Board of Trustees names Max Nikias as next USC president

C. L. Max Nikias, USC executive vice president and provost, will become the 11th president of USC on Aug. 3. His appointment was announced March 11 by Edward P. Roski Jr., chairman of the USC Board of Trustees.

Nikias will succeed Steven B. Sample, who has led USC since 1991. In November 2009, Sample announced his decision to retire Aug. 2, 2010.

Over the course of his career as a researcher, educator and university administrator, Nikias has earned accolades for his leadership, innovation and fundraising, as well as his ability to build partnerships among varied constituencies.

As President Sample’s second-ranking officer since 2005, Nikias is credited with accelerating the university’s recent academic momentum, recruiting new leadership, strengthening the academic and medical enterprise, helping attract a series of major donations to the institution, creating innovative cross-disciplinary programs, enhancing the university’s globalization efforts and increasing support for students at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels.

Nikias’ selection by the Board of Trustees followed a search process that involved an advisory committee of trustees and senior faculty representatives, working with R. William Funk & Associates, one of the nation’s premier search consulting firms serving higher education. Between November 2009 and January 2010 the advisory committee met with 15 key USC constituent groups, including students, faculty, alumni leaders, community representatives, staff and various university supporters and friends. After reviewing approximately 75 candidates, the committee interviewed seven finalists, all of whom were senior presidents or provosts at major universities.

“It is a testament to Max Nikias’ abilities that, from such an impressive group of educators, he was unanimously recommended by the advisory committee,” Roski said. “During his 19 years as a faculty member and administrator at USC, he has provided distinguished service to the university in a variety of roles. He is a remarkable researcher, educator and leader. USC is fortunate to have him as our next president.”

President Sample praised the appointment and said he has long believed that Max Nikias is one of the country’s most talented provosts. “I’m delighted to have a successor whose keen vision and energy will keep the university moving ahead at a rapid pace. USC will be in excellent hands with Max as president.”

USC study faults drug research for lack of comparative effectiveness

By Leslie Ridgeway

An analysis by researchers at the Keck School of Medicine has found that only 32 percent of medication studies published in top medical journals compare the effectiveness of existing treatments.

These studies, known as comparative effectiveness studies, help doctors know which therapies work best and under what circumstances they are most effective. More government funding and other changes are needed to promote comparative effectiveness studies and improve their quality, according to the study’s co-authors, Michael Hochman, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School, and Danny McCormick, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School.

The study, “Characteristics of Published Comparative Effectiveness Studies of Medications,” published in the March 10 edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), provides the first formal analysis of comparative effectiveness research, which is a priority issue for the Obama Administration. Last year, Congress appropriated $1.1 billion in funding for comparative effectiveness studies as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“Research on new therapies is, of course, critical for scientific advance-
Colorectal cancer survivors and families vow to fight on at USC Norris event

By Katie Neith

Survivors of colorectal cancer and their families gathered with physicians, nurses and staff for the tenth annual Patient Reception March 6 in the first floor lobby of the USC Norris Cancer Hospital. March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

Jennifer Weir, a stage IV colon cancer survivor who was diagnosed at the age of 39, shared her success story about being treated at USC Norris twice in two years.

“I currently have no evidence of disease. I can’t say enough about this cozy little hospital that means so much to me,” said Weir.

She also commented on another event that happened that weekend in Los Angeles—the Oscars, stating that while movie stars get a lot of attention, “the famous are rarely significant and that the significant are rarely famous.”

“Think about all the very significant people in this room, including the research scientists and the doctors that encourage us and hold our hands,” said Weir.

Heinz-Josef Lenz, professor of medicine and preventive medicine in the division of medical oncology at the Keck School of Medicine, presented the inaugural “Spirit Award of the Norris” to the wife and son of Martin Franco, a patient who has been fighting colorectal cancer at USC Norris for over seven years. Lenz cited the support of family as critical to the overall success of cancer treatment.

He also took a moment to thank the patients and reflect on the positive effect they have had on him.

“My interactions with patients make me a better person,” said Lenz. “I am amazed at the resiliency, and the courage and the willingness to fight and help others along. This is an amazing virtue that all of us, as patients, bring to us.”

In opening the event, Lenz said, “Over the past 10 years, colon cancer [treatment] has made tremendous progress. For the first time … we are talking about a cure.’”

