The Department of Internal Medicine
On the Medical College of Virginia Campus of Virginia Commonwealth University

Progress Notes

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The Quest for Excellence

It is tempting in the era of managed care medicine for academic departments to focus excessively on delivery of care issues, to imagine how to compete with community physicians in routine patient management, and to put research and scholarship on the back burner. Yet what distinguishes academic medicine are our unique skills in delivery of care and our investigational and educational efforts. In a word – innovation.

With the rapid pace with which innovation becomes a commodity, the constant pressures to maintain uniqueness are great for our clinicians. Even with special skills today we are quickly forced to consider what to do tomorrow that will distinguish us from the community. Our uniqueness may be special access to care or unusual clinical skills. Alternatively, novel procedures, non-invasive diagnostic abilities, clinical treatment protocols, or high-level experience in the management of complex medical conditions will bring acclaim to our medical center.

Dr. Kevin Cooper, a winner of several awards for outstanding teaching, has taken on a new task – the editorship of the only state pulmonary journal in the U.S. (see page 4). He and his colleagues in the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine are unique in providing access to the best critical care in the region. Dr. Cooper is now poised to help improve the health of citizens in the Commonwealth as leader of the Virginia Pulmonary Journal, in a word – innovation.

Out ability to create new knowledge is a key to an international reputation. In this issue of Progress Notes we highlight the winner of this year’s VCU Distinguished Scholar Award, Z. Reno Vlahcevic, M.D. Dr. Vlahcevic has dedicated his career to understanding the biology of bile acid synthesis and is a world class investigator. He is, in a word – innovation.

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

Dr. Z. Reno Vlahcevic Receives VCU Distinguished Scholar Award

Dr. Z. Reno Vlahcevic, Professor and Chairman, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, has been named as the recipient of the 1999 VCU Distinguished Scholar Award. Dr. Vlahcevic was nominated for the award by several faculty members of the School of Medicine. After being nominated, the Awards Committee received over 130 letters of support from local, national, and international faculty peers familiar with Dr. Vlahcevic’s research. The Award was presented by Dr. Hermes Kontos, Professor of Medicine, and Dean of the School of Medicine, at VCU’s Convocation, September 8, at the VCU Performing Arts Center.

Dr. Vlahcevic joined the faculty of the Department of Internal Medicine over 30 years ago. He has published over 200 papers, chapters, and reviews. He is the 1994 recipient of the Adolph Windaus Award for Outstanding Publications in the Field of Bile Acid Research, presented by the Falk Foundation. In the 1980s he established the Lipid Research Group for studies on lipid metabolism and in 1996 he established the MCV Liver Center dedicated to basic and clinical research of liver diseases. He is currently a full-time faculty member at the McGuire VA Medical Center. Most of his current research is conducted at the VAMC.

During his career Dr. Vlahcevic has conducted seminal research on how cholesterol is eliminated from the body through bile acid synthesis, and the regulation of the process of bile acid synthesis using various enzymes. “We started out studying the pathogenesis of gallstones. These studies showed us that we needed to understand the underlying processes, and eventually we were conducting work at the molecular level,” said Dr. Vlahcevic. Ultimately, Dr. Vlahcevic seeks to understand the pathways for elimination of cholesterol and to develop therapeutic methods of manipulation.

Dr. Vlahcevic has received uninterrupted funding for his research from the Veteran’s Administration for over 33 years, and uninterrupted NIH funding for over 20 years.

Dr. Z. Reno Vlahcevic

Mark Mitchell Photography
Honors, Awards & Offices

Dr. Maria Iuorno, Assistant Professor, Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism, is the recipient of the 1999 Sandra Tate Russell Memorial Award as the leading Young Investigator in Virginia in the study of diabetes. The Award includes funding for continued research.

Dr. John Nestler, Professor and Chairman, Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism, has been elected by the faculty of the School of Medicine to serve as member-at-large on the Executive Committee of the Faculty.

Dr. Arun J. Sanyal, Associate Professor, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, has been appointed to the editorial board of the American Journal of Gastroenterology. Dr. Sanyal has also recently served as guest editor for the journal Hepatology.

Faculty Publications


Grants

Dr. Mitchell Shiffman, Associate Professor, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, has received an NIH grant for a multi-center clinical trials study for treatment of hepatitis C. The award of $2.3 million will fund the study for five years.

Send in Your Contributions for the Fourth DOIM Poetry Volume Between Rounds

A number of contributions have already been submitted, along with some world class original photography. The deadline this year is September 30, so send in your submissions now! All contributions will be published. Send your contributions to: Michael F. Barnes, Box 980452, 828-5548, or email address: mfbarnes@hsc.vcu.edu


The following abstracts were presented at the annual meeting of the American Heart Association, Atlanta, November, 1998.


The following abstracts were presented at the Federation of Societies for Experimental Biology meeting, April 1999.


Dr. Kevin Cooper Named Editor of The Virginia Pulmonary Journal

**Dr. Kevin Cooper**, Professor, Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, has been named the Editor of *The Virginia Pulmonary Journal*, published by the Virginia Thoracic Society, the medical advisory arm of the American Lung Association of Virginia.

At present, *The Virginia Pulmonary Journal* is the only state pulmonary journal in the nation. The position of editor rotates between faculty at VCU/VCU and the University of Virginia for terms of two years. In its fifth year, *The Virginia Pulmonary Journal* has a circulation of 5,000. It is distributed to primary care physicians and pulmonologists. The journal offers scholarly, clinically-based articles on state-of-the-art treatments for allergies, asthma, emphysema, and other bronchial and pulmonary conditions. Most of the articles are authored by faculty from VCU/MCV and UVA, with VCU/MCV faculty contributing about half of the articles. Dr. Cooper's editorial policy is to select articles germane to both primary care physicians and specialists.

The most recent issue, shown here, included articles by Dr. Curtis Sessler, Professor, Dr. Paul Fairman, Professor, and Dr. Cooper, of the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine.