By Alison Trinidad

One hundred seventy USC physicians are included in Pasadena Magazine’s June 2011 “Top Doctors” issue, an annual recognition of more than 600 medical doctors practicing in the San Gabriel Valley area and deemed by peers to be at the top of their profession.

“To have more than one-fourth of Pasadena Magazine’s 600 Top Doctors represent USC this year is a wonderful honor and reflective of the medical expertise at the Keck School of Medicine,” said Carmen A. Puliafito, dean of the Keck School.

This year, the list includes 96 Doctors of USC and also 74 Keck faculty members who practice at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

The Doctors of USC is a team of more than 600 physicians who are full-time faculty members of the Keck School. These physicians practice at USC University Hospital, USC Norris Cancer Hospital, LAC+USC Medical Center, among other locations.

“This recognition is a testament to the exceptional care that our doctors provide to patients on a daily basis in both outpatient and inpatient settings, including our operating rooms,” added Mitch Creem, CEO of USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital. “Our hospital staff and all of our physicians are proud to serve the Pasadena community.”

“To be considered for inclusion in Pasadena Magazine’s Top Doctors list, physicians were nominated and voted on by their peers, who submitted confidential ballots over a 2.5-month period. The votes were tabulated and the physicians’ credentials verified by the Yee & Belilove law firm in Pasadena. Doctors cannot pay to be included on the list.

USC doctors appeared in 50 specialty categories. In 33 of those categories, more physicians from USC appeared than doctors from any other health provider in the area. These specialties include breast cancer, cardiac surgery, colorectal surgery, critical care medicine, gynecologic oncology, hepatobiliary (gallbladder/liver) surgery, neurology, neuroradiology, obstetrics/gynecology, oncology/hematology, ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery, plastic surgery, radiology, vascular surgery and 18 pediatric subspecialties.

Other specialties in which USC doctors appear include cardiology, dermatology, endocrinology/diabetes, gastroenterology, general surgery, gynecology, infectious diseases, infertility, internal medicine, nephrology, neurosurgery, oncology, orthopedics, otolaryngology, pulmonology, rheumatology and urology.

The June 2011 issue also includes profiles of USC neurosurgeon Steven L. Giansanti, orthopedic surgeon Daniel A. Oakes, spine surgeon Mark J. Spoonamore, gastroenterologist Jacques Van Dam, the USC Fertility program, and both USC hospitals.

This year, the list includes 96 Doctors of USC and also 74 Keck faculty members who practice at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

The USC Trojan Marching Band joined the group on the steps of the Keck School on June 3, inducting alumni of the class of 1961 (left) as its newest members of the fellowship. The USC Trojan Marching Band joined the group on the steps of LAC+USC Medical Center, where many of the physicians trained. Above, Phil R. Manning, professor emeritus of medicine at the Keck School, accepts the Distinguished Alumni Award for his service to the university, which spanned 48 years until his retirement in 2002, and his continued service as an active alumnus.

Carmen A. Puliafito, dean of the Keck School of Medicine.
LAC+USC launches universal rapid HIV testing program to limit new infections

By Ryan Ball

In an effort to boost early detection and decrease the spread of HIV in the Los Angeles area, the Los Angeles County+University of Southern California Medical Center Emergency Department (LAC+USC ED) has launched a universal, opt-out rapid HIV screening.

The new testing method and modified guidelines follow months of planning and collaboration among the Pacific AIDS Education and Training Center (PAETC) in the Department of Pediatrics at Children’s Hospital, the Office of AIDS Program and Policies, and the LAC Rand Shrader HIV Clinic.

Studies have found that roughly 60 percent of people in the U.S. have never been tested for HIV, and an estimated 21 percent of those infected don’t know they’ve been infected. In a Los Angeles County sample of HIV-positive individuals, over half of the subjects first learned of their HIV status after developing symptoms of AIDS, which appear an average of eight years after HIV transmission. The LAC+USC ED hopes rapid testing can help close this dangerous gap between infection and treatment.

