New primate fossil fills ecological gap

By Zen Vuong

Fossil hunters have found part of an ancient primate jawbone related to lemurs — the primitive primate group distantly connected to monkeys, apes and humans, a Keck School of Medicine at USC, said a co-author of the study.

Biren Patel, PhD, associate professor of clinical cell and neurobiology, has been digging for fossils in a palaeontologically rich area of Kashmir in northern India for six years.

Although paleontologists have scoured this region for a century, relics of small extinct primates were rarely found or studied.

Scientists named the new species Ramadops sainati and said that it existed 13 million to 14 million years ago. It is a member of the ancient Sivaladapidae primate family, consumed leaves and was about the size of a house cat.

The last primate found in the area was 38 years ago. So, in addition to being a new species, this is the first primate fossil found in the area in decades.

“The fossil we found is from a different group on the primate family tree — one that is poorly known in Asia. We are filling an ecological and biogeographical gap that wasn’t really well documented. Every little step adds to the understanding of our human family tree because we’re also primates.”

Patel said. “The fossil we found is from a different group on the primate family tree — one that is poorly known in Asia. We are filling an ecological and biogeographical gap that wasn’t really well documented. Every little step adds to the understanding of our human family tree because we’re also primates.”

The inch-and-a-quarter partial mandible belongs to a primate weighing less than 11 pounds that had outlived its other adapidae cousins found in North America, Europe and Africa by millions of years.

“New primates are always a hot topic, and this one is the first of its kind to address medical student development

Karen Restifo, MD, JD, has been appointed associate dean for student affairs at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, according to Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine at the Keck School of Medicine with a wealth of experience in student affairs and national recognition as a student affairs leader.

“Dr. Restifo comes to the Keck School of Medicine with a wealth of experience in student affairs and national recognition as a student affairs leader.”

She joins the Keck School of Medicine in the USC Viterbi School of Engineering. He became the first engineer to receive the National Science Foundation Alan T. Waterman award in 1990.

In 1995, while at Caltech, Davis expanded the focus of his research to biomaterials for cancer research. He did so in response to his wife’s long, painful but ultimately successful, fight against breast cancer.

Davis and his team became the first researchers to successfully engineer nanoparticles that are made from...
Researchers awarded $1.7 million to study heart regeneration

By Jennifer Marcus

C hing-Ling (Ellen) Lien, PhD, assistant professor of surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and an investigator at The Saban Research Institute of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, has been awarded nearly $1.7 million, over a four-year period, from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health to study the molecular and cellular mechanisms of the heart’s circulatory system. The research will lead to a better understanding of heart development and regeneration after injury.

Heart disease among the leading causes of death for both adults and children. A heart attack (or myocardial infarction) occurs when the heart is deprived of oxygen due to blockage of a coronary artery, which supplies the heart muscle with oxygenated blood. Yet, the mechanisms that regulate coronary vascularization of the myocardium (the middle and thickest muscle layer of the heart wall) remain unknown.

Using zebrafish as a model system to study developmental and regenerative processes of the heart, Lien’s goal is to determine the molecular and cellular mechanisms of myocardial vascularization during heart development.

Zebrafish have become an important vertebrate model for cardiovascular research not only because of their natural ability to undergo heart regeneration, but also because transparency allows researchers to observe the internal processes like blood vessel development.

Their long-term goal is to use the mechanisms of zebrafish heart regeneration as a blueprint to design potential therapeutic approaches to enhance heart repair in humans, said Lien, principal investigator. The investigators expected their research to lead to findings that will shed light on potential developmental ability and characteristics of disease, neovascularization, or new blood vessel formation in abnormal tissue, in diseased human hearts in the future.

Co-investigators on the team include: Scott Fraser, PhD, Provost Professor of Biological Sciences and Biomedical Engineering; Megan McCain, PhD, assistant professor of biomedical engineering; Mark Fey, PhD, assistant professor of pediatrics; and Henry Suen, PhD, professor of stem cell and regenerative medicine.

Students pitch global surgery solutions

By Larissa Puro

S tudents from across the university spent a week strategizing ways to improve Nicaragua’s medical infrastructure as part of the sixth annual USC Global Health Case Competition.

The competition, open to all USC students and hosted by the Institute for Global Health, partnered with medical charity Operation Smile and Children’s Hospital Los Angeles to develop a case challenge based on the organza experience providing surgical care in more than 60 countries worldwide.

With two-thirds of the world’s population lacking access to safe surgery, the competitors were tasked with developing operating room systems that would be both sustainable and appropriate to Nicaragua. The teams pitched ideas to faculty judges in 15-minute presentations.

Approximately 50 students participated in the Feb. 14 competition, forming multidisciplinary teams from seven USC schools. Members of the winning team include biology and Master of Public Health degree undergraduate Cristina Gago; Master of Public Administration candidates Julian Cernuda and Brantynn Washington; and Master of Public Health candidates Ashley Millhouse and Haizt Georgovan.

