

Med School Watercooler

NEWS FROM FREDERICK P. WHIDDON COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Thursday, February 23, 2012

Med School Café - Expert Advice for the Community



This week, Dr. Christopher Eckstein, assistant professor of neurology at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, presented the February Med School Café lecture.

The lecture, "New Developments in the Treatment of Multiple Sclerosis," had a total of 80 attendees.

At the lecture, Dr. Eckstein discussed multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. During the talk, he covered signs and symptoms of the disease and provided information on novel treatments and therapies.

The March Med School Café lecture will feature Dr. Crisostomo Baliog Jr., assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of South

Alabama College of Medicine. If you are interested in attending, email kepartridge@usouthal.edu for more details. To learn more about the lectures, [click here](#).



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USA Researchers' Work Featured in American Society for Microbiology Journal of Virology



Dr. Ron Balczon (left), associate professor of cell biology and neuroscience, with Dr. Troy Stevens (right), professor of pharmacology and internal medicine.

The work of two researchers at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine was published in the January issue of the American Society for Microbiology's Journal of Virology.

Dr. Troy Stevens, professor of pharmacology and internal medicine and director of the Center for Lung Biology, and Dr. Ron Balczon, associate professor of cell biology and neuroscience and a member of the Center for Lung Biology, co-authored the article along with Dr. Terrence Tumpey, a graduate of the USA College of Medicine doctoral program and the current senior microbiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

The research focuses on highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 viruses, which continue to cause sporadic human infections with a high fatality rate.

"We all know that the flu is something to avoid, especially in children, the elderly, and in adults who are immunocompromised," Dr. Stevens said. "While the H1N1 and H3N2 influenza viruses are responsible for the well-known flu symptoms, some influenza strains such as H5N1 are more virulent, or highly infective, and cause even worse symptoms."

This research identifies a mechanism of virulence used by H5N1 to cause acute respiratory lung disease, a serious form of lung disease where blood and fluid seeps out of blood vessels in the lung and into the airspaces, preventing patients from oxygenating tissues.

Drs. Stevens and Balczon said that for strains like H5N1 to illicit such severe responses, the virus must interact with human cells, where it replicates and is

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Med School Café - Expert Advice for the Community

USA Researchers' Work Featured in American Society...

Next Week's DSS - Dr. Alan Cherrington

It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint

2012 Summer Research Proposal Deadline Approaching

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released in higher numbers. The current research shows that H5N1 replicates in endothelial cells – cells that line blood vessels – and is released into the bloodstream, allowing the virus to spread.

“What is perhaps an even greater concern is that other emerging influenza strains will adapt the strategy of H5N1 to replicate in endothelium,” Dr. Balczon said.

They emphasized that H5N1 infections are far less common than H1N1 or H3N2 infections. The H5N1 virus is still a concern, however, especially because it causes severe lung injury with a high death rate.

“At present, there are few therapeutic options available to patients that effectively target viruses in general, and influenza in particular,” Dr. Balczon said. “Improving our understanding of how viruses replicate in tissues will allow us to develop new therapeutic approaches in the future that attack this problem.”

To view the entire article published in the Journal of Virology, visit <http://jvi.asm.org/content/86/2/667.abstract>.

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Next Week's DSS - Dr. Alan Cherrington



The next Distinguished Scientist Seminar at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine will be presented by Dr. Alan Cherrington, professor of molecular physiology and biophysics and medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

His lecture, titled “Glucagon: The Forgotten Hormone,” will take place March 1, 2012, at 4 p.m. in the Medical Sciences Building auditorium on USA's main campus.

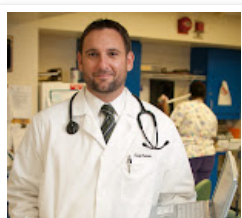
Dr. Cherrington's research focuses on the advance treatment of diabetes and the control of glucoregulatory feedback mechanisms.

Dr. Cherrington, who also serves as director and Charles H. Best Professor of the Diabetes Research and Training Center, received a B.S. degree at the University of New Brunswick. In addition, he earned M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in physiology at the University of Toronto.

