

Patient donates \$1 million to support neurological care



Brian Morris

Charmean Neithart (center) and her husband, Robert (left), recently donated \$1 million to help Steven L. Giannotta of the Keck School to establish the Stroke and Cerebrovascular Disorders Center.

By Imelda V. Fowler

In 2007, a then 37-year-old Charmean Neithart had much to be grateful for: a growing family with a wonderful husband, three small children, a comfortable home in Pasadena and a busy interior design business.

But then she encountered a health issue that threatened everything in her life.

Neithart began to experience vision problems, severe headaches, dizziness and a constant ringing in her ears. An MRI revealed that a small tumor had formed at the base of her brainstem, a very delicate, critical area that controls breathing and heart rate and regulates the central nervous system.

She learned that she had a cavernous angioma, a malformation of blood vessels in the brain or spine. She began researching her condition and treatments; all of the specialists she spoke with pointed her in the direction of Steven L. Giannotta,

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‘It’s spectacular that a couple so young would think about philanthropy at this level.’

—Steven L. Giannotta, chair, Department of Neurological Surgery, Keck School of Medicine

Keck Medical Center appoints new chief managed care officer

By Sara Reeve

Rick Desai has joined USC in the new position of chief managed care officer for the Keck Medical Center overseeing the managed care strategy and operations functions for the hospitals and USC Care practice. Desai, who joined USC on Feb. 13, reports to Jon Spees, chief financial officer for Keck Medical Center, and to Keith Gran, CEO of USC Care.

Desai is responsible for planning and implementing a managed care strategy and for addressing a shifting market environment to ensure optimal reimbursement for clinical care services.

“The department is involved in the overall development and implementation of the managed care strategy for the hospitals and the practice. Our goal is to create an environment that will improve the alignment of incentives between the hospitals, the doctors and the payers in the community,” said Desai. “We want USC to be the

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Book Drive 2012 opens for *L.A. Times* Festival of Books

By Alan House

Book Drive 2012—an annual USC Civic Engagement event benefitting the USC Family of Schools—kicked off March 22. Organizers hope to collect more than 4,000 books through the end of April with the help of the campus community.

The drive runs in conjunction with this year’s *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books, which will be held April 21-22 on the University Park campus.

For the first time, books can be donated by making orders online through the USC Bookstores, which will deliver them directly to USC Civic Engagement.

“Our goal is certainly attainable because the Trojan Family has always been known for its generosity,” said Kim Thomas-Barrios, program director for the USC Family of Schools.

The USC Family of Schools has compiled a wish list of book donations at festivalofbooks.usc.edu and at the Health Sciences campus bookstore.

The store will have a selection of wish list books for sale, including *Charlotte’s Web* by E. B. White, *Dogku* by Andrew Clements and *The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister.

USC students, faculty and staff are asked to donate new or gently used books that are appropriate for children in kindergarten through the sixth grade at book drops at the Biggy Street garage entrance and at the HSC bookstore. USC Civic Engagement also will have a donation station located at booth 748 during the Festival of Books.

The *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books, now in its 17th year, will be held on the University Park campus for the second

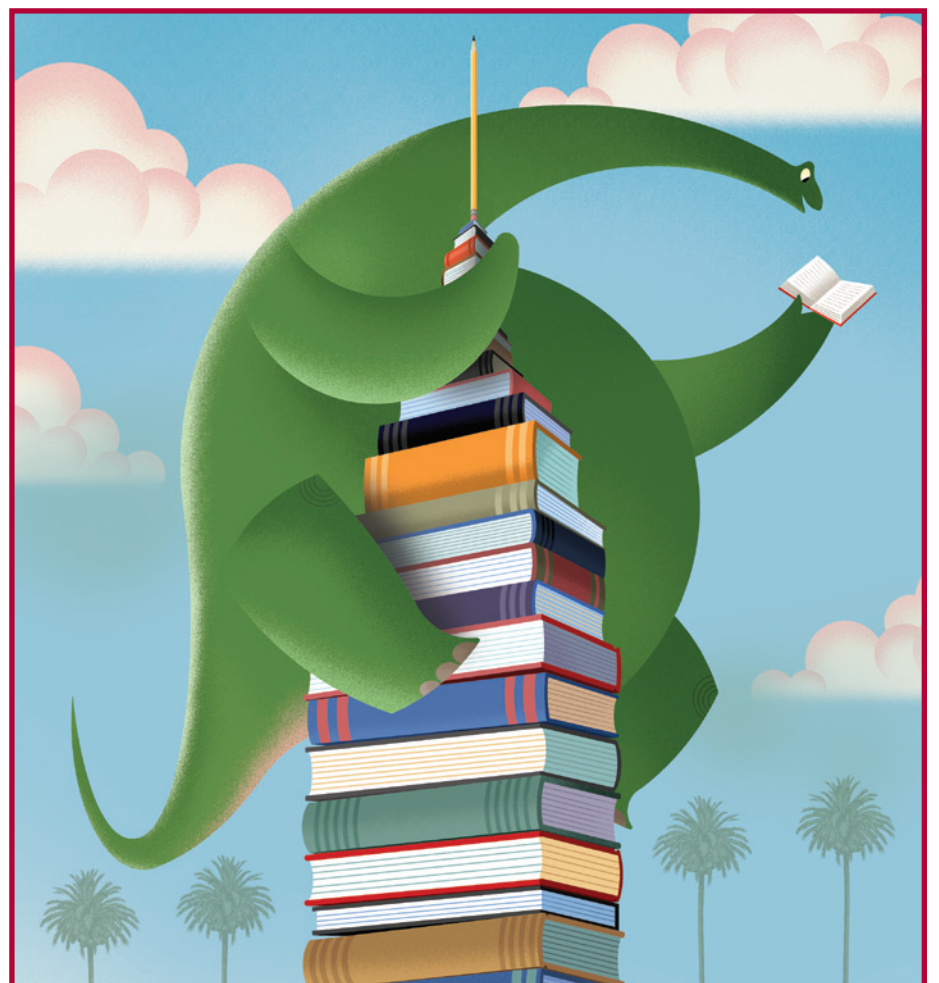
consecutive year. It is expected to attract 150,000 book lovers from across Southern California.

The two-day event will include panel discussions, ethnically and culturally diverse authors and hundreds of booksellers and publishers, as well as literacy and

cultural organizations.

For more information on Book Drive 2012, contact Kim Thomas-Barrios at thomasba@usc.edu or (213) 740-6313.

For more information on the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books, visit festivalofbooks.usc.edu.



The *L.A. Times* Festival of Books will bring together the people who create books with the people who love to read them on April 21-22 on the University Park campus.

Chemistry Nobel prize winner Roger D. Kornberg to speak at Keck School of Medicine

Roger D. Kornberg, recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, will present “The Molecular Basis of Eukaryotic Transcription” at 4 p.m. on April 10 at the Keith Administration Building, Mayer Auditorium.

Kornberg is an American biochemist and professor of structural biology at Stan-

ford University School of Medicine. He received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his studies of the process by which genetic information from DNA is copied to RNA.

To view the live webcast, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/7knuevd>.

Keck professor finds pregnant women suffer more severe heart attacks

‘Guidelines [for treating myocardial infarction] may be ineffective in some women.’

—Uri Elkayam, professor of medicine, Keck School of Medicine of USC

Heart attacks during pregnancy tend to be more severe, lead to more complications and occur for different reasons than is commonly seen in the general population, according to research presented by Uri Elkayam, professor of medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, during the American College of Cardiology’s 61st Annual Scientific Session on March 24.

The study analyzed 150 new cases of heart attack associated with pregnancy published in the literature or consulted by the research team since 2005, and builds upon a previous analysis of another 228 cases that occurred prior to 2005. The aim of the recent study was to better understand how heart attacks occur and are being treated in this patient population.

Elkayam, the lead investigator, and his team discovered that while maternal mortality has decreased steadily since the first survey, dropping from a high of 16 percent prior to 2005 to 7 percent after 2005, most pregnant women did not present with traditional cardiovascular risk factors

such as high blood pressure, diabetes or high cholesterol levels. They did, however, tend to have more serious heart attacks.

Although the likelihood of having a heart attack during pregnancy is very low (one out of 16,000 deliveries), the risk is still three to four times higher than in women of the same age who are not pregnant, says Elkayam.