With rapid HIV testing, results are available within 40 minutes and patients know their HIV status before they leave the emergency room. They can then begin receiving proper medical care and modify their behavior so they don’t spread the infection.

Citing a recent study, Kathleen Jacobson, medical director for the PAETC, said treating HIV-positive patients and getting their HIV viral load down to an undetectable level can nearly eliminate the chance of HIV transmission among couples. “Getting these patients tested, diagnosed and into care means we can impact their risk to transmit to their partners by 96 percent,” she said.

Jacobson said LAC+USC is implementing rapid, point-of-care testing on a scale unmatched by any other health care provider in the country.

Previously, HIV screening at LAC+USC ED was reserved for patients on labor, victims of sexual assault, individuals stuck by needles, and anyone under clinical suspicion. Now, universal point-of-care screening will be administered to 15,000 patients, regardless of their chief complaint. California’s opt-out HIV screening legislation, passed in October of 2007, does not require separate written consent for HIV screening. However, providers must notify patients when an HIV test is being ordered, and patients have the right to refuse the test.

This significant change in HIV screening at LAC+USC ED was facilitated by key individuals from the Emergency Department including Sanjay Arora, Nico Forget, Mike Menchine, Kim Newton, Shira Schlesinger and Alicia Schecter, in collaboration with Jacobson and with the support of Joe Caidden and Stellas Quinn from the Rand Shrader clinic.

The program is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Office of AIDS Program and Policies with additional support from the LAC+USC ED and the PAETC.

CONTRACT: Staffing levels, retention of experienced nurses are key

Continued from page 1

...as a paid holiday; and
• Centralized scheduling of “premium” shifts, or shifts as a paid holiday;
• CNA negotiating team, said the contract helps University Hospital nurse who extra shift bonuses.

CNA negotiating team, said the contract helps University Hospital nurse who extra shift bonuses.

of “premium” shifts, or shifts as a paid holiday; and

Continued from page 1

LAC+USC launches universal rapid HIV testing program to limit new infections

The Society of Neurological Surgeons recently conferred its highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award for Academic Medicine, to Martin H. Weiss, professor and the Martin H. Weiss Chair in Neurological Surgery at the Keck School.

During his 38-year tenure at USC, Weiss served as chair of the Department of Neurosurgery and also as chair of the American Board of Neurological Surgery and the Residency Review Committee for Neurological Surgery, the NIH Neuro B Study Section and the Advisory Council for Neurosurgery of the American College of Surgeons.

Weiss also has served as president of the Society of Neurological Surgeons as well as the American Association of Neurological Surgeons from which he received the Cushing Medal, neurosurgery’s highest honor.

The Russian Academy of Medical Science recently awarded the Negovsky Medal to two Keck School of Medicine physicians, honoring their work in critical care medicine.

Philip Lumb, professor and chair of the Department of Anesthesiology, and Vladimir Zelman, professor and chair of anesthesiology, accepted the awards in Moscow in late March under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences and the Negovsky Institute of General Reanimatology.

The medal is a prestigious award that is given only once every three years to international leaders in the field of critical care medicine. The award is named for academician Vladimir A. Negovsky, known as “the father of reanimation.”

For his studies in the physiology of resuscitation.

Michele D. Kipke, professor of clinical pediatrics and preventive medicine at the Keck School and vice chair of research for the Department of Pediatrics at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, has been named a fellow of the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) Program of Drexel University.

The program, based at Drexel University College of Medicine, selected 34 senior women faculty for the 2011–2012 class of fellows.

ELAM’s mission is to increase the number of women in senior academic leadership positions, where they can ultimately help change the culture of academia.

The program is a nonprofit, professional organization founded in 1885 for the advancement of scientific and practical medicine.

The goals of its members include the pursuit of medical knowledge, and the advancement through experimentation and discovery of basic and clinical science and their application to clinical medicine.

Election to the AAP is an honor extended to individuals with outstanding credentials in biomedical science or translational biomedical research and is limited to 60 persons per year.

