

THE PATHOLOGY

SPRING 2001

SCOPE

Department of Pathology • Medical College of Virginia Campus of Virginia Commonwealth University • <http://views.vcu.edu/pat>

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

A department as large and complex as ours requires a great deal of careful and committed strategic planning. The environment in which we operate is dynamic and rapidly changing. Failure to adjust in these changing times would cause us to fall behind in our critical missions of research, education, and patient care. To avoid being placed in a reactive posture, we have developed a strategic planning program that compels us to routinely review our short- and long-term goals and objectives, thus ensuring that our efforts and expenditures are realistic, achievable, and current. One of the great strengths of our planning process is the fact that we maintain a two-year operational horizon. We are compelled by the designed obsolescence of our strategic plan to continually review our priorities.

Decreasing protected time for research has been an ongoing national trend in academic medical centers in recent years. Economic and environmental factors have compelled clinical faculty members to contribute ever-increasing effort toward patient care initiatives, usually at the expense of scholarly activity. Our own faculty effort monitoring has proven this very trend during the past six years. While our funded research programs have flourished, the amount of time our clinical faculty members devote to research has not increased at all since 1996. This trend presents some very real challenges in the areas of recruitment and retention, presuming that people enter academic medicine so that they may be actively involved in academics. In March, a small leadership group consisting of Jeff Casterline, Carl Garrett, Richard McPherson, Greg Miller, Al Poklis, Celeste Powers, Larry Vetter, Joy Ware, and myself set out to address

this problem. The objective of the Research Planning Group was to suggest ways to improve the collaborative environment within the Department of Pathology and to make recommendations that will free up time for research and scientific interaction.

Some of the recommendations are quite simple, and many have only minimal costs. We have a powerful medical informatics tool in the Cerner laboratory information system, and we intend to develop an informatics infrastructure (people, training, and equipment) that will allow us to realize the full potential of this system in clinical and translational research. We intend to develop our collective skill in grantsmanship by creating a formal grant support mechanism, research mentorship programs, and an expanded lineup of formal fellowships. We intend to increase protected time by redirecting faculty effort toward research and creating structured venues for scholarly interaction.

We have within our department a large and diverse group of faculty with rich experience and a wide array of research interests. Our objective is to enhance the overall research environment in the Department of Pathology and, ultimately, to increase research and scholarly interaction between our basic science faculty and clinical faculty in the areas of translational and clinical research. It is our expectation that, by creatively redirecting effort and resources, our faculty will be given greater opportunities to connect with one another. The benefits will be numerous. Enhanced academic standing, stronger programs of research, a more unified faculty, cross-fertilization of intellect, and a more collegial environment are some of the most desirable effects.

By **David S. Wilkinson, MD, PhD, Professor and Chairman**

MOLECULAR DIAGNOSTICS GRAND OPENING

On April 5th, 2001, the Department of Pathology proudly dedicated its new Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory in the Clinical Support Center at MCV Hospitals. Virginia Commonwealth University and VCU Health System President Eugene Trani joined Dr. David Wilkinson and Dr. Carleton Garrett in a ribbon cutting ceremony to formally open this thoroughly modern and unique testing facility. The \$1.5 million capital project triples the department's molecular laboratory space. The new 6,400 square-foot lab includes two large testing areas with state-of-the-art equipment and safety features, patient waiting rooms, office space, and a conference room.

Molecular Diagnostics is now positioned to expand its testing capabilities in some very important areas. New technologies and processes, including DNA chip technology, will enhance cancer diagnosis and treatment through the analysis of thousands of possible genetic mutations that are present in a single tumor. Most labs that do molecular testing focus either on research or on clinical testing. Our Molecular Diagnostics lab is equipped to support the university's clinical and basic science research programs and to provide the most sophisticated clinical patient testing possible, thus providing unique flexibility and a high degree of utility in the academic health center environment.



