

# White coats on, KSOM class of 2017

By Ryan Ball

As the Keck School of Medicine of USC's first-year students waited eagerly in Mayer Auditorium on Aug. 16 for the start of the annual White Coat Ceremony, Sarah Wheeler was following instructions on how to fold her crisply pressed lab coat and drape it over her arm just right.

"For me, the white coat symbolizes putting others above yourself, and committing yourself to being a lifelong learner and teacher," said 28-year-old Wheeler, who earned a master's degree in epidemiology and pursued a career in research before deciding she really wanted to interact with patients.

Michael Opene, who has an interest in sports medicine and solving medical mysteries like the title character in the TV drama *House*, came to the ceremony with some perspective from those who came before.

"I hear some of the second- and third-year students say that when they're feeling down and going through a rough patch, they'll look at that white coat with their name on it and think, 'Look at how much I've accomplished to get here. I can do this,' and it kind of fires them up." Opene remarked.

As the Trojan fight song played, it was time to walk onto the Harry and Celesta Pappas Quad to the cheers of supportive family and friends.

Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, noted how exciting it will be for him to witness the ongoing metamorphosis of the 186 young people assembled before him.

"Today, they are suddenly grown up and ready to embark on a journey that will lead to their becoming smart, hard-working and, most importantly, compassionate physicians," Puliafito added.

Vice Dean for Medical Education Henri Ford,



First-year medical student Wendy Hsiao poses for a photo after receiving her white coat during this year's White Coat Ceremony, signalling the beginning of her journey in medicine.

Sara Reeve

MD, MHA, likened the next four years in medical school to an Olympic event in which being a top finisher is far less important than running a good race. Ford asked, "Will you ignore your partner who is stumbling, or will you try to support him or her?"

The keynote speaker was Jeffrey Canceko, MD, recipient of the school's 2013 Humanism in Medicine Award. Canceko reflected on his time as

a first-year medical school student at Georgetown University as the events of Sept. 11, 2001, played out. While walking through a hospital on his way home, he was inspired by the sight of fourth-year medical students putting their own fears aside while donning their white coats and preparing for whatever may come.

"This is why you worked so hard to get here,"

See **WHITE COAT**, page 2

## Debbie Walsh, Don Larsen appointed CEO, CMO of USC Verdugo Hills Hospital



Jason Wallis



Bill Youngblood

Two new leaders will take on the management of USC Verdugo Hills Hospital. Debbie Walsh, RN, MSN, has been appointed the new CEO of USC Verdugo Hills Hospital, succeeding former CEO Len LaBella who is retiring after 12 years at Verdugo Hills Hospital.

In addition, Donald Larsen, MD, MBA, has been appointed chief medical officer for USC Verdugo. The announcements come on the heels of a hospital-wide celebration event and the transformation of Verdugo Hills Hospital as a part of Keck Medicine of USC.

Walsh has more than 30 years' experience in hospital management and was most recently responsible for operations and strategic planning as president and CEO at the 400-bed Fountain Valley Regional Hospital. Walsh also has strong roots in the USC medical community, having previously served as CEO of the former USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital.

"Under her leadership, Debbie drove initiatives that improved outcomes, patient satisfaction and

hospital finances; expanded and restructured hospital programs and information systems; and oversaw the construction of the Norris Inpatient Tower on the then-USC University Hospital campus," said Tom Jackiewicz, MPH, senior vice president and CEO of USC Health. "This familiarity and experience, along with her expertise in running community hospitals, makes her an ideal choice for taking USC Verdugo Hills Hospital forward."

As the new CEO, Walsh will lead the hospital as it adds new programs, expands facilities and initiates new organization-wide policies and procedures. She will manage continuous improvement, develop and manage the hospital budget, and will report monthly to the USC Verdugo Hills Hospital governing board.

As the physician executive for USC Verdugo, Larsen will help drive key clinical and strategic initiatives at the hospital, and will serve as an important liaison between Keck Medicine of USC leaders and USC Verdugo physician partners.

As CMO, he will promote relationships with new and existing physician partners, and will support business development through targeted community outreach. He will also guide the development and implementation of new systems to ensure optimum quality and efficiency.

