USC President Nikias casts USC as trendsetting academic leader

By Amy E. Hamaker

The future of online education in higher learning, the global and local nature of university activities and the reintroduction of humanistic principles were topics touched on by USC President C. L. Max Nikias, PhD, in his annual address to Health Sciences Campus faculty on Feb. 11 at Aresty Auditorium.

Nikias discussed the changing face of higher learning, noting that online courses at USC are leading the way in terms of maintaining academic rigor and integrity. USC will not offer massively open university courses or online degrees for undergraduates, he said.

However, USC’s masters, executive and graduate programs will reach 7,600 students globally and bring in $125 million in revenue this year, a figure that is unprecedented for a top American research university.

Nikias expects that all USC schools will have some online offerings by next year, and hopes to double enrollment and degree offerings online over the next five years.

The president also cited notable achievements for the USC community, including: USC’s freshman class continues to be outstanding; The university received 51,000 applications for 2,600 freshman slots, and of those accepted, more than 600 received perfect grade point averages in high school.

“Do you honestly think they’d do that if they went to school?”

USC has the world’s largest contingent of international students, hailing from 115 nations; most of USC’s current freshmen are not fully differentiated?

“USC is now a rising power in medicine, interdisciplinary health and patient care during a time when medical science is moving to the forefront.”

―USC President C. L. Max Nikias

Businessman invests in USC Stem Cell Kidney Disease Team

By Cristy Lytal

Can patients with kidney disease be effectively treated with injections of stem cells or other cells that are not fully differentiated? Chinese businessman Yong Chen has pledged $400,000 to begin answering this question.

Chen’s gift establishes a Yong Chen Zhongmei Group USC Kidney Research Fund to support research led by USC researchers Andy McMahon, PhD, and Laura Perin, PhD.

Cross-institutional research efforts such as these are central to USC Stem Cell, a collaborative, multidisciplinary initiative working to translate the potential of stem cell research to the clinical imperative of regenerative medicine. Perin, assistant professor of research urology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and principal investigator at The Saban Research Institute at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, and McMahon, director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, are key members of the USC-Stem Cell Kidney Disease Team.

According to McMahon, who heads USC Stem Cell, one in 10 adults in the United States — more than

Save the Date: Lasker Lectures

This year, the Keck School of Medicine of USC will host the 2014 Lasker Lectures.

The first lecture will be held March 4 at 4 p.m. in Mayer Auditorium and will feature Richard Scheller, PhD, executive vice president, research administration at Genentech, and Thomas Südhof, MD, professor of molecular and cellular physiology at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

To RSVP, visit: http://tinyurl.com/usclasker1

‘USC is now a rising power in medicine, interdisciplinary health and patient care during a time when medical science is moving to the forefront.’

―USC President C. L. Max Nikias

By Jon Nalick

Owen Bennett-Jones, freelance British journalist and a host of “Newshour” on the BBC World Service, captivated audiences in Mayer Auditorium as he told tales of how local culture can shape — or sabotage — efforts to improve education and health worldwide.

He described how a leader in north-west Afghanistan shunned offers to build for free a school in his region, saying simply, “I don’t want it.” Later, while hunting with a would-be benefactor, the leader shot ducks that fell into a lake. He whirled and several men jumped into the water to retrieve them. The leader mused, “Do you honestly think they’d do that if they went to school?”

“And that is what you’re up against,” said Bennett-Jones: “Local elites who are quite determined to keep their people uneducated so they can hold on to the power that they’ve got.”

BBC journalist stresses need for cultural awareness

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See CHEN, page 4

See JONES, page 2
First female department chair still vital to Keck School at 90

By Ryan Ball

Nancy Warner, the first woman in the United States to be named chair of a pathology department at a coeducational school of medicine, said of her 1972 appointment: ‘That just wasn’t done back then.’

