1990-06

BUSM News & Notes: June 1990 no. 137

Boston University School of Medicine Office of Informational Services

Boston University School of Medicine Office of Informational Services

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/20937

Boston University
Sullivan challenges BUSM graduates to promote new vision of health care

Physicians must find ways to provide health care more efficiently without compromising quality, Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis W. Sullivan, M.D., told the BUSM graduating class at the 118th commencement ceremonies held at Boston's Opera House on May 20.

"The physician must do much, much more to help patients stay healthy and prevent the onset of disease," said Sullivan, who graduated cum laude from BUSM in 1958. "Physicians can help promote a new vision of health care where individuals exert more control over their own lives.... We must make health promotion and disease prevention a national crusade—a top priority."

The graduating class included five students who were accepted as part of the Early Medical School Selection Program (EMSSP), a program that Sullivan helped to develop as a faculty member. Also among the graduates were 40 who were enrolled in the Combined Six-Year Liberal Arts and Medical Education Program. Thirteen students enrolled in the Modular Medical Integrated Curriculum also graduated. Eight graduating students were awarded both M.D. and Ph.D. degrees. Kamal Kalia graduated summa cum laude; five students graduated magna cum laude; and 11 students graduated cum laude.

The Class of 1990 includes 69 women and 41 minority students. Graduating students represent 26 states, a U.S. territory and two foreign countries.

Social issues raise questions public health officials must address, says Walsh

Social issues are the origins of many of today's public-health problems, and the questions they raise must be addressed by public health officials, Diana Chapman Walsh, Ph.D, a professor of social and behavioral sciences, told SPH graduates at commencement ceremonies held at the University's School for the Arts on May 20.

"'Live the questions now,'" Walsh, citing poet Rainer Maria Rilke, urged the graduates. "I can hardly imagine a profession on this graduation day that is facing questions as monumental—and rich—as those we are counting on you to address, and live, in the work that you will do."

The questions Walsh listed included: How much of what kind of health should be pursued, at what cost, to whom? How can the social response to the threat of AIDS be measured without starting a dangerous backfire of fear, repression and hate? How can public-health officials find a workable balance in their professional practices and a healthy balance in their private lives?

Medical Center study shows anti-AIDS drug to be promising alternative to AZT

The drug ddl (dideoxyinosine) shows promise as an alternative to AZT in the treatment of AIDS, especially for people who do not tolerate or respond to AZT, according to a study by researchers at BUSM, Boston City Hospital and the University Hospital.

Ddl is a member of the same chemical group as AZT—the only FDA-approved treatment for AIDS—and works in the same manner, by inhibiting an enzyme necessary to replicate the AIDS virus. AZT can have serious side effects, the most significant being the suppression of white blood cells. Researchers tested ddl in a group of AIDS patients to determine if the drug would be effective, but without the serious side effects of AZT.

In the study, which was published in the New England Journal of Medicine, daily doses of ddl were given to 34 patients with AIDS or AIDS-related complex for a median of 12 weeks. Although several patients developed serious side effects, such as inflammation of the pancreas and nerve damage in the legs, no patient had the suppression of white blood cells or anemia associated with AZT. In fact, there was a significant improvement
in blood counts after treatment with ddl, even among patients intolerant to AZT.

In evaluating the drug's efficacy, researchers found there was a significant increase in T4 lymphocytes—the white blood cells infected by the AIDS virus—and a decrease in the HIV antigen that reflects the level of the virus in the blood. In addition, the majority of patients experienced an increase in energy and appetite and gained a statistically significant amount of weight.

"This study shows that ddl has an acceptable toxicity profile that is different from AZT," said Timothy Cooley, M.D., an assistant professor at BUSM, a member of the Clinical AIDS Service at BCH and a co-investigator of the study. "We're hopeful that the preliminary results showing efficacy are clinically significant, with a decrease in major infections and improved survival. This would make ddl a reasonable alternative to treatment with AZT, particularly for those patients who are intolerant or unresponsive to AZT."

