

NOTEWORTHY EVENTS

The 58th Annual Lowe Conference on Rheumatic Diseases – September 27-29, 2013, Camp McDowell, Nauvoo, Alabama. Speakers included osteoarthritis expert Joanne Jordan, MD, MPH, director of Rheumatology, University of North Carolina.

Osteoarthritis Symposium 2013 – August 14, 2013, Birmingham. Keynote speaker: Richard Koeser, Jr, MD, chief of Molecular Medicine, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, “Osteoarthritis: From Etiology to Management.”

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RHEUMATOLOGY INSIGHT

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM



Study Explores Microbiota Link in Spondyloarthritis

UAB clinicians and scientists are integrating cutting-edge technologies of antigen identification in a search for novel information on the microbial contributions to spondyloarthritis (SpA). They hope their data will result in new insights into pathogenesis of SpA, which includes such conditions as ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, and reactive arthritis. This project may also suggest potential new biomarkers for diagnosis and monitoring, and lead to new approaches to therapy by manipulating the microbiota and adaptive immune responses to it.

“We are going to explore the link between the microbiota and SpA, as we suspect the microbiota has a marked effect

on the systemic and mucosal immune systems that involve this condition,” says pediatric rheumatologist Matthew Stoll, MD.

SpA affects between 0.5% and 2% of the US population and is characterized by an asymmetrical inflammatory arthritis, spondylitis, and enthesitis, with risk of extra-articular complications. Stoll calls SpA treatment “less than optimal,” with poor responses to agents that benefit other forms of arthritis.

He is working with gastroenterologist and researcher Charles Elson, MD, in the study, which is one project in UAB’s NIH-funded Multidisciplinary Clinical Research

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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Study Explores Microbiota Link in Spondyloarthritis

The UAB Musculoskeletal Clinic: A Collaborative Pilot Project

Prestigious Research Award for Stoll

Saag Cited for Investigative Mentoring

UAB Faculty Receive National Appointments

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

Vale AM, Kapoor P, Skibinski GA, Elgavish A, Mahmoud TI, Zemlin C, Zemlin M, Burrows PD, Nobrega A, Kearney JF, Briles DE, Schroeder HW Jr. “The link between antibodies to OxLDL and natural protection against *pneumococci* depends on D(H) gene conservation.” *J Exp Med*. 2013 May 6;210(5):875-90.

Specks U, Merkel PA, Fessler BJ, et al. “Efficacy of remission-induction regimens for ANCA-associated vasculitis.” *N Engl J Med*. 2013 Aug 1;369(5):417-27.

O'Dell JR, Curtis JR, Mikuls TR, Cofield SS, Bridges SL Jr, Ranganath VK, Moreland LW; TEAR Trial Investigators. “Validation of the methotrexate-first strategy in patients with early, poor-prognosis rheumatoid arthritis: results from a 2-year randomized, double-blind trial.” *Arthritis Rheum*. 2013 Aug;65(8):1985-94.

Plenge RM, Greenberg JD, Mangravite LM, Derry JM, Stahl EA, Coenen MJ, Barton A, Padyukov L, Klareskog L, Gregersen PK, Mariette X, Moreland LW, Bridges SL Jr, de Vries N, Huizinga TW, Guchelaar HJ; International Rheumatoid Arthritis Consortium (INTERACT), Friend SH, Stolovitzky G. “Crowdsourcing genetic prediction of clinical utility in the Rheumatoid Arthritis Responder Challenge.” *Nat Genet*. 2013 May;45(5):468-9.

The UAB Musculoskeletal Clinic: A Collaborative Pilot Project

The UAB Health System is piloting an innovative Integrated Practice Unit to meet the demand for patient care for musculoskeletal disorders. The UAB Musculoskeletal Clinic is a collaborative effort of faculty and staff of the Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology, the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) and diseases are the leading cause of disability in the US. In 2005, 107.7 million adults reported suffering from a musculoskeletal condition lasting 3 months or longer during the previous year.

Musculoskeletal disorders are seen as an interrelated set of patient medical circumstances that can be best managed in an integrated way by multiple specialists. When fully operational, an Integrated Practice Unit provides the full range of care for a medical condition or group of closely related conditions.

