Keck School recruits Coreen Rodgers as new chief of operations

By Jon Nalick

Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen Puliafito has named Coreen Rodgers chief operating officer, filling a new position charged with helping to set and implement strategic plans for the growth and success of the School.

Rodgers, who holds a bachelor’s of science degree in accounting from Pepperdine University and an M.B.A. from the University of Miami, said she would work with the dean to grow the School. Her chief priorities are to bolster its business relationships, finances and ability to deliver top-quality patient care.

To that end, Rodgers said, consensus building among constituents is key to her management style.

“I like to listen carefully to people and hear what their needs are—as well as what they feel they require to meet those needs,” she said. “It’s important to me that we do the right thing to support the people and organizations we work with and have them buy into our goals and plans.”

Moreover, she added, it’s important “not to assume anything. I’m very data-driven and I like to have as many statistics and numbers to measure a given situation as possible when determining how best to improve upon it.”

She said her short-term goals are “to have as many meetings as I can with the directors and administrators of the units that directly relate to my job—human resources, information systems, financial systems, the provost’s office, for example—to get a better understanding of our business.”

In her new position, Rodgers serves as the chief administrative officer of the Keck School and is tasked with these key duties:

• Developing and implementing strategies to promote the development of the USC academic medical center, with the Keck School of Medicine at its core
  • Providing high-level financial oversight of the Keck School’s operations
  • Directing the development of a medical finance function
  • Working with department chairs and institute directors and their administrative staffs to develop strategies for growth of the clinical and research enterprises
  • Working to identify and implement those business strategies and processes that will promote excellence in patient care delivery
  • Working with other medical school leaders to promote organizational excellence and workforce diversity.

Rodgers’ professional experience includes two years as the chief operating officer at the American Lung Association.

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NIH awards $1.1 million to USC pharmacologist

By Kukla Vera

Nouri Neamati, associate professor of pharmacology and pharmaceutical sciences at the School of Pharmacy, has been awarded a National Institutes of Health RO1 grant of $1.1 million to study drug design, delivery and imaging pertaining to cancer drugs.

Neamati’s work features a novel drug system that delivers anti-tumor effects to both tumor cells and the blood vessels that feed them. His hypothesis has its greatest potential in highly metastatic tumors, such as non-small cell lung cancer.

“Since this project examines solid tumors that express integrin on the cell surface, our findings should also apply to other cancers, including brain, breast, prostate, ovary and colon,” said Neamati, whose research is also supported by the American Association for Cancer Research, the Department of Defense and the American Lung Association.

Neamati works at the interface between the traditional laboratory and the computer lab. His expertise in computational drug design allows his lab to evaluate hundreds of thousands of compounds in the search for the right structure to do the job at hand.

His research has surfaced a number of compounds that have distinctively different structure and function qualities than known anti-cancer agents. This provides promise in lung cancer since many of the currently available chemo drugs are not effective against it.

“Our idea is to develop AV38, our highly selective integrin antagonist, as a novel anti-tumor agent for non-small cell lung cancer alone and in combination with currently used chemotherapy. We hypothesize that combining our targeted therapy with conventional therapy will increase efficacy without added toxicity to patients,” explains Neamati.

The research also calls for monitoring the effects of the agents through advanced imaging techniques.

“Several agents work to eliminate the integrin protein in cancer that have moved into pre-clinical and clinical trials. However, none of these

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USC surgeon Namir Katkhouda named to prestigious French Legion of Honor

By Meghan Lewit

France’s elite Legion of Honor officially inducted USC surgeon Namir Katkhouda into its ranks on Dec. 17 in a ceremony at USC. He received the award—the highest honor the country can bestow—for his pioneering work in laparoscopic surgery.

Katkhouda, a French citizen, is an international leader in the development of minimally invasive surgery. He received the Knighthood of the French Order of the Legion of Honor from the French Ambassador to the United States, Pierre Vimont, representing French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

“It is a huge honor for me to wear the ribbon that was originally created by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, and to accept this recognition of leadership in my field,” said Katkhouda, 52, professor of surgery and director of the minimally invasive surgery program at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. “I hope that I have created a legacy that will inspire the next generation of doctors.”

More than 200 of his colleagues and peers attended the formal ceremony, including C.L. Max Nikias, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, and Carmen A. Puliafito, dean of the Keck School of Medicine.

