USC breast cancer experts disavow new screening guidelines

By Leslie Ridgeway
If you’re thinking about canceling your mammogram after reading about guidelines recently announced by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, USC breast cancer experts urge you to keep the appointment.

The guidelines, which state that most women under age 50 do not need routine mammograms, have left many women puzzled about what they should do to prevent breast cancer. If a woman doesn’t have a family history of breast cancer, should she stop scheduling an annual mammogram between ages 40-49? Should she only have a mammogram if she has a family history of breast cancer? If she has been diagnosed with breast cancer, should she get a mammogram as well?

“You helped place the cancer treatment and legislation, when decisions are being made about which tests and procedures should be covered by health insurance.”

Ridgeway, a former USC breast cancer researcher, noted that health care legislation is currently under consideration by Congress. When decisions are being made about which tests and procedures should be covered by health insurance.”

USC celebrates 50-year tenure of pharmacy professor Walter Wolf

By Kukla Vera
While many things have changed at USC over the last 50 years, professor Walter Wolf has remained a consistent force at the School of Pharmacy.

Wolf, one of only 20 faculty members holding the title of Distinguished Professor, started his USC career in the chemistry department in 1959, moving to the School of Pharmacy in 1962.

Since then, Wolf has shepherd hundreds of students through the school’s Pharm.D., Ph.D. and M.S. programs. Many of those students were among the Trojans gathered at the Edmondson Faculty Center on the Health Sciences Campus Nov. 7 to celebrate his milestone.

“USC School of Pharmacy ahead of the curve. With skill and devotion, with insight and great talent, you advanced pharmaceutical studies and the training of newer generations of pharmacists and scientists.”

President Steven B. Sample wrote in a letter read by School of Pharmacy Dean Edmondson Faculty Center on the Health Sciences Campus Nov. 7 to celebrate his milestone.
Columbia University honors USC diabetes expert Richard Bergman

By Leslie Ridgeway

For his achievements in research on type 2 diabetes, Richard Bergman has been honored with the Naomi Berrie Award for Outstanding Achievement in Diabetes Research from Columbia University Medical Center. The award, designed to promote and recognize outstanding accomplishments in the field of diabetes research, gives Bergman $100,000 to support a two-year research fellowship for a student or research fellow in his lab.

Bergman, professor and chair of the Department of Physiology & Biophysics, accepted the award at the 11th Annual Frontiers in Diabetes Research conference on Nov. 14.

“It’s a great honor for me and my colleagues to receive the Naomi Berrie Diabetes Award,” said Bergman. “It is equally honorific to be listed among the previous recipients, who are among the best diabetes researchers in the world. I am very much looking forward to the arrival in my lab of Dr. Jossiane Brousard, who will be supported by the Berrie (award). She is a young investigator with enormous potential.”

One of Bergman’s most important contributions to diabetes research is the definition of the “disposition index,” a predictor of risk for type 2 diabetes. The disposition index describes the capacity of the pancreatic β-cells to secrete additional insulin to compensate over time for alterations in insulin sensitivity. It is now known that the disposition index is inherited, and is a potent predictor of long-term normality versus instability of glucose levels.

The diabetes research community has extensively used Bergman’s minimal model analysis to study the regulation of metabolic functions under a variety of environmental and genetically influenced conditions. Large-scale epidemiologic and genetic studies of diabetes and related diseases have been made possible by the analysis of Bergman and his colleagues.

Bergman’s other major contributions to understanding endocrine regulation and metabolism include discovering sensors for glucose in the abdominal portal vein that are the first line of defense in the counter-regulatory response to hypoglycemia. This latter work has important implications for countering hypoglycemia in type 1 diabetes mellitus.

Bergman received the Banting Medal for Scientific Achievement in 2006 as well as the Man of Distinction Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004, both from the American Diabetes Association.

He is a graduate of the Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland, Ohio, where he received a bachelor’s degree in biomedical engineering in 1965. In 1971, he received his Ph.D. in physiology from the University of Pittsburgh Medical School.
KECK WEB: Renovation aims for user-friendliness, efficiency in updating content

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and Marketing. “The goal is to produce a site that better serves the increasing Web needs of the Keck School community while effectively representing the Keck School to external audiences with impactful pages.” Highlights of the new site will include: a new master calendar application for all Health Sciences Campus events, searchable databases to help researchers connect and keep apprised of ongoing studies, and integration of more interactive applications.

