



women's health

A publication for those who support the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health

Making a difference across the globe

The University of Minnesota Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health is making a difference not only here in the Twin Cities, but also across the globe.

This past year brought physicians to Saudi Arabia and midwives to Afghanistan to teach, provide care and learn. Looking ahead, a trip to Scotland will offer an opportunity to broaden the scope of knowledge within the department.



Dona Maki, R.N. (second from right) with staff from the King Fahad Medical City during the department's first visit to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Women's Health in Saudi Arabia

Over the course of the year, physicians from the Division of Gynecologic Oncology traveled on three separate trips to the King Fahad Medical City in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to help the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Health establish a gynecologic oncology department, to provide patient services and to institute patient care initiatives.

The trips gave physicians a first-hand view of Saudi Arabia, both before and during the Islamic holy days of Ramadan, and a look into the differences and similarities between patients here and there.

"Some of the patients I saw wouldn't make medical decisions for themselves, deferring instead to the male family member who accompanied them," said Sally Mullany, M.D. "Patients were not comfortable undergoing a physical examination or undergoing

surgery during Ramadan, so I saw more patients the first half of my trip, before Ramadan, than the second."

Mullany, the only female physician from the University of Minnesota to embark on this trip, saw patients who had never before seen a female obstetrician or gynecologist, let alone a gynecological oncologist.

"Some of the women who I saw seemed a little hesitant at first, but they showed me nothing but respect," said Mullany. "The only real difficulty was the feeling of being lost in translation. We relied heavily on nurses for communication."

Much to the surprise of the physicians from the University of Minnesota, many of the women were open to preventative care for HPV and cervical cancer screenings.

"It was eye-opening to see how similar our take on women's health is to theirs," Levi Downs Jr., M.D., director of Gynecologic Oncology at the University of Minnesota, said of his trip to

continued on page 2

Across the globe, continued

Saudi Arabia: “They have a real interest in working with Western health care to improve their own.”

The hospital now boasts a new formal preventative care program based on a former program in the United States, which Downs helped develop.

Though the main goal of the trip was to help provide better care for women in Saudi Arabia, the trip also served as a tool to build and foster global relationships, establishing the University of Minnesota and the Division of Gynecologic Oncology as an international leader.

“We have some of the best doctors in the world, and we want patients from all over the globe to know they can come to us for exceptional care,” said Downs. “We believe this relationship with Saudi Arabia will prove to be very beneficial to both of us.”

The relationship with King Fahad Medical City can also grow through continued education, even giving advanced education to some of the female doctors of Saudi Arabia. Women are already seen as department chairs in the hospital, though there is not yet a gynecological oncologist.

“In the future, we hope the University of Minnesota can be a place for some of Saudi Arabia’s female gynecological oncologists to come visit and observe,” explained Downs. “Working together, these physicians could further establish a strong women’s health department in their own country.”



Pictured above right: Afghan midwife plays a role of a pregnant woman who gave birth then experienced a postpartum hemorrhage during a simulation with students

Below: King Fahad Specialist Hospital-Dammam in Saudi Arabia

Midwives in Afghanistan

A partnership between the University of Minnesota and the Ministry of Health in Afghanistan gave two midwives from the Women’s Health Specialists Clinic the opportunity of a lifetime.

In August, Ann Forster Page, M.S., C.N.M., and Carrie Neerland, M.S., C.N.M., traveled to Kabul, Afghanistan, to train health professionals, including midwives, in blood transfusions and blood product safety.

The week-long training session was part of an ongoing series to support the Afghan National Blood Safety and Transfusion Services (ANBSTS). *(continued)*



Across the globe, continued

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, largely due to postpartum hemorrhages. Health officials specifically requested training for midwives to combat this trend.

Over five days, Forster Page and Neerland worked with health care professionals from a variety of specialties and facilities. Topics for lectures and simulations ranged from infections and transfusions to limiting blood loss and hemorrhaging.

Even without the translator, the energy level among participants was clear. The visiting instructors noted the strength and vivacity of the midwives, especially. "They weren't afraid to contradict the male doctors," Forster Page noted. She remembered one woman who interrupted a pair of men discussing a case study to give them the correct explanation.

