

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 students, 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. I urge the USC community to participate actively in this important national debate," he said.

'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 for most specialties.

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 nationwide," said Mitch Creem,

See **BEST**, page 2



INTEGRATION CELEBRATION—The Doctors of USC hosted a party on July 8 at the Harry and Celesta Pappas Quad to toast the successful integration of 18 independent practice groups under the Doctors of USC umbrella. CEO Minor Anderson hailed the move, saying that it would "make a more efficient practice and create a better experience for our patients." Underscoring the scope and complexity of integrating so many disparate groups, Anderson noted that the change required the conversion of more than 835,000 patient records and the manual transfer of more than 22,000 patient appointments from the old system to the new one. Anderson summed up the theme of the recent celebration, saying that in the last year, "Many good things have happened—and we are very excited about our future prospects."

USC hospitals CEO sees 'tremendous progress' in first 100 days

By Sara Reeve

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: If you only had a couple of words to describe the first 100 days since USC took ownership of the hospitals, what would they be?

A: Beyond expectations. There is so much genuine support and excitement for our goals. The patient volume is higher than we expected. The faculty is extremely loyal and supportive. The university management has also been very supportive—I couldn't have asked for more.

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 Larsen. Our fiscal year 2010 operating goals have been established around the five pil-

See **100 DAYS**, page 3

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.

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 provides 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 contribu-

tions to science and engineering developed through the collaboration on this project open up great opportunities in many different fields related to prosthetics, bioscience and biomimetics."

R&D Magazine issues the award every year for the most innovative technologies in bioscience. 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 microelectronic-tissue hybrid prosthesis for imaging.

The five national laboratories are: Argonne National Laboratory, Lawrence 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.



Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, Bob Riha Jr.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL— Singer-actress Jessica Simpson (center) poses with Ernest Katz, co-director of the Hematology-Oncology Psychosocial and Education (HOPE) Program at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, and cancer survivors at the 18th annual Celebrate Life with HOPE event on June 7 at Paramount Studios. The celebration is the largest event for pediatric cancer survivors in the western United States and provides patients, caregivers and former patients the chance to celebrate with their medical "family" from the Childrens Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases at CHLA. This year the event drew about 2,400 people, including more than 450 patients, former patients and their families. HOPE develops a wide range of culturally sensitive psychosocial services and educational activities for young people with cancer and blood diseases—and also for their families, health professionals, and members of the community.

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.

The Weekly

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The Weekly is published for the faculty, staff, students, volunteers and visitors in the University of Southern California's Health Sciences Campus community. It is written and produced by the Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing staff. Comments, suggestions and story ideas are welcome. Permission to reprint articles with attribution is freely given.

Associate Senior Vice President, Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing: Jane Brust

Executive Director of Communications and Marketing: Ina Fried

Editor: Jon Nalick

Contributors: Eva Blaauw, Cheryl Bruyninckx, Wendy Chang, Meghan Lewit, Carol Matthieu, Katie Neith, Sara Reeve, Leslie Ridgeway and Bryan Schneider

Senior Vice President, University Relations: Martha Harris

Phone: 323-442-2830 Fax: 323-442-2832

E-mail: hscwkly@usc.edu Web: uscnews.usc.edu/hscweekly/ RSS: <http://www.usc.edu/hscw>

100 DAYS: Planning for growth is priority

Continued from page 1

lars of quality, people, Trojan spirit, finance and growth. We have a new billing process and have worked with various public agencies to ensure that we can bill Medicare. We should be sending out our first Medicare bill within the next couple of weeks. We are creating a new concierge service. We have engaged our faculty in various operating and management committees of the hospital, and we've brought back orthopedic surgeons as of July.

And finally, we've signed our marketing affiliation with the Dodgers and initiated a brand identity/market research process that will result in our first advertising campaign, to launch in January.

Q: Have there been any unexpected challenges during this transition period?

A: Our patient census is higher right now than we expected, and the challenge is to make sure we have enough nurses and support personnel. Thankfully, there have not been any other surprises. Even that challenge of higher census is wonderful news—demand for our service is very strong.

Q: What have you observed about the hospital personnel since the change in hospital ownership?

A: I have noticed that there is a wonderful spirit of compassionate care and loyalty to USC. There are many alums who work here, and many employees are fans of USC, so there is a powerful Trojan spirit that permeates the institution and seems to grow stronger every day. I also notice that it is a very competent and capable workforce that is dedicated to patient and family needs.

Q: Early on, you discussed some goals regarding investment in recruiting more personnel, space planning and improving business systems. What kind of progress has been made in those areas?

A: We put together a plan this year to hire 162 new nurses and support staff over the next year. We've increased faculty funding support by \$10 million, and we plan to make another investment of \$10 million in salary support for new physician recruits. Those are investments in people. We also plan on spending \$30 million in new technology and equipment this year.

On space planning, we've gone through two charrettes [in which designers draft solutions to design issues], one for inpatients and one for outpatients.

We are working on transition plans to get to our new configuration, which include renovations of the 1991 tower and the Norris Cancer Hospital facility. We have agreed on a new location for the outpatient surgery center, to be located on the lower level of HCC II.

