

Conti to become president of the USC Academic Senate

'I have a wonderful opportunity to bridge the gap and improve relationships between faculty from both campuses.'

—Peter Conti, professor of radiology at the Keck School of Medicine and USC Academic Senate President-elect

By Sara Reeve

For the first time in university history, the president of USC's Academic Senate will be an M.D. Peter Conti, director of the USC PET Imaging Science Center and professor of radiology at the Keck School of Medicine, will be installed as president of the Academic Senate on July 1.

The Academic Senate is the primary governing body of the university faculty from both the University Park Campus and the Health Sciences Campus.

"I have a wonderful opportunity to bridge the gap and improve relationships between faculty from both campuses and encourage interdisciplinary activities, whether that's in research, teaching or just socialization," said Conti. "There is a great opportunity to represent the Keck School and increase its presence among the various schools and units. I have a unique responsibility to do that."

Bringing eight years of past experience as a member of the senate, Conti will serve as president of the senate for a

one-year term. He follows outgoing president Alex Capron, Scott H. Bice Chair in health care law, policy and ethics at the Gould School of Law and Keck School of Medicine.

"The Keck School of Medicine faculty, staff, students and I are very proud of Dr. Conti and his election as president of the USC Academic Senate," said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito. "The election of a physician is an historic accomplishment, and his leadership will be visible at an historic time in USC history, with a new president assuming leadership of the University. Dr. Conti's new role will help to strengthen the links between our Keck School of Medicine faculty and the rest of USC."

Comprised of faculty leaders from all schools within the university, the Academic Senate works with administration to develop policies and procedures related to faculty life. In cooperation with the Office of the Provost and deans from around the university, the Academic Sen-



Peter Conti

ate works to mitigate serious and sensitive issues, such as grievances and policies related to relationships with outside industry.

"What we want to do is create a positive environment where issues can be resolved effectively and to people's satisfaction," said Conti. "We try to work through system problems and fix those policies and procedures that aren't correct."

Conti has identified four key goals for his term:

- Continue to strengthen faculty wellness programs that provide incentives for healthy lifestyle choices;

- Improve university-wide research administration practices to create a more productive and effective infrastructure and increase research grant success;

- Grow the culture for mentoring young faculty members, post-doctoral researchers and teachers;

- Reinvigorate the Medical Faculty Assembly by increasing engagement and participation among Keck School faculty members.

Conti's most visible role as president of the faculty may be during the upcoming inauguration of USC's next president, C. L. Max Nikias. Conti will lead the procession into the ceremony holding the mace, representing the role of the faculty in university life.

"This is an exciting opportunity—university inaugurations only happen every 10 to 20 years or so," said Conti. "I have two hoods—my purple Ph.D. hood and my green M.D. hood, and I'm debating which one to wear. I think I'll wear my green one to make it clear that this is something different."



Tania Chatila

From left: Tarek Salaway, Vaughn Starnes, Ray Matthews, Leslie Saxon, May Kim, Emma Wright and Fred Weaver display a specially outfitted ambulance used in the USC University Hospital rapid transport program. They represent departments that use the service.

Rapid transit program provides new transport service

By Tania Chatila

A rapid transportation program at USC University Hospital is gaining momentum.

The program, created in October, is designed to transfer critically ill patients to USC University Hospital for procedures or treatments that cannot be provided at their hospital of origin.

Ray Matthews, professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine, was integral in launching the program based on experience he had with similar initiatives at other hospitals. And now the program is seeing increased use, said Matthews.

"We are very satisfied with the utilization of this program, and we are confident it will only continue to grow over time," said Matthews, adding that USC's cardiovascular medicine, vascular surgery, cardiothoracic surgery and neurosurgery

programs use the transportation service now.

As part of the program, USC University Hospital has contracted with a local ambulance company to provide transportation from Los Angeles-area hospitals, using a specially outfitted ambulance emblazoned with the hospital logo. A rapid admission process has also been created to ensure there are no delays in patient care.

