Devoted to noteworthy happenings at the medical school ... To stay abreast of school news day by day, see www.health.pitt.edu.

Japan Honors Sando
Isamu Sando, professor emeritus of otolaryngology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, was feted in his native Japan for his lengthy service in the field. In May, he was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasures, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon at a ceremony at the Japanese Government Office in Tokyo. After receiving the honor, Sando visited the Imperial Palace, where he had an audience with Emperor Akihito.

Sando, an MD, has served on the faculty of Tokyo’s Nihon University School of Medicine. The award was given in recognition of his work benefiting the Japanese and others. Sando joined Pitt in 1976, becoming a full-time temporal bone researcher and director of the Division of Otopathology. He has contributed to the basis of our understanding of the clinical anatomy of the inner ear, middle ear, and Eustachian tube.

—Joe Miksch

FOOTNOTE
Psst, buddy. Wanna buy a medical school?
The year was 1908. The Western University of Pennsylvania had just become the University of Pittsburgh. The unaffiliated Western Pennsylvania Medical College was church-mouse poor. Looking to grow, Pitt bought the med school for a paltry $100,000. Today, that’ll get you about 50 reconditioned defibrillators and a gross of tongue depressors.

BEATING HEART TRANSPLANT
One of the many pitfalls of transplantation is that organs, when they’re being transported and not performing their duties within the body, can fall prey to damage. A clinical trial led in Pittsburgh by Kenneth McCurry is testing a new device intended to keep a heart pumping en route to the OR.

The Organ Care System (OCS), designed by a Massachusetts company that’s also funding the study, was used to keep a heart beating for nearly three hours before it was transplanted into a 47-year-old Western Pennsylvania man. He was discharged in late April 2007 and is doing well.

Mccurry, an MD assistant professor of surgery in the School of Medicine and director of cardiopulmonary transplantation at UPMC’s Heart, Lung, and Esophageal Surgery Institute, says the OCS may greatly improve the health of the transplanted heart, leading to less rejection and shorter hospital stays. —JM
It sounded so promising in the ’90s—paperless hospitals. Computers promised more, faster, and better information for doctors and patients. But it hasn’t happened. Physician acceptance, high costs, and compatibility problems have kept paper the dominant recording medium in most U.S. hospitals.

At UPMC, Dan Martich (above), vice president of eRecord and chief medical information officer, has led a $200 million effort to leave the paper world behind. With more than 2 million discreet patient records, UPMC’s is among the most-digitized hospital record systems in the country.

Martich, a critical care physician and professor, shared his thoughts on technology and the future of medical records.

**On the benefits of electronic records**

When the big Vioxx scare happened [Merck’s anti-inflammatory drug was pulled from the market in 2004], within a 24-hour period we had letters out to each of our physicians with a list of their patients who were on Vioxx. Those are things that are just [unheard of] in the paper world—they don’t happen.

**On the likelihood of a paperless hospital**

I have a phrase, “not paperless, less paper.” I think there’s a need for less paper, but I think a truly paperless physician’s office or hospital is about as practical as a paperless bathroom. You need some amount of paper to mitigate the risks of losing power or losing connectivity. If we don’t plan for those kinds of failures, we’re deceiving ourselves.

**On the next frontier in electronic records**

The big frontier in electronic medical records is interoperability. That’s the biggest headache. There are over 400 different vended products [such as Cerner Millennium] out there on the market, and they don’t all operate on the same system. Even within the same system, the programming language may be a little different, from even the same vended product, from site to site.

**His question for the world**

If everyone believes this is the right way to go, that we need electronic records that run cradle to grave for every man, woman, and child, why isn’t it done already? —Interview by Reid R. Frazier

*Next Generation*

“She’s discovered two diseases since starting here,” Jerry Vockley says of Miao He, a clinical biochemical genetics fellow in the lab of the MD/PhD professor of pediatrics and human genetics. “That’s a good career for most people.”

He, a PhD, played a major role in unearthing a previously unknown enzyme-related disorder that leads to acute liver failure if left untreated. Her work on the topic was published in the July issue of *The American Journal of Human Genetics*. More recently, she helped identify a cholesterol-synthesis disorder that leaves patients with significant shortcomings in mental and physical development as well as severe skin problems. She’s preparing a paper on this subject for publication.

Amber Barnato, Janet Lee, and Wenjun Wang—Department of Medicine chair Steven Shapiro calls these three “rising stars with the potential for excellence in academic medicine.” They also are the first recipients of the Junior Scholars Award, a $35,000-a-year, two-year grant intended to ease the path to the peak of academic medicine for those with “inordinate family responsibilities.”

Barnato is an MD assistant professor of medicine and health policy and management who studies end-of-life care in hospitals. Lee, also an MD, is an assistant professor of medicine. She is investigating the mechanism by which red blood cell transfusion can result in lung injury in critically ill patients. Wang, an MD/PhD research assistant professor of medicine, seeks to understand the role a transcription factor called Foxp3 plays in melanoma.

Shapiro sought to create the award after arriving at Pitt in 2006 (see profile on p. 18). He says the money essentially buys time. It can be used to hire a research assistant or help with elder or child care. Lightening such duties, Shapiro says, allows an investigator more time in the lab. —JM
Wine v. Cancer

An agent common in vegetables and fruits, including black raspberries and red wine grapes, kills leukemia cells in culture while allowing normal cells to thrive.

