



Scoop



Black History Month

Friday, February 11, 2000

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - HOUSTON MEDICAL SCHOOL

EVENTS TO KNOW:

- **MSRDP Meeting**, Wed., Feb. 23, 4 - 6 p.m., MSB 3.001
- **Town Hall Meeting**, Fri., March 17, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., MSB 3.001.
- **Annual Faculty Meeting**, Wed., May 24, 11:30 lunch, 11:45 meeting, MSB 3.001.

UTmost Interest

Dr. William Dowhan, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, is serving on the Planning Committee for the 2001 national meeting of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

Hot News

SCIENCE ENGINEERING FAIR

Judges needed. Over 1,400 junior and senior high school students, some of the brightest and most creative from 16 area counties, need you. Approximately 800 judges are needed for: behavioral & social sciences, biochemistry & microbiology, botany, chemistry, computer science, earth & space sciences, engineering, environmental science, mathematics, medicine & health, physics, and zoology. The judging activities will be 8:30 a.m.-noon, and 1:30-5 p.m., Fri., **March 24**, Astroarena Exhibition Center. Volunteers can contact **Dr. Stewart Turner**, UT-Houston Dental Branch, 713-500-4588.

DR. EDITH I. JONES, SPEAKER

Dr. Edith Irby Jones, a medical pioneer, and **Dr. Espy Fernandez**, will speak at the free *Living Longer-Living Well* program for women, sponsored by the American Heart Association (AHA), Houston Division's Community Education (CE) Committee, 6-8 p.m., Wed., **Feb. 16**, Museum of Health & Medical Science, 1515 Hermann Drive. Jones was the first African-American admitted to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, graduating in 1952. The evening will feature free health screenings, health information, and a ballet created for the occasion, performed by **Sandra Organ**. There will be door prizes plus hors d'oeuvres and punch. **Nora K. Shire**, Community Affairs and Public Education, is chair of this AHA CE committee.



KNOBIL ENDOWED LECTURESHIP ANNOUNCED

Dean Maximilian Buja hosted a reception on Tues., Feb. 8, announcing the "Ernst Knobil Endowment Fund" to honor **Dr. Ernst Knobil** for his continued contributions to academic medicine. The fund will provide for an annual Ernst Knobil Lectureship that will enhance one of the current four annual Dean's Lectures with speakers of the highest caliber, noted Dr. Buja and **President M. David Low**, during brief tribute remarks. The H. Wayne Hightower Professor of the Medical Sciences and director of the Laboratory for Neuroendocrinology at the Medical School, Dr. Knobil first came to Houston from the University of Pittsburgh to serve as Dean of the Medical School from 1981- 84. In 1989 he was named an Ashbel Smith Professor by the UT System Board of Regents. Also on hand at the reception was **Dr. Luciano Martini**, chairman of the department of endocrinology at the University of Milan. Dr. Martini formally announced Dr. Knobil's 1999 honorary doctorate from that university (Dr. Knobil's fourth honorary degree). During the reception, Dr. Buja summarized highlights from Dr. Knobil's distinguished 40-year research career that are repeated for *Scoop*.

- Pioneered discoveries related to neuropeptide gonadotropin releasing hormone and our understanding of the 28-day ovulatory menstrual cycle. Also pioneered our understanding of the species specificity of growth hormone, which led directly and for the first time to the successful treatment of human pituitary dwarfs.
- Recognized leader in medical education who has trained 69 postdoctoral fellows and six graduate students, many of whom are the academic leaders in their field today.
- Past president of The Endocrine Society, American Physiological Society, and the International Society of Endocrinology.
- Honorary member of the German, Japanese and Mexican Societies of Endocrinology and has served on the editorial boards of the leading professional journals in his field while authoring three books along with 217 journal articles to date.
- Memberships in the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.
- Foreign associate of the French Academy of Sciences, the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, the Belgian Royal Academy of Medicine, and Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
- Honorary doctorate degrees from the University of Bordeaux, the Medical College of Wisconsin, the University of Liège and the University of Milan.

ABOULEISH RECOGNIZED IN ARABIC CITY OF ABU DHABI

Dr. Ezzat Abouleish, Anesthesiology, received a gold medal for his contributions and participation in the Sixth Pan Arab International Congress of Anesthesia, ICU, Pain, Emergency & Disaster Medicine, held January 17-21, 2000 in Abu Dhabi. He also received a recognition award in the form of a crystal boat, an ancient symbol of the early trading and pearl collecting days of that Arabian Gulf City. Abouleish lectured on "Combined Spinal and Epidural Technique," "New Local Anesthetics," and "Resuscitation of the Newborn."



