USC Roski Eye Institute research among most read

By Sherril Snaiting

JAMA Ophthalmology, a journal of the American Medical Association, announced four of its top 10 most talked about articles in 2016 are published research by the USC Gayle and Edward Roski Eye Institute.

The four articles include National Eye Institute-funded research led by principal investigator, Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC and director of the USC Roski Eye Institute. The research articles include: Visual Impairment and Blindness Will Double by 2050; The Los Angeles Latino Eye Study (LALES), which was the first and largest to study the relationship between age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and quality of life; Chinese American Eye Study — Prevalence of Diabetic Retinopathy (part of CHES Study); and Chinese American Eye Study — Prevalence of AMD

“Our research provides a better understanding of the burden and impact of potentially blinding eye diseases among an aging population.” — Rohit Varma, MD, MPH

Wellness initiatives focus on creating healthy lives for staff

By Douglas Morino

A series of wellness initiatives recently launched across Keck Medicine of USC aim to encourage healthy living among physicians, nurses and staff.

The initiatives include meditation practice, healthy eating and personal fitness tracking. They were created with the help of community partners and the Keck Wellness Committee, an interdisciplinary group of staff members who work to promote healthy living among their colleagues.

“I encourage all physicians, nurses and staff to take advantage of these unique opportunities to cut down on stress and take steps toward a healthier life,” said Rod Hanners, CEO, Keck Medical Center of USC and COO, Keck Medicine of USC.

“Because stress is inevitable in our lives, healthy, positive living must be a priority for all of us across Keck Medicine.”

Among the initiatives is a partnership with Headspace, a pioneering meditation app that guides listeners through simple and effective meditation exercises. Practicing meditation on a regular basis has been found to improve focus and sleep, and lower stress.

CIRM backs study of osteoarthritis therapies

By Mary Dacuma

The Keck School of Medicine of USC is one of four institutions to receive a multimillion-dollar grant from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) for translational research projects. The $2.5 million grant will support potential osteoarthritis therapies that could significantly impact standards of care for the disease. Arthritis affects approximately 52 million adults in the United States, with that number conservatively expected to grow to 78 million by the year 2040.

Grant recipient Denis Joyce said, “It is truly gratifying to know that our research is resonating with scientists, ophthalmologists, policymakers and the media who look to JAMA Ophthalmology as an indispensable source of ophthalmic knowledge.” Dr. Varma, one of the world’s leading experts in population-based eye diseases. “Our research provides a better understanding of the burden and impact of potentially blinding eye diseases among an aging population as well as how to avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach to understanding eye diseases among different racial/ethnic populations.”

USC Roski Eye Institute researchers are among the most respected and prolific ophthalmic researchers in the country with a total of $56.3 million in research grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), making USC the No. 2 ophthalmic research institution in the country. In addition, USC Roski Eye Institute was No. 1 in combined research funding among Keck Medicine of USC clinical departments.

Innovative research includes stem cell therapies, Human Connectome brain mapping, population-based epidemiological studies in Hispanic populations. Michael Goran, PhD, professor of preventive medicine, co-director of the Diabetes and Obesity Research Institute (DORI) and director of the Childhood Obesity, liver disease target of NIH grants

By Mary Dacuma

The Keck School of Medicine of USC was awarded two grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support projects that could prevent obesity and treat obesity-related fatty liver disease in Hispanic populations. Michael Goran, PhD, professor of preventive medicine, co-director of the Diabetess and Obesity Research Institute (DORI) and director of the Childhood Obesity, liver disease target of NIH grants

Keck Medicine team unfazed by rare bacterial infection

By Stephanie Corral

After being reanimated in a USC Verdugo Hills Hospital operating room, Alfred Lopez was transferred to Keck Medical Center of USC on May 12, on a ventilator, in septic shock and experiencing multi-organ failure. Lopez, a 56-year-old Ralph’s market produce worker, had necrotizing fasciitis, a rare bacterial infection that usually enters the body through an open wound and rapidly spreads through soft tissue, eating away at muscle and flesh at an alarming rate of an inch an hour.

In Lopez’s case, there was no trace of an open wound. Without being able to locate the origin of the flesh-eating bacteria in his body, the Keck Medical Center team raced against the clock to save his right leg — which had tripled in size — and his life.

“When they told me what it was, I knew we had a long battle,” said his sister Aurora Hanners, CEO, Keck Medical Center of USC.