“One of the major goals of this pilot project is to see how well this will allow us to better meet the demand for evaluation of patients with musculoskeletal symptoms,” says S. Louis Bridges, Jr, MD, PhD, director of the Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology.

Amie McLain, MD, chair of the UAB Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, says the multidisciplinary approach will provide more timely, high-quality care for patients with these conditions.

“Another advantage of this clinic is to help expedite referrals to the specialists who can best address the problem at hand,”

continued from cover

Center. Elson, an expert on the human microbiome, says microbes in the intestines consist of some 100 trillion organisms per person from more than 1000 species. “This microbiota has profound effects on our metabolism, nervous system, intestine, and immune system,” Elson says. “It represents the largest mass of microbial antigen and adjuvant that is encountered in life – thus it is not surprising that it has such an effect on these systems.”

The adaptive immune response to the microbiota already has been established as the major pathogenic mechanism in inflammatory bowel disease. “Our proposal tests the hypothesis that the adaptive response to the microbial population also



Bridges (left), Theiss, and McLain

says Steven Theiss, MD, director of the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery.

If this pilot clinic shows promise, it will be expanded from the initial 2 half-days per week. Future benefits may include enhanced educational activities in musculoskeletal medicine for trainees such as residents and fellows; clinical initiatives focused on quality improvement; facilitation of patient education, knowledge dissemination, and standardization of collection of patient-relevant and patient-reported outcomes to improve clinical care.

The physicians say that the Musculoskeletal Clinic may also lead to collaborative research among experts in Rheumatology, PM&R, and Orthopaedics to understand optimal management approaches to musculoskeletal syndromes.

The UAB Musculoskeletal Clinic is located at The WorkPlace at UAB Hospital-Highlands.

plays a major pathogenetic role in SpA,” says Stoll. The team is using a novel microbiota antigen microarray to test for abnormal serologic reactivity to the microbiota in SpA and will identify additional candidate antigens by Western blot of proteins from selected bacteria of the microbiota. They also will look for CD4 T cell responses to candidate antigens, and perform in-depth analyses of microbiota contents in patients with SpA and compare them with healthy individuals. This will be followed by sequencing of all the microbiota genes, so they can assign them functions and metabolic pathways in order to assess the functional activity of the microbiota in disease and in health.

UAB MEDICINE NEWS

Prestigious Research Award for Stoll

Pediatric rheumatologist Matthew Stoll, MD, PhD, has received the Rheumatology Research Foundation’s Investigator Award and will be recognized during the ACR/Association of Rheumatology Health Professionals annual meeting in October 2013. The award supports basic science and clinical investigators in research relevant to rheumatic diseases. Stoll’s research seeks to identify intestinal bacteria in excessive quantities in patients with spondyloarthritis (SpA) and to identify abnormal immunity to intestinal bacteria.



Saag Cited for Investigative Mentoring

Kenneth Saag, MD, MSc, has been named the first UAB faculty member to receive the 2013 Rheumatology Research Foundation Excellence in Investigative Mentoring Award. One member of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) is selected each year for this honor, which recognizes the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship. Saag will be honored at the Opening Ceremony of the ACR meeting in San Diego in October 2013 and at the UAB reception to be held at that event.

Curtis, Fessler, Schroeder Receive Named Research Funds

Nine of the division’s faculty members now hold endowed chairs, professorships, or named funds to support research or clinical activities. The latest three receiving named research funds are Jeffrey Curtis, MD, MS, MPH, the inaugural holder of the William J. Koopman Endowed Professorship in Rheumatology and Immunology; Barri Fessler, MD, MSPH, the inaugural Dunn Scleroderma Scholar; and Harry Schroeder, Jr, MD, PhD, the first John R. Irby Research Scholar.

National Appointments for UAB Faculty

UAB rheumatology experts frequently are recognized nationally. Three faculty members recently were named to significant positions. S. Louis Bridges, Jr, MD, PhD, has been appointed chair of the NIH Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Special Grants Review Committee for a term from July 2013 to June 2015. This study section reviews all career development grants, training grants, and conference grants for the National Institute of Arthritis, Musculoskeletal, and Skin Diseases. Maria Danila, MD, MSc, incoming medical director of the Kirklin Rheumatology Clinic at UAB, was selected to serve on the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) Insurance Subcommittee. Angelo

Gaffo, MD, MSPH, has been named a member of the ACR Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee.

