



Baritone Eli Villanueva sings holiday songs at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System.

## It's beginning to sound a lot like Christmas for patients

LA Opera, Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute partner to sing carols, patriotic songs at hospitals, care facilities during holidays

By Zen Vuong

USC's Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute (ZNI) is examining whether Christmas carols could help people with Alzheimer's disease or dementia recover memories.

Music to Remember, a program ZNI and LA Opera started in 2012, sends trained vocalists to sing holiday songs at long-term care and assisted living facilities in the Los Angeles area. Other partners include the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

"Music is the universal language that enables us to express how we feel," said Berislav Zlokovic, MD, PhD, director

of ZNI, based at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, and holder of the Mary Hayley and Selim Zilkha Chair in Alzheimer's Disease Research. "There have been some studies about the effect of music on Alzheimer's, but I don't think there is a definitive study."

This year, a group of LA Opera vocalists will sing at 13 hospitals, long-term care or assisted living facilities over five days. Holiday music is ubiquitous in December in the United States. Thus, the aim of Music to Remember is to tap into memories associated with these festive tunes.

The Alzheimer's Association,

See **CAROLS**, page 2

## Surgeons pioneer robotic prostate cancer treatment

By Mary Dacuma

Three patients entered a new era of prostate cancer treatment recently, as Keck Medicine of USC became the first academic medical center in the nation to use new energy-based robotic ablative technology in an outpatient procedure for a prostate cancer patient.

USC Institute of Urology surgeons used a Food and Drug Administration-cleared non-invasive high intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) surgical ablation system to destroy prostate tumors in three patients. The system enables surgeons to introduce the HIFU system into the patient's body through the rectum to treat localized tumors

in the prostate gland.

Inderbir S. Gill, MD, founding executive director, USC Institute of Urology, and chairman and professor, Catherine and Joseph Aresty Department of Urology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, performed the surgery on two patients on Dec. 10 and one more on Dec. 11. Two patients were discharged the same day and the third patient went home the next morning, which is sooner than patients typically experience with prostate cancer surgery.

"The goal of focal HIFU is to target and destroy only the significant cancer lesion, thereby preserving the delicate nerves around the prostate,

See **TREATMENT**, page 3



Inderbir Gill, front, points to a screen during a noninvasive high intensity focused ultrasound procedure on Dec. 10.

## Alice Issai named COO of Keck Medical Center of USC

By Douglas Morino

Keck Hospital of USC and the USC Norris Cancer Hospital will have a new leader as Alice Issai, MBA, has been named the new chief operating officer of Keck Medical Center of USC beginning Dec. 21. Issai will report to Rod Hanners, CEO of Keck Medical Center and COO of Keck Medicine of USC.

Issai has extensive experience managing and leading large, quaternary/tertiary health care organizations. She comes from UC Irvine Health, where as COO she oversaw operations for a 426-bed academic medical center, a freestanding NCI designated cancer center, a comprehensive digestive disease center and substantial ambulatory care operations. Issai also spent 12 years at Kaiser Permanente's Los Angeles Medical Center, where she was COO of Kaiser's 500-bed flagship tertiary hospital in Southern California; and rose to vice president of finance at City of Hope National Medical Center.

"I was fortunate to have Alice as a colleague at Kaiser Permanente," Hanners said. "As a leader, she emphasizes empowering staff and creating partnerships with physicians to drive performance, quality improvement and patient experience. I know she will be a great addition to the Trojan Family."



Alice Issai

## Keith Hobbs of CHLA to be CEO at USC Verdugo Hills Hospital

By Meg Aldrich

Los Angeles area hospital management expert Keith M. Hobbs, MBA, has been named CEO of USC Verdugo Hills Hospital, effective Jan. 4. Hobbs has been at Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA), holding multiple leadership positions over more than 20 years.

"Keith Hobbs' skills and experience make him the ideal choice for the position of CEO of USC Verdugo Hills Hospital," said Thomas E. Jackiewicz, senior vice president and CEO of Keck Medicine of USC. "His long tenure at Children's Hospital demonstrates a proven track record for strengthening and supporting all aspects of hospital operations — clinical, operational and financial."

