THE DAILY CLIPS

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ECU professor receives federal grant for research

By ECU News Bureau
Special to The Daily Reflector

An East Carolina University professor, in collaboration with the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Springs, Md., has been awarded more than $400,000 by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense to study antibacterial activity.

Dr. Rickey Hicks, chairman of the chemistry department in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, initially created the study in 2003, titled "Antimicrobial Drug Development."

The purpose of the study, which is funded through June 30, 2009, is to research a class of unnatural peptides that are designed to kill bacterial cells by punching holes in the cells' membranes.

Hicks and two fellow researchers, Jayendra B. Bhonsle in the Department of Medicinal Chemistry, and Divakaran Venugopal of the Division of Experimental Therapeutics at the Walter Reed research institute, developed the peptides while Hicks was serving as chief of the Department of Medicinal Chemistry.

As principal investigator, Hicks will receive $422,962, which will support his research and three student researchers at ECU. The students will determine the structural requirements for antibacterial activity, using nuclear magnetic resonance and other spectroscopic methods.

The WRAIR will receive $295,326, bringing total funding of the project to $718,288.

In August 2006, Hicks began working at ECU and was able to continue the project, in large part, because of the support of Col. Alan Magill, director of the Division of Experimental Therapeutics at the WRAIR.

"If not for Col. Magill's efforts and strong support, we would not have been able to transition the project to ECU," Hicks said.

"I am very excited to be able to translate this research to ECU and to take full advantage of the synergistic effect of combining the research talents and strengths of WRAIR and ECU," said Hicks. "WRAIR is a world leader in infectious disease research and drug development. Combined with ECU's program in pharmaceutical chemistry, the probability for a successful outcome is very high."

The goal of the research is to show that the peptides protect against drug-resistant strains of both gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria. If the peptides are effective in protecting healthy cells, and in curing infected cells, the compounds will be selected for clinical development. Hicks and his fellow collaborators would then seek to extend the funding for their project for an additional three years.

Current research at the WRAIR shows how healthy cells in mice infected with See ECU, B3
Continued from B1

particular bacteria are being protected, preventing bacteria from taking hold. This may prove to have important future applications, according to Hicks.

Due to their improved drug-like properties and increased stability, the peptides may be used to treat infections that are the result of bacterial, biological warfare agents – an area of research being examined by the WRAIR.

"It is exciting to be a part of this ‘cutting-edge’ research here in eastern North Carolina, which has the potential to protect both the war fighter and the general civilian populations from drug-resistant bacterial infections," said Hicks.

Collaborators at the Walter Reed research institute include Dr. Jayendra B. Bhonsle, Dr. Richard Borschei, Col. Alan Magill and Capt. William McCalmon.

Reimbursement book released

The second edition of "Principles of Healthcare Reimbursement," written by Elizabeth Layman, chairwoman of the Department of Health Services and Information Management in the College of Allied Health Sciences, and Anne B. Casto of Ohio State University, has been released.

The book was published by the American Health Information Management Association, which calls it "the go-to-text for health care reimbursement."

Survivors Day set for Thursday

Cancer survivors will be the honored guests at the Leo W. Jenkins Cancer Center's Survivor Day on Thursday.

The event begins at 5 p.m. with an open house and music. Dinner begins at 6:15 p.m. At 7:15 p.m., Dr. John Gibbs, a local neurologist and cancer survivor, will speak.

The first 50 survivors to register will receive $10 gasoline cards. There will also be face-painting and other activities for children, and a pirate painting by cancer survivor Doug Granger will be raffled.

The Leo W. Jenkins Cancer Center is part of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University.

For more information or to register, call 744-4929.
New clue to Alzheimer’s found

Researchers have caused Alzheimer’s symptoms in rats by injecting them with one particular form of beta-amyloid.

By Randolph E. Schmid
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Researchers have uncovered a new clue to the cause of Alzheimer’s disease.

The brains of people with the memory-robbing form of dementia are cluttered with a plaque made up of beta-amyloid, a sticky protein. But there long has been a question whether this is a cause of the disease or a side effect. Also involved are tangles of a protein called tau; some scientists suspect this is the cause.

Now, researchers have caused Alzheimer’s symptoms in rats by injecting them with one particular form of beta-amyloid. Injections with other forms of beta-amyloid did not cause illness, which may explain why some people have beta-amyloid plaque in their brains but do not show disease symptoms.

The findings by a team led by Dr. Ganesh M. Shankar and Dr. Dennis J. Selkoe of Harvard Medical School were reported in Sunday’s online edition of the journal Nature Medicine.

