

### **Mustafa al'Absi, Ph.D. Named Founding Director of DMRI**

Mustafa al'Absi, Ph.D. has been named the first director of the new Duluth Medical Research Institute (DMRI) at the University of Minnesota Medical School – Duluth Campus.

Announcing the appointment, Gary L. Davis, Ph.D., senior associate dean of the medical school campus, attributed his selection of al'Absi to his strong biological, behavioral and clinical research skills and his prominence within the national scientific community. “Professor al'Absi's research crosses many disciplines,” he said, “and his excellent regional, national and international reputation will raise the visibility of our research achievements, expand our research base and strengthen our ability to develop more research funding.”

al'Absi has secured funding for research from such national organizations as the National Institutes of Health (NIH); National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the American Heart Association. This month Davis also announced that al'Absi and a national team received a \$1.6 million, four-year grant from the NIH for collaborative research that will quantify the physical connection between stress and addictive substances.

According to Davis, the concept of an institute will help leverage existing and future resources to create collaborative relationships among researchers from multiple biomedical and clinical disciplines at the university and at community health agencies. “We plan to develop groundbreaking programs in biomedical and health research as well as clinical research programs to translate research discoveries,” he said.

“The research community in the Medical School welcomes this new institute. We look forward to positive effects on collaboration between the two campuses of the school,” said Vice Dean for Research of the University of Minnesota Medical School Charles Moldow, M.D. “We expect Dr. al'Absi to be an outstanding director for this new institute.”

“Extending the collaboration between the pharmacy and medical schools and other departments here on the Duluth campus into the research arena is very important,” said Randall D. Seifert, Pharm.D., senior associate dean and professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice and Pharmaceutical Sciences. “Because funding for research is limited, anything that we can do to maximize the collaborative effort of our work makes us more competitive with other institutions seeking research funding.”

“Ultimately we want to advance new therapies for treating disease that will improve quality of life. Collaboration is the key to achieving that,” al'Absi said. “A research institute that will attract outstanding transdisciplinary scientists and provide unique opportunities for graduate and professional fellows to conduct research is one way to make that happen.”

### **Jean Regal, Ph.D. Named Director of Women's Mentoring Program**

Jean Regal, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, has been officially named the first director of the Women's Mentoring Program at the University of Minnesota Medical School—Duluth Campus.

Gary Davis, Ph.D., senior associate dean of the Medical School—Duluth, formalized the program under Regal who in her role as director of the program will report directly to Davis. The program has been informally operating in the Medical School Duluth since the year 2000, when Regal, Barbara Elliott, Ph.D and Lois Heller, Ph.D. initiated the program. The program expanded to

include women faculty in the College of Pharmacy in 2003, and a collaborative arrangement with women faculty from the College of Science and Engineering at UMD is beginning in 2007. The “faculty” group includes tenured/tenure track faculty, clinical and contract faculty, as well as research associates and postdoctoral fellows. They meet regularly to discuss professional development opportunities, talk with visiting scientists, and identify ways of advancing their careers. They also talk about ways of balancing personal and professional lives.

“It’s nationally recognized that women are increasingly leaving academic medicine,” explained Regal. “The goal of this program is to promote a supportive and positive environment for career development of women faculty and to take one small step to improve the climate for women,” she said.

“I hope, that by formalizing the Women’s Mentoring program, the profile will be raised and that the University’s and the Medical School’s commitment to its women faculty is expanded,” said Davis.

### **James Boulger, Ph.D. Named Interim Head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences**

James Boulger, Ph.D. has been named the Duluth Campus’s Interim Head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences by Gary Davis, Senior Associate Dean of the University of Minnesota Medical School – Duluth Campus. The position was held by Davis before he was named chief academic officer of the Medical School – Duluth campus.

“I am grateful to Jim for agreeing to add this to his long list of responsibilities in the School. Jim brings excellent administrative experience and skills to the position and I know the Department is in good hands,” commented Davis.

In addition to this position, Boulger is the Director of the Center for Rural Mental Health Studies, Director of Alumni Relations, and Director of the Family Medicine Preceptorship Program. He is professor in the Departments of Behavioral Sciences and Family Medicine and Community Health. He served as Associate Dean of the medical school from 1974 through 1990. Dr. Boulger has been a faculty member at the school since 1974.

## **Events**

### **Duluth White Coat Ceremony Scheduled For October 6<sup>th</sup>**

58 first year medical students (Duluth’s largest entering class) will receive their white coats on Saturday, October 6<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. at the University of Minnesota Duluth Campus. The White Coat Ceremony will be conducted in the Weber Music Hall on the UMD campus with a reception in the Medical School atrium.