Hobbs most recently served as vice president of ancillary services, support services and supply chain. In that role, he was responsible for the operational and financial oversight of the departments of radiology, pathology and anesthesiology critical care medicine, along with other departments and contracted services at CHLA.

He also had been associate vice president of finance and administrative director of the department of surgery and manager of decision support.

Before entering health care, Hobbs was a compensation representative for Walt Disney Imagineering in Glendale and a senior compensation analyst for Security Pacific Corp. in Los Angeles.



Keith M. Hobbs

## Emergency medicine physician offers tips for holiday safety

By Douglas Morino

The holidays are an opportunity to give thanks and celebrate life. They also can be a time of danger.

Overindulgence of alcohol or drugs is an increased health threat during the holidays, experts at Keck Medicine of USC say, as is accidental consumption of harmful substances. Children may be most vulnerable. During the holiday season, emergency rooms see many young patients who have accidentally ingested medications from visiting older relatives or family friends.

Michael Levine, MD, an assistant professor of emergency medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC who specializes in toxicology and treats patients suffering from drug and alcohol overdoses, including children who unknowingly consume dangerous chemicals.

"Around Thanksgiving, we start seeing an increase in accidental ingestions," said Levine, who works at Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center as well as USC Verdugo Hills Hospital and Keck Hospital of USC.

Prior to joining Keck Medicine, Levine completed his toxicology fellowship at the Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center in Phoenix and residency at the Brigham and Women's/Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. With the recent hiring of two new toxicology physicians, the LAC+USC Department of Emergency Medicine's Section of

See **SAFETY**, page 3



Les Dunseith

Keck School of Medicine of USC Dean Carmen A. Puliafito gestures to panelists Andrew A. Moshfeghi, Daniel Oakes and Sharon Orrange at a meeting of the USC Alumni Board of Governors.

## Puliafito welcomes Alumni Board of Governors to HSC

By Amanda Busick

‘Ask questions. Do not assume anything.’

This was the advice of Keck School of Medicine of USC Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, at a Dec. 11 discussion featuring leading experts in patient care.

The panel, which was part of the USC Alumni Board of Governors quarterly meeting, discussed many aspects of medicine and treatment and highlighted that patients should be proactive and get involved in their own care. The panel consisted of Seth C. Gamradt, MD, director of orthopaedic surgery residency program; Stephen B. Gruber, MD, PhD, MPH, director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer

Center; Ray V. Matthews, MD, division chief of cardiovascular medicine; Andrew A. Moshfeghi, MD, MBA, associate professor of clinical ophthalmology at the USC Eye Institute; Daniel Oakes, MD, director of the USC Joint Replacement Program; and Sharon Orrange, MD, MPH, assistant professor of clinical medicine.

The Board of Governors is a volunteer organization that is an integral part of the development and implementation of programs and services of the USC Alumni Association.

Members represent each of the alumni association constituency groups as well as all of the major academic areas of the university.

## Calendar of Events

### Tuesday, Dec. 22

**5:30 p.m.** Ophthalmology Grand Rounds. Ananth Sastry, MD, USC. HC4 Conference Room, 3rd Floor. Info: Tyaisha Christopher, (323) 409-5233, Tyaisha.Christopher@med.usc.edu, <http://usceye.org>

### Wednesday, Jan. 6

**Noon.** Saban Research Institute at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles Seminar. “Research Seminar: Deciphering Host-Microbiota Crosstalk to Elucidate Mucosal Immunity,” Neeraj K. Surana, MD, PhD, Harvard Medical School. Auditorium, Saban Research Building, 4661 Sunset Blvd. Parking is available at the main hospital garage. Info: Ritu Gill, (323) 361-8715, [tecpad@chla.org](mailto:tecpad@chla.org), <http://chla.org/tecpad>

### Saturday, Jan. 16

**7 a.m.-5 p.m.** Continuing Medical Education second annual Update on Esophageal Diseases Conference. USC course directors: Edy Soffer, MD, and John Lipham, MD. University Club of Pasadena. Info: Anika Bobb, (323) 442-2547, [anika.bobb@med.usc.edu](mailto:anika.bobb@med.usc.edu), <http://usc.edu/cme>

