David Geffen School of Medicine | UCLA Health

Patrons Circle

A PUBLICATION FOR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE UCLA DIVISION OF DIGESTIVE DISEASES

Guided by a Legacy of Philanthropy

Mrs. Bren Simon has a simple explanation for her tireless advocacy and philanthropic support of programs that will make a difference in people's lives. "Supporting worthy causes is not only my pleasure and honor, it is a core responsibility," she says.

In making the gift that established the Melvin and Bren Simon Digestive Diseases Center at UCLA, Mrs. Simon says, she was honoring her late husband Melvin Simon. The multidisciplinary center will provide an infrastructure to develop cutting-edge treatment and support for generations of patients (see the article on page 4).

Melvin Simon's fighting spirit played a role in his life and his many accomplishments – from co-founding the Simon Property Group, one of the largest shopping mall companies in the United States, to becoming a co-owner of the NBA's Indiana Pacers in 1983. "Mel was an incredibly generous man," says Mrs. Simon. "He was a loving husband and father. He was brilliant, kind, and epitomized unselfishness. I am proud to carry his legacy and philanthropic priorities forward."

The Simons' long-held belief that it is a privilege to share with others developed into a passion over the course of their 40 years together. It led them to establish the Melvin and Bren Simon Foundation and the Joshua Max Simon Foundation in order to support causes that positively affect medical research and health, particularly among vulnerable populations. "We established the foundation to give back to the community and continue a legacy of respect, kindness, and compassion for all," Mrs. Simon explains.

Mrs. Simon notes that all of her philanthropic activities, whether personal or through the foundations, are motivated by a personal connection to the cause, knowing a critical need will be met, and the positive difference that will result from the gift. "Innovation in medical research will make a difference in our lives today and for future generations," she says.

Continued on page 13

Mrs. Bren Simon

UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases

WINTER 2014

From the Division Chiefs

Gary Gitnick, M.D., F.A.C.G.
Fran and Ray Stark
Foundation Chair

Professor of Medicine

Eric Esrailian, M.D., M.P.H.
Lincy Foundation Chair in
Clinical Gastroenterology

Assistant Clinical Professor
of Medicine

It is a pleasure to share with you the exceptional programs and people that fortify the mission of the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases. Our extraordinary clinicians and researchers continue to elevate the level of innovation and expand the body of knowledge that is spurring new discoveries and groundbreaking treatments to improve the lives of patients.

The scholarly work and personalized care of our Division is built on the generosity of our many friends, without whose passion and dedication to advancing medicine we would not have come so far. It is this steadfast commitment that is helping us to bring together many great minds in science – some, for example, who have already made medical history, such as Nobel Laureate Dr. James Watson, whose pioneering work led to the identification of the structure for DNA, and others who hold the promise of revolutionizing science like, Dr. Dimitrios Iliopoulos, Director of the Center for Systems Biomedicine, who is spearheading studies that are leading to expedited drug discoveries.

Bren Simon is one of our philanthropic partners who understands that this type of visionary work of investigators and clinicians can only take root with seeds of support. Mrs. Simon's transformative gift to establish the Melvin and Bren Simon Digestive Diseases Center at UCLA in honor of her late husband is enabling the recruitment of leading physicians and supporting state-of-the-art programs that advance clinical care and translational research. We are grateful to Mrs. Simon for her tremendous kindness and generosity that will provide quality healthcare for generations of patients and will inspire others to envision how we can all make a difference.

This is an exciting time – truly a journey – and we cannot thank you enough for taking it with us and helping to make so much of the cutting-edge investigation and patient care possible. Read more about these stories and other news here in our winter newsletter. Thank you for your continued support.

Welcome the Ambassadors

We are pleased to announce a newly established volunteer leadership group that will assist the Division in advancing its cornerstones – groundbreaking research, innovative patient care and rigorous training. The Ambassadors will work collaboratively, guided by a shared entrepreneurial mindset, to advance medical science at UCLA through philanthropic efforts and community building. These exceptional leaders will play a key role in enhancing the engagement of the community and broadening the awareness for the Division and its work, while assisting in the development of financial resources. The founding members of the Ambassadors include: Andre Agassi, Vicky Cornell, Peter Diamandis, James Gianopulos, Andrew Hauptman, G. Bradford Jones, Jeffrey Katzenberg, Vatche Manoukian, Kevin Mayer, Joan Payden, Chip Rosenbloom and Bren Simon.

