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Brody school, others eye medical technology industry

The consortium's goal is to establish an organizational structure and a business plan to focus on the state's advanced medical technology sector.

The Daily Reflector

The Brody School of Medicine is one of eight institutions sharing a $100,000 grant to plan for a Center of Innovation in Advanced Medical Technologies.

The North Carolina Biotechnology Center awarded the grant, NCBIO, a state organization designed to help the bioscience industry become a source of economic opportunity, is coordinating the consortium of research institutions. The group not only includes the Brody School of Medicine but the Charlotte Research Institute, the Duke University Department of Biomedical Engineering, the Joint School of Biomedical Engineering at North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanengineering at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and the Wake Forest University Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

Technology transfer offices at the partnering academic institutions, as well as representatives of the state's regional economic development partnerships in Charlotte, the Piedmont Triad, the Research Triangle and eastern North Carolina will also participate in the planning process.

The consortium's goal is to establish an organizational structure and business plan to focus on the state's advanced medical technologies sector.

If the plan is completed and approved by the Biotechnol-
Federal law scuttles plan for new hospital

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

A law extending a children's health insurance program, signed by President George W. Bush on Dec. 29, also puts a three-year moratorium on construction of new long-term, acute-care hospitals.

A Rocky Mount company has withdrawn its bid to build a longterm care hospital in Greenville.

A change in federal law scuttled LifeCare Hospitals of North Carolina's plan to build a 60-bed hospital in Greenville's medical district.

Signed by President George W. Bush on Dec. 29, a law extending a children's health insurance program also puts a three-year moratorium on construction of new longterm, acute-care hospitals.

"As a result of that legislation, we are withdrawing the formal (certificate of need) application at this time," Kevin Cooper, CEO of the LifeCare facility in Rocky Mount, said Wednesday.

The moratorium gives federal officials time to draft new certification standards for longterm, acute-care hospitals, according to the Acute Longterm Hospital Association, a lobbying group.

The company was seeking a certificate of need from the state Division of Health Services Regulation, a prerequisite to building the new hospital. Cooper couldn't be reached for further comment.

LifeCare Hospitals of North Carolina, which is owned by a Texas company, had planned to build a $28.5 million facility that would cater to patients too sick for home or rehab care but stable enough to be out of a trauma-care hospital.

Per said in December. It would have employed between 150 and 200 people, drawing physicians from the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and local practices.

Greenville made an appealing site for LifeCare because it doesn't have a longterm, acute-care center, Cooper said in December. One in five patients treated at the 40-bed LifeCare facility in Rocky Mount live in Pitt County, he added.

LifeCare had Pitt County Memorial Hospital's backing for the project. It would have helped open patient beds and shorten the average stay for PCMH patients, Pitt Memorial President Steve Lawler said in December. It would have helped "create an opportunity to move patients to a level of care that's really more appropriate," he said.

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Public Forum

Question chancellor, AD's actions

Many have written letters of support for the actions of East Carolina University Athletics Director Terry Holland and Chancellor Steve Ballard. Those who still think there have been some improprieties should ask themselves the following questions:

1. Isn't it perfectly normal for the chancellor to receive an e-mail about every student who receives financial aid and/or gets a part-time job on campus?

2. Can we expect the chancellor to remember that his athletics director's 51-year-old brother was enrolling at ECU and had been given a part-time job (which I'm sure the athletics director had nothing to do with)?

3. Isn't it standard operating procedure to respond to an e-mail that you haven't read ("glad to have him")?

4. Aren't these the values we want to instill in our students: nepotism, favoritism and cronyism?

5. Isn't it customary and perfectly ethical to use funds inappropriately as long as you don't get caught and buy yourself out of trouble if necessary?

6. Doesn't the end justify the means?

You're doing a great job, Brownie (er ... Terry). Just for the record, alumnae is feminine plural. I guess ignorance isn't limited to us ax-grinders. Sorry, I've got to go, my turnip truck is coming.

LOWELL A. SPEIGHT
Greenville
Abnormal chromosome found by researchers linked to autism rates

By Linda A. Johnson  
The Associated Press

A rare genetic variation dramatically raises the risk of developing autism, a large study showed, opening new research targets for better understanding the disorder and for treating it.

Research into the causes of autism has focused on genetic causes because so many families have multiple children with the disorder. Thus far, only about 10 percent of autism cases have a known genetic cause. Boston-area researchers estimate the gene glitch they’ve identified accounts for another 1 percent of cases.

They found a segment of a chromosome which has genes linked to brain development and various developmental disorders was either missing or duplicated far more often in autistic people. The defect was inherited in some cases, but more often the result of a random genetic accident.

The results from the Autism Consortium study, released online Wednesday by the New England Journal of Medicine, confirm those of smaller studies by U.S. and Canadian research groups in the past year. The consortium verified its findings by checking two other DNA databases.

"They really did nail it," said Dr. Andrew Zimmerman, director of the Kennedy

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AUTISM
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Krieger Institute's Center for Autism & Related Disorders in Baltimore, who was not involved in the research.

He predicted children newly diagnosed with autism or other developmental disorders now will be tested for this defect on chromosome 16 and that studies of many more DNA samples may reveal other autism-related gene variations.

Already, the findings are starting to be used to give some parents long-sought answers to burning questions: What caused autism in their child and how likely is it that any future children also would have autism, long known to run in families?

"We've provided very compelling evidence that this particular small stretch of the genome provides an important clue to the biological roots of autism," said lead researcher Mark J. Daly, an assistant genetics professor at Harvard Medical School and an investigator for the consortium, which includes researcher specialists from 14 Boston-area universities and medical centers.

When the biological pathways involved are figured out, scientists can try to design drugs to target chemicals in the brain to treat autism, said Geraldine Dawson, chief science officer of the advocacy group Autism Speaks.

"I think chromosome 16 is now going to be a hotbed for autism research," said Thomas Lehner, head of the genomic research branch at the National Institute of Mental Health. "It gives us a very important lead."

Another study researcher, Dr. David Miller of Children's Hospital Boston, said the chromosome 16 variations increased the risk of autism a hundredfold.

But he said the disorder must be due to a combination of genetic variations since there were cases of people who had the defect but didn't have autism.

Autism, a complex, poorly understood disorder, is characterized by repetitive behaviors and poor social interaction and communication skills.

Research has mainly centered on genetic causes, and on whether it could be caused by the mercury-based preservative once used in childhood vaccines, which has been repeatedly discounted.

The number of children diagnosed with autism has risen steadily in recent years to as many as one in 150 American children, but experts are unsure whether its prevalence really is increasing or if the trend is actually due to a broader medical definition of autism.

For their study, consortium researchers scanned all 46 chromosomes from DNA samples from 1,441 children with autism or related disorders. They also scanned DNA from most of their parents and 2,800 other people, none known to have autism.

The researchers found a 25-gene segment of chromosome 16 was missing in five children with autism; none of their parents had the deletion. That shows that in some cases the genetic glitch is not inherited from the parents, but instead due to a random accident while an egg or sperm is being formed.

Another seven autistic children had a chromosome 16 duplication, but all but one had parents with the same duplication.

The researchers confirmed their findings by looking at DNA databases from Children's Hospital Boston and Iceland. The same defect was found in 1 percent of those with autism or related disorders.

It was found in just seven of about 19,000 Iceland samples from people without the disorder.

Thomas Lehner
National Institute of Mental Health

On the Net: http://www.nejm.org
www.autismspeaks.org
www.autismconsortium.org
EMILY DUPREE BRIGHT

