1992-08

BUSM News & Notes:
August/September 1992 no. 155

Boston University School of Medicine Office of Informational Services

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/20951

Boston University
Sept. 30 symposium will mark Genetic Center’s 10th anniversary

The School’s Center for Human Genetics will mark its 10th anniversary with a symposium on Wednesday, Sept. 30, entitled “Advances in Medical Genetics: From Basics to Bedside.” The symposium, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the Keefer Auditorium, will feature internationally recognized physicians and scientists, and will explore the interface between basic and applied genetics. According to Aubrey Milunsky, M.D., D.Sc., the director of the center, the goal of the symposium is to present the most recent advances that directly apply to clinical practice and to demonstrate the evolution of basic-science observations to genetic diagnosis and gene therapy.

Guest speakers will include Ronald G. Crystal, M.D., chief of the pulmonary branch of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; Victor A. McKusick, M.D., University Professor of Medical Genetics at Johns Hopkins University; Stuart H. Orkin, M.D., the Leland Fikes Professor of Pediatric Medicine at Harvard Medical School and an investigator at Howard Hughes Medical Institute; and Darwin J. Prockop, M.D., Ph.D., director of Jefferson Institute of Molecular Medicine and chairman of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Jefferson Medical College.

In addition, BUSM faculty in the Center for Human Genetics will update clinically relevant aspects of their work. Presentations will be made by Milunsky, who is also a professor of human genetics, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, pathology and biology, and Clinton T. Baldwin, Ph.D., an assistant professor of biochemistry; James C. Skare, Ph.D., an assistant research professor of pediatrics and director of molecular genetics research; Richard H. Myers, Ph.D., an associate professor of neurology; Herman E. Wyandt, Ph.D., an associate professor of pathology and director of the Cytogenetics Laboratories; Jean A. Amos, Ph.D., an assistant professor of pathology and director of the Molecular Genetics Laboratories; Charles R. Cantor, Ph.D., director of the Center for Biotechnology at the University’s College of Engineering and a professor of biochemistry; and Lindsay A. Fairer, Ph.D., an associate professor of pathology and public health.

In 1982, Milunsky started one of the first centers for human genetics in the United States. Since that time, the center has become one of the busiest and most comprehensive clinical genetic diagnostic academic-based laboratories in the country. It conducts DNA analyses for the most extensive list of disorders and has one of the largest maternal serum screening programs for birth defects in the United States.

For more information, contact the Center for Human Genetics at 638-7083 (x7083).

Medical Center’s biomedical/biotech construction project now called BioSquare

Boston University Medical Center’s $350-million development of a biomedical/biotechnology complex is now officially known as BioSquare. Located along Albany Street, opposite the Medical Center, BioSquare is being developed by University Associates, a joint venture of Boston University and Boston University Medical Center/The University Hospital. The 20-plus-acre site and approved master plans together are facilitating the rapid development of the BioSquare components.

The first building in the project, the School’s 180,000-square-foot Center for Advanced Biomedical Research, is scheduled for completion in September 1993. The new building will house basic-research laboratories dedicated to investigating the causes and prevention of heart and vascular diseases, kidney disorders, certain cancers, genetically determined illnesses, and dental problems.

The BioSquare complex eventually will include a medical-office and ambulatory-care building, two additional medical/research/office facilities, a 240-room hotel and conference center and a 1,000-car parking garage with a child-care center and retail space.
Annas says accuracy of DNA samples should be recognized in court

The accuracy of using DNA samples to link suspects to crimes is widely recognized in the scientific community and should be recognized in court, said George J. Annas, J.D., chairman of the Department of Health Law at the School of Public Health, in a recent issue of The New England Journal of Medicine. Annas noted, however, that such samples should be admitted as evidence only if jurors are told that the scientific community is still debating the level of probability of an erroneous match.

The debate over how to calculate this probability should be waged in the scientific community and not in the courtroom, Annas wrote. Up until now, some defense attorneys have argued that because the debate continues, DNA samples should not be used as evidence in court. However, because the suspected level of probability is so low—ranging from 1 in 177,000 to 1 in 300 million, depending on the genetic makeup of the suspect—most courts have admitted DNA samples as evidence.

Scientists predict that it will take up to 15 more years to determine the actual level of probability of two individuals having the same DNA sample.

