Keck Medicine of USC hospitals ranked among nation’s best

By Meg Aldrich

For the eighth consecutive year, the hospitals of Keck Medicine of USC have been named among the best in the country by U.S. News & World Report, a distinction only 3 percent of the analyzed hospitals receive. The magazine’s annual “Best Hospitals” rankings recognize hospitals in the United States that provide the best overall patient care, as well as specialized treatment in areas like cancer and urology.

Keck Medical Center of USC, which consists of Keck Hospital of USC and USC Norris Cancer Hospital, maintained its Top 3 ranking in metro Los Angeles (No. 3). The medical center also increased its rankings among the Best Hospitals in California (No. 8), moving up one spot from last year. The medical center has been highly ranked since having been purchased by the university in 2009.

“Keck Medicine of USC is honored to be ranked among the country’s best hospitals and clinical programs for the eighth year running,” said Tom E. Jackiewicz, MPH, senior vice president and CEO of Keck Medicine of USC. “Our faculty physicians, nurses and staff work tirelessly to ensure that we provide exceptional medical care to our patients and I am delighted to see their efforts recognized on a national scale.”

“The medical center also performed well in a number of specialty rankings, securing a Top 10 placement in seven specialties. The USC Roski Eye Institute remained the institution’s top-performing service line for the 23rd consecutive year (No. 11). The USC Institute of Urology had the largest increase since 2015 out of the hospitals’ specialties and received its highest-ever ranking (No. 15). The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center also moved up considerably for its highest ranking ever (No. 18). Keck Medical Center also increased its ranking in geriatrics (No. 21), and is newly ranked in orthopedics (No. 22), nephrology (No. 37) and cardiology (No. 48). Four additional service lines were ranked as High Performing: gastroenterology & GI surgery; neurology & neurosurgery; pulmonology; and diabetes & endocrinology.

“As a university-based medical center, we are proud to help disadvantaged health care professionals achieve their medical dreams through the Keck School of Medicine of USC scholarships,” said Vassilios Papadopoulos as dean.

Pharmacy school taps Papadopoulos as dean

By Emily Gersema

Vassilios Papadopoulos, PharmD, PhD, executive director and chief scientific officer of the Research Institute of McGill University Health Centre in Montreal, has been named dean of the USC School of Pharmacy, effective Oct. 1. Papadopoulos, who also has been the associate executive director of research for the McGill University Health Centre, will hold the John Stauffer Dean’s Chair in Pharmaceutical Sciences at USC.

USC Provost Michael Quick, PhD, announced the appointment Aug. 2 on behalf of USC President C. L. Max Nikias, PhD. “Vassilios Papadopoulos is a transformative leader and I am thrilled that the USC School of Pharmacy will be helmed by someone of his broad experience and expertise,” Nikias said. “Over the years, the USC School of Pharmacy has established a national reputation for excellence in research and for preparing the next generation of pharmacists to lead the development of transformative medicines and health care strategies.”

$2.5 million award to fund student scholarships

By Claire Norman

The Primary Care Physician Assistant Program at the Keck School of Medicine of USC has been awarded more than $2.5 million to support scholarships for disadvantaged students, one of only three physician assistant (PA) programs nationally to receive this award.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded the program $2.596 million to help fund the tuition of 101 disadvantaged students over the next four years.

“We are excited to be able to offer funds to disadvantaged students that will lower their student debt levels,” Program Director Kevin Lobeheny, PA-C, PhD, said. “We hope to help break down some of the barriers for disadvantaged students who seek to enter the PA profession through the Keck School of Medicine of USC.”

The funds will be distributed over the next four years based on financial aid calculations focused on financial need. Scholarships will be awarded to students in amounts from $24,000 to $26,000 toward their costs for attending the graduate program.

Titled “Four Rs for USCPA Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students,” the goals of the grant focus on four aspects to help disadvantaged health care profes-
Innovator Showcase seeks student startups

By Peljan Tseli

USC students with a startup idea or invention could earn recognition and funding through the USC Stevens Student Innovator Showcase business competition.

The USC Stevens Center for Innovation is currently seeking applications from students to compete in the 10th annual USC Stevens Student Innovator Showcase. Applications for the Showcase are being accepted online at http://stevens.usc.edu/events/student-innovator-showcase until Sept. 2.