Emily Dupree Bright, 32, died early Tuesday morning, January 8, 2008, after a courageous, nine-year battle with cancer. A memorial service will be held Saturday at 11 a.m. in Jarvis Memorial United Methodist Church. A Greenville native, Emily was born on Nov. 24, 1975, to Dalton D. "Skip" Bright and Judy Brewer Bright. She graduated from J.H. Rose High School in 1994 and left Greenville for UNC-Chapel Hill, graduating in 1998. After college, Emily began her career as a copywriter with Jennings & Co. in Chapel Hill. She later moved to the Stone Agency in Raleigh. Emily returned home in 2006, taking a position with the University Health Systems marketing department. Emily earned numerous awards for her creative work. Emily was preceded in death by her father, Dalton "Skip" Bright. She is survived by her mother, Judy Bright; sister, Kerri Bright Flinchbaugh and husband, Michael; and nephew, Elliott Dupree Flinchbaugh. Emily will be remembered by her friends and family as the magnetic force-humorous in wit and generous in spirit-that drew them to her, and as the adhesive force-steadfast and optimistic-who held them together. The family will receive friends on Friday from 6-8 p.m. at Wilkerson Funeral Home and other times at her mother's home. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Emily's memory to the Ovarian Cancer Research Fund (www.ocrf.org).

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Photo exhibit showcases UNC graduates’ work

BY CHERYL JOHNSTON SADGROVE STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL — As a family searched through trash for recyclables in a Mexican dump, Janet Jarman was taken by a distant look in the brown eyes of 8-year-old Marisol.

Jarman's camera captured the girl with her face glowing in the setting sun, smudges of dirt at the corner of her mouth and bridge of her nose. The photojournalist scrapped her other plans and went home with the family for the rest of the week.

That was 1996. For more than a decade, Jarman has followed Marisol and her family as they moved first to Florida and then to Texas in search of the American dream.

Jarman, a 1989 graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Journalism and Mass Communication, is among 31 former students featured in a special exhibit at the Ackland Art Museum that opens Friday.

The exhibit represents some of the group's best work over 30 years. Images from six highly accomplished photojournalists, including Jarman, are on display, along with mostly single photographs from 25 graduates and two student multimedia presentations created in Chile.

Jamie Francis, class of 1985 and now with The Portland Oregonian, captures a disappearing life on a historically black street in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Charles "Stretch" Ledford, class of 1986, takes viewers to Kenya, Mongolia and Zaire. Ami Vitale, class of 1993, brings the military tension in Kashmir to life along with the region's natural beauty.


For Jarman, photographing Marisol's family has been an opportunity to share the emotions of a large issue: immigration.

"I always want to put a human face on the issue," she said. "For immigration in particular, I've always felt that it's so easily viewed in a statistical manner. It's very easy, ... if it's not your everyday experience to deal with immigration, ... not to feel it."

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NCCU seeks repair money

Dorm heating fix put at $390,000

BY ERIC FERRARI
STAFF WRITER

DURHAM — N.C. Central University is requesting nearly $400,000 in emergency funding to fix a heating problem in a residence hall that forced the relocation of dozens of students.

The university is asking the UNC system’s Board of Governors for $390,000 in emergency funding to fix heating and electrical systems in 41-year-old Baynes Residence Hall. Late last semester, students in 27 double-occupancy rooms on the lower floors of the residence hall were without heat.

“Some kids had gone out to Lowe’s and bought space heaters,” said Bob Nelson, the UNC system’s vice president for finance. “It’s safe, but it’s not an ideal situation. There was heat there, but it wasn’t enough.”

Faulty steam lines were the culprit, according to a UNC system memo.

About 50 students were moved to other campus dorm rooms, and the university now plans to fix the heating problem using state operating funds and a salary savings fund.

Baynes is a nine-story, 85,320-square-foot dorm built in 1966. In 2002, NCCU officials planned to close it down upon completion of its replacement. That replacement, New Baynes Residence Hall, has been built and is now occupied, but a space crunch led officials to keep the original Baynes dorm open, Nelson said.

Now, campus officials expect to keep the aged dorm open for eight to 10 years because of space needs. Thus, the heating system must be repaired, Chancellor Charlie Nelms said.

“The whole thing could go out at any moment, so we have to take care of it,” he said.

The UNC system board will likely approve the funding request this week.
Gun law urged for college safety

Panel: Ban sales to the mentally ill

BY JANE STANCILL  
STAFF WRITER

North Carolina should do more to prevent people who have been involuntarily committed to mental hospitals from buying handguns, a task force on campus safety recommends.

