AMA president visits Keck Medical Center

By Douglas Morino

From a meeting with President Barack Obama at the White House, American Medical Association President Robert Wah, MD, stopped by Keck Medical Center of USC to discuss the Affordable Care Act, regulatory hurdles facing physicians and historic legislation that could impact health care payments.

“The cost of health care in this country is raising in a way that we as a society are having trouble keeping up with,” said Wah, who became AMA president in June 2014 and is the first Asian-American to hold the post. “The path we are on is not sustainable.”

Stephanie Hall, MD, chief medical officer of Keck Medical Center of USC hosted the March 26 presentation. Wah, a reproductive endocrinologist and obstetrician-gynecologist, was joined at the Broad Conference Center by Pedram Salihmpour, MD, president of the Los Angeles County Medical Association.

Wah met with Obama the day before his USC visit to discuss legislation that could directly affect physicians and patients. The Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 will improve Medicare payments for physician services, expand availability of Medicare data, encourage care management for patients with chronic care needs and extend the Children’s Health Insurance Program for two more years.

“We’re talking to the executive and legislative branches about the regulatory tsunami facing physicians and their offices,” Wah said.

Stephenson family’s $10 million gift will further cancer fight

By Les Dunsmith

In Las Vegas, where good luck is everyone’s dream, a chance meeting in 2013 put two men — one a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist, the other a renowned physician and author — on a path that they hope will change medicine and save the lives of countless cancer patients.

The entrepreneur, Emmet Stephenson, was participating in a conference at the Bellagio for investors when he attended a talk by David B. Agus, MD, professor of medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. “I was there as an investor. Just by pure luck, I met David,” Stephenson recalled.

The bond began to form that day would eventually lead Stephenson, along with his wife, Toni and daughter Tessa, to pledge $10 million to further Agus’ pioneering efforts to change the way cancer is viewed and treated. Their gift will establish the Stephenson Family Personalized Medicine Center at the Center for Applied Molecular Medicine (CAMM) at the Keck School of Medicine.

Agus’ view that cancer treatments should be tailored to each individual has special meaning for the Stephenson family. Shortly before Emmet Stephenson met Agus, Toni Stephenson learned she had cancer.

Agus advised in developing her treatment regimen. His recommendation to try an experimental medicine specific to her condition proved crucial. “She’s in clinical trial No. 1 for her kind of cancer using this particular drug,” Emmet Stephenson said, noting that his wife’s cancer has been in remission for about 18 months. “And it’s terrific.”

The couple’s daughter, Tessa Stephenson Brand ’02, is a graduate of the USC School of Cinematic Arts and founder of Tessa Family Personalized Medicine Center at the Center for Applied Molecular Medicine (CAMM) at the Keck School of Medicine.

The donation from the Stephenson family will develop personalized medicine to battle cancer and support the research of David Agus, a renowned oncologist and genomics expert who advises in developing cancer treatment programs.

Blumenthal lecture focuses on fixing problems in U.S. health care system

By Sharon Brock

U.S. health care is in dire need of repair, said David Blumenthal, MD, MPH, during a March 31 talk titled “Creating a High Performing Health System” in the Keck School of Medicine’s Dean’s Distinguished Lecture Series.

A former national coordinator for health information technology in the Obama Administration, Blumenthal has been president since 2012 of the Commonwealth Fund, an organization that promotes a health care system that achieves better access, improved quality and greater efficiency by funding independent research and making grants to improve health care practice and policy.

“We have a broken health care system,” Blumenthal told the crowd in Mayer Auditorium. “The cost is enormous. The quality is not as good as it should be — thousands of patients still die each year from medical error. And there are 55 million Americans who remain uninsured.”

Blumenthal said that billions of medical dollars are spent unnecessarily each year — overspending that puts patients at risk, drains resources and makes health care less accessible and less effective. The U.S. has the highest rate of health care expenditure in the world, he reported, with an average of $9,077 per person being spent on health care annually. Second place Switzerland spends far less per person, roughly $6,500.

