CHLA ranked best in West by U.S. News

By Lorenzo Benet

Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA), an affiliate of the Keck School of Medicine of USC, is the top-ranked pediatric hospital in California again, based on the latest rankings announced by U.S. News & World Report. CHLA also was named to the publication’s Honor Roll of Best Children’s Hospitals, a designation bestowed on elite pediatric academic medical centers that excel in multiple specialties.

CHLA is the only pediatric hospital on the West Coast to be named to the Honor Roll this year, finishing sixth nationwide in the 2017–18 assessment of the best pediatric health care facilities in the United States. CHLA has made the Honor Roll every year since its inception nine years ago.

“This distinguished recognition reflects the collaborative efforts of our world-class physicians, nurses, researchers, technicians and clinical staff,” said CHLA President and CEO Paul S. Viviano.

“This year will mark the 75th anniversary of a successful partnership between the Keck School and CHLA. The convergence of missions with regards to education, research and clinical care between the two institutions has grown considerably in recent years.

“The dedicated physician-scientists at CHLA are committed to providing compassionate and personalized care for our youngest and most vulnerable patients, many of whom suffer from some of the most complex medical problems,” said Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

“Los Angeles finds itself falling behind in the biotech-related fields each year. “Now we see an unparalleled opportunity to keep this intellectual capital right here in our region,” he said.

“The event at the Eli and Edythe Broad CIRM Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC focused on the educational, employ- ment, health and business benefits of a biotech park. Speakers included Thomas S. Sayles, JD, senior vice president for university relations; Earl Paisinger, vice president of civic engagement; and Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

“The university has long provided an environment that fosters collaboration and entrepreneurialism, which is critical to the success of the Biotech Park,” Varma said. “This type of scientific innovation and growth allows us to expand the Keck School’s commitment to our community here in Los Angeles and advances our quest for life-changing innovations and discoveries.”

Baker tapped to lead cardiac surgery

By Lex Davis

Vaughn A. Starnes, MD, Distinguished Professor and chair of surgery, and H. Russell Smith Foundation Chair for Stem Cell and Cardiovascular Thoracic Research at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, has appointed Craig J. Baker, MD, professor of clinical surgery (educational scholar), to the position of chief of the division of cardiac surgery as of July 1 of this year.

“Dr. Baker is going to navigate the hospital into the next era of health care and usher in technological innovation to keep up with our rapidly changing field,” Starnes said. “I have absolute confidence that he’s going to do a great job.”

Starnes also cited the deep respect Baker has earned from cardiac surgeons across the country. “The leader of any outstanding division needs to have a national presence,” Starnes said. “Dr. Baker has that.”

Biotech park could create ‘explosion of employment’

By Ron Mackovich

The competition for biotech investment is escalating, and USC President C. L. Max Nikias, PhD, wants to make sure Los Angeles emerges a winner.

“Los Angeles finds itself falling behind in the race for the future of this increasingly important industry,” Nikias said at a June 8 Business of Biotech event that brought together community, business and university leaders.

“The USC leader envisions a biotechnology park in east Los Angeles on the Health Sciences Cam- pus. The development could provide thousands of construction and biotech jobs.

“We will see an explosion of employment in many areas, and we will watch this community emerge as an attractive area for large companies and small busi- ness startups, all searching for new employees to help them grow and expand,” he said.

Nikias emphasized the Los Angeles basin’s biotech assets, including USC hospitals, research institu- tions and more than 5,000 university graduates in biotechnology-related fields each year.

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Doctor’s orders: How to stay healthy, and maybe find a career

By Ron Mackovich

Get regular checkups, keep in touch with your doctor and be aware of opportunities in biotech. Those are doctor’s orders from René Sotelo, MD, professor of clinical urology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, who spoke with community members and families during a health fair June 17 at East Los Angeles College.

“Take care of yourself,” said Sotelo, a pioneer in urinary robotic surgery, as he answered questions in Spanish about cancer screening and treatment from residents of Boyle Heights and other nearby communities. Sotelo also emphasized the educational and career prospects in medicine and biotech.

“There are many career op- portunities for students, involving technology that will assist them to improve the quality of health care. This includes apps, medical devices, pharmacueticals,” Sotelo said. “There’s technology that can help us follow the patient home after the surgery to see exactly how they’re doing. All this is part of it, and there are no barriers.”

Ghernemy Lopez, a cancer information resource and naviga- tion specialist with the Keck School, took the stage along with Sotelo. She focused on engaging and educating youths about the importance of creativity and critical thinking in STEM, cancer research and patient advocacy.

Lopez said that STEM education — focusing on science, technology, engineering and math — is an equalizer of economic and
using zebras to study human hearing loss

By Grisy Liyf

Larger than a marble-sized jaw, "tell us something about hearing loss in the voice and human? The answer is yes, according to a new publication in the *Science Reports*. In a twist of evolution, the zebras’ upper teeth, an asymptomatic tooth rise to three tiny bony protrusions in the mammalian middle ear to serve as an aid to their hearing. sweat and the stimulus, which transmits sound vibration.

