

## Medical students don white coats



First-year medical students are all smiles after receiving their white coats for the first time on Aug. 4. The ceremony included a photo with Keck School Dean Rohit Varma, below left.



By Douglas Morino

One of medicine's hallowed traditions was celebrated on a warm August afternoon at the Health Sciences Campus, as the Keck School of Medicine of USC incoming class of medical students donned their white coats for the first time.

"Your white coat represents an extraordinary privilege and a solemn responsibility," said Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School. "This is your first step down a path that will bring you much joy and great satisfaction."

Physicians must not only commit to provide compassionate medical

treatment, but also work to form strong, positive bonds with those in their care, Varma said at the Aug. 4 ceremony.

"At the Keck School of Medicine, we have long recognized the importance of the bond between physicians and their patients," Varma added. "You have to continue to strive to be positive and optimistic with your patients. Your inner strength has no limits."

The white coat ceremony is held at the start of each academic year, symbolizing the students' first step on their journey in medicine. After receiving their white coats, each

See **WHITE COAT**, page 3



Photos by Ricardo Carrasco III

## Hospitals ranked among nation's best

By Mary Dacuma

For the ninth consecutive year, the hospitals of Keck Medicine of USC have been named among the best in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*, a distinction only 3 percent of the analyzed hospitals receive. The magazine's annual "Best Hospitals" rankings recognize hospitals in the United States that provide the best overall patient care as well as specialized treatment in areas like urology and orthopaedics.

Keck Medical Center of USC, which consists of Keck Hospital of USC and USC Norris Cancer Hospital, was ranked among the Best Hospitals in both metro Los Angeles (No. 5) and California (No. 10). The medical center has been highly ranked



since it was purchased by the university in 2009.

"Keck Medicine of USC is delighted to maintain our rankings among the best hospitals locally, regionally and nationally," said Thomas E. Jackiewicz, MPH, senior vice president and CEO of

Keck Medicine of USC. "Every member of our medical and support staff strives to provide world-class patient care each day, and we are honored to be recognized for these efforts."

The medical center also performed well in a number of specialty rankings, securing a Top 50 placement in five specialties. The USC Roski Eye Institute remained the institution's top performing service line for the 24th consecutive year (No. 11). The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center received its highest-ever ranking (No. 15). Keck Medical Center was again ranked among the Top 25 for Orthopedics (No. 24) and the Top 50 for Geriatrics (No. 27) and Urology (No. 29).

See **RANKING**, page 3

## USC-VHH thrives with new leadership

By Mary Dacuma

Four years ago, Keck Medicine of USC welcomed USC Verdugo Hills Hospital (USC-VHH), a long-standing fixture in the Glendale and La Cañada Flintridge community, to the medical enterprise. In December 2015, the hospital recruited Keith Hobbs, who held multiple leadership positions at Children's Hospital Los Angeles for more than 20 years, to serve as its new CEO.

Over the last year and a half the hospital has made incredible strides. Hobbs spoke with *HSC News* about USC-VHH's progress, as well as the hospital's future and continued growth.



Keith Hobbs

Ricardo Carrasco III

See **USC-VHH**, page 3

## D-Health Lab holds summer Innovation Series

By Leigh Bailey

Innovation in medicine, the role of groundbreaking technology and venture capital were the subjects of an engaging and well-attended conversation between Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC, and renowned angel investor David Lee, JD, MS, co-founder and managing partner of Refactor Capital, which describes itself as a \$50 million venture capital firm designed to "invest in founders solving fundamental human problems."

The discussion, held July 18 on the Health Sciences Campus, was the latest installment in the Innovation Series, sponsored by USC Digital Health (D-Health) Lab, a health care innovation lab established in collaboration with Keck Medicine of USC to address