Molecular Diagnostics Director Carleton Garrett, VCU President Eugene Trani, and Pathology Chairman David Wilkinson (left to right) dedicate the new facility.

FACULTY NOTES

Barbara H. Amaker, M.D., Assistant Professor of Pathology, left our faculty in March to take a position in private practice in Norfolk, Virginia. Prior to joining us in 1999, Dr. Amaker was a two-year Neuropathology Fellow in the department. We thank Barbara for her outstanding contributions and we wish her the very best in her new position.

Andrea Ferreira-Gonzalez, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Pathology, was named as the first Chair of the Association for Molecular Pathology Policy Committee.

A. Scott Mills, M.D., Professor of Pathology, Dr. Arun Sanyal, and Dr. Velimir Luketic presented a symposium on cholestatic liver disease to the Joint Meeting of the European and Indian Associations for the Study of

the Liver in Goa, India on Saturday, March 25.

Celeste N. Powers, M.D., Ph.D., Professor of Pathology, was appointed Divisional Chair of Surgical and Cytopathology beginning January 1, 2001. She will continue to serve as Director of Anatomic Pathology Services.

Susan Roseff, M.D., Assistant Professor of Pathology, was appointed by Governor James Gilmore to serve on the Commonwealth of Virginia Hemophilia Advisory Board for a four year term.

Alphonse Sirica, Ph.D., Professor of Pathology, presented a talk entitled "Cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) Up-regulation: A Common Alteration in

Human and Rat Biliary Cancers" and a mini-symposium entitled "Gastrointestinal Malignancies: Biology and Treatment" at the 92nd Annual Meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research in New Orleans in March.

Dr. Sirica presented a talk entitled "Up-regulation of Cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) in C611B Rat Cholangiocarcinoma Cells Overexpressing NEU and in Neu-Transformed WB-F344 Rat Liver Epithelial Stem-like Cells" at the Hepatic Stem Cells and Cellular Signaling mini-symposium of FASEB's Experimental Biology 2001 Meeting in Orlando, Florida in April.

PERC Committee

The **Pathology Employee Recognition Program** offers all pathology employees the opportunity to be recognized for demonstrating good customer service skills and behaviors. This program is coordinated by the Pathology Employee Recognition Committee (PERC), which is comprised of employees from Anatomic and Clinical Pathology. The theme of this program is "HUGS", and nominations for HUGS awards are called into the HUGS line at 828-HUGS.

The program has three levels of recognition. The first level award is given to the employee by his or her manager and consists of a HUGS sticker and candy. The PERC committee meets once a month to review all HUGS nominations and selects honorees for second level awards. The second level award, a HUGS Pin, is presented to those employees who have provided truly exemplary customer service. All HUGS recipients are eligible for the third level award, Employee of the Year, which is presented at the annual Holiday Party to that employee who consistently goes beyond the scope of his or her job responsibilities in providing excellent customer service. The Employee of the Year receives a gift certificate and a certificate of recognition. A letter of acknowledgement is placed in the permanent personnel file of each HUGS recipient.

Thank you to all the members of the PERC committee for all the time and effort they put into this program. The 2001 committee members are Leigh Ann Cahill, Chair; Margaret Ailes, Brenda Diffendal, June Jones, Vickie Pace, Adelemarie Robinson, Nancy Simmons, Lurline Tadeo, Le Tran and Winnie Westbrook.

Has someone in Pathology done something nice for you today? If so, call 828-HUGS and give them a HUG!

Student Awards

The Robert C. Bryan Prize in Pathology is awarded each year to the medical student scoring highest in the first-year Pathogenesis course. This year's honoree is **Gaelyn Elizabeth Eaton**, who received a check in the amount of \$500. The Bryan Prize was established in 1935 by Dr. Bryan to recognize and reward student achievement. Congratulations and best wishes to Ms. Eaton, who joins a distinguished group of past winners in carrying forward a tradition of excellence in education.

