Genetics Center researchers locate gene linked with fatal disease

The discovery of the location of a gene that causes a rare but fatal disease may help researchers to develop a method to treat or prevent the disorder. Researchers at BUSM's Center for Human Genetics have located the site of the defect—a tiny deletion of an X chromosome—which results in X-linked lymphoproliferative disease (XLP), a disease carried by females that affects males. Most males born with this genetic defect die during childhood of infectious mononucleosis caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). Those who live to adulthood often die from lymphoma or other immune system diseases.

Previously, BUSM researchers had located the approximate site on the X chromosome of the defective gene. Most recently, they examined blood samples from 14 affected families, using samples from males affected with the chromosome at the site of the defective gene in those who had the disease or were carriers. The Center for Human Genetics researchers who discovered the site of the defect included Herman E. Wyandt, Ph.D., an associate professor of pathology and director of the cytogenetics lab; James C. Skare, M.P.H., Ph.D., an assistant professor of pediatrics and microbiology and director of the molecular genetics lab; and Aubrey Milunsky, M.D., D.Sc, a professor of pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology and pathology, and director of the Center for Human Genetics.

"The confirmation of the site of this defect is an historic observation," said Milunsky. "It will open new avenues for carrier detection, prenatal diagnosis and, ultimately, treatment or prevention of the disease."

This finding, published in a recent issue of the American Journal of Medical Genetics, also may help scientists better understand how lymphomas are formed and what relationship they have with EBV. BUSM researchers, with support from the National Institutes of Health, are continuing this work, which is aimed ultimately at cloning and sequencing the XLP gene and determining its products.

International Symposium on Cellular Endocrinology held in honor of Bucher

The recent Fifth International Symposium on Cellular Endocrinology was held in honor of Nancy L. Bucher, M.D., a BUSM research professor of pathology, and Van Rensselaer Potter, Ph.D., a professor of oncology at the University of Wisconsin. Entitled "Molecular Cell Biology of Liver Growth and Function," the symposium was hosted by the W. Alton Jones Cell Science Center in Lake Placid, N.Y., and honored Bucher and Potter for their outstanding contributions in the field of liver research. Currently, Bucher is studying mechanisms for physiological control of tissue growth in liver, liver regeneration and the role of hormones and growth factors in the regulation of hepatocyte growth and function.

Also participating in the symposium was Stephen R. Farmer, Ph.D., a BUSM associate professor of biochemistry, who presented "Regulation of Hepatic Gene Expression by Cell-Extracellular Matrix Interactions."

Acker is appointed chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

David Acker, M.D., a Harvard Community Health Plan physician, recently was appointed chairman of the School's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Acker also will serve as chairman of gynecology at the University Hospital and chief of ob-gyn at Boston City Hospital. From 1979 to 1984, Acker was director of maternal-fetal medicine (obstetrics) at BCH under former department chief Kenneth C. Edelin, M.D., an associate dean for students and minority affairs.

Shapiro named president-elect of American College of Radiology

Jerome H. Shapiro, chairman of the radiology department, recently was named president-elect of the American College of
Radiology (ACR) for 1990-91. The announcement was made during the ACR annual meeting held in Seattle, Wash. Shapiro, who is also the director of the Department of Radiology at the University Hospital and Boston City Hospital, has held many appointments within the ACR, including vice president, member of the Board of Chancellors, councillor, and representative to the Council of Medical Specialty Societies 1980-88.

SPH study finds health-care law not covering the uninsured

A recent SPH study reports that 84 percent of the money stipulated in funding arrangements under the Commonwealth's new universal health-care law is for services for hospital patients who are already insured rather than for improving the access to health care for the uninsured.

In addition, according to SPH's Second Monitoring Report on the law, known as Chapter 23 or the "Health Care for All" legislation, the projected amount of money that will be provided for access will be less than two-thirds of what was originally promised.

According to Alan Sager, Ph.D., an associate professor of public health at SPH and principal author of the report, cuts in funding could seriously harm access for many of the uninsured. Further, such cuts would be a blow to hospitals and health centers that have been trying to serve the uninsured. Sager says important questions, such as how to keep all hospitals operating and providing care to all citizens in need, must be addressed now.

Memory aids being developed at VMAC unit to help amnesics

Memory aids that may help some amnesics remember better are now being studied as part of a $1.5-million grant from the National Institutes of Health awarded to BUSM and the new Memory Disorders Research Center at the Boston Veterans Administration Medical Center. Researchers are attempting to use computer programs tailored to an individual's memory loss and daily routine to produce behavioral changes in the amnesic.

