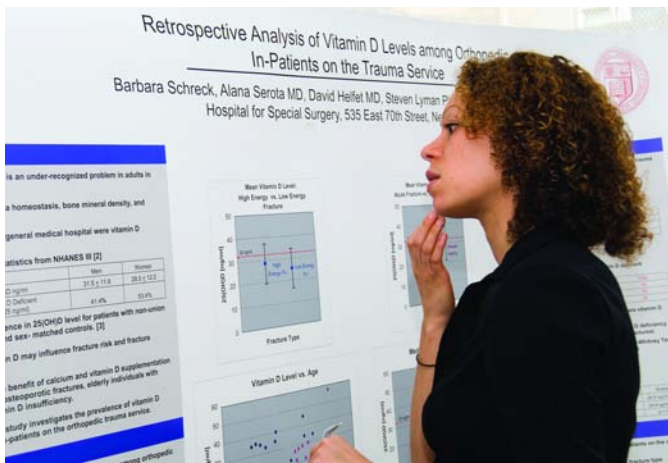


Shining a Spotlight on Student Research

WCMC symposium focuses on independent research options for medical students



Six months after creating an administrative office dedicated to supporting medical student research, Weill Cornell Medical College held its fifth annual Medical Student Research Day on March 14, the

largest in its history with 36 research presentations overall. The success of the student-organized symposium, as well as the creation of the new Office of Medical Student Research, marks an increased emphasis on independent research exper-

iences for medical students at Weill Cornell.

“Real, independent student research is turning out to be increasingly important for graduates of progressive schools,” said Dr. Joel Pardee, associate dean for research services and head of the Office of Medical Student Research.

“It’s a bit of a transition from school to life and that requires not only professional training, but training in administering,” said Dr. Pardee. “Students love to do it, and frankly, they’re better at it because they bring a lot of energy to the symposium.”

Planning for the 2007 Research Day was led by Aimee Angle-Zahn and Alex Pitts-Kiefer, both first-year, non-traditional students coming to Weill

Cornell after careers in biomedical research, and included second-year medical students Connie Chen, Jonathan Chen and Ankit Patel.

“Often medical students go on to become not just physicians, but leaders in academic medicine and this involves research, whether it is basic science or clinical research,” said Angle-Zahn. “And this symposium is a celebration of our academic work and a start on our path toward becoming physicians.”

Reflecting larger research trends in academic medicine—and in an effort to provide more opportunities for students—the College expanded definitions of research to include not only traditional work in basic and clinical sciences, but >>> page 5

Dr. Skorton Makes the Rounds

Cornell University president holds first Grand Rounds at WCMC

GREATER COLLABORATION BETWEEN WEILL CORNELL MEDICAL COLLEGE (WCMC), NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital and Cornell University in Ithaca is a major priority, stressed Cornell President David J. Skorton in his first Grand Rounds lecture at Weill Cornell on Jan. 18. Dr. Skorton broadly discussed the public service and outreach roles of academic health centers both at Cornell and in the community at large.

“We need to focus planning with agreement among all the institutions and increase the interdependence of the Medical College with the Hospital and Cornell-Ithaca,” said Dr. Skorton, who is also a cardiologist and faculty member in internal medicine and >>> page 6



President Skorton with Cornell alumnus and Weill Cornell Class of 2010 student Daniel Friedman.

RICHARD LOBEL

Secondhand Smoke at 30,000 Feet

WCMC collaboration with flight attendants organization looks at long-term dangers of secondhand smoke

Flying the friendly skies got a lot healthier in 1988, after smoking was banned on all U.S. flights. Now, flight attendants, bartenders and other service industry personnel are being recruited for a series of studies examining the impact of someone else's cigarette smoke on your health.

The studies—funded by an \$8.7 million grant from the Flight Attendant Medical Research Institute (FAMRI)—are being conducted at Weill Cornell in collaboration with the International Early Lung Cancer Action Program (IELCAP), the largest CT lung tumor screening effort in the world.

Researchers hope to recruit more than 5,000 participants for the new studies, which will focus on the early detection of illness related to secondhand smoke.

“We expect to show that it is possible to screen for disease caused by secondhand smoke early enough for effective treatment,” explained Dr. Claudia Henschke, professor of radiology and cardiothoracic surgery at Weill Cornell and chief of the Chest Imaging Division at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell. She is also principal investigator of I-ELCAP

and of the new FAMRI-IELCAP initiative.

