Executive Committee of the National Cancer Control Plan Technical Working Group.

Dr. Rivers research portfolio has endeavored to expand the application of integrative biological and behavioral research to address cancer health disparities in clinical and community-based settings, utilizing multi-level/multi-domain/multi-sectoral approaches. The goal of his program of research is to conduct research that promotes understanding of integrative biological and behavioral mechanisms and pathways through which social and environmental determinants of health influence adverse health conditions among disparate populations. Dr. Rivers has and is leading several large randomized controlled trials, funded by NIH National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) (R01), to evaluate and characterize the impact of multi-level, digital health interventions purpose to reduce stress, targeting African American men diagnosed with prostate cancer, and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) (R01), to examine the interplay of social and molecular determinants in lung cancer disparities. Dr. Rivers is lead Multiple-Principal Investigator (MPI) for the NIH National Cancer Institute (NCI) funded Partnerships to Advance

Cancer Health Equity (PACHE) U54 Cancer Research Partnership between MSM, Tuskegee University, and the University of Alabama-Birmingham O'Neil Comprehensive Cancer Center (UAB OCCC). Dr. Rivers serves as MPI of the inaugural NIH Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation Coordination and Evaluation Center (FIRST CEC). Lastly, Dr. Rivers is the Principal Investigator of two American Cancer Society recently launched initiatives, Diversity in Cancer Research Institutional Development Program and Cancer Health Equity Research Centers. Dr. Rivers has presented his novel and innovative research findings in diverse settings including the First Congress on Oncology Clinical Trials (Lagos, Nigeria); Movember International Prostate Cancer Consortium (Queensland, Australia); The Atlantic Magazine, *The People vs Cancer*; South by Southwest (SXSW) conferences; and the National Press Foundation.



José G. Treviño, II, MD, FACS
Surgeon in Chief, VCU Massey Cancer Center
Chair, Division of Surgical Oncology
Richmond, Virginia

Dr. José Treviño holds the prestigious position of Chair of the Division of Surgical Oncology and Surgeon-in-Chief of Massey Cancer Center. These roles place him at the forefront of providing hope and exceptional care to patients. The profound impact of his work is particularly evident in cases of pancreatic cancer, a devastating disease known for its dismal prognosis. Among the countless individuals who have encountered this formidable challenge, one remarkable patient stands out—Geoff Shudtz.

Inspired by his experience, Geoff, along with his wife Julie, took bold steps to confront pancreatic cancer head-on. Together, they established the FCSP ("Fight Cancer Stay Positive") Foundation, a research fund dedicated to advancing the understanding and treatment of pancreatic cancer.

The groundbreaking research spearheaded by Dr. Treviño and his team has played a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of pancreatic cancer. Their relentless efforts have shifted the narrative from a disheartening 5% five-year survival rate to a potential 12% five-year survival rate. Recognizing that cancer is not merely a localized ailment but a complex systemic condition, the research conducted at Massey Cancer Center empowers surgeons and the entire care team to devise optimal treatment strategies for patients confronting intricate cancer-related challenges.

While surgery alone may not be the most effective approach to combat cancer, the multidisciplinary research endeavors undertaken at Massey Cancer Center have yielded invaluable insights. This comprehensive approach enables healthcare professionals to develop personalized treatment plans that integrate surgery with other essential modalities, considering the intricate nature of the disease and the unique circumstances faced by each patient.

Dr. Treviño's leadership within the Division of Surgical Oncology and his position as Surgeon-in-Chief of Massey Cancer Center have been instrumental in fostering a culture of hope, excellence, and innovation. Through the tireless dedication of Dr. Treviño and his team, the division continues to be a beacon of light for patients facing seemingly insurmountable odds, offering cutting-edge research, compassionate care, and unwavering support in their battle against cancer.



LaKesha Tables, MD, MPH, MS
Assistant Professor
Community Health and Preventive Medicine
Morehouse School of Medicine
Atlanta, GA

Dr. LaKesha Tables is a board-certified pediatrician and preventive medicine physician who is dedicated to helping children grow up healthy and strong. She earned her bachelor's degree in biology from St. Ambrose University and completed both her medical degree and pediatric residency at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis. She later completed a second residency in Public Health and Preventive Medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine, where she also earned a Master of Public Health and a Master of Science in Clinical Research. Dr. Tables cares for children of all ages and has a special interest in helping families manage and prevent childhood obesity. Her clinical and research work focuses on improving access to both behavioral and pharmacological treatments for children and families affected by obesity. Outside the clinic, Dr. Tables enjoys hiking local trails and unwinding with a good Netflix series.



Alejandro Valdez
Wounded Warrior Foundation
AACR Cancer Disparities Progress Report Featured Survivor
AACR Scientist↔Survivor Program®

Alejandro "Alex" Valdez is a Los Angeles native, father, and colorectal cancer survivor who brings both personal and professional experience to his advocacy.

He works in Strategic Partnerships with Wounded Warrior Project, supporting programs that serve injured service members and their families. Diagnosed with stage II colorectal cancer at age 38, Alex underwent surgery and chemotherapy while navigating the challenges of early-onset cancer. His experience participating in the ENLACE study deepened his appreciation for research and the importance of culturally responsive care. Today, Alex uses his experience to advocate for early detection, genetic research, and continued investment in cancer research that can help save lives.



Jabil Johnson, PhD
Assistant Professor
Director of Genotyping Core
Co-Director of the ITGM Geno-Prodigy/ Geno-Rising Pathway Program
Department of Microbiology, Biochemistry, and Immunology (MBI)
Morehouse School of Medicine
Atlanta, GA

Jabril Johnson, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Microbiology, Biochemistry, and Immunology at Morehouse School of Medicine. He earned his doctorate in Human Genetics from Howard University in 2016, while simultaneously acquiring advanced certification in higher education teaching through the Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (NSF-AGEP), Preparing Future Faculty (PFF), and the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL) programs. Dr. Johnson further honed his expertise as a Cancer Research Training Award (CRTA) postdoctoral Fellow at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institutes of Health (NIH), in Bethesda, MD, and completed his postdoctoral training at the Beckman Research Institute at City of Hope in Duarte, California. During this period, his research focused on cancer stem cell biology and vitamin D's role in regulating signaling pathways involved in prostate cancer development. Dr. Johnson's notable achievements include developing a novel pedagogical methodology for teaching HBCU undergraduates, receiving the 2023 AACR Scholar-In-Training award, and serving on the 2024 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) roundtable on mentoring, well-being, and professional development. He has also received recognition for his community outreach, including a certificate of recognition from the City of Pasadena, California, and an outstanding community service/mentorship award. Dr. Johnson's current research centers on the immunomodulatory effects of vitamin D, immune signaling in the prostate microenvironment, and identifying biomarkers in men at risk for or diagnosed with prostate cancer.