Message from the Chair

John E. Nestler, M.D., Department Chair

During the holidays, I reflected on what led me to pursue a career in academic medicine. After all, when I entered medical school I had intended to become a family practitioner in the country. Here I am years later, ensconced in academia after a long tenure conducting research and teaching. And, by the way, loving it all.

The answer was the role models I encountered along the way – the superb educators who stimulated my curiosity, expert clinicians with virtually magical diagnostic skills and researchers who provided insights into the complexities of human biology. Decades later, I still remember these icons with great clarity and fondness. I wanted to be like them, and becoming an academic physician became a foregone conclusion for me.

I mention this to highlight the importance of mentorship. As faculty, we all bear the grave responsibility of being inspiring role models for our trainees. Our interactions with them help shape their futures and ultimately affect the healthcare system as much as our didactic lectures or clinical teaching. Our trainees will not all want to become academicians, but, no matter what their ultimate career paths, our guidance and examples should exhort them to be compassionate and expert physicians dedicated to outstanding patient care and the advancement of medical knowledge. We should prompt them to be the best that they can be.

As a department, we are fortunate to have as our faculty some of the best physician role models and mentors I have ever encountered. These are individuals who hold themselves to the highest standards and are fully dedicated to both the art and science of medicine.

In this new year, let us all rededicate ourselves to being exemplary role models and mentors whom our trainees will remember decades from now with admiration and gratitude.

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Dr. Luis Guzman joins VCU Health as the new director of the Adult Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory

Dr. Luis Guzman joined the VCU Health team as director of the adult cardiac catheterization laboratory in August 2015. Originally from Argentina, Dr. Guzman trained at the Cleveland Clinic and was director of the cardiac catheterization laboratory at the University of Florida in Jacksonville for 12 years before coming to Richmond. Dr. Guzman began his career in cardiology 25 years ago in the area of interventional cardiology.

At the time, options for cardiac patients were limited to a handful of medications that provided limited results or bypass surgery. Dr. Guzman wanted to develop ways to care for patients with much less invasive alternatives to bypass surgery. He believed the percutaneous approach, which was significantly less invasive, was the way of the future. Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI, formerly known as angioplasty with stent) is a non-surgical procedure that uses a catheter to place a small structure called a stent to open up blood vessels in the heart that have been narrowed by plaque buildup, a condition known as atherosclerosis. Dr. Guzman persisted with this method through different advances in techniques and technologies.

Dr. Guzman was excited to join the VCU Health team because its heart program is well-recognized, and, as a large institution, VCU offers the entire spectrum of care for cardiovascular disease. Dr. Guzman was also drawn by the state-of-the-art technology and new cath labs within the VCU Pauley Heart Center as well as the opportunity to share his experiences and expertise with a large group of fellows. After meeting with Drs. Antonio Abbate, Mike Cowley and George Vetrovec, Dr. Guzman welcomed the opportunity to build up an aggressive interventional group with new doctors and with the possibility to expand in other areas of expertise. He was excited to bring his 20 years of experience with peripheral vascular disease interventions to develop that aspect of the cardiac cath lab. Developing and expanding the areas of high-risk intervention and very complex intervention also appealed to Dr. Guzman.

Within interventional cardiovascular medicine, imaging plays a major role. The VCU Pauley Heart Center is in the process of updating all of the labs with the latest technology. This enables physicians to have the best possible imaging capabilities and incorporates safety features such as a decreased amount of radiation received by the patient as well as the entire healthcare team. Guzman intervention program and the use of left ventricular support devices. He said, “We would like to incorporate cardiac interventionalists who bring new techniques and technologies and vibrant personalities.” He is also looking for a research-oriented person to develop some areas of clinical investigation in the near future.

As the new director of the cardiac cath lab, Dr. Guzman would like to make the lab as functional and effective as possible. He said:

“We have a great staff and great doctors in place. We need to utilize resources efficiently and fortunately we have a modern cardiac cath lab, which has the latest technology and lets us incorporate new techniques to take care of every type of disease in the cardiovascular system.”

