

The SEASONAL

Quarterly Newsletter of the NCAAIS - Summer 2026

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the first edition of our NC Allergy, Asthma & Immunology Society quarterly e-newsletter! It is a privilege to serve as your President, and I am grateful for the opportunity to represent such a dedicated community of allergy professionals across NC.



Erin Dennis, MD
NCAAIS President

First, thank you for your membership. Our Society is strengthened by each physician, APP, fellow, researcher, and industry partner who invests their time and expertise in advancing our specialty.

Like many of you, my inbox is already overflowing. Our goal with this newsletter isn't to add to the clutter but rather provide something worth opening. Each quarter, we'll share Society updates, advocacy and legislative news, educational opportunities, member highlights, and practice pearls, while celebrating the outstanding work happening across our state.

Most importantly, I hope this newsletter starts a conversation. If there are topics you'd like us to cover, challenges facing your practice, or successes you'd like to share, I'd love to hear from you. This Society belongs to all of us, and your voice matters.

Thank you again for your membership, your dedication, and all you do for patients throughout North Carolina. I look forward to connecting with you throughout the year and continuing to strengthen our Society together.

Warmly,

Erin N. Dennis, MD

President, NC Allergy, Asthma & Immunology Society

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2026 ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The 2026 NCAAIS Annual Meeting, held May 16–17 at the JB Duke Hotel in Durham, brought together approximately 55 physicians and advanced practice providers for a weekend of learning, connection, and collaboration. The annual meeting continues to be an important opportunity for North Carolina's allergy and immunology community to come together, share knowledge, and strengthen professional relationships.

Key Highlights

This year's **educational program** featured nationally recognized speakers who explored some of the most timely topics in allergy, asthma, and immunology. Sessions covered the effects of climate change on allergic disease, new developments in the management of chronic urticaria and hereditary angioedema, advances in genetic testing and hereditary alpha-tryptasemia, the growing challenge of medical misinformation on social media, and evolving approaches to food allergy prevention and treatment.



Dr. Edwin Kim presents his talk on Food Allergies.

Attendees left with practical insights they can incorporate into patient care while gaining a broader perspective on the future of the specialty.

One of the meeting's highlights was the opportunity to celebrate the next generation of allergists and immunologists. **Fellows from the University of North Carolina, Wake Forest University, and Duke University shared their innovative research,** showcasing the impressive work taking place in North Carolina's training programs.

Just as valuable as the educational sessions were the **opportunities to reconnect with colleagues and build new relationships.** From the NCAAIS Business Meeting to the welcome reception with exhibitors and informal conversations throughout the weekend, attendees enjoyed time to exchange ideas, share experiences, and celebrate the vibrant allergy and immunology community. The meeting once again highlighted the strength of collaboration and the shared commitment to advancing patient care across North Carolina.



NCAAIS outgoing president Dr. Joel Gallagher receives a plaque for his service in 2025-2026 from incoming president Dr. Erin Dennis.

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION RECAP

What North Carolina Physicians Need to Know

*By Jenni Hines & Hannah Rice,
North Carolina Medical Society*

The 2026 legislative session has been one of the busiest in recent years. Lawmakers convened in April and completed the state budget in July, but several healthcare issues—including prior authorization reform—remain under consideration as the General Assembly continues meeting throughout the year.

Throughout the session, the North Carolina Medical Society (NCMS) remained actively engaged on behalf of physicians and PAs. NCMS helped advance the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact and Physician Assistant Licensure Compact, supported the CARE FIRST Act, shaped legislation affecting team-based care and pharmacy test-and-treat, successfully opposed changes to APRN definitions, worked to prevent proposed Medicaid physician payment reductions, and continues discussions with commercial insurers regarding downcoding concerns.

Medicaid and State Budget

The 2026 State Budget includes several Medicaid provisions physicians should monitor. Funding will modernize eligibility systems, resulting in more frequent coverage reviews that may increase eligibility verification challenges for practices.

The budget also requires Medicaid prepaid health plans to meet new



cost-control goals through spending benchmarks, prescription drug savings targets, a statewide drug formulary, and expanded reporting requirements. As these changes are implemented, practices may see adjustments to prior authorization, formularies, and other managed care policies.

In addition, the budget invests more than \$1.5 million annually in fraud, waste, and abuse analytics, increasing oversight of claims and reinforcing the importance of accurate documentation and coding.

Beginning October 1, 2026, licensing fees for the North Carolina Medical Board will increase to support implementation of the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, the Physician Assistant Licensure Compact, and modernization of the Board's licensing systems.

Federal Update: Medicare Payment

Congress recently introduced the bipartisan Patients First Act (H.R. 9693), which would reform Medicare physician payment by providing more



predictable annual updates, supporting independent and rural practices, replacing MIPS with a simplified quality reporting program, and expanding value-based care opportunities.

At the same time, the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released the proposed 2027 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (PFS).**

While the proposal includes efforts to modernize Medicare payment, it also includes another round of physician payment reductions.

Under the proposal, clinicians participating in Advanced Alternative Payment Models (APMs) would see a 1.19% payment reduction, while all other physicians would face a 1.68% decrease beginning January 1, 2027.

CMS also proposes **reducing payment when Modifier-25 is used for a separately identifiable evaluation and management (E&M) service provided on the same day as a procedure.**

Under the proposal, the highest-paid service would be reimbursed at 100%, while additional procedures or E&M services performed the same day would be paid at 50%.