Atherosclerosis, a narrowing of the arteries due to fatty build-up and the most common cause of heart attacks in the general population, was the cause of heart attacks in only one-third of the pregnant women.

Much more common among pregnant women was coronary dissection, where a separation of the artery wall layers blocks normal blood flow. Coronary dissection is very rare in nonpregnant patients and is thought to occur during and immediately after pregnancy because of the weakening of the coronary artery walls.

According to Elkayam, these analysis results also help determine how to optimally treat—and how not to treat—heart attacks during pregnancy and post partum.

Researchers also found that coronary dissection may actually be worsened in pregnant women by use of standard therapies such as thrombolytic therapy and mechanical interventions. “We have very clear guidelines for treating myocardial infarction in the general population, but these guidelines may be ineffective in some women or cause more harm than good in others with pregnancy-associated heart attacks,” said Elkayam.

Elkayam hopes to someday see a registry established to collect information prospectively, rather than retrospectively. “This is the third survey we have done over the last 20 years, and in every step we have been able to confirm the information of previous steps and collect more useful information thanks to increased sophistication of evaluation over the years and more angiographic data,” he says. “We believe this study provides important information that can help guide clinicians in the approach to these unique heart attacks, and hopefully improve the care of these patients.”

DESAI: Managed care strategy is a crucial driver in provider health care today

Continued from page 1

preferred academic provider in the market. By creating better alignments, we are creating a long term partnership that is mutually beneficial.”

He will work with medical center, hospital and physician group leadership regarding business strategies, compliance with managed care and financial planning.

“A successful managed care strategy is one of the most crucial drivers in the success of a provider health care organization today,” he said. “Managed care business drives a significant portion of the organization’s revenue stream, and with the evolution of the market dynamics and health care reform, this will continue to rise in the future. Managed care strategy revolves

around a tough balance of maximizing margins while positioning us to develop and grow market share, which is why managed care works very closely with other functions such as business development and operations to assure that we are all working towards the same goals and objectives.”

Desai has outlined several top priorities for his department:

1. Create an enterprise-wide approach to how the medical center and physician practice develop and implement a managed care strategy and operations.
2. Maximize the alignment of incentives within managed care contracts by using innovative options to improve on the relationships



Rick Desai is the new chief managed care officer for the Keck Medical Center.

with the payer community.

3. Structure contracts that are administratively feasible and efficient, which will help to improve the organization’s revenue cycle.
4. Improve employer-based relationships, as large

employers take more of an interest and role in directing employees to certain medical providers.

5. Improve the medical center’s managed care analytic functions, which will position staff leaders to make better decisions and be more innovative.

6. Position Keck Medical Center as the preferred academic medical provider in California.

“I’m tremendously excited about joining the leadership team at USC and the potential and opportunity for this organization,” he said. “I think we are at a very key phase in the evolution of health care today, which means that we as an organization must grow and evolve as well. I believe that our organization is positioned for that growth and I am very

much looking forward to having managed care playing a crucial and influential role in that growth process.”

Prior to joining Keck Medical Center, Desai served as corporate service area director of managed care for Catholic Healthcare West, where he oversaw managed care strategies for nine hospitals and physician medical practices, including their Southern California network.

He has considerable understanding of the health care arena, having experience working for Ernst & Young Health Sciences Service Line, Tenet Health Systems and Universal Care Health Plan. He received his master of science in health care management and administration from California State University, Long Beach.

The Weekly

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The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

A March 30 article in *The Daily Beast* quoted **Pat Levitt**, director of the USC Zilkha Neurogenetic Institute, on the newest statistical data on autism prevalence generated by the CDC. Essentially, Levitt said, “what the new CDC figures reflect is that there are ‘a few thousand more children nationally’ with autism than previously identified.”

A March 29 broadcast of KPCC-FM’s “Air Talk” quoted **Larry Yin**, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics at the Keck School, on the newest statistical data on autism prevalence generated by the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention. ABC News also quoted Yin. KTTV News also reported on the CDC data and quoted **Douglas Vanderbilt**, assistant professor of clinical pediatrics at the Keck School.

A March 28 CBS *HealthWatch* webcast about colorectal cancer on *The Doctors* featured **Anthony Senagore**, chief of colorectal surgery at the Keck Medical Center of USC.

