

## Health Sciences Campus congratulates the Class of '09!



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By Sara Reeve

At commencement ceremonies held on May 17, graduates of the Keck School of Medicine prepared to enter a “renewed golden age of medicine,” said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito.

The Health Sciences campus celebrated additional commencement ceremonies, graduating Master of Science, Master of Public Health and Ph.D. students on May 13. Graduation ceremonies for Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy, Dentistry, Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, the School of Pharmacy and the Physician Assistant Program were held on May 15.

With access to healthcare topping the current political agenda, Puliafito acknowledged the challenges and opportunities ahead for the 193 graduates who received the Doctor of Medicine degree at the ceremony in the Shrine Auditorium. “Equipped with your formidable clinical skills and with a strong moral and ethical compass, I guarantee that you will be personally and professionally challenged in ways that you cannot imagine today,” he said.

Eight of the graduates received a Doctor of Philosophy in conjunction with a medical degree, and three received a joint degree with a Master of Business Administration.

At the Keck School ceremony, Puliafito reflected on reports of medical professionals’ involvement in Central intelligence Agency interrogations of prisoners.

“The ethics of medicine are rooted in the basic idea that society can trust physicians in all circumstances to do no harm,” said Puliafito. “The American Medical Association’s code of ethics clearly states that physicians must oppose and must not participate in torture for any reason because participation in torture undermines the physician’s role as healer. ... As you start your medical careers, I urge you to uphold the highest standard of medical ethics, no matter how challenging the circumstances. We expect nothing less.”

To view a transcript of the dean’s remarks, visit: <http://uscnews2.usc.edu/hscweekly/detail.php?recordnum=16552>.

USC Executive Vice President and Provost C.L. Max Nikias predicted a coming revolution in the field of medicine, one that the current graduates will lead. “Many of you will go on to take roles that past generations, maybe even this generation, would see as miraculous, as you bring sight to the blind and help the lame to walk, and

help the elderly live longer than ever before,” said Nikias. “Your accomplishments will be astonishing.”

Peter Katsufakis, vice president of assessment programs, National Board of Medical Examiners, gave a commencement address at the Keck School ceremony. Katsufakis is a former associate dean for student affairs of the Keck School. The Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy honored 91 new Doctors of Physical Therapy and one post-professional Doctor of Physical Therapy, and also conferred one new Ph.D. in Biokinesiology and six M.S. degrees in Biokinesiology.

The commencement speaker was Kristina Ripatti, a Los Angeles Police Department officer paralyzed from the chest down after a gunshot wound in the line of duty. After undergoing extensive rehabilitation, she remains an accomplished athlete as well as a USC graduate student.

At the commencement ceremony for the USC School of Dentistry, degrees were conferred upon 174 Doctorate of Dental Surgery graduates, along with 33 Dental Hygiene and 45 Advanced Dental Education graduates. “You have joined a very special group; life will never be the same,” said speaker Arthur A. Dugoni, dean emeritus and namesake of the University of the Pacific’s Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry.

The Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy welcomed Shawn Phipps, 1997 USC alumnus and current president of the Occupational Therapy Association

See **COMMENCEMENT**, page 3



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Mark Mosson and son celebrate at the Keck School of Medicine graduation reception on May 17 at Founders Park.



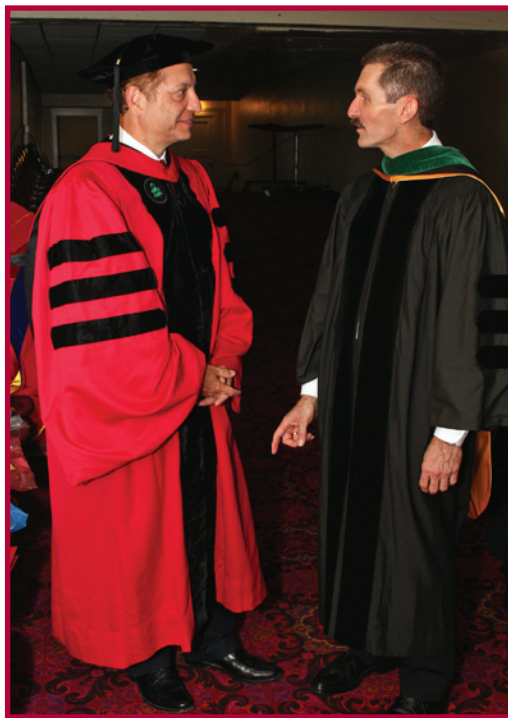
Beth Dunham



#### COMMENCEMENT 2009—

Clockwise from top: Tessa Stecker displays her newly-minted Keck School of Medicine diploma; receiving her Doctor of Physical Therapy degree, Kristen Belcastro accepts her robe from Beth Fisher, associate professor of clinical physical therapy, and Todd Schroeder, assistant professor of research; Dean Carmen A. Puliafito (left) speaks with commencement speaker (and former Keck School associate dean for student affairs)

Peter J. Katsufakis at commencement; Arthur A. Dugoni, dean emeritus of the University of the Pacific’s Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry, delivers his address to the graduates of the USC School of Dentistry.



