Spring is just about to begin and I see new energies among our doctors and residents as we put the dark days of winter behind us. Daylight savings time came very early this year and Easter is about as early as it can be. This helps us to get things in perspective and develop a positive outlook on whatever lies ahead.

In this issue of the Letter, we bring you information on some new vaccines that are available. Also there is information about your postpartum visit, as Latterman is participating in a project to improve outcomes for our pregnant mothers. Finally there is an article about allergies since spring ushers in the pollens that cause a lot of misery for some.

There is a new editor of the Letter this month, Dr. Samidha Bhat, and we welcome her expertise and enthusiasm. I will be off to Thailand in April for two weeks. My second grandchild was just born there and I want to meet her and spend a little time to get to know her. Enjoy the Letter.

William H. Markle, M.D.

Spotlight on Latterman Faculty and Attendings

Essam Demian, MD is a 1981 graduate of the University of Ain-Shams School of Medicine in Cairo, Egypt. He is currently the Director of Obstetrical Services for the UPMC McKeensport Family Medicine Residency Program. Dr. Demian completed a residency and obtained a master’s degree in Obstetrics and Gynecology in Egypt. He pursued further training in the United Kingdom where he obtained a membership in the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Dr. Demian completed his residency in Family Medicine at UPMC McKeensport where he served as Chief Resident before joining the faculty. His special interests in medicine are women’s health and child development issues. He is married with two children. Recreational activities include reading French novels, traveling and watching soccer.
RESIDENT PHYSICIAN SPOTLIGHT

**Dr. Evelyn T. Omana** was born and raised in the Philippines. She decided to take the BS Biology major in microbiology at the University of the Philippines, thinking it had nothing to do with math, which she abhors. She was wrong. Her sister, Lolita, convinced and supported her to pursue medicine. She finished medical school at the University of the East Memorial Medical Center in 1999. After passing the Philippine Medical Boards, she devoted her time to practicing Occupational Medicine while applying for the USMLE exams. In 2005, she was accepted to train in Family Medicine at UPMC in McKeesport, PA.

Dr. Omana enjoys long drives, particularly going to see her family in King of Prussia, PA. Besides that, she loves cooking and eating Filipino dishes, shopping, decorating, and watching movies. In the summer, she gets pleasure from biking and walking in the parks. Dr. Omana is finishing her last year of training. She hopes to practice Family Medicine on the West Coast, being welcomed and respected in the community she serves.

**Dr. Wassim Abosamra** was born in Damascus, Syria, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world! He graduated in 1996 from the Damascus University School of Medicine. “After graduation, I completed my military service and served for 4 years in a clinic caring for military personnel and their families. Following this service I completed a pathology residency at Damascus University. In 2005 I moved to Pittsburgh, PA and begin a residency in Family Medicine at UPMC McKeesport. Upon completing my residency this year I plan to move to Somerset, PA to provide medical care for an underserved community. My interests outside of medicine include reading history, swimming, soccer and watching the Steelers.”

**SPRING AND SUMMER ALLERGIES**

**Hay Fever/Allergic Rhinitis**

With the peak of the spring allergy season, millions of Americans are concerned about their allergies. The budding trees and blooming flowers in spring, is associated in some people with an increase in itchy, watery eyes, sneezing, runny nose, nasal stuffiness and dark circles under their eyes. “Hay fever: or allergic rhinitis is caused by common outdoor allergens, such as pollen or mold. This causes seasonal allergies. Indoor allergens such as animal dander, indoor molds and dust mites can cause allergies all year round (perennial allergies)

**Prevention**

- Limit your exposure to pet dander, dust and mold
- Try to stay indoors when the pollen count is high, which is usually in the morning
- Keep the windows closed
- Bathe or change clothes after being outdoors
- To avid mold do not walk through fields or rake leaves
- Clean moldy surfaces in the house, fix water leaks, use a dehumidifier and air conditioning
- Discuss your symptoms with your doctor, and if indicated you may be referred to an allergist for further testing

