USC Norris Festival of Life celebrates cancer survivors

By Ryan Ball

A pair of novelty T-shirts worn by a couple in the crowd said what a lot of people were thinking: “Cancer Sucks.”

But there was another message made loud and clear at the 20th annual Festival of Life: “There is hope.” Rather than being printed on sturdy cotton, that message was worn on the faces of more than 700 cancer survivors and family members gathered on the USC Health Sciences Campus on June 5. Held in recognition of National Cancer Survivors Day, the event was hosted by the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hospital.

Art Ulene, a Norris Cancer Center advisory board member and former Today Show medical correspondent, was there for the very first Festival of Life in 1991, and says the event took on a whole new meaning when he received his own cancer diagnosis about 10 years ago.

Back again to emcee this year’s gathering, he said the event is more than a way to honor cancer patients past and present.

“It’s a celebration of the extraordinary work being done by the doctors and the researchers who are here,” Ulene stated. “It’s a celebration of the people who have helped us get through an experience with cancer. It’s a celebration of the future, a message of hope to patients in the hospital right now.”

Also speaking at the event was Rick Selby, professor of surgery at the Keck School of Medicine, another physician who had his own bout with the big C. He said the Festival of Life helps raise enthusiasm for active research that is changing the way doctors treat cancer.

“Learn about your disease, surround yourself with positive people, communicate with your doctors and—most importantly—don’t forget to laugh.’

—Breast cancer survivor Nadia Estes, offering her advice on fighting the disease

Dental School receives ethics award

By Beth Dunham

The USC Office of Compliance has recognized individuals from the Herman Ostrom School of Dentistry at USC with the first annual USC Ethical Leadership Award.

Given to individuals who best embody the spirit of the USC Code of Ethics and principles of the USC Compliance and Ethics Program, the award was presented to Sigmund Abelson, associate dean for clinical affairs; Todd Dickey, senior vice president for administration; and Avishai Sadan, senior vice president for compliance; Ruby Hinds, Ostrow School of Dentistry health care compliance officer; and Laura LaCorte, associate dean for clinical affairs; Todd Dickey, senior vice president for administration; and Archana Sadan, dean of the Ostrom School of Dentistry.

Abelson and Hinds took the lead in establishing the Ostrow School of Dentistry’s official health care compliance program, a comprehensive program and set of policies regarding facility credentialing, schedules, privacy, security measures, risk management and more.

The new program significantly unifies, organizes and strengthens the school’s compliance efforts. The policies and standards are strongly aligned with university compliance measures, Abelson said, and both he and Hinds expressed gratitude for the involvement of and the guidance provided by the Office of Compliance.

“Awareness of and adherence to compliance policies is an essential part of the university and part of the day-to-day operations of a health care environment,” Hinds said.

The extensive program was nearly three years in the making, and Ostrow School of Dentistry staff and faculty readily have embraced the new structure and realigned policies, Abelson said.

“As we built this program, we did it in such a way as to build support from the school community at the same time,” he said. “That is a partnership.”

The school also has refined its partnership with members of industry through the program, including the institution of new industry relationship policies, Abelson said.

USC researchers discover new subtype of brain cancer

A study conducted by a collaborative team led by USC researchers may lead to better insight into the clinical outcome for some patients with a particularly aggressive type of brain cancer. The research may also provide a framework for development of targeted drug treatments.

The research by The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), published online in the journal Cancer Cell, used epigenomics to determine that tumor DNA methylation profiles were distinctly different in about 10 percent of patients with glioblastoma multiforme (GBM).

“Most GBM patients survive fewer than 15 months, and fewer than 10 percent live more than five years,” said Peter W. Laird of the USC Epigenome Center, who led the TCGA team in collaboration with Kenneth Aldape at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Stephen B. Baylin at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and many other TCGA consortium members. “With this research, we have identified a subset of patients with a distinct type of GBM that have substantially better clinical outcomes, with a median survival time of more than three years from the time of diagnosis.”

Epigenomics is the study of how DNA is packaged and marked to control which genes can be used in a particular type of cell or tissue. The distribution of one of these marks along the DNA, called DNA methylation, is often abnormal in cancer, contributing to the disease process. The characteristic epigenetic profile discovered by the TCGA team is called G-CIMP (Glioma CpG Island Methylator Phenotype) and was found to occur in much

From left: Rene Aragomaniz, assistant director of faculty provider compliance; Danny Cappetta, assistant vice president for health care compliance; Laura LeCort, associate vice president for compliance; Ruby Hinds, Ostrow School of Dentistry health care compliance program director; Sigmund Abelson, Ostrow School of Dentistry associate dean for clinical affairs; Todd Dickey, senior vice president for administration; and Archana Sadan, dean of the Ostrom School of Dentistry.
Keck School dean establishes community leadership council

A new Dean’s Community Leadership Council will partner with the Keck School of Medicine of USC to explore ways to improve health services that meet the needs of the surrounding community.

