

Making Kidney Disease a Medical Priority

An Interview with Kenneth Kleinberg, President and Director, and Lewis Kleinberg, Director, University Kidney Research Organization (UKRO)

EDITORS' NOTE Kenneth Kleinberg is one of the nation's leading attorneys specializing in legal and business aspects of the entertainment industry. Kleinberg and his firm, Kleinberg Lange Cuddy & Carlo LLP, represent a wide variety of prominent individuals and companies, including some of the industry's most successful actors, writers and authors, directors, producers, financiers, distributors, musical artists and rock groups, animators, video game designers, international broadcasters, corporate executives, literary and talent agents, managers, specialists in CGI cinematography, the internet and other emerging technologies, as well as other creators and users of intellectual property. Previously from 1969 to 1985, he served as an associate, partner and then senior partner and head of the entertainment division of the Los Angeles law firm of Mitchell, Silberberg and Knupp. Between late 1985 and 1991, Kleinberg served first as Executive Vice President and a director of a major studio, United Artists Corporation, and then as President and Chief Operating Officer of Weintraub Entertainment Group, an independent motion picture, television, and music production/distribution company. Kleinberg is a graduate of UCLA and UCLA School of Law. His initial work as an attorney was at the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, DC. He is admitted to the Bars of California and the District of Columbia. Kleinberg has lectured frequently at leading law schools and institutes, and he is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. He was the first Chairman of the American Cinematheque and has been a long-time member of its board of directors.

Lewis Kleinberg is a writer/producer and has written, developed, and produced projects for Sony Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, New Regency, 21st Century Fox, TNT, Anonymous Content, BBC Productions, Renegade 83, Kapital Entertainment, and USA Network, among others. A graduate of the USC School of Cinematic Arts, he has served as an advisor to Donate Life Hollywood and as a mentor for USC's Compass program, which supports undergraduate students pursuing careers in regenerative medicine. Together with fellow UKRO board member Ammiel Najar, Kleinberg creates and produces films for UKRO's website, media outreach, and benefit dinners. He is the son of Kenneth Kleinberg.



Kenneth Kleinberg



Lewis Kleinberg

ORGANIZATION BRIEF UKRO (ukrocharity.org) is committed to funding the development of a revolutionary synthetic kidney, derived from stem cells, that will improve treatment of kidney disease and replace dialysis. In 10 years, UKRO envisions a time when kidney diseases are understood, and new and novel treatments increase quality of life and lifespan for patients.

Kenneth, will you discuss your career journey in the legal profession?

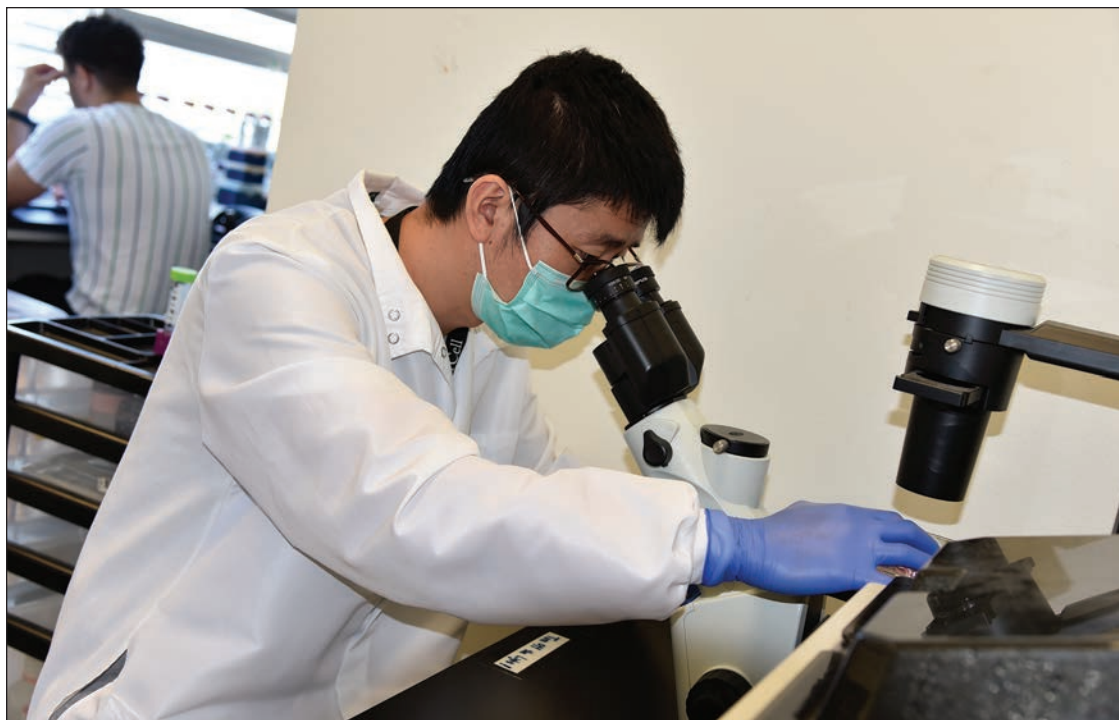
I started my legal career at the FCC in Washington, DC for two years. Then, I worked as an

associate lawyer at Mitchell, Silberberg, & Knupp, a Los Angeles firm, where I ultimately became a senior partner and head of the film and television division. After 17 years, I left my law practice to become President and COO of a start-up entertainment company, Weintraub Entertainment Group. I resumed practicing law in 1991, in partnership with my friend and colleague, Robert Lange. Our current firm, Kleinberg, Lange, Cuddy & Carlo, specializes in entertainment and media transactions. In the course of my varied practice, I have represented studios, movie stars, rock stars, producers, directors, writers, and all manner of talent.