He also spoke about the important role research plays and how he would like to incorporate research within the cath lab more. In addition, he would like to focus on treating critical limb ischemia, a severe obstruction of the arteries that reduces blood flow to the extremities and has progressed to the point of severe pain and even skin ulcers, sores or gangrene. Dr. Guzman has worked extensively with peripheral vascular disease interventions, which focus on critical ischemia. He has used advanced techniques in below the knee intervention with great success. Dr. Guzman would also like to make high-risk interventions and interventions in chronic total occlusions a priority in the cardiac cath lab. He has traveled to Japan and Korea to learn more advanced techniques in these areas. He strives to help high-risk patients who would otherwise not have any alternatives. He said the cardiac cath lab at VCU has specific devices that allow physicians to do much higher risk and complex intervention that was not possible in the past.

Dr. Guzman recognizes the importance of a teamwork approach to treating a patient with collaboration from all of the physicians and care providers treating the patient for various issues. He said:

“[Doctors] in the cardiac cath lab don’t just do cardiac procedures or coronary interventions in a vacuum. We work with cardiac surgeons, pediatric cardiologists and vascular surgeons. We interact with diabetic

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He said, “I foresee us being the main institution in the area for everything related to high risk and complex cardiovascular interventions as well as the management of structural heart disease. To be the best, we must all understand our unique roles and how we each contribute something to the total picture of patient care.”

Coronary artery disease is by far the number one disease treated in the cardiac cath lab. Younger patients and female patients are being treated now more than ever before. Because of advances in cardiovascular care, people are surviving for decades with conditions that become more complicated through the years. Because of improved survival rates, the cardiac cath lab sees a significantly high number of very elderly patients with different and more complex coronary problems and other diseases, like peripheral vascular disease and advanced valvular heart disease, which make them challenging to treat. They do not just have one issue they have several complex issues that must all be considered when being treated.

The cardiac cath lab is a wonderful resource for cardiac patients with limited options. However, even though improved technology and technique allow doctors to perform difficult procedures, heart diseases remain high risk to treat or cure. It is important to remember that if a person goes to the cardiac cath lab to have an issue “solved,” it does not mean that they are “cured.” Patients must follow appropriate diet, exercise, medication and lifestyle guidance to prevent the issue from recurring.

The Practical Frontiers in Primary Care conference began from the vision of Dr. John Nestler and Dr. Lisa Ellis who recognized the need to improve the working relationship between VCU and the community. Dr. Ellis explained:

“Most academic centers throughout the country have an internal medicine meeting of some sort. Some do a conference for their own CME education in the department, and some do a meeting to highlight their speakers from internal medicine to provide education for others in the community. We decided to provide education for primary care within this region using the incredible speakers/educators from our academic medical center and this proved to be very successful from the beginning.”

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Division of General Internal Medicine Holds First Scholarship Symposium

Over the past academic year, the Division of General Internal Medicine (DGIM) faculty and nurse practitioners have produced an impressive array of scholarship, research, innovations and projects. In order to showcase these efforts and provide a venue for mutual learning and networking with potential collaborators, the division created the first DGIM Scholarship Symposium, with the intent to continue with the symposium on an annual basis.

The first DGIM Scholarship Symposium was held October 29, 2015, in the lobby and gallery of the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Medical Education Center. The symposium demonstrated individual and collaborative efforts put forth by members of the DGIM, other divisions across the Department of Internal Medicine and residents and faculty within the School of Medicine’s Office of Educational Affairs. Dr. John Nestler, Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine (DOIM), delivered opening remarks commending faculty for its achievements and increased scholarship over the past year. Dr. Stephen Bishop, who has launched a CME podcast series covering faculty and general internal medicine topics, live-podcasted from the event. Attendees were able to listen to an archive of podcasts by linking into www.rampages.us/dgimpodcast from an onsite display center.

Dr. Bishop, the associate clerkship director for the DOIM and clinical educator for the DGIM, said of the symposium, “The DGIM scholarship symposium was a great opportunity for our division to showcase all of the amazing contributions our faculty makes across the health system. From education to administration to clinical care, DGIM members really form a core group of faculty for the institution, and it was a humbling experience to see all the great work my colleagues are doing.”

