

## Fresh Faces:

### The GRECC and CFA attract top recruits to UAB

#### CYNTHIA BROWN, M.D.

Cynthia Brown, M.D., moved to Birmingham about nine months ago, after finishing a postdoctoral fellowship at the Yale School of Medicine. As a geriatrician focusing on mobility issues in hospitals, she found UAB and the Birmingham VA to be a perfect fit.

"Honestly, when I started interviewing, this was just the right place," says Brown. "The people who work here—and the support and mentoring that occurs—will be really beneficial for a junior faculty member such as myself."

UAB's interdisciplinary structure was one of the features that helped attract Brown to UAB and the Birmingham VA. Specifically, collaborations with the Schools of Public Health and Health Related Professions, along with an unorthodox interview process, piqued her interest.

"I even met some folks outside of the division when I interviewed," says Brown. "No other school introduced me to people outside of the division, but because everybody works so closely together at UAB, it made sense."

Established gerontological entities such as the Center for Aging (CFA) and the Birmingham/Atlanta Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC) also helped cement Brown's decision.

"Having the CFA and the GRECC in place is one of the reasons I came—the fact that there is that kind of support from the 'powers that be,'" says Brown. "For some-

body who's as junior as I am, having people available to review proposals and papers is critical."

Brown's research will focus specifically on the amount of bed rest older patients get during hospital stays. She will first interview patients, hoping to determine what type of patients are getting too much bed rest. Then she plans to develop a model for targeted interventions.

"There's a lot of opportunity for this to be something much more than local. I think this could impact the way that hospitals operate all across the country," says Brown.

#### TIM GARVEY, M.D.

Brown is just beginning a promising career at UAB, but Timothy Garvey, M.D., came to the campus in his prime. Garvey has been practicing medicine for 20 years, and for the last 10 he has been the director of the endocrinology division at the Medical University of South Carolina. Though he wasn't actively looking to move elsewhere, he says the research opportunities at UAB and the GRECC were too good to pass up.

"The research environment here is superior," says Garvey. "It's extensive, sophisticated; it's an interactive, collaborative campus; and it just seemed to me that I would have a lot of potential to increase the quantity and quality of my research."

*Continued on back*



*Cynthia Brown came to UAB because of the excellent level of support that the Center for Aging and the GRECC provide.*



*Tim Garvey chose UAB because of the opportunities for collaborative research.*

# From Genesis to Judgment:

## The SCEGM gets a report card



From January 21 to 24, 2004, SCEGM faculty hosted a site visit for outside parties to evaluate the success of the center.

It's the envy of top academic institutions across the country, but it's not a novel form of technology or a brand-new building. It is, in fact, something less glamorous and less common in academic medicine: It's the Southeast Center of Excellence in Geriatric Medicine (SCEGM), a ground-breaking collaboration between Emory University and UAB, two academic health centers committed to serving as a regional and national resource in geriatric medicine.

### IN THE BEGINNING. . .

The SCEGM was established in 1998 by a grant from the Hartford Foundation, along with matching funds from UAB, Emory, the University of Alabama Health Services Foundation, and Wesley Woods in Atlanta.

The center's purpose is to recruit, train, and develop geriatricians, as well as to combine the resources of Emory and UAB to best facilitate the advancement of geriatric medicine. Richard Allman, M.D., and Joseph Ouslander, M.D., serve as co-directors of the SCEGM.

The center's mission is accomplished quietly by guiding faculty through the research process, providing invaluable assistance in establishing research goals, and writing grant proposals.

Some of its work, however, is accomplished through more visible means. Two recent examples include the seventh International Conference on Geriatric Nephrology and Urology in October 2003, which the SCEGM co-sponsored, and the

Basic Biology of Aging retreat held April 2-3, 2004, in Birmingham. Both events featured SCEGM faculty as speakers and helped connect geriatricians from all over the Southeast.

### LET THERE BE LIGHT. . .

From January 21 to 24, 2004, the SCEGM was put under the spotlight. Sarajane Brittis, Ph.D., of the Hartford Foundation, along with consultants Patricia Blachette, M.D., M.P.H. (University of Hawaii), and George Taffet, M.D. (Baylor College of Medicine), came to UAB to assess the progress of the SCEGM in fulfilling its mission. UAB president Carol Garrison attended the event and expressed UAB's commitment to the center's continuing success. Brittis said that she was "very impressed" with what the center had been able to accomplish, and both Blachette and Taffet had similar words of praise in their letters to Allman and Ouslander following the visit.

### THEY SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD. . .

"The staff members that we met at both facilities have an enthusiasm for their work that is infectious," writes Blachette. "The SCEGM has been successful in launching the careers of several very promising young geriatricians."

Taffet complimented the "shared foci" of the research and the "shared vision of the co-directors," but also took time to commend the institutional support coming from Emory and UAB, something not all geriatrics programs enjoy. "I was quite impressed by the level of institutional commitment at both sites," writes Taffet.

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

More than 140 faculty members contribute to the programs of the UAB Center for Aging (CFA). This issue of Insight on Aging introduces two new faculty members, Cynthia Brown and Timothy Garvey, and highlights the aging-sensitivity training programs, important educational initiatives, being conducted by Lesa Woodby. Partnerships with Emory University and the John A. Hartford Foundation through the Southeast Center of Excellence in Geriatric Medicine (SCEGM) have made the CFA a regional and national resource in geriatric medicine. None of this would be possible without your support, and we thank you.

