USC awards Presidential Medallion to Inderbir Gill

Inderbir Gill, chairman and professor of the Catherine and Joseph Aresty Department of Urology and founding executive director of the USC Institute of Urology, has received the Presidential Medallion, USC’s highest honor. USC President C. L. Max Nikias presented Gill with the award at the 32nd annual Academic Honors Convocation on April 23.

The medallion, which was also presented to USC Trustee Verna B. Dauterive, is awarded to those individuals who have brought honor and distinction to the university. In his introduction, Nikias noted Gill’s contributions to robotic and laparoscopic surgery, and called Gill a “world leader” in minimally invasive kidney-preserving surgery for renal cancer.

“Dr. Gill is a true medical visionary who has immeasurably advanced USC’s clinical experience, while reimagining the boundaries of modern surgery,” Nikias said. Gill, who also serves as associate dean of clinical innovation at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, is ranked as the top author in the entire field of urology, having published eight textbooks and 513 peer-reviewed scientific papers with more than 8,000 citations. Nikias also recognized Gill’s contributions to robotic and laparoscopic surgery, and called Gill a “world leader” in minimally invasive kidney-preserving surgery for renal cancer.

“The Quarterly...

In May, 16 noon-1 p.m. in the Aresty Auditorium of the Harlyne J. Norris Cancer Research Tower, Nobel Laureate Sir John Gurdon will speak on “From Nuclear Transplantation to Prospects for Cell Replacement” on April 22.

Nobel Laureate Sir John Gurdon will speak on “From Nuclear Transplantation to Prospects for Cell Replacement” on Thursday, May 16, noon-1 p.m. in the Aresty Auditorium of the Harlyne J. Norris Cancer Research Tower. Gurdon has led significant advances in developmental biology, particularly through his pioneering research in nuclear transplantaion and cloning. In the 1960s and ‘70s, his seminal experiments demonstrated the viability of animal cloning and laid the foundation for modern stem cell research. His discoveries transformed the understanding of how gene regulation generates cellular diversity with profound implications for stem cell and medical research.

In recognition of his achievements, he was awarded the 2012 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Gurdon, who will receive an honorary degree from USC at commencement ceremonies, is a professor emeritus at the University of Cambridge and a Distinguished Group Leader at the Wellcome Trust/Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute.

The free public lecture is sponsored by USC Stem Cell, the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, and the Department of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine, Keck School of Medicine of USC.

While they’re thrilled that Alerta is recovering, therapists and all the others who helped her son make his recovery.

“Without your help, I don’t think my son would be strong,” she said.

While they’re thrilled that Alerta is recovering

USC research identifies new model to study Alzheimer’s

By Leslie Ridgeway

Research by Keck School of Medicine of USC faculty supports the idea that increases in a molecule called beta-amyloid in the brain drives Alzheimer’s disease, according to a study published in the Journal of Neuroscience.

Using genetically engineered lab rats with the full array of brain changes associated with Alzheimer’s disease, a team led by Terrence Town, the study’s senior author and a professor in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute, created a next-generation disease model to study the disease.

“We believe the rats will be an excellent, stringent pre-clinical model for testing experimental Alzheimer’s disease therapeutics,” said Town, who conducted the study while working as a professor of biomedical sciences at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and pharmaceutical sciences at the USC School of Pharmacy.

Other awards and winners included:

• Associates Award for Creativity in Research and Scholarship was awarded to Yves De Cleeck, professor of pediatrics, biochemistry and molecular biology;
• Phi Kappa Phi Faculty Recognition Award was given to Gelya Frank, professor of occupational therapy and anthropology; and
• Phi Kappa Phi Student Recognition Award was presented to Shili Xu, candidate, Ph.D., pharmacology and pharmaceutical sciences at the USC School of Pharmacy.

Nikias also recognized Gill’s contributions to robotic and laparoscopic surgery, and called Gill a “world leader” in minimally invasive kidney-preserving surgery for renal cancer.