To stay ahead of the flesh-eating bacteria, a team of six wound care physical therapists dressed patient Alfred Lopez’s wounds every day, which sometimes took up to two hours to complete.
By Hope Hamashige

Stephanie Zia, MD, MACM, clinical professor of medicine (clinician educator) at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, and the career advising officer, recently started serving the needy brown bag lunches for Keck School first- and second-year students to raise any questions they may have about their futures as medical professionals.

Zia, who was recently appointed assistant dean of career advising at the Keck School, said the office has made some important changes that are designed to provide support for students at the Keck School, which include expanding career advising for first- and second-year students. Another of her new initiatives is a monthly newsletter, called Keck Corners, which is aimed at helping medical students find answers to one of the important decisions they face in medical school: choosing a specialty.

"Some medical students are not sure about specialties they are interested in," Zia said. "They are interested in specialties they may not know much about, such as orthopedic surgery, radiation oncology and physical medicine and rehabilitation.

"We surveyed the students and there are specialties they know about and others they don’t," she said. "Introducing them to specialties they know less about may spark their interest. The office has multiple staff advisors to answer questions about specific specialties, as well as to review their resumes and personal statements. They work in conjunction with designated departmental faculty advisors for each specialty as well as explore opportunities for students to shadow faculty.

"We told them about a unique perspective to the office. A graduate of the Keck School, she also completed her residency in internal medicine and pediatrics at Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center and, for five years, served as the assistant program director for the combined medicine/pediatrics residency program.

In other words, she is keenly aware of the pressure that Keck School students face. And, since she is still involved with selecting LAC-USC’s residents, she is well-acquainted with the selection process for residency programs.

"I love watching students discover their identities and interests in medicine and learn about who they are as developing physicians," Zia said.

She encouraged all students interested in learning more to drop by her office in KAM 100.

For more information, go to https://koon.usc.edu/careeradvising/.

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**Programs offer pilot grants for researchers**

In a continued effort to support university faculty and encourage groundbreaking research, the USC Institute of Urology and the Keck School of Medicine of USC’s Dean’s Pilot Grant Program and the Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute have distributed nearly two dozen grants as of press time.

Principal investigators and their colleagues from more than 30 multidisciplinary teams represent a wide variety of institutions, schools and departments of Medicine, including the Keck School and Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

"Supporting faculty members through these grant programs is a key part of our ongoing mission to foster groundbreaking research at the Keck School," said Rahib Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School and director of the USC Gayde and Edward Roski Eye Institute. "I look forward to seeing the development and innovation that result from supporting these exceptional researchers.

The SC CTSI Pilot Program will support a range of projects from pre-clinical development of novel diagnostic technologies to translational community-based research that ultimately will improve patient and public health.

"These two programs provide a crucial element of research that is hard to find — the very first funds to begin to test a new idea," said Toon Buchanan, MD, director of SC CTSI and vice dean for research at the Keck School. "We have lots of evidence that this sort of funding leads to bigger grants and important research. I am very pleased that the dean and the SC CTSI are able to provide this crucial funding to our research community."

"The Keck School of Medicine of USC’s Dean’s Pilot Grant Program received 44 applications, funding 11 projects. The SC CTSI Pilot Program received 70 applications, funding 10 programs and co-funding two more with the Alzheimer Disease Research Center. The SC CTSI Pilot Program spring cycle is open for grant applications through Feb. 15, said Sarah Hamm-Alvarez, PhD, associate dean for basic and translational research. Applications can be submitted at http://sc-ctsui.org/funding.

"We’re thrilled to be able to have access to the funds to administer both programs," said Hamm-Alvarez. "For each of the programs, we’re able to fund more new investigators — in many cases, for their first peer-reviewed award — to seed their research careers. We also are able to fund the development of new directions for experienced investigators that promise further innovation and discovery."

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**Infection: Bacteria spread into right leg tissue**

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**Calendar of Events**

Saturday, Jan. 14
7 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Department of Medicine and Department of Surgery Continuing Medical Education: "Annual Update on Eosinophilic Diseases," John Linpham, MD, and Edy Soffier, MD, University Club of Pasadena.

Noon, SC CTSI. "Information Session: Pilot Grant Applications on Inflammation, Cancer, and Infectious Disease.


7 p.m. Noon. "PMV Lecture Series: Corticosteroids and Cortisone: the golden age of steroid medicine," John Van Wyhe, MD, Keck School of Medicine of USC.

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Tuesday, Jan. 17
Noon, SC CTSI. "Information Session: Pilot Grant Applications on Inflammation, Cancer, and Infectious Disease.


