NIH grants Brown $11M for brain research

ROVIDENCE – With a five-year, $11 million major new federal grant, Brown University has established a research center to study key questions in the neuroscience of attention and related behaviors. The COBRE Center for Central Nervous System Function will encompass five projects, each led by a junior faculty member with mentoring from a more senior professor, with the dual goals of better explaining the brain and generating potential new ideas for addressing disorders such as autism.

“Attention is a gateway to human behavior, normal or abnormal,” said JEROME SANES, professor of neuroscience and a neuroimaging expert who will lead the new center, with help from deputy director SHEILA BLUM-STEIN, the Albert D. Mead professor of cognitive, linguistic and psychological sciences, and JOHN DAVENPORT, associate director of Brown’s Institute for Brain Science. “There is a wide range of functions that depend upon attention,” Sanes said. “You can list many of them just by thinking about what you do every day, such as deciding where to go, what to eat, and remembering yesterday’s events.”

COBRE, which stands for Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence, is a program of the National Institute for General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) that helps bolster research and mentoring of promising young faculty members.

The new NIGMS grant of $11 million over the next five years, including more than $2.5 million this year, will fund underlying research and administrative cores for the center and support these projects:

**DIMA AMSO**, assistant professor of cognitive, linguistic, and psychological sciences, will study the development of visual selective attention, the process by which the brain focuses on what’s relevant instead of on distractions. She will look at healthy development and how it is disrupted in autism spectrum disorders. Mentor: Blumstein

**DR. WAEL ASAAD**, assistant professor of neurosurgery, will focus on how the basal ganglia integrates sensory information from the cortex and motivational information from subcortical structures to generate learning. Mentor: John Donoghue, neuroscientist, engineer and Henry Merritt Writston Professor

**DR. ERIC MORROW**, assistant professor of molecular biology, cell biology, and biochemistry, will use a combination of genetics, neuroimaging, and psychiatric diagnosis techniques to determine whether autism patients with significant levels of obsessive-compulsive behaviors have a unique subtype of autism. Mentors: Sorin Istrail, professor of computer science, and Dr. Steven Rasmussen, professor of psychiatry and human behavior

**JOO-HYUN SONG**, assistant professor of cognitive, linguistic, and psychological sciences, will study how multiple neural systems in the brain work together when someone selects one target over distractors such as deciding to pick up a one object vs. another that differs in color. Mentor: Sanes

**MICHAEL WORDEN**, research assistant professor of neuroscience, will examine cases in which the brain must adapt to visual stimuli that conflict in that they seem to call for incompatible behavioral responses (such as arrows pointing in opposite directions). He will look at the effect of such adaptation on visual processing. Mentor: David Sheinberg, professor of neuroscience

Sanes said the research core, which will focus on developing methods and protocols for experimental design and analysis, will serve as a resource for helping brain science investigators across campus and Brown’s affiliated hospitals to plan new studies and analyze collected data.

With the new grant, the projects are now beginning and the cores are starting up, Sanes said. Some of this year’s money will be used to acquire new research equipment such as eye-tracking systems and noninvasive neural recording equipment, such as EEGs. A portion of the funds will also go to bolster the University’s OSCAR computing cluster.

Overall, Sanes said, the grant and new center provide the resources to build Brown’s foundation for future neuroscience research in health and brain disorders.

Photo by L. Pepe
Dr. Phipps assumes OB-GYN leadership positions at Brown, CNE

PROVIDENCE – Brown University and Care New England Health System have named DR. MAUREEN G. PHIPPS the new chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and assistant dean for Teaching and Research on Women’s Health in the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, and chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island and the executive chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Care New England.

Brown Provost Dr. Mark Schlissel, interim dean of medicine and biological sciences, and Constance A. Howes, president and CEO of Women & Infants, and Dennis D. Keefe, president and CEO at Care New England, made the joint announcement in August. The appointments were effective Sept. 1.

Dr. Phipps, who will hold the Chace-Joukowsky Professorship in Obstetrics and Gynecology, said her vision is to develop interdisciplinary and inter-institutional programs that facilitate research, curriculum development and integrated clinical programs linked to translational research in women’s health. These responsibilities dovetail with the medical school-hospital affiliation agreement signed in 2012, which designates Women & Infants as the major teaching affiliate for services unique to women and newborns for the Warren Alpert Medical School and the Care New England hospitals.

