

Memorial Physician Co-Authors New York Times Op-Ed on alternative approach to treating Ebola

PAWTUCKET — **STEVEN M. OPAL, MD**, chief of infectious disease at Memorial Hospital of Rhode Island, co-authored an editorial piece published by the *New York Times* in August which proposes using existing inexpensive medication to treat people with the Ebola virus. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/16/opinion/can-statins-help-treat-ebola.html>)

'For one of them (a statin), a clinical trial has shown that treatment of sepsis patients reduced the occurrence of multi-organ failure (the complication that kills Ebola patients) by 83%...'

"An Alternative Approach to Treating Patients with Ebola Virus," which is also garnering international attention from scientists and the media, was written with Dr. Opal's colleague, **DAVID S. FEDSON, MD**, director of medical affairs with Aventis Pasteur MSD. It draws on research from more than a decade ago that showed "striking similarities between patients with Ebola and bacterial sepsis."

Both conditions, the doctors assert, involve severe dysfunction of the endothelial cells that line blood vessels throughout the body. This triggers abnormalities in blood coagulation, and can lead to the failure of internal organs like the liver and kidneys, which can lead to death. Infectious disease specialists have since learned that abnormalities of endothelial function and coagulation can be modified

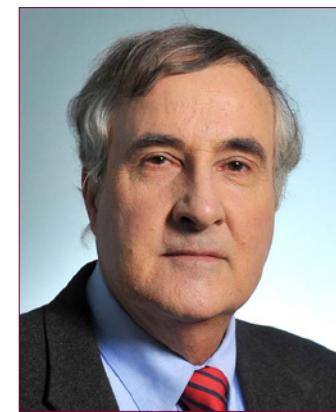
or even reversed by treatment with modern drugs initially developed to treat patients with cardiovascular disease and diabetes, including statins, ACE inhibitors and angiotensin receptor blockers.

"For one of them (a statin), a clinical trial has shown that treatment of sepsis patients reduced the occurrence of multi-organ failure (the complication that kills Ebola patients) by

83%," the editorial reads in recommending the use of these drugs, available inexpensively in generic form, to treat Ebola patients in Africa.

"The global implications of this approach to patient care in developing countries could be immense. Viewed this way, the challenge of treating Ebola patients also represents an opportunity to transform the way acute critical illness is managed throughout the world. We should not pass it by."

Publication of the pair's paper has earned global coverage from such organizations as the American Association for the Advancement of Science and news outlets in Europe. ♦



Steven M. Opal, MD

New prescribed food insurance law will allow affordable treatment for rare diseases

STATE HOUSE — Legislation requiring insurance coverage for special baby formula and prescribed food is now law.

The new measure, which is now in effect, abolishes the mandated cap on coverage for those suffering from rare diseases and inherited disorders requiring prescribed nutrition mandates. The bills (2014-S 2505A, 2014-H 7903), sponsored by Sen. Ryan W. Pearson (D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln) and Rep. Raymond A. Hull (D-Dist. 6, Providence, North Providence), induced passionate testimony from patients and family members of patients who require prescribed diets and formulas during the hearing process.

Senator Pearson said he had introduced the bill because the family of a constituent suffering from a rare disease called phenylketonuria (PKU) asked him for help. PKU is a birth defect that causes an amino acid called phenylalanine to build up in the body. Too much phenylalanine can cause a variety of health problems, and babies, children and adults with PKU need to follow a strict diet that limits this type of protein building block.

Newborns suffering from PKU need special formula that can cost around \$1,000 per month, placing a heavy burden on middle class and low-income families. The number

of people suffering from PKU in the state is an estimated 40 individuals, but the struggle over cost of care has not been overlooked. The legislation could also be beneficial to much larger populations afflicted with Crohn's disease, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and more prevalent conditions that may call for unusual dietary restrictions. ♦

Electric vehicle license plates will protect first responders

PROVIDENCE — Gov. Lincoln D. Chafee signed a bill into law that requires owners of hybrid and electric-powered vehicles to obtain special license plates so that first responders and emergency crew members don't accidentally electrocute themselves while using jaws of life to extricate passengers from wreckage.

The legislation allows first responders to determine what instrument is appropriate to use for the rescue of those trapped inside electric vehicles quickly simply by looking at the license plate. ♦