USC Norris Festival of Life celebrates cancer survivors

By Ryan Ball

A pair of novelty T-shirts worn by a couple in the crowd said what a lot of people were thinking: “Cancer Sucks.”

But there was another message made loud and clear at the 20th annual Festival of Life: “There is hope.” Rather than being printed on sturdy cotton, that message was worn on the faces of more than 700 cancer survivors and family members gathered on the USC Health Sciences Campus on June 5. Held in recognition of National Cancer Survivors Day, the event was hosted by the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hospital.

Art Ulene, a Norris Cancer Center advisory board member and former Today Show medical correspondent, was there for the very first Festival of Life in 1991, and says the event took on a whole new meaning when he received his own cancer diagnosis about 10 years ago.

Back again to emcee this year’s gathering, he said the event is more than a way to honor cancer patients past and present.

“It’s a celebration of the extraordinary work being done by the doctors and the researchers who are here,” Ulene stated. “It’s a celebration of the people who have helped us get through an experience with cancer. It’s a celebration of the future, a message of hope to patients in the hospital right now.”

Also speaking at the event was Rick Selby, professor of surgery at the Keck School of Medicine, another physician who had his own bout with the big C. He said the Festival of Life helps raise enthusiasm for active research that is changing the way doctors treat cancer.

USC researchers discover new subtype of brain cancer

A study conducted by a collaborative team led by USC researchers may lead to better insight into the clinical outcome for some patients with a particularly aggressive type of brain cancer. The research may also provide a framework for development of targeted drug treatments.

The research by The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), published online in the journal Cancer Cell, used epigenomics to determine that tumor DNA methylation profiles were distinctly different in about 10 percent of patients with glioblastoma multiforme (GBM).

“Most GBM patients survive fewer than 15 months, and fewer than 10 percent live more than five years,” said Peter W. Laird of the USC Epigenome Center, who led the TCGA team in collaboration with Kenneth Aldape at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Stephen B. Baylin at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and many other TCGA consortium members. “With this research, we have identified a subset of patients with a distinct type of GBM that have substantially better clinical outcomes, with a median survival time of more than three years from the time of diagnosis.”

Epigenomics is the study of how DNA is packaged and marked to control which genes can be used in a particular type of cell or tissue. The distribution of one of these marks along the DNA, called DNA methylation, is often abnormal in cancer, contributing to the disease process. The characteristic epigenetic profile discovered by the TCGA team is called G-CIMP (Glioma CpG Island Methylator Phenotype) and was found to occur in much.
Ocular prosthesis offers ‘new lease on life’ for patients

By Leslie Ridgeway

A special prosthesis that fits over the entire eye is bringing hope to patients suffering from corneal irregularities and severe dry eye.

The Boston Ocular Surface Prosthesis (BOS-P) is now available at the Perry Rosenthal Clinic at the Doheny Eye Institute: the prosthesis, about the size of a quarter, bathes the eye in saline solution and is thin enough that the patient can easily blink. The prosthesis are custom designed and fitted to each patient, who is then trained on proper insertion.

25 patients with the prosthesis and is working with many others from throughout the United States. The clinic is led by Yiu, John Irvine, executive director, and Gloria Chiu, chief optometrist. “The device is designed for patients with keratoconus, a degenerative disease that affects the cornea, as well as other painful and potentially blinding diseases and conditions such as post-corneal transplant astigmatism and severe dry eye. The saline solution is poured into a well in the center of the prosthesis. When the prosthesis is placed correctly, the patient can see through the saline solution. The saline solution serves as a kind of protective ‘bandage’ on the eye. “The scleral footing of the prosthesis, along with the ability to bathe the cornea in fluid, allows a tremendous amount of improvement in selected patients’ vision, comfort and quality of life,” said Irvine. “Recognition of its potential for patient comfort and rehabilitation is growing. More physicians are weighing in on the device, which allows for positive feedback for further development.” After being fitted for and trained to use the prosthesis, patients return to the clinic for regular lens maintenance. Cost for the prosthesis is in the $7,000 range for patients without insurance. Irvine and Yiu are working to find a way to offer financial assistance to qualified patients, once funding becomes available.

Ocular prosthesis offers ‘new lease on life’ for patients

The council is expected to meet at least several times a year to address concerns and issues that arise from discussions.