Putting those numbers in perspective, Blumenthal calculated that the U.S. spent $15.5 trillion more than Switzerland over 30 years (1980 to 2010) — money better spent in other ways.

“It’s called opportunity cost,” he explained. “With this $15.5 million, we...
NEW TECHNOLOGY

Emergency app offers safety information

By Douglas Morino

A web-based app that monitors and displays a variety of surgical data in real time has been unveiled at Keck Hospital of USC. The Perioperative QlikView App displays data for the 24 operating rooms in the Main OR. The app allows physicians and staff to view and analyze data related to the performance of their operating rooms and find ways to improve or root out inefficiencies.

“We are increasing the transparency of our data,” said Felipe Osmo, associate administrator, Performance Management. “The idea is that physicians will have access to look at data to find opportunities for improvement.”

The app allows users to track turnover time, utilization, case lengths and on-time starts by surgeon, specialty and operating room.

“The QlikView app is a game changer for our operating rooms,” said Dr. Michael A. Bonaguidi, associate professor of surgery and Anesthesiology and director of Perioperative Services, Keck Medicine of USC.

The app is available for iOS and Android operating systems. It can be downloaded from the Keck Medicine Internal App Store at hisapps.med.usc.edu/AppStore.

Surgery app tracks operating room results

Friday, April 10

9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute Symposium. “Building on Progress: New Developments in Genetics, Neuronal, Glial and Vascular Biology.” Herklotz Seminar Room, ZNI 112. Info: Terry Church, (323) 442-3219, jcarl@usc.edu

9 a.m. Noon. Neuroscience: Neuronal, Glial and Vascular Biology. Herklotz Seminar Room, ZNI 112. Info: Julie Carl, (323) 442-3219, jcarl@usc.edu


11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Genomics and Stem Cell Research Seminar. “Closing the Loop: How a Linear DNA Sequence Becomes a 3-Dimensional Tissue, and How It May Become Malignant and Metastatic?” Mona H. Lee, PhD, UC Berkeley. GIBR Center Auditorium.

11 a.m. Noon. Diabetes & Obesity Research Institute Symposium. “Neighborhood Environmental Conditions and Children’s Diet, Activity and Obesity,” Ashleigh Davis, PhD, USC. McKibben Lecture Hall, Online: Christine Ayala, (323) 442-2500, trollj@usc.edu

11 a.m. Noon. Keck School of Medicine Education and Development Seminar. “Determining the promise of a new drug: What’s going on?” and we can say “This is what’s going on.” This is what’s going on.” and we can say “This is what’s going on.” and we can say “This is what’s going on.” and we can say “This is what’s going on.” and we can say “This is what’s going on.” and we can say “This is what’s going on.”

All physicians and staff in the Keck Medicine of USC enterprise can download the app, including USC Verdugo Hills Hospital and USC Care employees. Phase One of the app’s release will be a Keck Hospital-based roll out. Additional windows are being built for Verdugo Hills Hospital and USC clinics.

“This app is a long time coming,” Vance said. “It will have long range implications for the entire medical enterprise.”

The app will be available for both iOS and Android operating systems. It can be downloaded from the Keck Medicine Internal App Store at hisapps.med.usc.edu/AppStore.

“We are all connected to our devices,” he said. “People can access information on various topics quickly and efficiently through the app without going to a policy manual.”

Health expert called this level of perfor-
Health Pavilion to be a centerpiece of Festival of Books

By Douglas Morino

Considered the largest public literary celebration in the country, the L.A. Times Festival of Books will sweep through the University Park Campus April 18 and 19. A centerpiece of the festival will again be the Keck Medicine of USC Health and Wellness Pavilion, which will double in size to host several health-related screenings, including those for skin cancer, sleep apnea, glucose, BMI, blood pressure and oral health.

“The Health and Wellness Pavilion showcases so much USC has to offer — we’re not just a university, we’re also a medical enterprise,” said Adam Rosen, assistant vice president, office of cultural relations and university events. Held at USC since 2011, the two-day event is in its 20th year. The festival is a marquee event for USC and Los Angeles, drawing an estimated 150,000 literary fans last year.

