The Rookies

Goodbye books...
Hello real world

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Hippocratic honor
Science superstar
Caring for cows
When health care gets political

What is the fate of health-care reform if Democrats win the 2008 presidential election? What if the Republicans win office? And how will the nation’s deficit affect reform attempts? Those were the topics of an April 11 talk by leading economist and health-policy expert Gail Wilensky, Ph.D., who discussed “The politics of health-care reform” as part of the College of Public Health and Health Professions 50th Anniversary Lecture Series.

Wilensky is shown here with (from left) College of Medicine pediatrics chair Richard Bucciapelli, M.D.; interim dean of Public Health and Health Professions Michael Perri, Ph.D.; and Ira Gessner, M.D., of the College of Medicine.

To view a video of Wilensky’s lecture, visit www.phhp.ufl.edu/50th-Anniversary/lecture-series.
COAT OF HONOR

UF student leader Shasanka Thumu, standing behind his classmates, was one of four students chosen to lead his campus at the UF College of Pharmacy Professional Coating Ceremony in April. Representing the Orlando campus, Thumu joins (from left) Kelly Braun, Courtney Gunn, Jienn Hahn Le and Komal Shah, posing for friends and family after the ceremony at the Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. Along with nearly 300 of their classmates from four campuses, the students celebrated the completion of their first year of education by taking the white coat of a pharmacist. Photo by Jeff Knee.

PAINT IT GREEN

Master of Public Health students celebrated National Public Health Week with a series of events related to this year’s theme — “Climate Change and the Nation’s Health.” Activities included a free lunch featuring healthy foods, a climate change discussion with community experts, and a Florida native plant sale. The students kicked off the week by painting a mural on the 34th Street Wall. Painters included (from left) Amanda Gersch, Namrata Uberoi, Lisa Reidenauer and Catherine Johnson.

I’M A SURVIVOR

Join cancer survivors and their families, friends and health-care providers for the Gainesville observance of “National Cancer Survivors Day — It Takes a Team” from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. June 1 at the HPNP Complex. The event recognizes cancer survivors and the contributions of their survivor teams and will feature workshops and demonstrations on topics such as psychological health, yoga, nutrition and a special workshop for caregivers. The event will also include music, prizes and projects for all ages. National Cancer Survivors Day is sponsored locally by WUFT-TV.

A NEW LEADER

Joseph V. Simone, M.D., an internationally recognized leader in cancer care, research and education, has been named director of the UF Shands Cancer Center and physician-in-chief of cancer services for Shands at UF, effective July 1. Simone, who has held leadership positions in some of the country’s top cancer programs, is making a second stop at UF. He served as a consultant in the planning for the Shands at UF Cancer Hospital and the university’s overall cancer program in 2006 and 2007, briefly holding an appointment as a UF associate vice president for health affairs. A pediatric oncologist, Simone worked for 25 years at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, is a former president of the Association of American Cancer Institutes and has been an adviser for the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center, which recently partnered with UF and Shands. At UF, Simone’s key goals include leading a redesign of UF and Shands clinical cancer services to better align them with Moffitt’s patient-centered programs. He will also work to integrate UF and Shands patient-care and research activities with Moffitt’s “Total Cancer Care” program and the renewal of its prestigious National Cancer Institute Comprehensive Cancer Center core grant.
A different kind of field trip

Local law enforcement officers take pharmacy students inside drug busts

By Christa Wagers

A 15-passenger unmarked van prowls the streets of Gainesville on a quest for the latest drug deal.

No, this isn’t an episode of “Cops.” It’s a UF class going on a field trip.

The eight-week pharmacy course called Drugs and Society, which was held this semester, took the 15 students on drug busts as part of their “other” drug use education.

Sgt. Shawn Brooks, of the Alachua County Sheriff’s Office, doesn’t remember any other UF classes all going on what he calls a “buy bust” together. However, individual ride-alongs are common.

Brooks was in the van with the students, along with another officer from the Gainesville Alachua County Drug Task Force. The other officer is not named because he still works undercover. Brooks, 36, has moved to the uniform patrol department.

Through the busts and talks with the sheriff’s department gave, the students gained an understanding of what law enforcement really does to combat drug abuse.

“It’s not the excitement of television shows,” said Viviane Barry, 37, a student in the course.

There is a lot of patience and waiting involved during the bust, Barry said. There’s also much planning done for safety. The students arrived at a buy bust scene after the situation had been controlled by law enforcement officials, Brooks said.

“For their safety, we keep them out of the area,” he said.

Drugs and Society was started about 15 years ago by Paul Doering, M.S., a UF distinguished service professor in the College of Pharmacy.

“Since there is seemingly a pharmacy on every street corner, it follows that parents, children and adolescents will go to the pharmacist with their questions about some aspect of nonmedical drug use,” he said.

Although the students have knowledge of the drugs, they don’t necessarily know the terminology, he said.

One of Doering’s favorite parts of the class is going on the drug busts.

“It is fun to see the wide-eyed excitement that the students show when they work with the law enforcement officers dressed in combat fatigues or undercover clothing,” he said. “It is truly a first-rate ‘peek behind the curtains’ that very few people get to experience.”

During some of the busts the group got to see a glimpse of the families, Barry said.

There was still cocaine on a table inside one apartment. A baby and a toddler were there, too.

“It’s really sad when you see this whole family of people where there are children involved,” she said.

Students went on drug busts toward the end of the course. Up until that point, Barry said the students had been learning about how the drugs got into the country and how they were obtained by individual users.

The sheriff’s office brought in cocaine and prescription drugs such as OxyContin into the class for the students to see what the drugs look like on the street.

“It gives them the understanding for the potential for drug abuse for the drugs they are responsible for dispensing.”

— Sgt. Shawn Brooks, Alachua County Sheriff’s Office

“It gives them the understanding for the potential for drug abuse for the drugs they are responsible for dispensing,” Brooks said.

Another thing Barry learned during the class was that illegal drug use isn’t a problem that can be attributed to race, gender, age or economic standing.

“As a professional caregiver, we have to be concerned about that,” Barry said.

Barry said she will be able to take this knowledge, use it to recognize symptoms and help others.

“It gives me a lot more knowledge to talk to people about this usage with real information, not just giving them an empty slogan,” she said.

Visit us online @ http://news.health.ufl.edu for the latest news and HSC events.
**Message in a Skittle**

Pharmacy students bring new spin to drug abuse message

By Lauren Edwards

Remember Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” campaign? Drug abuse isn’t a new issue in America, and many authority figures from the White House on down have attempted to curb drug use. Yet millions of teens are still trying — and habitually using — both illegal and prescription drugs, sometimes with fatal consequences.

For Erica Fernandez, president of the College of Pharmacy class of 2010, the reality of drug abuse hit a little too close to home when a friend of her younger sister died of a drug overdose last November.

Fernandez felt compelled to action, and along with some of her fellow pharmacy students, came up with a novel way to present the dangers of drug abuse to local high schools using the popular candy Skittles.

While many drug-education programs are heavy on the scary statistics, Fernandez’s group of 31 presenters structured theirs to be less lecture and more fun.

“We didn’t want to hit them with stats,” said Fernandez. “We wanted it to be more of an interaction ... we’re not telling them what to do, but trying to treat them as peers.”

On April 14, Fernandez and her team visited five area high schools, where they spoke about the dangers of using and abusing illegal and prescription drugs to more than 1,000 students.

In their presentation, each colored Skittle represented a different drug. Every student received a random handful, and Fernandez and her team spoke to the students about how such drugs affect the body and the dangers of mixing them together or with alcohol.

Fernandez says she felt the visits were a success.

“(Their) questions were very insightful,” she said of the mostly freshman participants. “It went really well. Everyone had a good time.”

And that attitude went both ways. The pharmacy school presenters impressed local teacher Maria Randell so much, she told the group she hoped they could come back twice a year.