Big Data – Innovations in Drug Discovery

Dimitrios Iliopoulos, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Director, UCLA Center for Systems Biomedicine

With the launch of the UCLA Center for Systems Biomedicine, the Division of Digestive Diseases is thinking big.

The new center has begun implementing an unprecedented infrastructure combining the best of university-based laboratory research, hospital-based clinical research, and pharmaceutical/biotech industry research to dramatically expedite the process of discovering new therapeutic drugs and bringing them to patients.

"At the UCLA Center for Systems Biomedicine, we will be able to take advantage of our infrastructure and powerful new technologies to perform experiments that will help us to more rapidly identify new therapies for digestive diseases, as well as many other conditions," says Dimitrios Iliopoulos, Ph.D., an associate professor in the division and the center's director.

Dr. Iliopoulos, along with his colleagues Maria Hatziapostolou, Ph.D., Christos Polytarchou, Ph.D., George Koukos, Ph.D. and Tiziana Palumbo, Ph.D., recently came to UCLA from Harvard Medical School, where they began to develop their "big data" approach aimed at reducing the time it takes for therapies to benefit patients. At Harvard, a group led by Dr. Iliopoulos screened large numbers of drugs already approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for a variety of conditions to determine their applicability in pancreatic cancer. That innovative strategy resulted in a closely watched clinical trial testing the ability of metformin – long used in the treatment of type 2 diabetes – to improve survival for patients with metastatic pancreatic cancer.

As important as metformin could prove to be for pancreatic cancer patients, Dr. Iliopoulos believes the trial is also a testament to the power of the systems biology approach in expediting the drug discovery process. "When an effective new drug is identified through experiments in cells and animals, it can be 8-10 years before it is brought to patients," he says. "This took 2-3 years after our discovery."

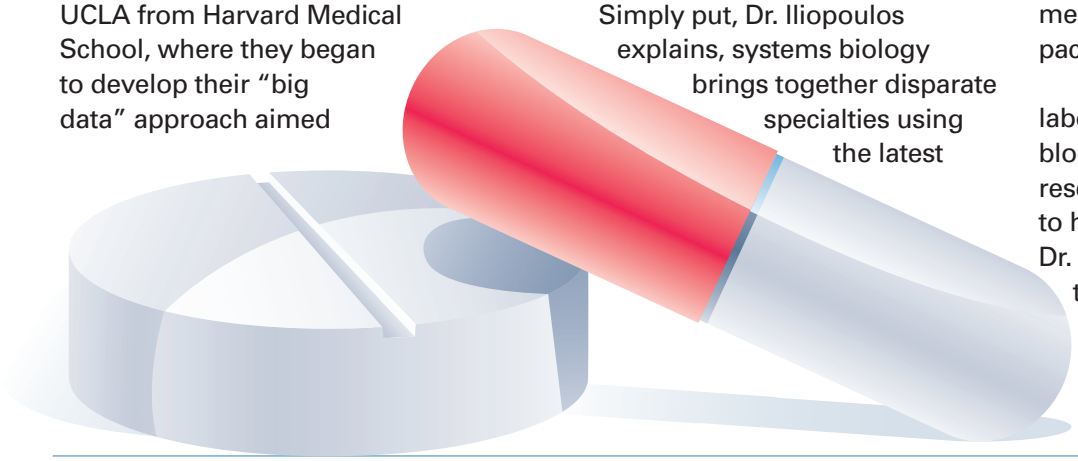
Simply put, Dr. Iliopoulos explains, systems biology brings together disparate specialties using the latest automated technologies to extract data from large numbers of patient tissue samples in an effort to better understand how diseases originate and develop therapies based on that knowledge. The new center's large-scale approach to tissue analysis and drug discovery involves processing hundreds of thousands of samples each year through the use of powerful high-throughput screening methods.

Dr. Iliopoulos notes that biomedical research institutes tend to fall into three categories, each of which has its strengths and limitations:

* The classic university-based laboratory model is strongest at applying the advanced tools of molecular biology to conduct research on cellular and animal models of disease. But because of funding and space constraints, each laboratory tends to be narrowly focused on a single gene or mechanism, resulting in a slower pace of discovery.

