

C. L. Max Nikias becomes 11th president of USC

Check out the new USC website <http://www.usc.edu/> and learn more about plans for the inauguration of President C. L. Max Nikias at <http://inauguration.usc.edu>

USC President C. L. Max Nikias became the 11th president of the university on Aug. 3, with his official inauguration ceremony set for Oct. 15.

One of his first acts as president was to begin the search for a new provost, a vacancy created when Nikias was named president.

"I believe this appointment is particularly critical at this juncture in USC's history, as we embark on our journey to take the university into the ranks of undisputed elite universities," he wrote in an e-mail message to all faculty and staff.

The executive search firm Isaacson, Miller is assisting the university in its search. Elizabeth Garrett serves as interim senior vice president for academic affairs and provost during the search. Garrett, the Frances R. and John J. Duggan Professor of Law, Political Science and Public Policy, has served since 2005 as USC's vice presi-

dent of academic planning and budget.

Nikias has emphasized the growing financial importance to the university of the clinical enterprise.

"With USC's recent purchase of two hospitals, subsequent improvements to those hospitals, and the integration of a vast and complex faculty health care practice into USC's fiduciary control, the health professions and medicine now constitute nearly 50% of USC's total annual operating budget," he stated in a recent memo. "This is an inevitable and welcome development. Consequently, I will continue chairing the governing board of the USC Hospitals."

Nikias also announced a search for the university's first chief investment officer. The search will be assisted by Prince Houston Group, an executive search firm specializing in asset management professionals.



Philip Channing

USC President C. L. Max Nikias

Roberta Diaz Brinton honored with prestigious award from White House

By Kukla Vera

Roberta Diaz Brinton, director of the USC Science, Technology and Research Program, was presented with the prestigious 2010 Presidential Citizens Medal by President Barack Obama in a ceremony at the White House on Aug. 4.

"What unites these citizens—what makes them special—is the determination they share to find a wrong and right it; to see a need and meet it; to recognize when others are suffering and take it upon themselves to make a difference," said President Obama at the ceremony.

Considered among the nation's highest civilian awards, the Presidential Citizens Medal recognizes citizens who have performed exemplary deeds of service for the nation. Twelve other citizens were honored along with Brinton, having been chosen from a pool of some 6,000 applicants.

Brinton, who holds the R. Pete Vanderveen Chair in Therapeutic Discovery and Development in the USC School of Pharmacy, was recognized for work in improving science and technology education for students in Los Angeles through

the USC Science, Technology And Research Program, known as STAR, for the last 22 years. The STAR program provides elementary, middle and high school students and their teachers with unique access and tools that are structured to engage the students in science.

"I am very grateful for this honor," said Brinton. "And I especially want to thank USC President Nikias, President Emeritus Sample and School of Pharmacy Dean R. Pete Vanderveen for their persistent support of this program and its outreach into our community."

A cornerstone of the STAR program is the opportunity for high school students to become working members of research teams in labs throughout USC. As an embedded portion of their secondary school curriculum, these students are in the lab daily, conducting experiments, using research technologies and even working on journal articles. Ultimately, the experience gives these students a high-level science background, which gives them stellar experiential training when applying to colleges and, in many, igniting a lifelong interest in science and in mentoring future generations.

Emmi Oji, a STAR graduate who is now a physician, said, "As a STAR student, I learned to work not according to the clock, but according to what needed to be done to succeed. I recall asking myself why I was in a research laboratory working on assays until 3 a.m., while my fellow high school students were playing or sleeping. However, I

Leaders review health reform effects on clinical enterprise

By Katie Neith

Health care reform at the USC Academic Medical Center may be in the hands of our own faculty and executive leadership.

Two national authorities in health care reform spoke at a leadership summit on July 19 to outline considerations for the future of the USC clinical enterprise in relation to health care reform. Quality measures were among key issues discussed at "The Changing Health Care Landscape" event for clinical leaders from the USC hospitals and the Keck School of Medicine.

"There are some real opportunities for us to look at the new laws ... and take advantage of some new things that are in the laws," said Vaughn Starnes, chair of the Department of Surgery at the Keck School and surgeon-in-chief at USC Norris Cancer Hospital and USC University Hospital. "The objective of this conference is to get us thinking about what this train looks like that is coming toward us. I'd rather be a rider than be on the tracks."

Attended by approximately 50 faculty and staff, the day long summit was organized by Starnes, who is also executive director of the USC Cardiovascular Thoracic Institute and the H. Russell Smith Chair for Cardiovascular Research at Keck, to examine how health care reform will affect USC

and how hospital leaders can work to implement positive solutions to the upcoming changes and challenges.

