On December 8, 2013, the Pediatric Research Center (PRC), the research arm of the Department of Pediatrics, held its 2nd annual research retreat at the Denton A. Cooley, MD and Ralph C. Cooley, DDS University Life Center located in the UTHealth School of Dentistry. Thirty-one members of the PRC, ranging from staff, research associates, graduate students and faculty from both the Medical School and School of Dentistry, heard presentations describing the research interests and goals of 9 faculty members of the division. The Division Director, Jacqueline Hecht, PhD, started the retreat with a very informative “state of the division” address, delivering both a historical and present outlook on the division. Following that, the morning session of the retreat focused on the newest faculty members of the PRC; Junichi Iwata, DDS PhD and Walid Fakhouri, PhD from the Center for Craniofacial Development at the School of Dentistry and Rachel Miller, PhD and Yoshihiro Kondaira, PhD from the Pediatrics Department at the Medical School. This session introduced the research ambitions and the technical skills of the new colleagues to the audience with topics ranging from the influence of signaling and metabolism in craniofacial and mandible development to the relationship of ciliogenesis and signaling on kidney development. Following lunch, more senior members of the PRC presented their research interests in a session focused on developmental mechanisms of pediatric disease. Ariadne Letra, DDS, Eric Swindell, PhD and Kit-Sing “Paul” Au, PhD regaled the audience with presentations describing the genetics underlying tooth agenesis and tuberous sclerosis as well as the use of zebrafish for genetic analysis of forebrain development. The session highlighted pediatric disease and potential therapies, and featured presentations from Yuying Liu, PhD and Richard Johnston, PhD describing mechanisms that underscores the benefits of probiotics on gastrointestinal inflammation and an association of obesity with lung dysfunction. With the scientific sessions complete, the group had a short, open discussion to exchange ideas to increase interaction and interdependence within the PRC. The very wide diversity in the expertise among the members of the PRC was noted, and as in previous interactions, the discussion demonstrated the ability of the group to work well together with an excellent mix of constructive critiques and useful suggestions. The retreat was considered a success and provides a template for future research retreats.

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