Study shows substance abuse increases risk of violence during pregnancy

Pregnant women are at an increased risk of being victims of violence if they are heavy alcohol and drug users or if their partners are multiple drug users, according to a recent study by researchers at BUSM and SPH.

The researchers studied over 1,000 pregnant women receiving prenatal care at Boston City Hospital. Study participants—mostly poor, urban, minority women—were interviewed during their prenatal and postpartum period to determine: the number of violent incidents during pregnancy; the demographic and psychosocial characteristics of victims of violence; the association between violence and drug and alcohol use by the pregnant women and their partners; and the association between violence during pregnancy and fetal outcome.

According to Hortensia Amara, Ph.D., an associate professor of public health and pediatrics at BUSM and SPH, and the first author of the study, one of the major findings was that pregnant women who drink heavily or use drugs and whose partners use multiple illicit drugs were twice as likely to experience violence during pregnancy than women who don't drink heavily and whose partners do not use drugs.

"This study has important implications for the delivery of health care," says Amaro, who says it points to the need for comprehensive treatment of women who use drugs, since women who use drugs also become victims of violence. "The study also suggests that there is a need for a coordination of services between prenatal and obstetrical services and services for battered women. Those caring for pregnant women need to assess their risk of exposure to violence, and those who care for battered women need to provide better services to pregnant women," she adds.

The study was published in the American Journal of Public Health.

School of Medicine faculty members hold biomedical research grants

Ten School of Medicine faculty members received research support during 1989-1990 from a federal Biomedical Research Support Grant to BUSM, according to Edward W. Pelikan, M.D., a professor of pharmacology and chairman of the BUSM Faculty Grants Committee. BRSG funds, which are distributed annually by the National Institutes of Health, are based on an institution's level of federal funding for the previous year.

The awardees and their research topics are: Stuart R. Chipkin, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and physiology, studies of CNS glucose transport; Ross B. Edwards, Ph.D., an associate professor of ophthalmology, vitamin A metabolism and Muller cells; Wayne LaMorte, M.D., an assistant professor of surgery and biochemistry, fish oils and cholesterol transport; Paul Meers, Ph.D., an assistant professor of pathology, annexins in neutrophil degranulation; Gwynneth D. Offner, Ph.D., an assistant research professor of biochemistry, plasma membrane fatty-acid-binding protein; Robert A. Reed, Ph.D., an instructor in biophysics, receptor-mediated signal transduction; David Sassoon, Ph.D., an assistant professor of biochemistry, muscle gene regulation during limb morphogenesis; Barbara Seaton, Ph.D., an assistant research professor of physiology, X-ray crystallography of peptide hormones; Elizabeth Simons, Ph.D., a professor of biochemistry, flow cytometry; John Tonkiss, Ph.D., an assistant research professor in the Center for Behavioral Development and Mental Retardation, prenatal nutrition and hippocampal function.

Information about BRSG research support and eligibility can be obtained from Pelikan, at L-603, x4300 (638-4300).

Whitaker Health Sciences Fund announces ten awards to School of Medicine faculty

The Whitaker Health Sciences Fund has announced awards totaling $600,000 to ten BUSM junior faculty members collaborating on research with Massachusetts Institute of Technology faculty members in the biomedical area. The grants, effective July 1, are for $48,000 each.

The School of Medicine recipients are as follows: John E. Brush, Ph.D., an assistant professor of medicine; Tai C. Chen, Ph.D., an assistant professor of medicine; Wai-Fung Cheong, Ph.D., an instructor in dermatology; Douglas A. Cotanche, Ph.D., an assistant professor of anatomy; Evangelia C. Mantzouranis, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics; Bertram R. Payne, Ph.D., an assistant professor of anatomy; Gary S. Rogers, M.D., an assistant professor of dermatology; David A. Sasson, Ph.D., an assistant professor of biochemistry; James C. Skare, Ph.D., an assistant professor of pediatrics; Yuk-Chor Wong, Ph.D., an instructor in oncology; and Lewis V. Wray, an assistant professor of microbiology.
Ryan awarded prestigious NIH fellowship; conducting research at Oxford Univ.