"They have to be so strong, so hungry for an education. They are very bold," said Neerland.

The cultural experience was just as striking as the experiences in the classroom. Both women quickly recognized the differences in culture between the United States and Afghanistan. They saw it most in the relationships between men and women as well as the evidence of tension even in the nation's largest city.

"I don't know if I've felt so vulnerable," said Forster Page. "You know you'll feel unsafe, but the reality of the experience is unexpected."

Neerland agreed, but that isn't stopping her from a return trip. Another training session is planned for early 2013, and Neerland will be among the instructors.

Both Neerland and Forster Page have become involved in efforts to increase opportunities for women in Afghanistan.

"It was clear the best chance for Afghanistan to move toward peace is educating women," said Forster Page.

Neerland, for her part, also hopes to use her experience to expand education here at home.

"We have to help out internationally and apply the lessons learned there back at home."



Sabbatical to Scotland

This spring, Peter Argenta, M.D., is embarking on the learning experience of a lifetime. A gynecological oncologist, Argenta will be traveling to Scotland to work with the Glasgow Royal Infirmary Canniesburn Plastic Surgery Unit in Glasgow, Scotland, followed by two other stops before heading home.

"This sabbatical will give me the opportunity to broaden my skills as a surgeon and bring these skills back to the University of Minnesota to further educate the fellows of the Division of Gynecologic Oncology," said Argenta.

While in Scotland, Dr. Argenta will study with John Telfer, M.D., who is the referral consultant for much of the United Kingdom and handles a majority of the complex perineal reconstructions for both the gynecologic oncology and colorectal services.

Many of the patients seen at the University of Minnesota Division of Gynecologic Oncology have been referred and need to have extensive reconstructive surgery. The scope of ability and talent within the department is abundant, yet there is not a physician trained in both gynecologic oncology and plastic surgery.

"As a gynecological oncologist, I see many patients who have had drastic surgeries where complex reconstructing is necessary," said Argenta. "The further knowledge and training in a plastic surgery will only aid in what we are able to offer our patients." *(continued)*

Certified Nurse Midwives Carrie Neerland (third from left) and Ann Forster Page (second from right) with Afghan midwives.

Across the globe, continued

While in Scotland, Argenta will not be limiting his time to one location. He will also spend time at the University of Edinburgh's Breakthrough Breast Unit, which is the only facility of its kind in Scotland.

The unit focuses on hormone sensitive breast cancer, which is the most common form of the disease. Scientists are working to identify cancer cells that change form once they've spread, which will help physicians with a more accurate diagnosis and ensure the patient receives the most effective treatment.

"I share the Breakthrough Breast Unit's interest in the function of estrogen and steroid converting enzymes with regards not just to breast cancer, but to the development and propagation of ovarian cancer," said Argenta. "The research they are doing may prove to be a breakthrough in the treatment of ovarian cancer, too."

Before he heads home from his sabbatical, Argenta plans to help patients in need by making a stop on the SS HOPE.

Project HOPE, which was founded on the goodwill of doctors, nurses and other medical volunteers, is a floating hospital ship that provides medical care, health education and humanitarian assistance to people in need.

"The last two weeks of my trip I hope will be spent working with fistula patients aboard the SS HOPE," shared Argenta. "From Glasgow to Edinburgh and on to the SS HOPE, I'm looking forward to returning to the University of Minnesota with further knowledge to share with fellows and colleagues alike."

Moving forward

The world we live in continues to seem smaller, yet gives us the opportunity to grow and learn from others who may appear very different on the outside, but are very much the same under the skin.

These phenomenal trips have helped shape — and will continue to shape — the care the University of Minnesota is able to give to patients. And they reiterate our similarities, even when we are worlds apart.



A website for for ovarian cancer patients and their caregivers to access all clinic resources in one location

Together, a website designed by researchers at the University of Minnesota and funded by the University of Minnesota Academic Health Center Faculty Research Development Grant, gives ovarian cancer patients and their caregivers access to all of the resources offered in clinic in one centralized location.

"When tough decisions arise, we want women and their families to be well educated on the options," said Melissa Geller, M.D. "With easy access to information, patients and their loved ones can eliminate time spent searching for resources."