"With this program came a large organizational effort on the part of the hospital to care for unexpected patients," Matthews said. "We have taken this opportunity to integrate systems and learn how to work together for the greater good of the patient."

Matthews said he hopes to further expand the program for response to urgent—but non-emergency—care throughout the Health Sciences Campus.

USMLE scores continue to climb at Keck School

By Ryan Ball

Keck students' mean scores on the U.S. Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Part 1 continue on an upward trajectory, rising well above the national average. When the final scores from 2009 recently came in, the average score for Keck's class of 2011 reached 235, while the national mean hovered at 221.

Keck students first began to break away from the pack in 2001 after the school implemented a new, fully integrated curriculum. Since then, their USMLE scores have improved from year to year, finally hitting a plateau in 2007 and 2008. Just when they seemed to be leveling off, they shot up again.

According to Allan Abbott, dean for curriculum and associate dean for Continuing Education at the Keck School, the students are simply better prepared for the test now.

"The Year I-II medical school curriculum was completely revised to enhance the understanding and clinical relevance of the basic medical sciences that are taught," Abbott remarked. "This and other factors, including more time for directed self-study, small group learning and integration of clinical case scenarios that feature applications of basic sciences have helped students better prepare for the USMLE."

Sponsored by the Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States Inc. and the National Board of Medical Examiners, the USMLE assesses a physician's ability to apply knowledge, concepts and principles, and to demonstrate fundamental patient-centered skills. The three steps of the testing process are reviewed cumulatively in assessing readiness for medical licensure.

Dr. Norman Levan Chair for Medical Ethics established at Keck School

'Your commitment to ethical behavior by physicians is really a true commitment to community service, to doing the right thing.'

—Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, to Crystal K Award winner Norman Levan

By Ina Fried

An announcement of the Dr. Norman Levan Chair for Medical Ethics was one of the highlights of the 50-Year Fellows Luncheon of the Keck School of Medicine.

Held for the first time on the Health Sciences Campus, the May 21 luncheon in the Harry and Celesta Pappas Quad welcomed medical school alumni who graduated 50 or more years ago, along with some of the faculty members who taught them.

Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito presented the Crystal K Award to Norman Levan, in recognition of his gift of \$2 million to endow a chair in medical ethics at the Keck School. "Your commitment to ethical behavior by physicians is really a true commitment to community service, to doing the right thing," Puliafito said in thanking Levan, a retired chairman of the Department of Dermatology. "We have a special program in medical humani-

ties, and your chair will make it possible for us to recruit a great new leader in this very important area."

Levan recounted his good fortune in knowing all the deans of the medical school since 1955. "It was a wonderful experience," he said. "The deans gave me a great deal of freedom to experiment with all kinds of innovations; for example, we had the first courses in medical humanities and the first courses in medical ethics."

The luncheon program included induction of the Class of 1960 as 50-Year Fellows. Representing the class, Jerry Andes recounted some of their student experiences. "It's absolutely amazing to look around and see how the health sciences campus has grown," he said. "We didn't have class buildings, but we had outstanding faculty. ... My feeling is that it takes much more than buildings to make a fantastic medical school. It takes outstanding faculty and



Phil Manning, left, emcee of the Keck School of Medicine 50-Year Fellows Luncheon, congratulates Norman Levan on receiving the Crystal K Award in recognition of his \$2 million gift to endow a chair in medical ethics at the school.

outstanding students."

Others at the event echoed the same pride in the faculty, classmates and school. Eugene Temken, who practiced cardiology in Long Beach before retiring, said, "I'm very proud of my Class of '47. They diversified into 23 specialties, and they were always interested in their patients."

Emcee Phil Manning,

USC alumnus who served the university as a physician-educator for almost 50 years, said, "We were talking about some of our teachers—we had some really good faculty. They really were the foundation of where we are today."

Also on the program was a presentation by Arthur Donovan on "The History of the Los Angeles County Hospital."

