Nurses honored at recognition celebration

By Douglas Morino

A group of nurses across Keck Medicine of USC were recognized in May for their hard work and dedication to exceptional patient care.

The 2015 Nursing Recognition Awards were announced May 6 at a ceremony in Hoffman Café at Keck Hospital of USC. The Nurse of the Year Award went to Victor Dimacali in recognition of his clinical expertise, commitment and outstanding patient care.

Dimacali, who works as a nurse on 6-North and is the 2015 Nursing Recognition Award recipient, is the culmination of four long years of hard work and sacrifice. Seeing my classmates and their families all dressed up today puts it all into perspective.”

Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, dean of the Keck School, opened the ceremony by congratulating the Class of 2015 and marshaling Sarah Bream shows. “These extraordinary individuals are role models for our medical students because they show the importance of community service on a global scale,” said Puliafito.

Next up was Provost Michael W. Quick, PhD. “Fight On!” is a wonderful slogan and greeting. But, for graduates of this medical school, it is more than just “Fight On!” is a call to action. For you, it is a call to service. For you, it is a plea from your patients. For you, it is your mission. So, I say to the Keck School of Medicine, Class of 2015: ‘Fight On!’”

By Sharon Brock

The weather was gray outside Galen Center on Saturday, May 16, but inside it was bright with Cardinal and gold as MD and MD/PhD graduates buzzed with excitement during commencement ceremonies for the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Just before 3 p.m., the 168 medical degree recipients donned red caps and gowns, crossing pride as they readied themselves to march into the arena to the tune of pomp and circumstance.

“It’s an amazing day,” said MD candidate TC Scorton, who will attend the psychiatry residency training program at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA this summer. “Today is the culmination of four long years of hard work and sacrifice. Seeing my classmates and their families all dressed up today puts it all into perspective.”

Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, dean of the Keck School, opened the ceremony by congratulating the Class of 2015 and acknowledging key faculty members. He also acknowledged the six staff members from the Keck School and Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center who

Dreary weather doesn’t dampen spirits at medical commencements

Charles Gibson, journalist and former ABC News Good Morning America anchor, gave the commencement address, which made parallels between the medical and journalism professions.

“Both of our professions involve a sacred trust,” said Gibson. “Journalists give a voice to those who might not otherwise be heard. As doctors, you have the sacred trust of caring for people. Giving them the health they need to be as productive as possible, as contented as possible, as fully realized human beings.”

Most of Saturday’s graduates in the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and Global Health programs let their emotions show in a May 15 group photo with faculty.

Brain mapping effort draws attention to researchers

ENIGMA director wins Innovations in Academia prize

By Les Dunseith

Paul Thompson, PhD, a professor at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, recently won the top prize in an international competition called Innovations in Academia. The awards celebrate creativity and innovation between Europe and the United States, honoring individuals whose professional accomplishments have made a sig-

By Les Dunseith

If you’re a math and science whiz studying brain scans and analyzing genetic biomarkers for a living, you’re not expecting to get the Hollywood treatment. But there she is, Neda Jahanshad, USC neuroscientist, peering ever so coolly over her shades as the “brain mapper” in the L.A. Weekly’s recent People of 2015 coverage.

Paul Thompson talks with attendees at event sponsored by University of Kent.

Neda Jahanshad was selected as one of 54 trendsetters in Los Angeles.
By Douglas Morino

Nurses working long shifts in a busy unit at Keck Hospital of USC will now have a comfortable place to rest and relax before getting back to what they do best — delivering world-class compassionate care. A new break room has opened on the seventh floor of Keck Hospital, thanks to a $50,000 gift from USC alumna Christine Marie Ofiesh, ’74. Seven South is home to the neurosciences ICU, where nurses care for patients with serious head, neck and spine injuries.

The break room features new paint, doors, furniture and fixtures, with a separate room for storage. Large clear windows overlook the Health Sciences Campus and let in natural sunlight.

