

## Buchanan named first Keck School Associate Dean for Clinical Research

by Lori Oliwenstein

Thomas Buchanan—professor of medicine and obstetrics and gynecology, chief of the division of endocrinology, metabolism and diabetes at the Keck School of Medicine, and director of the General Clinical Research Center (GCRC) at LAC+USC Medical Center—has just added another title to his resume. Buchanan has been named as the Keck School's first-ever associate dean for clinical research.

"As the current project director for the GCRC, Tom is the natural person to lead our efforts to coordinate clinical and translational research," said Keck School Dean Brian Henderson. "Tom is a self-starter, and someone who clearly possesses strong leadership qualities, and as a funded National Institutes of Health clinical research investigator he has a perspective that

will help him in his role as associate dean for clinical research."

In his new role as associate dean for clinical research, Buchanan will lead the Keck School's efforts to coordinate its clinical and translational research programs. "In the short term, my main focus will be on developing a successful application, on behalf of USC, for one of the new NIH Clinical and Translational Research Awards (CTSA)," said Buchanan. "This effort will require hard work and collabora-



Thomas Buchanan

tion by people across the university who are or would like to be involved in clinical and translational research. Receipt of a CTSA will provide a crucial nucleus for my long-term vision — an Institute of Clinical and Translational Sciences."

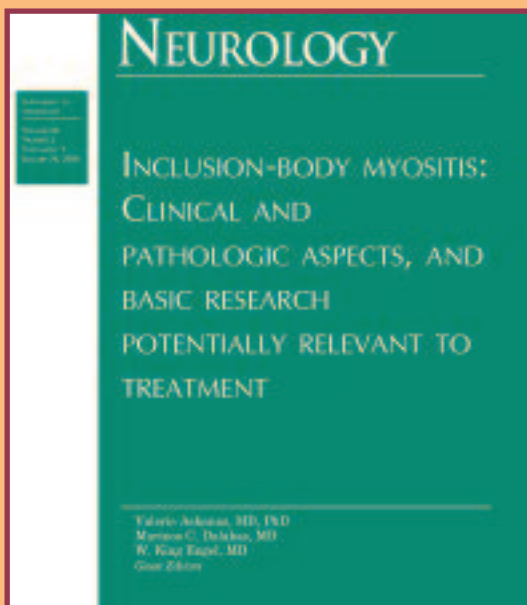
Buchanan is well aware of the importance of clinical research. His own endeavors focus on the prevention and treatment of type 2 diabetes. In particular, he is known for his clinical research into ways to prevent the pro-

gression from gestational diabetes (which occurs in up to 5 percent of pregnant women) to type 2 diabetes (which occurs within four years of pregnancy in as many as 40 percent of previously obese women who were diagnosed with gestational diabetes). He has not only demonstrated that defects in the insulin-secreting beta cells of the pancreas make women more likely to develop gestational diabetes, but has also shown that drugs that sensitize the body's tissues to insulin can postpone the development of type 2 diabetes in women who are at increased risk because of their history of gestational diabetes.

His current research includes studies to determine which genes, if any, confer a genetic predisposition to diabetes, and clinical trials to look at the prevention of diabetes in overweight

See BUCHANAN, page 2

## Keck researchers lead new efforts on aging-related disease



severe weakness and wasting of arm and leg muscles, and sometimes swallowing difficulty. Patients may become unable to perform daily living activities and be confined to wheelchairs. S-IBM is thought to be a degenerative muscle disease in which abnormal proteins are assembled in a toxic configuration and accumulated.

Up until now, most researchers have not focused on s-IBM, said Askanas, and the disease is often misdiagnosed as simple "aging." As a result, there are almost no treatments and no firm count of those affected.

"The supplement will go out to 22,000 neurologists, so they'll start thinking about it," she said. "The goal is to get bench researchers working on potential therapies, and physicians aware that this is a common disease."

In addition to having two articles published in the supplement dated January 24, Askanas, Engel, and Marinos Dalakas from the National Institutes of Health, served as guest editors of the entire issue and wrote its preface. "Unlike most supplements, this is not sponsored

by a drug company but by the Muscular Dystrophy Association," Askanas said. "It was also thoroughly peer reviewed."

