



PEARL



The Pancreas Education and Research Letter

MMPSG

Midwest Multicenter Pancreatic Study Group Is Now CAPER

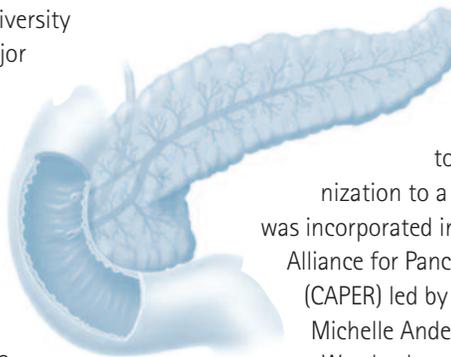
The highly successful Midwest Multicenter Pancreatic Study Group (MMPSG) was a group of dedicated physician-scientists that formed in 1994 with a handshake during a summer golf outing between Charles Martin, MD and Stephen Ulrich, MD at the University of Cincinnati, Lawrence Gates, MD from the University of Kentucky, and David Whitcomb, MD from the University of Pittsburgh. The group's first major project was a family study of hereditary pancreatitis, leading to a revolutionary discovery of trypsinogen gene mutations – a finding published in *Nature Genetics* and highlighted in the *Wall Street Journal*. The group formed the foundation of the North American Pancreatitis Study 2 (NAPS2), which has revolutionized our understanding of chronic pancreatitis, including the fact that most pancreatitis is NOT due to alcohol abuse. The group has grown beyond the "midwest," with university faculty members contributing from Boston to Southern California, and from Florida to Seattle.

One of the major successes of the MMPSG was due to the intention that each faculty must be dedicated to mentorship, and to bring a trainee to the traditional summer meeting in Pittsburgh (now known as PancreasFest). The trainees were taught how to present new scientific hypotheses and design multicenter studies in which MMPSG mentors would participate,

and the trainees would also agree to reciprocate by participating in other studies. This spirit of mentoring and collaboration has resulted in one of the most effective pancreatic study groups ever formed in the USA, as well as a vital and unique support structure for young investigators. Due to the increasing size and complexity of the group, Dr. Whitcomb (as the last president of MMPSG) has helped organize and establish a new non-profit (501c) corporation to take the effectiveness of this organization to a new level. The new organization was incorporated in Pennsylvania as the "Collaborative Alliance for Pancreatic Education and Research" (CAPER) led by Randall Brand, MD (President), Michelle Anderson, MD (Secretary/Treasurer).

We also have appointed three committee chairmen including Santhi Vege, MD, chair of the meeting committee, Timothy Gardner, MD, chair of the communication committee and Wahid Wassef, MD, MPH, chair of the education committee.

As a non-profit organization, individuals, foundations and corporations can support pancreatic research directly by funding the research support events, databases, equipment and supplies that young investigators need to start and to develop their research careers. For more information about CAPER, please contact Dr. Brand at 412-623-0021 or reb53@pitt.edu.



Follow-up Questionnaires – Subjects who enrolled in the North American Pancreatitis Study with recurrent acute pancreatitis, chronic pancreatitis and controls and subjects who enrolled in the Hereditary Pancreatitis Study will be contacted either by mail, or by the site from which they were referred in the coming months. Please fill out this questionnaire and return it in the stamped and addressed envelope provided. If you have questions, please call 1-888-PITT-DNA.

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Preparing for the Future: Young Investigators

One of the major concerns over the past two decades has been the slow disappearance of physicians and scientists who were dedicated to a lifetime of investigation into pancreatic diseases and their cure. However, recently there is renewed energy and excitement as a new generation of outstanding researchers emerges. The photograph at right from *PancreasFest 2009* features three rising stars, along with two well-established leaders. Bimaljit Sandhu, MD has developed a major practice at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. Dr. Sandhu is studying factors that worsen chronic pancreatitis. Dhiraj Yadav, MD, MPH is a physician-epidemiologist at the University of Pittsburgh who is analyzing the NAPS2 samples to understand how environmental factors influence the development of chronic pancreatitis. Timothy Gardner, MD is the founding director of the Pancreatic Disorders Section of the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Division at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, NH. Dr. Gardner is working with two more young investigators, George Papachristou, MD from the University of



Left to right: Drs. Sandhu, Yadav, Gardner, Burton and Geenen discuss new discoveries during a break at PancreasFest 2009.