Ofiesh is a noted philanthropist and volunteer with a long history of giving to Keck, Keck Medical Center of USC and charitable causes across Los Angeles County. She received the Alumni Service Award in 2014. “I’ve always wanted to try and make a difference,” Ofiesh said. “I deeply value the important work being done by the nurses of Keck Medicine of USC. So when I learned the new break room was an important need for them, I jumped at the chance to contribute.”

The room was dedicated during a May 6 ceremony as the Christine Marie Ofiesh Room, which commemorates the work of the men and women on the front lines of health care. Chief Nursing Officer Annette Sy, Keck Medicine of USC CEO Tom Jackiewicz and many nurses joined Ofiesh in the room. The improvements to the break room coincide with an effort across Keck Medicine of USC to build a workplace environment that values, engages and supports staff, Jackiewicz said.

“All of our nurses work tirelessly and exceptionally hard every day to provide the best possible care and healing environment to our patients,” Ofiesh said. “It is only fitting that we provide an appropriate resting environment for them, where they can relax and recharge during their breaks, before getting back to their life-saving work.”

He continued, saying, “Something as simple as a remodeled, comfortable break room can make the world of difference for a nurse who has just spent nine hours caring for some of our most critically ill patients. That is why we are so excited to unveil this refreshed break room, knowing that we have been possible without the generosity of Christine Marie Ofiesh.”

By Leslie Ridgeway

The goal of enhancing research related to lung disease, the Hastings Foundation has pledged $7.5 million over five years to establish the Hastings Center for Pulmonary Research (HCPR) at Keck Medicine of USC.

The center brings together basic and translational researchers and clinicians to create a nationally recognized center of excellence for advanced lung disease that builds upon existing collaborations within and outside of Keck Medicine. Zeev A. Koval, MD, the division of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine at Keck Medicine of USC, directs it.

“We expect this generous gift from the Hastings Foundation will help us greatly enhance pulmonary research and clinical medicine at Keck Medicine of USC,” said Borok, who is also professor of medicine and biochemistry and molecular biology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. “This gift will support our efforts to recruit renowned scientists and promising young researchers in basic lung biology, epigenetics, regenerative medicine and stem cell research, complementing our current research efforts with their knowledge and expertise.”

The research will focus on lung injury, repair and regeneration in an effort to discover new treatments and cures for pulmonary diseases that affect millions of people worldwide, including cystic fibrosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

“This gift builds on the relationship between the Hastings Foundation and USC that has lasted more than 50 years,” said David Treliff, PhD, president of the foundation’s board of directors.

The HCPR will bring together all scientists at USC currently working on lung-research related investigations to create shared resources as well as opportunities for scientific interaction and collaboration, thereby expanding the scope of lung research at USC.

The center will also collaborate with clinicians in the USC Clinical Center for Advanced Lung Disease and investigators in the Edythe and Edytoe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC.

“The HCPR will attract the best and brightest scientists and students studying advanced lung disease, adding to our medical school’s strength in research,” said Keck School of Medicine of USC Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA. “We’re grateful to the Hastings Foundation for their support of our work to cure lung disease.”
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"Much to her surprise, Jah- anshad was selected among 54 actors and singers and artists and fashionistas to be profiled as trendsetters by the LA Weekly in its annual celebration of fascinating people in Los Angeles. In her case, it started with a research paper unglamor- ously titled, "Common Genetic Variants Influence Human Subcortical Brain Structure."

"A former called," Jahanshad said. "She had read about one of our recent papers, and I was one of the co-authors."

She was one of almost 300 authors on the Xavere paper, which was led by Derek Hobar, an associate professor in the Keck School of Medicine of USC. That paper built on work being done by Jahanshad and her research colleagues as part of a project known as Enhanc- ing Neuro Imaging Genetics through Meta Analysis, or ENIGMA. Jahanshad is among the leaders of a worldwide network of neuro- scientists that is sharing find- ings in hopes that the pooled information will crack the brain's genetic code. It's a groundbreaking effort, as the LA Weekly story makes clear: "They're trying to go deeper into understanding of the human brain, mapping it and uncovering aspects of it that no one has ever understood."

