President Nikias gives first address to HSC faculty

“The USC hospitals have implemented a new team of physicians and support staff to help streamline and analyze requests for new technology purchases. The Value Analysis Committee (VAC) was launched earlier this year and evaluates the adoption of new products based on peer reviews by other physicians. These new products can include anything from grasper to robotic technologies. “The VAC is an important tool in our assessment of new technology,” said Chief Financial Officer Jon Spees. “This committee helps the hospitals respond to the needs of our physicians and patients, while at the same time recognizing the importance of effective supply chain management.” In this new process, physicians requesting a new product from the hospitals are asked to submit a request to the committee and then present their case for adopting the new technology at a VAC meeting.

Following a thorough evaluation that looks at impact to quality of care cost, and the potential for hospital-wide adoption, the committee makes a final decision. If the committee does not approve a request, an appeals process ensures the physician another chance to make the case.

Hospital administrators say the practice will help offset supply costs and streamline standardization efforts. “This is a best practice that occurs in most academic medical centers across the country,” said Jean Sargent, director of supply and materials management for the Health Sciences Campus. Nargert spearheaded the effort to launch the Value Analysis Committee. “It will help to ensure we are prudent with our expenses. We have existing physicians, returning physicians and new physicians, and we want to make sure we meet the needs of everyone.” The Value Analysis Committee is chaired by Chief Medical Officer Don Larsen, co-chaired by Dr. Marty Marx and Fred Weaver, and includes other USC physicians such as Ray Matthews, Namir Karkhouda and Earl Strum. Support staff on the committee includes representatives from administration, finance and nursing, among other departments.

“See this as yet another wonderful opportunity to include our physician leaders in the decision-making processes affecting our hospitals,” Larsen said. “I’m excited about what this committee will be able to accomplish.” In addition to review of new product proposals, the committee also handles standardization of products from outside vendors in the hospitals. Sargent said the committee is also looking at hospitals-wide product standardization as a way of ensuring better pricing on orders.

SUPPORTING ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH - Left, Congresswoman Linda Sanchez (D-CA) recently visited the USC Alzheimer Disease Research Center (ADRC), which received a nearly $11.5 million, five-year renewal from the National Institute on Aging. In an Aug. 19 meeting with Sanchez, Helena Chu (center), director of the ADRC and chair of the Department of Neurology at the Keck School of Medicine, and Lon Schneider (right), director of the clinical core of ADRC and professor of psychiatry, neurology and gerontology at the Keck School, discussed N.R. 2009, Cure and Understanding through Research for Alzheimer’s Act of 2009. The bill, which Sanchez supports, would ensure sufficient resources for Alzheimer research and education, with a particular emphasis on outreach to Hispanic populations. A main focus of the ADRC is outreach to the Hispanic community.
Scout gathering finds medical team well prepared (to serve 36,000)

By Ryan Ball

Whenever you get five boys together, it’s a good idea to have a first-aid kit handy. Multiply that number by 800 and you’re going to need much more than a box of Band-Aids and a bottle of peroxide.

Glenn Ault, assistant professor of colorectal surgery at the Keck School of Medicine and associate dean for clinical administration (LAC+USC Medical Center), knows it takes a serious medical installation, and generous help from the military, to look out for the well-being of 36,000 kids and their family members.

Ault served as Assistant Chief Medical Officer for the southern region at the recent Boy Scout Jamboree in Fredericksburg, Va.

Ault has been involved with the Boy Scouts of America since his own badge-earning days and was thrilled to have the opportunity to lead a team of nearly 800 medical services personnel in upholding the famous Scout motto, “Be Prepared.”

The 10-day ultimate campout took place at Fort A.P. Hill, a sprawling military base that saw so many visitors that, overnight, it became the seventh most populous city in the commonwealth of Virginia.

With two years of planning and 19 medical facilities scattered throughout the base, Ault and his colleagues were ready for anything and everything.

“We prepared for all different types of things: heat injury, storms and in today’s day and age, a shooter on the base,” Ault said.

Worst-case scenarios avoided, Ault and company mostly attended to routine injuries.

He said, “We had fractures, bumps and bruises, sprains, cuts and things like that. The majority of what we saw was rashes and insect bites. Seven kids had to be sent out with appendicitis and one kid had testicular torsion. The usual things you would expect to see with kids happened while we were there. That’s why we really focused on having E.R. physicians, pediatricians, and internists there in our clinics to be able to do that front-line primary care stuff.”

Being on a military installation afforded Ault the opportunity to work with a joint task force of the Northern Command based in Colorado Springs, where Ault and other team leaders did some training in March. Additional training took place in May at Fort A.P. Hill.

