

Larry King moderates panel of regional healthcare leaders at HSC

By Ina Fried

Howard Kahn, CEO of L.A. Care, drew a laugh from the audience and other panelists with his blunt advice during the Nov. 8 Southern California Health Leadership Panel, "Succeeding with Reform: Understanding Access and Quality."

Among Kahn's observations: Improving access to health care may be an open and shut case. Health care providers need to open lines of communication both with their patients and with each other. And members of the general public need to "shut our mouths," to curb smoking, drinking and obesity—the biggest controllable risk factors for cardiac and other diseases.

National health policy leaders convened at the Keck School of Medicine to discuss the pressing issue of increasing access to cardiac care for uninsured, under-insured and low-income populations.

The panel discussion was followed by a "Road to Health" fair and free health screenings. The fair, also held at the Keck School of Medicine, was designed to raise awareness about the prevalence and prevention of cardiac disease.

Talk show host Larry King, founder of the Larry King Cardiac Foundation, hosted the event in partnership with Los Angeles-based COPE Health Solutions, LAC+USC Medical Center and the Keck School.

The Larry King Cardiac Foundation was established in 1988 to provide funding for life-saving treatment for individuals, who, due to limited means or no insurance, would be otherwise be



Jon Nalick

Talk show host Larry King (right), founder of the Larry King Cardiac Foundation, moderates a Nov. 8 panel of healthcare providers and experts discussing the need for reform and improved access to care. Panelists particularly emphasized the problems facing low-income populations in seeking adequate cardiac care.

unable to receive the treatment and medical attention they so desperately need.

"Cardiac disease is a serious problem in Southern California, as it is across the nation—and particularly in our low-income communities," noted Larry King Jr., president of the Larry King Cardiac Foundation.

He added that "the most at-risk indi-

viduals are also the patients least likely to be able to access the care they need."

Several panelists quoted statistics indicating that members of low-income populations are less likely to see a doctor, to have cardiac diagnostic procedures and to be treated for cardiac disease.

COPE Health Solutions, a non-profit healthcare corporation, works with

health systems to improve efficiency and coordination of care delivery. "We have successfully redefined managed care for the uninsured in Los Angeles County, connecting patients with the care they need, when they need it and where they need it," noted Allen Miller, CEO of COPE Health Solutions.

"The Camino de Salud (Healthy

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USC researchers show how cancer cells can switch off crucial genes

By Meghan Lewit

A new study led by USC researchers identifies how genes are silenced in cancer cells through distinct changes in the density of nucleosomes—the units that package DNA into chromosomes inside the cell nucleus.

The findings, published in the Nov. 13 issue of the journal *Cancer Cell*, will enable researchers to explore new therapies to switch the genes back on and may lead to novel treatments for human cancers, said study lead author Peter A. Jones, director of the USC/Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Distinguished Professor at the Keck School of Medicine.

"The study shows for the first time exactly how genes get shut down in cancer cells," Jones said. "It

identifies what the target looks like so that new therapies can be designed to turn them back on."

The study showed that silencing of transcription start sites in some cancer cells involves distinct changes in nucleosomal occupancy—or the density of nucleosomes—in the cell.

Researchers found that three nucleosomes, almost completely absent from start sites in normal cells, are present in the methylated and silenced promoter, suggesting that epigenetic silencing may be accomplished by the stable placement of nucleosomes into previously vacant positions.

DNA cytosine methylation—the addition of a group of specific chemicals to a stretch of DNA that can lock or silence a gene—may ultimately lead to silencing by enabling the stable presence of nucleo-

somes at the start sites of cancer-related genes, the study suggests.

"We believe these findings will contribute to the development of cancer therapies," Jones said. "We were surprised to find how rigid the inactive structure is, and how rapidly it can be dissolved by drug treatment."

The study was supported by a grant from the National Institutes of Health.

Joy C. Lin, Shinwu Jeong, Gangning Liang, Daiya Takai, Merhaz Fatemi, Yvonne C. Tsai, Gerda Egger, Einar Nili Gal-Yam, Peter A. Jones, "Role of Nucleosomal Occupancy in the Epigenetic Silencing of the MLH1 CpG Island," *Cancer Cell*, Volume 12; Issue 5, November 2007. DOI: 10.1016/

USC study examines age and ethnicity differences in eye problems

By Carrie St. Michel

In a study of more than 6,000 Los Angeles-area children—the largest study of its kind—researchers at the Keck School of Medicine found that both strabismus (commonly known as cross-eyed or wall-eyed) and amblyopia (often referred to as lazy eye) were more prevalent in older children than in younger children.

