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Appointments

Dr. Joseph Izzi, Jr, joins University Orthopedics

JOSEPH IZZI, JR, MD, has joined the surgical team at University Orthopedics (UOI).

Dr. Izzi, a fellowship trained orthopedist with a special concentration in hand, wrist, elbow, and shoulder disorders, has been practicing orthopedic surgery in Rhode Island since 2003. Between 2007 and 2008, he also practiced at Tufts Medical Center and served on the faculty of Tufts University School of Medicine.

An orthopedic specialist who has treated a wide range of upper extremity injuries through surgical and nonsurgical procedures, Dr. Izzi completed an orthopaedic residency through the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University’s program at Rhode Island Hospital. He also completed a fellowship in adult and pediatric trauma at Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children’s Hospital, and an additional fellowship in hand and microvascular surgery at the Hospital for Special Surgery, which is affiliated with the Weill Cornell Medical College of Cornell University.

Dr. Izzi, who resides in Rhode Island, holds an undergraduate degree from Boston University and a medical degree from the Boston University School of Medicine. He has professional affiliations with The Miriam Hospital, Rhode Island Hospital, Our Lady of Fatima Hospital, and Roger Williams Medical Center.

EDWARD AKELMAN, MD, president of University Orthopedics, said, “In addition to the wealth of knowledge and insight he brings to his position, he is also committed to a higher-level of patient care. This dedication to enhanced patient outcomes is at the heart of our practice and we are pleased to welcome Dr. Izzi to our group.”

Franklin McCool, MD, named medical director of the Roger Williams Sleep Disorders Center

FRANKLIN MCCOOL, MD, ABIM, has been named medical director of the Roger Williams Medical Center Sleep Disorders Center.

Over the past two decades, Dr. McCool has held a number of related leadership roles including service as medical director of the Sleep Laboratory at both Memorial Hospital and Kent County Hospital. At Memorial, he also served as Chief of Medicine, Chief of the Pulmonary, Critical Care, and Sleep Divisions, as well as Medical Director of Respiratory Care.

Board certified in Sleep Medicine and Internal Medicine, he completed his Pulmonary Fellowship at Strong Memorial Hospital, University of Rochester, following a residency and internship at Rhode Island Hospital, Brown University. Dr. McCool received his medical degree from St. Louis University School of Medicine.
Josiah “Jody” Rich, MD, elected to National Academy of Medicine

The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) announced the election of 75 regular members and 10 international members during its annual meeting on October 15th. Election to the Academy is considered one of the highest honors in the fields of health and medicine and recognizes individuals who have demonstrated outstanding professional achievement and commitment to service.

Among those elected was Josiah "JODY" RICH, MD, MPH, professor of medicine and epidemiology, Brown University; and director, Center for Prisoner Health and Human Rights, The Miriam Hospital, was recognized "for dedication in his medical and public health research career to improving the health and well-being of people in detention and incarceration, to substance users, and to health and well-being post release in communities in need."

“I have strived to address HIV and other diseases among disadvantaged populations, and that led me to work with incarcerated and criminal justice involved populations,” said Dr. Rich. “That in turn opened my eyes to the clinical and public health challenges with this population. More recently I have been focusing my energies on trying to address the opioid crisis.”

He is the principal investigator for Rhode Island Hospital’s new Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) on Opioids and Overdose, which was recently established with an $11.8 million grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences.

“This distinguished and diverse class of new members is a truly remarkable set of scholars and leaders whose impressive work has advanced science, improved health, and made the world a better place for everyone,” said National Academy of Medicine President Victor J. Dzau. “Their expertise in science, medicine, health, and policy in the U.S. and around the globe will help our organization address today’s most pressing health challenges and inform the future of health and health care. It is my privilege to welcome these esteemed individuals to the National Academy of Medicine.”

New members are elected by current members through a process that recognizes individuals who have made major contributions to the advancement of the medical sciences, health care, and public health. A diversity of talent among NAM’s membership is assured by its Articles of Organization, which stipulate that at least one-quarter of the membership is selected from fields outside the health professions – for example, from such fields as law, engineering, social sciences, and the humanities. The newly elected members bring NAM’s total membership to 2,178 and the number of international members to 159.

Established originally as the Institute of Medicine in 1970 by the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Medicine addresses critical issues in health, science, medicine, and related policy and inspires positive actions across sectors. NAM works alongside the National Academy of Sciences and National Academy of Engineering to provide independent, objective analysis and advice to the nation and conduct other activities to solve complex problems and inform public policy decisions. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine also encourage education and research, recognize outstanding contributions to knowledge, and increase public understanding. With their election, NAM members make a commitment to volunteer their service in National Academies activities.

