Researchers Whose Work May Impact Alzheimer’s, Cancer and Other Diseases to Receive Albany Prize

Three researchers who have made important contributions to biology will receive the 2016 Albany Medical Center Prize in Medicine and Biomedical Research at a ceremony at Albany Med on Sept. 28. They are:

- **F. Ulrich Hartl, MD,** Managing Director, Max Planck Institute for Biochemistry, Germany
- **Arthur L. Horwich, MD,** Sterling Professor of Genetics and Pediatrics and Investigator, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Yale University School of Medicine
- **Susan Lee Lindquist, PhD,** Professor of Biology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and member of MIT’s Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research.

The $500,000 award has been given annually since 2001 to those who have altered the course of medicine and science in the United States. It was established by the late Morris “Marty” Silverman, a businessman and philanthropist originally from Troy. A $50 million gift commitment from Troy. A $50 million gift commitment from the Marty and Dorothy Silverman Foundation from Troy. A $50 million gift commitment from the Marty and Dorothy Silverman Foundation provides for the prize to be awarded for 100 years.

The trio was chosen to receive the prize for their fundamental and complementary discoveries related to the mechanisms of “protein folding.”

“Though this may not be a term familiar to the general public, protein folding is a concept considered revolutionary in modern biology, with important implications for the treatment or delay of Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s disease, Huntington’s disease and other neurodegenerative conditions, as well as cancer and drug resistance,” said Vincent Verdile, MD, ’54, the Lynne and Mark Groban, MD, ’67, Distinguished Dean and chair of the National Selection Committee.

Their work has drastically changed thinking about protein folding inside cells—the last step in transmitting genetic information from amino acids to proteins, giving cells their unique characteristics. Disruption of this process can lead to disease. These scientists have shown that protein folding is not spontaneous, as was believed, but instead is achieved with previously unknown molecular “assistants.” Their subsequent work on what is known as “chaperone-mediated protein folding” has led to research examining these proteins as they relate to all aspects of biology and disease in laboratories worldwide.

To read more, visit: amc.edu/Academic/AlbanyPrize.

Grateful Patient Feels Abiding Bond With Rehabilitation Caregivers

While rehab specialists are traditionally celebrated this month during National Rehabilitation Awareness Week (Sept. 18 - 24), it is actually Mother’s Day when Renee Pirone finds herself thinking most about her caregivers in Albany Med’s Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Unit.

“They took care of me so beautifully,” said the 48-year-old lawyer and mother of two. “You think of motherly love, unconditional love, and they certainly embodied those things.”

In 2014, Pirone and her husband were snowmobiling in the hills outside of Little Falls, in Herkimer County, where they live, when her snowmobile went down an embankment. She was transported to Albany Medical Center by helicopter and, after orthopaedic surgeon James Lawrence, MD, performed delicate surgery on her neck, she spent the next three months at Albany Med, recovering from her accident and adapting to life with a spinal cord injury, which robbed her of mobility in all of her limbs.

“I couldn’t even scratch my nose,” she said.

Pirone credits everyone at Albany Medical Center with helping her through this wrenching time—“everyone who cared for me,” she said, “right down to the very last person on the night shift.” But it was the nurses and physical and occupational therapists in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation who helped her meet what was at once a most daunting but much-yearned-for goal: getting home.

“They showed me the direction I needed to go in, even maybe when I didn’t want to see it,” she said. “They helped me get there.”

Jane Mission, RN, Catherine Bologna, PT, Brenna Rousseau, OTR/L, and Lauren Tompkins, PCA, comprised Pirone’s core care team. Together, they prepared her for the activities of daily living (“the tasks the rest of us take for granted,” Rousseau said). These included bed mobility and sitting up, head and neck mobility, transferring from bed to wheelchair, bathing, dressing, taking medication.

While Mission and Tompkins provided care at the bedside, Bologna and Rousseau worked with Pirone on physical and occupational therapy. Still, all four of them were continually communicating with one another.

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A ‘White Coat Welcome’ for the Class of 2020

As part of a longstanding tradition at Albany Medical College, first-year medical students participated in the school’s annual White Coat Ceremony in August. Each member of the Class of 2020—there are 143, in all—was presented with a white medical coat by a second-year student mentor as part of the event’s proceedings.

Drawn from more than 9,000 applicants, the Class of 2020 comes from 24 states, including 48 students from New York State.

First-Year Medical Students Tour the Capital City

Immersive Bus Tour Offers First Glimpse of Albany and the Patients They Will Serve

No sooner did the Class of 2020 begin to get acquainted with Albany Medical College in early August than they were whisked out into the city for the College’s first-ever community immersion bus tour.

Accompanied by faculty, community members, police officers and fellow classmates, the new students boarded four buses on a sunny morning during orientation week and embarked on a tour that gave them insight into Albany and its residents.

Each bus journeyed through the city’s varied neighborhoods—Arbor Hill, the Mansion District and Park South, among them—and stopped at a different location that offered unique insights into medical practice: Ezra Prentice Homes, the Radix Ecological Sustainability Center, the Sheridan Preparatory Academy and the Whitney Young Health Center. Here, students got out, toured facilities and met with members of the community.

“We wanted to introduce our students to the history and characteristics of Albany, the city they will call home for the next four years,” said Hyacinth Mason, PhD, MPH, CHES, assistant dean for student support and inclusion. “In addition, we hoped the experience would serve as an in-depth introduction to the College’s service learning curriculum.”