Spurred by previous reports that identified anti-cancer properties in naturally occurring antioxidants called anthocyanids, Xiao-Ming Yin, associate professor of pathology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, obtained the most common type, C-3-R.

When his lab group introduced C-3-R to leukemia cells, about 50 percent of them underwent apoptosis, or programmed cell death. At a higher dose, it killed all leukemia cells. Normal cells were unaffected.

Yin’s results were published recently in The Journal of Biological Chemistry. —JM

JUST BETWEEN PEERS

When Rachel Hess was on fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Research on Health Care and considering a junior faculty position there a few years ago, she didn’t know how to negotiate for an academic post.

So she turned to a group of women who did, and eventually she accepted a position at Pitt. Hess is now an assistant professor of medicine.

“This was the group of people who told me what was in the scope of ‘askable’ and what was in the scope of ‘reasonable’ and what was in the scope of ‘a little out there but I could ask anyway.’”

The group is an informal collection of faculty members in the Department of Medicine that goes by the appellation “Research Women.” They meet every few months at swank restaurants near campus. (“We basically hit hot spots that can feed enough people,” Hess confesses.) They share tips on everything from gaining tenure to navigating family leave policy to finding dry cleaners.

The group is a form of “peer-to-peer” mentoring—a place where students and young faculty can find guidance from those at or just past their station on the academic totem pole.

At least one other such grassroots group has popped up on campus. Peer-to-peer is gaining momentum nationally, says Darlene Zellers, director of the Office of Academic Career Development, Health Sciences.

She notes that when young doctors and scientists lean on each other this way—and also seek out more established mentors—their productivity improves, and they have greater success in obtaining grants and getting published:

“When other people take you under their wings, it puts you at an advantage. If you think about it, it’s common sense.” —RRF

CLIFFS NOTES: THE CLASS OF 2011

The Class of 2011 consists of the usual suspects: multitalented women and men who are curious, compassionate, and accomplished. They wouldn’t have been admitted otherwise. That said, a few caught our attention.

The class has a U.S. Military Academy at West Point graduate, foreign languages major Jon Lewis, and a former Army medic, Tara Miller, who was named Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.

Steven Addo-Yobo helped build water towers in Ghana with an aid organization he founded and directed. Tiffany Behringer wrote her thesis at the University of Pennsylvania on the reproductive decision-making processes of Chinese immigrant women. Her work won her the W.H. Rivers prize for most outstanding U.S. undergraduate student research paper.

Gil Hoftman graduated from UCLA. He’d left the academic path for a time to tour with his band. His classmate Timothy Ng started college at 14 and never left. Now 22, Mr. Ng has at least four more years to go. —JM
Appointments

Larry Moreland, the former associate dean for clinical research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, is the new chief of the Division of Rheumatology and Clinical Immunology at the University of Pittsburgh. Moreland, an MD who also held an endowed professorship and directed the Pittman General Clinical Research Center and the Arthritis Clinical Intervention Program at UAB, helped establish the first FDA-approved biological agent for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.

Yoel Sadovsky is the new science director of the Magee-Womens Research Institute. He’s also a professor and vice chair for research in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences.

Sadovsky comes to Pittsburgh from Washington University in St. Louis, where he served as director of the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine and Ultrasound.

Sadovsky’s research explores the molecular mechanisms that determine placental differentiation during human pregnancy. “The placenta is the communication center,” he says. “How does it function during pregnancy? What are the potential injuries to the placenta that may adversely affect the developing fetus? How can they be overcome, and how can they be prevented from causing diseases?”

Sadovsky, an MD, says that the Magee-Womens Research Institute appeals to him because it encompasses all elements of women’s and newborns’ health—from the molecular and biochemical aspects of prenatal development through birth and beyond.

“It’s a really unique place in that way,” he says.

The new chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery, Amin Kassam, has been in the School of Medicine for nearly a decade. He had held the position in an interim capacity, beginning in 2006, in the wake of L. Dade Lunsford’s decision to step down to spend more time in the clinic.

Kassam, an MD, also directs the UPMC Center for Cranial Nerve Disorders and codirects the Center for Cranial Base Surgery. His surgical career has focused on cranial nerve disorders. In recent years, he has led the development of endonasal cranial skull base surgery, which allows for the removal of tumors, pituitary lesions, and vascular anomalies through the nostrils. This innovative procedure has garnered Kassam international recognition, as has his experience with microvascular decompression surgery, a procedure that relieves facial pain, throat pain, tinnitus, and deep ear pain. —JM

MAGICAL MYSTERY MRI

Standing in the MRI room of Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC is like being underwater. Minus the water. An octopus, some angelfish and starfish, and a slew of other painted creatures drift along blue walls. Colorful coral completes the feel. When the lights are dimmed for an MRI procedure, the room seems to come alive. The Indiana University of Pennsylvania Art Education Student Association created this peaceful aquatic world for young patients at the request of Children’s radiology department. The artwork relaxes children and has reduced the need for sedatives.

—Matt Minczeski