

Innovative Symposia

‘The People Speak’ at Columbia, With a Range of Voices Heard

By Lana Zak

On Sept. 13, Columbia played host to a lively panel discussion on the topic of “American Power and Global Security,” featuring former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright; the former adviser to the U.S. presidential envoy in Iraq, Dan Senor; Chilean Ambassador to the U.N., Heraldo Munoz; and ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos, CC’82, who served as moderator. As the host of the event, University President Lee C. Bollinger opened the night’s discussion by encouraging this type of dialogue. He challenged audience members to understand and resolve the paradoxes of globalization, calling it “the great undertaking of our times. This work must be done not only in the corridors of power but also in the halls of our great universities, where great minds convene to think through great issues.”

The discussion, which took place in Low Library, considered how best to neutralize threats to U.S. interests and ensure global security. Topics debated included how to wage an effective war on terrorism, the war in Iraq and how U.S. conduct in both cases has affected its standing in the world. Exchanges became heated at times, with panelists and audience members asserting opposing perspectives and vigorously challenging

each others’ point of view.

The opportunity to interact with such distinguished visitors to Columbia was not lost on the students, who turned out in throngs to be a part of the event. Free tickets were distributed at 10 a.m. at the box office at Lerner. By 9 a.m. the lines stretched out the door. When the panel discussion got under way at just after 7 p.m., the Low Library rotunda was filled to capacity, with many more students standing outside.

In all, more than 400 Columbia students, faculty and staff attended, with many adding their voices to the discourse. Guanhua Puah, CC’08, an international student from Singapore, appreciated the opportunity to challenge the panelists’ remarks. After speaking about the perception of America’s annual release of U.S. Human Rights Report, which criticized human rights in Singapore, he asked, “How can the U.S. repair our international image and how long will it take?”

The discussion marked the first in a series of town hall-style meetings called “The People Speak: A Discussion of America’s Role in the World,” which will bring together foreign policy experts, elected officials and the public to talk about important global issues nationwide. Monday’s discussion was the start of approximately 4,000 events



Senor, Munoz, Albright and Stephanopoulos listen to an audience participant.

planned as part of “The People Speak” series, ranging from large-scale assemblies held in major media markets and moderated by ABC News, like the one held at Columbia, to smaller, grassroots gatherings in high schools, coffee shops, universities and community centers coast-to-coast.

At Columbia’s initial event, Stephanopoulos moderated a 45-

minute discussion among the panelists, posing several questions to the group. Albright received the most applause of the evening for comments such as her remark on Iraq: “We are trying to impose freedom, which is an oxymoron.”

The wide-ranging conversation was remarkably diverse. Chelsea Ricker, CC’06, said, “I liked that there were representatives of dif-

ferent points of view. Frankly, I was surprised since this is known as such a liberal campus.”

The event was taped by ABC News for future broadcast. Segments also will be made available for viewing on at the Columbia news Web site, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/news/>.

The Story Behind the News: CUMC’s History of Innovation

By Anne Bayne

All eyes were recently on the cardiovascular surgery unit at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center (NYPH/Columbia), where former President Bill Clinton underwent a successful triple bypass surgery.

During that experience, the public learned much about the expertise of the University’s heart surgeons and its cardiovascular strength. What they may not know is that a series of medical milestones at Columbia paved the way for this lifesaving cardiac procedure.

If you scrape just below the surface, however, you will find that Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC) was the incubator of many of these breakthroughs. In research area after research area—from treating arrhythmias to preventing restenosis or re-clogging of arteries after angioplasty, from clinical devices to heart transplant techniques—CUMC’s medical achievements have allowed for today’s cardiovascular surgeons to routinely restore diseased hearts to health.

In particular, three milestones stand out. Horatio Williams introduced the first electrocardiography machine—known as the ECG in the United States—while he was at Columbia University in 1911. ECG tests are now performed on thousands of patients every day as a simple, non-invasive test for heart disease. The right cardiac catheter, an invaluable tool essential for the exploration, diagnosis and treatment of coronary heart problems, was developed by Andre Cournand and Dickinson Richards. The two Columbia researchers won the Nobel Prize in 1956 for their con-

tributions to medicine and physiology. And in 1984, Columbia surgeons were also responsible for the first successful pediatric heart transplant.

Technological Advances and Surgical Excellence

Today, a series of technological advances in cardiovascular research at CUMC are continuing to improve the longevity and well-being of the millions of people affected by heart disease. One such discovery, the use of left ventricular assist devices—LVADs—has dramatically lengthened and improved the lives of end-stage heart failure patients. In a landmark clinical trial, Eric Rose, associate dean for translational research and chairman of the Department of Surgery at CUMC, and his team proved that LVADs more than doubled one-year survival rates. As a result of this research, the Food and Drug Administration and Medicare and Medicaid Services have approved the devices for use in these terminally ill patients.

Until Michael Argenziano, assistant professor of medicine at Columbia and director of robotic cardiac surgery and arrhythmia surgery at NYPH/Columbia conducted the first robot-assisted coronary artery bypass graft (CABG), the operation had required open-chest surgery. Robot-assisted surgery requires only three small holes the size of a pencil tip made between

the ribs, through which two robotic arms and an endoscope gain access to the heart, making surgery possible for some patients without having to open the chest at all.

One of the more frequent complications of heart surgery is the potential for bleeding during the surgery. Research currently being conducted by Eric Rose has uncovered an investigational anticoagulant. In recent trials, this “factor IX” appears to significantly reduce the bleeding during heart surgery that is associated with heparin, a commonly used anticoagulant.

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Arrhythmias or irregular heartbeats are the cause of sudden death in half of all heart patients. Research at CUMC under the direction of Andrew Marks, has led to the discovery of a new medication that could potentially treat this condition by patching the leak in the heart’s calcium channels.

Ongoing Clinical Trials

The pioneering research continues today, with several large ongo-

ing clinical trials leading the way to future breakthroughs in the treatment and prevention of cardiovascular disease.

For instance, CUMC and NYPH/Columbia are among seven centers participating in an international trial of a less-invasive alternative to open-heart surgery for the estimated 4 million Americans suffering from severe chronic mitral valve regurgitation (MR). MR is a defect in which the heart’s mitral valve fails to close properly resulting in abnormal flow of blood, weakening of the heart, and potentially leading to congestive heart failure. The new treatment involves a small implant that helps the mitral valve to close properly. Allan Schwartz and Hal Wasserman are leading the CUMC team.

Research by Silviu Itescu uses adult stem cells from bone marrow to build and repair blood vessels damaged during heart attacks. Michael Rose in a collaborative project with Stony Brook University and Guidant Corporation, is developing a biological pacemaker for humans using genetically engineered adult stem cells that mimic the natural rhythm of the heart.

Treating the disease is the second half of the battle; preventing it, first and foremost. In the largest national trial of its kind, researchers at CUMC led by Thomas Bigger, are studying and advancing strategies to prevent heart disease in the growing number of Americans with type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes

affects approximately 14 million Americans. The strategies used in the trial may ultimately help decrease the damage to blood vessels, heart, brain, eye and kidney caused by diabetes.

More Than 1,500 Open-Heart Procedures a Year

While this preventative work is encouraging, heart disease is still the nation’s No. 1 killer. Cardiovascular experts at CUMC are in the forefront of those working to reduce its death toll. NYPH/Columbia’s open-heart surgery program performs more than 1,500 open-heart procedures annually, and reports some of the lowest mortality rates for coronary bypass procedures in Manhattan and one of the lowest in the state. Columbia surgeons perform an unusually high percentage of valve procedures, and are recognized for innovation and expertise in valve repair.

CUMC is also widely known as a regional and national leader in congenital heart surgery under the direction of Jan M. Quaegebeur and Ralph Mosca. The New York State Database for complex congenital procedures shows an astounding 1.5 percent mortality rate at NYPH/Columbia, compared to 15 percent statewide.

NYPH/Columbia’s current Heart Transplant Program, directed by Donna Mancini is one of the first in the nation. It has recently completed its 25th year of operation and has consistently been among the most active programs in the United States.

For more information on other innovative research initiatives, visit CUMC’s web site at www.cumc.columbia.edu.