Keck School dean launches new health reform initiatives

By Bryan Schneider

As the health reform debate heats up in Washington, D.C., and across the country, the Keck School of Medicine dean’s office is launching a number of initiatives to keep the USC community well informed and engaged.

Initiatives include the development of the Dean’s Council on Health Reform, monthly forums, and a Web site serving as a clearinghouse for information about health care reform.

The monthly health reform forums will include a diverse group of speakers from the state and federal legislatures, governmental administration, health care advocacy groups, the Los Angeles community, organized medicine and academia.

The first forum will feature U.S. Representative Adam Schiff (D—Pasadena, Glendale, Burbank) on Aug. 18 at 5 p.m. in Aresty Auditorium. The congressman will be speaking to Keck School students about health care reform. Faculty and staff are also welcome to attend. A discussion period will follow his remarks.

A new Web site launched at healthreform.usc.edu features daily news updates on health reform, helpful resource links, the Dean’s Health Reform blog, relevant news from USC faculty and information about the Dean’s Council on Health Reform. Visitors to the site can post comments and also sign up to join the council.

Membership in the Dean’s Council on Health Reform is open to all members of the Keck School faculty, medical and graduate student residents, and fellows in USC training programs, and USC staff, as well as alumni and others interested in these important issues.

The council will provide guidance to the dean’s office in the selection of speakers and the content of the Web site, and in recommending other relevant educational and research activities.

“The council will meet approximately once a month. The USC community is invited to join the council by filling out the form provided on the health reform site (healthreform.usc.edu).”

“As we all know, Congress is considering legislation that promises to alter dramatically the financing and delivery of health care in the United States,” said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito.

“Proposed legislation is likely to produce the greatest changes in American health care since the enactment of Medicare in 1965.”

—Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito

USC hospitals ranked among best in the nation

By Leslie Ridgeway

USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital placed among the best hospitals in the nation in the U.S. News & World Report magazine’s 20th annual rankings of “America’s Best Hospitals,” published in the July 21 issue.

USC-affiliated hospitals included in the rankings are: USC University Hospital, USC Norris Cancer Hospital, Doheny Eye Institute and Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center. Children’s Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA), staffed exclusively by USC faculty physicians, was recognized in June as a top children’s hospital.

The rankings are categorized by medical specialty, with the top 50 medical centers listed in each specialty.

USC University Hospital ranked 30th in gynecology, climbing 15 spots from last year, and 45th in neurology and neurosurgery—up three spots from a year ago. Doheny ranked eighth in ophthalmology, Rancho Los Amigos ranked 18th in rehabilitation, and USC Norris Cancer Hospital ranked 48th in cancer.

“We’re extremely proud of our talented physicians, nurses and staff whose work and dedication to excellent patient care has been recognized nation-wide,” said Mitch Creem, Medicine Dean.

USC hospitals CEO sees ‘tremendous progress’ in first 100 days

By Sara Reese

Just over 100 days have passed since USC took ownership of USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital on April 1, 2009. In the following interview, CEO Mitch Creem gives his thoughts on the progress made to strengthen and upgrade the hospitals, as well as efforts to integrate the hospitals and their staff into the Trojan family.

Q: Since USC acquired the hospitals April 1, what are the most significant accomplishments in this time of transition?

A: We have made tremendous progress in a very short time. We have reorganized the hospital governance boards, reshaped our governing and management structure. We have established a new operating budget and capital budget processes for the hospitals.

We have integrated payroll systems with the university, as well as all other business services, such as purchasing, human resources, legal, compliance and capital program risk management. The space planning process has begun, and that will result in the first bed moves, patient-area renovation and seismic remediation projects by September.

We are nearing the end of two executive searches—chief human resources officer and chief information officer—and we have already hired a new chief medical officer, Don Larson. Our fiscal year 2010 operating goals have been established around the five pil-
The artificial retina, a unique bio-electronic implant, gives those with retinitis pigmentosa—a severe form of retinal degeneration leading to blindness—the ability to recognize objects and navigate in their environment. The implant is intended eventually to enable patients to read large print and recognize faces. Currently, 29 patients have had artificial retina systems implanted as part of clinical trials. Patients now can distinguish between light and dark and see some objects with the aid of the implant, which features 60 pixels. In order to make the leap to reading and recognizing faces, the implant must feature 1,000 pixels. As part of a collaborative effort with five national labs, four universities and an industrial partner, Doheny Eye Institute researchers are now developing an implant with 200 pixels. "Creating a 200-pixel implant is a major accomplishment, but we are far from where we need to be to restore eyesight," said Mark Humayun, project director, named 2005 R&D Magazine Innovator of the Year. "With continued collaboration and funding, this goal will be within reach. Receiving the R&D 100 Award indicates the value of this project." Humayun conducted the initial studies of electrical stimulation of the human retina and generated the original intellectual property that forms the basis of the artificial retina project. The Doheny Eye Institute processes program management, systems engineering, surgical techniques, implant testing and fundamental research for the artificial retina project.

