



TAKING STRIDES



Searching for Answers

Research Plays Key Role in Rheumatoid Arthritis Care

Those who've been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) are familiar with the telltale signs of the disease – joint pain, stiffness, swelling, fatigue.

They're also familiar with the questions. *Why does RA strike who it does? Why are there so often associated health problems from heart disease to diabetes?*

The Lupus Center of Excellence at West Penn Allegheny Health System is dedicated to providing comprehensive care that improves the quality of life not only for patients with lupus, but also for those coping with RA and other conditions in which the body's immune system attacks healthy tissue.

The Center's rheumatologists help RA patients manage symptoms to achieve optimal mobility and quality of life. They also actively search for answers to the questions surrounding RA.

"Our practice in the Lupus Center of Excellence has a strong research orientation with a focus on exploring the connection between RA, cardiovascular

disease and diabetes," said **Mary Chester Wasko, MD, MSc**, an avid researcher who has secured funding from the National Institutes of Health for several studies related to RA and secondary disorders.

By incorporating research into daily practice, the Lupus Center rheumatologists expand knowledge of the disease and provide patients with access to the newest information and therapies.

Lupus Center physicians are investigating the impact of RA medications on longevity and exploring the link between RA and increased risk of diabetes, hypertension, infection and osteoporosis. A study is also underway to determine if a widely used RA drug may also be useful in preventing individuals with prediabetes from developing type 2 diabetes.

Additionally, the Center is designing a study to determine how lifestyle interventions, such as implementing an exercise regimen, could improve the vascular health and glucose metabolism in patients with RA.

The Research Registry: Your Gateway to Research

Would you like to further the knowledge of lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and other related diseases? Would you like to know when you may qualify to participate in a research study?

Adults with a diagnosis of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), rheumatoid arthritis, Sjögren's, vasculitis, scleroderma, osteoarthritis and other related diseases are invited to join the Immune-Mediated, Inflammatory, Rheumatic and Hematologic Disease (IMIRH) Research Registry. More than 400 patients from our region and beyond have already enrolled.

Those who enroll in the IMIRH Research Registry may be asked to complete questionnaires and donate blood or urine samples during their regular office visits. The process should take approximately 30 minutes and all information shared in the registry is confidential.

Participants will not only provide valuable information that will help researchers learn more about these diseases, but will also receive research newsletters and information regarding upcoming research studies that may pertain to them.

For more information on the Research Registry, please contact registry coordinator **Margie Ruffing** at **412.578.5630**.



Angela Stupi, MD

NEW To The Team

The Lupus Center of Excellence welcomes **Angela Stupi, MD**, a board-certified rheumatologist with special expertise in metabolic bone disease and arthritis treatment and research. Dr. Stupi has participated in more than 30 clinical drug trials and research registries to further the knowledge of rheumatoid arthritis and search for more effective treatment options. She sees patients in the West Penn Hospital, Allegheny General Hospital – McCandless and Cranberry locations.

We are also happy to welcome two new physician's assistants to our team: **Natalie Crescenze, PA-C** and **Allison Karan, PA-C**.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Stupi, please call **724.935.0400**.



West Penn Allegheny Health System
Outpatient Center in Peters Township

NEW Office Sites

The Lupus Center of Excellence is proud to introduce two new office locations to make quality, comprehensive care accessible to patients in their own communities.

- Our office in the West Penn Allegheny Health System Outpatient Center in Peters Township is located off Route 19, providing convenient access for residents of southern Allegheny and northern Washington counties. This brand new facility is warm and inviting with amenities such as a café, computer kiosks with free Internet access and concierge services.
- The Center's office in the Allegheny General Hospital – McCandless building is located on McKnight Road in the heart of Pittsburgh's North Hills.

These new locations supplement our Cranberry Township and West Penn Hospital/Bloomfield offices for added convenience. To make an appointment with **Dr. Amy Kao**, **Dr. Fotios Koumpouras**, **Dr. Susan Manzi** or **Dr. Mary Chester Wasko**, please call **Elaine Scanlon**, patient concierge, at **412.578.1152**.

Heart of the Matter

McCandless Woman Explores the Connection Between RA and Heart Disease



Maureen and Jeff Lengel traveled to Texas for Super Bowl XLV.

Maureen Lengel didn't smoke. She didn't have high cholesterol. Her blood pressure was normal.

But in 2003, at the age of 48, she suffered her first heart attack.

Though she lacked the classic warning signs of heart disease, Ms. Lengel had rheumatoid arthritis (RA), an autoimmune disease that attacks the joints and has a less understood link to cardiovascular disease.

