Research retreat explores future model for collaborations

By Jane Brust

When Keck School of Medicine Cardiovascular Medicine Chief Leslie Saxon met Viterbi School of Engineering’s Toni Levi, a professor of electrical engineering, she said her “socks were knocked off” to learn of their similar interests in devices to monitor functions such as heart rate and stroke.

Viterbi Assistant Professor of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering Andrea Hodge introduced herself to Keck’s Chairman of Dermatology, David Woodley, expressing interest in lending her expertise in the mechanical behavior of materials to his need for measuring skin plasticity in the wound healing process.

These were only two of the new connections made as more than 100 faculty from USC’s medical and engineering schools spent a weekend together Oct. 17-19 exploring opportunities for enhanced collaboration.

Already faculty from the two schools have worked together on development of an artificial retina and neuromuscular stimulation to minimize swallowing difficulties in cancer patients—among many other projects. However, the schools’ two deans see even greater potential.

“Collaboration between Keck and Viterbi can lead to increased research funding for USC—definitely a priority—as well as enhanced learning experiences for all kinds of students,” said Dean Carmen A. Puliafito of the Keck School.

According to Viterbi Dean Yannis Yortsos, “Engineers develop tools to help answer questions. Our engineering faculty are eager to learn more about the questions the medical school faculty want to answer, so we can see where we might come together.”

Program organizers Elizabeth Fini, Keck’s vice dean for research advancement, and Maja Mataric, senior associate dean for research at Viterbi, agreed that enhanced synergy is the ultimate goal—synergy to leverage and nurture existing partnerships, collaborative grants and research activities.

Among the areas of potential collaboration explored during the retreat were:

• Brain, vision, hearing, speech and neuro-rehabilitation
• Biomedical imaging (from molecular to whole body)
• Diagnostics and therapeutics (including nanomedicine and ultrasound)

See RETREAT, Page 2

LAST CALL–Good Neighbors Campaign draws to a close Oct. 31

By Jon Nalick

The University’s Good Neighbors Campaign, was born from the desire to focus the University’s philanthropy efforts in the communities surrounding the Health Sciences and University Park campuses.

The campaign has raised more than $9 million since its inception 14 years ago.

Every dollar of contributions designated to USC Neighborhood Outreach is distributed to programs that benefit children and families living in the immediate neighborhoods around both campuses.

The programs support science, health, literacy and math education, as well as sports, arts and safety.

For information about the Good Neighbors Campaign, including a full list of programs funded, visit www.usc.edu/ext-relations/gnc.

At the annual USC Health and Science Expo, students from nearby partner schools examine a booth that investigates the water-absorbing properties of toilet paper. Funded by the Good Neighbors Campaign, the expo introduces local children to science principles and potential careers.

HEALTH SCIENCES ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT CAMPAIGN LEADERS

• Keck School of Medicine (Faculty): John Cleary
• Keck School of Medicine (Staff): Eva Blauw
• Occupational Therapy (Faculty): Linda Fazio
• Occupational Therapy (Staff): Jacalyn Mardirossian
• Physical Therapy (Faculty): Cheryl Resnik
• Physical Therapy (Staff): Lydia Vasquez
• School of Dentistry (Faculty): Kelley Randle
• School of Dentistry (Staff): Meredythe Mann
• School of Pharmacy (Faculty): Mel Baron
• School of Pharmacy (Staff): Kukla Vera
Keck School researchers awarded grants from Arthritis Foundation

Four Keck School researchers were recently awarded $190,000 to pursue studies of arthritis and related diseases. Rheumatology Division Chief William Stohl, Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine Bracha Shaham, and two post-doctoral fellows at the Institute for Genetic Medicine, Yankel Gabet and Sanjeev Banival, were awarded grants from the Arthritis Foundation, Southern California Chapter.

