

## 2023 Georgia Cancer Summit

### Presenters



**Smitha Ahamed, DrPH, MA, MPH**, serves as CEO of the East Georgia Cancer Coalition. Dr. Ahamed received her MA in non-profit leadership as well as a Doctor of Public Health—Health Policy & Management from The University of Georgia. She started with the coalition as a volunteer and intern and has served in the roles of executive assistant, Director of Development and Programs and is currently serving as the CEO. Dr. Ahamed has worked to establish and expand prevention, education, screening, and survivorship programs within the EGCC region. She is passionate about creating new partnerships, bringing different sectors together in the fight against cancer, and helping prepare the emerging workforce.



**Fred Ammons**, President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Health Works and Rural Health Works, Inc. Mr. Ammons started his career with Community Health Works in 2005. During his time with Community Health Works, Mr. Ammons has served in multiple positions, including the organization's RX for the Uninsured program. He serves as Executive Director of both the Central Georgia Cancer Coalition and the Central Georgia Stroke Coalition, and as co-chair of the Central Georgia Health Partnership. He is the immediate past President of the Council of Regional Cancer Coalitions of Georgia. Mr. Ammons holds a Bachelor's Degree from Mercer University. He also earned a post-baccalaureate certification as a Kellogg Executive Scholar in Nonprofit Management from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University in 2016.



**Rana Bayakly, MPH**, serves as Chief Epidemiologist, Georgia Department of Public Health, Chronic Disease, Health Behaviors and Injury Epidemiology Section and the Principal Investigator for the Georgia Cancer Registry. Ms. Bayakly received her bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences from Boston University and master's degree in Public Health, Epidemiology concentration, from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. Ms. Bayakly started her career as an injury epidemiologist at the Louisiana Office of Public Health in 1991 and was promoted to a Chief Epidemiologist in 1994. Ms. Bayakly moved to Atlanta, Georgia in 1996 when she was employed as the Director for the Georgia Comprehensive Cancer Registry. Since then, Ms. Bayakly has served in various roles within the Chronic Disease Epidemiology section.



**Vickie J. Beckler, MBA, RN**, is a lung program implementation expert and the US Lung Ambition Alliance Lead for AstraZeneca. She has worked with centers across the nation to help develop lung screening programs. She spent 12 years at Wellstar Health System in Atlanta where she built one of the highest lung screening volume programs in the nation. She co-authored the *National Framework for Excellence in Lung Cancer Screening and Continuum of Care* with the Lung Cancer Alliance in 2012 which won the Celgene Innovation Impact Award. Ms. Beckler received her MBA from the University of West Georgia and BSN from Georgia Highlands College. She is certified in Design Thinking through MIT and is a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt. Among her awards and honors, she is a Biden Cancer Center Initiative FiERCE Award nominee and past recipient of the American Lung Association's Resilience in Healthcare Award.



**Shantoria "Tori" Brown, MHA, CCRP** serves as Assistant Director of Research and Compliance for the Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education (Georgia CORE). With over six years of oncology clinical research experience, she is responsible for monitoring the clinical trial conduct of over eighty studies across seven clinical research sites, onboarding new research coordinators, verifying program metrics, and maintaining financial records for affiliates sites at the Georgia NCORP. Much of Ms. Brown's experience has been ensuring protections of the rights and wellbeing of clinical trials participants and assuring that research professionals are properly trained in clinical trial conduct. Ms. Brown is motivated and passionate about bridging the gap of minority and underserved participation in clinical trials.



**Ajaz Bulbul, MD**, St. Joseph's/Candler, is triple board certified in Internal Medicine, Medical Oncology and Hematology. Dr. Bulbul completed his medical residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Southern California (USC). He was then accepted to the prestigious USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center for a Hematology and Oncology Fellowship and graduated as the Chief Hematology Fellow. Dr. Bulbul has authored more than 50 publications and presented at major international conferences around the world. He has written expert commentaries in treating lung cancer and targeting these cancers with precision. Dr. Bulbul has over 9 years of experience building clinical practices, especially in rural areas. With the St. Joseph's/Candler team, he opened medical oncology services in Liberty County by partnering with Liberty Regional Medical Center, a critical access hospital.