He emphasized that a commitment to basic research and tailored therapies at USC has contributed to the progress, as well as investments from nonprofits that have helped develop new cancer therapies.

“AT USC, personalized medicine is an everyday reality. This is still flight and dream in most centers in the U.S. and the world,” said Lenz, who is also associate director of clinical research of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, chair of the GI Oncology Program and co-director of the Colorectal Center. “We will never give up until we really have the treatment to cure this terrible disease.”

Julie Croner, executive administrator for the USC Norris Cancer Services, Andreas M. Kaiser, associate professor of clinical surgery in the division of colorectal surgery, and Anthony El-Khoueiry, assistant professor of clinical medicine and director of the Clinical Investigations Support Office at USC Norris, also spoke to the group about improvements in patient care, surgery and clinical trials, respectively. Selma Schimmel, a cancer survivor and patient advocate, spoke about the importance of partnerships between doctors and their patients.

“Feast to wine, cheese, and an assortment of other appetizers during a reception that featured a harpist, the event offered the chance for past patients and their families to celebrate life with the physicians who treated them at USC Norris. The theme of the event was “Together We Fight On.”
American Society for Clinical Investigation honors USC researchers

By Katie Neith

Two faculty members from the Department of Medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC have been elected to the American Society for Clinical Investigation (ASCI).

Alan Yu, associate professor of medicine, and Tzung Hsiai, the Mary G. and Robert G. Lane Early Career Chair and associate professor of biomedical engineering at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering with a joint appointment in medicine at the Keck School, were named members of the prestigious society as part of a nomination process that takes place once annually.

The ASCI is an honorary society of physician-scientists who translate findings in the laboratory to the advancement of clinical practice. Each year, ASCI members nominate those they feel have had significant accomplishments at a relatively early age—45 or younger—in their careers. Founded in 1908, the society is home to more than 2,800 members who are in the upper ranks of academic medicine.

“This is an extraordinary honor in academic medicine, particularly for young physician-scientists,” said Edward Crandall, chair of the Department of Development and Philanthropy.

Added Nikias: “For the greatest honor to be given this opportunity by USC’s Board of Trustees—Dr. McNab’s fund, to work toward realizing the dreams and aspirations of the Trojan Family. The Trustees have committed themselves wholeheartedly to continuing the historic, rapid ascent begun by Steve Sample—and even to accelerating USC’s momentum based on opportunities that lie before us.

This incredible, wide-ranging university represents an electric environment, one remarkably skilled at producing new ideas and new leaders to strengthen our society. Moving USC forward, and accelerating its breathtaking momentum, strikes me as the most rewarding endeavor in American higher education today.”

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Nikias launched other initiatives, including a quarter-billion-dollar campaign to establish the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education.

Nikias was a member of the National Academy of Engineering and a Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the California Council on Science and Technology, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He is the recipient of the 2008 IEEE Simon Ramo Medal.

NIKIAS: ‘To be able to lead this Trojan Family now is the opportunity of a lifetime’

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

A March 16 Los Angeles Times article quoted professor of medicine in the cardiovascular division Robert Klöner about a new study showing that erectile dysfunction is a strong predictor of fatal heart ailments.

A March 14 San Diego Union-Tribune article reported that the Keck School received a $100,000 grant from the St. Baldrick’s Foundation, which raises money for children’s cancer research and treatment, to create a follow-up care center that will track pediatric cancer patients into adulthood.

A March 9 Los Angeles Times article featured a study by assistant professor of clinical medicine Michael Hochman and a Harvard University colleague which found that only 32 percent of medication studies published in top medical journals compared the effectiveness of existing treatments. "Reuters, Newsweek, The Boston Globe, Modern Healthcare, BusinessWeek, Nature, Scientific American, MedPage Today and a widely carried HealthDay News story also covered the research. On March 10, the Los Angeles Times ran an op-ed by Hochman about the study.

A March 6 Asian News International article featured a study by professor of radiology and orthopedic surgery at the Keck School and Childrens Hospital Los Angeles Vicente Gilsanz and a colleague at McGill University which suggested a link between vitamin D insufficiency and increased body fat, decreased muscle strength and a range of other disorders.