Walsh holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from California State University, Los Angeles, and a master's degree in nursing from Azusa Pacific University. She maintains a California registered nurse license. She has also served as a board member and area board chair for the Hospital Association of Southern California.

Larsen is an associate professor of neurosurgery and radiology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. He holds a medical degree from Chicago Medical School and a master's of business administration from the USC Marshall School of Business. He previously served as medical director for USC Care Medical Group, and CMO for Keck Hospital of USC and USC Norris Cancer Hospital.

Debbie Walsh (top) and Don Larsen (bottom) have been recently appointed as CEO and chief medical officer, respectively, at USC Verdugo Hills Hospital.

# PT student attends signing of student loan bill at White House

By Hope Hamashige

Zuleima Hidalgo, a student in the USC Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy, was in attendance at the White House on Aug. 9 when President Barack Obama signed into law a student loan reform bill.

Hidalgo, who is about to enter her second year in the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program, was one of several students asked to attend the signing. Prior to putting his signature on the legislation, Obama thanked the students who had raised their voices in support of the legislation.

“Without their voice, without their participation, we probably would not have gotten this bill done,” Obama said.

Hidalgo said it was an incredible honor to stand behind Obama as a witness to history.

“To witness our president sign something that I was so passionate about made me feel so proud, as well as happy, to know that our Congress could come to an agreement,” she said.

Hidalgo also got the chance to meet the president and tell him how grateful she is for the passage of this bill.

The Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act of 2013 retroactively lowered the interest rate on student loans disbursed after July 1, regardless of whether they are subsidized or not. The bill lowered the interest rate for loans to undergraduates from 6.8 to 3.9 percent and for graduate students to 5.4 percent. Interest rates on graduate student loans, depending on the type, have been reduced to between 5.4 and 6.4 percent for the life of the loan.

Future student loan rate increases will be tied to financial markets, but they will not exceed 8.25

percent for undergraduates and 9.5 percent for graduate students. Because of the new legislation, estimates are that nearly 11 million students across the United States will see their interest rates drop.

Jason Murillo, a USC financial aid officer, noted that “the new lower rates will result in thousands of dollars in savings over the life of these loans.”

President Obama said during his remarks that student loan debt, which has ballooned in recent years, burdens new graduates, their families and “has a depressive effect on the economy overall.” He added that student loan debt makes it harder for recent graduates to buy homes or start their own businesses.

Hidalgo said she expects this measure to be a major benefit to her, as well as her classmates, once she completes her degree.

“Honestly,” she said, “this alleviates some of the pressure that my classmates and I will face to pay off our loans as quickly as possible so that we don’t

accumulate too much interest.”

Not only does she see the new legislation as a boon for students, she also sees it as a help to the continuing recession.

“If college is affordable, then that means less debt that America will be in,” she added. “That means students will be more prone after graduation to buy a house, to buy appliances and furniture, to buy a car — those are all things that help keep the economy going.”



USC physical therapy student Zuleima Hidalgo (third from right) looks on as U.S. President Barack Obama signs a student loan bill to keep students' interest rates low during a signing ceremony in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C., on August 9.

Saul Loeb/AP/Getty Images

## WHITE COAT: New students will prepare to learn more than ever thought possible, says speaker

Continued from Page 1

Canceko told the assembled crowd. “This is why you’re going to work harder than you’ve ever worked before, and you will learn more than you ever thought was possible. We hope for the best and prepare for the worst.”

The Keck School of Medicine’s ceremony was the first of several White Coat Ceremonies taking place on the Health Sciences and University Park

Campuses.

The USC School of Pharmacy held its White Coat Ceremony on Thursday, Aug. 22, on the Harry and Celesta Pappas Quad. Below is a list of the remaining white coat ceremonies:

- Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC. Monday, Sept. 9, from 5 to 7 p.m. in Bovard Auditorium on the University Park Campus. There will be a reception for attendees before the

ceremony, at 4 p.m. in Founders Park.

- Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy at the School of Dentistry. Thursday, Aug. 29, at 6 p.m. The ceremony will be preceded by a reception on the lawn behind the Eli and Edythe Broad CIRM Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research on the Health Sciences Campus.

