TEAMING UP

UVM Cancer Center clinicians and laboratory researchers translate new treatments and therapies from bench to bedside.

ALSO FEATURED: • LEARNING IN ACTION • LIFE AFTER POLIO • ALUMNI Awardees
Celebrating the College’s First Endowed Professorship in Family Medicine

For MORRIS GOLDMAN, M.D.’32, caring for patients meant always having his doctor bag close by, ready for house calls any time of day or night. The resources at his disposal: his five senses and the tools he could fit in his bag. In honor of this legacy of service, Goldman’s daughter and son-in-law, HARRIET GOLDMAN and MICHAEL KAPLAN, have established the first endowed professorship in family medicine at the Larner College of Medicine. The new professorship recognizes the critical need for primary care expertise while celebrating the specialty’s roots.

It also acknowledges Dr. Goldman’s gratitude to UVM for helping him become a physician at a time when very few medical schools accepted students “without regard to race, creed and religion.” The $1 million gift is “intended to support the threefold mission of the department: to provide high quality care and service to our patients; to ensure high quality education programs for our residents and students; and to advance the science and specialty of family medicine through investigation and query.”

Features

12 Polio 1949: A Memoir
A bout of polio when he was eight years old left John Dick, M.D.’67 with lifelong challenges, and valuable lessons about the art of perseverance.

By John Dick, M.D.’67

16 The Science of Learning in Action
The key to educating the next generation of physicians is innovation: using active learning techniques that help students build skills, and become self-driven, lifelong learners prepared for the ever-evolving world of medicine.

By Erin Post

22 Dynamic Duos
Collaborative relationships between clinicians and basic science researchers accelerate the translation of laboratory discoveries into clinical practice.

By Sarah Zobel
This May, as the academic year came to a close, I took part in my first Medical Commencement as dean—a notable day for me, but even more of a landmark for each of the members of the Class of 2019 to whom I handed a diploma at that ceremony. As I noted to our graduates that day, this event was the culmination of four years of hard work and the beginning of a new chapter, the defining chapter, in each of their lives: the start of their careers as physicians.

Just a couple of months earlier, I joined these graduates on Match Day, and witnessed the excitement and joy as they matched to some terrific residency programs. As they carry with them the lessons learned at the Larner College of Medicine, I know they will make us proud. Graduation is a tribute to our students’ hard work, but it is also a tribute to other important people who were there at commencement, both on the Ira Allen Chapel stage and in the audience: the Larner College of Medicine faculty. Our faculty is world class. We had celebrated that fact earlier in the semester when Russell Tracy, Ph.D., was honored by being named a University Distinguished Professor, UVM’s highest faculty honor, and when, in late April, Mark Nelson, Ph.D., also a University Distinguished Professor, was elected to the National Academy of Sciences, the highest national recognition a scientist can receive.

A few hours before our College’s ceremony, I took part in the University’s main commencement exercises, where I saw another of our faculty members, Emeritus Professor of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine Jackson W. Clemmons, M.D., Ph.D., receive an honorary degree in recognition of his decades of work as a nationally known expert in perinatal pathology, his service to the community in retirement, and as a pioneer at this institution as its second African American faculty member. Dr. Clemmons is just one example of our outstanding faculty and the work they do throughout their lives to make this a better world.

As another faculty member, Rebecca Wilcox, M.D., our commencement speaker, said in her address, what we practice at the Larner College of Medicine, and what we show in all our daily interactions, is commitment, a promise to work for the betterment of patients throughout our careers as physicians and biomedical scientists, guided by the spirit of professionalism as we emphasize cultural competence, kindness, and respect in all interactions with patients, their families and our community.

After my first cold winter in Vermont, I have been amazed by the beauty of our spring. Best wishes for a warm and relaxing summer.

RICHARD L. PAGE, M.D.
Dean, The Robert Larner, M.D. College of Medicine at The University of Vermont

Suresh Garimella Named University of Vermont President

Suresh Garimella, Ph.D., began his tenure as the University of Vermont’s 27th president on July 1, 2019. He comes to UVM after serving as Executive Vice President for Research and Partnerships at Purdue University, where he was also the Goldsone Distinguished Professor of Mechanical Engineering. In his previous position, he led a world-changing, $660 million per year research enterprise and saw the discovery park, a unique set of facilities and institutes, where disciplines converge to solve global challenges related to health and life sciences, sustainability, food, energy and defense and security. Garimella has a long list of honors and awards, including his 2018 appointment as a member of the National Science Board. In 2010, the U.S. Department of State appointed him as a Jefferson Science Fellow to serve as a Science Advisor in the International Science Fellowships. He also served for six years as a Senior Fellow in the State Department’s Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas, and as the State Department delegate to the International Energy Agency. He is co-author of over 500 publications and 13 patents. Garimella earned his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley, his M.S. from The Ohio State University and his bachelor’s degree from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. Garimella succeeds former president Tom Sullivan, J.D., who retired after a seven-year tenure and successful completion of a $500 million comprehensive campaign. The University of Vermont Board of Trustees announced Garimella’s appointment on February 22, 2019, after a national search.

National Academy of Sciences Elects Nelson to Membership

On April 30, 2019, University Distinguished Professor and UVM Chair of Pharmacology Mark Nelson, Ph.D., was elected to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), one of the greatest honors a scientist can achieve. A member of the UVM faculty since 1996, Nelson is internationally recognized for his research on the molecular mechanisms and cellular communication involved in blood flow, particularly in the brain’s blood vessels. His extensive research contributions have been recognized with more than 250 peer-reviewed publications and over 360 invited lectureships since 2000. Nelson is the first and only UVM faculty member to be elected as a NAS member.
NEW MILLER BUILDING

CELEBRATING THE

On Saturday, June 1, 2019, UVM Medical Center clinical and support staff were all smiles as they moved the first patients into the new Robert E. and Holly D. Miller inpatient building. Under construction since 2016, the project marks the first major upgrade to the medical center’s inpatient facilities since the mid-1980s. Over the course of the day, approximately 120 patients moved into the new building. The seven-level, 180,000 square foot building offers vastly improved spaces for education of medical students and is designed to improve the quality of care and the experience of patients and their families by increasing the number of private patient rooms from approximately 30 percent to nearly 90 percent. Evidence-based studies show that private rooms with ample room for families can promote better healing, reduce medical errors, improve sleep quality and facilitate greater involvement of families and care teams. “We wanted the patient experience to be as positive as possible,” said Frank Ittleman, M.D., professor of surgery and UVM Foundation faculty associate in development. “We wanted the environment to be one that engendered a sense of well-being, a sense of safety, and a sense that we’re doing the best we can to get you better.” Named for Vermont philanthropists Bob and Holly Miller, who provided the lead gift for the project, the building commemorates the couple’s long-standing commitment to improving the health and well-being of community members. Besides the Millers, nearly 1,400 other individuals donated to fund the building.

TRACY HONORED AS UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

Research

In over 30 years as a member of the faculty, UVM Professor of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine and Biochemistry Russell Tracy, Ph.D., has built an extensive body of work rooted in the improved understanding of mechanisms of cardiovascular disease. His accomplishments were recognized when he was selected as one of three new University of Vermont Distinguished Professors, the highest academic honor UVM bestows upon a faculty member. An international leader in the field of biomarkers for blood clotting, inflammation and adaptive immune systems in cardiovascular disease, Tracy has been consistently funded by the National Institutes of Health for more than 35 years. The recipient of several international research awards, including the 2015 Distinguished Scientist Award from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, Tracy is a distinguished investigator of the Cardiovascular Research Institute of Vermont. Tracy and two other faculty members were formally appointed at the UVM Commencement ceremony on May 19, 2019.

Study Explores How Optimism Can Bias Prognosis

Most people think of optimism as a good thing—a positive outlook in challenging circumstances. But in reality, it’s a psychological state that can be “contagious” in a bad way. A new study, published in the journal Psycho-Oncology, details how a seriously ill patient’s optimism can impact a clinician’s survival prognosis in palliative care conversations. Senior author Robert Gramling, M.D., D.Sc., associate professor of family medicine and the Miller Chair in Palliative Medicine, and colleagues at Purdue University, the University of Rochester and University of California San Francisco, state that clinicians have a duty to estimate prognosis accurately as possible. If survival is overestimated, Gramling and his coauthors write, “these errors in judgment can prevent patients from making timely decisions about their end-of-life care.” The researchers enrolled 189 hospital patients with advanced cancer undergoing palliative care consultations at two geographically distant sites. Forty-one palliative care clinicians participated in the recorded consultations. The group’s findings showed a generally high level of both disposition- and prognostic optimism just before palliative care consultation, as well as a correlation between higher levels of patient optimism and clinicians’ greater likelihood of overestimating survival, even after adjusting for clinical markers of survival time. “Our study suggests that patient-level optimism might exert an unforeseen influence over palliative care clinicians’ prognostic judgments,” write the study’s authors, who add that “if so, then raising clinician awareness about these effects and including de-biasing steps in prognostication skills training may lead to more accurate estimates.” Data analyses for the study took place at the Vermont Conversation Lab, where Gramling and his colleagues both conduct research and develop training sessions through their TidbitVermont program to help clinicians gain conversational proficiency.