Members of the Dean’s Community Leadership Council are:

- Father Greg Boyle, S.J., founder, Homeboy Industries
- Dr. Alan Cohen, executive director, Nobel Health
- Jorge C. Corrales, chair & CEO, Latino Business Chamber of Greater Los Angeles
- J. Lorraine Estrada, chief executive officer, Arroyo Vista Family Health Center; represented at the meeting by Irene Holguín, director of community outreach
- The Honorable Juan Marcos Gutiérrez González, counsel general, Consulado General de México, represented at the meeting by María Sánchez, health window coordinator
- Steve Kasten, president, Lincoln Heights Chamber of Commerce
- Alicia Maldonado, president, Boyle Heights Chamber of Commerce
- Warren K. Zachary, president & CEO, White Memorial Medical Center, represented at the meeting by Roland Fargo, vice president, business development
- Richard Zaldivar, president & founder, The Wall las Memorias Oral Health Center
- Laurie Stone—USC Office of the General Counsel
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ETHICS: Award honors openness, compliance

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reporting guidelines for facility, the use of the RepTiA program in order to keep track of visiting industry partners and other measures that make productive, appropriate relations with industry easier.

Hinds said that the new structure and the openness of the whole process have made adhering to compliance policies, as well as reporting any concerns or problems, simpler for staff and faculty members.

“We aim to be very inclusive and accessible for any of our community members who have questions about the program,” she said. Avishai Sadan, dean of the Outst School of Dentistry, praised Abelson and Hinds’ leadership in implementing the new program throughout the school.

“In the ever-changing world of regulations which govern institutions such as USC, the Outst School of Dentistry has been able to adapt to new guidelines and new technologies while maintaining an environment that encourages productive, professional relationships with patients, students, visitors and industry partners,” Sadan said. “This environment fosters research growth, improves education, enhances patient care and helps us to better fulfill our mission.”

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By Sara Reves

The question of how to tackle challenges associated with an aging population was the topic of the day at an interdisciplinary conference hosted by the USC Davis School of Gerontology and the USC Office of the Vice Provost for Research Advance-

ment on April 20.

The event, held in the Da-

vidson Conference Center on the University Park Campus, featured presentations from USC faculty from a wide variety of disciplines—from genomics to research architecture, medicine to public policy.

“When Social Security was created, life expectancy was 65—most people didn’t live to retirement,” said Randolph Hall, vice provost for research advancement. “The question now is, ‘How do we maintain a high quality of life as we age?’”

J.C. Chen, associate profes-
sor of environmental health at the Keck School of Medicine, presented information about urban living and its effect on cancer and the elderly. “Urbanization is likely the single most important demo-

graphic shift worldwide for the past century and continuing into the 21st century,” he said.

According to Chen, while urban living has several advantages for older people, including improved access to health care, arts and culture, issues of crime, pollution and social isolation pose distinct challenges. “Air pollution, in particular, seems to cause increased harm to elderly. Chen stated that older people may be more sensitive to pollution due to a variety of factors, including reduced capacities for detoxification, increased cell damages and decreased capabilities for cell repairs. “One year’s worth of average urban exposure to ozone is associated with poor performance in cognitive tests for coding ability, attention and short-term memory,” he noted.

A hot topic at the con-

ference was the issue of Alzheimer’s Disease, with several presenters speak-
ing about different aspects of related research. Roberta Diaz Brinton, the R. Pete Vanderveen Endowed Chair in Therapeutic Discovery and Development at the USC School of Pharmacy, presented findings regarding the bisennergetics of menopause and the brain. Her research shows that estrogen helps to promote the brain’s use of glucose for energy.

“When there is a decline in estrogen in the brain, it’s not as if the entire brain can’t function, but you just are down 25 to 30 percent in your ability to generate energy,” said Brinton. “A 25 to 30 percent drop actually hurts. In the case of your bisennergetic portfolio, you have a limited window of opportunity to restore this system. This has lasting consequences for sus-
taining the cognitive ability.”

Other highlights from the conference included a presen-
tation from Carolee Weinstein, professor of biokineiology and physical therapy and director of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Technologies for Successful Aging with Disability, she discussed the center’s projects harnessing technology to slow the progress of disability for older people. Technology lunch sessions that allowed attendees to interact with robots and virtual reality games designed for older adults.

To view a webinar of the en-
tire day’s panel presentations, visit www.usc.edu/dept/gero/USC AgingResearch.