“It’s the only event like this in the country that brings out the literary community and is focused on art, books and literature,” Rosen said. “The festival is a wonderful opportunity to show-case our campus and our commitment to arts and literature.”

The Health and Wellness Pavilion events Saturday, April 18 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Free health screenings offered throughout the day, including:
• Body Mass Index (BMI)
• Glucose check
• Blood pressure check
• Med checks
• “Talk to a Doctor” sessions
• Vision screenings courtesy of the USC Eye Institute
• Dental screenings and oral hygiene instruction courtesy of the USC Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry
• Melanoma screenings (until 4 p.m.) courtesy of the USC Department of Dermatology
12 p.m. – noon
“Q & A About Your Vision” with Robin Yama, MD, director of the USC Eye Institute
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
“Try To Parse the Sleep Specialist: All Questions Wel comed” with Rae Dragupta, MD, Keck Medicine of USC Sleep Center
2 p.m. – 6 p.m.
“New Approaches to Treating Age-related Macular Degeneration” with John Kertesz, MD, Keck Medicine of USC Eye Institute

Sunday, April 19 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Free health screenings offered throughout the day, including:
• Vision screenings courtesy of the USC Eye Institute
• Dental screenings and oral hygiene instruction courtesy of the USC Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry
• Melanoma screenings (until 4 p.m.) courtesy of the USC Department of Dermatology
12 p.m. – 5 p.m.
Interactive health activities courtesy of Mrs. T.H. Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, including Lifestyle Redesign weight and stress management, a sensory integration station featuring productive play for kids and a low-vision station focused on adaptive reading tools
2 p.m. – 5 p.m.
Health screenings, including:
• Body Mass Index (BMI)
• Glucose check
• Blood pressure check
• Med checks
• “Talk to a Doctor” sessions

Health and Wellness Pavilion events

Health and Wellness Pavilion

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latimes.com/FestivalofBooks

PA Program makes US News & World Report Top 20

By Alison Trinidad

The Keck School of Medicine of USC Primary Care Physician Assistant Program has risen 50 spots since 2011 and is now ranked 20th in U.S. News & World Report’s 2015 “Best Graduate Schools” rankings. “This honor demonstrates the commitment that PA program has received from the Keck School of Medicine and the Department of Family Medicine, as well as our commitment to our faculty, staff and students who have to the profession and the communities we serve through our medical education,” said Program Director Kevin Lohrney, PhD, PA-C.

U.S. News surveyed 192 accredited PA programs for the 2015-16 ranking. PA programs are ranked based on a survey of academics at peer institutions. Also ranked at 20th are Yale, Northeastern, Rosalind Franklin and Midwestern universities.

The Primary Care Physician Assistant Program at USC focuses on recruiting, educating and graduating a diverse group of students in primary care medicine. A national leader in interprofessional education, the Keck School program has trained future interprofessional leaders in practicing team-based medicine in underserved communities.

The 33-month master’s program is one of few in the United States that places an emphasis on cultural Spanish, with most students reporting a doubling of their confidence in communicating with patients in Spanish by the time they graduate.

JOIN THE CELEBRATION

MUSICAL PERFORMANCES

Five top LA Times events during Festival of Books

United States

USC

Author: JOYCE CAROL OATES

Rock, pop, folk, bands, jazz, kids’ music and the Trojan Marching Band all have a place on the stages.

