Largest Internal Medicine Interest Group in U.S.: ClubMed

This year marks the tenth anniversary since the founding of ClubMed, the Department of Internal Medicine’s interest group for medical students. While it has been a rebuilding year of sorts, our future is brighter than ever.

After a very successful 2004–05 school year, a late election meeting and student apathy entering the summer resulted in no new officers being elected to replace rising M2s. As a result, the club was inactive for most of the year.

The revival of ClubMed is due in no small part to Rebekah White, a former ClubMed President and future intern at Northwestern University. Rebekah coordinated the student trip to the ACP Conference in Roanoke last October, and was instrumental in helping us put the pieces back together and connecting us with Ann Tennett. As ACP Virginia chapter coordinator, Ann gave us moral support and the financial support necessary to get back off the ground.

Even with this late start, we have accomplished much in a few months. We have added 70 new student members. We designed and purchased five hundred water bottles to promote internal medicine and ensure the club’s legacy. The club sponsored a booth at Cancer Day to discuss the role of the internist in cancer care and treatment. We have held two lunch lectures, and we are very grateful for the generosity of Dr. Stephen Call and Dr. Alan Dow, who gave their time and insight to students considering careers in internal medicine. And finally, in the hopes of expanding our activities even further, we have submitted a $5,000 budget for next year.

We have ended the year with 467 members representing the largest club in the country and with an array of programs planned for next year. We will kick off the year by sponsoring a lunch with an array of programs planned for next year.

We will continue to build our club as we are just getting started. We are planning a revival gala to connect students, residents and faculty to socialize and enjoy a nice evening on us.

Contact us at: Phone (804) 828-5738 Fax (804) 828-5566 Email katia@hsc.vcu.edu

... over 1,000 patients with chronic HCV have been enrolled in over 200 separate clinical trials sponsored by various industry sponsors and the National Institutes of Health. 

Departmental Experts Lead National Effort To Treat Hepatitis C

The Hepatology Section, within the Division of Gastroenterology, has been at the forefront of developing new treatments for chronic HCV. Led by Mitchell Shiffman, MD, the group consists of five hepatologists based at VCU: Drs. Velimir Luketic, Richard Sterling, Todd Strautis and our divisional chair, Arun Sanyal. Three additional hepatologists are based at the McGuire VA Hospital: Drs. Anastasios Mihos, Douglas Heuman and Adil Habib. During the past 15 years, over 1,000 patients with chronic HCV have been enrolled in over 200 separate clinical trials sponsored by various industry sponsors and the National Institutes of Health.

Approximately 2% of the US population – over 4 million persons – are infected with HCV. Liver disease is currently the 9th most common cause of death in the USA. By 2019, liver-related mortality, a direct result of the HCV epidemic, is expected to become the 3rd most common cause of death. Developing improved treatments for chronic HCV is therefore a national priority.

Since 1990, our Hepatology group has participated in clinical trials which have led to an improvement in the treatment of this disease. In 1995 we learned that combining interferon with the anti-viral agent ribavirin increased sustained virologic response (SVR) to 35%. Last year we participated in studies which demonstrated that certain sub-groups of HCV patients can achieve a response of 90%! A study designed and conducted just at VCU demonstrated that continuing interferon long term as maintenance therapy could likely prevent fibrosus progression to cirrhosis. This concept is now the basis for the HALT-C trial, a large multi-center study of people of all ages with chronic HCV who have not previously been treated. The HALT-C trial is also the basis for the HCV/Trial, a large multi-center study of people of all ages with chronic HCV who have not previously been treated.

Three experimental anti-viral agents are currently being evaluated in clinical trials at our Center. Clinical trials of two additional anti-viral agents will begin later this year. Additional agents which are being developed at our Center for treatment of chronic HCV include a Caspace inhibitor. Caspaces inhibit apoptosis (liver cell death) and may therefore reduce inflammation and fibrosis in patients with chronic HCV. Another agent is a p-par-gamma antagonist, which appears to have anti-fibrotic activity and may enhance fibrosis regression in patients with chronic HCV.