“Dr. Gill is a true medical visionary who has immeasurably advanced USC’s clinical experience, while reimagining the boundaries of modern surgery,” Nikias said. Gill, who also serves as associate dean of clinical innovation at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, is ranked as the top author in the entire field of urology, having published eight textbooks and 513 peer-reviewed scientific papers with more than 8,000 citations.
After serving 14 years as clinical director of the Pediatric Oncology Branch of the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the internationally renowned pediatric hematologist-oncologist, Alan S. Wayne, is joining USC and Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. Wayne has been named director of the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases at CHLA and will serve as the division head of hematology-oncology and bone marrow transplantation in the Department of Pediatrics at the hospital. He will also hold positions as professor of pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and associate director for pediatric oncology at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. He will begin his duties on July 1. At CHLA, Wayne will assume the Stuart E. Siegel Endowed Chair. His directorship duties will include responsibility for the delivery of patient care services to all inpatients and outpatients of the hospital’s cancer and blood diseases center and the hematology-oncology and bone marrow transplantation division. In addition, he will oversee direction for research, lead fundraising efforts and promote the hospital’s missions and values in the community. He also will supervise the quality and accreditation of oncology and hematology teaching programs for interns, residents and fellows. “Dr. Wayne will increase the scientific integration and collaborative work between the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases and the broader community at Children’s Hospital, The Saban Research Institute and the University of Southern California,” said Carmen A. Puliafito, dean of the Keck School of Medicine and a member of the CHLA Board of Trustees. Wayne has authored more than 20 scholarly books and monographs and more than 70 peer-reviewed scientific papers in the fields of pediatric hematology, oncology, stem cell transplantation and transfusion medicine. In the past five years he has contributed to 40 exhibitions and presentations at national and international conferences. Among his numerous awards and honors, he received the NIH Director’s Award for Mentoring and has been listed among “The Best Doctors In America” every year since 1995. Throughout his career, Wayne has served in leadership roles on institutional and national committees and as a member of numerous professional societies and organizations including the Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplant Consortium, Children’s Oncology Group and the American Society of Hematology. His current editorial responsibilities include the position of associate editor, Frontiers in Pediatric Oncology.

Heart: Patient’s birthday present—leaving the hospital with a new heart—comes early

A trip to urgent care revealed an enlarged heart. He made an appointment to see a cardiologist but never went. Instead, the recording engineer went on a 16-city tour with a rap group. After going to the doctor a few months later, he was diagnosed first with bronchitis and then pneumonia. His mother came from her home in Lompoc, Calif., as quickly as she could.

“As soon as I got here, he went into cardiac arrest,” she said. “I got down on my knees crying. I experienced my own son dying in front of me. I was begging people to save him.”

He needed a new heart, a process that took months. During that time, a bond developed between the family and the nursing staff. “The nurses are so good to us,” Mel Alerta said. “I don’t know why. Joe can be so bratty.”

Good news finally arrived on Good Friday—a healthy heart was available. The transplant took place on Easter Sunday.

“I feel so grateful, but I feel bad for the other family,” Mel Alerta said. “I feel sad for them, but I’m overwhelmed that my son is getting better.”

Alerta was released the day after the party. It was a happy day for everybody.

Town: Genetically engineered rats offer new avenue to study Alzheimer’s disease

Using rats engineered to have certain mutant genes, the researchers were able to see that beta-amyloid in the rats’ brains increased with age. They also noticed the development of neurofibrillary tangles in brain regions most affected by Alzheimer’s involving learning and memory, and the death of about 30 percent of neurons, or brain cells, in these regions. Some of the rats’ glial cells—cells which normally support, protect or nourish nerve cells—are overactivated in Alzheimer’s. Some of the rats’ glial cells—acquired shapes reminiscent of the activated glia found in patients. Activation of gli cells occurred earlier than amyloid plaque formation, which suggests that Town and his colleagues identified an early degenerative event and a new treatment target that scientists studying other models may have missed.

In addition to grants from the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NS07694), National Institute on Aging (AG029726, AG033394) and the National Institute of Mental Health Intramural Research Program, this study was funded by the Alzheimer’s Association (IRG2-05-14993, ZEN:10-174633) and the Ellison Foundation/American Foundation for Aging Research (M11472).

Next Issue: May 10

The Weekly is published for the faculty, staff, students, volunteers and visitors in the University of Southern California’s Health Sciences campus community. It is written and produced by the Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing staff. Comments, suggestions and story ideas are welcome. Permission to reprint articles with attribution is freely given.