### Thursday, Jan. 28

**11 a.m.** USC Stem Cell Seminar. Didier Stainier, Max Planck Institute for Heart and Lung Research, Eli and Edythe Broad CIRM Center Auditorium, BCC 101. Info: Cristy Lytal, (323) 442-2172, [lytal@med.usc.edu](mailto:lytal@med.usc.edu), <http://stemcell.usc.edu>

### Saturday, Jan. 30

**7 a.m.-4:30 p.m.** Continuing Medical Education third annual USC Multi-Disciplinary Breast Cancer Symposium. USC program organizers: Eric L. Chang, MD; Eugene Chung, MD, PhD, JD; Christy A. Russell, MD; Naomi R. Schechter, MD; Stephen F. Sener, MD. Intercontinental Hotel, Los Angeles. Info: Anika Bobb, (323) 442-2547, [anika.bobb@med.usc.edu](mailto:anika.bobb@med.usc.edu), <http://usc.edu/cme>

### Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 4-6

**7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.** Continuing Medical Education Conference: Practical Urology. USC course directors Inderbir S. Gill, MD; René Sotelo, MD; and Monish Aron, MD. Aresty Auditorium. Info: Anika Bobb, (323) 442-2547, [anika.bobb@med.usc.edu](mailto:anika.bobb@med.usc.edu), <http://usc.edu/cme>

### Tuesday-Wednesday, Feb. 16-17

**10:30 a.m.-3:55 p.m.** Continuing Medical Education Conference: A Multi-Dimensional View of Diabetes and Obesity. Aresty Auditorium. Info: Anika Bobb, (323) 442-2547, [anika.bobb@med.usc.edu](mailto:anika.bobb@med.usc.edu), <http://usc.edu/cme>

### Friday-Saturday, Feb. 19-20

**Noon-5:45 p.m.** Continuing Medical Education Innovations in Medical Education Conference. Hilton Los Angeles/San Gabriel. Info: Anika Bobb, (323) 442-2547, [anika.bobb@med.usc.edu](mailto:anika.bobb@med.usc.edu), <http://usc.edu/cme>

**Notice:** Calendar items are due at least 10 days before publication date. Timely submission does not guarantee publication in print. See more calendar entries at [hscnews.usc.edu/calendar-of-events](http://hscnews.usc.edu/calendar-of-events). Submit items at [tinyurl.com/calendar-hsc](http://tinyurl.com/calendar-hsc). Include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location and a phone number/email address.

## Transplant patient’s young son is a triumph of faith and medical expertise

By Margaret Trtryan

The successful pancreas-kidney transplant that Eidalia Marquez Vazquez had a few years ago at Keck Medicine of USC meant that she no longer needed to constantly monitor and administer insulin as a type 1 diabetic. But there was another wish she hoped could still come true — she wanted to be a mother.

“They told me there are risks and possible complications, but I always wanted to get pregnant. I had faith,” said Marquez, 32, a Las Vegas resident who this year celebrated the first birthday of her son, Jesus.

To ensure the best chance of a successful pregnancy without leading to rejection of the transplanted organs, the kidney-pancreas post-transplant team at Keck Medical Center of USC had to plan carefully in advance, adjusting Marquez’ medications and scheduling frequent checkups despite the distance from Marquez’ home.

“Unlike a kidney transplant that has been done alone, diagnosing a rejection on a pancreas transplant is a bit harder,” said Yasir A. Qazi, MD, medical director of the kidney-pancreas transplant program and associate professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Not only is it difficult for recipients of this type of transplant, known as SPKT, to conceive and deliver a healthy baby, they face additional risks. Complications can include failure or rejection of the transplanted organ(s), deterioration in maternal renal and pancreas function, and increased risks of maternal illness or disease, maternal death, miscarriage, preterm birth, fetal malformations, low birth weight, hypertension, preeclampsia and infection.