“The presentation was outstanding,” said Randell, a teacher at Oak Hall School, in a written evaluation. “They were extremely comfortable and receptive to the students’ questions.”

More important, however, were the students’ reactions.

When Fernandez had a chance encounter with one of the participating students a few days later, the young woman recognized the pharmacy student and told her how the presentation had affected her.

“I wouldn’t have done drugs before,” the girl said. “But now, I definitely won’t.”

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**Their own Hippocrates**

Medical students give prestigious award to oncologist

By April Frawley Birdwell

James Lynch, M.D., quickly wiped his eyes as he stood in a narrow lobby just off the Founder’s Gallery, listening to some of the reasons why, just moments earlier, senior medical students had named him their choice for the 2008 Hippocratic Award.

“He never speaks with a flair of arrogance or a tone of superiority ... He is a model educator.”

“The Hippocratic Award, a distinction the senior class awards each year to the UF professor they feel best models the qualities of a good, compassionate physician and teacher, is generally considered one of the highest honors in the college. The award was established in 1969.

“I don’t even know what to say,” Lynch said to the crowd of medical students, staff and faculty clustered in front of him. “Today, you’ve shown me grace.”

With the award, Lynch joins a select trio of UF medical professors — Patrick Duff, M.D., the late Hugh Hill, M.D., and Gene Ryerson, M.D. — who have received the honor three times.

Lynch, a professor of medicine who specializes in the treatment of lymphoma and breast cancer, has been named one of the Best Doctors in America, has received numerous awards for his teaching and was one of the first faculty members inducted in the Chapman Society, the UF chapter of the Gold Humanism Society.

“It shows you his teaching ability and his compassion,” said Bhavin Adhyaru, president of the College of Medicine Class of 2008, of Lynch’s many honors.

“Oncology is one of the few classes we get to hear from patients (in the first two years of medical school). He brings in his own patients and they always mention what a wonderful doctor he is,” Adhyaru added. “Every single patient always mentions that.”
Horse tale
Brazilian Olympic team horse recuperating after treatment at UF

By Sarah Carey

After surviving an odyssey of difficult surgeries and complicated medical problems, a Brazilian Olympic dressage horse named Livello has lived to train another day and is recuperating back in his home country, thanks to UF veterinarians.

UF equine surgeon David Freeman, who played a key role in Livello’s amazing story and eventual turnaround, discharged the horse on April 11 to one of his Brazilian veterinarians, who flew home with him.

“His horse is all quality,” Freeman said. “Everyone who dealt with him here did a wonderful job, and this is a horse that came all the way from Brazil because we had the technology to treat him.”

Freeman said Livello’s case illustrated the importance of powerful imaging equipment, particularly UF’s MRI unit, in guiding effective medical treatment.

“Radiology, specifically Drs. Matt Winter and Shannon Holmes, did a wonderful job with interpreting the images,” Freeman said, adding that clinicians and technicians from the radiology, surgery, ophthalmology and anesthesia services were all extremely helpful.

“Livello actually came here because the owners were aware we had CT and thought that could be used to help him, but it turned out that the MRI was a better imaging tool for his problem,” Freeman said.

Brazillian veterinarian Fernanda Bicudo Cesar said the horse’s owner, Dr. Jorge de la Rocha, and his family were “very thankful for everyone involved.”

Cesar spent two weeks at UF with Livello when his primary veterinarian, Patricia Brossi, had to return home after spending two months in Gainesville.

“The owners haven’t seen him for three months, but now they can sleep well and finally feel that things are going to be OK,” Cesar said.

Brossi said Livello was a fighter, and so much more than that to those who know him.

“You have only to go through his medical records to appreciate how much of a fighter he is,” she said. “Besides that, he talks to you, he makes it really clear how much he appreciates everything you do for him.”

Livello is the horse we dreamed of in our childhood, when we first realized we loved horses, those huge creatures, their smell, the noise from their hooves, the feeling of being on top of them,” Brossi said. “He is special to Dr. Jorge because he fits him, with his size and his personality, as no other horse ever did.”

Livello’s story began in Brazil last October with a bad tooth. A tooth extraction procedure damaged the horse’s tear duct and intraorbital nerve, veterinarians said.

“Tears were coming down his face, and he had nerve damage that was causing him to rub his face and sneeze,” Freeman said, adding that a subsequent procedure involving a veterinary surgeon from Tennessee and a world-renowned equine dentist who were flown to Brazil to help did not resolve the problem.

“The surgeries went well, but never cleared up the infection Livello had developed in his sinuses,” Freeman said.

Because of his infection, Livello subsequently developed facial swelling and a malodorous nasal discharge.

Desperate to help him, his owners and their veterinarians, who had heard of Freeman and UF’s imaging capability through veterinary meetings in Brazil, decided the horse needed to be treated at UF. In February, de la Rocha, who also has ridden Livello as part of the Brazilian Olympic dressage team, flew the horse and Brossi, his veterinarian, to Florida’s Alec P. and Louise H. Courtelis Equine Hospital.

“We had some idea based on Livello’s history and clinical signs that there was probably some necrotic bone that needed to be removed,” Freeman said. “But we didn’t know the exact location or extent of it, and that is where both the CT and our new MRI unit came in.”

An initial surgery resulted in the removal of a lot of dead bone and tissue, but Livello’s sinus drainage continued, as did the nasal discharge.

“So we did another MRI on him about three weeks later and then another surgery after that,” Freeman said. “The MRI images helped us find the sites where we needed to go, and the site was not an easy area to gain access to. We were somewhat reserved by then in terms of our level of satisfaction because we knew there might still be more bone left.”

By the time Livello left, he had undergone three surgeries at UF, with the last one being the most difficult. Within two weeks of his last procedure, however, Livello began showing signs of improvement.

“His attitude definitely improved,” Freeman said. When Livello’s nasal discharge vanished, Freeman and his colleagues knew they had turned a corner.

“This was a tough case,” he said. “Every now and then we get cases that test us and test our general ability to handle very serious veterinary challenges, and this was one of them.”

Freeman added that he gave a lot of credit to Livello’s owner, de la Rocha, for his unwavering commitment to the horse.

“He was not going to be deterred by the cost of treatment but he was realistic and committed and most of all, he did not want this horse to suffer,” Freeman said. “He wanted the very best for him, and he did all the right things. That didn’t replace any of our caregiving for the horse, but it made it a lot easier.”
On the move
UF, Shands relocate services to meet patients' needs
By Karen Dooley

UF and Shands have moved all pediatric inpatient services back under one roof, just one change that took place in April as part of a massive realignment of services at four of the health-care system's patient-care sites.

The move, which brings pediatric inpatients back to Shands at UF, comes less than two years after many of the department's clinical services were sent to Shands AGH.

"Some very good things came out of the move of pediatric to and then from Shands AGH," said Richard Buccarelli, M.D., chair of the department of pediatrics. "We learned that we were not able to fit all the pediatric services at AGH. There was additional support that just wasn't available, and we found it necessary to transport some kids to UF.

"We were not happy with the inconvenience and the stress this may have caused on the kids and their families. It wasn't meeting our expectations of highest quality of care. We knew we had to move to a different setting."

The reconsolidation of pediatric services is one part of a broader plan — the Quality Access and Care Realignment — that was sparked by an intensive investigation to find the appropriate patient mix for each Shands venue.

"About 25 people worked diligently and strategically for months to make sure it was a smooth transition for staff, physicians and patients," said Mike Good, M.D., senior associate dean for clinical affairs in the College of Medicine. "Twenty-one pediatric patients were moved from AGH in two days to the fourth floor of Shands at UF beginning (April 15), and surgeons began operating in their new ORs with new schedules that same day."

A beautiful mind
Arthur Otis, first UF chair of physiology, passes away
By April Hrawley Birdwell

Arthur B. Otis remembered it took him all day to get to UF. But the trip was worth it.

"The university campus was beautiful," said Otis, the first chair of physiology in the UF College of Medicine, during a 2005 interview about the college's early days. "It had a lot of gardens and flowers and little ponds."