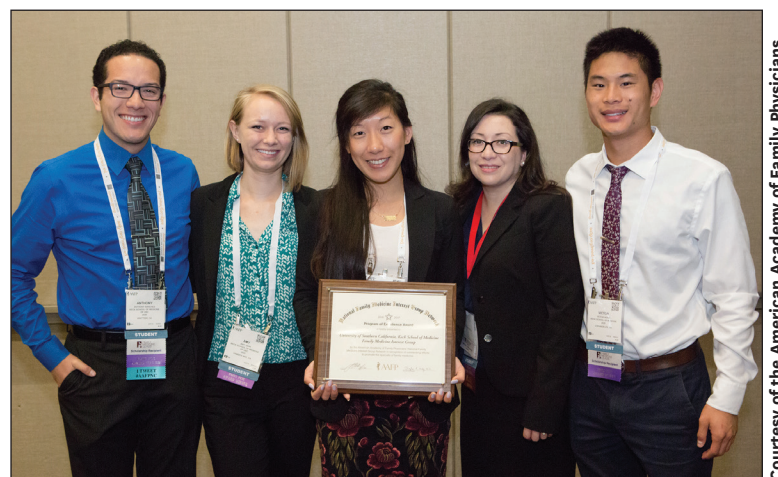
the challenges facing modern health care providers today.

"The purpose of the innovation series is to convene thought leaders at USC, Keck Medicine, and the greater L.A. community to discuss how we can drive the culture of innovation here, and better impact our communities," D-Health director Karthik Murali, PhD, explained to the audience.

Lee and Varma, he said, "are both very mission-driven, and both believe in the value of using technology for public good."

Lee, who was named one of the top technology investors by *Forbes* magazine, is considered by many to be a visionary in start-up investing circles. Prior to Refactor, he was the managing partner of SV Angel,

See **INNOVATION**, page 2



**NATIONAL RECOGNITION:** Medical students, from left, Anthony Sanchez, Amy Jahr, Serena Lui, Andrea Banuelos and Victor Wong, pose with the Award for Excellence given to the Keck School of Medicine of USC Family Medicine Interest Group at the 2017 American Academy of Family Physicians National Conference. **For the full story, see page 3.**

Courtesy of the American Academy of Family Physicians

# New procedure reduces stroke risk for carotid stents

By Lex Davis

Plaque buildup in the main artery to the brain presents a dilemma for surgeons. Surgically opening up the artery to clear the blockage is the most direct solution, but when the artery is unclamped, there is a small risk that debris can be released into the bloodstream and cause a stroke.

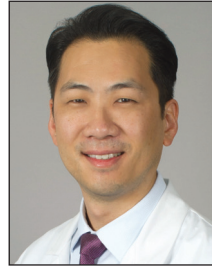
Inserting a stent to open up the artery is a minimally invasive alternative, but also can pose a risk of embolic stroke when the stent is inserted into the femoral artery and guided through the bloodstream to the neck.

Sung Wan Ham, MD, assistant professor of clinical surgery at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, has undergone special training to offer a new minimally invasive technique called transcrotid

artery revascularization (TCAR). The procedure reduces the risk of stroke with a device that reverses the flow of blood away from the brain and filters out plaque debris from the bloodstream.

“Carotid artery endarterectomy and conventional carotid stenting are both safe and effective ways to treat carotid artery occlusive disease,” Ham said. “But TCAR is a hybrid of both procedures that is minimally invasive and a potentially safer alternative for select patients.”

One of the device’s catheters is inserted into the



Sung Ham

carotid artery and a second goes into the femoral vein in the groin. Because the pressure in the artery is greater than that in the vein, the flow of blood temporarily reverses during the placement of the stent. Any debris is carried away from the brain and captured by the device’s filter. The 30-day risk of stroke is only 1.4 percent, compared to 4.1 percent for a traditional stenting procedure, Ham said, citing studies of this new procedure.

Surgeons must be trained and certified by the manufacturer in order to use the device, so the TCAR procedure is not widely available. Ham noted that by having another option available for treating carotid artery plaque, each patient could be matched with a safe procedure that best suits their individual needs.

## Holly Muir talks experience, plans for anesthesiology

By Mary Dacuma

Holly Muir, MD, has been leading the Department of Anesthesiology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC since January. She specializes in obstetric anesthesia and has published extensively on the management of childbirth pain. Muir previously spent 18 years at Duke University School of Medicine. She spoke with *HSC News* about her background and what her plans are for the department.