Qazi explained that SPKT surgeries are rare, usually only offered to candidates with kidney failure from type 1 diabetes. Only 709 were done nationwide in 2014, making up 2.4 percent of all transplants in the United States for that year. Since 2002, a total of 43 kidney-pancreas transplants have been performed at Keck Medicine of USC, one of the few centers in the world that also considers kidney-pancreas transplants for certain type 2 diabetics with insulin dependency. There’s an even

lower rate of successful pregnancies for these patients — research from Osaka University indicated only 77 pregnancies worldwide for 43 SPKT patients as of 2011.

To facilitate pregnancy, the team changed one of Marquez’ immunosuppressants and adjusted doses to reduce negative effects to fetal growth and development, while still maintaining good function of her transplanted organs. In addition to follow-ups by a local high-risk OB-GYN in Las Vegas, Marquez and her husband made monthly trips to Los Angeles throughout her pregnancy and after delivery for monitoring by the USC team, which conducted lab tests and ultrasound procedures.

“They had to come all the way from Vegas, which made it even harder because it wasn’t easy to have them get in a car while pregnant and have them come all the way over here. I was always worried about the safety of the entire family driving back and forth,” Qazi said.

Fast-forward to early October 2015, when Marquez, accompanied by her husband and little Jesus, made another visit to Los Angeles for a checkup. Numerous staff members greeted the family, expressing their disbelief at how much the boy had grown since their last visit in March 2015.

Jesus and his mother are both thriving and in good health. After an all-clear from Qazi, the Marquez family won’t need to make the drive again to Los Angeles until next year.



Courtesy Eidalia Marquez Vazquez  
From left, Eidalia Marquez Vazquez, her son Jesus and husband Adrian Chavez.

## CAROLS: Music to Remember also to sing to veterans, sick children

Continued from page 1

California Southland chapter, also is part of the collaborative effort.

“Music in general has a transformative effect on people with dementia because it corresponds with certain parts of their life,” said Ayesha Dixon, who manages the Alzheimer’s Association’s Memory Mornings in Los Angeles.

“Music makes them feel connected to a time period or a memory associated with that song. People with dementia physically react to the music.”

LA Opera also will share holiday joy by singing to veterans and sick children. Dressed in layers and capped with Santa hats, LA Opera singers stroll through the halls of facilities such as Keiro Nursing Home, Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, City of Hope and Huntington Hospital.

“In the course of even 45 minutes of music, you see a calm going over someone who is very disconnected or who may be very agitated,” said Stacy Brightman, a spokeswoman for LA Opera. “Someone who was only looking down will start to look up with a focus. We’ve even seen foot tapping and tears.”

Although Music to Remember started three years ago, LA Opera has been singing to children in hospitals and to the elderly for the past six years, Brightman said. The seasonal concerts are part of a movement toward total patient care, she said.

“You can’t separate someone’s spirit and soul from their mind,” Brightman said.

“Holiday music is some of your earliest memories, and that’s the key to Alzheimer’s. You remember the things you learned when you were very young.”



Ricardo Carrasco III

The medical team watches a monitor during a robot-assisted paraspinal tumor resection at Keck Medical Center of USC.

## Surgeons join forces to remove spinal tumor

By Melissa Masatani

To do what's best for a patient, sometimes a combined effort is the best approach. That was the case recently at Keck Medical Center of USC, where an experienced neurosurgeon and an expert in robot-assisted urologic surgery teamed up successfully to remove a particularly troublesome spinal tumor.

Patrick C. Hsieh, MD, associate professor in the Department of Neurological Surgery and director of minimally invasive spine surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, enlisted Andrew J. Hung, MD, assistant professor of clinical urology, to assist him during a paraspinal tumor resection on Nov. 3. The patient, a 71-year-old woman with neuromatosis, had developed a rapidly growing tumor outside the spinal canal, next to the aorta and kidneys in the L3-L4 spinal section.

"For this particular tumor in this location, we felt that this was a favorable tumor to treat robotically," Hsieh said. "The advantage of the robotic procedure is that there is a much smaller incision with very little disruption of the soft tissue and minimal blood loss."

The da Vinci Surgical System robot has brought revolutionary changes to certain major surgeries, particularly in urology. Other fields, including neurosurgery, may not yet have as much

experience using the device, however, so a multidisciplinary approach is needed to provide the most meaningful benefits to a patient.

