Happy New Year! Let’s recap the past year’s events in The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center Department of Neurosurgery.

The year began with the 20th annual Milam E. Leavens Lecture, honoring Dr. Leavens, the first chief of the MD Anderson Neurosurgery Service. Titled “Developing New Approaches to Brain Tumor Therapy,” it was presented on Jan. 15, 2016, by Dr. Henry Brem, Director, Department of Neurosurgery, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland.

The 21st annual Milam E. Leavens Lecture, titled “The Evolution of Endoscopic Skull Base Surgery: Current Indications, Limitations and Results” will be presented Friday, Jan. 20, 2017, by Fred Gentili, M.D., MSc, Professor, Division of Neurosurgery, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

On Jan. 28, Dr. Raymond Sawaya hosted the 25th Anniversary Gala celebrating the creation of MD Anderson’s Department of Neurosurgery, at the River Oaks Country Club, Houston, Texas. Consequently, William H. McRaven, Chancellor of The University of Texas System, issued a proclamation declaring Jan. 28, 2016, to be The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center Neurosurgical Oncology Day of The University of Texas System.

Dr. Franco DeMonte directed the Fifth Annual Nicholson Lecture in Surgical Neuroanatomy and Research, with Dr. Carl B. Heilman, at the Nicholson Microsurgical and Endoscopic Center for Clinical Applications (MECCA) Laboratory at Baylor College of Medicine in March.

In August, he directed the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) 3-D Surgical Anatomy Course for Senior Residents at the MECCA lab.

Dr. Sherise Ferguson continues to lead our department’s efforts in MD Anderson’s Houston-area locations.

Dr. Amy Heimberger was elected Director of the MD Anderson Brain Tumor Center’s research program. She was appointed chair of the NIH/CNBT-Study Section and reviewed grant proposals there in February, May, June, and October. She served as a member at the CARIS Scientific Advisory Board Meeting, Phoenix, Arizona, in April and December. She also served as a member at the 2016 University of California at San Francisco Brain Tumor Center External Advisory Board Meeting in May.

She was program chair for “Airing Innovations from the GBM Moon Shot” at MD Anderson’s Advances in Oncology Institutional Grand Rounds, in June, and she chaired the NBDA-GBM AGILE Think Tank: “Re-thinking” biomarkers and therapeutic targets for the GBM AGILE Trial and Workshop: “Finalizing the protocol and plans to implement and manage the GBM AGILE Trial,” in Scottsdale, Arizona, in August.

She was the Co-PI on an NIH R01 grant to Shulin Li, Ph.D. for $250,000/year for five years to study “Fgl-2-targeted therapy for reversing multimodality immune suppression,” and on an $800,000 grant from the Gateway Foundation for three years to study “Targeting cytomegalovirus as a novel immunotherapy for glioblastoma multiforme.” As PI, she also received $499,999 for one year from Dr. Ronald DePinho’s NIH/NCI P30 grant for a “Canine immunotherapy supplement.”

Dr. Suyun Huang was awarded a five-year NIH/NCI R01 grant of $366,000 (for the first year) as PI to study “Epigenetic modulation of the wnt/beta-catenin pathway and tumorigenesis of glioma cells by KDM4C.” She also continued reviewing grants as a member of the NIH Tumor Cell Biology Study Section.

Dr. Frederick Lang served as visiting professor for the Otto Lien Da Wong Visiting Professorship in Neuro-Oncology at the 13th Asia Pacific Multidisciplinary Meeting for Nervous System Diseases, Shatin, Hong Kong, in January. He was invited as the Samuel Hassenbusch Lecturer, at the Texas Association of Neurological Surgeons Annual Meeting in Ft. Worth, Texas, in February. He was a finalist for MD Anderson’s Robert M. Chamberlain Distinguished Mentor Award, and he served as chair for MD Anderson’s Brain SPORE Mini-Retreat, in June. In April, he received $145,535 as PI from the “Priscilla and Jason Hiley Cancer Research Fund,” and in June, he was awarded $1 million by the Broach Foundation for Brain Cancer Research as PI, to support the clinical trial of mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) and Delta-24-RGD to fight glioblastoma. In November, he also received $1.25 million (over five years) from The Howard and Susan Elias Foundation as PI to study “Biological therapies for human gliomas: developing new strategies to treat brain tumors.”

Dr. Joseph McCarty is serving on two NIH Study Sections, the Intercellular Interactions section and the Tumor Microenvironment section.

