



Scoop

Sept. 9, 2005

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL AT HOUSTON

Events to Know

September

- 13 Deadline to register for Baylor's Medical Terminology, Anatomy and Physiology Course.** Course runs Sept. 20-Nov. 15. The cost on or before Sept. 13 is \$125. Details: <http://www.hcoa.org/medterm>
- 14 Deadline for hotel registration for Conference on Innovations in Medical Education: Physician Competencies and Professionalism.** Conference to be held Oct. 6-7 in Austin. Details: www.utsystem.edu/hea/symposiumoct2005
- 21 Faculty Honors Convocation.** 5 p.m., Hornberger Convention Center.
- 21 Conversation with James Madison.** Noon, SPH auditorium and video streamed to MSB 1.006.
- 26 13th Annual Scholarship Golf Classic.** 7:30 a.m. - 3 p.m., Timber Creek Golf Club, Friendswood.

Blood Drive TODAY!

To Honor Victims of Sept. 11
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Medical School Leather Lounge

Medical School's Totals for People and Pets Food Drive

Cash Donations – \$5,065
 Food and Toiletries – 61 Boxes
 Pet Supplies – 20 Boxes/Bags
 Bottled Water – 8 Cases



Analissa Moreno, 15, volunteers at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

UNIVERSITY RESPONDS TO HURRICANE KATRINA RELIEF EFFORTS

As the number of Hurricane Katrina refugees rises in Houston, The University of Texas Health Science Center is doing its part to help. The university launched several relief efforts to aid the thousands of evacuees who have taken refuge in the city.

"The devastation and aftershocks of Hurricane Katrina have left this nation in a new state of crisis," said **James Willerson, M.D.**, president of the UT Health Science Center. "Those of us who witnessed the wrath of Tropical Storm Allison realize that the elements of nature are unpredictable and indiscriminate—everyone and everything in the path of a hurricane suffers.



UT VIPs coordinate medical clinic.

There will be time to reflect upon losses and lessons learned. Now is the time for action."

Michael McKinney, M.D., chief operating officer of the UT Health Science Center, took care to organize a UT-led medical clinic at the George R. Brown Convention Center over the Labor Day holiday weekend. As of Sept. 5, the clinic helped 2,000 patients and managed 2,500 volunteers.

A campus-wide People and Pets Food Drive held Sept. 1 was another way the university banded together to aid refugees. In the Medical School's Leather Lounge, grocery bags overflowed with things like canned goods, snack foods, toiletries, bottled water, diapers, and pet food. All donations were delivered Sept. 2 to the Houston Food Bank

(Cont'd. on back)

XIA RECEIVES EARLY CAREER AWARD FOR HEART RESEARCH

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease remains the leading cause of death for Americans. By understanding the molecular mechanisms behind the disease, **Yang Xia, M.D., Ph.D.**, assistant professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, looks to reduce the statistics.

"We want to decrease the mortality rate due to cardiovascular disease—that's the goal," Xia said.

Xia and her colleagues work to reach the goal through a cardiac hypertrophy study, funded by the American Heart Association-Texas Affiliate, that concentrates on identifying the switches that cause this early predictor of heart failure.

"In cardiac hypertrophy, the cell grows in size," Xia said.

"This is the early stage of heart failure, which is reversible and compensatory. However, continued hypertrophic growth of the cardiac cells may eventually result in irreversible damage."

Xia's study focuses on a protein called calcineurin and its role in the signaling pathways that contribute to cardiac hypertrophy.

"If we can figure out the signaling pathways controlling hypertrophy, then we can stop it and prevent it in the early stages," Xia said. "I want to find the

(Cont'd. on back)



Dr. Xia shows her award.



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of TEXAS

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Produced weekly by the Office of Communications



UTTERBACK GETS OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEE AWARD

Called a “consummate ambassador” for the Medical School, **Linda Utterback** is the latest Outstanding Employee of the Quarter. Utterback is a senior executive assistant in the Office of Finance and Administration and has been with the Medical School for 10 years. In this role, she provides administrative support for the executive director of administration and for the director of finance and works as the office manager. She also serves as the parking representative for the Medical School.



Linda Utterback

“She brings her own brand of friendliness, courtesy, and respect to every encounter,” said **Nancy McNiel, Ph.D.**, executive director of administration for the Office of Finance and Administration. “She is always willing to go beyond the call of duty to assist anyone, and she willingly takes on assignments and volunteers for tasks that benefit the Finance and Administration Office, the Medical School, and the university.”

Utterback’s responsibilities don’t end there. As someone who’s worked for the Medical School for a decade, she is a valuable resource and reference for questions about the Texas Medical Center, Medical School, and health science center.

“I’ve been here a long time, so I know a lot of people to contact for questions,” Utterback said. “I can either answer the question for them, or refer them to someone who can.”

When asked how it feels to be Employee of the Quarter, Utterback said: “I’m very honored and very flattered. I work with a wonderful group of people. To be nominated is quite an honor.”

Utterback has been married for 37 years and has lived in Houston since 1972. She and her husband, Steve, have two sons, a daughter-in-law, and two “adorable” grandsons. In her spare time, she enjoys playing piano, reading, bicycling, and traveling with her husband.

Did you know the Medical School awards employees who go above and beyond the call of duty? If you know or work with someone who fits this description, nominate him or her for an **Outstanding Employee of the Quarter Award!** Nominating someone is easy. Go to www.uth.tmc.edu/ms_erc/employee_awards.html. Click “Make a nomination for Employee of the Quarter.” Write the nomination. Return the completed nomination to **Dawn Alvarado, MSB G.300**, or call her at 713.500.5103 for more information.

Hurricane efforts, cont’d.

and Houston SPCA, and more drives are under way. (See sidebar for total donations collected from the Medical School.)

Medical School faculty and students staffed a clinic at the Astrodome to provide health services to the more than 11,000 evacuees who were transported there from New Orleans. Earlier, Medical School faculty provided care to patients at Memorial Hermann Hospital who were evacuated from Ochsner Hospital in New Orleans.

UTHelps, the university-wide volunteer program, has several needs for those interested in volunteering to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. As of Sept. 2, the Office of Public Affairs reported more than 500 UT faculty, staff, students, and friends had already registered on the UT Helps Web site to support the relief effort. Visit www.uthouston.edu/uthelps for more information about volunteering.

In addition, the Office of Public Affairs launched the UT Health Science Center’s Katrina Response & Relief Web site at www.uthouston.edu/media/newsreleases/nrSpecial/katrina/index.html to provide up-to-date information about ways in which the university is responding to the crisis.



Viviane Nguyen, UT School of Nursing, helps a patient.

Xia award, cont’d.

molecular basis that results in hypertrophy and heart failure. If I know, I can stop it and rescue a lot of people’s lives.”

Based on this research, Xia recently received the Outstanding Early-Career Investigator Award at the 2nd Annual Symposium of the American Heart Association Council on Basic Cardiovascular Sciences – Targeting Heart Failure: New Science, New Tools, New Strategies.

Xia’s abstract was chosen from a pool of about 250 applicants. As one of three finalists for the competition, she gave a 15-minute oral presentation of her work and answered questions from the judges and audience.

“This is one of the highest awards in the field for young investigators,” Xia said. Being chosen the winner was “surreal,” she said.

Xia received a \$1,500 prize, as well as invitations from colleagues at the symposium to lecture at King’s College London and The University of Birmingham in England.

The Outstanding Early-Career Investigator Award is not the first recognition Xia has received from the American Heart Association. In 2003, she received the Lyndon Baines Johnson Research Award for the highest-ranking research proposal in a group of more than 70 in the junior investigator category. More recently, she was selected a finalist for the Young Investigator Award at the 27th Annual International Society for Heart Research American Section Meeting.

In addition, Xia was recently awarded National Institutes of Health funding for a four-year research project titled “AT1 Receptor Activating Autoantibodies and Preeclampsia.” This project, which involves a pregnancy induced cardiovascular condition, involves collaboration with **Susan Ramin, M.D.**, professor, and **Larry Gilstrap, III, M.D.**, chair, of the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences.

“Yang has been conducting outstanding research in cardiovascular biology at the Medical School for many years—first as a graduate student, then as a postdoctoral fellow, and now as a junior faculty member,” said **Rodney Kellems, Ph.D.**, professor and chair of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. “We are proud of her accomplishments in this area and happy to see the recognition she is receiving for her important research. I am confident that Yang will continue to make major research contributions in the area of cardiovascular biology.”