The national anthem has been sung thousands of times before at the USC Galen Center. But on May 17, the familiar tune celebrated medicine, heralding the opening of commencement ceremonies for the MD and MD/PhD graduates of the Class of 2014 of the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Distinguished speakers shared advice with the 169 graduating Keck School students on their careers and the impact they can have on all parts of society in a changing medical landscape.

Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, dean of the Keck School, praised their passion and commitment to social justice in health-care delivery. "I love this class’s brilliance, enthusiasm, clinical acumen, research accomplishments and love of life," he said. “As your Dean, I have one simple request: Do not forget the poor, the unlucky, the unfortunate — those people whom you will encounter without the means or knowledge to get the health care they need and deserve."

Student speaker and MD candidate David Herman II expounded on the profundity of Disney characters, citing Sebastian, the hermit crab from The Little Mermaid, who said, “Listen to me. The human world is a mess.”

"Harsh criticism from a crustacean, but in many respects, the human world is a mess," said Herman. "I suspect that many of us chose to enter medicine because we felt we had something to offer to help clean it up. We came to Keck because the faculty asked us to join them with the intention of molding us, training us, stamping us and sending us out into the world to make it better in whatever ways we can."

Actress and social activist Madeleine Stowe spoke on her father’s illness and the profound impact the doctors’ compassion had on her family’s security. "You are healers, easing and eradicating pain and suffering, and that is a vocation — it is not a job, no matter how much it may feel like one at times," she said. "It is a true calling, and you are so lucky because most of us struggle in life to ever find one."

"As medical practitioners, I ask you to make one

Graduates advised to hold on to their passion and altruism

By Amy E. Hamaker

The national anthem has been sung thousands of times before at the USC Galen Center. But on May 17, the familiar tune celebrated medicine, heralding the opening of commencement ceremonies for the MD and MD/PhD graduates of the Class of 2014 of the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Distinguished speakers shared advice with the 169 graduating Keck School students on their careers and the impact they can have on all parts of society in a changing medical landscape.

Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, dean of the Keck School, praised their passion and commitment to social justice in health-care delivery. “I love this class’s brilliance, enthusiasm, clinical acumen, research accomplishments and love of life,” he said. “As your Dean, I have one simple request: Do not forget the poor, the unlucky, the unfortunate — those people whom you will encounter without the means or knowledge to get the health care they need and deserve.”

Student speaker and MD candidate David Herman II expounded on the profundity of Disney characters, citing Sebastian, the hermit crab from The Little Mermaid, who said, “Listen to me. The human world is a mess.”

“Harsh criticism from a crustacean, but in many respects, the human world is a mess,” said Herman. “I suspect that many of us chose to enter medicine because we felt we had something to offer to help clean it up. We came to Keck because the faculty asked us to join them with the intention of molding us, training us, stamping us and sending us out into the world to make it better in whatever ways we can.”

Actress and social activist Madeleine Stowe spoke on her father’s illness and the profound impact the doctors’ compassion had on her family’s security. “You are healers, easing and eradicating pain and suffering, and that is a vocation — it is not a job, no matter how much it may feel like one at times,” she said. “It is a true calling, and you are so lucky because most of us struggle in life to ever find one.”

“As medical practitioners, I ask you to make one
Rodgers steps down from Keck School after reinvigorating school’s finances

Coreen Rodgers, MBA, will step down as chief operating officer of the Keck School of Medicine on Aug. 1 to assume the role of chief financial officer and vice president at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Gardens in San Marino, CA. She will be responsible for the management of a $450 million endowment and the annual operating budget. Rodgers was appointed chief operating officer in 2007. During her tenure at USC, she was instrumental in transforming the Keck School’s administrative and financial structure, and she leaves the Keck School in its best financial position in history. Reporting directly to Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, Rodgers oversaw the Keck School’s annual budget of $750 million, coordinating and managing the School’s research activity, the clinical departments, various areas of administration and education, as well as the contract with the County of Los Angeles. Among her many accomplishments at USC, Rodgers led the integration of 19 separate clinical practice corporations in USC for over 500 faculty physicians, led the financial planning prior to acquisition of USC University and USC Norris Hospitals from the Tenet Healthcare Corporation, developed integrated financial statements for the clinical and basic science departments and installed a new general ledger system at the medical school.

Deborah Rodgers called her an “outstanding financial troubleshooter who helped many of us to solve a wide variety of financial challenges. She was an excellent liaison to the Provost’s Office and the Keck Medical Center of USC, medical schools are complex, difficult and often times perplexing institutions. Coreen made many positive contributions to benefit our students, patients and faculty.” Rodgers said, “My experience at USC has been so rich and rewarding because of the many talented individuals and exciting projects at the University. After working with Dean Puliafito for the past thirteen years, I must thank him for this extraordinary opportunity to come to California, and for the trust and guidance he has always given me. The Chairs and administrators have accomplished so much for the departments of the medical school. I am so proud of our current state of affairs and will miss the daily interactions with my wonderful Keck colleagues.”

A search for her successor will begin immediately.