In the days ahead, academic departments and key administrative units will receive instructions for reviewing their current content. “Each unit needs to ‘own’ their content, and we need a thoughtful review to determine what content is outdated, what content should be kept, and what content should be developed,” Brust said. Interviews with and surveys of Keck faculty, staff and students were conducted last spring to assess the Web needs of Keck School constituents including alumni, donors and prospective students.

Reviews of other medical school sites, analysis of current Keck site utilization and other research laid the groundwork for a preliminary Web strategy and work plan. A new, user-friendly content management system emerged as the highest priority, and such a system has been purchased to simplify the process of updating and expanding the new Web site going forward. “Web sites are like living organisms, they constantly evolve,” Brust said. “In this era of growth among all Keck School programs, we need to be sure our site matches the caliber of our faculty and students and all those whom we serve.”

The first phase of the project will produce a new design template, updated and enhanced content (text and images) for the most visible pages on the site, and restructured navigation and organization.

The launching of the new site will mark the conclusion of the first phase and the beginning of the second phase, in which more pages on the site will be updated and put into the new design template. More new functions and technologies will be integrated into the site in this phase.


The Keck School Web re-development project follows the recent launch of other new sites for the Health Sciences Campus including the award-winning Doctors of USC site launched in July 2008, and new sites for USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital, unveiled in 2009. PR and Marketing staff teamed up with Swanson Russell on all three sites. Eventually, all three clinical sites will be well-integrated with the new Keck School site.

‘Web sites are like living organisms, they constantly evolve. In this era of growth among all Keck School programs, we need to be sure our site matches the caliber of our faculty and students and all those whom we serve.’

—Jane Brust, senior associate vice president, USC Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing

BRAUN: ‘Academic medicine is one of our country’s most precious public goods’

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private practices of the Doctors of USC into one health care system, effective July 1.

The ultimate goal is to create a vibrant academic medical center that enhances the productivity and prestige of the medical school, the faculty and the hospitals and the university as a whole. “Academic medicine is one of our country’s most precious public goods,” Braun said. “I’m committed to promoting awareness of its mission to educate the next generation of physicians and scientists, to provide specialized care for those most in need, and to advance medical research that can lead to new therapies and disease prevention. I truly treasure those who generously give of themselves and their resources to fulfill a shared vision for the advancement of academic medicine.”

Prior to joining the University of Florida, Braun worked at the University of Michigan in Medical Development and Alumni Relations. She was the first fundraiser to bridge development efforts between pediatrics and C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital, leading to the Champions for Children Campaign, which resulted in the construction of a new children’s hospital.

Prior to moving into development, Braun spent 13 years in educational sales with a subsidiary of Berkshire-Hathaway. She earned both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in communications from Eastern Michigan University.

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

A Nov. 30 Los Angeles Times article quoted Jeff Goad, Steven Chen and Kathy Besinque from the School of Pharmacy about how pharmacists play an important role in health care by serving as resources about drug use and effectiveness.

A Nov. 23 Los Angeles Times article quoted associate professor of medicine and co-director of the Lee Brotman Center at USC Norris Cancer Hospital Christy Russell about new mammogram guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. KABC-TV also interviewed Russell about the guidelines.

A Nov. 22 New York Post article quoted professor of obstetrics and gynecology and chief of the division of reproductive endocrinology and infertility Richard Paulson about a report that a 49-year-old patient at a fertility center in New York gave birth to a baby conceived with her own egg frozen at age 48—the oldest on record.

On Nov. 20, KCBS-TV interviewed professor of clinical pathology and obstetrics Juan Felix about new cervical cancer screening guidelines.

A Nov. 19 Nashville Business Journal article reported that D. Brent Polk has been named chair of the Department of Pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine and chair of pediatrics and vice president of academic affairs at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, which is affiliated with the Keck School. A MedCenter Today Online article also reported on the announcement.