### How did you get into the field?

I have been in this field for more than 30 years, but when I finished my internship I thought I wanted to be a surgeon. Even still, it was very trendy back then to work in family medicine — then called general practice — so I spent a year working in the community. It was a small town, and I covered the emergency room shift and really got to know the anesthesiologists. I saw the skill set they had and the acute nature of their responses, and I always liked the essence of anesthesiology, which is pharmacology and physiology.

### What is something that might be a surprise to learn about this field?

Anesthesia is often viewed as a hospital-based profession, but we touch of a lot of areas. We can be facilitators of growth and development, and people may not be aware of the skill set required to succeed in this field. This is why one of my goals for the department is to increase our visibility within the enterprise.

### Do you have any hobbies or unusual interests that you'd like to share?

I am actively engaged in global health and have traveled to both Africa

and Haiti to work on global health missions. My biggest project was in Ghana. I was one of the key initiators for a nurse anesthetist training school with which I continue to work. My passion is extending into the global community, which does not necessarily mean I have to go across the ocean. I am interested in community affairs and how I can help the local community outside of my health center.

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### Is there something about yourself that you want people to know?

My major focus when I come to work on the clinical side is always the patient. I strongly advocate for patients getting best possible care, no matter what clinical arena I am working in. I was a bit of a radical in the 1970s, advocating for woman’s rights, which is why I went into obstetrics. I continue to be an advocate for women in medicine, to ensure they are treated fairly and that their needs are respected. In fact, I am a strong advocate for personal rights for anybody, which is why I love global health.

### What are your plans for the department?

I want to develop a program for the Department of Anesthesiology to foster academic and professional growth for the faculty. Moreover, I would like to strengthen our department’s relationships with both the health center and the university.



Holly Muir

Ricardo Carrasco III

## INNOVATION: Topics included investment strategy, entrepreneurs in public health

Continued from page 1

where he invested in companies like Airbnb, Oscar Health, Dropbox and Pinterest.

Varma is one of the highest-funded ophthalmologists by the National Institutes of Health in the world and has earned funding for his research for more than two decades. Currently, in addition to serving as dean of the Keck School, Varma is pursuing new imaging technology that could improve early diagnosis of optic nerve damage in people with glaucoma.

Varma opened the conversation by asking Lee about his investment strategy.

Lee said that the founder of the company was one of the most important factors to consider. “What is it about them that’s unique?” he explained. “One test I use is, I’m 48 and I’m looking at someone who is 22 and I’ll ask myself, would I work for this person? Would I follow this person?”

Another factor was how the core idea of the company translates, Lee added. A successful start-up “has to be

able to take something very complex and not only explain it but get you excited about it,” he said.

Varma spoke about his career-long interest in community and public health, noting that it isn’t an area that attracts a lot of technological investment. “What can one do to see more of this sort of entrepreneurial work in that public health space?” he asked Lee.

“The younger generation today, for whatever reason, really thinks about the greater good,” Lee responded. “I think for someone who is 24 or 25, with a background in public health, there’s someone out there who is unstoppable, who will just say, ‘I don’t have a choice but to do this. This is all I think about and failure is not an option.’”

Cultivating and nurturing that kind of mindset is an integral part of the Keck School education, Varma explained.

“We’re working to create a culture of innovation at Keck Medicine and the Keck School, in health and in other areas as well,” Varma said.



David Lee, left, and Rohit Varma speak during the July 18 Innovation Series.

Nick Gingold

## Calendar of Events

### Friday, Aug. 11

**Noon.** Southern California Research Center for ALPD and Cirrhosis Seminar. “Hemodynamic Changes and Hepatic Remodeling,” Yasuko Iwakiri, PhD, Yale University School of Medicine. McKibben Lecture Hall. Info: Gencie Turner, PhD, (323) 442-3109, Gencie.Turner@med.usc.edu

**Noon.** Department of Medicine Grand Rounds. Alexander Yang, MD. LAC+USC Inpatient Tower Conference Room B. Info: Diane Reed, (323) 409-6625, mededu@med.usc.edu

### Tuesday, Aug. 15

**4 p.m.-7 p.m.** USC Women in Management. “Unwind with WIM again; another WIM Mixer at Edmondson Lounge.” Edmondson

Lounge. Info and RSVP: Ginger Mayerson, (323) 384-6049, mayerson@usc.edu, <http://uscwim.org/calendar.asp>. Free event, RSVP requested in case of venue change.