“We are tremendously proud of Dr. Katkhouda and his pioneering contributions to the field of surgery, which have made surgical care less traumatic for countless patients,” said Puliafito.

“The entire Keck School of Medicine of USC basked in the glow of the international recognition he has received.”

Katkhouda spent much of his youth in Vienna and Austria and received his

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RODGERS: New administrator seeks to build Keck School brand in healthcare market

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As a C.P.A. with Arthur Andersen LLP and more than 10 years’ experience in an academic medical center.

She served as managing director of the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, where she directed a $33 million physician practice. Additionally, she was director of the Anne Bates Leach Eye Hospital, a specialty hospital with an annual operating budget of $100 million. Both organizations are affiliated with the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine—where she worked closely with Puliafito.

In a Jan. 2 letter to Keck School faculty and staff, Puliafito praised Rodgers’ experience and expertise. “She is familiar with every aspect of the academic medical environment, having worked closely with clinicians, clinician-scientists and laboratory investigators,” he wrote. “She has had significant project management experience, developing a $25 million, 7.5-acre University of Miami medical campus in Palm Beach County, Florida.”

For her part, Rodgers said she is pleased to be working with Puliafito again. “He sets the bar high and consistently challenges his team to be the best,” she said.

Rodgers also said she is excited to assume her new position for reasons both personal and professional. Professionally, she pointed to “the great opportunities the Keck School of Medicine has in building our brand and our place in California’s healthcare market.”

And, she added, “I’ve always enjoyed working for organizations that are altruistic—that have a mission to help others. So it’s great to work in a medical setting where we’re training students and helping faculty teach and helping patients. I like the not-for-profit ethos and the Keck School is all about that.”

Rodgers said that her chief goal as COO is to provide the School and its various constituents “a steady bottom line and a stable financial environment so they can excel at their missions.”

Personally, Rodgers, a Miami native who enjoyed Southern California immensely when attending college at Pepperdine, said she is thrilled to return. “I love the weather and the people in Los Angeles. It is a diverse and fast-paced city. I enjoy the beach, the arts and museums, and the great shopping. This is a very exciting place to live,” she said.

Rodgers, her husband Charlie and their three-year-old daughter Katie recently moved into a house in San Marino—“and we love living in USC country,” she added.

“We’ve really received a warm welcome at USC,” she said. “I’ve been so impressed with how helpful and friendly people have been. I’m really looking forward to getting to know everyone better and working with them more closely.”

USC study supports novel stroke therapy

By Veronica Jauriqui

Two years after participating in an intensive rehabilitation intervention using constraint-induced movement therapy (CIMT), stroke patients continued to experience substantial improvement to both limb function and quality of life, according to a study published in the January issue of the journal *Lancet Neurology*.

Stroke patients with mild to moderate impairments in one of their upper limbs participated in an intensive two-week intervention using CIMT. In CIMT, the healthy limb is restrained while patients engage in routine tasks using the impaired limb. A 2006 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that patients experienced substantial and long-term improvements in their impaired limb one year after the intervention, compared to stroke patients who did not participate in the intervention.

In the new study, said Carolee Weinstein, a professor of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy, a division at the USC School of Dentistry, and co-principal investigator of the study, researchers followed up with the patients another year later. Two years after the initial rehabilitation, patients continued to experience increased mobility in their impaired limb.

This study is a continuation of the EXCITE (extremity constraint-induced therapy evaluation) trial, the first multi-site randomized study to demonstrate the potential of CIMT intervention in stroke patients. USC was one of the seven study sites nationwide participating in the initial project. Patients participated in six hours of intense rehabilitation over the course of two weeks wearing their constraint for up to 90 percent of waking hours.

“The intervention was a short period of time and the constraint was removed after two weeks. What this study shows is that how they used their limb was motivated by what they learned during that intense two-week period,” said See CIMT, Page 4

NEAMATI: Research targets lung cancers

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studies include non-small cell lung cancer. Our work fills this gap,” said Neamati. Non-small cell lung cancer comprises 85 percent of all lung cancer cases. Currently, lung cancer is the leading cancer killer, ending the lives of over 160,000 Americans each year.

Neamati’s research also has support from the Louise Pfeiffer Research Foundation, Susan Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, the Whittier Foundation, the American Association of Cancer Research and the UniversityWide AIDS Research Program.

