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Boston University
School of Medicine

News & Notes

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School of Medicine, Armenian institutions solidify health-care agreement

The long-term health-care partnership forged recently between the School of Medicine and two hospitals in Armenia was solidified in December, when two officials from that country visited the School to sign the memorandum of understanding between the institutions. Representing Armenia were Sevak H. Avakian, M.D., director of American Affairs in Armenia's Ministry of Health, and Ara M. Minasian, M.D., chairman of the Emergency Scientific Medical Center in Yerevan.

The agreement is one of 10 U.S. health-care partnerships announced in October by acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and Alan Roskins, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The \$13.5 million partnership program, funded by USAID, is part of the U.S. government's far-reaching effort to provide technical assistance to the Newly Independent States (NIS) in what was once the Soviet Union.

The program, which is managed by the American International Health Alliance (AIHA), a nonprofit agency, will utilize the expertise of American health-care professionals to address the specific health-care problems facing each newly independent nation.

At the heart of the program is a series of exchanges, in which senior academicians, clinicians, nurses and administrators will travel to the various new nations to help their partner hospitals identify their most important clinical and administrative needs and develop a plan for meeting those needs.

Dean Aram V. Chobanian and Michael Eliastam, M.D., medical director of Boston City Hospital, made a preliminary visit to the major hospitals in Yerevan in the early fall as part of a survey team sent by the AIHA. According to Chobanian, the program will establish a model teaching hospital system and train physician leaders, senior hospital administrators, financial officers, computer-system technologists and physicians in modern methods of hospital management and state-of-the-art approaches to health-care delivery. As part of the program, senior staff from the Armenian hospitals will visit Boston for up to three months to continue their educational process.

Teams of leaders from the School of Medicine, the School of Public Health, Boston University Medical Center Hospital, Boston City Hospital and other institutions affiliated with the School will help the two largest municipal hospitals in Yerevan work out a strategy for meeting their goals. Physicians from the University of Massachusetts also are expected to participate in the project. The program will focus in part on the hospitals' needs in emergency care and trauma. Accidents currently represent the major cause of death in the republic, even exceeding the high rates of death caused by heart disease and cancer.

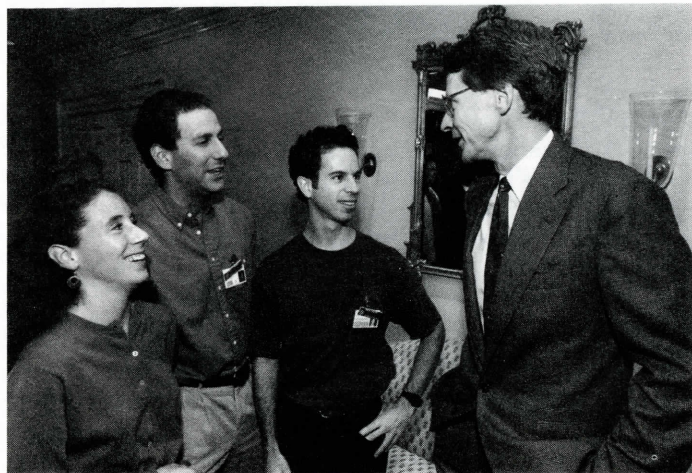
"The devastating 1988 earthquake and the long-standing war in Karabagh have underscored the need for a trauma center that can become a model for other major hospitals in Armenia," said Chobanian. "The health-care system in Armenia is in crisis. At this transitional point in history, it is critical that we assist our counterparts in every way we can."

Meenan assumes post as new director of School of Public Health

Robert F. Meenan, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., former director of the Section of Arthritis at the School of Medicine, Boston University Medical Center Hospital and Boston City Hospital, stepped down from these positions on Nov. 1 to become the new director of the School of Public Health and the chairman of the Department of Socio-Medical Sciences. He succeeds Norman A. Scotch, Ph.D., who announced his retirement from these two posts last spring.

Meenan is a nationally recognized leader in rheumatology and health-care research. He recently completed a one-year term as president of the American College of Rheumatology, and is a member of the National Institutes of Health's National Arthritis Advisory Board. He was elected to membership in the American Society for Clinical Investigation in 1990.

Meenan received his M.D. degree *cum laude* from the School of Medicine in 1972, his M.P.H. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1977 and his M.B.A. from the School of Management in 1989.



A reception was held in October in honor of Robert F. Meenan, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., right, the new director of the School of Public Health. Talking with Meenan are second-year M.D./M.P.H. students, from left, Diane Krause, Steve Mendes and Drew Factor. (photo by BU Photo Services)

Elevated maternal zinc level linked to neural tube defects in offspring

Women who have elevated levels of zinc in their toenails during the second trimester of pregnancy are about three times more likely to have a child with a neural tube defect (NTD) than women with normal levels of zinc, according to a School of Medicine study published in the October issue of *Teratology*. The study, which is part of a larger investigation of pregnancy outcomes conducted by BUSM and other institutions, was led by Aubrey Milunsky, M.B.B.Ch., director of the Center for Human Genetics.

