Clinical Trials In Rheumatology – June 2002

We have been fortunate to be part of a number of clinical trials over the past several years. Biologic therapies for rheumatoid arthritis (RA) have been the main focus of our clinical trials over the past 4-5 years. During this time period, we have been involved in studies with agents that inhibit tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF) for patients with RA. These have included studies of etanercept (TNF receptor) and infliximab (chimeric anti-TNF antibody) in early RA, and adalimumab (human anti-TNF antibody) in patients with incomplete responses to methotrexate.

As we enter a new era of biologic therapies for RA, we are just beginning a trial of a human antibody to CD-4. This study is designed for patients who have failed methotrexate and one of the TNF inhibitors, and should prove to be a challenge to fill, but offers us an opportunity to study a group of patients in great need of new therapy. In addition, we will soon be participating in a new trial of another TNF blocker, an antisense oligonucleotide, for patients with refractory RA.

Finally, we will be part of an NIH-sponsored study to address the question of the safety of oral contraceptives in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). Our participation in this study will offer our patients a chance to help further our understanding of this important issue in lupus research.

Contributed by Christopher M. Wise, M.D.

Dana-Farber Scientist Joins Department of Internal Medicine Faculty

Dr. Hisashi Harada, a research scientist from Boston’s Dana-Farber Institute and expert on intracellular signalling in normal and cancerous cells, will join the Department of Internal Medicine this summer. Dr. Harada has a Master and PhD from Osaka University, where he began his career at the Institute for Molecular and Cellular Biology. He subsequently had positions at the University of Tokyo, Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, and in the Department of Cancer, Immunology and AIDS at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Most of his publications have been in prestigious scientific journals such as Nature, Cell, Science and the Journal of Biological Chemistry. “Dr. Harada is a valuable recruit to our faculty in Hematology-Oncology,” said Dr. Richard Wenzel, Chair of the Department, “and he will help us build world-class recognition in science.”

Internal Medicine Faculty Member Wins NIH K-Award for Research

In an attempt to identify and support young investigators, the National Institute of Health has competitive research awards called K Awards. A member of the faculty of the Department in the Division of Nephrology, Betsy Ripley, M.D., has received a K23 award from the NIDDK. This award is a mentored clinical research award. Dr. Domenic Sica is the primary mentor for the grant, which provides 75% salary support for education in the area of clinical research. During the five-year grant, she will obtain a Master in Clinical Research and Biostatistics at VCU. The associated research project is investigating at 24-hour ambulatory blood pressure readings in young, healthy African-Americans. Participants will be defined as “dippers” or “non-dippers” depending on whether their blood pressure decreases at night (dips). Being a non-dipper has been associated with increased cardiovascular risk. Renal functional reserve, or whether glomerular filtration rate (GFR) can be increased after a protein load, will also be measured. Participants will then receive potassium or placebo in a trial to see if non-dipper status can be converted to dipper by the addition of the electrolyte. This study will require approximately 300 participants.
Eleven Faculty Receive Promotion

The Department of Internal Medicine announces the promotion of eleven of its members. The process is among the most rigorous in the country and carries true weight. The promotion process is thorough, and fair, and ultimately results in the promotion of the most talented and dedicated physicians in our department.

From Associate to Full Professor:

On Topaz (Division of Cardiology)

Christopher Wise (Division of Rheumatology, Allergy and Immunology)

From Assistant to Associate Professor:

From Instructor to Assistant Professor:

Shobha Ghosh, assistant professor in the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, has just received notice that her National American Heart Association grant application, “Cholesterol Ester Hydrolysis and Cellular Cholesterol Efflux,” has been funded. The award brings $65,997 per year for two years.

In a recent issue of The New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Belinda Ostrowsky has her second first-authored paper in less than two years: An Outbreak of S.marcescens Bacteremia with a Nancy Drew twist. The New York Times had a feature article on Dr. Ostrowsky’s work in late May.

The Importance of Medical Grand Rounds

Dear Colleagues:

A tradition in medicine that has evolved from the educational ward rounds of uniquely astute clinicians, Medical Grand Rounds today is the signature presentation of excellent clinical departments. Ideally, the topics would be of broad interest and have elements of clinical, epidemiological, and scientific content. They should be provocative and invite debate and critical discussion during the question-answer period. Within our department, the weekly Medical Grand Rounds are moving close to the ideal and deserve our attention.