The special supplement arose out of an international conference Askanas conceptualized and Engel organized that was held in Los Angeles last year to promote new ideas for treating s-IBM. The 25 speakers at the "think tank" meeting included basic scientists from various fields, including Alzheimer disease, the ubiquitin-proteasome system, virology, autoimmune cytotoxicity, RNA interference, protein misfolding and intracellular cholesterol metabolism. Among the speakers: Caleb Finch, USC professor of gerontology and expert in aging and Alzheimer's research; Kelvin Davies, USC professor of gerontology and molecular biology and expert in oxidative stress; and 2004 Nobel Laureate Aaron Ciechanover, discoverer of the ubiquitin-proteasome system. Their articles are included in the supplement.

"The goal of the conference and of this supplement was to bring the best minds in bench research together to think about ways of developing treatments for patients," said Askanas. There are now drugs being developed, she said, that may correct the machinery that malfunctions in s-IBM.

See NEUROLOGY, page 4

## Keck School researchers help to advance survival for ovarian cancer

by Alicia Di Rado

Keck School of Medicine gynecologic oncologists have helped propel a significant advance in the battle against ovarian cancer.

Lynda Roman, associate professor of gynecologic oncology at the Keck School, and colleagues at USC/Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and LAC+USC Medical Center participated in a study showing



Lynda Roman that a high-powered chemotherapy regimen can dramatically improve survival in women with advanced ovarian cancer. The study was published in the Jan. 5 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Roman and her USC colleagues provided the chemotherapy regimen to ovarian cancer patients as members of the Gynecologic Oncology Group, a research network supported by the National Cancer Institute. Oncologist Deborah K. Armstrong of the Johns

See ROMAN, page 3

by Monika Guttman

Valerie Askanas and W. King Engel, professors of neurology and pathology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, offer some hope for patients suffering from sporadic inclusion-body myositis (s-IBM) in a special supplement to the journal *Neurology* published this week.

Once thought to be a rare disease, sporadic inclusion-body myositis is now considered the most common muscle disease in people over the age of 50. S-IBM progresses steadily and may lead to

## BUCHANAN: bench-to-bedside researcher

Continued from page 1

people with an early form of the condition.

Buchanan has played a key role in clinical and translational science since he was recruited to USC in 1988. In addition to his role as director of the GCRC, which is now the largest of the 77 federally designated GCRCs in the United States, he has also served as president of the National GCRC Program Directors Association.

"I am particularly pleased that Dean Henderson has placed such a strong focus on clinical research," Buchanan said. "This new position will allow me to work closely with people within the Keck School and across USC to develop an integrated and robust clinical and translational research enterprise."

His colleagues point to Buchanan as a role model for interdisciplinary research.

"He represents the kind of translational scientist that has become increasingly rare as regulatory problems and funding limitations have driven many clinical investigators out of the research arena," said Richard Bergman, chair of physiology and biophysics and the W.M. Keck Chair in Medicine. "Also, I am proud to say that many of the concepts we developed in animal research have been successfully applied in Tom's brilliant work, making the Keck School one of the most important examples of bona fide bench-to-bedside research that is so often touted as being a major goal of the National Institutes of Health."

## Lynda Knox awarded CDC prevention grant

by Monika Guttman

Lynda Knox, associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, has been awarded \$1.6 million by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to study the impact of multi-family group interventions on the health and well-being of immigrant children.

The grant is the USC portion of a \$4.3 million award to the Southern California Academic Center for Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention to continue and expand its programs. The Center, which is based at the University of California at

Riverside, is a consortium of faculty from five universities including the Keck School of Medicine, the University of California at Irvine, the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of California at Santa Barbara.

With the new five-year grant, the Center becomes one of eight Comprehensive Academic Centers for Excellence funded by the CDC.

Knox co-directs the Academic Center of Excellence with Nancy Guerra, professor of psychology at UC Riverside, and is principal investigator for the multi-family group study, which

See KNOX, page 4

## Keck School radiology professor tops ranking by *Medical Imaging* magazine

by Monika Guttman

Peter S. Conti, professor of radiology, clinical pharmacy and biomedical engineering at the Keck School of Medicine, has been named among the top 10 nuclear physicist/nuclear medicine researchers nationwide by *Medical Imaging* magazine.

