In Memoriam: John K. Niparko, 61

By Sara Reeve

Chair of the USC Caruso Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery was an internationally renowned otoneurologic surgeon and researcher John K. Niparko, MD, Tiber Alpert professor and chair of the USC Rick and Tina Caruso Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, died April 25. He was 61.

“Dr. Niparko was a transformative recruitment to the Keck School of Medicine and was a pillar of the department,” said Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, interim dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC and director of the USC Roski Eye Institute. “He led its ascent to the top ten departments of otolaryngology in the U.S. in research funding. He was a dynamic leader and a humble colleague whose good humor, compassion and gentle nature earned our esteem and deep affection. We are all enriched for having known him.

Holder of the Leon J. Tiber and David S. Alpert Chair in Medicine at the Keck School, Niparko was an internationally renowned otoneurologic surgeon and researcher who joined USC in 2013. As a national expert on hearing technologies, he built USC’s otolaryngology group into one of the nation’s finest, recruiting outstanding researchers from around the country and spearheading a long-running national clinical trial of treatments for children with hearing loss. He also founded and directed the USC Caruso Family Center for Childhood Communication, which assists more than 5,000 children and their families coping with hearing loss.

Study: Gene tied to bone development, vertebrate evolution

By Cristy Lytal

With the emergence of bone in early life forms, the diversity of life on Earth expanded to encompass the bone-forming vertebrates, a group of species ranging from the tiny frog Paedophryne amauensis to the mighty blue whale. Bone formation in vertebrates is linked to a shared gene, called Sp7 or Osterix, that acts early in establishing the bone-forming cells or osteoblasts.

In a new study in Developmental Cell, Himali Ahmad, PhD, from the USC Stem Cell laboratory of Andrew McMahon, PhD, and colleagues reveal how Sp7 directs the development of bone-secreting osteoblasts to fashion the skeleton.

“This is a wonderful example of how a narrow focus on the workings of a single gene illuminates bigger questions on the evolution of a skeletal scaffold we mammals share with fish, frogs, lizard and birds,” said Andrew McMahon, senior author and W.M. Keck Provost Professor and chair of the Department of Stem Cell Research and Regenerative Medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

The Sp7 gene encodes a protein that acts early in establishing the bone-forming cells or osteoblasts.

New Intranet page tracks construction progress

By Douglas Morino

A new page on the Keck Medicine of USC intranet portal provides faculty and staff with regular updates from the series of construction projects currently happening across the Health Sciences Campus.

The HSC Construction page will include timeline information on projects, as well as photos, renderings and video. The site can be found at: http://tinyurl.com/HSCconstruction

The new site on the KeckNet is a convenient place to find the latest information on the construction project happening across the Health Sciences Campus,” said Robert Scrofano, director of capital construction development at HSC.

The largest projects happening across the campus include USC Stevens Hall, home of the USC Mark and Mary Stevens Neuroimaging and Informatics Institute; student housing complex Currie Hall; and the Norris Healthcare Center (NHC). Stevens Hall is scheduled for completion this month, while Currie Hall is scheduled to open in August. NHC is the first new medical building on the USC Health Sciences Campus in more than a decade. Scheduled completion for the Norris Healthcare Center is in late 2019.
Health Sciences commencements

Friday, May 13
Physician Assistant Program 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Allan Hancock Foundation Building, southwest lawn, University Park Campus. A reception will follow at the same location. Info: (213) 442-4547. Speaker: Raymond Wallace, MD, medical director of the Primary Care Physician Assistant Program.

Dentistry 11 a.m. at McClister Field, University Park Campus. Tickets not required. A reception will follow at the same location. Info: allamt@usc.edu. Speaker: Carol Gomez Summey, DDS, president, American Dental Association.

Health Promotion and Global Health 11 a.m. at Town and Gown, University Park Campus. Reception is at 10:30 a.m. following the USC main ceremony. Tickets are required; four tickets allotted per graduate. Info: (213) 825-1601. Speakers: Jonathan M. Samet, MD, MS, director, USC Institute for Global Health, Distinguished Professor and Flora L. Thornton Chair, Department of Preventive Medicine; Elahie Nezami, PhD, associate dean for undergraduate, masters and professional programs.

Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy 11 a.m. at Leavey Library West, University Park Campus. A reception will follow at the same location. Tickets not required. Info: (323) 442-2811. Speaker: Farsad Manesh, ScD, founder and managing principal.