In addition to the information and perspectives offered by excellent speakers, Medical Grand Rounds represent an opportunity to enhance the community of faculty, housestaff, and fellows. This is an intellectual tradition that housestaff will remember fondly for years, well into their careers.

For outside speakers, the highlight of any presentation is the opportunity for challenges to their ideas. That is how wisdom develops from knowledge. Furthermore, without a doubt, a vibrant audience shows enormous respect for a guest speaker who will recount the experience many times on returns to his or her home institution.

We are fortunate to have so many excellent speakers of varied backgrounds to deliver Medical Grand Rounds. This great tradition needs to continue to enrich the community of clinicians and scientists on our campus.

Richard P. Wircz, M.D., M.Sc.
William Branch Porter Professor and Chairman

2002 House Staff Awards

The Annual House Staff Awards Ceremony was held on May 23rd. Awards were presented to faculty and residents who, by the vote of the house staff, were determined to be the outstanding members of a truly outstanding group. In addition, awards were presented for scholarship, consistent clinical excellence, physical examination skills, and to the Outstanding Physician in the Residency as chosen by the DOIM faculty. In addition, certificates were presented to those placing highest in the balloting as finalists for each award. Chamber music was performed before and after the ceremony by Kathy Kreutzer and Joanne Schloenburger, and an ice cream social was held in the courtyard following the presentations. It was a grand celebration of the excellence of our internal medicine housestaff.

Best Attending in an ICU or Subspecialty Setting:

Lisa Brath, M.D., and Skip Minisi, M.D.

Best Ward Attending:

Todd Gehr, M.D., and Andy Pinson, M.D.

Outstanding Intern:

Shrita Patel, M.D.

Outstanding Junior Resident:

Dan Carl, M.D.

Outstanding Senior Resident:

Robin Obenchain, M.D.

Excellence in Physical Exam:

Jeff Sicat, M.D.

Outstanding Clinician:

Drs. Mike Cannon and Matt Hunningshake (co-recipients)

Scholars Prize:

Steve Zingalea, M.D.

Arthur Klein Award:

Robin Obenchain, M.D.

Department of Medicine Faculty Award:

John Zakaib, M.D.

From Associate to Full Professor:

On Topaz (Division of Cardiology)

Christopher Wise (Division of Rheumatology, Allergy and Immunology)

Velmur Lakutsig (Division of Gastroenterology)

From Assistant to Associate Professor:

Michael Cline (Division of Infectious Diseases)

Diane Biskobing (Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism)

Laurel Lyckholm (Division of Hematology/Oncology)

James Shaw (Division of Hematology/Oncology)

Alfred Rogers (Division of Neurology)

Margaret Robertson (Division of General Medicine)

Andrew Price (Division of General Medicine)

From Instructor to Assistant Professor:

Vibha Thakral (Division of General Medicine)

Bestowing the highest accolade on its faculty, the Department of Internal Medicine announces the promotion of eleven of its members. The process is among the most rigorous in the country and carries true meaning. The chair of the promotion committee, Dr. Gardner, said, “Candidates for promotion and tenure in the Department of Medicine undergo rigorous scrutiny of all aspects of their academic performance, including scholarship, teaching, and service. Individual committees consist of a total of six individuals and are chaired by members of the Department of Medicine Promotion and Tenure Committee. The responsibility of each committee is to review performance in each area in detail prior to submitting a recommendation to the chairman of the department. Subsequent review includes the School of Medicine F&T Committee, the Dean of the School of Medicine, and finally the Vice President for Health Sciences. The process is slow, thorough, and fair, and ultimately results in promotion of the most talented and dedicated physicians in our department.”

Dr. Andy Pinson (l) and Dr. Todd Gehr (r)

left to right: Dr. Steven Freer,

left to right: Dr. Dan Carl

left to right: Dr. Robin Obenchain

left to right: Dr. Robin Obenchain

left to right: Dr. Robin Obenchain

left to right: Dr. Todd Gehr

left to right: Dr. Steven Freer

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