### Friday, Aug. 18

**Noon.** Department of Medicine Grand Rounds. Pejman Larger, MD. LAC+USC Inpatient Tower Conference Room B. Info: Diane Reed, (323) 409-6625, mededu@med.usc.edu

### Tuesday, Aug. 22

**9 a.m.-4 p.m.** Department of Global Medicine. “Global Citizenship Roundtable,” Robert Kezaala, MD, MPH, UNICEF. Aresty Auditorium. Info: Ryan Seuffert, (323) 865-1649, rseuffert@usc.edu

**11 a.m.** USC Stem Cell Seminar. “Modeling Human Brain Development and Disease at Single-Cell Resolution with Brain Organoids,” Giorgia Quadrato, PhD, Harvard University. Eli and Edythe Broad CIRM Center Auditorium. Info: Cristy Lytal, lytal@med.usc.edu, <http://bit.ly/2u5FFv>

### Wednesday, Aug. 23

**Noon.** Department of Medicine Grand Rounds. “Second Victim,” Eric Wei, MD. LAC+USC Inpatient Tower Conference Room B. Info: Diane Reed, (323) 409-6625, mededu@med.usc.edu

### Thursday, Aug. 24

**12:30 p.m.** SC CTSI and the Keck School of Medicine of USC Workshop. “Lunch &

Learn Biostatistics Workshop: Formulating a Sound Research Question and Study Hypotheses: Hypothesis Testing.” Harkness Auditorium. Info and RSVP: Aileen Dinkjian, (323) 442-1087, aileen.dinkjian@med.usc.edu

**1 p.m.** Center for Work and Family Life Workshop. “How to Manage Gossip and Build Civility in the Workplace.” Keck Hospital Silver Room 34. Info: Center for Work and Family Life, (213) 821-0800

### Friday, Aug. 25

**Noon.** Department of Medicine Grand Rounds. Golnaz Vahdani, MD. LAC+USC Inpatient Tower Conference Room B. Info: Diane Reed, (323) 409-6625, mededu@med.usc.edu

**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](http://hscnews.usc.edu/calendar-of-events). Submit items at [tinyurl.com/calendar-hsc](http://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.

# Student group recognized nationally in family medicine

By Claire Norman

The Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG) at the Keck School of Medicine of USC received a Program of Excellence Award from the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), based on the group's commitment to engaging students interested in pursuing family medicine. One of 10 recipients based on overall excellence, the program was honored in July at the AAFP's national conference.

Jo Marie Reilly, MD, is the faculty adviser for the FMIG and has been integral to seeing the program grow.

"The FMIG leadership team has done a fabulous job in promoting the breadth, depth and diversity of family medicine at the Keck School," said Reilly, professor of clinical family medicine (educational scholar).

"Their passion and dedication to learn and share family medicine with the community is exemplary."



From left are Andrea Banuelos, Serena Lui, Victor Wong, Anthony Sanchez, Amy Jahr, Ruth Barber-Goodson, Jo Marie Reilly and Warren Yamashita, at the American Academy of Family Physicians National Conference in July.

Students participate in diverse health care experiences with patients of all ages, getting involved in activities that include providing comfort to high-risk infants in the Cuddle Club, organizing community health fairs, volunteering in an interprofessional program in senior

housing complexes, and leading a fitness initiative called Ready, Set, Fit.

Third-year medical student and FMIG Co-President Serena Lui traveled to the conference to accept the award with some of her classmates.

"Our dedication motivated us

to organize two yearlong pediatric community service programs, six lunch talks and dinners, two community health fair booths, a skills workshops and many mentorship opportunities over the past year," Lui said. "The size and strength of our team allowed us to dive deep into the many facets of family medicine and explore our passions."

In a press release announcing the awards, the AAFP highlighted the importance of encouraging more medical students to choose a career in primary care.

"It is critical we continue to garner interest and attract students to the specialty of family medicine," said Cliff Knight, MD, senior vice president for education at the AAFP. "The physician shortage in primary care continues, and programs such as FMIG are key to exposing students to real-world experiences that will help them dig deeper into — and ultimately choose — family medicine."

