

## Physician spotlight: Jessica Shank, MD

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Dr. Jessica Shank, assistant professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, gynecological oncologist, and Gynecologic Oncology Section chief. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Women in New Orleans experience cervical cancer at twice the national average, which presents challenges and opportunities for Jessica Shank, MD, an assistant professor and gynecological oncologist in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Tulane, and chief of the Gynecologic Oncology Section. She has collaborated with Tulane Radiation Oncologist Kendra Harris, MD, to provide comprehensive care to women with gynecological malignancies at Tulane Cancer

Center.

Raising awareness about preventive care can destigmatize HPV, the virus that can cause cancers of the cervix, vulva, head and neck.

“Part of the way that we as a society prevent cancer or other significant morbidities is to give people access to preventive healthcare,” said Shank, who also specializes in minimally invasive robotic surgery.

After surgical treatments end, Shank focuses on helping women patients live beyond cancer by addressing the physical and emotional effects of cancer and their treatments. These can include sexual dysfunction, early menopause and even the emotional aspects of surviving cancer.

“That often gets under-recognized,” Shank said.

She is a part of the NOLA Transgender Institute, a local collective of surgeons and health providers that provides comprehensive care to transgender patients.

“I like taking care of vulnerable populations,” she said. “Patients who have high healthcare needs, even with the best insurance, typically have trouble navigating our complicated healthcare system.”

She likes that she can treat complex medical problems through surgeries, chemotherapy and targeted therapies as well as provide continuity of care for women.

“Unfortunately, I think women cancer survivors are made to feel that they should just be happy to be alive,” she said, “as opposed to, ‘You’re alive — now let’s figure out how to maximize this life that you have.’”