Picking at her smoked salmon with chopsticks at the faculty center named for Hugh A. Edmondson, MD, who preceded her as chair of the Department of Pathology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, Nancy Warner, MD, Hastings Professor of Pathology, emerita, reflects on her legacy at the school.

At the age of 90, Warner remains a formidable presence, one that has been felt on the Health Sciences Campus since she became the school’s first female department chair in 1972. In fact, she was the first woman in the United States to be named chair of a pathology department at a coeducational school of medicine.

“That just wasn’t done back then,” Warner said of her groundbreaking appointment. “The people in the department were very gracious, all of them. There were some big professors, and I didn’t know how they were going to take it. But there was no problem.”

Warner was selected to succeed the retiring Edmondson by then Keck School Dean Franz K. Bauer, MD, whose wife and mother both had medical degrees. She believes they put more than a little pressure on him to consider a female candidate.

“Which I appreciated,” Warner said. “I was able to do as much harm as good. In Vietnam promoted by then-U.S. Ambassador Pete Peterson in the 1970s, Peterson, whose son died in a car crash, advocated for a program to require Vietnamese motorists to wear helmets to reduce the high incidence of traffic fatalities and head injuries common at the time. The Vietnamese saw Peterson’s passion as he gave out helmets and understood that the American was making a personal gesture as he ended his ambassadorial term. The program’s organizers, recognizing a cultural reluctance for individuals to stand out from the crowd, pushed to have everyone nationwide switch to wearing helmets simultaneously, Bennett-Jones said: “They did it, and it worked.”

Bennett-Jones concluded, offering a few examples. A calm demonstration in Peshawar might, with the introduction of a foreign news crew’s video camera, escalate rapidly into an anti-America riot with police responding with tear gas. Alternatively, if a journalist rides along with a police officer, it might inhibit the officer from accepting a motorist’s culturally acceptable bribe to settle a minor traffic violation — and result in the surprised motorist’s incarceration.

Still, he noted that cultural awareness can help people navigate the local environment and make great strides possible. He cited the example of a public health program during vaccination efforts have been murdered in an effort to thwart the program. He also warned that the mere presence of outsiders often alters local citizens’ behaviors in unpredictable ways. “We underestimate the extent that, just by being there, we change the situation,” said Bennett-Jones, offering a few examples. A calm demonstration in Peshawar might, with the introduction of a foreign news crew’s video camera, escalate rapidly into an anti-America riot with police responding with tear gas. Alternatively, if a journalist rides along with a police officer, it might inhibit the officer from accepting a motorist’s culturally acceptable bribe to settle a minor traffic violation — and result in the surprised motorist’s incarceration.

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Keck School researchers link gene to brain tumor growth

In a groundbreaking study, Anat Erdreich-Epstein, MD, PhD, associate professor of pediatrics and pathology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, has linked the level of messenger RNA of the gene PID1 to clinical outcomes of patient with certain types of brain cancer.

With colleagues at The Saban Research Institute of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, Erdreich-Epstein also found that, or controls, PID1 inhibits cell growth of medulloblastomas and gliomas as well as atypical teratoid/rhabdoid tumors (AT/RTs).

The study, done in collaboration with a group from Heidelberg, Germany, was published online in the Dec. 3, 2013, issue of Clinical Cancer Research.

Erdreich-Epstein said the 2016 PID1 regulates insulin signaling and mitochondrial function in fat and muscle cells. The few research reports on PID1 have focused on the gene’s biological role in conditions such as obesity, diabetes and Alzheimer’s disease, but to date, PID1 has never been associated with cancer.

After analyzing reports of hundreds of medulloblastoma patients, initially in children and later in both children and adults, Erdreich-Epstein found that the level of PID1 coding material, PID1 mRNA, in tumors was highly correlated with the outcome of the patients. Higher levels of PID1 mRNA directly correlated with increased patient survival time.

