Keck School inks deal to train Chinese students

A delegation from a highly rated medical school in China visited the Keck School of Medicine of USC on April 9 to sign an agreement establishing an education and research program for visiting students.

The agreement was signed by Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito and Xiangya School of Medicine Dean Tao Lijian.

The arrangement calls for as many as 10 qualifying Xiangya students to spend two years studying and conducting research as Dean’s Research Scholars at the Keck School. The scholars will have already completed six years of their medical education in China.

Each visiting student will be hosted by a Keck biomedical, clinical or translational research laboratory.

“We’re honored to open our doors to these visiting students,” Puliafito said.

“Experience and training they receive here will help them throughout their careers.”

The Chinese medical school is part of Central South University in the Hunan Province.

A memorandum of understanding was signed last year by the leaders of both schools in which they agreed to explore opportunities for international exchange and to promote mutual cooperation in education and research.

Founded by the Human Institute of Education and the Yale-China Association of America in 1914, Xiangya School of Medicine is considered one of the best medical schools in China.

The school has 12,000 students, 1,800 faculty members, affiliations with five major teaching hospitals with more than 10,000 beds, and active research programs in various fields.

ACC honors Rahimtoola for lifetime achievement

The American College of Cardiology has given its 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award to Shahbudin H. Rahimtoola, a USC Distinguished Professor and George C. Griffith Professor of Cardiology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Rahimtoola is only the fifth person to receive the award—the highest honor bestowed by the ACC. It was given at the group’s annual meeting in March.

The award is presented to those who have career-spanning achievements in the field of cardiovascular disease and have served as role models through service, research and teaching.

“It acknowledges one’s efforts over 40 or 50 years,” Rahimtoola said. “I value it highly.”

Rahimtoola earned his medical degree in 1963. He came to the United States in 1954. He was on the medical faculty of the University of Illinois and the University of Oregon before joining USC in 1980.

Among his many accomplishments, Rahimtoola considers his discovery of the hibernating myocardium among his most important. He was also the first person to describe the problems of prostatic valve patient mismatch.

Although he’s given 1,750 lectures around the world, edited 11 textbooks and published 593 scientific articles, Rahimtoola—who has been called “the world’s cardiologist”—is humble when describing himself.

“I think of myself as a hands-on cardiologist and a doctor who, in addition, does a lot of teaching,” he said.

His colleagues said the award is very well deserved.

“Dr. Rahimtoola has been recognized throughout his career as a particularly astute and insightful contributor in his fields of interest,” said Edward Crandall, chairman of the school’s

Transplant recipient relishes second chance

He likes to think of it as a birthday celebration.

It was 10 years ago this month when Bill Widen received a new lung—and a new life.

On April 5, Widen returned to Keck Hospital of USC to commemorate the anniversary with some of the people who helped make it happen. April is National Donate Life Month.

Bubbling with the energy of a man half his 60 years, racecar driver Widen greeted hospital workers and other transplant recipients. He also got supporters and curious onlookers to sign the hood of his Donate Life car, which he drives to events around the country to encourage people to become organ and tissue donors.

“We owe so much to the doctors and staff of USC for getting us through all these years,” he said. “They have become a second family.”

Several members of his original transplant team from the hospital—then called USC University Hospital—came outside to chat with Widen and to congratulate him on his continued good health.

“He’s done great,” said lead transplant coordinator Felicia Schenkel. “He’s the biggest advertisement for transplant that we have.”

Transplant scheduler Patricia Pulido has known Widen since his surgery.

“I’m glad he’s doing great and glad we can give patients a second chance,” she said.

Widen, an Ontario resident, was suffering from emphysema and could barely walk a few feet when he received his new lung. He doesn’t know the 18-year-old man who donated it, but it was an act of generosity that has inspired Widen ever since.

He and his daughter, Andrea Smith, drive the Donate Life Chevy Nova to drag races and to raise awareness for the importance of donating organs.

“People are afraid to put the dot on their license,” said Widen, who runs thewesu.com.

See WIDEN, page 2
USC research may point the way to regeneration of brain cells

By Leslie Ridgeway

New research from a USC team has possible implications for patients of neurological conditions including stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The research, published April 2 in the Journal of Neuroscience, demonstrates that human neural progenitor cells, which build neurons, can be prompted into action by a genetically engineered variant of a key protein in the body.

A treatment developed using this variant could mean a stroke victim with irreversible brain damage might, days after suffering the stroke, be able to build new brain cells and regain cognitive and other functions thought to be lost forever.

“This implication is very exciting,” said Belisario Zlokovic, director of the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. “We could be talking about a treatment that could be given within three days of a stroke, and then after a week. The patient could receive treatment weekly for several months to stimulate neurogenesis. When we give mice the variant two weeks after they suffer a stroke, we’ve seen good results and behavior.”

The research, “An Activated Protein C Analog Stimulates Neuronal Production by Human Neural Progenitor Cells Via a PAR-1-PAR-3-S1PR1-Akt Pathway” also describes the molecular mechanism and pathway needed for neuronal production, Zlokovic said.

“The variant, called 3K3A-APC, was developed by Zlokovic and colleagues at ZZ Biotech, a Houston-based biotechnology company he co-founded with USC benefactor Selim Zilkha. Genetically engineered 3K3A-APC is a variant of the naturally occurring protein APC, which plays a role in protecting the brain against bleeding and inflammation.”

In the new study, Zlokovic and colleagues analyze how 3K3A-APC works in human neural progenitor cells after stimulating the cells, the researchers observed the cells differentiated mainly into neurons and suppressed differentiation into astroglial or oligodendrogial cells, which inhibit replenishment of neurons.

Future research will focus on whether 3K3A-APC may have applications for helping patients with neurological conditions other than stroke, Zlokovic said.

Funding was provided by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health (grant number HL63290).

The research team includes scientists from ZZ Biotech, the Center for Neurodegenerative and Vascular Brain Disorders in the Department of Neurosurgery and the Center for Translational Neuromedicine in the Department of Neurology at the University of Rochester Medical Center, the Department of Medical Pharmacology and Blood Brain Barrier Research Laboratory at the University of Arizona, and the Department of Molecular and Experimental Medicine at The Scripps Research Institute.

When it comes to pharmacy law, USC professor Fred Weissman wrote the book

By Kukla Vera

When Fred Weissman’s son was in pharmacy school in the 1990s, he complained about the dullness of the law portion of his studies.

This sparked Weissman, who holds Pharm.D. and J.D. degrees, to write a book on pharmacy law that was engaging while still covering the important material.

A Guide to California Community Pharmacy Law was first published in 1997 and has just come out in its eighth edition, reflecting recent changes in laws relevant to the practice of pharmacy.

Pharmacy students, board exam candidates, practicing community pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are the typical audience for the book.

“I try to put law into a narrative language using a Socratic method in the book,” said Weissman, associate professor at the USC School of Pharmacy, where he also serves as associate dean for student/faculty affairs and admissions. “Each legal point is raised as a question or statement, then answered in a concise manner supported by statutes and/or regulations.”

In the state’s pharmacy law text, similar statutes and regulations often appear in different parts of the text, making it difficult for the reader to obtain a full view. Weissman’s book organizes similar statutes and regulations in the same section, making it more accessible to the reader.

Having taught USC students throughout their pharmacy studies, Weissman is well versed on getting legal information across to pharmacy students and pharmacists. Among the topics he teaches are legal issues around compounding pharmacy, the role of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and a semester-long course on statutory and regulatory state laws complemented by a discussion of relevant federal laws. Weissman said.

“The book mirrors some of the material that I teach in my classes and goes beyond to cover material that will be included in the pharmacy portion of the Board of Pharmacy licensure exam,” Weissman said.

“Further, the book is a resource for practicing pharmacists.”

Fred Weissman

USC benefactor Selim Zilkha. Geneti- cally engineered 3K3A-APC is a variant of the naturally occurring protein APC, which plays a role in protecting the brain against bleeding and inflammation.

Revlon Run/Walk to aid USC Norris

Faculty, staff, students and friends are invited to join the USC Norris Team for the 20th Anniversary of the Entertainment Industry Foundation’s 5K REVOLUTION Run/Walk for Women on Saturday, May 11, at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum at Exposition Park.

USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center has been selected as one of this year’s beneficiaries, with proceeds benefiting women’s cancer research conducted by Michael Press, co-leader of the Women’s Cancers Program. USC Norris also has an information booth at the Health Expo the day of the run/walk, distributing giveaways and information.

To join the USC Norris Team, visit revlonrunwalk.org and click “Join Us In LA,” then “Register” and “Join a Team.” Input “USC Norris” for the team name. The registration fee is $35 through May 10 ($40 of the event). The fee includes an 5K REVOLUTION Run/Walk for Women T-shirt, gift bag and a USC Norris Team T-shirt.

