FROM THE CHAIR

It is a great honor to serve as interim chair of the Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery at the Baylor College of Medicine.

I also feel a great sense of responsibility in light of the history of the Department and its outstanding faculty, past and present, especially Dr. DeBakey himself. My objectives during this period of transition are to improve day to day operations of the Department, to develop a stronger sense of teamwork among the leaders of the Department, and to recruit new faculty in a few key areas while at the same time preserving and enhancing the many outstanding qualities of the Department, its faculty its clinical and academic programs and its affiliated hospitals. I believe that in order to succeed we must improve communications within the Department and with the outside world including the rest of the Baylor community, referring hospitals and physicians, our patients and the general public. Our Department is quite large and scattered over the Texas Medical Center so that it is difficult for each of us to keep track of everything that is going on. I hope this newsletter will help.

In order to clarify lines of responsibility and to put the best people in key leadership roles I have asked David Berger to serve as Vice Chair of the Department with special responsibility for quality and patient safety. I have also asked Dr. Berger to chair the departmental Appointments and Promotion Committee. Mary Brandt has agreed to serve as vice chair for education with overall responsibility for graduate medical education in our eight approved training programs and for medical student education. Johnny Chen has accepted the position of vice chair for research. All three vice chairs have made significant improvements in their respective areas, which are described in greater detail below.

We conducted a planning session in August focused on the organization and day-to-day operations of the Department, and recruitment plans for the current academic year. Following this, we created a new organization chart, which is shown below. We also discussed planned recruitments in general surgery, cardiothoracic surgery, vascular surgery, congenital heart surgery and abdominal transplantation surgery. We will convene similar planning sessions for education and research in the coming months.

We have made significant improvements in our resident training programs this year, especially for the general surgery residents and the residents in research. You’ll find more detail on these efforts on the following pages.

I plan to produce three editions of the newsletter each year in the fall, winter and spring. I would welcome your ideas and suggestions to make this an effective tool for keeping all members of the Department in touch.
Professor Yukihiko Nosé passed away on October 13, 2011 at age 79, after a long battle with cancer. Professor Nosé was a loving and devoted husband, father, medical technology pioneer, and educator. He will be greatly missed by his family and his friends all over the world.

Dr. Nosé was a professor of surgery in the Department since 1991 and director of the Center for Artificial Organ Development. During his career, Nosé authored over 1,100 scientific articles, covering various topics related to biomaterials, transplantation, surgery and experimental artificial organs—with particular emphasis on non-pulsatile blood pumps.

It is with deepest respect and admiration that we dedicate this inaugural issue of our newsletter to him.
ABDOMINAL TRANSPLANTATION

2011 marks the expansion of our clinical services. The center will now offer pancreas and expanded renal transplant services, creating a multidiscipline Liver, Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Center. New team members of specialized transplant nephrologists, renal and pancreas transplant surgeons, and transplant coordinators have joined our group in recent months. Ronald H. Kerman, PhD is setting up an immune evaluation laboratory to give us the advantage of an on site tissue typing lab that will work directly with the transplant team to ensure the patients are matched with the best possible allografts, giving them improved outcomes both short and long-term.

Jacqueline Lappin, MD, will act as Surgical Director of the Pancreas Transplant Program. Lappin ran the largest pancreas transplant service in South Texas. Charles T. Van Buren, MD will bring his vast transplant experience to the group, and will remain Surgical Director of Renal Transplant at St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital. Van Buren performed the very first liver transplant in Houston in 1985.

The entire team, including more than two dozen lab technicians, nurse coordinators and administrative staff were recently recruited from Memorial Hermann and UTHealth’s transplant program, transferring the entire program to Baylor College of Medicine and it’s affiliates.

In 2010, the Division performed our 1,000th successful liver transplant, while maintaining the highest liver transplant survival rate in the nation, with a one-year adult patient survival rate of 96.5 percent, compared to the national expected survival rate of 89.38 percent.

ST. LUKE’S EPISCOPAL HOSPITAL EXPANDS TRANSPLANT SERVICE

First pancreas transplant recipient goes home

Faculty members in the Division of Abdominal Transplantation discharged their first pancreas recipient from the St. Luke’s Cooley Transplant Center. The team, consisting of nephrologists, transplant surgeons and coordinators, were recently recruited from the UTHealth/Memorial Hermann program.