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Dr. Ian McCutcheon was awarded renewal of his tenure term. He moderated the session on “Neuro-Oncology” at the 21st International Charles Heidelberger Symposium on Cancer Research, Moscow, Russia, in May. In November, he also moderated the session on “Intracranial Metastases” at the Seventh Asian Gamma Knife Academy in Honolulu, as well as the session on “Nonendocrine Pituitary Tumors” at the 14th Annual Meeting of the International Pituitary Pathology Club in Annecy, France.

Dr. Sujit Prabhu served as an expert guest at the Society for Neuro-Oncology Latin America 2016: Update on Neuro-Oncology 2016, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in March.

Dr. Ganesh Rao participated in the Congress of Neurological Surgeons Executive Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, in March, and he was nominated to the MD Anderson Faculty Leadership Academy in June. In July, he served as an instructor for the Society of Neurological Surgeons Boot Camp Fundamental Skills Course, Houston. And in October, he was elected to active membership in the American Academy of Neurological Surgery. In July, he was awarded $350,000/year for five years by the NIH/NINDS as PI of an RO1 grant on “Modeling malignant progression in glioma.”

Dr. Shaan Raza became co-chair of the Research Committee for the North American Skull Base Society (NASBS) in February. In May, at the 7th World Congress of Endoscopic Surgery of the Skull Base and Brain in Chicago, he was a panelist for the discussion of both “Endonasal Approaches for Trigeminal Schwannomas” and “Chondrosarcomas.”

Dr. Laurence Rhines graduated from MD Anderson’s Faculty Leadership Academy in January. In April, he served as moderator for sessions on both “Lumbar Spondylolisthesis” at the 6th Annual Conference on Multimodal Treatment of Spinal Tumors, Seattle Science Foundation, Seattle, Washington, and on “Tumors” at the Global Spine Congress 2016, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. He also served as visiting professor at the Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio, in September.

Dr. Raymond Sawaya became a member of the External Review Committee at the Neurosurgery Department of Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, in January. He presented the inaugural Dr. Raymond Sawaya Award at the Society for Neuro-Oncology Latin America 2016: Update on Neuro-Oncology, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in March. He became a member of the American University of Beirut’s International Advisory Council (April 2016–April 2019) and also a member of the Scientific Advisory Board at the Brockman Medical Research Foundation. In November, he received the 2016 Charles A. LeMaistre, M.D., Outstanding Achievement Award in Cancer at the MD Anderson Faculty Honors Convocation.

Dr. Dima Suki became an associate member of MD Anderson’s Institutional Review Boards 1 and 2 in June, as well as chair of MD Anderson’s Institutional Review Boards 4 and 5.

Dr. Claudio Tatsui was promoted to associate professor this year. He was also noted for being the first person in the world to use laser interstitial thermal therapy (LITT) to treat spinal tumors, in a story in Conquest magazine.

Dr. Jeffrey Weinberg became the current president of the Texas Association of Neurological Surgeons. In addition, he was reappointed as a member of the AANS/CNS Section on Tumors Executive Committee for the 2016–2018 term.

Residents for 2016 from Baylor College of Medicine were Drs. Ali Jalali (10/15–2/16), Anish Sen (11/15–2/16), Patrick Karas (11/15–2/16), Eric Momin (7/16–6/16), Jared Fridley (03/16–06/16), Jacob Cherian (03/16–06/16), Kate Wagner (03/16–06/16), Loyola Gressot (7/16–10/16), Sung HoLee (7/16–10/16), Jonathon Sellin (11/16–02/17), Rory Mayer (11/16–02/17), and Melissa LoPresti (11/16–02/17).

New clinical fellows this year (7/16–6/17) were Drs. Wajd Al-Holu (University of Michigan), Richard Everson (Duke University), Jacob Freeman (Georgetown University), and Ali Jalali (1/17–6/17; Northwestern University). Finishing their fellowships in 2016 were Drs. Sarah Garber (University of Utah), Peleg Horowitz (Brigham & Women’s Hospital/Harvard University), Jonathan Thomas (Baylor College of Medicine), and Brian Williams (University of Virginia). Continuing for a second year in 2016 was Dr. Tiffany Hodges (7/15–6/17; Duke University).

A visiting scientist in 2016 was Yi Li, M.D., from the People’s Republic of China, and there were 18 postdoctoral fellows in our department.

We thank our friends Kyle C. and Eleine Brooks, Paul Oreffice, the Dr. Marnie Rose Foundation, the Broach Foundation for Brain Cancer Research, the Nicholson Family, the Apache Corporation, the Silverman Foundation, the Ben & Catherine Ivy Foundation, the Pappas Family, the Dore Fund, and the Chip & Susan Bonner Fund. Their generous gifts have helped greatly in the advancement of brain tumor research in our department.