

Events to Know

April

- 21 UT House Medics.** See <http://is.hsc.uth.tmc.edu/projects/housemed.html>.
- 23 Abstracts due for Advances in Teaching & Learning Regional Conference.** Abstract submission and conference registration are free. See <http://atlday.shis.uth.tmc.edu/>.
- 29 March of Dimes WalkAmerica 2007** to raise money for research and programs to help prevent or treat premature birth, birth defects, and other threats to babies' health. 9 a.m., Robertson Stadium at the University of Houston, See www.uthouston.edu/community/marchofdimes/index.html or call Rose Mary Betancourt Trevino at 713.500.3209.

To send a news tip or event
for Scoop,
e-mail scoop@uth.tmc.edu.

Lone Star Stampede scheduled April 28

The Lone Star Stampede, a sanctioned race with a certified 5K course, takes place Saturday, April 28 to provide scholarships for deserving Houston-area high school students attending The University of Texas at Austin. Sponsored by the Texas Exes Houston Chapter, the race begins and ends in front of the UT School of Nursing and Student Community Center. The Eeyore's Children's Run begins at 9 a.m. A health fair and party will follow the race. Register online at www.texasexes.com/. Packet pickup: 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Thursday, April 26 and Friday, April 27 at Finish Strong Sports, 6426 Washington Ave.

Neurology team testing new oral drug for treating MS

Researchers in the Department of Neurology at the Medical School are part of a worldwide Phase III clinical trial of the first oral drug to show significant promise in treating multiple sclerosis.

The drug, fingolimod, also known as FTY720 by manufacturer Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corp., has been shown in earlier trials to significantly reduce relapse rates in people suffering from the relapsing-remitting form of MS, the most common type.

"In the MS world, this is one of the most promising drugs for the treatment of multiple sclerosis," said **Dr. Flavia Nelson**, assistant professor of neurology and principal investigator for the Houston site. "This will be very beneficial for MS patients who have trouble taking injectable medications either because of a generalized or site reaction."

The Medical School is the only Houston site for the FTY720 trial.

The two-year study, funded by Novartis, will include 2,000 MS patients in about 200 study centers worldwide. The study is placebo-controlled with one-third of the patients taking a placebo, one-third a dose of 1.25 milligrams of fingolimod, and one-third a fingolimod dose of 0.5 milligrams.

Promising results of the Phase II trial conducted at 32 centers in 11 countries (Europe and Canada) were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* Sept. 14, 2006.

Multiple sclerosis is an autoimmune disease in which T-cells in the immune system attack the myelin, a fatty sheath that surrounds and protects nerve fibers in the central nervous system. As areas of the myelin are destroyed, scar tissue called sclerosis forms and interferes with the ability of the nerves to send electrical impulses to and from the brain. Often the nerves can be destroyed as well, causing irreversible neurological damage resulting in physical disabilities.

Fingolimod is an antibody specifically designed to bind to a receptor on immune cells, including T cells and B cells that have been activated to react against myelin, and blocks the cells from

(Cont'd. on back)

Cox selected for national medical coding advisory board

Maryann Cox, R.N., CPC, director of the Department of Billing Compliance Coordination, has been selected for the American Academy of Professional Coders National Advisory Board for a two-year term from April 2007 – April 2009. She will be part of an elite group of individuals who are regarded as experts in the field of medical coding.

"I'm very excited about joining the National Advisory Board because professional coding is an invaluable tool for academic medical centers where compliance is concerned," Cox said.

The American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) was founded in 1988 to elevate the standards of medical coding by providing certification, ongoing education, networking, and recognition. Currently, the AAPC has a membership base of 60,000 worldwide, of which more than 40,000 are certified.

"The American Academy of Professional Coders is one of two groups, which set the standard and provide certification for the Certified Professional Coder (CPC)," Cox said. "This certification goes a long way to ensure regulatory billing compliance for entities that utilize professional coders who are certified."

Through her appointment with the National Advisory Board, Cox will promote the mission of the AAPC at the national and local level. She will work with AAPC leadership for the betterment of the entire membership and the medical coding community through participation in national sponsored publications, educational programs, and activities. She also will support the organization locally by attending and speaking at chapter meetings and serving as a resource to chapter members.



Maryann Cox

(Cont'd. on back)



PBS series examines Texas' challenges, innovative solutions

Through the personal stories of patients, hurricane survivors, researchers, scientists, and doctors, the documentary television series "State of Tomorrow"™ depicts global issues and solutions on a human scale. Faculty members at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston are among those interviewed for the series.

"State of Tomorrow" will debut on KUHT-TV, Channel 8, in Houston at 11 p.m. Thursday, April 26. The 13 half-hour episodes then will air regularly in Houston on Thursdays at 11 p.m.

