Pulmonary researcher and clinician Anand Iyer, MD has been preparing for his current role at UAB nearly his entire life.

“Alabama is home,” Dr. Iyer said. “I’m from Anniston. That’s where my parents have a family medicine practice. We’ve been in business there for around 30 years.”

Dr. Iyer was recruited to UAB’s Early Medical School Acceptance Program, or EMSAP, and the University Honors Program in 2003. These programs provided him with early training and experiences in medicine, clinical research, and community service, along with introducing him to mentors he still works with today.

“Because of EMSAP, I worked at the Birmingham VA as an undergrad where I learned from clinical investigators in the UAB Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care. I wanted to pursue that specialty until I got very interested in pulmonary during medical school and residency,” he said. “I owe those early mentors a lot. They taught to approach medicine through the lens of geriatrics, which is important given the aging population.”

Dr. Iyer chose to remain at UAB for his residency and fellowship, wanting to take full advantage of the resources, networks, and research available here.

“In addition to UAB having excellent clinical training, I was able to continue my research in COPD with Mark Dransfield who has been my primary research mentor since around 2012,” Dr. Iyer explained. “He’s one of the big reasons I stayed, to continue that arc and to distinguish my research from his clinical trials. I also wanted to learn as much as possible from Surya Bhatt and Mike Wells, two important mentors in my training and really great teachers.”

Outside of clinical responsibilities during fellowship, Dr. Iyer was also a post-doctoral trainee in the UAB Health Services, Outcomes, and Effectiveness Research Training Program. In this program he had protected time to conduct clinical research while nearly completing a Master of Science in Public Health supported by T32 training grant from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and an institutional Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award.

“It was an honor being selected for this post-doctoral fellowship and defining my niche in patient-centered outcomes research, or PCOR, in COPD was an added bonus. Beyond our division’s leadership, I am also grateful for the support from Kenneth Saag and Ryan Outman for helping me refine what I am really interested in doing.” he explained.

Dr. Iyer will be focusing on PCOR and mixed methods research in COPD, which is a departure from this division’s typical development track. To support his line of research, Dr. Iyer was recently named one of three UAB PCOR K12 Scholars in the UAB K12 Patient Centered Outcomes Research Career Development Program which selects from applicants across the university.

“I’m excited to have been selected for this institutional award and how it will enable me to explore the role of palliative and supportive care in COPD,” he explained. “The division really doesn’t have anyone doing PCOR. Stakeholder engagement in research is a huge push nationwide and can help solve some
really challenging health system problems. Getting to collaborate with clinicians in geriatrics and palliative care brings things full circle.”

“In pulmonary and critical care, we try the most advanced interventions, but this may or may not be in line with patients’ actual wishes,” Dr. Iyer said. “Physicians must take a particular interest in palliative and supportive care, and include it in our treatment arsenal. That field has come a long way from its initial roots in hospice medicine. Now, palliative and supportive care is guideline-recommended in many chronic lung diseases but rarely implemented or referred. We shouldn’t be addressing issues of values and goals of care when a COPD patient is on the ventilator. This should be happening long before.”

“My K12 project will explore perspectives on barriers and facilitators to palliative and supportive care in COPD,” he explained. “I will bring together Mark and my co-primary mentor from the UAB Center for Palliative and Supportive Care, Marie Bakitas, to adapt an intervention to COPD that Marie has shown to be very successful in advanced cancer,” Dr. Iyer continued. “This has huge potential to improve quality of life for this population.”

Dr. Iyer is also committed to leadership outside of research. Having been raised in the area, he strongly believes in the importance of taking on leadership roles and responsibilities locally to help the community. He credits some of this drive to medical school and residency experiences at Cooper Green Mercy Health Services, where he saw the impact of limited access to care on the health of citizens across Birmingham. He is now re-establishing the ambulatory subspecialty pulmonary clinic at this facility, which will bring much-needed pulmonary care to a large indigent population in Jefferson County.

“Building this clinic will require more of an understanding of patient needs in the context of their community than anything I’ve done before. I’m excited to give back to the Birmingham community in this way. I’ve always tried to be a leader and learned to embrace that mentality to give back from my mentors here at UAB.”