What we are doing in the lab will contribute not only to the basic science field but also potential stroke treatment. Understanding how blood vessels are constricted during hypertension will help to develop targeted pharmacological approaches to improve outcomes, as high blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke.”

Graduate Student Voice

“arresting steps in prognostication skills training may lead to more accurate estimates.”

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In the hospital room at: MED.UVM.EDU/VTMEDICINE/

**Pharmacology**
- Allie Denny .........  University of Colorado School of Medicine
- Andrew Breyer ..  Duke University Medical Center
- Hailey Brinkley ...  Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center
- Anna Dittes .......  University of Rochester/Strong Memorial

**Pain Medicine**
- S. Ramdath .........  University of Colorado School of Medicine
- R. Rivera ............ Duke University Medical Center

**Palliative Care**
- Catherine Primack ...  Duke University Medical Center
- Karyn Rizzi ...........  University of Maryland Medical Center

**Pathology**
- Elizabeth Doughty ...  University of Colorado School of Medicine
- Ryan Lamberti ......  University of Michigan Hospitals-Ann Arbor
- Nicole Leonard .......  University of Utah Affiliated Hospitals

**Pediatrics**
- Allison Robbins ...... Brown University/Rhode Island Hospital
- Alan Lee ............ Cedars-Sinai Medical Center (Los Angeles, Calif.)
- Khaled Al Tawil......  Zucker/Northwell Lenox Hill Hospital (N.Y.)

**Pediatrics/Research**
- Sravana Paladugu....  University of Texas Southwestern Medical School–Dallas
- Emily Kinn .......... Massachusetts General Hospital

**Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation**
- Tessa Bartlett ......  Duke University Medical Center

**Plastic Surgery**
- Allison Arndorfer ....  Duke University Medical Center
- Jessica Bartz-Mills ...  Duke University Medical Center

**Podiatry**
- Zainab Ali ............  Medical University of South Carolina (Charleston, S.C.)
- Alex Dadelo .........  Medical University of South Carolina (Charleston, S.C.)

**Psychiatry**
- Zachary Wunrow .... University of Vermont Medical Center
- Laura Director ....... Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center

**Radiation Oncology**
- Hyunsoo No ......... Stanford University Programs

**Radiology**
- Nikiert Patel ........... Wake Forest National Military Medical Center

**Surgery**
- John Corbett ........ Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center
- Andrew Cordero .... UCLAl Semel Institute for Neuroscience
- Bailey Ferraro ...... Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (Boston, Mass.)
- Stephanie Kukla .... University of Maryland Medical Center

**Transitional Year**
- Nikiert Patel ........... Wake Forest National Military Medical Center
- Nika Curiel ......... Albert Einstein Medical Center (Philadelphia, Pa.)

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**LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE CLASS OF 2019**

My grandma, Loretta Harford, is extremely tough. While working as an OR nurse, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She continued working full time, passing only for her chemo treatments during her lunch hour before returning to finish out the day. Decades later, she has found herself battling cancer again, this time in her lungs. At nearly eighty years of age, chemo has taken its toll, however when I saw her a month before Match Day she insisted she would be there, stubborn in spite of the fact she could no longer walk unassisted. Arriving in Burlington the day before the Match, my grandma was in terrible pain. The mere fact that she admitted to being in pain was concerning, and we rushed her to the emergency room. After undergoing an operation the morning of Match Day, her team had a conversation with us that they would need to communicate the difficult news to the ICU nurses a second match ceremony had been arranged to take place in my grandma’s ICU room. She would get to experience Match Day after all. The formal ceremony was a blur of emotional extremes, between the incredible news that I had matched at Duke, my first choice of pediatrics program, and calling other family members to communicate the difficult news about my grandmother. The group gathered outside of the ICU included Deans Page and Zehle, Dr. First, Dr. Basia, as well as Amy, the nurse manager who had organized everything. Complete with bagpipes, we processed to our room, where I was relieved to see my grandma was awake and talking. Dr. Zehle presented me with a pristine envelope, which I opened to tell her the news that I was going to Duke. It was an incredibly special moment, to be surrounded by the people I cared about most, and it would not have happened without the support of the med school.
What are we going to do with this energy, this big gift that is filling Ira Allen Chapel? We're going to collect it. We're going to take a little bit of it, we're going to store it away. In time we might need it. I wish I could stand up here and tell you you're never going to need it. Because once you get that M.D. behind your name, smooth sailing. Easy path. But you know that's not true. You've been patient advocates. You know there are battles to fight. There are political battles. There are system battles. There are battles between what is real information and not real information. There will also be internal battles. Times where you're just going to have to discriminate, “Is this the time to have a battle at all? Maybe this is the time to sit, be quiet, and listen.”