“There were no surprises, my team prepared me and I knew what to expect.”

The recipient, Randy Hernandez of Nederland, Texas, received a living related kidney at the same time, known as a Simultaneous Pancreas and Live-donor Kidney (SPLK) transplant. Randy received the kidney from his wife Tammy.

The lead surgeon, Dr. Jacqueline Lappin, has been at the forefront of this type of transplant, citing the overall improved outcomes and shorter wait-list time for this type of transplant. Dr. Lappin is one of only a handful of surgeons in the area currently qualified to perform pancreas transplants. Lappin moved one of the largest...
Abdominal Transplant

and most successful pancreas transplant practices in the Southwest to Baylor College of Medicine in July of this year.

Ringing Out

As he left, Randy rang a bell located in the transplant center. The bell toll is a symbol of hope for others patients, and of a fresh start for Randy and his family.

Randy explained, “Looking back, I didn’t know how bad I felt before my surgery, now I feel great.”

“There were no surprises, my team prepared me and I knew what to expect.” “I am especially grateful for my wife and her donation.” “My team was great, I wake up feeling good, I have energy and I don’t have to worry about my blood sugar swinging.”

CARDIOTHORACIC SURGERY

Dr. Hari Mallidi has been named Associate Professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. Dr. Mallidi comes to Baylor College of Medicine from Stanford, California, where he served as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the Stanford University School of Medicine. Dr. Mallidi will serve as Surgical Director of the College’s lung transplant program under Dr. Joseph Coselli, Chief of the Division. He will also be the Surgical Director of Lung Transplantation for St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital (SLEH) and additionally will have the role of BCM Director of Surgical Management of Advanced Heart Failure and Advanced Lung Diseases. Dr. Mallidi will work with Dr. Charles Fraser at Texas Children’s Hospital (TCH) to expand the adult congenital/hypertrophic cardiomyopathy program at SLEH and TCH. We welcome Dr. Mallidi, who will join us in January, 2012.

Dr. Kim de la Cruz joined us in August as an Assistant Professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery.
Dr de la Cruz was one of the first group of residents to complete his Cardiothoracic Residency in the joint three-year THI/BCM program, and stayed to do an additional year of Aortic Fellowship with Dr. Coselli. We are pleased to have Dr. de la Cruz with us, and wish him every success.

On November 11, Dr. Joseph Coselli, Chief of the Division, was honored by and gave the presidential address to the 58th meeting of the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association (STSA), held in San Antonio, Texas. Dr. Coselli has served as president of STSA since November, 2010. He also was an invited speaker at the Cleveland Clinic in October on “Advances in Endovascular Aortic Repair: Conquering the Ascending and Aortic Arch: Will Open Surgery Ever Be Necessary Again?,” and also at the Heart Valve Summit of the American Association of Thoracic Surgery in Chicago, where he spoke on, “The Aortic Valve and Root: Pathoanatomy.”

CONGENITAL HEART SURGERY

The pediatric heart failure and ventricular assist device program at Texas Children’s Hospital is the largest and most complete in the United States. It began when Dr. Denton Cooley performed the first successful pediatric heart transplant operation in an infant in 1984. Since then, Texas Children’s has gained vast experience with pediatric heart transplantation. Currently, all four faculty surgeons perform pediatric heart transplantation.

Starting with early work done by Dr. O.H. Frazier, Texas Children’s has developed the most complete pediatric ventricular assist device program in the world offering every device currently available to a pediatric population.

In 2004, Dr. Charles Fraser implanted the first DeBakey Child Ventricular Assist Device (VAD) in the world. Between 2007 and 2010, he also served as National Principal Investigator on the only prospective pediatric VAD trial ever conducted in the world (Berlin Heart trial). With pediatric cardiac surgeon Dr. David Morales leading the way, Texas Children’s has implanted more Berlin Heart VAD’s and has placed more HeartMate II VAD’s in children than any pediatric hospital in North America. Texas Children’s was the first pediatric hospital to discharge a child being supported with such a device so he could wait at home for a donor heart.