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Class president Krystle Cher Purificacion, Pharm.D. 2009, awaits the dean’s annual toast at the US School of Pharmacy commencement.



# Keck School maps its strategic vision for next five years

By Jon Nalick

To help define the Keck School of Medicine’s top priorities and objectives for the next five years, Dean Carmen A. Puliafito has convened a group to formulate a strategic plan to replace its current guiding document, which was last updated in 2000.

The planning effort is headed by Tom Buchanan, associate dean for clinical research, and Judy Garner, senior associate dean for academic affairs.

On May 9, leaders of 15 working groups met with the

Dean and members of the Central Planning Committee to review recommendations for the new five-year plan, specifically designed to improve the quality, impact and reputation of the Keck School’s education, research and clinical care.

According to Buchanan, the planning process focuses on five key areas:

- Integrating research and health care to develop teams of researchers and care providers to address important health problems;
- Integrating science and

medical education, training and career development;

- Creating a physical environment that promotes interaction and collaboration;
- Developing the new hospitals on campus into an outstanding academic medical center; and

- Identifying and developing novel technologies and partnerships to expand the school’s capabilities and impact in research, education and clinical care.

Buchanan pointed out that the school is already undergoing significant changes in its clinical, research and educational activities in response to initiatives from Puliafito. A

major focus on strategic planning will be to integrate these activities in keeping with a growing emphasis on interdisciplinary care, research and training nationwide.

He added, “It’s really about making sure that while we’re making greater advances in all those areas, we’re coordinating to make sure that the focus is always on improving medical care.”

During the next few weeks, members of the Planning Committee will draft a plan that will be delivered to Puliafito on June 1. Public comment on the document will be solicited this summer.

## The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

Complete listing at:  
[www.usc.edu/uscnews/usc\\_in\\_the\\_news](http://www.usc.edu/uscnews/usc_in_the_news)

A May 18 *Baltimore Sun* article quoted preventive medicine expert **Jonathan Samet** about the “e-cigarette,” which emits water vapor instead of smoke, but still contains nicotine.

A May 18 Medpage online article featured a presentation by cardiologist **Leslie Saxon** on the ALTITUDE study, which found that implanted devices that shock the heart into normal rhythm appear to work even better in a real world, primary prevention setting than they did in clinical trials.

On May 17, the NBC News show “Dateline NBC” interviewed cancer researcher **David Agus** about a widespread perception that other countries are more open to different medical treatments and more willing to take risks with therapies for diseases like cancer.

A May 12 *Easton Journal* noted that senior associate dean for research advancement **M. Elizabeth Fini** will deliver the keynote address and receive an honorary doctor of science degree from her alma mater, Stonehill College.

On May 9, KCBS-TV noted that the **USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hospital** was a beneficiary of the Revlon Run/Walk cancer fundraiser.

A May 2 *La Opinion* article quoted public health expert **Michael Cousineau** about Los Angeles County considering reducing medical services to cut costs. Another article highlighted a seminar held at the Keck School, with the goal of inspiring 160 young Latinas to become doctors.

A May 1 *The Press-Enterprise* article quoted clinical pharmacy expert **Jeffery Goad** about the availability of flu vaccine Tamiflu.



**HONORING EXCELLENCE**—The Keck School of Medicine held its Senior Awards Ceremony on May 16 in the HSC Quad. Awards were granted to outstanding Doctor of Medicine candidates on the basis of excellence in academic achievement, research and service. Above, among the dozens of award recipients honored, are Adam Seide and Kathryn White Russell, each of whom received an American Medical Association Education and Research Foundation Fund Clinical Award and the Eric Cohen, M.D., Introduction to Clinical Medicine Award—in addition to several other honors. In the background Henri Ford, vice dean for medical education, congratulates the pair.

The Weekly

Next Issue: June 5

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### EDITOR’S NOTE

*HSC Weekly* has begun its summer publishing schedule, with issues being published every other Friday—except during weeks that include a university holiday. We will resume our regular weekly publication schedule in September.



# Keck School physiologist receives prestigious McKnight Scholar Award

**By Sara Reeve**  
Alapakkam Sampath, assistant professor of physiology and biophysics in the Keck School of Medicine and Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute, has received a 2009 McKnight Scholar Award from the McKnight Endowment Fund for Neuroscience.