"I am very grateful to Dr. Vaughn Starnes for his own wisdom and foresight in organizing a summit such as this one," said USC President C. L. Max Nikias, who kicked off the day's activities. "Today we stop to look carefully at how [the health care] landscape is shifting right before our eyes. We must become wise interpreters of uncertainty, translating uncertainty into possibility."

The morning session featured plenary sessions by David Katz, an executive director at The Advisory Board Company, which provides performance improvement services to the health care and education sectors, and Jeffrey Rich, former director of the Center for Medicare Management during the Bush Administration.

Katz spoke about how to prepare the USC health system for new payment methodologies and incentives and encouraged investing today for tomorrow's payment system.

"Investments and relationships that support us now in the emerging pay-for-performance role will also prepare us for overarching payment reform," said Katz. He pointed to four key actions that will assist in managing any type of payment reform: engaging active medical staff,



Official White House photo by Lawrence Jackson

President Obama presents Roberta Diaz Brinton with the 2010 Citizens Medal, the nation's second-highest civilian honor, during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, Aug. 4.

Keck School donation keeps high school Med COR program alive

‘I’m happy that Dean Carmen Puliafito came forward with support. That institutional support speaks volumes to parents.’

—John Davis, Med COR director and professor of pediatrics at the Keck School

By Leslie Ridgeway

A nearly 40-year-old USC program designed to help high school students in underserved areas of Los Angeles County will remain open with a joint donation of \$150,000 from the Keck School of Medicine and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The program, Med COR (Medical Counseling, Organizing and Recruiting), was established in 1970 by John Davis, Med COR director and professor of pediatrics at the Keck School. The goal then—to help students of color get the education, exposure and experience they need to take on careers in the health professions—has not changed, even though the reduction of funding will affect how many students can participate in the program. The Keck School, under the direction of Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, will donate \$75,000 to the program, which LAUSD will match. “We’ve helped more than 4,000 kids since Med COR was founded. Thanks to this donation, we’ll still be able to work with 400,” said Davis. “Some of the parents were crying because they know how

important this program is and don’t want to lose it. I’m happy that Dean Carmen Puliafito came forward with support. That institutional support speaks volumes to parents.” The program has helped middle school and high school students at hundreds of L.A.-area schools with tutoring in science, math and English, as well as personal exposure to health care professionals and professions. Drastic cuts were made to the program earlier this year as the LAUSD experienced budget difficulties due to state reductions. The program formerly had a budget of nearly \$500,000. “This program has helped thousands of young people not only make a decision to enter the medical profession, but also to get the education and motivation they need to apply to top universities,” said Puliafito. “Med COR must be sustained to continue to give that opportunity to these kids.” The Keck School has provided in-kind support to the program in the past, arranging for seminars and tutoring sessions to take place in USC buildings for no cost, said Davis.

Participating students learn about health care careers in seminars with health care professionals and participate in a summer program that places them in health care facilities for hands-on instruction and learning. The program includes monthly meetings with parents to help them see that it is possible not only for their children to be accepted into a university, but also to get a job in health care. “I’m excited that Dr. Davis and USC were able to come up with funding and Superintendent (Ramon) Cortines also agreed to support the program,” said Estelle Luckett, director of student integration services, LAUSD. “It’s a small amount but a powerful amount. Now we will need to work to seek other resources for funding the program.” Four medical magnet high schools—Bravo Magnet, King Drew Magnet, Van Nuys Magnet and Orthopaedic Magnet—will participate in Med COR this year. For more information on the Med COR program, go to <http://www.usc.edu/programs/uscmedcor>.

Early stages of USC University Hospital pilot nets positive feedback

By Tania Chatila

It’s been three weeks since the start of a new pilot study at USC University Hospital, and employees are already responding with positive feedback. The interruption free zone pilot program was launched July 19 in an effort to enhance accuracy and safety during the administration of medication. It involves the establishment of interruption free zones—areas that are free from intrusion or distraction—in 6-North and 8-West. These areas are clearly marked with signs, and neon yellow sashes or vests identify nurses who are in the process of administering medications. As part of the study, these nurses are not to be interrupted while wearing the neon yellow sash or vest unless there are questions about the medications

being administered or there is an emergency. Since launching the pilot program and implementing the interruption free zones, employees and managers in 6-North and 8-West say the process is proving to be a positive learning experience. The pilot study was launched by the Medication Administration Safety Team. This group was formed by the Nurses of USC to address interruptions during medication preparation and administration—an issue that affects hospitals across the country. A 2006 study of the National Institute of Medicine found that 1.5 million preventable medication errors occur annually in the United States. “Medication errors are not uncommon in hospital settings,” said nurse manager Daniel Hudson, who has been leading

the pilot study. “But that doesn’t mean we can’t come up with innovative ways to minimize those errors. Many of the nurses have been enthusiastic about this study and have come up with great ideas to refine the process. I am excited to tabulate the data and speak with some of the ancillary departments to see what effect this process has had on patient safety.” The interruption free zone pilot study is expected to last between four and six weeks, and results will be reported through the Performance Improvement Committee. If significant strides were made in minimizing medication errors as a result of the study, interruption free zones could eventually be implemented throughout the USC hospitals.