Ingrid Allard, MD, MSEd, associate dean for Community Outreach and Medical Education, said, “It’s important for our students to become immersed in the community as well as get to know the community partners and patient populations they will eventually work with.”

The bus tour was conceived and coordinated by faculty and staff in the Division of Community Outreach and Medical Education and the Office of Student Affairs.

Upon returning to the College, students met with faculty and community members from the Albany Police Department, the University at Albany School of Public Health, the Albany County Health Department, the Youth Life Support Network and the New York State Department of Health.

During small-group sessions after the tour, Marva Richards MPH, director of community outreach and service learning, and Kara Burke, MPH, director of community engagement, were among the facilitators who asked students about their impressions.

Many were struck by the city’s diversity. “It’s apparent right away,” said Kyle Scarano, ’20. “I come from a really rural part of New Hampshire. I know more different kinds of trees than I do different kinds of people, so it really hit me, the varied patient population.”

“It’s great to know there are resources available, things you can suggest to your patients other than just the care you provide to them,” said Lana Vasiljevic, ’20, noting the wide array of services available at Whitney Young.

Amy Yue, ’20, said, “Now, if I meet a patient from one of the neighborhoods we visited, I’ll have a much better idea of the kinds of questions to ask them.”

Students noted the beauty of the capital buildings and the eclectic mix of neighborhoods around them, as well as other visions well-known to locals.

“Hey, it’s Albany,” said Akshay Bommireddi, ’20, a native Californian.

Kim Kilby, MD, MPH, associate dean of students, said, “The experience was designed to provide students with a deeper appreciation of the people who make up Albany’s communities and the challenges many of our local patients experience every day. We wanted students to think about ways they can make a meaningful difference.”
Strive to Thrive Committee Keeps Spirits Up in Albany Med’s Emergency Department

About a year ago, Martha Kowalik, RN, assistant nurse manager of emergency and critical care services, got to thinking about ways to encourage and support the hard-working staff in Albany Med’s Emergency Department. “It was summer,” said Kowalik. “That tends to be a very busy time in the ED, and I was trying to think of ways to help combat stress.”

Kowalik asked Bridgit Hurst, RN, if she would help create a committee dedicated to supporting ED staff and, with that, Strive to Thrive was born—a retention and recruitment committee that also handles some of the everyday tasks of the department.

Under Hurst’s supervision, the committee initiated projects like ‘getting to know you’ factoids about current and new employees, recognition bulletin boards and even, around the holidays, the introduction of a departmental Elf on the Shelf. “There’s a spirit of levity to it all,” said Hurst. “And it really is a team effort. So many people have gotten onboard.” Committee member Jennifer Hamlett, RN, remembers as a new nurse the stress associated with caring for her first critically injured child and Hurst pulling her aside to ask if she was OK and talk things through. “It meant a lot to me,” Hamlett said. “The spirit behind that gesture is something we’ve hoped to instill in the committee’s New Grad Program,” said committee co-chair Tyler Owitz, RN.

Once a month, the Strive to Thrive Committee meets with new nursing grads to talk about their experiences in the ED and review any cases or issues they didn’t have time to go over earlier in the month.

Kowalik is pleased the Strive to Thrive Committee has become the success that it is. “Happy nurses, happy patients’ is a motto behind a lot this committee’s work,” she said, “and our Emergency Department is all the better for it.”
Albany Medical College knows education, biomedicine and innovation. Siena College knows education, business and leadership. Together they have partnered to weave them together to create the “BACC Academy,” a first-of-its kind program that launches Sept. 9.

The 13-week course to be held at Siena is a natural extension of the work of the Medical College’s Biomedical Acceleration and Commercialization Center, according to Vincent Verdile, MD, ’84, The Lynne and Mark Groban, MD ’67, Distinguished Dean of Albany Medical College and senior executive vice president for System Care Delivery.

Dean Verdile explained that the BACC Academy is designed “to help build the infrastructure to enable the growth of biotech in the Capital Region.

“It’s about leading biomedical innovation from bedside to bench to business,” he said, noting that the BACC Academy is focused on physicians, entrepreneurs, engineers, researchers and students who want to build the skills and network to bring innovative ideas from disclosure through commercialization.

The genesis of the BACC Academy was at Albany Med’s Biomedical Acceleration and Commercialization Center (BACC), which houses medical device and software start-up companies, when discussions were initiated with long-time Albany Med partner Siena College and Mike Hickey, Siena vice president and chief of staff, who previously headed its Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship as well as the region’s Center for Economic Growth.

“Because of Siena’s deep and proven understanding of leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship, it is an ideal educational collaborator on this program,” Hickey said. “We are not at all surprised by the interest in the BACC Academy, and, in fact, we’ve increased the number of slots available as we recognized a real, pent-up interest in biomed in the region.”

Applicants, he said, include researchers, physicians, GE scientists, business executives, entrepreneurs, and medical and graduate students. The classes will be taught by Siena and Albany Med professors as well as researchers, attorneys, accountants and CEOs. They will focus on business skills, leadership and management, and biomedical issues, including managing intellectual property, regulations and reimbursement.

One clear outcome of the BACC and the BACC Academy is their economic impact on the region. “The BACC is already creating new jobs and helping grow new companies. We see the BACC Academy as accelerating this process,” pointed out Kevin Leyden, Albany Med senior vice president for business development and strategic partnerships.

For more information about the BACC Academy, please visit http://albanymedbacc.org/academy/.