**Renée Branch Canady, PhD, MPA**, serves as Chief Executive Officer of MPHI, a Michigan-based and nationally engaged non-profit public health institute dedicated to advancing population health through innovation and collaboration. Dr. Canady has been recognized as a national thought leader in the areas of health inequities and disparities, cultural competence, and social justice. She has published and presented broadly on these topics and has been highly influential in broadening the discussion of health equity and social justice while serving on numerous national boards, review panels, and advisory groups. She has been an outstanding public health advocate, researcher, educator, and facilitator, and is a highly sought-after speaker. Her career path has also included serving as Director of Student Affairs in the College of Nursing at MI State University and Assistant Area Director in the Department of Residence Life at the University of North Carolina. She earned her PhD in Medical Sociology from Michigan State University, a master's degree in Public Administration from Western Michigan University and a bachelor's degree in Public Health Nutrition from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.



**Pamela Cooper** is the Program Manager for Morehouse School of Medicine's Cancer Health Equity Institute. She has served in the healthcare and clinical research arenas for over 40 years. Ms. Cooper began her career with Grady Healthcare System. Over the years, she has obtained a diverse portfolio of work experience, ranging from the in-patient engagement to clinical research. She has served as a community collaborator and convener with internal partners and external stakeholders to understand the barriers that hinder access to affordable healthcare, especially in rural communities. Morehouse School of Medicine Clinical Research Center originally recruited Ms. Cooper to develop and market its Recruitment and Retention Core. In her current position, she focuses on providing comfort to patients and their families, while also encouraging the community to participate in clinical trials and genomic testing.



**Jorge Cortes, MD**, Director, the Georgia Cancer Center. Dr. Cortes also serves as Cecil F. Whitaker Jr., GRA Eminent Scholar Chair in Cancer after spending 27 years at MD Anderson Cancer Center as Deputy Chair Department of Leukemia, Chair of AML and CML Sections, and Leukemia Fellowship Program Director. He has more than 230 grants and research contracts where he was principal investigator and led the approval of 4 leukemia drugs. Dr. Cortes is a member of the National Academy of Medicine in Mexico, has served as Associate Editor for *Blood*, and as a member of the National Board of Directors of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Dr. Cortes also is Co-Founder and Co-Director of the International CML Foundation, Vice Chair of the Publications Committee for the American Society of Hematology, and a member of the European LeukemiaNet panel for CML recommendations since 2006.



**Marcus W. Downs, MPA**, serves as Director of State Government Affairs for the Southeastern Territory in the U.S. Public Affairs Division for Takeda Pharmaceuticals America, Inc. He most recently served as CEO of the Georgia Nurses Association, and prior to this, he was the Director of Government Relations and GAMPAC (the Political Action Committee) for the Medical Association of Georgia. Mr. Downs also served as an Executive Committee member and Director of Government Affairs for the North Carolina Health Plan, chief lobbyist for the Georgia and North Carolina affiliates of the National Education Association, and Special Assistant to the Deputy President Pro Tempore of the North Carolina Senate. Mr. Downs was educated at Morehouse College and received his graduate training at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Public Health and North Carolina Central University School of Law.



**Rep. Matt Dubnik**, Georgia 29<sup>th</sup> District. A conservative born in Gainesville, Georgia, Matt Dubnik graduated from Lakeview Academy and received his Bachelor of Science in management with a minor in information technology from Georgia Institute of Technology. Mr. Dubnik was first elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 2016 to serve the people of Gainesville and other portions of Hall County. After working as an information security specialist for a Fortune 100 company, he transitioned his career to nonprofit fundraising, serving as a regional director for Ducks Unlimited, where he was responsible for leading volunteers statewide in their efforts to raise millions of dollars annually for wetlands conservation. Following his stint in fundraising, he entered the digital marketing industry. Currently, he serves as the Chief Engagement Officer of Forum Communications, a full-service strategic marketing agency he founded with his wife in 2012.



**Cam Escoffery, PhD, MPH, CHES**, **Cam Escoffery, PhD, MPH, CHES**, is a Professor of Behavioral Sciences and Health Education at the Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University. Dr. Escoffery has a PhD in Health Promotion and Behavior. She has conducted research for over 28 years on health promotion, cancer prevention and control, implementation science and evaluation. Her current research aims to translate evidence-based interventions related to cancer control and self-management into local settings. She is the PI on a hybrid I effectiveness-implementation trial to evaluate the use of Cancer SurvivorLink on return for follow-up cancer care among pediatric cancer survivors, and she leads the Emory Cancer Prevention and Control Research Network (CPCRN). She has

worked on projects to increase cancer screening or vaccination (e.g., breast, cervical, HPV vaccination) in southwest Georgia and evaluated uptake of evidence-based interventions for colorectal cancer screening with the CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program.