* Hospital-based clinical laboratories study the tissue and blood of patients, making their research more directly relevant to human disease. However, Dr. Iliopoulos points out that these efforts typically involve observational approaches rather than in-depth, systematic examinations aimed at

Continued on page 6



Simon Digestive Diseases Center Elevates Division's Programs to New Level

SIMON CENTER LAUNCH

From left: back row: Dr. Raman Muthusamy, Dr. Daniel Hommes, Dr. Brennan Spiegel, Dr. Emeran Mayer and Dr. Peter Anton. From left front row: Dr. Hon Wai Koon, Dr. Kevin Ghassemi, Dr. Eric Esrailian, Bren Simon, Dr. Gary Gitnick and Dr. Lin Chang.

From enabling the recruitment of leading physicians and researchers to supporting innovative programs that are improving patient care and quality of life, the multimillion-dollar gift that established the Melvin and Bren Simon Digestive Diseases Center at UCLA has been a major boon to the Division.

The gift from the Melvin and Bren Simon Foundation has brought all of the Division's clinical, translational and educational programs under one umbrella, creating an infrastructure to support the use of the latest technologies for the diagnosis and treatment of gastrointestinal disorders; implement novel patient-centered approaches to disease management; and develop programs dedicated to cost savings, patient satisfaction and improved outcomes.

The multiyear gift, initiated in 2012, has already made a difference. In addition to recruiting key faculty members to expand the inflammatory bowel diseases program and developing a state-of-the-art home care program, the Simon Center has established a quality initiative. "Our goal is to study and track outcomes – in patient care, research and education – so that we can make improvements each year," says Eric Esrailian, M.D., M.P.H., co-chief of the division, the Lincy Foundation Chair in Clinical Gastroenterology, and medical director of the Simon Center. While tracking the quality of its efforts, the Simon Center is also taking measures to improve them through more streamlined coordination of care and better communication.

Dr. Esrailian notes that the UCLA Center for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD), part of the Simon Center, has already begun to demonstrate the impact of

SIMON CENTER LAUNCH

L to R: Arline and Henry Gluck and Bren Simon.

specialized nurses and care coordinators working closely with patients to improve quality of life for those living with chronic conditions. Under the leadership of Daniel Hommes, M.D., Ph.D., a renowned IBD physician who was recruited to UCLA thanks to the Simon Center gift, patients in the IBD program are using mobile technology for real-time support from their nurses and physicians. The interactive tool also provides the healthcare team with invaluable data to help track patient care and outcomes. The division plans to replicate the patient-centered approach in other chronic disease programs within the Simon Center.

The Simon Center is also novel for its focus on diet and nutrition. The new Digestive Health and Nutrition Clinic, under the direction of Lin Chang, M.D., includes as an integral member of the clinical care team a registered dietitian with a special focus and expertise in gastrointestinal disorders. "A multidisciplinary approach is very important in treating patients with digestive diseases, and nutrition is part of the armamentarium that can help them," says Dr. Chang.

Among the advanced technology services receiving a significant boost from the gift is the center's growing program in interventional endoscopy, a non-surgical approach used for the diagnosis and treatment of an increasing number of gastrointestinal illnesses. "Many procedures that were once the domain of the surgeon can now be done in a more minimally invasive way," says V. Raman Muthusamy, M.D., who was recruited as the interventional endoscopy program's first director. "We are covering the full spectrum of digestive diseases through a broad set of endoscopic techniques that, in many ways, are approaching surgical capabilities."

"We are dedicated to staying on the cutting edge of medicine and health care delivery," says Dr. Esrailian of the new center. "We are extremely grateful to the Simon family for their transformative gift, which will provide support for our patient care and research for years to come."

SIMON CENTER LAUNCH | L to R: Dr. Lin Chang, Ken Rubey and Agi Hirshberg.

SIMON CENTER LAUNCH | L to R: H. Tony and Marti Oppenheimer.

SIMON CENTER LAUNCH | L to R: Dr. Gary Gitnick, Dr. Melina Esrailian, Dr. Eric Esrailian and Bren Simon.