### CENTER FOR AGING CONTRIBUTIONS September 2003-April 2004

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"People are really kind of astounded that we've done this," says Allman. "It's been more successful than people thought possible for UAB and Emory."

Allman says that while many institutions have expressed interest in developing similar partnerships, most efforts have been stymied by the lack of willing partners, as many colleges and universities view such relationships as unnecessary complications.

The SCEGM has succeeded where other attempts have failed because of a shared vision, but also because of a shared commitment to advancing the field of gerontology.

"The geographical proximity of the two schools could have led to fierce competition," notes Blanchette. "Instead, much to Emory and UAB's credit, they have chosen to capitalize on that proximity to enhance opportunities at both sites."

Taffet was impressed that "each site's recognition of the other's strengths promot-

ed sending trainees and junior faculty to the place where they are likely to do best.

"This was admirable and clearly showed the whole center was much greater than the two parts," he adds.

### BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY. . .

The SCEGM has facilitated the development of the Birmingham/Atlanta Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC) based at the affiliated VA Medical Centers. Regional collaboration has also grown by the recent establishment of a Southeast affiliate for the American Federation for Aging Research, based in Atlanta. This will allow young investigators in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama to apply for grants directly through the affiliate program rather than through separate institutions.

"There will be more faculty from UAB and Emory talking to each other, and it will expand

throughout the Southeast," says Allman. "We believe that our presence can help improve research, education, and patient care related to geriatrics in the region."

Of course, much of the future of the SCEGM depends on continuing support from the Hartford Foundation, which had the vision to recognize the potential of the center and provide the necessary funds.

"Their ability to recognize that the SCEGM could function as a unit is rare," says Taffet, "and without it, the clear synergies and excellent relationships would not have been able to grow."

### *Insight on Aging*

The Newsletter for the UAB Center for Aging

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**Sarajane Brittis (above) and William J. Koopman (right) participate in the review process.**



**SCEGM faculty and guests discuss the progress of the ground-breaking center.**

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Garvey's research focuses primarily on type 2 diabetes and insulin-resistance syndrome, which can lead to obesity, atherosclerosis, stroke, heart attack, and other conditions normally associated with aging.

"These things increase with age as we suffer the slings and arrows of fate," says Garvey. "They just catch up with us in our older years."

Garvey came to UAB a short time ago, but already the collaborative campus that

brought him here is enhancing his research. Just across the hall at the VA, Marcas Bamman, Ph.D., is doing research that overlaps Garvey's. The collaboration started when Garvey attended the Southeast Center of Excellence in Geriatric Medicine (SCEGM) retreat at Callaway Gardens in September 2003.

"I got the lay of the land and saw what the potential was, and that's how I started inter-

acting more with Dr. Bamman and some of the atherosclerosis group," says Garvey.

"The campus is just an outstanding place to work. There is a wealth of expertise and technology and many avenues for collaboration."

UAB and the CFA are confident that their investment in these bright stars will illuminate the world of geriatrics for years to come.

## Aging and Sensitivity

New employees at the VA Hospital are starting to see the world of the elderly very differently.

That's because they're all taking part in the new Aging and Sensitivity course taught by Lesa Woodby, Ph.D., M.P.H., as a standard part of new-employee orientation at the VA. The course was created to help sensitize employees to common problems and conditions experienced by the elderly by using a "kit" including glasses that simulate vision loss and gloves that simulate loss of manual dexterity.

Woodby, associate director for education for the GRECC, got the idea from an intensive geriatric training course she attended two years ago.

"When I learned about this type of train-

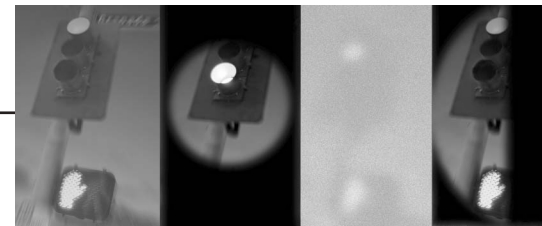
ing, I felt that it fit very well into the mission of the GRECC and the VA," says Woodby. "It's an opportunity to enhance customer service for America's heroes."

Through an orientation evaluation, Woodby has received an overwhelmingly positive response to the training sessions.

"We usually get written comments saying that the aging sensitivity course has opened the participants' eyes and that we should give it to everyone," says Woodby.

Expanding the course might not be far off, as its success at the VA in Birmingham has sparked interest at similar institutions across the Southeast.

Since the program was implemented, Woodby has received calls from Atlanta, Georgia, and Charleston and Columbia,



**Special glasses used in the course simulate the effects of glaucoma, cataracts, stroke, and macular degeneration, conditions commonly associated with aging.**

South Carolina, about implementing their own programs. Here in Birmingham the UAB School of Public Health has also expressed interest and has invited her to guest-lecture on aging and sensitivity.

"As America ages, we need to become more sensitive and empathetic about the problems associated with aging," says Woodby, "not only for others, but for ourselves, so that we can all age more gracefully."

### INTERESTED IN AGING?

If you would like to learn more about the UAB Center for Aging or are interested in supporting the research, education, and outreach activities of the center, please contact George Mickwee at (205) 934-9261 or Martha Frankel at 934-0232 or mfrankel@uab.edu.

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