Emory Pathology Leaps into the Top 3 in Annual NIH Rankings (See Comment)

An eye-popping $10-million increase in annual NIH grant awards lifted our Department into the elite Top 3 among pathology departments nationwide last year. With NIH grants totaling more than $33 million in the federal 2011 fiscal year, Emory Pathology vaulted into third place by a wide margin, joining Johns Hopkins and the University of Pennsylvania as the top NIH-funded departments of pathology in medical schools across the country. This represents an astonishing 35% increase in our NIH funds as compared to the year before, which is especially impressive in light of the current tight funding climate at the NIH, where only 10-12% of submitted research proposals are likely to be supported. The official rankings just released are compiled each year by the Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research, based on raw data from the NIH itself. Our Department was credited with 64 NIH grants that were active during 2011, including more than 40 RO1 research grants, 3 program projects, 3 research contracts, 3 training grants, and 4 MERIT awards (see story on page 2). In a broader measure of 2011 grant awards, compiled by the School of Medicine, our Department brought in $57.2 million in extramural support during 2011 from all funding agencies including the NIH, as compared to $49.8 million the prior year. A total of 50 Pathology faculty and trainees were Principal Investigators on grants or research contracts in 2011 that contributed to this landmark result.

Comment: Pathology's funding from NIH alone has tripled since 2001. This is an extraordinary testament to everyone in our Department who helps create an environment where world-class scholarship flourishes.

Two More Pathology Faculty Join Woodruff Leadership Academy

Professor and Vice Chair Volkan Adsay, M.D., and Assistant Professor Karen Strait, D.V.M., have been chosen to participate in the 2012 class of the Woodruff Leadership Academy (WLA), bringing to seven the number of members of our Department inducted into this select Emory leadership cadre. Established in 2003, the WLA is a training and mentorship program designed "to motivate professionals and managers ... to develop, exercise, and strengthen individual leadership potential." Approximately 20 new WLA Fellows are chosen each year from a highly competitive pool of over 100 nominees representing all of the WHSC's academic, administrative, and clinical operating units. Fellows pursue a four-month intensive program of networking, lectures, workshops, and retreats that emphasize leadership skills, teambuilding, problem solving, and a deep understanding of the organization and its strategic priorities. Past WLA inductees from Pathology include Angela Caliendo, M.D., Ph.D. (2005), Marilea Grider (2008), Deb Mook, D.V.M. (2009), Dan Brat, M.D., Ph.D. (2010), and Francois Villinger, D.V.M., Ph.D. (2010).

Upper photo (L-R): Volkan Adsay, MD; Dan Brat, MD, PhD; Marilea Grider, MS, MT(ASCP); Angela Caliendo, MD, PhD
Lower photo (L-R): Francois Villinger, DVM, PhD; Karen Strait, DVM; Debra Mook, DVM
NEW FACULTY — Mirko Paiardini, PhD

Assistant Professor Mirko Paiardini, Ph.D., is the newest addition to our Experimental Pathology Division, and the latest in a series of highly successful joint recruitments between the Emory Vaccine Center, the Yerkes Primate Center, and Pathology. Primarily focused on the immunopathogenesis of lentiviral infections, his research deals with mucosal immunity, Th17 cells, and other topics that complement the work of others in our Department. He was born in Italy and earned his Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Pharmacology from the University of Urbino in 2003 for thesis research on ubiquitin-dependent regulation and age-related changes in the erythrocyte membrane protein spectrin. But he developed an early fascination with the T-cell dysregulation that is a hallmark of HIV infection, and that theme soon came to dominate his subsequent research. This led him to spend two predoctoral years at Yerkes studying simian immunodeficiency virus infection (SIV), a non-human primate model of AIDS. He then joined the laboratory of Dr. Guido Silvestri at the University of Pennsylvania (2006-09) before moving with Dr. Silvestri to Emory in June 2010. As he now opens the doors of his own laboratory at Yerkes and begins his first independent faculty appointment, Dr. Paiardini already holds active NIH RO1 and R56 grants and has authored more than 55 papers and review articles, many with coauthors in Pathology. He is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking studies with Dr. Silvestri on why certain species of monkeys naturally resist the pathogenic effects of SIV infection—a tantalizing question that could point the way to new treatments for HIV disease. That work was reviewed in Science magazine earlier this month (335:1188-93) and will also be recounted by Dr. Paiardini in his Pathology Faculty Research Seminar on April 17, offering two superb opportunities to learn more about his scholarly interests and to welcome him into our Department.

CASE REPORTS

Associate Professor Cassandra Josephson, M.D., received this year’s Mentoring for Leadership Award from Emory’s President’s Commission on the Status of Women, for her inspiring mentorship of Assistant Professor Jeanne Hendrickson, M.D., of Pediatrics, with whom the award is shared. Both are specialists in pediatric hematology-oncology and transfusion medicine, as well as members of our Center for Transfusion and Cellular Therapies, and together they direct the blood bank at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. They received the award at a campus ceremony on February 23rd.

CASE REPORTS -

Professor Max Cooper, M.D., has been named the recipient of the 2012 Dean’s Distinguished Faculty Lectureship, regarded as the School of Medicine’s highest award for research achievement. In announcing the award, Dean Thomas Lawley hailed Dr. Cooper as “one of the most influential immunologists in the world,” citing his four decades of landmark discoveries that began with the discovery of B lymphocytes and have continued through today, fundamentally shaping our understanding of adaptive immunity. A member of both the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine, Dr. Cooper was previously an Investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and is currently the Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar in Comparative Immunology. He will present this lecture and be honored for his outstanding achievements at a School-wide ceremony on April 15 at 5:00 in the WHSCAB Auditorium.

Research grants awarded to two Pathology faculty have been elevated by the National Institutes of Health to R37 MERIT status, a coveted special category of long-term funding for investigators whose research competence and productivity are distinctly superior and who are highly likely to continue to perform in an outstanding manner.” Investigators cannot apply for this status, but instead are chosen by NIH through its peer-review process when grants are renewed. Professor and Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar Guido Silvestri, M.D., earned R37 for his work on why certain monkey species resist the pathogenic effects of immunodeficiency viruses. And Candler Professor Bali Pulendran, Ph.D., was similarly honored for his research on how dendritic cells launch and guide immune reactions. This is the second concurrent MERIT award for Dr. Pulendran, whose research on mucosal antigen-presenting cells received MERIT status two years ago. Together with an R37 grant to Professor Eric Hunter, Ph.D., for research on HIV transmission, that earned a 5-year renewal this spring, our Department now holds four active NIH MERIT awards—the largest number in our history.

The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Pathology (IJCEP), an open-access on-line professional journal that was co-founded four years ago by Associate Professor Shiyong Li, M.D., Ph.D., has been selected for inclusion in the SCI Web of-Knowledge, a searchable index of peer-reviewed journals that meet high standards in impact, influence, timeliness, and other criteria. Dr Li, a hematopathologist, was the founding Editor-in-Chief of IJCEP during its first two years of publication, and he continues to serve on its Editorial Board.

To contribute to the next newsletter, send an email to Donna Martin (dmart06@emory.edu)
Intra-Departmental Consultation

Submitted by Marilea Grider and John Roback, M.D.:

Emory Healthcare Medical Technology Program

The Medical Technology Program (MTP), located in the Davis Fischer Building at EUH-Midtown, is now in the middle of training its 4th class. The MTP has been highly successful during its short existence. The 17 graduates from the first 3 classes have all passed their national certification exams to become certified Medical Laboratory Scientists, and 16 of the 17 were hired by EML. All graduates hired from the first 2 classes have received good to excellent job performance reviews, and we anticipate the 3rd class will be similarly successful.

The Program was awarded accreditation by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS) through the hard work of the Program administration, previously led by Marilea Grider and Stacy Steward. Accreditation has had a significant impact on applications. As of this year, under the direction of Kimberly Randolph, the Program has now processed over 50 applications for 8 positions in the upcoming 2012-13 class.

The overall success of this Program could not have been possible without the tremendous efforts of over 80 departmental staff and faculty members (including visiting lecturers from CDC, CHOA, Grady and the VA)! In particular, we’d like to highlight those who have devoted at least 5 hours to teaching the didactic curriculum last fall. Among faculty, this list includes current and previous faculty instructors, Drs. Eileen Burd, Alexander Duncan, Corrine Fantz, Jeannette Guarner, David Koch (leading all faculty with 17 hours), Shi Yong Li, Ross Molinaro, John Roback, and Ifor Williams. We would also like to acknowledge Drs. Jeannine Holden, David Jaye, Karen Mann, James Ritchie, Andrew Young, and chemistry and hematology fellows who performed dozens of hours of teaching over the first three years of the Program. Several staff members from Microbiology, Blood Bank, Coagulation, Hematology, Immunology, and Chemistry logged tremendous hours teaching the didactic portion of the curriculum. Collectively the applied staff devotes hundreds of additional hours each year to the clinical portion of the curriculum, which is currently underway. All have contributed to the incredible success of this program, which currently boasts a 100% pass rate on the external ASCP certification exam. This could not occur without the concerted effort of everyone involved.

To contribute to the next newsletter, send an email to Donna Martin (dmart06@emory.edu)