BCM students graduate, join alumni ranks

BCM medical and graduate students in the class of 2013 gathered Tuesday, May 21, for commencement. Little did they know they would also be getting married.

In his speech, medical school class president Faheem Ahmed likened the journey through medical school to starting a relationship that leads to marriage. Both require a deep and long-standing commitment. He led his peers in a “ceremony” that included the exchange of vows.

Christopher McGraw, student representative for the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, also spoke at commencement, offering remarks to his colleagues about their training that has prepared them for their careers in leading research.

The commencement address was given by Dr. Harold Varmus, Nobel Laureate and director of the National Cancer Institute, who offered graduates his perspective on how they can make a difference going forward.

“He listed four issues to which physicians can bring a unique public and personal health perspective:

- Gun control. Physicians have special insight into the role guns play in homicide, suicide, accidental deaths and injury.
- Science and math education. “We need more than medical training,” he said. Research such as that done at BCM can contribute to healthier lives.
- The environment. Physicians have critically important perspectives to bring to this issue.
- Rising costs of healthcare.

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James Hackett is named chair of Baylor College of Medicine board

The Baylor College of Medicine Board of Trustees has named business leader James T. Hackett as its Chair.

Hackett is retiring from Anadarko Petroleum Corp, where he is recognized as spearheading the company’s success over the past decade. He stepped down as chair of the Anadarko board earlier this month and as CEO last year, when he announced the timeline for his retirement from the exploration company.

He succeeds Marc Shapiro, who served as Chair of the Baylor College of Medicine board since 2009. Shapiro will remain on the board and lead the Development Committee.

Jim Hackett is a tremendous leader in the business world and of people. He has had a great impact on BCM’s success as a board member and as Chair of the Finance Committee, and he will provide innovative direction for the College as Board Chair.

Hackett has been a member of the BCM Board of Trustees since 2004. He has announced that after retiring, he will attend Harvard Divinity School to bolster his communications and leadership skills. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Illinois and a Master of Business Administration from Harvard University.

The board also elected Judge Carolyn Dineen King as Vice Chair and Board Secretary; and Fred Lummis and Robert McNair as Vice Chairs.

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The event also included the presentation of special awards and honorary degrees.

Dr. Bobby Alford, Distinguished Service Professor of the Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery, and Dr. Bert O’Malley, Professor and Chair in the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology, received the newly created Leadership Award in recognition of their leadership at BCM for more than 40 years.

Honorary degrees of Doctor of Humanities in Medicine were awarded to Dr. Miguel Nevárez, Professor of Education at the University of Texas-Pan American who was instrumental in establishing the collaborative BCM and UT Pan Am Premedical Honors College, and Corbin Robertson, member of the BCM Board of Trustees and longtime supporter of the college. The honorary Doctor of Letters in Medicine degrees were awarded to Dr. Barry Coller, Vice President for Medical Affairs at the Rockefeller University, and Varmus.

Degrees were conferred to 82 students from the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and 191 medical students.

Being invited to speak at an international medical conference is an honor for a physician. For a first-year medical student, it’s almost unheard of, but Harrison Nguyen was able to do just that this May. He was invited to speak at the International Investigative Dermatology Conference, which was held in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Since he was a student at Rice University in the Rice/Baylor program, Nguyen has been conducting research on Merkel cell carcinoma, a rare aggressive skin cancer. Throughout his years of research with mentor Dr. Stephen Tyring of the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston, he has made great progress in understanding viral carcinogenesis, the virus that causes Merkel cell carcinoma. It took five years of work to characterize the oncoprotein that the virus expresses, and at the conference, Nguyen presented on the virus’ protein binding partners.

The ultimate goal of his work is to understand the virus and how it mediates cancer and develop a treatment that targets specific pathways of the virus. Because little is known about Merkel cell carcinoma, Nguyen was able to do some groundbreaking research. He has published papers in *JAMA Dermatology*, the *International Journal of Dermatology* as well as the *Archives of Dermatology*, among others.

After completing medical school, Nguyen hopes to do a residency in dermatology, and his exposure to the field and his experience in clinical, translational and basic science research will have him ahead of the game. He hopes to become an academic dermatologist who directs a lab while also seeing patients.
Baylor College of Medicine student Jared Rammell is taking the idea of biking to school to the next level by biking from Boise, Idaho, to Houston for his orientation into the new Master of Science in Orthotics and Prosthetics program this June.

Rammell embarked on his 2,100 mile journey on May 30th and plans to be in Houston in time for his first day of orientation on June 24, meaning he will average roughly 90 miles per day on his journey.

The new master’s program in the School of Allied Health Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine trains orthotists and prosthetists who design, build, fit and maintain prosthetic limbs and custom orthopedic appliances for individuals with limb loss and physical impairments.

Rammell, an avid cyclist who has competed in road races and endurance mountain biking events, decided to go into the field of orthotics and prosthetics at the encouragement of his wife, who is a nurse. He went back to school to complete his prerequisites and decided to come to BCM for his training.

He’s always wanted to do a trip like this, and his move to Houston allows the perfect opportunity, all while raising money for the Range of Motion Project, an organization that provides orthotic and prosthetic care to those in Guatemala who do not have access to these services. He hopes to raise $1 per mile that he travels. Rammell will carry a trailer on the back of his bike with camping equipment.

“I’m really looking forward to the program at BCM and I’m excited to kick start this next chapter in my life with an adventure by bike that starts in Boise and ends at BCM,” he said.