Five second year dental students were recognized for scoring highest in the General Pathology Course. **Zane Berry, Kip Jones, Matt Casperson, Ted Struhs, and Sherif Elhady** (pictured left to right with Dr. Richard McPherson, co-course director) each received a gift certificate to the VCU Bookstore in recognition of their accomplishments.



PATHOLOGY CLUB LINKS DOGS AND DOGS

Hungry? I mean for a great medical education...including hot dogs, tomatoes and pigsfeet. They're par for the course, when it comes to teaching fine needle aspiration (FNA) at the Pathology Club sponsored by the VCU Department of Pathology.

"It's a great way to get exposed to the multiple facets of pathology," said Dr. Kristen Atkins, Surgical and Cytopathology Fellow. She and Dr. David Rowe, fifth year Pathology Resident, led the lunchtime presentation and hands-on skills practice in FNA at the Pathology Club meeting, Wednesday, March 28 in the Medical Sciences Building on the MCV campus.

In addition to their practice, students learned about the costs/benefits of FNA, including its rapid turnaround, decreased patient anxiety, its low invasiveness, and its comparatively low cost.

"The Pathology Club is a unique opportunity for medical students to become acquainted with the clinical practice of Pathology, which is not a routine part of the medical school curriculum," said Dr. Margaret Grimes, Professor and Vice Chair for Resident Training and Education. "The Club attempts to dispel commonly held misconceptions about pathology practice, to develop in medical students an appreciation for the role of pathologists and the clinical pathology laboratory in patient care, and to stimulate an interest in Pathology as a career."

It's also a fun and stress-free way to gain new knowledge in pathology, to practice new skills, to talk to Pathology Residents and Fellows, and to network with faculty and friends. The Pathology Club meets several times each school year, from 12-1pm in the Medical Sciences Building, 1217 East Marshall Street, rooms 104/105. For further information, please contact Katherine Stevenson, (804) 828-4973, klsteven@hsc.vcu.edu. All VCU/MCV medical students are invited. Oh, and lunch is provided.

A medical student practices fine needle aspiration techniques on a tomato.



Transfusion Medicine

The Blood Bank has changed its name to Transfusion Medicine. The new name reflects changes in the scope of services provided. Whereas blood banks traditionally did compatibility testing and dispensed blood, the area now provides more specialized testing and consultative services as well as apheresis procedures. The staffing reflects this greater complexity and includes medical technologists with specialty training and certification in blood banking, and three registered nurses.

The Mid Atlantic Association of Blood Banks (MAABB) held its annual meeting in Williamsburg, VA, April 26 & 27. The MAABB's mission is education, so it is only natural that MCVH employees were involved. Rie Southers was an active committee member and co-designer for the technical workshop on Thursday, the 26th. Jill Sheek was one of two Virginia delegates to the MAABB Board and a member of the technical workshop committee.

A number of MCVH technologists and physicians joined 100 other technologists, doctors, and vendors

from the Mid Atlantic region. The all day Thursday workshops varied from technical to management to quality assurance. The Friday lectures covered current "hot topics" in transfusion medicine delivered by experts in the field from across the nation (Mayo Clinic, UVA, ARC, NIH, AABB, and of course MCVH).

Three people from our Transfusion Medicine Service were speakers at this meeting. Rie Southers co-hosted the Thursday morning portion of the Technical Workshop and she also facilitated the Round Table discussions on "Competency Testing". Jill Sheek presented case studies, and Dr. Sue Roseff described the current safety of our blood supply in a talk titled "The A, B, CJDs of Blood Safety". The MAABB annual meeting and regional workshops provided excellent opportunities for continuing education, networking, and participation by all levels of technologists wanting to know more about Transfusion Medicine.

Client Services Slogan Contest

During National Lab Week, the Client Services office sponsored a contest for pathology employees. Staff members were challenged to submit a motto or slogan that was representative of who we are and what we do. Twenty-three slogans and mottoes were submitted.