“Those guys were phenomenal to work with,” noted Ault. “I left there with a huge, tremendous respect for our military.”

The Air Force brought in an EMEDS unit, which is essentially an inflatable 50-bed mobile hospital that is currently being used in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This became known as Jamboree General, or Jambo General for short, and it was there for cases requiring more than routine first aid. There was also a pharmacy station and pediatrics, ophthalmology and dentistry clinics on site.

Ault said the jamboree provided an opportunity for him to give back to something that has helped shape his life, noting that the qualities scouting instills in a boy are the same qualities that make a good physician.

“Most of the time around here about people who do some really neat stuff as volunteers or as part of some community outreach, and I think it’s part of being a Trojan,” Ault concluded. “Whether it’s outreach, and I think it’s part of being a Trojan.”

Glenn Ault (center left), associate dean for clinical administration (LAC+USC Medical Center), recently helped lead a team of nearly 800 medical services personnel at the Boy Scouts of America’s annual Jamboree. With him are Lt. Col. Bradley Golden (left), nurse Ruth Reynolds (center right) and Lt. Col. Bradley Snow.

Primary Care Week 2010 set for Oct. 18-21

The Keck School of Medicine and Charles Drew University will host Primary Care Week 2010 (PCW 2010) from Oct. 18 through Oct. 21.

PCW 2010 aims to highlight, educate and celebrate the importance of primary care within the institutions and communities.

Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito will host the opening reception on Oct. 18 with keynote speaker Robert K. Ross, president and CEO of the California Endowment.

Registration begins on Sept. 1. Early reservations are encouraged as seating is limited.

For more information, visit http://tinyurl.com/2bsyulp or contact Yvonne Banzali, primary care community medicine coordinator, at Banzali@usc.edu or call (323) 442-1678.

Phyical Therapy unveils new center Sept. 10

The Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy at the Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry will host an open house Sept. 10 at the Bice Clinical Research Center.

The new facility has been customized for testing human research subjects and conducting clinical research trials and evidence-based practice in rehabilitation. The Bice Center enables research faculty to continue to attract collaborators, obtain outside funding for clinical research, and provide upgraded facilities for human subjects and visitors.

Located in the Center for Health Professions (CHP) building, the facility is named in recognition of alums and part chair of the Division’s Board of Councilors, Kathleen Bise, for her generosity in making the lead gift to establish the center.

The open house will be held from 1:30–3 p.m. in CHP 159 and is open to all Health Sciences Campus faculty and staff.

RSVP by e-mail at villagia@usc.edu or by calling (323) 442-1193.
USC hospitals launch Facebook page to strengthen ties to patients, community

By Leslie Ridgeway and Tania Chutla

‘We can stay connected with our patients, learn what they like about us, read their suggestions for improvement.’

—USC hospitals CEO Mitch Creem

Keck School researchers pursue blood-based biomarkers for cancer detection

Keck School of Medicine researchers will test whether a set of blood-based biomarkers can assist mammography in the early detection of breast cancer with a $180,000 grant announced from Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

The grant will fund research into whether specific biomarkers, or minute substances in the blood, can effectively distinguish breast cancer patients from their healthy counterparts and whether an inexpensive, less invasive screening strategy can be developed based on this approach.

‘Breast cancer progression is marked by increased levels of a DNA modification, known as DNA methylation, at certain positions in the human genome, and this increase can be detected in the blood from these patients,’ said investigator Simeen Malik, post-doctoral investigator at the USC Epigentome Center. ‘The research will help us detect these differences in the blood, an approach that may be more effective than current image-based screening techniques like mammography since it is based on the underlying biology of the tumor.’

These diagnostic tests could potentially be administered more frequently than mammography, which may result in earlier detection of breast tumor by 6-12 months, Malik said.

Malik and Peter W. Laird, director of the USC Epigenome Center, will lead the research in collaboration with investigators at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and City of Hope National Medical Center.

The Komen for the Cure grant is part of $2.8 million in research money Komen is investing in California medical institutions this year alone. These funds are part of a $59 million portfolio of research grants that Komen is funding in 2010 to find the cures for breast cancer and end the disease for good.

‘We can’t say it often enough: early detection saves lives and too few women are getting the screenings they should be getting today. This is a global issue, one that Susan G. Komen for the Cure is putting considerable energy into solving by funding research that may lead to more portable, accessible and more accurate breast cancer screening on a global scale,’ said Ambassador Nancy G. Brinker, founder and CEO of Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

NIKIAS: The largest fundraising campaign in university history will soon be announced

Continued from page 1

Referring to the original ability of the face of Helen of Troy to launch 1,000 ships, Nikias joked, “If the new face of Troy could bring our City of Troy to launch 1,000 ships, this would be a good effort to increase revenue.”