Contributed by Mitchell Shiffman, MD
Professor of Internal Medicine, Chief of the Hepatology Section

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APRIL – MAY 2006
Douglas Johnson, MD
BS, The College of William & Mary, 1999; MD, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003; Internship and residency, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003–06
Dr. Johnson came to Richmond from Falls Church, VA. He is excited about his upcoming year as chief medical resident and the opportunity to mature into a clinician educator. Following his chief year, he will pursue his fellowship training in endocrinology at VCU beginning the summer of 2007.
His outside interests include tennis, soccer refereeing, and teaching Sunday school with his wife Sally, who is a 4th-grade teacher in Mechanicsville.

John Port, MD
BS, Duke University, 1996; MD, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003; Internship and residency, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003–06
Dr. Port came to Richmond from Califton, NJ. Prior to beginning his medical training at VCU, he worked for three years as a clinical researcher at Duke University. He enjoys spending as much time as possible with his wife, a pediatrician, and their two girls.
Dr. Port’s family enjoys the variety of activities, culture, restaurants and easy commutes of Richmond, and plans to remain here indefinitely. He is interested in primary care and general medicine and looks forward to life as a general internist following his year as a chief medical resident.

Venkat Ramachandran, MD
BS, Pennsylvania State University, 1999; MD, Pennsylvania University, 2003; Internship and residency, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003–06
Dr. Ramachandran came to Virginia via Oman, the United Arab Emirates, India and Pennsylvania. He has an interest in cardiovascular electrophysiology and plans to pursue a cardiology fellowship after the chief year. He also enjoys medical education and would like to work as a clinician educator.

Kelsey Salley, MD
BA, University of Virginia, 1998; MD, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003, Internship and residency, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003–06
Dr. Salley grew up in Virginia Beach. After finishing her undergraduate degree in Biology, she worked for LifeNet Transplant Services before beginning medical school. She completed the Women’s Health Track in Internal Medicine, and her interest are in Women’s Health and graduate medical education. She is planning a career in academic General Medicine.
Dr. Salley’s husband Dave is an ENT resident at VCU. She enjoys snowboarding, party-planning, and extreme power-walking.

Dr. Ramachandran’s wife Pooja works for Circuit City in Strategic Brand Marketing. He is passionate about soccer and Barcelona FC and hopes that one day he will be in the lower tier of Barcelona’s stadium, Camp Nou, chanting for his team with other Spanish fans.

Introducing Our Chief Residents for 2006–07

The National Institutes of Health is championing the importance of translational research. The mission of translational research is defined as the conversion of basic science discoveries into clinical applications and the use of clinical observations to generate research for basic sciences. By its nature, translational research crosses boundaries between basic science and clinical application. It places researchers in new contexts: pre-clinical testing and clinical evaluation of a diagnostic or therapeutic approach demand an intense interaction between investigators with diverse backgrounds.

VCU is planning to create an environment that would best facilitate interactions promoting bench to bedside research. In the past few months, a School of Medicine committee led by Dr. Richard Wenzel has outlined a strategy to enhance translational research. The key conclusions of the committee’s work include the need to recruit expert faculty and to establish a centralized office facilitating the issues involved in the research processes. The committee also suggested creating a centralized structure for faculty development, emphasizing a continuum of translational research education.

Our Best of the Best

Earlier this month, Richmond Magazine published its listing of the best doctors in the metro Richmond area. 19 physicians from the Department of Internal Medicine were recognized. We commend our distinguished faculty members for their hard work and dedication.

Allergy and Immunology
Lawrence B. Schwartz

Cardiovascular Disease
Kenneth A. Ellenbogen
George W. Vestvoep

Endocrinology and Metabolism
John N. Clore
Robert W. Downs
David F. Gaidner

Gastroenterology
Donald F. Kirby

Geriatric Medicine
Peter A. Boling

Hematology
Thomas J. Smith

Infectious Diseases
Sara Monroe
Michael B. Edmond
Richard P. Wenzel

Internal Medicine
Richard P. Wenzel

Nephrology
Tod W. B. Gehr

Oncology
Thomas J. Smith
Mary Helen Hackney

Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine
R. Paul Fairman
Alpha A. Fowler, III

Rheumatology
Lenore Buckley
Christopher M. Wise
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Chairman: Richard P. Wenzel, MD, MSc
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