



Scoop

Nov. 7, 2003

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL AT HOUSTON

Events to Know

November

- 10 Biochemistry & Molecular Biology Seminar Series, Dr. Frederick Alt,** Linking Histones to Genomic Instability and Cancer, 11:45 a.m., MSB 2.135.
- 13 Fields Lecture, Dr. John Marler,** 4 p.m., MSB 3.001.
- 14 Research Day,** 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Homberger Conference Center.

UTMost Interest

Dr. William H. Donovan, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, recently attended The Southern African Spinal Cord Association Congress in Johannesburg and gave presentations on topics, including spinal cord injury, spasticity management, and pain management. He also attended and gave presentations at the International Spinal Cord Society meeting in Beijing, China.

COLOMBIAN PIONEER IS NEW LIVER TRANSPLANT DIRECTOR

Dr. Rafael Botero has been installed as medical director for the Liver Transplant Service within the Division of Immunology and Organ Transplantation. He also will serve as Medical Director for The Memorial Hermann Hospital Texas Liver Center as well as professor of medicine and director of hepatology for the Division of Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition.



Dr. Rafael Botero

Botero previously worked at the University of Wisconsin Medical School in Madison, The Colombian School of Medicine, and at his alma mater, The University of Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia, as director of gastroenterology and hepatology. During his career, Botero was Colombia's first hepatologist and founded the first successful liver transplantation program in Bogota. "**Dr. Luis Mieles, Dr. Hadar Merhav,** and myself, share a dream. We have a lot of expertise in hepatology and liver transplantation, and we think this city deserves one of the best liver transplant programs in the United States," Botero said. (See related *Scoop* article, Feb. 7, 2003).

MEDICATION BORN AT THE MEDICAL SCHOOL COMES TO LIGHT

Lenard M. Lichtenberger, professor of integrative biology and pharmacology at the Medical School and a PLx Pharma company founder, said the company is poised to launch a clinical trial of an improved ibuprofen product. "We are moving ahead on both scientific and business fronts with our safer and cost-effective approach to pain relief," said **Lichtenberger**, the company's interim president. "Our new partners from MediGen Group are providing entrepreneurial expertise to advance our goal of bringing superior varieties of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to the market."



Dr. Lenard Lichtenberger

MediGen Group partners Ron Zimmerman and J.T. Thompson are actively involved as interim management. The venture capital group was formed to assist researchers in the Texas Medical Center in their commercialization efforts with a goal of keeping more startup companies in Houston. MediGen invested \$500,000 in PLx Pharma earlier this year.

"The worldwide market for non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs exceeds \$10 billion annually and yet, with all the products currently available, the market largely fails to address the issue of debilitating and dangerous gastrointestinal side effects associated with long term use," Zimmerman said. "We have a unique opportunity to address this need with Dr. Lichtenberger's technology and to provide an effective, low-cost alternative with a relatively short regulatory path to market." Lichtenberger, who also has a faculty appointment at the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, has conducted extensive research supported by more than \$8 million of National Institutes of Health and other grants into the effects of NSAIDs on the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. He has found

(Continued on back page)

THUMBS UP!!!



Giving the thumbs up on the new flood door at the Medical School, after successful testing, **Oct. 8** are (l. to r.): **David Beard**, Vaughn Construction; **Ray Drexler**, Walter P. Moore, structural engineer; and **Hyde Griffith**, Facilities Operations, senior project manager.

CLARIFICATION - In addition to the support and sponsorship provided by the Dean and the Office of Educational Programs, the major support for the Summer Research Program Research Forum (story in *Scoop* Oct. 31 issue), is through a grant from the National Institutes of Health.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT HOUSTON
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Stanley Schultz, M.D., Interim Dean
Darla Brown, Director
e-mail: M.Darla.Brown@uth.tmc.edu
Colleen O'Brien, Editor
e-mail: Colleen.L.O'Brien@uth.tmc.edu
Phone: 713-500-5114; FAX: (713) 500-0597
E-Scoop online:
http://www.med.uth.tmc.edu/community_affairs/escoop.htm
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MEDICATION COMES TO LIGHT, CONTINUED

that blending a substance called phosphatidylcholine (PC) – a purified form of lecithin derived from soybeans – with an NSAID, such as aspirin or ibuprofen, will dramatically reduce the GI bleeding and ulcers NSAID use may cause.

PLx Pharma expects to launch a phase one clinical trial in early 2004 with its lead compound, PC-ibuprofen. The company anticipates using an expedited process allowed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration when a company proposes combining two substances previously approved by the agency, in this case, ibuprofen and PC.

Lichtenberger said the plan is to get PC-ibuprofen to market first while continuing the development of PCaspirin, which will address a much larger potential market that extends from pain relief to prevention of cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease, and several types of cancer.

The patented technology is licensed from the UT Health Science Center at Houston. The university is a shareholder in the company, formerly known as GrassRoots Pharmaceuticals, along with **Dr. Ferid Murad**, Lichtenberger and his original investment group, and MediGen Group.

For more information, see <<http://www.plxpharma.com>>.

- S. Merville

APPLICANTS TO U.S. MEDICAL SCHOOLS INCREASE, WOMEN THE MAJORITY FOR THE FIRST TIME

After a six-year decline, the number of applicants to U.S. medical schools is on the rise, according to data released Nov. 4 by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Almost 35,000 individuals applied to attend medical school in the 2003-2004 school year, a 3.4 percent increase over last year's applicant pool of 33,625. The main reason for the increase was the number of women applicants - 17,672 - an almost 7 percent rise over last year's total.

Among the applicant pool were 26,160 individuals applying for the first time to medical school, an increase of 5 percent over last year, constituting evidence that the previous decline has ended.

For the past six years, the total number of medical school applicants has steadily dropped between 1,000 to 4,000 applicants in each subsequent year.

This trend reached its lowest point with last year's total of 33,625 applicants.

The sharp decline of males applying to medical schools, a trend that started in 1997, leveled off this year. Male applicants totaled 17,113, about the same as last year's figure of 17,069.

The total number of black applicants (2,736), rose almost 5 percent due to a 10 percent increase in black women applicants (1,904). The total number of Hispanic applicants (2,483) increased by less than 2 percent since last year, while Hispanic attendees declined by almost 4 percent (to 1,089).

"The increase in total and first-time applicants is a reaffirming sign that the current generation of young people recognizes the attractiveness of medicine as a profession," said AAMC President, Jordan J. Cohen, M.D.

Hard Hat Update

ELECTRICAL POWER SWITCH OVER PLANNED MON., NOV. 10, AND SAT., NOV. 15

The electrical contractor is now ready to switch over the normal and emergency power in the John Freeman Building and ground floor, basement, and south half of the first floor of the Medical School to the new electrical system. However, this switch over will require major electrical shutdowns to several areas in the buildings.



Tommy Roberts, engineer, and **Paul Ehrhardt**, project manager, have planned the

following outage to get the first switch over completed.

The first power outage is scheduled for Monday evening, **Nov. 10**, beginning at 10 p.m. This will involve: the south half of the Medical School on the first floor and the ground floor. Regular power, i.e., all lights and wall receptacles on regular power in the labs and offices and air conditioning in the offices only, will be shut down on these floors only, on the south half of the MSB. Emergency power will not be affected. This will also include the MSB 1.006, the Learning Resource Center, the Educational and Executive Conference Center, and the Imaging Center. Full power will resume no later than 6 a.m.

The electrical contractor needs to do two power outages in the JFB, which will affect all regular power, lights, and air conditioning in the building. The first one is scheduled for next Wednesday evening, **Nov. 12**, starting at 10 p.m. and ending no later than 6 a.m.

This is an "investigational" outage and may be as short at 2 hours, or it could last the full 8 hours, according to Paul Ehrhardt.

On Sat., **Nov. 15**, the electrical contractor will shut down the John Freeman Building electrical system beginning at 6 a.m. Saturday morning, and lasting until 6 a.m. Sunday morning. They will be pulling out old electrical conduit and installing the new conduit. The contractors want to do this on Saturday instead of Sunday, to allow a little more time.

Anyone requiring special accommodations should contact **Marty Dockins** at x5942 or pager, 713-905-0785.

NEUROSCIENCE POSTER SESSION IS DEC. 6

Get set for the 10th annual neuroscience poster session, 10 a.m. - noon Sat., **Dec. 6**, Leather Lounge. The event is hosted by the Neuroscience Research Center (NRC), highlighting current neuroscience research at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. A light brunch will be served. Participants from various departments within the UTHSC-H are provided an opportunity to become better acquainted with one another and current neuroscience research at the Health Science Center. The event includes drawings and awards, including the best poster by a graduate student for the Dee S. and Patricia Osborne Endowed Scholarship in the Neurosciences -- a \$500 prize. The best poster by a postdoctoral fellow will win a \$250 prize. Attendance is open to anyone interested in neuroscience research. For more information, contact **Sharon Pepper**, 713-500-5538.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Submit abstracts by Mon., **Nov. 17** for the 10th Annual UT Houston Neuroscience Poster Session, which is scheduled for noon, Sat., **Dec. 6**, Medical School's Leather Lounge.

A registration form is available at <nba.med.uth.tmc.edu/nrc/> or contact **Sharon Pepper**, 713-500-5538. Open to faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, residents, and medical students.