Courtesy Jo Marie Reilly



First-year medical students applaud, above, after reciting the Hippocratic Oath, below right, during the Aug. 4 ceremony. The Class of 2021 is composed of 186 students from 56 universities.



Photos by Ricardo Carrasco III

## WHITE COAT: Family, friends attend milestone event to support students

Continued from page 1

student's name was read aloud as they walked across the stage to shake Varma's hand. Friends and family members applauded as the names were read, waving programs to fan away the midsummer heat.

A physician's greatest teachers are often their patients, said keynote speaker Stephanie Zia, MD, clinical assistant professor of medicine (clinician educator) and assistant dean for career advising.

"Get to know the patient behind the diagnosis," said Zia, also a Keck School graduate. "Advocate on their behalf. My hope for each of you is to care for your patients as you would a loved one."

The ceremony concluded with students reciting the Hippocratic Oath, a rite of passage binding physicians to the highest ethical and professional standards.

"This ceremony symbolizes the start of one of the greatest journeys life has to offer," said

Henri Ford, MD, MHA, vice dean for medical education and professor of surgery at the Keck School. "Few other professions can boast such a significant impact on the lives of others."

Students come to the Keck School from across the U.S. and world. The Class of 2021 is composed of 186 first-year medical students from 56 universities. These students were born in 23 countries outside the U.S., speaking 26 different languages.

"I was attracted to the Keck School because of the opportunity to interact with patients from the first step and work with exceptional faculty members," said Priya Bhattacharjee, a first-year medical student and Bay Area native who earned her bachelor's degree in bioengineering from the University of California, Berkeley. "At the end of the day, it's all about the Keck School's commitment to the patient experience."

## RANKING: Hospitals among top 3 percent in nation to be ranked

Continued from page 1

"We see firsthand that patient care is strengthened by the cutting-edge research of our renowned physician-scientists at Keck, who are focused on continually improving the lives of others," said Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine.

For the 2017-18 rankings, *U.S. News* evaluated more than 4,500 medical centers nationwide in 25 specialties, procedures and conditions. In the 16 specialty areas, only 146 hospitals (just over 3 percent) were ranked in at least one specialty. In rankings by state and metro area, *U.S. News* recognized hospitals as high performing across multiple areas of care. The methodologies include risk-adjusted survival and readmission rates, volume, patient experience, patient safety, quality of nursing care and other care-related indicators. Best Hospital



rankings are produced by *U.S. News* with RTI International, a top research firm based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

The rankings are available at <http://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals> and will appear in the *U.S. News Best Hospitals 2018* guidebook, available on newsstands in late August.

## USC-VHH: Changes include expanding specialty care

Continued from page 1

When you arrived at USC-VHH, what were some of the challenges you identified?

Admittedly, we had not earned the trust of our community. I do not think the average person in the area would immediately associate USC Verdugo Hills Hospital with world-class care or clinical expertise. I understood that we would have to raise our standards as both a hospital and a community partner.

How would you describe the relationship between Keck Medicine and USC-VHH?

Our affiliation gives USC-VHH patients better access to specialized care. We have expanded our spectrum of specialty services, which includes orthopaedic, spine and urologic surgery. We offer the expertise of an academic medical center without ever having to leave the community. For patients who may require even more complex care, we serve as the gateway to the Keck Medicine of USC enterprise.

The Keck Medicine enterprise also provides us the resources necessary for expansion and improvement. Independent hospitals need the strength of a larger health system. Keck Medicine has made it possible for us to offer state-of-the-art technology and upgrade our facilities.

What are some of the changes implemented at the hospital over the last year?

Our quality and safety ratings have increased. We've raised our Transitional Care Unit rating from three- to five-out-of-five stars. We've seen significant improvements in our patient satisfac-

tion surveys in our Emergency Department, which is responsible for 65 percent of our inpatient admissions, all the while experiencing steady growth in our volumes. Most recently, we instituted our hospitalist program to provide patients with a physician around the clock, which will result in better patient care, shorter length of stay and improved patient satisfaction.