“It’s important that we communicate with the community about what we’re doing and hear what the concerns of the community are on an ongoing basis. So we would like to think of this as a forum to talk about health care issues,” Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito said May 27 at the first meeting of the Community Leadership Council on the USC Health Sciences Campus.

Puliafito mentioned two important ways in which the Keck School is connected to the community. First, “we provide health care to many tens of thousands of patients in this community,” he said. Second, many staff members both of the Keck School and of its major teaching hospital, Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center, live in the community.

Glenn Ault, associate dean for clinical administration (LAC+USC Medical Center) briefed the council members about the medical school and its historic relationship with the county hospital, which is the largest provider of health care in Los Angeles County. He then opened the floor for questions and discussions. “We want to hear from you, what your concerns are and how USC and the Keck School can help you,” Ault said.

Ocular prostheses offer ‘new lease on life’ for patients

By Leslie Ridgeway

A special prosthesis that fits over the entire eye is bringing hope to patients suffering from corneal irregularities and severe dry eye. The Boston Ocular Surface Prosthesis (BOS-P) is now available at the Perry Rosenthal Clinic at the Doheny Eye Institute.

The prosthesis, about the size of a quarter, bathes the eye in saline solution and is thin enough that the patient can easily blink. The prostheses are custom designed and fitted to each patient, who is then trained on proper insertion and removal of the devices. The extra work is worth the trouble, patients say: “One of our patients with dry eyes was almost forced to quit her job,” said Samuel Yiu, medical director of the clinic and cornea specialist. “Now she is enjoying her work and her life again. Most of our patients feel the prosthesis gives them a new lease on their lives.”

The prosthesis, developed by Perry Rosenthal, and approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1994, previously required patients to travel to the nonprofit Boston Foundation for Sight in Boston, Mass., to be fitted for the lens. The lens has been approved since Oct. 2009 at satellite clinics established at the Doheny Eye Institute at USC, Baylor University and the Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas. The Doheny Eye Institute clinic has fitted 25 patients with the prosthesis and is working with many others from throughout the United States. The clinic is led by Yiu, John Irvine, executive director, and Gloria Chiou, chief optometrist.

“The device is designed for patients with keratoconus, a degenerative disease that affects the cornea, as well as other painful and potentially blinding diseases and conditions such as post-corneal transplant astigmatism and severe dry eye. The prostheses fit on top of the sclera, which has few nerve endings. Preservative-free saline solution is poured into a well in the center of the prosthesis. When the prosthesis is placed correctly, the patient can see through the saline solution. The saline solution serves as a kind of protective “bandage” on the eye.”

“The secleral footing of the prosthesis, along with the ability to bathe the cornea in fluid, allows a tremendous amount of improvement in selected patients’ vision, comfort and quality of life,” said Irvine. “Recognition of its potential for patient comfort and rehabilitation is growing. More physicians are weighing in on the device, which allows for positive feedback for further development.”

After being fitted for and trained to use the prosthesis, patients return to the clinic for regular lens maintenance. Cost for the prosthesis is in the $7,000 range for patients without insurance. Irvine and Yiu are working to find a way to offer financial assistance to qualified patients, once funding becomes available.

Doheny Eye Institute’s David Huang is exploring new applications of a technology called optical coherence tomography that may speed up production and decrease costs of the device.

For information on the BOS-P or to make an appointment, call (323) 442-6337, or visit the Doheny Eye Institute website at www. doheny.org.

ETHICS: Award honors openness, compliance

Continued from page 1 reporting guidelines for fac- ulty, the use of the RepTix program in order to keep track of visiting industry partners and other measures that make productive, appropriate rela- tionships with industry easier.

Hinds said that the new structure and the openness of the whole process have made adhering to compliance policies, as well as reporting any concerns or problems, simpler for staff and faculty members. “We aim to be very inclusive and accessible for any of our community members who have questions about the program,” she said. Avishai Sadan, dean of the Outschool of Dentistry, praised Abelson and Hinds’ leadership in implementing the new program throughout the school.

“In the ever-changing world of regulations which govern institutions such as USC, the Outschool of Dentistry has been able to adapt to new guidelines and new technologies while maintaining an environment that encourages productive, professional relationships with patients, students, visitors and industry partners,” Sadan said. “This environment fosters research growth, improves education, enhances patient care and helps us to better fulfill our mission.”