"Teamwork is critical between specialties and surgeons — each brings critical skills and experience in multidisciplinary procedures like this," said Hung, who is director of robotic simulation and education at the USC Institute of Urology. "In this procedure, we incurred almost no blood loss, and the surgery was completed in a little over an hour. The neurosurgery team told us that a similar procedure done traditionally [non-robotically] could have taken several hours longer and resulted in significantly more blood loss."

The surgeons approached the deep-seated spinal tumor through multiple small ports and, because of the robot's ability to work in confined spaces, quickly were able to dissect the tumor from the nerves and organs before removing the mass. In this case, the patient has underlying health problems that delayed her release from the hospital, but Hsieh said healthier patients could be discharged as soon as the next day after a robotic procedure.

"We are developing innovative ways to deal with complex diseases and a multidisciplinary approach allows us to do things that each of us would not be able to do separately," Hsieh said.

## SAFETY: Hospitals seeing increase in prescriptions for powerful medication

Continued from page 1

Medical Toxicology has expanded to other health care facilities, including Huntington Hospital in Pasadena.

Prior to the holidays, medical professionals at these sites had already seen an increase in prescription drug overdoses. Levine attributes the trend to an increased number of prescriptions for powerful pain medications.

"We've seen an increase in prescription opiate drug overdoses on par with the national trend," he said. "There has been a push over the last couple of years to be aggressively treating pain, and the volume of prescriptions for opiates has increased. If people are in pain, they want medicine to treat it."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has called the rise of prescription painkiller overdoses an epidemic. The amount of painkillers prescribed and sold in the United States has nearly quadrupled since 1999, according to the agency.

Meanwhile, overdoses from illegal drugs have been rising.

Heroin overdoses quadrupled this

decade, according to CDC data.

Doctors like Levine who work in local emergency rooms say the number of accidental overdoses could be drastically reduced by increased awareness. During the holidays, it's important to make sure all medication is safely stored out of the reach of children.

"Visiting grandparents who are not used to having young children around should not be leaving medication on the night stand," Levine said.

Those struggling with addiction also may feel especially vulnerable during the holidays, increasing the risk of alcohol and drug abuse.

"Around the holidays, we see an increase in ingestion overdoses and suicide rates," Levine said.

The emergency physicians and nurses at Keck Medicine of USC facilities are well equipped to handle the influx of patients who have overdosed.

"As a general rule, if someone makes it to the hospital alive, their odds of survival are very high," Levine said.

"The key is very good, supportive care."

## Emotion recognition in people with autism spectrum disorder is focus of study

By Debra Kain

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often have difficulty recognizing and interpreting how facial expressions convey various emotions — from joy to puzzlement, sadness to anger. This can make it difficult for an individual with ASD to navigate social situations and empathize with others.

A study led by researchers at Children's Hospital Los Angeles and Columbia University used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to study the neural activity of different brain regions in participants with ASD, compared with typically developing (TD) participants, when viewing facial emotions.

The researchers found that while behavioral response to face-stimuli was comparable across groups, the corresponding neural activity between ASD and TD groups differed dramatically.

"Studying these similarities and differences may help us understand the origins of interpersonal emotional experience in people with ASD, and provide targets for intervention," said principal investigator Bradley S. Peterson, MD, director of the Institute for the Developing Mind at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. The results have been

published online in advance of publication by the journal *Human Brain Mapping*.

In order to more objectively look at how participants in both groups responded to a broad range of emotional faces, the study used fMRI to measure two neurophysiological systems, called valence and arousal, that underlie all emotional experiences. "Valence" refers to the degree to which an emotion is pleasant or unpleasant. "Arousal" represents the degree to which an emotion is associated with high or low interest.

"We believe this is the first study to examine the difference in neural activity in brain regions that process valence or arousal between typically developing individuals or those with ASD," said Peterson, who is director of the division of child and adolescent psychiatry at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

The study demonstrated there was much more neural activity in participants with ASD when they viewed arousing facial emotions, like happiness or fear.