Researchers at the institute have decades of experience in surgically implanting prototype devices, which have markedly accelerated the development of artificial retina systems.

"This award recognizes the leadership of Mark Humayun and his talented team and collaborators and partners across the nation," said Stephen Ryan, president of the Doheny Eye Institute. "The fundamental contributions to science and engineering developed through the collaboration on this project open up great opportunities in many different fields related to prosthesis, biochemistry and biomimetics." R&D Magazine issues the award every year for the most innovative technologies in biotechnology. This year's awards were announced July 20. The artificial retina team was established through a Department of Energy-sponsored Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) in 2004 with the mission of developing the world's most advanced high-density hybrid prosthesis for imaging. The five national laboratories are: Argonne National Laboratory, Livermore National Laboratory, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Oak Ridge National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratories. The four universities are USC (Doheny Eye Institute), California Institute of Technology, North Carolina State University and the University of California at Santa Cruz. The industrial partner is Second Sight Medical Products, Inc., which is responsible for commercializing the product and conducting clinical trials.

**BEST: USC hospitals garner national praise**

Continued from page 1

chief executive officer of USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital. "We also congratulate our colleagues at Childrens Hospital and Rancho Los Amigos for their achievements in excellence.”

On April 1, 2009, USC closed a historic deal to purchase the 411-bed USC University Hospital and 60-bed USC Norris Cancer Hospital from Tenet Healthcare Corp.

"The purchase of these two hospitals provides us an even greater opportunity to further expand and enrich our clinical services as we move into a new era of academic medicine," Creem said. "Investments are now under way for refreshed facilities and amenities for our patients while we also add many new employees to accommodate growth.”

Childrens Hospital Los Angeles was one of only 10 children’s hospitals in the nation—and the only pediatric medical center on the West Coast—named to the national "Honor Roll" of children’s hospitals in the United States. The ranking was published in the U.S. News & World Report 2009 “America’s Best Children’s Hospitals” rankings.

"These rankings are a testament to the commitment to excellence exhibited by all our Keck School of Medicine faculty and all staff connected to the clinical enterprise,” said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito. "Congratulations to all on this important recognition.”

The Best Hospitals guide ranks 174 medical centers nationwide in 16 specialties.

To be eligible for the rankings, a hospital must be a teaching hospital that has at least 200 beds, or has at least 100 beds plus several key medical technologies, and is nominated in the magazine’s annual specialist survey. Hospital reputation, death rate, patient safety, nurse staffing and technology are other factors taken into account.

In four specialties—including ophthalmology and rehabilitation—ranking is based solely on reputation, derived from the three most recent physician surveys.

The full list of hospital rankings and methodology is also available online at www.usnews.com/besthospitals. Full data is available online for another 1,500 hospitals that are unranked.

**USC wins prestigious award for artificial retina project**

By Leslie Ridgeway

The Doheny Eye Institute at the Keck School of Medicine has won a prestigious 2009 R&D 100 Award for its U.S. Department of Energy-funded artificial retina project, designed to restore sight to the blind.

“This award is bestowed every year only to the most innovative bioscience programs in the United States,” said Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito. "We hope the award will help push the artificial retina project to the next level. We are honored that R&D Magazine has chosen to recognize that the Keck School of Medicine of USC is home to important research that will improve the human condition.”

The artificial retina, a unique bio-electronic implant, gives those with retinitis pigmentosa—a severe form of retinal degeneration leading to blindness—the ability to recognize objects and navigate in their environment. The implant is intended eventually to enable patients to read large print and recognize faces. Currently, 29 patients have had artificial retina systems implanted as part of clinical trials.

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100 DAYS: Planning for growth is priority

Continued from page 1

A: Thank you for all of your support you.