Jahanshad first became involved with the brain-imaging project while studying at UCLA for her PhD in biomedical engineering with Professor Paul Thompson, PhD, and she stayed on when Thompson recruited his research partner, Provost Professor Arthur W. Toga, PhD, to lead the Institute of Neuroimaging and Infor- matics to USC in 2013.

"The ceremony was one part of an initiative to celebrate the University of Kent's 50th anniversary, said Jahanshad, and "very happy to be part of the USC enter- prise." At 30, she has assumed a leadership role in the ENIGMA project. Building on her engineering background, she is heavily involved in the imaging aspect, building tools to look at brain scans and extract information from them.

She helps produce com- puter models that process the data from thousands of MRIs obtained from research partners. The goal is to establish a baseline map of a normal brain that will help in discerning patterns common to various neurological disorders.

"We see the brain as a complex network," said Jahanshad, who is an assistant professor of neurology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

"A typical workflow? That's a rarity. "It's hard to say that you may need to consult from all over the world," Jahanshad explained. "I might be on a conference call at 6 a.m. or 11 p.m." And the project always seems to be expanding.

"When we start some- thing, we suddenly realize there is so much more to discover about aspects of the brain that we can look into," Jahanshad said. "A current project is looking at HIV across the world. There are various strains. But what is the com- mon effect on the brain?"

Finding commonality from seemingly endless data sources can be challenging, but also the global scope of the project is a plus. "When its combined, the knowledge is so much greater than what one can find alone," Jahanshad said.

"Something that is subtle in one case may be noticed as a pattern when you combine the info with many, many cases."

**THOMPSON: Award recognizes Europeans who excel as educators in the United States**

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signficant and lasting impact in the field of higher education and whose work and charac- ter have earned the respect and admiration of their professional colleagues," according to the award spon- sor, the University of Kent based in Canterbury, United Kingdom. Nominations were open to those who are producers of nuclear, engineering, and life science, and have worked in Europe and are currently working — or have worked — in the United States.

"Working in different countries is a privilege, and helps you build lifelong relationships and opportu- nities," said Thompson, a professor of neurology, psychiatry, radiology, engi- neering, and ophthalmology. "The Greek oracle Iosiates was right when he said, "Never be afraid to travel a long distance to learn from the best." The Kent Awards celebrate that vision."

The award also recognized the international scope of the work being done by Thompson as principal investigator of the Enhanc- ing Neuro Imaging Genetics through Meta Analysis network, or ENIGMA. This project pools brain scans and genetic data from 33 coun- tries to discover factors that help and harm the brain.

"We are seeing a revolu- tion in science where people worldwide pool their talents and resources to discover better treatments for brain disorders such as Alzheimer's and depression," Thompson said.

During the annual April 30 event at the Skirball Center in Los Angeles in celebration of the award, leaders from across the academic world gathered to exchange ideas and build alliances.

The ceremony was part of an initiative to celebrate the University of Kent's 50th anniversary. "I am not an alum of Kent, so it is especially nice and surprising to be honored," said Thompson, a native of England who studied at Oxford University. "LSE, their university prides itself on successful partnerships across Europe and across the world."

Many at The event noted the value of exchange programs and the life-changing opportuni- ties when students travel. "Here at USC — and in Kent — we are always keen to help students find opportunities overseas," Thompson said. "And we do our best to make our interna- tional students feel at home. It has never been easier for scientists worldwide to help each other to find their way in science, and in life."
Continued from page 1

ates received MD degrees, but five earned an MD/PhD degree, two earned an MD/MBA and one earned a MD/MPH.

Other health and medicine commencement ceremonies had taken place throughout the week. On May 13, the Keck School awarded 173 master’s degrees in a variety of biological and biomedical fields, 132 master’s of public health degrees, 43 PhD degrees and four master’s of academic medicine degrees.