The symposium featured academic endeavors that had been previously presented at premier national academic, policy and research meetings, including those held by the Society for General Internal Medicine (SGIM), the Society of Hospital Medicine (SHM) and AcademyHealth. SGIM, SHM and AcademyHealth together reach tens of thousands of physicians and researchers from medical schools, private health systems and major universities within the United States. The DGIM’s faculty and staff conferred 38 presentations in total reaching that wide audience.
At the symposium, DGIM faculty members with a range of interests and specializations presented their posters featuring scientific abstracts, educational and faculty innovations and clinical vignettes. Two video display stations digitally featured workshop presentations and publications, and a third screen digitally displayed the DGIM video, available for viewing on YouTube at https://youtu.be/FUk-eNmlP0k. Some of the topics presented focused on education of residents and students, clinical cases and quality and systems improvement. Some featured scholarly products included:

- *It's Not a Tumor, Redux. An Unexpected Cause of Mesenteric Mass: AL Amyloidosis*
- *You Can't Improve What You Don't Measure: A Systems Engineering Approach to Developing Geographically-Matched Patient Provider Teams*
- *Getting to Know Your Patients: Strategies for Teaching Social and Community Medicine*
- *Design and Implementation of a Transition-to-Practice Hospitalist Rotation*
- *The Death of a Patient: The Intern Experience*
- *Guideline Driven Computerized Order Set to Improve Restraint Ordering and Decrease Length of Use*

The symposium was open to all DGIM faculty and staff, associated divisions within VCU Health, as well as residents and medical students considering a career in general internal medicine. Because of its open-air location, the symposium attracted a diverse cross-section of people from the greater VCU Health community. The symposium was an excellent opportunity for the VCU Health community to learn more about the DGIM, whether attendees were at the start of their medical career or seasoned health care providers.

Dr. Shin-Ping Tu, chair of the DGIM, said of the inaugural symposium:

“In addition to providing the highest quality of care as medical quarterbacks for VCU Health patients, Division of General Internal Medicine faculty is engaged in a variety of academic and innovative endeavors. The Scholarship Symposium provided an opportunity to highlight our faculty’s clinical expertise in addition to the breadth of our teaching and research scholarship. It was remarkable to see all the presentations faculty had delivered at regional and national conferences this past year! Checking out the GenMed podcasts was a lot of fun, too! In fact, I find myself looking forward to new episodes so I can learn about exciting general medicine issues our faculty and national experts are addressing.”

The Division of General Internal Medicine is already in the planning stages for another DGIM Scholarship Symposium to be held next fall.

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Jason O. Blake has joined the Department of Internal Medicine as webmaster and web content manager. In this role he will be responsible for designing, developing, and updating the Department of Internal Medicine’s website. Please contact him with information that you would like to have updated on the website at jason.blake@vcuhealth.org or 804-828-6065.

Jason has long been a part of the VCU community having worked in the Department of Mathematics as an adjunct instructor and webmaster for the department’s Community Outreach and Grants Office for 10 years. Jason has also spent many years teaching at Clover Hill High School in Chesterfield, VA.

We are excited to welcome him to the Department of Internal Medicine.
Jerry Riggins has worked for VCU Health since 1992 when he graduated from VCU with a degree in accounting. His first position was with the Department of Anatomy, and he later joined the Division of Hematology, Oncology & Palliative Care as a fiscal technician and grants specialist in 1994. Currently, Jerry is the administrator for the Division of Hematology, Oncology & Palliative Care. He has also been acting as the interim administrator for the Division of General Internal Medicine since this past June. In this dual role, Jerry reports to Dr. Steven Grossman, chair of the Division of Hematology, Oncology & Palliative Care, and Al Dunn, administrator for the Department of Internal Medicine.

In his primary role, Jerry works closely with Dr. Grossman. He provides strategic planning support, clinical and research operations support, accounting and finance services, and human resources support. He gathers information, analyzes data, writes business proposals and ensures that the division meets its full potential in advancing research, teaching and clinical missions. For the Division of General Internal Medicine, Jerry provides similar support for Dr. Shin-Ping Tu.