Q: Early on, you discussed some goals regarding invest-
ment in recruiting more personnel, space-planning and
improving business systems. What kind of progress has
been made in those areas?
A: We have over 100 days as CEO of the two USC
hospitals compared to your previous experiences at
other academic medical centers?
A: My past experience had been at academic medical
centers that were struggling financially. There is much
optimism and excitement for the future here at USC, and
a lot of support for our plans.
All the operating indicators are very positive right now.
Q: You’ve been working with the hospital management team
to formulate goals for the new fiscal year that began July 1.
What are the priority goals during this upcoming year?
A: Planning and building for growth is a priority for
the hospitals in this coming
year, and that’s not just hiring people and renovating
patient units. We also need
to empower and train our
workforce to plan and respond
to that growth. Hiring a CIO
is a priority for us because we
have many IT projects that
need to be get launched.
Q: What factors will most
likely influence the ability of
the USC hospitals to compete
successfully in the Los Angeles
healthcare marketplace?
A: We are in a growth
phase, and other hospitals
around us are not due to
capacity constraints. We have
a real opportunity to make
continuous improvements on
our competition.
Another factor is our ability
to recruit outstanding staff and
faculty from around the area and
across the nation, to
build our clinical programs
and our reputation. We need
to increase our visibility in the
community as a viable and
desirable place to work, which
will lead to our ability to
attract and retain the best talent
that the city has to offer.
Q: Have you had any
moments or interactions with
hospital staff that have been
especially meaningful for you?
A: Last Thursday, I had
several physicians in my
office, and they were all
strategizing about patient
flow issues in the hospital.
I remembered seeing a wonder-
ful feeling that this was the
first time that physicians have
been in the administra-
tive office with that type
management to improve hospital
operations.
Last Wednesday, we had
216 patients at UH and
42 patients at Norris, and it was
a very stressful day. I ordered
lunch for all of the nurses
because it was so busy and
I didn’t know if everyone
would have a chance to
take a break.
I was overwhelmed by
the amount of gratitude that
was expressed to me, over such
a small gesture. I was struck by
how little support our nursing
staff must have received over
the years. I am committed to
changing that.
Q: What is your primary
message to the employees of
USC University Hospital and
USC Norris Cancer Hospital?
A: Thank you for all of your
dedication and loyalty, from
accepts a crystal award in appreciation of his dedication and loyalty, from
cancer center Director Peter Jones. Bill now offers his assistance to the cancer
center as a volunteer.

Neuropathy Foundation funds USC study

The Hereditary Neuropathy Foundation (HNF) recently formed a Research Consortium designed to speed the development of new therapies for Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT), which affects about 1 million Americans, and is the most common inherited neuromuscular disorder worldwide.
Pragna Patel, professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California (USC), is the recipient of one of HNF’s annual awards. She and her team will study potential drug targets for CMT.
Those who receive funding from HNF adhere to a commitment for real-time sharing of their research findings and facilities to speed the development of effective treatments to prevent or reverse disabil-
ity caused by CMT.
Patel will be a leader in new and promising therapeutic approaches in the field of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, which affects a large group of people who have a wide range of symptoms and experience.

The Weekly NEWSMAXERS

The July 21 issue of U.S. News & World Report ranked
USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital
among the best hospitals in the nation in five specialty areas.
The Los Angeles Times and San Francisco Business Times
also covered the rankings.

A July 21 widely carried Reuters article featured a study
led by environmental researcher Rob McConnell. The study
found that children who spent time outdoors and exposure to
air pollution have a higher risk of asthma than those who
are just exposed to air pollution. The study was also featured by
CNN, the BBC (U.K.), U.S. News & World Report, HealthDay
News, Health Magazine, Telegraph (U.K.), CBC (Canada),
Mirror (U.K.), Daily Record (U.K.) and Asian News Interna-
tional (India).

A July 17 widely carried Reuters article featured research by
infectious disease expert Fred Sattler and colleagues, which
found that a testosterone patch, particularly in combination with
a growth hormone injection, improves body composition
and muscle performance in older men.

HONORING THREE DECADES OF SERVICE—More than 100 members of the USC Institute for Reproductive Medicine gathered on June 26 in the Hindenberg Garden to honor Bill Taylor, director of general services, as he retired after 29 years at the center. Phyllis Ridenour, former USC director of administration, lauded Taylor’s accomplishments at the reception as did Joe Landolph, associate professor, and retired Keck School staff member Gordon Cohn. Above, Taylor (at right) accepts a crystal award in appreciation of his dedication and loyalty, from cancer center Director Peter Jones. Bill now offers his assistance to the cancer center as a volunteer.

