



# Scoop

Aug. 13, 2004

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL AT HOUSTON

## Events to Know

### August

**13, 14 Student Retreat**, Camp Allen.

**19, 20 First-Ever Children's Miracle Network Hispanic Radiothon**, 6 a.m.-7 p.m., listening room, Lowe's Sun Room, 10th floor, Memorial Hermann Children's Hospital. KRTX, Tejano 980 AM.

### September

**27 12th Annual UT Scholarship Golf Classic**, 9 a.m., Redstone Golf Club. Contact **Rose Mary Betancourt-Trevino** at 713-500-3209.

### October

**6 Faculty Honors Convocation**, 4-6 p.m., TMC Edwin Hornberger Conference Center.

## UT Most Interest

**Dr. Heinrich Taegtmeier**, Division of Cardiology, presented a keynote address, "Metabolic Signals in Normal and Diseased Heart: New opportunities for molecular imaging," at the 7th Nuclear Cardiology Interventional Conference in Park City, Utah.

## HEALTHY LIFESTYLE IS A FACTOR IN HEART AND DRINK STUDY

Are you at risk for heart disease or breast cancer? Your answer may determine whether drinking moderate amounts of alcohol — one to two glasses of wine, say, daily or every other day — will help or harm you. While the verdict on having a history of breast cancer and drinking is in — drinking increases the risk — the verdict is still out on heart disease risk. The National Institutes of Health recently concluded that people 40 or older who consume a drink or two a day, or every other day, protect their hearts. The advice is even reputed to reduce Type 2 diabetes.



**Dr. David Aguilar**

Helping to sort through the often mixed signals given on the subject is **Dr. David Aguilar**, Division of Cardiology, a recently arrived faculty member, whose research interests are in diabetes, heart failure, and clinical trials. Aguilar and his colleagues studied over 2,200 heart attack survivors with reduced heart function, dividing the groups into nondrinkers, light-to-moderate drinkers, and heavy drinkers. The researchers found, in "Alcohol Consumption and Prognosis in Patients with Left Ventricular Systolic Dysfunction after a Myocardial Infarction," (*Journal of the American College of Cardiology* vol. 43, no. 11, 2004), that light to moderate drinking appears to have a neutral impact on health.

On the surface, alcohol consumption appeared to reduce the incidence of heart failure, but the benefit was no longer seen after accounting for differences between drinkers and nondrinkers. "What we have found in our study" he said, "is that, overall, light-to-moderate drinkers were healthier than nondrinkers." The researcher found that light-to-moderate drinkers were younger and had less associated illness, such as hypertension and diabetes. Thus, their healthier status in general, was more of a factor than light to moderate drinking, per se. Aguilar concluded that light-to-moderate alcohol consumption does not appear to increase the risk of chronic heart failure in these heart attack survivors.

Importantly, previous studies have suggested that the consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol increase the risk of heart failure. Aguilar says that "the left ventricular function of the heart has been shown to improve after abstaining from alcohol" in individuals with alcohol-induced cardiac dysfunction. Aguilar imparts that his study was unable to definitively comment on the risk of heavy drinking and, therefore, heavy alcohol consumption should be discouraged.

"The bottom line," Aguilar said, "is that our study suggests that it is likely safe for people who have suffered a heart attack to drink in moderation. Excessive alcohol consumption should continue to be avoided."

**Dr. Marc Pfeffer**, at Brigham and Women's Hospital of Harvard University, was an early mentor in Aguilar's career. "He and his wife, **Dr. Janice Pfeffer**, were testing ACE inhibitors back in 1992 and found that they protected hearts. I became very interested in the subject and in clinical trials."

Aguilar graduated summa cum laude from Texas A&M, received his medical degree from Baylor College of Medicine, graduating with honors, and was a research and clinical fellow in medicine (cardiology) at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

- C. O'Brien

## NO PETS ALLOWED IN THE SCHOOL – WHAT ARE THE RULES?

The Board of Regents of The University of Texas System, part one, Chapter VI, Sec. 6.13 Animals on Campus, states: "With the exception of certified support animals and animals involved in approved University activities, **animals are not permitted in any university building.** Animals may be brought onto campus, other than in buildings, but should be appropriately restrained and/or contained. The owner shall be responsible for cleaning up after the animal."