If finalized, NCMS believes this policy would undervalue physician work by reducing reimbursement for medically necessary E&M services that require additional clinical judgment and time. It could discourage comprehensive same-day care, delay treatment by requiring follow-up visits, and increase administrative burdens for practices. Because commercial insurers often adopt Medicare payment policies, the impact could extend well beyond Medicare beneficiaries.

Looking Ahead

With North Carolina's 2026 elections approaching, the political landscape continues to evolve. Competitive statewide races and legislative turnover will influence healthcare policy well beyond this session.

NCMS will continue monitoring legislative and regulatory developments and advocating for policies that protect physician practices and preserve patient access to care.

Stay informed by subscribing to the [NCMS Substack](#), where you'll receive the **Tar Heel Payer & Practice blog**, advocacy updates, and new episodes of the **Political Pulse** podcast delivered directly to your inbox.

Jenni Hines and Hannah Rice are healthcare policy leaders and staff members at the North Carolina Medical Society (NCMS). They frequently collaborate to analyze state legislation, healthcare budget allocations, and medical policies affecting physicians, physician assistants, and patients. Feel free to reach out to them with payer or advocacy questions.



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STATE OF SCIENCE: ALPHA-GAL SYNDROME

We are very fortunate to have some stellar research universities in our very own backyard! Many of us in private practice do not get a chance to appreciate this—but we’re going to try to help you out in this series called State of the Science. In this edition, we will be highlighting research by **Dr. Scott Commins**.

Alpha-gal syndrome —whose underlying etiology was in part teased out by Dr. Scott Commins in his work with Dr. Thomas Platts-Mills—plagues many of our patients in this part of the country. Beyond avoiding mammalian meat, affected patients often must pay attention to hidden sources of mammalian meat such as medications. While omalizumab is an option for those plagued by cross-contamination episodes, this requires ongoing injections for an undetermined period to maintain its effectiveness.

What They Did

Researchers used CRISPR/Cas9 to knock out the GGTA1 gene in immortalized bovine satellite cells (iBSCs) — the muscle stem cells used in cultivated meat production. GGTA1 encodes the enzyme responsible for making the alpha-gal epitope, the carbohydrate that triggers Alpha-Gal Syndrome (AGS), a potentially serious meat allergy.

Key Results

- They successfully created a clonal cell line with a homozygous frameshift mutation in GGTA1, achieved through high-efficiency gene editing.



Scott Commins, MD, PhD
UNC School of Medicine

- Flow cytometry and immunofluorescence confirmed the alpha-gal epitope was no longer present on these cells.
- RNA sequencing showed the edit didn’t meaningfully disrupt the cells’ broader gene expression, and the cells retained their ability to differentiate into muscle tissue — meaning the edited cells still behave like normal muscle cells otherwise.
- Most notably, when lysates (cell extracts) from the edited cells were tested against plasma from an actual AGS patient, they triggered substantially less basophil activation — a lab proxy for allergic response — than unedited cells would.

Bottom Line

This is a proof-of-concept study showing that cultivated meat technology can be used to engineer beef muscle cells that lack the allergen responsible for Alpha-Gal Syndrome, potentially opening a path toward “alpha-gal-free” beef for AGS patients, who currently have little in the way of treatment options.

Please join us in welcoming **Kevin Diehl, MD**, the newest member of the NC Allergy Society and our first Fellow Member, a new position created to engage fellows in the Society and encourage involvement early in their careers. As our Fellow Member, Kevin will work with the Society on our newsletter and participate in other Society activities and initiatives.

Kevin is a first-year Allergy & Immunology fellow at Duke University. Originally from Newtown, Pennsylvania, he studied Immunology and Infectious Disease at Penn State before attending Penn State College of Medicine. He completed his Internal Medicine residency and chief year at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist in Winston-Salem.

Kevin was drawn to A/I by his fascination with the immune system and the field's opportunities for discovery, patient education, and educating physicians in other specialties about misconceptions and the many services allergists provide.



Kevin Diehl, MD
Duke University

During fellowship, he hopes to study the impact of antibiotic allergy labels on patients with immunodeficiencies and ultimately pursue academic medicine.

Outside of medicine, Kevin enjoys cooking, seashell collecting, and time with his cats, Thunder and Cleopatra. He also spends weekends with his girlfriend, Tazia, and her Boston terriers, Macadamia and Hazelnut—very fitting for an allergist!

Welcome, Kevin! We're thrilled to have you involved!

TWO WAYS TO GET CONNECTED WITH NCAAIS:

1. Join NCAAIS to stay connected with colleagues, informed about important issues affecting allergy, asthma, and immunology care, and engaged with the Society's work across North Carolina. ***Membership is free!***

2. Join the Practice Managers Listserv! Practice managers can also sign up for our dedicated listserv to receive timely updates, resources, and information relevant to managing and supporting your practice.

UPCOMING EVENTS



2027 NCAAIS ANNUAL MEETING

May 14-16, 2027

Embassy Suites by Hilton Asheville Downtown

192 Haywood Street, Asheville, NC 28801

2027 NCAAIS WHITE COAT DAY

April 14, 2027 | 8:30AM-3:00PM

NC Medical Society Headquarters

222 N. Person Street, Ste. 101, Raleigh, NC 27601

Join us for our inaugural Legislative Advocacy Day! Kick off the day with an overview of the latest issues affecting your practice, then head to the General Assembly to connect with legislators and participate in key committee meetings. It's a great opportunity to make your voice heard and advocate for the issues that matter most to your profession.



For more information on these upcoming events, contact **Megan Eberle-Gliarmis**, NCAAIS Executive Director. Additional details to be posted soon: ncmedsoc.org/ncaais