Thomas J. Ryan, M.D., a professor of medicine and head of the cardiology section at the University Hospital, recently was awarded a fellowship to conduct research on cardiovascular disease at Oxford University in England.

Ryan received one of 35 fellowships awarded annually by the John E. Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Md. In addition, he received a Fulbright Award from the Council for International Exchange of Scholars in Washington, D.C., in support of his research.

As a senior international fellow, Ryan will spend 10 months working closely with Peter Sleight, M.D., and the cardiovascular medicine staff at John Radcliffe Hospital at the University of Oxford. Ryan plans to link his experience with clinical trials of thrombolytic therapy in the United States with its counterpart trial in England.

"The proposed research has great promise to improve the acute management of myocardial infarctions in the United States and the United Kingdom," says Philip E. Schambra, director of the Fogarty International Center. "It also has great potential to further refine clinical-trial methodology for cardiovascular disease."

Internationally recognized in the field of cardiology, Ryan is a major grantee of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in relation to clinical trials of thrombolytic therapy.

BUSM student chosen to participate in Research Scholars Program

Sridhar Ramaswamy, a second-year BUSM student, recently was accepted into the 1990-1991 Class of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute-National Institutes of Health (HHMI-NIH) Research Scholars Program. Ramaswamy will spend one year at the NIH in Bethesda, Md., conducting basic research in cellular immunology, and then return to BUSM to continue his medical studies.

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute, with resources of more than $5 billion, was established in 1953 with the purpose of conducting medical research. It has research programs and over 40 laboratories located in major academic medical centers and universities throughout the country.

The Research Scholars Program allows selected medical students, chosen through a nationwide search, the opportunity to travel to the NIH on full scholarship. While there, scholars develop skills in biomedical research under the guidance of accomplished medical investigators.

Pediatricians urged to promote literacy during visits with patients and parents

Pediatricians can make special contributions to combat illiteracy, according to commentary published in Pediatrics in Review. In the commentary, members of the Division of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at the School of Medicine and Boston City Hospital suggest that pediatricians are in a unique position to address literacy issues with parents as part of well-child care long before problems develop or are recognized at school.

"Since pediatricians see parents on a regular basis at a time when few other professionals do, and since parents look at pediatricians as a source of guidance in childrearing, pediatricians are in an ideal position to affect parents' beliefs and behaviors about reading to their children," says Robert Needlman, M.D., the principal author of the paper, a fellow at BUSM and a pediatrician at BCH.

This approach is being used as part of BCH's Reach Out and Read (ROAR) program, which is believed to be the only program in the country that incorporates literacy promotion into each pediatric office visit.
Manuel elected president of MMS

Barry M. Manuel, M.D., associate dean for continuing education and a professor of surgery, was elected president of the Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) during the Society's 209th Annual Meeting held May 18-20. Previously, Manuel had been an MMS councilor and secretary/treasurer of Middlesex South District Medical Society. He also has served as a member of numerous MMS committees and chairman of three—Health Planning, Occupational Health and Finance.

Gardner receives education award

Howard E. Gardner, Ph.D., a research psychologist at BUSM and an adjunct research professor of neurology at the Boston Veterans Administration Medical Center, is the recent recipient of the 1990 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Education. The purpose of the $150,000 award is to stimulate ideas that have potential to bring about significant improvement in educational practice and attainment. Gardner was selected for using his theory of multiple kinds of intelligences to develop more effective teaching and testing methods. Several schools have adopted programs based on his ideas, including The Key School in Indianapolis and the Pittsburgh public schools.

Alpert, Culbert attend workshop

Elaine J. Alpert, M.D., assistant dean for student affairs, and Arthur J. Culbert, Ph.D., associate dean for educational programs, recently attended a workshop on career advising in Itasca, Ill. Sponsored by GLAXO, Inc., the three-and-a-half-day workshop trained Alpert and Culbert to run the Career Advising Workshop for third year students at BUSM as an addition to the School's current Career Advising Program.