Diagnosed with RA at age 17, Ms. Lengel has spent decades looking for the best treatment to keep her symptoms under control.

"It started with pain in the second and third fingers of one hand during the winter and, by summer, everything just swelled up. Now, I have arthritis just about everywhere in my body."

Ms. Lengel has undergone hand surgery, multiple foot and ankle surgeries, two back surgeries, three hip replacement procedures and the physical therapy that comes along with them, in addition to trying a variety of medications to manage her RA symptoms.

The year before her first heart attack, Ms. Lengel's physician, **Mary Chester Wasko, MD, MSc**, enrolled her in a research study examining RA patients' higher-than-average incidence of heart disease.

"One of the things that drew me to Dr. Wasko is that she's very active in pursuing research about the link between RA and heart disease for women," Ms. Lengel said.

A second heart attack in early 2010 requiring treatment with two stents and a breast cancer diagnosis later that year further cemented Ms. Lengel's interest in efforts to discover the link between RA, cardiovascular disease and other associated secondary diseases.

Though RA has changed her life, Ms. Lengel lives to the fullest working as a special education inclusion facilitator in a local school district and traveling and attending Pittsburgh Steelers games with her husband, Jeff.

"One of the most important things in managing RA is having a doctor that you feel confident in. Dr. Wasko not only knows the research and the new medicines but also is compassionate and patient-oriented. She looks at the total picture, not just RA."

Novel Approach to Gene Therapy Wins Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation Support

Scientists at West Penn Allegheny Health System's Allegheny Singer Research Institute (ASRI) have been awarded a grant from the Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation (SSF) to investigate an innovative technique for delivering gene drugs to the salivary glands to potentially block the development and progression of Sjögren's syndrome. Sjögren's syndrome is a chronic autoimmune disease in which people's white blood cells attack their moisture-producing glands, causing dry eyes and mouth, fatigue, joint and muscle pain and other serious complications.

ASRI's Gene Therapy Program, based at Allegheny General Hospital, received the SSF's highest grant award, the Innovative Concept Grant. The \$100,000 two-year SSF award will fund a project to determine the effectiveness of ultrasound-assisted

gene transfer to the salivary glands of mice with Sjögren's. "We are proud to have been recognized by the Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation for our inventive research efforts in gene therapy," said **Joseph Ahearn, MD**, Co-Founder of the Lupus Center of Excellence and Chief Scientific Officer of ASRI.

The ASRI project will use safe ultrasonic energy to poke microscopic holes in the membranes of salivary gland cells, allowing the gene drug to slip through. These holes remain open for just seconds and don't harm the cell. Once inside the salivary gland cells, the gene drug cannot be distinguished from the patient's own DNA and the immune system ignores it.

Michael J. Passineau, PhD, principal investigator for the study and Director of the Gene Therapy Program for ASRI, is leading a burgeoning research program exploring cutting-edge therapies based upon genetic medicines for a variety of conditions and will be collaborating with the Lupus Center of Excellence on future research efforts.

Mark Your Calendar:



- Partners for Lupus Research will host its fifth annual Nemacolin raffle and golf outing on **Saturday, September 24, 2011** at Castle Hills Golf Course in New Castle. Raffle tickets are now available for a \$1,500 getaway to Nemacolin Woodlands Resort and Spa for \$10 each. All proceeds from the raffle and golf outing will benefit WPAHS' lupus program, funding lupus research efforts at Allegheny Singer Research Institute.

For more information, please call **724.971.3174**.

- Join the Foundation for the Lupus Center of Excellence from 6 to 8 p.m. on **Thursday, October 20, 2011** for an evening at the Mendelson Gallery. Learn about the Foundation's plans for 2012 while enjoying great art in the heart of Shadyside. Twenty percent of any art purchases made that evening will benefit the Lupus Center of Excellence at West Penn Allegheny Health System. For more information, please call **412.406.7399**.

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We welcome your feedback.

Please contact Elaine Scanlon at **412.578.1152**

or **escanlo1@wpahs.org**

with comments or to be added to the mailing list.

Visit us online at **lupuscenter.org**.

Giving Opportunities

The Lupus Center of Excellence is dedicated to conducting the research needed to discover a cure for lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and related disorders. We are thankful to the many patients and families who have pledged their financial support to our efforts as well as the Foundation for the Lupus Center of Excellence, a local non-profit which has funded much of our research.

To learn how your gift can help bring us closer to a cure, call **412.578.1152** or visit us on the web at **lupuscenter.org**.