ADVANCED LIVER THERAPIES

Advanced Liver Therapies (ALT) is a clinical research center for the study of liver diseases. ALT is affiliated with Baylor College of Medicine and St. Luke’s Medical Center, and the mission of the accomplished research team, led by principal investigator Dr. John Vierling, is to conduct clinical studies to advance the science and practice of hepatology and liver transplantation. ALT strives to overcome the lack of participation of women of child bearing potential and underserved minorities in clinical research. ALT is involved with St. Luke’s Liver Health Outreach, which raises critical awareness of the need for testing for hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections and provides thousands of free screening tests per year throughout South Texas.

The ALT team includes the transplant hepatology faculty, a nurse practitioner, research coordinators, regulatory and financial coordinators, laboratory and pharmacy coordinators, and a data management specialist. ALT has the capacity for phase 1 studies requiring confinement of any duration. Over the past eight years we have conducted randomized, controlled therapeutic trials for chronic HCV and HBV infections, HCV-HIV coinfection, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, primary biliary cirrhosis, primary sclerosing cholangitis, and hepatic encephalopathy. These studies have led to multiple publications and to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval of four new drugs to date. Upcoming studies will assess antiviral therapies for HCV-infected patients with unmet needs. These studies will include patients with end-stage renal disease (ESRD) on hemodialysis, decompensated cirrhotic patients, HCV-HIV coinfected patients, and patients both pre- and post-liver transplantation. In addition, ALT provides support for investigator-initiated clinical research protocols. For more information, please visit us online at: www.stlukeshouston.com/alt

PROJECT ECHO

St. Luke’s Medical Center and Baylor College of Medicine are partnering to launch an exciting tele-health program, Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes), with world-renowned hepatologist Norman Sussman, MD. Dr. Sussman is triple board certified, has over 30 years of experience in hepatology, and has active interests in advancing the management of chronic hepatitis C and fatty liver disease.

Project ECHO is a tele-health program in which Dr. Sussman will assist primary care providers throughout Texas to identify and treat patients with chronic hepatitis C. The mission of this program is to enhance medical resources in communities that currently lack specialized care. The program uses multipoint teleconferencing to connect with community providers in a peer-to-peer format, and uses case-based learning to teach providers to deliver state-of-the-art medical care. The end result is a sophisticated medical workforce and improved health and health care in communities across the state.

The program has broad applicability across many medical specialties, and other ECHO programs, including surgical consultation, tumor boards, and psychiatry, are currently being evaluated.

For more information on our Project ECHO please refer to our web site at https://www.bcm.edu/departments/surgery/divisions/abdominal-transplantation/echo
DR. O’MAHONY NAMED SECTION CHIEF

Christine O’Mahony, MD, was appointed section chief of Renal Transplant Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine. Dr. O’Mahony’s responsibilities within the Department and at our affiliate hospitals will enable her to maximize the growth and development of the Renal Transplant Program at BCM.

Dr. O’Mahony is an associate professor of surgery at BCM, surgical director of Kidney Transplantation at Texas Children’s Hospital, and surgical director of Kidney Transplant at St. Luke’s Medical Center. She joined the Department in 2004 after completing a fellowship at NYU Medical Center/SUNY Downstate New York and a surgery residency at UT-San Antonio.

ADMINISTRATOR, DIVISION OF ABDOMINAL TRANSPLANTATION

Cynthia Griffin is responsible for the day-to-day operations of abdominal transplantation, which include the Kidney, Liver, Pancreas and HLA laboratory. She is responsible for faculty recruitment, financial analysis, budgeting, business development, and affiliate relationships.

Cynthia received her master’s degree in business administration from Texas Woman’s University. She joined BCM’s Department of Pediatrics, Hematology/Oncology as an administrative professional in 1997. In 2002, she moved to Texas Children’s Hospital as administrative manager for the Heart Center, and within a couple of years was promoted to the position of ambulatory manager for the Cardiology Clinic, where she managed the day-to-day clinical operations. Cynthia was later promoted to assistant director of business and research operations in the Critical Care Section, where she has spent the last three years.

HEPATITIS C VIRUS INFECTION SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS

BY GRACIELA GUTIERREZ

In an effort to prevent liver disease, doctors at Baylor College of Medicine are supporting the latest recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding screening for hepatitis C virus infection.

