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Boston University
BUSM establishes Advanced Center for Parkinson’s Disease Research

The School of Medicine has been awarded a $500,000 five-year grant from the American Parkinson’s Disease Association (APDA) to establish an Advanced Center for Parkinson’s Disease Research. The new center, which also will include a reference and information service, will be headed by Robert Feldman, MD, the head of the Department of Neurology at the School and the chief of neurology at BUMC Hospital.

The announcement of the funding was made at a private viewing of the Boston Museum of Science’s “Decade of the Brain” exhibit on Nov. 7, which was attended by over 500 guests. During the ceremony, Feldman was honored with a plaque from the APDA for his lifelong efforts to find a cause and a cure for the debilitating disease.

Parkinson’s disease is a chronic, progressive, neurological disorder affecting approximately 1.5 million Americans. It is caused by an insufficiency of the neurotransmitter dopamine, and produces symptoms ranging from tremors and stiffness to slurred speech and difficulties in balancing.

Feldman’s work has focused on conducting clinical trials of new medications to control the disease’s symptoms, seeking new ways to help patients maintain adequate nutrition, and testing surgical procedures aimed at controlling tremors.

Study uses x-ray crystallography to identify unique changes in a protein

In an investigation published in the journal Science, a group of researchers at the School of Medicine and at the University of Cincinnati have used x-ray crystallography to identify, for the first time, a unique, calcium-induced conformational change in annexin-V. Annexins are a family of proteins that have been shown to mediate important cell membrane-related processes, such as secretion, signaling and calcium channel activity. All annexins bind to phospholipid membranes in the presence of calcium.

In this particular annexin structure, one of the protein’s four domains, or stretches of amino acid sequence, has been shown to undergo a dramatic calcium-induced change in shape that is believed to help the protein interact with the membrane. Scientists do not yet know the precise details of how the shape change influences the membrane binding, but they suspect that the change is important in controlling the physiological function of the cell.

Barbara Seaton, PhD, an associate professor of physiology at BUSM and an author of the study, said that scientists do not yet know how annexin affects the properties of cell membranes; ongoing investigations in her laboratory are attempting to resolve this issue.

Americans still consume high levels of fat, despite warnings to the contrary

In spite of the wealth of scientific evidence linking high fat diets to an array of diseases, Americans continue to consume high levels of fat, according to a series of investigations conducted by researchers at the Boston University Framingham Study. The findings were presented at the Second International Conference on Nutrition and Health in Leuven, Belgium, this fall.

In this analysis, the researchers, led by Barbara Millen Posner, DrPH, RD, an associate professor of socio-medical sciences and community medicine and public health, found that total fat consumption for men and women has remained at a fairly stable 38 percent of total calories since the mid-1950s. Moreover, the study found that, among males, saturated fat intake is actually rising, from 16.4 percent of caloric intake within the period 1957 to 1960, to 17 percent during 1984 to 1988. Researchers also noted, however, that cholesterol intakes dropped markedly, from 704 to 376 milligrams per day in men, and from 493 to 259 milligrams per day in women.

According to Posner, these studies suggest that while Americans are able to adopt simple dietary changes, such as avoiding...
Boston University opens new Center for Advanced Biomedical Research

Boston University's new Center for Advanced Biomedical Research (CABR) was officially opened on Oct. 14 with a two-ribbon cutting ceremony and a celebratory luncheon. The opening marks the birth of BioSquare, the $350-million biomedical/biotechnology complex being developed by the University and BUMC Hospital. When complete, BioSquare will be the largest and most comprehensive health care and biotechnology development in Boston.

Following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, led by Dean Aram V. Chobanian, some 300 guests of the University—including leaders of the Medical Center, University and community—gathered in a tent behind the CABR for lunch and the remainder of the opening ceremony. Speakers included Thomas Menino, mayor of Boston, Judith Vaitukaitis, MD, a BUSM graduate and a former faculty member who is now director of the National Center for Research Resources at the National Institutes of Health, Boston University President John Silber, BUMC Hospital President J. Scott Abercrombie Jr., MD, and Spencer Frankl, DDS, dean of the Goldman School of Graduate Dentistry.

