



Looking for a referral?

Let us recommend the Orange County Medical Association's list of 238 local Physicians of Excellence—all who have proven themselves a cut above.

2009 TOP

DOCTORS

Orange County is evolving into one of the nation's most vibrant health-care hubs, with leading-edge facilities for stem-cell research and alternative medicine, hospital technology (the new pharmacist at Children's Hospital of Orange County just went totally Jetsons), and a tantalizing menu of advantages and innovations. But at the center are the doctors, the men and women whose training, instincts, compassion, and community involvement remain the most vital sign of the county's overall health.

Each year, the Orange County Medical Association conducts an exhaustive survey of local

physicians and rates them on leadership, teaching and mentoring, research, and humanitarian service. (For a full accounting of the association's selection criteria, see Page 87.) For 2009, the association named 238 doctors in 57 specialties to its Physicians of Excellence list based on those criteria, and it's *Orange Coast's* privilege to present their names exclusively on the following pages, arranged by specialty. (Unless otherwise noted, each physician is an M.D.)

We hope you never need them for anything serious, but we suspect that, like us, you'll feel better just knowing who they are.



Gastroenterologist John G. Lee of UCI Medical Center, representing the doctors on the Orange County Medical Association's 2009 Physicians of Excellence list.

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Exercise for Everyone

Personal goals vary at Goodwill's new fitness center for disabled and chronically ill adults, but everyone has a chance to succeed

Among the estimated 700 fitness centers in Orange County (we are, if nothing else, committed to paying monthly dues), only one is specially designed and staffed to serve the county's 70,000 disabled and chronically ill adults.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the disabled and ill are less likely to exercise than those without health issues. The Goodwill Fitness Center in Santa Ana opened in August following a yearlong, \$7 million capital campaign headed by Dan Rogers, president and CEO of Goodwill of Orange County. The 12,000-square-foot facility, which already has more than 100 members, has state-of-the-art fitness equipment, a 5-to-1 ratio of members to staff, and a full-time, on-site physical therapist.

To hear program manager Elizabeth Toumajian tell it, members are drawn to the center from as far away as Ladera Ranch and Mission Viejo for two primary reasons: the accessibility of the widely spaced equipment, and the center's supportive, nonjudgmental atmosphere.

"Our clients might not be comfortable at a 24-Hour Fitness or a Bally's," she says. "We're not a meat market, and the focus here isn't on body image."

Fitness goals are tailored to each client, such as the charter member from Ladera Ranch at right, and Toumajian says the staff works with members to help them reach their personal goals, "whether that's carrying groceries in from their car or running a 10K. Those are all significant accomplishments depending on your level of ability. We want to help them celebrate their successes without being judged."

Fees at the Goodwill Fitness Center are comparable to other fitness clubs. Members, who must provide a medical release from their doctors, pay a one-time \$65 assessment fee to help staffers create a customized fitness program; monthly dues are \$25.—*Martin J. Smith*



ANGELS OF THE LABYRINTH

Florence Nightingale was an excellent nurse, but could she help you file an insurance claim?

Hacking your way through the medical-care maze is difficult enough, and you usually have to do it when you're sick. But some local hospitals may have an easier solution.

They offer a "navigator" who guides patients through the labyrinth of medical paperwork and treatment options, and acts as a link between patients and their insurance providers, physicians, and other caregivers.

At most hospitals, the position is attached to a specific disease or to a particular department within the hospital. At the new 15,000-square-foot Women's Wellness Center at Mission Hospital in Mission Viejo, however, nurse navigator Susann Burnett has a more broadly defined mission.

"I'm here to help any woman who needs assistance get through the system," she says. "It's important for all women who come here to have an opportunity not to be overwhelmed by health care."

The Women's Wellness Center has been open since July, and Burnett, who also is a registered nurse and lactation consultant, says she spends her days helping patients with a wide range of issues, including insurance claims, driving directions to the center, and locating available health-care resources.

Similarly, the UCI Family Health Centers offers patient navigator Barbara Anabo, who plays a role similar to Burnett's. Anabo says patients heal better when they know someone else has to deal with the headaches that often come with modern medical care.

Burnett has felt the effects of their work firsthand: "I had a woman stop and hug me twice the other day."—*Martin J. Smith*



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An Accountant Who Counts His Blessings

*Once in need, Ed Gerber is now helping the
needy at the Lestonnac Free Clinic in Orange*

Fourteen years ago, Ed Gerber lost his retail business and was beginning to lose hope. His son was desperately ill and he had nowhere to turn until someone recommended the Lestonnac Free Clinic in Orange, which is dedicated to treating the working poor and the uninsured. He got help, got back on his feet financially, and eventually started working as an accountant for the clinic. Two years ago he was asked to become its director, happily accepted, and has never looked back.

“My favorite thing to do is walk around handing out toys to the kids and getting feedback from patients on what we’re doing right and wrong. I absolutely love it here,” says Gerber, right.

The clinic has doubled the number of patients it serves during Gerber’s tenure, and he wants to do more. His accounting background comes in handy with the finances and fundraising, and he gets creative working out deals with local pharmacies, and in recruiting doctors and dentists.

“I go to conventions and anywhere doctors are willing to listen,” he says. But you don’t have to be a professional to lend a hand. All donations and volunteers are welcome and the work is rewarding, Gerber says, noting that one doctor has been coming back for 16 years. “They don’t tell me much, but they walk around with a smile on their face and they stay—that’s the most telltale sign.”

Gerber hopes to persuade doctors, dentists, and anyone else who cares to join his cause. Spend a few minutes on the phone with this jovial man and you might end up volunteering, too.—*Anne Valdespino*



CHOC'S ROBO PHARMACIST

*Children's Hospital of Orange County becomes the world's first
hospital to deliver all intravenous medication with a robotic system.*

Rosie the Robot took care of Elroy Jetson, and since Dec. 1, patients at Children's Hospital of Orange County have had their own cyber attendant: RIVA (Robotic IV Automation). Of course RIVA doesn't walk the halls, but it does prepare intravenous syringes and bags. Medication isn't typically packaged in child-sized portions, and correct dosages are critical. “We have anywhere from a half-kilo baby to an adult-sized adolescent,” says Rita Jew, executive director of pharmacy services. “Precision is very important.” RIVA also frees up pharmacists so they can make rounds with doctors.—*Anne Valdespino*

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The Medical Bookshelf

*Two Orange County self-help projects,
one for parents, the other for youth,
reach new audiences*

Parents with sick children, and children of parents with cancer have special resources to turn to in books produced in Orange County.

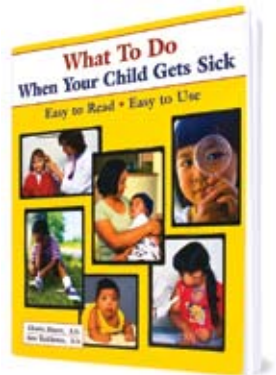
The first, “What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick,” provides solid advice for parents, says co-author Gloria G. Mayer, president and CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Advancement in La Habra, a nonprofit company that published the book. “There’s no medical jargon,” says Mayer, a nurse who targeted the publications to a third- to fifth-grade reading level. “It gives specific guidelines on what you can do at home and whether you need to take your child to the doctor.”

The state of California gives away the book as part of a gift box to parents of newborns, which boosted sales to an estimated 2 million copies. It’s available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Next up? The authors plan two new titles: “What to Do for Overweight Kids” and “What to Do for Asthma.” To order, call 800-434-4633 or visit www.ih4health.org.

A second book by local authors is geared to teens who need support when their parents are gravely ill. “Love Sick: Teens Reflect on Growing Up With a Parent Who Has Cancer” is an anthology of poetry, art, blog and journal entries, “shrink wrap” pages (advice from a therapist), a directory of cancer resources, a glossary of medical terms, and blank space for more personal art work and entries. The contributors belong to Teens Konnection, an extension of Kids Connected, a group that supports children of all ages who have a parent with cancer, or have lost one.

The book was published in Anaheim and compiled by 43-year-old Harald Herrmann of Anaheim Hills, whose wife died of cancer while raising two sons. Herrmann launched the project because he sees kids as living tributes to their parents. “My wife used to bargain all the time. She said she just wanted to see them finish high school. So when my 13-year-old graduates, I’ll be the one sitting in the back crying.”