To support the team, sign up for the Revlon Run/Walk in Your Dreams. The cost is $40, and you will still get the team T-shirt. Register for the USC Norris Team and click on the Participate in Your Dreams option.

For more information, contact Tonia Strom, USC Norris Team Captain, at (323) 865-0688 or tstrom@usc.edu.
By Amy E. Hamaker

The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center was the host for the recent annual board meeting of The V Foundation for Cancer Research, a leading nonprofit fund for cancer research founded by NCAA-winning coach Jim Valvano, who died in 1993 from cancer.

New board officers were elected at the meeting, held on Feb. 7, and the meeting was chaired by the foundation’s new CEO Susan Braun.

Highlights included a special presentation. Composer David Barrett honored The V Foundation’s board members with a special performance of two of his musical compositions—“One Shining Moment” (performed on piano) and “The Grateful Life” (performed on guitar).

Before the performance, Stephen B. Gruber, director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, welcomed the board members to the Health Sciences campus.

“Our investigators represent the many other scientists across the United States who have benefited from The V Foundation’s support, and we wanted to honor you in a special way,” he said. “Thank you for your work for generations of patients, to help us work toward a life free from cancer.”

Afterward, foundation board members and USC Norris researchers attended a lunch at which researchers made brief presentations explaining how previous grants from The V Foundation have helped shape their work:

- Christina Curtis, assistant professor of preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, spoke on research distinguishing individual cells, evolutionary cancer dynamics and resistant cells.
- Tanya Dorff, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School, described her work in helping patients fast to protect against chemotherapy toxicity, and shared information on the phase I trial she has already completed.
- Parkash Gill, professor of medicine at the Keck School, talked about his team’s work creating drugs to affect the KRAS gene. (Mutation of this gene is an essential step in the development of many types of cancer.)
- Nora Heisterkamp, professor of pediatrics pathology at the Keck School, spoke about 5-FU chemotherapy drugs, and how The V Foundation’s grant provided his team with a start to their translational research.

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L.A. Kings Stanley Cup Championship ring to be auctioned to benefit CHLA

Fans of the defending world champion Los Angeles Kings have a unique opportunity to own a piece of sports history while also supporting a worthy cause.

One of a limited number of authentic L.A. Kings Stanley Cup Championship rings, courtesy of the Kings in support of their charitable partners, is up for auction now through April 22 on CharityBuzz.com.

Proceeds from the sale will benefit two of the Kings’ charitable partners, Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and City Year Los Angeles.

The Tiffany & Co.-fabricated ring is to the specifications of the Stanley Cup Championship rings that were also created for the King’s players. Worth $13,500 at market value, the ring features 14 karat white gold with 84 carats in round, brilliant cut diamonds, and will be personalized with the name of the auction winner prominently engraved on the band. Authentic LA Kings Stanley Cup Championship rings will not be sold in retail outlets.

Kings fans also can bid on an “Ultimate Kings Fan Package,” valued at $7,500. The package includes dinner for two with Luc Robitaille, two tickets to the Kings vs. Sharks game on April 27 and a Kings jersey signed by the team.

The auction is currently underway, with bidding started at $3,000 and $3800 respectively. Both opportunities will close at noon on April 22.

For more information, visit http://tinyurl.com/calryck.

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

An April 12 article in the U-T San Diego quoted Geoffrey Joyce, associate professor of clinical pharmacy and pharmaceutical economics and policy at the USC School of Pharmacy, about the tax subsidies that come with the Affordable Care Act’s new individual mandate.

An April 13 story in The Sentinel cited an op-ed by Ken Murray, retired clinical assistant professor of family medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, about how doctors view end-of-life care.

An April 13 story in the Beverly Hills Courier quoted Brent Polak, chair of pediatrics and vice dean for child health at the Keck School of Medicine, and Sentra Georgia, assistant professor of pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine, about new research on generating insulin-producing beta cells. The research has implications for people diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

On April 11, The New York Times featured research by Jan-Patrick Allemand, a doctoral student in the Keck School of Medicine, and colleagues, who used Google searches to analyze seasonal patterns of mental health. Their study found that searches pertaining to anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression and other disorders surged in winter months.