His research project titled “The role of optimal processing in setting sensory threshold” is aimed at understanding how the nervous system processes information that is transduced by sensory receptors.

The McKnight Scholar Awards encourage neuroscientists in the early stages of their careers to focus on disorders of learning and memory.

The award provides \$225,000 to support recipients’ research.

“Our goal is to understand how light-evoked signals generated in our retinal photoreceptors, the rods and cones, are processed by the neural circuitry of the retina to provide us with the remarkable properties of our visual system,” said Sampath. “More specifically, the experiments proposed are aimed at understanding how we see in very dim lighting conditions where vision relies on few photons of light. Thus we are interested in how the retina extracts sparsely represented signals from the underlying noise of the system.”

The Scholar Awards have

## COMMENCEMENT: Schools fete their newest grads

Continued from page 1  
of California, to deliver its commencement speech. The division honored 21 Bachelor of Science and 126 M.S. recipients, 17 Doctor of Occupational Therapy and five Ph.D. recipients.

The USC School of Pharmacy awarded 176 new Doctors of Pharmacy, 29 M.S. and eight Ph.D. degrees, as well as 38 certificates to those completing residency or fellowship programs.

“Patients don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” advised School of Pharmacy commencement speaker Paul Gregerson, chief medical officer at the JWCH Institute. Gregerson reminded the graduates of the responsibilities that their privileged educations bring them. “For those to whom much is given, much is expected,” said Gregerson.

The Physician Assistant Program conferred degrees in Master of Physician Assistant Practice on 49 graduates.

been given annually since 1977. Sampath is only the second scientist to receive the award while pursuing research at USC, and the first at the Keck School. The first was awarded in 1985 to Sarah Bottjer, professor of biological sciences and psychology in the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

Pat Levitt, director of the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute, is a past recipient of the McKnight Endowment Fund’s Neuroscience of Brain Disorders Award.

“The McKnight Scholar Award is a reflection of both the remarkable accomplishments and the great promise of the research program that Alapakkam Sampath has undertaken,” said Levitt.

“Like many of his outstanding colleagues in the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute, Sam’s passion and rigor for solving the mysteries of brain function come through when one talks to him. I am certain that the McKnight selection committee sensed that in Sam’s writings and in their own conversations with him. We are all very proud.”

The Endowment Fund especially seeks applicants working on problems that, if solved at the basic level, would have immediate and significant impact on clinically relevant issues. Sampath’s research could have direct impact on patients with certain types of visual impairments.

“Determining how neural circuits process informa-

tion generated by sensory receptors is critical to our understanding of behavioral deficits in sensory processing (such as for conditions like congenital stationary night blindness) arise due to abnormal signal processing within the sensory receptors or within the neural circuitry that reads the sensory receptor output. Our goal is that these experiments will provide deeper insights into such conditions.”

Research supported by the Endowment Fund has furthered understanding of such impairments as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries and many others.

**‘The McKnight Scholar Award is a reflection of both the remarkable accomplishments and the great promise of the research program that Alapakkam Sampath has undertaken.’**

**—Pat Levitt, director of the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute**



**PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT**—The USC Norris Cancer Hospital hosted the fifth annual Los Angeles City Radiation Oncology Mock Oral Board Exam on May 9, which attracted 28 attendees, 14 examiners and 14 examinees. Created by Parvesh Kumar (center front, wearing glasses), professor and chair of the Keck School of Medicine’s Department of Radiation Oncology, the event is designed to help the radiation oncology residents in training in LA to prepare for their actual Oral Board Exam. Originally boasting only participants from USC and UC Irvine Radiation Oncology Departments five years ago, the event has grown considerably to include radiation oncology departments from USC, UC Irvine, UCLA, Kaiser Permanente and Valley Radiotherapy Associates (the largest private practice group in LA). This year’s event was organized with the help of Paul Pagnini (front row, left of Kumar), assistant professor of radiation oncology at the Keck School.

## Calendar of Events

This Calendar of events is also online at [www.usc.edu/hscalendar](http://www.usc.edu/hscalendar) for the Health Sciences Campus community

### Tuesday, May 26

**9 a.m.** Neurology Grand Rounds. “MEG and Epilepsy,” William Sutherling, The Epilepsy & Brain Mapping Program. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-7686

### Wednesday, May 27

**Noon.** “Renal Biopsy,” Michael Koss and Vito Campese, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

### Friday, May 29

**8 a.m.** Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Grand Rounds. “Tumors of Unknown Primary – Determining Site of Origin,” Noel Weidner, UCSD. NOR 7409. Info: (323) 442-1180

**8 a.m.** CHLA Grand Rounds. “Surgical Evaluation and Treatment of Persistent Pediatric Obstructive Sleep Apnea,” Aaron Lin, USC/CHLA. CHLA Saban