- Division of Occupational

Science and Occupational Therapy at the School of Dentistry of USC. Friday, Aug. 30, at 5 p.m. on the lawn behind the Eli and

Edythe Broad CIRM Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research on the Health Sciences Campus.

The Weekly

Next Issue: Aug. 30

The Weekly is published for the faculty, staff, students, volunteers and visitors in the University of Southern California’s Health Sciences campus community. It is written and produced by the Health Sciences Public Relations and Marketing staff. Comments, suggestions and story ideas are welcome. Permission to reprint articles with attribution is freely given.

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40 USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center  
Part of the Keck School of Medicine of USC

### USC Norris to celebrate 40th anniversary with a week of activities

The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center marks its 40th anniversary this October with a week of events. Mark your calendar for these special events:

**Thursday, Oct. 10**

USC Trojan Football honors USC Norris and the Norris Foundation  
7:30 p.m., Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum

**Friday, Oct. 11**

USC Norris 40th Anniversary Gala  
6:30 p.m., Westin Bonaventure Hotel

**Saturday, Oct. 12**

“DNA, the Double Helix and Cancer: Advancing Precision Oncology,” CME Seminar  
7:30 a.m., Aresty Auditorium

**Friday, Oct. 18**

“Genomic Cancer Medicine: The Power and the Promise,” A Symposium for Scientists  
8:00 a.m., Aresty Auditorium

## New postdoctoral scholars program announced for clinical residents and fellows

In a memo sent out recently to academic deans, faculty and staff, USC Provost Elizabeth Garrett, JD, announced the creation of a new program to enhance the “success and effectiveness of tomorrow’s health-care professionals.”

Garrett stated that she and Keck School of Medicine of USC Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, worked together to create the Provost’s Postdoctoral Scholars Program for Clinical Residents and Fellows. Beginning in fall 2013, this new signature program will award qualifying senior residents and fellows at Keck Hospital of USC, LAC+USC Medical Center and Children’s Hospital Los Angeles the rights and privileges of a postdoctoral scholar at USC. Those privileges include up to 20 units of graduate tuition funding to support their education and full access to library material and facilities for their study or work.

“This new program will provide resources to facilitate and catalyze consequential scholarship and scholarly activity by these promising doctors, many of whom go on to become our junior faculty or join other prestigious academic centers,” Garrett stated in the memo.

Also stated in the memo is that additional tuition support is available on a competitive

basis for those students who wish to pursue a master’s degree at the Keck School and who have been admitted to a qualifying program.

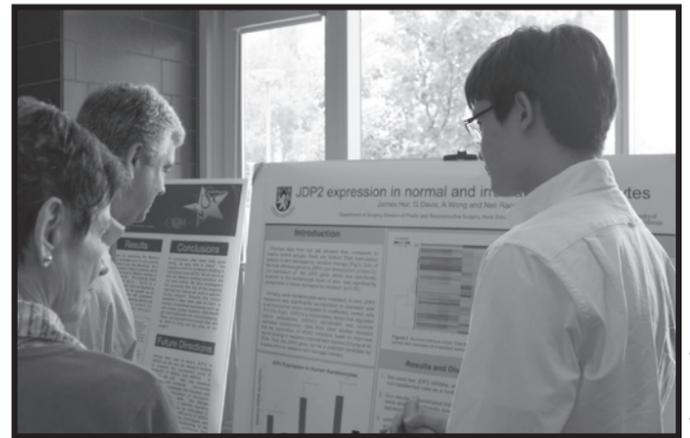
“It is critically important that our residents and fellows have additional opportunities to immerse themselves in scholarly areas beyond their clinical training,” said Puliafito. “By fulfilling their residencies and fellowships at USC, they are gaining incredible clinical skills. This new postdoctoral scholars program will encourage them to grow their expertise in research, business administration, epidemiology and other areas.”

To be eligible for the program, candidates must meet a number of requirements, including having a relevant doctoral degree (PhD or MD) and being engaged in a residency or fellowship program that allows a significant portion of training to be spent in pursuit of research or scholarly activity. The residency or fellowship program director must approve the candidate’s participation in the program and must also certify that the scholar will have sufficient protected time to achieve success in his or her research or scholarly efforts.