From left: Hahui Lu, Noriko Shimazaki and Feng-Ting Huang.
medical training in France. He did his residency at the University of Nice School of Medicine where, while training to be an abdominal surgeon, he joined forces with a small group of surgeons who were revolutionizing the field of traditional surgery through minimally invasive techniques.

“The first time I saw a laparoscopic gallbladder removal performed I thought, ‘this is magic.’ It required such perfection in the technique,” Katkhouda said. “I was stunned. I saw the future and I never looked back.”

In 1988, he performed one of the first laparoscopic cholecystectomy (gallbladder removal) surgeries in France and established himself as a world-renowned pioneer in the field.

In 1993, he was recruited to the Keck School of Medicine by Tom DeMeester, chair of the Department of Surgery. That year, Katkhouda relocated to Los Angeles with his family: wife Dominique and children Nadine and Philippe.

“I wanted to find a place that would help me to expand my skills and to reach the next level. I knew that place would be in the United States,” he said. “I admired the entrepreneurial spirit of USC; it’s a university that is constantly rethinking itself and has an impressive international flavor. It also nurtures pioneering spirits.”

Katkhouda’s activities in the field of laparoscopic surgery include these notable accomplishments:

• He successfully performed in 1991 the world’s first minimally invasive laparoscopic vagotomy (surgical cutting of the vagus nerve) for treatment of duodenal ulcer disease, publishing his results in the *American Journal of Surgery*
• He performed Europe’s first laparoscopic hernia surgery in 1990
• He pioneered laparoscopic liver surgery and published the first paper in the field
• He performed USC’s first laparoscopic gastric bypass surgery in 2002
• He published the first in-depth book on the principles of laparoscopic surgery, and another book on laparoscopic techniques that received a special award from USC President Steven B. Sample
• He has traveled all over the world lecturing and demonstrating ground-breaking surgical techniques, including performing China’s first laparoscopic cholecystectomy.

Katkhouda was nominated for the Legion of Honor by professor Daniel Benchimol, dean of the University of Nice School of Medicine, who proposed his name to the French Secretary of Health. The decree was signed in January 2007 by then President Jacques Chirac.

Admittance into the order requires an extensive vetting process to determine that the nominee has contributed a minimum of 20 years of outstanding public or professional service. Past recipients from America have included Clint Eastwood, former President Ronald Reagan and astronaut Neil Armstrong. The President of the French Republic serves as the Grand Master of the Order.

The Legion d’Honneur recognizes exceptional military, cultural, scientific or social contributions to France, from both citizens and non-citizens. Inductees receive the cross of the Legion and are admitted with the rank of knight.

Recipients are not addressed with a title, but rather wear a discreet red ribbon on the lapel of their suits and coats made of the same fabric as the decoration.

A self-proclaimed student and admirer of Bonaparte, Katkhouda said the rich history of the Legion holds great significance for him.

“Napoleon wanted to create an order that would spur the imagination and he did not want it to be something that could be inherited, but something that would be earned when honor is brought to the country,” he said. “It is with great emotion that I have received the same decoration that he wore during his battles, attesting to our deep love for France.”

In Case of An Emergency...

Visit the USC Web: http://emergency.usc.edu

This page will be activated in case of an emergency. Backup Web servers on the East Coast will function if the USC servers are incapacitated.

Call the Emergency Information Phone: 213-740-9233

The emergency telephone system can handle 1,400 simultaneous calls. It also has a backup system on the East Coast.

A Jan. 4 Newsweek article featured psychiatrist Bruce Spring as an expert in a story about hospitalizing psychiatric patients.

On Jan. 4, KCBS-TV Channel 2 interviewed psychiatrist Jeffrey Sugar on a story about mental health and substance abuse intervention.

A Jan. 3 Chicago Tribune article quoted food expert Roger Clemens about the definition of “natural” foods.

A Jan. 2 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article quoted fertility researcher Rebecca Sokol about infertile couples seeking medical help.

A Jan. 2 Los Angeles Times article quoted urologist David Penson about the FDA’s decision not to fast-track the prostate cancer medication Provence.

A Jan. 2 Los Angeles Business Journal article featured surgeon Namir Karkhouda, who was inducted into France’s Legion of Honor for his pioneering work in the field of laparoscopic surgery.

On Dec. 30, ABC News quoted Childrens Hospital Los Angeles diabetes expert Francine Kaufman about actress Halle Berry’s claim that she had cured herself of type 1 diabetes.