Armed with da Vinci robot, surgeons can save face in complex cancer surgery

By Ryan Ball

The revolutionary da Vinci robot helps doctors save lives, but, crucially, it can also help spare a patient reconstructive surgery. USC University Hospital recently saw its first transoral robotic surgery (TORS), the first one performed on the West Coast, according to Niels Kokot, assistant professor of otolaryngology, head and neck surgery, at the Keck School of Medicine. Kokot performed the surgery with Uttam Sinha, assistant professor and vice chair of Otolaryngology, on March 22.

TORS was developed at the University of Pennsylvania, where Kokot trained for fellowship and gained experience in using the da Vinci robot to extract cancerous tumors.

The operation in March was for resection of tonsillar carcinoma. Using the robotic

arms and 3D visualization, the surgeons were able to gain access to an area of the body that usually requires extremely invasive measures.

Kokot said that tumors of the tonsil and tongue base are generally removed via lip-splitting mandibulotomy, where surgeons splay open the entire jaw to get to the tumor. The procedure leaves facial scarring and a gaping hole between the

neck and throat that requires reconstructive surgery involving transplantation of a skin flap from the chest or arm.

"Going transorally allows us to avoid the need for those big reconstructions," said Kokot. "The transoral robotic surgery patients have the potential to start eating within a few days after surgery, will stay in the hospital for a few days and generally are going to do

much, much better."

A month after surgery, USC's first TORS patient is recovering nicely. "He has minimal pain and is eating essentially a normal diet," Kokot said. "Cosmetically he is very happy not having a lip-splitting mandibulotomy. With the large, open operation he would not likely be eating normal food at this point. He

would most likely have a gastrostomy tube, and he might still have a trach."

USC surgeons will soon use TORS for resection of tumors of the supraglottic larynx and hypopharynx, while also treating sleep apnea with procedures such as tongue-base reduction. Kokot said that they'll also be performing robotic thyroidectomies.



The TORS procedure is made possible by the da Vinci surgical system.

USC hospital employees split on representation by unions

By Tania Chatila

The results of a National Labor Relations Board election to determine representation for about 700 USC University Hospital employees have been certified.

The secret ballot election was held at USC University Hospital on May 26 and 27, and a majority of employees within the hospitals professional group voted against the union, while the majority of technical employees at USC University Hospital voted in favor of representation by the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW).

On June 21, administrators of the USC hospitals received official notification from the board that those votes had been certified.

The professional group is comprised of pharmacists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, social workers, speech therapists and clinical lab scientists. The technical group includes patient care techs, operating room techs and housekeeping staff, among others.

"I am grateful to everyone who took the time and energy to participate in a professional manner, and I respect your choices," said hospitals CEO Mitch Creem in an e-mail sent to employees earlier this week. "Regardless of how you voted, we are one family. The USC hospitals continue to be committed to being an employer of choice, and we support and recognize the important contributions of our entire staff."

With the election now certified, USC will begin processing benefits for employees in the professional group. The leadership of the USC hospitals will also begin negotiating a contract with NUHW.

"As we work through the negotiations process, we will strive, in good faith, to find solutions that are fair to both sides," Creem said.

The Weekly

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Keck student wins AMA Foundation 2010 Minority Scholars Award

By Sara Reeve
The American Medical Association (AMA) Foundation announced that Keck School of Medicine student Cianna Leatherwood has been named a 2010 Minority Scholars Award recipient. As one of only 13 awardees in the country, she will receive a \$10,000 scholarship in recognition of her scholastic achievement and commitment to improving minority health. Leatherwood, who just finished her second year of medical school, was selected for the award based on her extensive history of community service in medically underserved

and minority communities, including service as a medic at the Berkeley Free Clinic and a research assistant at Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center. “On behalf of the Keck School, I am extremely proud of Cianna for her incredible achievements and her unwavering commitment to serving the community,” said Henri Ford, vice dean for medical education at the Keck School. “Cianna is a wonderful example of the extremely accomplished and passionate medical students here at the Keck School. Cianna is truly an inspiration and a role model for aspiring physicians.” The Minority Scholars