The hope is the website will give patients tools to complete an advanced directive, learn about clinical trials and about their disease, as well as provide women an array of communication outlets such as journals or message boards. The goal is that increased communication and access to such tools will ultimately increase a patient's and her caregiver's quality of life.

When the pilot study is completed, the next step will be to bring the model nationwide. Ultimately researchers would like to make the *Together* website the standard of care for ovarian cancer patients, their families and health care teams treating this disease.

Dr. Geller reiterated *Together's* importance when she said, "This site will be a tool for all ovarian cancer patients, especially women in rural areas who don't have access to the support and services we offer here at the University."

The pilot study is still underway, and they are actively seeking study participants. Currently the study is only open to Stage 3 and 4 ovarian cancer patients. If a woman is interested in applying, she can contact Matt Gerber, Gynecologic Oncology clinical research coordinator, directly at mhgerber@umn.edu to learn more.

www.ovcattogether.org

Giving from the heart

Mother's experience inspires donor's dedication to the early detection of ovarian cancer

by Karin Miller

When he gives, Brian Pietsch strives to maximize the impact of his money and accomplish the greatest amount of good possible. And as head of state government relations and community relations for a major corporation, he understands the tremendous power philanthropy has for advancing causes.

So when Pietsch wanted to personally support ovarian cancer research, the physicians and philanthropic leaders he consulted kept pointing him in the same direction: to the University of Minnesota—or as he says, “right in my own backyard.”

Betty Pietsch, Brian's mom, learned of her cancer late—like the vast majority of women who have ovarian cancer. In fact, there is no early detection test for the aggressive cancer.

Betty Pietsch pursued aggressive treatment and spent some time in remission. But when the cancer returned, the family exhausted all treatment options. Five years after she began treatment, she passed away.

Ovarian cancer research—and in particular early detection research—became a passion for Pietsch and his partner, John Walsh. At the University, they connected with Levi S. Downs Jr., M.D., M.S., co-leader of the Women's Cancer Research Program in the Masonic Cancer Center, University of Minnesota.

“We're researching a new process for identifying proteins in the blood that may be connected to cancer at very low concentrations,” Downs says of a project led by colleagues Amy Skubitz, Ph.D., and Jianping Wang, Ph.D.

It sounded like a great fit with Pietsch's philanthropic intentions. Intrigued, he approached the subject with physicians he knew elsewhere.

“I was trying to validate whether the project made sense,” he says. “The doctors got very excited about it and talked about the impact it would have on their practices and their patients.”

That's when he knew he was making the right giving decision.

The state-of-the-art technology used in the project relies on a robotic “spotter” that deposits microscopic protein spots onto a highly sensitive monitoring device. Researchers are using this nanotechnology to determine whether a patient's blood contains proteins specific to ovarian cancer. The project could help detect ovarian cancer earlier and identify recurrent cancer.

Downs says Pietsch's gift was “instrumental” in initiating the project.

“Cancer is a familiar enemy to too many people,” says Pietsch, adding that two of his aunts also have suffered from the disease. “Investing in this type of innovative research is an invaluable first step in finding a breakthrough remedy that protects other families from the grief caused by cancer. The pain of losing my mother will always be felt, but I'm so pleased to be able to support this effort in her memory.”



Brian Pietsch

To learn how your gift to ovarian cancer research can make a difference, please contact Kathy Beenen of the University of Minnesota Foundation at 612-625-6495 or kbeenen@umn.edu, or visit give.umn.edu/cancer.

UMPhysicians chooses physician leader

Levi S. Downs, Jr., M.D., associate professor and director of the Division of Gynecologic Oncology, has been appointed the chief medical officer for University of Minnesota Physicians. Downs will serve as a physician and an administrative clinical dyad partner for the clinical practice at UMMC and UMPhysicians. He will work on care model development and integration, including service and outcomes, for all clinical care delivery across inpatient and outpatient settings.

Downs has worked at the University as a respected clinician and researcher since 1998. He has served as co-director of the Deborah E. Powell Center for Women's Health and co-leader of the Masonic Cancer Center's Women's Cancer Research Program. Downs has also been a member of the UMPhysicians Board of Directors as well as numerous UMPhysicians, UMMC and AHC committees and task forces, giving him the experience needed for this new leadership position.