Texas Children’s is the first pediatric hospital to complete the first and second phase of certification to implant the SynCardia Total Artificial Heart as a bridge to transplant for their patients. On May 22, 2011, Texas Children’s became the first pediatric hospital in the world to implant the SynCardia temporary Total Artificial Heart into the chest of 17-year-old Jordan Merecka.
Congenital Heart Surgery

Later, Merecka was able to go home wearing the Freedom portable driver. This battery operated, 13.5-lb portable power supply allowed him to move around freely while he awaited a donor heart, which he received on October 29.

For more information on congenital heart surgery at Texas Children’s Hospital please visit www.texaschildrens.org.

GENERAL SURGERY

This has been an exciting year for the Division of General Surgery in terms of clinical care, education, and research. David Berger, MD, MHCM has been awarded a 15 million dollar grant from Veterans Integrated Service Network 16 to establish the Systems and Workflow Improvements Flexible Team (SWIFT-Health). The goal of SWIFT-Health is to hire systems engineers to work on increasing safety, quality, and efficiency in health care. Dr. Berger is partnering with the Houston Center of Excellence in Health Services Research, the University of Houston, and Texas A&M to improve health care delivery throughout the region.

Michael Liang, MD, who was recruited to the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) in 2010, has established a multidisciplinary hernia center. According to Dr. Liang, “hernias are one of the most common procedures performed such that even small improvements in outcomes and patient satisfaction can result in substantive improvements in the overall health care system. Not to mention improving the quality of life of our patients!” Dr. Liang has led a team that has implemented standardized pre-operative screening to decrease unnecessary re-operations, developed novel surgical techniques for laparoscopic ventral hernia repair which has decreased recurrences and pseudo-recurrences, integrated surgical bundles in treating complex abdominal wall reconstruction to decrease surgical site infections and recurrences, and carefully tracked patient functional status to improve the long-term satisfaction of treated patients. Projects are underway to improve peri-operative pain management, to improve treatment of chronic pain following hernia surgery, to develop guidelines to decrease re-operations and mesh explantation, and to prevent incisional hernias. In the past year, the hernia team at MEDVAMC has performed outcomes research in laparoscopic ventral hernia repair and stoma site hernia formation. The hernia research has yielded twenty-two abstracts and twelve manuscripts to be presented and published nationally this academic year. The hernia group has received several grants including $130,000 to evaluate the outcomes and results of biological mesh. Additional grants to evaluate outcomes in stoma reversal (both surgical site infections and hernia formation), one for $100,000 and another for $130,000 are being finalized.
The hernia group is in discussion for a major grant to evaluate outcomes and results in open ventral hernias for over $300,000.

James Suliburk, MD has developed a multidisciplinary endocrine program at Ben Taub General Hospital (BTGH). The Endocrine Surgery Program at BTGH performs in excess of 100 cases annually of thyroidectomy, parathyroidectomy, and adrenalectomy. All aspects of endocrine surgical disease including compressive and sub-sternal thyroid goiter, papillary, medullary, and follicular thyroid cancer, Multiple endocrine neoplasia (MEN I, MEN IIa), hyperparathyroidism, benign and malignant adrenal tumors, extra-adrenal pheochromocytoma, insulinoma, gastrinoma, and carcinoid tumors are treated. The program has integrated state-of-the-art minimally invasive techniques into the treatment of endocrine surgical disease and performs minimally invasive thyroidectomy, parathyroidectomy, laparoscopic adrenalectomy and laparoscopic enucleation of neuroendocrine pancreas tumors. Laparoscopic adrenalectomy for tumors <3 cm and with favorable radiologic characterization is performed via single incision laparoscopic technique and this has become the preferred approach in treating primary hyperaldosteronism due to adrenal adenoma (Conn’s Syndrome). Laparoscopic adrenalectomy is the preferred approach to treat tumors of the adrenal gland when they are characterized as benign by preoperative radiologic assessment and has been successfully used to remove pheochromocytomas as large as 8 cm. Currently, Dr. Suliburk, is developing an endoscopic posterior auricular approach to perform thyroidectomy and parathyroidectomy in a “scarless” fashion. He is also developing a clinical database and a tissue bank to facilitate research.