Jerry was initially drawn to the VCU Department of Internal Medicine because of the opportunity to gain exposure to clinical service. During his 23 years in the Division of Hematology, Oncology & Palliative Care, Jerry has worked with numerous distinguished physicians. He recalls learning something unique from many of them. In particular, Jerry observed how to be a good citizen of the university, health system and community from his interactions with Dr. Tom Smith during Dr. Smith’s decade-long tenure as chair of the division. Jerry said of Dr. Smith:

“He is friendly, approachable and a good listener. … Tom demonstrates daily how a small gesture can make a big impact in people’s lives and how you can accomplish a lot through hard, efficient work with a mindset of serving others. After he transitioned from chair to faculty, we started training for marathons together. Tom is now the Director of Palliative Care at Johns Hopkins, but we stay in touch.”

Jerry also shared that he enjoys working with Dr. Steven Grant. He said, “I remember my first meeting with Dr. Grant when I was in my early twenties. I related to his thought processes and his strategies for project and program planning. … I got an early chance to use my accounting background and IT skills … to help him identify funds and develop a plan to expand staffing. [Observing his writing] has helped me develop my own writing style.”

Jerry also said he enjoyed his time working with Dr. Grossman. He said, “His first five years have flown by quickly, and the division has almost doubled the number

of its faculty since [Dr. Grossman] started as the division chair. Although I have not worked with Dr. Grossman as long as some of our other faculty, I am learning a lot from him. I enjoy working and brainstorming with the next generation of thought leaders who bring different backgrounds, experiences and ideas to VCU.”

Al Dunn said of working with Jerry, “[He] is a long-term dedicated employee and a great asset to the department and to me personally.” He continued, “…I no longer consider myself new, but in the beginning Jerry was always there to answer my many questions. Jerry has always done a great job in managing hematology, oncology and palliative care, but recently he has willingly taken on the added responsibilities of managing general internal medicine during our transition to a new division administrator. [This] has been very helpful to department operations.”

Over the course of more than two decades, Jerry has witnessed many changes on the MCV Campus. He shared that there have been notable, positive changes in the cultural diversity of the workforce, the increasing ratio of women to men completing medical school and VCU’s footprint in the city and throughout Virginia. He believes Dr. John Nestler and Dr. Gordon Ginder have significantly shaped VCU’s growth and development through their support and leadership.

Originally from Richmond, Jerry enjoys staying active and is an avid runner. When he turned 30, he began running by himself around the MCV Campus. Dr. Smith saw him running and encouraged him to do a 5K, 10K, half-marathon, marathon and, eventually, an ultramarathon. Now, Jerry leads several small running groups, and he would like to start a running group for cancer patients and cancer survivors.

Jerry enjoys meeting new people, socializing with friends and learning new skills like how to play guitar or speak foreign languages. He stays active by running, hiking, biking, playing a variety of sports and volunteering at his church. He hopes others will view him as a good example of how to exercise, reduce stress and serve others.

One of the most important people in Jerry’s life is his significant other, Chum. The two enjoy competing against and working with each other, whether playing badminton, tennis, or golf, learning to play the guitar or speaking Vietnamese. Jerry recently achieved a personal goal and reached a new milestone in his life with Chum when he proposed!

Be sure to ask Jerry about the proposal the next time you see him!  

Welcome to Our Faculty

Charmaine Elliott, M.D. will join the Division of General Internal Medicine this January as an assistant professor and general internist. Dr. Elliott comes to the DOIM from the Montefiore Medical Group, Albert Einstein College of Medicine where she was an attending physician and associate professor.
Update from the Associate Chair for Research

Securing funding for research continues to be a challenge nationwide but recent legislative actions at the U.S. Capitol include $2 billion (Senate Appropriation Committee) or $1.1 billion (House Appropriation Committee) increases in the NIH budget. NHLBI Director Gary Gibbons has announced an increase in pay line for RO1 to 12% with the Early Stage Investigator (ESI) pay line at 21%. This is a great opportunity for the DOIM junior faculty. Early stage investigators with promising research projects are also encouraged to apply for seed money through the DOIM academic incentive funds to obtain the required preliminary data to be competitive for subsequent R- or K-awards. I am available to provide guidance to whomever is interested.