Inaugural director of Institute for the Developing Mind named at CHLA

Coreen Rodgers, MBA, has been named the inaugural director of the Institute for the Developing Mind (IDM) at The Saban Research Institute of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, effective July 1.

Rodgers’ research interests are centered primarily with the applications of neuroimaging to the study of serious developmental neuropsychiatric disorders, including Tourette syndrome, ADHD, OCD, autism, bipolar disorder, depression, prenatal toxin exposures and premature birth. His imaging studies integrate measures of brain structure and function with genetic, neurobehavioral, chemical, neuropsychological and clinical measures to define disease processes and therapeutic responses in large samples of children and adults.

A search for her successor will begin immediately.

Handling complex cases — Keck Medical Center of USC hosted the first annual “Solutions for Complex Care” Symposium on May 8, aimed at broadening knowledge and improving the health of children with disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders. The Institute for the Developing Mind has been established to fulfill the need for expanding research efforts, development of new research technologies, and education of a new generation of interdisciplinary clinicians and scientists — all working to discover new diagnostics, identify risk factors, and develop innovative biomedical, behavioral and educational treatment strategies for childhood brain disorders.

Peterson’s research interests are centered primarily with the applications of neuroimaging to the study of serious developmental neuropsychiatric disorders, including Tourette syndrome, ADHD, OCD, autism, bipolar disorder, depression, prenatal toxin exposures and premature birth. His imaging studies integrate measures of brain structure and function with genetic, neurobehavioral, chemical, neuropsychological and clinical measures to define disease processes and therapeutic responses in large samples of children and adults.

PIBBS boasts stellar class of students

Lured to USC by the Programs in Biomedical and Biological Sciences (PIBBS) — the gateway into PhD programs in biomedical and biological sciences — 30 new PIBBS students will call the Health Sciences Campus home this fall as they begin working towards their biomedical doctoral degrees.

PIBBS Director In Laird-Offringa said the program received 345 applications, with selected incoming students coming from diverse backgrounds and six countries. Students hail from California universities, including Berkeley and UCLA, and from across the nation, including University of Minnesota, University of Tennessee, Ohio State University, NYU and Emory University. Peggy Farnham, associate dean of graduate affairs, said she is extremely pleased with this year’s recruits, which she called “top-notch students who will truly contribute to our research environment while getting superb training in the biomedical sciences.”

PIBBS students spend their first year rotating through research laboratories while taking a core curriculum. After the next year, they will select a PhD degree-granting program and laboratory. This incoming cohort will be the first to take advantage of novel educational innovations, including the establishment of four PhD programs: Cancer Biology & Genomics; Development, Stem Cells, & Regenerative Medicine; Molecular Structure & Signaling; and Medical Biology. As part of the program, students prepare their first year

MSC News 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. Permission to reprint articles is available upon request. No artwork may be reproduced without the artist’s consent.

Next Issue: June 13
Keck Medicine Initiative advances in record-breaking year

The Keck Medicine Initiative, a $1.5 billion, multi-year effort, has raised more than $629 million.

By Amy E. Hamaker

It’s official— the University of Southern California has reached the halfway point in its $6 billion Campaign for USC, and Keck Medicine of USC continues to play an important part. As of press time, total Campaign for USC fundraising had reached more than $3.3 billion, while the Keck Medicine Initiative, a $1.5 billion, multi-year effort, has raised more than $629 million. This figure represents 42% of the initiative’s $1.5 billion goal. Health sciences fundraising progress for the current fiscal year (including gifts and new pledges) stood at $188 million, an increase of 155% from progress at the same time during the previous fiscal year.

“The Keck Medicine Initiative has already provided resources to fund endowed chairs, establish new programs, and provide support for medical student scholarships. The campaign will transform every part of our medical enterprise and positively impact aspect of the Health Sciences Campus,” said Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA. “To reach our goal of creating the most influential medical center on the Pacific Rim, we must continue to recruit world-class faculty, provide state-of-the-art laboratories and clinics, and provide comprehensive care to hundreds of thousands of patients annually from Southern California and around the world.”

The Keck Medicine Initiative, part of the Campaign for USC, seeks to advance Keck Medicine’s academic, research and clinical priorities. The initiative focuses on USC’s academic medical enterprise:

• Endowment for faculty and research programs, including programs, direct and sales and chairs, and start-up funding;

• Endowment for student scholarships for all areas of medical education;

• Academic priorities, including Keck Medicine’s broad spectrum of institutes and centers; and

• Capital projects, including the Norris Healthcare Center, renovation of educational and laboratory spaces, investments in core facilities and equipment maintenance.

“It is vital that we continue to support transformative, interdisciplinary medicine to tackle the most challenging medical issues of our time,” said Melany Duval, senior associate dean for development. “Gifts at every level bring us closer to that goal, and we are very grateful for the support shown to us by our donors, who have brought us so far already.”

To learn more about the Keck Medicine Initiative, contact Duval at (323) 442-1531 or melanyduval@usc.edu.