"Although there is no known therapy to improve memory, we hope that by using computers programmed to their specific needs, amnesics will be able to live more productive lives without the constant attention of family and friends," says Laird Cermak, M.D., Ph.D., a professor of neurology at BUSM and director of the Center.

To aid an amnesic, a computer can be programmed to describe a series of tasks that the patient wants to perform on a particular day. Once sufficient time has passed, the computer will ask if the task has been completed. Once the patient answers "yes" by touching a computer key, the program will go on to the next task. Without the interaction of asking if the task was performed, the amnesic might perform the task over and over again, forgetting that he had already done it.

The Memory Disorders Research Center is the only center in the country devoted solely to amnesics whose memory loss is not progressive and is not accompanied by other disorders. The Center is funded through a grant from the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke.

BUSM students hit hard by cuts in state scholarship funds

BUSM students joined other medical and health-profession students for Student Lobby Day on September 27 at the Massachusetts State House to urge lawmakers to restore the scholarships promised under the health professional student contract program.

The elimination of the state scholarship program is having an enormous impact on the ability of 27 BUSM students to finance their medical school education and may influence their future career choices. The students—who are financially needy Massachusetts residents—have had to find alternative and more expensive funding for their medical school tuition. To meet their financial obligations, students may enter higher-paying specialties rather than enter primary care or other needed specialties that have lower salaries.

The scholarship cuts also will affect the people of Massachusetts living in underserved areas, who will lose an important program designed to improve their medical service. Students "pay back" the scholarships by serving in underserved areas or in under-represented specialties in the state for half the time they received scholarships. Without the scholarships, students will not be fulfilling these public-health needs throughout the state.

NIH grant awarded

Robert W. Simms, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and director of the Fibromyalgia Unit at BUMC's Arthritis Center, recently was awarded a three-year multipurpose Arthritis Center Developmental and Feasibility Study grant from the National Institutes of Health. Simms' study is entitled "Evaluation of Muscle Metabolism in Fibromyalgia Syndrome." The $50,000-per-year grant will support collaborative efforts between the Arthritis Section at BUMC, the Neuromuscular Research Center at the University's Charles River Campus and the NMR unit at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Prothrow-Stith joins Community Care; resumes BUSM faculty position

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D., who has resumed her BUSM faculty position as a full-time assistant professor of medicine, has accepted a position as vice president, medical director of Community Care Systems, Inc. (CCS). CCS operates a network of psychiatric, diagnostic and treatment facilities for acute psychiatric disorders, alcohol and drug abuse and eating disorders. The facilities also offer specialized medical/psychological programs for women, abused children and the elderly.

Prothrow-Stith, who is joining CCS after serving two years as Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner, will be in charge of the development of all clinical and patient-care services. She also will be responsible for managing and strengthening CCS' teaching and psychiatric training affiliations with BUSM, the
AID FOR CANCER RESEARCH PRESENTS EQUIPMENT—
Se Yung Oh, Ph.D., right, an associate professor of microbiology, recently received a centrifuge donated by Aid for Cancer Research. Pictured with Oh are, from left to right, Debra Seltzer and Carol Ann Epstein, ACR co-presentation chairwomen, and Paul H. Black, M.D., chairman of the microbiology department. (Photo by Lucy Milne, Educational Media Support Center)

University of Miami, the University of Vermont and the University of Madrid.

Executive Nursing Management Program begins this fall at SPH
SPH is offering a ten-week course this fall to prepare registered nurses to become directors of nursing in long-term care facilities. Participants will receive training in all aspects of long-term care delivery, including human-resource management, new approaches to patient care and policy negotiation.

According to Gail Douglas, R.N., M.P.H., one of the program’s organizers and instructors, a nursing director of a long-term care facility faces a very different set of challenges than her counterpart in acute care. Douglas says that a long-term care nursing director must not only satisfy patients’ medical demands, but must also understand and negotiate all aspects of long-term care delivery, including legislation, reimbursement, rate setting and human-resource management.

ACS awards grant to SPH faculty member
The American Cancer Society recently awarded a $203,000 research grant to Marianne N. Prout, M.D., M.P.H., an associate professor of public health (epidemiology and biostatistics) and socio-medical sciences and community medicine, to support her research on cancer screening by physicians. As part of her research, Prout will examine whether doctors who are on call and must respond to medical emergencies are less likely to perform procedures for detecting cancer. Prout also will distribute cards that patients with less education and income can give to their doctors to request cancer screening. In addition, Prout’s research will examine patterns of screening for oral cancer.