"With federal funding being as tight as it is, and with the low probability of the National Institutes of Health funding high-risk innovative areas of research, funding from organizations such as the Arthritis Foundation is very important," said Stohl. "They provide seed money to allow researchers to test new ideas, and to build proof of new principles. We can then take those preliminary findings to larger funding organizations like the NIH. Research funding from outside foundations is fundamental to the pursuit of ideas not yet adequately proven."

Victoria Fang, Arthritis Foundation senior vice president for public health and research, said "The Arthritis Foundation is committed and pleased to support the invaluable work of USC's arthritis researchers." She added, "This type of local collaboration and support holds the key to tomorrow's advances in the understanding, treatment and prevention of arthritis."

Gabet received the Meyer Young Investigator Award, which funds $50,000 to support postdoctoral fellows pursuing careers in rheumatic diseases.

Stohl was awarded the $60,000 Tina C. Foundation Lupus Research Award. This grant will provide funding to research B-cells, and the factors that modulate them, in order to learn about potential treatments for lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

Shaham, director of education at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, received a $30,000 Clinical Rheumatology Pediatric Fellowship Training Award, to continue selection of trainees for the CHLA fellowship program in pediatric rheumatology.

Banival received the $50,000 California Community Foundation Award, which will support his research on the role of estrogens in skeletal metabolism.

Panel to explore racism's role in infant mortality on Nov. 5

At a Nov. 5 forum hosted by the California Endowment, a panel of USC experts will examine the causes and potential solutions to the disproportionately high infant mortality rate experienced by the black community.

The panel—including Bryan Parker Dominguez, assistant professor of social work; Jack Turman, director of the USC Center for Premature Infant Health and Development; and Lavonna Blair Lewis, clinical associate professor of policy, planning and development—will explore the reasons that blacks in the U.S. suffer double the infant mortality rate of white Americans.

The panel will also discuss how the causes of this persistent disparity is not entirely explained by medical, behavioral or economic risk factors and will highlight recent research that suggests that the chronic stress of racism may play a critical role.

The event also will feature a screening of "When the Bough Breaks" from the PBS series "Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?"

The forum will be at the California Endowment, 1000 N. Alameda St. in Los Angeles from 3-6 p.m. and is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.

For more information or to RSVP, email swevent@usc.edu.

RETRIEVABLE

Beyond the grassroots connections for collaborative projects, faculty heard a discussion of different models for creating a new collaborative program between the two schools.

The discussion was led by Martha Gray, visiting associate dean for health science and technology, who recently arrived from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

She is charged with advising USC faculty on the creation of a program similar to the Harvard University-MIT model called "HST" for Health Science and Technology. The proposed new program is referred to as "HST at USC."

"The premise is that many important health and medical problems are too big and too complex to be addressed by a single discipline," Gray explained. "Engineers and physicians look at problems differently, and they need to work together in universities, teaching hospitals and research centers."

Gray recommended an organizational model in which some faculty serve as good stewards of their separate disciplines while other faculty embrace a new approach to steward a network of disciplines and translation of the work.

"You can't do both of these things within a single academic unit," she said, "and faculty and senior leadership must have to drive the cultural change that is required for a new model."

Among the issues to be overcome, said Gray, are infrastructure needs and faculty appointments.

"The new entity could create opportunities to recruit outstanding faculty and students who otherwise would not come," she said.

Gray pointed out that 95 percent of the HST alumni work in the biomedical arena, many in leadership positions. More than 400 students are currently enrolled in the program.

Research awards available for liver and digestive tract disease studies

The USC Research Center for Liver Diseases is offering awards of $10,000-$50,000 to support pilot studies in the field of liver and digestive tract function and disease.

Funds are available to support studies for one year beginning April 15, 2009. Awards are potentially renewable for two to three years, contingent on progress.

Collaborative projects among different laboratories are encouraged, and especially meritorious projects that appear likely to be successful in leading to R01 funding will be given preference.

