Holiday Letter to Our Colleagues and Friends
Raymond Sawaya

Happy New Year! Here’s a recap of the past year’s happenings in the Department of Neurosurgery.

Last January we began with the 16th annual Milam E. Leavens Lecture, honoring Dr. Leavens, the first chief of the M.D. Anderson Neurosurgery Service. Titled “Evolving concepts of quality in surgery: the case of carotid endarterectomy.” The talk was presented by A. John Popp, MD, Chairman, Dept. of Neurosurgery, Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA.

The 17th annual Milam E. Leavens Lecture, titled “Surgical Expertise in Neuro-Oncology. History, Theory, and Neurosimulation: The Future,” will be presented on January 11, 2013 by Rolando Del Maestro, M.D, Ph.D., Brain Tumour Research Center Director and Chair in Neuro-Oncology, Montreal Neurological Institute, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

We regret that Dr. Syed Azeem has left M.D. Anderson to be closer to his family in the Chicago area. We wish him well.

We wish to welcome Dr. Claudio Tatsui, who comes to us now from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, where he retains an adjunct professor appointment. He specializes in surgery of the spine and spinal tumors.

Dr. Franco DeMonte became Chair of the Membership Committee of the Society of University Neurosurgeons in March. He was visiting Professor and Lecturer at the Univ. of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada in April and was AO North America Visiting Professor at the Dept. of Neurosurgery at Loyola University in Chicago, IL, in July. In August, he served as instructor for “Transfascial Approach” at the CNS 3-D Surgical Anatomy Course for Senior Residents at the Nicholson Microsurgical and Endoscopic Center for Clinical Applications Laboratory (MECCA) in Houston, TX. He was selected for the Patients’ Choice Award (sponsored by www.patientschoice.org & MDx Medical, Inc.), and he served as guest editor for the Neurosurgical Clinics of North America issue on skull base malignancy.

Dr. Amy Heimberger was promoted to the rank of Professor with tenure as of September 1, 2012. She recorded the M.D. Anderson podcast, “Brain Cancer Basics and Hope through Research—CNL” (available at: http://www3.mdanderson.org/streams/AudioPlayer.cfm?xml=cdg%2FCNL-Brain-Cancer-Hope-Research–mp3), and she received the Robert M. Chamberlain Distinguished Mentor Award for 2012 from the M.D. Anderson Postdoctoral Fellows Mentor Award Committee. She also served as co-leader of the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center Support Group (CCSG) Brain Cancer Program and became a member of the M.D. Anderson Brain Tumor Center Executive Committee. In November, she chaired the “Immunotherapy Session: Targeting Glioma-Mediated Immune Suppression” at the 17th Annual Society for Neuro-Oncology Scientific Meeting and Education Day in Washington, DC.

Dr. Suyun Huang was promoted to the rank of Professor with tenure as of September 1, 2012.

Dr. Frederick Lang served as Program Director/PI for the application for renewal of The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center SPORE in Brain Cancer. He presented the Keynote Lecture at the 7th Central European Neurosurgical Society Meeting (CENS) in Prague, Czech Republic in June. He also became a member of the Milestones Working Group in the Society of Neurological Surgeons 2012, and he was nominated for the Waun Ki Hong Award for Excellence in Team Science at M.D. Anderson’s 7th Annual Division of Cancer Medicine Faculty Recognition and Awards Program in December. In November, the Developmental Research Program of the NIH/NCI SPORE in Brain Cancer awarded him $50,000 as PI to study “MSCs as natural bio-factories for nanosized exosomes carrying STAT3 siRNA.” He also received $725,000 from the Broach Foundation for Brain Cancer Research, as PI to conduct a “Phase I trial of conditionally replication-competent adenovirus (delta-24-RGD) for recurrent malignant gliomas.”

Dr. Nicholas Levine used a $100,000 grant from the David Nicholson Brain Center Research Foundation to open (as director) the new Nicholson MECCA laboratory, a multidisciplinary state-of-the-art cadaveric and animal surgical lab for education, training, and research, a joint venture of the neurosurgery departments at M.D. Anderson and Baylor College of Medicine. Subsequently at MECCA, he directed the 1st Annual Nicholson Lecture in Surgical Neuroanatomy and Research in May and was the instructor for the CNS 3-D Surgical Anatomy Course.
for Senior Residents in August. He also received $100,000 for the MECCA Lab by Life’s Requite, Inc.