BUSM study shows that women and men quit smoking in equal numbers

In a study that contradicts widely held perceptions that women are less likely to quit smoking than men, Framingham Study researchers have found that women and men quit smoking in equal numbers.

While previous studies counted men who had switched from cigarettes to pipes or cigars as quitters, the Boston University study counted these men as smokers. The study was conducted under the direction of Karen M. Freund, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and director of the Women's Health Group at the Evans Medical Foundation.

By counting only those people who had abstained from tobacco products for one year as quitters, the researchers found the cessation patterns of women and men to be roughly equal. The researchers did find, however, that certain indicators of smoking cessation were directly tied to gender. For example, women who smoked heavily were less likely to quit than women who were light smokers, while the same was not true of men. Freund said that the study should lead to new gender-based approaches to smoking-cessation programs.

Researchers find that the elderly underestimate their abilities

Large-scale surveys of the elderly taken to determine their physical limitations could be misleading, because older people sometimes overestimate their disabilities, according to a recent Framingham Study investigation.

Margaret Kelly-Hayes, R.N., an investigator with the Framingham Study, said that such investigations do not take into consideration the capabilities of the elderly. Instead, she said, they measure only the self-reported lifestyles of the population they are surveying. When the researchers asked 1,453 people over the age of 63 to rate their performance of six basic tasks and then measured those abilities in a laboratory, they found that there was an overall discrepancy of 3 to 6 percent. There was an even greater discrepancy among those with impaired cognition and those over the age of 75.

The researchers said that this study should encourage those who study the elderly to look at the specific characteristics of a population rather than rely on self-reported measures of disability.

Confocal laser scanning microscope available for use on Medical Campus

The School of Medicine now has one of two confocal laser scanning microscopes in Boston. The microscope is available for use by any faculty, staff and student of Boston University or other area academic institution who has a demonstrated need for its use and is willing to pay a fee.

The integrated computer system enables scientists to perform complex reconstruction and image analysis. A computer-controlled scanning mechanism assimilates the points being focused on in a tissue in a way that they can be generated as an image of just one plane. The computer is able to move an individual sample of tissue up by a very small amount, so the next layer down can be observed. This produces a series of computer-generated
images that can be manipulated and generated into three-dimensional pictures. Whole cochleas of the ear or corneas of the eye, for instance, can be viewed in this way.

The microscope is available for use in blocks of four-hour sessions. Initially, two sessions will be scheduled each day. Use of the microscope will be restricted to people who have completed the training course conducted by the Confocal Facility Use Committee or who can demonstrate previous experience and expertise with the instrument. Advice and help in operating the confocal microscope will be available from members of the use committee, but individual researchers will be responsible for doing their own work on the microscope.

For more information, contact: Kathy Svoboda, Ph.D., at 638-4123 (x4123); Vickery Trinkhaus-Randall, Ph.D, at 638-5099 (x5099), or Douglas A. Cotanche, Ph.D., at 638-4530 (x4530).

Faculty take part in International AIDS/III STD Conference

Nine School of Medicine faculty members participated in the recent VII International Conference on AIDS/III STD World Congress, held this year in Amsterdam. The presenters and the titles of the presentations were as follows: Lawrence M. Banat, M.D., an instructor of medicine and AIDS Policy Advisor for the City of Boston, "Bacterial Infections Are the Most Common Cause of Fever in HIV-Infected Patients Admitted to a Municipal Hospital"; Cynthia Chase, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychiatry, "Mental and Motor Development in HIV-Infected and Seroreverter Infants"; Ellen Rae Cooper, M.D., an assistant professor of pediatrics, "Response to Measles and Rubella Vaccine in Children with HIV Infection," and Donald E. Craven, M.D., a professor of medicine, microbiology and public health, "Public Health Impact of HIV Infection in Parturients and Clients in the Outpatient Women's Clinics at Boston City Hospital."

Other participants included: Kenneth Freedberg, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine, "Initial Staging of HIV-Infected Patients: The Yield and Cost of Laboratory Tests"; Jon Fuller, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of medicine, "Prevalence of Ocular Abnormalities in HIV-Infected Patients"; Joan Lebow, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine, "Initial Presentation of HIV-Infected Homeless Persons for Primary Medical Care"; Howard Libman, M.D., an associate professor of medicine, "Development of Comprehensive Primary Care Program for HIV-Infected Patients at a Municipal Hospital," and Wendy K. Mariner, J.D., an associate professor of health law, "Entitlement to Care for People with AIDS."