Veronica Valenzuela, RN, administers medication while wearing the yellow vest designed to discourage interruptions.

Tania Chatila

BRINTON: STAR program encourages young students to pursue science

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learned that a very important part of being a caring and successful physician is working without a timetable until the work is complete.” The STAR program has served thousands of minority and disadvantaged children in the Los Angeles area over the past two decades. Those who went through the secondary school lab experience have had a 100 percent rate of attending and completing college. Many of the students who participate in the program are the first in their families to attend college. Brinton attended the White House ceremony with family members, including husband Theodore Berger, the David Packard Chair in Engineering at the Viterbi School of Engineering, who is also a STAR mentor. Other USC faculty mentors for the STAR program include Ronald Alkana and Nouri Neamati, both from the School of Pharmacy; Margarita Zeichner-David, Ostrow School of Dentistry; and James Knowles, Austin Murcheff, Carlos Pato and Michele Pato of the Keck School of Medicine. Additionally, graduate students and post docs working at these schools have contributed greatly to STAR students over the years of the program. The STAR program has been supported by a USC Neighborhood Outreach grant funded by the Good Neighbors Campaign and by the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation.

The Weekly

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'A Concert to Cure Cancer' event to raise funds for USC Norris

By Imelda Valenzuela

The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Keck School of Medicine of USC will host “A Concert to Cure Cancer,” a fundraising event to be held on Sept. 26 at the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza Hotel in Century City.

The gala is the first of its kind for USC Norris. The event will feature the Pasadena POPS, conducted by Rachael Worby in a “Hooray for Hollywood” themed concert that highlights both nostalgic and current sounds of old and new Hollywood, including songs from “Titanic,” “The Wizard of Oz,” “Nine” and “Star Wars.”

Event organizers hope to raise \$1 million to benefit the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and



the new USC Center for Molecular Pathways and Drug Discovery.

“We are excited that this event shines a spotlight on the relevant work taking place every day at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center while specifically supporting the USC Center for Molecular Pathways and Drug Discovery,” said Peter Jones, director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. “Proceeds from this event will help accelerate the pace of drug discovery and the development of non-toxic, less invasive, and more effective treatments of cancer.”

The new center was created by Heinz-Josef Lenz, professor of medicine and preventive medicine, associate director of clinical research at USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, and Kathryn Balakrishnan

Chair for Cancer Research; and Michael Kahn, professor of biochemistry and molecular biology, and Provost’s Professor of Medicine and Pharmacy. Lenz and Kahn are co-leaders of the USC GI-Oncology program.

Lenz called the new center “a unique marriage between clinical research and basic science, a real bench to bedside approach.” He added, “We hope this center will be the mechanism, or pipeline, for faster translation of novel promising molecules to bring them into the clinic more quickly.”

The event opens with a reception at 6 p.m., followed by dinner at 6:45 p.m., and a live auction and concert starting at 7 p.m. Philanthropists Leslie and Peter Tolan, whose friend was treated by Lenz, initiated the event and are underwriting the Pasadena POPS performance. Individual tickets are \$500. For more information, contact USC Norris Development at 323-865-0700 or visit <http://usc.com.convio.net/DrugDiscovery>.

USC researchers create HIV-resistant immune cells in mice

By Meghan Lewit

Researchers at the Keck School of Medicine have successfully transplanted blood stem cells modified to be resistant to HIV into mice, allowing the animals to control HIV infections.

If the approach can be translated to human patients, it would enable the long-term generation of HIV-resistant T cells in a patient’s body, and the potential for the patient’s own cells to suppress HIV.

The strategy is explained in a new study published online in the journal *Nature Biotechnology*.

“This hybrid gene and stem cell therapy shows that it is possible to create HIV resistant immune cells that can eventually win the battle against HIV *in*

vivo,” said principal investigator Paula Cannon, associate professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at the Keck School. “We’ve done it at the scale of a mouse, and the challenge now is to see if this can be done at the scale of a human patient.”