“I am honored and excited to have been selected to serve as chair of Obstetrics & Gynecology at Brown and Women & Infants Hospital and to lead this talented department with its unmatched quality clinical care in all areas of obstetrics and gynecology, unyielding commitment to patient safety, resolute dedication to resident and medical student education and passion for research and innovation,” Dr. Phipps said. “My focus as chair and assistant dean will be to work collaboratively to grow academic and clinical leaders, enhance models for clinical and teaching excellence, and advance innovative science and community partnerships.”

Dr. Schlissel praised Dr. Phipps as someone who embodies excellence in each of the many roles her position requires: physician, teacher, researcher, administrator and community leader at the hospital, in the medical school, and in the school of public health.

“I am very pleased that Dr. Phipps has accepted this appointment,” Dr. Schlissel said. “Time and again she has demonstrated a remarkable ability to lead our shared efforts to advance women’s health and obstetric care, moving us forward in the classroom, the clinic, the community and in research.”

About Dr. Phipps
Dr. Phipps, professor in the Departments of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Epidemiology at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University and in the Brown School of Public Health, has led numerous initiatives at Brown, Women & Infants and in Rhode Island. She served as department chair in an interim capacity, directed the Brown/Women & Infants Hospital National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health; led the Rhode Island Task Force on Preterm Birth; was co-principal investigator for the Brown University National Children’s Study Center, and chairs the Rhode Island Chapter of the March of Dimes Board.

In addition to the National Children’s Study Center, Dr. Phipps has been the principal investigator or co-investigator in numerous projects and programs funded through the National Institutes of Health and other agencies, including the Women’s Reproductive Health Research Scholars Program; the Children’s Environmental Health Formative Center; ESCUCHE-a program to improve health and science literacy; FIT for Delivery; Project REACH, a study to prevent postpartum depression in adolescent mothers; and several other projects related to women’s health and obstetric outcomes.

Dr. Phipps has been recognized on numerous occasions as an outstanding teacher and mentor, including being recognized nationally with the American Congress of Obstetrics & Gynecology Mentor Award for District I (National Recognition Award), the Council on Residency Education in Obstetrics and Gynecology Excellence in Teaching Award (National Recognition Award), and the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics Excellence in Teaching Award (National Recognition Award). She earned her medical degree from the University of Vermont College of Medicine and her residency in obstetrics in gynecology from Brown/Women & Infants. She completed her master’s in public health at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, and a fellowship through the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar Program.
CNE, Memorial finalize affiliation

PAWTUCKET – More than a year after launching the process to affiliate, leadership from Care New England Health System (CNE) and Memorial Hospital of Rhode Island (MHRI) gathered Sept. 3 and ceremoniously signed the closing paperwork signifying the completion of the deal.

Dennis Keefe, president and CEO of CNE, and Arthur DeBlois III, interim president and CEO of MHRI, were flanked by Memorial employees and system leadership as they finalized the regulatory process for Memorial to become the fourth hospital partner in CNE, joining Butler, Kent and Women & Infants hospitals. CNE also includes the Care New England Wellness Center and the VNA of Care New England.

“It is very exciting to be at this point, and to officially welcome Memorial Hospital to Care New England,” Keefe said. “The system as a whole has been keenly focused on improving the way health care is delivered to our patients and their families. Memorial Hospital and its rich legacy in the Blackstone Valley is an ideal addition to our system.”

DeBlois also reflected on the turning page in Memorial’s history book.

“Memorial has a proud legacy of serving the people of this area and we look forward to continuing to do so as part of the Care New England health system,” DeBlois said. “This new venture for Memorial ensures we will also be able to provide an expanded constellation of specialty services to our patients.”

Donald Grebien, mayor of the City of Pawtucket and a vocal supporter of the affiliation, echoed both Keefe and DeBlois’ enthusiasm.