USC Stem Cell opens Choi Family Therapeutic Screening Facility

By Cristy Lytal

How can scientists make more accurate predictions about whether potential drugs will effectively treat disease — before launching expensive and laborious human clinical trials? USC’s new Choi Family Therapeutic Screening Facility offers one answer: through the “disease in a dish” approach.

The approach involves reprogramming patients’ stem cells into their disease-afflicted cell types. This allows scientists to populate petri dishes with neural cells from patients with neurodegenerative diseases, inner ear cells from patients with hearing loss or balance disorders, and other cell types relevant to a wide variety of medical conditions. These “diseases in a dish” can then be used to test the effects of potential drugs on a patient’s actual cells.

Part of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, the facility comprises extensive chemical libraries, state-of-the-art screening equipment and trained technicians — which will support researchers across the university.

“Stem cell research is such an exciting field right now,” said C. W. “Ken” Chung Choi. “Our family is honored to have the opportunity to learn alongside USC’s scientists and help them reach their potential in turning, discovering into cures.”

Justin Ichida, PhD, director of the screening facility and assistant professor of stem cell biology and regenerative medicine, highlighted his own promising work: conducting some of the first screens on Lou Gehrig’s disease using patient-specific cells.

Two of Ichida’s colleagues from the Department of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine shared additional examples of how the facility is accelerating the development of new patient therapies.

Neil Segil, PhD, professor of research, talked about the quest for potential drugs that can regenerate inner ear cells and help them reach their potential in turning, discovering into cures.

The USC Neurorestoration Center founding team includes Director Charles Liu (from left), Theodore W. Berger, Mindy Aisen, co-director Christianne Heck, and Richard A. Andersen.

Edmondson Faculty Center to reopen with fresh new look

The Edmondson Faculty Center closed May 16 for a renovation designed to update its appearance and furnishings, improve its accessibility to faculty and better utilize its current space. The center is scheduled to reopen around Aug. 1.

Robert Cooper, MBA, EdD, vice provost for academic operations and strategy, said the planned improvements are intended to refresh the interior to make it brighter with new furniture, carpet and paint. Partition walls may be moved as well to make the bar area more useful to patrons.

Cooper said that an advisory council from the Keck School, the Ostraw School of Dentistry and the USC School of Pharmacy would offer guidance on the renovation, operational aspects of the center, and new seasonal menu choices.

During the renovation, catering through Auxiliary Services, which staffs the center, will remain available and alternative meeting rooms for catering events are now being secured.

The changes were spurred, in part, by a Keck Faculty Council survey that garnered responses from more than 400 faculty members. Victoria Marx, MD, president of the council, said the unprecedented level of response showed that “USC faculty care very much about the issue of the effectiveness of the [faculty center].”

The renovation is intended to address issues of concern to survey respondents such as that the interior was too “dark” and “dingy” and the food lacked the quality and variety guests expected.

Also, since many respondents said they were disappointed by the membership requirement, that has been dropped. The center will be open to all faculty and senior staff members who make a reservation, and their guests. A reservation system will be implemented to allow for easy access to the center.

Noted Marx that in the proximity of the Health Sciences campus grows, with recruitment of senior researchers as well as growth of Keck Medical Center, “The need for a vibrant, modern faculty center is growing. The community has many places to eat but only the Edmondson Faculty Center provides a high-end restaurant experience to gather and entertain guests and visitors.”

Edmondson Faculty Center to reopen with fresh new look

The Edmondson Faculty Center closed May 16 for a renovation designed to update its appearance and furnishings, improve its accessibility to faculty and better utilize its current space. The center is scheduled to reopen around Aug. 1.

Robert Cooper, MBA, EdD, vice provost for academic operations and strategy, said the planned improvements are intended to refresh the interior to make it brighter with new furniture, carpet and paint. Partition walls may be moved as well to make the bar area more useful to patrons.

Cooper said that an advisory council from the Keck School, the Ostraw School of Dentistry and the USC School of Pharmacy would offer guidance on the renovation, operational aspects of the center, and new seasonal menu choices.

During the renovation, catering through Auxiliary Services, which staffs the center, will remain available and alternative meeting rooms for catering events are now being secured.

The changes were spurred, in part, by a Keck Faculty Council survey that garnered responses from more than 400 faculty members. Victoria Marx, MD, president of the council, said the unprecedented level of response showed that “USC faculty care very much about the issue of the effectiveness of the [faculty center].”

The renovation is intended to address issues of concern to survey respondents such as that the interior was too “dark” and “dingy” and the food lacked the quality and variety guests expected.

Also, since many respondents said they were disappointed by the membership requirement, that has been dropped. The center will be open to all faculty and senior staff members who make a reservation, and their guests. A reservation system will be implemented to allow for easy access to the center.

Noted Marx that in the proximity of the Health Sciences campus grows, with recruitment of senior researchers as well as growth of Keck Medical Center, “The need for a vibrant, modern faculty center is growing. The community has many places to eat but only the Edmondson Faculty Center provides a high-end restaurant experience to gather and entertain guests and visitors.”
GRADUATION: Health Sciences Campus celebrates Class of 2014