The approach targets a gene called CCR5, one of the two gateway molecules that HIV uses to enter human cells. Cannon’s strategy arose from the observation that people with a mutation in a gene called CCR5 are naturally resistant to infection with the most common strains of HIV and do not develop AIDS.

The team used enzymes called zinc finger nucleases — which physically cut DNA — to knock out the CCR5

gene in human blood stem cells. The researchers transplanted these modified stem cells into mice, where they developed into mature cells of the human immune system, including the T cells that HIV infects. When the researchers then infected the animals with HIV, they found that the mice were able to maintain normal levels of the human T cells and suppress HIV to very low levels, unlike control mice that received unmodified stem cells.

Cannon’s preliminary data on the ability of this anti-CCR5 therapy to control HIV replication has formed the basis of a collaboration between USC, lead institution City of Hope National Medical Center and the biotech company Sangamo BioSciences Inc., which

makes the gene-editing technology.

The team received \$14 million last year from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine to develop this novel therapy further in the hope that it may offer lifetime immunity to HIV infection. The grant was awarded as part of the Disease Team Research Awards, aimed at speeding the process of bringing stem cell therapies to clinical trials.

“By engineering CCR5-deficient stem cells, we may allow a patient to produce HIV resistant cells in all of the cell types that the virus infects and for long periods of time,” Cannon said. “If successful, it could one day allow patients to control their HIV without needing to take antiretroviral drugs.”

REFORM: USC hospitals look to adapt payment systems in light of health care reform changes

Continued from Page 1

standardizing care processes, tracking and analyzing performance and leveraging physician incentives.

Rich provided an overview on transforming U.S. health care delivery, and care at USC hospitals, from a volume-driven system to a value-driven system.

“There is no one-size-fits-all plan. There are a lot of ways that [USC] can create your own personalized program,” said Rich, who outlined different ways some health institutions have piloted value-based payment systems using quality measures.

In the afternoon, Mark Amey, chief technology officer for the USC Health Sciences Campus, outlined plans for the IT transformation that will take place here over the next few years, including the creation of electronic medi-

cal records. Attendees also participated in a Q&A and discussion session.

Mitch Creem, CEO of the USC-owned hospitals, expressed excitement about the role of the USC hospitals in shaping future federal reimbursement policy, the future role of an academic medical center in the design of accountable care organizations, the plans to implement vitally important IT programs and the opportunities to actively participate in cultivating physician relationships into a regional referral network.

“I am optimistic about the expansive challenges that lie ahead as health care reform begins to take shape,” concluded Minor Anderson, CEO of The Doctors of USC.



PLAY BALL!—USC University Hospital patient Rob Hertel threw out the first pitch at the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game on July 23. Hertel was accompanied by hospitals CEO Mitch Creem and other guests at the match-up between the Dodgers and the New York Mets. Hertel received an aortic valve replacement last year at USC University Hospital and is part of a special study group related to the procedure. He is also a USC alum, having formerly played football and baseball for the University.

Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Dodgers

The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

On Aug. 6, KPCC-FM interviewed **Roberta Diaz Brinton** of the USC School of Pharmacy about receiving a Presidential Citizens Medal. *USA Today*, *Science*, AOL News and ABC News affiliate WZZM-TV also reported on Brinton’s award.

An Aug. 5 *Newsweek* article quoted Flora L. Thornton Chair of the Department of Preventive Medicine **Jonathan Samet** about Interphone, a study organized by the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer to research the health effects of cell phones.

An Aug. 4 *San Gabriel Valley Tribune* article reported that a nearly 40-year-old USC program designed to help high school students in underserved areas of Los Angeles County will remain open due to a joint donation from the Keck School of Medicine and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

An Aug. 2 *Los Angeles Times* article quoted assistant professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine **Adam Leventhal** about the use of electronic cigarettes.

A July 29 HealthDay News article quoted professor of clinical surgery and chief of the division of surgical oncology at USC Norris **Stephen Sener** about analyzing the genetic makeup of breast cancer tumors.

On July 28, Fox 11 News featured USC Norris breast surgeon **Dennis Holmes** and a one-day breast cancer therapy offered at USC University Hospital that combines surgery and radiation.

Clinical trials successes highlighted at Phases of Hope event

By Katie Neith

Supporters of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hospital gathered in the Hinderstein Garden on June 23 to learn more about the importance of clinical trials.

Approximately 75 attendees of the “Phases of Hope II” event met to hear the goals and accomplishments of the clinical trial program at USC Norris and to get a firsthand account of clinical trial participation from patients.

“Basic scientists can make monumental discoveries,” said Peter Jones, director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. “Those discover-

ies don’t mean anything unless we can actually test them in various ways and, ultimately, test them in patients who volunteer to really help in making cancer a disease of the past.”

