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President Hunter-Cevera to Leave

UMBI President Dr. Jennie Hunter-Cevera announced her resignation on February 25, 2009 in a brief press release sent to all staff and faculty. She will leave office at the end of the fiscal year, just short of her 10th anniversary as president, having started in October of 1999. Dr. Hunter-Cevera was trained as a microbiologist and worked in the pharmaceutical industry and related businesses before heading the Center for Environmental Biotechnology at the E.O. Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in collaboration with the University of California, Berkeley, before being recruited to UMBI. Over her tenure here, she was often tapped for government service on advisory boards both at the state and federal levels.



From a center perspective, her tenure at UMBI led to an increased recognition of UMBI's presence and significant expertise both within the University System of Maryland and more importantly within the State Legislature and the biotechnology sector. Within UMBI, her emphasis on bringing centers together resulted in the Research Council and the Inter-center grants program.

Her future plans were not available at this time.

MBC Director in Germany

As a member of an international consortium studying atrial fibrillation funded by the Leducq Foundation in France, MBC Director, Dr. W. Jonathan Lederer, was invited to speak at the Center for Regenerative Therapies at the University of Dresden, one of the other members of the consortium. The consortium is formally known as the European North American Atrial Fibrillation Research Alliance. The title of his January 5 talk was "Calcium Sparks in Atrial Cells." Dr. Lederer is co-discoverer of calcium sparks, the fundamental unit of calcium signaling in excitable cells, such as muscle and neurons. It is calcium signaling that initiates and controls the heart beat and rhythm. Atrial fibrillation is one of the most common forms of arrhythmias but the underlying signalling defects are not well understood.

While there, Dr. W. Jonathan Lederer also traveled to the University of Göttingen to discuss a proposed FP7 European Union Grant with Dr. Stephan Lehnart, a collaborator formerly at Columbia University, and set up collaborations for new stem cell research there and at the University of Meistrich.



UMBI Annual Report

UMBI's annual report was released on February 18, 2009. It can be found at <http://umbi.umd.edu/about/images/annualreport2008.pdf>.

Reorganization Plan Announced

On January 27, 2009, UMBI President Dr. Jennie Hunter-Cevera sent the "UMBI DRAFT 2009 Reorganization & Management Plan" to all of UMBI, which was to begin implementation on March 1, 2009. Per an email from the President on February 18, 2009 the plan was tabled for 120 day because it "generated a great deal of uncertainty and unrest within the UMBI community." The President subsequently resigned on February 25, 2009 (see page 1).

USM Response to Resignation

On February 27, the Board of Regents (BOR) of the University System of Maryland (USM) announced the formation of an ad hoc committee to study UMBI. This was in response to the resignation of Dr. Hunter-Cevera. This was not unexpected. In the 2004 review of UMBI under the Efficiency and Effectiveness initiative of the BOR, any change in presidential leadership was to trigger another review. According to the BOR news release, Clifford Kendall, BOR Chairman, will name the committee and "charge the group with developing recommendations for maximizing the return on the state's investment in UMBI and its component centers." Mr. Kendall is quoted as saying: "This period of transition offers an opportunity to carefully study the advantages of UMBI's current structure, as well as consider alternative organizational options, including distribution of the UMBI centers to other USM institutions."

Unfortunately, this reference to "alternative organizational options" is reminiscent of the repeated attempts over the last 20+ years to break UMBI apart. However, UMBI has just as often been successful in demonstrating the unique advantages that our unusual institutional structure has brought to USM and the State of Maryland. Long before biotechnology had fully emerged as a driving economic force, the creation of UMBI put USM and the State of Maryland at the forefront in the biotechnology revolution. It is part of the reason that the State of Maryland is one of the leaders in biotechnology.



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Congratulations!

Dr. Shengyun Fang was invited to the Executive Editorial Board of *American Journal of Translational Research*, an online open access journal dedicated to publishing top quality research articles from translational research in www.ajtr.org.

Dr. Chris Geddes was featured in the 2009 *Biotech Report*, published by the American Biotechnology Association along with UMBI.

Maryland Stem Cell Grants

MBC researchers again took advantage of the State of Maryland's commitment to stem cell research, submitting four new proposals. In addition, four postdoctoral fellowships were also submitted. Postdoctoral fellowships were actually offered last year by the Maryland Stem Cell Commission, but very few researchers were aware of the opportunity.

Both Dr. W. Jonathan Lederer and Dr. Shengyun Fang, who were funded the first year grants were offered, put in new grants. Dr. Mariusz Karbowski and Dr. Xuehong Xu also put in proposals. Two of the postdoctoral fellowships were submitted by current postdoctoral research associates, Dr. Didier Brochet and Dr. Julio Altamirano, both in Dr. Lederer's laboratory. The other two were submitted in advance of coming to work at UMBI by Dr. Leyla Teos and Liron Boyman. They too will be in Dr. Lederer's laboratory.

It was not clear at the time of submission, what effect the State fiscal crisis would have on funding rates and the future of the State stem cell program. In addition, with the new federal administration and the expected lift of the ban on federal funding of stem cell research, the impetus for State funding may be significantly reduced. Whatever happens, MBC and UMBI will be in a position to take advantage of whatever funding becomes available and be a leader in stem cell research in the State of Maryland.



Making do with Less

As a state institution, UMBI was affected by the current fiscal crisis in the State of Maryland. Fortunately, the University System of Maryland was allowed to develop its own policies regarding budgetary reductions. USM in turn let each institution determine how to reduce expenses and decide if and how employees would be furloughed.

UMBI, along with several other USM institutions, exempted several categories of employees, specifically:

- hourly employees (students & contingent I)
- employees earning less than \$40,000 annually
- graduate assistants
- H-1B Visa Workers
- employees funded 100% from grants and contracts as of November 13, 2008.