10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Health screenings, including:
• Body Mass Index (BMI)
• Glucose check
• Blood pressure check
• Med checks
• “Talk to a Doctor” sessions
HSC Newsmakers
academic journals and mentions in the news media: — a finding that could have a profound impact on the un-
are responsible for the growth of craniofacial bones in mice
the brain has fully developed, which can cause problems
with craniosynostosis, the skull bones fuse together before
sis, a birth defect affecting one in 2,500 births. In an infant
could significantly impact the treatment of craniosynosto-
Zhao, DDS, PhD, identified a population of Gli1+ stem
ResearChers at Usc
Discovery could lead to biological treatment for birth defect
Researchers at USC have discovered which stem cells are responsible for the growth of craniofacial bones in mice — a finding that could have a profound impact on the understanding and treatment of craniosynostosis, a birth defect that can lead to an array of physical and intellectual disabilities in humans. In an article in the April 2015 issue of Nature Cell Biology, Yang Chai, DDS, PhD, a member of the USC Stem Cell Executive Committee and holder of the George and Mary Lo Boone Chair of Craniofacial Biology at the Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC, describes how he and postdoctoral fellow Hu Zhao, DDS, PhD, identified a population of Gli1+ stem cells with the capacity to enhance the growth of the bones of the skull, known as cranial sutures. Chai’s research team noted that if Gli1+ cells were eliminated from the sutures, the craniofacial bones experienced growth arrest and weakening, leading them to conclude these cells are indispensable in healthy skull development. The findings could significantly impact the treatment of craniosynostosis, a birth defect affecting one in 2,500 births. In an infant with craniosynostosis, the skull bones fuse together before the brain has fully developed, which can cause problems that include hearing and vision defects, as well as developmental disorders. — John Hobbs

Stephen B. Grauer, MD, director of USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center; recently hosted physicians and researchers from the National University Singapore’s Cancer Science Institute. The first Bi-National Cancer Symposium, USC-Singapore, was held March 26. The delegation from Singapore included Khay-Guan Yeho, MMed, deputy chief executive of the National University Health System and dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine; and Suo-Chin Lee, MMed, association director (research) of the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore. Topics included bioimaging and companion diagnostics, nanotechnology and genomics, cancer prevention and control, and experimental therapeutics. — Douglas Morino

David B. Agus, MD
Laboratory Director Shannon Mumenthaler and Director of Analytics Dan Ruderman. Mumenthaler, who has a bachelor’s in genetics from UC Davis and a PhD in cellular and molecular pathology from UCLA, is leading a team that will use advanced imaging approaches to dissect the complexities of the tumor environment. The goal is to disrupt specific cellular environments to prevent disease progression and improve patient outcome. Ruderman has a doctorate in theoretical physics from UC Berkeley and has done functional research at UCSC, Cambridge University and the Salk Institute. His team will generate and analyze large data sets to dissect the genomic complexities within and across cancer patients and dynamically track changes in mutations and cell signaling over short- and long-term scales to help guide clinical decision-making. The work at CAMM benefits directly from the advanced technology in use at USC. “We’re very lucky in that we came to USC over 20 years ago, and they have one of the great supercomputing facilities in the country,” Agus said. “And our team is made up of physicists, mathematicians, medical oncologists, biologists — all different disciplines who each look at data in a different fashion. Our goal is to create models for what’s happening to the cancer and what will happen. And those mathematical models can hopefully tell us which treatments to do or — not to do.” The more information that a doctor has available, the better the decisions that will be made. But it is an immense undertaking. “There are over 400 kinds of cancer and over 7 bil-

GIFT: Seeking personalized medicine

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Lieberman takes office as 25th president of national association
JAY R. LIBERMAN, MD, is the new president of the American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons (AAHKS). He is professor and chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and director of the Institute of Orthopedics at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and an internation-
ally renowned total joint replacement surgeon who has a special interest in the treatment of osteonecrosis (bone death) of the hip and knee. Lieberman assumed leadership of the organization March 25 as it prepares to mark its 25th Anniversary this November. “I am honored to be the leader of this association during its 25th Anniversary, and I plan to continue our mission as delineated by my predeces-
sors to enhance the profession of hip and knee surgery in order to benefit our patients,” Lieberman said.

ATHENS CONFERENCE CENTER

Singapore symposium held at USC

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‘There are over 400 kinds of cancer and over 7 billion people. That’s a lot of possible combinations for personalized medicine. The thing that we hope will come from this donation is that other people will step up and help us,’ he added. “It’s going to take a lot of smart people. One of those smart people is David Agus, who also knows that fortune was in his favor that day in Las Vegas when he first met Em-

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