UF Health Neuromedicine ranked 21st nationally

UF Health Neuromedicine climbed 19 spots from last year to 21st in the country, according to the 2016-2017 U.S. News & World Report adult specialty rankings of the nation’s hospitals.

The recently released rankings placed UF Health Neuromedicine as the highest-ranked neuromedicine program in the state and among the top two in the Southeast.

U.S. News & World Report assessed 16 adult medical specialties ranging from cancer to urology in approximately 5,000 hospitals. The new rankings put UF Health Neuromedicine among the top 1 percent of hospitals nationwide that provide neurosurgical and neurological care.

William A. Friedman, M.D., chair of the Lillian S. Wells Department of Neurosurgery, said there are several factors that influenced the program’s jump this year, the largest year-over-year gain at UF Health in the last decade.

“This improved ranking reflects sustained clinical excellence, devotion on the part of the hospital and the academic departments to improve patient quality and safety, and a dramatic improvement in our research capability with many new first-in-human treatment protocols now being developed here,” Friedman said.

Michael S. Okun, M.D., chair of the UF department of neurology, said the rise in ranking was made possible by collaboration with colleagues in neurosurgery, partners in the neuromedicine quality initiative, faculty, staff, fellows, students and residents who work together as a team every day.

“We are all actively engaged in the process of building the perfect patient experience in anticipation for a November 2017 opening of the new, freestanding UF Health Neuromedicine Hospital,” Okun said. “This recent ranking is reflective of the power of togetherness as we strive for excellence in clinical care, research, education and outreach.

“This also reflects the new highly visible recruitments to our neuromedicine departments, especially through the preeminence initiative,” Okun said.

This year’s UF Health ranked specialties are as follows: nephrology (tied for 11th), pulmonology (25th), gynecology (29th), geriatrics (33rd), urology (42nd), diabetes and endocrinology (tied for 48th) and cancer (49th).
Pediatric neurology and neurosurgery at UF Health also ranked high this year. In June, U.S. News & World Report recognized the UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital in nine specialties: diabetes and endocrinology (tied for 18th), cancer (22nd), neonatology (23rd), cardiology and heart surgery (24th), pulmonology (27th), nephrology (tied for 32nd), gastroenterology and gastrointestinal surgery (40th), urology (40th) and neurology and neurosurgery (46th).

Ken Marx named new MBI director of operations

The MBI welcomes Ken Marx as its new director of operations. Marx, who previously served as chief administrator for UF’s department of emergency medicine for 15 years, succeeds Kelly Sharp, who is now executive director of administration and finance at the UF College of Pharmacy.

Marx started his career as a lab tech at Georgetown University, where he supported research into spinal cord injuries and antidotes for nerve gas exposures. He later obtained dual master’s degrees in health care administration and business administration from the University of Iowa, where he continued on to complete an administrative residency and fellowship in hospital administration. He then joined the staff at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, where he administered 12 areas and worked to create an affiliated home health care company.

In 1997, he joined UF & Shands in the division of emergency medicine within the department of anesthesiology, becoming the division’s first administrator. He facilitated the creation of the new department of emergency medicine in 1999 and became its first administrator.

During his tenure in emergency medicine, Marx helped direct tremendous growth, including expansion of the faculty from nine members to 40, development of a new residency program and the opening of the UF Health Shands Pediatric ER and UF Health Shands Emergency Center – Springhill.

"The MBI is delighted to have attracted such a skilled and experienced administrator," said Steven T. DeKosky, M.D., interim executive director of the MBI.

The Conversation
Putting your work on the national stage

Scholars at top institutions across the country are putting their research in front of national lay audiences through The Conversation. It’s a website featuring essays that run about 900 words — written by academics and edited by journalists — on hot topics ranging from the Common Core to fracking. The Conversation reaches more than 5 million unique readers a month — and then the pieces go even farther, with many picked up by major newspapers such as The Washington Post.

Be sure to check out recent Conversation pieces by the MBI’s William Greene, M.D., and Lisa J. Merlo, Ph.D., Michael S. Jaffee, M.D., and Robert Caudle, Ph.D. More than 60 UF faculty members have contributed to The Conversation since it started less than two years ago.
This is a great opportunity to highlight your work. Please contact MBI communications director Michelle Koidin Jaffee with your ideas for The Conversation.

