FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Message From the Chair: Researchers Clear Early Hurdles With Three Seed Grants.

1 – Providing evidence-based recommendations for first line treatment of nonmuscle invasive bladder cancer.
   — Juan J. Chipollini, MD

2 – Hispanic Americans Prostate Cancer Comprehensive Genomic Profiling Study
   — Ron L. Heimark, PhD

3 – A fishing expedition in our own backyard—searching for a substance that fights prostate cancer.
   — Noel Warfel, PhD

Dr. Juan Chipollini
Associate Professor, Department of Urology
At the start of a new year, it’s natural to take time to reflect on the previous year’s events. While emerging from the issues of COVID-19, 2022 and now 2023 offered more stability and opportunities to flourish after the challenges of the pandemic which have dominated the past few years. I am amazed at what the University of Arizona Department of Urology has accomplished as it continues to grow, thrive and continue the quest for excellence towards its tripartite mission of research, clinical care, and education.

With respect to research, using part of the proceeds from our Prostate Cancer Golf Benefit, as well as a portion from the Dr. George W. Drach Endowment, we awarded three seed grants to pilot research projects in the early stages of cancer research. One seed grant was awarded to Noel Warfel, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Cellular and Molecular Medicine and Associate Professor of Cancer Biology. This edition of the newsletter features an article explaining the importance of Dr. Warfel’s work developing a drug that can target androgen-independent cells in prostate cancer patients which were becoming resistant to standard androgen deprivation therapy. Dr. Warfel has tested extracts from native plants of the Sonoran Desert and identified a promising compound in a plant called yellow nightshade ground cherry. The Drach seed grant will enable Dr. Warfel to continue investigating this compound’s potential to kill prostate cancer cells.

Ronald Heimark, Ph.D., Professor at the University of Arizona Department of Surgery, received a seed grant for his comprehensive study of genomic profiling in Hispanic prostate cancer patients, who experience higher mortality rates and are typically underrepresented in prostate cancer research. Along with co-investigators Dr. Alejandro Rico-Boiles from the Department of Medicine, and Dr. Juan Chipollini, Associate Professor of Urology, Dr. Heimark successfully identified unique genomic aberrations in the Hispanic population. The seed grant will allow further investigation of the significance of these mutations associated with aggressive prostate cancer, with the hope of improving the ability to detect high-risk Hispanic American patients who would benefit from earlier and more intensive treatment, and ultimately addressing the racial disparity in treatment of prostate cancer in Hispanic men.

We awarded our third seed grant to Dr. Juan Chipollini, Assistant Professor of Urology, who is investigating treatments for nonmuscle invasive bladder cancer. The standard treatment for this disease is BCG, or bacillus Calmette-Guérin, a tuberculosis vaccine that has been in short supply since 2018, resulting in wait lists for patients who need treatment. To help these patients, we have been using gemcitabine, a chemotherapy drug which is typically used to treat bladder cancer when BCG has been unsuccessful. Dr. Chipollini is investigating the effects of using gemcitabine as first-line therapy, with the objective of providing evidence-based recommendations to patients about the best course of treatment.

Among the education highlights of the year was the ACGME / RRC approval of a resident complement increase for our residency program. Under the leadership of Program Director Dr. Christian Twiss, the program will add to our current residents over the next five years to reach a full complement of 15 residents. At our spring residency graduation, we announced the launch of the Dr. Marty Dresner Resident Education Fund. After serving as a urologist in the Army for 33 years, Dr. Martin L. Dresner went on to become an adjunct professor at the University of Arizona, serving as the Chief of Surgery and Chief of Urology at the Tucson VA Medical Center. The fund established in his memory will be used in partnership with Che Guevara Drach Education fund to sponsor residents’ attendance of the AUA Western Section Meeting, as well as the National AUA Meeting, helping to train and develop the next generation of urologists.

Another highlight of 2022 was receiving a $50,000 donation in honor of Steve and Diane Uhl to support prostate cancer research. We are tremendously grateful for this generous support and the opportunities it will create for research and the discovery of better treatments.