The study is currently available in the online edition of the journal *Ophthalmology*.

The population for this first phase of the Multi-Ethnic Pediatric Eye Disease Study (MEPEDS) was composed equally of African-American and Hispanic youngsters, ages six months to six years, who reside in the Los Angeles County community of Inglewood.

The overall prevalence of strabismus was 2.5 percent; while this finding remained constant regardless of gender or ethnicity, prevalence trended upward with increasing age.

The overall prevalence of amblyopia, which was 2.6 percent in both ethnic groups, similarly trended upward with age, although researchers concluded that this trending stabilizes by three years of age. As with strabismus, researchers found no difference when amblyopia results were stratified by gender.

"This is the first evaluation of strabismus and amblyopia in these two ethnic groups," said principal investigator Rohit Varma, professor of ophthalmology and preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, and director of the Ocular Epidemiology Center at USC's Doheny Eye Institute.

"What was most surprising about our findings," he adds, "was that the vast majority of children who we diagnosed with either strabismus or amblyopia had been previously undiagnosed and hadn't received any care. Both of these disorders can be detected by age three, so this points to a crucial need for early

screening and intervention programs that could prevent lifelong visual impairments," he said.

According to Susan Cotter, the study's co-principal investigator and a research professor of ophthalmology at the Keck School, "These study results fill an important gap in our knowledge base regarding the magnitude of strabismus and amblyopia in infants and young children, as well as our understanding of age-related differences in these children. MEPEDS results will likely impact the development of vision screening programs and health-care policy."

This population-based, multi-phased study began in January 2004. With the Inglewood portion of the study completed, USC researchers are now conducting vision screenings in Southern California's Riverside County. When these screenings are completed, children in the Southern California community of Monterey Park will be assessed.

The population for the Riverside and Monterey Park screenings will be Asian-American and non-Hispanic white children ages six months to six years. All MEPEDS phases will be completed by 2011, at which time more than 12,000 youngsters will have been screened for strabismus, amblyopia and other vision conditions including astigmatism, as well as near- and farsightedness.

"This study, supported by the National Eye Institute (NEI) of the National Institutes of Health, provides new information on the development and extent of eye diseases among infants and preschool children from two major ethnic groups in the United States—African-American and Latino," said Paul A. Sieving, director of the NEI. "The study highlights the importance of early detection and treatment to reduce the burden of visual impairment on children, their families and society as a whole."

Web development team targets The Doctors of USC Web site for major redesign

By Cheryl Bruyninckx

A major Web redesign project for The Doctors of USC took a leap forward recently with a visit from the creative firm leading the effort.

A seven-member marketing team from Swanson Russell Associates, an outside marketing firm working with USC Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing, arrived at the Health Sciences Campus for a three-day site visit beginning on Oct. 15.

The team scouted out key storylines, graphics and other content for the new Web site while touring the Health Sciences Campus, including LAC+USC

Medical Center and The Doctors of USC-Downtown (formerly USC Executive Health and Imaging Center). Interviews were conducted with dozens of physicians, researchers, residents and patients representing the wide array of healthcare services offered by The Doctors of USC.

"The visit was a complete success," said Heather Monaster of Swanson Russell Associates. "We have a clear vision of how we can design the new Web site to serve as a powerful resource for patients."

The team will visit the campus two more times to gather content for an expected launch in June 2008. The new site will promote The Doctors of USC to patients and referring physicians, offer patients easy access to healthcare information and incorporate more multimedia and interactive elements.



USC physician Brett White discusses patient care on camera as part of a web development project due in 2008.

Other current marketing efforts on behalf of The Doctors of USC include ads in game programs and on video scoreboards at Trojan football and basketball games. Plans are in place for improved signage at athletic facilities to

promote The Doctors of USC. A campaign to promote the newly renamed The Doctors of USC-Downtown health center (from USC Executive Health and Imaging Center) is also underway.

DID WE SAY THAT?

Due to an editing error, an article in the Nov. 9 issue of *HSC Weekly* incorrectly identified the hospital to which USC alumnus Mark Lewin has been named chief of cardiology. He has been named chief and co-director of Children's Heart Center at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center, Seattle, Wash.

Mike Silka is chief of cardiology at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. *HSC Weekly* apologizes for the error.