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New 3T MRI/S!

_A note from Joanna Long, director of the Advanced Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Spectroscopy (AMRIS) facility in the MBI_

Construction is now underway at the MBI to install a new Siemens 3T MRI/S scanner. This powerful new $3 million scanner will have the strongest gradients available for human imaging, advanced motion correction algorithms and more flexibility in scanning disparate areas (i.e., head to foot without having to change coils or having the person being scanned get up and turn around).

The new 3T will support a rapidly increasing number of federally funded UF investigators who are studying Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophy, aging and cognition, Alzheimer's disease, adolescent brain cognitive development, traumatic brain injury and more.

During the construction, efforts are being made to minimize the impact on operations of the current 3T. In the meantime, please be aware:

- There will be night-time jackhammering (after 5 p.m.) for one or two nights. We do not recommend after-hours scanning with the current 3T during this time. Firm dates will be announced ASAP.
- On Nov. 28, the two-story glass front of the MBI will be removed to bring the new 3T into the building. The glass will be replaced within 24 hours. During this part of the construction, access to the current 3T will be limited for a day or two. We will provide a map with alternate routes for you and your participants.

Please contact Angie Fuhr or Ken Marx with any concerns or questions.

Sincerely,

Joanna R. Long, Ph.D.

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Psychiatry department publishes book to share wisdom of "Dr. C"

In tribute to the beloved late UF psychiatrist Richard Christensen, the department of psychiatry has published “Christensen Pearls,” a 38-page manual to share his clinical “pearls,” or time-honored methods and wisdom for treating various conditions based on clinical observation and experience.

Christensen, M.D., M.A., was killed by a hit-and-run driver last Nov. 26, Thanksgiving Day, while out for his morning run during a Habitat for Humanity mission trip to Zambia. A professor of psychiatry and two-time winner of the College of Medicine’s Hippocratic Award, Christensen, 60, devoted his life to helping those suffering from chronic mental illness and homelessness. He was director of behavioral health services at
the Sulzbacher Center in Jacksonville, where he was known for deploying in a van to help people where they were, on the streets, in parks, under bridges.

Now, his colleagues have produced “Christensen Pearls” as a teaching tool for residents and medical students, pulling from a few of his 100-plus peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and reviews and including recollections from patients and peers. Topics include “Making peace with hostile, unwilling patients,” “How to approach your patient’s relapse” and “Homeless, not hopeless: four strategies for successful interventions.”

Copies of the book, which includes artwork by Christensen’s patients, are being distributed to medical students through the clerkship and to psychiatry interns and residents.

Christensen’s colleagues hope to pass on his “pearls” to future young psychiatrists to carry on his legacy. Their next project, already underway, is development of an ethics curriculum drawing on his publications.

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**MBI takes on landmark NIH study of adolescent brain development**

The MBI is part of an elite group of national institutions embarking on the largest long-term study of brain development and child health in the United States.

With a highly competitive $3.76 million NIH grant, UF researchers led by Sara Jo Nixon, Ph.D., and Linda B. Cottler, Ph.D., M.P.H., will follow the biological and behavioral development of children beginning at ages 9 and 10 through adolescence and into early adulthood.

The Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development, or ABCD, study officially kicked off in September. In the Gainesville region, recruitment is now underway for about 400 children; more than 10,000 children will participate at 19 institutions nationwide.

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**New console for the 11.1 tesla**

In August at the MagLab, engineers installed a new “control center” for one of the magnet systems that will result in faster experimental set-up times, more sensitive readings and detailed information for functional MRI experiments — all contributing to a wide range of neuroscience applications such as pharmacological MRI.

The beneficiary of this significant upgrade is an 11.1 tesla magnet located within the Advanced Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Spectroscopy, or AMRIS, facility. Used primarily for imaging the three-dimensional structure of living organisms, the system combines high magnetic fields with a particularly large bore (40 cm) and strong magnetic field gradients that allow large samples to be imaged with submillimeter resolution.

Scientists will use the magnet’s new, custom-built control center — a custom-built Bruker AV3HD console with Paravision 6.0.1. — to program experiments, sending radiofrequency pulses on a nanosecond scale and receiving signals back with information on their sample. It will support growing research in developing
preclinical models for a variety of diseases, including the research program of new faculty member Matthew Merritt, an expert in in vivo metabolic flux measurements.