Pisces LLC, founder, Kids Institute for Development and Advancement.

Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy 11:30 a.m. at Ronald Reagan Auditoryum, University Park Campus. Tickets not required. A reception will follow at the same location. Info: (323) 442-1383. Speaker: Dana Goldman, PhD, distinguished professor and director, USC Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics; USC School of Pharmacy and USC School Price of Public Policy.

Saturday, May 14 — Medicine 9 a.m. at Galen Center, University Park Campus. Tickets not required. A reception will follow at 11 a.m. at McCarthy Quad, University Park Campus.

Info: (323) 442-1007. Speaker: Barbara Woold, PhD, Beckman Institute at the California Institute of Technology.

MD/PhD, MD — Medicine 3 p.m. at Galen Center, University Park Campus. Doors open at 2 p.m., tickets not required. A reception will follow at 3 p.m. at McCarthy Quad, University Park Campus.

Info: (323) 442-2420. Speaker: Paul Farmer, MD, PhD, founder of Partners in Health.

Celebrate nurses, hospital weeks

Events will be held to honour National Nurses Week, May 6-12, and National Hospital Week, May 8-14, throughout Keck Medicine of USC. Check the Daily Huddle sheets for more information or events not listed here.

Nurses Week events:

May 6 7-9 a.m. Kick-off breakfast, USC Verdugo Hills Hospital 4th Floor Foyer
10:30 a.m. Nursing Awards Reception, Hoffman Café at Keck Hospital

May 9 8-11 a.m. Shopping Extravaganza, Hoffman Café at Keck Hospital
8 a.m.-5 p.m. Education Day, USC Verdugo Hills Hospital 4th Floor Foyer: Schedule includes compassion fatigue, LGBTQ+, de- escalation and a catered lunch

May 10 8:30 a.m. Nursing School Information Session, Cardinal Room at Keck Hospital
8-8:30 p.m. Ice Cream Social, VHII Cafeteria

May 11 Noon. Cake cutting, VHII Cafeteria
10:30 a.m. DMSY Statue Dedication, Keck Hospital Garden
1 p.m. Daisy Award Ceremony
3 p.m. DMSY Statue Dedication, USC Norris Cancer Hospital

Intranet

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to open in 2017, USC will have an ambulatory surgery center, a women’s cancer program, the region’s first comprehensive multiple sclerosis clinic, a state-of-the-art infusion center and several new dining options. The projects are aimed at transforming the 79-acre campus into an oasis of clinical research and health care, while providing benefits to the surrounding community.

Work also continues on the HSC Beautification Project, which is aimed at giving the USC Health Sciences Campus a more university-like, institutional feel, with architectural benefits to the surrounding community.

The HSC Construction page was developed by the Keck Medicine web services and internal communications teams.

Calendaring of Events

Saturday, May 7 7:30-10 p.m. The USC Alzheimer Disease Research Center Continuing Medical Education. “23rd Annual Van Der Meulen Symposium: Multiple Sclerosis Update.” Daniell Pelletier, MD, Army Auditory. Info: Anika Bobb, (323) 442-2547, usccme@usc.edu. Registration: http://bit.ly/AusMit.


Tuesday, May 10 5:30 p.m. Department of Ophthalmology Grand Rounds. Sun Young Lee, MD, PhD, HCA Conference Room, 6th Floor. Info: Tishta Christopher, (323) 409-5323, Tishta.Christopher@med.usc.edu.

6 p.m. Department of Orthopaedic Surgery Grand Rounds. Joy Keener, MD, Washington University School of Medicine, Ansch Auditory. Info and RSVP: Sylvia Suarez, (323) 252-6773, sylvias@usc.edu.


Info: Jeannie Dickovs McKeen, (323) 442-7209, dicken@usc.edu. RSVP: (323) 442-8201, http://bit.ly/1WKGQ8S.

Wednesday, May 18 Noon. The Saban Research Institute Seminar: “Research Seminar: Drifting Inflammation in Human Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes.” Barbara Wold, PhD, Boston University School of Medicine. Info: Saban Research Building, 4661 Sunset Blvd. Info: Gina Gill, (323) 464-4715, tanka@hola.org, http://srl.usc.edu/epad


Info: Tishta Christopher, (323) 409-5323, Tishta.Christopher@med.usc.edu.
Rendition of developing vertebrate bone.