“For more than a century, Memorial Hospital has been an outstanding community partner with the City of Pawtucket and, most importantly, an outstanding care provider for the people of the city, the Blackstone Valley and beyond. Indeed, in the first annual report for the hospital, its president stated, ‘It was organized and is conducted for the benefit of the community’ and that has been true ever since,” Grebien said.

Based on their reviews, state officials determined that the affiliation met the criteria and standards set by state law. The affiliation was also endorsed by physicians, civic leaders and organizations, businesses, public officials and other members of the community who spoke at a public hearing in June or submitted letters of support during the review process.

CNE and MHRI envision that their partnership will bring to the expanded and enhanced CNE system:

- Improvement of quality of clinical programs and services
- Patient access to a broader continuum of services over an expanded service area
- Development of signature service lines, including women’s health, behavioral health, primary care, cardiovascular services, and home health
- Maintenance of the strong academic and research platform that is essential to fostering clinical excellence and innovation
- Enhancement of physician recruitment, retention and integration initiatives
- Improvement of facilities, technology and information technology platforms
- Development of an integrated delivery system in which patient care is coordinated across the full continuum of care for population health management
- Operational efficiencies to improve performance and reduce costs

Affiliation history

The closing came two months after the affiliation received state approval from Director of Health Michael Fine, MD, and Attorney General Peter Kilmartin, capping a rigorous yet highly collaborative and constructive review process. This process included public review by the Health Services Council as part of the Department of Health’s (DOH) Change in Effective Control review, and review by the DOH at Attorney General’s Office under Rhode Island’s Hospital Conversions Act.
Kent Hospital introduces Advanced Heart Failure Program

WARWICK — Kent Hospital announced the development of a new Advanced Heart Failure Program on July 29, in conjunction with the Center for Advanced Heart Disease at Brigham and Women’s Hospital of Boston.

GARRICK C. STEWART, MD, MPH, a member of the Brigham and Women’s Cardiovascular Associates at Kent Hospital, will direct it. He will also co-direct the Care New England Heart Failure Management Program, a population health management program focused on reducing readmissions for heart failure.

Dr. Stewart is a board certified advanced heart failure and transplant cardiologist, as well as an instructor in medicine at Harvard Medical School and associate physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. His current research focuses on the appropriate use of devices in patients with heart failure, particularly on the timely deployment of ventricular assist devices. He is a member of the International Society of Heart and Lung Transplantation and the Heart Failure Society of America.

“We are extremely excited to add the advanced heart failure program to the cardiology services at Kent Hospital and also to welcome Dr. Garrick Stewart to Kent Hospital,” said CHESTER HEDGEPETH, MD, PhD, executive chief of cardiology at Kent Hospital.

“Dr. Stewart brings specialized experience to our team. We hope to apply this advanced care and clinical expertise to the increasing cases of chronic heart failure in our community.”

Heart failure services to be provided include:

- Comprehensive heart failure evaluation
- Individualized medical therapies
- Multidisciplinary care
- Evidence based disease management program
- Education about dietary and lifestyle choices
- Access to clinical trials for heart failure
- Evaluation for advanced heart therapies, including mechanical heart pumps and heart transplantation

In January 2013, a major expansion of cardiology services at Kent Hospital was announced through an agreement with Brigham and Women’s Hospital of Boston.

RI Hospital 150th Anniversary Seascape

From left, Gov. Lincoln Chafee, Providence Mayor Angel Taveras and Timothy J. Babineau, MD, president and chief executive officer of Lifespan, and president of Rhode Island Hospital, at the unveiling of the Rhode Island Hospital 150th anniversary mural at the I-95 underpass on Eddy Street in Providence in late July. Public Art Works created the seascape.
Butler to dedicate $17M Patient Care Center Sept. 25

PROVIDENCE – The new $17 million Patient Care Center at Butler Hospital will hold a dedication on Wednesday, Sept. 25 at 10 a.m. with guided tours slated from 9 to 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. to noon.

The 49,000 square-feet center includes an expanded Patient Assessment Services (PAS) area and a new 26-bed adult inpatient care unit. More than double the size of the hospital’s existing area, it includes private evaluation and exam rooms, two waiting areas – one a separate secured waiting area for highly acute patients – and affords greater privacy for patients and families.