The researchers used extracts from the brains of people who donated their bodies to medicine.

Forms of soluble beta-amyloid containing different numbers of molecules, as well as insoluble cores of the brain plaque, were injected into the brains of rats. There was no detectable effect from the insoluble plaque or the soluble one-molecule or three-molecule forms, the researchers found.

But the two-molecule form of soluble beta-amyloid produced characteristics of Alzheimer’s in the rats, they reported.

Those rats had impaired memory function, especially for newly learned behaviors. Studies were also done on mice and when their brains were inspected, the density brain cells were reduced 47 percent.

The beta-amyloid seemed to affect synapses, the connections between cells are essential for communication between them.

The research, for the first time, showed the effect of a particular type of beta-amyloid in the brain, said Dr. Marcelle Morrison-Bogorad, director of the division of neuroscience at the National Institute on Aging, which helped fund the research.

It was surprising that only one of the three types had an effect, she said in a telephone interview.

Morrison-Bogorad said the findings may help explain the discovery of plaque in the brains of people who do not develop dementia. For some time, doctors have wondered why they find some brains in autopsy that are heavily coated with beta-amyloid, but the person did not have Alzheimer’s.

The answer may lie in the two types of beta-amyloid that did not cause symptoms.

Now, the question is why one has the damaging effect.

“A lot of work needs to be done,” Morrison-Bogorad said. “Nature keeps sending us down paths that look straight at the beginning, but there are a lot of curves before we get to the end.”
UHS employees work to set healthy example

By Tom Marine
The Daily Reflector

In a continuing effort to practice what they preach, some employees of University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina are focusing on their own health and well-being.

Kathy Kolasa, registered dietitian and professor of family medicine at East Carolina University, presented a nutrition initiative to the UHS board of directors last month, which revealed high overweight and obesity rates among its employees. More than 75 percent of UHS workers were categorized as overweight or obese during the 2007 fiscal year, according to the initiative.

To improve opportunities for healthy lifestyles, the initiative includes various weight loss programs, eating plans, monthly education campaigns, challenges and incentives.

"As an employer and health care organization, it is vital that we serve as models of healthy behaviors for our fellow employees, patients and community," according to a UHS employee wellness benefits document.

Shelly Merrill, nurse case man-

ager for Pitt County Memorial Hospital, is one of about 2,600 employees who competed in the Drop A Ton campaign last year.

During the last eight months, Merrill said she has lost 15 pounds because she wants to be a good steward for health advice.

"I felt like I was losing the battle," Merrill said, referring to her fight to get in shape. "Then the Drop A Ton program opened up and I thought it would be great fun to compete against other people. The incentives are great."

By making adequate progress in the program, Merrill entered into a drawing for prizes and won a Nintendo Wii game system. The campaign, which resulted in 11,000 pounds lost a year ago, lists its 2008 goal as dropping seven tons.

"It's never too late to make a change, no matter how little," Merrill said. "It can have a huge impact on your life."

ViQuest, the wellness division for UHS, operates two medically modeled centers in eastern North Carolina, one being in Greenville.

Scottie Gaskins, administrator of ViQuest, said nearly half of its members are Pitt County Memorial Hospital employees and their dependents. She said the facility offers a range of benefits, including well screens, weight management, nutrition therapy and wellness seminars, among others.

"None of us develop these habits overnight," Gaskins said. "It really takes a long-term commitment to make a significant impact."

Similar to the findings in the initiative, Gaskins said a culture change is needed to promote healthy eating choices. She said changing this culture demands looking at all facets of the problem and determining what needs to be done to create an environment that supports healthy behavior.

"It's about engaging leadership to support their employees who are participating in programs like this," Gaskins said, referring to the Drop A Ton campaign.

Gaskins said even though children learn about health in school, it is still up to the adults to provide them with healthy eating options at home.

"We need to engage the whole family unit because that is what makes a difference in their long term behavior," Gaskins said. "It's not a lack of education. It is a lack of motivation."

Tom Marine can be contacted at tmarine@coxnc.com and 329-3567
Study shows unhealthy lifestyles hurt economy

The Daily Reflector

Be Active North Carolina commissioned a study showing how obesity and unhealthy lifestyles are draining the state economy of more than $67 billion each year in avoidable medical expenses, workers compensation claims and lost productivity.

Ben Blankenship, president and chief executive officer of Be Active North Carolina, said at some point the community will have to prioritize healthy behavior, but it is not happening yet.

According to the report, the annual loss to North Carolina’s economy could rise to more than $75 billion by 2011.

