The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation has awarded over $1.8 million dollars to the VCU School of Medicine to launch a multi-component four-year effort that will invigorate and expand geriatric education for faculty, students, housestaff, and community physicians. Of 64 proposals submitted, only ten were funded: A team of over 25 faculty members from several VCU departments and the McGuire VAMC Geriatrics Section was involved in the project from its planning stages last summer. Dr. Peter Boling from the Department of Internal Medicine initiated the project and will lead the team. With $4850,000 of internal matching funds, the entire project will have a budget of about $2.7 million and will have a far-reaching and lasting impact at VCU.

The program will enhance the teaching of geriatrics for learners at all levels. It will have four main components: medical student education, residency training, CME and faculty development, and advanced continuing education. Each medical student will benefit from an endowed lecture, given by national experts on aging, 30 hours of new gerontologic basic science curriculum, a series of integrative case studies, an afternoon of home visits, ten new or changed hours in FCM, and additional teaching during clinical years. Faculty development will involve basic science faculty as well as community FCM preceptors who will then teach our students and residents.

Residents in the Department of Internal Medicine will receive additional hours on geriatric subjects at morning report, in noon seminars, through web-based learning modules, and on geriatric consults, and thus double required resident involvement in geriatrics. The geriatric consult service initiative, including nurse practitioners and pharmacists, will allow simultaneous teaching of medicine residents and other specialties in the hospital. The residency’s ERIC website will be enhanced with modules on common geriatric problems and a core curriculum.

“Many benefits will accrue. The medicine housestaff will be stimulated with a variety of new, high-quality curricular offerings directed at improving the care of the elderly,” Dr. Boling says. “Now they have only five available core hours, we’ll increase it to 30. The program will provide incentives for physicians to participate in educational programs and expand their knowledge about care of older Americans.”
Dr. Arun Sanyal, Associate Chair for Research, briefly outlines the main directions and progress of research and scholarly efforts in the Department.

• The quarterly research seminars have been successful and are well under way. At each seminar, a member of a core University facility gives a presentation about the technology and other services that are available to support researchers in their research. The seminars give an opportunity for discussion and communication between investigators and educators.

• Each month our Department partners with other departments in order to carry out the Biological Seminar series. The first one took place on April 5th and was an example of partnership with the Department of Biological Sciences. It was an example of how we can work together to create an environment where people are excited about the possibilities of advancing their research opportunities.

Research in the New Year

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The Value of Research

Recently two investigators in the Department of Internal Medicine, Peter Boling, M.D., and Wally Smith, M.D., received large grants of $2.7 million and $1.4 million, respectively. These awards bring special recognition to the individuals themselves as well as to the Department and the University. Undoubtedly, our national and international reputation depends on the scholarship that will result from competitive awards such as these.

Research is not a means to an end; it is the end in itself. The discovery of new knowledge is a key mission for an academic department. That is why we engage in this activity. The benefits also include attracting bright young people with whom to work and study, enhancing the academic spirit of the department. The gift of exchanging ideas in an environment where ideas are valued is a wonderful part of our lives. Then to impact the new knowledge from research to colleagues and students is to participate in the best of traditions in Medicine.

The Department of Medicine has doubled its research volume in the last five years and more than doubled its annual number of publications. The fellowship programs have been subscribed by increasingly competitive applicants, and our national reputation continues to grow. Importantly, the culture for discovery is strong in the Department, and the exchange of interesting ideas is vibrant.

Richard P. Wenzel, M.D., M.Sc.
William Branch Porter Professor and Chairman

Dr. Ellenbogen Receives the VCU Annual Distinguished Clinician Award

Kenneth Ellenbogen, M.D., Hermes A. Kontos Professor and chief of the Clinical and Academic Cardiac Electrophysiology Program, has recently been awarded the Distinguished Clinician Award for 2001 by the VCU Health System.

Dr. Ellenbogen is an excellent academic physician who is nationally recognized for his advances of the clinical science of electrophysiology. He was among ten physicians nominated this year for the award that recognizes special contributions of faculty clinicians within the university.

Dr. Ellenbogen received his first academic degree from Princeton University, after which he obtained his M.D. degree from Johns Hopkins University. He completed his internal medicine training at Johns Hopkins, where he obtained his specialty training in cardiology at Duke University Medical Center. In 1986, he joined VCU faculty. Dr. Ellenbogen has authored over one hundred articles and served as a senior editor for Clinical Cardiac Pacing and Defibrillation, a major electrophysiology textbook.

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• We’re in the process of looking at the research needs and agenda for each individual division in our Department. We are asking the division chiefs what kind of projects their faculty will be doing in the next five years. This information will enable us to make a priority list of research topics that in turn will reflect the areas of research excellence in our Department as a whole.

$1.4 Million Sickle Cell Study Funded

Dr. Wally Smith, Professor and Chair of the Division of Quality Health Care, was awarded $1.4 million over three years from NIH Bi to fund the Pain in Sickle Cell Epidemiologic Study. The study will advance knowledge of the etiology of and influences on pain and pain response in sickle cell disease. By revealing potentially mutable explanatory variables, the study’s results will suggest targets of biobehavioral treatment interventions. Results of this study can be used to improve sickle cell pain diagnosis and treatment and to dispel myths about sickle cell pain. Led by Dr. Smith, the project is a collaborative effort between VCU and the University of Virginia.

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