Rhode Island Primary Care Physicians to Affiliate with CNE

PROVIDENCE – The Care New England Health System (CNE) and the Rhode Island Primary Care Physicians Corporation (RIPCPC) executed an affiliation agreement in late July, following Care New England’s affiliation with Memorial Hospital of Rhode Island, which was approved by state regulators earlier in July.

Seventy physicians from RIPCPC have signed on. The goal is to build an integrated health care system, including physicians, nurses, hospitals, specialists, labs, home care and others who are included in a patient’s total health care.

Albert J. Puerini, MD, president and CEO of RIPCPC, said, “Since its formation in 1994, RIPCPC has a proud and strong track record introducing innovative approaches to health care delivery through our physicians and practices, and we look forward to taking it to the next level with our Care New England affiliation. We will ultimately work to introduce ‘disease pods’ which will foster a new collaborative approach to enhanced care management for such issues as congestive heart failure and diabetes.”

According to Dennis Keefe, president and CEO of Care New England, through management of the care of populations for defined periods of time for a set dollar amount, the new approach to health care delivery encourages more effectiveness and efficiency with a focus on keeping individuals well and out of the hospital. At the same time, there are incentives in place in these new arrangements which reward providers for improved patient care outcomes and improved patient satisfaction.
Women & Infants, Brown to offer Women’s Mental Health Fellowship

Applications are being accepted for a Fellow to begin training in July 2014

PROVIDENCE – Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island and The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University have formed a 12-month Women’s Mental Health Fellowship. The advanced study will be geared toward psychiatrists wishing to obtain specialized clinical training in the unique psychiatric needs of pregnant and postpartum women, the impact of infertility on women, and the impact of maternal mental illness on infants and children.

It will be the fourth such fellowship nationwide and the 12th fellowship offered through Brown at Women & Infants. “This is a tremendous accomplishment and testimony to the breadth of services available for women at Women & Infants,” said Constance Howes, the hospital’s president and CEO. “It would be difficult to create a comprehensive educational program that covers so many aspects of a woman’s life and health without such a broad base of services.”

The fellowship is designed to offer focused clinical training in women’s mental health with an emphasis on perinatal psychiatry, according to NEHA HUDEPOHL, MD, an attending psychiatrist in Women & Infants’ Center for Women’s Behavioral Health and director of the new fellowship program.

Fellows will receive in-depth exposure to and training in:

• Pharmacology for pregnant and breastfeeding women
• Attachment disorders in the postpartum period
• Interpersonal psychotherapy
• Perinatal loss
• Substance abuse in perinatal women through the hospital’s Project Link program
• Sociocultural influences on perinatal psychiatric illness
• Influence of menstrual cycle on mood disorders
• Trauma-based disorders
• Impact of maternal mental illness on the developing fetus and infant
• Interplay between cancer and women’s mental health
• Infertility’s impact on a woman’s mental health

“Fellows will work in the various areas within the Center for Women’s Behavioral Health – including our Day Hospital for perinatal mental health concerns, an academic inpatient consultation-liaison service, and at Project Link for women struggling with addictions in the perinatal period,” Dr. Hudepohl said, adding that the Butler Hospital Women’s Partial Hospital Program will also give fellows an opportunity to train with women who are chronically suicidal and meet criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder.

Women’s Mental Health fellows can opt to focus their studies even more specifically on one of the program’s core areas, add electives to supplement their training, and develop a research project in women’s mental health under the supervision of a research mentor.

“Women & Infants provides multiple opportunities for exploring women’s mental health,” explained MARGARET HOWARD, PHD, a clinical psychologist, director of the Day Hospital, and associate program director of the new fellowship. “The fellows can spend time, for example, in the hospital’s different clinic sites and provide outpatient psychiatric consultation for women with cancer, chronic medical conditions or infertility concerns.”

Applications will be accepted starting September 1, 2013, for a fellow to begin training in July 2014. Applicants must have completed a residency or plan to complete a residency in general adult psychiatry prior to the start of the fellowship program and be board certified or eligible with the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in adult psychiatry. For more information on the fellowship, physicians can go to womenandinfants.org or call the Center for Women’s Behavioral Health at 401-459-7955.
NIH awards URI researchers $11.4M to continue study on dengue virus

PROVIDENCE – University of Rhode Island Research PROFESSOR ALAN ROTHMAN and colleagues in the Institute for Immunology and Informatics have been awarded $11.4 million from the National Institutes of Health for ongoing research on dengue virus, a potentially deadly mosquito-borne disease.