What have been the keys to the strength and leadership of the firm?

I have had the good fortune to be in practice, previously and presently, with brilliant lawyers who are committed to honesty and the highest integrity. I enjoy being in a boutique law firm where we are known for the high level of our expertise and for problem-solving capabilities for our clients. Our firm functions largely by consensus.

One of the most inspiring and pleasing aspects of our law practice is to have colleagues who are generous and philanthropic. They have provided long-term support for UKRO since its inception.



Scientist Biao Huang at the lab at the Keck School of Medicine at USC

Lewis, where did you develop your passion for writing and producing?

Funny enough, that probably began with my dad. He'll say he is not a creative person, but he told amazing bedtime stories. As little kids, he would toss my sister, brother, and I under a big blue comforter. Seconds later, it was an ocean or the sky we were flying through in a rocket. He'd shake the bed to simulate a tidal wave or turbulence, and we'd crash into each other. We loved that. So it's probably his fault that I took the creative route.

Kenneth, what led you to founding University Kidney Research Organization (UKRO) and how do you define UKRO's mission?

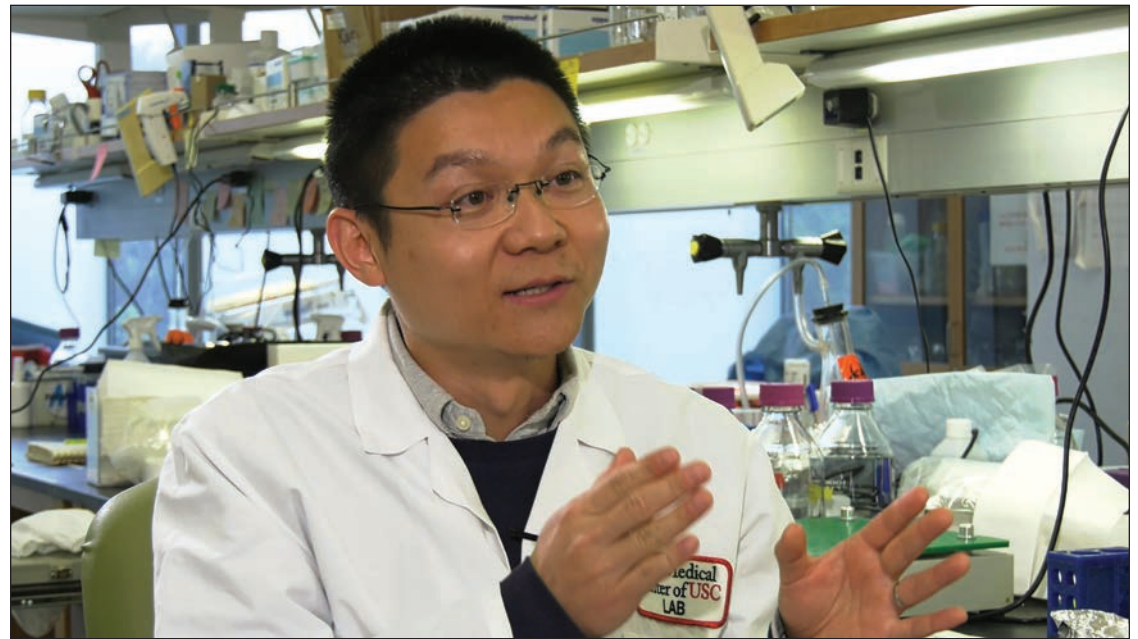
In 1999, while at a film festival in the south of France, I developed the symptoms of what was later identified as a serious kidney disease of unknown origin with no known cure. I was shocked to discover a stunning paucity of major kidney research centers in America, especially on the West Coast. While I was on dialysis, my nephrologist, Dr. Vito Campese, and I developed a plan for what became UKRO. This involved the immeasurable help and cooperation of USC, where the USC UKRO Kidney Research Center is now based.

Initially, UKRO's mission was fundraising to support research to discover the causes of, improved treatments for, and the elimination of all forms of kidney disease. Currently, we are focusing on funding the synthetic kidney.

After six years on dialysis, I was fortunate enough to receive a transplant.

How has the work of UKRO evolved over the past 20 years?