At the end of this program, we will all stand together and recite The Oath. The Oath is our commitment to our patients, and to our profession, and it also reminds us to put professionalism at the forefront of what we do. Now, I'm going to circle back to a communication we started when you were first-years, to remember that professionalism is not perfection. Nothing will degrade this energy faster than attempting to maintain that illusion of perfection. Perfection is not the goal. So, just keep using what you have already learned, the skills of transformation energy that I have seen you practice and develop here at the Larner College of Medicine. The, “I don't know. I'm going to find out, but I don't know right now.” The, “I'm sorry. How could I have done that better next time?”... I don't care how many years you have on that white coat. Keep that openness. It is your greatest strength. In times when you have every right to be angry, every right to be frustrated, and maybe, at times, even despondent, it will help you transform that energy into kindness, into connectedness, into compassionate health care, and compassionate patient care.

Okay, class. Transformed energy. You've recognized it. You have stored a little bit of it away. What's the last thing we're going to do? We're going to be grateful for it. When you go through residency, and beyond, be grateful for every member of your health care team who has the strength to transform energy. Do it in big ways. Awards and double-decker chocolate cakes. Do it in small ways. Don't underestimate the transformative power of a single kind sentence on a long, long call night. And don't forget to turn that gratitude inward. Don't forget to recognize it in yourself. Self-care, inward, nurturing, it's not a checkbox. It's not a road to perfection. It is not a selfish act. And who am I kidding? You're the ones teaching us that. The generation I come from, and before, the culture is different. I ask you to keep teaching us. Keep role-modeling that for us. We'll get better. Because energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but it can be transformed. We are grateful for the positive, joyous energy that your journey has filled this room with today. I'm going to grab a little bit of that and say that this gift empowers us to keep transforming. Thank you so much, Class of 2019.
In 1962, when Jackson J. W. Clemmons, Ph.D., M.D., moved to Vermont to join the UVM Department of Pathology, he was only the second African American on the College of Medicine faculty, and the first to stay for any length of time. Early on, a large farmhouse for sale in the town of Charlotte caught his eye. Public transportation stopped at Shelburne so, according to his daughter, Lydia Clemmons, the doctor walked the remaining six miles down a dirt road to reach the property. Locals called it the “white elephant house,” but Dr. Clemmons’ childhood experience apprenticing with his grandfather, a master carpenter, helped him see the possibilities beneath its surface.

“I didn’t look at this like an old run-down house. This was a good building that could be developed,” recalls Dr. Clemmons. He and his wife, also named Lydia Clemmons, who was the first African American nurse anesthetist at UVM, purchased the Charlotte property—148 acres with six historic buildings—and raised five children there. Pioneering through rocky terrain was second nature for the Clemmonses. As a biochemist, Dr. Clemmons had been part of the lab team of the noted scientist Karl Paul Link in Wisconsin that developed the anticoagulants Dicoumarol and Warfarin. He earned a B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, and was then accepted into Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Ohio and promised financial aid; but, the younger Lydia says, the school’s admissions office rescinded that aid offer when he arrived and the administrators realized he was African American. The couple pinched pennies to get by, and Dr. Clemmons received his M.D. in 1959. Three years later he came to UVM, where he practiced pediatric pathology until 1991.

Six years ago, the Clemmons family began asking the perennial question posed by all farming families: Does the next generation want to continue on the land? Concerned that African Americans have, over the last 100 years, lost 93 percent of their U.S. agricultural assets, the family decided to preserve the property and launched Clemmons Family Farm, a multicultural center dedicated to celebrating African American heritage through the arts.

“It’s very rare to find a farm that is owned by black people in New England,” says the younger Lydia. “It’s more than a family story. This is American history.”

This May, Dr. Clemmons was awarded an honorary degree at UVM’s commencement ceremony—recognition by the institution for his work as a pioneer and innovative leader, both at the University and in the wider community.