Pittsburgh (*not shown*) and Bechien Wu, MD, MPH, from Harvard University (*not shown*) on complications of acute pancreatitis. Frank Burton, MD (St. Louis University) and Joseph Geenen, MD (Medical College of Wisconsin) are well-established mentors who are showing the young guys the way to success! ○

PancreasFest 2009



PancreasFest Lectures. Darwin Conwell, MD, Harvard University (left) discusses new methods of measuring pancreatic function testing. An audience of the leading clinical scientists with a focus on pancreatic diseases discuss striking new findings during a series of lectures related to the North American Pancreatitis Study 2 (NAPS2). ○

Greetings from the Dartmouth Pancreas Team

by Timothy Gardner, MD

The Pancreas Center of Excellence in the Section of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center was started in 2008. It serves patients with pancreatic diseases from New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and southern Canada. The Center consists of two gastroenterologists,

Dr. Stuart Gordon and myself, a nurse coordinator, Marsha Call, and an administrative coordinator, Erica Gillette. The clinic is supervised by the chairman of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Dr. Richard Rothstein.

Dr. Gordon and I see patients in the clinic two days per week and perform endoscopic procedures related to the pancreas the remaining days. Once weekly, a pancreatic tumor clinic is held, in which patients with newly diagnosed malignancies of the pancreas see medical and radiation oncologists, surgical oncologists, palliative care specialists and nutritionists. Dartmouth is one of the only centers in the country to perform direct pancreatic function testing. Some of the other

procedures performed at the Medical Center are advanced ERCP and interventional EUS, including endoscopic necrosectomy.

The Medical Center is actively involved in many research projects related to the early diagnosis and novel treatment of acute and chronic pancreatitis

and pancreatic cancer. We have also been very fortunate to collaborate with Dr. Whitcomb and his staff at the University of Pittsburgh on the North American Pancreatitis Study, and have welcomed Dr. Whitcomb to Dartmouth on multiple occasions as a guest professor and lecturer.

We congratulate Dr. Whitcomb and his colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh on their many advances in the field of pancreatic disease and look forward to continued collaboration in the future. ○



Dartmouth Pancreas Team (left to right): Dr. Stuart Gordon, Director of Endoscopy; Dr. Richard Rothstein, Section Chief Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology; Erica Gillette, Administrative Coordinator; Dr. Timothy Gardner, Director Pancreatic Disorders.

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National Pancreas Foundation Is Poised for Growth

by Orelle Jackson, Executive Director, National Pancreas Foundation

The National Pancreas Foundation (NPF) was founded a decade ago by dedicated volunteers committed to fighting pancreatic disease. We have achieved a great deal to date – funding research; hosting medical education opportunities and reaching out to patients with support and information. But we have always had the vision of doing more, reaching more patients and families, and now is the time.

The NPF is launching its *Network of Courage* – a network of volunteers across the country who are interested in bringing the programs and services of the NPF to their communities. We will work with volunteers in their communities to set up chapters, raise awareness, provide patient outreach, work with local medical professionals and

raise much needed funds. Our first two Courage Chapters, in Boston and Pittsburgh should be up and running before the end of the year and we are anticipating at least two more Courage Chapters in the next six months. ○

If you are interested in starting a Courage Chapter in your community, please contact Orelle Jackson at ojackson@pancreasfoundation.org.



Pancreas Research Supporter Gets Hole-in-One

The **James F. Walsh Memorial Golf Outing** is an annual event held near Chicago, Illinois to support the pancreatic cancer research work of the University of Pittsburgh and pancreatic cancer support groups. This year at the event, a special par 3 challenge was set at the third hole. On Saturday, August 1, one of the research supporters, Paul Murray, knocked in a hole-in-one! (*Mr. Murray is pictured at right in red.*) The event was witnessed by Drs. Whitcomb and Brand, and Mr. Murray walked away with a beautiful golf bag and set for his effort.

The Walsh Foundation was formed in memory of Jim Walsh and has raised over \$200,000 in support for research in the past four years. Their web site is www.jamesfwalshfoundation.org. For those in the Chicago area that would like to participate in next year's event, it is scheduled for the first Friday in August. ○



Hereditary Pancreatitis Clinic – The HP clinic at the University of Pittsburgh is restarting in November 2009. Initially, the clinic will be held once a month on a Friday and will be located at UPMC Shadyside in Pittsburgh, PA. Dr. Andres Gelrud is the clinical pancreatologist and Dr. Whitcomb is the translational physician. Appointments can be made by calling (412) 623-3105. Please mention you would like to participate in the Hereditary Pancreatitis Clinic at the time of your call. ○

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