“The culture starts at home,” Blankenship said. “There needs to be some partnership between parents and their children. It’s just as important for parents to receive information on why physical activity is critical as it is for children.”

As for schools, Blankenship said teachers must get their students moving in the traditional classroom environment if physical education budgets continue to be cut and physical activity continues to be undefined.

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings from “Tipping the Scales,” a study commissioned by Be Active North Carolina.

- Unhealthy eating and physical inactivity cost the state more than $67 billion each year.
- At the current rate, the costs associated with the risk factors for adults will rise to more than $75 billion in 2011.
- Decreasing the prevalence of excess weight in three percent of the population could save North Carolinians $152.5 million annually in health care costs.
- Excess weight results largely from physical inactivity and is a precursor to type II diabetes.
Pitt County Medical Society holds mini-internship program

Seven Greenville-area residents took part in the spring mini-internship program offered by the Pitt County Medical Society.

The mini-internships, held every spring and fall, offers community professionals an opportunity to experience the medical world by shadowing a physician as they go about their daily schedule.

Spring participants were Angelene Brinkley of the City of Greenville, Sterling Edmonds of First Citizens Bank, Pitt County Commissioner Jimmy Garris, Jenni K. Bogey of Jenni K Handcrafted Jewelry, Marcy Romary of East Carolina University, Chris Taylor of AXA Advisors, and Delano Wilson of the Pitt County Board of Education.

Participating private practice physicians were Dr. Rae Fountain of Atlantic Gastroenterology, Dr. Chris Hasty of Orthopaedics East, Dr. F. Doug Jones of Eastern Neurosurgical & Spine Associates, and Dr. Eric Lindbeck of Eastern Carolina Ear, Nose & Throat.

Participating physicians from the Brody School of Medicine were Dr. Hyder Arastu of the Department of Radiation Oncology, Dr. William Bogey of the Department of Surgery/Vascular, Dr. David Collier of the Department of Pediatrics, Dr. Hiram Gay of the Department of Radiation Oncology, Dr. Steven Powell of the Department of Surgery/Vascular, Dr. Roytesa Savage of the Department of Pediatrics, Dr. Joseph Zanga of the Department of Pediatrics, and Dr. Richard Zerl of the Department of Surgery/Plastic and Reconstructive.

For more information about the mini-internship, call 758-8833 or e-mail kbeanpcms@earthlink.net.
As college students in the United States pack up and head to Europe this summer to attend academic programs, a weak dollar and the high price of oil are making it tougher.

About 225,000 U.S. students will study abroad in 2008 in what many hope will be a life-altering experience to broaden horizons and develop independence.

With the greenback down by more than 20 percent against the euro and about 6 percent against the British pound in the past two years, many colleges have had to raise the costs of study-abroad programs.

Others are encouraging students to try less-expensive destinations such as Latin America or Asia rather than traditional but more costly European destinations such as France, Spain, England and Ireland.

At the University of Georgia, enrollment for programs abroad remains strong, said Kasee Laster, director of study-abroad programs.

But she said a weakening dollar has taken a toll.

"Some UGA programs, particularly those operating in Western Europe, have had to make adjustments in their budgets, and of course some have seen a higher increase in the program fee this year than has been common in the past," she said.

"Part of the increased costs are related to exchange rates, definitely, but almost as significant for some of our programs that move through multiple locations has been the increased cost of ground transportation such as coach rental due to petrol prices," she said.

Some 2,069 UGA students earned academic credit abroad during the past school year, or triple the number of a decade ago.

Laster said that Italy has long been the most popular destination, followed by Britain.

"But our fastest-growing region for the past two to three years has definitely been Asia, followed by the Middle East," she said.

At Georgia Tech, Amy Henry, the school's director of education abroad, said the weak dollar is making it increasingly difficult to run study-abroad programs.

"We've had to do things like reduce the benefits provided to the faculty or reduce group excursions or meals. We've raised program fees some, but only by a few hundred dollars, and even then we are still being squeezed."

Ellen Dunham-Jones, director of the architecture program, agrees. "We certainly are feeling the strength of the euro against the weak dollar. Prices in euros in Greece seem more or less equivalent to U.S. prices in dollars — until one factors in the exchange rate," she said.

"We have economized in various ways, and the students are always inventive in finding ways to save where they can so they can splurge where it matters most to them."

So far, Henry said rising costs haven't affected enrollment numbers.

"I think students look at this as being such an expensive thing anyway, so a few hundred dollars won't stop most students from participating," she said. "If the dollar continues to be this weak, though, we'll have to see what happens."

