HSC News

USC University of Southern California

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Courtesy USC Roski Eye Institute

The Los Angeles Latino Eye Study was the largest population-based study of adult Latinos and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and the first to analyze the risk and prevalence of early and late stage AMD and its impact on quality of life for older Latinos.

USC Roski Eye Institute research among most read

By Sherri Snelling

JAMA Ophthalmology, a journal of the American Medical Association, announced four of its top 10 most talked about articles in 2016 are published research by the USC Gayle and Edward Roski Eye Institute.

The four articles include National Eye Institute-funded research led by principal investigator, Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC and director of the USC Roski Eye Institute. The research articles include: Visual Impairment and Blindness Will Double by 2050; The Los Angeles Latino Eye Study (LALES), which was the first and largest to study the relationship between age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and quality of life; Chinese American Eye Study — Prevalence of Diabetic Retinopathy (part of CHES Study); and Chinese American Eye Study — Prevalence of AMD (part of CHES Study). *JAMA Ophthalmology* used Altmetric to determine the Top 10 list of most read articles. Almetric provides a quantitative measure of the attention each scholarly article receives in traditional and social media.

"It is truly gratifying to know that our research is resonating with scientists, ophthalmologists, policymakers and the media who look to *JAMA Ophthalmology* as an indispensable source of ophthalmic knowledge," said Varma, one of the world's leading experts in population-based eye diseases. "Our research provides a better understanding of the burden and impact of potentially blinding eye diseases among an aging population as well as how to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to understanding eye diseases among different racial/ethnic populations."

USC Roski Eye Institute researchers are among the most respected and prolific ophthalmic researchers in the country with a total of $56.3 million in research grants from the National Eye Institute (part of the National Institutes of Health), making USC the No. 2 NIH-funded research ophthalmology department in the country. In addition, USC Roski Eye Institute was No. 1 in combined research funding among Keck Medicine of USC clinical departments.

Innovative research includes stem cell therapies, Human Connectome brain mapping, population-based epidemiological studies in

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" Our research provides a better understanding of the burden and impact of potentially blinding eye diseases among an aging population."

— Rohit Varma, MD, MPH

Obesity, liver disease target of NIH grants

By Mary Dacuma

The Keck School of Medicine of USC was awarded two grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support projects that could prevent obesity and treat obesity-related fatty liver disease in Hispanic populations. Michael Goran, PhD, professor of preventive medicine, co-director of the Diabetes and Obesity Research Institute (DORI) and director of the Childhood

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Phil Channing

Michael Goran

Keck Medicine team unfazed by rare bacterial infection

By Stephanie Corral

After being resuscitated in a USC Verdugo Hills Hospital operating room, Alfred Lopez was transferred to Keck Medical Center of USC on May 12, on a ventilator, in septic shock and experiencing multi-organ failure.

Lopez, a 56-year-old Ralph's market produce worker, had necrotizing fasciitis, a rare bacterial infection that usually enters the body through an open wound and rapidly spreads through soft tissue, eating away at muscle and flesh at an alarming rate of an inch an hour.

In Lopez's case, there was no trace of an open wound. Without being able to locate the origin of the flesh-eating disease in his body, the Keck Medical Center team raced against the clock to save his right leg — which had tripled in size — and his life.

"When they told me what it was, I knew we had a long battle," said his sister Aurora

See **INFECTION**, page 2

Christina Gandolfo

To stay ahead of the flesh-eating bacteria, a team of six wound care physical therapists dressed patient Alfred Lopez's wounds every day, which sometimes took up to two hours to complete.

Wellness initiatives focus on creating healthy lives for staff

By Douglas Morino

A series of wellness initiatives recently launched across Keck Medicine of USC aim to encourage healthy living among physicians, nurses and staff.

The initiatives include meditation practice, healthy eating and personal fitness tracking. They were created with the help of community partners and the Keck Wellness Committee, an interdisciplinary group of staff members who work to promote healthy living among their colleagues.

"I encourage all physicians, nurses and staff to take advantage of these unique opportunities to cut down on stress and take steps toward a healthier life," said Rod Hanners, CEO, Keck Medical Center of USC and COO, Keck Medicine of USC. "Because stress is inevitable in our lives, healthy, positive living must be a priority for all of us across Keck Medicine."

Among the initiatives is a partnership with Headspace, a pioneering meditation app that guides listeners through simple and effective meditation exercises. Practicing meditation on a regular basis has been found to improve focus and sleep, and lower stress.