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By Zen Vuong

Although men often outnumber women in science fields, women comprise the majority of a USC-led team that is the first in the world to seek therapeutic drug discovery from fungi launched into space. USC School of Pharmacy doctoral students Jillian Romsdahl, 25, and Adriana Blachowiak, 26, were overjoyed to send Aspergillus nigerlatus to the International Space Station on April 8. They had worked on the Micro-10 experiment in collaboration with NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory for the past two years. The team — three women and two men — said fungi produce biologically active secondary metabolites called secondary metabolites such as penicillin when put in stressful conditions.

“Three years ago, if anyone told me I would end up working on a NASA mission so early in my career, I would have just laughed out loud,” she said.

This correlation sheds light into a far-away, fascinating and compelling history of life on Earth: a long-ago recession of the history of life on Earth; the emergence of Sp7 was likely closely connected to the evolution of bone formation in a common ancestor that gave rise to all modern vertebrates. This study provides a fascinating and compelling example of how the emergence of novel gene regulatory networks connects to new cellular capabilities in the evolutionary process — specifically here in the program of bone formation,” said Hojo, first author.

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In lieu of flowers, the Niparko family has requested gifts be directed to the John Niparko Endowment Fund at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

For more information, visit http://bit.ly/32QoVoA

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Early postmenopausal hormone therapy tied to heart health

A STUDY CONDUCTED BY THE Atherosclerosis Research Unit at Keck School of Medicine suggests that hormone therapy, when taken within six years of menopause, may slow the buildup of plaque in the arteries. This is the first study to directly examine the hypothesis that the cardiovascular effects of postmenopausal hormone therapy vary with the timing of hormone therapy initiation, according to Howard N. Hodis, MD, director of the Atherosclerosis Research Unit and principal investigator of the study. The study, titled “Vascular Effects of Early versus Late Postmenopausal Treatment with Estradiol,” was published in the March 31 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. — Mary Dacuma

Molecular Imaging Center director recognized for contributions

Peter Conti, MD, PhD, was recognized by the Western Region Society of Nuclear Medicine recently with the presentation of its Distinguished Scientist Award, given annually to an individual who has made significant contributions to the Clinical Science of Nuclear Medicine or Molecular Imaging. Conti, who also is director of the Molecular Imaging Center and PET Imaging Center, as well as a professor of radiology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, received the award at the society’s annual meeting in October, where he also presented a lecture titled, “Perspectives on Translational Molecular Imaging.” — Melissa Hasastani

Researchers learn about new resources for clinical trials

By Amanda Busick

A approximately 100 researchers at the Keck School of Medicine of USC learned about the new initiatives being implemented to help navigate the complex world of clinical trials reporting and tracking at a town hall that took place April 21 on the Health Sciences Campus. Four speakers presented information about the services available, such as the newly expanded Clinical Trials Office (CTO), Clinical Research Support (CRS), the new clinical trials management system recently implemented called OnCore and the Research Data Warehouse.

April Armstrong, MD, MPH, associate dean for clinical research, spoke on the goal of CRS to become more efficient in providing assistance to the clinical trial research community.

“We wanted to have something that’s a one-stop shop in which one can look to develop study proposals, conduct studies and report results,” Armstrong explained.

She went on to introduce Diana Palma, who serves as the research navigator for the office and who helps researchers understand and use the resources they need for a successful study.

CTO, meanwhile, recently saw changes that included the appointment of a new director, Melissa Archer, JD, who spoke about what the office hopes to accomplish going forward.

“Our goals are to increase efficiency, transparency and customer service,” she stated. “I’ve been talking to the team about how we are a service-based office. We’ve put some new folks in there to make sure we have the capacity to service the clinical trials community at USC.”

This year so far, there has been a decrease of 53 percent in the backlog of clinical trials at the CTO that have been submitted for development and activation.

Amanda Schmitt, project manager for clinical research applications, presented an overview of OnCore, a comprehensive clinical trials management system recently implemented that will help researchers manage many aspects of conducting clinical trials.

Another resource for researchers that is available in the Research Data Warehouse, a searchable database of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)-compliant clinical information that can be utilized by all clinical research staff.

Daniella Meecker, PhD, assistant professor of preventative medicine, explained that the information available could help with planning criteria for studies, screening and recruiting, and health outcomes and implementation science.

A recording of this town hall is available at http://tinyurl.com/hnvy55.