In 2008, through the hard work of Samir Awad, MD, the Critical Care Fellowship Program received accreditation from the ACGME. The Surgical Critical Care Program’s mission is to provide fellows with a broad-based education in all phases of SCC and allow fellows to develop advanced proficiency in the management of critically ill surgical patients specifically as they relate to hemodynamic instability, multiple organ failure and complex co-existing medical problems; to develop the qualifications necessary to supervise a SCC unit; and to conduct scholarly activities in SCC. This is accomplished through a large and diverse patient population in our three affiliated hospitals MEDVAMC, BTGH, and Texas Children’s Hospital. To date, four fellows have successfully completed the program and are currently in practice. This year we have two former Baylor General Surgery Residents in the program. Drs. Natasha Becker, and Bindi Naik are both doing an outstanding job. For the 2012 academic year, we have matched two fellows, Meredith Knofsky from the University of Florida at Jacksonville and Ryan Helmick from Washington University St. Louis.
In the first quarter of the academic year, members of the Elkins Pancreas Center have continued to be very active in clinical and translational research challenging established concepts and applying the latest technology to advance the care of patients with pancreatic disease. Drs. Silberfein, Artinyan, and Fisher published two articles describing a large series of patients undergoing pancreas resection without routine intraperitoneal drainage or nasogastric tubes.\(^1\,\^2\) For decades, it has been surgical dogma that a drain needs to be placed near the pancreatic anastomosis or transection margin after pancreas resection. We have challenged this concept and preliminary data indicates that pancreas resection without drains may be safe. This Fall, members of the Elkins Pancreas Center successfully coordinated and launched a randomized prospective trial which will involve not only our Center but also over a dozen additional academic medical centers to definitively address this question.

Our team has further developed our focus on immunotherapy for pancreas cancer. We are currently offering patients who have undergone resection of pancreas cancer the opportunity to participate in a clinical trial testing the efficacy of a cancer vaccine. The trial is open and enrolling at St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital and the Ben Taub General Hospital. In addition, our basic science research team continues to make progress. Dr. Leen from the Center of Cell and Gene Therapy has been collaborating with members of the Elkins Pancreas Center to develop an adoptive T cell therapy for pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma.\(^3\) Under an IRB-approved protocol, she has obtained T cells from patients with pancreatic cancer treated at our Center and expanded and modified the cells in the lab. The modified T cells specifically attack and kill pancreatic cancer cells from the same patients in tissue culture. In the near future, we hope to re-infuse the modified T cells back into our patients as a new immunotherapy for pancreas cancer.

**PEDIATRIC SURGERY**

Fifteen full-time, clinical faculty physicians and two full-time research faculty currently comprise the Pediatric Surgery Division, centered at Texas Children’s Hospital (TCH). Dr. Jed Nuchtern assumed the role of interim division chief in July, 2011 when Dr. Wesson became interim chair of the Department. Dr. Nuchtern is also the program director of the pediatric surgery fellowship program. Nuchtern recently convened a faculty retreat where long range goals of the Division of Pediatric Surgery were developed.

Research activities remain one of the primary foci of the Division. Fourteen basic research grants are currently active, with over one million dollars in annual funding.

In the past academic year, Pediatric Surgery faculty authored thirty-two peer reviewed publications, twenty-seven invited lectures, seventy-four presentations at national and international meetings, three book chapters and co-edited a book. Several of the presentations were recognized with awards.

Research is concentrated in the areas of the cell biology of neuroblastoma, fetal wound healing/vascular remodeling and clinical retrospective and prospective outcome studies. Drs. Monica Lopez and Timothy Lee are working on Master of Science in Clinical Research degrees to help foster the collaborative research programs in surgical outcomes and quality improvement for the Division. Increasingly, clinical research post-doctoral fellows and students are recruited to participate in the clinical research programs sponsored by the Division.