Please visit the page on the 11.1 tesla MRI/S system for more details.

This new console was made possible by joint funding from the MagLab and the MBI, the College of Medicine and the Division of Sponsored Programs.

Text and photo by Elizabeth Webb.

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**Center for Autism providing free tracking devices to improve safety**

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at UF is launching a new state-funded pilot program to provide free, wristwatch-style tracking devices to residents of the Gainesville region who have autism spectrum disorder and are at risk for wandering. The program covers the cost of the devices for participants and receivers for local sheriff’s offices.

The devices are being provided through a $100,000 state grant resulting from Senate Bill 230, passed this year by the Legislature. Known as Project Leo, the law was passed following the 2014 death of 9-year-old Leo Walker, a boy with autism spectrum disorder who wandered from his North Florida home and drowned in a nearby pond.

Eighty personal transmitters, which can be attached to clothing or worn around the wrist or ankle, will be available at the UF Center and distributed to those who meet certain criteria, including risk of wandering and a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Residents of Alachua, Columbia, Suwannee, Hamilton and Baker counties may apply; those interested should contact Ana Vilfort Garces at the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at 352-273-0581 or ana501@ufl.edu.

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**MBI professor on "Ice Bucket" breakthrough**

In an interview with TV-20 News in Gainesville, James Wymer, M.D., Ph.D., a professor of neurology, discusses a breakthrough in ALS research linked to money raised through the viral "Ice Bucket Challenge."

The challenge became a viral sensation in 2014 and raised $115 million for the ALS Association. Those who accepted the challenge allowed buckets of ice water to be dumped on their heads to raise awareness and money for ALS, also called Lou Gehrig's disease.

Watch here

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**The Neurologist Is In**

Check out the Neurology Now blog by the MBI's Melissa J. Armstrong, M.D.
Armstrong, director of the Mangurian Clinical-Research Center for Lewy Body and Parkinson’s Disease Dementia, writes about topics such as managing depression in Parkinson’s disease and tips for promoting better sleep in patients with Parkinson’s or multiple sclerosis.

Mindful Relaxation Minutes

In this busy world, we all could use a few minutes to enhance our own wellness. Each Thursday from 12:15-12:45 p.m., join your MBI colleagues for Mindfulness Relaxation Minutes.

The program, started a year ago by the department of psychiatry, offers a respite in the middle of the day and an opportunity to increase resilience and strengthen compassion. Practice includes mindfulness, progressive muscle relaxation and yoga nidra.

Sessions are held in MBI L4-100B and held or broadcast in conference rooms at UF Health Springhill, the UF Health child psychiatry clinic, the psychiatry business office in the 1329 Building and the UF Health dermatology practice.
MBI Fellowship Awards

The MBI Fellowships were established to support students and fellows conducting neuroscience and brain-related research in MBI-affiliated labs. For full project descriptions, click here.

2016 awardees:

Sarah A. Johnson, postdoctoral associate in neuroscience

Award: $60,000 over two years

Mentor: Sara Burke, Ph.D.

Project: Identifying the neuronal mechanisms responsible for stimulus discrimination deficits and determining how these mechanisms contribute to memory loss.

Changjun Yang, postdoctoral associate in neuroscience

Award: $30,000 over two years

Mentor: Eduardo Candelario-Jalil

Project: Determining the neuroprotective role of adropin in ischemic stroke and exploring the underlying mechanisms of its protection.

Marissa Ciesla, predoctoral student in the College of Public Health and Health Professions

Award: $30,000 over two years

Mentors: Gordon S. Mitchell, Ph.D., and Dr. Elisa Gonzalez-Rothi, D.P.T., Ph.D.
Project: Testing the hypotheses that folate: 1) mitigates breathing deficits following injury to the cervical spinal cord either by preserving and/or restoring lost respiratory motor function and 2) further enhances rAIH-induced respiratory motor recovery and axonal sprouting/regeneration.

Do you have a new MBI lab?

We would like to spotlight new labs in the MBI. Tell us who you are, where you are and what you do! Write to michelle.jaffee@ufl.edu.