A March 5 Long Beach Press-Telegram article cited USC research which found that children living or attending school close to major trade corridors suffered disproportionately high asthma rates.

This is an extraordinary honor in academic medicine, particularly for young physician-scientists’ —Edward Crandall, chair of the Keck School Department of Medicine
Global health funding expert Joe Cerrell says major successes going unnoticed

By Katie Neith

In a recent visit to the Health Sciences Campus, Joe Cerrell, USC alumnus and director of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Europe Office, aimed to change what he sees as the negative story of global health.

“For many Americans, and perhaps for many in this room, the old dominant story of global health is one of problems, of desperation, of guilt and an enduring crisis,” said Cerrell at “Global Advocacy, Policy and Change,” a Global Health Lecture Series: Visions for Change event held March 3 at the Aresty Auditorium.

An expert in global health funding and advocacy, Cerrell said the truth—and the story that needs to be told—is that we have made tremendous strides in global health.

“Until we get much better at conveying the progress and successes that we’ve seen in global health in the last century, we will have a very difficult time sustaining, much less increasing, global investments in global health in the future,” he said.

Using examples from the Gates Foundation’s Living Proof Project, Cerrell outlined key areas where U.S. and global investments have made a measurable impact in the health and lives of people around the world. He cited decreases in child deaths, improvements in HIV/AIDS drug delivery as a few examples of accomplishment.

“People want to invest in success, not failure, so we need to share the proof—the living proof—that America’s generosity, and the world’s generosity, is in fact making a difference,” said Cerrell, calling on the audience to help tell a new positive story of global health.

He said it is important for the public to know that investments in global health are working in order to support U.S. funding of global health.

“This is the most effective investment the governments can make for saving lives,” he emphasized.

Cerrell also spoke at the University Park Campus on March 2. The Visions for Change lecture series is a partnership between the Norman Lear Center’s Hollywood, Health & Society and the USC Institute for Global Health.

For more information on the Gates Foundation’s Living Proof Project, visit: www.gatesfoundation.org/livingproofproject

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.

Calendar of Events

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

Monday, Mar. 22

Tuesday, Mar. 23


Wednesday, Mar. 24
8:30 a.m. “Lung Transplant,” Michael McFadden, USC. IRB 732. Info: (323) 226-7923


Noon. “Financing a Cancer in Primary Care,” Hector Flores and Chris Hocoma, White Memorial Medical Center. Jackie Ruby, USC. HMR 100. Info: (323) 442-1678

Thursday, Mar. 25
Noon. BROM Cellular Homeostasis Lecture Series. “MicroRNA Regulation of Cell Fate Decisions,” Despok Stravastoa, USC. San Francisco. MGH 156. Info: (323) 442-3109

4 p.m. “Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura: Is the Management Paradigm Changing?” James George, Univ. of Oklahoma. NRT LG053. Info: (323) 865-3913

Friday, Mar. 26
8 a.m. Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Grand Rounds “Medico-Legal Death Investigation in LA County – Unusual Case Scenarios,” Lakshman Sutharwajawanam, USC. NOR 7409. Info: (323) 442-1150

8:30 a.m. Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine Lecture “Metalloproteinases: Effectors of Inflammation.” William Furst, Univ. of Washington. IRB 732. Info: (323) 226-7923

3:30 p.m. “Thrombotic Thrombocytopenic Purpura: A Community Perspective,” James George, Univ. of Oklahoma. IPT 221/241. Info: (323) 865-1913


Noon. “Case Presentations,” Angi Sadeghi, USC. OPT ASC/129. Info: (323) 409-7995

Wednesday, Mar. 31
8:30 a.m. “Classification of Lung Cancer,” Michael Koss, USC. IRB 732. Info: (323) 226-7923

1 – 5 p.m. BROM Parent’s Association “Mini-Medical Day.” Various speakers, campus and LAC-USC. Tows. KAM Meyer Aud. Info: (323) 442-1084

Thursday, Apr. 1
Noon. BROM Cellular Homeostasis Lecture Series. “Role of Pred-1 in Adipogenesis and Mesenchymal Cell Fusion.” Ha Suh, UC Berkeley. MGH 156. Info: (323) 442-3109

Tuesday, Apr. 6

Wednesday, Apr. 7

Thursday, Apr. 8