We closed out the year with our third annual Department of Urology Fight Against Prostate Cancer Golf Benefit in December. Held at the Arizona National Golf Club, this event attracted close to 100 participants and included a lunch symposium honoring cancer survivors and featuring talks by faculty. In addition to raising prostate cancer awareness, this event generates funds which make our seed grants possible.

We have added many new faces to the Urology Department in 2022–23. We’re excited to welcome Dr. Timothy Roddy to our clinical practice at Banner University Medicine–North as a General Urologist. We were fortunate in recruiting three new Nurse Practitioners – Stephanie Roberts NP, Jaime Weisheit NP, and Amy Colvin NP, who are joining our team at Banner University Medical Center – South / North. Rosa Garcia, NP retired after 10 years in clinical service to our patients at Banner University Medical Center South campus Urology clinic. In this newsletter we introduce our new Director of Research, Steffan Nawrocki, Ph.D., who is also the research co-director of Translational Medical Oncology at the University of Arizona Cancer Center, as well as an associate professor in the Department of Medicine.

We are also pleased to introduce new additions to our support staff. We have a new Clinical Research Coordinator, Christopher Combates. You’ll read about our new Business Manager, Sr., David Jacobson, and our Senior Administrative Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy. And for our growing residency program, Susan Reno has joined as our Assistant, Ann Dunleavy.

As you can see, 2022-23 was a fruitful year full of positive changes. We appreciate all the support we have received from the community and our generous donors, and we anticipate that 2023 will offer even more opportunities for innovation and growth.

To make a donation to support UArizona Urology residency training, please visit

https://give.uafoundation.org/urology
When Dr. Juan Chipollini came to the Department of Urology 4 ½ years ago, he was attracted to the University of Arizona because of so many opportunities for career growth: academically, clinically and professionally. He recognized a complex oncology tradition, with potential for growth and the need for a specialist for the complicated surgeries he had trained for. Patients travel from all corners of the Southwest region for treatment at Banner University Medical Center. “It’s humbling that people drive four hours to share their cancer stories and issues,” Dr. Chipollini says. “It’s also disheartening that patients wait so long to see a specialist, when I can do something to help them.”

Dr. Chipollini’s mom was a nurse. Seeing her go to work in scrubs every day planted the seed of entering the medical field. The seed was planted which took root and flourished. Dr. Chipollini can’t remember a time when he didn’t expect to enter the medical profession. It felt like his calling. During his training, he participated in medical mission trips to India and Jamaica. “It’s great to see how other medical systems exist,” he says. “It also makes you appreciate that we have the best medical treatment in this country.” Several of Dr. Chipollini’s research projects are focused on disparities in medical and surgical treatment for vulnerable populations, including his NIH-funded research with kidney cancer patients. He appreciates the close working relationship that the Urology Department has with the University of Arizona Cancer Center, and enjoys the fact that disparity-focused research often creates the opportunity to work with other oncologists and patients who speak Spanish. An observation that kidney cancer affects the Hispanic population at an earlier age, with higher death rates, led to his research which is in the early stages of development.

Dr. Chipollini completed his residency at the University of Miami, where he met his wife, Rosalinda. Rosalinda was a nurse at the time and currently works in the mental health field. He is tremendously grateful to have a partner who understands the specific stresses of the medical field and is supportive in every way. They enjoy cooking, reading together, and spending time with their bulldog, DeeDee. Although they jokingly consider DeeDee to be their firstborn daughter, they are celebrating the birth of their first human child, Daniel Antonio, in December.

One of the aspects of being an Associate Professor at the University of Arizona which Dr. Chipollini did not anticipate was how rewarding it is to be involved with educational aspects of the residency program. Training young doctors and watching them transform from novice interns into confident chief residents has been very fulfilling. His advice to residents is, “Nothing is as bad as it seems. Always try to be humble. Many problems can be fixed with humility and patience—both in your professional and personal life.”

