William Koopman —
LESSONS FROM UAB’S LARGEST PRIVATELY SPONSORED RESEARCH

The career of William J. Koopman, MD, is a case study in creating bridges between medicine and research. Dr. Koopman retired on July 1, as chair of UAB’s Department of Medicine, after leading the department for 11 years. The University of Alabama Board of Trustees named Dr. Koopman, who also earned the university’s Distinguished Professor title, Chair Emeritus in September.

A talented physician and researcher, Dr. Koopman was an early pioneer in the field of targeted biologic therapy for autoimmune diseases. Since joining UAB in 1977, he has worked to uncover the best management for rheumatic diseases — from developing a mouse model of human rheumatoid arthritis (RA) to demonstrating the vital role of synovial tissue in the inflammation and joint destruction caused by RA. For this discovery, he is world renowned.

Specifically, his insights into the molecular biology of RA have inspired treatment possibilities. His research of immunoglobulin and its relationship to RA has led to development of such groundbreaking therapies as arthritis-fighting proteins, a monoclonal antibody, and a T-cell receptor peptide vaccine.

Dr. Koopman has led UAB rheumatology programs to national prominence as director of the Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology Division and the SANKYO PROJECT

One initiative he established — a partnership with Sankyo Co., Ltd., of Japan to develop new rheumatoid arthritis therapies — has become the largest privately sponsored research program in UAB history. Since 1996, UAB has been working with Sankyo, Japan’s second largest pharmaceutical company, on a variety of research topics. UAB was originally selected as the Tokyo-based firm’s first research partner in the United States, and collaboration initially focused on rheumatic diseases. In 2002, the program expanded to include cancer...
research. Dr. Koopman has directed the program for the past 10 years.

Today, the UAB/Sankyo Program for Rheumatic Diseases and Cancer Research has produced the monoclonal antibody TRA-8, a breakthrough that was developed by UAB researchers. TRA-8 works by targeting specific sites on cell surfaces, called “death receptors,” triggering apoptosis. The antibody has generated excitement among researchers because it kills active, proliferating cancer cells, while sparing surrounding healthy tissue. Tong Zhou, MD, associate professor of medicine, is leading this work. Investigators involved in the project include Donald Buchsbaum, PhD, Robert Kimberly, MD, Alexander Szalai, PhD, and Kurt Zinn, PhD.

“Drawing on our monoclonal antibody experience and strong research commitment with Sankyo, we hope to develop TRA-8 into the next promising cancer killer,” Dr. Koopman says. “We look forward to working with Sankyo to offer this drug to as many patients as possible.”

EXAMINING UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

“University research provides the vital link between the patient, the medical expert, and the development of new therapies,” Dr. Koopman continues. “Physician scientists are nationally recognized experts and leaders in the field of translational clinical research and in strategic planning essential for development of new therapeutic agents.”

Interaction with larger commercial companies, such as Sankyo, helps ensure success. UAB is in an enviable position, since drug companies now fund 70% of the clinical trials in the United States, and medical schools generally are receiving an ever-decreasing slice of this pie. UAB/Sankyo is also poised on the forefront of breakthroughs in gene therapy.

“Working on a molecular level, we’re now rapidly moving toward delineating pathogenic mechanisms and developing increasingly effective therapies, such as antitumor necrosis factor agents, for RA and other autoimmune disorders. Such advances, however, will pale in comparison to those we will see over the next several decades,” Dr. Koopman says.

“Targeted RA therapy will increasingly be based on the patient’s individual genotype,” he explains. “If instituted promptly after diagnosis, I suspect that individualized therapy will ultimately induce clinical remission in a substantial fraction of patients at some point in the future.”

Coming full circle, the chronic inflammatory response is also central to many other diseases under study at UAB, leading to a competitive extramural funding status. “Rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, type 1 diabetes, inflammatory pulmonary and bowel disease, pulmonary fibrosis, chronic liver disease – all have recurring pathogenic themes suggesting overlapping pathogenic mechanisms whereby scientists could intervene, identify patients at risk for severe disease, and offer more aggressive treatment.

“Physicians realize the great promise that drug innovations hold,” Dr. Koopman concludes. “The key is to maintain a balance so that the business side of translational research never supersedes what is best for patients.”