While the Division’s academic and research productivity has increased, clinical productivity has increased apace. Clinical services provided by the pediatric surgery faculty extend beyond the main TCH campus to the five Health Centers and the West Campus. Additionally, the service provides 24/7 inpatient coverage of the Ben Taub General Hospital neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and the NICU at St. Joseph’s Hospital. Last year, Pediatric Surgery faculty performed over 6,000 operative cases and completed over 10,600 ambulatory visits. In addition, the trauma service consulted on over 1,000 trauma cases. The TCH trauma program, led by the Pediatric Surgery service, was designated a Level I Trauma Center in 2010, under the leadership of Dr. Wesson.
SURGICAL ONCOLOGY

Surgical Oncology and Minimally Invasive Surgery is comprised of ten full-time clinical faculty physicians. The clinical program spans six campuses, including University General Hospital (UGH), Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC), Park Plaza Hospital (PPH), Ben Taub General Hospital (BTH), St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital (SLEH), and Baylor Clinic–Dan. L. Duncan Cancer Center.

The division recently recruited Dr. Juliet Holder-Haynes, MIS surgeon from Duke University, who started on August 2011 and is based at PPH and SLEH.

We have experienced tremendous clinical growth in all campuses. Clinical volumes have increased steadily at a ten to fifteen percent annual rate at the MEDVAMC and BTH campuses. In the private hospitals, we have increased clinical volumes at SLEH and established brand new clinical programs at non-traditional hospitals, including UGH and PPH. We are currently exploring other available expansion options outside the Texas Medical Center. Our Minimally Invasive Surgery Fellowship is fully funded from a training grant from the Foundation of Surgical Fellowships. We graduated two fellows in July: Dr. Seiichi Kitahama (who took a position as a PGY2 resident at TMH in Houston), and Dr. Anas Al-Kassam, who returned to Toronto to establish an MIS program. We currently have two fellows, Dr. Sigi Joseph Parakadan, from Kansas, and Dr. Frederick Amog, from New York.

The research activities of our division during the past academic year included over ten active research grants, forty-nine peer reviewed publications, ten book chapters, thirty-one presentations in national meetings, eighteen invited national lectures, and twenty-three international invited lectures.

Our group was also responsible for the organization of the last two Academic Surgical Congresses (which set records in abstract submissions and attendance), the preeminent annual congress for academic surgery worldwide. Moreover, through the Association for Academic Surgery, we have spearheaded the development of international programs and courses in Academic Career Development throughout the world, with exchange visitors programs and formal courses now established in Colombia, West Africa, Taiwan, Australia, France, and, starting next year, India. These international courses are the first of their kind.

VASCULAR SURGERY

Seven full-time clinical faculty physicians and two full-time research faculty make up the Division of Vascular Surgery and Endovascular Therapy. The clinical program spans seven institutions, including University General Hospital, Baylor Clinic, Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center,
From left: Julie Gilkeson MD, George Pisimisis MD, Ramy Gilani MD, Thomas Beadle MD, Panos Kougias MD, Peter Lin MD, Lyssa Ochoa MD, Johnny Chen MD, PhD, Carlos Bechara MD, and Bashar Ghosheh MD.

Photo by Lindsey Lampp

Park Plaza Hospital, Ben Taub General Hospital, St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital, and Texas Children’s Hospital. In February, 2011 the division recruited Dr. George Pisimisis who will work out of the VA Medical Center. Two additional faculty physicians will join the vascular division in August 2011, and October 2011, respectively. Dr. Carlos Bechara became the new program director of the Vascular Surgery fellowship program in May 2011. An RRC site visit occurred in October 2011 which granted a four-year approval for the ACGME-accredited program. Two graduating fellows in the class of 2011, Drs. Lyssa Ochoa and Thomas Beadle, took private practice jobs in San Antonio after completing the fellowship.

The research activities of the vascular surgery division during the past academic year included 16 active research grants, forty-one peer reviewed publications (an additional twelve publications are in press), twenty-nine presentations, eighteen invited lectures, and four book chapters.

On December 1, 2011, our BCM Vascular Surgery Clinic moved to a new location at 7501 Fannin Street, Suite 750, which is located on the 7th floor of the University General Hospital.