An April 11 post by the Associated Press featured a medical device tested by John Lipham, associate professor of surgery at the Keck School of Medicine, and colleagues, that treats gastroesophageal reflux disease. The device, approved a year ago by the federal Food and Drug Administration and also sold in Europe, employs a ring of titanium beads around a weak muscle at the base of the esophagus. Lipham and colleagues recently published a study of the device in the New England Journal of Medicine, finding that acid in patients’ stomachs greatly decreased after the device was implanted.

An April 11 story in The New York Times quoted Andrea Bricklow, professor of clinical preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, about pollution at the Port of Los Angeles, noting that she has done research on the subject.

On April 11, KPCC-FM interviewed Ying Lu, assistant professor of research with a joint appointment between the Keck School of Medicine and the USC Price School of Public Policy, about the impact of public education and clear menu labeling on public health.

HONORING EXCELLENCE—From left: Keck School of Medicine of USC Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, Maurice Hitchcock and Vice Dean for Medical Education Henr Ford admire the cake at a March 20 reception in honor of Hitchcock. A professor and director of the school’s division of medical education, Hitchcock retired after 17 years. He received an engraved silver tray in appreciation for his work in recruiting and fostering professional development of outstanding medical educators.
By Diana Ver Steeg Anderson

Amanda Wong, a third-year student in the Doctor of Pharmacy program at the USC School of Pharmacy, has found new ways to meet the needs of blind and visually impaired patients. Wong has done this through a partnership between the School of Pharmacy and the Los Angeles Braille Institute.

Wong, who volunteered as a high school student at the Orange County Braille Institute, came up with the idea when a visually impaired patient at a USC community health fair had difficulty getting help.

“I made me think about how I could further help,” Wong said. “I met with the Braille Institute. It took a year to educate them about the value a pharmacy can provide and the importance of having patients adhere to their medications.”

To further the partnership, Wong applied for and was awarded an Albert Schweitzer Fellowship, a national program that annually grants fellowships to select graduate students at the institutions of medicine, pharmacy and public health. Each fellow identifies an unmet need in the community and develops a patient care project to meet that need.

As part of her Schweitzer project at the Braille Institute, Wong conducted medication reviews with participants, brought in fellow students to give presentations about asthma, hypertension, bone loss, osteoporosis and over-the-counter drug safety, and handed out brochures about Braille pillboxes.

“My goal for the project was not only to educate and teach the students at the Braille Institute, but also to provide an outlet for USC Pharmacy students to learn and get a chance to interact with [the] community,” Wong said.

Brad Williams, professor of clinical pharmacy and clinical genomics and Wong’s fellowship mentor, noted that “she worked seamlessly” with the staff of the Braille Institute and with student organizations to accomplish her goal.

“She was most efficient and adept at working with several groups, which always is a challenge,” Williams said. “The maturity with which she handled all situations speaks very highly of her leadership abilities in both easy and difficult circumstances.”

WIDEN: “Who doesn’t want to be a hero?”

Continued from Page 1

Donate Life/Signatures Across America. “We talk to them about that.”

Widen’s appearance also inspired the family of a man who received a heart transplant at the hospital in March. Still recovering from his operation, 22-year-old Joe Alerta was escorted outside in a wheelchair to meet a man who was in a very similar situation a decade ago.

“Not only was it an honor for him, but it was truly an honor for his family,” Widen said.

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AACC: Rahimtoola honored as skilled teacher, physician

Continued from Page 1

Department of Medicine. “He is widely known and appreciated as a teacher and mentor, and has been an important part of the USC division of cardiovascular medicine for many years.”

His sentiment was shared by colleague John T. Nicoloff, professor of medicine.

“How pleased we are his mother, Mel Aketa. “It gives me goose bumps. I’m overwhelmed.”

On hand was Mike Catterall, who received a double lung transplant nine years ago. He said Widen’s enthusiasm and energy show that people can lead active lives after a transplant.

“He helped me have a lot of lives,” Catterall said. “This brings out the awareness. You can save someone’s life and be a hero. Who doesn’t want to be a hero?”

For Widen, every day of the past 10 years has been a gift.

“It gave me a different outlook on life,” she said. “It definitely changed the entire way I look at life.”

For more information about Widen’s project, visit www.donoracing.com.

In case of an emergency...

Call the Emergency Information Phone: (213) 740-9233 The emergency telephone system can be accessed from any phone on campus.

Visit the USC Web: http://emergency.usc.edu This page will be active in case of an emergency. Backup Web servers on the East Coast will function if the USC servers are incapacitated.