Pulitano also gave welcoming remarks during this ceremony, followed by a commencement address from Keith R. Yamamoto, PhD, vice chancellor for research at the University of California, San Francisco. Yamamoto encouraged graduates to take risks. “The conventional wisdom is to play it safe, hold back and wait until you’re established to take risks, but I disagree,” said Yamamoto, who is also executive vice dean of the UCSF School of Medicine. “Seek out risk. Seek out adventure with a capital ‘A’.”

In the audience was Christine Hogan, an ROTC scholar who earned a master’s degree in pathology while training for the military. As a soldier-student, a typical day for Hogan included early morning workouts with the Army, attending classes for both Army and USC courses, followed by evening shifts at Children’s Hospital, Los Angeles, working in the laboratory of Yves DeClerck, MD. After her six-year contract with the Army, Hogan plans to attend medical school and pursue her goal to become a global leader in health care.

“People ask me why I am going into active duty rather than work in a lab or in corporate America. But I believe that nothing is more important than serving our country as a medical services officer in the United States military,” said Hogan, who has been selected to be trained as a medical evacuation pilot and fly Blackhawk helicopters. “Life is too short not to pursue your dreams and do what you want to do.”

On May 13, additional health-related ceremonies took place in conjunction with commencement at the University Park Campus. The USC School of Pharmacy awarded 182 PharmD degrees, 13 PhD degrees and five doctor of regulatory science degrees. Additionally, 52 graduates were awarded master’s degrees and 44 pharmacists completed their residency training.

Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy awarded 91 Doctor of Physical Therapy degrees, four master’s degrees in biokinesiology and eight PhD degrees in biokinesiology. Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy honored 45 Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree recipients, 137 who earned master’s degrees and 10 who received bachelor’s degrees.

The Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC awarded 174 doctor of dental surgery degrees, three PhD degrees in craniofacial biology, five master’s degrees in dental hygiene, 17 master’s degrees in orofacial pain and oral medicine, 45 advanced specialty degrees and 37 bachelor’s degrees in dental hygiene.

Family Medicine’s Primary Care Physician Assistant Program awarded 56 master’s of physician assistant practice degrees. Preventive Medicine awarded 116 bachelor of science degrees to undergraduates in the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, and Global Health programs.

The Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry granted a total of 281 degrees at its May 15 commencement.

ROTC scholar Christine Hogan was among those who received a PhD, MPH or MS degree on May 13 from the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

USC valedictorian Alexander Yuen, who graduated with a double major in biological science and in the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program, gave the May 15 student address.
Soon-to-be MD Jazmin Cole is all smiles during the Keck School commencement. Prior to the commencement procession, Kevin Platt snaps a photo of classmates Allison Woo, Grant Meyer, Amanda Sandoval and Ryan Kobayashi.

Above, co-class president Reem Itani delights the crowd with observations about a medical education while giving the student address at the MD and MD/PhD commencement for the Keck School of Medicine of USC. Far left, a parade of new doctors received diplomas and congratulations from Vice Dean Henri Ford, Dean Carmen A. Puliafito and Provost Michael Quick. Left, keynote speaker and broadcast journalist Charles Gibson said new graduates are seeing sweeping technological changes as they begin their careers.

Far left, Nick Saade shows off his “Dr. Nick” statuette. Above left, new doctors Miriam Lassiter and Meredith Laird share a hug. Left, T.C. Scotton and Megan Early chat after receiving their MD degrees. Above, Mariya Kalashnikova beams as she is recognized for her academic achievements during the commencement ceremony on May 16.
Acoustic neuroma proclamation

Los Angeles City Councilman Jose Huizar, second from right, and Keck Medicine of USC grateful patient Kevin McCarthy, third from left, were among the special guests on hand May 12 for the official proclamation of May 10-16 as Acoustic Neuroma Awareness Week in Los Angeles. — Allison Trinidad