SCEHSC offers \$25,000 for one-year pilot projects in environmental health

The Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center (SCEHSC) is seeking applications for the 2008 Environmental Health Research Pilot Project Grants. The SCEHSC awards one-year pilot projects up to \$25,000. The goal of this program is to advance environmental

health research and to enable investigators to seek external funding to pursue larger scale projects.

Eligible applicants include faculty or graduate students/post-doctoral researchers with a faculty sponsor. Young investigators are particularly encouraged to apply and, with all other

factors equal, will receive funding priority.

Applicants should submit a one-page Letter of Intent describing their proposed projects by Nov. 26 to Krissy Nielsen at Kristen@usc.edu. Nielsen may be contacted for more information at (323) 442-2750.

Keck School collaborates in opening Memory Assessment Center in Coachella Valley

By Pamela Bieri

A collaboration between the Keck School of Medicine and the Alzheimer's Association's California Southland Chapter is the first of its kind in the nation and creates the most comprehensive diagnostic center for Alzheimer's disease, memory loss and related disorders in the Coachella Valley.

The Memory Assessment Center opened Nov. 8 in the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic Medical Building (formerly Hope Square) on the Eisenhower Medical Center campus in Rancho Mirage. The center was endowed in perpetuity from a \$2.5 million gift through the Keck School of Medicine from Helene and Lou Galen, longtime USC benefactors and Coachella Valley philanthropists.

Lou Galen died earlier this week after a brief illness. He was 82.

The Memory Assessment Center is also funded by a leading gift from Ann Marie and Robert Byfield, longtime Alzheimer's Association benefactors; annual grants from The Judy Fund, established by Marshall Gelfand, through the Alzheimer's Association; and the Maxwell Charitable Trust.

"It is estimated that 8,000 people in the Coachella Valley are experiencing a disorder that hastens decline in memory and intellectual ability," said Helena Chui, professor and chair of the Department of Neurology at the Keck School of Medicine.

"The new Memory Assessment Center is dedicated to providing state-of-the-art diagnosis and treatment," said Chui, who is also the Raymond



USC benefactor Helene Galen (left) and Keck School of Medicine neurologist Helena Chui attend the Nov. 8 opening of the Memory Assessment Center.

and Betty McCarron Chair in Neurology. "The opening of the center reflects the culmination of a team effort between the University of Southern California, the Alzheimer's Association, Eisenhower Medical Center and leaders in the local community. We are committed to making this a center of excellence, a catalyst for the care and cure of Alzheimer's disease."

The center is directed by Lily Tseng, assistant professor of clinical neurology at USC, who specializes in Alzheimer's disease, vascular cognitive impairment and other memory disorders. The center also employs nurse practitioner Nasrin Esnaashari, who has previous expertise in stroke and critical care nursing.

As a leader in Alzheimer's research, USC offers Valley residents opportuni-

ties to participate in genetic and other research studies locally. Clients of the center may be included in State of California and National Alzheimer Coordinating Center databases, as well as studies funded by the National Institute on Aging.

In addition, the Alzheimer's Association provides a part-time care consultant to the center. Care consultation is a grouping of services to assist the person with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias and/or their families in planning for and dealing with all aspects of the illness, including assessment of needs, assistance with planning, problem solving and provision of support.

"This important medical component enhances our services to Coachella Valley residents," said Stephen Geist, regional director for the Alzheimer's Association of the California Southland. "The Memory Assessment Center now makes it possible for people in the desert to obtain a complete medical workup and diagnosis without having to travel outside the area. The center adds diagnosis and research to our two-tiered mission of compassionate care and finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease."

Eisenhower Medical Center is equipped to provide critical diagnostics tests including laboratory studies, and MRI, CT and PET imaging, making it a convenient location for the center.

"The Memory Assessment Center furthers Eisenhower's vision to offer comprehensive health care that addresses the diverse needs of the Valley's residents," said G. Aubrey Serfling, president and chief executive officer of

Eisenhower Medical Center.

The new Memory Assessment Center in the Coachella Valley is open Tuesday through Thursday 8 a.m.-4 p.m. For appointments, call (760) 341-5315.

It is a satellite of the USC Memory and Aging Center, which is dedicated to research and care of Alzheimer's and related disorders in diverse communities.

Preventive medicine expert Thomas Valente honored by APHA

Thomas Valente, associate professor of preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, received the inaugural Everett M. Rogers Award at this year's American Public Health Association Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 3-7.

This award is given to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to advancing the study and/or practice of public health communication. Valente has authored two books and more than 85 articles and chapters on social networks, behavior change and program evaluation.