Research Auditorium. Info: (323) 361-2935

**9 a.m.** “Media and Peer Influences on Food Intake and Alcohol Use in Young People: An Observational Experimental Approach,” Rutger Engels, Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands. CSC 250. Info: (323) 442-2637

**11 a.m.** Hematology Grand Rounds. “Langerhans Cell Histiocytosis, Diagnosing and Current Management,” Ravin Rupani, USC. IPT C2J103. Info: (323) 865-3950

### Monday, June 1

**Noon.** “Epidemiology of Kidney Diseases,” Arshia Ghaffari, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

**4 p.m.** “Research in Progress,” Suma Raju, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

### Tuesday, June 2

**11:30 a.m.** Psychiatry Grand Rounds. “Community Partnered Research in Mental Health,” Kenneth B. Wells, UCLA. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-4000

### Wednesday, June 3

**Noon.** “Regulation of Immunoglobulin Heavy Chain Gene Transcription and Recombination,” Ranjan Sen, NIH. NOR 7409. Info: (323) 442-1144

**Noon.** “Mixed Connective Tissue Diseases,” Mohammad Akmal, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

### Friday, June 5

**9:30 a.m.** Early Ovarian Cancer Symposium. “Applying Novel Technologies and Biological Knowledge to the Detection, Diagnosis and Clinical Management of Early Ovarian Epithelial

Cancer,” Louis Dubeau, USC. HNRT Aresty Auditorium. Info: (323) 865-3147

### Monday, June 8

**Noon.** “Drug Overdose and Intoxication (V),” Alan Yu, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

### Monday, June 15

**Noon.** “Tubulointerstitial Renal Disease,” Hosameldin Madkour, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

**4 p.m.** “Research in Progress,” Rami Bouajram, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

### Monday, June 22

**Noon.** “Psychosocial and Ethical Issues of Dialysis,” Mohammad Akmal, USC. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7337

**Notice:** Deadline for calendar submission is 4 p.m. Monday to be considered for that week’s issue—although three weeks’ advance notice of events is recommended. Please note that timely submission does not guarantee an item will be printed. Send calendar items to HSC Weekly, KAM 400 or fax to (323) 442-2832, or e-mail to [ebalauw@usc.edu](mailto:ebalauw@usc.edu). Entries must include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location, and a phone number for information.



# Campus celebrates Hospital Week with style—and smiles

**By Leslie Ridgeway**  
The Trojan Spirit was on display at USC University Hospital (UH) and USC Norris Cancer Hospital during Hospital Week 2009, with nurses, physicians and staff enjoying everything from sweet treats and crafts to entertainment from co-workers.

From May 11-15, staffers enjoyed complimentary breakfast, received USC keychains and mugs, lapped up ice cream and participated in contests, all in appreciation for their hard work.

Jun Sapitola of UH Outpatient Surgery laid ‘em out in the aisles with his version of “Sometimes When We Touch,” taking home first place in the karaoke contest and a pair of Los Angeles Dodgers tickets.

The Trojan Helmet contest added a creative splash of cardinal and gold in the lobbies of University Hospital and Norris. At UH, winners included: First place: 7North; second place: 7West ICU; third place: CVT ICU. At Norris, winners were: First place: Surgery; second place: Day Hospital; third place: Clinical lab. First place winners received a hot breakfast buffet; second place, an ice cream sundae party; and third place, a basket of treats.

Answering Trojan trivia questions correctly won several employees a chance to attend a Dodger game. UH winners were: Cristina Donato, Michelle Lee, Zuart Ousepyan, Meg Oliveta, Jeff McCullough, Maria Baez and Gina Ryan. Norris winners were: Yenny Lopez, Connie Gonzalez, Irene Cartner, Bobby Casey, Alma Aguirre, Isabel Lastra and Evelyn Wing.

Several lucky employees also snagged Dodger tickets in a daily drawing. UH winners include: Jennifer Arnes, Courtney Lambert and Blanca Romero. Norris winners include: Suhua Lin, Sheila Fitzgerald, and Pamela Foster.



Photos/Jon Nalick



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: USC Norris Hospital nurses Susan Victoria (left) and Latrice Holmes enjoy a cool treat and a warm laugh at an ice cream social at the hospital cafeteria on May 14; the Trojan helmet contest entry by the USC Norris Clinical Lab Department, “Academic Medicine Waging a War on Cancer,” watches over the first floor corridor; staffers at USC University hospital line up for free breakfast at a Hospital Week event on May 12; as her friend looks on, USC Norris research assistant Ahva Shahabi places her hands under an ultraviolet lamp as part of an educational display designed to show how effectively and completely participants wash their hands.

## In Case of An Emergency...

**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.

**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.

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