A March 27 story in the *Los Angeles Times* cited **Heinz-Josef Lenz**, professor of medicine and preventive medicine at the Keck School, about new cancer research.

Associate dean of occupational therapy helms national professional organization

By Laura Sturza
With Florence Clark serving as president of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), USC's Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy is gaining even greater exposure nationally. The division, ranked No. 1 by *U.S. News & World Report*, was already recognized as a premier school for study in a field that encourages people to "Live Life to Its Fullest."



Florence Clark

Clark, who is the associate dean of the division, accepted the appointment with AOTA for several reasons. First, she believed AOTA would profit from having in its leadership a scientist who had completed extensive research in preventative treatment. Second, she believed that her 23 years of administrative leadership experience at USC was an excellent match with the skill set the association would need to ensure future growth. Finally, Clark knew that USC would also benefit from her presidential role.

"I anticipated the OT profession would have to adapt to changes resulting from health care reform," Clark said. Her work as president of AOTA keeps her updated on the latest policy issues, which can impact USC occupational therapy's ability to meet societal needs. As president, Clark has been invited to represent OT in other key positions affecting local and national legislation. She was recently appointed to California's Autism Advisory Task Force, which is developing recommendations for state policy on treatment for people with autism. In addition, she will take

part in an upcoming U.S. Department of Defense Conference, in which community leaders will tour U.S. military stations to increase understanding of national defense. Occupational therapy and USC's long history of service to the military is in keeping with her participation in this conference. In fact, the division was founded during the initiation of War Emergency Courses to train occupational therapists to serve veterans in Army hospitals. Occupational therapy services are available at USC's Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice (<http://ot.usc.edu/>)

patient-care/faculty-practice) and at the Keck Medical Center of USC.

April is National Occupational Therapy Month. OT booths will offer information about stress management, healthy eating and more. HSC events include:

Wednesday, April 11
11 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Keck Hospital Cafeteria

Monday, April 16
11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Harry & Celesta Pappas Quad

Wednesday, April 18
4 - 6 p.m.
Soto Building

USC cancer researchers present work at international meeting

By Alison Trinidad
Sensitizing drug-resistant liver cancer cells to chemotherapy. Using new genetic technology to prescribe more personalized treatment to patients. Examining the underlying racial and ethnic differences in obesity-related cancer risk. These are only three of 70-plus research topics from the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center recently highlighted at the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) annual meeting in Chicago. The AACR's annual meeting attracts more than 17,000 representatives from 60 countries to discuss the latest breakthroughs in all fields of cancer research. The theme of this year's meeting, which took place March 31 to April 4, was "Accelerating Science: Concept to Clinic."

In addition to giving oral and poster presentations, several USC investigators were tapped to help organize discussion topics at the meeting, including a session on new genetic technology used in cancer diagnostics co-chaired by Stephen B. Gruber, director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. "Understanding which genetic changes are inherited and which arise within the cancer is the key to unlock best treatment for the disease," said Gruber, an oncologist and geneticist who also is a professor of medicine at the Keck School of Medicine. The genetic and epigenetic links to cancer were hot issues. Peter Jones, Distinguished Professor of urology, biochemistry and molecular biology at the Keck School, presented an overview of the evolution of epigenetic therapy since his 1980 discovery of the drug 5-azacytidine, now a standard treatment for a pre-leukemia bone-marrow disorder. Peter Laird, associate professor of surgery, biochemistry and molecular biology at the Keck School and director of the USC Epigenome Center, spoke on the colorectal cancer methylome and how epigenetics may play a causal role in its development.

Other scheduled oral presenters included Keigo Machida, assistant professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at the Keck School, who led a study that has identified a possible new drug target for hepatocellular carcinoma, and Steven Mittelman, assistant professor of pediatrics, physiology and biophysics at the Keck School, who examined how race and ethnicity may affect obesity-related cancer risk. The meeting featured nearly 60 scientific posters affiliated with USC Norris researchers — including work by postdoctoral fellows Hyung-Gyoo Kang (Timothy Triche lab, about the role of cytokine proteins in Ewing sarcoma tumors), Houtan Noushmehr (Gerhard Coetzee lab, on prostate cancer risk) and Reshmi Parameswaran (Nora Heisterkamp lab, about alternative treatment approaches for acute lymphoblastic leukemia). Stephen Swenson, assistant research professor of biochemistry and molecular biology, presented a poster on a new non-invasive radiologic method he and colleagues developed for the diagnosis of early-stage ovarian cancer.