Karuppiah Arunachalam, MD, (left) represented Rhode Island Hospital and the Alpert Medical School at the Heart Failure Society of America meeting in Nashville, Tenn., in September. He presented a case report of cardiomyopathy due to eosinophilic myocarditis as a result of autoimmune disease Eosinophilic Granulomatosis with Polyangiitis (EGPA) or Churg-Strauss Syndrome. At right is senior author Rayan Yousefzai, MD, advanced heart failure specialist and cardiologist.
Recognition

Carlos Vargas-Irwin, PhD, awarded $1.5M NIH Innovator grant

The National Institutes of Health has awarded 89 grants that will provide funding to address major challenges in biomedical science. The grants are part of the NIH High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program, which supports ideas with potential for great impact in biomedical research from across the broad scope of the NIH.

CARLOS VARGAS-IRWIN, PhD, received a $1.5 million five-year NIH Director’s New Innovator Award, established in 2007, which supports unusually innovative research from early career investigators who are within 10 years of their final degree or clinical residency and have not yet received a research project grant or equivalent NIH grant.

His project is titled: Project Title: Synergistic Effector/Environment Encoding: A New Perspective on Motor Cortex and Brain-Computer Interfaces.

“The goal of this project is to better understand the interaction between sensory and movement-related information so that we can interpret signals related to intended actions more accurately,” said Vargas-Irwin, who is part of the BrainGate collaboration led by researchers from Brown, Case Western Reserve University, Stanford University, Massachusetts General Hospital and the Providence VA Medical Center.

In Vargas-Irwin’s project, he will combine an external camera and artificial vision with the neural activity information from a neural decoder.

“This would allow the decoder to interpret neural activity within the context of the visual environment in a way that more closely resembles the natural operating state of the brain,” said Vargas-Irwin, who is affiliated with Brown’s Carney Institute for Brain Science.

Background

Vargas-Irwin enrolled at Brown University in 1998 after finishing secondary education in his hometown of Cali, Colombia. After earning a BS in Neuroscience working in the lab of Dr. John Donoghue (completing his honors thesis under the supervision of Dr. Nicho Hatsopoulos), he stayed at Brown working as a laboratory technician and then joined the Neuroscience Graduate program in 2003. For his doctoral thesis project [featured in Nature’s Research Highlights], he collaborated with Dr. Michael Black to combine Hollywood-style motion tracking and micro electrode array recording technology to demonstrate that dexterous upper-limb movements can be accurately reconstructed from neural activity recorded from relatively small areas (4x4mm) of primate motor cortex. After completing his PhD in 2010, he continued to work on neural decoding models in the Donoghue Lab, becoming an Assistant Professor in 2016. During this time he also joined the BrainGate2 clinical trial [led by Dr. Leigh Hochberg] in order to develop neural interface devices aiming to restore autonomy and independence to people with limited mobility due to neuromotor disorders.

About the NIH awards

“This program supports exceptionally innovative researchers who have the potential to transform the biomedical field,” said NIH Director FRANCIS S. COLLINS, MD, PhD.

“I am confident this new cohort will revolutionize our approaches to biomedical research through their groundbreaking work.”

Funding for the awards comes from the NIH Common Fund and other Office of the Director appropriations; National Cancer Institute; National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health; National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; National Institute of General Medical Sciences; National Institute of Mental Health; and Office of Research Infrastructure Programs.
Recognition

Dr. Melissa Russo earns grant from Marfan Foundation
Research to study risk factors for cardiovascular and obstetric complications in pregnancy among women with genetic predisposition to aortic dissection

MELISSA RUSSO, MD, a maternal-fetal medicine and clinical genetics specialist in the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine at Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island has recently received a $100,000, two-year grant through The Marfan Foundation Grant Program to study the risk factors associated with Cardiovascular and Obstetric complications in pregnancy among women with a genetic predisposition to aortic dissection. Dr. Russo is the director of Prenatal Genetics at Women & Infants’ Prenatal Diagnosis Center.

“We know that pregnancy in women with Marfan syndrome and related conditions is a high-risk time for aortic dissection, but many of these women, with a prenatal multi-disciplinary care team, can have a successful pregnancy,” said Dr. Russo. “Currently, we cannot predict who will have a successful pregnancy versus a catastrophic event during pregnancy because the risk factors for aortic dissection during pregnancy are not well understood. We are seeking to address this knowledge gap by building a multi-center database for reproductive and pregnancy outcomes in women with a genetic predisposition for aortic dissection. Our long-term goal is to continue this work and build a nationwide database.”

Dr. Russo is also an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University and a member of Care New England Medical Group. She was recently added as a member of the GenTAC Alliance, a community of stakeholders committed to advancing understanding of genetic thoracic aortic diseases and their treatment. The Alliance builds upon the successes of the GenTAC Registry, which enrolled and followed participants from 2006 to 2016 and seeks to involve a much wider group of stakeholders and be more expansive in scope.