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CIRM backs study of osteoarthritis therapies

By Mary Dacuma

The Keck School of Medicine of USC is one of four institutions to receive a multimillion-dollar grant from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) for translational research projects. The $2.5 million grant will support potential osteoarthritis therapies that could significantly impact standards of care for the disease. Arthritis affects approximately 52 million adults in the United States, with that number conservatively expected to grow to 78 million by the year 2040.

Grant recipient Denis

See **GRANT**, page 3

Assistant dean brings expertise to career advising office

By Hope Hamashige

Stephanie Zia, MD, MACM, clinical assistant professor of medicine (clinician educator) at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, and the career advising staff, recently started holding brown bag lunches for Keck School first- and second-year students to raise any questions they may have about their futures as medical professionals.

Zia, who was recently appointed assistant dean for career advising at the Keck School, said the office has made some important changes that are designed to better serve the needs of students at the Keck School, which include expanding career advising for first- and second-year students.

Another of her new initiatives is a monthly newsletter, called Career Corners, which is aimed at helping medical students find answers to one of the most important decisions they face while in medical school: choosing a specialty. Career Corners introduces students to specialties they may not know much about, such as otolaryngology, radiation oncology and physical medicine and rehabilitation.

Ricardo Carrasco III

Stephanie Zia

"We surveyed the students and there are specialties they know a lot about and others they don't," she said. "Introducing them to specialties they know less about may spark their interest."

The office has multiple staff advisers to answer questions about specific specialties, as well as to review their resumes and personal statements. They work in conjunction with designated departmental faculty advisers for each specialty and are creating more opportunities for students to shadow faculty.

Zia said she brings a unique perspective to the office. A graduate of the Keck School, she also completed her residency in internal medicine and pediatrics at Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center and, for five years, served as the assistant program director for the combined medicine/pediatrics residency program.

In other words, she is keenly aware of the pressure that Keck School students face. And, since she is still involved with selecting LAC+USC's residents, she is well-acquainted with the selection process for residency programs.

"I love watching students discover their identities and interests in medicine and learn about who they are as developing physicians," Zia said.

She encouraged all students interested in learning more to drop by her office in KAM 100C.

For more information, go to https://ksom.usc.edu/careeradvising/.

Programs offer pilot grants for researchers

In a continued effort to support university faculty and encourage groundbreaking research, the Keck School of Medicine of USC's Dean's Pilot Grant Program and the Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute have distributed nearly two dozen grants for the fall funding cycle.

Principal investigators and their collaborators include many multidisciplinary teams and represent a wide variety of institutions, schools and departments, including the Keck School and Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

"Supporting faculty members through these grant programs is a key part of our ongoing mission to foster groundbreaking research at the Keck School," said Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School and director of the USC Gayle and Edward Roski Eye Institute. "I look forward to seeing the development and innovation that result from supporting these exceptional researchers."

These pilot grants will support a range of projects, from pre-clinical development of novel diagnostics and therapeutics to community-based research that ultimately will improve patient and community health.

"These two programs provide a crucial element of research that is hard to find — the very first funds to begin to test a new idea," said Tom Buchanan, MD, director of SC CTSI and vice dean for research at the Keck School. "We have lots of evidence that this sort of funding leads to bigger grants and important research. I am very pleased that the dean and the SC CTSI are able to provide this crucial funding to our research community."

The Keck School of Medicine of USC Dean's Pilot Grant Program received 44 applications, funding 11 projects.

The SC CTSI Pilot Program received 70 applications, funding 10 programs and co-funding two more with the Alzheimer Disease Research Center.

The SC CTSI Pilot Program spring cycle is open for grant applications through Feb. 15, said Sarah Hamm-Alvarez, PhD, associate dean for basic and translational research. Applications can be submitted at http://sc-ctsi.org/funding.

"We're thrilled to be able to have access to the funds to administer both programs," Hamm-Alvarez said. "For each of the programs, we're able to fund new investigators — in many cases, for their first peer-reviewed awards — to seed their research careers. We also are able to fund the development of new directions for experienced investigators that promote further innovation and discovery."

INFECTION: Bacteria spread into right leg tissue

Continued from page 1

Jubile, who had encountered the disease during her 31 years of experience as a registered nurse.