During the first few years, we deepened our relationship with USC and formed a joint initiative to establish the USC UKRO Kidney Research Center at their Health Sciences Campus. UKRO has been very fortunate that USC was concurrently undertaking stem cell research at its Edythe



& Eli Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine. This included research led by Andrew McMahon, a world-renowned expert in renal stem cell research. Together with Dr. McMahon, Ken Hallows, the Director of our Research Center, recruited Dr. Zhongwei Li, who was recently recognized by the NIH for his groundbreaking research into the creation of a synthetic kidney generated from stem cells.

What role did UKRO play in the creation of a synthetic kidney at University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, a massive medical and scientific breakthrough that will impact millions of people worldwide?

UKRO is not responsible for conceiving or creating the synthetic kidney. This is entirely the work of Dr. Li, working with investigators in labs he supervises and in collaboration with Dr. McMahon and others at USC. UKRO's role has been financial support for this extraordinary

research which, if perfected, will have enormous worldwide implications. This will take a number of years and a very large budget to achieve, which is our mission as well as that of the stem cell scientists at USC.

Our next challenge is to move beyond the level of relatively small donors and philanthropists, and even NIH grants, to lure large capital investment that will be needed to reach the finish line.

Lewis, is there an effective understanding and awareness about kidney disease?

The biggest challenge is that unlike cancer, heart disease, Parkinson's, ALS, and so many other diseases, kidney disease hasn't really had its moment of national recognition. People don't know that one in seven Americans have chronic kidney disease. Or that at the end-stage of the disease, the therapies haven't changed since the 1970s – it's either a transplant, which can be very hard to get, or going on dialysis, which often makes patients sick and only does about 15 percent of what even one good kidney can do.

That's why the synthetic project is so exciting. From the jump, in a decade or less, it can replace dialysis, even do a little better, and give patients back their quality of life.

How valuable has it been to build such an engaged and committed board for UKRO?

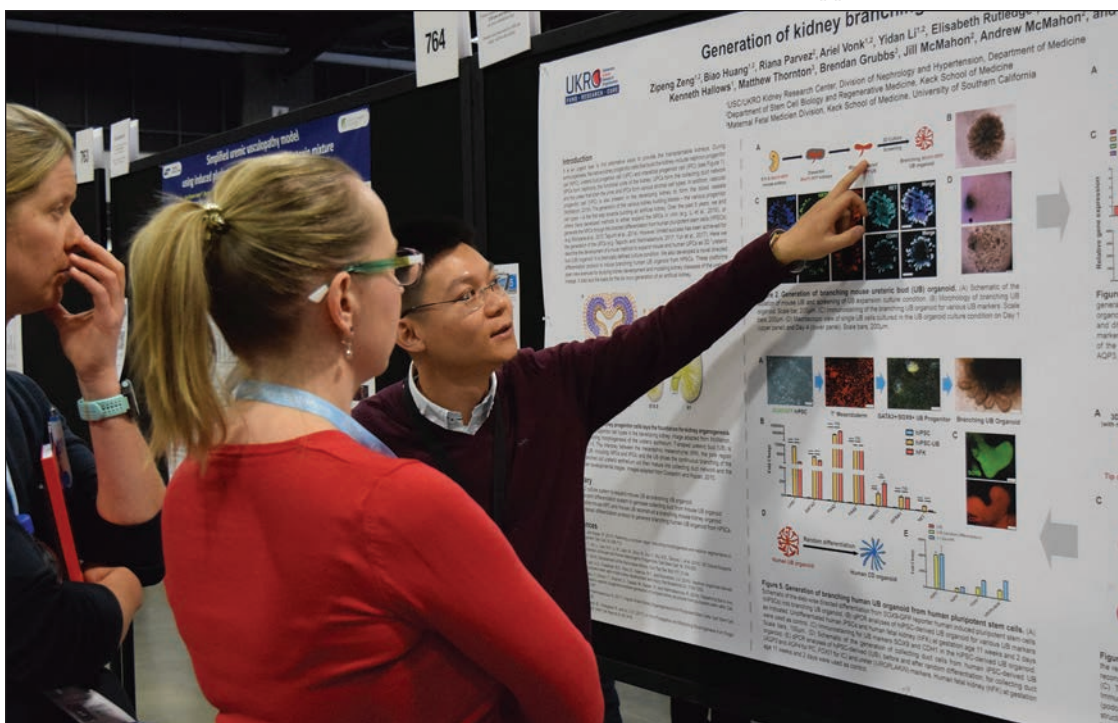
It's impossible to do this without like-minded people. Most of our board members have someone in their lives dealing with kidney issues, so it's personal. Frankly, it's an amazing thing that my dad, and Vito, have done in building something from nothing that is having this kind of impact.

Kenneth, do you feel strong progress is being made in the fight against kidney disease?

Yes. Very definitely.

Are you able to take moments to reflect on the impact that UKRO has made over the past 20 years?

Yes. Beyond the financial support UKRO has provided, which I wish to emphasize is not nearly as large as that of USC, UKRO has been a tremendous stimulant in the health sciences community, sparking awareness of the need to make kidney disease a medical priority. I'm proud of that. ●



Dr. Zhongwei Li at work in his lab at USC (above and top)