Otis, who served as a department chair for more than 20 years and spent the rest of his career at UF, passed away April 4.

He was 94.

A native of Groton, Maine, Otis earned his doctorate from Brown University in 1941. He began studying what would become his specialty, respiratory physiology, at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, where he accepted a position as an instructor in 1941. There he worked with researchers as part of a project studying positive pressure breathing for the U.S. government during World War II.

After a year as a Fulbright visiting research scholar at Cambridge University and four years as a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Otis was selected to lead the new UF College of Medicine's department of physiology.

"This is the first chair of something that was my own," Otis said in 2005. "I didn't find another place that was better. I liked the job. It gave me personal freedom."

He served as department chair until 1980 and as a professor until he retired in 1986.

A member of Phi Beta Kappa and several professional societies, Otis continued to focus on experimental respiratory physiology throughout his career. His studies led to dozens of journal articles as well as books and book chapters. 
**RESEARCH**

**Skipping Doses**

New device could help docs track drug adherence

By Ann Griswold

Most of us have missed a dose of antibiotic or forgotten to take a daily vitamin. But when the stakes are higher — as they are for people with HIV/AIDS — a skipped pill could mean the difference between health and hazard for the entire population. Now, a breath-monitoring device developed by scientists at UF and Xhale Inc. could help prevent the emergence of drug-resistant strains of HIV by monitoring medication adherence in high-risk individuals.

"For HIV, it's been shown that if you don't take a very high percentage of your medication, you may as well not take medication at all," said Richard Melker, M.D., a professor of anesthesiology at the UF College of Medicine and chief technology officer for Xhale.

Patients who take some but not all of their medication increase the likelihood the virus will mutate into a deadlier, drug-resistant form. Experts have tried literally hundreds, if not thousands, of ways to monitor drug adherence, ranging from daily log books to blister packs that record the time each pill is dispensed. Despite the money, time and effort devoted to these methods, Melker said only one works well: directly observed therapy, or DOT.

"If you have a disease that is deemed to be a public health risk, authorities can put you into a program where you have to come to the clinic every day and be observed putting the pill into your mouth and swallowing it," Melker said.

But that process is inconvenient for patients, as well as for clinic personnel who have to track them down when they fail to show up. A breath-monitoring device developed by UF scientists and Xhale could change that, allowing patients to participate in a type of virtual DOT from home.

"The machine sits in your home and when it's time for you to take your medication, it makes a beeping noise. If you don't hit a button after about five minutes, it's going to beep louder and louder until you come," Melker said. "If you don't come after a certain amount of time, the machine can call the clinical trial coordinator and indicate that subject or patient didn't take the medication as prescribed."

The device, which is slightly smaller than a shoebox, records the results of each breath test, allowing patients to bring a memory card or USB key to the clinic once a month and receive a printout of their results. Eventually, the researchers hope to reduce the size of their detection device to fit inside a cell phone. But for now, they're satisfied the technology works.

"The doctor can see how often you took it and exactly what time. If it made the patient really sick or dizzy and they didn't take it, they can find out why," Melker said. "It's not just a question of did I or didn't I take it, but when you took it or why you didn't take it."

The researchers developed the adherence monitor by incorporating minute amounts of an alcohol into a gel capsule. The additive, called 2-butanol, is one of many GRAS — Generally Recognized as Safe — compounds approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in foods.

"We wanted (patients) to swallow a chemical and have it transform into something else that's easy to monitor," said Matthew Booth, Ph.D., an assistant professor of anesthesiology at the UF College of Medicine and an investigator in the study. "When it hits the stomach lining and liver, an enzyme converts the alcohol to a gas that can be measured in the breath."

To determine how well the byproduct could be detected, six healthy volunteers swallowed empty pills in which the capsules contained trace amounts of 2-butanol. After five to 10 minutes, the scientists could measure the volatile byproduct in the volunteers' breath using a small detector.

"It is encouraging that the biological and chemical elements of the adherence system work as predicted," said Donna Dennis, M.D., the Joachim S. Gravenstein professor of anesthesiology at the UF College of Medicine and an investigator in the study. "We were able to conclusively show who swallowed the capsules containing the 2-butanol. With further optimization, we are optimistic the device will perform very well."
Heart attacker
Stress can be deadly for patients with genetic variation

By Melanie Fridl Ross

UF researchers have identified a gene variation in heart disease patients who appear especially vulnerable to the physical effects of mental stress — to the point where blood flow to the heart is greatly reduced.

"Searching for the presence of this gene may be one way to better identify patients who are at an increased risk for the phenomenon," said David S. Sheps, M.D., a professor and associate chairman of cardiovascular medicine at UF's College of Medicine and the Malcom Randall Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Those with the gene variation are three times more likely to experience dangerous decreases in blood flow to the heart — a condition doctors call ischemia — than heart disease patients without it. Ischemia increases the chance these patients will suffer a heart attack, heart rhythm abnormalities or sudden death, UF researchers reported April 14 in the Archives of Internal Medicine.

"There's no question that in certain populations it is associated with worse prognosis than in patients who do not have mental stress-induced ischemia in terms of overall adverse events and also mortality," Sheps said. "And it has become apparent that it is far more prevalent than we initially thought."

UF researchers studied 148 patients with coronary artery disease. Participants were asked to perform a public speaking test designed to induce stress. Images were taken of blood flow to the heart at rest and during the speech task. Blood samples were also collected and analyzed for five common gene variations.

About a fourth of the patients experienced mental stress-induced reduced blood flow to the heart, and about two-thirds of them harbored a particular variation of the adrenergic beta-1 receptor genotype that was associated with a three-fold increased risk of this phenomenon, said Mustafa Hassan, M.D., the study's lead author and a research fellow in UF's division of cardiovascular medicine.

This receptor typically helps the body respond to stress by regulating blood pressure and heart rate, but a common variability in its gene may make certain patients more vulnerable to the effects of psychological stress.

"We should focus our research on two areas," Sheps said. "One is better identification of patients who are prone to have this problem and two is looking for effective treatments once we know they have it. We need to know whether we can reverse this phenomenon. We are embarking on other treatment studies fairly soon."

Targeting cancer’s force field

By Jennifer Brindise

New therapies must target a key protein interaction to destroy aggressive cancer cells' protective force field, UF scientists reported in April at the American Association for Cancer Research's annual meeting in San Diego.

The barrier deflects damage from radiation or chemotherapy, making some cancer cells difficult to destroy, but researchers from UF and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill may have discovered why. Their study revealed that mutations in the tumor-suppressing p53 protein lead to an overabundance of a second protein called focal adhesion kinase, or FAK, which makes the cells less vulnerable to attack.

"These findings are significant to future cancer research and the development of new therapies," said Vita Golubovskaya, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the UF department of surgery, who presented the findings. "The high correlation between these two markers is critical for predicting patient prognosis."

The next step will involve developing cancer therapies that target this interaction, Golubovskaya added.

Both p53 and FAK are found in low levels in normal, healthy cells. The p53 protein ensures that cells strike a balance between growth and death. In its normal state, p53 suppresses the FAK protein and weakens the molecular force field around cancer cells. But mutations in the p53 protein can interfere with this regulatory function.

Mutations in the p53 gene are commonly found in patients with cancer, and those with more aggressive forms of the disease boast particularly high levels of p53 and FAK. Most cancer therapies are largely ineffective against the resulting FAK force field, which has been identified in melanoma and most solid tumors of the breast, lung, brain, thyroid and colon.

Scientists are still unsure what causes mutations in p53 and why FAK binds to the damaged protein. But the study revealed that the interaction interferes with the signaling process that normally induces cell death, allowing cancer cells to grow unchecked.

