



VRIC: Highlighting Research in Vascular Calcification

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Vascular calcification affects the vascular health of millions of patients. No current therapies exist to prevent or reverse it, and the problem has confounded researchers and physicians for decades.

The development of innovative treatment strategies requires both a better fundamental understanding of the problem and collaboration between vascular surgeons and vascular biologists/biomedical engineers. This year's Vascular Research Initiatives Conference (VRIC) will bring these audiences together and provide insight from key investigators in this field. V

VRIC, which focuses broadly on emerging vascular science and translational research relevant to vascular patients, will be Monday, May 13, in Boston, one day prior to the American Heart Association's Vascular Discovery Conference. More than 200 abstracts were submitted for presentation, and as such, organizers have expanded the scientific program. Visit vsweb.org/VRIC19 to view the preliminary program and to register.

Cecelia Giachelli, PhD, is the W. Hunter and Dorothy Simpson Professor and Endowed Chair of Bioengineering at the University of Washington and a world-renowned expert in vascular calcification. She will present the Third Annual Alexander W. Clowes Distinguished Lecture on "New Concepts in Regulation and Bioengineered Therapies for Vascular and Valvular Calcification." The interactive Translational Panel will follow, discussing calcific arteriosclerosis, or hardening of the artery.

Panel members are fellow vascular calcification experts Elena Aikawa MD, PhD (director of the Vascular Biology Program at Brigham and Women's Hospital/Harvard Medical School); Dwight Towler, MD, PhD (J.D. and Maggie E. Wilson Distinguished Chair in Biomedical Research and the Louis V. Avioli Professorship in Mineral Metabolism Research and vice chair, research, Internal Medicine at UT-Southwestern); and Raul Guzman, MD (vascular surgeon, Beth Israel Deaconess/ Joslin Diabetes Center and chair of the SVS Clinical Research Committee).

"Since calcium turns normally compliant and energy-efficient arteries into hard pipes, vascular surgeons are commonly frustrated by this disease," said Luke Brewster, MD, PhD, chair of the SVS Research and Education Committee, which organizes the VRIC program. "Medical therapies for this are lacking, in contrast to atherosclerosis. This is a field where vascular surgeons bring much needed value to translational science in vascular calcification."

Given the increased incidence and survival of patients with diabetes and/or end-stage renal disease, calcific arteriosclerosis will only become more of a clinical problem in the future, he said.

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As with any complicated process, a broad group of investigators is needed to solve this terrible problem, said Dr. Brewster. And when the problem IS solved, he said with a laugh, someone “will win a Nobel Prize or own a winery!”

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