“Today, the surgeon general estimates that 35 million U.S. children are still exposed to secondhand smoke in the home. Obviously, this is a threat that is not going away,” said Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., dean of Weill Cornell Medical College. “We applaud FAMRI for their leadership in addressing this important public health issue.”

The FAMRI-IELCAP Collaborative Network will peer into the issue of secondhand smoke on a number of fronts.

“We hope to assess the risk of specific respiratory and cardiovascular diseases for people exposed to this toxin, and develop appropriate screening,” Dr. Henschke said. “We also hope to determine if increased levels of certain inflammatory ‘biomarkers’ in urine, called prostaglandins, might serve as a red flag for the early effects of tobacco smoke.”

Two pilot projects are also planned for each year. Of the first two projects planned, one will examine sinus disease linked to secondhand smoke, while the other will explore gene expression patterns in hopes of finding new targets for therapy.

“It is well-established that secondhand smoke causes a wide variety of health problems, from heart disease to lung cancer and beyond,” said Dr. Herbert Pardes, president and CEO of NewYork-Presbyterian. “This bold series of collaborative and multidisciplinary studies is designed to bring the maximum benefits for the millions exposed, and in the most timely and cost-effective manner possible.” ■



THE STEPHEN AND SUZANNE WEISS DEAN, WEILL CORNELL MEDICAL COLLEGE
Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr.

DEAN, WEILL CORNELL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES
Dr. David P. Hajjar

VICE PROVOST FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Myrna Manners

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
Jonathan Weil

DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS/EDITOR
Michael Sellers

SCIENCE WRITER
Ernie Mundell

FEATURE WRITER
Gabriel Miller

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT/COPY EDITOR
Andria Lam

DESIGN
Shostak Studios, NYC

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY
Amelia Panico

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Treating Prostate Cancer: More Is More

Study refutes conventional “watch and wait” strategy for aggressive prostate cancers



Dr. Ash Tewari meets with members of the press during a March 13 demonstration of the use of robotics in prostate surgery.

To treat or not to treat? For many men facing a diagnosis of aggressive prostate cancer, doctors often advise against active intervention, adopting a “watch and wait” approach instead.

But that tactic too often fails, according to a new Weill Cornell study that could change the clinical management of this deadly condition.

Published in the March *Journal of Urology*, the study of 453 men with localized but aggressive prostate tumors found that opting for surgery or radiation doubled the

men’s life expectancy compared with a wait-and-see approach.

“Men who got the active treatment lived an average of 14 years after diagnosis vs. just seven years for patients who were treated more conservatively,” said the study’s lead first author Dr. Ashutosh Tewari, director of robotic prostatectomy and urologic oncology outcomes at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell and the Ronald P. Lynch Associate Professor of Urologic Oncology at the Medical College.

According to >>> page 7

Hitting Cancer Where It Hurts

New treatment is first to directly target a tumor’s blood supply

A BREAKTHROUGH TREATMENT developed by WCMC researchers is aimed literally at the lifeblood of lethal cancers.

Reporting in the February *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, a Weill Cornell team described an immune system antibody called J591 as the first agent to directly target the blood vessels that feed cancer’s growth.

“This is an important first in the fight against malignancy,” explained the study’s senior author Dr. Neil H. Bander, the Bernard and Josephine Chaus Professor of Urological Oncology. While other so-called “anti-angiogenic” therapies have sought to impact tumor vasculature, they have always done so indirectly, by blocking the effects of blood vessel growth factors.

J591 is different. In their phase 1 trial, the Weill Cornell team

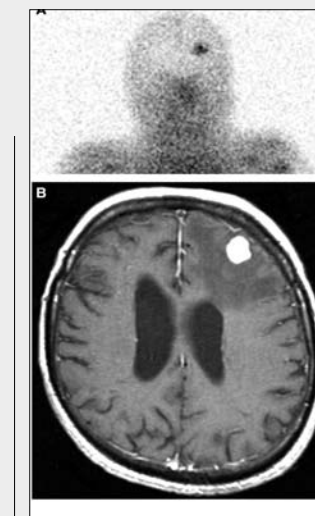
watched as the antibody homed in on a molecule called prostate-specific membrane antigen (PSMA). “PSMA was first identified in prostate cancers and, because it was not found in any normal tissue and was anchored to the cell membrane, it was designated ‘prostate-specific membrane antigen.’”