Other employees were furloughed in a tiered system, so that those earning less did not see a greater impact than those earning more:

- Employees earning less than \$40,000 were exempted as noted above
- Employees earning \$40,001-\$60,000 must take one day
- Employees earning \$60,001-\$100,000 must take 3 days
- Employees earning \$100,001-\$150,000 must take 5 days
- Employees earning over \$150,000 must take 6 days

Employees are free to choose which days they want to be furloughed but all days must be finished before the end of the fiscal year. Further reductions may be needed in the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2009, but the impact on employees will not be known until after the legislative session.

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MBC Happenings

Comings and Goings

Dr. Giovanni Benard, a Research Associate in Dr. Mariusz Karbowski's laboratory has left to pursue his career elsewhere. Dr. Precious Lim, Dr. Mervyn Monteiro's student who recently graduated, has gone on to a post-doctoral fellowship. Dr. Chris Geddes welcomed Lynda Ngo Mandeng and Radmilla Pavlovic as interns.

Publications

Dobrev D, Teos LY, **Lederer WJ**. Unique atrial myocyte Ca^{2+} signaling. *J Mol Cell Cardiol*. 2008 Dec 25. [Epub ahead of print].

Dragan AI, Zhang Y, **Geddes CD**. Voltage-Gated Metal-Enhanced Fluorescence II: Effects of Fluorophore Concentration on the Magnitude of the Gated-Current. *J Fluoresc*. 2009 Jan 14. [Epub ahead of print].

Zhang Y, **Aslan K**, **Geddes CD**. Voltage-Gated Metal-Enhanced Fluorescence. *J Fluoresc*. 2009 Feb 12. [Epub ahead of print]

Iribe G, Ward CW, Camelliti P, Bollensdorff C, Mason F, Burton RA, Garny A, Morphey MK, Hoenger A, **Lederer WJ**, Kohl P. Axial Stretch of Rat Single Ventricular Cardiomyocytes Causes an Acute and Transient Increase in Ca^{2+} Spark Rate. *Circ Res*. 2009 Feb 5. [Epub ahead of print]

Talks and Travels

Dr. W. Jonathan Lederer, invited speaker, Center for Regenerative Therapies Dresden, Cluster of Excellence, University of Dresden, "Calcium Sparks in Atrial Cells," January 5, 2009.

Dr. Chris D. Geddes, invited speaker, "Metal-Enhanced Fluorescence: Ultra bright molecules" 180s Company, Columbus Center, January 15, 2009.

Dr. Valeriy Lukyanenko, invited speaker, Department of Cellular and Molecular Physiology at Loyola University Chicago, Stritch School of Medicine, "Surprising regulation of cardiac calcium signaling," January 23, 2009.

Dr. Mariusz Karbowski, invited speaker, Institute for Research in Biomedicine, Barcelona, Spain, "Role of the ubiquitin conjugation system in the control of mitochondrial integrity," February 16, 2009.

Newsfeed Articles

Starting in this issue, we will list the dates and articles that appeared in the Daily UMBI Newsfeed. These articles are archived at <https://intranet.umbi.umd.edu/index.php>. Access requires a UMBI email account. Interested parties may sign up for an automatic RSS feed. Please contact UMBI's Office of Education, Professional Advancement, and Training for more information.

1-12-09: MBC Provides New Insights into Huntington's Disease

1-23-09: UMBI Represented at 1st Maryland Stem Cell Research Symposium

2-3-09: Staff Profile: Mike Kelly

2-6-09: Four UMBI Scientists Have Stem Cell Funding

2-10-09: Staff Profile: Mike McCrea



Bits and Pieces

NIH Looks at the IoF: Dr. Chris Geddes and the entire Institute of Fluorescence (IoF) were put in the spotlight by NIH on February 11, 2009. The IoF hosted a "site visit" by NIH. Site visits are designed to determine whether the facilities and scientists can perform the proposed work. NIH is particularly interested in the Microwave Accelerated Metal Enhance Fluorescence (MAMEF) technology that Dr. Geddes and his laboratory have developed. NIH is one of many interested parties for this technology. Dr. Geddes is working with Bio-rad in California and the Department of Defense.

FIRCA? What's a FIRCA? One of the more unusual grant programs at NIH is called FIRCA: Fogarty International Research Collaboration Award. This award links NIH funded researchers with collaborators outside the US, with particular emphasis on developing nations. Recently, Dr. W. Jonathan Lederer submitted such a grant to work with a former postdoctoral fellow, Dr. Silvia Guatimosim. The grant, if funded, would help Dr. Guatimosim set up advanced imaging capabilities at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in the Department of Physiology where she is an Associate Professor.

Have Powerpoint, Will Travel: MBC's newest faculty member, Dr. Mariusz Karbowski, put a lot of miles on this February, traveling from Finland, where he served on a review panel for the Academy of Finland Fellow grant applications sponsored by the Academy of Finland, to Barcelona, Spain, where he was an invited speaker at the Institute for Research in Biomedicine. Packing for such a difference in winter climates must have been difficult!

ISAB Video Conferencing Survey: UMBI's Information Systems Advisory Board (ISAB) is conducting a survey on current usage of video conferencing tools. Most members of the UMBI community are familiar the use of IVN (Internet Video Network) at UMBI. Full fledged real-time conferencing, however, is just coming into its own on the desktop. Given the distances that UMBI faculty and staff have between the centers and the increased collaborations, this is a timely topic. All faculty and staff are encouraged to complete the survey. Any questions you may have should be directed to MBC's ISAB representatives, Pamela Wright and Mike Kelly. The survey can be found at https://carb.umbi.umd.edu/videoconferencing_and_online_collaboration_survey. You will need a UMBI login to access it.