Sixth national annual geriatric medicine program held at Medical Center

The sixth Summer Institute in Geriatric Medicine was held recently at the Medical Center, from July 28 through Aug. 1. The program was cosponsored by the School of Medicine and the American Geriatrics Society.

The conference, which was mainly funded by the National Institutes of Health, provided an opportunity for 15 third- and fourth-year medical students from around the country to have a week of intensive exposure to geriatric medicine and research. The program included lectures, seminars and case discussions as well as site visits to research and clinical programs.

The principal investigator and course co-director was Spencer Wilking, M.B., B.S., M.P.H., an assistant clinical professor of medicine at BUSM. Also co-directing the course was Patricia Barry, M.D., who returned from the University of Miami School of Medicine to Boston University Medical Center/The University Hospital as chief of geriatrics, effective Aug. 1. Other participating faculty members included: Barbara Gilchrest, M.D., chairperson of the Department of Dermatology; Michael Holick, Ph.D., M.D., a professor of medicine, dermatology and physiology and director of the Vitamin D, Skin and Bone Research Laboratory; Lawrence Markson, M.D., an assistant research professor of medicine; Theodore Colton, Sc.D., a professor of public health, and David Felson, M.D., an associate professor of medicine and public health.

Marcello steps down as chief of surgery at Brockton Hospital

David E. Marcello Jr., M.D., a clinical professor of surgery, recently retired as chief of general surgery and surgical services at Brockton Hospital, an affiliate of the School of Medicine.

Marcello, who has been on staff at Brockton Hospital since 1962, will continue to serve on the hospital's medical staff and to practice from his private office in Brockton. He also will maintain his faculty duties at the School, which include serving on the Residency Review Program.

ACS research grants available

Boston University's Cancer Center has been awarded an institutional grant from the national chapter of the American Cancer Society to encourage young investigators (junior faculty) to carry out cancer-related research. The primary purpose of the grant is to provide "seed" money to permit initiation of promising new projects or novel ideas that will serve as the basis for future grant applications from other programs. The awards will vary according to the needs of the investigators and should not exceed $12,000. The majority of allocations will be made to persons who have not received prior grant support.

Applications will be awarded on a competitive basis and be evaluated according to criteria described in the application forms, which are available from the Cancer Center office, E-124, 638-4173 (x4173).

The deadline for submitting applications is Oct. 1, 1992.

Craven appointed to CDC panel

Donald E. Craven, M.D., a professor of medicine and epidemiology at the School and director of the Clinical AIDS Program at Boston City Hospital, has been appointed to the federal Hospital Infection Control Advisory Committee, a 12-member group selected by Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan. The group, which will serve for three years, was formed to advise the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on
strategies for the prevention and control of nosocomial infections—infections that originate or take place in U.S. hospitals.

Briefly noted

At the annual meeting of the American College of Surgeons, Peter J. Mozden, M.D., F.A.C.S., a professor of surgery, was cited for “Distinguished Contribution to the College” during the decade between 1980 and 1990. In addition, Mozden was nominated for and accepted an appointment as eastern area chairman of the Commission on Cancer of the College of Surgeons. In this capacity, Mozden will oversee the development and maintenance of more than 300 hospital-based cancer programs in the eastern United States and Puerto Rico....Victor Evdokimoff, Sc.M., director of radiation protection at the Medical Center and an assistant clinical professor of radiology and public health, presented a paper on personnel monitoring at the International Radiation Protection Meeting in Montreal....Aram V. Chobanian, M.D., dean of the School of Medicine, has been appointed for the third time to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute’s Joint National Committee for the Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of Hypertension. The task force is composed of national hypertension experts who lead a quadrennial effort to draft new guidelines for the management of high blood pressure....Harrison Farber, M.D., an associate professor of medicine and a member of the Pulmonary Center, recently was elected to the American Society for Clinical Investigation....Frederick H. Millham, M.D., an assistant professor of surgery, recently was appointed associate director of the Surgical Intensive Care Unit at Boston University Medical Center/The University Hospital....Howard K. Koh, M.D., F.A.C.P., an associate professor of dermatology, medicine and public health, received a $200,000, two-year grant from the SHARE Foundation. The title of the grant is “Melanoma Education and Screening in the Elderly.” Koh is also co-director of the Skin Oncology Program and director of the Photopheresis Program.