Book by Annas cites power of patients’ rights in decision-making
"The recognition of human rights is the only force powerful enough to prevent medicine from becoming an impersonal and dehumanizing industry," writes George Annas, J.D., M.P.H., a professor of health law, in the completely revised and updated second edition of "The Rights of Patients." In his book, Annas points out that we live in an age in which economics and technology often dictate medical choices.

Many patients aren’t aware of their rights, and many physicians and health-care facilities fail to recognize them, according to Annas, an internationally recognized expert on health law and medical ethics. In "The Rights of Patients," Annas describes how to make the health-care system respond to patients’ concerns, how to discover the medical treatment options available to patients, when and how to get a second medical opinion, and how to gain access to medical records. He also outlines a model patient bill of rights listing 25 specific rights that should be accorded to patients, and proposes that each state adopt this bill of rights by statute.

"The Rights of Patients" is published by Southern Illinois University Press and is part of the American Civil Liberties Union Handbook series.

Faculty member serves as editor-in-chief for new journal
Steven H. Zeisel, M.D., Ph.D., an associate professor of pathology and an assistant professor of pediatrics, is serving as editor-in-chief for a new monthly publication, The Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry. Zeisel, like several members of his Board of Editors, is a fellow of the American College of Nutrition.

The journal, which succeeds Nutrition Reports International, will focus primarily on investigations about nutrients that overlap with areas claimed by biochemistry, molecular biology, neurochemistry, toxicology or pharmacology. The journal will seek submissions from investigators whose work focuses on experimental nutrition at the animal or human level or on work in basic biochemical and molecular biology with nutritional orientation. The first issue is scheduled for January 1990.

Book chronicles changes in childbirth in America from colonial times
Childbirth in America has undergone a dramatic transformation from a natural event in the colonial days to the technological event it has become. In "Lying In: A History of Childbirth in America," Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz, Ph.D., a research professor of public health at SPH, demonstrate how changes in gender roles and cultural values interacted with the medical profession as it emerged to transform the birth process.

"Lying In," published in September 1989 by Yale University Press, has been expanded and updated since its first printing in 1977. Arguing that childbirth is too "medicalized," the authors write that most women agree with the medical view that the route to a child’s perfection lies in the use of more technology in
pregnancy and birth. They note that at the same time that technology is being overused for low-risk pregnancies, many poor women are not receiving even the most basic care. They conclude their book with strong arguments for using less technology during birth and for making home birth available as an alternative.

Theran joins MSPCA; LASC gets new director
Peter Theran, V.M.D., director of the BUMC Laboratory Animal Science Center since 1966, has joined the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals as vice president of health and hospitals. Jerome A. Goldsboro, D.V.M., assistant director of Laboratory Animal Care at the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Illinois, has been appointed as the new head of the Laboratory Animal Science Center.

Faculty member receives alumni award
George E. Garcia ’61, an assistant clinical professor of ophthalmology, recently was presented with a Boston University Alumni Award. The Boston University General Alumni Association annually honors a select group of distinguished alumni whose accomplishments bring credit to themselves, their communities, their professions and Boston University. Garcia, who is also president-elect of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, was honored for his distinguished service to his profession. The award was presented at a ceremony held at the George Sherman Union at the Charles River Campus.

Briefly noted
A number of faculty members recently participated in the American College of Surgeons Clinical Congress held in Atlanta, Ga. They included Robert J. Krane, M.D., a professor and chairman of the urology department, Richard J. Shemin, M.D., a professor and chairman of the cardiothoracic surgery department, and Barry M. Manuel, M.D., a clinical professor of surgery. Manuel also recently presented grand rounds at the Brigham & Women’s Hospital on professional liability—contemporary solutions....The Department of Continuing Medical Education is offering the following courses during November: Pediatric Emergencies: Trauma/Ingestion/Infection, November 2-4, Hynes Convention Center, Boston, Mass.; Head and Spinal Cord Injury, November 16-17, Keefe Auditorium, BUMC; New Applications of Lasers in Medicine and Surgery: A Multi-disciplinary Course, November 18, BUMC. For more information contact the Department of Continuing Medical Education at 638-4605 (x4605).