Several patients who have enrolled in clinical trials at USC Norris also spoke about their positive experiences.

Janice Hall, who was diagnosed in 2006 with Stage IV colon cancer, is now free of disease and has become a fundraiser for clinical trials at USC Norris.

“The key to curing this disease is research and research involves clinical trials,” said Hall. “I stand here today, three years and

three weeks cancer-free. I am living proof that clinical trials work.”

A variety of investigators exhibited posters around the garden about their research. Parkash Gill, professor of medicine and pathology at the Keck School and the Ezralow Family Chair in Cancer Therapeutics, emphasized the importance of clinical trials to make advances in cancer therapies.

“I want recognize that making a medicine is not an individual process. It takes hundreds of people—scientists, clinicians and of course, most importantly, the patients,” said Gill.



Anthony El-Khoueiry, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine and director of the Clinical Investigations Support Office at USC Norris, and Janice Hall, a colon cancer survivor and clinical trials advocate, at Phases of Hope II, an event to highlight the importance of clinical trials at the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hospital.

Janet Morgan

Calendar of Events

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

Tuesday, Aug. 17

9 a.m. Neurology Grand Rounds. “Brain & Space: A Clinical Approach,” Thedi Landis, Univ. of Geneva. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-7686

Friday, Aug. 20

8:30 a.m. “Factors that Drive Claims and Risk Management: Focus on Quality Improvement and Patient Care,” LAC+USC County Council Panel. DOH 100. Info: (323) 442-2506

11 a.m. “Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma: An Update,” Anil Tulpule, USC. IPT C2J103. Info: (323) 442-7744

Saturday, Aug. 21

12:30 p.m. “Art to Heart: Bridging Global Trends in Cardiac Health.” Institute of Genetic Medicine Art Gallery. Info: <http://www.tfaforms.com/172729>

Tuesday, Aug. 24

Noon. Psychiatry Grand Rounds. “Advanced LPS Training Seminar,” Matt Miller, Dept. of Mental Health. Info: (323) 442-4000

Friday, Aug. 27

8:30 a.m. “Enhanced Recovery in Colorectal Surgery,” Anthony Senagore, USC. DOH 100. Info: (323) 442-2506

11 a.m. “Disorders of Neutrophil Number and Function,” Howard Liebman, USC. IPT C2J103. Info: (323) 442-7744

Friday, Sept. 10

8:00 a.m. Health Disparities Summit. “Childhood Obesity: A Call to Action,” U.S. Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard. Town and Gown, UPC. Info: (213) 740-1744

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.

Richard Merkin Distinguished Fellowship provides young doctors with international experiences

By Katie Neith

For Nico Forget, an interest in international and emergency medicine has had a strong influence on his life over the past 10 years. After completing a residency in emergency medicine at LAC+USC Medical Center in 2008, he was named the recipient of the second Richard Merkin Distinguished Fellowship in Emergency and Tropical Medicine—an honor that would take him around the world.

The Richard Merkin Distinguished Fellowship in Emergency and Tropical Medicine was established at the Keck School in 2006 by Richard Merkin, president and CEO of Heritage Provider Network.

“I have benefitted tremendously from the Richard Merkin Distinguished Fellowship in Emergency and Tropical Medicine,” said Forget. “Since I have been interested in international medicine for years, the fellowship was a way for me to formalize and expand my knowledge, as well as find a niche for me to be most useful.”

During the two-year fellowship, Forget travelled to Thailand, India, Peru, Chile, Vietnam and Haiti. He worked on TB programs, presented lectures, studied tropical medicine, taught emergency medicine residents, assisted in trauma training and led a team to Haiti after the devastating earthquake earlier this year.

Forget’s experience during the fellowship has led to a new position at Vanderbilt University, where he will build an emergency medicine residency program in Guyana.

“I feel very strongly that the fellowship has prepared me well for the position. I now have knowledge in tropical medicine, public health, emergency medicine and academics, all of which will be extremely valuable in Guyana,” he said. “The Merkin Fellowship has been an incredible opportunity and an amazing experience for which I am extremely grateful.”

Monica Kumar, an emergency medicine resident at LAC+USC from 2007 to 2010, is the current Richard Merkin



From left: Carmen A. Puliafito, dean of the Keck School of Medicine; Monica Kumar, 2010 Merkin Fellow; Richard Merkin, president and CEO of Heritage Provider Network; and Nico Forget, 2009 Merkin Fellow.

Sara Reeve

Distinguished Fellow in Emergency and Tropical Medicine for 2010. She has a strong interest in international medical education and in addressing major issues such as HIV and tuberculosis care in developing nations.

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