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# NSA

Neurosurgical Society  
of Alabama

## News & Notes

Advancing interest in neurological surgery and allied subjects

WWW.NSANEUROSURGEONS.COM

## Executive Order provides liability protections from COVID-19

In May, Gov. Kay Ivey issued an Executive Order protecting physicians, their staff, and their practices from lawsuits related to COVID-19. The order provides immunity for treatment that resulted from, was negatively affected by or was done in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or the state’s response to the pandemic unless proven by clear and convincing evidence that a health professional acted with wanton, reckless, willful, or intentional misconduct – a standard significantly higher than simple negligence. Importantly, the liability protections in the order apply retroactively to March 13, 2020, and will remain in place until the COVID-19 public health emergency is terminated.

In response to the executive order, **NSA 2018-2020 President Curtis Rozzelle, MD**, sent a letter to the Governor thanking her for her work in protecting physicians, their staff and patients. 🍷

### Neurosurgical Society of Alabama

#### 2020 Virtual Annual Conference

#### May 30

## Conference receives great reviews

In response to the increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases in Alabama and in keeping with the health and safety of our attendees, the decision was made in mid-April to conduct NSA’s 2020 Conference virtually.

Despite being the first time for NSA to conduct a virtual conference, participants reported having a positive experience saying the virtual format was “efficient and effective.” In addition, we experience greater overall participation. The program, which provided 6 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™, also received high reviews.

While it is uncertain whether or not we will be able to conduct our 2021 conference as an in-person meeting, please save the date and plan to join us June 11-13 at the Grand Hotel Golf Resort and Spa in Point Clear or online via Zoom.

NSA’s Board will monitor coronavirus developments and will make a decision based on recommendations from the Alabama Department of Public Health and Centers for Disease Control in determining whether to conduct the meeting in-person or on-line. 🍷

## Medical Association delivers advocacy during COVID-19

*Editor’s note: The Medical Association of the State of Alabama, through its wholly owned subsidiary, MASA Services, Inc., provides management services for the Neurosurgical Society of Alabama. Those services include providing updates on legislative activities that affect the practice of neurosurgery in Alabama.*

*by Niko Corley, Director, Legislative Affairs, Medical Association of the State of Alabama*

While Alabama’s neurosurgeons were busy caring for patients during COVID-19, the Medical Association was and remains hard at work advocating for the house of medicine. Time and again, the Association’s advocacy efforts have delivered for physicians. Specifically, early on during the pandemic, the Medical Association:

1. Worked with various stakeholders and Governor Ivey to secure **liability protections** via an Executive Order for physicians, their staff and their practices against frivolous COVID-19 lawsuits ([summary available here](#));
2. Successfully advocated against multiple dangerous scope of practice expansions proposed by both state and national organizations, which, would have eliminated physician supervision



and destroyed the team-based care model, and allowed a patient’s prescriptions to be switched without physician authorization and without any notification to the physician or the patient; and

*Continued on page 3*

## Neurosurgical Society of Alabama

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### ABOUT NSA

The Neurosurgical Society of Alabama is a non profit corporation that was formed on June 17, 1974. Its purpose is to advance the interest in neurological surgery and allied subjects and to act as a representative for its member at the discretion of the membership by:

- Fostering a feeling of fraternal spirit among those members of the medical profession and closely integrated scientific professions whose interests are chiefly concerned with neurological surgery;
- Stimulating interest within the state or surrounding area and within the medical professions at-large in neurological surgery;
- Advancing knowledge in the above respective fields through the medium of either clinical or preclinical endeavors;
- Facilitating the dissemination of knowledge among members of the Society concerning recent advances in any of the allied fields by appropriate means; and
- Receiving contributions for the purpose of setting up one or more tax free foundations.

## Bentley to serve as diversity liaison at UAB

[www.uab.edu](http://www.uab.edu)

NSA member and UAB Department of Neurosurgery Assistant Professor **Nicole Bentley, MD**, will serve as a diversity liaison to the UAB School of Medicine Office for Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) along with Assistant Professor Jianmei Wu Leavenworth, MD, PhD.



As part of their first efforts they are updating and expanding the five-year diversity plan for the department, which will complement its existing commitment to diversity: "The Department of Neurosurgery believes that a diverse community of faculty and learners is essential to fulfilling our mission and vision."

Dr. Bentley currently serves as secretary/treasurer for NSA. 🌐

## Lepard wins WFNS and Rutgers' Residents and Fellows Award for best abstract

[www.uab.edu](http://www.uab.edu)

UAB Neurosurgery Resident Jacob Lepard, MD, recently won the Residents and Fellows Award for best abstract at the *Global Neurosurgery: Ask Not for Whom the Bell Tolls* virtual symposium. The meeting was joint-hosted by the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies and Rutgers New Jersey Medical School.