For more information on Dr. Cherrington's research, [click here](#).

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It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint



When learning to break unhealthy habits, Dr. Brian Bettencourt, assistant professor of family medicine at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine, said it's important to understand the process it takes to initiate change.

“Change takes practice,” he said. “It's a marathon, not



Dr. Bettencourt, who serves as a sports medicine family physician, said that the top three things American adults this year were to lose weight, quit smoking, and exercise more.

He said the best ways to lose weight involve caloric restriction, exercise, and behavior modifications that allow a person to maintain set goals.

"The first goal for any overweight individual is to prevent further weight gain," Dr. Bettencourt said. "An initial weight loss goal of 5 to 7 percent of body weight is realistic for most individuals."

Dr. Bettencourt recommends that a person participate in moderate intensity exercise for 30 minutes for a minimum of five days a week. Exercise decreases all cause mortality, improves function and cognition, and reduces stress and depression.

Food choices are also an integral part of weight loss. Dr. Bettencourt said the key to making meaningful changes in food choices is to start with simple goals such as avoiding fatty foods and choosing more plant-based foods. "Make a few simple dietary changes and stick with them," he said. "Over time, add some new choices."

Another top vow for Americans is to quit smoking, which Dr. Bettencourt said is one of the best choices you can make for your health.

According to Dr. Bettencourt, cigarette smoking causes more than 400,000 deaths each year in the United States alone and is also associated with osteoporosis, skin wrinkling, peptic ulcer disease, impotence, and pregnancy complications.

"Quitting will improve your health no matter how old you are and no matter how much you have smoked," he said.

He emphasized that quitting smoking can lower your chances of dying from heart disease, lung disease, and cancer. It will also allow you to breathe easier and feel healthier.

For those trying to quit smoking, Dr. Bettencourt suggests starting an exercise regimen and staying away from people and places where smoking is common. "Social interaction is essential," he said. "Recruit friends to quit smoking with you."

When you get a craving for a cigarette, Dr. Bettencourt said to "ride the wave."

"Cravings come in five-minute periods, or waves," he said. "Learning to ride the wave of cravings and getting beyond it will make your cravings farther and farther apart."

Want to quit smoking? Here's how to start:

- S** = Set a quit date.
- T** = Tell family, friends, and the people around you that you plan to quit.
- A** = Anticipate or plan ahead for difficulties you may face while quitting.
- R** = Remove cigarettes from your home, car, and work.
- T** = Talk to your doctor about getting help to quit.

"Any kind of change is a commitment," Dr. Bettencourt said. "Assume a long-term approach to meeting your goals and accept them as a lifestyle change. If you slip up, don't give up."

"Ultimately, you should do what's best for you and your family," he added. "A little bit of change can be fantastic."

Dr. Bettencourt recently gave an overview of healthy habits at the January Med School Café lecture. To view the lecture in its entirety, [click here](#).

For a good start on making healthy food choices, visit www.choosemyplate.gov.
For more resources on how to quit smoking, [click here](#).

2012 Summer Research Proposal Deadline Approaching

The deadline to submit proposals for the 2012 Medical Student Summer Research Program is Wednesday, Feb. 29, 2012.

The Summer Research Program for incoming freshman or rising sophomore medical students is a 10-week program (June 1, 2012, through Aug. 3, 2012) that pairs medical students with faculty mentors. The program is open to all areas of basic science and clinical research.

The program has been very successful in mentoring first and second year medical students, providing valuable research experience that will benefit them as they continue their medical careers. This program also generates productive research and pioneers new projects for investigators within the College of Medicine. Collaborative projects between investigators are encouraged.

Student stipend support is provided through the Dean's office, AHA or NIH T32 (Dr. Mary Townsley).

Research Day will be held on Friday, Aug. 3, 2012, at 8:30 a.m. in the Medical Sciences Building auditorium beginning with oral presentations and followed by the Research Day guest speaker, lunch and poster presentation at noon.

For more information, please contact Natalie Kent at (251) 461-1548.

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