ETCETERA

Robert Rude, professor of medicine in endocrinology and diabetes, has been named the recipient of the American College of Nutrition's Seelig Magnesium Award.

The award, which recognizes outstanding contributions defining the role of magnesium in nutrition, was presented at the organization's annual meeting Oct. 2-5 in Arlington, VA. On behalf of Rude, USC Endocrinologist Frederick R. Singer accepted the award and also presented a lecture on "Skeletal and Hormonal Effects of Magnesium Deficiency."
USC University Hospital Guild honors Harlyne J. Norris

By Ina Fried

USC Trustee Harlyne J. Norris was honored by the USC University Hospital Guild at an Oct. 14 luncheon celebrating the Guild’s 15 years of service to the hospital and the Keck School of Medicine of USC. Some 200 people attended the event at the Wilshire Country Club.

A USC trustee since 2000, Norris is a trustee and past chairman of the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation and serves on the advisory board of the USC/Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. Through the Norris Foundation, the Norris family has given nearly $50 million to USC.

Norris was invited to present two Celebrate Life Scholarships, funded by the Guild, to medical students Michael Marques and Maria Victoria Peralta.

Another scholarship in memory of Guild member Darlene Dufau Reid went to student Neda Roosta.

For more information about the Guild, please call Candy Duncan at (310) 545-2239.

USC University Hospital Guild Activities

Support for USC University Hospital:
- Surgical information desk;
- TLC Program – holiday gifts;
- Tours conducted by docents;
- Magazines for patients;
- Books and toys for young patients;
- Music and tapes for the digital piano in the lobby;
- Medical equipment.

Education:
- Speakers Series and Outreach Programs featuring lectures by USC physicians and researchers;
- Teen Focus workshop for students at Bravo Medical Magnet High School, featuring The Doctors of USC;
- Health-related tours for freshmen at Bravo.

Support for Keck School of Medicine:
- Scholarships for medical students;
- Contributions to the Surgical Skills Center and other areas;
- Fundraisers such as annual “Walk the 5K for Keck.”

Support of Community:
- Outreach programs on the Westside, in Orange County and in Pasadena;
- Outstanding Student Book Award to Bravo High School;
- Gifts and toiletries for patients through the USC Violence Prevention program.

School of Pharmacy students host annual Legislative Day with elected officials

By Elizabeth Chapin

Pharmacy students got a glimpse of how the political process impacts their careers at Legislative Day, Oct. 17 at the Davidson Conference Center.

Legislative Day provides a forum for various perspectives on the pharmacy profession and the legislative issues that surround it.

Sponsored by the American Pharmacy Student Alliance, the event brings pharmacists, students, legislators and other community leaders together to discuss the pivotal pharmacy issues on the legislative agenda.

Legislative Day promotes student awareness and involvement in legislative issues and educates legislators about pharmaceutical issues. It also gives today’s pharmacists a chance to voice their concerns to politicians.

“Our profession is impacted by numerous outside forces,” said David Breslow, School of Pharmacy alumnus and chief executive officer of United Pharmacists Network Inc. “The legislature will make changes happen. Pharmacists must be on the political frontlines to have their voices heard.”

Breslow was among the speakers at the breakfast event attended by nearly 200 people. Elected officials speaking at the event included California State Assemblymembers Mike Eng and Anthony Portantino, State Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas and Chair of the State Board of Equalization Judy Chu.

Other speakers included John Tilley, past president of the National Community Pharmacists Association; Jeffery Goad, president-elect of the California Pharmacists Association and an associate professor at the School of Pharmacy; and Victor Law, chairman of the United Pharmacists Network Inc. USC School of Pharmacy Dean R. Pete Vanderveen and Kathleen Johnson, chair of the Titus Family Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Economics & Policy, also spoke.

The event was sponsored by the United Pharmacists Network, Inc., California Pharmacists Association, Albertsons-SavOn, USC Graduate and Professional Student Senate and the Associated Students of the School of Pharmacy.

Pharmacy students Maryam Nowakhtar and Tim Bensman organized the event. Immediately following the formal program, students hosted a health fair at Alumni Park, giving guests an opportunity to be checked by student pharmacists for diabetes, cholesterol, hypertension and osteoporosis.
An Oct. 20 Los Angeles Times article featured Childrens Hospital Los Angeles in an article about Proposition 3, which would provide funding for children's hospitals in California.

An Oct. 20 Los Angeles Times article featured Candace Brady and Mike Dubron, who are members of the patient advisory council at USC/Norris. The article also noted that retired L.A.P.D. officer Candace Brady served on review boards helping assess grant proposals for cancer research at USC.

An Oct. 20 Times of India article quoted cancer researcher Myles Cockburn about melanoma, a potentially deadly form of skin cancer.

An Oct. 19 Edmonton Journal (Canada) article quoted environmental health expert Scott Fruin about air pollution.

An Oct. 14 Reuters article highlighted a new study by Alzheimer's expert Shanee Hapuarachy, special project manager for the Department of Public Safety (DPS), that said the new electronic lock system would allow access to buildings after regular business hours—generally between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., although some buildings may have different policies depending on the needs of their occupants.

Under the new system, personnel are issued USCards, which serve as their identification and are coded with their access authorization for the buildings in which they work or are authorized to enter.

The cards permit access after hours and also log the times at which the user enters and leaves the building.

"Department heads make the decision concerning who is authorized and whether you are someone who needs access after hours. So if you try to come in at 10 p.m., and doors lock at 6 p.m., you need to be at an assigned access level or you won't get in," he said.

Hapuarachy said that employees should consult their home department coordinator for questions about whether they need their cards updated or replaced to access their buildings after hours.

Earthquake preparedness seminar for all

Students, faculty and staff are invited to attend a free, one-hour seminar on earthquake preparedness, held in Mayer Auditorium on the Health Sciences Campus from 11 a.m. to noon, Tuesday, Oct. 28. The program will be presented by Steven Goldfarb, a USC fire safety and emergency planning specialist, and is hosted by Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing. Cookies and beverages will be provided, and attendees are welcome to bring their own lunch. For more information on earthquake preparedness, visit the Dare to Prepare Web site at daretoprepare.org.

HSC NEWSMAKERS

Complete listing at: www.usc.edu/uscsnews/uscs_in_the_news/

An Oct. 20 Los Angeles Times article featured Childrens Hospital Los Angeles in an article about Proposition 3, which would provide funding for childrens hospitals in California.

An Oct. 20 Los Angeles Times article featured Candace Brady and Mike Dubron, who are members of the patient advisory council at USC/Norris. The article also noted that retired L.A.P.D. officer Candace Brady served on review boards helping assess grant proposals for cancer research at USC.

An Oct. 20 Times of India article quoted cancer researcher Myles Cockburn about melanoma, a potentially deadly form of skin cancer.

An Oct. 19 Edmonton Journal (Canada) article quoted environmental health expert Scott Fruin about air pollution.

An Oct. 14 Reuters article highlighted a new study by Alzheimer's expert Shanee Hapuarachy, special project manager for the Department of Public Safety (DPS), that said the new electronic lock system would allow access to buildings after regular business hours—generally between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., although some buildings may have different policies depending on the needs of their occupants.

Under the new system, personnel are issued USCards, which serve as their identification and are coded with their access authorization for the buildings in which they work or are authorized to enter.

The cards permit access after hours and also log the times at which the user enters and leaves the building.

"Department heads make the decision concerning who is authorized and whether you are someone who needs access after hours. So if you try to come in at 10 p.m., and doors lock at 6 p.m., you need to be at an assigned access level or you won't get in," he said.

Hapuarachy said that employees should consult their home department coordinator for questions about whether they need their cards updated or replaced to access their buildings after hours.