In this epidemiological study, researchers analyzed toenail clippings from 2,004 women during the second trimester of pregnancy. Once the pregnancy outcomes were known, the scientists found that a larger proportion of the 17 women with NTD offspring had elevated levels of toenail zinc than did the 1,781 women with normal offspring.

The researchers suspect that the sequestration of zinc in the toenails might reflect an acquisition of zinc from the site of neural tube closure. Previous studies have shown zinc deficiency to be a cause of neural tube defects. Among the most common neural tube defects are spina bifida, which occurs when the bony casing around the spinal cord fails to close, and anencephaly, a condition in which major parts of the brain and skull are missing.

Ducharme to consult with rehabilitation centers in India and Australia

Stanley H. Ducharme, Ph.D., a clinical professor of rehabilitation medicine and director of rehabilitation psychology at Boston University Medical Center Hospital, has been granted a fellowship from the International Exchange of Experts and Information in Rehabilitation, a component of the World Rehabilitation Fund. Under this fellowship program, he will study and compare psychological services and the relationships between hospitals and independent living centers in Australia and the United States. The study will be conducted in Australia in March and April.

Before undertaking this initiative, Ducharme will travel to India, where, at the invitation of the country's National Institute on Disability, Rehabilitation and Research, he will join a group of three U.S. physicians in assisting the Indian government in the development of a rehabilitation hospital in New Delhi, that country's capital. Ducharme will be the only psychologist in the group and, as such, will be charged with developing a clinical and research psychological program for people with neurologic disabilities. While in India, he also will travel south to Pune, where he will consult with local psychologists at a U.S. military hospital in the development of a program for families with disabilities.

AIDS education, health-care costs among topics presented at APHA

The effect of AIDS education on teens' sexual behavior and national controls on health-care spending were among the topics



*Michael A. Grodin, M.D., left, and George J. Annas, J.D., associate director and director respectively of the School's Law, Medicine and Ethics Program, autograph copies of their book *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation* at a recent book signing. (photo by BU Photo Services)*

presented by faculty at the American Public Health Association's 120th Annual Meeting and Exhibition.

Participating faculty members and the titles of their presentations included: Ralph Hingson, Sc.D., a professor of public health and an associate professor of pediatrics, "Five Years After Surgeon General Koop Called for Adolescent AIDS Education: Have Teen Beliefs and Behaviors Changed?"; Louis McCloskey, Dr.P.H., an adjunct assistant professor of pediatrics, "Infant Mortality as a Women's Health Issue: Lessons of a Case-by-Case Review," and Jonathan Howland, Ph.D., an associate professor of public health, "Sex Differences in Aquatic Skills, Exposures, Activities and Risk-Taking Behaviors: Results From a National Survey."

Other faculty members participating included: Alan Sager, Ph.D., an associate professor of public health, "Massachusetts: Rejection and Revival of Universal Coverage"; Howard K. Koh, M.D., an associate professor of dermatology, public health and medicine, "Confirmed Melanomas Found in National Skin Cancer Screening"; Daniel Merrigan, Ed.D., "Spiritual Health as a Component in Health Promotion," and Alan S. Geller, melanoma research coordinator, "Rising Death Rates of Malignant Melanoma Among Older Men: An International Trend?"

Tendency to run red lights on rise in Massachusetts

The proportion of drivers running red lights has increased from 6 percent to 21 percent in the last four years, according to a statewide survey conducted by a School of Public Health researcher.

Ralph Hingson, Sc.D., the chairman of the Department of Behavioral Sciences, conducted the survey at 200 intersections from 1988 through 1992, and found that the increase in running red lights coincided with a 36-percent increase in traffic fatalities at intersections with light signals. He said the increase in the

proportion of drivers running red lights is of particular concern because of the low proportion of people in Massachusetts who wear safety belts (31 percent), well below the national average of over 50 percent.

At the same time, Hingson noted a 26-percent decline in fatalities at intersections without signals and a 29-percent decrease in fatal crashes occurring at night. Hingson says this trend could be due to the fact that most nighttime fatal crashes are caused by drunk driving, which has been cut in half since the early 1980s, according to other surveys Hingson has conducted. He said that the same initiatives used to combat drunk-driving—public education on the issue, social pressure and better enforcement—could be used to deter people from running red lights.