Excellence in Clinical Care, Education

Winn Chatham, MD, was selected for the C. Glenn Cobbs, MD – Edwin A. Rutsky, MD, Award for Clinical Excellence by the UAB Department of Medicine and also was elected to receive the Argus Award by UAB medical students as the Best Lecturer in the Musculoskeletal course module. In addition, Martin Trojanowski, MD, was one of 31 School of Medicine faculty named to mentor medical students as Clinical Skills Scholars.

FACULTY BY CLINICAL INTERESTS

Rheumatoid Arthritis

S. Louis Bridges, Jr, MD, PhD
Jeffrey R. Curtis, MD, MPH
Maria I. Danila, MD, MSc
Laura B. Hughes, MD, MSPH
Archana Jain, MD
Iris Y. Navarro, MD
Kenneth G. Saag, MD, MSc
Jasvinder Singh, MD, MPH
David M. Spalding, MD

Osteoporosis and Metabolic Bone Disease

Jeffrey R. Curtis, MD, MPH
Sarah L. Morgan, MD, RD
Kenneth G. Saag, MD, MSc
Angelo Gaffo, MD, MSPH

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

W. Winn Chatham, MD
Barri J. Fessler, MD, MSPH
Archana Jain, MD
Robert P. Kimberly, MD
Martin Trojanowski, MD

Primary Immunodeficiencies/Immunodeficiency Associated Autoimmunity

Harry W. Schroeder, Jr, MD, PhD
W. Winn Chatham, MD

Scleroderma

Barri J. Fessler, MD, MSPH
Martin Trojanowski, MD

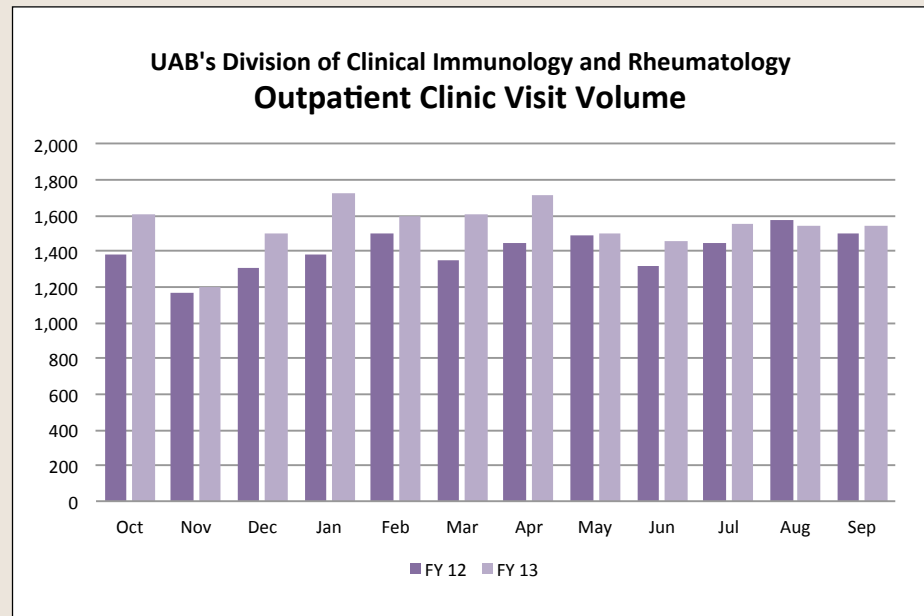
Seronegative Spondyloarthritis

David M. Spalding, MD

Vasculitis

Barri J. Fessler, MD, MSPH
Angelo Gaffo, MD, MSPH
Robert P. Kimberly, MD

MEASURES OF SUCCESS



UAB Rheumatology continues to identify opportunities to improve patient access to outpatient care. The division’s clinics increased visits by about 10% from 2012 to 2013.