Award, given in collaboration with the AMA Minority Affairs Consortium, is designed to promote diversity in the medical profession and helps with the rapidly rising cost of medical education. The award recognizes scholastic achievement, financial need and commitment to improving minority health among first or second-year medical students in groups defined as historically underrepresented in the medical profession. While Leatherwood is undecided on her final medical specialty, she feels like her past volunteer experience will influence her decision. “I do know that whatever I do, it will be focused on working



Cianna Leatherwood

with underrepresented minorities and helping to decrease gaps in health status,” she said. “I have always been really interested in working with underserved populations, so

whatever I end up doing will have that aspect to it.” The AMA Foundation has made it a priority to help medical students handle the rising cost of their education. Leatherwood is grateful that this award will make a difference in her student debt load. “This morning I was looking at my financial aid award for next year, which consists of loans, loans, and more loans,” said Leatherwood. “I’m pretty sure I’m not the only med student who is kept awake some nights thinking about the tremendous amount of debt that awaits them, and this award has definitely resulted in more restful, less nightmare filled nights!”

School of Pharmacy professor tapped for leadership institute



Sarah Hamm-Alvarez

Sarah Hamm-Alvarez has been chosen to attend this year’s Higher Education Research Services (HERS) Institute for Advancing Women Leaders in Higher Education Administration at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. At the School of Pharmacy, Hamm-Alvarez is the Gavin S. Herbert Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences, associate dean for research affairs and chair of the Pharmacology

and Pharmaceutical Sciences Department. She will attend four sessions in the academic year beginning in October. The institute aims to promote a better understanding of the higher education environment through a curriculum that focuses on planning and leading change in the academic world, managing and investing resources strategically, and developing

as leaders. Hamm-Alvarez was selected to attend the institute by a committee who evaluated her based on an application, interviews and interest in senior administration. She is one of three women from USC who will be participating in the Institute, and the only one from the Health Sciences Campus. Others selected for participation include Kathleen Speer,

associate dean of faculty and research at the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, and Allyson Hill, assistant dean of admissions at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. “The objective is to further educate and expand the mindset of these already accomplished women,” said Carol Gray, vice president of USC Women in Management, which coordinated the USC interview process. HERS is a non-profit organization that focuses on educating women involved in higher education administration through institutes and other activities. Their curricula aim to provide leadership and management development to participating women, Hamm-Alvarez joined the Pharmacy faculty in 1993 and has had continuous funding from the National Institutes of Health since 1994.

Two new grants support research to improve brain cancer treatment

Two grants totaling \$175,000 will fund the research of Mark Shiroishi, assistant professor in neuroradiology at the Keck School of Medicine, who is studying outcomes of imaging of brain cancer tumors. Shiroishi has won \$150,000 from the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) and a \$25,000 USC Zumberge Individual Research grant to study outcomes of perfusion and permeability imaging of high-grade gliomas. Currently, contrast magnetic resonance

imaging (MRI) is used to determine whether a glioma is being affected by the typical three-pronged treatment of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy. However, this method does not provide conclusive evidence for clinicians that a tumor is growing or has changed because it has been affected by treatment. “The main method of tracking therapeutic response is to use contrast MRI, but it really doesn’t tell the clinician if treatment is working,” said Shiroishi. “High

grade glioma is a horrible prognosis and is highly resistant to therapy. If we could figure out sooner whether a patient is responding to therapy, it may impact how we view and treat these patients.” The RSNA grant will be awarded over a two-year period and the Zumberge grant over a one-year period. Shiroishi is being mentored by Meng Law, director of neuroradiology and professor of radiology and neurological surgery at the Keck School of Medicine.