In addition, USC faculty gave oral presentations on seven studies during the meeting, including "Impact of child health insurance expansions on ambulatory care-sensitive hospitalizations in California," "Reasons for urban trail use predict trail-related physical activity" and "Trends in access to care for immigrant children in California: 2001 to 2003."

PANEL: Coordinated care and enhanced access for patients can be financially viable

Continued from page 1

Road) Network not only improves the health of patients through enhanced access and coordination of care, but is a financially sustainable model that can be replicated in communities across the country," Miller said.

The value of technology in establishing medical networks was cited by Leslie Saxon, chief of the division of cardiovascular medicine at the Keck School of Medicine.

"When I look at the American health care delivery system, I see the best specialists in the world," she said.

But, she added, "I think there's an issue of gaps in care and information silos. We've overcome gaps in the media, we've overcome them in entertainment—with networks. The military is working on networks, and that's a pretty complex institution, certainly as complex as medicine. I think these networked devices and networked information can really be promising ways to

solve some of these problems."

The panel, introduced by Pete Delgado, CEO of LAC+USC Medical Center, included these national and California health care experts:

- Joe Dunn, CEO, California Medical Association
- Howard Kahn, CEO, L.A. Care
- Jeanne Lambrew, fellow, Center for American Progress, and associate professor, LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin
- Pat Mackin, senior vice president and president, Cardiac Rhythm Disease Management, Medtronic
- Leslie Saxon, chief, Division of Cardiovascular Medicine, Keck School of Medicine of USC
- Bruce Vladeck, executive director, Health Services, Ernst & Young

Following the morning panel discussion, Keck School Dean Carmen Puliafito hosted a brunch for King, the panelists and other special guests. "We appreciate Larry King's leadership," he



A team of nurses take talk show host Larry King's blood pressure as part of a health fair at the Health Sciences Campus on Nov. 8. The event, taped by news media, coincided with the Southern California Health Leadership Panel, held earlier in the day.

said, "and his contributions to public health," not only providing care for patients through the Larry King

Foundation, but also "bringing forward the health policy and social and political issues."

Calendar of Events

The HSC Calendar is online at www.usc.edu/hsc/calendar

Monday, Nov. 19

NOON. Fellow's Didactic Teaching Conference. "NephSAP: Critical Care," Mitra K. Nadim, USC. GNH Drs. Dining Rm. A & B. Info: (323) 226-7307

NOON. Pharmacology and Pharmaceutical Sciences Seminar. "Structure-based Investigation of Wnt Signaling Inhibitors," Jie Zheng, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. PSC 104. Info: (323) 442-2341

4 P.M. "Research in Progress," Jayakumar Vidhun, USC. GNH 10-340. Info: (323) 226-7307

Tuesday, Nov. 20

NOON. Cardiovascular Medicine Grand Rounds. "Expanding the Understanding of the Treatment of Chronic Stable Angina—approach in the 21st Century," Dick Conti, USC. GNH 7420. Info: (323) 442-7419

Wednesday, Nov. 21

7 A.M. Medicine Grand Rounds. "Acute Alcoholic Hepatitis," Andrew Stolz, USC. GNH 1645. Info: (323) 226-7591

NOON. Renal Grand Rounds Conference. "How the Body Senses Potassium Intake and Adjusts Potassium Excretion," Jang H. Youn. GNH 6441. Info: (323) 226-7307

Monday, Nov. 26

NOON. Fellows' Didactic Teaching Conference. "Renal Physiology (Regulation of GFR, RF, TGF)," Janos Peti-Peterdi, USC. GNH Drs. Dining Rm. A & B. Info: (323) 226-7307

Tuesday, Nov. 27

11:30 A.M. Psychiatry Grand Rounds. "Current and Future Management Strategies for Bipolar Disorder," Andrew Angelino, Johns Hopkins Univ. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 226-5572

Wednesday, Nov. 28

NOON. "Genetic Architecture of Visual Perception & Behavior in Zebrafish," Herwig Baier, UC San Francisco. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-3219

NOON. Renal Grand Rounds Conference. "Renal Artery Stenosis," Fred A. Weaver, USC. GNH 6441. Info: (323) 226-7307

Friday, Nov. 30

8 A.M. Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Grand Rounds. "Catheter-related Bloodstream Infections:

Detection Dilemma," Ellen Jo Baron, Stanford Univ. Med. Ctr. NOR 7409. Info: (323) 442-3320