Attracting new interdisciplinary faculty who can serve as bridges between the two

USC campuses was also stated as a key priority by Nikias.

He acknowledged the recent $58.6 million Clinical and Translational Science Award presented to USC by the National Institutes of Health as an example of the stellar work that can be achieved when schools work together. The award-winning team is comprised of faculty from eight different schools at USC.

It is when our faculty, professors and students join with others and learn to challenge our views that discovery and invention can reach new levels on our campuses,” he said.

Key to all of these goals is an effort to increase revenue substantially.

Nikias told faculty to expect the announcement later this year of the largest fundraising campaign in university history.

While the effort ahead may seem daunting, Nikias affirmed that he believes the university’s position is strong, with plenty of untapped potential.

‘At the very moment when the center of gravity of our world is shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific, we will be able to extend USC’s influence where it lies most,’ he said. ‘Given USC’s location, our international heritage and our academic strengths, this university can hope to embody the intersection of the Pacific century and the biological century.’

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS


A second version of the article also ran in BusinessWeek and the San Francisco Chronicle.

An Aug. 22 front page Los Angeles Times article featured research by associate professor of molecular ecology and immunology Paula Cannon on the use of gene therapy to create HIV-resistant cells.

An Aug. 18 The New York Times article quoted professor of psychiatry, neurology and gerontology Lon Schneider about the failure of a promising Alzheimer’s drug in clinical trials.

An Aug. 22 Orange County Register article quoted Flora L. Thornton Chair of the Department of Preventive Medicine Jonathan Samet about a study on the health effects of cell phones.

An Aug. 11 Nature article featured assistant professor of cell and neurobiology Qi-Long Ying and colleagues, who successfully created the first “knockout” rats—animals that are genetically modified to lack one or more genes—through embryonic stem cell-based gene targeting.

Bloomberg News, in an Aug. 10 widely carried HealthDay News article, featured research by Keck School of Medicine student Tanmai Saxena and colleagues, who found that women who reported using estrogen hormone replacement therapy for 15 years or more had a 19 percent greater risk of breast cancer compared with women who never used hormone therapy.

NCI awards $2.5 million to USC cancer researcher

By Ellin Kavanagh

Fatih Uckun, professor of research pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine has been awarded $2.5 million from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to support development of a new class of anti-cancer drugs against acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), the most common form of cancer in children and adolescents.

Uckun and his colleagues have been developing rationally designed and cancer-specific nanomedicines that target the survival machinery of leukemia cells as potent cancer “smart bombs.”

“Our long-term goal is to translate recent research discoveries in nanotechnology and biotherapy into effective patient-tailored treatment programs for the most common form of childhood cancer,” said Uckun, who is a member of the Sahas Research Institute of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

The work will be accomplished in close collaboration with other member institutions of the NCI Alliance for Nanotechnology in Cancer.

Nanotechnology refers to science and engineering performed on a molecular level. Applied to oncology, nanotherapeutics can target the infrastructure of cancer.

“The development of these nanomedicines will be a significant step forward to overcome chemotherapy resistance in childhood leukemia,” added Paul Gaynor, professor of pediatrics and medical director of the Therapeutic Advances in Childhood Leukemia consortium.

Stuart Siegel, director of the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, said, “We are excited about these nanomedicines because they may provide the foundation for therapeutic innovation against childhood cancer.”

Center for Work and Family Life celebrates 30 years of service

The USC Center for Work and Family Life is celebrating its 30-year anniversary this year, and center staff encourages all employees to familiarize themselves with the range of free services available to University employees.

The center’s employee assistance and work-life programs are available to all benefits-eligible university faculty, staff and their dependent family members, and are meant to support a healthy balance between work and family life.

Among the services offered are confidential, short-term counseling services for a wide range of work-related and personal concerns, consultation and coaching on a variety of issues such as workplace human relations and family matters, and wellness classes on topics including stress management and communication.

“For 30 years the University has supported this program, which is focused on helping our faculty and staff to be productive in both their personal and professional lives,” said John Gaspari, the center’s executive director.

“We approach issues with our clients from both a problem-centered and a strength-based perspective, and our professionally trained and licensed staff is committed to supporting the health and well-being of all University employees.”

The center is open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is located in the Center for Health Professions, 1540 Alcazar Street, Room 234B.

For more information about programs and services, visit www.usc.edu/worklife or call (213) 821-0880.

For more information on the variety of wellness programs available at USC, visit http://wellness.usc.edu.

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.