



Premedical program a collaboration between Mayo Clinic and ASU

The growing relationship between Mayo Clinic and Arizona State University (ASU) has resulted in a new collaborative effort: The ASU Barrett Honors College Premedical Scholars Program. The Mayo Clinic-sponsored program for students at Barrett Honors College will teach premedical students about career opportunities in medicine and encourage them to take an active role in community and humanitarian programs.

The initiative pairs each student with a Mayo Clinic physician-mentor and provides a number of active educational experiences, including shadowing Mayo Clinic physicians, hands-on laboratory experiences, operating in the surgical simulation center, and participating in Mayo Clinic-sponsored research projects.

Students will also be encouraged to participate in a number of human-interest community programs, including training as a support group facilitator at the New Song Center, which provides grief support and education for children, young adults and their families.

"I am delighted about this connection with our ASU colleagues and the opportunity to proactively encourage pre-med students to become involved in diverse areas of medicine that will help them to provide support to those in need," says Victor Trastek, M.D., CEO of Mayo Clinic Arizona. ■

Arizona campus honored for treatment and prevention

Mayo Clinic was recently recognized for exceeding national performance standards and received two VHA West Coast Leadership Awards. Mayo Clinic was honored for excellence in heart attack treatment and high reliability in the prevention of surgical infection.

Each year, VHA, a national health care alliance, recognizes high-performing hospitals with Leadership Awards for clinical excellence. To qualify for the awards, hospitals must



achieve at least 90 percent compliance with stringent standards guidelines.

Mayo Clinic received awards for performance excellence for the treatment of acute myocardial infarction and high reliability for surgical infection prevention care.

"These prestigious awards pay tribute to the hard work of the entire Mayo team," says Victor Trastek, M.D., CEO of Mayo Clinic's Arizona campus. "They reflect a commitment to providing the highest quality care to the patients we serve." ■

Mayo Clinic develops potential therapy to stop progression of Parkinson's disease

Mayo Clinic researchers have developed a method to reduce the production of alpha-synuclein in the brain. Alpha-synuclein is a protein that is believed to be central to the cause of Parkinson's disease. All patients with Parkinson's disease have abnormal accumulations of alpha-synuclein protein in the brain.

The new method involves the delivery of RNA interference compounds via injection directly to selected areas of the brain. The RNA interference compounds silence the gene that produces alpha-synuclein, according to the Mayo researchers. The study was published in *Molecular Neurodegeneration*.

"While our research has not yet been tested on humans, we expect that these findings will lead to an effective treatment for slowing or even halting the progression of Parkinson's disease," says Demetrius Maraganore, M.D., a Mayo Clinic neurologist.

Drs. Maraganore and Matthew Farrer, Ph.D., a Mayo Clinic neuroscientist, invented a method to treat Parkinson's disease by reducing alpha-synuclein expression. Mayo Clinic patented and licensed their invention to Alnylam Pharmaceuticals Inc., which is leading the effort to

commercialize the Mayo invention using Alnylam RNA interference compounds.

"Our next step with this research is to test the therapy in mice and primates with experimental forms of Parkinson's disease and prove that we are able to stop the disease progression in those animals," says Dr. Farrer. "We are hopeful, as preliminary studies suggest this is possible."

"It is important to note that there are significant hurdles to this therapy. The compound needs to be directly delivered to the brain through a neurosurgical procedure — it cannot be given by mouth or injection into a vein," says Dr. Maraganore. ■



Demetrius Maraganore, M.D., Mayo Clinic neurologist