On Nov. 19, ABC News.com noted USC is one of a number of American medical centers recommending that women not follow new mammogram guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

On Nov. 18, the TV show “The Doctors” featured professor of ophthalmology Mark Humayun and the retinal implant project.

A Nov. 17 Los Angeles Times article quoted surgical resident Heather Rosen about a study she led while at Harvard Medical School which found that trauma patients without health insurance are more likely to die than people who belong to a health plan. A widely carried Associated Press article, National Public Radio, ABC News, Reuters, CBS News, Nature, MedPage Today, and the Huffington Post also quoted Rosen on the study.
Calendar of Events

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

Saturday, Dec. 5
8 a.m. ESOM Continuing Medical Education Seminar “Breast Cancer Update: State of the Art for the Primary Physician,” Various speakers. NRT Arsey Conference Ctr. Info: (323) 442-2855

Monday, Dec. 7


Tuesday, Dec. 8
8 a.m. Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Grand Rounds. “Inflammatory Skin Diseases for the General Surgical Pathologist,” Mark Wick, Univ. of Virginia Health System. NOR 7-409. Info: (323) 442-1180
10:30 a.m. University Hospital Gould Holiday Luncheon. “Overlapping Drugs,” Kathy Bualong, USC. USH Inpatient Care. Info: (323) 254-0600

Wednesday, Dec. 9
8:30 a.m. “Radiographic Evaluation of Pulmonary Vasculature,” Jabi Shriki, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923
Noon. “Molecular Imaging: Modalities, Methods and Utility,” Rossen Jirad, USC. NML East Conference Rm. RSVP: usccer@usc.edu

Noon. “Vitamin D,” John Sim, Kaiser Permanente. GNH 4420. Info: (323) 226-7307

Friday, Dec. 11
Noon. GI Grand Rounds. “Case Presentations,” Sarto Khemichian, USC. OPT ASC129. Info: (323) 409-7995

Monday, Dec. 14


Wednesday, Dec. 16

Friday, Dec. 18
Noon. GI Grand Rounds. “Case Presentations,” Kian Keyashian, USC. OPT ASC139. Info: (323) 409-7995

Monday, Dec. 21

Wednesday, Dec. 23
8:30 a.m. “Blood Pressure Management in Neurocritical Care,” Nerses Sandossian, 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 The Weekly, KAM 400 or fax to (323) 442-2852, or e-mail to eblassow@usc.edu. Entries must include date, day, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location, and a phone number for information.

Medical students connect with donors at scholarship luncheon

By Sara Reeve
For fourth-year medical student Grant Shiflett, the decision to attend medical school was a need instead of a choice. “Medicine is a calling with an almost gravitational pull,” said Shiflett, speaking at the annual Keck School Scholarship luncheon on Nov. 4 at Hoffman Hall. “The decision to go into medicine is not programmatic—it’s about passion.”

The cost of attending the Keck School of Medicine can be prohibitive for some of the best prospective students. According to Henri Ford, vice dean for medical education, the average cost of attending for one year is $63,000, which includes tuition, fees, books and living expenses. The average debt load for graduating Keck School students is $71,000. “To help reduce that amount, many students rely on the generosity of donors who provide funds for scholarships. The luncheon gave 29 medical students an opportunity to meet these donors and thank them.”

Shiflett, the student speaker at the event, told the audience that scholarship funds have opened tremendous opportunities to study, pursue research and travel. “With your support, the heart and soul of medicine is safe,” he said. “Your love and generosity give us the opportunity to do what we love most—practice medicine.”

Ford noted that by providing funds to support the education of Keck students, donors are helping to improve the health care of California. “Seventy percent of our graduates end up practicing in California, so you are actually investing in your future doctors who will take care of you and your family members in years to come,” he said.

Take The Weekly readership survey

To make the The Weekly more responsive, useful and informative, we are conducting an online readership survey through the end of December. We will compile the survey results and report back in the new year with a story on your feedback, as well as on any changes to this publication that we feel are appropriate based on survey responses. Please take five minutes to complete the nine-question survey at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FD8LX5E