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When Florence Jackson, 73, had some difficulty swallowing food one evening, her husband insisted she see her doctor. She mentioned it to her on month checkup, and noted that years earlier she had suffered from acid reflux, which is known to cause difficulty swallowing. "It was quite the realization," she says. "I was really scared."

A year later, after some diagnostic testing, Dr. Ernest (Gary) Rosato, Director of the General Surgery Division, and Florence Jackson are pleased to report that robotic surgery has now made surgery possible. "We are aggressively taking robotic surgery into the realm of thoracic surgery," Dr. Rosato explains, "and we are now training residents and a fellow on this specialty." Dr. Weksler and Dr. Rosato have already performed over 30 robotic procedures for patients with thoracic tumors in the last two years. "We are now performing surgical procedures for patients with tumors who would have previously been excluded due to morbidity or open surgery," Dr. Rosato continues. "This is a very exciting time for surgeons and patients alike."
New faculty, upgrades to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and multiple new trials and studies are just some of the changes underway in the Acute Care Surgery Division. The addition of Jay Martin, MD, and Nida Martin, MD, brings the Division team to seven faculty, strengthening its intensive care program, which makes attending acute care surgeons available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Dr. Martin and N. Martin recently joined the Division after completing fellowships in Trauma and Surgical Critical Care at the Hospital of The University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Martin, Assistant Professor of Surgery and a 2006 graduate of Jefferson’s Surgery residency program, is Board Certified in both surgery and critical care medicine. Dr. Martin, a 2009 graduate of Jefferson’s residency program is also Board Certified in surgery and critical care medicine and has been named to the Associate Professor of Graduate Degree Education. As part of their commitment to continually improving the care and experience of patients, the hospital is building a new, state-of-the-ICU facility on the Gibbon Building on Jefferson’s Center City campus. Construction is expected to be completed during this year and will add to the existing ICU. The new space will accommodate 36 beds, half of which will be dedicated to surgical patients.

Dr. Martin has enjoyed the variety of caring for patients with acute illnesses. “I enjoy this type of work because you never know what is going to come through the door next,” he said. “It is wonderful to be a part of a team that is committed to providing the best possible care.”

The Spring of 2009 represents an exciting time here in the Department of Surgery. Despite the turbulent economic times, our Department has enjoyed growth averaging a 5-10% increase per year for the last three years. Newer programs such as the Minimally Invasive Thoracic surgery and pneumonectomy programs, our bariatric surgery program, our mechanical heart support program, and our thoracic acute care surgery (and intensivist) program are examples of success stories.

We have received great news on the research front. Our residents and faculty just completed a very busy Fall and Winter, where over 20 national and international presentations were made at national fora, such as the Southern Surgical Congress, the American Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Congress, the Southeastern Surgical, and the American Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association, amongst others. Additionally, the American Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association, amongst others. Additionally, we are delighted to have recently been notified of major grant awards to Drs. Lanzo-Jacoby and Trautman, representing first entries into the Department. Our clinical research has grown nicely, and the addition of Shawn Mokdad, MD, RN, BSN, CRNC from our Clinical Research Nurse Manager Project will do much to ensure the attention to detail needed for our clinical trials. My thanks go out to all members of the Department for their enthusiasm, hard work, clinical expertise and academic and professional accomplishments.

It has been wonderful to see Jefferson’s stature rise amongst other academic medical centers, as we have added faculty, increased our clinical volumes, added new clinical programs, and raised the research profile both for our basic science researchers and for our clinicians.

The Department of Surgery’s research efforts have expanded greatly in recent years as evidenced by the breadth and depth of resident research projects. Dr. Curtin’s doctoral research studied the actions of natural products of Vitamin A known as tumor cell differentiators. Derivatives of Vitamin A are a class of compounds known as retinoids, which have been shown to prevent the uncontrolled division of cancer cells. Although traditional chemotherapies kill both the mutated cancer cells and the healthy normal cells, Dr. Curtin explains, “this treatment stops only the cancer cells from dividing.”