**Erin Hernandez, MPA, BSEd**, President and CEO, Northwest Georgia Regional Cancer Coalition brings more than 20 years of experience in health education, cancer control research, grant management, and community health program development. In her role as President and CEO, she is responsible for local, state, and national government relations, program and fund development, planning and marketing, and overall strategic direction of the organization. Ms. Hernandez holds a Bachelor of Science in Education (Health Education) from the University of Georgia and a Master of Public Administration from Troy University.



**William A. James** is the Executive Director and Founder of Summit Quest. Driven through the experience of his family's personal cancer journey and the loss of his father to cancer in 2007, Mr. James felt the need to bring a holistic approach to providing support to the entire family facing a cancer diagnosis. Summit Quest offers group and individually family-focused support initiatives as well as specialized support groups such as Moms Moving Mountains and Mountain Men. Summit Quest offers outdoor adventure trips such as rock climbing, rappelling, canoeing and paddle-boarding that allow families to work together and discover unknown strengths. Summit Quest provides transportation to treatment appointments and an Acts of Kindness program to aid families facing increased financial crisis during their cancer journey. Lastly, each year Summit Quest publishes and freely distributes "Voices Over Cancer" with the goal of making all of our voices louder than the cancer that has impacted our lives.



**Troy F. Kimsey, MD, FACS**, is a practicing surgical oncologist with 15 years of experience, and he serves as Medical Director of the Oncology Service Line at Phoebe Cancer Center/Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital in Albany. Dr. Kimsey is passionate about developing programs around disease sites and striving for the highest quality of care through the full spectrum of cancer care – prevention, screening, diagnostics, treatment, navigation, clinical trials, wellness/survivorship, palliative care, and hospice. He enjoys a practice caring for patients with a broad range of malignant diseases involving the thyroid gland, breast, gastrointestinal system, skin, and soft tissues. Dr. Kimsey has been involved in numerous state initiatives including State Chair for the Commission on Cancer Cancer Liaison Physicians program; Co-Chair of the diagnosis/staging/treatment committee of the Georgia Cancer Control Consortium; and the Co-Chair of the Hospital Systems and Community Engagement committee for the Colorectal Roundtable.





**Carrie Kozel, PT, DPT, CLT, CES** is a senior physical therapist at TurningPoint Breast Cancer Rehabilitation, a non-profit 501(c)3 healthcare organization. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Exercise and Sports Science from The University of Georgia and a Doctorate of Physical Therapy from The University of North Georgia. Prior to joining TurningPoint, Ms. Kozel was involved in research in women's health and worked in numerous pediatric settings. Over the last 12 years, she has used her diverse skill set to help meet the physical and functional needs of breast cancer patients and survivors, and she teaches both physical therapy students and clinicians. She also works to reduce geographic barriers to care by leading the Georgia Outreach Initiative at TurningPoint. Ms.

Kozel is a certified lymphedema therapist and member of the Academy of Oncologic Physical Therapy of the American Physical Therapy Association.



**Amelia A. Langston, MD.** Dr. Langston is Medical Director of Winship Cancer Network of Emory University, a network of hospitals working together to improve access to and provision of high-quality cancer care, cutting-edge research, and continuing patient and provider education throughout Georgia. Dr. Langston also serves as Professor and Executive Vice Chair, Department of Hematology and Medical Oncology at Emory University School of Medicine. As a practicing physician, Dr. Langston treats patients with leukemia, myelodysplastic syndrome, lymphoma, graft-versus-host disease, aplastic anemia and HIV-related malignancies. Dr. Langston holds memberships with American Association for the Advancement of Science and American Society of Hematology. Dr. Langston

received her Medical Degree from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She completed her residency in Internal Medicine at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina, followed by a Medical Oncology fellowship at the University of Washington Hospitals.



**Lauren E. McCullough, PhD, MSPH,** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Epidemiology at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University. Her overarching research interests are in the life-course epidemiology of breast cancer, specifically the contributions of obesity and the social environment to the tumor epigenome and microenvironment, as well as disparities in cancer outcomes. Her research program integrates molecular epidemiology, epigenetics and other biomarkers for disease risk and progression; environmental and reproductive epidemiology; disparities research; and causal inference methods.