RUN/WALK HELPS DONATE LIFE—

By Robert Schecter

In an effort to boost early detection and decrease the spread of HIV in the Los Angeles area, the Los Angeles County+University of Southern California Medical Center Emergency Department (LAC+USC ED) has launched a universal, opt-out rapid HIV screening.

The new testing method and modified guidelines follow months of planning and collaboration among the Pacific AIDS Education and Training Center (PAETC) in the Department of Pediatrics at Children’s Hospital, the Office of AIDS Program and Policies, and the LAC Rand Shrader HIV Clinic.

Studies have found that roughly 60 percent of people in the U.S. have never been tested for HIV, and an estimated 21 percent of those infected don’t know they’ve been infected. In a Los Angeles County sample of HIV-positive individuals, over half of the subjects first learned of their HIV status after developing symptoms of AIDS, which appear an average of eight years after HIV transmission. The LAC+USC ED hopes rapid testing can help close this dangerous gap between infection and treatment.

With rapid HIV testing, results are available within 40 minutes and patients know their HIV status before they leave the emergency room. They can then begin receiving proper medical care and modify their behavior so they don’t spread the infection.

Citing a recent study, Kathleen Jacobson, medical director for the PAETC, said treating HIV-positive patients and getting their HIV viral load down to an undetectable level can nearly eliminate the chance of HIV transmission among couples. “Getting these patients tested, diagnosed and into care means we can impact their risk to transmit to their partners by 96 percent,” she said.

Jacobson said LAC+USC is implementing rapid, point-of-care testing on a scale unmatched by any other health care provider in the country.

Previously, HIV screening at LAC+USC ED was reserved for patients on labor, victims of sexual assault, individuals stuck by needles, and anyone under clinical suspicion. Now, universal point-of-care screening will be administered to 15,000 patients, regardless of their chief complaint. California’s opt-out HIV screening legislation, passed in October of 2007, does not require separate written consent for HIV screening. However, providers must notify patients when an HIV test is being ordered, and patients have the right to refuse the test.

This significant change in HIV screening at LAC+USC ED was facilitated by key individuals from the Emergency Department including Sanjay Arora, Nico Forget, Mike Menchine, Kim Newton, Shira Schlesinger and Alicia Schecter, in collaboration with Jacobson and with the support of Joe Caidden and Stellas Quinn from the Rand Shrader clinic.

The program is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Office of AIDS Program and Policies with additional support from the LAC+USC ED and the PAETC.
Keck School tests medical home program at LAC+USC Medical Center

By Pauline Vu

When a patient at Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center calls one of its clinics with a problem, he typically reaches a clerk, who may not be able to answer the patient’s question. A possible result: the patient puts off dealing with the problem, only to later end up in the emergency room. It would be much better if the patient could reach a knowledgeable person who could quickly determine the seriousness of the problem, answer questions, and even schedule an appointment for the same day.

That’s how things should work under the new medical home model that LAC+USC Medical Center is planning to roll out at one of its three clinics in early July. The rollout is thanks to a $750,000 grant from the UniHealth Foundation, a private foundation that funds health services and programs at qualified charitable hospitals in Los Angeles and northern Orange counties.

“Our emergency room is overcrowded, our hospital is overcrowded, and we know that a lot of these patients are going to the emergency room for things that they should be seen in the outpatient setting for. Not only is this bad care, it’s also very costly for the system,” said Michael Hochman, an assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine and one of the program’s principal investigators.

“We’re hoping that this will be a more efficient way of providing care and at the same time provide higher quality. That’s what I think is exciting about UniHealth investing in this,” Hochman added.

The program, known as Galaxy Care, will be administered by Keck School faculty and run in a clinic staffed by its residents.

It will involve about 4,000 patients, 50 residents and 15 faculty members. The UniHealth funding will allow the program to run for two and a half years after its inception, but it could draw new money and continue if it proves to be a success.

“We believe that Galaxy Care has great potential for finding a better way to deliver care to patients, and that the grant-funded program evaluation will promote the sustainability and spread of the model,” said Mary Odell, president of the UniHealth Foundation.