A report to be presented today at Peace College will recommend that the legislature pass a law requiring county court clerks to provide involuntary commitment orders to the national background check database.

"People with severe and dangerous mental illness don't need to be buying guns," Attorney General Roy Cooper said Wednesday. "It's as simple as that."

The call for a new law is one of 11 recommendations to better protect students at the state's public and private colleges and universities, according to a draft of the report obtained by The News & Observer. Cooper launched the panel two days after a shooter at Virginia Tech left 32 people dead before killing himself in April.

Campuses will be asked to establish "threat assessment" teams to monitor students who show dangerous behavior. They'll also be urged to create and practice emergency plans, forge partnerships with local law enforcement and establish systems to notify campuses of an emergency. The report said faculty and staff should be trained to react in an emergency, and campus administrators and counselors should have better guidance on privacy laws.

Gun controversy

The gun measure is likely to get the most attention. It comes days after President Bush signed federal legislation that includes incentives for states that provide records of people who are prohibited from buying guns to the federal registry. That includes felons, domestic violence offenders and people who are deemed dangerously mentally ill to the federal database.

"It's very timely on North Carolina's part," said Paul Helmke, president of the Washington-based Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. "North Carolina could be one of the first states since this legislation has passed to start taking action on it."

At least one group plans to vigorously fight the proposed state law, said Paul Valone, president of Grass Roots North Carolina, a Raleigh-based gun rights group.

"Obviously, nobody wants guns in the hands of the insane," Valone said. "However, as these laws are typically written, they don't just encompass involuntary commitments. The way these laws will be implemented, they will saddle tens of thousands of people with a permanent firearms disability."

There is a provision in the federal law — and the one recommended by the state task force — to allow people to be eligible to buy guns if they prove they are no longer seriously mentally ill.

Helmke said that since instant background checks were required in the 1993 Brady Bill, about 1.4 million people have been stopped from buying guns from licensed dealers. But, he said, the system is only as good as the database. Helmke said estimates suggest as many as 90 percent of the dangerously mentally ill people are missing from the system.

As it is now, mental health information is provided on a limited basis to the federal system by North Carolina. The state shows only about 300 such records as of last year, according to the task force report.

The Virginia Tech shooter, Seung Hui Cho, was deemed a danger to himself and sent for treatment in 2005, but a judge's order did not appear on his background check. He was able to buy two handguns for his rampage.

Brad Wilson, chairman of the task force, said the state's campuses are generally safer than society, but there are always ways to improve. "Don't assume this is never going to happen again or it won't happen in North Carolina."

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force recommended that campuses:

- Establish teams that monitor students and employees who may pose threats to campus.
- Provide better guidance to administrators and mental health counselors about student privacy laws.
- Adopt emergency plans in conjunction with standards known as the National Incident Management System.
- Enter into mutual aid agreements with partners such as local law enforcement agencies.
- Practice and regularly update their emergency plans.
- Train faculty, staff and students as part of their emergency plans.
- Adopt multiple, redundant systems to notify students and employees in the event of an emergency.
- Form partnerships with local law enforcement and first responders for compatible communication systems.
- Create victim counseling services and provide regular briefings for victims' families in an emergency.

The group made two recommendations for the state:

- Prohibit gun sales to individuals who have been involuntarily committed by submitting that information to a national background check database.
- Establish a Center for Campus Safety to coordinate training programs, hold annual safety summits and share information on best practices.
SPONSORS WANTED

BY TIM SIMMONS  
STAFF WRITER

As institutions smothered in tradition, universities aren’t inclined to break with the past.

But for the right amount of money, they might bend the rules from here on out.

So in addition to old-school philanthropy, many are taking a close look at the kind of deals that have made corporate naming rights a staple of professional sports.

No one is about to slap the name of a bottled water company across the Old Well at UNC-Chapel Hill. But local universities are seeing the kind of money typically offered for “term contracts” at arenas and stadiums. Many would like a piece of that pie.