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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](http://www.med.uth.tmc.edu/community_affairs/escoop.htm)  
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## SUMMERTIME MICROBIAL DISCOVERY INSTITUTE A SUCCESS

The American Society for Microbiology has designated the UT Health Science Center a Regional Training Site for the annual Microbial Discovery Institute workshop offered, which is at the Medical School each summer.

The workshop, designed to encourage and prepare secondary school teachers to incorporate microbiology into their science curriculum, was offered July 26 – 30, at the Medical School's teaching laboratories.



Dr. Mark Gallo (r.), associate professor, Biology, Niagara University, New York, showed a teacher participant microbial discoveries at Bayou Parkland.

The Microbial Discovery Institute is aligned with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills guidelines and National Science Standards and includes information about the roles microbes play in health and disease, biotechnology, agriculture, and bioremediation. Participants attended seminars, took field trips to gather microorganisms from soil and water, and participated in inquiry-based exercises and group discussions. This year, the workshop included a field trip to Pfizer's "Microbes, Invisible Invaders and Amazing Allies" exhibit at the John P. McGovern Museum of Health and Medical Science.

Attendees received a stipend for their participation, a syllabus, teaching videos, books, microbiological supplies and follow-up support from the faculty.

"The overall workshop was outstanding," said a participant. "I have learned so much information to share with my students."

For more information, contact **Liliana Rodriguez** at <Liliana.F.Rodriguez@uth.tmc.edu> or at 713-500-3289.



Katherine Puno-Daquinag (l.), and Caroline Santamaria isolate antibiotic-producing microorganisms from the soil.

## STUDY REVEALS HEME IS A MAJOR PLAYER MOLECULE IN THE SLEEP-WAKE CYCLE

Heme, a workhorse molecule best known for its crucial role in carrying oxygen to red blood cells, is a vital cog in the body's biological clock, according to a study published in the journal *Nature*. Senior author **Cheng Chi Lee, Ph.D.**, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, said the findings mark a breakthrough in the fundamental scientific understanding of two crucial biological processes and also point to the therapeutic potential of heme's molecular cousins, including vitamin B12.



Dr. Cheng Chi Lee

"What we've found is that the biological process that makes heme and the process that controls our sleep-wake cycle are tied together," Lee said.

Vitamin B12 is similar to heme in structure. Research by others have shown that vitamin B12 can shift the mammalian body clock. So Lee and lead author **Krista Kaasik** examined its impact on the mouse circadian clock. They observed that B12, when given to mice, has the opposite effect of that caused by heme.

"This provides a chance for us to examine a whole new class of molecules, for their potential use as drugs," Lee said, "to treat sleep disorders, for example. We think we have provided the molecular mechanism that explains why vitamin B12 is capable of affecting the mammalian body clock."

Other studies have observed a link between B12 and tumor suppression. The article suggests that B12 and other porphyrin-containing molecules that target circadian-regulators might help people undergoing chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

Lee joined the Medical School faculty in January from Baylor College of Medicine, where the bulk of the research for this paper was conducted.

- S. Merville

## FENCING IS A PART OF BERM PROJECT

Fencing will continue going up on the Fannin side and Ross Sterling side of the Medical School Building as part of the berm project (See *Scoop*, July 30). The berm project will feature earthen berms and hydrostatic walls as part of a secondary flood protection measure for the Medical School. The project also will improve drainage on Webber Plaza. The whole project is estimated to take a year.

## AUF WIEDERSEHEN! PERKOWSKI OFF TO MINNESOTA



**Linda C. Perkowski, Ph.D.**, director, Office of Educational Programs, was bid a fond farewell in the Fifth Floor Gallery Aug. 5.

Dr. Linda Perkowski

She will become associate dean, Education and Curriculum Development, University of Minnesota Medical School, Office of Education and Curriculum Development.