Details of the new program and an application form can be found at <http://postdocs.usc.edu/provosts-postdoctoral-scholars-program-for-clinical-residents-and-fellows>.

### Pfizer CTI proposal date revised

Pfizer’s Centers for Therapeutic Innovation (CTI), a recent partnership that combines USC’s academic medical center research teams with Pfizer’s technological, legal, regulatory and commercial expertise, has extended the deadline for preproposals. Two-page, non-confidential preproposals are now due to the Office of Foundation Relations at the Keck School of Medicine by Aug. 30; all researchers, clinicians and postdocs may apply. For more information, contact Kavita Munjal, senior executive director for foundation relations at the Keck School, at (323) 442-2355 or [munjal@usc.edu](mailto:munj@usc.edu).



Cristy Lytal

**HANDS-ON IN STEM CELLS** James Hur (right), a student from Harvard-Westlake School, describes his research on healing radiation wounds at the USC Early Investigator High School (EiHS) & USC CIRM Science, Technology and Research (STAR) Colloquium and Poster Presentation on August 2. Hur was one of 20 local students who enjoyed a summer of hands-on experience in stem research laboratories through the EiHS and CIRM STAR programs. “I’ve been most surprised by the level of independence and the freedom that our mentors give us. The experience has cemented my desire to enter research science,” he said.

## New electrophysiology director brings love of tech to Keck Medical Center

By Josh Grossberg

Pacemakers and defibrillators are fairly common life-saving devices these days, but when Rahul N. Doshi, MD, was getting his start in the medical profession, they both relied on fairly rudimentary technology. A self-described tech geek, Doshi knew the field of electrophysiology was on the cusp of great change, and he wanted to be part of it.

As the new director of electrophysiology at the Keck Medical Center of USC, Doshi will help guide the future of this exciting field that is advancing in ways he couldn’t have

imagined.

“It’s a relatively new and fast-growing sub-specialty of cardiovascular medicine,” he said. “It’s very different from what the interventional cardiologists do. They look at arteries and pipes; I look at the heart’s internal wiring.”

Electricity is what makes the heart pump, and it can be manipulated to help regulate its movements. In addition to pacemakers and defibrillators becoming smaller, more complex and ubiquitous, Doshi said that doctors can now target specific areas of the heart that cause it to beat irregularly.



Jon Nalick

Rahul N. Doshi

“We’re using technology to essentially burn or freeze parts of the heart that are responsible for these abnormal rhythms,” he said. “This technology has grown

tremendously over the last decade. Catheter ablation is one of the fastest growing procedures in cardiovascular medicine.”

As with all electronics, the devices that Doshi uses to keep the heart pumping continue to evolve. For example, he keeps a small device in his briefcase that can turn his iPhone into an EKG monitor.

Doshi received his medical degree from Stanford University School of Medicine. He arrived at the Keck Medical Center after serving as director of electrophysiology at UC Irvine and St. Jude Medical Center. A fellow of both

the American College of Cardiology and the Heart Rhythm Society, Doshi has experience in all areas of electrophysiology, including complex ablation and implantable device therapy. He is active on numerous committees and advisory boards, and has published dozens of peer-reviewed articles.

In his new job, Doshi oversees four electrophysiologists, a lab team and other support staff. “We’re rapidly expanding,” he said. “It’s amazing how far things are going. The potential demand for this is huge, especially here at USC.”

## The Weekly NEWSMAKERS

An Aug. 19 column in *The New York Times* quoted **Larry Neinstein**, MD, professor of pediatrics and medicine at the Keck School and executive director of USC’s Engemann Student Health Center, on communication tips for parents and their college-aged children. “Don’t hover,” Neinstein said.

An Aug. 19 story in the *Beverly Hills Courier* reported that USC alumna **Deborah Lanni**, a member of the Keck School of Medicine of USC Board of Overseers, donated \$250,000 to support the USC Norris Comprehensive

Cancer Center. The donation was also noted by the *Pasadena Star-News*.

An Aug. 17 article in the *San Bernardino Sun* quoted **Heather Volk**, PhD, MPH, assistant professor of preventive medicine at the Keck School, about her research linking air pollution exposure to autism risk. “Children born to mothers living within 309 meters of a freeway appeared to be twice as likely to have autism,” Volk wrote. The story also was carried by the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*.

An Aug. 15 broadcast on CBS News quoted **David**

**Agus**, MD, professor of medicine at the Keck School, about new findings in drugs that may reduce the risk of developing prostate cancer.

An Aug. 13 article in the *Glendale News-Press* reported that **Debbie Walsh**, RN, MSN, was appointed CEO of USC Verdugo Hills Hospital and that **Don Larsen**, MD, MBA, associate professor of neurological surgery and radiology at the Keck School, was appointed the hospital’s first chief medical officer. The appointments were also covered by the *Beverly Hills Courier* and *Becker’s Hospital Review*.



Courtesy Kevin Kaldjian

**KECK SCHOOL HOSTS CME LUNG CANCER EVENT** Nearly 60 health professionals attended a continuing medical education event about multidisciplinary approaches to treating lung cancer, hosted by the Keck School of Medicine of USC. The June symposium was a chance for doctors throughout the area to learn about the many services offered by USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hospital. “It’s a great opportunity to share with the community physicians about our multidisciplinary lung cancer program and the advances we’ve been making,” said Kevin Kaldjian, the hospital’s director of performance management. “It’s putting us on the map for referring physicians to hear about our program,” Kaldjian said. “This is pretty big in terms of letting people know what we do well.” Another event is already being planned for next year.

## Calendar of Events

### Tuesday, Aug. 27

**Noon.** KSOM Continuing Medical Education Workshop. "Faculty Development: Curriculum Development," Julie Nyquist and Cha-Chi Fung, USC. KAM 206. Info: (323) 442-2372

**4 p.m.** Women's Cancers Program Monthly Research Seminar. "While You Study the Fingerprints, I Will Identify the Serial Killer: Ovarian Cancer Pathology Overview," Paulette Mhawech-Fauceglia, USC. NOR 7409. Info: (323) 865-0801

### Wednesday, Aug. 28

**8 a.m.** 12th Annual Moving Targets Symposium – The American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists. "Neurodegenerative Disease: Therapeutic Challenges & Opportunities," various speakers. Radisson Hotel, Los Angeles Midtown, 3540 S. Figueroa St., Los Angeles. Info: (323) 442-1369

**8:30 a.m.** Medicine Grand Rounds. "Introduction to Clinical Research," Alex Balekian, USC. IRD 732-734. Info: (323) 226-7923

**Noon.** KSOM Continuing Medical Education Workshop. "Faculty Development: Writing Smart Objectives," Julie Nyquist and Cha-Chi Fung, USC. KAM 206. Info: (323) 442-2372

### Thursday, Aug. 29

**Noon.** KSOM Continuing Medical Education Workshop. "Faculty Development: Lectures Medical Students Will Want to Attend," Mike Snow and Dixie Fisher, USC. KAM 206. Info: (323) 442-2372

**5 p.m.** School of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy White Coat Ceremony. Broad Center Lawn. Info: (323) 442-2900

### Friday, Aug. 30

**8:30 a.m.** Medicine Grand Rounds. "Cystic Fibrosis," Adupa Rao, USC. IRD 732-734. Info: (323) 226-7923

**Noon.** Medicine Grand Rounds. "Non-Cardiac Causes of Troponin Elevation," Maryam Balouch, USC. IPT Conference Room B. Info: (323) 226-7556

**5 p.m.** School of Occupational Therapy White Coat Ceremony. Broad Center lawn-area. Info: (323) 442-3340

### Friday, Sept. 06

**11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.** Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center. "Functional Annotation of Breast Cancer Risk Regions," Gerry Coetzee, USC. SSB 116. Info: (323) 442-7732

### Thursday, Sept. 12

**Noon.** SC CTSI Research Ethics Forum. "Risk, Consent, and the Ethics of Comparative Effectiveness Research," Alex Capron and Donna Spruijt-Metz, USC. NRT LG 503/504. Info: (323) 442-7289

**2 – 4 p.m.** SC CTSI Workshop. "Strategies for Successful Mentoring," Emil Bogenmann, CHLA. Aresty Auditorium. Info: (323) 442-7289