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

A June 21 *New York Times* article quoted chief of the division of cardiovascular medicine **Leslie Saxon** about new, implantable defibrillators that monitor heart information and transmit it to doctors and hospitals. A June 21 *Los Angeles Times* article quoted professor of preventive medicine **Malcolm Pike** about the link between breast density and cancer risk. A June 18 *Wall Street Journal* article quoted associate professor of clinical medicine and director of

cardiac electrophysiology **David Cesario** about a new medical device that freezes tiny portions of heart tissue to correct a condition involving faulty heartbeats. A June 15 *Wall Street Journal* article quoted assistant professor of clinical medicine **Sharon Orrange** about why men don’t go to the doctor as often as women. A June 7 *New York Times* article featured research by USC Norris breast surgeon **Dennis Holmes** and University College London

colleagues which found that a single dose of radiation, delivered directly to the site of a tumor right after breast cancer patients have lumpectomies, was as effective as the roughly six weeks of daily radiation that most women now endure. *The Chicago Tribune* and United Press International also quoted Holmes about the research. A June 6 *Los Angeles Times* article highlighted research by associate professor of medicine and medical director of the USC Norris Cancer Hospital **David Quinn** and colleagues at the

USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. In a trial of 40 patients with advanced bladder cancer, the team found that 42 percent had significant tumor shrinkage in response to a new experimental drug derived from sea sponges. A June 2 *Los Angeles Times* article cited an editorial written by chief of the division of endocrinology and program director of the General Clinical Research Center **Thomas Buchanan** that accompanied a new study in the journal *Lancet*. The new research suggests

that a combination of low doses of the diabetes drugs Avandia and metformin can reduce the progression to Type 2 diabetes by two-thirds in people who are at high risk of developing the disease. Reuters and Bloomberg News also cited the editorial. On June 1, NBC’s “The Today Show” interviewed associate professor of medicine and chief, division of geriatric, hospital and general internal medicine **David Goldstein** about a nun who was excommunicated for supporting a life-saving abortion at an Arizona hospital.

U.S. News & World Report names CHLA to 'Honor Roll'

For the second consecutive year, Childrens Hospital Los Angeles is one of only seven children's hospitals in the nation ranked in all 10 pediatric specialties and named to the national "Honor Roll" of children's hospitals in the United States in the current *U.S. News & World Report* rankings released online on June 3. In addition, Childrens Hospital Los Angeles is the only pediatric medical center on the West Coast named to the Honor Roll.

Childrens Hospital Los Angeles physicians and scientists are on the faculty of the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

"We congratulate Childrens Hospital Los Angeles for achieving this ranking two years in a row," said Carmen A. Puliafito, dean of the Keck School of Medicine. "Our faculty physicians and researchers are proud to work in partnership with this world-class hospital. We look forward to many more opportunities to work together in the pursuit of saving and improving the lives of hundreds of children every year."

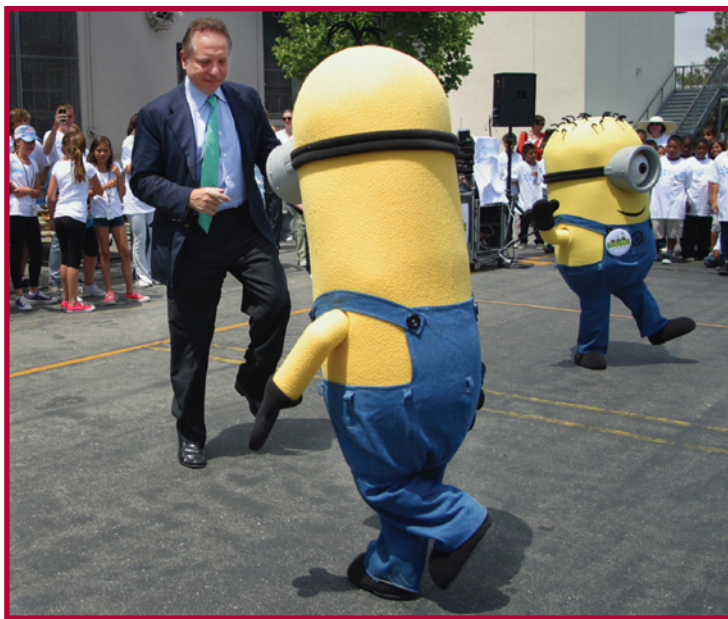
The article on "America's Best Children's Hospitals" will be published in the August issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, available on newsstands in late July. The list of children's hospitals to make the prestigious national Honor Roll for two consecutive years includes: Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Children's Hospital Boston, Texas Children's Hospital in Hous-