We have hired more than 40 new nurses in just this year alone, thanks in no small part to a new contract with expanded benefits and competitive wages. Employee satisfaction continues to rise, with more than 95 percent of our employees agreeing or strongly agreeing that USC-VHH is a great place to work. Our Emergency Department also was the team recipient of the Choi Family Award for Excellence in Patient-Centered Care.

Our technology investments include the da Vinci Surgical System surgical robot, a high-intensity frequency ultrasound device and a Xenex disinfection robot for superbug infections, allowing us to expand our services and provide cutting-edge care.

What other changes are on the horizon?

We will open the doors of our neonatal intensive care unit by the end of the year and start our refresh of the labor and delivery department. We are expanding our surgical services at the hospital, providing the community with even more specialty care in their own backyard. And we soon will be adding a series of Women's Health seminars to our roster of community events.

## HSC Newsmakers

A roundup of news items related to Keck Medicine of USC, which may include philanthropic donations, research grants, publication in academic journals and mentions in the news media:



Ricardo Carrasco III

From left, Zea Borok, John H. Reith, Rohit Varma, Michael Gurevitch and Richard H. Zeiss are seen during a meeting with the Hastings Foundation board of directors, July 17 on the Health Sciences Campus.

## Hastings Foundation board of directors meet

THE HASTINGS FOUNDATION'S BOARD of directors recently met on the Health Sciences Campus, joined by Rohit Varma, MD, MPH, dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC; Thomas Buchanan, MD, vice dean for research at the Keck School; and Zea Borok, MD, professor of medicine, Ralph Edgington Chair in Medicine, chief of the division of pulmonary, critical care and sleep medicine at the Keck School and inaugural director of the Hastings Center for Pulmonary Research. The Hastings Foundation is a longstanding supporter of pulmonary research at the Keck School, donating more than \$33 million, including a recent \$7.5 million gift to launch the Hastings Center for Pulmonary Research.

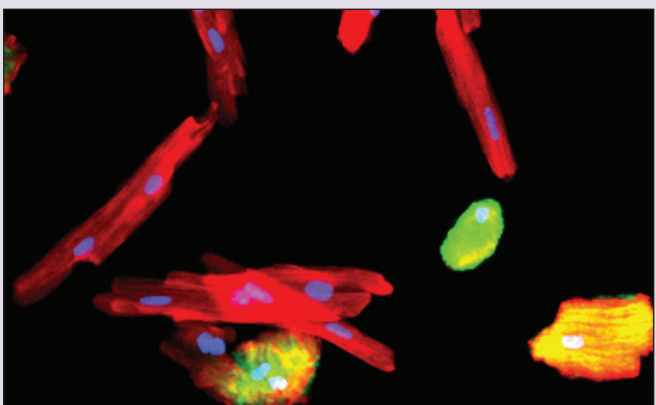
## Chief quality and patient safety officer appointed

SANTHI IYER KUMAR, MD, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, has been appointed chief quality and patient safety officer of Keck Medical Center of USC. Reporting to Chief Medical Officer Stephanie Hall, MD, Kumar will work in close partnership with the Associate Administrator of Quality and Outcomes Linda Barraza, RN, to ensure the delivery of high-quality, effective, safe and patient-centered care across Keck Medical Center USC. Additionally, Kumar will collaborate with leadership and staff throughout the organization to achieve outstanding performance on key, nationally standardized metrics of quality and safety. — Douglas Morino



Santhi I. Kumar

Ricardo Carrasco III



Image/Michaela Patterson

Heart muscle cells (red) with nuclei (blue). On the far right is a regenerative cell, which only has one nucleus, called a mononuclear diploid cardiomyocyte.