The abiding goal of Dr. McCullough's research is to improve cancer outcomes in underserved populations by identifying targets for pharmacologic, behavioral, and policy intervention.



**Cynthia Merchant**, CEO of Horizons Community Solutions (formerly the Cancer Coalition of South Georgia), has more than 25 years of healthcare leadership experience in Marketing and Development. She has served as Vice President of Marketing, Government Affairs and Strategic Planning at Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, as Interim Chief Advancement Officer at Darton State College, as past Chair of the Albany Area Chamber of Commerce, and immediate past Chair of the Albany Dougherty Economic Development Commission. Ms. Merchant is the co-founder of Strive2Thrive, an anti-poverty organization that provides a hand up instead of a hand out, helping people in Dougherty County turn their life around. Merchant graduated from Georgia Southern University with a degree in Public Relations. She was the first woman elected to the County Commission in Lee County and served two terms in public office from 1992 to 2000.



**Edjah K. Nduom, MD, FAANS**, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Neurosurgery at Emory University School of Medicine. Dr. Nduom obtained his B.S. in Biomechanical Engineering at Stanford University in 2002 and subsequently obtained his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 2006. He then pursued Neurosurgical training at Emory University. He completed an in-folded Research Fellowship in Neurosurgical Oncology at the NIH in 2012. After residency, Dr. Nduom pursued an additional Neurosurgical Oncology Fellowship at UT MD Anderson Cancer Center. Thereafter, he joined the faculty of the NINDS Intramural Research Program in August 2015 and returned to Emory in 2020. Dr. Nduom is a member of the Cancer Immunology Research Program at Winship Cancer Institute and serves on the Winship Executive Council.



**Chris Parker, MPH, MBBS**, Director of Population and Global Health at the Georgia Health Policy Center holds a leadership role in many of the center's projects related to public health, health needs assessments, and policy and program evaluation. Dr. Parker is a skilled facilitator who has guided a significant number of multisectoral, state and local organizational strategic and evaluation plans. Dr. Parker leads the Legislative Health Policy Certificate Program aimed at enabling Georgia's legislators to improve their decision-making skills, and he is Principal Investigator for the evaluation of a Public Health Training Initiative in Sudan and Nigeria. As a trained family physician and board vice-chairman of Mercy Care, Dr. Parker has worked with underserved populations and faith-based organizations, bringing his clinical and community linked experiences to addressing current and long-standing public health issues.



**Pamela Proman, MBA, RTT**, serves as Administrator of Operations & Strategic Directions for the Nancy N. and J. C. Lewis Cancer & Research Pavilion at St. Joseph's/Candler. Ms. Proman has more than 21 years of progressive financial and operational leadership in healthcare delivery systems. She received her Bachelor of Science in Radiologic Sciences, Radiation Therapy, from Armstrong Atlantic State University in 2002; her Master of Business Administration from South University in 2015; and her Lean Six Sigma Green Belt from the University of Georgia. Ms. Proman's expertise covers financial controls, budgets, strategic planning, performance measurement, staff development and streamlining services using the Lean Six Sigma approach. She is a results-driven resourceful problem solver with a proven track record for growing the oncology service line through the development of regional access points.

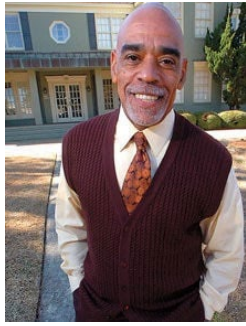


**Suresh S. Ramalingam, MD, FACP, FASCO**. An internationally renowned thoracic oncologist and physician scientist, Dr. Ramalingam serves as Executive Director of Winship Cancer Institute of Emory University. In addition to his Winship duties, Dr. Ramalingam serves as assistant dean for cancer research at Emory University School of Medicine and the Roberto C. Goizueta Distinguished Chair for Cancer Research. Dr. Ramalingam's research has focused on the development of individualized therapies for patients with non-small cell lung cancer. He is principal investigator for Winship's Lung Cancer SPORE, an NCI specialized program of research excellence; has published more than 200 peer reviewed studies; and served as president of the Georgia Society of Clinical Oncology. Earlier this year, Dr. Ramalingam was named to serve as editor-in-chief of *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society.