Herrmann describes his time with the teens in his anthology as a bitersweet experience, as is reading the raw, powerful, sorrowful reflections of kids who bare their souls to comfort one another. To order, call 800-899-2866, or visit www.kidsconnected.org.—Anne Valdespino



BUILDING A BETTER HOSPITAL

The first phase of the new UCI Medical Center opens this month

The new UCI Medical Center in Orange opens next month, offering patients larger rooms that can accommodate visiting family members as well as teams of doctors and nurses. There will be less shuttling of patients from one section of the hospital to another for follow-up and secondary care, and most rooms will be private and spacious. The 482,428-square-foot building stands seven stories tall and replaces a structure built in 1960. Part of a two-phase construction project, the center will be completed at the end of 2011 at a cost of \$556 million.—Anne Valdespino

A Different Kind of Regeneration

With change in Washington, a new day may dawn at Orange County's upstart stem-cell center

For Hans Keirstead, co-director of the new Sue and Bill Gross Stem-Cell Research Center at UC Irvine, the election of Barack Obama was more than just a political milestone



for the United States. It was hope for a new generation of research scientists.

Bush administration policies restricting stem-cell research “have been really devastating for the stem-cell field because it has stopped the flow of money,” he says. Worse, he adds, the threat of jail time and fines for violation of those policies has scared promising researchers away from the field, which could revolutionize treatment of diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

“The trickle down is that it completely crushed the next generation of stem-cell researchers in this country,” says Keirstead, below.

Overturning those policies, which Obama has pledged to do, will not necessarily free up scant federal dollars during these tough economic times, he says, but will “have an effect on investment and small industry in Orange County. We need the federal government to put money into this [field], but we’d be happy if it simply gives it a green light.”

UC Irvine is well on its way to establishing itself as one of the nation’s premier centers for stem-cell research. In late October, it broke ground on a four-story, 100,636-square-foot building in the university’s Biomedical Research Center in the Health Sciences Complex. Expected to cost \$66.6 million, and made possible in part by a \$27.2 million grant from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, which funds stem-cell research statewide, the center has been named for the couple who donated \$10 million in July 2006 to support stem-cell research at UC Irvine.

When completed in July 2010, the facility will include the core stem-cell laboratory and equipment for human embryonic stem-cell line derivation, cell culture, differentiation and purification, and cell and tissue imaging. It also will include clinical space, with resources for patient care.

“This building can be thought of as a facility for expansion of our program,” says Keirstead. “It also brings together disparate talents in one single facility to allow fast, efficient, and economic translation of basic discoveries. We’ll be able to move quickly from bench top to bedside.”

—Martin J. Smith

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HONORING THE DOCTORS

The Orange County Medical Association will honor its 2009 Physicians of Excellence at a Jan. 21 luncheon at the Hyatt Regency Huntington Beach, 21500 Pacific Coast Highway. For more information, call 714-978-1160, or visit www.ocma.org.

CRITERIA

To be selected for the 2009 Physicians of Excellence honor, applicants were required to meet the following baseline criteria:

- Be certified by an American Board of Medical Specialties member
- Be in good standing with the Medical Board of California
- Maintain his/her primary practice in Orange County for the last five years
- Be in practice within his/her specialty for the last five years

Applicant nominees also were required to meet at least three of the following four criteria. The selection committee determined whether the applicant met the criteria, and in some instances, discretion was used.

- 1. Physician Leadership** To be considered a physician leader, applicants were required to meet one of the three criteria:
 - Recent positions as an elected or appointed member of a medical organization, including, but not limited to: chief of staff, member of the medical executive committee, department chair or vice chair, board of director position for Orange County Medical Association, California Medical Association, American Medical Association, American Board of Medical Specialties, or other medical groups.
 - Recently elected/appointed positions as a member of a peer review organization/journal, including, but not limited to: Medical Board of California, hospital-based peer review committee, or a peer-reviewed journal.
 - Current significant community leadership positions such as PTA president, or district school board member.
- 2. Teaching/Mentoring** Current medical school or university faculty appointment and/or involvement in teaching of other physicians, medical students, and pre-med students, or other health-care professionals.
- 3. Medical Research/Scientific Advances** Currently active in peer-reviewed clinical research activities, or possess unique skills within field of nomination including but not limited to performing a unique breakthrough surgical procedure, or development of a unique and important treatment protocol.
- 4. Humanitarian Service** Currently a volunteer physician aiding the indigent or underserved population and serving a special population of patients.

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