Best Motto:

First Place: *“Focus, Believe, Achieve, Succeed”*

submitted by Nina Pascual, who works in Pathology Information Systems. Nina received a VCU Thermal Cup as prize for her creativity.

Second Place: *“Dedicated, Innovative, Patient-centered”*

submitted by Mike Langley, from Molecular Diagnostics

Best Slogans:

The task of selecting a single winner was difficult. The four best slogan entrants will be asked to serve on a marketing team to develop the final slogan that will be used by the Outreach Program for name and brand recognition in the industry. For their participation and imagination, these team members will receive a t-shirt imprinted with the new slogan.

“The key to the heart of the problem”

submitted by Barbara Williams, in Immunology

“We pass the test for quality” and *“Defining the science of medicine today and tomorrow”*

submitted by Maryann Fischler, Administration

“Service is our specialty”

submitted by Wayne Byrd, Chemistry/Toxicology

“Our mission is your health: to educate, diagnose, and maintain good health”

submitted by Joyce Johnson, Client Services

STONY POINT

The Department of Pathology has recently implemented new diagnostic testing services in support of the Cancer Center at Stony Point. The new testing includes serum measurements of the basic metabolic panel and magnesium for patients who will receive chemotherapy on the same day. Transfusion of red blood cells and platelets is also performed for oncology patients at Stony Point; blood products are supplied through the main hospital blood bank. Other onsite laboratory services previously established at Stony Point include hematology and coagulation testing. As other medical facilities such as the new Richmond Eye and Ear Hospital open in the vicinity of Stony Point, the Department of Pathology laboratory will have the capability of providing rapid response testing for those prospective clients as well.

Pathology Lab Accreditation

Based on the results of the recent on-site inspection, the Pathology Laboratory of the VCU Health System has been awarded accreditation by the College of American Pathologists (CAP) Commission on Laboratory Accreditation. The CAP accreditation program, which was established in the early 1960's, is recognized by the federal government as being equal to or more stringent than the government's own inspection program. Inspectors examine the records and quality control processes of the laboratory for the past two years. Staff qualifications, CME, facilities, equipment, safety programs, and management are also scrutinized to determine the overall quality of patient care.

This successful inspection would not have been possible without the dedication and careful attention of each and every laboratory employee. Our laboratories provide the patients and physicians of the VCU Health System with the very best in clinical service. On behalf of Dr. David S. Wilkinson, the Department of Pathology wishes to acknowledge our laboratory personnel, supervisors, and managers for their ongoing commitment to excellence and to thank them for this valuable accreditation.



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

The funded research programs of the Department of Pathology continue to excel. In calendar year 2000, we had extramurally funded research projects with direct and indirect costs valued at \$1,161,378. Our research scientists have been quite successful in growing existing research projects and developing new ones.

Principal Investigator Alphonse E. Sirica, Ph.D., was awarded a competitive renewal grant from the National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health for the grant "Hepatic Oval Cells in Culture and In Vivo". The grant is for the five year period from January, 2001 to December, 2005. This grant, aimed at developing novel therapeutic strategies targeting critical receptor tyrosine kinases and cyclooxygenase-2 up-regulated in biliary cancer epithelium, has been consistently funded for 21 years. The total amount of the five-year award is \$1,378,405. It also focuses on elucidating the molecular pathogenesis of human biliary cancers in comparison with experimental biliary carcinogenesis models.

Shawn Holt, Ph.D., was awarded a one-year grant from the Department of Defense to investigate gene expression patterns using microarray in normal breast epithelial cells compared to immortalized or tumor-derived cells. The one-year, \$50,000 grant was one of 80 awarded nationally from a pool 1800 applicants.