The series explores major challenges facing Texans today, including public health, homeland security, energy policy, economic development, and education, among others.

"Public higher education offers solutions to many of the major challenges facing Texas, and it is important for Texans to know that whether or not they ever set foot on our campuses, we work to ensure that they are the beneficiaries of education's service to society," said UT System Chancellor **Mark Yudof**.

Faculty from Texas A&M, Texas State, Texas Tech, University of Houston, University of North Texas, and University of Texas university systems are featured in the series, representing a collaboration among Texas' public higher education systems.

The series is co-produced by The University of Texas Foundation and Alpheus Media Inc. in partnership with public television station KLRU-TV, Austin PBS, and is paid for with private funding from sponsors including AT&T Inc., Exxon Mobil Corp., and IBC Bank, among others.

"State of Tomorrow" will air on all 13 PBS stations in Texas (schedule available at www.stateoftomorrow.com). Each episode addresses advances made possible by higher education.

Cox, cont'd.

Cox has been in the health care field for 25 years and became interested in medical coding 13 years ago. In 1997, she became certified in medical coding upon completion of a rigorous certification course and exam.

As director of the Department of Billing Compliance Coordination, Cox's job is to assist Medical School physicians with the ever-changing mandates related to billing integrity. She and other certified coding specialists help physicians on a daily basis with coding and compliance issues.

"To keep up with regulations is nearly impossible for physicians," Cox said. "This department was designed to be a one-stop shop for understanding regulatory compliance and to make sure that bills are accurate when they go out. It's an ongoing educatory process to help fine-tune the physician's understanding of adequate documentation and coding requirements."

Cox has been a member of the AAPC since 1996. "The organization is a meeting ground for others of like profession to share their knowledge, to mentor, and to be a vehicle to promote this profession to the medical community," she said.

Cox said being chosen for the academy's National Advisory Board was special because it occurred at a time when the profession is changing and being catapulted into the forefront of sound billing and compliance practices.

"The next two years for the profession are key," she said. "We can do a lot to promote this organization and help everyone understand how vital this profession is. The time has come to give professional coders their due."

-C. Webb

SCSC benefits from April 11 steakhouse opening



The Medical School's Surgical and Clinical Skills Center (SCSC) was the beneficiary of two grand opening parties at Bob's Steak & Chop House Wednesday, April 11. More than 400 guests dined and visited with medical students who demonstrated how they practice complicated procedures with simulators in a realistic setting, which will translate

to better patient care as they move forward in their careers.

"There was a great deal of interest in how vital signs are monitored on the simulators and how a variety of programs are written to challenge and teach the students to handle medical emergencies," said SCSC Director **Dr. Eric Reichman**, adding that Laerdal provided the simulators and a team to help guests experience how to learn from them.

UT-Austin alumni **Ed Toles** and **Dan Matheson** and other friends wanted to honor the Medical School on its 35th anniversary year and chose to feature the SCSC at the restaurant's grand openings.

Attending the event were (L-R) IMM Director **Dr. C. Thomas Caskey**, former Dean **Stanley Schultz**, interim Dean **Jerry Wolinsky**, and former Dean **L. Maximilian Buja**.



Photos by Kim Coffman.



Be The Change in Healthcare conference set

Be The Change in Healthcare 2007, a three-day conference from May 1-3 at Rice University, will bring together world-renowned scholars and innovative change agents for a dialogue on supporting the emergence of a more compassionate, sustainable, and effective health care system.

Dr. Thomas Cole, director of The John P. McGovern, M.D. Center for Health, Humanities, and the Human Spirit and a professor of humanities in the Department of Religious Studies at Rice University, will be among speakers to include **Dr. Robert Thurman**, **Dr. Brad Keeney**, **Dr. David Himmelstein**, **Dr. George Annas**, **Dr. Jerome Kassirer**, **Dr. Marilyn Schlitz**, **Marc-Ian Barasch**, **Dr. Eduardo Bruera**, and many more. **His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama** also will be talking on the Rice campus May 1.

Evening events include a special session with the Texas Bioneers and a documentary and concert with Kim Prevost and her New Orleans Friends.

Find more information at www.bethechangeusa.net.

MS clinical trial, cont'd.

leaving the lymph nodes and migrating into the brain and spinal cord.

The most effective injectable MS drugs now available have been shown to reduce the number of relapses by an average of 30 percent, while in Phase II trials, fingolimod has shown a 52 percent reduction.

Because fingolimod can cause a slight decrease in heart rate, it is not recommended for people who have low blood pressure or a history of heart problems.

For more details about the Houston clinical trial, call 713.500.7045.

-D. Mann Lake