Dr. Bander’s lab developed J591 to target the segment of PSMA on the exterior of the cell membrane. “In the course of characterizing J591, we also discovered that PSMA is present in high amounts in blood vessels that feed a wide variety of cancers but not in the body’s normal blood vessels,” Dr. Bander explained. “This set the stage for highly targeted treatments that can directly attack the blood supply of cancers with the

potential for few side effects.”

The preliminary trial included 27 patients with a wide variety of tumor types, including melanoma and cancers of the kidney, bladder, lung, breast, colon and pancreas. Using a radioactive tracer, “we could clearly see that J591 locked on specifically to PSMA within the sites of disseminated cancer,” he said. “This is really exciting because the antibody should allow us to deliver lethal drugs directly to the tumor vasculature—something that no one’s done before.”

Clinical trials in prostate cancer have already confirmed that J591 can efficiently and effectively target payloads consisting of therapeutic radioisotopes or drugs to prostate cancer sites wherever they are in the body. “Current anti-angiogenic ap-



(A) Indium-labeled J591 scan in a patient with metastatic kidney cancer demonstrating localization to the left front skull. (B) Magnetic resonance imaging of the brain confirming the presence of a left frontal lobe metastatic lesion.

proaches simply starve the blood vessels of growth signals, but with J591, one can directly target a lethal blow right at the tumor’s blood supply. This could open up a whole new front in the war against this disease.” ■

It's a Match!

Weill Cornell seniors "match" to some of the nation's most prestigious residency programs

Corners throughout the Great Hall in the new Weill Greenberg Center were lit up with the glow of cell phones just after noon on March 15, as fourth-year medical students at Weill Cornell called their family and friends with good news: all 92 of them would have jobs next year, and yes, after

"This is one of those days that we always remember," said Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., dean of Weill Cornell Medical College. "We have another outstanding round of students and we are proud of all of them."

This year, 78 percent of Weill Cornell graduates matched to a position at one of the top 50 medical institutions as ranked

for the students were allowed to rush forward and open their "match" envelopes. "We know where our students are going and we know that Weill Cornell has done well, but 'match success' is an intricate and complex phenomenon to describe."

Although students can apply to more than two dozen different kinds of programs and specific specialties, medicine often breaks down into broader categories, such as those positions geared toward the technically inclined (surgery or positions that involve dialysis or catheterization, for instance) or those requiring more patient interaction (psychiatry and family practice), said Dr. Storey-Johnson.

As for the chosen institution's quality, students may weigh factors like reputation or location, but they also include intangible factors. "Institutions want the most qualified students and students want to go where they'll get the best possible training, but there are a lot of 'gut' feelings in a final match list," said Dr. Peter Marzuk, Weill Cornell's associate dean for curricular affairs, adding that he has known many top students who ranked the best programs lower on their list because of a feeling about that particular institution.

To make these decisions, students are provided with a faculty adviser at Weill Cornell from their chosen field of interest, but many also rely on informal networks comprised of upperclassmen, deans, trusted faculty and the residents they meet while doing subinternships in hospitals around New York City.

Laura Libby, a fourth-year student from New York who applied to 17 programs and ultimately matched to St. Vincent's Hospital in Manhattan, said her parents—both doctors—as well as residents at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell provided some of her best counsel. But ultimately her final decision came down to an impression, not statistics or rankings: "You get a feel for them and you might get a feel back from them—and I got that feel at St. Vincent's." ■

by *U.S. News & World Report* in 2006. Mirroring a national trend, more Weill Cornell graduates applied for—and successfully matched in—the nine most competitive subspecialties.

Although the process has become extremely competitive—with grades, extracurricular activities, and independent research experience all boosting students' chances of a prestigious match—one aspect has not changed since the National Residency Matching Program began 55 years ago: it is an individual relationship between an institution and a student, and no statistic can quantify exactly what makes a "good match."

"It's a very individual definition of success," said Dr. Carol Storey-Johnson, senior associate dean for education, moments be-



WCMC medical students share news of their residencies during the March 15 "Match Day" ceremony.

four rigorous years at Weill Cornell, they would be at some of the most prestigious medical institutions in the country.

For more than 15,000 students, "Match Day" is the moment when medical school seniors across the country first learn where they will be spending their years of residency training following graduation. At exactly noon, students ceremoniously open envelopes holding the fate of their next four years.

The match process begins as student apply to as many as 20 residency programs throughout the country, who in turn select qualified students to meet for an information interview. Following that meeting, both sides rank each other, with the most accomplished seniors "matching" with the top institutions.

Knitting for the NICU

WCMC graduate students knit hats for preemies at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell

ON FEB. 14, AS TEMPERATURES HOVERED in the high 20s and snow fell in New York City, a small group of Weill Cornell graduate students, along with nurses, faculty and friends of the Medical College, were making sure that babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell would be well-protected against any cold-weather drafts.

The group, formally known as the "We Knit Because We Care Campaign," coursed its way between incubators, seeking out parents and providing their premature babies with hand-knit hats specifically sized for their tiny heads.

The group began when Georgette "Charli" Yandolino, an administrative secretary at the Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences, approached the Graduate School Executive Counsel (GSEC) with the idea of creating a student knitting club that would provide premature babies with yarn caps, which she had



Newborn Nehir Kayhan models her new cap that was hand-knit by WCMC graduate students.

seen at Winthrop Hospital on Long Island when she was visiting her newborn triplet nieces.

Pamela Wille, a pharmacology graduate student and the treasurer of GSEC, began coordinating the effort, eventually meeting with NICU clinical nurse manager Claudette Theuriere; Barbara Loughlin, wife of Department of Pediatrics Chairman Dr. Gerald Loughlin; and Anita Gotto, wife of Weill Cornell Medical College Dean Dr. Antonio Gotto. Mrs.

Gotto, who hosted the meeting, founded the "We Care" program of volunteer services focused on patients and their families at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell.

For premature babies, the little caps serve a very specific, and vitally important, clinical purpose.

"A premature baby's head is disproportionately larger than a full-term baby's, and they tend to lose more heat through their heads," said Dr. Jeffrey Perlman, chief of the Division of Newborn Medicine. "These caps allow them to maintain warmth, particularly outside the incubators in rooms where there may be drafts."

As the snow continued to fall outside, one happy mother said she wouldn't be needing a hat; her baby would be leaving later that day. Pamela Wille, the campaign's student coordinator, seized her opportunity: "I said, 'No, today is a perfect day—you definitely need one!'" ■

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Spotlight on Med Student Research

projects in clinical epidemiology, public and community health, and psychology, among others fields.

The Medical College also encourages students to pursue as many external research experiences as possible, which was reflected in the number of student projects with co-authors from institutions outside of Weill Cornell, including the University of Michigan, Harvard University/Massachusetts General Hospital, Duke University, among many others, including those closer to home like Mount Sinai Hospital and Memorial Sloan-Kettering

Cancer Center.

"If a student finds someone through a different school or the NIH that they want to work with, we allow them to do research wherever they want to," said Dr. Pardee. "We would love to have them here, of course, and many do their research here."

During the afternoon on Research Day, 31 students presented posters as faculty and other students filtered through the Great Hall in the Weill Greenberg Center. Later in the afternoon, students with either completed or more advanced projects who expressed

interest in delivering oral presentations discussed their work in the Weill Auditorium.

Dr. Laurie Glimcher, the Irene Heinz Given Professor of Immunology at the Harvard School of Public Health, pre-

sented the symposium's keynote address. Dr. Glimcher said she admired Weill Cornell's program and its renewed push for student research, and said with strong students like those she had met while on campus, it's

best to give them an opportunity and let them take it: "With students this good, you just let them go."

Judging by the 10-fold increase in student presentations during this year's Research Day, it seems that many students have done just that. ■

First-year student Brian Rebolledo discusses his poster presentation with Dr. Joel Pardee.



Gene Imbalance Helps Drive Rare Blood Disease

THE INTERPLAY OF GENES EXPRESSING TWO KEY PROTEINS HELPS SPUR

dangerous iron overload in patients with a rare form of chronic anemia, called beta-thalassemia, concluded an international team led by researchers at Weill Cornell. “For years, doctors assumed that the transfusions patients needed were the driving force behind their iron overload,” explained lead researcher Dr. Stefano Rivella, assistant professor of genetic medicine in pediatrics at the College. Reporting in *Blood*, his team found that genes controlling two proteins—ferroportin and hepcidin—get out of balance in beta-thalassemia, prompting excessive iron uptake. “But if we can manipulate this relationship, we may be able to get iron absorption back under control,” Dr. Rivella said. ■



Dr. Stefano Rivella and members of his research team in the lab.

