



Scoop

June 21, 2002

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL AT HOUSTON

Events to Know

June

27 Summer Research Program Seminar, Dr. Michael Smolensky, SPH, speaker, noon, MSB 2.006.

UTMost Interest

The Winter 2001 issue of *UT-Houston Medicine*, published by the Office of Community Affairs and Public Education, received an award of merit in the international 2002 Dalton Pen Communications Award Program...**Dr. Robert E. Jordon**,



chairman, Dermatology, and **Dr. Irma Gigli**, associate director, Institute of Molecular Medicine, were among only three physicians nominated for honorary membership in the Society of Investigative Dermatology's annual meeting in Los Angeles...**Dr. Subodh**

Verman, resident, University of Toronto, was awarded the first-ever James T. Willerson Vulnerable Plaque Young Investigator Prize for Basic Research. **Dr. Willerson**, president, UT-Houston, is a pioneer in the field of vulnerable plaque. His early research on thrombosis, a clot formation inside the artery, shed light on the cause of sudden heart attack.

FYI - The United Latin American Medical Students (ULAMS) recently recognized personnel for their support, including **Dr. Carlos A. Moreno**, Community & Educational Outreach, and Family Practice; **Dr. Gilbert Castro**, Academic Affairs; and **Liliana Rodriguez**, Office of Community & Educational Outreach. New officers are: **Magdalena Peixoto**, president; **James Nelson**, vp; **Martha Suarez**, treasurer; **Mark Ellis**, secretary; and **Priscilla Saldivar**, historian.

PAPANICOLAOU TO DIRECT INAUGURAL SUMMER INSTITUTE

What would you consider to be your best and most complete educational experience? For **Dr. Andrew Papanicolaou**, professor and director, Division of Clinical Neuroscience, Department of Neurosurgery, it was a summer institute session back in 1976 when he was a graduate student in Illinois. He was given a fellowship from the Linguistic Society of America to attend the society's Annual Summer Institute at the State University of New York at Oswego, on the southern shores of Lake Ontario. He found himself interacting with 300 academics from around the world and the experience left a lifelong impression. Looking back at how it promoted both professional bonds and lifelong friendships convinced him 25 years later that a summer institute again was an idea whose time had come.



Dr. Andrew Papanicolaou

Papanicolaou will direct the Vivian L. Smith Advanced Studies Institute in the coastal town of Xylocastro, on the northern side of Greece, June 19 through July 17. Fifteen professors and 75 graduate students and residents in Psychiatry and Neurology from around the globe, including Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, Iran, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the USA, Yugoslavia, and of course Greece, will participate in the institute. The program is underwritten by the Vivian L. Smith Foundation of Houston and is operating under the auspices of the international professional organization, The International Neuropsychological Society. "My hope is that the institute will be an ongoing event each summer in Xylocastro," Papanicolaou said.

The theme of the inaugural institute is "Language and the Brain." Lecturers will address topics as diverse as the cross-linguistic aspects of language disorders, to signed languages and their representation in the brain. Students were chosen on merit and knowledge of English, given that English is the language of instruction.

"My goal is that this monthlong experience will inspire the participants, that they will have a rare opportunity to meet and mingle with exemplary academicians from the international community," Papanicolaou said. "I am most indebted to the board of the Vivian L Smith Foundation, which has helped support our research in the Department of Neurosurgery, and to Mr. Pete Seale, the president of the foundation. He embraced this project with enthusiasm and helped its realization in many ways. I am also deeply indebted to the mayor of the town of Xylocastro, Greece, Mr. Takis Skouras. He graciously provided the infrastructure for this event to take place and offered the participants free excursions to southern Greece, to give them the opportunity to explore archeological sites that abound in the area."

Dr. Jack Fletcher, professor, Department of Pediatrics, also will participate as a faculty member. - C. O'Brien



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DR. MARSHALL MAKES PROGRESS ON POST-ALLISON STUDY

It's been one year since Tropical Storm Allison hit, and **Dr. Gailen Marshall**, associate professor, Department of Internal Medicine, and the director of the Division of Allergy & Clinical Immunology, is still hard at work on his follow-up respiratory health research of UT-Houston Medical School building occupants.



Dr. Gailen Marshall

Soon after Tropical Storm Allison, Marshall posted a general e-mail notice to Medical School students, faculty, and staff, inviting their participation in a respiratory health questionnaire. Marshall's post-Allison questionnaire followed a multiple-choice format and encompassed a list of 18 potential symptoms. The respondents were asked to identify any symptoms they experienced after Allison.

All respondents who stayed with the study were tested for allergy symptoms. What Marshall and his colleagues found through the initial questionnaire was that some allergy responses and immune changes that seemed related to the stress caused by Tropical Storm Allison were evident in the majority of respondents. How much stress impacted very real allergy symptoms and immune changes will be an area for further study. "There were a number of people working here whose symptoms correlated with the level of anxiety," Marshall said.

The range of symptoms listed on the questionnaire included: nasal congestion, runny nose, daytime fatigue, difficulty sleeping, wheezing, coughing, or tightness in the chest. The respondents were asked to rank their responses on a scale of 0 to 4, with 0 being no symptoms and 4 as having incapacitating symptoms. Marshall was interested in looking at why so many individuals reported getting ill from mold exposures.

The questionnaire, with an initial response of 140 (out of 3,000 building occupants), was entirely voluntary, and replies were kept anonymous. Marshall said that at no time did either UT-Houston Health Science Center **President James Willerson** or UT-Houston Medical School's **Dean Max Buja** ask him to reveal the responses. "Only in the case of an identifiable health problem where corrective health measures would need to be taken, would I have had to contact the administration," Marshall said.

Three conditions are necessary for mold, the primary suspect in a questionnaire of this nature, to exist: temperature, humidity, and a food source. The post-Allison Medical School building was without power for a period of four weeks, during the hottest quarter of Houston's climate, and was a prime breeding ground for toxins like mold to proliferate. "Mold is in the Gulf coast area—from Mexico to the tip of Florida—in everybody's homes and office buildings," Marshall said. The objective is to keep the conditions for mold to take hold, at bay. That's normally accomplished in interior environments in Houston with good air conditioning systems.

Marshall said he plans on using the results of this initial study to obtain an NIH grant to further investigate other mold-related illnesses in homes and other buildings. "There will almost certainly be some flooding somewhere in our area every year," said Marshall. "The study will be finished in August and I intend to publish the findings." - C. O'Brien



Downtown Houston after Tropical Storm Allison

BEGINNING JUNE 26, EACH

Wednesday, 5 - 6:30 p.m., through Aug. 14, you will be able to augment your skills in writing grants and manuscripts, as part of the Clinical Research Curriculum of UT-Houston and M. D. Anderson. This will be an intensive scientific writing workshop given through August 14. All clinical faculty and fellows are invited to participate. It will be held in MSB 2.135.

For more information or to register, please call 713-500-5651 or 713-500-6708.



THE NIH-FUNDED CLINICAL RESEARCH

Curriculum will begin Wednesday, **Aug. 21** in MSB 2.135. The first course will be Biostatistics, followed by Literature Appraisal, Ethics, Translational Research, and a Research Seminar in which participants develop their own protocols. There is no charge for these courses, which are a core service of UT-Houston to help faculty members become skilled and productive clinical investigators. Please pass this information on to faculty and fellows who would be interested but may not be aware of it. For more information or to register, call 713-500-5651 or 713-500-6708.