The publication's first annual ranking of the industry's "best and brightest" in the field of radiology was determined by a readership poll. The results appear in the January 2006 issue.

Conti, who since 1991 has served as director of the Positron Emission Tomography (PET) Imaging Science Center at the Keck School, was honored for his leadership and pioneering work with PET imaging and nuclear medicine.

"It is quite an honor to be recognized by my peers as a pioneer and leader in the field of nuclear medicine," said Conti. "After many long years of dedication to the growth and development of PET and its role in cancer detection and patient management, I am proud to see its current widespread acceptance by so many medical specialists and its integration into patient management."

Conti was recently elected president of the Society of Nuclear

Medicine and will serve through 2006 as head of the society, an international scientific and professional organization that promotes the science, technology and practical application of molecular imaging and nuclear medicine.

Conti received his medical degree from Cornell University Medical College and his doctorate in biophysics from the Cornell University Graduate School of Medical Sciences, Sloan-Kettering Division, both in 1985. He completed his residency in diagnostic radiology and a fellowship in nuclear medicine at Johns Hopkins. Conti interned in the Department of Surgery at St. Luke's Hospital in New York.

Conti is co-editor of the recently published "PET/CT: A Case-Based Approach" and is a native of Yonkers, N.Y. He is a fellow of both the American College of Radiology and the American College of Nuclear Physicians. Conti is board certified in both diagnostic radiology and nuclear medicine. He is also a member of the American College of Radiology, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, the American Association for Cancer Research, the American Chemical Society and the Society of Molecular Imaging.

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## HSC RESEARCH GRANTS FOR NOVEMBER 2005

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"Effects of Volcanic Air Pollution on Respiratory Health"  
\$24,297

TIMOTHY C. FISHER

Physiology and Biophysics

Sponsor: National Human Genome Research Institute  
"A Simple Vaso-Occlusion Model for SCD Drug Discovery"  
\$284,907

TOINETTE FREDERICK

Pediatrics (LAC+USC)

Sponsor: Westat, Inc.  
"LEGACY (Longitudinal Epidemiological Study to Gain Insight into HIV and AIDS in Children and Youth)"  
\$81,426

STEVEN GIANNOTTA

Neurological Surgery

Sponsor: University of Cincinnati Medical Center  
"Familial Intracranial Aneurysm Study"  
\$39,850

JOSEPH G. HACIA

Institute for Genetic Medicine

Sponsor: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development  
"Mutational Analysis of Peroxisome Biogenesis Disorders"  
\$403,392

ROBERT W. HAILE

Preventive Medicine

Sponsor: Dartmouth Medical School  
"Colorectal Chemoprevention with Calcium and Vitamin D"  
\$272,801

BRIAN E. HENDERSON

Administration—Medicine

Sponsor: Health Resources & Services Admin.  
"Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students (Discipline: Physician Assistant)"  
\$48,553

DANIEL HOLSCHNEIDER

Psychiatry and Behavioral Science

Sponsor: University of California, Los Angeles  
"Mind/Brain/Body Interactions in Stress-Related Disorders"  
\$20,160

CHIH-LIN HSIEH

Urology

Sponsor: Johns Hopkins University  
"Prostate Cancer Susceptibility: The ICPCG Study"  
\$70,887

BRENDA JONES, PATRICIO ESCALANTE

Medicine

Sponsor: University of California, San Diego  
"Tuberculosis Curriculum Coordinating Center (TCCC)"  
\$108,765

ROBERT D. LADNER, HEINZ-JOSEF LENZ,

SUSAN GROSHEN

Cancer Center

Sponsor: V-Foundation for Cancer Research  
"Histone Deacetylase Inhibitors as a Novel Approach to Combination Chemotherapy in Colon Cancer"  
\$300,000

JACEK K. PINSKI, SUSAN GROSHEN, DEBRA

HAWES, PETER DANENBERG

Cancer Center

Sponsor: Department of Defense Medical Research Acquisition Activity  
"Prognostic Molecular Markers for Prostate