The medical home concept—which is a method of delivering care, as opposed to a physical place—gained prominence during the recent health care debate. The model’s goal is to make care more patient-centered and lead to better preventative care and chronic disease management. Its principles include providing more access to care, improving care coordination, and establishing a personal physician for each patient.

While the private sector has long used some form of a medical home system and, in the public sector, a handful of localities are testing it, this experiment will be one of the country’s first in a publicly teaching hospital setting, Hochman said.

The clinic’s patient population suffers from a high rate of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and mental health problems. They average 0.7 emergency room visits each year, considerably higher than the rate in the general population.

Currently patients can contact the clinic only during regular office hours, must schedule appointments several weeks in advance, and cannot contact nurses or doctors in between visits.

But under Galaxy Care, the clinic will have a 24-7 hotline where patients can reach a patient care coordinator who will provide case management, raise patients’ questions with physicians, and also schedule same-day appointments for more pressing problems. The program will initially allot five slots a day for those appointments.

LAC+USC Medical Center’s other two clinics will serve control groups. After a year the investigators will assess the program’s effectiveness by measuring emergency room visits, hospitalizations, patient and resident satisfaction, and quality-of-care metrics such as hemoglobin A1C, which monitors diabetes control, and LDL level, which monitors cholesterol.

If the experiment is successful, Hochman hopes to draw additional funding to spread the medical home model to the other two clinics. “Then we’d be able to make the case when the grant runs out that the program should be continued and expanded by the county,” he said.

‘We’re hoping that this will be a more efficient way of providing care and at the same time provide higher quality.’

—Michael Hochman, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine

HONORING EXCELLENCE—The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors honored LAC+USC Health-care Network’s Patient Safety programs in April, specifically citing two programs aimed at improving patient safety. Receiving scrolls honoring their achievement were program leaders Ron Ben-Ari, Eric Hsieh, Michael Hochman, and others presented are Saxena (center) and Vaidhnan (center right).

CHLA researchers zero in on drug-resistant leukemia

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia, or ALL, is the most common form of childhood cancer. While most children treated for this disease survive, in a subgroup of patients the disease does not respond to treatment.

Now a team of scientists led by researchers at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) have identified the reason for this drug resistance: BCL6, a protein that leukemia cells use to stay alive in spite of chemotherapy. Targeting this protein provides a novel key mechanism to fighting drug-resistant leukemia.

“We believe this discovery is of immediate relevance to patient care,” said Markus Müschen, an investigator at The Saban Research Institute of Children’s Hospital and lead author on the study.

In a significant breakthrough, investigators working at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and UCSF have been able to overcome resistance to targeted drug therapy, demonstrating complete eradication of the cancer in cell and animal studies.

The study, published in the May 19 issue of Nature, shows that an investigational drug, RI-BPI, developed at the Weill Cornell College of Medicine, used in combination with the drug Gleevec, shut down stem cells that give rise to leukemia cancer cells. Gleevec is a targeted therapy effective against many different cancers including ALL, a cancer of white blood cells that affects older adults as well as young children. While Gleevec has greatly improved survival of leukemia patients, there continues to be a small subset of patients who do not respond to therapy and ultimately die from their disease.

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

On May 29 The Bakersfield Californian reported that Anne Peters, director of the USC Clinical Diabetes Program, helped diabetic IndyCar driver Charlie Kimball to monitor and regulate his blood sugar levels during races.

A May 31 article in The New York Times reported that Jonathan Samet, a physician and epidemiologist at the Keck School of Medicine and a member of President Obama’s National Cancer Advisory Board, led the World Health Organization panel which released a new decision classifying cell phones as possibly carcinogenic. This was based largely on epidemiological data showing an increased risk among heavy cell phone users of a rare type of brain tumor called a glioma, Samet said. The story was also covered by The Wall Street Journal, four stories in The Washington Post, The Associated Press, USA Today, Los Angeles Times, among many others.

On May 31 CBS News interviewed Thomas Mack, professor of preventive medicine and pathology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, about a new study on stress and multiple sclerosis. This new research did not find a link between stress and MS, the story stated.