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Calendar of Events
This Calendar of events is also online at
www.usc.edu/hscalendar for the Health Sciences Campus community

Monday, July 27
2:30 p.m. “Timelocks Lessons in Professionalism” Bryant Botrell, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Anesty Conference Center, NRT. Info: (323) 442-2800

Tuesday, July 28

Wednesday, July 29
8:30 a.m. “Brockoscopy II,” C.F. Chang, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Friday, July 31
8 a.m. CHLA Grand Rounds. “Noninvasive Assessment of Tissue Iron Stores: From Bedside to Bench and Back Again,” Tomos Cosmas and John Wood, USC/CHLA. CHLA Suban Aud. Info: (323) 361-2935
8:30 a.m. “Shock I,” K. Afshar, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923
11 a.m. Hematology Grand Rounds. “Hemostasis In Vivo,” Howard Lachman, USC. LAG/USC/ IPT. G22101. Info: (323) 865-3950

Monday, Aug. 3
8:30 a.m. “Pneumonia,” Thomas Boylen, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Wednesday, Aug. 5
8:30 a.m. “Shock II,” Kam-yar Afshar, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Friday, Aug. 7
8:30 a.m. “ARDS,” Junios Lusibber, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Monday, Aug. 10

Monday, Aug. 17

Wednesday, Aug. 12
8:30 a.m. “PFT I,” Ami Oren, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Friday, Aug. 14
8:30 a.m. “Pulmonary Embolism,” Bunri Giao, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Monday, Aug. 21
8:30 a.m. “Sleep Breathing Disorders,” Ricardo Juarez, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Friday, Aug. 21
8:30 a.m. “Pneumonia,” Thomas Boylen, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

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) 442-2812, or e-mail to ehiazzo@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.

Nurse anesthesia program thrives at Keck School

By Sara Reeve
Some students may complain about professors putting them to sleep, but in one Keck School program, the students are learning how to put others to sleep.

The USC Program of Nurse Anesthesia is a master’s-level program within the Department of Anesthesiology that trains nurses to provide anesthesia services to patients in a variety of settings.

The program renewed its accreditation in late May from the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Programs, achieving a 100 percent in compliance ranking and 10-year accreditation—the highest available.

“We are a rigorous program, and our students have an average 3.1 years of professional nursing experience setting before coming to our program,” said Michele Gold, director of the program. “We value that clinical experience very highly. We see a really good correlation between clinical experience and then success in the program.”

Nurse anesthetists have a long history of providing anesthesia services in the United States, beginning during the Civil War. According to the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) administer approximately 30 million anesthetics to patients each year.

While CRNAs are more common on the East Coast and Midwest than in California, USC’s graduates do go on to practice locally. “They are in rural areas, and they are in the military, but, here in Los Angeles, they are also at County Hospital, USC University Hospital and Harbor/UCLA,” said Terrie Norris, associate director of the nurse anesthesia program. “We have graduates who go out to private practice in major surgery centers, or in plastic surgery offices. Kaiser Permanente is also a very large employer of nurse anesthetists in many of their facilities.”

CRNAs are the highest compensated of all nursing specialties, but Norris noted that the USC students are more excited about the professional challenges inherent in the practice. “Every day is completely different because all patients react differently to the anesthetics,” she said. “You read in the textbooks what the normal reaction would be, but then your patient has a variation of what that normal reaction would be. There are also teaching implications. So your job is to figure out where in that range your patient lies.”

The program first came to USC in 1996, having moved from UCLA to become part of the USC School of Nursing. When that department was disbanded in 2004, the nurse anesthesia program was incorporated into the Keck School of Medicine’s Department of Anesthesiology.

“The university recognized the strength of the nurse anesthesia program,” said Gold. “The chair of the department of anesthesiology, Philip Lumb, was instrumental in working with the university to help the program survive and really thrive here in the Keck School.”

Despite receiving a stellar 10-year accreditation, the nurse anesthesia program is not resting on its laurels. According to Gold, administrators plan to transition the program from a master’s degree to a doctoral level within the next three to five years. “We are looking for the leaders of tomorrow, and wish that, we are looking for those who want to work hard in this rigorous program and then get out into the field and face high stakes and big challenges,” she said.