Big-Data, continued from page 3

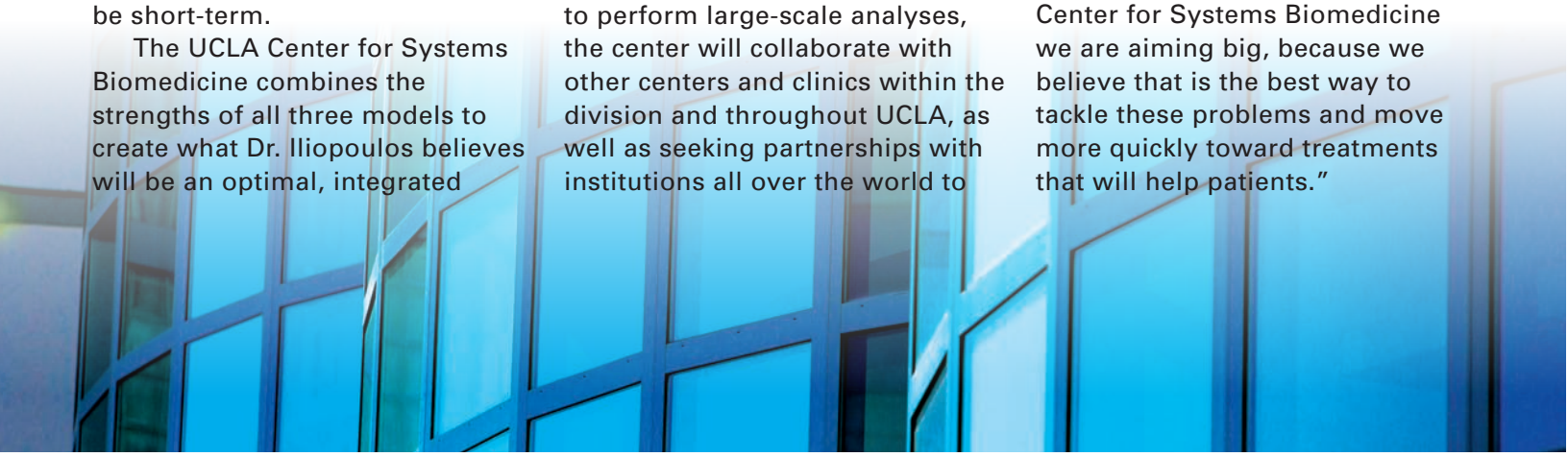
determining the cause of the disease process or targeting a drug to address the problem.

* And finally, the model followed by pharmaceutical and biotech companies applies the same types of automated technologies to screen thousands of potential drugs as the UCLA Center for Systems Biomedicine, but the research tends not to involve patient samples due to the fact that patient samples have to be processed directly after surgery and also because, projects tend to be short-term.

The UCLA Center for Systems Biomedicine combines the strengths of all three models to create what Dr. Iliopoulos believes will be an optimal, integrated infrastructure. "We are a university-based center with basic research laboratories, hospital-based clinical research, and the technology of a pharmaceutical company," he explains.

He notes that the center is also taking extraordinary efforts to bring together a multidisciplinary group of experts in a collaborative environment, including clinicians, laboratory researchers, computer scientists, biomedical engineers, chemists and others. To ensure the volume of samples necessary to perform large-scale analyses, the center will collaborate with other centers and clinics within the division and throughout UCLA, as well as seeking partnerships with institutions all over the world to share tissue samples, knowledge and technologies. Given the vast amount of data being collected, the center includes software engineers and mathematicians who will develop specialized programs to meet the data analysis needs.

"There are many important biomedical problems that can be solved only through a large infrastructure," says Dr. Iliopoulos. "They require resources beyond what just one lab or even one center can provide. With the UCLA Center for Systems Biomedicine we are aiming big, because we believe that is the best way to tackle these problems and move more quickly toward treatments that will help patients."



Esophageal Center, GI Motility Program Bring Wide-Ranging Expertise to Quality of Life Disorders

By bringing together a wide range of specialists who collaborate in evaluating and treating patients using the most advanced methods, the UCLA Center for Esophageal Disorders and the GI Motility Program are providing much-needed relief to people who suffer from chronic conditions that can significantly impair quality of life.

The center, now under the leadership of Jeffrey Conklin, M.D., features specialists in gastroenterology, endoscopy, surgery, oncology, radiology, pathology, pulmonology, nutrition, and speech and language therapy, all working as a team to deliver state-of-the-art diagnosis and treatments for patients with problems involving the esophagus – the hollow organ through which food and liquid are transported from the mouth to the stomach. Dr. Conklin also directs the related GI Motility Program,

Esophageal dysfunction and GI motility can lead to symptoms that include heartburn, regurgitation of stomach contents back into the mouth (reflux), difficulty swallowing, constipation and diarrhea, as well as potentially affecting the throat, sinuses, lungs and mouth. "Many of the disorders we see require a significant level of expertise from a team of specialists to successfully treat," says Dr. Conklin. "These conditions can have a severe impact on patients' quality of life, particularly those caused by acid injury, allergies, infections, swallowing problems and tumors."