Besides the cost of the programs, even daily expenses are likely to give students sticker shock.

"There's no doubt that if a student studies in the U.K. or any of the European countries using the euro, the day-to-day expenses are expensive," said Lee Frankel, director of Academic Studies Abroad, a private company based in Boston that arranges study-abroad programs around the world.

International Studies Abroad, a study-abroad provider based in Austin, Texas, said it was forced to raise prices on about two-thirds of its euro-based programs by about $400 each in October to keep pace with the weakening dollar.

According to ISA, students must shell out $14,900 for a semester in Rome next fall, which includes tuition, room and board, while a semester in Costa Rica runs less than $8,000.

Students who have participated in study-abroad programs have learned the art of pinching pennies.

Kim Ybarra, a 21-year-old junior at the University of Dayton, spent three "great" weeks in Italy last summer.

"It was the first time I'd gone to Europe, and I found it to be very expensive," she said. "It was
always hard to do the math and to really realize that 3 euros is not the same as $3 but that it’s $5.

"I found myself running short of money before the end of the trip," she said.

Despite the weaker dollar and post-Sept. 11 security concerns, the number of U.S. students participating in study-abroad programs has increased dramatically in recent years. A record 223,000 U.S. students studied abroad during the 2005-06 academic year, up 8.5 percent from the year before, according to the most recent data available from the Institute of International Education, a New York-based nonprofit organization that administers study-abroad programs.

Experts say the surge is partly due to a spike in interest in foreign countries after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and also because universities are placing an increased emphasis on international studies.

Expenses are cheaper in places such as Asia, Africa and Latin America and often their currencies haven’t battered the dollar as much as the euro and the pound.

Studies show that enrollment in programs in alternative destinations outside Europe has been particularly healthy over the past few years where the dollar isn’t as weak.

"For instance, we are encouraging students who want to improve their Spanish to look at our Argentina and Chile programs, where the dollar is strong," Frankel said.

The number of students studying abroad in Europe increased by only 4.8 percent between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 academic years, while those going to the Middle East jumped by 31 percent, Asia by 26 percent and Africa by 20 percent, according to a report by the Institute of International Education.

Besides costs, another huge factor behind the shift away from traditional locations such as England is the rise in English-language programs now available in places like China, Japan and France.

"In the past, there was a huge preference for Britain and Ireland and Australia, but today that’s changing because so many programs in other countries are offered in English today," said Allan Goodman, president of the Institute of International Education. "Years ago, one almost had to be fluent in French in order to do a semester in France, but that’s no longer the case."

In the end, Frankel argued that for many students, it’s still actually cheaper to study abroad for a semester than it is to attend their home institution.

"For instance, if a student attends a private college or university in the United States, they likely pay between $15,000 and $22,000 per semester," he said. "The clear majority of these programs are well below $15,000 so it’s a good deal."
Confidential, free testing of HIV status to be offered

Health officials recommend everyone take an HIV test, although they are focusing their efforts on people who have unprotected sex or share needles.

The Daily Reflector

County health officials are working with a local AIDS service organization and infectious disease physicians to offer confidential HIV testing next week.

The free testing offered by the Pitt County Health Department, the Pitt County AIDS Service Organization, and the East Carolina University Physicians is being offered in observance of National HIV Testing Day next Friday. It will be available at various sites in Pitt County, beginning Sunday.

In addition to the rapid HIV testing, the week will end with a block party featuring a live radio remote, talent show, food and games held on Friday at the Eppes Recreation Center.

Testing will be offered at the following locations and times:

- **Sunday** — Grimesland Health Assist Building, 550 River St., noon-4 p.m.
- **Monday** — Greenville Community Shelter, 1400 Chestnut St., 3-9 p.m.
- **Tuesday** — Pactolus Health Assist Building, 5688 U.S. 264 East, 1-4 p.m.
- **Wednesday** — Grifton Health Assist Building, 450 Queens St., 1-4 p.m.
- **Thursday** — Fountain Fire Department, 3642 Lynch St., 1-4 p.m.
- **Friday** — Eppes Recreation Center block party, 400 Nash St., 5:30-8:30 p.m.

County health officials recommend everyone take an HIV test, although they are focusing their efforts on people who have unprotected sex or share needles.

No appointment is required for the testing, but appointments can be scheduled by calling the health department at 902-2449.