Dr. Levi S. Downs, Jr.
UMPhysicians CMO

Honors and Awards

Ob/Gyn faculty recognized as “Top Doctors”

The following physicians were recognized in the July 2012 issue of *Mpls./St. Paul Magazine* as the Top Doctors for 2012.

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Carrie Ann Terrell, M.D.

Gynecologic Oncology

Peter Argenta, M.D.
Linda F. Carson, M.D.
Amy L. Jonson, M.D.

Maternal Fetal Medicine

Daniel V. Landers, M.D.
Tracy L. Prosen, M.D.
Kirk D. Ramin, M.D.

Reproductive Endocrinology

Mark A. Damario, M.D.
Theodore C. Nagel, M.D.
William R. Phipps, M.D.

Minnesota Monthly Magazine also recognized our physicians as 2013’s Top Doctors for Women.

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Carrie Ann Terrell, M.D.

Gynecologic Oncology

Peter Argenta, M.D.
Linda F. Carson, M.D.
Levi Downs, M.D.
Melissa Geller, M.D.
Rahel Ghebre, M.D.
Amy Jonson, M.D.
Deanna Teoh, M.D.

Maternal Fetal Medicine

Daniel V. Landers, M.D.
Tracy L. Prosen, M.D.
Kirk D. Ramin, M.D.
Preston Williams, M.D.
Yasuko Yamamura, M.D.

Reproductive Endocrinology

Mark A. Damario, M.D.

ZBI - Zero Birth Injury Initiative

In 2008, Fairview Health System was approached by Premier to participate in the Premier Perinatal Safety Initiative to:

- Improve perinatal (maternal and neonatal) processes and clinical outcomes
- Implement evidence-based education, guidelines and order sets
- Reduce and ultimately eliminate preventable birth injuries

Through ZBI, Fairview Health System stresses devotion to evidence-based best practices, communication, simulation and teamwork to prepare OB teams for any potential birth scenario.

Some of the press coverage of ZBI includes:

- Pioneer Press
- Modern Healthcare
- Health Leaders Magazine
- MedCity News

Congratulations, Phillip Rauk, M.D., and the ZBI team!

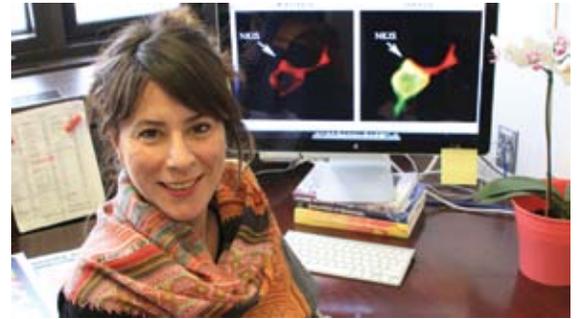
Clinical Care Award

Preston Williams, M.D., was recognized by the medical staff of the University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview, for his exceptional efforts to benefit patients. Selection criteria for the Clinical Care Award include providing exemplary care to patients; fostering an environment of collaboration, collegiality and teamwork; and demonstrating a deep understanding and respect for patients by modeling the values of dignity, integrity, service and compassion.

Alumni Service Award

June LaValleur, M.D., received the University of Minnesota Board of Regents’ Alumni Service Award. An 18-year faculty member in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women’s Health, the now-retired

Lavalleur is a proponent of lifelong sexual education and a dedicated advocate for mature women’s sexual health. She has served on the Medical School’s admissions committee for more than 20 years.



Dr. Bazzaro Receives Randy Shaver Research Grant

Martina Bazzaro, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women’s Health and the Masonic Cancer Center, is the recipient of a \$25,000 one-year grant from the Randy Shaver Research and Community Fund. This fund supports the cancer community in Minnesota by funding research, prevention, treatment and other programs relating to the Minnesota’s cancer community. Her research project is titled “*Targeting ubiquitin-dependent protein degradation pathways for treatment of aggressive ovarian cancer.*”

Bazzaro was also invited to speak at the **SUMO, Ubiquitin, UBL Proteins: Implications for Human Diseases Sixth International Conference** held in February 2012 at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas.