### Thursday, Sept. 26

**6 p.m.** 17th Annual Robert K. Kerlan, MD Memorial Lecture. "The Thrower's Shoulder and Elbow – Biomechanics and Treatment," G. Russell Huffman, University of Pennsylvania. Aresty Auditorium. Info: (323) 226-7204

**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](mailto: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.

## John Niparko tapped as president of USC Care Medical Group

John K. Niparko, MD, has been appointed to the position of president of USC Care Medical Group. Niparko will serve a two-year term, which began on July 1. He succeeds Edward Crandall, MD, chair of the Department of Medicine, who also served a two-year term.

Also the recently appointed chair of the Department of Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, Niparko joined USC from Johns Hopkins University, where he was the inaugural George T. Nager Professor and director of the Division of Otolaryngology and Skull Base Surgery.

Niparko received his bachelor's degree and medical degree with distinction from the University of Michigan,



Don Millici

John K. Niparko is the newly appointed president of USC Care Medical Group.

where he also completed his residency in otolaryngology-head and neck surgery and a fellowship in otology, neurotology and skull base surgery.

He is an author or co-author of more than 200 peer-reviewed papers and

abstracts, 45 review articles and four books, among them *Atlas of Skull Base Surgery and Cochlear Implants: Principles and Practices*. He has served as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Otology & Neurotology* since 2006.

"The role of the USC Care president is critical to achieving a high-caliber, thriving physician practice within the Keck Medical Center of USC," said Tom Jackiewicz, MPH, senior vice president and CEO for USC Health. "In this role, Dr. Niparko will collaborate with leadership across the health-care enterprise, as well as connect the achievements of our practice into the greater University of Southern California academic and research communities."

## Patient Experience helps couple celebrate their 54th wedding anniversary

By Josh Grossberg

About to celebrate their 54th wedding anniversary, Grace and Ray Vagas were not going to let anything as bothersome as a hospital stay stop them. And neither was the staff at USC Norris Cancer Hospital, where Ray has been a patient for nearly a month after being diagnosed with leukemia.

When their son, Ray Vagas Jr., realized the anniversary was approaching, he knew he had to do something. He contacted the staff of the Patient Experience Program at the Keck Medical Center of USC.

"I called them to see what we could bring in," he recalled. "They said, 'We've got it. We'll do it. We'll have staff come and bring them balloons.'"

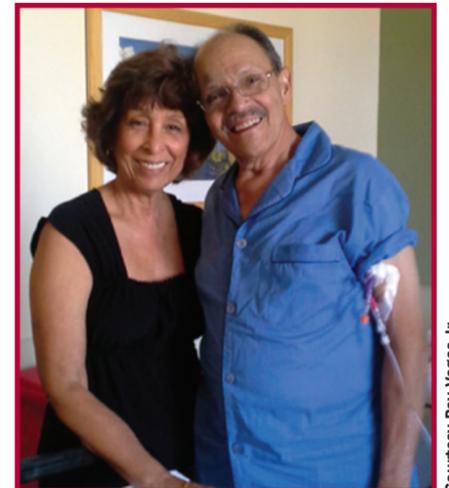
On June 20, Grace and Ray Vagas were surprised with a beautiful cake and some happy wishes from family and staff.

"They're so loving and tight-knit," said receptionist Laura Molyneaux, who organized the event for Patient Experience. "They take care of each other."

For their part, the family couldn't have been happier with how the party turned out. "You never expect that in a hospital," Grace said. "You think they have more important things to do. But psychologically, something like this really helps."

Anniversaries have always been a big deal for the couple. To mark the 25-year milestone, they gathered their original wedding party and re-created the ceremony — Grace even wore a wedding dress. And for their 50th anniversary, they went on a second honeymoon to Costa Rica.

"It was such a pleasure to have your group surprise you with a cake," Grace said. "It was just lovely. It made a day that could have been sad very festive."



Courtesy Ray Vagas Jr.

Patient Ray Vagas and his wife Grace were able to celebrate their 54th wedding anniversary in style at USC Norris Cancer Hospital.

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**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.