When asked what his favorite surgery is, Dr. Chipollini was quick to respond: “The surgery I did this morning—a Retroperitoneal Lymph Node Dissection. I cut out a big tumor in a young patient. The family was very thankful, and they hugged me. It’s a curative surgery. It’s wonderful to cure a young person from cancer and give them the ability to move on with their life.” Since his first day at University of Arizona, Dr. Chipollini has been busy working alongside Department Chair Dr. Benjamin Lee to build the department’s oncology division, with the future goal of continued growth, striving to become both regionally and nationally recognized for the innovative, quality care that our department provides.
Dr. Steffan Nawrocki has been appointed Director of Research for the Department of Urology. He is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine with a joint appointment in the Department of Urology. Dr. Nawrocki serves as Co-Director for Translational Research and Co-Leader of the Clinical and Translational Oncology Program at the University of Arizona Cancer Center. Dr. Nawrocki has published over 80 peer-reviewed publications and his laboratory has been continuously funded by the National Cancer Institute.

His laboratory globally focuses on the investigation of mechanisms of action of novel anticancer agents and methods to enhance cancer cell death. He has worked with a broad range of cancer therapeutics in collaboration with industry and academic investigators. Dr. Nawrocki has specific expertise studying anticancer agents that target protein degradation pathways, including proteasome and NEDDylation inhibitors, autophagy inhibitors, and therapies that induce endoplasmic reticulum (ER) stress. His research projects are designed with a bench to bedside strategy and have provided groundwork for multiple clinical studies.

Dr. Nawrocki’s current research is focused on targeting autophagy as a novel therapeutic strategy for renal cell carcinoma (RCC). He is PI of this NIH Grant, in collaboration with Dr. Jennifer Carew as Co-PI, and Dr. Lee as Co-Investigator. Autophagy is frequently upregulated in cancer cells under metabolic stress to recycle cellular components for protein and ATP synthesis to promote cell survival. Based on its important roles in maintaining cell viability and inducing resistance to radiation and chemotherapy, inhibition of autophagy has become a viable therapeutic approach that has been evaluated in clinical trials. However, there is a need to identify predictive biomarkers to enable selection of patients that may best respond to autophagy inhibitors. Our preliminary data demonstrates the mTORC1 inhibitor REDD1 regulates sensitivity to autophagy inhibition suggesting that cancers with significant REDD1 levels, such as Renal Cell Carcinoma, are hypervulnerable to this therapeutic approach. The major goal of this study is to investigate mechanisms which control sensitivity to autophagy inhibition in RCC cells in order to optimize its potential clinical application.

Congratulations to Dr. David Tzou for being awarded a $50,000 grant from the University of Arizona to continue his research: “Urinary Stone Endotoxin and its Cellular Impacts: Considerations for Sepsis Development.” This award was from the Fund to Unequivocally Recover Research Careers after COVID-19 and will help support submission for an R21 or R01 grant in the near future.

Congratulations to Nurse Practitioner Felicia Goraj and Dr. Timothy Roddy, who were named Banner Health Heroes! The Banner Health Hero program allows grateful patients to recognize an employee for their exceptional care by making a donation to the Banner Health Foundation in their honor. The patient who donated in honor of Felicia Goraj said, “Felicia is amazing! She takes her time and is always very helpful!” Dr. Roddy’s patient said, “He is a skilled surgeon. In the clinic he is clear and concise.” We are grateful to have these two talented and conscientious providers on our team.
Simulation Symposium for Urology Residents a Resounding Success

Urology Residents gain exposure to the latest in Urologic technology at cutting edge simulation center at the University of Arizona

On July 30th, 2022, Urology residents from both the University of Arizona and Mayo Clinic Arizona took part in the 1st Annual Urological Simulation Symposium. With the gracious support of industry sponsors, course directors David T. Tzou, MD (UArizona) and Karen L. Stern, MD (Mayo Arizona) organized this day event at ASTEC - the University of Arizona’s 6,000 square foot simulation facility (Arizona Simulation Technology & Education Center). This state-of-the-art facility has the latest in surgical simulation including space to mimic operating rooms and intensive care units, as well as the capability of performing 3-D printing to create models that resemble human organs.