Q: How has your first 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 get launched.

Q: What factors will most likely influence the ability of the USC hospitals to compete successfully in the Los Angeles health care market?

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 considerable gains 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 remember having a wonderful feeling that this was the first time that physicians have been in the administrative offices to work with the management team 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 hard work and loyalty to these hospitals, and bear with us as we continue to grow at rates faster than we anticipated. We are striving to make sure that we have all the right people and equipment in place to provide the highest quality of care to our patients. We fully support you.



Jon Mallick

HONORING THREE DECADES OF SERVICE—More than 100 members of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Keck School of Medicine gathered on June 26 in the Hinderstein Garden to honor Bill Taylor, director of general services, as he retired after 29 years at the center. Phyllis Rideout, former USC Norris 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.

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 is the recipient of one of HNF's initial awards. She and her team will study potential drug targets for common forms of 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 disability caused by CMT.

Patel will be doing research on the most common form of CMT, CMT1A, and will be working to identify targets for drug discovery. "We are excited that HNF has given us the opportunity to apply new strategies to understand how the PMP22 gene is regulated and to develop a treatment for CMT1A," she said.

Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease is a neuromuscular disease that causes extreme muscle wasting in the hands, feet, arms and legs. Besides muscle atrophy, common symptoms include pain, fatigue, deformity and loss of the mobility. Charcot-Marie-Tooth is genetic, progressive, and has no cure.

Teresa Eickel, HNF's Executive Director, explained that HNF's Research Consortium Agreement differs from the traditional research agreement because HNF will have the right to sub-license all CMT-indicated discoveries. Typically, intellectual property management is handled by the participating university. "The right to manage the intellectual property is crucial for any organization funding research on a lesser-known disease, such as CMT," Eickel stated. "We feel that we are highly motivated to aggressively market the research findings to pharmaceutical companies for research at the clinical level."

Elizabeth Fini, vice dean for research at the Keck School and interim director for the USC Institute of Genetics, agreed that this strategy was progressive and goal driven. "This novel strategy for sharing the benefits of research fits well with the Keck School's focus on rapid dissemination of research knowledge and its translation into clinical practice. We are proud to be able to support Dr. Pragna Patel in this effort."

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

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 with stressed-out parents 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 International* (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.

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. "Timeless Lessons in Professionalism" Bryant Botwell, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Aresty Conference Center, NRT. Info: (323) 442-2830

Tuesday, July 28

9 a.m. Neurology Grand Rounds. "Neuro Emergencies-Infections," Leslie Weiner, USC. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-7686

11:30 a.m. Psychiatry Grand Rounds. "Current Legal Issues Psychiatry," Don Harper Mills, USC. CSC 2200. Info: (323) 442-4065

Wednesday, July 29

8:30 a.m. "Brochoscopy 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," Tomas Coates and John Wood, USC/CHLA. CHLA Saban 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 Liebman, USC. LAG+USC IPT C2J103. Info: (323) 865-3950

Noon. "Case Presentations," Gebran Abboud, USC. OPT Bldg. A5C129. Info: (323) 409-7995

Monday, Aug. 3

Noon. Liver Grand Rounds. "Case Presentations," Sarah Sheibani, USC. IPT C2J101. Info: (323) 409-7995

Wednesday, Aug. 5

8:30 a.m. "Shock II," Kamyar Afshar, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Friday, Aug. 7

8:30 a.m. "ARDS," Janice Liebler, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Noon. Gastrointestinal Grand Rounds. "Case Presentations," Michael Chan, USC. OPT A5C129. Info: (323) 409-7995

Monday, Aug. 10

Noon. Liver Grand Rounds. "Case Presentations," Sarah Sheibani, USC. IPT C2J101. Info: (323) 409-7995

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," Renli Qiao, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Noon. Gastrointestinal Grand Rounds. "Case Presentations," Joon Kim, USC. OPT A5C129. Info: (323) 409-7995

Monday, Aug. 17

Noon. Liver Grand Rounds. "Case Presentations," Sarah Sheibani, USC. Info: (323) 409-7995

Wednesday, Aug. 19

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

Noon. Gastrointestinal Grand Rounds. "Case Presentations," Michael Chan, USC. OPT A5C129. Info: (323) 409-7995

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 eblaauw@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.



Left, Terrie Norris, associate director of the USC Program of Nurse Anesthesia, uses a training dummy to instruct her first-year students Laurel Schooler (center) and Cheryl Powell in the proper placement of an endotracheal tube using a fiberoptic laryngoscope into the throat—a routine anesthesiology procedure. The program recently received a 10-year accreditation—the highest available—from the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Programs.

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 on average 3.1 years of professional nursing experience in a clinical intensive care 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 into 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 ranges for medication dosages. It's your job 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 doctorate level within the next three to five years. "We are looking for the leaders of tomorrow, and with 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.

USC Health Sciences
Public Relations and Marketing
1975 Zonal Ave.
KAM 400
Los Angeles, CA 90033

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