Dr. Ian McCutcheon served as program cochair for the 10th International Medical Symposium on Von-Hippel Lindau in Houston in January, and he was special editor for the “Pituitary Tumors” issue of Current Problems in Cancer. He was elected President of the Texas Association of Neurological Surgeons for the 2012-2013 term and also elected to the Society of University Neurosurgeons, where he was appointed to the Bylaws Committee. He was nominated Chair-Elect of the Executive Committee of the M.D. Anderson Medical Staff for 2012-2013. And in October, he served as Visiting Professor at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, Dept. of Neurosurgery in Peoria, IL. As Co-PI, he was awarded $8,000 in January by the NIH/NCI to conduct the “Bianual von Hippel-Lindau Family Alliance medical meeting.”

Dr. Sujit Prabhu served as instructor for “Insular Tumors & Awake Craniotomies” at M.D. Anderson’s 6th Annual Functional Brain Anatomy Seminar in January. He successfully renewed his multiyear appointment in the Dept. of Neurosurgery at M.D. Anderson. He also served as director for the Anatomi-e Workshop: “Test Drive” software, which embeds extensively labeled Deformable Anatomical Templates (DAT) into volume images of the patient, at the 9th Annual World Congress of the Society of Brain Mapping and Therapeutics in Toronto in June.

Dr. Ganesh Rao was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor with initial award of tenure, as of September 1, 2012. He was a member of the panel presenting the Ronald L. Bitner Award on Brain Tumor Research at the 2012 AANS annual meeting in Miami, FL. He also served as chairman of the annual CNS meeting in Chicago in October.

Dr. Laurence Rhines successfully renewed his tenure. He served as director for the course “Spine Tumors” at the meeting of the AANS/CNS Section on Disorders of the Spine and Peripheral Nerves in Orlando, FL, in March. He also served as education director for “Principles and Treatment of Spinal Disorders for Residents” at the AO North America meeting in Las Vegas, NV, in April.

Dr. Raymond Sawaya hosted the 4th Annual Philip L. Gildenberg Lecture, which was presented by David W. Roberts, M.D., at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, TX, in February. He was also the Guest of Honor at the 29th Congress of the Brazilian Society of Neurosurgery in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in September. He presented the Samuel J. Hassenbusch Lecture at the annual meeting of the Texas Association of Neurological Surgeons (TANS). This year he was also an honored guest of the British Neurosurgical Society. In 2012, he received a total of $70,000 from various donors to fund the M.D. Anderson “Brain Tumor Center Priority Program.” He also received a generous contribution of $1 million for brain cancer research from the Silverman Foundation.

Dr. Dima Suki served on the discussion panel for the topic “Clinical Infrastructure/Clinical PoC & Unmet Needs/Clinical Trials” at the M.D. Anderson Brain Tumor Program Strategic Retreat in Houston in May. And her appointment on M.D. Anderson Institutional Review Board 4 was renewed for fiscal year 2012-2013.

Dr. Jeffrey Weinberg was elected Vice President of the Texas Association of Neurological Surgeons for the 2012-2013 term. He served as a faculty member for the AANS Goodman Oral Board Course in Houston in April. He also graduated from M.D. Anderson’s Faculty Leadership Academy in May. As fellowship director, he received $50,000 from the Neurosurgery Research and Education Foundation (NREF) to fund M.D. Anderson Cancer Center Fellowship program.

Residents for 2012 from Baylor College of Medicine included Tarek Abuelen, MD (10/11-2/12), Deshdeepak Sahni, MD (7/12-10/12), Anish Sen, MD (7/12-10/12), George Al-Shamy, MD (10/12-12/12), Akash Patel, MD (12/12-2/13), and Zheng Lan, MD (11/12-2/13). And from the Univ. of Chicago, Sherise Ferguson, MD (7/11-6/12) along with James Alan Muns, MD, (7/12-6/13) from UT Medical Branch (Galveston, TX).

New Clinical Fellows this year (7/12-6/13) were Adrian T. Harvey, MD (Midwestern University, Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine, Normal, IL), Nicholas F. Marko, MD (Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH), Mateo Ziu, MD (Univ. of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, TX), Tal Shahar, MD (Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel) and Betty Kim, MD (Univ. of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON) continue for another year (8/11-7/13). Finishing their fellowships in 2012 (7/11-6/12) were Lana Christiano, MD (Univ. of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Newark, NJ), Paul Kongkham, MD (Univ. of Toronto, Toronto, ON), and Fassil B. Mesfin, MD (Albany Medical Center Hospital, Albany, NY).

Visiting Scientists this year were: Al-Hua Gong, PhD, and Lin Yang, MD, from the People’s Republic of China. There were 10 Postdoctoral Fellows in our department in 2012.

We thank our friends Kyle C. and Elaine Brooks, Paul Oreffice, Bill Dore, Polys Hajoannou, the Dr. Marnie Rose Foundation, the Sorensen Family, the Broach Foundation, and the Silverman Foundation. Their support has helped greatly to advance brain tumor research in our department.