Harvard scientist to lead Keck’s stem cell research

Andrew P. McMahon will leave Harvard University to join the university on July 1, 2012, as a Provost Professor and the inaugural holder of the W. M. Keck Professorship of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine. He also will hold an appointment in the Department of Biological Sciences in the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. In addition, he will chair the newly created Department of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine at the Keck School and serve as director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC.

“As USC advances its ambitious fundraising campaigns, we will continue to make bold investments in recruiting world-class faculty,” said USC President C. L. Max Nikias. “Dr. McMahon’s appointment marks a significant milestone in these efforts, and will dramatically bolster the medical and biological sciences at the university, elevating our programs to an entirely new level.”

McMahon is currently the Frank B. Baird Jr. Professor of Science in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University and is on the Executive Committee of the Harvard Stem Cell Institute. In 1993, he joined Harvard University as a full professor, and from 2001 to 2004, served as chair of its Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology. McMahon is currently a professor in the Department of Stem Cell and Regenerative Biology, Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology and principal faculty member in the Harvard Stem Cell Institute.

McMahon says he decided to come to USC because of university leadership’s compelling vision for the future and the university’s strong potential to achieve it. “There’s an obvious investment being made to advance the university as a whole and to enhance the stem cell and regenerative medicine program,” he said. “It’s also quite appealing to have the opportunity to build something at an institution that is clearly heading to the big leaguers.”

In establishing his laboratory at USC, McMahon will bring a team of highly accomplished researchers from Harvard. At USC, McMahon will be charged with recruiting a new generation of the world’s top biological scientists to our campuses. USC anticipates building a core group of faculty across the university to pursue science that will benefit the university’s entire life sciences research enterprise, as well as contribute to larger efforts to better understand basic human biology.

In addition to conducting research and leading USC’s regenerative medicine and biology efforts, McMahon will teach undergraduates and graduate students at USC, fulfilling a commitment to helping students learn basic scientific concepts.

“In the recruitment process, Dr. McMahon specifically requested the opportunity to teach undergraduate students each year at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences—a testament to his belief in the importance of mentoring future scientists,” said Provost Elizabeth Garrett. “This will be an outstanding opportunity for USC’s top biological scientists to our campuses.”

USC President Nikias discusses the future with HSC faculty

By Amy L. Hamaker

USC is poised to take its rightful place as a world-class medical and research center during the coming decade, which will be a time of impressive growth in the areas of biological and health sciences, said USC President C. L. Max Nikias during his annual address to the faculty of the Health Sciences Campus. The address was presented on Feb. 8 at the Areyes Auditorium. Nikias gave a comprehensive update on the university’s progress over the past year and thanked faculty members for their unwavering support of university goals.

He stressed that USC is perfectly poised in its location on the Pacific Rim and as a premier research university to take advantage of the emerging importance of biological and health sciences. The goal, he said, is to translate powerful new ideas into something that can impact human life.

Health sciences and patient care already have become an important aspect of the USC brand. Spending for the Health Sciences campus represents 45 percent of USC’s budget. “The purchase of the two hospitals and the integration of Keck faculty practices made USC a very different enterprise overnight,” Nikias told the audience. “The $150 million W. M. Keck Foundation naming gift gives us the financial and academic reputation we need to make an academic medical enterprise.”

According to Nikias, numbers are up among all of the Keck Medical Center of USC properties.

• Revenue at Keck Hospital of USC and USC Norris Cancer Hospital grew from $390 million to more than $600 million over the last three years, and the Keck School of Medicine faculty practice has seen an increase from $121 million to $142 million.
• There has been a 22 percent increase in hospital admissions and a 33 percent increase in surgeries in the past year.
• New satellites in La Canada and Beverly Hills have flourished, with Pasadena due to open this year.

Recruitment of translational researchers has had a “catalyzing effect” on biological sciences on both campuses. Nikias specifically cited the recent appointment of Andrew P. McMahon as director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, the first W. M. Keck Professor of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine and the first chair of the newly created Department of Stem Cell Biology and...
USC Institute of Urology receives $13.3 million gift

An announcement from USC President C. L. Max Nikias of an anonymous gift of $13.3 million was the highlight of a special meeting Feb. 7 hosted by the USC Institute of Urology. The gift will fund the USC Urology Robotics Center of Excellence and the Program for Prostate Cancer Targeting.

“Today the USC Institute of Urology is an internationally renowned powerhouse in robotic and open surgery. ... Surgeries that were once considered fantasies are now fact.”

—C. L. Max Nikias, USC president

Fit Families nutritionist wins Maestro Positivo positive role model award

By Cathy Curtis

Sara Train, a nutritionist who teaches healthful cooking as part of the Fit Families program of the Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy at the Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC, has received a $2,500 Maestro Positivo (Positive Role Model) award from the California Milk Processor Board (CMPB). A matching amount was awarded to the Fit Families program, the charity of Train’s choice.

The division launched Fit Families in 2006 as a free wellness program for underserved children and adults living near the Health Sciences campus.