A CT scan finally pinpointed the disease's source: A plum-sized abscess had ruptured in Lopez's rectum and had spread into the soft tissues of his right leg.

"I was scared, but I had a lot of faith," said Lopez, who has trouble remembering the early details of his ordeal because of the heavy sedation and pain he was in.

Lopez finally started turning a corner, thanks to the aggressive and unified approach taken by Keck's experienced surgeons, nurses and wound care physical therapists.

"Alfred survived with excellent functional results because of the state-of-the-art multidisciplinary team effort" available at Keck Medical Center, said Demetrios Demetriades, MD, PhD, director of the trauma and surgical intensive care unit division at the hospital and professor of surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Demetriades performed seven of the 10 surgeries Lopez received during a three-and-a-half-month period.

To stay ahead of the bacteria, a team of six wound care physical therapists dressed his wounds every day, which sometimes took up to two hours to complete.

"The main challenge was the location and extent of his wounds, in particular his posterior hip and perineum," said Angela Kwan, PT, MPT, lead in-patient wound care physical therapist at Keck Hospital of USC and instructor of clinical physical therapy at the USC Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy.

Jubile had never seen anything like it. "His whole leg was without flesh. It looked like something out of an anatomy book."

The fact that Lopez healed and wakes up every morning to walk a mile uphill (with the help of a cane) is nothing short of a miracle.


Christina Gandolfo

Alfred Lopez was treated at Keck Medicine of USC in May 2016 for a rare bacterial infection that rapidly eats away muscle and flesh.

Stephanie Woelfel, PT, MPT, instructor of clinical physical therapy at the USC Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy and a board-certified wound specialist, credits Lopez's unlikely recovery to Demetriades' high skill and the Keck Medicine team's approach to complex cases.

Lopez, whose ordeal had turned him into a legend in Keck Medical Center's hallways long before his Aug. 29 release, said he is especially grateful to Demetriades and the wound care physical therapists who still text him to see how he is doing.

Calendar of Events

Saturday, Jan. 14

7 a.m.-5 p.m. Department of Medicine and Department of Surgery Continuing Medical Education. "3rd Annual Update on Esophageal Diseases," John Lipham, MD, and Edy Soffer, MD. University Club of Pasadena. Info: Anika Bobb, (323) 442-2547, anika.bobb@med.usc.edu. RSVP: Chelsea Michel, (323) 442-2555, usccme@usc.edu

Tuesday, Jan. 17

Noon. SC CTSI. "Information Session: Pilot Award in Support of Clinical and Community Research." NRT LG503. Info: Juli Wu, juli.wu@med.usc.edu, http://sc-ctsi.org

Noon. USC Women in Management. "HSC WIM Brown Bag Book Club." Norris Medical Library East Conference Room. Info: Ginger Mayerson, (323) 384-6049, mayerson@usc.edu, http://bit.ly/2hdzrEx/. Book: *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond*, edited by Suzanne Lummis

Wednesday, Jan. 18

Noon. The Saban Research Institute Seminar. "TSRI Core Facility Seminar: Learn About Resources Available to Support your Research with: Cellular Imaging Core & Flow Cytometry Core (FACS)." Saban Research Building Auditorium, 4661 Sunset Blvd. Info: Sandy Wang, (323) 361-7489, tecpad@chla.usc.edu, http://chla.org/tecpad

Thursday, Jan. 19

Noon. Southern California Research Center for ALPD & Cirrhosis Lecture. "Cellular Homestasis Lecture Series: Premalignant Regulation of Liver Growth," Wolfram Goessling, MD, PhD, Harvard Medical School. McKibben Lecture Hall, MCH 156. Info: Asma Deras, (323) 442-3121, asmadera@usc.edu

Friday, Jan. 20

8:30 a.m. Hastings Center for Pulmonary Research Seminar. "Repair of the Alveolar Epithelium After Acute Lung Injury," Rachel L. Zemans, MD, National Jewish Health. IRD 734. Info: Elva Rubio, (323) 409-7184, elvarubi@usc.edu

Saturday, Jan. 21

8 a.m.-Noon. Department of Ophthalmology. "Ophthalmology Resident Potpourri Case Presentations." Aresty Auditorium

Wednesday, Jan. 25

11 a.m. USC/Amgen Seminar. "Interdiction at a protein-protein interface: Structure-based design of Mcl-1 inhibitors," Sean Brown. Health Sciences Campus. Info: Cristy Lytal, (323) 442-2172, lytal@med.usc.edu, http://stemcell.usc.edu/events