ton, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, New York Presbyterian Morgan Stanley-Komansky Children's Hospital and St. Louis Children's Hospital-Washington University.

Childrens Hospital Los Angeles has been named among the best children's hospitals in the nation since *U.S. News & World Report* began its ranking of children's hospitals in 1990. The methodology for the rankings is a blend of reputation, clinical outcomes and care-related measures, including nursing, advanced technology, credentialing and other factors. The children's hospitals were evaluated on a combination of opinions from pediatric specialists—the hospitals these specialists would recommend for the sickest children—along with data collected from a lengthy survey.

Most of the hospitals considered for these rankings are members of the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions. This is the second year the magazine has ranked children's hospitals in 10 specialty areas. *U.S. News & World Report* invited 160 hospitals to complete its more than 60-page survey to be considered for ranking.

The survey was created and administered by RTI International. Complete rankings of children's hospitals by specialties and more information about methodology are available at www.usnews.com/childrenshospitals.



STAY FIT, EAT HEALTHFULLY—The Keck School of Medicine has pledged its support to The Teaching Garden, a Los Angeles-based organization designed to teach schoolchildren lessons about nutrition and physical fitness by establishing gardens at their schools. On June 21, Dean Carmen Puliafito, introduced by the Trojan Band, encouraged Nevin Elementary School students to pay attention to what they eat and get some exercise every day. "Healthy eating is the key to good health," he said. "Eat your vegetables!" Also at the event (clockwise from top): volunteer Garrett Reppenhagen instructs students on how to plant and care for herbs and vegetables in the garden; chef and nutritionist Mary Tafi teaches a class on healthful foods and food preparation; "Curb Your Enthusiasm" actress Cheryl Hines discusses the day's events with Michael O'Gorman, founder of the The Farmer-Veteran Coalition; professional volleyball player Gabrielle Reece (left) leads several hundred youngsters in a physical workout; Puliafito dances with characters from the upcoming movie "Despicable Me," who were on hand to encourage children to stay active and fit. *Photos by Jon Nalick.*



Calendar of Events

This Calendar of events is also online at www.usc.edu/hscalendar for the Health Sciences Campus community

Monday, June 28

Noon. KSOM Research Seminar. "Transcription Factor Mediated Epigenetic Regulation of Cell Growth and Phenotype," Gary Stein, Univ. of Massachusetts. NRT Aresty Aud. Info: (323) 442-1144

Wednesday, June 30

8:30 a.m. "Administration and Management of an MICU," Hidenobu Shigemitsu, USC. IRD 734. Info: (323) 226-7923

Noon. Attending Physician Lunch Forum. "How Not to Get Sued," Marty Lockwood, Beta Healthcare Group. UNH Copper Rm. Info: (323) 442-8686

Thursday, July 8 – Sunday, July 11

8 a.m. 6th Annual International Head & Neck Symposium. Various speakers. USC Health Sciences campus. Info: (323) 442-7432

Thursday, September 23

8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. 14th Annual Max R. Gaspar Vascular Symposium. "Vascular Emergencies and Complications," R. Patrick Claggett, Univ. of Texas Southwestern Medical Ctr. Millennium Biltmore Hotel. Info: (323) 442-2555

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 *The Weekly*, KAM 400 or fax to (323) 442-2832, or e-mail to eblaauw@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.

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