Drs. Alvero, DiSilvestro, Sung inducted as AGOS Fellows

Three physicians from Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island/The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University have been inducted as fellows of the American Gynecological & Obstetrical Society.

The three new fellows are: RUBEN J. ALVERO, MD, of Providence, director of the Division of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility; PAUL A. DISILVESTRO, MD, of Exeter, director of the Division of Gynecologic Oncology; and VIVIAN SUNG, MD, MPH, FACOG, of Providence, of the Division of Urogynecology and Reconstructive Pelvic Surgery.

Fellowship in AGOS is by invitation only and is reserved for individuals who are nationally and internationally recognized as leaders in their field.

Dr. Alvero is a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Warren Alpert Medical School. His clinical interests include assisted reproductive technologies, polycystic ovarian syndrome, endometriosis, and robotic surgery for uterine fibroids. His research interests include polycystic ovary syndrome, ovarian aging, and medical education.

Dr. DiSilvestro is a professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Warren Alpert Medical School. He serves as the director of the Division of Gynecologic Oncology and the Program in Women’s Oncology and the chair of the Board of Managers of Care New England Medical Group (CNEMG). He is principal investigator for the Women & Infants Hospital site of the National Cancer Institute’s cooperative research group, NRG Oncology, the NIH-sponsored cancer collaborative that includes the Gynecologic Oncology Group.

He is also the co-chair of the Gynecologic Cancer Committees at NRG Oncology and previously served on multiple other committees. In addition, he has been study chair or co-chair of multiple National Cancer Institute-sponsored Gynecologic Oncology Group trials. He is a specialty board examiner as well as a subspecialty (gynecologic oncology) board examiner for the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Dr. Sung is professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Warren Alpert Medical School. She is an active researcher and serves as the director of research for the Division of Urogynecology. Dr. Sung achieved certification in Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery (FPMRS) by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ABOG), where she serves as a FPMRS subspecialty board examiner. She is past president of the Society for Gynecologic Surgeons. Dr. Sung balances non-surgical, surgical, and minimally-invasive options for the management of pelvic organ prolapse, urinary incontinence, and fecal incontinence. She has a particular interest in the critical evaluation and translation of new and existing clinical practices for pelvic floor disorders.
Recognition

Tobey, St. Luke’s, Charlton Memorial hospitals honored for exceptional stroke care

Southcoast Health recently announced that all three of its hospitals – Charlton Memorial in Fall River, St. Luke’s in New Bedford, and Tobey in Wareham – received awards for excellence in stroke care. Each hospital was designated a Primary Stroke Center by the American Heart Association in 2005 and has been recognized for quality care numerous times.

Tobey received two awards, including the Coverdell Defect-free Care Award, which recognizes hospitals that provided defect-free care to 90 percent or more of their stroke patients by using all the interventions for which the patient was eligible based on clinical guidelines.

Tobey and St. Luke’s were both recognized for screening 90 percent or more of their stroke patients for dysphagia, which is difficulty swallowing after a stroke. The awards were for the period covering January to December 2017.

St. Luke’s also received the Get With The Guidelines® Silver Plus Achievement Award from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association®. Hospitals receiving the silver plus award have reached an aggressive goal of treating stroke patients with 85 percent or higher compliance to core standard levels of stroke care as outlined by the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association for one calendar year. In addition, those hospitals have demonstrated 75 percent compliance or higher with additional stroke quality measures.

Charlton Memorial received the Get With The Guidelines® Gold Plus Achievement Award from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association®. Hospitals receiving the gold plus award have reached the same aggressive goals of 85 percent or higher in adherence to stroke quality measures for two consecutive years or more in addition to demonstrating 75 percent compliance to seven out of 10 stroke quality measures.
Recognition

RWMC receives outreach award from Latino Cancer Control Task Force

Roger Williams Medical Center received the Champions of Distinction Award from the Latino Cancer Control Task Force at its October celebration. The award was given for Roger Williams’ efforts to “educate and improve access to prevention and early detection as well the care and quality of life of Latinos in Rhode Island.” Surgical oncologist Dr. Abdul Saied Calvino, who has led Roger Williams’ outreach efforts in the Latino community, moderated a panel called “Culturally Sensitive Care For Latino Cancer Patients”.

In September, Dr. Calvino, a board-certified surgical oncologist, received the 2018 Carol Friedman Award, given annually to recognize outstanding achievement in cancer care. The honorees were chosen by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Comprehensive Cancer Control Branch. Dr. Calvino was recognized for his work since 2016 to increase colorectal cancer screening and education in Rhode Island’s Hispanic community.

