The Southern California Research Center for ALPD & Cirrhosis hosted its 5th annual Community Seminar, entitled “Health Effects of Alcohol: What your Patients and Clients need to Know,” in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Alcohol and Drug Program Administration (ADPA), on Friday, April 3, 2009, at the Alhambra Campus Auditorium. Over 130 attendees, including alcohol and drug counselors, therapists, licensed clinical social workers, public health educators, nurses, physicians, and laymen packed the auditorium to learn about new research on the role of alcohol abuse in liver and pancreatic disorders.

After introductory remarks by John Viernes, Jr., director of ADPA, Alex Bruehl, research analyst at ADPA, and Tom Valente, professor and director of the Master of Public Health program at USC, Michel Mendler, associate professor of medicine at Loma Linda University, opened with a lecture on the “Role of Alcohol Abuse and Obesity/Diabetes.” Dr. Mendler highlighted that the risk of fatty liver increases with obesity and diabetes and can be further increased by superimposed alcohol consumption. He underscored that a combination of diet, exercise, and abstinence from alcohol can significantly ameliorate fatty liver.

Next, Sammy Saab, associate professor of clinical medicine at UCLA, spoke on “Viral Hepatitis, Alcohol and Liver Transplantation,” discussing various etiologies of hepatitis, including alcohol and viruses, and algorithms used to diagnose hepatitis B and C infections. Dr. Saab informed that liver cancer is the second fastest growing cancer in the United States and elaborated on transplantation as a potential therapy for this disease and cirrhosis.

This was followed by Stephen Pandol, professor of medicine in residence at UCLA, who delivered a lecture, entitled “Your Pancreas, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Cancer,” and which introduced the basic anatomy and physiology of the pancreas. Dr. Pandol pointed out that alcohol abuse and smoking are important risk factors for pancreatitis and pancreatic cancer.

Finally, Barbara Mason, Pearson Family Professor and co-director of the Pearson Center for Alcoholism and Addiction Research at the Scripps Research Institute, presented on “Newer Medications to Treat Alcoholism.” Dr. Mason reported that epidemiological studies estimate that over 8 million Americans currently meet criteria for alcohol dependence. She described that naltrexone and acamprosate are FDA-approved medications for alcohol dependence. She further explained that naltrexone reduces the risk of relapse to heavy drinking and shows beneficial effects in short term treatment, while acamprosate increases the rate of abstinence, has an excellent safety profile, and shows beneficial effects in long term treatment of alcohol dependence.

To determine the educational value of the Community Seminar, Dr. Valente and Keane Lai, clinical instructor of pathology at USC, designed and administered pre- and post-tests to attendees in order to assess potential improvement in knowledge and understanding of key concepts presented. Analysis of the pre- and post-tests demonstrated that the Community Seminar increased attendee knowledge by 20%.

The Community Seminar, part of the Center’s Outreach program, which was co-directed by Tom Valente and Keane Lai, serves to disseminate up-to-date research findings to health care professionals and laymen to promote prevention of ALPD in a high-risk community.
Keigo MaChIda is an assistant professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. He obtained his B.A. degree in pharmacy from Gifu Pharmaceutical University and his Ph.D. degree in medicine from the University of Tokyo. Attracted by the outstanding research opportunities for young scientists and the scientific and melting pot diversity in the United States, he relocated to Los Angeles and subsequently completed postdoctoral training in molecular/tumor virology and cancer genetics at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute/USC under the mentorship of Michael Lai, an international authority on the molecular virology of hepatitis C (HCV). Keigo joined the USC faculty in 2006.

Keigo has published extensively on how HCV induces DNA damage and mutations of host cellular genes, including immunoglobulin genes and protooncogenes. To date, he has published 22 peer reviewed papers and 4 book chapters. Earlier in the year, he published a seminal paper in PNAS which demonstrated that: 1) the stem cell marker, Nanog, is a novel target gene upregulated by TLR4 activation; 2) alcohol and HCV synergistically enhance hepatic tumorigenesis via induction of this TLR4-Nanog pathway; and 3) CD133/Nanog-positive cells found in liver tumors of alcohol-fed NS5A transgenic mice are potential liver cancer stem cells. Keigo is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Wright Foundation Research Grant, Zumberge Fellowship, and Lee Summer Student Fellowship Program. He has published 22 peer reviewed papers and 4 book chapters. Earlier in the year, he published a seminal paper in PNAS which demonstrated that: 1) the stem cell marker, Nanog, is a novel target gene upregulated by TLR4 activation; 2) alcohol and HCV synergistically enhance hepatic tumorigenesis via induction of this TLR4-Nanog pathway; and 3) CD133/Nanog-positive cells found in liver tumors of alcohol-fed NS5A transgenic mice are potential liver cancer stem cells.

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CONGRATULATIONS!!!

NEW GRANTS BY CENTER MEMBERS

5. Derick Han, K01 AA016911, 2009–2013, $127,328 annual

5TH INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ALPD & CIRRHOSIS

OCTOBER 7 & 8, 2010: FREIBURG, GERMANY

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