The scientists concluded that the near absence of group differences for valence suggests that individuals with ASD are not atypical in all aspects of emotion processing.



Ricardo Carrasco III

Inderbir Gill, second from right, examines a patient during a noninvasive, high intensity focused ultrasound procedure on Dec. 10.

## TREATMENT: New technique is noninvasive, nonsurgical

Continued from page 1

thus protecting both continence and potency," Gill said. "This is a noninvasive, nonsurgical, outpatient procedure that does not involve any radiation. There is no blood loss, the recovery is quick and typically the patient is back on his feet and discharged home the same day."

Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of death among American men, behind lung cancer. It is diagnosed most frequently in older men.

According to Gill, HIFU surgery is an option for patients who have low- to intermediate-risk cancer, with localized lesions within a prostate that is no more than 40 grams in volume, and who already possess strong levels of continence and potency. In general, patients should have organ-confined disease, and a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) level under 15-20 ng/ml.

Brett Lindsay, 46, of Scottsdale, AZ, was the first of Gill's patients to receive this form of treatment. As a regional vice

president for Clean Energy Fuels and a strong advocate for the environment, Lindsay maintains a rigorous travel schedule.

"I was anxious to find a form of treatment that would remove my cancer, but still allow me to get back on the road with minimal down time," Lindsay said. "With HIFU I can continue working with my team and still having the energy to get in a few rounds of golf on the weekends."

Currently, HIFU systems developed by two manufacturers, EDAP TMS and SonaCare Medical, have been granted FDA clearance. The USC Institute of Urology is the first and only center in the U.S. to offer both these cutting-edge technologies, which collectively cover the entire range of HIFU treatments.

Patients are given general anesthetic and the HIFU probe is introduced into the rectum. The ultrasound beam is aimed at the prostate through the rectum, destroying the tumor noninvasively and precisely, with a flash of heat.

## HSC Newsmakers

A roundup of news items related to Keck Medicine of USC, which may include philanthropic donations, research grants, publication in academic journals and mentions in the news media:



Physician Assistant Education Association

Maria Maldonado holds the Excellence Through Diversity Award presented in November to the Primary Care Physician Assistant Program at Keck Medicine of USC.

### National physician assistant group honors Keck School program

THE PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAM at Keck School of Medicine of USC has won a prestigious award from the national Physician Assistant Education Association. The Excellence Through Diversity Award was presented Nov. 13 during the organization's Education Forum held in Washington, D.C. In announcing the honor, the PAEA noted that "USC has been dedicated to recruiting, educating and graduating a diverse group of students for more than 40 years. The program's current Recruitment Pipeline Program is making a significant impact in the local community by exposing diverse students to careers in health care." USC representatives on hand to accept the award included Maria Maldonado, PA-C, MPAP, MPH, the faculty member primarily responsible for the outreach done by the Pipeline Program. Since its inception in 1972, USC's Primary Care Physician Assistant program has placed a strong emphasis on recruiting, educating and graduating a diverse group of students.

### Radiation Oncology department chair named ASTRO Fellow

ERIC L. CHANG, MD, professor and chair of the Department of Radiation Oncology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, has been selected along with 16 other distinguished members to receive the Fellows designation by the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO). The 2015 class was honored at ASTRO's 57th annual meeting on Oct. 20 in San Antonio, Texas. The Fellows designation honors those who have been an active or emeritus member of ASTRO for at least 15 years, given the equivalent of 10 years of service and significantly added to the field of radiation oncology in the areas of research, education, patient care or service and leadership. In all, 259 members have received this designation since the inception of the award in 2006.



Eric L. Chang



Courtesy USC Spine Center

A team of leaders from Keck Medicine of USC traveled to China recently to meet with Tongde Hospital leaders there.