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-HOUSTON
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER



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Produced weekly by the Office of Community Affairs and Public Education

PERIMENOPAUSE, MENOPAUSE, & OTHER NATURAL WONDERS OF WOMEN'S MID - LIFE



Editor's Note: This is the first in a two-part series on the subjects of perimenopause and menopause. **Dr. Shahla Nader**, co-director, UT-Houston Medical School Office of Women's Health, and professor, Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences, and Internal Medicine, will be giving a talk on perimenopause, "The Perimenopause Experience: What to Expect," including hormonal changes, signs, symptoms, and treatment options, noon, Thursday, Feb. 17, MSB 3.001. A website covering the topics mentioned in this article is the Power Surge web site at <<http://www.dearest.com>>.

The cartoon read, "I'm out of estrogen and I have a gun." I laughed when I spied those words pinned on an office wall showing a frustrated middle-aged woman suffering from mid-life menopause behind her office desk. That was a few years ago. Today, at the mid-point of my life, I'm now experiencing sometimes powder-keg angry outbursts, confusing mood swings, crying jags, prolonged menstrual cycles, headaches, and night sweats that remind me of that cartoon.

So, what's going on? Why for more than 40 million female baby boomers (close to 38 % of the U.S. population), who've reached the age of 50, is "estrogen" the buzzword of women's health? For starters, approximately 14 % of American women over the age of 45 are now taking supplemental estrogens, as they enter first perimenopause, and subsequently menopause.

How does estrogen perform in the body anyway? Perhaps the better question is, how doesn't it perform? All of a woman's most important body tissues contain estrogen receptors. There are 300 different tissues, ranging from the brain to skin to bone in a woman's body, that contain receptors for estrogen. That includes the breasts, skin, and blood vessels. They're all depending on estrogen to stay flexible and toned. Estrogen keeps the uterus, vagina, and base of the bladder moist. And there are many sites in the brain where estrogen receptors are found, which may explain why some women entering perimenopause and menopause experience forgetfulness, free-floating anxiety, and memory loss.

Each woman's experience as she enters perimenopause, a transitional period of declining estrogen levels marked by fluctuations in her estrogen cycle, is different. For some, the transition is quiet, unobtrusive - like a cat on a night prowler. Some unexplained exhaustion perhaps, some acne eruptions, atypical headaches, some irritability, or lapses in libido. For others, it's dramatic, startling - like a wolf howling at the moon. There's a shortening of menstrual cycle intervals, or a change in the pattern of bleeding, perhaps also so-called "hot flashes," "power surges," and night sweats. A footnote here from the experts. "Abnormally prolonged, intermittent, or heavy bleeding, could also be a signal of other pathological conditions that need to be checked out by a physician," cautions **Dr. Shahla Nader**, co-director, UT-Houston Medical School Office of Women's Health. In fact, this period of a woman's life calls for an early baseline checkup. Blood tests, such as measuring the level of Estradiol, menstrual history, and a transvaginal ultrasound are some of the options, if clinically indicated.



Dr. Shahla Nader
UT-H Medical School
Office of Women's
Health

Perimenopause is the period of time, normally about four years, that leads into menopause. Menopause is defined as a woman's last menstrual period. This is strictly defined retrospectively as an absence of menses for one year. The woman is no longer producing estrogen and progesterone. How do you know when you've reached menopause? Normally symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats herald the impending event. But a test to see whether a woman's serum FSH (follicle stimulating hormone) level has risen into menopause rank can be done. There is a gradual rise of FSH during perimenopause. At the menopausal point, a woman may be placed on a traditional Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) regime. The goal is the least medication for the most benefit.

Andropause, also called viropause or malepause, is the male equivalent of menopause and is less dramatic. It normally occurs later in life, during the sixth to eighth decades. While a deficiency of androgens defines andropause, estrogen is known to be as important to a man's bone strength and skeletal structure as it is to a woman's. This is because men produce estrogen by converting it from the male hormone androgen. Men at this time in their lives can have symptoms that include increased nervousness, constipation, impaired memory, reduced potency, and excessive perspiration. Lower hormone levels may result in impotence in some men. Testosterone replacement therapy has been used for this purpose and to increase bone density as well.

There is still much research being done on the different medical options for women during perimenopause and menopause. In 1995, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched a \$628 million *Women's Health Initiative* to study 27,500 women, half receiving HRT, and the other half, a placebo. Results are expected out in 2005. At UT-Houston Medical School, **Dr. Firyal Khan**, Obstetrics, Gynecology & Reproductive Sciences, has devoted 20 years to studying the reproductive cycles of female baboons. Presently she is examining the Papio baboon in a study entitled "Aging Female Baboon and Ovarian Function." Dr. Khan says that normal human ovarian tissue and samples of blood can be difficult to obtain, but the baboon's perimenopause-menopause cycles are easier to observe and are similar to a human female's cycles.

(See Part II of this article in next week's *Scoop* with useful tips for women).

- C. O'Brien