NYP/Westchester Division Launches Major Anorexia Study

SPEARHEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST ANOREXIA—THE DEADLIEST OF ALL

psychiatric illnesses—researchers at Weill Cornell and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital’s Westchester Division are partnering with five other medical research centers to study the eating disorder. “This four-year randomized, controlled study is the first to test two early-intervention treatments in children aged 12 to 18 diagnosed with anorexia,” explained Dr. Katherine Halmi, a Weill Cornell professor of psychiatry and director of the Eating Disorder Treatment Program at the Westchester Division. ■

Working to Ensure Cell Transplant Success FOR YEARS, DOCTORS HAVE TRIED TO CURE

Type 1 diabetes by transplanting new insulin-producing islet cells into the patient’s pancreas. These efforts have largely failed, however, because the immune system gradually eats away at these “foreign” cells. But a new study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* may change all that. “Through a sophisticated manipulation of the immune system’s T-cells, we were able to shield transplanted islet cells in mice from immune attack,” explained lead researcher Dr. Manikkam Suthanthiran, the Stanton Griffis Distinguished Professor of Medicine at Weill Cornell. “If this translates to humans, it could achieve long-term islet cell stability and put an end to the lifelong use of powerful immune-suppressing agents in transplant patients.” ■

Easing Panic Disorder With Therapy

IT’S BEEN AROUND FOR A CENTURY, BUT UNTIL

now, no study has proven the effectiveness of psychodynamic psychotherapy against any major psychiatric illness. “However, our small study of 49 patients treated for 12 weeks found that this approach was twice as effective in easing panic disorder as another standard therapy, called applied relaxation training (ART),” said Dr. Barbara Milrod, associate professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell and an associate attending physician at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell. Reporting in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, her team found that 73 percent of patients responded to psychodynamic psychotherapy vs. 39 percent of those treated with ART. ■



Dr. Barbara Milrod

Dr. K. Craig Kent Named Greenberg-Starr Professor of Surgery



Professor of Surgery **DR. K. CRAIG KENT** has been named the first Greenberg-Starr Professor of Surgery at Weill Cornell Medical College, named for Maurice R. Greenberg and the Starr Foundation in recognition of their \$2 million commitment to endow the position. Dr. Kent also serves as chief of the combined Division of Vascular

Surgery at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital at its two major medical centers NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell and NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia.

Weill Cornell Medical College has led important research findings in the treatment of vascular disease, including prevention and treatment of stroke and “Quick Screen” for abdominal aortic aneurysm. Ongoing research includes studies in gene therapy, drug-eluting stents, and advanced carotid stenting and grafts for aneurysms.

“The pace of innovation and excellence that is continually demonstrated by the Division of Vascular Surgery would not be possible without the leadership and commitment of Hank Greenberg. For his continued support, we are all very grateful,” said Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., the Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean of Weill Cornell Medical College.

“I am grateful for this honor. The Division of Vascular Surgery is truly a team effort and recognition goes to the outstanding achievements of my many talented colleagues,” said Dr. Kent. ■

Dr. Marc Silverstein Appointed Chairman of Department of Public Health at The Methodist Hospital in Houston, and Professor of Public Health at Weill Cornell



DR. MARC SILVERSTEIN has been appointed chairman of the newly created Department of Public Health at Weill Cornell Medical College’s affiliate The Methodist Hospital in Houston. Dr. Silverstein has simultaneously been named professor of public health at Weill Cornell. The announcement represents the seventh major joint appointment

since The Methodist Hospital affiliated with Weill Cornell in 2004.

“The appointment of Marc Silverstein represents an important step in the unique and innovative partnership between Weill Cornell Medical College and The Methodist Hospital. A strong culture of collaboration between our two institutions will enable valuable public health research in Texas and beyond,” said Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., dean of Weill Cornell.

As the parent academic department, the public health department at Weill Cornell Medical College serves in an advisory and oversight capacity to the department in Houston. A joint advisory committee ensures alignment of goals and objectives, facilitates academic recruitment, and fosters collaboration on research and educational programs.