### Spine Center forms partnership with Tongde Hospital of Zhejiang Province

A TEAM OF PHYSICIANS from Keck Medicine of USC recently returned from a trip to China, where they signed a collaboration agreement with officials from Tongde Hospital of Zhejiang Province. Jeffrey Wang, MD, and John C. Liu, MD, co-directors of the USC Spine Center, joined Paul Craig, RN, JD, chief administrative officer for Keck Medicine of USC, on the November trip to establish the partnership with the Chinese medical center. This collaboration agreement establishes a formal relationship for educational exchanges, joint research projects, patient care collaboration as well as joint participation in international meetings with Tongde Hospital. The USC Spine Center has a 15-year history of working with and training physicians in China, producing 10-15 international doctors annually. — **Melissa Masatani**



Ricardo Carrasco III

Christine Hovagimian, second from right, was named 2015 Keck Medicine of USC Employee of the Year. Shown with her, from left, are Keck Medicine of USC leaders Tom Jackiewicz, Amar Desai and Rod Hanners.

## Employee of the Year chosen for her work ethic, being a team player

By Douglas Morino

Christine Hovagimian was hoping her colleague would win.

But as the annual Employee of the Year Award was announced Dec. 9 at the 2015 Holiday Party, Hovagimian heard her own name called.

"It was very surprising," Hovagimian said of winning the Keck Medicine of USC Employee of the Year Award. "I was rooting for another candidate. I was hoping she would get it."

Hovagimian, an account representative at the Office of Revenue Cycle Management for the USC Care Medical Group Inc., was selected by the Keck Medicine leadership team from the 12 winners of "Employee of the Month" in 2015.

Hovagimian was chosen for her strong work ethic, harmonious and cooperative spirit, being a team player and for being a role model of our USC Keck Culture Values. She received a \$2,500 check as part of the award. Hovagimian has been with Keck Medicine for three years and said that she tries to promote an atmosphere of collaboration, respect and unity in the workplace.

"I was raised in that atmosphere — be respectful to your elders, be courteous and be kind," Hovagimian said. "I don't put differences between people and I'm more into unity than the

individual. I try and create unity everywhere I go."

She works in a "very hectic" environment — tending to a steady stream of phone calls and emails to ensure that billing is done correctly and on time. She is credited with leading an effort to decrease missing charges by 42 percent in the past 12 months.

"We make sure providers get rendered for services," she said. "We make sure our patients are always happy and so are our physicians."

Those who nominated Hovagimian said her willingness to share knowledge and technical expertise makes her a driving force within her department. Recognized as the November Employee of the Month, Hovagimian also displayed superior initiative and outstanding leadership.

Hovagimian said using effective communication was

part of her success in the workplace. She also knows everyone's name.

"I'll remember the name of everyone I meet so I can put a face with a name," she said. "Name recognition is a big tool."

And about a year and a half ago, Hovagimian created a "Month End Potluck" — a small, informal gathering to bring people in her division together in the midst of a busy and often stressful time — the final billing day of the month. What started as a box of doughnuts and bagels at a cubicle for a few colleagues to share has turned into a monthly tradition that brings members in the nine departments across CBO together.

"We are so spread apart in our different departments, we would never associate," she said.

"This is a chance to bring everyone together."

USC Health Sciences  
Public Relations and Marketing  
2011 N Soto Street - SST-2830  
Los Angeles, CA 90032

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### New look, same information: KMC Intranet site goes live

Keck Medical Center of USC employees can see a new look for the community page off of KeckNet. The redesigned KMC Intranet site offers the latest information from KMC, with workplace tools, Town Hall times and dates, and a calendar of events. It can be reached by going to [kmc-intranet.med.usc.edu/keckhospital/Pages/default.aspx](http://kmc-intranet.med.usc.edu/keckhospital/Pages/default.aspx).

## HSC News

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Editor: Les Dunseith

Director, Internal Communications: Virginia Baca

Contributors: Andrea Aldana, Meg Aldrich, Amanda Busick, Louise Cobb, Mary Dacuma, Cristy Lytal, Melissa Masatani, Carol Matthieu, Douglas Morino, Sara Reeve, Leslie Ridgeway, Sherri Snelling, Carol Sussman, Zen Vuong and L. Alexis Young

Phone: (323) 442-2830  
Fax: (323) 442-2832  
Email: [hscnews@usc.edu](mailto:hscnews@usc.edu)  
Web: [hscnews.usc.edu](http://hscnews.usc.edu) | [kecknet.usc.edu](http://kecknet.usc.edu)

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