Children ages 10 to 17 at high risk for diabetes and conditions associated with inactivity receive evaluations, exercise programs and nutrition counseling. Fit Families delivers its services through lectures, discussions, exercise, interactive demonstrations, one-on-one counseling, and tutorials on diabetes and nutrition. The program currently partners with El Sereno, Griffin Avenue, Murchison and Sereno, Medical Magnet High School. The program is supported by the USC Good Neighbors Campaign. Train, who holds weekly nutrition classes for 20 to 30 participants, was one of three winners of the Maestro Positivo contest. She is planning to publish a cookbook based on her classes.

“I am passionate about seeing people interested in taking care of themselves and sharing those values every week with their kids,” Train said.

The contest was open to Californians ages 13 and up. Contestants submitted an essay in Spanish describing the type of work they do to promote nutrition and healthful living, why it’s important to do such work in the Latino community and how the grant would help the nominee’s charity.

The award ceremony was held on the Health Sciences campus on Jan. 30. Speakers included Cheryl Resnik, associate chair and director of community outreach for the division; Jose Huizar, Los Angeles City councilman; and Steve James, executive director of the CMPB.

Established in 1993 to increase milk consumption in California, the CMPB is known for its “Got Milk?” and “Toma Leche!” (“Drink Milk”) campaigns. The board is funded by all California milk processors and administered by the California Department of Food and Agriculture.
Continued from page 1

undergraduates to learn directly from a world-renowned scientist.” McMahon will work closely with USC’s clinicians to develop new stem cell therapies.

“In leading the Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, Dr. McMahon will bridge our Health Sciences campus, the research departments at the Keck hospitals, and a number of schools and academic departments on our University Park campus, including the Viterbi School of Engineering and our biology and chemistry departments with Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences,” said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito. “The Broad Center will provide a central core around which these disciplines—and those at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles—can come together.” McMahon and his team study the mechanisms that underlie the assembly, repair, and regeneration of critical organ systems, and have made enormous contributions to the understanding of the way the kidney matures during development. Building knowledge on these subjects, they seek to provide an informed, logic-based platform for translating basic research into practical applications in the area of regenerative medicine. This carries enormous potential for the treatment of human disease, as stem cell science offers a particularly broad reach. It can provide insights into normal and abnormal development in human cells, and holds the potential for the repair and replacement of human tissues and organs.

The cutting-edge research has yielded important findings into the biology of mammalian signaling factors that have been translated into clinical medicine with the development of a novel anti-cancer drug, vismodegib, the first FDA-approved hedgehog pathway inhibitor, in a Curis/Genentech partnership. Before arriving at Harvard, McMahon led the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology at the Roche Institute for Molecular Biology in Nutley, N.J. He previously held the position of staff scientist at the National Institute for Medical Research in London, where he started his independent research program. McMahon received his bachelor’s degree from St. Peter’s College, Oxford University, and his Ph.D. from University College in London. He subsequently worked for three years as a postdoctoral fellow at the California Institute of Technology. McMahon is an elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Royal Society (London), as well as an elected Associate Member of the European Molecular Biology Organization. He has served as an editor of the journals Development and Developmental Biology and on the editorial boards of several other scientific journals, including Genes and Development and Current Biology.

McMahon’s wife, Jill, is also an accomplished scientist and will continue her research at USC as part of her husband’s team. The Mahon’s daughter, Samantha, is a senior at the University of Vermont in British Columbia, and their son, Sean, will start high school in the fall. An avid trail and marathon runner, McMahon is eager to learn about the recommended running trails in the Los Angeles area that he and his wife might explore.

NIKIAS: USC faculty ‘are the strong foundation of all academic excellence’

‘Faculty are the strong foundation of all academic excellence at a university.’

—USC President C. L. Max Nikias

Continued from page 2

Regenerative Medicine at the Keck School of Medicine and USC. Nikias thanked USC Provost Elizabeth Garrett and Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito for their work on the recruitment. Nikias also discussed the importance of increasing the university’s endowment. Currently, the university is 23rd nationally, but Nikias believes that USC’s endowment must be in the top tier of private institutions to continue and secure academic gains for the long term. “The Campaign for USC requires an enormous amount of hard work,” he said, “but we are determined to reach our $6 billion goal.”

The USC faculty continue to play a central role in helping keep the university strong.

• During the previous year, 26 USC assistant professors joined the ranks of the tenured professoriate.
• Forty-three USC faculty members were honored with 55 medals, prizes and awards, while 18 were elected to prestigious academies and societies, and 13 received honorary degrees from universities around the world.
• There was an 11 percent increase (to a total of $454 million) in research dollars raised this last year, and a 43 percent increase in research spending over the last five years. Additionally, USC faculty members have won more than $452 million in research grants from government-based sources in the last five years.

“Young faculty, senior faculty, midcareer faculty—each cohort is important. This carries enormous potential for the treatment of human disease, as stem cell science offers a particularly broad reach. It can provide insights into normal and abnormal development in human cells, and holds the potential for the repair and replacement of human tissues and organs.