Leading Nutrition Text Honors Late UAB Professor

The newly published 10th edition of Modern Nutrition in Health & Disease, the nation’s leading comprehensive clinical nutrition text, honors the late Roland Weinsier, MD, a professor of nutrition sciences at UAB for 27 years.

The text’s lead editor, Maurice Shils, MD, ScD, had asked Dr. Weinsier to serve as the new edition’s associate editor. Dr. Weinsier recruited six UAB Department of Nutrition Sciences faculty members to write chapters for the book, but then fell ill and passed away while the project was still in early development. Dr. Shils included a memorial to Dr. Weinsier in the completed book. The text’s lead editor, Maurice Shils, MD, ScD, had asked Dr. Weinsier to serve as the new edition’s associate editor. Dr. Weinsier recruited six UAB Department of Nutrition Sciences faculty members to write chapters for the book, but then fell ill and passed away while the project was still in early development. Dr. Shils included a memorial to Dr. Weinsier in the completed book.

First written in 1955, Modern Nutrition in Health & Disease is considered the authoritative text on clinical nutrition. “It is the most exhaustive and comprehensive book on human nutrition available to medical professionals, on the magnitude of the Cecil or Harrison textbooks of medicine,” says Douglas Heimburger, MD, UAB professor of nutrition sciences and a chapter author.

Other UAB faculty who contributed to the book include Sarah Morgan MD, Christine Ritchie, MD, Joe Baggott, PhD, and Gary Hunter, PhD. Former UAB postdoctoral student Margarita Treuth, PhD, also contributed.

Dr. Weinsier joined the UAB faculty in 1975 as director of the Division of Clinical Nutrition, following service in the U.S. Air Force and medical education at the Universities of Florida and Virginia. His research into the relationship between food intake and physical activity led to new understanding of the causes of obesity and associated medical conditions. He served as chair of the UAB Department of Nutrition Sciences from 1988 to 1999 and in 2000 received a National Institutes of Health grant to create a clinical nutrition research unit on campus. He died in November 2002.

The 10th edition of Modern Nutrition in Health & Disease includes information on nutrition’s role in disease prevention, international nutrition issues, public health concerns, the role of obesity in a variety of chronic illnesses, genetics as it applies to nutrition, and areas of major scientific progress relating nutrition to disease. It is published by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, and can be purchased at www.lww.com/product/0-7817-4133-5.
ACCOLADES

Larry Moreland, MD, the Anna Lois Waters Professor of Medicine in the Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology, has been named West Virginia University's 2005 distinguished alumnus. Dr. Moreland is internationally recognized for clinical research in rheumatoid arthritis, especially biological therapies. He served as coeditor of Arthritis and Allied Conditions: A Textbook of Rheumatology, now in its 15th edition, sometimes called the “Bible of rheumatology.”

Dr. Moreland’s primary research has focused on evaluation of targeted therapies with immune modulating agents as treatment for autoimmune diseases; examples include biological response modifiers such as anti-CD4 monoclonal antibodies, inhibitors of tumor necrosis factors and interleukin-1, and costimulating blockers, such as soluble CTLA4. He was the first to test a biological agent later approved by the Food and Drug Administration for patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

He is currently principal investigator of a large multicenter trial that will help define appropriate therapies for patients with early rheumatoid arthritis.

Billions Joins Addiction Medicine

F. Cleveland Kinney, PhD, MD, interim chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurobiology, announces the appointment of Jill K. Billions, MD, as assistant professor in addiction medicine. Dr. Billions, a magna cum laude graduate of UAB, received her medical degree from the School of Medicine at UAB, where she was honored with the Tinsley Harrison Award for Highest Academic Achievement in Internal Medicine. She completed an internal medicine residency at Baptist Medical Centers, Birmingham, and subsequently worked with Bessemer/Carraway physician services.

Dr. Billions’ clinical interests encompass all the drugs of addiction. Her special interests include spirituality in the recovery process, addiction in health care providers, and women’s issues in addiction. She accepts patients ranging from those who think they may have a problem with drugs or alcohol but are highly functional to those who are physically dependent and need detoxification and medical stabilization prior to educational and supportive treatment.