Urology residents rotated through multiple stations that allowed them to practice performing endourologic procedures including ultrasound & fluoroscopic guided percutaneous access for PCNL, Holmium Laser Enucleation of the Prostate (HoLEP), and ureteroscopy. Additional stations also provided exposure to ablation of the prostate, urethral bulking, transperineal prostate biopsy, female and male urethral slings, and more. Junior trainees benefited from the hands-on experience in a safe, low-stakes environment, while more senior trainees gained the ability to refine their skills and teach their junior colleagues.

Per Dr. David T. Tzou: “Karen and I are both graduates from the Mayo Arizona and UArizona residency programs compared to others around the country.”

A Fishing Expedition in our Own Backyard

Dr. Noel Warfel, PhD
Assistant Professor, Cellular & Molecular Medicine

Prostate cancer is fed by hormones called androgens, which antiandrogen drugs can block to slow cancer progression. Unfortunately, many prostate cancers develop resistance to these drugs, at which point they can grow and spread to other parts of the body. Noel Warfel, PhD is hoping to be on the ground floor of discovery for a new class of prostate cancer drugs.

“Finding androgen-independent ways to kill prostate cancer cells is an important goal,” he said. Dr. Warfel hopes a solution to antiandrogen resistance can be found springing from the nearby soil. Physalis crassifolia, or the yellow nightshade ground cherry, is native to Arizona and northern Mexico, sporting bell-shaped yellow flowers and berry-like fruits.

A compound found in its leaves might be able to kill prostate cancer cells regardless of their resistance to antiandrogen therapy. “A compound like this might selectively take out highly aggressive and highly resistant cells, shutting down tumor-driving proteins so the patient can live longer,” Dr. Warfel said. “We are trying to identify the tumor’s Achilles’ heel and go after that target.” Dr. Warfel’s investigation arose from a collaboration with Leslie Gunatiakka, PhD, director of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences’ Natural Products Center, which identified yellow nightshade ground cherry as a potential anticancer agent with activity against prostate cancer cells. “They took over 20,000 extracts from Sonoran Desert plants to find ones that were effective against cancer, but not against normal cells,” Dr. Warfel said. “It was a fishing expedition in our own backyard.”

Dr. Warfel suspects the compound works by blocking certain genes in cancer cells. With funding from the seed grant, Dr. Warfel will analyze genetic changes induced by the compound to test this hypothesis. “Before we develop it further, we need to know how it’s working,” Dr. Warfel said. “This, hopefully, will get us one step closer to a new drug.”

Juan J. Chipollini, MD
Associate Professor, Urology

Clinical Trial: Prostate cancer surgery: An option for select patients with advanced disease

About 1 man in 8 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime. Currently, with PSA screening, most prostate cancers are diagnosed at an early, asymptomatic stage with localized, organ confined disease. However, a significant portion of men will present with symptomatic, metastatic, advanced disease. Traditionally, systemic therapy with androgen-deprivation therapy (ADT) + radiotherapy has been used for patient with very high-risk prostate cancer or low-volume metastatic prostate cancer. In this day and age, there has been a shift towards greater application of multimodal therapy involving resection of the primary tumor due to several potential benefits for patients such as alleviating local symptoms, better local control, avoiding local invasion into the bladder and reducing tumor seeding by metastatic spread.

The University of Arizona Cancer Center is a leading site for several cutting-edge clinical trials evaluating the...
NEW Additions to Our Team

Susan Reno
Residency Program Manager

We are excited to welcome Susan Reno to the Department of Urology as our new Residency Program Manager. Susan began onboarding to the department remotely on October 31st and is joining us in person in January as she relocates from Sierra Vista to Tucson.