The CABR has nine floors, 180,000 square feet of laboratory and office space, and state-of-the-art equipment to support leading-edge research. Some of the research to be conducted at the CABR includes studies on the underlying causes of heart attack, heart failure and stroke; the causes and treatment of high blood pressure; the causes of sexual dysfunction and new treatments for the conditions; the treatment of prostate and kidney cancer, and oral cavity diseases and their prevention.

These studies “will undoubtedly have major clinical applications in the future,” said Chobanian. “Mankind should be well-served by the efforts of our scientists.”

Vaitukaitis called the construction of the CABR the “logical next step in the quest to conquer disease. ... This new center is bringing medical, social and economic benefits not only to the citizens of Boston, but to all Americans,” she said.

Menino said that BioSquare “represents economic hope for Boston, because it will generate jobs for Boston residents and attract vital new business.” The full development of BioSquare will provide Boston with 2,000 construction jobs and 2,000 permanent jobs, he said. “I fully recognize that attracting employment in biotech research centers and high tech companies is a path that Boston must follow to secure its future,” he added.

Silber expressed the hope and vision behind BioSquare when he said, “BioSquare reflects our commitment not only to extending the frontiers of knowledge, but to working with industry in order to bring new products based on this knowledge to the marketplace and into our daily lives.”

School of Medicine mourns loss of two distinguished faculty members

Two former members of the School of Medicine faculty died recently. Ralph Reid Notman, MD, a former professor of psychiatry, died on Oct. 25, at the age of 74; and John W. Strieder, MD, a former professor of thoracic surgery, also died on Oct. 25, at the age of 92.

For many years, Notman was the director of consultation and education at Solomon Carter Fuller Mental Health Center in Boston and on the faculties of Harvard Medical School and Boston University School of Medicine. A researcher in social and community psychiatry, Notman trained in psychiatry at the Montreal Neurological Institute and in psychoanalysis at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute. He received his medical degree from McGill Medical School in Montreal.

Notman is survived by his wife, Malkah Tolpin Notman; three children, and a sister.

Strieder, a former professor of thoracic surgery, developed an international reputation as a pioneer in cardiac surgery. In 1937, at Boston City Hospital, he performed the first ligation of a patent ductus in history, thus beginning the modern era of surgery for congenital heart disease.

After receiving his MD degree from Harvard Medical School, Strieder trained and practiced at the University Hospital in Ann Arbor, Mich., in the country’s first recognized thoracic surgical residency program. In 1936, he came to Boston City Hospital, where he became the institution’s first chief of thoracic surgery. After World War II, he founded the Thoracic Surgical Service at Boston City Hospital and became the first chief of cardiothoracic surgery at Boston University Medical Center Hospital. During his tenure, 38 residents and fellows completed the Thoracic Surgical Training Program under his direct supervision. In recognition of Strieder’s contributions to cardiothoracic surgery, The John W. Strieder Visiting Professorship was founded by his former residents and fellows in 1990.

Strieder is survived by his wife, Denise Jouasset Strieder, MD; three daughters, and four grandchildren.
Changes in medical education among topics presented at parents reception

The effects that health care reform will have on medical education were discussed by Dean Aram V. Chobanian during the School’s New England Parents’ Reception, held Oct. 31 in the Hiebert Lounge.

“The nature of what we do in medical schools will have to change,” said Chobanian. “It’s clear that we’re going to have to increase the number of students pursuing primary care,” he added. “The School of Medicine is in a very good position to meet this challenge. With the recent curriculum changes, we’re placing more emphasis on teaching in ambulatory care settings and less in hospital-based settings, and we’re including much more of the humanities in medicine.”

Alan Edelstein, who with his wife, Sybil, founded the Parents Committee in 1978, also addressed the group. “As parents who have children who have attended medical school, we share your pride, enthusiasm and your commitment to your child’s medical career,” said Edelstein. The Edelsteins’ daughter, Marcia delstein Herrmann, graduated from the School of Medicine in 1978, and their son, David, graduated in 1980.

Arthur Culbert, PhD, associate dean for student affairs, also spoke at the reception, reminding the audience that medical education is a “team sport.” “Part of that team is parents—emotionally and perhaps financially,” said Culbert. “You’re a very important component of this team.”