Cancer"

\$610,453

GERALD M. POHOST, PADMINI VARADARAJAN

Medicine

Sponsor: Department of Energy  
"Development of Advance Surgical Robotics (DARS)"  
\$964,000

EUGENE SUNG

Neurology

Sponsor: New Jersey Medical Center  
"A Prospective Pilot Multicenter Study Evaluating Tolerability and Safety of Antihypertensive Treatment in Acute Supratentorial Intracerebral Hemorrhage"  
\$61,168

GARY A. ULANER

Radiology

Sponsor: Society of Nuclear Medicine  
"PET and Bioluminescent Imaging of Telomerase Promotor Activity to Evaluate In Vivo Chemotherapy Response"  
\$10,000

# Huperzine A study seeks alternative Alzheimer's treatment

by Monika Guttman

A clinical trial to test the Chinese herb *Huperzia serrata*—known commercially as huperzine A—as a treatment for early or mild Alzheimer's disease is underway at USC, announced Lon Schneider, professor of psychiatry, neurology and gerontology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

Schneider, who is spearheading USC's participation in the multi-center Phase II trial sponsored by the National Institute on Aging, noted that earlier trials suggested huperzine A works much like some of the main medications now prescribed to treat Alzheimer's symptoms. "Aricept, Razadyne, Exelon—the current drugs used to ease Alzheimer's symptoms—are expensive and have side effects," he said. "What's potentially attractive about huperzine is that it's an herb that's been chewed by people over the course of centuries because of its cholinergic effects. It's very available and easy to extract from the plant, may have fewer side effects and would cost much less than the current drugs for Alzheimer's disease."

Current medications like Aricept inhibit acetylcholinesterase, an enzyme that deactivates the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. Acetylcholine is involved

in memory and learning. By inhibiting the enzyme that breaks it down, more acetylcholine continues to be available to stimulate neurons. Medications that block acetylcholinesterase may improve symptoms in some patients but do not stop the progression of Alzheimer's.

Huperzine A, a naturally occurring compound found in a moss from the tropical woodland regions of China, has long been used by traditional healers as a fever and inflammation remedy. The compound is extracted from a Chinese herbal plant named *Huperzia serrata*, Shuangyiping, or Qian Ceng Ta. Huperzine A has become the most commonly prescribed medication in China for Alzheimer's disease and other memory disorders, and appears to be able to improve memory loss and possibly slow the emergence of some symptoms of Alzheimer's, especially in the early stages.

Delaying onset of some symptoms may delay the onset of disability. Finding a treatment that could delay onset by even five years could reduce the number of individuals with Alzheimer's disease by nearly 50 percent after 50 years, according to the Alzheimer's Association. Currently 4.5 million Americans have Alzheimer's, more than double the number in 1980.

The huperzine A study, said Schneider, is intended to show whether the herb improves cognitive function in those already diagnosed with Alzheimer's. It will also show what dosage may be most effective, and whether there are significant adverse effects. "Most of the information we have so far is anecdotal—there just hasn't been well-designed clinical trials of this herb," he noted.

Yet huperzine A, which is available commercially in health food stores and on web sites, is already being used by some doctors and patients to treat Alzheimer's. The danger with that approach, said Schneider, is that huperzine is not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration with regard to purity and amount of substance because it is an herb. "With most substances regulated as nutraceuticals or diet supplements you never know what you're getting."

It can be a broad range of substances of differing quality. The trial huperzine A is derived through a pharmaceutical-grade extraction process so it's more than ninety-nine and forty-four hundredths percent pure, and so we know what dosages we're giving."

That is important, he noted, because it is possible to overdose on drugs that

block acetylcholinesterase. "If someone added huperzine to Aricept, for example, they risk nausea, vomiting, confusion, muscle cramping, respiratory difficulties and even seizures," he said.

What makes huperzine more attractive than the current pharmacologic treatments is that "it may be a bit different, it may have certain benefits the current treatments do not," said Schneider. Yet, he cautioned, "We don't have unrealistic expectations. This cholinesterase inhibitor may have a more favorable side effect profile, so it may make a difference. We have expectations that it will help, but this is still in the very early stages."