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In Dr. Curtin’s work, clinical expertise and academic medicine have been combined to provide a unique model for research and patient care. When well over a dozen presentations were made at national fora, such as the Southern Surgical Congress, the American Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Congress, the Southeastern Surgical, and the American Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association, amongst others. Additionally, the American Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association, amongst others. Additionally, we are delighted to have recently been notified of major grant awards to Drs. Lanzo-Jacoby and Trautman, representing first entries into the Department. Our clinical research has grown nicely, and the addition of Shawn Mokdad, MD, RN, BSN, CRNC from our Clinical Research Nurse Manager Project will do much to ensure the attention to detail needed for our clinical trials. My thanks go out to all members of the Department for their enthusiasm, hard work, clinical expertise and academic and professional accomplishments.

Charles J. Yeo, MD
Samantha D. Gross Professor and Chief, Department of Surgery
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The Division of Acute Care Surgery at Jefferson is expanding its faculty, facilities and research. New faculty, upgrades to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and multiple new trials and studies are just some of the changes underway in the Acute Care Surgery Division.

As part of Jefferson’s commitment to continually improving the care and experiences of patients, the hospital is building a new, state-of-the-art ICU facility in the Gibbon Building on Jefferson’s Center City Campus. Construction is expected to be completed during this year and will add to the existing ICU. The new space will accommodate 36 beds, half of which will be dedicated to surgical patients.

Dr. Joshua Curtin, in the New Transplant Laboratory Joshua Curtin, PhD, is in a research fellowship in the lab of Cataldo Doria, MD, PhD, focusing on the regulation of tumor cell growth and death, primarily in the liver. He examines how molecular components of cellular signaling pathways function to regulate cell growth and cell death.

Dr. Curtin’s doctoral research studied the actions of natural products of the Western Acanthus as cancer cell differentiation agents. Derivatives of Acanthus are a class of compounds known as retinoids, which have been shown to prevent the unchecked division of cancer cells. Although traditional chemotherapies kill both the mutated cancer cells and the healthy normal cells, Dr. Curtin explains, “this treatment stops only the cancer cells from dividing.”

Dr. Curtin has collaborated his expertise as a post-doctoral fellow in the lab of Jonathon Brody, PhD, a specialist in pancreatic cancer research. He has been an assistant professor in the Laboratory of Cataldo Doria, MD, PhD, Director of the Kimmel Cancer Center. Dr. Shyam Shroffwater explored targets in pancreatic cancer to develop novel therapeutic strategies and summarized the effect of naturally occurring Vitamin K on pancreatic cancer cells. She found that Vitamin K actually inhibits pancreatic cancer cell growth. Dr. Shroffwater also used novel nanotechnology to deliver diabegelling drugs to pancreatic cancer cells, thereby killing the cancer cells without affecting the growth of normal, non-cancerous cells. To date, she has presented the findings at three meetings, including the American Association for Cancer Research Annual Meeting, and in three peer-reviewed articles.

Dr. Jennifer Sullivan is analyzing how nicotine exposure contributes to the aggressive behavior of pancreatic cancer cells. Her research focuses on the expression of a protein, PPARγ, which appears to be increased in patients with pancreatic cancer, especially those with a history of smoking. This protein could be a potential target for future therapy. Dr. Sullivan recently presented her data at the American Surgical Congress and a manuscript has been accepted for publication in Surgery.

Dr. Nikolai Bialkowicz is continuing the work established by Dr. Williams on the role of p53 in a drug resistance pathway. However, his primary research focus is on Radiation Therapy Oncology Group (RTOG) 1 (PARP-1), an enzyme found within the cell nucleus that serves many cellular functions including regulation of DNA. In collaboration with John Pascal, PhD, Assistant Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Dr. Bialkowicz is working with both normal and mutant forms of the enzyme in pancreatic cancer cells. His goal is to create a model of using novel agents, PARP inhibitors, to sensitize pancreatic cancer cells to platinum-based therapy. This work provides the proof of principle data for a proposed clinical trial. Dr. Bialkowicz is a post-doctoral fellow at the Philadelphia Academia of Surgery meeting in February 2008.

Dr. Matthew Rosen is studying the effect of Neuramin, a natural Cox 2 inhibitor on pancreatic cancer cells, and the relationship of arterial (a protein involved in improving health during calorie restriction) to pancreatic cancer. Dr. Rosen has already presented findings at two meetings including the American Association for Cancer Research. Dr. Rosen is also the outpost of the Arnold P. Gold Foundation Humanism and Excellence in Teaching Award.