UNC researchers, led by Kathleen Conway-Dorsney, Ph.D., an assistant professor of cancer epidemiology, analyzed mutations in tumor tissue samples from 600 breast cancer patients. UF researchers then identified the FAK protein in the samples and performed a statistical analysis, finding that the p53 mutation is associated with an overabundance of FAK.
Words can never hurt me?
Effects of social bullying could linger in adults

By April Fravley Birdwell

Spreading rumors and gossiping may not cause bruises or black eyes, but the psychological consequences of this social type of bullying could linger into early adulthood, a new UF study shows.

In a study of 210 college students, UF researchers discovered a link between what psychologists call relational victimization in adolescence and depression and anxiety in early adulthood, according to findings published in the April issue of Psychology in the Schools. Rather than threatening a child with physical violence, these bullies target a child’s social status and relationships by shunning them, excluding them from social activities or spreading rumors, said Allison Dempsey, a doctoral student in the UF College of Education and the study’s lead author.

“Even though people are outside of high school, the memories of these experiences continue to be associated with depression and social anxiety,” said Dempsey, who graduated from Columbine High School in Colorado one year before the 1999 school shooting there and now studies school prevention programs. “It was interesting to see these relationships still continue to exist even though they are in early adulthood now and in a completely different setting.”

To uncover the relationships between social bullying and loneliness, depression and anxiety, researchers surveyed undergraduates between 18 and 25 and asked them to recall their high school experiences. They found no gender differences and discovered that having friends or other positive social relationships in school didn’t lessen rates of depression and anxiety in adulthood, a finding that surprised researchers, Dempsey said. For some children, having friends and positive support can help make them more resilient to the slings and arrows from bullies, said Eric Storch, an assistant professor of psychiatry in the UF College of Medicine and a co-author of the study. But other children take the words and abuse more to heart and begin to believe what’s being said about them.

“Those types of negative thoughts are actually believed to be at the core of things like depression and anxiety,” Storch said. “Behaviorally what starts happening is you avoid interactions and situations that could be quite positive for you. “I think many people have the belief that victimization is a normal rite of passage in childhood,” Storch said. “While it certainly does happen to most kids, it’s not acceptable. And while I think it would be difficult to completely curtail it, by reducing it you’re going to help someone a tremendous amount to not have to go to school and be plagued by this environment of being tortured day in and day out.”

Trouble in the aquarium
Researcher discovers foreign disease in imported reef clams

By Sarah Carey

Vividly colorful giant clams officially called tridacnids decorate many an upscale aquarium. But now experts say they boast an exterior beauty that masks an ugly truth: their potential for carrying foreign diseases.

In findings that may impact the reef clam industry as well as international trade, a UF veterinary pathologist recently discovered Perkinsus osleri, an internationally reportable foreign pathogen, in aquacultured clams imported from Vietnam.

While not believed to be a threat to human health or other reef aquarium species, the pathogen’s presence concerns scientists as well as aquaculture industry representatives and points out the largely unregulated environment in which the importation of aquacultured reef clams from Asia occurs.

“I had 30 clams in my lab as part of a student research project,” said Barbara Sheppard, D.V.M., Ph.D., a clinical associate professor of pathology at the UF College of Veterinary Medicine. “Then they started looking sickly, and within four months, all of them were dead.”

Sheppard began investigating the cause of death by freezing tissues, putting them into formalin and conducting histopathology and DNA tests in her laboratory. Her findings, which appeared recently in Diseases of Aquatic Organisms, showed the presence of Perkinsus osleri along with a new species of Perkinsus that has yet to be characterized.

“This is an important finding,” said Ralph Elston, Ph.D., president of AquaTechnics, a Carlisborg, Wash.-based company that provides veterinary, laboratory and environmental assessment services to the shellfish industry. “It indicates the potential risk of the spread of animal disease when health monitoring is not in place to control such risks.”

Sheppard is now collaborating with other researchers to further characterize the new exotic species of Perkinsus discovered in her clam colony.

Giant clams are the largest bivalves in the world. These clams represent an increasingly large proportion of the live invertebrates imported to become aquarium specimens.

“This is not a zoonotic disease, transmissible to people,” Sheppard said. “No one is going to get sick from this, as far as we know. The problem here is economic and international trade. We know that Perkinsus is a pathogen of aquatic shellfish, and the reason it is so important is that it makes animals very vulnerable to dying when the weather gets hot or when they get stressed in some other way.”
By Lauren Edwards

Shani Isaac didn’t expect to be performing brain surgery on rats at 18 years of age. She didn’t expect to one day get accepted into the top medical school in the nation or to work side-by-side with a Nobel Prize winner while still in college. But that’s exactly what happened.

Isaac, who graduated this month with a bachelor’s degree, came to UF as a freshman in 2004 with interests in neurosurgery, psychiatry and addiction medicine. During the fall of her first year, she went online to search for researchers in her fields of interest and stumbled upon the name of Mark Gold, M.D., chief of addiction medicine in the College of Medicine’s department of psychiatry.

Though she had no prior research experience, Isaac decided to contact Gold. “I didn’t expect him to let me come into his lab, because I had no skills whatsoever,” Isaac said. “But he e-mailed me back in 20 minutes and said there was a spot for me (to do research).”

Isaac began in the lab that first semester, conducting experiments and performing electrode-implantation surgeries on rats to learn more about the effects of addiction and withdrawal. It was there she met Adriaan Bruijnzeel, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychiatry who would later become her mentor.

Isaac worked in the lab alongside Bruijnzeel to find ways to block withdrawal symptoms in the hope of creating smoking cessation treatments.

Bruijnzeel says Isaac was a natural from day one.

“I showed her how to do surgeries, and she picked it up really easily,” he said. “It was pretty exceptional … I’d never seen that before.”

UF soon took notice of Isaac’s abilities and awarded her a University Scholars Program fellowship, which permitted her to conduct her own research project and present it at the annual Society for Neuroscience meeting. Then, in 2007, Isaac was chosen to be a part of the UF/Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s prestigious Science for Life Extramural Research Program, which gave her the chance to spend seven months with Nobel laureate Susumu Tonegawa, Ph.D., at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, research ing memory pathways in relation to addiction.

Isaac said Bruijnzeel helped her choose Tonegawa’s lab by looking into all the possibilities and letting her know whose research he thought best suited her interests and abilities. Although it was rare for Tonegawa to accept undergraduates, Bruijnzeel encouraged Isaac to try.

“I was really lucky,” she said of Bruijnzeel’s help. “He’s extremely supportive of my research … He trained me from ground zero, which a lot of investigators don’t do.”

Bruijnzeel says he enjoys mentoring students like Isaac and watching them grow. Since he came to UF from San Diego’s Scripps Research Institute in 2004, he’s mentored Isaac, along with 15 other students.

“I think it’s one of your duties as an academic researcher,” he said. “I had great mentors myself … and when you help people and they become successful, that really adds to your job.”

Isaac also credits Randy Duran, Ph.D., as a great help in her academic career. Duran, a UF chemistry professor, is the director of the UF/Howard Hughes Medical Institute Science for Life program, the largest program for early undergraduate research in Florida.

Together with Bruijnzeel, Duran has helped Isaac get to where she is today: a future student at Harvard Medical School, the nation’s top medical program.

And it is the mentoring, Isaac says, that has made all the difference.

“T here’s a major shortage of people going into the fields of science,” she said. “I think a major part (of fixing that) is starting them early.”

Isaac says it takes effort to get an inexperienced student involved in research, but it’s what is necessary “so that they won’t be intimidated.”

Bruijnzeel agrees.

“I like working with undergraduate students and seeing how they grow,” he said. “It’s nice to see people transform in three years.”

Of Isaac, Bruijnzeel smiles when he talks about one of his first — and most successful — students.

“She’s very easy to work with,” he said. “I think she can focus really well. That’s probably why she has such good results. The quality of her work is so, so high.”

Isaac echoes this sentiment about the mentor who has helped her for the past four years.

“He has been absolutely amazing,” she said.
Impending grads may have mastered the books, but many will learn it takes years to cope with the pressure of professional life when their reputations and patients’ lives are on the line.