Noon. The Saban Research Institute Seminar. "Lessons from a Rare Disease: Genetics and Study of Intestinal Failure," Mamata Sivagnanam, MD, Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego. Saban Research Building Auditorium, 4661 Sunset Blvd. Info: Sandy Wang, (323) 361-7489, tecpad@chla.usc.edu, http://chla.org/tecpad

Thursday, Jan. 26-Saturday, Jan. 28

6:15 a.m.-5 p.m. USC Institute of Urology Continuing Medical Education. "2nd Annual Conference: Practical Urology." Hilton Los Angeles, Universal City. Info: Chelsea Michel, (323) 442-2555, usccme@usc.edu, https://cmetracker.net/KECKUSC/Catalog

Friday-Saturday, Jan. 27-28

7:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Department of Neurosurgery. "6th Annual USC Hands-On NeuroEndoscopy Course for Neurosurgery and Otolaryngology Residents," Gabriel Zada, MD, MS. Surgical Skills Simulation and Education Center. Info and RSVP: http://bit.ly/2cJKvJv

Notice: Calendar items are due at least 10 days before publication date. Timely submission does not guarantee publication in print. See more calendar entries at *hscnews.usc.edu/calendar-of-events*. Submit items at *tinyurl.com/calendar-hsc*. Include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location and a phone number/email address.

Professor joins 'Help Me Grow' leadership council

By Claire Norman

Gregory Stevens, PhD, associate professor of clinical family medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, has joined the newly formed LA "Help Me Grow" Leadership Council. This new county-wide program has been created in partnership with First 5 and L.A. Care to address gaps in childhood development screenings. The group will meet quarterly to give input on the design of the initiative and provide insight.

First 5 LA and L.A. Care recently began contracting researchers, including Stevens, to investigate the gaps for lower-income children in proper developmental screening. As part of his study, he asked physicians if they routinely check children for lags in speech, motor function and overall development.

His findings revealed major gaps in screening, so he recommended the implementation of a program called "Help Me Grow," which already has proven successful in other communities. The idea behind "Help Me Grow" is to create a centralized system for providers, families and services to connect. Currently, it is hard for doctors to connect patients with resources, so this would create a singular place for physicians, patients and regional centers to implement care plans.

"L.A. County is so large and diverse, with so many moving complex and competing parts, that having one coordinating entity for children, their parents and doctors makes a lot of sense," Stevens said.

First 5 LA and L.A. Care adopted the recommendation and have committed millions of dollars into implementing the "Help Me Grow" model for Los Angeles County. As part of the leadership council, Stevens will be involved in the process of implementing this new model in order to close the gap in developmental screening.

"Being a part of this council that has brought a lot of passionate voices to the table, means USC will be at the forefront of improving the lives of our county's youngest residents," Stevens added.

Gregory Stevens

OBESITY

Continued from page 1

Obesity Research Center at the Keck School, was the recipient of both grants and will be leading the research efforts.

One project, which was awarded a $3.3 million, 5-year grant, will launch a randomized two-year intervention trial to examine the impact of reducing sugary beverage consumption on obesity reduction in post-partum Hispanic women. In addition, this trial will examine whether delaying the introduction of sugary beverages to infants will prevent the onset of obesity development through age 2. This trial is based on prior work by the Goran lab that showed that early introduction of sugary beverages to Hispanic infants was associated with much higher prevalence of obesity in the first few years of life.

"If this trial works and we can reduce obesity in women post-partum, while also preventing early onset of obesity in the offspring, then this would support the case for public health approaches to promote healthy beverage choices during the critical stages of post-partum and infancy," Goran said.

The second project, supported by a $3.1 million grant, aims to decrease liver fat in obese Hispanic children by reducing participants' sugar intake. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is rapidly increasing in the population and the Hispanic population is particularly vulnerable to this health problem. NAFLD can lead to liver failure, requiring a liver transplant and is therefore becoming a critical health issue in Hispanics, and liver disease is now one of the leading causes of death in the Hispanic population in LA County. Hispanics are especially at-risk for fatty liver disease due to a genetic factor (PNPLA3) that causes the liver to store fat. Half of all Hispanics carry this gene. Previous work from the Goran lab showed that this genetic effect was manifested early in life and worsened by high-sugar diets. While there is no "cure" for the disease, the condition is reversible with diet and lifestyle changes.

