



Dr. Stanley Burns, M.D., center director (left) and Dr. Rodger J. Elble, M.D., Ph.D., neurology chair, evaluate Onalee Lutz of Springfield at the Parkinson Center at SIU in Springfield.

Capsaicin Research May Hold Key to Pain Sensation

Capsaicin — the same pungent ingredient found in hot chili peppers — may play an important role in the activation and sensation of pain.

The findings were published in a recent issue of the scientific journal *Nature* after a year-long research project conducted by Louis Premkumar, Ph.D., assistant professor of pharmacology at SIU, and Gerard Ahern, Ph.D., post-doctoral fellow studying at the medical school. Their research paper identifies a molecular mechanism that can induce hypersensitivity to different types of pain. The findings have provoked worldwide interest.

The two will continue to work at unraveling other complexities related to the pain process. “Continued research will enable us to identify other pathways that activate sensors involved in different forms of thermal and inflammatory pain,” Dr. Premkumar explains.

“We’re also hopeful that the information gained from these and other studies will eventually lead to the development of new treatment strategies to alleviate pain, which may be helpful in the treatment of arthritis and similar other chronic pain syndromes.”

An internal SIU grant funded the research.

SIU Med School Opens Parkinson Center

The Parkinson Center at SIU, a Center of Excellence of the National Parkinson Foundation (NPF), has been established at the School of Medicine in Springfield.

One of 52 U.S. centers affiliated with NPF, the Center provides diagnosis and treatment for patients with Parkinson’s disease, blepharospasm, dystonia, Huntington disease, Tourette syndrome, tremor, ataxia and other movement disorders.

The state of Illinois earmarked \$375,000 to support the Center this fiscal year and recommended continued funding for next year’s budget.

Rodger J. Elble, M.D., Ph.D., professor and chair of neurology, undertook the initial development of the Center, recruiting R. Stanley Burns, M.D., as director of the Center and professor of neurology. Dr. Burns previously was director of the Movement Disorders Clinic at The Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

Basic and clinical research is an important part of the new SIU program, including participation in various national clinical trials to evaluate new drugs.

The first clinical trials are expected to be open for enrollment later this year.

The SIU Parkinson Center physicians will see patients in current clinical space used by the Department of Neurology in the SIU Clinics (second floor), 751 N. Rutledge, Springfield.

For more information, patients can call 217-524-8417 weekdays.

Mind and Matter

As part of an annual national campaign to introduce lay audiences to the most complex organ of the human body, the School of Medicine in Springfield observed “Brain Awareness Week” in March with a variety of events.

A public forum, “Parkinson’s Disease: What Will It Take to Find a Cure?,” featured Abraham N. Lieberman, M.D., national medical director of The National Parkinson Foundation and R. Stanley Burns, M.D., professor of neurology and director of the new Parkinson Center at SIU.

Two “brain briefings” programs also were held, one for adults addressing the effects of aging on the brain, the other presenting neuroscience exhibits to seventh-grade students from Lincoln Magnet School in Springfield. SIU’s Department of Neurology and SIU’s Center for Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders sponsored the programs.

Black History Month

“The Evolving Vision” was the theme for the School of Medicine’s February celebration of Black History Month. The School’s chapter of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) organized several events in Springfield.

“The theme reflects how far we’ve come in medicine to eliminate racial disparities in health care, where we are today, and what our goals are for the near future,” said Dyi Kinney, second-year medical student from Champaign and SNMA member. “The ‘vision’ will only be achieved by working together.”

Kinney was one of four second-year medical students who taught a three-week health care class for about two dozen youngsters held at the Springfield Housing Authority’s Community Center. The other medical students were Maya Carter from Palmdale, Calif., Dana Ray from Decatur and Karen Whitehorn from Chicago.

As part of the Black History Month activities, Edem S. Agamah, M.D., received the 2001 *Dr. Edwin A. Lee Memorial Award* for community service. Dr. Agamah is a hematologist/oncologist at the Central Illinois Hematology and Oncology Center and is a volunteer faculty member at SIU. A native of Ghana, West Africa, he was recognized for his service, including efforts with the International Health and Development Network, a medical mission organization he founded in 1995. Father Joseph Brown, Ph.D., professor and director of Black American studies at SIU Carbondale, gave the keynote address at the evening event.

The celebration also featured several exhibits and photo displays at the medical school detailing the lives of prominent African-American physicians. Other activities included showings of two documentary films and a book fair fund-raiser.



SIU President Holds Open Forum

Southern Illinois University President James E. Walker, Ed.D., (at the podium) held an open forum in late January at the School of Medicine in Springfield. The forum gave the SIU community an opportunity to provide input into the future of the University. Faculty, staff and students shared their optimism about the future of the medical school with Dr. Walker, covering topics ranging from campus architecture to research support.

Study Shows Decreased TV Viewing Reduces Aggression in Children

A recent Stanford University study revealed that children who reduced their television viewing and video-game playing exhibited less aggressive behavior than classmates who didn’t.

Glen Aylward, Ph.D., professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at SIU, said the study supports earlier-released data suggesting a possible relationship between viewing violence on television and in movies and video games, and aggressive behavior.

Published in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, the study involved third- and fourth-grade students at two California public schools.

“Other factors, both within and outside of the home and school, have an impact on children and such behavior. These include socio-economic

status, family values, violence in the home, family support and conflict resolution through talking as opposed to physical means,” explains Dr. Aylward.

Dr. Aylward advises parents to monitor their children’s television viewing and to discuss the program content with them to help reduce aggressive behavior.

“Limit the amount of time that your child watches television, engages in video games or watches movies. It doesn’t aid a child’s development,” he says.

For more information about *In Brief* stories, contact the Office of Public Affairs, SIU School of Medicine, P.O. Box 19621, Springfield, Illinois 62794-9621, 217-785-2155 (office) or 217-785-0580 (fax) or e-mail Nancy S. Zimmers, director of public affairs, at nzimmers@siumed.edu.