Tuesday, Jan. 17

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

Gregory Stevens, PhD, associate professor of orthopaedic surgery, is working toward this therapy by using pluripotent stem cells to regenerate cartilage. While scientists have used these cells to create a cartilage-like tissue, they have not been able to generate cells that develop new cartilage. Evseenko proposes a unique approach: harvesting pluripotent stem cell-derived chondrocytes, which are the cells that can become cartilage, and implanting them into the joint. If successful on a large scale, this therapy would be a cheaper, minimally invasive, off-the-shelf alternative to joint replacement surgery as a treatment for osteoarthritis.

“The rapidly growing prevalence and staggering costs of osteoarthritis demand a solution that can benefit both patients and providers,” Evseenko said. “My team is working diligently to provide this solution by expanding on our previous stem cell research, and we are grateful for CIRM’s support of our endeavor.”

Osteoarthritis, more commonly known as arthritis, is a chronic disease caused by injury and wear and tear of the joints. It affects 23 percent of adults nationwide and costs the U.S. $100 billion annually. Those numbers are expected to grow exponentially due to longer lifespans and rising obesity.

AMD and its impact on quality of life for older Latinos. The study found Latinos diagnosed with bilateral AMD with large drusen (the lipids or fatty proteins that are yellow deposits under the retina) and degeneration as well as a more severe AMD had a substantially lower health-related quality of life as compared to those with AMD lesions in only one eye. In addition, the findings point to a more significant health-related quality of life decline beginning in early rather than later stages of the disease.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

By Denis Evseenko, MD, PhD, associate professor of orthopaedic surgery, is working toward this therapy by using pluripotent stem cells to regenerate cartilage. While scientists have used these cells to create a cartilage-like tissue, they have not been able to generate cells that develop new cartilage. Evseenko proposes a unique approach: harvesting pluripotent stem cell-derived chondrocytes, which are the cells that can become cartilage, and implanting them into the joint. If successful on a large scale, this therapy would be a cheaper, minimally invasive, off-the-shelf alternative to joint replacement surgery as a treatment for osteoarthritis.

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Research assess disease rates, trends among minorities

Minority communities, the latest break-throughs to address diabetic retinopa-thy, keratoconus, LASS1, postoperative ectasia, Sjögren’s syndrome, glaucoma and retinoblastoma in children. Beyond basic science and translational research, USC Roski Eye Institute remains at the forefront of clinical medicine through its clinical trial initiatives. Physicians are investigating the latest in drug development and treatment strategies for a number of eye conditions leading to solutions to prevent blindness and visual impairment and restore sight.

The Visual Impairment and Blindness Will Double by 2050 Study found that over the next 35 years, the number of Americans with a variety of eye disease and impairment issues, including AMD, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma, will dramatically increase impacting both individuals and society. More than 16.4 million Americans over age 40 will have visual impairment due to uncorrected refractive error compared to 8.2 million in 1990. Additionally, more than 2 million age 40+ will be blind and 6.95 million will have visual impairment by 2050 compared to 1.02 million and 3.22 million respectively from 2015.

The study also found women and minority populations (Latinos, African Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders) are at higher risk for visual impairment.

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Continued from page 1

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Keck Medicine physicians care for Rose Bowl champs

By Virginia Baca

The Trojan family celebrated an extraordinary 2017 Rose Bowl victory on Jan. 2.

As with all successful athletic achievements, it truly took a team to build a successful football season and the fabulous finish on the national stage.

At the official doctors of USC Trojan athletes, the USC Sports Medicine Center at Keck Medicine of USC specializes in treating sports-related and recreational injuries affecting the shoulder, knee, hip, elbow and neck.

“We are proud to contribute to the success of Trojans athletes,” said Jay R. Lieberman, MD, professor and chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery. “The expertise of our clinical team fits well with the needs of our athletes.

Many common injuries for USC athletes include tears to the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and meniscus in the knee, frozen shoulder, shoulder joint pain, shoulder impingement and tennis elbow, and cartilage preservation procedures.

In addition to being experts in minimally invasive arthroscopic procedures, joint replacement and reconstructive procedures, specialists at the USC Joint Preservation and Replacement Center also perform traditional procedures to restore damaged joints, ligaments and bones.

Keck Medicine physicians are highly regarded in total hip, knee and shoulder replacement as well as treatment of complex fractures.

Not only do Keck Medicine physicians treat the Trojans, they take care of professional athletes, Olympians, high school athletes and weekend warriors. These physicians have worked or are currently working with many professional teams including the Los Angeles Rams, Los Angeles Lakers, Los Angeles Dodgers, Los Angeles Galaxy, Los Angeles Kings and U.S. Women’s National Soccer.

CHLA marks 300 pediatric liver transplants with first patient

By Owen Lei

At 7 months old, Donovan Daniels of Westminster may not understand for some time just how serious his medical condition, biliary atresia, really is. It may be years before he knows he was the 300th pediatric liver transplant ever performed by doctors at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) and Keck Medicine of USC. But one day he’ll know his father Dejon Daniels went under the knife so that a portion of dad’s liver could help him live a longer, healthier life.

In the meantime, Donovan’s mother Jessica Valdepeña and Daniels got a glimpse of what that life might look like, thanks to a meeting with a young woman named Lydia Hand.

Hand, now 18, was CHLA’s first living donor liver transplant patient. As an infant, she also was diagnosed with biliary atresia, a rare life-threatening disease where bile ducts cannot expel bile from the liver. In 1998, Lydia received a liver from her grandmother. Today, the Lancaster resident is a college freshman majoring in music, and said her donated liver is still going strong.

“It’s pretty amazing how far she has come,” Valdepeña said. “I want Donovan to grow up and see what their family is going through is a special experience.”

Lydia said. “Donovan is me, I know he was the 300th pediatric liver transplant patient here, and I know that hundreds of other kids have received this life-saving transplant.”

By the day Donovan left the hospital, CHLA’s Liver and Intestinal Transplant Program had since grown to become one of the largest programs in the country — the hospital is now a consistent leader in the volume of living donor transplants performed nationwide among pediatric centers, with success rates well above national averages.

“Biliary atresia are not the real story,” said Daniel Thomas, MD, clinical professor of pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and medical director of the Liver and Intestinal Transplant Program at CHLA. “It is seeing patients like Lydia Hand grow, accomplish, and live to be a happy young woman with a life full of dreams and hopes.”

Coincidentally, the same team that worked on liver patient No. 1 also treated patient No. 300. Thomas is both Hand’s and Donovan’s hepatologist while Yuri Genyk, MD, professor of clinical surgery, is their transplant surgeon.

“Donovan’s success is truly the culmination of the knowledge and skills from the 299 liver transplants that preceded him, including Lydia’s,” said Genyk, surgical director of the Pediatric Liver Transplant Program at CHLA. “It speaks to the expertise and dedication of the entire liver transplant team, as well as the collective support we receive from all the services CHLA provides.”

When Donovan’s parents brought him to Children’s Hospital Los Angeles in October, doctors told them Donovan urgently needed a new liver. Daniels volunteered and was found to be a match. The transplant took place Nov. 18, with Genyk performing both parts — Daniels’ surgery at USC in the morning and Donovan’s transplant at CHLA several hours later. Daniels was released and finally was able to visit Donovan just in time for Thanksgiving.

Lydia and Donovan’s family met in Donovan’s hospital room on Dec. 1, the day he was discharged.

“We’ve heard all the stories about my transplant from my family, but to actually see and hear what their family is going through is a special experience,” Lydia said. “Donovan is me, I was once him, and it’s incredible to know that hundreds of other kids have received this life-saving procedure at CHLA in the years between us.”

From left, C. Thomas Vangsness, James Tibone, Rizza Omid, George Hatch, Jay Lieberman and Seth Gamradt are seen at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The physicians, joined by Alex Weber, pictured at right, provide official care for USC Trojan athletes.

Now at age 18, Donovan recently had surgery on his right knee, which was torn during the Rose Bowl, the game he was honored to attend.

Lydia Vangsness is launching a six-week Heartfulness meditation group class series supported by the Heartfulness Institute at Keck Hospital of USC, USC Verdugo Hills Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital.

Classes began Jan. 10 in the Coliseum Room at Keck Hospital of USC and continue on Tuesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Classes at USC-VIH and USC Norris will be coming soon.

A bounty of healthy lunch and fresh food options is available at the Keck Farmers Market, which is held every Tuesday at Hazard Park, on Norris Street and at the hospital from Keck Hospital Gold Lobby. A portion of the market’s proceeds will benefit the local neighborhood surrounding our campus through the Hazard Park Community Center.

Starting at the end of January, faculty and staff are encouraged to participate in the first Fitbit Wellness Challenge. The Fitbit is wearable technology that allows participants to track exercise, calorie intake, weight and sleep with real-time information and motivation that progress toward goals.

HSC News

HSC News is published for the faculty, staff, students, volunteers and visitors in the University of Southern California’s Health Sciences Campus community. It is produced by Keck Medicine Marketing and Communications staff. Permission to reprint articles is available upon request. No artwork may be reproduced without the creator’s consent.

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WEBINEL: Employees can create free Headspace account

To create a free Headspace account, visit https://headspace.com/keckmedicine and use code CTUSC17.

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