This new trial will recruit children and teenagers with NAFLD and enroll them in an aggressive, 12-week treatment program that will aim to cut dietary sugars toward the health goal of 10 percent of daily calories. The study will examine if the reduction in liver fat in response to the low sugar diet will be more effective in the participants who have the PNPLA3 gene. If Goran's hypothesis proves true, the study results could reshape dietary recommendations for people who have fatty liver disease due to their genetic predisposition.

RESEARCH: Studies assess disease rates, trends among minorities

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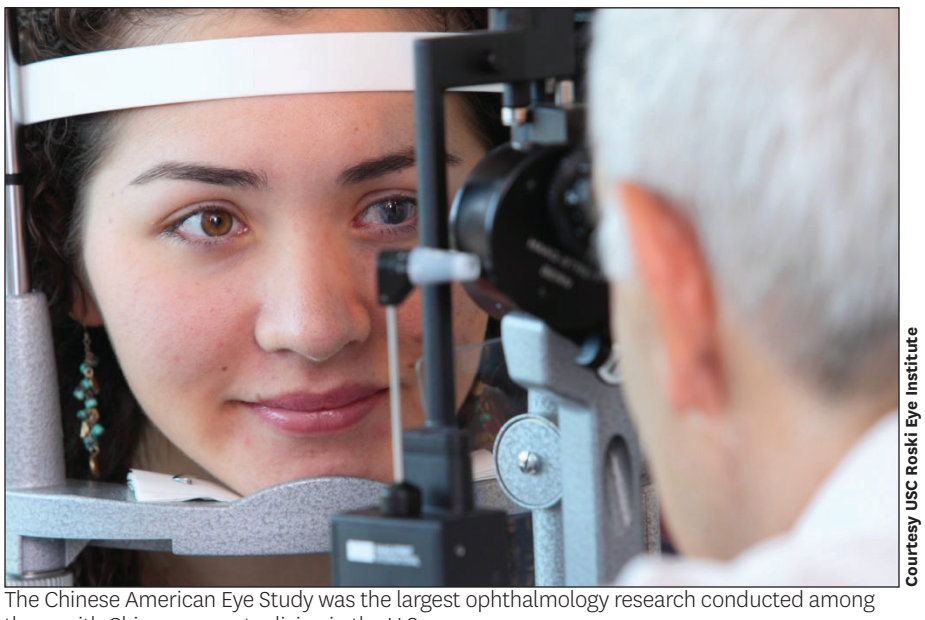
minority communities, the latest breakthroughs to address diabetic retinopathy, keracotonus, LASIK postoperative ectasia, Sjögren's syndrome, glaucoma and retinoblastoma in children. Beyond basic science and translational research, USC Roski Eye Institute remains at the forefront of clinical medicine through its clinical trials initiative. Physicians are investigating the latest in drug development and treatment strategies for a number of eye conditions leading to solutions to prevent blindness and visual impairment and restore sight.

The Visual Impairment and Blindness Will Double by 2050 Study found that over the next 35 years, the number of Americans with a variety of eye disease and impairment issues, including AMD, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy (DR) and cataracts, will dramatically increase impacting both individuals and society. More than 16.4 million Americans over age 40 will have visual impairment due to uncorrected refractive error compared to 8.2 million in 2015. In addition, more than 2 million age 40+ will be blind and 6.95 million will have visual impairment by 2050 compared to 1.02 million and 3.22 million respectively from 2015. The study also found women and minority populations, especially Latinos, carry the largest burden.

The CHES studies were the largest ophthalmology research conducted among those with Chinese ancestry living in the U.S. The CHES study on diabetic retinopathy found the prevalence for this disease in the Chinese American participants is relatively lower than studies of Chinese individuals residing in rural northern China or Latino individuals from Los Angeles County.



Courtesy USC Roski Eye Institute

The Chinese American Eye Study was the largest ophthalmology research conducted among those with Chinese ancestry living in the U.S.

The LALES Study was the largest population-based study of adult Latinos and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and the first to analyze the risk and prevalence of early- and late-stage AMD and its impact on quality of life for older Latinos. The study found Latinos diagnosed with bilateral AMD with large drusen (the lipids or fatty proteins that are yellow deposits under the retina) and depigmentation as well as a more severe AMD had a substantially lower health-related quality of life as compared to those with AMD lesions in only one eye. In addition, the findings point to a more significant health-related quality of life decline beginning in early rather than later stages of the disease.