For more information about HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases, call Ginger Dail at 902-2330.
Laurels — To Camp Rainbow and Camp Hope, where about 80 children with health problems participated last week in summer activities at the Don Lee Center near Arapahoe. The children came from 29 eastern North Carolina counties served by Pitt County Memorial Hospital to experience sailing, swimming, fishing, canoeing and other fun stuff. The one dart in this laurel is a funding shortage that limits the number of children able to attend the camps.
CHAPEL HILL — A Chapel Hill firefighter gives a thumbs up and a water-bottle toast as his co-worker casually sprays a raging trailer fire with a tiny garden hose.

Ramses, the UNC mascot, smirks in the foreground. A Duke Blue Devils banner hangs from the burning mobile home.

Jeanne Brown doesn't think the mural in the Firehouse Subs franchise on Franklin Street is very funny.

"To celebrate the burning down of a rival's campus is taking the fun too far," said Brown of Chapel Hill. She wrote to the company and town officials.

Company officials say they understand Brown's concern, but they don't intend to remove the Chapel Hill painting. A mural at the new Firehouse Subs on Erwin Road near Duke's campus in Durham shows Ramses' tail on fire.

Firehouse Subs was founded by two firefighters and raises money to support community fire departments.

"The last thing we want to do is offend anybody," said company representative Tim Goss. "It's just college rivalry, and we're trying to have a little fun with it."

Chapel Hill Fire Chief Dan Jones defended the Franklin Street mural.

"I believe most people in town recognize it as an artist's joke of sarcastic nature and do not believe it to be disrespectful," Jones wrote to Brown. "We are not offended by it."

But Brown plans to boycott the Franklin Street store until the mural is removed.

— Jesse James DeConto
June 6, 2008

MUSIC REVIEW | AMERICAN COMPOSERS ALLIANCE

Giving Voice to Poetry in a Concert of Choral Works

By ALLAN KOZINN

In its heyday the American Composers Alliance fostered several important institutions, most notably CRI (Composers Recordings Inc.), a label that specialized in new American music, and the American Composers Orchestra. But that was midway through the last century. These days the alliance works mostly behind the scenes, publishing, archiving and advocating for American music. In a way it has been hobbled by its success: American music just isn’t as hard to sell now as it was in 1937, when Aaron Copland helped found the organization. Some of it is downright popular.

The alliance’s public face since 2000 has been its annual Festival of American Music. This year’s edition, five concerts in four days, opened on Wednesday evening at the Leonard Nimoy Thalia at Symphony Space. Mostly the concerts offer chamber music, but opening night was devoted to choral works, performed by the New York Virtuoso Singers. (Midway through the concert the choir’s director, Harold Rosenbaum, was given the alliance’s 2008 Laurel Leaf Award, in recognition of his devotion to contemporary music.)

Ten composers were represented, but the range of musical accents was fairly slender: most leaned on the mildly dissonant, slightly jazzy shimmer that has been typical in American choral writing since the 1950’s. Mark Zuckerman, in “Two Browning Settings” (1998-99); Brian Fennelly, in “Soon Shall the Winter’s Foil” (1994); and Robert Ceely, in “Five Contemplative Pieces” (2000), used that style eloquently, although their works taxed Mr. Rosenbaum’s eight-voice choir. When the scoring was particularly intricate, as in Mr. Ceely’s work, ensemble attacks were ragged, and individual voices, peeking out of the texture, sounded tentative and pallid.

When the writing was more solidly chordal — as in Gregory Hall’s “April” (2005), Louis Karchin’s “To the Stars” (2003) and Edward Jacobs’s intriguingly morphing “When Time” (2007) — the singing was decidedly better.

A few works stood slightly apart from the shared harmonic style. One was Jody Rockmaker’s warmly harmonized “Yiddish Choruses” (2006). The only work here overtly to accommodate folk influences, it included a lovely lullaby, “Shlof Meyn Kind,” and a zesty setting of a classic Passover song, “Ma Noymfar Uma Nedaber.”

Another departure, heading in a different, more abstruse direction, was John Eaton’s foray into microtonality in “Duo” (1977), which treated contrasting biblical texts (God as both the refuge of the faithful and a source of retribution) with solo and choral sections pulling in opposite directions. Cynthia Richards Wallace gave a fearless, polished account of the microtonal solo soprano line.

Mr. Rosenbaum closed his program with Elliott Schwartz’s vibrant and at times appealingly cacophonous “Two Watterson Poems” (2004), with light percussion accompaniment, and Steven R. Gerber’s “Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought” (2003-4), a set of five richly harmonized settings of Shakespeare sonnets about love and death (mostly death). In these the choir’s performance was beyond reproach.
The Festival of American Music 2008 runs through Saturday at the Leonard Nimoy Thalia at Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th Street; (212) 864-5400, symphonyspace.org.