The Global Neurosurgery symposium marks the largest event of its kind. More than 1,000 registrants were in attendance, with 160 speakers from 34 countries, across three days. It was broadcast in live translation to several hundred people in China, and had a combined total of 11,300 Facebook live views for the event, reaching almost 41,000 people across 44 countries around the globe.

Dr. Lepard is completing an endowed fellowship in global neurosurgical research and education through the Harvard Program for Global Surgery and Social Change. 🌐

## Researchers develop mitochondrial-targeted prodrug for treating glioblastoma

[www.news-medical.net](http://www.news-medical.net)

Houston Methodist researchers found that mice harboring human glioblastoma tumors in their brains had greatly enhanced survival and weight gain when given a newly developed prodrug.

This mitochondrial-targeted prodrug - an inactive compound that cancer cells selectively metabolize to produce an active toxic drug - also greatly improves outcomes when coupled with standard therapies of radiation and/or chemotherapy.

The drug selectively targets and destroys the DNA inside the glioblastoma cell mitochondria (the energy factory of the cancer cell) leaving normal cells intact.

In an Oct. 8 study published online in *Molecular Cancer Therapeutics*, a journal of the American Association for Cancer Research, investigators used a second generation prodrug called MP-Pt(IV) to target the deadly cells of glioblastoma tumors, a brain cancer that is almost always fatal and has no cure. Life expectancy in humans with glioblastoma ranges from a few months to two years.

Human glioma cells were removed from patients during surgical excision and isolated within 10 minutes after removal. The glioblastoma cells were injected into the brains of 48 female mice for a 300-day study.

The prodrug was well tolerated, and, when given on its own, extended survival by more than a factor of three. However, when combined with standard chemotherapy and radiotherapy, the drug was curative in nature, allowing 90% of mice to survive, thrive and gain weight during the 10 months of observation. 🌐

# Alabama Legislature: 2021 session begins February 2



The 2021 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature will convene on February 2. The length of the regular session is limited to 30 meeting days within a period of 105 calendar days. Special sessions of the Legislature may be called by the Governor, with the Proclamation listing the subjects which the Governor wishes considered. These sessions are limited to 12 legislative days within a 30 calendar day span. In a regular session, bills may be enacted on any subject. In a special session, legislation must be enacted only on those subjects which the Governor announces in his proclamation or "call." Anything not in the "call" requires a two-thirds vote of each house to be enacted

## Where is the Alabama State House Located?

The Alabama State House is located at 11 South Union Street in Montgomery. The House of Representatives chamber is on the 5th floor and the public viewing gallery for the House is located on the 6th floor. The Alabama Senate chamber is on the 7th floor and the public viewing gallery for the Senate is located on the 8th floor.

## Who Can I Call to Find Out what Time the Legislature Meets During a Session?

To find out the times the House and Senate will convene on any given legislative day during the session, you can reach the House of Representatives at (334) 261-0500 and the Alabama Senate at (334) 261-0800.

## Advocacy, continued

3. Successfully advocated against a proposal to give out-of-state telehealth corporations special treatment that physicians currently living, working, and paying taxes in Alabama do not enjoy.

Currently, the Medical Association's COVID-19-related advocacy is focused on four key areas, identified through the Association's *COVID-19 Impact Survey*:

1. COVID-19 grant program for medical practices – the Association worked successfully with the Ivey Administration and the Alabama Department of Finance to create a simple process for medical practices to be reimbursed for COVID-19 related expenses.
2. Expanding PPE and testing availability – the Association secured PPE sources and created a straightforward program for medical practices to purchase

much-needed medical supplies. The Association continues to monitor availability of PPE and cleaning supplies. Regarding testing, while result backlogs continue in some areas, the Association is working toward solutions on the issue with state stakeholders.

3. Ensuring telemedicine access remains – the Association has long advocated for payment parity for telemedicine services provided by physicians. The Association, through its Third Party Task Force, has petitioned Blue Cross Blue Shield and others to keep these policies in place. As well, the Association is engaged with other stakeholders in advocating for expanding broadband availability across Alabama to increase access to telemedicine for patients.
4. Enacting "Safe Harbor" legislation –

## House Health Committee Members

Rep. Paul W. Lee (R-District 86) Chairman  
 Rep. Laura Hall (D-District 19), Ranking Minority Member  
 Rep. Matt Fridy (R-District 73)  
 Rep. Jeremy Gray (D-District 83)  
 Rep. Wes Kitchens (R-District 27)  
 Rep. Craig Lipscomb (R-District 30)  
 Rep. Joe Lovvorn (R-District 79)  
 Rep. Rhet Marqués (R-District 91)  
 Rep. Arnold Mooney (R-District 43)  
 Rep. Becky Nordgren (R-District 29)  
 Rep. Ed Oliver (R-District 81)  
 Rep. Neil Rafferty (D-District 54)  
 Rep. Chris Sells (R-District 90)  
 Rep. Pebbin Warren (D-District 82)

For more information on the Health Committee visit the [Alabama House of Representatives website](#).