Susan began her Medical and Academic Career in the United States Air Force Reserves (USAFR) in 2002 after finishing four years of Active Duty in the USAF in the Communications field. During her time as a USAF Reservist, she served in over forty-three countries around the world, and was a Program Manager/Superintendent for several Military/Civilian Programs such as National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT), Infection Control, Nursing CEU’s and Military Awards and Decorations to name a few. Susan then went on to Ambulatory Clinic Management and eventually Private Nursing/Phlebotomy/IVBW Academic Program Management. During that time Susan began as Clinical/Didactic faculty at several CA Community College Districts in various Allied Health Programs.

Susan is working with two local Community Colleges in Allied Health, and she is elated to begin her work with the University of Arizona, where she will support her local and global community in delivering outstanding care in the Urology Department. While here, she hopes to also complete her Ed.D. Degree at the University of Arizona.

Jaime Weisheit
Family Nurse Practitioner

Jaime Weisheit is a board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner with over 15 years of clinical healthcare experience who recently joined our team at Banner Health. While Arizona is home to her now, Jaime is originally from Indiana where she attended Ball State University and received a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing in 2008. After relocating to Arizona in 2018, she went on to complete her Master of Science in Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner degree at the University of Phoenix in 2020. She has training and experience interacting and treating patients across the lifespan and across a variety of practice settings. She is also an active member of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and the American Urological Association.

Jaime has been married to her husband, Braden, for over 10 years and they have two young children. She enjoys cooking, reading, the outdoors, and traveling. She can frequently be found adventuring or camping out in the desert or mountains with her husband and kids.

Timothy M. Roddy, MD
Associate Professor

Joining us from the University of Washington last October, Dr. Timothy Roddy practices general urology, focusing on male sexual dysfunction, prostate health, and kidney stones. Dr. Roddy completed his surgical internship/urology residency at the University of Texas in San Antonio and his male sexual dysfunction fellowship at Boston University. Dr. Roddy’s personal interests include travel, golf, exercise and reading. Dr. Roddy will provide clinical services at the Urology clinic at Banner University Medicine – North.

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After owning a home in Tucson since 2012, Ann and her husband, Jim, relocated full-time in July 2019 from New Jersey. Enjoying Tucson’s desert warmth, and not missing the cold, snow or traffic of New Jersey, Ann enjoys being outdoors, sightseeing in Arizona, and hitting the local craft shows. Becoming a Wildcat fan was easy. Jim graduated from the U of A and Ann is a proud Iowa Hawkeye.

Stephanie Roberts
Family Nurse Practitioner

Stephanie Roberts is a board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner who has been with the team at Banner Health for almost 17 years and brings with her 26 years of clinical healthcare experience. While Arizona is home to her now, Stephanie is originally from Illinois where she attended Methodist School of Nursing and she received her Diploma in Nursing in 1996. After relocating to Arizona in 2006, she went on to complete her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Grand Canyon University in 2011 and Master of Science in Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner degree at the University of Phoenix in 2016.

She has spent the past 6 years in Family Medicine as an FNP and worked with the outpatient team at the South Campus COVID Clinic for 2 years. She is also a current member of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners.

Stephanie has been married to her husband, Shawn, for 19 years and they have four children and three grandsons. She enjoys working in the yard, boating, camping, and traveling.

David Jacobson
Business Manager Sr.

David Jacobson has joined the Urology Finance Team as the Business Manager, Sr. David comes to the department after almost 10 years practicing accounting at the University of Arizona, first in Emergency Medicine and most recently at the School of Plant Sciences. David’s education has been expansive, diverse, and rather non-traditional, ultimately culminating in a Degree in General Studies achieved in May, 2020 while working full time as an accountant. Outside of work, David enjoys spending time with his spouse and two children, playing in a local band, golfing with friends and family, and homebrewing.