The huperzine A trial is currently seeking participants who have not found current medications effective or tolerable, are 55 years and older with Alzheimer's disease and are not taking other cholinesterase inhibitors. For more information please call Shirley Sian or Morella Menicucci at (323) 442-7600 or e-mail [gsc@usc.edu](mailto:gsc@usc.edu).

Additional information on this trial and on Alzheimer's disease in general can be found on the USC Geriatric Studies Center Alzheimer's Disease Research Center website at <http://www.usc.edu/memory>.

## ROMAN: New chemotherapy approach dramatically improves cancer survival

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Hopkins Kimmel Cancer Center was lead author on the study.

Ovarian cancer is one of the most lethal cancers in women: Fewer than half of the women found to have the cancer remain alive five years after diagnosis. Any

advance in the fight against ovarian cancer, then, is applauded by physicians, patients and caregivers, and this therapy appears to deliver on its promise.

The treatment is intriguing because it features intraperitoneal or IP chemotherapy, the delivery of anti-cancer drugs directly into the intraperitoneal cavi-

ty in the abdomen, where ovarian cancer is most likely to spread or recur.

"We have been using IP therapy for several years at USC, so we have a great deal of experience with it," said Roman. "We have seen its benefits."

Standard therapy for advanced ovarian cancer begins with surgery and follows with six to eight courses of intravenous chemotherapy consisting of a platinum drug, such as cisplatin, and a taxane drug, such as paclitaxel.

In this study of 429 women, about half received paclitaxel and cisplatin intravenously. The other half got paclitaxel intravenously, then abdominal infusions of cisplatin and paclitaxel at high doses. In IP chemotherapy, the drug is delivered through a catheter implanted in the abdomen.

Researchers found that, on average, women on combined intravenous and intraperitoneal chemotherapy survived more than five and half years, while those on intravenous chemotherapy exclusively survived a little longer than four years. The 16-month difference represents a huge boost in survivorship.

Some women however, experienced significant side effects with the IP treatment. "By adjusting the dose and timing of the IP therapy, the side effects can be significantly lessened," Roman said.

Based on these promising results, the National Cancer Institute has recommended that the therapy be adopted as the preferred method of treatment, a move echoed by several women's health organizations.

Roman and her colleagues continue to offer the treatment at USC/Norris and LAC+USC.

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# Calendar of Events

The HSC Calendar is online at [www.usc.edu/hscalendar](http://www.usc.edu/hscalendar)

## Saturday, Feb. 4

9 a.m. "Ophthalmic Emergencies," John Irvine, USC. KAM Mayer Aud. Info: (323) 442-2555

10 a.m. Head & Neck Cancer Patients Support Group. "Effects of Medication," Shabana Yasmin and Komal Patel. HCT 4600. Info: (323) 442-7432

10 a.m. "Diabetic Retinopathy," Srinivas Satta, USC. KAM Mayer Aud. Info: (323) 442-2555

11 a.m. "Headache," Peter Quiros, USC. KAM Mayer Aud. Info: (323) 442-2555

## Monday, Feb. 6

Noon. Seminar. "Hair, Sweat and Tears: Identification of a Molecular Pathway for Appendage Induction," Paul A. Overbeek, Baylor College. NOR 7409. Info: (323) 442-1145

## Tuesday, Feb. 7

8 a.m. Pathology and

Laboratory Medicine Grand Rounds. "Immunochemistry in Primary Cutaneous Tumors vs. Metastatic Tumors in Skin," Scott Binder, UCLA. NOR 7409. Info: (323) 226-7148

9 a.m. Neurology Grand Rounds. "Macaque fMRI and Electrophysiology for Studying Cortical Plasticity: Area V1 Reorganization Revisited," Stelios M. Smirnakis, Massachusetts General Hospital. ZNI 112. Info: (323) 442-7686

12:15 p.m. Psychiatry Grand Rounds. "A Review of the Neurobiology of Addiction and its Pharmacological Treatment," Akikur Mohammad, USC. HMR Hastings Aud. Info: (323) 226-5572