Working alongside Rothman on the project in Rhode Island will be URI Assistant Research PROFESSOR CAREY MEDIN and DR. JENNIFER FRIEDMAN of Rhode Island Hospital.

Rothman heads the Laboratory of Viral Immunity and Pathogenesis at URI’s Institute for Immunology and Informatics on the Providence campus. His research involves clinical and basic research studies on pathogenesis and immunity of emerging and re-emerging viral infections.

Field studies for the project will be conducted by collaborators in Thailand and the Philippines who will look at natural dengue virus transmission in humans. This research will also include collaboration with a phase-three vaccine trial. Laboratory research will take place in the United States, Europe and Asia.

RI-CART receives $1.2 million grant to create statewide autism registry and network

EAST PROVIDENCE – The Rhode Island Consortium for Autism Research and Treatment (RI-CART), a group of the state’s leading experts on autism research, education, health and services, has received a $1.2 million grant to create a first-of-its-kind confidential registry of every individual diagnosed with autism in Rhode Island. Awarded by the Simons Foundation, the grant will help RI-CART create a data and resource continuum for thousands of children and adults in the state with autism spectrum disorders. The RI-CART resource will be used to support critically-needed research projects. Participation in the project will facilitate communication between clinical experts and families as well as provide families with important information for navigating state autism services. The registry project is also supported by funds from the Brown University Institute for Brain Science, the Norman Prince Neuroscience Institute, and the Alpert Medical School Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior which catalyzed RI-CART activities in the fall of 2012.

“This effort will link families and researchers to spur important and innovative research on the causes and treatments for individuals with autism and related conditions,” said STEPHEN SHEINKOPF, PhD, a clinical researcher at Women & Infants Hospital, assistant professor at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University and co-director of the RI-CART project. “As a partnership between researchers and families, the RI-CART resource will be a uniquely collaborative approach to research.”

As part of the project, members of the RI-CART team with advanced training in autism assessment will offer to administer the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) to each individual enrolled in the project. Only a fraction of individuals with autism in Rhode Island currently have access to the ADOS, which is considered a ‘gold standard’ measure of autism symptoms. Offering the ADOS to all children and adults with autism could greatly improve the accuracy of autism diagnoses, as well as potentially improve the treatment that families receive. Participants will also have access to resource staff who can provide information on autism and available services, and who can help connect families to resources in the community.

During the next three years, RI-CART hopes to enroll over 1,000 children and adults with autism. This will be the first step in the long-term goal of enrolling all individuals with autism in Rhode Island in this unique research network.

“The Framingham Heart Study – through collaboration between a community and researchers – helped identify many of the major causative factors and characteristics of heart disease. While there has been much hopeful progress in autism research in recent years particularly as a result of ambitious team science, we are behind in our understanding and treatment by comparison to other medical conditions, such as heart disease”, said ERIC MORROW MD, PhD, an assistant professor in biology at Brown University and genetics researcher at Bradley Hospital. Dr. Morrow is the principal investigator on the Simons grant. He will lead the project with Sheinkopf, which will also collect DNA, and other bio-samples, including those that will allow studies of environmental exposures.

For more information about RI-CART call 401-432-1200, email RICART@Lifespan.org, or visit www.AutismRI.org.
Four RI hospitals to receive additional $5.75 million in Medicare payments

WARWICK – U.S. Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and U.S. Representatives James Langevin and David Cicilline announced in August that Kent, Newport, South County, and Westerly Hospitals will receive an additional $5.75 million in Medicare payments as a result of the renewal of a “wage index” adjustment by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that accounts for different labor costs across the country. The new wage index is estimated to increase the Medicare reimbursements made to each of these four hospitals by the following amounts:

**NEWPORT HOSPITAL** is estimated to receive an additional $968,000 in Medicare reimbursement in FY14.

**KENT HOSPITAL** is estimated to receive an additional $2.7 million in Medicare reimbursement in FY14.

**SOUTH COUNTY HOSPITAL** is estimated to receive an additional $1.09 million in Medicare reimbursement in FY14.

**WESTERLY HOSPITAL** is estimated to receive an additional $990,000 in Medicare reimbursement in FY14.

CPAP reduces risk of death in people with COPD and sleep apnea

*More time on CPAP was associated with reduced mortality after controlling for common risk factors*

DARIEN, IL – A new study suggests that continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy reduces the mortality rate in people who have both chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), which the authors refer to as “the overlap syndrome.”