Clinical marketing programs hit a home run for USC hospitals

Four marketing projects for the USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital have garnered five awards in a recent national competition.

The four entries produced in 2009 received recognition in the Healthcare Marketing Report competition, which garnered more than 4,000 entries nationwide. The Healthcare Marketing Report is considered the national newspaper for healthcare marketers.

The awards include:

• Gold Award in the special video production category for the USC Institute of Urology video featuring interviews with Inderbir Gill and actress Shirley Maclaine. The video was produced for posting on the Institute’s website.

• Silver Award in the professional recruitment category for the full-page nurse recruitment ad appearing in Trojan Family Magazine. The ad says the USC hospitals are “looking for nurses who work like Trojans.”

The award-winning work was created by the USC Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing staff in collaboration with Swanson Russell, the agency responsible for leading the development of the USC hospitals’ “Fight On” marketing campaign launched in January.

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CANCER: Findings will help detection

Cell, builds off of this publicly available data and provides a unique and informa-
tive look at the epigenome of patients suffering from this most aggressive cancer. The USC epigenome Center (http://epigenome.usc.edu/), led by Laird, is one of the nation’s first research centers focused on the genome-scale study of epi-

genesics. Created with a $10 million gift from the Kenneth T’Eileen L. Norris Foundation, the center is one of the lead-
ing institutions for epigenomic research, a field that shows great promise for cancer and disease research. The center is affili-
ated with the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Most analytic TCGA datasets are publicly available to the research community through a web database, http://cancergenome.nih.gov/datasets. To learn more about TCGA, including Quick Facts, Q&A, graphics, glossary, a brief guide to genomics and a media library of available images, visit http://cancergenome.nih.gov.

Novakshobe H. et al., Identification of a Cycl-Island Methylation Phenotype that Defines a Distinct Subgroup of Glioma, Cancer Cell 12(2010), doi:10.1016/j.ccc.2010.03.017

Aging research seminar presents interdisciplinary perspectives

By Sara Reves

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Kulig Elected Catherine Worthingham Fellow

By Cathy Curtis

The Board of Directors of the American Physical Therapy Association has elected Kornelia Kulig, associate professor of clinical physical therapy, a Catherine Worthingham Fellow—the highest honor bestowed by the APTA.

The award recognizes “persons whose work has resulted in lasting and significant advances in the science, education, and practice of the profession of physical therapy.” Kulig, who joined the Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy in 1997, has played an instrumental role as principal investigator for the MUS-SEI (Muscle-Specific Strengthening Effectiveness Post Lumbar Micro-discectomy) project in the Physical Therapy Clinical Research Network (PTClinResNet). Kulig’s team has been evaluating the ability of muscle-specific strengthening to improve function and quality of life and reduce pain and disability in individuals who have undergone this post-surgical intervention.

In her nomination letter, Carollee Winston, principal investigator for PTClinResNet, praised Kulig for “her ideas, her passion, her intelligence, her hard work, and her unassuming personality; she has created a highly productive research environment.”

The more than 30 peer-reviewed papers published in a broad range of respected professional journals, Kulig has garnered over $500,000 in research funding to support clinical research in orthopedics.

Her efforts to improve scientific and clinical understanding of tissue morphology, biomechanics, neuropathology and pathology in relation to degenerative processes in tendons, intervertebral discs and muscles. Kulig is a three-time winner of the Physical Therapist Research Award in the Faculty category from the California chapter of the APTA for multi-authored publications. Winston wrote that the letters in support of Kulig singled out her ability to develop strong collaborative relationships with colleagues.

At USC, Kulig teaches coursework related to anatomy and biomechanics and is a clinical mentor in the orthopedic physical therapy residency program.

Her work as an educator has been recognized by major awards, including the APTA’s James A. Gould Excellence in Teaching Orthopaedic Physical Therapy Award (2002) and Dorothy R. Baetke–Eleanor J. Cazin Award for Excellence in Academic Teaching (2004). She was honored by the Division as Outstanding Teacher of the Year in 2002.

The sole female founding member of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists, Kulig has served in many capacities, including chair of the Nominating Committee and program reviewer for orthopedic residencies. She has also served on the APTA Task Force on Residency Accreditation.

Kulig holds a B.S. in physical therapy from Oakland University, Rochester, Mich., and an M.S. in physical therapy and physical education and Ph.D. in biomechanics, both from the Academy of Physical Education, Wroclaw, Poland. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Iowa.

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.