Faculty members participate in AHA's 65th Scientific Sessions

Several School of Medicine faculty members and fellows recently participated in the American Heart Association's (AHA) 65th Scientific Sessions held in New Orleans from Nov. 16 through Nov. 19.

Participating faculty members and fellows and the titles of their presentations included: Donald A. Weiner, M.D., an associate professor of medicine, "The Significance of Silent Myocardial Ischemia in Women"; David P. Faxon, M.D., an associate professor of medicine, "The Relationship Between Repeat

PTCA and Time From Initial Procedure: A Report From the NHLBI PCTA Registry"; Matthew W. Gillman, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics, "Relationship of Alcohol With Blood Pressure in Young Adults," and Gary J. Balady, M.D., an associate professor of medicine, "Cardiac Adaptations to Long-Term Arm vs. Leg Exercise: Wheelchair Athletes vs. Runners."

Also included were: May Kay Steen, M.D., a fellow in cardiology, "Gender Related Differences in Complications During Coronary Angiography"; George A. Philippides, M.D., a fellow in cardiology, "Late Outcome of PCTA in Women vs. Men: A Report from the NHLBI PCTA Registry"; Richard I. Fogel, M.D., a fellow in cardiology, "Exercise Conditioning in Cardiac Patients Does not Affect Heart Rate Variability Despite Attainment of a Training Effect"; Faisal Khan, Ph.D., a fellow in vascular medicine, "Endothelium-Dependent Forearm Vascular Responses in Diabetic Patients"; James D. Fonger, M.D., an assistant professor of cardiothoracic surgery, "Human Mammary Artery Endothelial Sparing With Fibrous Jaw Clamping," and Nicholas A. Ruocco, M.D., "Augmentation of Coronary Blood Flow by ACE Inhibition Enhanced by Endogenous Bradykinin but not by Angiotensin II Receptor Blockade."

In addition, Philip A. Wolf, M.D., a professor of neurology and public health, delivered the Lewis A. Conner Memorial Lecture, titled "Contributions of Epidemiology to the Prevention of Stroke."

Survey on alcohol and aquatics reveals widespread risky behavior

A nationwide survey conducted by researchers at the School of Public Health has determined that there is widespread abuse of alcohol by people engaging in aquatic activity.

The survey of 3,042 people revealed that 60 percent of the men and women over the age of 16 in this group used alcohol while engaging in aquatic activity on at least one occasion during the previous year. Moreover, only 35 percent of those responding to the survey said that they were aware of new federal regulations that make driving a boat while drinking illegal.

According to Jonathan Howland, Ph.D., the principal investigator of the study and an assistant professor of public health, there is a distinction in the motivations that prompt drunk driving and drunk boating. "People drive when they're drunk to get home or to get to another bar. They don't drink to enhance their driving," he said. In aquatic settings, however, "they drink to combine two pleasures."

Howland noted, however, that over half of the respondents who reported drinking said that consumption of alcohol did not enhance their pleasure when engaging in aquatic activities. He said that he now is planning a study to determine the circumstances under which people could be induced to separate the two pleasures.



The School of Medicine recently held a memorial service in honor of the late Fritz Grunebaum, LL.D., who established the Karin Grunebaum Cancer Research Foundation in 1966 to provide an annual stipend to selected BUSM and Harvard Medical School students studying biomedical sciences related to cancer research. The foundation was named in honor of Grunebaum's first wife. Pictured from left to right are John Sandson, M.D., dean emeritus of BUSM; Roberta Grunebaum, Fritz Grunebaum's second wife, and Carl Franzblau, Ph.D., chairman of the School's Department of Biochemistry. (photo by Lucy Milne, Educational Media Support Center)

Weinschenk named interim chief librarian

Andrea Weinschenk, A.M.L.S., has been named interim chief librarian of the Alumni Medical Library. She fills the vacancy left by Irene Christopher, who retired as chief librarian last month, after 22 years of service.

Weinschenk remains the co-head of the bibliographic services department at the University's Mugar Memorial Library. Before joining the staff at Mugar in 1985, she had extensive experience with both university and medical libraries at the University of Michigan and at Wayne State University. At Mugar, she was involved in the development of computer services before her appointment as co-head of the bibliographic services.

Weinschenk will serve as interim chief librarian until a permanent chief librarian is appointed.

Briefly noted

Barry M. Manuel, M.D., associate dean for continuing medical education, recently was appointed to an advisory panel for the Office of Technology Assessment of the Congress of the United States....**Gary J. Balady, M.D.**, an associate professor of medicine, was elected a fellow of the American Association for Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation for 1992....**David J. Salant, M.B.B.Ch.**, a professor of medicine, recently was appointed to the American Board of Internal Medicine Subspecialty Board on Nephrology.

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