GRANT: Approach would offer off-the-shelf alternative to surgery

Continued from page 1

Evseenko, MD, PhD, associate professor of orthopaedic surgery, is working toward this therapy by using pluripotent stem cells to regenerate cartilage. While scientists have used these cells to create a cartilage-like tissue, they have not been able to generate cells that develop new cartilage. Evseenko proposes a unique approach to storing pluripotent stem cell-derived chondrocytes, which are the cells that can become cartilage, and implanting those chondrocytes into the joint. If successful on a large scale, this therapy would be a cheaper, minimally invasive, off-the-shelf alternative to joint replacement surgery as a treatment for osteoarthritis.

"The rapidly growing prevalence and staggering costs of osteoarthritis demand a solution that can benefit both patients and providers," Evseenko said. "My team is working diligently to provide this solution by expanding on our previous stem cell research, and we are grateful for CIRM's support of our endeavor."

Osteoarthritis, more commonly known as arthritis, is a chronic disease caused by injury and wear and tear of the joints. It affects 23 percent of adults nationwide and costs the U.S. $100 billion annually. Those numbers are expected to grow exponentially due to longer lifespans and rising obesity.

Ricardo Carrasco III

Denis Evseenko

There is no cure for osteoarthritis. Some patients with severe arthritis will require a total joint replacement. Although total joint replacement is a successful operation, the prosthesis may wear out over time in younger patients, requiring revision surgery. Evseenko hopes his research will reduce the need for these types of surgeries, mitigating the burden of osteoarthritis on patients and physicians.

"Bridging the gap between scientific innovation and clinical application is critical for our mission to provide the best quality of patient care," said Jay Lieberman, MD, professor and chair of orthopaedic surgery. "We are delighted for Denis and are eagerly anticipating his contributions made possible through CIRM's support."

CIRM, the California agency charged with dispensing $3 billion in voter-approved dollars to researchers throughout the state, accelerates stem cell treatments for patients with urgent medical needs without a current solution. This grant is part of CIRM's Translational Award program, which supports the most promising scientific projects with the potential for human clinical trials. In addition to the Keck School, this year's recipients also include two biotech institutes studying Alzheimer's disease and osteonecrosis, and one other academic medical center researching pediatric therapies for sickle cell disease.

"CIRM has made a wise investment in Denis and his research. He's an outstanding young scientist, developing innovative approaches to bridge the gap between basic understanding and clinical application. Developing new approaches will be essential to combat osteoarthritis, a prevalent disabling disease," said Andy McMahon, PhD, W.M. Keck Provost Professor of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine and Biological Sciences, chair of stem cell biology and regenerative medicine, and director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research.

Keck Medicine physicians care for Rose Bowl champs

By Virginia Baca

The Trojan family celebrated an extraordinary 2017 Rose Bowl victory on Jan. 2.

As with all successful athletic achievements, it truly took a team to build a successful football season and the fabulous finish on the national stage.

As the official doctors of USC Trojan athletes, the USC Sports Medicine Center at Keck Medicine of USC specializes in treating sports-related and recreational injuries affecting the shoulder, knee, hip, elbow and neck.

"We are proud to contribute to the success of Trojans athletics," said Jay R. Lieberman, MD, professor and chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery. "The expertise of our clinical team fits well with the needs of our athletes."

Many common injuries for USC athletes include tears to the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and meniscus in the knee, frozen shoulder, shoulder joint pain, shoulder impingement and tennis elbow, and cartilage preservation procedures.

Courtesy Department of Orthopaedic Surgery

From left, C. Thomas Vangsness, James Tibone, Reza Omid, George Hatch, Jay Lieberman and Seth Gamradt are seen at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The physicians, joined by Alex Weber, pictured at right, provide official care for USC Trojan athletes.

In addition to being experts in minimally invasive arthroscopic procedures, joint replacement and reconstructive procedures, specialists at the USC Joint Preservation and Replacement Center also perform traditional procedures to restore damaged joints, ligaments and bones. Keck Medicine physicians are highly regarded in total hip, knee and shoulder replacement as well as treatment of complex fractures.