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‘Faculty are the strong foundation of all academic excellence at a university.’

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USC hospitals bootcamp program flexes leadership muscles

By Tania Chatilla

The USC hospitals are preparing to launch a fourth comprehensive management training course for directors and managers. The course is part of an ongoing effort to promote leadership development and enhance employee relations within the organization.

The Trojan Bootcamp leadership program was launched in 2010 and has since successfully graduated 72 directors and managers from across the Keck Medical Center of USC over three different sessions. The most recent cohort completed its training program in January, and 78 more leaders are on a waiting list for future cohorts starting in the fall.

“We initially created this program in response to feedback from our 2010 Employee Partnership Survey,” said Chief Human Resources Officer Matt McElrath. “We wanted to give our managers and leaders a tool to help them lead better—to connect with their staff, promote engagement and foster collaboration. Since then, the program has grown into a career-changing experience for so many of our employees.”

Administrators from Keck Hospital of USC and USC Norris Cancer Hospital developed Trojan Bootcamp in collaboration with USC’s Professional and Organizational Development team, a part of USC Career and Protective Services.

This team also leads the courses—intense, all-day sessions spanning 10 weeks and covering a multitude of management topics including business management, effective communication, employee relations and change management.

In the program, medical center leaders focus on their own leadership growth through personal assessments. The course curriculum is specifically tailored to address the dynamic, complex field of health care. Bootcamp participants work collaboratively to share leadership experiences, and visits from high-level administrators across USC put leadership principles into real-life context.

“The lessons we learned in Bootcamp were invaluable,” said Kevin Kaldjian, manager of administrative operations and a graduate of the most recent Bootcamp cohort. “It was really powerful and rewarding to be able to go through this experience with a room full of talented, dedicated, committed leaders. We were able to take our experiences as managers and build on them, strengthening our own abilities to lead our teams to excellence.”

In addition to learning about new ways to meet leadership goals and challenges, each cohort is also tasked with a capstone project following completion of the course. The project is a gift back to the organization. For example, recent cohorts have been focused on efficiency in meetings and ways to spread the medical center’s mission among all staff and physicians.

“The development of our managers into more effective leaders is a key investment in our future,” said hospitals Chief Operating Officer and interim Chief Executive Officer Scott Evans. “In order to really move forward and excel as a trusted leader in health care, we need to learn how to work together collaboratively with our peers and our staff. This program is helping to grow and inspire our leaders, so that we can move forward as an organization—facing the same challenges and accomplishing the same goals together.”

For more information about Trojan Bootcamp or to sign up, contact Lisa Lawrence at lawrencelisa@verizon.net.

‘McMahon has pioneered new ways of looking at the complex three-dimensional organization of the kidney. This has had far-reaching importance for development of other organ systems and for diseases that affect the kidney.’

—Brigid Hogan, George Barth Geller Professor and Chair, Department of Cell Biology at Duke University
Jamie Oliver Food Foundation improving health of Los Angeles children, say Keck School professors

By Pauline Vu

The Jamie Oliver Food Foundation is making a positive impact on the eating habits of children in the Greater Los Angeles area through its Food Revolution “Big Rig” Mobile Teaching Kitchen, according to faculty at the USC Childhood Obesity Research Center at the Keck School of Medicine.

The foundation was established by celebrity chef and activist Jamie Oliver, aiming to curb childhood obesity by bringing its 70-foot-long big rig-turned-mobile-kitchen to several Los Angeles and Orange County communities. In partnership with The California Endowment, it offers cooking courses and nutrition lessons to youths ranging from ages 8 to 17. The Childhood Obesity Research Center is the project’s research collaborator and third-party evaluator.

In South Central Los Angeles, the first wave of the pilot study involved almost 100 youth from the Challengers Boys and Girls Club. The program has already yielded improvements in the children’s confidence in their cooking skills and beliefs in the positive benefits of cooking. In one student evaluation, a participant wrote that the class “inspired me to eat better.”

“You can see a short amount of time,” Ventura said. “A lot of the kids report they’re making the recipes at home,” said Emily Ventura, the co-principal investigator leading the evaluation, a participant wrote that the class “inspired me to eat better.”

“The parents told us that after class their children pleaded with them to buy more fruits and vegetables…” I think it’s been a very empowering experience for the kids and their families.”

The classes show youths how to cook healthy meals made from fresh ingredients, such as whole-wheat pancakes with fruit or spaghetti and meatballs from scratch. In each 90-minute class, foundation staff teach the children and teens at least two recipes.

“Jamie Oliver is a very talented, creative person who’s made a lot of change here in Los Angeles in such a short amount of time,” Ventura said.

The foundation has partnered with the Keck School to measure the project’s effectiveness.

Ventura is collaborating on the project with the Jamie Oliver Food Foundation to test the effectiveness of its mobile kitchen, which has visited several communities in Los Angeles and Orange County to offer cooking and nutrition courses.