## Discovery uncovers new ways to refresh the heart

SOME PEOPLE ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS at recovering from a wounded heart, according to a new study published Aug. 7 in *Nature Genetics*. In the study, first author Michaela Patterson, PhD, a postdoctoral scholar – fellowship trainee at the Keck School of Medicine of USC who works in the laboratory of Henry Sucof, PhD, senior author and professor of stem cell biology and regenerative medicine, and her colleagues focused on a regenerative type of heart muscle cell called a mononuclear diploid cardiomyocyte (MNDCM), commonly found in zebrafish and newborn mammals. Adult mammals have few MNDCMs and a limited capacity for regeneration after an injury such as a heart attack. The researchers then identified a key gene underlying this variation: *Tnni3k*. By blocking this gene in mice, the researchers produced higher percentages of MNDCMs and enhanced heart regeneration. In contrast, activating this gene in zebrafish decreased MNDCMs and impaired heart regeneration. — Cristy Lytal

# From high school to stem cell lab

By Cristy Lytal

Even though Richard Lopez is still in high school, he can already tell you a thing or two about the ureteric bud, the metanephric mesenchyme and the developing kidney. More impressively, he was familiar with these terms before starting his summer internship in the lab of Andy McMahon, PhD, kidney researcher, W.M. Keck Provost Professor of Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine and Biological Sciences at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, and director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC.

"I knew I was going to come here," he said. "So from December on, I was just reading papers that were written by Dr. McMahon's lab."

Lopez undertook this intense preparation as part of the Science Research Program at his boarding school, Choate Rosemary Hall in Connecticut.

Lopez didn't start his high school career at Choate. Growing up in Lennox, a neighborhood near the Los



Cristy Lytal

Richard Lopez, a student at Choate Rosemary Hall in Connecticut, spent his summer internship in the lab of Andy McMahon.

Angeles International Airport, he attended the local public schools until his sophomore year in high school. At that point, his exceptional scores on the California Standardized Test (CST) attracted the attention of the Young Eisner Scholar program, which empowers underserved students to fulfill their potential. As a Young Eisner Scholar, he earned both admission and a full scholarship to Choate.

In the McMahon Lab, Lopez has learned about the molecular signals that drive the branching development of the kidney

and practiced a wide range of laboratory techniques.

To get to the lab every day, Lopez rides his bicycle for the 32-mile round trip from his home in Lennox to USC's Health Sciences Campus. He's run the Los Angeles Marathon once and the San Francisco Marathon twice. In November, he's planning to celebrate his 18th birthday with his first Ironman Triathlon — as a way to give back.

"I was very lucky," he said. "So I want to raise money for the scholarships that have helped me out along the way."

## Five questions with Annette Sy

By Douglas Morino

Annette Sy, DNP, RN, chief nursing officer, Keck Medical Center of USC, began her career at a small community hospital in rural Illinois, back when nurses wore white uniforms and glass IV bottles stood next to patient beds.

"I've seen a lot of changes," Sy said. "I've enjoyed seeing the path nurses are on."

Sy, who spent her childhood on a dairy farm in Iowa, knew she wanted to become a nurse in high school. Sy's grandfather battled emphysema, passing away a day after her high school graduation.

"Caring for him and watching him struggle had a big impact on me," she said. "I decided I wanted to learn the science behind his disease and be in a profession where I could care for others."

Today, Sy is responsible for all acute care nursing across Keck Medical Center.

**What's your leadership philosophy?**

My philosophy is to take care of our staff so they can care for our patients. I've always had an open-door policy. But you can't lead by staying in your office. I want each of our 1,300 nurses to know who I am and be comfortable approaching me. I want our nurses to share their ideas and concerns with me. I want them to know that I am here to advocate for them.

**What book is on your nightstand?**

*Patients Come Second* by Britt Berrett and Paul Spiegelman. It's a great look at how we need to take care of our employees so that they can care for our patients. I need to understand what our nurses need so they can provide exceptional care for our patients.

**What's your favorite hobby?**

Hiking and camping. My son, Jonathan, is an Eagle Scout and I've volunteered with the Boy

Scouts of America for many years. We've enjoyed our time with the scouts. We've taken trips hiking in Joshua Tree and river rafting in Yosemite.

**What personal attributes do you believe have led to your professional success?**

Hard work and dedication. Caring for people and treating coworkers like you want to be treated.

**What's the toughest part of your job?**

What keeps me awake at night and the toughest part of my job is making sure we have enough experienced nurses to



Annette Sy

Ricardo Carrasco III

care for our very ill patients. Because of the high acuity of our patients, we need the best of the very best nursing team members at their bedside.

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