By Melissa M. Thompson
Photos by Sarah Kiewel
Nestled on a foam mattress with blankets draped over her frail, 60-pound frame, Tulip, a 3-week old premature filly, struggled to take each breath. Patches of chocolate-brown fur were missing from her bony flanks while feeding and oxygen tubes jutted from her nostrils. The rhythmic drip ... drip ... drip of intravenous lines delivered a laundry list of medications throughout her body.

As she lay in the neonatal intensive care unit at the University of Georgia’s Large Animal Hospital, battling symptoms from a blood infection, seizures and diarrhea, some veterinary interns caring for the filly saw a heart-wrenching but inevitable death. Amanda House, D.V.M., saw an opportunity to save a young life.

“At one point, she had such severe acidosis and hypernatremia (a condition where blood pH is too low and sodium is too high) that she was blind,” says House, a UF assistant professor of equine extension in large animal clinical science in the College of Veterinary Medicine, who was the senior clinician handling the case in 2005. “Many students, and probably a couple of veterinarians, thought she should be euthanized.”

After using the drug tris-hydroxymethyl aminomethane, a product used in human intensive care cases to help improve blood pH without increasing sodium levels in the body, and nearly four months of seasawing in and out of treatment at the hospital, Tulip slowly improved, eventually making a full recovery.

“If I was at the beginning of my career, I may not have been inclined to give the foal a chance,” House says. “Today she’s doing great, galloping around in a beautiful pasture and having a great life.”

Like House, most health-care professionals do not walk off the stage at graduation with Zen-like patience and the ability to solve every medical crisis with the skill and ease of Doogie Howser, M.D.—if it was that easy, the medical industry would be inundated with physicians and there wouldn’t be a nursing shortage. Rather, students and recent grads will learn that it can take years to feel comfortable in their professional skin and that real-life lessons begin beyond the confines of a 2,000-page medical textbook. It’s the sleepless nights spent drafting detailed nursing care plans. The 18-hour marathon shifts in the ER and the beaming smile from a pediatric patient who learns she is cancer-free.

“You get a lot of practice as a senior resident,” says Sarosh “Shawn” Batilova, a third-year pediatrics resident. “You get to see how everything you do helps kids get better.”

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late 1960s. “We started to see patients in our second semester of our second year. That way we now introduce clinical medicine on the first day of medical school hopefully helps (students) get a lot of practice from day one.”

First-year students complete three-week preceptorships where they are linked with community-based primary care doctors. In another course, students visit families in their homes along with other health professions students to help foster interdisciplinary work early on. The Harrell Professional Development and Assessment Center also offers an opportunity for students to train, allowing them to interact with standardized patients, individuals trained to simulate symptoms of ailments or who have stable abnormal physical findings.

Students across the health-education spectrum climb a carefully structured ladder of increasing responsibility. They begin by teetering on the bottom rung, slowly building a solid foundation of knowledge from course plans largely based on objective exams and carefully supervised clinical experiences. In the College of Medicine, third-year students edge closer to the top when they are assigned to monitor two to three patients under the supervision of an attending physician. As a culminating experience in their fourth year, students serve as sub-interns, an experience that Davidson describes as “Internship 101.” Students take on duties similar to first-year interns, ordering nutrition plans, medications, lab tests and other treatments under the supervision of attending physicians.

“I didn’t know what it meant to be an intern until my fourth year,” Bativala says. “I had two really great senior residents who took me under their wing.”

Davidson says he agrees that most students don’t open their eyes to the reality of the resident lifestyle until their last couple of years of school.

“The first two years of medical school is traditionally similar to college,” he says. “Sometime during their third year they realize they’re really going to have to take care of very sick patients in the middle of the night, and that it’s really not negotiable. That can be sobering.”

It was late at night in April when most students in Gainesville — with the exception of some procrastinators typing last-minute papers in a caffeinated buzz — were sleeping under a blanket of darkness. But Melanie Wexel, D.D.S., a third-year orthodontics resident, didn’t have that luxury. Under the glow of her office lamp at the UF College of Dentistry, Wexel was busy compiling her patient review, a written summary of the progress and outcomes of many of the patients she has treated over the past two to three years.

Spending extra time on important projects comes with the territory of being a senior resident, where some days are spent going beyond the call of duty. But when she first moved to Gainesville in 2005 to begin her residency, Wexel dealt with more than adjusting to fluctuating schedules during her transition from dental school to a residency program in an unfamiliar place.

“It took time to get adjusted because I had no family or friends here,” says Wexel, who attended dental school at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va. “In the beginning you’re overwhelmed. Orthodontics was like learning a whole new language for me because in my dental school orthodontics was not the primary focus.”

For Wexel, time and experience was the best prescription to become adjusted. As a third-year resident, she said she enjoys how faculty members place their trust in the senior residents’ hands, allowing them to have a large level of independence. Just three years ago, she would treat four to six patients a day. Today, she sees between 10 and 20 patients, while delegating tasks to orthodontic assistants and juggling more than one complex case at a time. Now, she says she is finally seeing the results of patient cases she began two years ago.

Third-year pediatrics resident Sarosh “Shawn” Bativala says senior residents took him under their wing when he was an intern. Here Bativala checks on Devan Dempsey.
“You see (patients) at age 11 and then, all of a sudden, the little boy you’re treating is suddenly taller than you,” says Wexel, who completes her training in May. “It’s a major source of accomplishment in my life right now.”

Relationships between senior faculty mentors and residents help increase the new professionals’ confidence, allowing them to feel more comfortable as they become more independent. This is at the heart of many of UF’s professional residency programs, where new physicians, dentists and veterinarians practice medicine alongside pioneers in their fields and specialties.

Pointing at his office wall plastered with more than a dozen framed photographs, Timothy Flynn, M.D., associate dean of graduate medical education for the college’s 650 residents, rattles off the names of former students. “You’re spending so much time with them, and they’re here because they want to be. Some have gone on to positions at Brown, University of Tennessee and Vanderbilt, while others have forged careers where they began, at UF. But they all share one common mentor.

“You develop a strong bond with these people,” Flynn says of his former students. “You’re spending so much time with them, and they’re there because they want to be just like you one day.”

As much as medical students want to end up as successful as their mentors, it takes several years to get there, constantly practicing and building relationships with patients. Six months ago, Bativala, a pediatrics resident, used a calm, soothing voice to coax a 2-year-old with a cut above his eye to remain still. With the reassurance of his mother, the toddler didn’t cry or struggle as Bativala moved toward him with a needle to suture his wound, something that probably wouldn’t have gone so smoothly in his days as a medical student.

“Medical school is designed so it gives you the basis to jump,” Flynn adds. “You don’t learn to be a healer there. That’s the beauty of residency.”

Dr. Tim Flynn, associate dean of graduate medical education for the College of Medicine, keeps photos of every resident he has ever trained on the wall in his office.

So, how long does it really take for a nurse to feel like a nurse and a pharmacist to feel like a pharmacist? The truth is it all depends on the individual.

For Hannah Palmer, Pharm. D., a 2006 College of Pharmacy alumna, the compilation of the lessons she learned at UF hit her in a series of “a-ha” moments she later shared in an email she sent to Paul Doering, M.S., a distinguished service professor in the department of pharmacy practice, in May 2007.

“I was the one who you may remember making a bit of a scene one time in the middle of our literature review class,” writes Palmer, who was completing a pharmacy practice residency in Charlottesville, VA, last year. “At the time, I could not understand why we took so much time reviewing these studies. I have learned many a thing this year, but if I could pinpoint one thing I have truly perfected it would be my ability to evaluate literature. I wanted to personally thank you for not reprimanding me at the time of my outrage. I now truly understand the importance of this and often think back to my attack of literature evaluation and wonder how I was so naive.”

It’s moments like these that are the foundation of a profession, where residents and newly graduated professionals realize that when they’re on their own, the white coat or stethoscope are much more than symbols of a profession.