Dr. Silverstein previously served as clinical scholar at the Institute for Health Care Research & Improvement for the Baylor Health Care System in Dallas. ■

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Dr. Skorton Makes the Rounds

pediatrics at the Medical College.

“Because an academic health center like Weill Cornell and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital interacts heavily with the public, it faces unusually complex issues,” he said. “Human and animal research is subject to extraordinarily tight governmental regulations, while

patient care activities must be handled as both business and academic ventures.”

Dr. Skorton noted that there are peculiar challenges to managing an academic health center. “The question is, what should we do with this well-functioning but brittle enterprise?”

For his part, Dr. Skorton—who jokingly described himself as “a doctor who went wrong, basically” by becoming an administrator—enjoyed the opportunity to revisit Grand Rounds. “I feel like I’m coming back home to be in a Medicine Grand Rounds,” Dr. Skorton said. “Although I must say, when I was an associate chair of medicine we never got turnouts like this at Grand Rounds.” ■

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Treating Prostate Cancer: More Is More

Dr. Tewari, in many cases, doctors decide prostate tumors are untreatable and then advise less aggressive treatments, if any. “Unfortunately, pessimism abounds among many doctors, who believe that aggressive prostate cancers are beyond cure and should only be followed with watchful waiting, postponing immediate treatment,” he said. “Our new study points to the fallacy of this outlook.”

More research may be needed to turn the conventional wisdom around, however.

“Ultimately, randomized clinical trials studying long-term outcomes will be necessary to fully demonstrate the benefit of treatment for these patients,” said study

co-author Dr. David Nanus, medical director of the genitourinary oncology program at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell and the Mark V. Pasmantier Professor of Hematology at Weill Cornell Medical College.

“Ultimately, randomized clinical trials studying long-term outcomes will be necessary to fully demonstrate the benefit of treatment for these patients.”
— Dr. David Nanus

Last year, over 234,000 American men received a prostate cancer diagnosis. Left untreated, 85 percent of men with prostate cancer will die of the disease within 10 years. Dr. Tewari has long been at the forefront

of research into better, safer means of treating prostate disease. He recently received a \$99,000 Competitive Awards Program grant from the Prostate Cancer Foundation for developing procedures that would allow men to retain full sexual function after surgical removal of the prostate. Announcing the prestigious award, the foundation lauded Dr. Tewari’s pioneering efforts as “significant contributions toward accelerating the end of death and suffering from prostate cancer.” ■

Anesthesiology Expo Highlights Research, Careers

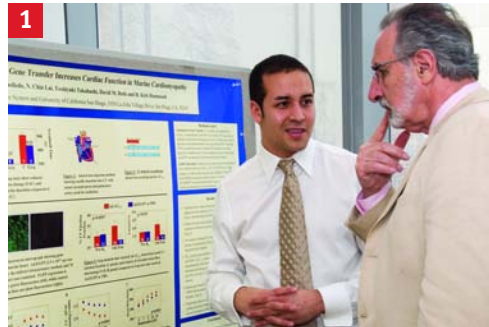
RESEARCH ON TOPICS IN ANESTHESIOLOGY

from basic science through postoperative patient care was on display during the Third Annual Anesthesiology Research Expo, held in Weill Cornell Medical College's Department of Anesthesiology from March 12 to 16. The weeklong expo highlighted 19 research projects by anesthesiology faculty, residents, postdoctoral fellows and graduate students, as well as collaborators from other clinical and research departments.

"This reflects the work of everybody within the department doing research and most of the studies involve a postdoctoral fellow, resident or student as the lead author," said Dr. Hugh Hemmings, professor of anesthesiology and pharmacology and vice chairman of research for the department.

The projects on display featured those completed in the last year as well as research presented at meetings of the International Anesthesia Research Society and the Society of Cardiovascular Anesthesiologists.

Beyond educating staff and residents, the expo also provided a chance for clinicians and scientists across a department of more than 50 faculty members and 11 research teams to meet face-to-face and discuss complementary projects. Potential and current anesthesiology students and residents also found opportunities to become more involved in the department's research studies. ■



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Weill Cornell Medical College and
 Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences
 Office of Public Affairs
 1300 York Avenue
 Box 144
 New York, NY 10021

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