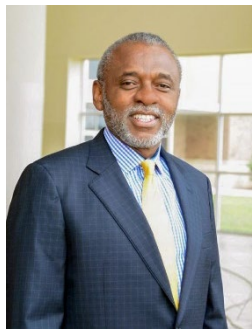


**George Ray, JD**, is Senior Associate at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough, where he focuses his practice on Georgia government relations, state and local administrative law and regulatory proceedings, and business litigation. Representing education, healthcare, nonprofit, and other business entities before the Georgia General Assembly and State agencies, Mr. Ray works with clients to develop and implement strategies at each stage of the legislative and regulatory policy processes. He also helps clients resolve Georgia business, regulatory, and procurement disputes.





**Darrell Sabbs** serves as Community Benefits Manager for Phoebe Putney Health System in Albany. He also serves as a consultant for the Morehouse School of Medicine and the Morehouse Research Institute. His work with the health system includes identifying ways to impact community health, with a focus on the underserved. For more than four decades, Mr. Sabbs has served the communities of Southwest Georgia through hard work and determination, driven by the shared belief that “service is the rent we pay for living.” He played a key role in developing health initiatives for “Men on the Move,” a faith-based partnership of more than 30 faith-based institutions designed to help Southwest Georgia men. His work with both underserved men and women led to the creation of two of Phoebe’s most successful health events – a Women’s Health Fair and a Men’s Health Fair, held annually, attracting more than 300 individuals at each event.



**Daniel Simmons, DMin.,** Sr. Pastor, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Albany, GA. Pastor Simmons has served in his role for 31 years and expanded Mount Zion’s outreach of over 50 ministries to include ministries in Liberia, Ethiopia, and Haiti. Local ministries include low and moderate-income housing and healthcare for the uninsured. A graduate of Albany State University, University of Georgia, and Bethany Theological Seminary, Pastor Simmons is Vice-President of the Fellowship Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. He is active in local, state, and national organizations.



**Claire Thevenot, MBA, RN, OCN, BCPA** is an oncology certified registered nurse and a metastatic breast cancer thriver. In 2013, she was working at Northside Hospital when she learned she had stage IV breast cancer that had metastasized to her bones. Despite having regular mammograms, Ms. Thevenot’s cancer was missed due to dense breast tissue. She has turned her diagnosis and professional expertise into an opportunity to help other cancer patients by speaking about her experience and starting her own private patient advocacy practice, Clarity Patient Advocates. As a Board-Certified Patient Advocate, Ms. Thevenot works with cancer patients, helping them navigate the overwhelming and confusing healthcare landscape and guiding them along their cancer journey.



**Kia Toodle, M.Ed., CPM** is the Georgia Department of Public Health's Chronic Disease Prevention Section Director and Principal Investigator for 8 CDC Cooperative Agreements. Ms. Toodle's role is to prevent and control chronic disease through evidenced-based strategies and interventions to support a better quality of life, improve overall health, economic, and educational outcomes for families and communities in Georgia. Her leadership spans 5 Offices, overseeing an estimated 32 million dollars of federal and state funds. Ms. Toodle has over 27 years of diverse public health experience at the national, state, and local community level. Her last 20+ years have been with the Georgia Department of Public Health in various roles. Ms. Toodle has a BA in Organizational Behavioral Management from Covenant College and a Masters in Learning, Leadership, and Organization Development from the University of Georgia. She is also a Certified Public Manager and a *Prosci* Certified Change Practitioner.



**Jessica S. Wells, PhD, RN, WHNP-BC, FAAN**, is an Assistant Professor at Emory University's Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing. She received her undergraduate degree in nursing from Howard University in 2006; a PhD in Nursing along with a graduate certificate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from the Laney Graduate School of Emory University in 2012; and a postdoctoral fellowship from Emory in 2015. Dr. Wells' research focuses on promoting cancer prevention strategies in the vulnerable HIV+ population. Her research is at the forefront of an emerging public health problem—an aging HIV population who is increasingly dying from HPV-related cancers. Her research has been funded by national and federal agencies to promote cancer prevention strategies among people living with HIV including the National Institutes of Health, American Cancer Society, Woodruff Health Science Institute, and others. Dr. Wells is currently the Principal Investigator on a recently funded R01 study that aims to tailor and implement an evidence-based, multi-level intervention to promote HPV vaccination among people living with HIV.