For Flynn, a veteran vascular surgeon, it took about six to eight months after completing residency to feel like an expert confident in his ability to handle the cases that came his way.

“It might take 10,000 hours to learn to play the violin,” he says. “It can take five times as long to learn how to be an expert in your field.”

Remembering Tulip, one of the more intense cases of her postresidency professional life, House said she realises there will always be cases that surprise doctors, whether they are in their third or sixth year of professional practice.

“I think all of us can relate to a time when we were stressed or panicked about a critically ill case,” she says. “Even as a faculty member, that case taught me a lot. Early on in my career, I wanted to jump to conclusions and know the answer right away. Now I realize how essential it is to keep an open mind and investigate all of the possible diagnoses and options for treatment.”
Ready or not …

New anesthesiology chair Kayser Enneking recalls her days as a medical ‘newbie’

By Ann Griswold

The evolution from student to doctor can be intimidating: Goodbye Human Patient Simulator, hello world! Having experienced this transition herself, UF alumna Kayser Enneking, M.D., chair of the department of anesthesiology, says there’s no better preparation for the real world than the training med students receive at UF’s College of Medicine.

Originally from Gainesville, Enneking attended college at Vanderbilt University and returned to UF for medical school. She later completed an anesthesia residency at the University of Texas and a fellowship at Harvard Medical School. Since joining the UF faculty in 1991, Enneking has been named one of the Best Doctors in America and has received several teaching awards for her work with students and residents.

Why did you go into the medical field, anyway?

Well, the obvious answer would be my Pop (William F. Enneking, M.D.), who was the chairman of the orthopaedics department here. But, really, I wanted to be a teacher. I liked science. I wanted to help people. I had a great role model, and it just kind of all made sense.

How shocking was it to wake up one morning, as a new physician, and realize that everyone was taking you seriously?

Let me tell you — that first year as an attending — all of a sudden you’re the one signing everything and making all the decisions. I probably didn’t begin to feel that lead physician role until my last year of residency. I always had somebody holding my hand and helping me until then. And then in my last year of residency, and certainly in my fellowship, I transitioned to the responsible party.

What advice do you have for recent graduates, especially those who haven’t yet experienced that transition?

People used to say to me that anything that’s really important they’ll tell you 10 times in medical school, and that’s really true. As you get more confidence in your skills and your abilities, people begin to take you more seriously because they recognize that confidence.

What was the most nerve-wracking part of your transition from student to physician, and what gave you that initial boost of confidence?

Part of what made me most anxious was that I was afraid I would miss something. I was worried that I would get bored doing the same thing all the time and then miss something. But what I found in anesthesia was that it’s so stimulating all the time — it’s the kind of job where you’re maximally stimulated while you’re doing it and then when you’re done, you’re done.

What made me more confident is realizing that (UF) prepared me extremely well. When I got to my internship, I looked around and realized I was better prepared than kids from lots of different schools. I realized they didn’t have anything on me, that I had been extraordinarily well-trained and all those hands-on experiences had really served me well.

What insights have you gained from these experiences?

It’s probably more important how nice you are and how hard you’re willing to work than how smart you are. I used to think I got passed along because I was just a nice person and I was willing to work hard, but it turns out there’s a lot of value in that. We need really bright people in medicine, but we also need folks who work hard and play nicely with other people.
Medical students bring ‘Beauty and the Beast’ to local school

The White Coat Company, UF’s medical student acting troupe, recently performed “Beauty and the Beast” at the Sidney Lanier School in Gainesville. Here, pre-kindergarten student Tina Kelly watches as “Belle” and “Beast,” played by Cheryl Shaffer and Farokh Demehri, dance on stage. Afterward, Kelly got to meet “Belle.”

By April Frawley Birdwell

The lights grew dim in the packed cafeteria. The shades were drawn to block the hazy mid-afternoon light and the chairs were arranged for the 3-year-olds to sit near the stage.

In minutes, Belle would be singing about books, Gaston would be serenading her with a song about himself and a kicking chorus line of utensils would be crooning about the merits of hospitality as the students at Sidney Lanier School watched in wide-eyed wonder.

Rebecca Gomez didn’t imagine scenes like these — she and other UF medical students putting on a musical at a local school — when she founded the White Coat Company in 2005. She thought she and other thespian-minded medical students would get together, do some skits, act out a few scenes. Maybe a little improv, even, just for fun to take a break from their hectic studying. But sets, music, elaborate costumes and — gasp — choreography? Well, Gomez never imagined the little medical student acting troupe that could become quite the production it is now.

This year’s production of “Beauty and the Beast,” which they performed at Sidney Lanier April 25 and then again at the hospital and in the HPNP Auditorium, is the third musical the group has done since its inception. So what spurred the turn toward musicals? “I think it’s the talent, Gomez said. In short, medical students can act. And sing.

“We have always been blown away by the talent of the medical students who show up at the auditions,” she said. “We’re not in school for our acting and singing abilities.”

And once they did one big production — “The Wizard of Oz” was their first — it was easy to do it again, Gomez said. Last year’s play, “The Lion King,” was particularly elaborate, Gomez added.

This year is the first they have taken a production out of the HSC and into a local school, though, Gomez said. They chose Sidney Lanier, a Gainesville school focused on educating students who have developmental disabilities.

“I think this is so special for our children,” said Cathy Costello, the school’s principal, before the performance. “Our kids are so appreciative of this.”

For Gomez, who graduates from medical school in May, “Beauty and the Beast” also spells the end of her White Coat Company days. But she’s found other medical students happy to take over the leading role in the group next year.

“I’m excited people want to take over the group,” said Gomez, who is headed to Orlando for a family medicine residency. “I hope I can come back for a performance.”
Wonder women
Program helps academic women succeed

By April Frawley Birdwell

When the UF College of Medicine graduated its first class 48 years ago, there were only three female medical students in a class of 40. Overall, only 5 percent of medical students in the country were women at that time, according to The New England Journal of Medicine.

How times have changed. About half of medical students today are women. The numbers are similarly on the rise in U.S. dental schools. Yet, the number of female faculty in the upper echelons of these professions is still inching upward at a snail’s pace.

That’s one of the reasons the Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine program at Drexel University was established in 1995 — to give women in medicine, dentistry and public health the tools to move ahead in their institutions, said Roslyn Richman, ELAM’s director, during a talk she gave at the HSC’s Diversity Dialogue in March.

Several UF faculty members are graduates of ELAM’s selective yearlong program, which gives academic women a chance to learn and gain professional development skills in a woman-only environment.

“It gives women the opportunity to learn about themselves, academic health centers and leadership in an environment that feels comfortable to them,” Richman said. “We would never say that what we’re teaching isn’t applicable to men, but we believe, at this point, men have such an advantage to getting positions of leadership that we want to do as much as we can to help women gain equity.”

The HSC’s Diversity Dialogue series was established to highlight issues of equity and diversity. The March session focused on mentoring, which is, in a sense, what ELAM is all about.

Roslyn Richman, director of the Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine program, spoke to faculty and students in March.

“It’s amazing the change we notice from the fall session, when the fellows first come together, and the spring session. By spring they have definitely incorporated a lot of what they are learning over the course of the year,” Richman said. “A lot of what they are learning about is themselves and how they fit into their institution and how their leadership can impact their institution.”

Aside from sessions on issues management and leadership skills, fellows also work with coaches to develop their skills and take part in extensive evaluations. Although already dean of the UF College of Dentistry when she was an ELAM fellow, Teresa Dolan, D.D.S., said she still felt she gained a lot from the program, especially from exchanging ideas with classmates from other fields.

“Even if you come to ELAM with a lot of experience there is still so much to learn,” Dolan said.

