VRIC a Big Success

With presentations highlighting the latest research in vascular biology, plus the inaugural Alexander W. Clowes Distinguished Lecture, the recent Vascular Research Initiatives Conference was a rousing success.

SVS' surgeon-scientists presented an outstanding program with an excellent mix of basic and translational research, said Dr. Edith Tzeng, chair of the SVS Research and Education Committee, which oversees VRIC.

“Our talks typically have much more of a translational edge to them, with a greater emphasis on clinical applications,” she said. “That brings into focus research that is relevant to patients and patient care.”

Four abstract sessions covered vascular endothelium and thrombosis, aortic and arterial pathology, stem cells and tissue engineering and peripheral arterial disease.
One of the program highlights was the translational panel session. Three presentations illustrated the progress from “bench to bedside” in the development of bio-engineered vascular grafts and the clinical translation considerations for a stem cell–seeded biodegradable graft, developing tissue-engineered grafts in congenital heart surgery, and clinical experience in dialysis access and arterial disease of human tissue–engineered blood vessels.

This work has real-world impact. Dr. Christopher Breuer and his team have created a cardiac vascular graft for use in congenital heart surgery that grows along with the patients, some of whom have been followed out to 18 years after placement. SVS member Dr. Jeffrey Lawson and his team developed a scaffold-based graft that is now in Phase 3 clinical trials for dialysis access here in the United States. This graft has shown great promise and has great potential application for arterial reconstruction. Justin Sol Weinbaum discussed clinical translation considerations for adipose derived stem cell–seeded biodegradable grafts.

“The information these speakers presented really impacts how we will be practicing vascular surgery in the very near future,” said Dr. Tzeng. “It’s cutting-edge and it’s very exciting.”

The 2017 conference also featured Dr. William Sessa delivering the first Alexander W. Clowes Distinguished Lecture. This annual lecture honors Dr. Clowes, who died in July 2015. Dr. Clowes was a renowned surgeon-scientist and one of the original founders of the VRIC; the new named lecture honors him, his work and the tremendous impact he had on those he mentored over the course of his long career.

Drs. Alan Dardik and Michael Conte were instrumental in selecting Dr. Sessa, whom Dr. Dardik called “a logical choice” for this first address. Drs. Sessa and Clowes were friendly, had many common connections with surgeon-scientists and had great mutual respect for each other. Approximately 15 years ago, Dr. Dardik visited Dr. Clowes for career advice as part of the SVS Foundation Wylie Traveling Fellowship, "as many people had consulted with Dr. Clowes over the years," Dr. Dardik said. "He essentially sent me to Bill Sessa and told me to work with him. This was instrumental to launching my investigative career and I am eternally grateful." Dr. Conte had had a similar experience, and the two surgeons unanimously recommended Dr. Sessa.

"It was a magnificent lecture, highlighting new directions for vascular biology which, of course, is important for vascular surgery," Dr. Dardik said. "We had a lecture to tell us about ground-breaking research and the new, exciting directions it’s leading to, for our own research and our patients. It made everybody think and that’s exactly what Alec would have wanted."

Dr. Dardik told guests at the dinner that night that “Alec was looking down on us and smiling. He couldn’t have been more proud.”

To view a slideshow of VRIC photos, visit vsweb.org/VRICslides17. To learn more about the lecture and to contribute to funding it in perpetuity, visit vsweb.org/ClowesLecture.

Photo caption: William C. Sessa, PhD, (second from right) receives congratulations and a plaque after presenting the inaugural Alexander W. Clowes Distinguished Lecture at the 2017 VRIC. With him are, from left, SVS President Dr. Ronald Fairman; Susan Detweiler, widow of Dr. Clowes; and Dr. Alan Dardik, who moderated the lecture. NOAH WOLF/NOAH WOLF, INC.
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