

January 28, 2014

Information Sharing From the Dean's Office

Beginning with this message I will circulate twice monthly perspective pieces targeting pertinent topics of high relevance to promote communication and stimulate dialogue between the College of Medicine Dean's office and faculty. Some messages, such as this one, will be from me while others will be authored by other members of the Dean's office.



Thomas F. Boat, MD
Vice President for Health Affairs, Christian R. Holmes Professor and Dean, College of Medicine

The era of the solo basic science investigator with narrowly focused research programs is now at an ebb.

Basic Science and Research

For the past two and a half years, an important goal of the College of Medicine has been the creation of a strong Academic Health Center with a robust health system as a partner. We accomplished this with the formation of UC Health, its integration with UC Physicians and planning for a Funds Flow process from the clinical programs that will help the College maintain and create new academic programs. As a result, many clinical faculty have been recruited and UC Health and the faculty practice have grown impressively. Additionally, we have implemented an innovative curriculum and our graduate programs, including a revitalized MSTP (MD/PhD) program, are thriving. It is now time to invigorate our research programs targeting the entire research spectrum from discovery to clinical and health services research.

Our basic science faculty, as is true today in nearly all colleges of medicine, are under unprecedented pressure and stress. Over the last five to 10 years our historically strong basic science departments have had more and more resources diverted to support faculty whose research funding has waned and less and less is available to recruit and repopulate our basic science ranks with young, productive investigators. Furthermore, our College has not adapted to the changing funding climate where the NIH and industry support projects of high clinical relevance and multi-investigator, high-tech, cross-disciplinary research. The

era of the solo basic science investigator with narrowly focused research programs is now at an ebb.

Still, there has been progress. The research activities of the Department of Environmental Health, led by Shuk-mei Ho, PhD, hold high relevance and attention at this time and should be solidly supported for the foreseeable future. The College has remodeled one basic science department to create a cancer biology focus, recruited Jun-Lin Guan, PhD, as Chair and committed resources to recruit additional investigators, consistent with our goal to develop an NCI-designated cancer center. In partnership with Cincinnati Children's, a Department of Biomedical Informatics has been created and Peter White, PhD, will join us in April as Chair. This new department will embrace both original research and programs to support the bioinformatics and medical informatics needs of our investigators. Strong laboratory-based research programs in our clinical departments offer additional opportunities for research program growth.

As with many medical schools, we must consider how to optimally organize our remaining basic science departments. Strategies might include:

- Matching the efforts of investigators to our institutes, namely cancer; heart, lung and vascular disorders; and neurosciences.

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- Clustering investigators to develop programs of note that can be sustained.
- Looking for opportunities to align discovery science with translational and clinical research efforts as well as with the strong clinical programs of our Academic Health Center.

Melanie Cushion, PhD, Senior Associate Dean for Research, will lead efforts to determine the optimal programmatic organization of research and take advantage of collaborative opportunities with programs and investigators at Cincinnati Children's, other UC colleges and the growing biotechnology industry in our region.

The essential message of this communication is that the College of Medicine will make major investments in discovery research that provide a platform for future basic and clinical research success. These investments will be strategic and will be tied to the identification or recruitment of strong leadership. While this plan will play out over the next five or more years, clear evidence for progress should be visible within the next one to two years. The College of Medicine must be among the top medical colleges and have a profound impact on health over the next decade. I realize that change may not occur as quickly as some might like, but with help from all of our research faculty we will achieve our goals.

I value your input concerning this and other topics. Please contact me with your comments, suggestions and questions.

Thomas F. Boat, MD
Vice President for Health Affairs
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