Aside from Dolan, other ELAM “elums” include College of Medicine faculty members Nancy Harth, M.D., Maureen Goodenow, Ph.D., Susan Frost, Ph.D., and Rebecca R. Pauly, M.D.
Dr. Vikas Dharnidharka and his wife, Dimple, became American citizens April 17 during a naturalization ceremony at the federal courthouse in Gainesville.

By April Frawley Birdwell

They stood, each keeping one hand in the air, as they recited the words that would change everything.

“I, hereby declare, on oath...”

When Vikas Dharnidharka, M.D., his wife, Dimple, and 28 other people entered the federal courtroom in downtown Gainesville the morning of April 17, they had been citizens of somewhere else. Some, like UF pediatric nephrologist Dharnidharka, were from India. Others hailed from countries as far away as Vietnam and as close as Cuba.

They all left as Americans.

“We have dreamed many dreams over the years. We dreamed of liberty, a chance for a better life, a chance to provide for the next generation,” said Dharnidharka, who was chosen from the group of new citizens to give a short speech during the ceremony. “We all came here many years ago and settled in America because we saw opportunities to make good on those dreams. We came from different countries, from varying backgrounds and varying stages of life. But the dreams were not different, they were and even now, remain the same dreams for each of us.”

Dharnidharka, the division chief of pediatric nephrology in the College of Medicine, lived in the United States for several years as a child but eventually returned to India with his family. There, he attended college and medical school. He and his wife moved to the U.S. 15 years ago so he could complete his training in pediatric nephrology at Children’s Hospital Boston. He joined the UF faculty in 1999.

For Dharnidharka and his wife, the decision to start the process to become American citizens was an easy one to make. “We made this country our home many years ago and we want to participate fully in the country,” he said. “(I feel) fortunate that I can do what I love as my everyday job. This is not always true in other parts of the world.”
Over the hill for the pill?
Researcher says women over 40 can still use oral contraceptives

By Kandra Albury

Older women can safely choose birth control pills or an intrauterine device for contraception, according to a paper published in the March issue of The New England Journal of Medicine. For years women and physicians believed the pill was for the younger set and not necessary for women who had reached premenopause.

That's not the case, reports Andrew M. Kaunitz, M.D., a UF College of Medicine-Jacksonville professor of obstetrics and gynecology and the review’s author. Women in their 40s still have unplanned pregnancies and are more prone to problems when they conceive than women in their 20s and 30s, Kaunitz writes. Birth control could be the answer many older women are looking for to prevent unplanned pregnancies, Kaunitz said.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the number of women taking oral contraceptives in their 40s rose from 6 percent to 11 percent between 1995 and 2002, but many still may not realize birth control is an option for them, Kaunitz said. Lean, healthy, non-smoking women actually can use oral contraceptives into their mid-50s, he added.

"Healthy women who are non-smokers can take advantage of both the contraceptive and non-contraceptive benefits of the pill," Kaunitz said. "Women over 40 who take the pill are less likely to experience symptoms that are commonly associated with menopause, such as hot flashes, night sweats and irregular menstrual bleeding. The pill also reduces hip fractures and ovarian cancer."

There is often misunderstanding about the use of oral contraceptives, not only among patients but also physicians, Kaunitz said. Because there are some health risks associated with taking the pill, many physicians do not believe women can remain safely on the pill beyond age 40, he added. But women who use low-estrogen oral contraceptives have at least a 50 percent lower risk of developing ovarian cancer than women who have never used these formulations.

The pill is not appropriate for all women over 40, though. Factors such as obesity and smoking could increase the risk of blood clots, heart attack or stroke. Other health problems such as diabetes and hypertension can also cause problems. In these instances, women should consider an alternative method of contraception, such as the IUD. Kaunitz said the IUD, which is widely used in Europe, is becoming more popular in the United States.

Kaunitz said there are two myths commonly associated with women over 40 taking oral contraceptives. The first myth is that the pill increases a woman's chance of developing breast cancer.

"The pill does not elevate the risk of breast cancer," said Kaunitz, citing the Women's Contraceptive and Reproductive Experiences Study. This population-based case-control study showed no increased risk of invasive or in situ breast cancer among women who were current or previous users of oral contraceptives as compared with women with women who had never used them. The study included an analysis limited to women who began to use oral contraceptives in their 40s.

The second myth, as previously mentioned, is that women in their 40s are too old to take the pill.

"I keep my lean, healthy, non-smoking patients on the pill until their mid-50s. By that time they no longer need birth control," Kaunitz said. "At that point the patient can come off the pill."
Reshaping rural America
UF researchers to study obesity treatment for rural residents

By Jill Pease

People living in rural America have higher rates of heart disease and obesity than those in urban areas, yet few weight-loss research trials have been conducted in rural settings.

A UF research team plans to tackle the unique weight-loss challenges faced by rural residents in a new study called Rural Lifestyle Intervention Treatment Effectiveness Trial, or Rural LITE. The research is supported by a $3.6 million grant from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

"Most weight-loss trials have been efficacy studies conducted with middle-class, urban participants and delivered by teams of experts working in academic medical centers," said principal investigator Michael G. Perri, Ph.D., interim dean of the College of Public Health and Health Professions. "But serious health disparities exist in rural areas where there are higher rates of poverty, more residents without health insurance, a greater percentage of people with chronic disease and fewer health professionals to treat them."

The UF researchers will offer a weight-loss program at UF/IFAS County Extension Offices in eight rural counties in North Florida. In addition to measuring weight loss, researchers will also evaluate how well the lifestyle intervention program affects the participants’ blood pressure, lipid profiles and blood sugar levels— all important indicators of overall health.

The Rural LITE research program will build on the success of a previous study led by Perri that tested the effectiveness of a weight-loss program with long-term follow-up counseling services for women in rural counties.

“We found that the participants who received extended care were able to maintain their weight loss at higher levels than those participants who only received printed health education as a follow-up,” Perri said. “In addition, telephone counseling was as successful as in-person counseling, giving us a cost-effective alternative to face-to-face visits that is more convenient for rural residents who may need to travel long distances for care.”

In the new study, researchers hope to determine the minimum intensity of treatment required to produce clinically meaningful, long-term weight loss in underserved community settings.

The UF study will include 542 men and women between the ages of 21 and 75 who are considered obese — those who have a body mass index of 30 or higher, which usually means a person is about 30 or more pounds overweight. The participants will be randomly assigned to one of three lifestyle intervention programs that will be conducted over a two-year period: eight treatment sessions and eight follow-up sessions by phone or in-person; 16 sessions and 16 follow-up meetings; or 24 treatment sessions and 24 follow-up appointments.

Researchers have tailored the content of instructional materials to address particular areas of concern expressed by rural residents who participated in the previous study, such as cooking demonstrations of low-fat, low-calorie versions of traditional Southern dishes, coping strategies for stress and a lack of social support, and tips for eating away from home.

Participants will also be instructed to walk at a moderate intensity for 30 minutes most days of the week.

“We hope the results of this study will address two major barriers to research translation to underserved rural populations: the lack of infrastructure to offer services and the absence of an empirical database indicating the treatment dose that will produce the most significant long-term weight loss,” Perri said.

The multidisciplinary UF team includes Marian Limacher, M.D., of the College of Medicine; Linda Bobroff, Ph.D., from the Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences; and David Janicke, Ph.D., Danny Martin, Ph.D., and Michael Daniels, Sc.D., of the College of Public Health and Health Professions.

The Rural LITE program builds on the success of Perri’s previous study in which 234 women in rural North Florida counties participated in an obesity treatment program with a long-term follow-up component. Clinical and health psychology graduate student Mary Murawski (right), served as a group leader for the Levy County program. Here she provides instruction on how to examine nutritional labels to participants Sarah Miller and Patricia Daniels.
COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY

ABI ADEWUMI, B.D.S., M.P.D., an assistant professor of pediatric dentistry, recently became a member of the College of Diplomates of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry after passing the group’s board examinations. The American Board of Pediatric Dentistry is the only certifying board recognized by the American Dental Association for the specialty of pediatric dentistry. Adewumi joined the college in 2004 as a fellow and became a faculty member in 2005.