In the test tube, increasing PID1 promoted tumor cell death and reduced the proliferation of the brain cancer cells. Similar correlation of higher PID1 mRNA and longer survival were observed in cohorts of adult patients with gliomas. Furthermore, experiments in laboratory cultures of medulloblastoma, AT/RT and glioma cells showed that PID1 has a tumor-inhibitory effect in these brain cancer cells.

New ARCS fellowship nurtures emerging scientific talent at the Keck School

By Ryan Ball

When the ARCS (Achievement Rewards for College Scientists) Foundation Inc. was established in 1959 to provide financial awards to U.S. graduate and undergraduate students for innovative pursuits in science, engineering and medical research, the Soviet Union had just launched Sputnik and the United States feared it might lose the Cold War.

Although the Cold War space race has long since reached the $3 billion mark late last fall, USC during the past three years.

The $6 billion Campaign for USC consultation Center.

In the January 2014 issue of the Journal of Neurochemistry, the Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute within the Keck School of Medicine of USC, said he admires her independence and key leadership skills in the lab, where she mentors undergraduates and graduate students.

“The proteins we work on are difficult to make and complicated structures to push in the right form, and I think she’s done a great job optimizing the system,” Siemer remarked.

For Service, a major draw to working in Siemer’s lab was the opportunity to train on the new nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometer. “The cutting-edge technology allows the team to decipher the atomic resolution structure of amyloid fibers, which are linked to Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease,” Cheryl M. Craft, PhD, professor of ophthalmology and cell & neurobiology at the Keck School, is co-vice president of university relations for the ARCS Inc. Los Angeles Foundation Chapter, and received awards on the executive and international scientific advisory boards of The John Douglas French Alzheimer’s Foundation.

She said Service was chosen for the inaugural fellowship because of her intelligence, academic achievements and potential to advance research in Alzheimer’s.

“It’s important for us to look at not only the clinical translational research, but also the basic research that goes into a project,” said Craft. “Looking at her overall background and what she wants to accomplish here in Angar’s lab, I think it’s essential that she has that support.”

The fellowship award was presented in honor of Maggie McKnight Russell, a long-time supporter of the Keck School.

Six researchers from the Keck School of Medicine of USC were recently selected to join the Society for Pediatric Research. Membership in the society is based on peer nomination and election, and marks the member’s standing as an internationally recognized pediatric researcher.

The newest members will be honored at the Society for Pediatric Research annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, on May 3. Researchers to be recognized include:

- Jamie Wood, MD, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics; Robinder Khemani, MD, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics; Vincent Wang, MD, MHA, associate professor of clinical pediatrics; Yong-Mi Kim, MD, MPH, PhD, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics; Douglas Vanderbilt, MD, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics; and Toni Frederick, MD, MPH, associate professor of pediatrics.

In the January 2014 issue of the journal Child. Renli Qiao, MD, professor of clinical medicine, and colleagues from China and the United States described their joint efforts in establishing pulmonary and critical care medicine as a subspecialty in China. Qiao has played a major role in helping China see the need for improved post-MD medical training in all fields.

The Harrington Discovery Institute at University Hospitals Case Medical Center has named Mark Humayun, MD, PhD, professor of ophthalmology and biomedical engineering and professor of cell & neurobiology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, as a recipient of a 2014 Harrington Scholar-Teacher award.

The award supports drug discovery efforts of great promise at renowned institutions across the nation.

Applications for the 2015 awards are expected to be between $200,000 over two years — for work on the development of an oxygen delivery device to treat ischemic retinal disorders, a leading cause of blindness worldwide.

ADDRESS: President Nikias sees great potential in patient-care growth

Continued from Page 1

Institute for Childhood Cancer and the Institute for Childhood Cancer and the Pediatric Treatment of Medicine of USC, has linked the level of coding material, PID1 mRNA, in tumors to clinical outcomes of patient with certain types of brain cancer.