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Diagnosed with and successfully treated for breast cancer at Jefferson in 1984, Marianne Connolly set out, faced with a personal diagnosis of pancreatic cancer in 2010, feeling blessed by her fortunate outcome and access to excellent medical care, Marianne and her husband Charles made very personal decision to support Jefferson. They decided to contribute to research efforts that will translate into advanced treatment for patients with pancreatic cancer.

“It is truly the generosity and the example set forth by the Connollys that will provide us with the resources necessary to fight this complicated disease.”

The Connollys key pledged $100,000 to support Jefferson’s cutting edge clinical and investigative work in pancreatic cancer and its related diseases. Charles J. Yao, MD, Samuel D. Gross Professor and Chair of Surgery, leads a multidisciplinary team of surgeons, radiologists, and gastrointestinalists in the new Marianne Connolly, Pancreatic, Biliary, and Related Cancers Center. The Connolly gift helps Dr. Yao and the Center pursue research discoveries and gain momentum in the ongoing fight against these diseases.

Jefferson is the only hospital in the Philadelphia region performing a high volume of laparoscopic esophagectomies—23 during 2008, and the Department expects to double that number in 2009. A study of those cases demonstrates a decrease in morbidity over open surgeries. Dr. Rosato explains the benefits of the procedure: “With conventional ‘open’ surgeries, the incisions are large and painful, and the hospital stay is longer.” He says “Laparoscopic surgery results in shorter hospitalization and patient hospitalization.”

Jefferson also offers the only hospital in the Philadelphia region performing a high volume of laparoscopic esophagectomies.

Marianne and Charles Connolly’s generous contribution to the Jefferson Pancreatic, Biliary, and Related Cancers Center is making individualized treatment and research a reality for patients battling these diseases.

When Florence Jackson, 73, had some difficulty breathing one evening, her husband insisted she see her doctor. She mentioned it in her morning check-up, and notes that years earlier she had suffered from acid reflux, which is known to cause heartburn.

“Laparoscopic surgery results in shorter hospitalization and patient hospitalization.”

Dr. Robert Neroni, who is Board Certified in Surgery and Thoracic Surgery, is a leader in the innovative technique of robotic surgery. “Like laparoscopic surgery, ‘robotic surgery is done via only a few small incisions. However, instead of holding the surgical instruments, the surgeon sits at a central control panel and utilizes robotic arms to move the instruments.’ He notes that robotic surgery is far safer because it offers greater precision, smaller incisions, decreased blood loss, and less pain for the patient.

The only robotic system approved by the Food and Drug Administration is the da Vinci® Surgical System, named after the famous artist who invented the first robot. “We are the only facility in Philadelphia using robotic surgery for thoracic operations,” says Dr. Rosato.

“Laparoscopic surgery results in shorter hospitalization and patient hospitalization.”

In southern Delaware, where Florence lives, there were no facilities that could do an endoscopic ultrasound. She was referred to Jefferson, where she was treated by Ernest V. Yeo, Jr., MD, Director of the General Surgery Division, and Associate Professor Benokey Weckler, MD, MBA, a thoracic surgeon. She was diagnosed with Stage 2A cancer of the esophagus, but the team offered her an excellent treatment plan. Prior to any surgery, Florence underwent chemotherapy and radiation therapy at the Cancer Tunnel Center in Delaware to shrink the tumor as much as possible. Then, at Jefferson, she underwent a laparoscopic esophagectomy, which is an innovative, minimally invasive surgery with a relatively short recovery.

Jefferson is the only hospital offering a unique team approach which provides the patient with the expertise of two surgeons trained in minimally invasive surgery (MIS). Dr. Weckler operates on the part of the esophagus in the chest and Dr. Rosato operates on the part below the diaphragm. “My experience with Jefferson was none other than outstanding,” says Florence. “In addition to the kindness and respect for me as an individual, it was a great comfort to have such an experienced, compassionate team with a successful track record.” Florence’s stay in the hospital was only 11 days, and she was pleased that she was “back to normal” within just 10 days of returning home.