HOW MUCH FOR A NAME?  → 3D

“It’s not an aggressive pursuit, but we weren’t talking about this at all 15 years ago, and now you hear more and more of these discussions,” said Nevin Kessler, vice chancellor of university advancement at N.C. State University.

The trick is getting into the game without alienating wealthy alumni who have given millions to their alma mater.

Wake Forest University balanced the two interests in the fall when BB&T bought the rights to Groves Stadium for an undisclosed amount of money. BB&T will hold the naming rights to the football field for 10 years, but the Groves name will be prominently displayed at a proposed stadium complex.

Performing arts centers are also logical places for universities to consider corporate naming rights, said Rae Goldsmith of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education in Washington.

“On a scale of 1 to 10, I would say the number of deals like this that we see today is about a 2,” Goldsmith said. “But five years ago, it was zero.”

Universities have been slow to auction their landmarks to the highest bidder for a simple reason: Traditional philanthropy has worked well, fueling capital campaigns that

SEE NAMING, PAGE 3D
can top $1 billion. If the gift is big enough, the school often shows its gratitude by tastefully displaying a family’s name.

That stands in stark contrast to corporate naming deals in which marketing departments calculate return on investment. Some individual donors, by comparison, don’t even want their names used, and their business connections are often secondary to the gift.

A gift of $500,000 from Boddie-Noell Enterprises to East Carolina University in November is a good example.

The Boddie family has long ties to North Carolina and wanted to give back to ECU. After settling on a pledge to the East Carolina Heart Institute, university officials had to convince the family that a plaque showing the school’s appreciation was in order.

"It plants the seed for others that maybe they want to do something for the university," said Mickey Dowdy, ECU vice chancellor for university advancement.

Barely mentioned was the fact that Boddie-Noell owns several restaurant chains, including Hardee’s and Texas Steakhouse & Saloon, and might be considered an unlikely candidate for naming rights to a heart institute.

"Philanthropy and naming contracts are two different approaches, so you need to be careful how you go about it," said Hill Carrow, chief executive of Sports & Properties, a Raleigh company that helps put together naming-rights deals. "But you are going to see more universities finding room for both."

Not all schools are racing to embrace the deals.

Leaders at UNC-CH and Duke, for example, have discussed the idea but found no enthusiasm for it. They prefer to honor large gifts and repeat donors with lifetime naming rights.

"There is something very special about Kenan Stadium," said Matt Kuper, vice chancellor for university advancement at UNC-CH. "There would be a lot of resistance to that."

Besides, universities have plenty of things they can name the old-fashioned way. Hallways, atriums, lobbies, labs and even individual classrooms are fair game.

University of Florida researchers discovered a new species of butterfly and auctioned the naming rights to it last year. It fetched $40,800.

"Some types of donations will always be philanthropic," ECU’s Dowdy said. "Compared to a stadium, you aren’t going to get a lot of traffic at a science lab. Why would a corporation spend marketing dollars on that? That donation is philanthropic."

But Kessler said universities are wondering whether corporate deals will change the way alumni offer gifts. Alumni in their 70s and 80s are usually comfortable contributing to a school’s endowment fund, allowing the university to invest the money for future years.

"But baby boomers are very much about making an impact," Kessler said. "Their appetite for an endowment is not clear to us. They might say ‘I want to give you X amount of dollars and if I’m happy with how that goes, I might be willing to give you more.’ It would be a term contract."

Neither approach is free of risk. In 2005, Seton Hall University decided to rename a building and rotunda honoring Dennis Kozlowski after the former CEO of Tyco was convicted of stealing $150 million from his company.

And it is possible to shoot too high when naming a building for life. NCSU’s Department of Computer Science has been trying since 2004 to find someone who will pledge $20 million to have her or his name placed on the building.

The business school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison came up with an ingenious solution to a similar problem in October. In that case, alumni pooled their money and asked that the building not be named after a single donor for at least 20 years. In return, alumni offered $85 million.

"What individual person’s name would bring more brand equity in this industry than Wisconsin?" School of Business Dean Michael Kneter asked reporters on the day of the announcement.

That’s a rhetorical question. But perhaps someone with $86 million might offer a suggestion?