“This study adds to the growing body of literature regarding the combined impact of OSA in patients with COPD,” said lead author and principal investigator **MICHAEL L. STANCHINA, MD**, clinical assistant professor of medicine at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University and physician at Rhode Island Hospital. “We have shown that more time on CPAP in patients with the overlap syndrome was associated with a reduced risk of death, after controlling for common risk factors.”

The study is in the Aug. 15 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, which is published by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. It involved a post hoc analysis of 10,272 outpatients. Dr. Stanchina’s team identified a study sample of 3,396 patients from 2007-2010 who had COPD or OSA. This sample included 227 overlap syndrome patients who had both COPD and OSA. All patients in the overlap group were treated with CPAP therapy, and objective treatment compliance data were collected for the first one to three months of use. Seventeen patients with the overlap syndrome died.

Multivariate analysis revealed that hours of CPAP use at night is an independent predictor of mortality (hazard ratio = 0.71) in patients with COPD and OSA. Results show that overlap syndrome patients who use CPAP have a significantly higher survival than those who do not. Even minimal use of CPAP was associated with some reduction in the risk of death, and this benefit increased with more nightly hours of CPAP therapy.

“We were most surprised to find that any level of CPAP use in this cohort, over no use, was associated with some mortality benefit,” said Dr. Stanchina.

To request a copy of the study, email lcelmer@aasmnet.org.

Kent Hospital’s Palliative Care Program featured on news with Diane Sawyer

NEW YORK – ABC World News Tonight with Diane Sawyer featured Kent Hospital’s Palliative Care Program along with Kent Hospital resident physicians, in a segment focused on The Conversation Project, a national initiative dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care.

The segment focused on residents being taught how to interact with their patients preparing for end-of-life care. **DR. KATE LALLY**, the director of palliative care at Kent, introduced a program to the residents to teach them how to talk to patients about their options, at any stage of illness.

This effort is all part of a bigger national initiative, The Conversation Project, which is dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care. Care New England Health System has joined a national Initiative with other pioneering organizations to support a new effort by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI). The initiative is to better prepare health care providers to receive and respect patients’ wishes about end-of-life care and is a critical companion to The Conversation Project.

ABC’s article on Kent Hospital: http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2013/08/09/young-doctors-pave-way-for-end-of-life-conversations/
Center for Bariatric Surgery at Miriam Marks One-Year Anniversary

Members of the Center for Bariatric Surgery at The Miriam Hospital recently celebrated the one-year anniversary of the Center with some of their patients. At far left is Siva Vithiananthan, MD; and at far right is G. Dean Roye, MD. Arthur Sampson, president of The Miriam Hospital, is next to Dr. Roye. Kellie Armstrong, RN, Bariatric Surgery Program coordinator, is next to Dr. Vithiananthan.

PROVIDENCE – The Center for Bariatric Surgery at The Miriam Hospital – a combined program that unites nationally recognized bariatric surgeons and staff from Rhode Island and The Miriam hospitals into a single program on one campus – recently celebrated its one-year anniversary.

The Miriam Hospital has been offering weight loss surgery since 2007, before the program united with the bariatric surgery program at Rhode Island Hospital. The combined Center performed 315 total bariatric-related cases in its first year and continues to offer a variety of widely attended seminars and support groups for both patients and their families.

It provides different minimally invasive, or laparoscopic, bariatric surgical techniques, including:

• laparoscopic Roux-en-Y gastric bypass
• gastric banding
• laparoscopic gastric sleeve resection
• bilio-pancreatic duodenal switch surgery procedures

The Center also includes a 20-bed surgical intensive care unit. A bariatric surgeon is also available around-the-clock for any emergencies or consults.