'Understanding which genetic changes are inherited and which arise within the cancer is the key to best treatment for the disease'

—Stephen B. Gruber, director, USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

GIANNOTTA: Remarkable philanthropy

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professor and chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. Three weeks after her initial diagnosis, Neithart underwent surgery with Giannotta to remove the tumor. Because of the location of the tumor, the surgery was considered dangerous. Survivors are often left visually impaired or paralyzed. "There were more risks than I can recount," said Neithart. "I knew about all of them, but for me, I would rather deal with the risk than the fear of something that could get you at any moment. And I just felt so comfortable and confident with Dr. Giannotta that I knew it would be OK."

The surgery went well, and Neithart made a full recovery. In gratitude to Giannotta, Neithart and her husband, Robert, made donations toward the doctor's research totaling \$150,000 immediately after the surgery. In the fall of 2011, the Neitharts made a more substantial gift of \$1 million to establish the Stroke and Cerebrovascular Disorders Center at the Keck School of Medicine, where Giannotta serves as director. "The reason why I turned out as well as I did is because of him," said Neithart. "He saved my life and he saved the quality of my life. Only someone like Dr. Giannotta could have done this and have it turn out as well as it did. It's purely a testament to him and his skill as a surgeon."



Larissa Puro

USC STUDENT TEAM AT 2012 GLOBAL CASE COMPETITION PLACES THIRD—From left, wearing medals: Undergraduates Peter Eskander, Hao-Hua Wu, Divya Bhamidipati, Sarah Bridge and Rebecca Gao (and Jasmine Thum, not pictured) pose with the judges and runners-up after winning the first USC Global Health Case Competition. They beat 20 other teams to win third place at the national Emory University Global Case Competition on March 31 in Atlanta. The USC students come from diverse backgrounds of study including biological sciences, East Asian studies, global health, theater, psychology, Spanish and biomedical engineering. During the initial round at USC, students were asked to present their ideas on how to best spend 50 million dollars to build sustainable programs for Haiti, then given notice that a pretend Category 4 hurricane had struck Haiti earlier in the day. The teams were given 45 minutes to adjust their presentations.

Calendar of Events

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

Saturday, Apr. 7

9 a.m. – 1 p.m. World Health Day LA 2012 Going For The Gold: A joint event between USC, UCLA and Western University of Health Sciences. Offering free health screenings, activities and entertainment to promote healthy lifestyles. Los Angeles Expo Center, Soboroff Sports Field. Info: worldhealthdayla.org

Tuesday, Apr. 10

Noon. Psychiatry Grand Rounds. “End of Life Issues,” Julie Siri, San Bernardino ACT Program. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-4065

Friday, Apr. 13

Noon. Department of Family Medicine. “Addressing Mental Health Needs within Primary Care,” Marvin Southard, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, and Barbara Saunders, ENKI Health and Research. HMR 100. Info: (323) 442-1678

Wednesday, Apr. 18

Noon. ZNI Seminar. “Treadmilling Actin Filament Arrays and Axon Growth,” Paul Forscher, Yale. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-2144

Thursday, Apr. 19

Noon. Dean’s Translational Medicine Seminar cosponsored with CHLA. “Toward a Fourth Generation of Disparities Research to Achieve Health Equity,” Sandra Crouse Quinn, School of Public Health, and Stephen B. Thomas, Maryland Center for Health Equity, both from University of Maryland. NRT Aresty Auditorium. Info: (323) 442-7874

Friday, Apr. 20

8:30 a.m. Surgical Grand Rounds: The 14th Annual Lyman Brewer Professor Lectureship. “Bicuspid Aortic Valve and Flow Mediated Aortopathy, Loyola Univ. DOH 100. Info: (323) 442-2506

8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Translational and Clinical Research in ONJ 2012, co-sponsored by the Center for Craniofacial Molecular Biology and Ostrow School of Dentistry and the Keck School of Medicine of USC. “Anti-Resorptive Agent Induced Osteonecrosis of the Jaw: Pathogenesis and Management,” various speakers. NRT Aresty Auditorium. Info: (323) 442-7874

Tuesday, Apr. 24

Noon. USC Global Health Lecture Series. “A Struggle for Relevance: The Future of WHO,” Kelley Lee, London School of Tropical Medicine. Lunch will be served. UPC: TCC 450. Info: (323) 865-0419

Friday, Apr. 27

Noon. Center for Applied Molecular Medicine. “Microfluidics for Cancer Cell Chemotaxis,” Mingming Wu, Cornell University. CSC 250. Info: (323) 442-3849.