4 p.m. Pharmaceutical Sciences and Molecular Pharmacology and Toxicology Seminar. "How Daxx Wrestles with SUMO in Transcriptional Control and Subnuclear Compartmentalization," Hsiu-Ming Shih, Inst. of Biomedical Sciences. PSC 104. Info: (323) 442-3409

## Wednesday, Feb. 8

7 a.m. Medicine Grand Rounds. "Obstructive Sleep Apnea," Haven Malish, USC. GNH 1645. Info: (323) 226-7591

8:30 a.m. Lung Biology Research Ctr. "Arrhythmia II," Jerold Shinbane, USC. GNH 11-321. Info: (323) 226-7923

Noon. IGM New Faculty Inaugural Seminar. "Transcriptional Regulation of Cardiac Conduction System Development," Mohammad Pashmforoush, USC. CSC 250. Info: (323) 442-1144

## Thursday, Feb. 9

Noon. Cellular Homeostasis Lecture. "Toll-like Receptors in Atherosclerosis," Linda K. Curtiss, Scripps Research Inst. MCH 156. Info: (323) 442-3121

**Notice: Deadline for calendar submission is 4 p.m. Tuesday** to be considered for that week's issue—although three weeks advance notice of events is recommended. Please note that timely submission does not guarantee an item will be printed. Send calendar items to HSC Weekly, KAM 400 or fax to (323) 442-2832, or e-mail to [eblauw@usc.edu](mailto:eblauw@usc.edu). Entries must include day, date, time, title of talk, first and last name of speaker, affiliation of speaker, location, and a phone number for information.

# NEUROLOGY: Myositis highlighted

Continued from page 1

As a result of the conference, "there are new collaborations among these scientists, and bench researchers are focusing on translational applications for this disease," added Engel. There's a great need, he said, because currently there are no drugs targeted to the disease and physicians can offer little relief. "About twenty percent of patients experience some improvement with prednisone,

but it doesn't stop progression."

A key to diagnosing and treating the disease was the discovery by Askanas that s-IBM involves the same amyloid deposits in muscle tissue that appear in brain tissue in Alzheimer's. "Patients hear that and fear they're going to get mental problems, too," said Engel. "For some reason, the brain is never involved."

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# KNOX: Impact of group interventions

Continued from page 1

also be examining victimization experiences of new immigrants from Latin America in the Santa Ana, Calif. area and the impact of these experiences on immigrant health. America Bracho and Christina Jose Kempner from Latino

Health Access, a community-based organization in Santa Ana, are collaborative partners on the study.

As part of her role at the Center, Knox also oversees training for health-care professionals on youth violence prevention.

## HSC NEWSMAKERS

A Jan. 31 Scripps Howard News Service story on the health effects of obesity quoted cell and neurobiologist **Ruth Wood**.

A Jan. 26 *Wall Street Journal* story looked at a study by cancer researcher and co-author **Chris Haiman** showing a high rate of lung cancer in African-American and Native Hawaiian smokers. Stories also appeared in the Voice of America, *Newsweek* magazine, BBC, KFWB-AM, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, Reuters, Associated Press, *Boston Globe*, *New York Daily News*, *Los Angeles Times*, CNN.com, ABC News.com and dozens of other publications and Web sites.

A Jan. 24 KABC-TV story on spinal surgeries quoted USC University Hospital surgeon **Michael Wang**.

A Jan. 23 *Los Angeles Times* story on chemotherapy quoted USC/Norris gynecologic oncologist **Lynda Roman**.

On Jan. 23, a press conference announced results of a study led by cancer researcher **Myles Cockburn** showing high rates of melanoma in the Hispanic population. Attending the press conference were KCBS-TV Channel 2, KTLA-TV Channel 5, KNBC-TV Channel 4, KVEA-TV Channel 52, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Sing Tao Daily News* and *La Opinion*. Subsequent stories showed up in the *Pasadena Star-News*, *Time* magazine, *Houston Chronicle* and *Oncology Times*.

A Jan. 18 *USA Today* story on exercise and Parkinson's Disease mentioned work by physical therapist **Beth Fisher** and neurobiologist **Michael Jakowec**.

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