Alex Weber

Not only do Keck Medicine physicians treat the Trojans, they take care of professional athletes, Olympians, high school athletes and weekend warriors. These physicians have worked or are currently working with many professional teams including the Los Angeles Rams, Los Angeles Lakers, Los Angeles Dodgers, Los Angeles Galaxy, Los Angeles Kings and U.S. Women's National Soccer.

Children's Hospital Los Angeles

Baby Donovan Daniels and his parents are seen post-transplant in 2016, joined by doctors and, at left, the first transplant patient Lydia Hand, now 18.

CHLA marks 300 pediatric liver transplants with first patient

By Owen Lei

At 7 months old, Donovan Daniels of Westminster may not understand for some time just how serious his medical condition, biliary atresia, really is. It may be years before he knows he was the 300th pediatric liver transplant ever performed by doctors at Children's Hospital Los Angeles and Keck Medicine of USC. But one day he'll know his father Dejon Daniels went under the knife so that a portion of dad's liver could help him live a longer, healthier life.

In the meantime, Donovan's mother Jessica Valdepeña and Daniels got a glimpse of what that life might look like, thanks to a meeting with a young woman named Lydia Hand.

Hand, now 18, was CHLA's first living donor liver transplant patient. As an infant, she also was diagnosed with biliary atresia, a rare life-threatening disease where bile ducts cannot expel bile from the liver. In 1998, Lydia received a liver from her grandmother. Today, the Lancaster resident is a college freshman majoring in music, and said her donated liver is still going strong.

"It's pretty amazing how far she has come," Valdepeña said. "I want Donovan to grow up and have a bright future just like Lydia is having."

CHLA's Liver and Intestinal Transplant Program has since grown to become one of the largest programs in the country — the hospital is now a consistent leader in the volume of living donor liver transplants performed nationwide among pediatric centers, with success rates well above national averages.

"But statistics are not the real story," said Daniel Thomas, MD, clinical professor of pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and medical director of the Liver and Intestinal Transplant Program at CHLA. "It is seeing patients like Lydia Hand grow, accomplish, and live to be a happy young woman with a life full of dreams and hopes."

Coincidentally, the same team that worked on liver patient No. 1 also treated patient No. 300. Thomas is both Hand's and Donovan's hepatologist while Yuri Genyk, MD, professor of clinical surgery, was their transplant surgeon.

"Donovan's success is truly the culmination of the knowledge and skills from the 299 liver transplants that preceded him, including Lydia's," said Genyk, surgical director of the Pediatric Liver Transplant Program at CHLA. "It speaks to the expertise and dedication of the entire liver transplant team, as well as the collective support we receive from all the services CHLA provides."

When Donovan's parents brought him to Children's Hospital Los Angeles in October, doctors told them Donovan urgently needed a new liver. Daniels volunteered and was found to be a match. The transplant took place Nov. 18, with Genyk performing both parts — Daniels' surgery at USC in the morning and Donovan's transplant at CHLA several hours later. Daniels was released and finally was able to visit Donovan just in time for Thanksgiving.

Lydia and Donovan's family met in Donovan's hospital room on Dec. 1, the day he was discharged.

"I've heard all the stories about my transplant from my family, but to actually see and hear what their family is going through is a special experience," Lydia said. "Donovan is me, I was once him, and it's incredible to know that hundreds of other kids have received this life-saving procedure at CHLA in the years between us."

By the day Donovan left the hospital, CHLA doctors had already performed three more pediatric liver transplants.

WELLNESS: Employees can create free Headspace account

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To create a free Headspace account, visit https://www.headspace.com/keckmedusc and use code CCUSC1Y.

Additionally, the Keck Wellness Committee is launching a six-week Heartfulness meditation group class series supported by the Heartfulness Institute at Keck Hospital of USC, USC Verdugo Hills Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital. Classes began Jan. 10 in the Coliseum Room at Keck Hospital of USC and continue on Tuesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Classes at USC-VHH and USC Norris will be coming soon.

A bounty of healthy lunch and fresh food options is available at the Keck Farmers Market, which is held every Tuesday at Hazard Park, on Norfolk Street across from Keck Hospital Gold Lobby. A portion of the market's proceeds will benefit the local neighborhood surrounding our campus through the Hazard Park Community Center.

Starting at the end of January, faculty and staff are encouraged to participate in the first Fitbit Wellness Challenge. The Fitbit is wearable technology that allows participants to track exercise, calorie intake, weight and sleep with real-time information and monitor progress toward goals.

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