RESIDENT & ALUMNI NEWS

SURGICAL SKILLS LAB RECEIVES GRANT

The Michael E. DeBakey Experimental Surgery and Surgical Training Laboratories are happy to announce the receipt of a generous BCM capital grant. This grant will allow upgrades to the laboratories with new ceiling mounted and portable surgery lights as well new surgical procedure tables, autoclave and new instrument washer. These upgrades will ensure continued support of the department and college’s mission of education and research.

Plans for a Grand Re-Opening will be announced once renovations are complete.

HEATHER VASSER, MD, FACS

Dr. Vasser, a 2010 residency alumna, joined Columbus Community Hospital. Columbus Community Hospital is a 40-bed, acute care medical and surgical facility located in Columbus, Texas. Columbus sits 75 miles west of Houston. Dr. Vasser is a member of the American Medical Association, Texas Medical Association, and the Harris County Young Physician Society.

Click here to donate to BCM’s Resident Loupe Fund
Clinical and basic science research programs within the Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery continue to raise their standards each year. The success of the individual programs is recognizable through research funding, publications, presentations, training and academic services, which significantly enhance the national and international reputations of the Department. Since July 1, 2011, the Department has made several changes in order to increase the quality of research. A new internal research committee has formed to discuss our long term goals and strategic plan for our multidisciplinary research programs, which focus on disease-oriented translational research such as biomarkers, genomics and health care services.

We are continuously building up an outstanding research infrastructure and environment in the Department. We have collected updated research summaries from all faculty members and enhanced communications and collaborations in research among our faculty investigators. A new mentoring plan for junior faculty is under active discussion.

We have implemented a new management system for research track surgical residents. For example, a weekly research forum is organized for the ten current research residents. Several of our faculty members and other research experts have been invited to give lectures for the residents based on their academic needs. Leadership training becomes part of the research training.

Through department support, residents have been able to attend the Association for Academic Surgery (AAS) 2011 Fall Courses, the Fundamentals of Surgical Research Course and Career Development Course. A mentoring plan has developed for the incoming research track residents. It is exciting that several new research grants have recently been awarded to our faculty and many research papers have been published. We are continuing our efforts towards the goals of our research programs.

**FUNDING**

The Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery hosts local faculty and outstanding regional or national speakers, who present on a range of surgical topics in weekly grand rounds. Surgery Grand Rounds are held every Wednesday, 7:00-8:00 am at Baylor College of Medicine, Alkek Building, N315, One Baylor Plaza. Health professionals from other departments at Baylor College of Medicine and from other institutions are welcome to attend.

**September**

7 David Wesson, MD, Professor and Interim Chair of Surgery, Baylor College of Medicine, presented, “Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery 2011”

14 George S. Bisset III, MD, Edward B. Singleton Professor of Radiology, Baylor College of Medicine, presented, “CT of Pediatric Blunt Abdominal Trauma: Panacea or Pandora’s Box?”

28 James W. Suliburk, MD, Assistant Professor of Surgery, Baylor College of Medicine, presented, “Well differentiated thyroid cancer: current state of the art, controversies and future directions”

**October**

5 Jacqueline A. Lappin, MD, Associate Professor of Surgery, Baylor College of Medicine presented, “Solid Organ Pancreas Transplant: A Review”

12 Darrell Cass, MD, and Oluyinka O. Olutoye, MBChB, PhD, Associate Professors, Departments of Surgery, Pediatrics and Obstetrics and Gynecology, Baylor College of Medicine, presented, “Advances in Fetal Surgery for Congenital Anomalies”

**November**

2 Daniel Von Hoff, MD, FACP, Physician-in-Chief and Distinguished Professor, TGen and Professor of Medicine, Mayo Clinic, presented, “The Oncologists’ 7th Vital Sign: A Context of Vulnerability”

9 Kathryn L. Agarwal, MD, Assistant Professor, Section of Geriatrics, Department of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, presented, “Acute Pain Management in the Elderly”

16 Mary L. Brandt, MD, Professor and Vice Chair for Education, Baylor College of Medicine, presented, “History of the Surgical Glove”

30 George P. Noon, MD, Professor and Chief of Transplant and Assist Devices at Baylor College of Medicine, presented, “Cardiovascular Surgical Achievements of Michael E. DeBakey, MD”

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