**Stinging Insect Allergy**

In summer there are a lot of outdoor activities such as swimming, walking, sports and barbecues. Up to 5% of Americans are at risk for a life threatening allergic reaction to insect stings from yellow jackets, honeybees, wasps, hornets and fire ants. Follow these steps to avoid being stung:

- Avoid bright-colored clothing and avoid perfumes when out doors
- Cover your food and sweet beverages and juice when outdoors
- Wear closed toe shoes outdoors and do not go barefoot
- Avoid loose-fitting garments
- Do not pinch the area to remove the stinger (You may inject more venom)
- If severely allergic to insect stings inject epinephrine (the Epi-Pen) immediately and call 911
- Consult an allergist for severe reactions to insect stings

Dr. Prakash Kaur
Several of my “older” patients have asked about the immunizations for “whooping cough” and “shingles”. Here is a brief overview of the immunizations recommended for most adults. As with all medications, there may be circumstances that require these shots be delayed or not administered at all. Your health care provider can make this determination.

**Tdap** The “Tee-dap” is a new tetanus booster. What makes it new is that it also boosts immunity against whooping cough. This bacterial disease has made a comeback in the United States. If it has been 5 or more years since your last tetanus shot, and you are younger than age 65 years, you can get the Tdap. You only need it once; once you have had it you go back to the regular Td vaccine once every 10 years. People aged 65 years and older cannot get it because safety has not been studied in this age group.

**Zostavax** is the “shingles” vaccine; it reduces your risk of getting shingles, a painful viral infection of the skin and nerves. It is given once starting at age 60 years. The younger you are when you get it: the more effective it is. If you have had shingles, you can still get the vaccine. Coverage for the cost varies by insurer.

**Pneumonia Vaccine** The Pneumovax reduces the risk of pneumonia, specifically pneumococcal pneumonia, a very severe disease. It is recommended for all adults with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, chronic lung disease, heart failure, etc. For healthy adults the shot is given at age 65 years. If you received the shot less than 5 years before you turn 65, wait until 5 years have passed before repeating it. The current recommendation is to get only one Pneumovax after age 65 years.

**Influenza Vaccine** Any adult with health problems, any health care worker and every employee of long term care facilities should get a flu shot. Healthy adults should get the flu shot starting at age 50 years. The flu shot is given every year, usually September through March.

Besides here at Latterman, the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) offers these shots. Call 412-578-8304 for more information. They charge $25 for Fluvax, $10 for Tdap, $155 for Zostavax and $36 for Pneumovax. There are also other shots that might be appropriate for you based on your medical conditions. For further information, ask your health care provider, call the ACHD or go to the CDC web site at www.cdc.gov/vaccines. The number for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is 1-800-CDC-INFO.
Postpartum Visits for New Moms

Your postpartum appointment (6 weeks after your baby is born) is a very important visit to keep with your doctor. It is a time you can talk with your doctor regarding any concerns you have about your baby or yourself. You can also arrange for contraception to prevent a second pregnancy too close together. Finally you will get a thorough physical exam to make sure you are doing well and have healed properly.

In an effort to improve care to our moms who deliver babies, the Latterman Family Health Center is one of 15 Family Medicine Centers in the IMPLICT Project. This stands for Interventions to Minimize Preterm and Low Birth Weight Infants through Continuous Improvement Techniques.

A major focus has been on how to improve the percentage of postpartum visits with the following interventions:

- Physicians will reinforce to patients the importance of postpartum follow-up appointments and ask patients to schedule the appointment during a third trimester visit.
- Physicians who perform deliveries will call and schedule a patient’s postpartum appointment prior to discharge from the hospital. If after hours, the patient’s name will be given to the record coordinator who is in charge of scheduling and tracking postpartum visits.
- Physicians and nurses will ask patients about the postpartum visit when the newborn is seen in the office. The visit will be scheduled if necessary.
- The record coordinator will maintain a monthly delivery data log with documentation that three phone calls were initiated to remind patients of their postpartum appointment.

The postpartum visit is obviously very important to your doctor and we hope you see its importance too!