Submission of all grants has completely transitioned to VCU RAMS-SPOT and I am working with the DOIM’s associate administrator for research administration, Rashmi Pershad, to develop simple systematic guidelines to simplify the navigation process. I would appreciate any feedback from the faculty so that we have a better understanding of the issues that need to be addressed.

The second issue of the DOIM Research Newsletter is in the works and to align it better with fiscal reporting at VCU, it will now include information spanning the Fiscal Year 2015-2016, rather that calendar year 2015. I urge all faculty members to work with their division chairs and administrators to ensure the inclusion of all achievements in this next issue. To highlight the research achievements of the DOIM’s faculty and fellows, I am also working towards a new initiative, namely a DOIM Research Day.

Bringing together investigators from different research areas and increasing the exposure of new and junior faculty to ongoing research in the DOIM and VCU has been the focus of the Bi-annual DOIM Research Forums. The last research forum, held on October 8, focused on the research continuum from “Bench to Bedside” with emphasis on challenges and strategies to work around such challenges. This theme will be continued in the next research forum planned for Spring 2016.

As always, I welcome any suggestions or ideas from all faculty members to facilitate the research efforts and research education in the DOIM.

Shobha Ghosh, Ph.D., FAHA
Associate Chair for Research
Professor of Medicine and Physiology
Department of Internal Medicine

Buttermilk Trail Loop Outing Promotes Wellness for Faculty and Residents

This past summer, when Dr. Rebecca Miller began her year as chief medical resident of the Department of Internal Medicine’s residency program, she shared with Department Chair, Dr. John Nestler, that she planned to start a wellness committee for the residents and was planning a variety of educational and social activities with a wellness theme.

Knowing that Dr. Nestler and his wife, Michelle, enjoy walking the 7-mile Buttermilk Trail Loop on a regular basis, Dr. Miller invited him to lead a walk for all residents and faculty. The Buttermilk Trail is one of the oldest sections of the James River Park System trail and runs along the contours of the hill below Riverside Drive from just west of the 22nd Street tower at Belle Isle to the Boulevard Bridge on the south bank of the James River.

A group of about 15 that included a mix of residents, faculty, family members and three dogs set out on Saturday, October 31, from Belle Isle. The party continued along the south bank of the James River until it came to the Nickel Bridge, crossed to the north bank and continued back to its starting point. On the north bank, the group walked on the outskirts of Maymont Park and spotted one of the notoriously people-shy bears. Dr. Nestler led the walk and told everyone about the history of the trail along the way.

It was a beautiful morning and a refreshing outing; many residents had just finished working on busy inpatient services the day before and felt that this was a terrific way to unwind. Because of the overwhelmingly positive response to the first Buttermilk Trail walk, Dr. Miller is hoping to offer another similar walk in the spring of 2016.

Buttermilk Trail Loop Outing Promotes Wellness for Faculty and Residents

The group led by Dr. Nestler, including residents, faculty, family members and three dogs, enjoyed a 7-mile walk on a beautiful October morning
The 17th Annual Faculty Excellence Awards Program was held on Wednesday, October 21. The Department of Internal Medicine would like to congratulate the following faculty members who received awards:

**Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award**
Dr. Mary Helen Hackney

**Educational Innovation Research Award**
Dr. Peter Boling and Dr. Alan Dow

**Enrique Gerszten, M.D. Faculty Teaching Excellence Award**
Dr. Diane Biskobing

**Women in Science, Dentistry, and Medicine Professional Achievement “WISDM” Award**
Dr. Elizabeth “Betsy” Ripley

**Best Teacher in the Course and Clerkship Awards:**

- Dr. J. Christian Barrett
- Dr. Diane Biskobing
- Dr. Dan Carl
- Dr. Susan DiGiovanni
- Dr. Megan Madaras

- Dr. Scott Matherly
- Dr. Beth Rubinstein
- Dr. Kevin Sumption
- Dr. Huaefah Syed
- Dr. Marjolein de Wit

**TiME Faculty Fellows**

- Dr. Stephanie Call
- Dr. Susan DiGiovanni
- Dr. Frank Fulco

- Dr. Bennett Lee
- Dr. Marjolein de Wit

Thank you for reading.

For more information about the **Department of Internal Medicine**, please visit us online at:

www.intmed.vcu.edu