The researchers believe that this genetic change causes a jaw malformation in a fish, an example of a genetic change that triggers hearing defects in mice and, possibly, people. In focus of their future research is the hearing of their dream, to see if the same happens in people with hearing loss.

Choi Award winner: Smiling ‘face’ of Keck Hospital

By Lars Nissen

Choi Award winner: Smiling ‘face’ of Keck Hospital

The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center (NCCC) has received the 2017 L.K. Whittier Foundation Choi Family Award, the inaugural award for excellence in patient-centered care at Keck Medicine of USC. The award recognizes the hospital’s exceptional work in improving the patient experience and strengthening the bond between patients and families. The award is named after Dr. Minerva Choi, who served the community for more than 40 years.

The award of $2,000,000 includes funding for research and resident training and activities that support and enhance the patient experience. The award was established in 2016 to honor Dr. Choi, who had a lifelong commitment to patient-centered care and providing excellence in the support of patients and their families.

The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center (NCCC) is the only comprehensive cancer center in the metropolitan Los Angeles area designated by the National Cancer Institute and a member of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network. It is part of Keck Medicine of USC, the University of Southern California’s healthcare enterprise, and includes the Keck Hospital of USC, the USC Norris Cancer Institute, the USC Loker Medical Research Institute, and the USC Loker Neurological Institute.

The award was presented to the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center by David G. Nirenberg, MD, PhD, president and CEO of Keck Medicine of USC, and Robert L. Cain, JD, MIA, MD, CEO of the Keck Foundation.

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Institute pioneers options for prostate cancer patients

By Hope Hamashige

The Department of Urology at Keck Medicine of USC is pioneering a new treatment option that minimizes invasiveness, requires no radiation and eradicates the need for hormonal treatment.

The procedure targets high-intensity focused ultrasound, or HIFU, to noninvasively target and kill cancer cells within the prostate, while the di Vincenzo robotic system simultaneously removes the neighboring lymph nodes.

Traditionally, the HIFU procedure has been used to treat men who risk low-concept because, although HIFU is effective and cancer-free, it cannot touch the lymph nodes. “If you don’t have healthy lymph node function remaining, you can’t cure the cancer,” said Charles K. Liu, director of clinical operations at the USC Institute of Urology.

To date, the procedure has been used on about 70 patients out of 107 who have returned for the two-year follow-up.

This innovation offers the potential for ablative technology to be used for more aggressive cancers, said Alexander J. Moore, a resident in urology.

Liu said the two-year follow-up results demonstrate that the cancer is eradicated in more than 95% of patients.

By Larissa Puro

For two months at Imperial College in London, by two months at Imperial College in where he taught and conducted research U.S. Fulbright Scholar in Ethiopia, where he taught and conducted research

Lee was honored by a MERIT award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science in recognition of his research, innovation and leadership in science and technology.

Lee was the first scientist to clone human embryos and the lead investigator of the Cell and Molecular Biology Program.

Protein may hold key to fight pancreatic cancer

New research from the Keck School of Medicine of USC shows new promise in the fight against pancreatic cancer, one of the most lethal forms of cancer. Studies indicate that expressing only half the amount of the glucose-regulated protein GRP78 is enough to halt the earliest stage of pancreatic cancer development.

The study, funded in part by the National Institutes of Health, suggests that the protein is required for “switching” healthy pancreatic cells that produce enzymes to digest food into potentially cancerous cells, reducing the amount of this protein delays pancreatic cancer development and prolongs survival.

The study published online on May 16 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, is the first to establish the pivotal role of the carbohydrate-GRP78-driven pancreatic cancer through an entirely new method.

By Douglas Morris

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Gill added that the team at the USC Institute of Urology has made tremendous progress in attacking this cancer.

“Look at the work this group has been doing,” she said. “The progress that has been achieved. I can’t think of anything more important.”

“Cancer cells are dedicated to high levels of GRP78,” said Chen, who is also an assistant professor of molecular biology at the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences at USC.

At a data-driven economy, biostatistics is a quintessential field of study needed to support the rising importance of evidence-based decision-making.

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K Michelle Medicine of USC theoretical, empirical and applied mathematicians and statisticians who are working on biostatistics.

In 2017-18, the national ranking in eight categories, including cardiology and heart surgery, gastroenterology and GI surgery, among its 62 fellows in 2017, professor of preventive medicine, Gill was honored by a MERIT award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science in recognition of his research, innovation and leadership in science and technology.

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Trauma survivors visit with caregivers at annual reunion

By Les Davis

The walls are covered with brilliantly colored balloon sculptures. There is a bubble-machine and a face-painting booth. Two golden retrievers named Fergus and Casper happily accept pets. It’s not the image most people have when they think of a trauma center.

The Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center Trauma Survivors’ Reunion started a decade ago, when a LAC USC trauma surgeon saw a former patient walk into the hospital. The young man had been unresponsive the last time he had seen him, now he was back in school. While most doctors and nurses in critical care don’t know what happens to their patients once they’re whisked off to long-term care, this surgeon realized how moving it is to be able to see a patient in recovery.

“The reunion is as much for staff as it is for survivors,” said Lydia Lam, MD, assistant professor of clinical surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, at this year’s 10-year anniversary event on May 20. “It’s about connection,” explained Dementios Demetriades, MD, PhD, professor of surgery and chief of the division of acute care surgery and surgical critical care. “We meet under very different circumstances. This is an opportunity to celebrate life.”

That celebration is evident as former patients enter the room. Doctors and nurses light up with recognition and rush to say hello. Dementios referred to many of the patients as “walking miracles.”

Former patient Alfonso Moellk was among the featured speakers. He was in a car accident that left him with traumatic brain injuries and fractures to his C3 and C4 vertebrae. He spoke about how he felt like he had to have the nurses gather and applaud him when he took his first step.

“It’s easy to become attached to patients,” said Nurse Manager Martha Navarro, RN, “especially when they’re like this one.”

Patricia López, center, a nurse at Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center, and members of the reunion planning committee spent three days making balloon art for the Trauma Survivor’s Reunion on May 20.

Infectious disease specialist joins training for fellowship

Brad Spellberg, MD, professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, joined 14 other teaching infectious disease specialists in Washington, D.C., for a public engagement fellowship training from June 12-16.

Urology professor discusses career, legacy

By Hope Hamashige

After nearly four decades on the faculty of the Keck School of Medicine of USC, Gary Lieskovsky, MD, professor of urology and holder of the Donald G. Skinner Chair in Urology, is retiring June 30. Lieskovsky, who recently was granted professor emeritus status, sat down with HSC News to discuss his legacy.

What were some of the major surgical advances you’ve seen?

First was in the field of urologic diversification and the development of a urinary reservoir made from one’s own intestine. Before this, patients who had their bladders removed had to wear a bag on the outside of their abdominal wall. Dr. Skinner, then-chairman of the department, and I felt that by making some modifications to the original procedure that there was the potential to create an internal reservoir, which would obviate the need for an external appliance apparatus.

Our work eventually evolved into connecting this high-capacity reservoir to the urethra, to rely on the patient’s own continence mechanism. This way, the patients could void naturally instead of simply increasing intra-abdominal pressure and pressing on their lower abdomen.

The second significant development came about in the late 1980s with the discovery of the position of the neurovascular bundles and their relationship to the prostate itself. With better understanding of the anatomy, we had vital information that allowed us to spare the nerve bundles in order for men to retain their potency following radical prostatectomy.

What prompted you to create the Gary Lieskovsky Fellowship in Urologic Oncology, an endowment of more than $1 million to support faculty research?

Without endowments, it’s hard to recruit faculty; it’s hard to give them start-up money so that they can get going and apply for NIH grants or other federally funded opportunities. Many of the outstanding research by a fellow and benefit patients in the future.

Final thoughts about your career at Keck Medicine?

It has been a phenomenal career, which I have cherished, and I am eternally grateful to Donald G. Skinner for recruiting me to USC and to the university for providing me the opportunity to be part of this great institution and the Tisch Family. Fight on!

Stuart Boyd receives lifetime achievement award

At the 2017 American Urologic Association Annual Meeting on May 13, Boston Scientific awarded Stuart Boyd, MD, professor of urology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, the F. Brantley Scott Award of Excellence. This is a lifetime achievement award for the practice of reconstructive urology. In receiving the award, Boyd said, “I am truly honored to receive this award and to be able to restore quality of life for so many patients and their families over these last 35 years at USC.” — Mary Dacuma

HSC News

A roundup of news items related to Keck Medicine of USC, which may include philanthropic donations, research grants, publications in academic journals and mentions in the news media.

From left, Gage Crump, Min Yu, Yang Chai, Joseph F. Rodgers and Denis Evseenko lead a panel discussion about “Preparing for the faculty job market” for postdoctoral scholars on May 30.

Postdocs get help with faculty job search in seminar series

Nearly 50 postdocs from departments across USC attended the first installment of “Preparing for the faculty job market.” The three-part seminar series is the brainchild of Michaela Patterson, PhD, and Lindsay Barlow, PhD, postdocs at the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC. The kick-off seminar focused on how to structure the research statement, an essential component of the faculty application package. The second seminar on July 21 will address the remaining application documents, including the CV, cover letter, teaching statement and diversity statement. The third seminar, to be held in November, will conclude the series with an overview of the interview process, including the infamous “job talk” and “chalk talk.” — Crissy Lytal

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