New fellowship program seeks exceptional stem cell researcher

The Heart Fellows at USC, which was recently established by a gift from the Hearst Foundations, is now accepting applications. The annual award of $65,000 includes one year of salary and benefits to be made to an exceptional junior postdoctoral researcher within USC's stem cell research community. The Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC is seeking postdoctoral fellows who have already engaged in stem cell-related research at USC or plan to do so within six months of the July 15 application deadline. Contact Program Director Qing Liu at qliumich@med.usc.edu for information or to submit an application. — Lydia Lam

Varma joins national committee to assess and promote eye health

Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, director of the USC Eye Institute, attended a May 19 meeting of the Institute of Medicine (soon to be renamed the National Academy of Medicine) as a member of a committee that will assess public health approaches to reduce vision impairment and prevent eye health issues in the United States. The meeting in Washington D.C. was the first step in a two-year study that will guide national policy on this issue. Varma is also the chair of ophthalmology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Academic Senate honors Gomer for Distinguished Faculty Service

After nomination by his peers, Charles J. Gomer, PhD, was selected for the 2015 Distinguished Faculty Service Award by USC's Academic Senate. The honor recognizes Gomer, professor of pediatrics and radiation oncology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, for his exceptional service to the faculty and to the university as a whole. He has long been actively involved in academic governance at the university, serving as vice president (2012-13), president (2013-14) and immediate past president (2014-2015) of the USC faculty. At Children's Hospital, Los Angeles, he is vice chair of faculty affairs in pediatrics and a cancer research scientist at the Saban Research Institute. His pediatric translational research led to the development of the laser-chemotherapy procedure used nationally to treat retinoblastoma. “Chuck Gomer exemplifies the best qualities of the academic scientist and colleague, and is well-deserving of this special honor,” said Brent Polk, MD, vice president of academic affairs, chair of pediatrics at CHLA and director of the Saban Research Institute. — Jennifer Jing

Surgeons use balloon to decrease blood loss during robotic surgery on kidney tumor

By Leslie Ridgeway

A procedure intended to decrease blood loss during removal of a kidney tumor that had grown into a major vein via robotic surgery was recently performed successfully for the first time in the world at Keck Medicine of USC. The procedure has the potential to decrease the length of surgery from five hours to three hours.

Using a 3-centimeter balloon to block blood flow during the surgery, a team of surgeons led by Inderbir Gill, M.D., executive vice founder of the USC Institute of Urology, isolated a 6-centimeter tumor growing into the inferior vena cava (IVC), a critical vein bringing deoxygenated blood from the legs to the heart. The balloon cut off blood flow within the vessel while the tumor was removed and minimized the amount of blood loss during the operation. The tumor posed specific challenges solved by the balloon, Gill said.

“Around 10 to 15 percent of kidney cancer patients are diagnosed with an IVC tumor thrombus, which is a tumor that grows into the inferior vena cava,” said Gill. “In this case, the tumor was attached to the patient's liver by many small blood vessels. This required us to control the vessels delicately, which we could do more safely with the balloon than with standard clamping and without the need to separate the vena cava from the liver.” The intra-IVC balloon was used to isolate the tumor thrombus in the part of the IVC close to the heart, at a section where the liver was attached to the vena cava. A clamp controlled the blood flow at the end toward the patient's legs. Gill said the balloon would have applications for other types of robotic and IVC-thrombectomy surgeries. Patient Nestor Martinez, 57, of Bakersfield, CA, was discharged the day after surgery, Gill said.

Kidney cancer is among the 10 most common cancers in the United States. Nearly 14,000 Americans are expected to die of kidney cancer in 2015, according to the American Cancer Society. Kidney cancer tends to affect older people.

HSC News

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Director, Internal Communications: Virginia Iaca

Contributors: Sharon Brock, Tania Chatila, Griselda Latyl, Carol Matthieu, Douglas Morino, Sara Reeve, Leslie Ridgeway, Talar Shahnian, Sherni Smelling and Alison Trinidad

Phone: (323) 442-2830 Fax: (323) 442-0832 Email: hscnews@usc.edu Web: hscnews.usc.edu | kecknet.usc.edu

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