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USC recently created the USC Health System Board, a new body that will provide high-level direction for the operations and strategic development of the University’s medical enterprise and joint ventures for surgical centers. With the 2013 addition of USC Verdugo Hills Hospital, the enterprise now includes three hospitals, more than 600 faculty physicians practicing through the USC Care Medical Group, five community-based ambulatory care clinics and a new medical foundation to engage community physicians in private practice. In a Dec. 20, 2013, memo describing the inaugural appointments to the board, USC President C.L. Max Nikias, PhD, said that its members “will advise the university on strategic growth initiatives and financial performance of the system, and will monitor quality of care and service across the system.” Nikias will serve as the board’s chair, with Tom Jackiewicz, MPH, senior vice president and CEO of USC Health, serving as vice chair. The board also includes the following additional members, whose three-year terms began Jan. 1:

- Robert Abeles, MBA, USC senior vice president and chief financial officer
- Carol Maumon Amr, general counsel
- Edward Crandall, MD, PhD, chair, Department of Medicine
- Todd R. Dickey, JD, USC senior vice president, administration
- Scott Evans, CEO, PharrMx, MHA, Keck Hospital of USC, USC Norris Cancer Hospital
- Elizabeth Garrett, JD, USC provost and senior vice president of academic affairs
- John Kassikian, USC trustee
- John Niparko, MD, president, USC Care Medical Group
- Carmen Pailapho, MD, MBA, dean, Keck School of Medicine of USC
- Leonard Schaeffer, USC trustee
- William Schoen, USC trustee
- Shawn Sheffield, MBA, MHSNA, chief strategy and development officer, Keck Medicine of USC
- Vaughn Stanislaw, MD, chair, Department of Surgery
- Mark Stevens, USC, trustee
- Debbie Walsh, RN, MSN, CEO, USC Verdugo Hills Hospital

**Calendar of Events**

**Monday, Feb. 24**

** Noon:** Keck School of Medicine Research Seminar Series: “Seizure Prophylaxis: Standard of Care or Standard of Practice,” Benjamin Eunnamul, USC. Harkness Auditorium. Info: maryjane.chen@med.usc.edu

** 6 p.m.:** USC Verdugo Hills Hospital Health Talk: “Tips for a Healthy Heart,” Eric Lau, USC. Info: (818) 952-2213

**Tuesday, Feb. 25**

** 8 a.m.:** Department of Neurology Grand Rounds: “Seizure Prophylaxis: Standard of Care or Standard of Practice,” Benjamin Eunnamul, USC. Harkness Auditorium. Info: (323) 442-7561

** 10 a.m.:** The Scripps Research Institute Seminar: “Cutting-Edge Findings from the International Space Station: Cancer Treatment Delivery, Space- conditioned Stem Cell Research and Other Exciting Advances,” Tara M. Buciky, PhD, San Diego Stem Cell Research Building Auditorium, CHLA. Info: (323) 361-8715


**Wednesday, Feb. 26**

** Noon:** Cancer Center Grand Rounds. Gordon Hagner, NCI. Aresty Auditorium. Info: pat.castro@med.usc.edu

**Thursday, Feb. 27**

** 3 p.m.:** Center for Technology and Innovation in Pediatrics Annual Symposium: “A New Era in Pediatric Innovation,” various speakers. Info and registration: tinyurl.com/ltb621


**Cristy Lytal\***

**In case of an emergency...**

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**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.

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**New Health System Board provides strategic direction**

**CHEN: Gift will help spur hunt for stem cell therapies**

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**Front row, from left:** Andy McMahon, PhD, director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, and Guangfei “Gary” Chen. Back row, from left: USC Stem Cell program director Ong Liu-Michael, program development director Kelli-Ann Nakayama, Hongxia “Helen” Zhang, Yong Chen, and McMahon lab postdoctoral fellows Lori O’Brien and Sanejoo Kumar.

**Can we take blood samples and return them in a day or two?**

**Medical education, training, investment, research and development**