Sunday, Apr. 29

3 p.m. KSOM Orange County Reception: Dean Puliafito hosts the OC Trojan Family and introduces the newly appointed director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, Stephen Gruber. Balboa Bay Club, 1221 West Coast Highway, Newport Beach, CA 92663. To RSVP: keck.usc.edu/balboabayclub Info: (323) 442-1767

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 email 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.



Photos by Brian Morri

Julie and Vaughn Starnes (left) and Jim and Mindy Halls (above) were recently honored by Salerni Collegium and Medical Faculty Family & Friends.

Salerni/MFFF scholarship dinner honors Starnes, Halls

Salerni Collegium Alumni Association and Medical Faculty Family & Friends hosted the March 3 annual scholarship benefit dinner for the Keck School of Medicine of USC at the Jonathan Club. At the dinner were honorees Julie and Vaughn Starnes, and Jim and Mindy Halls.

Vaughn Starnes is founding executive director of the USC Cardiovascular Thoracic Institute, Distinguished Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery, and the H. Russell Smith Foundation Chair for Stem Cell and Cardiovascular Thoracic Research at the Keck School. He is chief of surgery

and director of the Heart Institute at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

Julie Starnes, who has worked in health care for more than 35 years, is administrative director of the Cardiovascular Thoracic Institute.

Jim Halls was chairman of the Keck School Department of Radiology for 26 years and was the third chief of staff of USC University Hospital (now Keck Hospital of USC).

Mindy Halls, who was employed at Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center for 26 years, is president of CARES, the LAC+USC auxiliary.

Keck School to host TEDMED 2012 simulcast

Leslie Saxon, executive director and founder of the USC Center for Body Computing, will be among 50 thought-provoking speakers discussing the future of health and medicine during TEDMED 2012.

Taking place April 10-13 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., this year’s sold-out conference will be simulcast live in Aresty Auditorium, located on the lower level of the Harlyne J. Norris Cancer Research

Tower on the Health Sciences campus.

Saxon is also professor and chief of cardiovascular medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. The 2012 TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) MED presenters are a diverse group of individuals from various disciplines including health care, education, science and the arts, who will share novel ideas about the current state of health and medicine, and the shape of things to come.

Those who attend the sessions via simulcast will have the ability to send questions electronically to the speaker in real-time. Attendees will also be able to receive supplemental support material for any of the scheduled broadcast presentations.

The live TEDMED simulcast is hosted by Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito.

For more information, visit <http://www.tedmed.com/home>.

TEDMED Broadcast Schedule

- Tuesday, April 10**
2 to 4 p.m. (No. 1)
- Wednesday, April 11**
5:45 - 7:30 a.m. (No. 2)
8:15 - 9:45 a.m. (No. 3)
11:15 a.m. - 1 p.m. (No. 4)
2 - 3:45 p.m. (No. 5)
- Thursday, April 12**
5:45 - 7:30 a.m. (No. 6)
8:15 - 9:45 a.m. (No. 7)
11:15 a.m. - 1 p.m. (No. 8)
2 - 3:45 p.m. (No. 9)
4 - 5:45 p.m. (Replay, No. 6)
- Friday, April 13**
5:45 - 7:30 a.m. (No. 10)
8:15 - 10 a.m. (No. 11)
10:15 a.m. - 12 p.m. (Replay, No. 10)

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Call the Emergency Information Phone: (213) 740-9233 The emergency telephone system can handle 1,400 simultaneous calls. It also has a backup system on the East Coast.

Visit the USC Web: <http://emergency.usc.edu> This page will be activated in case of an emergency. Backup Web servers on the East Coast will function if the USC servers are incapacitated.