Amy Colvin
Family Nurse Practitioner

Amy Colvin, FNP joined our team in October. Amy has 25+ years nursing experience dedicated to providing quality comprehensive care, disease prevention, health promotion, and chronic disease management for patients in Southern Arizona. Amy earned her Master of Science degree and began practicing as a Family Nurse Practitioner in 2015 and has been part of the Banner team providing care to our patients at the Abrams Family Medicine clinic since 2016. Amy’s previous experience includes serving as a Clinical Nurse Leader and Sr. Nurse Manager at the University of Arizona Medical Center from 2009 through 2015. Amy will provide clinical services at the Urology Clinic at Banner University Medical Center – South.

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Clinical Trial: Treatment for hemorrhagic cystitis

The University of Arizona, Department of Urology continues to enroll patients in an ongoing phase-2a clinical trial of LP-10, a treatment for hemorrhagic cystitis. LP-10 is a patented liposomal formulation of tacrolimus that is currently being evaluated as a treatment for moderate to severe hemorrhagic cystitis. Lipella Pharmaceuticals received FDA Orphan Designation for the use of tacrolimus for treatment of hemorrhagic cystitis. This multi-site, prospective, open-label, dose escalation clinical trial is now assessing safety and efficacy of LP-10 at several sites throughout the United States. Dr. Matthew Gretzer is the Principal Investigator and welcomes calls to discuss eligible patients.

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<th>Clinical Trials</th>
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<td>Randomized Trial of Standard Systemic Therapy versus Standard Systemic Therapy Plus Definitive Treatment (Surgery or Radiation) of the Primary Tumor in Metastatic Prostate Cancer</td>
<td>SWOG</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Open to accrual</td>
<td>Jared Scoville or Juan Chipollini <a href="mailto:jscoville@arizona.edu">jscoville@arizona.edu</a>; <a href="mailto:jchipollini@arizona.edu">jchipollini@arizona.edu</a> (520) 694-9080</td>
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<td>First-in-human, dose titration and expansion trial to evaluate safety, immunogenicity and preliminary efficacy of W_pro1 in combination with cemiplimab and/or goserelin acetate in patients with high-risk, localized prostate cancer</td>
<td>BioNTech</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Open to accrual</td>
<td>Jared Scoville or Juan Chipollini <a href="mailto:jscoville@arizona.edu">jscoville@arizona.edu</a>; <a href="mailto:jchipollini@arizona.edu">jchipollini@arizona.edu</a> (520) 694-9080</td>
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<td>Clinical Study of Bioactivity of Low Dose Apalutamide in Prostate Cancer Patients Scheduled for Prostatectomy</td>
<td>National Cancer Institute</td>
<td>I/II</td>
<td>Open to accrual</td>
<td>Jared Scoville or Juan Chipollini <a href="mailto:jscoville@arizona.edu">jscoville@arizona.edu</a>; <a href="mailto:jchipollini@arizona.edu">jchipollini@arizona.edu</a> (520) 694-9080</td>
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<td>Phase III Trial Of Immunotherapy-Based Combination Therapy With Or Without Cytoreductive Nephrectomy For Metastatic Renal Cell Carcinoma (Probe Trial)</td>
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<td>Open to accrual</td>
<td>Benjamin Lee <a href="mailto:brlee@arizona.edu">brlee@arizona.edu</a> (520) 694-9080</td>
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<td>Establishing the Safety and Efficacy of Reloxaliase in Patients With Enteric Hyperoxaluria: A Phase III Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled Study (URIROX-2)</td>
<td>Allena Pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Open to accrual</td>
<td>David T. Tzou <a href="mailto:dtzou@arizona.edu">dtzou@arizona.edu</a> (520) 694-9080</td>
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E. Roger Rd.       E. President St.          N. Campbell Ave.
Allen Road       N. Campbell Ave.          E. Prince Rd.

Banner – University Medicine North Campus
3838 N. Campbell Ave. Building 2
Urology Clinic “G”, 3rd Floor
Tucson, AZ 85719

Banner – University Medicine South Campus
2800 E. Ajo Way
Tucson, AZ 85713

Banner – University Medicine Green Valley Clinic
1141 S. La Cañada Drive
Green Valley, AZ 85614