Many former bariatric patients attended a special anniversary reception, where they had the opportunity to thank and celebrate with the surgeons, physicians, nurses, dietitians and other team members who cared for them both before and long after their surgeries.

“Our goal is not just to help people lose weight, but we want to change their lives by giving them the tools they need to lead a healthier lifestyle,” said SIVA VITHIANANTHAN, MD, chief of minimally invasive and bariatric surgery at The Miriam Hospital and director of the Center for Bariatric Surgery. “It is incredibly rewarding to hear from former patients who tell us how they are now off of their blood pressure medication or are running half marathons and accomplishing other feats they never thought were possible before coming to us for bariatric surgery.”

“Hearing from patients whose lives have literally been transformed by our surgeons and the entire bariatric care team was both a moving experience and a sober reminder of the toll the obesity epidemic continues to have here in Rhode Island,” said ARTHUR J. SAMPSON, president of The Miriam Hospital.

Both Rhode Island and The Miriam hospitals have been recognized as American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS) Bariatric Surgery Centers of Excellence®. The designation recognizes surgical programs with a demonstrated track record of excellence in providing superior and comprehensive bariatric surgery care. The Miriam also has been designated a Blue Distinction Center for Bariatric Surgery by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island.
Dr. Chu introduces EX-MAZE procedure at RIH for high-risk A-fib patients

ANTONY CHU, MD, is the director of complex ablations at the Cardiovascular Institute of the Rhode Island and Miriam hospitals. Prior to this, he was the director of atrial fibrillation at the Reading Hospital Medical Center in Pennsylvania and a clinical faculty member of the Thomas Jefferson University Cardiovascular Division. He is a graduate of the Yale University School of Medicine.

The procedure, known as “EX-MAZE,” is a minimally invasive surgical procedure designed to treat patients with long-standing A-fib. Many of these patients have had prior failed therapies including patients who have had prior cardiac ablation procedures. The technique uses radiofrequency energy to create “lines of block,” which modify cardiac electrical connections from blood vessels (known as pulmonary veins) attached to the top left chamber of the heart (left atrium). Radiofrequency energy is delivered both on the inside (endocardial) and outside (epicardial) surfaces of the heart. This technique effectively blocks the electrical signals from the pulmonary veins that cause the atrial fibrillation.

“This novel approach to a common but complex problem is great news for patients with long-standing atrial fibrillation,” Dr. Chu said. “For this patient population, all other medical therapy and traditional cardiac ablation approaches have been exhausted. This approach is not only minimally invasive (i.e. does not involve cardiac bypass), but also offers excellent outcomes with short recovery times.”

Quality Institute, BCBS offer incentives to increase enrollment in CurrentCare

PROVIDENCE – The Rhode Island Quality Institute (RIQI) and Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) recently announced the launch of an incentive program for Rhode Island primary care physicians (PCPs) to adopt and use CurrentCare, Rhode Island’s health information exchange.

“We are very excited about this program,” said JONATHAN LEVISS, MD, chief medical officer at Rhode Island Quality Institute. “By creating financial incentives for providers who adopt CurrentCare, the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island Incentive Program encourages improved patient care across the state.”

“CurrentCare has tremendous advantages for both patients and providers that make care more coordinated, safe and patient-centered,” said DR. GUS MANOCCHIA, chief medical officer for BCBSRI.

Key areas

Under the incentive program, eligible providers (those in family practice, pediatrics or internal medicine who are in compliance with BCBSRI’s EHR payment policy) may receive up to $10,000 in incentives per practice related to three key areas:

• CurrentCare enrollment: To qualify for incentives, PCP practices must enroll the greater of the following: at least 200 patients per affiliated PCP or enroll a number of patients equivalent to at least 50 percent of their BCBSRI members.

• Viewer and Hospital Alerts: PCP practices can qualify for additional incentive if at least 75 percent of their staff is trained on the online portal known as CurrentCare Viewer and the practice enables CurrentCare Hospital Alerts.

• Implementation of a Direct Messaging Account: This allows for secure electronic communication between providers who use different electronic medical record systems.