Dr. Billions is accepting patients at the Center for Psychiatric Medicine and can be contacted at 975-7696 or via e-mail at jillbill@uab.edu.

Appointments

Korwyn L. Williams, MD, 996-7850, CHB 314, Pediatric Neurology, Effective July
Tina E. Wood, MD, 975-2895, WTI 231, Hematology/Oncology, Effective July

Abraham Is UAB Medicine Chair

continued from page 1

one of the few in the nation positioned to take full advantage of recent advances in medical science and bring these discoveries to the bedsides of our patients.

“UAB’s Department of Medicine has a wonderful tradition of excellence in all aspects of academic medicine — including research, education, and clinical care,” he continues. “Few such departments are as strong and ‘well balanced’ in so many areas. The faculty is absolutely outstanding and the leadership has been inspired.”

FULBRIGHT FELLOW, PULMONARY RESEARCHER

A former Fulbright Fellow who spent 2 years at the Pasteur Institute in Paris

SCHIZOPHRENIA FORUM

Researchers trying to crack one of medicine’s most perplexing mysteries can keep up with developments via the Schizophrenia Research Forum, a Web site launched by the National Institute of Mental Health. The site bills itself as a “virtual community,” where researchers can link to colleagues and potential collaborators, learn about new findings, meetings, and funding opportunities, and critique each other’s articles and ideas.

www.schizophreniaforum.org

To access a Synopsis article from the last 2 years, visit our Web site at www.health.uab.edu/synopsis. You can search by date or subject in the left sidebar.

UAB physicians: visit MSI, the password-protected Medical Staff intranet site, at https://horizon.hs.uab.edu.
before gaining prominence on the faculties of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Colorado, where he has been since 1993, Dr. Abraham has devoted his academic career to elucidating the mechanisms responsible for inflammatory lung injury and organ system failure in patients with critical illness, such as overwhelming infections.

“Dr. Abraham brings a wealth of academic distinction to UAB’s largest department,” Robert Rich, MD, vice president and dean of the School of Medicine, says. “Under Ed Abraham’s leadership, an already extraordinarily accomplished department will ascend to even greater heights as it continues to make many fine contributions to medical research, teaching, and clinical care for the benefit of Alabamians and others throughout the region, the nation, and the world.”

Dr. Abraham received his undergraduate degree, with honors, and his medical degree from Stanford University. He completed an internship and residency in internal medicine at UCLA Hospital in Los Angeles and, subsequently, fellowships there in emergency and critical care medicine.

He is a diplomate of the American Board of Internal Medicine and a member of the American Society for Clinical Investigation, the American Thoracic Society, the American Association of Immunologists, and the Society of Critical Care Medicine, among others.

His numerous professional activities include editorship of the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine and associate editorship of the Journal of Immunology. He is a member of the editorial boards of Critical Care Medicine, Critical Care, Intensive Care Medicine, Advances in Sepsis, and WebMD/Medscape Pulmonary Medicine. He also serves on key national panels of the National Institutes of Health, including the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Author of more than 250 research papers and editorials and six books, including Emergency Management of Critical Illness (1986) and The Textbook of Critical Care (5th Edition, 2005), he is a frequent speaker at international medical meetings.

HIPAA: National Provider Identifier Notice

To avoid disruption in billing and reimbursement within UAB or the UAB Health System (UABHS), providers are asked to not apply for individual or organizational National Provider Identifiers (NPI). The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Advisory Committee has recommended a unified approach to acquisition of NPI numbers by UAB/UABHS providers.

Peggy DePiano, who led institution-wide planning for successful compliance with the HIPAA Transaction Code Set regulations for billing, will lead a unified process for meeting HIPAA standards related to the NPI requirements. She is working closely with billing and credentialing representatives from UAB-covered entities, University Hospital, the University of Alabama Health Services Foundation, and other health care affiliates.

These individuals will be actively engaged with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and other payers to replace all current provider numbers, including your Universal Physician Identification Number, with the new NPI. You need not do anything at this time related to acquiring a NPI.

For questions, contact DePiano at pdepiano@uabmc.edu.