8:30 A.M. Lung Biology Research Seminar. "Sulfated Extracellular Matrices and Adult Human Alveolar Epithelial Differentiation," Philip L. Sannes, North Carolina St. Univ. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

10:30 A.M. Ctr. for Transdisciplinary Research on Energetics and Cancer Seminar. "The Validation of DietDay: A Novel Approach to Dietary Assessment for Large Population Studies," Lenore Arab, UCLA. CSC 250. Info: (323) 442-4101

Wednesday, Dec. 5

NOON. ZNI Seminar. "Development of GABA Inhibitory Circuits in Neocortex and Cerebellum," Josh Huang, Cold Spring Harbor Lab. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-3219

Saturday, Dec. 8

9 A.M. - 9:35 A.M. "Update on Carotid Artery Disease," Ray Matthews, USC. Mayer Aud. Info: (323) 442-2555

9:35 A.M. - 10:10 A.M. "Hormone Replacement and Coronary Disease," Tracy Lawrence, USC. Mayer Aud. Info: (323) 442-2555



Jon Nalick

MEETING THE DEAN—Dozens of Keck School of Medicine faculty members attended a Nov. 7 event designed to offer the campus community an opportunity to meet and chat with Carmen A. Puliafito, who assumed leadership of the School Nov. 1. Above, Puliafito (center) chats with Stephanie Hall, Keck School assistant dean for LAC+USC and chief medical officer for LAC+USC Health Care Network, as Darcy Spicer, associate professor of clinical medicine and interim chief of the division of cancer medicine and blood diseases, looks on. To view the complete schedule of upcoming "Meet the Dean" events, go to www.usc.edu/keck, click on "See Dean's Welcome Message" and then click on "Meet The Dean Activities" from links.

Geneticist Francis Collins to speak at HSC

By Jon Nalick

Physician-geneticist Francis S. Collins, director of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), will discuss "Genomics, Medicine and Society" at the Health Sciences Campus on Dec. 7.

Noted for his landmark discoveries of disease genes, Collins oversaw the Human Genome Project, the multi-disciplinary, international effort to map and sequence the 3 billion letters in the human DNA instruction book.

Human Genome Project scientists finished the sequence in April 2003, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Watson and Crick's seminal publication describing the double helix structure of DNA.

Collins will deliver his lecture in conjunction with his acceptance of the 2007 Will Rogers Institute Prize for Lung Research. The Toluca Lake-based philanthropic Institute has named him

the inaugural recipient of the prize in honor of his career achievements, most notably his identification in 1989 of the gene that causes cystic fibrosis.

Collins has received numerous other awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which he accepted from President George W. Bush on Nov. 5.

Collins will speak at noon at the Aresty Conference Center in the Harlyne J. Norris Cancer Research Tower. The event is free and open to the public. Medical students especially are invited to attend.



Francis S. Collins

Notice: Deadline for calendar submission is 4 p.m. Monday to be considered for that week's issue—although three weeks advance notice of events is recommended. Please note that timely submission does not guarantee an item will be printed. Send calendar items to HSC Weekly, KAM 400 or fax to (323) 442-2832, or e-mail to ebalauw@usc.edu. Entries must include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location, and a phone number for information.

HSC NEWSMAKERS

Complete listing at: www.usc.edu/uscnews/usc_in_the_news/

A Nov. 12 *San Fernando Valley Business Journal* article reported that 45 children from the San Fernando Valley will visit the Keck School as part of Kaiser Permanente's Hippocrates Circle Program, which promotes diversity among health care professionals.

A Nov. 9 *U.S. News and World Report* article quoted rheumatologist **Andreas Reiff** on research that demonstrated certain drugs are effective in treating juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. *HealthDay* ran a similar story.

On Nov. 9, KCBS-TV Channel 2 featured the opening of The Memory Assessment Center, a collaboration between the Keck School and the Alzheimer's Association, California Southland chapter. The segment noted that USC neurologist **Lily Tseng** will direct the center.

On Nov. 9, ABC News Online quoted OB/GYN **Donna Shoupe** about a new study linking birth control pills with cervical cancer.

A Nov. 8 *Technology Review* article featured USC's first annual Body Computing Conference and quoted cardiology expert **Leslie Saxon**.

A Nov. 8 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article highlighted a study led by cancer researcher **Kristine Monroe** that linked grapefruit with an increased breast cancer risk.

A Nov. 6 *Forbes* article quoted Alzheimer's expert **Lon Schneider** about a new study showing that Alzheimer's disease may progress faster in patients with high blood pressure or a type of irregular heartbeat.

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