OZLEM YILMAZ, D.D.S., Ph.D., an assistant professor of periodontology, was selected as one of five emerging scientists to present at the American Association for Dental Research’s annual meeting in Dallas. Yilmaz’s presentation, “Age of Exploration in Oral Sciences: Has P. gingivalis Discovered the Fountain of Youth in the Gingiva?,” dovetailed with the symposium’s focus on oral health research and scientific inquiry across a broad field, from the basic sciences through translational research to social and behavioral sciences.

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

PETER INDELICATO, M.D., a professor of orthopaedics and rehabilitation and division chief of sports medicine, was selected as the Sports Medicine Person of the Year for 2007 by the Athletic Trainers Association of Florida. He was honored at the group’s annual meeting April 26 for his contributions to the field of sports medicine and rehabilitation. Indelicato is also the head team physician for the UF Athletic Association.

MAUREEN NOVAK, M.D., an associate professor and vice chair of pediatrics, was recently named associate dean for medical education. Novak, who specializes in adolescent medicine, has been on the UF faculty since 1993 and also serves as director of the pediatrics residency and pediatric clerkship. She has received numerous awards for her teaching, including the 2006-07 Clinical Science Teacher of the Year Award.

REBECCA PAULY, M.D., associate professor of medicine and associate vice president for health affairs, equity and diversity, was awarded the 2008 Woman of Distinction Award by the UF Association for Academic Women during a March 25 ceremony. Pauly wears many hats for the college, including that of instructor and faculty council member and has liaison positions between UF and several national organizations.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

TERESE CHMIELEWSKI, Ph.D., P.T., an assistant professor in the department of physical therapy, received the James A. Gould Excellence in Teaching Orthopaedic Physical Therapy Award. This national award recognizes excellence in the instruction of orthopaedic physical therapy principles and techniques. Chmielewski was honored at the Physical Therapy Association’s combined sections annual meeting in Nashville in February.

RONALD ROZENSKY, Ph.D., a professor and the associate dean for international programs, has been appointed by Michael O. Leavitt, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, to the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages. The committee will advise the secretary on health-care workforce policy and program development.

DISTINCTIONS

Nursing student wins campus research competition

Andrea Pe Benito, a nursing student who graduated this month with her bachelor's degree in nursing, recently won a universitywide competition for her paper on aging. Pe Benito was the recipient of the Leighton E. Cluff Award for Aging Research for her paper titled “Sleep Poverty in Caregivers of Individuals with Alzheimer’s Disease.” She received the award for the best undergraduate paper.

The Cluff Award is designed to encourage both graduate and undergraduate students to research any topic within the area of aging. Students submit various projects, including empirical studies, scholarly reviews or other creative work that display their research on aging. A faculty review committee judges the work and awards one graduate student $1,200 and one undergraduate student $600.

Pe Benito’s paper was based on her research and work as a university scholar. Working with her mentor, UF nursing professor C. Meredith Rowe, R.N., Ph.D., Pe Benito investigated whether the sleep patterns of caregivers who take care of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease is different from those of individuals who do not care for these patients.

Students win scholarships

Weston Davis, Claire Ryan, D.V.M., and Ben Stoughton, all students in the College of Veterinary Medicine, recently received scholarships from Gulfstream Park to further their studies in equine medicine, surgery and research. Established after the death of 2006 Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro, the scholarship program provides $12,500 to two senior UF veterinary students committed to careers in equine medicine and surgery and $5,000 to a veterinary graduate student conducting equine research. Davis and Stoughton received the D.V.M. student scholarships. Ryan, a board-certified internist in large animal medicine, received the graduate student scholarship. Shown from left are Stoughton, Ryan, trainer Michael Matz, his son Alex Matz, Gulfstream Park executive Mary Milu, Davis and Dr. Mary Scollay-Ward.
By Sarah Carey

Jan Shearer, D.V.M., is an innovator who has been honored by institutions ranging from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to his alma mater, Ohio State University, for contributions to agriculture and animal health.

Whether in the trenches teaching hoof care to dairy workers or suit ed up behind a lectern lecturing on bovine welfare, Shearer, the UF College of Veterinary Medicine’s dairy extension veterinarian and chair of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners animal welfare committee, doesn’t do anything halfway.

People notice.

Geni Wren, editor and associate publisher of Bovine Veterinarian magazine, is one of them. An admirer of Shearer’s, Wren approached him about a subject she felt needed to be discussed in her magazine — euthanasia and personal beliefs.

“She came to me and said, “We need to put together and discuss some bovine welfare issues, and one pretty important topic is euthanasia,”” Shearer said. “So she sent me a few questions, and I responded.”

The result was a cover story titled “The Kindest Act” in the publication’s January issue, which also contained an editorial Wren wrote stressing that euthanasia, while an uncomfortable subject to many people, is a crucial part of veterinary medicine.

“The hardest part of euthanasia is getting over the emotional aspect and coming to grips with doing it,” Shearer said. “It’s not something anyone wants to do, but it is what you have to do to relieve animal suffering. It’s not always easy, but you have to be able to do it.”

As a member of the college admissions committee, Shearer said he often asks prospective students whether they would be capable of conducting euthanasia.

“While students need to learn how to save lives, it’s absolutely essential that they know how to end it when there is no medical means to relieve the suffering,” he said. “Euthanasia is something we don’t talk about enough here.”

So Shearer, who travels extensively for his extension and AABP duties, takes his message on the road. Just this year, he has given talks to students at Iowa State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine and the Ohio State University.

He also sees bovine lameness and animal welfare as interrelated.

“Part of the problem is that livestock producers don’t understand that prey animals like cattle instinctively hide their pain and discomfort,” he said.

An article he read in the journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2004 by Cydria M. Anette, D.V.M., helped spur Shearer to become an advocate for better communication about euthanasia.

“What she pointed out, and what was so helpful, was how we deal with this issue as veterinarians,” Shearer said.

But is euthanizing an animal ever easy? Shearer said it isn’t, nor should it be.

“All of us have had to face the paradox of our roles,” he said. “We nurture and care for our animals knowing they will one day be slaughtered for food. Or we must deal with the reality that some pets must be euthanized.”

Therein lies the subject of an inner conflict that is so difficult, Shearer said.

“I know that I am still going to struggle, but knowing that I am treating them humanely and with the respect they deserve authenticates my true feelings,” he said.

These days, Shearer spends about half his time on his Master Hoof Care Program, for which the USDA honored him in 2003. The program offers training to dairy workers and aims to aid in the early detection and treatment of potential lameness disorders in cattle, before problems become critical.

The remainder of his time is spent on his work in animal welfare communication.

“The lameness issue has brought me to a greater sensitivity and awareness of animal welfare issues,” Shearer said. “It’s something I couldn’t have anticipated, but the last five to 10 years in particular, I’ve started to focus a lot more on these issues.”

When he started in food animal medicine years ago, the primary objective was to look out for the client’s economic welfare.

“This was almost to the extent that this was the highest priority, while animal welfare was somewhere second,” Shearer said. “That’s going to sound strange to some. But I see today that this is becoming entirely different. What I try to share with people I work with today is that those things need to be coupled.

“The vet’s responsibility is to look out for the welfare of livestock. That’s got to be paramount,” Shearer said. “My objective is to share that message as best I can. Improved animal welfare and improved profitability, I think they can go hand in hand.”
College of Veterinary Medicine public relations director Sarah Carey checks in on a foal during a photo session with UF veterinarian Amanda House for the POST cover story.

Priscilla Santos, a writer for the College of Medicine development and alumni affairs office, poses during a photo shoot for this month’s POST cover story.

David Ostrov, an assistant professor of pathology in the College of Medicine, took this photo of HSC photographer Sarah Kiewel after she spent the afternoon snapping pictures of him at Kanapaha Park for a UF magazine.

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