Betty Anne Johnson Named New Residency Program Director

With Dr. Steven Freer’s departure, Dr. Betty Anne Johnson has assumed the highly visible responsibility of Residency Program Director. It promises to be an exciting year. “Although we face many challenges, including a Residency Review Committee accreditation survey in the spring of 2004,” said Dr. Johnson, “I will be assisted by an extraordinary team of energetic, creative and experienced faculty.”

With Dr. Freer’s departure, the Department of Internal Medicine continues to make progress in the area of research. In the last quarter, two DOIM faculty, Drs. Marjolein de Wit and Richard Sterling, have received high priority scores which will fund their K-23 career development awards. This brings the total number of K awards in the department to seven (Drs. Arun Sanyal, John Nezletter, James Arrowood, George Mosley, Elizabeth Riple, de Wit and Sterling). Dr. Sanyal, Associate Chair of the Department for Research, commented, “These awards signal the increase in high quality clinical research within the department, and are going a long way to establish a strong core of clinical research expertise which will form the foundation on which future research will be developed.”

Now Seven K-Awards from NIH

The Department of Internal Medicine continues to make progress in the area of research. In the last quarter, two DOIM faculty, Drs. Marjolein de Wit and Richard Sterling, have received high priority scores which will fund their K-23 career development awards. This brings the total number of K awards in the department to seven (Drs. Arun Sanyal, John Nezletter, James Arrowood, George Mosley, Elizabeth Riple, de Wit and Sterling). Dr. Sanyal, Associate Chair of the Department for Research, commented, “These awards signal the increase in high quality clinical research within the department, and are going a long way to establish a strong core of clinical research expertise which will form the foundation on which future research will be developed.”

Dr. de Wit’s study investigates methods of sedation of mechanically ventilated ICU patients. The main goals of the study are to compare two sedation strategies (protocol-directed sedation and daily interruption of sedation); to examine the prevalence of psychiatric complications, and to compare the pharmacokinetics of commonly used sedatives and narcotics. The current project seeks to test the central hypothesis that sedation practices impact strongly on the outcome of respiratory failure. Dr. de Wit also proposes that critically ill patients have altered pharmacokinetics and dynamics, and they routinely receive substantial doses of sedatives over prolonged periods. The impact of these management strategies on short- and long-term psychiatric complications has also not been studied. This study design creates a pathway for new understanding of the impact of sedation and the incidence of morbidity.

The project led by Dr. Sterling studies the effects of the combination of HCV and HIV infections. Effective therapy for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection has markedly prolonged survival in infected individuals. As a result, other diseases are now becoming clinically significant. Approximately 30% of HIV-infected patients are co-infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV) which is now the leading co-morbid disease in co-infected individuals. The histologic severity and natural history of HCV have been reported to be accelerated in those co-infected with HIV. The main hypothesis of the study is that the severity and progression of HCV disease is related to the immune competence of the individual. It is proposed that the immune restoration associated with HIV therapy may further accelerate the progression of HCV disease which may explain the marked increase in HCV-related morbidity and mortality observed in recent years. It will also be investigated if the virologic response to anti-HCV treatment is directly related to the degree of immunologic competence.
Dr. Rakesh Kukreja received the following letter:

"...I was particularly impressed by the team spirit of your group and by the many novel ideas that you are pursuing, which are at the cutting edge of the field. Your contributions to the field of prion disease have been enormous but it is clear that you are not resting on your laurels; instead, you are forging ahead even more..."

Dr. Deeptankar Demazumder (center) treats patients under candlelight in a small hut in India.

The project currently comprises 50 team members and has been incorporated into VCU’s Study Abroad program. Medical students and physicians from other universities (including U.C. Davis, Cornell U., SUNY Downstate) are participating as well. The first group of ten team members volunteered in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), West Bengal, India in June 2003, and they received extensive positive coverage by the Indian and U.S. media. Under the direct supervision and instruction of distinguished Indian physicians, they provided free healthcare and medicine to thousands of indigent patients. The team members have returned with an exceptional academic and cultural experience. Briefly, they were amazed to find a unique patient-doctor relationship that is different from the U.S. model. Nevertheless, the personal touch and hands-on method of Indian physicians made the process of treating patients very effective. Moreover, Indian physicians delivered patient care with limited resources to a large patient population, and they performed cost-effective and highly skilled bedside diagnosis without depending on sophisticated technology. Several team members are already making plans to return to India to continue their medical training and to serve the indigent population. A second group has worked in India for the month of July, and additional groups are planning to go in the Fall and Winter of 2003.

Faculty members of the project are: Clive M. Baumgarten, Ph.D. (Physiology); Peter S. Kilpatrick, Ph.D. (International Education); David W. Marsland, M.D. (Family Medicine); Sushila Mittra, M.D. (Surgery); and Richard P. Wenzel, M.D. (Internal Medicine). Project members appreciate the help of Hannah Cherian and Anish Shah.

We are now accepting submissions for Between Rounds, the Department of Internal Medicine’s annual publication of poetry, prose, art, photography and original musical scores. The deadline for submissions is October 1st. Please be sure to proofread submissions carefully and send all work to the Department of Internal Medicine’s annual publication. Attn: Katia Dobrotvorskaia Cotton Box 980663 Phone (804) 828-5738 Email katia@hsc.vcu.edu

**NEWS BRIEFS**

Deeptankar Demazumder (center) treats patients under candlelight in a small hut in India.

VCU Medical Students and Faculty Form City of Joy Medical Education and Relief Project in India

The City of Joy Project is an ongoing year-round program, and VCU medical students and physicians are strongly encouraged to volunteer in this project. The American General Consulate to India and the Chief Minister of West Bengal, India, have pledged their help, support and resources for the project. For more information, you may contact the project organizers at CityofJoyProject@aol.com.

**BETWEEN ROUNDS**

We are now accepting submissions for Between Rounds, the Department of Internal Medicine’s annual publication of poetry, prose, art, photography and original musical scores. The deadline for submissions is October 1st. Please be sure to proofread submissions carefully and send all work to the Department of Internal Medicine.

**CLINICAL ACTIVITIES:**

**LETTERS**

Dr. Rakesh Kukreja received the following letter:

"...I was particularly impressed by the team spirit of your group and by the many novel ideas that you are pursuing, which are at the cutting edge of the field. Your contributions to the field of prion disease have been enormous but it is clear that you are not resting on your laurels; instead, you are forging ahead even more..."

**PROGRESS NOTES**

**PROGRESS NOTES**