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Life in Discovery

For Immediate Release:

American Diabetes Association Funds Scholl College Student's Research

NORTH CHICAGO, IL – When she came to Dr. William M. Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine in 2006, Laura Shin dreamed of pursuing a career that would allow her to work with patients as a practitioner while still conducting research that could make a difference in the lives of people beyond her private practice.

At Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, Shin said she found the perfect way to bring those goals together by pursuing a dual degree in podiatric medicine at the Scholl College and a research-oriented PhD through the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

“I really hope to be part of this emerging trend of clinicians also having a hand in research,” she said. “I hope to practice clinical medicine, and turn that into a way turn research into results for patients.

At Rosalind Franklin University, Shin is working on a research project that will study the possibility of using adult stem cells to treat the foot ulcers that often plague diabetes patients, putting them at risk of amputation.

In pursuing that goal, Shin recently won the notable support of the American Diabetes Association. The ADA awarded Shin a three-year Clinical Scientist Training Award, funding her research in the field of podiatric medicine along with her tuition and research program costs. In winning the grant, Shinn, the only podiatric medical student to win the award, was competing against medical students and other health-related doctoral students pursuing joint degrees in research-oriented PhD work.

Shin, 26, was thrilled to receive the grant, which she said validates the strength of the Scholl College program. “It brings a lot of recognition to our school,” she said.

People with diabetes are at risk of developing ulcers and chronic wounds in the legs and feet, wounds that often lead to amputations. According to the American Diabetes Association, 21 million people in the United States and 189 million people worldwide suffer from diabetes, with the prevalence of the disease expected to rise by 72 percent by the year 2025.

Up to 25 percent of those with diabetes develop foot ulcers, and more than half of such ulcers eventually become infected, requiring hospitalization. About 80 percent of the 120,000 non-traumatic amputations performed in the United States each year are attributed to diabetes.

The research project Shin is pursuing looks at the using bone marrow derived mesenchymal stem cells to improve wound healing. Early clinical work suggests that applying a patient's own bone marrow cells topically to the site of an injury can improve healing.

But because diabetes can cause chronic disease that impacts the availability of stem cells in bone marrow, Shin's project seeks to discover how best to amplify the cells in a lab for treatment of diabetes patients.

"We are looking for a way to help people use their own stem cells to treat their illness," Shin said.

Her interest in stem cell research began during her undergraduate years at Johns Hopkins University in neuroscience, and in subsequent work in the field. When she came to Scholl College to pursue a degree in podiatric medicine, she saw the availability of the joint PhD program as a way to bring together her goal of working with patients as a podiatrist with her interest in research.

"It was the perfect blend of all my previous experience," she said. Growing up in Highland Park, Illinois, Shin said she always knew of the Scholl College, which she called the leading college of podiatric medicine in the country. The college was established in 1912, and became part of Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science in 2001.

In pursuing the joint program, she takes traditional podiatric medicine courses at the Scholl College while also working in research with Dr. Daniel Peterson, Director of the Center for Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine at RFUMS, and with CLEAR, the Center for Lower Extremity Ambulatory Research at the Scholl College.

The dual degree program is, she admits, a challenge, requiring hard work balancing her time in the classroom and studying for her traditional podiatric medicine degree with the hours she must spend in the lab.

"I get very little sleep," she said, laughing.

About Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science

Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science is a national leader in interprofessional medical and healthcare education, comprising the Chicago Medical School, College of Health Professions, Dr. William M. Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine and School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Rosalind Franklin University recently received approval for its new doctoral program in Interprofessional Healthcare Studies – the first in Illinois – and will launch a new master in science program in Psychology Clinical Counseling in fall 2008.

There are more than 16,000 RFUMS graduates in the United States and worldwide.