The Student Innovator Showcase is USC Stevens’ annual flagship event where USC students in all disciplines present their startup ideas to faculty and leaders from the entrepreneur and business community, competing for thousands of dollars in USC-sponsored prizes. It will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Oct. 7 on the Allan Hancock Foundation building lawn and feature keynote speaker Mark Stevens, a USC trustee, donor, alumnus and one of Silicon Valley’s top venture capitalists.

Awards, scholarships and benefits

The three primary goals of the Student Innovator Showcase are: first “retain,” aimed to encourage these students to stay during their time in school and focus on their educational efforts; second “reduce,” aimed to help students stay at USC and complete their degree; and third “grow,” aimed to improve educational opportunities and services at USC.

Innovation University

By Douglas Morino

A veteran Keck Medical and USC student has been selected as this year’s recipient of a prestigious award honoring an unwavering commitment to compassion and personalized health care.

Lapa, director of patient relations in the Patient and Family Experience Office of Keck Medical Center of USC, received in June the Ets Ingram — Tree of Life Award, which honors physicians, nurses and staff who demonstrate extraordinarily compassionate patient care.

Rod Hanners, CEO of Keck Medical Center of USC and COO, Keck Medicine of USC, said Lapa strives to improve the health and lives of patients through compassionate care that demonstrates integrity, excellence, respect and empathy.

“As we all know Diane possesses all of these characteristics and much more,” Hanners said. “She is an ideal candidate for this award.”

The Ets Ingram — Tree of Life Award of Compassionate Care was established in 2014 by Etan Chaim Milgrom, a clinical professor of family medicine and pediatrics. The award is presented annually to a Keck Medicine faculty or staff member who models and provides compassionate care, serves as a mentor and fosters a culture that celebrates learning and development of compassionate health care providers.

Lapa, who has worked for USC for 23 years, said she was grateful for the opportunity to work alongside her colleagues at Keck Medical Center while helping patients and their loved ones.

“My journey has been inspired by the colleagues I work with everyday,” Lapa said. “There are so many others deserving of this award. And I am so grateful that I get to go home each day and say I made a difference.”

Lapa embodies the spirit of the Tree of Life Award and exemplifies compassionate patient care, Milgrom said.

“Diane is such a worthy recipient,” Milgrom said during the Tree of Life Award ceremony. “She is a leader to her colleagues, promotes altruism and fosters compassion in the workplace.”

Calendar of Events

Friday, Aug. 12
8:30 a.m. Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Grand Rounds. LAC-USC Medical Center Inpatient Tower Conference Room A.
11 a.m. Jane Anne Nold Division of Hematology and Center for the Study of Blood Diseases Grand Rounds. “New Therapeutic Targets in ALL,” Kevin Kelly, MD, PhD, LAC-USC Medical Center Inpatient Tower Conference Room A. Info: Carolyn Castellanos, (323) 865-3913, castellanos@med.usc.edu
5 p.m. Office of Student Affairs. “White Coat Ceremony and Faculty Teaching Awards.” Ek and Edythe Broad Lawn. Info: Teresa Cook, (323) 442-2419, teresa.cook@usc.edu
Monday, Aug. 15
10 a.m.-1 p.m. Keck Medical Center of USC. “Wellness Fair.” Eli and Edythe Broad Lawn. Health screenings, chair massage, pet therapy, etc. Keck faculty or staff ID required for entry.
8-10 a.m. Medical Center of USC. “Wellness Fair.” Hoffman Cafe, Keck Hospital. Health screenings, chair massage, pet therapy, etc. Keck faculty or staff ID required for entry.
Wednesday, Aug. 17
Wednesday-Friday, Aug. 17-19
Friday, Aug. 19
8:30 a.m. Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Grand Rounds. “Practicing: What’s Trending.” Yoko Takashima, MD, and Brian Gordon, MD. LAC-USC Medical Center Inpatient Tower Conference Room A.
Tuesday, Aug. 23
Noon. Department of Psychiatry Grand Rounds. “Understanding the Military Culture for Improving the Care of Veterans and Military Families.” Carl A. Castro, PhD, PhEur,Keck S

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 hsnews.usc.edu/calendar-of-events. Submit items at tinyurl.com/calendar-hsc. Include day, date, title, time of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location and a phone number/email address.