Dr. Abdul Saied Calvino, at left, with panel members Dr. Mercedes Pacheco, Hope Health Medical Director for Hospice Services; Dr. Pablo Rodriguez, President and Executive Director of Women’s Care, and Dr. Michael Alavian, a CharterCARE urologist. [PHOTOS: ROGER WILLIAMS MEDICAL CENTER]

Dr. N. Joseph Espat, Director of the Cancer Center and Chairman of Surgery, is pictured receiving the award with Betty Bernal of the Latino Cancer Control Task Force, and John Holiver, CharterCARE CEO.
PATRICIA JOAN (KENNEDY) ISSARESCU, MD, 85, was the wife of the late Dr. Stefan Issarescu.

She graduated from Harvard University’s Radcliffe College, in 1953, and was employed by the federal government in Washington, DC, for several years, before returning to Milton, MA, her childhood home, to take science courses at Boston College, in preparation for applying to medical school. She received her MD degree from Boston University in 1961, one of only 5 women in her class.

Her early medical career included employment with VA hospitals, including the Providence VA Hospital where she was Acting Chief of Renal Service in 1974. After making a decision to go into emergency medicine, she became a board-certified ER physician.

She was employed at St. Joseph’s Hospital, Providence, St. Ann’s Hospital in Fall River and retired from her position at the Garden City Medical Center in Cranston, RI. When introducing herself to patients in the ER she would say, “Issarescu to the rescue! Along with her husband, she was active in the Iuliu Maniu Foundation which supports the resettlement of Romanian refugees.

Dr. Issarescu leaves a brother, Dr. Joseph L. Kennedy Jr. (Patricia) of Boston, and two sisters, Marcia T. Kennedy Manning of NY City and Anne Kennedy Ilacqua (Joseph) of Providence, RI, and many nieces, nephews, grand nieces and grand nephews.

Those wishing to make a donation in Patricia’s memory might choose an animal rescue organization, the Providence Community Library or the Church of St. Sebastian.

HENRY L. WHITED, MD, 88, died peacefully on Monday, October 1, 2018 at Saint Elizabeth Home, East Greenwich. For 29 wonderful years, he was married to his beloved wife, Birgitta (Andersson) Whited.

After high school, he earned his BS in Mechanical Engineering at University of Maine in Orono, ME, then continued on to earn his MBA at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. He served in the Army during the Korean War.

Despite his successful career as an engineer, he decided to further his education and change his career field by earning his Medical Doctorate from SUNY, Buffalo, going on to specialize in cardiology. An Associate Professor at Brown University, he was employed by Roger Williams Medical Center until March 2000.

A colleague and former student said eloquently that “he had a unique perspective on medicine as a result of his successful prior career. He inspired those at Roger Williams lucky enough to be under his tutelage. He was thorough, solid, generous, and caring. We gained not only cardiologic knowledge, but more importantly how to be a physician, to balance career with outside interests and make it work while delivering medical care with a capital ‘C’.”

An avid sailor, he owned many different boats (15 of different sizes when Birgitta came along). A skilled woodworker, he and Birgitta built their own home in Hope Valley, RI.

Beside his wife, he is survived by two step-daughters: Eva Stenberg of Newport, NH and Mona Akerblom of Mountain View, CA; two brothers: William and James Whited; three sisters: Marie Whited, Jo Anna Colby, and Sarah Whited-Higgins; and four step-grandchildren.

Memorial donations can be made to Alzheimer’s Research Foundation, 3152 Little Road, Suite 146, Trinity, FL 34655 or Saint Elizabeth Home, One Saint Elizabeth Way, East Greenwich, RI 02818.

DR. BARRY BENJAMIN SCHWARTZ, 75, died on October 12, 2018.

A graduate of Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, NY, he grew up in Long Beach, New York, where he met his wife, Linda. For his work, Linda and Barry moved to Cincinnati, Ohio; Barrington, RI; and then Providence, RI, where they lived and raised their family for almost 20 years.

He was an internal medicine doctor specializing in nephrology for over 25 years. During this time, he opened his own private practice and held numerous prestigious positions at Miriam Hospital.

After great success in private practice, Dr. Schwartz lent his talents to the insurance industry. He worked for several insurance companies, where he made an impact on countless people across the country by focusing on establishing medical coverage for many illnesses and treatments. This career shift led Dr. Schwartz to move to Albany, NY; Champaign, IL; and finally, Tampa, FL, where he became the Vice President of Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Florida in 2001 and held that position until his retirement.

Dr. Schwartz, a man always looking to further his skills, became a mediator for insurance companies as a part time job during his retirement.

He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Linda; his children, Marc (Carrie), Stacy (Randy), and Eric; and his grandchildren.
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