Among the most common disorders treated at the center and in the GI Motility Program are

Continued on page 7

Esophageal Center, continued from page 6

gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), swallowing disorders, fecal incontinence and constipation, Barrett's esophagus and esophageal cancer. Approximately one in four U.S. adults experience GERD at one point in their life, according to Kevin Ghassemi, M.D., clinical programs director for the center. "GERD is becoming increasingly common, especially with the growing problem of obesity," he explains. Being overweight, as well as a high-fat diet and excessive alcohol consumption, can place individuals at risk for GERD. A lifestyle change can improve the symptoms, but most patients require medical or surgical treatment, Dr. Ghassemi says.

Medication – specifically the use of an over-the-counter or prescription proton pump inhibitor drug to reduce acid production – is often effective, but when the problem persists, patients at the UCLA center undergo testing to determine the underlying causes, and the multidisciplinary team works together to determine the best course of treatment. Among the state-of-the-art diagnostic tools for GERD and other disorders that the center treats is one that Dr. Conklin was instrumental in developing: esophageal manometry, a test to determine the function of the esophagus. The conventional surgical approach is called a Nissen fundoplication – wrapping a portion of the stomach around the esophagus. The center is also exploring new surgical approaches that may reduce side effects of the fundoplication technique.

Swallowing difficulties, also known as dysphagia, produce the sensation of food being stuck in the throat, neck or sternum. Dr. Conklin notes that this can be due to a variety of factors, including anatomical problems and blockages. One common movement disorder of the esophagus, achalasia, is characterized by the inability of the lower esophageal sphincter to relax. For any swallowing issues, an endoscopy (insertion into the GI tract of a flexible tube with a light and camera at its tip) may be performed to ensure that a tumor is not causing the blockage. Once cancer is ruled out,

diagnostic tests such as esophageal manometry can help to pinpoint the cause.

Among the most dramatic advances in the approach to esophageal disorders is reflected in the way the center treats Barrett's esophagus, a complication of GERD in which the lining of the esophagus begins to take on the appearance of the stomach and small intestine – in some cases leading to the development of esophageal cancer. A decade ago, patients with Barrett's esophagus were monitored until the level of dysplasia (abnormal development) reached the point at which surgical removal of the esophagus was required to prevent cancer. Now the condition can be successfully treated the vast majority of the time through a much less invasive endoscopic approach called radiofrequency ablation, which burns off the abnormal tissue. "This has revolutionized the way we view Barrett's esophagus," says V. Raman Muthusamy, M.D., director of interventional endoscopy for the Division, who was involved in developing the technique prior to being recruited to UCLA. Because the approach is now minimally invasive and relatively routine, he explains, even many low-grade cases of Barrett's esophagus are now being treated rather than monitored if they are believed to be at a significant risk of progressing.

This cutting-edge treatment is one of many provided by the UCLA Center for Esophageal Disorders and GI Motility Program thanks to the breadth and depth of the expertise of the medical and surgical teams. "This is one of the few places where we have a truly multidisciplinary approach to esophageal diseases," says Dr. Conklin. "We are fortunate to have skilled experts in the many areas relevant to helping patients with esophageal problems through state-of-the-art diagnostics and therapy."

Jeffrey Conklin, M.D.
Professor
Director, GI Motility Program

Kevin Ghassemi, M.D.
Assistant Professor
Clinical Programs Director

UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases 2013-14 Fellows

Nikhil Agarwal
M.D.: Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Christopher Almario
M.D.: Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, PA
Residency: Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Eric Chak
M.D.: UC San Francisco, San Francisco, CA
Residency: UCLA - Olive View, Sylmar, CA

Gina Choi
M.D.: UC San Francisco, San Francisco, CA
Residency: NYU, New York City, NY

Tyralee Goo
M.D.: Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Gati Goel
Masters: Biomedical Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai, India
M.D.: K J Somaiya Medical College, Mumbai, India
Ph.D.: Engineering at the Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH
Residency: Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH

Deepinder Goyal
M.D.: Dayanand Medical College and Hospital, India
Residency: St. Joseph's Hospital, Chicago, IL

Andrew Ho
M.D.: UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Jonathan Jacobs
M.D.: Harvard Medical School, Cambridge, MA
Residency: Stanford University Hospital, Stanford, CA