A May 31 article in The New York Times reported that California energy executive John Bryson, chairman of the Keck School Board of Overseers, will be nominated as secretary of commerce by President Obama. The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post also covered the news.
Cancer survivors and their families celebrate at 21st annual Festival of Life

By Sara Reeve

The feeling of warmth that spread across the Health Sciences Campus on June 4 didn’t emanate from the sunny skies above. Instead, it radiated from the hundreds of cancer survivors along with their friends and family who gathered for the 21st Annual Festival of Life, held in the Harry and Celesta Pappas Quad.

Hosted by the USC Norris Hospital in recognition of National Cancer Survivors Day, the festival featured music, entertainment and inspiring speakers who shared their personal stories of living with cancer.

The speakers, who included USC hospitals chief operating officer Scott Evans, City of Los Angeles Councilmember Tom LaBonge, assistant professor of radiology Pulsin Sheth, and patients Barbara Kral and Paul Jordan, all expounded on a similar theme—the dedicated, patient-centered care available at USC Norris Hospital.

Kral related how amazed she was to feel the positive attitudes present at USC Norris when admitted with acute myeloid leukemia. She told the crowd that, upon being wheeled into the hospital, she spoke with a physician. “I said, ‘They told me I was dying.’ He said, ‘No, we’re going to get you well.’ And I thought, ‘I love this place!’”

Sheth, who is also the director of breast imaging at the Harold E. and Henrietta C. Lee Breast Center at USC, described his decision to leave private practice to come to USC Norris. “I was seeing patients, but I wanted to do more,” he said. “I wanted to be around people who were giving more of themselves. After a quick search, I came to USC Norris and it was a ‘no-brainer’ after I spoke with some patients.”

The event also featured informational tables from internal and external groups and organizations that provide supportive services to cancer survivors. Nurse practitioner Pamela Merram, who runs USC Norris Cancer Hospital’s CARE Team/Pain Medicine program said that she attends the event because it gives her a “shot in the arm” that allows her to keep going. “People stop by our booth and say, ‘I’m glad I don’t need to see you!’ And I know what they mean,” she said. “It’s just wonderful seeing familiar faces that aren’t in patient gowns.”

USC researchers discover genetic mutation causing excessive hair growth

By Leslie Ridgway

Keck School of Medicine researchers, with scientists in Beijing, China, have discovered a chromosomal mutation responsible for a very rare condition in which people grow excess hair all over their bodies. Investigators hope the genetic mutation responsible for CGH appeared in the June 2, 2011, issue of the American Journal of Human Genetics.

Pragna Patel, professor at the Keck School, the USC Institute for Genetic Medicine, and the Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC, is a co-investigator of the study, and Sunja Choi, a research associate in Patel’s lab, is a co-first author. The principal investigator is Xue Zhang, professor and chair of medical genetics at the Peking Union Medical College.

The initial discovery of the mutation came from Zhang’s lab, which examined the condition, known as CGH, in a Chinese family. Researchers there worked with Choi to confirm the finding in a Mexican family that Patel first began studying in 1993. Males with this disorder have hair covering their entire face including their eyelids and their upper body, while females have thick masses of hair on their bodies.

“In 1995, we traced the approximate location of the mutation responsible for CGH to a section of the X chromosome in the Mexican family,” said Patel, whose laboratory focuses on understanding the genetic basis of inherited diseases. “We sequenced nearly 100 genes but could not find any mutations. Then recently, Xue Zhang and his colleagues in Beijing were able to pinpoint the exact location, discovering that there was an insertion of chromosome 5 into the X chromosome in the Chinese family. When the Mexican family was examined, a piece of chromosome 4 was found to be inserted into the same part of the X chromosome, thus confirming that these extremely rare events caused the disorder.”

Calendar of Events

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

Monday, June 13


Friday, June 17

1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. “LAC-USC Breathmobile 15th Anniversary Celebration,” Pete Delgado, CEO, LAC+USC Health Network. Info: (323) 442-6044

Tuesday, June 21


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://emergencysusc.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.