Award honors compassion care

By Douglas Morino

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New team to improve customer service

By Douglas Morino

A new initiative to strengthen Keck Medicine of USC’s pledge to provide excellent customer service has been launched.

A new customer service division for patients will be established at the Health Sciences Campus, bringing crucial services that were once performed 3,000 miles away to the patient’s doorstep.

Previously, customer service had been outsourced to a call center in New Jersey. A total of 12 Keck Medicine customer service representatives and management employees have been hired and trained. The new Keck Medicine customer service employees began their role Aug. 1.

“Our goal is to partner with our patients and their families in the billing and payment process,” said Randy Ray, associate dean of revenue administration. In addition, the customer service division at Keck Medicine solely dedicated to billing inquiries will also be added to provide services to patients.

“Patients will see more complete, compassionate customer care,” Ray said. “We have instilled in our new staff the importance of providing patients with uncompromising customer service.”

Representatives also will be in a better position to help identify patients with financial concerns and aid them to most generous financial assistance programs provided by Keck Medicine, Ray added. Last year, Keck Medicine provided $57 million in financial assistance to patients.

While the primary goal of the customer service initiative is to provide patients with accurate information regarding their billing inquiries, the long-term goal is to broaden the scope of customer service to include all of Keck Medicine.

“This will allow us to provide an exceptional, personal experience for each of our patients far into the future,” Ray said.

NORRIS: Benefactor dedicated millions toward advancing science, benefitting patient care

Continued from page 1

These rankings reflect the daily interactions our faculty physicians make to world-class patient care complemented by the innovative research of our basic scientists that keeps our patients at the center of the latest treatments and therapies,” said Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, interim dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC, who also is president of USC Care, the medical enterprise’s faculty physician group.

“Being recognized in these rankings is an honor that continues to motivate us to do what is in the best interest of our patients,” said Ray. For 2016-17, U.S. News evaluated hospitals in 16 adult specialties and ranked the top 50 in most of the specialties. Three percent of the nearly 5,000 hospitals that were analyzed for Best Hospitals 2016-17 were nationally ranked in every one specialty. Objective measures such as patient survival and safety data, adequacy of nurse staffing and other data largely determined the rankings in most specialties. A few other specialty rankings, including Ophthalmology, are weighted more heavily on reputation data.

The specialty rankings and data were produced for U.S. News by RTI International based in Research Triangle Park, N.C. U.S. News used the same data to produce the state and metro rankings. The rankings are available at https://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals and will appear in the U.S. News Best Hospitals 2017 guidebook, available on newsstands Aug. 30.
Arthritis originated in primordial fish

By Cristy Hyfall

Research from the USC Stem Cell laboratory of Gage Crump, PhD, have found that zebrafish and two other ray-finned fishes could develop early onset arthritis in their jaws and fins because of similarities with mammalian synovial, or lubricated, joints, according to a new study published in eLife.

This means zebrafish, known for its regenerative abilities, can be used to study ways to reverse arthritis in patients by watching how it naturally repairs its damaged joints.

USC Norris and Hoag begin joint Phase I clinical trial program

By Amanda Busick

A n ongoing alliance between the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hoag Family Cancer Institute at Hoag Health System in Newport Beach has expanded to include a joint Phase I clinical trial program. The program was presented to USC Norris Cancer Hospital’s clinical nurses, critical care nurse practitioners and critical care doctors for their timely response, hard work, knowledge and accurate documentation when a Code Blue is called. — Douglas Morino

Research funding programs available for investigators

In a memo sent to Keck School of Medicine of USC faculty and staff on Aug. 3, Interim Dean Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, announced two funding programs that support the investigation of new research areas. The Pilot Funding Program targets junior and established investigators interested in launching or transitioning to a new area of research. Priority will be given to projects obtaining feasibility data that will lead to submission of new NIH R-series or other major research proposals. Letters of intent are due to the Office of the Dean by Aug. 15 and proposals are due by Sept. 2. The Bridge Funding Program supports principal investigators conducting research that will lead to the securing of new grant awards. The purpose of the program is to provide funds to productive principal investigators who have lost their extramural funding, but remain potentially competitive. Awards are for a period of one year and are renewable with progress and justification. For more information about these funding opportunities, visit http://keck.usc.edu/research-alerts. — Sara Reeve

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The nurses of 7 West are the first unit at Keck Hospital of USC to be awarded the Beacon of Excellence award.