## Senate Healthcare Committee Members

Sen. Jim McClendon (R-District 11), Chairman  
 Sen. Larry Stutts (R-District 6), Vice Chairman  
 Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison (D-District 20), Ranking

Minority Leader  
 Sen. William Beasley (D-District 28)  
 Sen. Tom Butler (R-District 2)  
 Sen. Donnie Chesteen (R-District 29)  
 Sen. Tim Melson (R-District 1)  
 Sen. Greg Reed (R-District 5)  
 Sen. Dan Roberts (R-District 15)  
 Sen. Cam Ward (R-District 14)  
 Sen. Tom Whatley (R-District 27)  
 Sen. Jack W. Williams (R-District 34)

For more information on members of the Health and Human Services Committee visit the [Alabama State Senate website](#).

the Association worked with various stakeholders to craft critical legislation to protect medical practices from COVID-19-era frivolous lawsuits. At present, the Association is advocating for its passage before the Legislature and has asked Gov. Ivey's Administration to maintain the State of Emergency (and thereby the existing executive order liability protection) in place until the legislation is enacted.

For more information, visit [www.alabamamedicine.org](http://www.alabamamedicine.org).

[alabamamedicine.org](http://www.alabamamedicine.org)



## Neurosurgery joins coalition in letter to CMS regarding Medicare pay cuts

[www.aans.org](http://www.aans.org)

The American Academy of Neurosurgery (AANS) signed on to an Oct. 5 letter to Seema Verma, MPH, administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) objecting to the extraordinary budget neutrality (BN) reduction proposed by CMS in the 2021 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (PFS) proposed rule.

If adopted as proposed, the 2021 Medicare PFS, among other concerns, will:

- Cripple the recovery of the nation's health care system by exacerbating revenue shortfalls that are already jeopardizing the financial viability providers.
- Reduce access to medically necessary specialty services for patients who have delayed seeking specialty treatment because of COVID-19 concerns.
- Further exacerbate the problems with practices furloughing or cutting staff, or closing their doors.

The letter urges CMS to consider the following actions:

- Exercise its PHE authority to eliminate or mitigate the impact of the proposed BN reduction.
- Eliminate the new E/M add-on code (GPC1X).
- Consider the negative impact of COVID-19 on 2021 E/M visit utilization projections to calculate the BN adjustment.
- Review its BN calculations to ensure that it accurately reflects the E/M billing policies that will become effective in 2021.
- Utilize previous over-estimated spending to reduce the BN adjustment.

The letter concludes by emphasizing that it is counter-intuitive to put forth drastic reductions to reimbursement at a time when both Congress and HHS are focused on engaging patients, increasing the delivery of integrated, team-based care, expanding chronic disease management, and reducing hospital admission/readmission rates for beneficiaries residing in the community as well as those in long-term nursing facilities. 🍌

**AANS 2021**  
**VANCOUVER**  
APRIL 17-21

**NEUROSURGERY UNITED**  
**STRONGER TOGETHER**  
APRIL 17-21, 2021 | VANCOUVER

## American Association of Neurological Surgeons Annual Scientific Meeting

**April 17-21, 2021, Vancouver**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenge unlike any neurosurgery has ever faced. To survive and thrive, our specialty must stand united. The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) Annual Scientific Meeting has always offered a forum to advance science and exchange ideas, and the need for this sense of community is now more critical than ever.

The theme of the 2021 AANS Annual Scientific Meeting is Neurosurgery United: Stronger Together. We hope you plan on joining us in Vancouver, as the latest science is presented and we map out the future of neurosurgery.

### Registration

Registration will open in mid January. Visit <https://www.aans.org/meetings> for details. 🍌

### AANS Virtual 2020 available online

Up to 45.5 CME credits are available with The Complete Collection of AANS 2020 courses. Visit <https://www.aans.org/virtual2020>.

## NSA News & Notes

### Neurosurgical Society of Alabama

19 South Jackson Street | Montgomery, AL 36104  
(334) 954-2500 | Fax (334) 269-5200 | [www.nsaneurosurgeons.com](http://www.nsaneurosurgeons.com)

Robert Robinson, MD, Publisher  
Meghan Martin, Executive Editor  
Charlotte H. Morris, Senior Editor

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*The articles contained in NSA News & Notes are meant to provoke thought and comment and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the members, Executive Council or staff of the Neurosurgical Society of Alabama. Comments and letters to the editor are welcome Send to [cmorris@alamedical.org](mailto:cmorris@alamedical.org).*