**Master of Ceremony:** Gary L. Davis, Ph.D., Senior Associate Dean.

**Welcome and Congratulations:** Raymond G. Christensen, M.D., Assistant Dean for Rural Health, Duluth

**Minnesota Medical Foundation Greeting:** Mark Parsons, Ph.D., Vice President and Director of Gift Planning

**Faculty Address:** Alan Johns, M.D., Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, Duluth, Duluth Clinic, SMDC Health System

**White Coat – Historical Perspective:** Kathleen V. Watson, M.D., Associate Dean for Students and Student Learning, University of Minnesota Medical School

**Keynote Speaker:** Lynne M. Lillie, M.D., HealthEast Woodbury Clinic, President of the Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians

**Greeters – Teachers of the Year:** M. Kent Froberg, M.D., Department of Anatomy, Microbiology and Pathology; Alan Johns, M.D., Department of Family Medicine and Community Health Duluth, Duluth Clinic, SMDC Health System; Vincent U. Ohaju, D.O. Duluth Clinic, SMDC Health System

**Coaters:** Kathleen V. Watson, M.D., Associate Dean for Students and Student Learning University of Minnesota Medical School; Lillian A. Repesh, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Admissions; University of Minnesota Medical School Duluth

**Poet:** Mary Bassing, MS II

**Piano:** Patrick C.J. Ward, M.B., B.Ch., Department of Anatomy, Microbiology and Pathology

**Honor Drum Song:** Drum: Chuck Branch (MSII), John Vukelich (MSII), Jean Howell (MSIII), Tom Salter (MSIII), Erik Brodt (M.D.), Jason Deen (M.D.)

## **Rural Pre-Med Summit in Duluth October 20<sup>th</sup>**

The University of Minnesota Medical School -- Duluth Campus will host a Rural Pre-Med Summit on Saturday, October 20, 2006 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The program is designed to inform and encourage premedical undergraduates between their sophomore and junior years, as well as nontraditional students who plan to enter medical school. School faculty, rural physicians and current first and second year medical students will discuss the challenges and rewards of pursuing a career in medicine.

Included in the full day of activities are breakout groups that offer hands-on experience in OB/delivery, medical imaging, histology, heart sounds and pathology; also MCAT entry exams, writing personal statements, interviewing for medical school and applying for financial aid. Paul T. White, J.D., admissions director in the Twin Cities and Lillian Repesh, Ph.D, associate dean for student affairs and admissions in Duluth will present information about the two campuses.

## **Academic Health Center in Duluth launches lecture series**

The Academic Health Center in Duluth will launch its lecture series on September 24 with “An Introduction to the Office for Technology Commercialization.” Speakers include: Jay Schrankler, Director, Michael Klug, Technology Strategy Manager and Doug Johnson, Director, Venture Center, Office for Technology Commercialization, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Other seminars scheduled can be found at:

[http://www.ahc.umn.edu/duluth/Seminar/0708\\_Seminars.html](http://www.ahc.umn.edu/duluth/Seminar/0708_Seminars.html)

## **Doctors on Call Announces Topic Lineup**

The Duluth Campus public television series, Doctors on Call, has released its full lineup of topics for the 2007-2008 television year. The program this year will be hosted by Raymond Christensen, M.D. Assistant Dean for Rural Health, Alan Johns, M.D. Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Ruth Westra, DO, Chair of the Department of Family Medicine, Duluth.

Schedule: <http://www.med.umn.edu/duluth/DoctorsOnCall/20072008.html>

## **Grants and Awards**

**Mustafa al’Absi, Ph.D., and a team of national collaborators have received a four-year grant of \$1.6 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for their research, “AutoSense: Quantifying Exposures to Addictive Substances and Psychosocial Stress.”**

al'Absi is a professor and founding director of Duluth Medical Research Institute at the University of Minnesota Medical School–Duluth Campus.

The project is among the first of 45 funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as part of the Genes, Environment and Health Initiative (GEI). al'Absi's study falls under the Exposure Biology Program coordinated primarily by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) in partnership with the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI), and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), all of which are part of NIH. The Exposure Biology Program supports interdisciplinary teams of basic scientists, bioengineers, physician-scientists and others working toward a variety of goals, including developing environmental sensors for measuring toxins, dietary intake, physical activity, psychosocial stress and addictive substances.

“What we are doing with this research is unique and innovative, particularly because we are moving the research out of the laboratory and into the real world, al'Absi commented. “Success with this research could lead to important improvements in how people at high risk for medical or psychosocial problems are monitored and treated.”

**Terri Rose-Hellekant M.S., D.V.M., Ph.D. has been awarded an R03 grant from the Cancer Prevention Center of the National Cancer Institute.** The title of the grant is "Local Delivery of Breast Cancer Chemopreventives Using Mesenchymal Stem Cells."

R03 grants are short-term awards that provide support for pilot projects, development and testing of new methodologies, or innovative projects that provide a basis for more extended research. Rose-Hellekant's grant, \$100,000 over two years, will support her project, "Local Delivery of Breast Cancer Chemopreventives Using Mesenchymal Stem Cells." She hopes to determine if injected bone marrow mesenchymal stem cells used to produce molecular therapies can interfere with early-stage breast cancer. This project as well as a broader project is part of a collaboration with Ph.D.'s Ed Perkins, Jon Holy, and Amy Greene.

**Ed Perkins, Ph.D., and his team have received a \$ 423,025 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to engineer adult stem and progenitor cells to cross the blood-brain barrier** in order to fix a rare genetic disorder that can cause seizures and other neurological defects, primarily in children. If they are successful, their work could have implications for treating other problems, such as brain tumors. Perkins's team on the NIH project includes, from the Medical School–Duluth Campus, professor Lester R. Drewes, Ph.D., internationally known for his study of the blood-brain barrier, and Amy Greene, Ph.D.; from the College of Pharmacy–Duluth, Grant W. Anderson, Ph.D.; and from the Mayo Clinic Departments of Anesthesiology and Pharmacology/Experimental Therapeutics, Zvonimir S. Katusic, M.D., Ph.D., internationally recognized for his work with endothelial progenitor cells.