Marc Kaneshiro
M.D.: University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Stephen Kim
M.D.: Tufts University, School of Medicine, Boston, MA
Residency: Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

David Kunkel
M.D.: University of New Mexico School of Medicine, Albuquerque, NM
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Folasade May
Masters: Philosophy and Epidemiology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England
M.D.: Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Residency: Massachusettes General Hospital, Boston, MA

Rushabh Modi
M.D.: Brown Medical School, Providence, RI
MPH: Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Vivian Ng
M.D.: UCLA, Los Angeles, CA
Residency: UCLA, Los Angeles, CA

Carl Nordstom
M.D.: University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

David Padua
M.D.: Weill Cornell Medical College, New York City, NY
Ph.D.: Molecular Biology - Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
Residency: UCLA, Los Angeles, CA

Claudia Sanmiguel
M.D.: Pontificial Javarian University, Bogota, Colombia
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Victora Sheen
M.D.: UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA
Residency: UCLA, Los Angeles, CA

Elizabeth Videlock
M.D.: UCLA, Los Angeles, CA
Residency: Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, MA

Michelle Vu
M.D.: Boston University, Boston, MA
Residency: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Guy Weiss
M.D.: Sackler School of Medicine at Tel Aviv University, Israel
Residency: SUNY, Buffalo, NY

Events

PATRONS CIRCLE | L to R: Joanna Poitier, Cherna Gitnick, Dr. Gary Gitnick and Sydney Poitier.

CNS LUNCHEON | L to R: Gerald Oppenheimer, Constance Gavin and Dr. Emeran Mayer.

PATRONS CIRCLE | L to R: Dr. Lynn Connolly, Jim and Carmen Ward.

In the last year, the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases welcomed friends and supporter to events showcasing its faculty and centers of excellence. Guests gathered for a luncheon highlighting the Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer Family Center for the Neurobiology of Stress and featuring a lecture by Dr. Emeran Mayer titled "Feeling Well: The Science Behind It and Ways to Achieve It." Dr. Lynn Connolly offered guests insight into the impact our diets have on our wellbeing in her lecture titled "Sweet Addiction: Understanding How Your Brain Responds to Food's Visual Cues" during the fall Patron Circle luncheon.

PATRONS CIRCLE | L to R: Jacqueline Rosenberg and Erica Brunson.

PATRONS CIRCLE | Back: Stanley Silver and Dr. Harry Pothoulakis. Front: Patricia Silver

CNS LUNCHEON | L to R: Sheila Weisman and Jane Hulick.

UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases Recently Welcomed Six New Members to Its Faculty

Michael J. Albertson, M.D.
Health Sciences Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine

The UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, welcomes **Dr. Michael J. Albertson** as Health Sciences Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine. Concentrating on clinical work, Dr. Albertson specializes in Gastroenterology. He has extensive experience in endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography and biliary tract intervention, and is well versed in the area of inflammatory bowel disease and the branch of Hepatology.

Board-certified in Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology, Dr. Albertson earned his medical degree at Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California. He did a straight medicine internship, his residency in Internal Medicine, and a fellowship in Gastroenterology at Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center. He returned to Keck School of Medicine as the Director of Student Health and as a Clinical Instructor of Gastroenterology. His medical career also includes work as a Gastroenterologist at Southern California Digestive Disease Consultants and Valley Gastroenterology Associates, both in Burbank, California. Immediately before coming to UCLA, he served as Assistant Professor of Medicine and Gastroenterology at State University of New York (SUNY)/ Downstate Medical School in Brooklyn.

Jeffrey R. Lewis, M.D.
Health Sciences Clinical Instructor of Medicine

Dr. Jeffrey R. Lewis begins his UCLA career as a Health Sciences Clinical Instructor of Medicine in the Division of Digestive Diseases, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. Dr. Lewis previously served as Attending Physician in the Department of Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York. He earned his medical degree from the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine, completed his residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Chicago Medical Center, and, following his residency, Dr. Lewis served as Chief Fellow, Division of Gastroenterology, at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York.

Dr. Lewis has received multiple honors, including election to the national medical honor society Alpha Omega Alpha. His current research includes studies on capsule endoscopy in healthy individuals and on the use of high resolution manometry to identify predictors of favorable outcomes after fundoplication for refractory gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). An experienced speaker, he also has co-authored work that has been published in prestigious peer-reviewed journals and as book chapters.

Mary Farid, D.O.
Clinical Instructor of Medicine

Dr. Mary Farid completed her undergraduate work at UCLA, graduating Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physiological Science and a minor in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. She completed her medical degree from the Western University of Health Sciences in 2003. She returned to UCLA to complete a residency in Internal Medicine at the UCLA-VA Greater Los Angeles Program, and then went on to complete her fellowship in Gastroenterology at UCLA.

Dr. Farid practices general gastroenterology in all its aspects, with particular interests in inflammatory bowel disease, esophageal disorders, irritable bowel syndrome and colon cancer screening. She is board-certified in both Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology. She is a member of the American College of Gastroenterology and the American Gastroenterology Association.

Dr. Rimma Shaposhnikov completed her undergraduate work at Yale University, earning a Bachelor of Science in Molecular Biochemistry. She obtained her medical degree from State University of New York at Buffalo. During that time, Dr. Shaposhnikov was one of six people selected by the CDC to investigate a break out of Hepatitis B in Brazil. Her training in internal medicine and subsequently gastroenterology was done at USC. Her research centered on UGI bleeding, as well as molecular markers found in polyps. After completing fellowship, Dr. Shaposhnikov joined a multi-specialty group in the San Fernando Valley. In addition to establishing the practice, she also started an esophageal lab at Providence St. Joseph's Medical Center.

Dr. Shaposhnikov practices general gastroenterology in all its aspects, with particular interests in inflammatory bowel disease, esophageal disorders, irritable bowel syndrome and colon cancer screening. She is board-certified in both Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology. She is a member of the American College of Gastroenterology and the American Gastroenterology Association.

She is a new addition to UCLA and is part of the spearheading effort to establish the northwest campus of UCLA Health in Westlake Village and Thousands Oaks.

Rimma Shaposhnikov, M.D.
Clinical Instructor of Medicine

Dr. Christina Ha graduated from Harvard University and earned her medical degree from Albert Einstein College of Medicine. She completed both her Internal Medicine residency and Gastroenterology fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine. Following GI fellowship, she spent a year as the Present-Levison Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Fellow at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. Subsequently, she joined the faculty at The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine as part of the Meyerhoff Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center where she was Co-associate Director of IBD clinical research. She also served as the Associate GI Fellowship Director. Her areas of clinical interest are in the inflammatory bowel diseases, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Her research is also centered around Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis with a particular focus in the natural history and clinical outcomes of IBD in the elderly.

She is actively involved in GI societies, including serving on the practice parameters committee for the American College of Gastroenterology, the GTE subcommittee for the American Gastroenterological Association, and a member of the AGA Academy of Educators. She has published her IBD research in multiple peer-reviewed journals including *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology* and the *American Journal of Gastroenterology*. She also is a reviewer for several of the major GI journals including *Inflammatory Bowel Diseases Journal, Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Gastroenterology, Digestive Diseases and Sciences, Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology* and *Alimentary Pharmacology and Therapeutics*.

Christina Ha, M.D.
Health Sciences Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine

Dr. Alireza Sedarat joined UCLA in 2013 as a member of the interventional endoscopy team and hemostasis group within the Division of Digestive Diseases. His clinical interests encompass the development and application of advanced endoscopic techniques and interventions to diagnose, stage, treat and palliate a range of benign and malignant gastrointestinal disorders. His research interests include endoscopic device development and application as well as evaluation of existing and emerging endoscopic technologies with a focus on improving patient outcomes. He is interested in the application of the emerging fields of endoscopic submucosal dissection (ESD) for early tumor resection and peroral endoscopic mytotomy (POEM) for achalasia palliation. He will also be participating in new and ongoing research in GI bleeding in association with the CURE Hemostasis Research Group. Dr. Sedarat completed his residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He completed his fellowship in Gastroenterology here at UCLA and returned to UPenn to complete an advanced endoscopy fellowship. He is board-certified in Gastroenterology and Internal Medicine and is a member of the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, American College of Gastroenterology and American Gastroenterological Association.

Alireza Sedarat, M.D.
Health Sciences Clinical Instructor of Medicine

Nobel Laureate Visits Division

When one of the most celebrated scientists of the last century visited the UCLA campus in March, he made a special stop.

Nobel Laureate James Watson, whose 1953 co-discovery of the structure of DNA was among the most important scientific advances of the 20th century, gave two lectures to standing-room-only crowds at UCLA, marking the 60th anniversary of his landmark discovery. Prior to his arrival, Dr. Watson requested a meeting with Dr. Dimitrios Iliopoulos, associate professor in the Division of Digestive Diseases and director of the Division's new Center for Systems Biomedicine.

Dr. Watson was intrigued by Dr. Iliopoulos's novel approach to drug discovery, which combines the best features of university-based basic science research, hospital-based clinical research, and pharmaceutical-industry research to expedite the process. The approach led a group headed by Dr. Iliopoulos to move the drug metformin – long used to treat diabetes – into a closely watched clinical trial for pancreatic cancer. (For more on the Center for Systems Biomedicine, see page 3.)

L to R: Dr. James Watson with Dr. Dimitrios Iliopoulos

L to R: Dr. Gary Gitnick with Dr. James Watson

Accompanied by Dr. Bruce W. Stillam, president and CEO of the renowned Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (CSHL), and Dr. David Tuveson, CSHL Cancer Center's director, Dr. Watson joined leaders of the Division and others in attending a talk by Dr. Iliopoulos called "Drug Discovery Strategies in the Center for System Biomedicine." In the talk, Dr. Iliopoulos discussed the infrastructure needed and the scientific questions that must be addressed to expedite the drug discovery process, then explained how the center he heads is building a paradigm to do so. The meeting also included discussions about potential collaborations between CSHL and the Center for Systems Biomedicine.

UCLA | XPRIZE Partnership Event

The Division was pleased to host an event that launched an important partnership between UCLA and the XPRIZE Foundation. This innovative new program will promote groundbreaking ideas, new research and solutions to some of society's most pressing challenges.

UCLA XPRIZE | L to R: Dr. Eric Esrailian, Dr. Peter Diamandis and Dr. James Economou.

UCLA XPRIZE | L to R: Dr. Gary Gitnick and Claude and Michael Arnall.

UCLA XPRIZE | L to R: Dr. Gary Gitnick, Dr. A. Eugene Washington and Dr. Raman Muthusamy.

Study Offers First Evidence that Diet Can Affect Brain Function

The old saying "you are what you eat" may take on new meaning if the findings of an early proof-of-concept study by researchers in the division's Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer Family Center for Neurobiology of Stress are confirmed.

The research team, headed by Drs. Kirsten Tillisch and Emeran Mayer, found that healthy women who regularly consumed beneficial bacteria known as probiotics through yogurt showed altered brain function, both while in a resting state and in response to an emotion-recognition task. It is the first evidence that changing the bacterial environment in the gut through diet can affect brain function in humans – a finding that could ultimately point the way toward dietary or drug interventions to improve brain function.

"Many of us have a container of yogurt in our refrigerator that we may eat for enjoyment, for calcium or because we think it might help our health in other ways," says Kirsten Tillisch, M.D., an associate professor of medicine in the division and lead author of the study. "Our findings indicate that some of the contents of yogurt may actually change the way our brain responds to the environment."

Researchers have known that the brain sends signals to the gut, which is why stress and other emotions can contribute to gastrointestinal symptoms. The findings of Dr. Tillisch's group confirm that signals travel the opposite way as well. "Time and time again, we hear from patients that they never felt depressed or anxious until they started experiencing problems with their gut," Dr. Tillisch says. "Our study shows that the gut–brain connection is a two-way street."

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Associate Professor of Medicine Division of Digestive Diseases

Kirsten Tillisch, M.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine
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Mrs. Bren Simon, continued from page 1

"Investing in health today will save lives tomorrow. I especially admire UCLA's dedicated staff. They tirelessly seek answers and explore treatments that will combat digestive diseases and improve the quality of life for those suffering from them."

In addition to the foundations, Mrs. Simon supports a variety of charitable causes – both at home in Indiana and throughout the world – with a focus on better health, a safer environment, quality education, and a more peaceful world. Under her direction, The Melvin and Bren Simon Foundation has donated a substantial amount of resources to the National Democratic Institute, a large portion of which has been allocated to a number of groups that support women's political participation.

Mrs. Simon says she is honored by the establishment of the Simon Center. "Knowing that lives are being changed for the better – and in many cases, are being saved – is a truly wonderful feeling," she says. "At the same time, it's humbling. I've been very fortunate in my life and it's only right that I share with others who are in need. I love seeing the difference that can be made as a result of these gifts."

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