Following the presentations, parents were invited to tour the newly renovated Bakst Auditorium.

A reception for parents in the New York area was held on Oct. 17 and was hosted by chairpersons Paul and Jean Rothbaum, whose son, David, graduated from BUSM in 1982.

Manuel receives American College of Surgeons’ highest award

Barry M. Manuel, MD, associate dean for continuing medical education and external programs at the School of Medicine, and a professor of surgery, was awarded the American College of Surgeons’ highest award, the Distinguished Service Award, at its annual meeting on Oct. 14 in San Francisco.

“I can think of no one more deserving of this honor than Dr. Manuel,” said Dean Aram V. Chobanian. “We are most fortunate to have had him on our faculty for almost three decades.”

Manuel was praised for his dedication to working for medical liability reform and his work as a clinical surgeon. He has pushed for liability reform at both the state and federal levels, devising a widely acclaimed “no fault” model as a solution to the professional liability problem.

In this model, maloccurrence settlements would be paid by a patient compensation fund, which would be financed by a small surcharge on private health insurance plans. This compensation plan could save the nation’s health care system up to $100 billion in the cost of defensive medicine alone, as physicians would not be forced to order tests solely out of fear of being sued.

Manuel was also cited for his role as a member of the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment’s Advisory Panel on Defensive Medicine and the Use of Medical Technology. He has also served as president of the Massachusetts Medical Society, the Massachusetts chapter of the American College of Surgeons, and the Bay State Health Care Foundation. He is currently vice chairperson of the board of the Massachusetts Professional Insurance Association.

McNamara receives public relations association’s highest award

Owen McNamara, BUMC’s former director of publication services, was recently awarded the New England Hospital Public Relations and Marketing Association’s highest honor, the Evans Houghton Memorial Award, at NEHRMA’s annual meeting on Oct. 27.

This award, presented annually by NEHRMA’s Board of Directors when there is a deserving candidate, is given in acknowledgment of “exemplary performance in, and dedication to, the field of health care public relations.” The award was established to honor the memory of Evans F. Houghton, one of NEHRMA’s founders.

For the past 20 years, McNamara served the Medical Center, first as senior editor and eventually as director of publication services. Under his direction, a number of publications have received regional and national recognition. During an October conference at which he received the Evans Houghton Memorial Award, McNamara also was selected to be the editor of Peer View, the professional journal of NEHRMA. In December, he resigned from his BUMC post to begin a health care communications company called Owen McNamara Associates.

Vitale helps to organize two conferences in Mexico

Joseph J. Vitale, ScD, MD, a professor of pathology and head of the Nutrition Pathology Unit at Boston City Hospital, helped to organize two conferences this past fall in Mexico. The first was a one-day symposium celebrating the 50th anniversary of the
National Institute of Perineontology (INPER). Held in Mexico City, the symposium was titled “Immunization and Infectious Diseases.” In addition to Vitale, Mexico’s minister of health, Jesus Kumate, MD, also helped to organize the symposium.

At the invitation of Kumate, Vitale was also asked to help organize INPER’s eighth annual International Conference on Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS, also held in Mexico City. Among the presenters at the conference were several BUSM faculty, including Vitale; Elizabeth Barnett, MD, an assistant professor of pediatrics; Denise Page, MD, an assistant professor of pathology, and Richard Diamond, MD, a professor of medicine and head of the Section of Infectious Disease at BUMC Hospital.

Briefly noted

Albert G. Hakaim, MD, MSc, an assistant professor in the Section of Organ Transplantation and Vascular Surgery, has been elected to membership in the American Society of Transplant Surgeons. Hakaim, who also is a member of the Board of Trustees of the New England Organ Bank, has a special interest in pancreas transplantation and thoracoabdominal aortic surgery. Matthew J. Fenton, PhD, an assistant professor of medicine and biochemistry, and his co-workers at the Massachusetts General Hospital were recently awarded a five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health as part of a special initiative to study mechanisms of host defence against tuberculosis. The project is entitled “Alveolar Macrophage Responses to Mycobacterial Cell Walls.” BUSM student Romeo E. Morales has been elected president of the National Boricua/Latino Health Organization, a group for Hispanic medical school students in the United States. Morales will serve a two-year term.