The CDC’s recommendations, which are supported by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, state that all Americans born between 1945 and 1965 go through a one-time screening for the disease with the goal of reducing the number of people at risk for progression to cirrhosis, liver failure, and liver cancer. Screening will also reduce the number of patients competing on the waiting list for a liver transplant.

FOCUS ON AGE GROUP

“Simply put, the baby boomer generation contains more than 75 percent of the estimated three million Americans infected with hepatitis C [virus],” said Dr. John Vierling, professor of surgery and medicine at BCM. “Since at least 70 percent of those infected have never been diagnosed, it makes sense to focus screening on this age group.”

Dr. Vierling, who is also director of Baylor Liver Health, chief of hepatology, and director of Advanced Liver Therapies at St. Luke’s Medical Center, said this type of infection usually causes no symptoms until liver disease is too far advanced and difficult to treat with antiviral therapies.

People with cirrhosis of the liver caused by hepatitis C infection have increased risks of liver failure and liver cancers. For these patients, liver transplantation becomes the only hope of survival. In America, the number of people with cirrhosis, liver failure, and liver cancer caused by hepatitis C infection has been dramatically increasing.

EARLY ANTIVIRAL THERAPY

“Screening allows for detection at the earliest possible time, which will increase the chance of successful antiviral therapy. This can result in a permanent cure of the infection,” Vierling said. “Our research unit, Advanced Liver Therapies, has been active in studies of new antiviral drugs to treat these types of infections.” The new antiviral drugs could be approved by the FDA in the coming months.

SIRA A. KHADERI, MD, MPH

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SURGERY

A native Houstonian, Dr. Saira Khaderi earned her bachelor’s degree in biology in 1999 from the University of Houston. She went on to earn her medical doctorate from The University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston in 2005 and a master’s degree in public health from The University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston in 2006.

She developed a strong interest in hepatology and liver transplantation in her intern year at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio. During her residency, she was involved in research related to complications of portal hypertension, and in 2006 she was honored with the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases Travel Scholar Award—an award given to accomplished trainees with potential for a career in academic medicine. After completing her residency, she returned to Houston and continued working in transplant medicine at Methodist Hospital, where she was an active member of the liver and kidney transplant programs.

She began her Transplant Hepatology Fellowship at Baylor College of Medicine last summer. Her research regarding outcomes of transplants in patients with portopulmonary hypertension has been presented at several major conferences, including the 48th Annual Meeting of the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) in Amsterdam and in the Digestive Disease Week (DDW) in Orlando, Florida. Her current research interests include hepatitis C, complications of portal hypertension, and liver transplant outcomes. She joined the Division of Abdominal Transplantation this July as an assistant professor.
PRESENTATIONS

F. BLAINE HOLLINGER, MD

PRASUN JALAL, MD
Hemochromatosis, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lecture, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas, August 14, 2013.

GAGAN SOOD, MD
Hepatorenal Syndrome, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lecture, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas, August 7, 2013.

RISE STRIBLING, MD

Liver Disease and Pregnancy - Part II, Hepatology/Liver Transplantation Conference, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas, June 24, 2013.

NORMAN SUSSMAN, MD

Cirrhosis, Resident's Lecture, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, Houston, TX, July 12, 2013.

What the Liver Tests are Telling You, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lecture, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, July 15, 2013.

Complications of Cirrhosis and Pulmonary Complications of Portal Hypertension, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lecture, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, July 17, 2013.

Pulmonary Complications, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lecture, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, July 22, 2013.

Obesity, Metabolic Syndrome, and Fatty Liver Disease - Why You Should Consider a Future in Hepatology, Department of Medicine Grand Rounds, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, August 1, 2013.

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lecture, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, August 12, 2013.

JOHN M. VIERLING, MD, FACP
Autoimmune Hepatitis: When First Line Therapy Does Not Work, 1st Annual GALA Conference, Texas Liver Institute and GI Health Foundation, Austin, TX, June 21-22, 2013.


Introduction to HBV, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lecture, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, July 8, 2013.

Hepatitis B Continued and Hepatitis B Cases, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lectures, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, July 10, 2013.

HCV - Part I, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lectures, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, July 29, 2013.

HCV - Part II and Autoimmune Hepatitis, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lectures, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, July 31, 2013.

Introduction to Immunosuppression, Hepatology and Liver Transplantation Didactic Lectures, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, August 7, 2013.

PUBLICATIONS