Associate Vice President, Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing: Deborah S. Fullerton
Executive Director of Communications: Ina Fried
Assistant Director of Publications: Sara Reeve
Editor: Jon Nalick
Contributors: Eva Blauw, Tania Chaitla, Josh Grossberg, Amy E. Hamaker, Carol Matthieu, Leslie Ridgeway and Alison Trinidad
Vice President, Public Relations and Marketing: Brenda Macco
Phone: (323) 442-2820 Fax: (323) 442-2832 Email: hscweekly@usc.edu Web: theweekly.usc.edu

BAXTER FOUNDATION VISITS THE KECK SCHOOL—Directors of the Donald E. and Delia B. Baxter Foundation visited the USC Health Sciences campus to hear formal presentations of the nominees for two junior faculty members to receive funding. The foundation also supports medical student summer research scholarships at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. The Baxter Foundation has had a long relationship with USC, having given more than $50 million during its 54 years of giving to the university. The foundation’s mission is to advance charitable, scientific and educational purposes, primarily at medical and transplants schools of higher learning in California. Pictured here, left to right, are Keck School Interim Vice Dean for Research and Associate Dean for Clinical Research Thomas Buchanan, and, from the Baxter Foundation, Martha B. Haake, Richard Haake, James Russell, Jane Russell, new director Martha E. Haake, William Russell, new director Maria Elliott, and Donald Haake.
By Leslie Ridgeway
As the Affordable Care Act plays out, numerous challenges have cropped up—from how to serve the millions of newly insured expected to crowd into doctors’ offices, community clinics and hospitals, to the perilous shortage of primary care doctors to serve them.

Researchers at USC believe they may have a solution to one of these challenges, which they recently put into practice through a merger of the Family Practice and Family Medicine Residency involving the Keck School of Medicine of USC, the California Hospital Authority and the Eisner Pediatric and Family Medicine Center.

The merger transformed a disabled family practice into a collegial family practice operated by USC into a federally qualified health center (FQHC) on the premises of the Eisner Center that is now eligible for federal grants and higher Medi-Cal reimbursements. USC faculty continue to run the residency and see patients. Patient volumes have increased, and the new center is not only in black after one year, but it has for the first time filled all eight of its residency slots. “This model is a true partnership between a university, a hospital and clinic and a model for how to expand community based medical training,” said Michael Cousineau, principal investigator on the paper and associate professor of preventive medicine at the Keck School. “Trying to align leadership was tough. But nothing comes free and the devil is in the details.”

Lessons learned were detailed in a paper recently published by the Journal of Medecine, a journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges. Titled “Transforming USC’s family medicine center and residency program into a federally qualified health center,” the paper is a kind of template that the researchers and participants hope will help others set realistic expectations when attempting to accomplish similar goals.

“We were surprised at the complexity of the project,” Cousineau said. “I’ve helped in merging organizations, but I didn’t imagine all the obstacles. The smallest things could have undermined us at any time.”

The most important lessons, as noted in the paper, include:

• Getting a commitment from all partners to the final goal, which helped use shared approaches and eliminate communications problems
• Hiring a project director to help on track and facilitate the grant process (including a $600,000 operational grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration)
• Leveraging opportunities for federal grants and higher

In a study that could have a great impact on people with type 1 diabetes, Keck School of Medicine of USC researcher Senta Georgia has discovered a key feature required for the differentiation of pancreatic insulin-producing cells. This research has been published as an op-ed by the Keck School of Medicine, and Robert S. Sherwin, a professor of medicine at Yale, about how the brain controls eating habits.

In a study that could have a great impact on people with type 1 diabetes, Keck School of Medicine of USC researcher Senta Georgia has discovered a key feature required for the differentiation of pancreatic insulin-producing cells. This research has been published as an op-ed by the Keck School of Medicine, and Robert S. Sherwin, a professor of medicine at Yale, about how the brain controls eating habits.
Calendar of Events

Tuesday, May 7


Noon, Psychiatry Grand Rounds. “Neuroopharmacological Effects of Mild TBI,” David Baron, USC. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-9865

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. Town Hall Los Angeles. “Changing the Faces of Health Care. Who Will Take Care of You?” Kevin Lohser, USC. Band Corporation, 1776 Main St., Santa Monica. Info: (213) 628-8141.

Wednesday, May 8

7:30 a.m. – 9 a.m. USC Institute for Integrative Health Seminar. “The Role of Occupational Therapy in Integrative Health.” Camille Deitering, USC. Broadcast reception 7:30–8 a.m. Speaker and discussion at 8 a.m. CHP 102. Info: (323) 442-2036


4:30 p.m. 3rd Annual Vladimir Zeliman Distinguished and Endowed Lectureship. “Living in Transformational Times. Two Personal Perspectives,” Roald Sagdeev, former advisor to Endowed Lectureship. “Living in Transformational Times: Two Personal Perspectives.” Info: (213) 740-6709

Friday, May 10


10 a.m. – 1 p.m. HTE & USC Frontiers Symposium. “Bringing the Shark Tank to USC: Place Your Bets: Assessing Medical Device Potential for Impact Park.” Ramasubramanian, Intellectual Ventures. UPC: TCI 450. Info: (323) 774-1442

11 a.m. – 2 p.m. USC Center for Excellence in Research Workshop. “Understanding, Writing, and Obtaining NIH-K- Series Career Development Grants.” Charles Gromus, USC. CHLA Subway Auditorium. Info: (213) 499-6566

Saturday, May 11

6 a.m. – 6 p.m. Revlon Run/Walk For Women. Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum at Exposition Park. Faculty, staff, students, residents and friends are invited to join the USC Norris Team for the 20th Anniversary of the Entertainment Industry Foundation’s 5K REVLO Run/Walk For Women. On Saturday, May 11, on the grounds of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum at Exposition Park. Info: (323) 968-0666

Tuesday, May 14

9 a.m. – 11 a.m. Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute Mentorship Workshop. “Strategies for Successful Mentoring.” Emil Bogomann, CHLA, and Kenneth Yates, USC. NRT Aresty Auditorium. Info: (323) 442-8289

2 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. USC Breast Center Forum. “Get Fit After the Fight: What You Need to Know About Exercise After Breast Cancer.” Christina Diehl-Connor and Deba Tripathy, USC. NRT Jennifer Diamond Cancer Resource Library. Info: (323) 442-7068

Friday, May 17


8:30 a.m. KSOM Surgical Grand Rounds. Thu. 15th Annual Lyman Brewster, MD, MD Visiting Professor Lectureship. “Translational Research in Aortic Disease: Clinical Applications.” John Inoumi, Univ. of South Carolina. DOH 100. Info: (323) 442-9064

Notice: Deadline for calendar submission is 4 p.m. Monday to be considered for that week’s issue—although three weeks’ advance notice of events is recommended. Please note that timely submission does not guarantee an item will be printed. Send calendar items to The Weekly, KAM 400 or fax to (323) 442-2823, or email to eblaauw@usc.edu. Entries must include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location and a phone number for information.

2013 Health Sciences Campus Commencement Ceremonies

Wednesday, May 15

Keck School of Medicine—M.S., Ph.D., M.P.H. 11 a.m. at the Harvey & Celesta Pappas Quad on the Health Sciences campus. Keynote speaker: Jonathan Evan Fielding, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and health officer for Los Angeles County. A reception will immediately follow at the same location. No tickets required. More Info: (323) 442-1017

Friday, May 17

Oncological Science and Occupational Therapy 10 a.m. at the lawn west of Leavy library at the University Park campus. Keynote speaker: Captain Mary I. Greenwood (Ret.), U.S. Navy. A reception will immediately follow at the Davidson Conference Center, Embassy Room. No tickets required. More Info: (323) 442-2281

Physician Assistant Program 10:45 a.m. at the University Park campus. Keynote speaker: Robert Sachs, president of the Physician Assistant Board. A reception will immediately follow at the same location. No tickets required. More Info: (626) 457-4753

Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy 11:15 a.m. at Bovard Auditorium. Keynote speaker: Stephanie Bell, physical therapist, senior writer and injury analyst for ESPN. No tickets required. More Info: (323) 442-5550

School of Pharmacy 3 p.m. at the Norris Library Quad on the Health Sciences campus. Keynote speaker: Jon Roth, CEO of the California Pharmacists Association. A reception will immediately follow on the Upper Quad. Tickets are required. More Info: (323) 442-1819

Saturday, May 18

Keck School of Medicine – M.D./Ph.D., M.D. 3 p.m. at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. Keynote speaker: Robert K. Ross, president and CEO of The California Endowment. A reception will immediately follow on the McCarthy Quad at the University Park campus. No tickets are required. More Info: (323) 442-2553

In case of an emergency...

Call the Emergency Information Phone: (312) 740-3133 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.