The collaborative work of Barbara Amaker, Lynne Elmore, Joy Ware, Ali Akalin, Heidi Forsythe, and Shawn Holt from the Department of Pathology, with the help of summer students Jennie Jarvis (Colorado College, supported by Howard Hughes Medical Institute), John Turner (VCU), and Eric McCollum (VCU) produced two papers. "A novel mechanism for chaperone-mediated telomerase regulation during prostate cancer progression" is in press for Cancer Research and "Stable association of hsp90 and p23 with human telomerase" is in press for the Journal of Biological Chemistry.

Lynne Elmore and Shawn Holt have also successfully collaborated on two book chapters in press, "Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Disease Using Telomerase as a Novel Target" for Cancer Drug Discovery and Development (Human Press) and "Cell Proliferation, Telomerase and Cancer" for Advances in Cell Aging and Gerontology (Elsevier Science).

Lab Week

National Medical Laboratory Week is a time to honor the over 280,000 medical laboratory professionals across the country. Pathologists, laboratory technologists, and technicians are among the many unsung heroes of healthcare. Working behind the scenes, laboratory professionals perform and interpret laboratory tests using sophisticated technology and instrumentation. The work done by many types of specialists in the lab - pathologists, technologists, cytologists, histologists, phlebotomists, processors, and support personnel - is invaluable in diagnosing, treating and monitoring disease.

This year's National Medical Laboratory Week celebration was held during the week of April 15th through 21st. Our department celebrated by giving each employee an appreciation gift of an umbrella with a Department of Pathology logo. We were also treated to daily door prizes, donuts, box lunches and a cookie party. The laboratories sponsored a hospital exhibit, games, contests and service projects. Our service projects included donations of pre-kindergarten workbooks for distribution to the pediatric patients at Hayes E. Willis Health Center, canned goods for the Hospitality House, and toys for the hospital's Child Life Program. By sponsoring these combined activities, we are celebrating our laboratory's contributions to the Health System, acknowledging our dedicated employees, and giving something back to our community.

Welcome New Employees!

We are pleased to welcome these new employees to our department: **Ki-Mara Barnes**, Anatomic Pathology; **Connie Bender**, Microbiology; **Ernestine Blume**, Specimen Processing; **Lorraine Brown**, Anatomic Pathology; **Jaime Chapman**, Chemistry; **Shameka Cheeks**, Client Services; **Janice Clack**, Transfusion Medicine; **Kim Covington**, Phlebotomy; **Denise Dailey**, Hematology; **Lidia Epp**, Molecular Diagnostics; **Eric Fleming**, Specimen Processing; **Christina Gary**, Specimen Processing; **Terri Hadley**, Hematology; **Rhonda Hines**, Phlebotomy; **Catherine Lee**, Microbiology; **Nanina Lewis**, Specimen Processing; **Cindy McDaniel**, Specimen Processing; **Tina Reynolds**, Client Services; **Adrianna Rosato**, Microbiology; **Jennifer Runion**, Microbiology; **Michael Smith**, Research; **Sparkle Turpin**, Specimen Processing; **Odalys Valero**, Anatomic Pathology; **Natalie Walker**, Molecular Diagnostics; **Robin Warekois**, Client Services; **Mary Woody**, Specimen Processing; **Byung Il Yoon**, Research.

Spirit of Virginia Chapter of CLMA

The Spirit of Virginia Chapter of the Clinical Laboratory Management Association (CLMA) elected the executive officers for the period October 2000-2002 during the Spirit of Virginia Annual Meeting held in conjunction with the Tri-chapter Annual Fall CLMA Education and Vendor Extravaganza held in Richmond, Virginia. The Central Virginia Chapter and the Spirit of Virginia Chapters merged their memberships during 2000 to form a stronger chapter, serving CLMA members throughout the state from Williamsburg to Charlottesville, from Emporia to Fredericksburg, and from Kilmarnock to Bristol. Three members of the Department of Pathology serve the Spirit of Virginia Chapter in leadership positions: they are Ann Harris, President; Judy Luck, One Year Director; Thomas Dilts, Two Year Director.

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YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE WELCOME!

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