They’ll travel to Atlanta to represent USC at the International University Global Health Case Competition on March 23.

Operation Smile has been providing cleft lip and palate surgeries worldwide since William and Kathy Magee founded the organization in 1982. Their son, William Magee III, MD, DDS, is an assistant professor of clinical surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC as well as the director of the International Research Program in the Department of Plastic and Maxillofacial Surgery at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

Magee III presented a lecture during the competition about innovations and challenges of the emerging global surgery field and focused on the Global Surgery Partnership, a novel collaboration between the Keck School, CHLA and Operation Smile.

Magee III praised the competition as an important educational exercise. “Leadership and problem-solving,” he said, “you only get good at it by doing it.”

Calendar of Events

Friday, March 10
8:30 a.m. Hartings Center for Pulmonary Research Seminar. “Mechanisms of Lung Hypersensitivity & Respiratory Disease.” Locations: H9105, 2nd Floor, Department of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine.

Tuesday, March 14

Wednesday, March 15
Noon. Division of Nephrology and Hypertension Lecture: “Metyz and Shad G. Masry Visiting Professor,” Susan E. Gaggin, MD, Northeastern University. Research School of Medicine, LAC-USC Medical Center HPT Conference Room B. Contact: Tania Jackson, (323) 442-1043, tania.jackson@med.usc.edu.

Friday, March 17
8:30 a.m. Hartings Center for Pulmonary Research Seminar. “ARDS: The Glucocorticoid Receptor Plays a Prominent Role in Disease Pathogenesis & Can Be Modulated with Prolonged Methylprednisolone Treatment.” Location: 4301-Floor, 6th Floor, Keck Medical Center.

Saturday, March 18
7 a.m.-4:30 p.m. USC Keck School of Medicine Research Symposium: The Spectrum of Headache Education. “24th Annual Van Der Meulen and Neuralgia Center Continuing Medical Education.” Location: Research Building Auditorium, 4661 Sunset Blvd. Contact: keanelai@usc.edu.

Monday, March 20

8 a.m.-Noon. Department of Ophthalmology. “Ophtalmology Grand Rounds: “Retina Grand Rounds: ‘Continued from page 1”” Location: Keck Medical Center. Contact: Nicholas Deras, (323) 442-3121, asmadera@usc.edu. Please contact host/ moderaor, Keane Lai, keanelai@usc.edu, for meetingmaterials.

Wednesday, March 22


Thursday, March 23
Noon. The Southern California Research Center for ALD0 and Cottinism Seminar. “Cellular Homestasis Lecture Series: Calcin Sigmond During Neutrophil Activation.” Contact: Clifford A. Lowrey, MD, PhD, University of California, San Francisco. McKibben Lecture Hall 156. Contact: Amy Assad, (323) 865-9133, castellano_s@usc.edu, for meetingmaterials.

Friday, March 24

PRIMATE

Continued from page 1

from its area in Asia, which has significant implications for understanding primates and evolution in the Old World,” said Michael Habib, PhD, assistant professor of cell biology and neurobiology at the Keck School who was not involved in the study.

The question that remains is how the ecosystem in northern India supports this species when its relatives elsewhere were disappearing or had already been exterminated. Extending their range and recovering more fossile primates will help answer this question.

“People want to know about human origins, but to fully understand human origins, you need to understand all of primate origins, including the lemurs and these microcebus,” Patel said. “Lemurs and microcebus are sister groups to what we are — the anthropoids — and we are all primates.”

This study was supported by the National Geographic Foundation, the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, the Institute of Human Origins and several universities.

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 news.usc.edu/calendar-of-events. Submit items at 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.
Nominations are open for the USC Choi Family Awards in Patient-Centered Care. The prestigious awards honor exceptional nurses and staff who hold an unwavering commitment to compassionate patient care. The awards are part of the USC Choi Family Excellence in Patient-Centered Care Endowment, which was established last year by Keck Medicine of USC through a generous gift from the Choi family.

“...a philanthropic partnership helps ensure the culture of service and patient advocacy that exists will be supported and enhanced now and into perpetuity,” said Rod Hamilton, CSO of Keck Medicine of USC and CEO of Keck Medical Center of USC. Winners will receive a special dinner and ceremony in May. Each individual recipient will receive an additional $2,000 for their department to be used for programs, training and activities that support and foster our culture of excellence in patient-centered care. Additionally, each recipient’s name will appear on a ‘perpetual plaque’ installed in the lobby of the Keck Medicine of USC Center. The Choi Family Awards are open to all health care professionals at Keck Medicine of USC. The Choi Family Excellence in Patient-Centered Care Endowment provides funding for education and training focused on compassion, empathy, advocacy and patient-centered care. The Choi family chose to support the Keck Medicine of USC Patient Experience department after a family member required exceptional care from Keck Hospital of USC physicians, nurses and staff.

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Thomas Lee receives Microsoft Health Innovation Award

The winners of the 2017 Microsoft Health Innovation Awards were announced recently and included Thomas Lee, MD, associate professor of clinical ophthalmology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. The award recognizes Lee’s work with SADA Systems, a technology company, on a telemedicine project to train eye surgeons in Armenia to reduce rates of infant blindness. — Amanda Busick

Radiology professor honored at international conference

Hossein Jadvar, MD, PhD, MPH, MBA, associate professor of radiology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC with a joint appointment as associate professor of biomedical engineering in the USC Viterbi School of Engineering, received the inaugural Ajit Padhy Memorial Award and delivered an oration lecture during the 11th International Conference of Radiopharmaceutical and Molecular Therapy (ICRT), held in November in Kochi, India. The theme of the conference, which is organized under the umbrella of the World Association of Radiopharmaceutical and Molecular Therapy (WARMTH), was “From Controversies to Consensus in Radiopharmaceutical Therapy.” Jadvar was recognized for “his contribution to education, research and clinical practice in the fields of Radiopharmaceutical and Molecular Therapy (ICRT), held in November in Kochi, India.”

By Cristy Lypal

Having a baby can change a woman’s life in one way that she is often too embarrassed to mention. Childhood can cause urinary incontinence, which affects up to 13 million people and incurs $13.6 billion in annual treatment costs in the United States alone.

To address this common problem, this year’s winners of the Eli and Edythe Broad Innovation Award are engineering a stem cell-based, biomaterials approach to promote the regeneration of the urethra. The one-year award provides $100,000 of direct research funding and an additional $20,000 to cover services in relevant core facilities at the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Research at USC.

The project brings together Larissa V. Rodriguez, MD, and Rong Zhang, PhD, DDS, from the Catherine and Joseph Aresty Department of Urology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, with Eun Ji Chung, PhD, from the Department of Biomedical Engineering at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering.

Together, they hope to advance treatments beyond the current industry standard, which involves injecting synthetic bolting agents or slings into the urethra to help control urine leakage. These therapies can assist with urethral closure, but do not improve urethral function and may trigger complications including chronic inflammation, abscesses, immune reactions, urinary tract obstruction, urethral or bladder erosion, or even blood clots in the lungs.

As a new approach, Rodriguez, Zhang and Chung are developing a bioactive hydrogel — a type of waterlogged gel made of peptides, which are the building blocks of proteins. They plan to inject this hydrogel around the urethra as a temporary bulking agent to assist with closure. At the same time, the hydrogel will actively deliver fat-derived stem cells and molecular signals to encourage tissue regeneration and the restoration of muscle tone.

Eventually, the hydrogel will completely biodegrade, replaced by a regenerated and fully functional urethra.

The research team currently is testing this approach in rats with urinary incontinence, in hopes of eventually garnering supplemental grant funding to advance this work into clinical trials.

“Urinary incontinence keeps people from enjoying their children, enjoying their grandchildren, going to a movie, doing activities that all of us expect in terms of having a happy life,” said Rodriguez, who also is associate provost for faculty and student initiatives in health and STEM, director of Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery (FPMRS) at the Keck Medicine of USC — Beverly Hills location, vice chair of academics at the Catherine and Joseph Aresty Department of Urology, and director of the FPMRS fellowship at the Keck School. “It disproportionately affects women. And I feel a moral sense of really giving to a population that I think of as being really under-served.”

Hossein Jadvar delivers the inaugural Ajit Padhy Memorial Oration at the 11th International Conference of Radiopharmaceutical and Molecular Therapy, held in November in India.

Investigators gather for first Hastings Center retreat

Nearly 50 researchers affiliated with the Keck School of Medicine of USC’s Hastings Center for Pulmonary Research gathered Feb. 24 at the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens in San Marino to attend the inaugural Hastings Center for Pulmonary Research Retreat. The event included investigators from across the university and from Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. They were welcomed by Zra Bonak, MD, director of the Hastings Center, Ralph Edgington Chair in Medicine and chief of the division of pulmonary, critical care and sleep medicine at the Keck School. Bonak recognized John Reith, chair of the board of the Hastings Foundation who attended the event, for the foundation’s generous support of lung research at the university. The daylong retreat featured 16 presentations by current USC investigators that were thematically grouped to focus on lung development; lung cancer and imaging; stem cells, epithelial biology and fibrosis; and environment and inflammation. — Eric Weintraub

Broad Innovation Award winners aim to ease bathroom breaks with stem cells

Larissa V. Rodriguez, left, and Rong Zhang

of Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery (FPMRS) at the Keck Medicine of USC – Beverly Hills location, vice chair of academics at the Catherine and Joseph Aresty Department of Urology, and director of the FPMRS fellowship at the Keck School. “It disproportionately affects women. And I feel a moral sense of really giving to a population that I think of as being really under-served.”

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