Outstanding Nurse for 2012

Dona Maki, R.N., was named one of 20 Outstanding Nurses for 2012 by *Mpls./St. Paul Magazine* for her care and commitment to women with ovarian cancer. Dona is a clinical care coordinator with the Gynecologic Cancer Clinic at University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview.



What's new?

New faculty and research staff

Joseph K. Hwang, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., will join our Maternal Fetal Medicine Division on the Riverside Campus in April. He currently serves as the associate director of the Perinatal Center of Iowa, LLC and clinical adjunct assistant professor at University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics.



Clinical interests: Preterm birth, prenatal diagnosis, ultrasound, CVS, fetal blood sampling and transfusion, cerclage, diabetes

Phoebe Hughes Leonard, M.D., will join our Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility (REI) Division in August. She is currently completing her REI fellowship and spent her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.



Clinical interests: all aspects of reproductive endocrinology and infertility, including assisted reproductive technologies, reproductive surgery and fertility preservation



Lisa Bowman, C.N.M. (left) and CaraLin Dees, C.N.M. (right), joined our busy midwifery practice at Women's Health Specialists.

Juan Abrahante, research associate, and **Dr. David Hermanson**, post-doctoral research associate, were hired to work with Dr. Tim Starr and Dr. Melissa Geller in our Ovarian Cancer Laboratory.



Silent No More Walk/Run

On September 8, 2012, the 13th Annual Minnesota Ovarian Cancer Alliance (MOCA) **Silent No More Walk/Run** was held in Edina. Thousands of participants came together to raise money and awareness to fight ovarian cancer, including the Gynecologic Cancer Clinic team. Members of Team U+unified handed out over 3,000 water bottles, worked the First Aid tent, participated in the 5K and spent time with patients and their families. In addition, the team raised over \$9,000 for the MOCA cause. Planning for this year's event to be held on September 7 has already begun with a karaoke fundraising night organized by Dr. Liz Dickson.

SAVE THE DATE



Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health Autumn Seminar

Friday,
September 27, 2013

Duluth Entertainment Convention Center
Harbor Side Ballroom
350 Harbor Drive
Duluth, Minn.

This one-day seminar will provide cutting-edge knowledge, best practices and innovations related to women's health.

Presented by: University of Minnesota Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health, Twin Cities and Essentia Health Obstetrics and Gynecology, Duluth, MN

For more info, visit:
www.essentia institute.org/obgyn

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health

MMC 395

420 Delaware Street SE

Minneapolis, MN 55455

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

TWIN CITIES, MN

PERMIT NO. 90155



*On My
Mind*

Dear friends,

At the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health we take pride in our participation in a variety of global health initiatives reaching places as far from home as Saudi Arabia and Israel.

One of these initiatives is a nearly decade-long relationship between University of Minnesota women's health professionals and health professionals from Poriya Hospital in Tiberias, Israel.

New instruments and materials introduced via our partnership have helped Poriya Hospital and its clinic better treat patients. We've helped establish new cancer programs and trained Israeli nurses in providing outpatient chemotherapy – a U.S. standard they previously lacked.

Over the course of a series of teleconferences and visits to Poriya, near the ancient Sea of Galilee, we have come to understand the different ways Poriya provides health care to their patient population.

In Tiberias, for example, Rabbis often participate in a woman's health care decisions. Women often discuss procedures and

treatments with religious leaders to receive approval prior to treatment. The solutions employed by nurses, physicians and other health care providers in Poriya when a first or second treatment option is unworkable, serve as a testament to the adaptable nature of treatment and care.

As academic leaders, the need to reach out worldwide in search of excellent care options for our patients is paramount. Often, it is all too easy for us to get lost in our own perspective. Our partnership with Poriya has opened our eyes to how excellent care can be presented in a different setting with different circumstances. Poriya has outstanding care and patient outcomes – among the best in the world for mortality and hospital care – and these are results we can learn from and replicate in our own environment to improve our own care systems.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads 'Linda Carson'.

Linda Carson, M.D.

Professor and Chair, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health

women's health Winter 2013

Published by the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health

Writers:
AHC Office of Communications Staff
Karin Miller

For more information, please contact
Sue Marshall
Administrative Director
612-626-3111
obadmin@umn.edu

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

© 2013 Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved.