Prize-Winning Quality in the Clinical Labs (see Comment)

Quality was a competitive sport for the lab professionals of Emory Medical Labs (EML) last December. With their eyes on a $1,000 prize offered by our Pathology Department, teams of EML staff from four lab sections rose to our challenge to carry out the best quality improvement project of 2013 by demonstrating sustained, positive impact on patient care. Each team presented its work and findings in poster form. The winning entry was selected by four expert judges, who included EML Quality Coordinator Pauline Etta; Chief Quality Officers Nathan Spell, M.D., and Bill Bornstein, M.D.; and Professor and EML Medical Director Jim Ritchie, Ph.D., who had originally proposed the contest. Competition was friendly but fierce, and in the end the Microbiology team (pictured) walked away with the coveted prize, along with the satisfaction of having reduced average turnaround times on specimens from the Emory University Hospital operating rooms by 53%. All four posters are still available to be admired in the F-wing hallway of EUH.

Comment: Congratulations and thanks to all the participants and judges in this year’s competition. One recurring message from the posters: Slow turn-around times often result from delays in getting specimens to the lab.

Emory Pathology Again Among the Top 3 for NIH Funding (see Comment)

Despite a dip in our NIH dollars, Emory was again ranked among the top 3 Pathology departments nationally for NIH research funding last year. In the latest rankings compiled by the Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research, based on data from the NIH, Emory Pathology investigators were awarded $27.8 million in grant support from the NIH during the 2013 federal fiscal year, which ended on September 30. That total excludes contracts but includes indirect cost recovery. Though $3.9 million less than in the prior year, it was exceeded only by Johns Hopkins and the University of Pennsylvania. In all, 56 Emory Pathology faculty and trainees brought in $44.5 million in research or training support from all extramural sources in fiscal 2013, according to the School of Medicine, an amount shared almost equally between Pathology investigators located at the School or at the Yerkes Primate Center. Emory’s School of Medicine itself ranked 16th for NIH funding in 2013, receiving NIH grant and contract funds that totaled $212 million.

Comment: This marks our third consecutive year in the top 3, and our sixth among the top 5. Pathology was Emory’s highest-ranked department by NIH funding in 2013.
NEW FACULTY— Geoffrey H. Smith, MD

Our new Pathology informatics expert, Dr. Geoff Smith, was already an accomplished computer scientist long before he started his Pathology career. A Virginia native, he had earned his bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering “with high distinction” from the University of Virginia in 1994, and then spent nearly a dozen years jetting around the country as an Atlanta-based computer and software consultant for various start-ups and established tech firms, including five years with the legendary Oracle Corporation. But he yearned to become a physician, like both his parents, so in 2006 he reinvented himself, first as a medical student at Emory, and then as a resident in our combined A.P./C.P. training program, from which he’ll graduate at the end of June. Now comes the best part: On July 1, Dr. Smith will join our faculty as an Assistant Professor and as our Associate Director of Pathology Informatics, tasked with taming torrents of terabytes in the name of medical science. He gets the exciting new career of his dreams, and we get a rising star with exceptional expertise in one of the fastest-growing frontiers of Pathology. Who knows? Pretty soon he may have the computers working for us, instead of the other way around.

NEW FACULTY— Sean Stowell, MD, PhD

A person could be forgiven for thinking that Dr. Sean Stowell is already a member of our Pathology faculty. As he settles into his new lab in the Whitehead Building this month, with a postdoc, technical staff, extramural seed funding, and active research projects that build on his expertise in glycobiology and transfusion immunology, he’s already published more than 30 scientific papers and reviews, sixteen of them as first or last author, and eight in the past year alone. But the truth is that Dr Stowell accomplished all of that during his training at Emory: first as an M.D./Ph.D. trainee in our Medical Scientist Training Program (2001-10), and since then in his Clinical Pathology residency, which he interrupted for a year of Transfusion Medicine fellowship, and from which he’ll graduate at the end of June. So there’s still time to congratulate him before he joins us as an Assistant Professor on July 1, when he truly will become a faculty member of our CP Division, of our Center for Transfusion and Cellular Therapies, and of the Emory Vaccine Center. A person could be forgiven for thinking that -- for Dr. Stowell and those of us who work with him -- the best is yet to come.

Woman of the Year

In a ceremony on March 26th celebrating Women’s History Month, Professor Jeannette Guarner, M.D., was honored as one of Emory’s Outstanding Women in Medicine. Sharing the podium with her was fellow honoree Dr. Patricia Hudgins of Radiology. Dr. Guarner presented a half-hour gazpacho of insights, highlights, and advice drawn from her experiences as an educator, stamp collector, microbe hunter, and infectious disease pathologist. Among her other current duties, Dr. Guarner was recently appointed as our Interim Laboratory Medical Director at EUH-Midtown.

ASM Election

Associate Professor Eileen Burd, Ph.D., has been elected in worldwide ballooning to lead the Clinical Microbiology Division (Division C) of the American Society for Microbiology, an organization that boasts more than 39,000 members, a third of whom are located outside the U.S. Dr. Burd will serve three successive yearlong terms as Chair-Elect, Chair, and Divisional Advisor, beginning on July 1, 2014. She is our Director of Clinical Microbiology.
The Association of Pathology Chairs (APC) has elected Professor and Chair Tris Parslow, M.D., Ph.D., to lead that organization for a six-year term that begins in July. Dr. Parslow, who has been the APC’s Secretary-Treasurer and a member of its national Council for the past six years, is now slated to serve as President-Elect in 2014-16, as President in 2016-18, and as Past President in 2018-20.

New Appointment:  Interim Chair, BMI

Professor Dan Brat, M.D., Ph.D., has been appointed Interim Chair of Emory’s Department of Biomedical Informatics (BMI). Founded in 2011, and with eight primary faculty so far, BMI has a mission of applying computational methods to medical practice that is well aligned with Dr. Brat’s own research on genomic and informatic approaches to brain cancer, and it offers exciting collaborative opportunities for our faculty and trainees. Dr. Brat will continue to serve as Pathology’s Vice Chair for Translational Programs, Director of Neuropathology, and Co-Director of our residency program.

An Important New Staff Recruitment, Too

It’s a great pleasure to welcome Pamela Saulsbury into our Department as our new Senior Human Resources Coordinator, beginning on April 21. Pamela is no stranger to Emory, since she served as Administrator of the Emergency Medicine Department in 2003-05, and then spent a year as Medical Staff Coordinator at Emory-Adventist Hospital before moving to the Kaiser Permanente Medical Group’s Atlanta branch, where she’s been for the past eight years. Pamela’s extensive experience in human resources, medical operations, physician credentialing, and recruitment within the Kaiser system make her an outstanding addition to our Department now. She takes over this important post from Kay Burnette, who retires in June after 25 years of dedicated service to Emory Pathology.

Interesting Links

Pathologists in the News

Colleen Kraft / Ryan McCormick / Drew Davis
Georgia Health News

An unusual transplant, an unusual donor

Carlos Moreno
Reuters

How big Pharma is slowing cancer research
- http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/01/moreno-cancer-idUSL1N0MT1O5201404012

Bali Pulendran
Nature

Systems Vaccinology

Francois Villinger
Nature

PET-CT imaging technique

To contribute to the next newsletter, send an email to Donna Martin (dmart06@emory.edu)
Photos from the 2013 Pathology Holiday Celebration held at the Michael C. Carlos Museum, December 2013

Our thanks go to Dr. Shiyong Li and Sue Rollins who were the photographers for this event. Individual images will be available on Blackboard in the Pathology Department's Photo Repository.

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