Doctors of USC celebrates grand opening of Beverly Hills location

By Imelda Valenzuela

The cardinal and gold flag of USC was officially planted on the Westside of Los Angeles at the opening of the University’s newest clinical satellite, The Doctors of USC Beverly Hills. With over 100 administrators, faculty physicians, board members and other friends of the Trojan family in attendance, the opening reception was held at the beautifully appointed medical offices May 10.

“It’s been a dream to come to the Westside for USC,” said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito. “This is the beginning of a new era in USC medicine. We’re here to inaugurate this new outpost of USC medicine on the Westside.”

The Doctors of USC Beverly Hills is located in suites 300 and 500 of the Archway Medical Plaza building, at 9033 Wilshire Blvd at Wetherly. The new 14,000-square-foot location offers cutting-edge expertise from top specialists in three key areas of medicine, ophthalmology, urology and cancer care.

Neda Shameie, a leader in corneal transplantation, serves as medical director of the USC Doheny Eye Center, affiliated with USC’s nationally ranked Doheny Eye Institute. Puliafito, an expert in muscular degeneration, also is seeing patients at the USC Doheny Eye Center.

Leading oncologist David Agus sees patients in the USC Norris Westside Cancer Center, affiliated with the National Cancer Institute-designated USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. Ineldir Gill, executive director of the
Keck School, community leaders examine restructuring of ambulatory care in the DHS

‘You can find the very best of healthcare within DHS, but you can’t find it across DHS.’

—Mitchell H. Katz, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (DHS)

Mitchell H. Katz, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, discusses his goals for the organization at a Community Leadership Council convened by Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito. Katz said that when he first talked about making the move to DHS, he was hit with a lot of skepticism about the system and its potential for reform. But rather than focusing on the negative associations, Katz chose to look at what is working at DHS and try to systematize those elements.

The Weekly

By Ryan Ball

The latest meeting of Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito’s Community Leadership Council featured a presentation by Mitchell H. Katz, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (DHS). During the May 11 assembly, Katz spoke of the challenges he faces in overseeing the second largest health system in the United States, and detailed some of his plans for improving the quality of care low-income residents receive at Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center and other County public hospitals.

Katz came to DHS in January of 2011 after serving as director of health for the City of San Francisco for 13 years. He said his goal is to make DHS the best safety net in the country, and invited the community leaders present to take part in the process. “Systems don’t change because of one person,” he stated. Katz said that when he first began talking about making the move to DHS, he was hit with a lot of skepticism about the system and its potential for reform. But rather than focusing on the negative associations, Katz chose to look at what is working at DHS and try to systematize those elements.

You can find the very best of healthcare within DHS, but you can’t find it across DHS, Katz remarked, adding, “my job is to fix it so that the best of us is all of us.”

One of Katz’s primary goals is to establish relationships between patients and primary care providers so that patients aren’t going to the emergency room when they need to see a doctor.

Among Katz’s accomplishments to date is facilitating a direct contract with health plan provider L.A. Care, something DHS was previously unable to do. The contract ensures that roughly 30,000 elderly and disabled individuals currently being treated at LAC+USC aren’t bounced out of the system on July 1.

Puliafito praised Katz’s strategic plan for DHS, noting similarities to USC’s efforts to transform the culture of its private hospitals.

“It is about the culture,” said Puliafito. “That is the most precious thing we have — that engagement of superbly trained physicians who actually want to work here.”

The Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation awards CHLA $1.15 million for cancer clinical trials

The Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation (PCRF) has awarded a five-year, $1.15 million grant to support the Clinical Trials Program in the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

The grant will provide critical infrastructure support for clinical trials, and in gratitude, the hospital has named the program the Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation Clinical Trials Program.

This research will be overseen by Stuart E. Siegel, director of the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases and professor of pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine, Marcio G. da Silva, PhD, division head for Hematology-Oncology, Clinical Affairs and Clinical Research, and Leo M. Masuren, director of the Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation Clinical Trials Program and associate professor of pediatrics at the Keck School.

The Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation Clinical Trials Program identifies and tests new therapies intended to decrease toxicity of these treatments and improve patient outcomes and survival rates.

The program works closely with other pediatric cancer centers around the world to carry out the necessary clinical trials of new agents and new combinations of agents in a rapid and efficient manner to battle pediatric cancers. By coordinating its studies with the overall agenda of the national Children’s Oncology Group, Children’s Hospital Los Angeles has tangibly improved the outcome for children with previously resistant cancers and improved the initial treatment that children with cancer receive throughout the world.

Research breakthroughs in the treatment of childhood cancers during the past 50 years — many pioneered by physician-scientists at the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases — have helped the cure rate improve from 10 percent to 80 percent.

Still, one in five children will not survive their disease, and many survivors — up to two-thirds in recent studies — suffer some long-term consequences of their curative treatment.

Cancer is the number one cause of death by disease in children, teens and young adults in the United States,” said Siegel. “The road from initial idea to clinical application can be a long one for new anti-cancer agents, particularly for those agents to be used for pediatric cancers. Knowing that we can rely on the support of PCRF to move the results we get at the bench quickly to our patients is essential to our future success.”

Albinor Salas and his mother Patricia Lozano prepare to walk in honor of Lozano’s aunt at the 18th Annual Entertainment Industry Foundation Revlon Run/Walk For Women.

WALK: Event part of ‘inspirational day’

Continued from page 1

Cancer Center and Hospital also hosted a booth at the event’s Health Expo. Organized by the USC Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing Office, the booth attracted thousands of participants, who picked up copies of Noris publications and a drawstring backpack featuring the USC Norris Cancer Hospital and USC University Hospital logos.

“It was an inspirational day,” Strom said. “I was proud to be a part of it.”

Did we say that?

In the May 6 issue of The Weekly, a story on a major new Keck School of Medicine study appearing in Nature ran with the wrong headline. The story, available online at http://tinyurl.com/43aav53, should have been headlined, “Groundbreaking Keck School study shows human placenta’s role in synthesizing serotonin.”

The Weekly regrets the error.
By Pauline Vu

Claudia Martinez walked proudly across the Shrine Auditorium stage on May 15 to collect her degree from the Keck School of Medicine. “We anticipate that this will be a very important video conferencing center. “We anticipate to expand USC’s global reach, live and work on the Westside. While a few blocks from Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center, where she was born. Her mother worked as a seamstress where she was born. Her family lacked health insurance and would end up in the county hospital’s emergency room whenever they needed medical care. Those trips to LAG+USC, along with Martinez’s six-year participation in the Keck School’s Med.COR program, in which she was in middle school, made her realize she wanted to be a doctor.

After Martinez graduated from California State University, Northridge, she applied to the Keck School, primarily because she wanted to work at the county hospital and help people from her community.

Erin Quinn, former associate dean of admissions, said Martinez was the only person in all of Quinn’s 18 years of interviewing medical school applicants who arrived for the interview via public bus. From Northridge, it was more than a two-hour commute.

Another aspect of Martinez’s background that wowed Quinn: during high school and college, she had logged more than 1,200 hours as a student volunteer at LAG+USC Medical Center. “I recall thinking, ‘We should just give her the degree now,’” Quinn said.

Martinez entered the Keck School in the fall of 2005. But then her depression re-surfaced. Keck School faculty and students rallied around her, especially Quinn, who made sure that Martinez received the care she needed, and who stayed in touch with phone calls and visits.

Faculty members suggested that Martinez take a break. It was just what she needed. “I took that time to find my own strength that I didn’t know I had,” she said. “I realized how much I can accomplish and overcome.”

Martinez returned in fall 2007 and thrust herself into her medical studies. She was selected for several scholarships, including a prestigious one from Health Care Partners. As a senior she was named the Edward Zapanta Outstanding Medical Student of the Year by the Latino Alumni Association.

As part of the American Medical Student Association, Martinez helped organize the first-ever health fair for the local community on the Healthcare for the Homeless site, a day of service for the uninsured who end up in the emergency room. When her residency is finished, Martinez hopes to return to Los Angeles and serve the community where she grew up.

Source: Brook Photography

Born just blocks away, student’s journey to Keck School was still long and difficult

Continued from page 1

USC Institute of Urology, sees patients there as well.

Puliafito said that buying USC University Hospital and Norris Cancer Hospital in 2009 “sent a signal that USC is on the move” and that opening the Beverly Hills offices were the next step in USC’s plan for its academic medical center.

“Center on the fifth floor was designed to align the clinical with the academic teaching mission of USC,” said Puliafito referring to the satellite’s video conferencing center. “We anticipate that this will be a very important location for continuing medical education for physicians, for community outreach and for donor and alumni events for USC.”

USC President C. L. Max Nikias and his wife, Niki, were in attendance after taking a red-eye flight home from another USC event the day prior in Philadelphia.

“I am thrilled—it is wonderful to plant the cardinal and gold flag in Beverly Hills,” said Nikias. “Most of all it is deeply satisfying to be able to provide specialty care that is so vital and so very convenient to those who live and work on the Westside. While we aspire to expand USC’s global reach, we also aspire to build one of the very best academic medical centers right here in Los Angeles.”

Nikias acknowledged the physicians who practice at the new center, as well as the Keck School and its doctors. “At this Beverly Hills location, the doctors practicing here, Dean Puliafito, Dr. Agus, Dr. Gill, Dr. Shamie and others, will help heal those suffering from devastating diseases such as cancer and blindness. They will give hope to patients and their families,” he said. “I’m very proud of USC’s doctors, our professors of the Keck School of Medicine. On the front lines of clinical care, they are healers. In the research labs, they are innovators and scholars. In their specialties, they are pioneers in developing new treatments and surgical techniques.”

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

On May 5 U.S. News & World Report quoted Richard Bergman, professor and chair of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics, and colleagues, who found a new way to measure percent body fat, called the Body Adiposity Index (BAI).

On May 11 Shape magazine featured research by Richard Bergman, professor and chair of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics, and colleagues, who found a new way to measure percent body fat, called the Body Adiposity Index (BAI).

The story reported that the currently used standard, Body Mass Index (BMI), doesn’t reflect true adiposity—the state of being obese. If its accuracy holds up, BAI just might replace BMI as the body fat test of choice, the story stated.

‘I took that time to find my own strength that I didn’t know I had. I realized how much I can accomplish and overcome.’

—2011 Keck School of Medicine graduate Claudia Martinez

DOCTORS: USC plants a cardinal and gold flag in Los Angeles’ Westside

From left: David Aqua, USC President C. L. Max Nikias, Neda Shami, Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito and Mitchell Gross.

Former Keck School of Medicine associate dean of admissions Erin Quinn (left) congratulates graduate Claudia Martinez, who overcame depression and other personal challenges to fulfill her longtime dream of becoming a physician.

On May 9 Medscape Medical News quoted Mark Humayun, of the Doheny Eye Institute, about the Argus II retinal prostheses system. With the retinal implant, Humayun states, “subjects are able to detect light and do well with certain performance parameters. We’re confident to study this in their daily lives and develop it into a rehabilitation program,” he added.

A May 6 story in the Daily Pilot reported that USC University Hospital honored one of its patients by arranging for her to throw out the first pitch at a Los Angeles Dodgers game, and featuring her in a video shown at the game.

On May 10 article in Medscape Medical News quoted Gene Sung, director of the Neurocritical Care and Stroke Division at USC, about a study that found that about 14 percent of all ischemic strokes occur during sleep. “A significant number of stroke patients wake up with stroke, making them ineligible for advanced treatment,” Sung said. Dr. Sung was not involved in the study, the story stated.

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Continued from page 1

I’m talking about things like art, music, dance, athletics, surfing, writing, singing, rock climbing, singing while rock climbing, standup comedy, sitdown comedy, kind of the whole orthostatics of comedy,” he said. “As long as it’s legal, I’m pretty sure somebody in this class can do it.”

But his speech also mentioned the difficult experiences the students discovered as they worked and learned at LAC-USC Medical Center: the scarce resources for some patients, intractable conditions and jaded resident supervisors.

“So that’s the bad news. But the good news is that the Keck Class of 2011 is the future of medicine,” Greenberg said.

“Whenever I would start to feel disheartened, even feel that I had chosen the wrong profession, it was you, dear class, your actions that lifted my spirits and gave me hope.”

The commencement address was delivered by Drew Pinsky, a Keck School alumnus and clinical assistant professor of psychiatry who hosts the nationally syndicated radio show “Loveline” and is executive producer of the VH1 television show “Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew.”

“This ceremony is one of the few degrees that, once conferred, changes who you are and what you can do and your relationship to the world forever,” he said. “So, my esteemed colleagues to be, I welcome you to this profession.”

Of the 163 M.D. graduates, four students received a combined M.D./Ph.D. while two also received their MBAs.

Other Health Sciences schools held their graduations earlier in the week. The Keck School’s Master of Science, Master of Public Health and Ph.D. students walked in on May 11 in Pappas Quad.

The Ostrow School of Dentistry graduated 176 new doctors of dental surgery, 42 dental specialists and 13 masters of craniofacial biology in a May 13 ceremony at USC’s McAllister Field near the University Park Campus.

“The school has a storied history of educating individuals that go on to lead the profession, and we fully expect that you will all strive to be leaders in your community, your field and beyond,” said Dean Avshai Sadan.

The USC School of Pharmacy awarded 178 doctors of pharmacy, 29 M.S. and 12 Ph.D. degrees, and 27 certificates to those completing residency or fellowship programs on May 13 on Pappas Quad. The Physician Assistant Program awarded 38 master of physician assistant practice degrees the same day.

On May 13 at Bovard Auditorium, the Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy graduated 92 new doctors of physical therapy, five Ph.D.s in Biokinesiology and an M.S. degree in Biokinesiology, while the Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy honored 25 bachelor of science and 113 M.S. recipients, 23 doctor of occupational therapy and two Ph.D. recipients.

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.