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NYMC AT THE FRONTLINE OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS
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ON THE COVER: Salomon Amar, D.D.S., Ph.D., Vice President for Research, New York Medical College, Senior Vice President for Research Affairs, Touro College and University System
Message from the Chancellor

The Uptick in Medical School Applications During the Pandemic, the Higher Education Admissions Scandal and New York Medical College

For the past several years the average annual increase in total medical school applications in the United States has been three percent. As I sit to write this column the increase from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 is approaching 17 percent. About two dozen U.S. medical schools have seen applications rise by at least 25 percent this year and a few schools have experienced year-to-year increases of 26 percent to 35 percent. In 2020-2021 we estimate that New York Medical College’s (NYMC) School of Medicine (SOM) will receive more than 14,400 applications for 210 entering seats. The medical school is on track to, once again, rank amongst the top ten allopathic medical schools in number of applicants. We also expect to receive about 2,500 applications for 110 seats at the Touro College of Dental Medicine at NYMC.

How can we explain the increase in medical school applications? No one knows for sure but almost everyone has a theory. Among the theories making the rounds is that potential applicants are watching the suffering of COVID-19 patients and the heroism of frontline health care providers and want to do their part. A related theory is the visibility of some physicians during the pandemic – the so-called “Fauci effect.” There are more mundane theories which include the fact that more students find themselves at home and with time on their hands and able to submit applications, the relative ease of submitting applications online or the perception that medicine is an economic safe haven in uncertain times.

In 2019 American higher education was rocked by a series of indictments, guilty pleas and potential court cases related to wide-ranging criminal manipulation of college undergraduate admissions. Utilizing a system of bribes, surrogate test-takers of standardized tests, falsified assertions of athletic prowess and convoluted payoffs to athletic coaches, as well as a self-styled “admissions counselor” who emptied the wallets of well-heeled parents to facilitate the admission of their children to selective universities. The scandal has enveloped parents who are prominent attorneys, business leaders, actors and officials of several universities.

This is certainly not the first scandal related to higher education admissions. In recent years investigative reporters have exposed favoritism in law school admissions. There are so many reports of the athletic department running roughshod over minimal academic admission and grading standards in NCAA Division I sports that the story has become old news.

NYMC, of course, will never face any pressure from the athletic department to admit someone. First, we do not have an athletic department. Second, in my eight years here I have never been approached by the coaches of the College’s croquet, chess or touch football teams, regarding the status of an applicant for admission. All kidding aside, in my years as chancellor of NYMC I have found that I get many inquiries every year from alumni and friends of the College, and occasionally from elected officials, regarding applicants to our schools of medicine and dentistry. With the national explosion in applications overall and with the flood arriving this year at NYMC during the pandemic, I am willing to bet that direct inquiries are the tip of the iceberg of interest. It is time for some straight talk about admissions.

Wading through those applications is one of the toughest jobs at the College. The professional staff in all admissions offices on campus study standardized test scores, academic transcripts, letters of reference, course selection, research and social service experience and—for the dental and medical schools—decide who to invite for interviews. Interviews are conducted online in accordance with quality control procedures and applicants are then presented to the respective medical or dental school admissions committees for decisions.

Is this system perfect? No, it is not. NYMC is constantly evaluating its procedures to make the system better. In recent years the introduction of the Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) and the Computer-based Assessment for Sampling Personal Characteristics (CASPer) test of ethical reasoning in the School of Medicine are both attempts to refine the process for admission. At the end of the day, I think it is fair to say that we currently know far more about how to predict who will be able to pass licensure and specialty board examinations two to eleven years hence than predict who will be a good health care provider twenty years hence. Becoming, however, is often superior to being and we must engage in continuous quality improvement to do better.

The accreditation bodies that oversee medical and dental education have adopted a very firm stance on their respective admissions’ processes. The authority to admit, waitlist or reject applicants, is vested entirely in faculty-controlled admissions committees. Intervention by a member of the Board of Trustees, president, chancellor, dean or anyone else into the work of those committees, would be viewed very negatively and could jeopardize a school’s accreditation. Asking an administrator of the College to intervene in an admissions committees’ deliberations is not appropriate. Writing a letter of recommendation regarding an applicant you know personally, on the other hand, and sending it to us is always welcome and appropriate.

Our responsibility is to educate and graduate the best possible physicians, scientists, researchers and health care providers. The pandemic has made it clear how high the stakes are and we will not shirk from our mission. Our responsibility is to make sure that the health care for our grandchildren will be better than it is today. Our admissions processes are, and will continue to be, consistent with the fulfillment of our mission and we will carry on during the pandemic.

Edward C. Halperin, M.D., M.A.
CHANCELLOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

New York Medical College
New York Medical College Mourns the Passing of Chairman of the Board, Dr. Mark Hasten

New York Medical College (NYMC) mourns the passing of Dr. Mark Hasten, (ל”זוד ‘ר ןב יכדרמ ‘רב), longtime and esteemed Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Touro College and University System and NYMC, on February 28, 2020, at the age of 92.

Dr. Hasten was a visionary leader and ardent supporter of the Touro College and University System. An engineer, as well as an entrepreneur in myriad businesses, including banking, real estate and health care, Dr. Hasten focused his philanthropic interests in education. Chairman during Touro’s most significant period of growth, he helped launch its western divisions in California and Nevada and was a major contributor to the establishment of Touro’s Lander College for Women—The Anna Ruth and Mark Hasten School, in Manhattan. During his 25-year tenure as Chairman of the Board, Touro’s student body doubled in size—from 9,000 to more than 18,000 students. Touro became one of the leading and largest health care educators in the United States, and its university system grew to 34 campuses and locations, mostly in New York but also in California, Nevada, Moscow, Israel and Berlin.

FIGHTING FOR JEWISH SURVIVAL ON ALL FRONTS

Mark Hasten was born in Bohorodczany, Poland, in 1927. He and his family survived WWII in Kazakhstan, where he entered the military. The young Hasten fought with the Polish Brigade of the Red Army against the Nazis on the Eastern Front during World War II and participated in the liberation of the Majdanek Concentration Camp in Poland. In a displaced persons camp, he joined the Irgun Tzivti Leumi and showed great bravery and perseverance as he endured the tumultuous pre-state battles and events including the so-called “Altalena Affair.” He joined the Israel Defense Forces in 1948, and participated in Israel’s War of Independence for two years.

FROM SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY TO GENERAL MILLS AND FIRST NATIONAL BANK

In 1952, Dr. Hasten married Anna Ruth Robinson and they emigrated to the United States in 1953. His education had been suspended at age 12 by WWII and he realized he needed training in order to advance professionally. He enrolled at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and in 1959, earned a B.S degree in mechanical engineering. He then spent nine years working for General Mills in Minneapolis, first in research, then as chief design engineer for corporate engineering. While there, Dr. Hasten invented and designed the products and machines that produced the bendable straw, Cheerios, Pringles and Bugles. In 1967, Hasten was invited by his younger brother, Hart, to join his health care business in Indianapolis. Hasten insisted that the company be Sabbath-observant. As the business grew, they worked closely with banks to raise capital. Eventually, they decided they would rather finance their projects themselves and they acquired a total of 36 banks under the First National Bank and Trust name. They divested their bank holdings in 2007.

The brothers worked together for 40 years and were partners in both business and community service. With no Jewish day school in Indianapolis, they decided to create one. The Hasten Hebrew Academy began with 13 children and its roster now numbers more than 150. The school produced numerous illustrious graduates who are engaged in full Jewish lives.

VISIONARY LEADER IN EDUCATION

Always passionate about education and especially interested in higher education that offered a Jewish environment, Dr. Hasten joined the Board of Trustees of Touro College in 1977 and became chairman in 1995. He and Touro founder, Dr. Bernard Lander, were extremely close, sharing a vision for building from the ground up.

“My father had that wonderful blend of being a visionary and a person with the courage to pursue those goals,” said Rabbi Michael Hasten, noted educator. “He really envisioned how Touro could be an all-encompassing dominant force in many fields of education and he realized that vision in his lifetime, while also creating a great opportunity for a young Jewish man
or woman to gain their academic training necessary to pursue their careers of choice."

“We have lost more than the crown of our head,” said Alan Kadish, M.D., president of the Touro College and University System and NYMC, at the funeral at Touro’s Lander College for Men-Beis Medrash L’Talmud. “Dr. Hasten was like a brother to Touro founder, Dr. Bernard Lander, and he was my mentor and father. He often spoke to our students of the four P’s necessary for success – patience, persistence, positivity and perseverance, and he exemplified all those traits. His perseverance to accomplish goals in his personal and professional life came along with a certain toughness. He led Touro with tenacity and a force of personality that was unmatched.”

“Mark Hasten exemplified the teaching of Simeon the Righteous in the Talmud who said ‘On three things the world stands. On Torah, on service [of G-d], and on acts of human kindness.’ New York Medical College was the beneficiary of Dr. Hasten’s devotion and his wise counsel. In his service to humanity through the support of health science education he served G-d. We will not see his like again. Make his memory be for a blessing,” said Edward C. Halperin, M.D., M.A., chancellor and chief executive officer of NYMC.

At NYMC’s virtual commencement in May, a special moment of remembrance honored Dr. Hasten, with an image of a chair holding a Touro baseball hat, symbolizing his preference for wearing a baseball cap rather than a typical academic hat. He never missed a commencement and traveled all over the United States and abroad to attend graduation ceremonies to show how proud he was of all the graduates of all the Touro schools.

**A HEART IN EVERY ONE OF HIS ORGANS**

Rabbi Michael Hasten recounted the words of the family’s rabbi in Minneapolis who said, “Your father had a heart in every one of his organs. He gave money to Jewish causes when he had money and when he didn’t have money.” Rabbi Hasten continued, “My father had incredible gratitude to Hashem for saving his life early on. After he was saved, my father was literally everywhere in Jewish history over the course of his life. The only thing he missed was Mashiach. Just a short while ago, he said to me ‘if we could just bring Mashiach now, I’d be the engineer to build the third Beit Hamikdash.’”

Dr. Mark Hasten truly lived a remarkable life and always expressed gratitude for the opportunities he was granted. Looking back at his life a few years ago, Hasten said, “I saw Gehinnom and lived Gan Eden…I’ve worked my entire life to create success for Yiddishkeit-Judaism and for those around me. As a lifelong inventor and creator, I believe success is the mother of invention.”

Hasten is survived by his wife, Mrs. Anna Ruth Hasten; his daughters Judy Kaye and Monica Hasten; sons Edward Hasten and Rabbi Michael Hasten; and his brother Hart Hasten.
NYMC Appoints Joseph D. Mark, M.B.A., as New Chair of the Board

Blending his professional and philanthropic passions, Mr. Mark believes that contributions of “time, experience and money” can help organizations achieve their missions.

In July 2020, distinguished business leader, entrepreneur and philanthropist, Joseph D. Mark, M.B.A., was named chair of the Board of Trustees of New York Medical College (NYMC). He succeeds Dr. Mark Hasten who died in February 2020. Prior to this appointment, he served as a member of the Board of Trustees for NYMC for nearly a decade. Both professionally and from a philanthropic standpoint, Mr. Mark has been involved in health care and education throughout his career. As such, Mr. Mark says he views his newest leadership roles as, “The ideal nexus between two fields about which I am extraordinarily passionate.” In addition to his service to the College, Mr. Mark currently serves as chair of Apos Therapy and a member of the board of directors of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York.

“I believe health science education needs to evolve to better reflect the changing economics and mission of our health care system. My involvement in health care has been tied to the evolution in transitioning the health care delivery system from a fee for service to a value-based system, as well as a recognition of the impact of health disparities and social determinants,” Mr. Mark says. “Our graduates are trained on how this system is evolving, and we have an opportunity to continue to be a leader in this respect.”

A former venture capitalist and investment banker on Wall Street who established himself as a seasoned leader in the health science and education fields, Mr. Mark acquired, built, and over time, successfully sold several health care companies. Throughout his career, he led these companies in becoming more efficient and better able to meet the needs of patients at a more affordable cost.

“Throughout its 160-year history, this institution has always prided itself as being at the forefront of change—whether that was admitting the first women physicians, training the first African American physicians or admitting Jewish medical students during a period in history in which they were being restricted from other medical schools. That’s the legacy New York Medical College has and this spirit of leadership inspires me,” Mr. Mark says. “What excites me most about NYMC is that this institution has carved out a role for itself in providing first-class biomedical education under Jewish auspices. The Touro College and University System and New York Medical College are beacons in this aspect, and I’m just very proud to be able to be part of it.”

He continues, “I am extremely proud to be involved with an institution that has been tremendously successful, training tens of thousands of physicians and other health care professionals over the years. After being involved with the College for nearly a decade, I have seen an administration and faculty who are thoughtful and humanistic and want to help society improve and flourish. The vision I have is to build on the success that we’ve had—cautiously and carefully, but in a very focused way—allowing the College to carve out its own path.”

Mr. Mark holds a bachelor’s degree from Columbia University and a Master of Business Administration from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He is married to Meryl Schlussel Mark, M.D., a gynecologist in private practice, with whom he has three grown children and three grandchildren.
School of Medicine Enhances Student Clinical Experiences

New York Medical College (NYMC) medical students and alumni frequently tout their clinical experiences as a highlight of their medical education. The School of Medicine (SOM) offers an array of opportunities at an extensive network of affiliated hospitals, which includes urban medical centers, suburban community hospitals and highly advanced regional tertiary care facilities, providing students with a comprehensive range of educational resources in demographically and clinically diverse settings.

Offerings for third- and fourth-year clinical rotations now include an innovative Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship (LIC) in the largest independent multispecialty group in New York State and expanded options at other clinical sites including NYC Health + Hospitals/ Lincoln, Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMCHHealth), NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan and Wykoff Heights Medical Center. Enhanced opportunities also include elective and research experiences at the oldest VA facility in New York City, the James J. Peters VA Medical Center.

In June 2019, 14 members of the SOM Class of 2020 became the first cohort of students to complete the new LIC program at CareMount Medical, P.C., and Northern Westchester Hospital. The six-month-long program is a modified form of third-year medical school clerkships where students participate in several clerkships simultaneously, rather than in distinct blocks.

“The LIC program was developed to expand the clinical clerkship opportunities available to medical students to allow students to participate in the comprehensive care of patients over time and develop long-term relationships with community practice clinicians,” said Jennifer L. Koestler, M.D., senior associate dean for medical education.

The students who participate in this program devote the majority of their time at CareMount, where they spend more time in an outpatient setting compared to students in traditional clerkships, ensuring continuity throughout transitions of care. For example, an LIC student may tend to a pregnant patient while clerking in obstetrics and gynecology. Later, that same student may tend to the patient’s baby while clerking in pediatrics.

Students in the LIC are expected to meet all the educational program objectives and graduation requirements of the typical SOM curriculum. Building on the success of its first year, the program will continue on an ongoing basis, offering LICs in internal medicine, neurology, pediatrics and obstetrics and gynecology.

The newest SOM academic affiliation agreement designates NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln as a teaching site for NYMC’s undergraduate medical students offering core clerkships in pediatrics, medicine, surgery and psychiatry, as well as elective rotations in emergency medicine and surgical and medical subspecialties. NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln is a full-service acute care hospital, serving the downtown Bronx community, and is one of the premier trauma centers in the country and the busiest in the Northeast region providing an outstanding range of educational opportunities to develop clinical skills.

With the expansion of WMCHHealth to a 1,700-bed health care system with 10 hospitals on eight campuses, medical students can now complete third-year clerkships, early Foundations of Clinical Medicine activities and research programs at Good Samaritan Hospital in Suffern, New York, and MidHudson Regional Hospital in Poughkeepsie, New York. This is in addition to the abundant learning experiences at WMCHHealth’s flagship hospitals, Westchester Medical Center and Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital on the Valhalla campus.

Since 1875, NYMC medical students have been training at NYC Health + Hospitals/ Metropolitan, a community hospital in East Harlem, representing the oldest partnership between a public hospital and a private medical school in the United States. Today the affiliation continues to afford students the chance to provide culturally sensitive primary and specialized medical care to patients of all ages regardless of national origin, immigration status or ability to pay.

Clerkship rotations have also been expanded at Wykoff Heights Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York. The 350-bed teaching hospital located in an ethnically diverse residential neighborhood on the border of northern Brooklyn and western Queens, now hosts rotations in pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, medicine, surgery and electives in a variety of specialties.

Elective and research opportunities are also now available for students at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center (formerly known as the Bronx Veterans Hospital), the second largest VA facility in the nation and the first veteran’s hospital in New York City. The hospital provides a full range of patient services in primary care, tertiary care and long-term care in the areas of medicine, surgery, psychiatry, physical medicine and rehabilitation, neurology, oncology, dentistry, geriatrics and extended care.

“It’s important for medical students to participate in a wide range of clinical settings and learn from physicians and patients with different backgrounds and perspectives,” said Dr. Koestler. “It takes a village to teach medical students to become compassionate and skilled physicians and NYMC’s clinical affiliation partners are a vital part of that village.”
Now at capacity with four full classes of students including two providing clinical care, the Touro College of Dental Medicine (TCDM) at New York Medical College has expanded Touro Dental Health, its state-of-the-art dental health facility providing affordable oral health care for the community and advanced educational training for dental students under the guidance of experienced faculty. The recently completed two-phased expansion includes additional clinical space and 34 new dental chairs for patient treatment. Touro Dental Health now encompasses a total of 42,000 square feet and 115 dental chairs.

The new space includes two new general dental practices with 14 dental chairs each and a family-friendly pediatric dental practice, Touro Dental Health Kids. The new state-of-the-art pediatric dental practice, designed with the needs of TCDM’s youngest patients and their families in mind, features six dental chairs, 2,600 square feet of modern, light-filled space, with four operatories and two spacious private rooms specially designed to treat children in a quiet and distraction-free environment. Each pediatric dental unit is equipped with nitrous oxide for mild sedation when needed to aid in comfort and alleviate dental anxiety.

Over the past year, TCDM also increased its clinical and pre-clinical faculty by 30 percent with a faculty roster of approximately 100 general dentists and specialists, providing a full range of dental care and providing students with hands-on exposure in all dental disciplines.

“We are fortunate to have dedicated and innovative faculty and staff to support our growth,” said Edward Farkas, D.D.S., M.A., vice dean at TCDM. “The Touro College of Dental Medicine is a visionary thought leader in the realm of dental education. With the talent and dedication of individuals working together for both the student and the patient, we will continue to be at the forefront of educating students in the ever-evolving practice of dentistry.”
NYMC Announces New Patents for a Bandage Using Nano Cells and for Holographic Wi-Fi Transmission

Alan Kadish, M.D., president of New York Medical College (NYMC) and Touro College and University System (TCUS), announced two new patents for revolutionary technology as part of a new agreement to acquire a world class portfolio of patents in medical, technological and consumer products, with one of the world’s most prolific inventors. The patents will be developed through BioInc@NYMC.

In July 2020, patent number 10,709,883 was issued by the United States Patent and Trademark Office for a revolutionary new bandage using Nano technology to deliver antimicrobials and promote healing. The new technology was developed by Donald Spector, an inventor with hundreds of U.S. and foreign patents in medicine, entertainment, communications, technology and consumer products.

The StatVac™ is a Nano Bandaging System that releases antibiotics, antiseptics and other pathogen killing ingredients, from a series of nano cells on the bandage, while almost instantaneously drawing out dead material and secretions from the wound, leaving the wound cleaner and drier. Unlike the V.A.C. System used in hospitals around the world to accelerate healing, the StatVac™ has no motors, no outside attachments and is a completely self-contained unit, no bigger than an average bandage. The StatVac™ looks like a regular plastic bandage or hospital bandage from the outside. Inside of a gauze layer that allows the surface of the wound to retain dead cells and bacteria, nano cells draw out the moisture and leave the wound cleaner and drier to accelerate the healing process. The patent is in the Nano cells that both release and absorb within the bandage itself.

“This new technology will be made available to the general public, as well as physicians and hospitals, as a low-cost bandage to help accelerate healing, even in difficult situations,” Dr. Kadish said.

In December 2020, the United States Patent and Trademark Office granted patent number 10,863,274 to NYMC for holographic Wi-Fi transmission that will add new dimension to several areas of medical imaging, education and telemedicine, as well as commercial applications in industrial markets and the entertainment industry.

“This patent adds to our extensive portfolio of patents in the area of holography, which will be one of the emerging technologies of communication. Its adoption is even more important as the world changes its behavior because of the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Dr. Kadish. “Adding to the strength of our portfolio in this area is the adoption of 5G wireless network technology. It will allow our Wi-Fi transmissions for holograms to stream on a broader scale and at a lower cost therefore making it available in the mainstream market.”

Lisa Pamintuan, director of technology business development for TCUS, added, “People who see holograms today are struck by the seamless blend of virtual and augmented images with reality itself.”

The holograms as seen in venues, which have fascinated viewers around the world, can now be controlled by a device as simple as a smartphone using the high data transmission enabled by 5G wireless technology systems. “The public has seen examples of holograms in concerts and in arenas but the day to day use in home entertainment, telemedicine and education, can now be unleashed and will change communications in all aspects of daily life,” said Ms. Pamintuan.
More than 200 members of the School of Medicine (SOM) Class of 2020 marked a major milestone on March 20, as they celebrated matching to their medical residency programs. Though the campus was lacking students, family and friends for the traditional letter opening ceremony due to COVID-19, a live stream of the virtual event allowed family and friends to join in the celebration as students learned where they matched online. Within moments of the noon release of match results, the tweet storm of congratulations began as students excitedly shared their match results.

With the top career choices in internal medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine, anesthesiology, general surgery, family medicine, radiology, orthopedics and obstetrics and gynecology, the SOM Class of 2020 is training at 104 different institutions in 24 states across the U.S and in Canada, with nearly half pursuing a career in primary care.

“Even though this is a real change from how we have traditionally celebrated this day here at New York Medical College, it doesn’t change the way we feel about all of our students,” said Jane M. Ponterio, M.D. ’81, senior associate dean for student affairs.

“This day is the one that brings you closest to establishing your professional presence—in our minds, however, you have already done this,” said Jennifer Koestler, M.D., senior associate dean for medical education. “I have never seen a community band so closely together as I have seen over these last few weeks—you have all stepped up to volunteer for our community, to share small acts of kindness to help maintain a sense of togetherness during unpredictable times—these are exactly the core qualities that we would expect of New York Medical College medical students.”

SOM Dean Jerry Nadler, M.D., MACP, FAHA, FACE, added his congratulations to the students, along with some heartfelt advice, “One thing you cannot learn in books or online is humanism and compassion that makes you a true healer,” he said, before closing with a quote from the Diary of Anne Frank. “Our lives are fashioned by our choices. First, we make our choices. Then, our choices make us.”

Third Annual Days of Giving Raises More than $530,000 for Student Scholarships

For two days in June, the New York Medical College (NYMC) community came together to raise $536,723 for student scholarships. A group of generous donors contributed funds to match the 233 gifts made during Days of Giving 2020. It was the most successful Days of Giving campaign to date. With increased scholarship support, students in the School of Medicine, the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences and the School of Health Sciences and Practice, can focus on their studies rather than worrying about loan debt. The additional scholarship money comes at a time of great magnitude when the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in financial hardships for some students who fear they may have difficulty remaining in school.
NYMC Celebrates the Class of 2020 with Online Pomp and Circumstance

It may not have been a typical Commencement—yet New York Medical College’s (NYMC) 161st and the Touro College of Dental Medicine’s (TCDM) inaugural Commencement celebrations were collectively a smashing success to behold. Not even the dictate to socially distance could put a damper on the tangible sense of pride and joy shared throughout the NYMC and TCDM communities, as they collectively viewed the online pomp and circumstance via a YouTube video premiere on May 19.

An audience of more than 1,600 viewers joined in to watch the unified virtual ceremony which included the conferral of 528 degrees to the Class of 2020, including 211 doctor of medicine (M.D.) degrees, 43 doctor of physical therapy (D.P.T.) degrees, 8 doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees, 69 master of science (M.S.) degrees, 91 master of public health (M.P.H.) degrees and 3 doctor of public health (Dr.P.H.) degrees from NYMC and 103 doctor of dental surgery (D.D.S.) from TCDM, the first new dental school in New York State in 50 years.

The Commencement address was delivered by R. Bruce Donoff, D.M.D., M.D., the Walter C. Guralnick Distinguished Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor and former dean of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. Dr. Donoff was an early proponent of breaking down the barriers between medicine and dentistry and advocating for the integration of what has been commonly viewed as two separate professions to improve overall patient health. “Crisis can forge change. But I hope this pandemic serves to reduce siloization of oral and general health, education practice and insurance coverage, rather than foster greater social distancing of them,” said Dr. Donoff.

Edward C. Halperin, M.D., M.A., chancellor and chief executive officer, concluded the ceremony with a charge to the Class of 2020. “As graduates of this College, I charge you to defend the proposition that the world is full of our fellow human beings,” he said. “That all are created equal and, sometimes our fellow humans are in need of prompt, expert and humane medical care and always benefit from discovery research—and sometimes we shall be the ones in need of the care and the benefits of research. We shall treat others as we would expect to be treated.”
NYMC Unveils Its 2021-2026 Strategic Plan

Charting a clear path to address the rapidly changing health care fields and ever-evolving higher education landscape, New York Medical College’s (NYMC) 2021-2026 Strategic Plan has been completed after a year-long inclusive planning process. Designed to meet the College’s great challenges and exciting opportunities, this forward-looking plan will take NYMC into the next era of growth.

Drawing input from across the College’s varied stakeholders, the NYMC Strategic Plan is the result of more than a year of hard work including numerous College-wide surveys and feedback-gathering sessions, copious collaborative strategy meetings and multiple draft versions. By intention, the plan was the product of an inclusive planning process—set into motion in the fall of 2018, when Edward C. Halperin, M.D., M.A., chancellor and chief executive officer, charged the College with initiating a college-wide strategic planning initiative, to be completed by 2020.

NYMC’s 2021-2026 Strategic Planning Initiative was launched in early 2019, under the guidance of Strategic Planning Chair Jennifer Riekert, M.B.A., vice president of communications and strategic initiatives, and Co-chair Dana Mordue, Ph.D., associate professor of microbiology and immunology and vice chancellor for Middle States Accreditation. The Strategic Planning Executive Committee, comprised of faculty, staff, administration, leadership, board of trustee members and students, worked together to identify opportunities and forging new paths on which the College can thrive.

Download and read the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan at: www.nymc.edu/strategicplanning

Nursing Program Receives Full Accreditation

As the inaugural class of students in the Touro School of Health Sciences Nursing Program at New York Medical College (NYMC) completed their first year, a rigorous accreditation process was underway by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), the officially recognized national accreditation agency by the U.S. Secretary of Education that ensures the quality and integrity of baccalaureate, graduate and residency programs in nursing. After a successful site visit in November 2019, the CCNE found the Touro College Nursing Program fully compliant with all standards without any deficiencies and awarded it the longest term of accreditation for ten years.

The Registered Nurse (R.N.) to Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree program at NYMC is a two-year program designed for licensed registered nurses who have graduated from accredited associate degree or diploma nursing programs. It includes training in skills such as database research and telehealth, and is intended to prepare nurses for modern health care environments focusing on professional nursing practice and building on theories of community nursing and leadership.

The first cohort of nursing students began the community outreach portion of the program in January 2020, working in hospitals and clinics, in addition to their full-time nursing jobs they hold while completing their degree.

“The accreditation process was a massive undertaking and I am deeply grateful for the dedication of my team and the support we received from the Touro administration,” said Sandra Russo, R.N., Ph.D., chair and director of nursing at the Touro School of Health Sciences. “It will be exciting to see our first class graduate and we look forward to welcoming more students to the program.”

Download and read the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan at: www.nymc.edu/strategicplanning
Doctor of Physical Therapy Class of 2022 Marks Transition to Clinical Education

Physically distanced, yet bonded together as a class rising to the challenge of learning during a pandemic, 44 members of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (D.P.T.) Class of 2022 donned their white coats for the first time in a ceremony on November 16. The milestone event, witnessed by families and friends online, marks their entrance into the clinical years of their education and the affirmation of their commitment to the profession of physical therapy and future patients. The ceremony was postponed from the spring when their clinical rotations were scheduled to begin but were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The D.P.T. Class of 2022, scheduled to start their clinical work in January 2021, were eager and primed for the next step in their education.

After an invocation by Rabbi Moshe D. Krupka, M.S., executive vice president of the Touro College and University System, Michael J. Majšak, P.T., Ed.D., associate professor and chair of the Department of Physical Therapy in the School of Health Sciences and Practice (SHSP), offered greetings and shared the history of white coats in the health care professions and the tradition of the White Coat Ceremony which symbolizes professionalism, humanism and trust. “It is the notion of others putting their lives in our hands,” said Dr. Majšak. “It is a time of reflection on the obligation our students are taking to serve others and to uphold the noble charges of the profession of physical therapy.”

Edward C. Halperin, M.D., M.A., chancellor and chief executive officer, addressed the D.P.T. Class of 2022 imparting three points of advice to the class: 1) tell the truth 2) beware of the third party in the room and 3) balance justice with mercy. Robert W. Amler, M.D., M.B.A., dean of the SHSP, Benjamin F. Johnson, Ed.D., vice dean of the SHSP, and Catherine L. Curtis, P.T., Ed.D., assistant professor of physical therapy, also addressed the students. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Susan L. Ronan, P.T., D.P.T., PCS, assistant professor of physical therapy, administered the Pledge for Physical Therapy from the American Physical Therapy Association Education Section 2004, a pledge the D.P.T. Class of 2022 will reaffirm two years from now at Commencement.

School of Medicine Class of 2024 Marks Start of Journey as Medical Professionals During White Coat Ceremony

At the White Coat Ceremony on November 29, the School of Medicine (SOM) Class of 2024 students officially donned their white coats for the first time and took an oath they had developed as a class, which included a commitment to compassionate patient care and inclusivity. Though the event this year was held mostly virtually, the SOM Office of Student Affairs went above and beyond to inject some normalcy into the event by holding ten separate, small and physically distant, gatherings during the month prior at which students could don their white coats in person and recite their oath as a group. Videos from each gathering were then combined into a virtual collage for the event, where, even with their masks on, one could see the joy and pride of students as they marked their transition from laypeople to medical professionals.

During all ten gatherings, the student also received a personal address by Jerry L. Nadler, M.D., MACP, FAHA, FACE, dean of the SOM. “The white coat ceremony is very symbolic of the responsibility to the world and the opportunity that you uniquely have as future physicians of helping humanity, especially now when the wounds of health disparities and the difficulties many populations face in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other diseases on an ongoing basis, has been brought to the forefront,” said Dr. Nadler.

“Viewing this ceremony should remind students each time they don their white coats of the reason they chose to be a physician and what is expected of them now and in the future,” said Jane Ponterio, M.D. ‘81, senior associate dean for student affairs and associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, who served as master of ceremonies for the event. “The white coat sets upon your shoulders standards to follow on your journey to becoming a physician. It should never be seen as a weight but rather a privilege to uphold. The white coat is a symbol of your welcome to the profession and your humanism.”

Throughout the ceremony, students also had the opportunity to hear from several speakers, including Vivek Murthy, M.D., the nineteenth surgeon general of the United States, who offered both congratulations and advice that emphasized the importance of their relationships—with their patients, their fellow physicians and their families and friends.
PAUL T. DIAMOND, M.D., the Catherine and Vladislav P. Hinterbuchner Professor and Chair of Rehabilitation Medicine

In his new role, Dr. Diamond has already identified opportunities for clinical expansion of the program at Metropolitan Hospital, which will create new opportunities for NYMC’s residents and medical students. “This is just the start,” says Dr. Diamond, who hopes to continue to grow NYMC’s Department of Rehabilitation Medicine into a best-in-class program.

“Significant expertise in the study of disability and rehabilitative care already exists on campus within the various schools and centers,” he explains. “By identifying opportunities for synergism through close collaboration, while continuing to strengthen the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine’s own undergraduate and graduate medical education and clinical research initiatives, I’m confident we will have a truly outstanding program in rehabilitation medicine here at NYMC.”

Board-certified in both internal medicine and physical medicine and rehabilitation, Dr. Diamond earned his medical degree from the University of Virginia School of Medicine and completed residencies in physical medicine and rehabilitation and internal medicine at Johns Hopkins University. He has contributed greatly to the field of rehabilitation medicine, having held several NIH and other grants, presenting internationally and publishing co-authoring journal articles and book chapters for more than 25 peer-reviewed academic publications. His clinical and research interests include stroke outcomes, rehabilitation interventions and virtual reality applications in stroke rehabilitation.

“What’s impressed me most about NYMC is the people,” says Dr. Diamond. “I consider myself very lucky to have been given the opportunity to work with such a bright and talented group of students and faculty.”

CHIRAG D. GANDHI, M.D., Chair of the Department of Neurosurgery

As one of the few dual-trained neurosurgeons in the country, with expertise in both cerebrovascular surgery as well as minimally invasive endovascular neurosurgery, Chirag D. Gandhi, M.D., is the new chair of the Department of Neurosurgery. Dr. Gandhi is a tenured professor of neurosurgery, neurology and radiology, at New York Medical College (NYMC) and also serves as director of neurovascular surgery at Westchester Medical Center (WMC).

He most recently served as vice chairman of neurosurgery at NYMC, which he joined in 2017. During Dr. Gandhi’s tenure as acting director of neurosurgery at WMC, a role he assumed in April 2019, the department expanded its residency training program and received national accreditation of its neuro-interventional fellowship. Prior to joining NYMC, he served as interim chair of the Department of Neurosurgery and associate professor of neurosurgery, neurology and radiology, at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School.
"I am honored to step into the role of chair in a department with a long tradition of excellence," says Dr. Gandhi. "With the great team we are building, I am genuinely committed to leveraging our outstanding clinical care to continue the expansion of departmental research endeavors and to the great responsibility of training our future generation of physicians and surgeons."

Board-certified in neurological surgery, Dr. Gandhi earned his medical degree from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) and completed his residency in neurosurgery and a fellowship in neuro-interventional surgery at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, where he also served as chief resident.

A well-recognized leader in the field with more than 150 research publications, books and national appearances, Dr. Gandhi is an active member and leader in the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, Congress of Neurological Surgeons, AANS/CNS Cerebrovascular Section, as well the Society of Neurointerventional Surgery. His various honors include membership in Alpha Omega Alpha and recipient of the BrainLab Outstanding Clinical Study Award. Dr. Gandhi’s clinical and research interests include cerebral aneurysms and arteriovenous malformations, revascularization treatments and outcomes in neurovascular surgery.

Most recently he has published work on managing COVID-19 patients with cerebrovascular disorders, ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke. “Through our experiences on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York, we have learned many novel aspects of its impact on the neurological health of our patients. With these preliminary publications, our group is hoping to disseminate key, previously uncharacterized, clinical and radiographic features that are essential to better understanding and managing this complex disease,” says Dr. Gandhi.

PETER PANZICA, M.D.,
Chair of the Department of Anesthesiology

As the newly appointed associate professor and chair of the Department of Anesthesiology at New York Medical College and the director of anesthesiology at Westchester Medical Center, Peter Panzica, M.D., says, “The ability to work with world renowned faculty from other departments has added to the day-to-day enjoyment of my job. Having the support of the medical school and hospital administration to work towards making the Department of Anesthesiology and our operating rooms the best they can possibly be has made my time here so gratifying.”

After 30 years in his field, Dr. Panzica still gets a rush of adrenaline when he steps into the operating room to help guide a patient through a complex surgery. “The thing I love most is never knowing what to expect and when.”

Dr. Panzica received his medical degree from the School of Medicine at Stony Brook University. He completed his internship in anesthesiology at Winthrop University Hospital and his residency and a fellowship at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

Dr. Panzica says he was always interested in physiology and pharmacology. When, early into his medical education, he realized he also had an aptitude for procedural and technical work, he knew this specialty was a perfect match for him both personally and professionally.

Just five years after graduating from medical school, Dr. Panzica was asked to serve as clinical director of anesthesia at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, where he experienced, first-hand, how complex and resource intense ORs are—and the importance of fostering communication and collaboration between anesthesia, surgery and OR nurses. “The OR is a three-legged stool, which would be unstable if any of the legs did not function evenly,” says Dr. Panzica. “You need to see cases through the eyes of a surgeon and an OR nurse to be the best possible anesthesiologist.”

Throughout his career, Dr. Panzica has been instrumental in expanding the use of echocardiography and ultrasound in the specialty at large, specifically its usage in operating rooms by countless trainees. “Ultrasound has revolutionized our ability to take care of patients in cardiac operating rooms to those undergoing structural heart minimally invasive valve procedures in catheterization labs to those receiving regional blocks or intensive care,” he says. “It is becoming more present in patient care and the handheld ultrasound machine may eventually replace the stethoscope.”

Dr. Panzica brings his passion for training the next generation of anesthesiologists, saying, “It is an honor to lead this amazing department. In my time here, I have met so many driven individuals who are so dedicated to patient care, training our next leaders and advancing the science of our field. This is truly a special place and I look forward to continuing and expanding the good work of the department.”
NEIL W. SCHLAGER, M.D., the Barbara and William Rosenthal Chair of the Department of Medicine

Neil W. Schluger, M.D., has been appointed as the Barbara and William Rosenthal Chair of the Department of Medicine at New York Medical College (NYMC) and director of medicine at Westchester Medical Center (WMC). The Rosenthal Chair was endowed in 2001 by William Rosenthal, M.D., and his wife Barbara. A significant contributor to scientific advancement in the field of gastroenterology, Dr. Rosenthal, who became the College's first endowed professor in 1969, trained generations of physicians who have contributed to the field of gastroenterology through research, teaching and clinical care.

Dr. Schluger served as chief of the Division of Pulmonary, Allergy and Critical Care Medicine, in the Department of Medicine at Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC). Most recently, he served as professor of medicine, epidemiology and environmental health sciences, director of the Population and Global Health Track for the Scholars Projects Program and co-director of the Program for Education in Global and Population Health for the Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University.

“I am thrilled to assume the role of chair of the Department of Medicine at NYMC and to join Dean Nadler and the leadership team to develop innovative programs in education, research and patient care, that will help shape the future of medicine locally, nationally and internationally,” says Dr. Schluger.

Dr. Schluger has been a principal investigator in the Tuberculosis Trials Consortium, an international collaboration sponsored by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for 25 years and was the chair of the consortium from 2000-2016. He is also co-editor and a co-author of The Tobacco Atlas, the definitive work describing the extent and consequences of the global epidemic of tobacco use.

Dr. Schluger is a founder and director of the East Africa Training Initiative in Pulmonary Medicine which trained the first generation of pulmonary physicians in Ethiopia and established an academically oriented pulmonary division at Ethiopia’s leading public hospital. He also serves as senior advisor for science at Vital Strategies, a global nonprofit organization devoted to public health issues.

Dr. Schluger is a co-author of a study on the use of hydroxychloroquine for treating COVID-19 infection, with results published in June 18, 2020, issue of The New England Journal of Medicine, demonstrating that patients who received the drug did not fare any better than patients who did not receive it.

Board-certified in pulmonary disease and internal medicine, Dr. Schluger earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania and completed a residency and served as chief resident in internal medicine at St. Luke’s Hospital in New York. He later completed a fellowship in pulmonary and critical care medicine at The New York Hospital/Cornell Medical Center.

“My own academic career has focused on public health threats such as tuberculosis, tobacco use and air pollution, both in the U.S. and abroad, and I hope to create opportunities for the Department of Medicine to engage in meeting the great medical and public health challenges of our day,” says Dr. Schluger. “The values and ethical commitments of NYMC are especially inspiring to me and I look forward to working with everyone to further those great traditions.”

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SEAN TEDJARATI, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

As chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at New York Medical College (NYMC), who also serves as chief clinical integration officer at Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMC Health), Sean Tedjarati, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., is responsible for the integration and strategic oversight of all clinical services across all WMCHealth’s hospitals. “I see the potential for NYMC, in collaboration with Westchester Medical Center Health Network, to make a significant regional and national imprint on women’s health and wellness.” Dr. Tedjarati envisions a future wherein the NYMC residency program is one of the most competitive, robust programs in the State.

“By partnering with practitioners in the area, I believe we have the ability to create a powerful collaborative network and become a resource to our partners and they, in turn, can serve as learning resources for us, creating a true synergistic partnership,” he explains. Dr. Tedjarati sees an exciting opportunity to increase the scope of medical education and to advance NYMC’s key fellowship programs including those in maternal fetal medicine, gynecologic oncology, advanced minimally invasive surgery along with female pelvic medicine and urogynecology.

Board-certified in gynecologic oncology and obstetrics and gynecology, he completed residencies in family medicine and obstetrics and gynecology at The Ohio State University, as well as a fellowship in gynecologic oncology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. Dr. Tedjarati also holds a Master of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University and a Master of Business Administration with a focus on leadership in health care from Yale University. He is also a fellow of the Royal Canadian College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and board-certified in obstetrics and gynecology in Canada.

Dr. Tedjarati has been named a Top Doctor in Westchester multiple times. In 2017, he was honored with the Ellis Island Medal of Honor Award by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations. Dr. Tedjarati has received multiple national and institutional excellence in teaching awards and is recognized as a passionate leader in education and teaching in graduate medical education.

He has contributed to the field of academic gynecologic oncology and has co-authored several publications in peer-reviewed journals and chapters in textbooks in gynecologic oncology. Dr. Tedjarati’s clinical and research interests include robotic and radical/advanced surgical technologies, clinical trials with chemotherapy and targeted therapies for gynecologic malignancies, as well as health care disparities and population health.

His other areas of interest and passions are patient-centered value-based efficient health care operations and delivery, incorporating academic and educational goals. Dr. Tedjarati has focused on leadership and management capacity development for health care providers. He has been involved in international health with a focus on women’s health and rights, delivering and developing cancer care for women in developing countries for more than 20 years.
MILL ETIENNE, M.D. '02, M.P.H., Appointed Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion

In keeping with its deep roots and a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, New York Medical College (NYMC) appointed Mill Etienne, M.D. '02, M.P.H. FAAN, FAES, associate dean of student affairs and associate professor of neurology and of medicine in the School of Medicine (SOM), to the College-wide position of vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion.

In this new role at the College, Dr. Etienne will work to enhance the diversity of the entire NYMC and Touro College of Dental Medicine (TCDM) community by promoting equity and inclusion in all aspects of teaching, student life, faculty recruitment, clinical practice and research. He will also oversee the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, working closely with Ray Whitt, M.D., assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, and Yvonne Thornton, M.D., professor emeritus of obstetrics and gynecology, as well as a new assistant to the vice chancellor to be named.

Dr. Etienne has served as associate dean for student affairs in the SOM since 2014, a role he will maintain. He has also directed the SOM fourth-year multiculturalism in medicine elective since 2019. Dr. Etienne is a visiting scholar at the National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care at Tuskegee University and he is director of the Epilepsy and EEG Laboratory at Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center, part of the Westchester Medical Center Health Network.

He is currently president of the New York State Neurological Society.

A graduate of NYMC in 2002, he completed his neurology residency and epilepsy fellowship at the Neurological Institute of New York (Columbia University). He earned his M.P.H. from Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health and completed a neuroepidemiology fellowship with a training grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Dr. Etienne was the founding director of the Comprehensive Epilepsy Center at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where he also served as director of the autonomic laboratory. While at Walter Reed, he was associate program director of the neurology residency program and was on the clinical neurophysiology teaching faculty for the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) at the NIH. He was also chief of the Ethics Committee on board the USNS Comfort during Operation Unified Response, the U.S. military response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. During the spring 2020 peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Etienne was deployed with the U.S. Navy to serve in New York City at the Javits Medical Station at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

He is a recognized expert in disaster medicine, particularly in the areas of ethics and culture. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Neurology and fellow of the American Epilepsy Society and has presented multiple times at both their annual meetings. He has authored numerous book chapters and has numerous publications in peer-reviewed journals. He is a member of Alpha Omega Alpha, the honor medical society, and has received numerous teaching awards throughout his tenure at NYMC. Dr. Etienne is board certified in neurology, epilepsy, clinical neurophysiology, brain injury medicine and public health.
BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON, ED.D., Assumes the Role of Vice Dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice

Benjamin F. Johnson, Ed.D., a 35-year veteran of higher education, joined New York Medical College’s (NYMC) School of Health Sciences and Practice (SHSP) as vice dean in July 2019.

Prior to joining NYMC, Dr. Johnson served as chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Health Promotion at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Dr. Johnson has also served as chair of the Department of Kinesiology at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York and as professor and associate dean for community partnerships and global initiatives in the WellStar College of Health and Human Services at Kennesaw State University, where he directed the Global Center for Social Change.

The author of numerous sports medicine-related research articles, Dr. Johnson served as member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Medical Commission and coordinated the IOC’s Sport Science Research Projects during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Dr. Johnson also served on the Program Committee for the 1996 IOC World Congress on Sport Science and has been the co-primary investigator on eight Department of State International Sport Programming Initiative projects. He is co-founder of the African Academy of Disability Sport and founder of the International Academy for Disability Rights.

Dr. Johnson was an expert witness and consultant on work-related musculoskeletal injury legal cases for nearly 30 years, specializing in the biomechanical aspects of occupational tasks to identify acute and chronic movement and environmental factors that may contribute to musculoskeletal injury.

Dr. Johnson received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina, M.A. from East Carolina University and Ed.D. from the University of Kentucky.

JANE M. PONTERIO, M.D. '81, is Named Senior Associate Dean for Student Affairs of the School of Medicine

Jane M. Ponterio, M.D. ’81, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, assumed the role of senior associate dean for student affairs of the School of Medicine (SOM) in October 2019. A New York Medical College (NYMC) alumna, Dr. Ponterio previously served as vice president for academic affairs and designated institutional official for graduate medical education at Richmond University Medical Center (RUMC), where she was responsible for overseeing all of the medical student educational programs in addition to all of the residency and fellowship programs at the hospital. She also served as program director of the residency program in obstetrics and gynecology and vice chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

In her time at RUMC, Dr. Ponterio served as a teaching attending and clinical supervisor for NYMC medical students doing third-year clerkships and fourth-year electives in obstetrics and gynecology.

Dr. Ponterio received her B.S. from the Sophie Davis Center of Biomedical Education of the City College of New York and went on to receive her M.D. from NYMC. She completed residency training at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York and is a diplomat of the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

In addition to winning several awards for excellence in teaching, Dr. Ponterio was the 2017 recipient of a two-year New York State Empire Clinical Research Investigator Program (ECRIP) Award. She has been included in Castle Connolly’s “Best Doctors in New York” list and was named a “Super Doctor” by The New York Times.
In the fall of 2018, BioInc@NYMC welcomed its ninth client, Affina Biotechnologies, a drug discovery startup developing a novel treatment for late-stage ovarian cancer. With the addition of Affina, New York Medical College’s (NYMC) biotechnology incubator was filled to capacity—yet demand for incubator space continued to grow. “We were receiving inquiries from interested entrepreneurs but didn’t have any space left to offer,” explains Salomon Amar, D.D.S., Ph.D., vice president of research at NYMC and senior vice president for research affairs for Touro College and University System. According to Dr. Amar, who oversees BioInc@NYMC, “We had outgrown our space and it was time to expand.”

Recognizing BioInc@NYMC’s potential to fill this demand, the State of New York awarded NYMC $450,000 to fund the incubator’s expansion. Previously occupying a 10,000-square-foot wing of NYMC’s Dana Road building, the expansion nearly doubled the incubator’s space to 19,500 square feet, allowing BioInc@NYMC to support up to 20 additional clients at the forefront of medical innovation.

On October 29, 2019—five years after NYMC launched BioInc@NYMC as the Hudson Valley’s only biotechnology incubator at a health sciences college—New York State’s prominent business leaders, policymakers, academics and entrepreneurs, gathered in the incubator’s sleek new meeting space to celebrate the grand opening of its expansion. Thus, began the next chapter of innovation for BioInc@NYMC.

It began as a dream

At the event, New York State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart Cousins, recalled how BioInc@NYMC came to be, “What started as a vision grew into this incubator filled with biotech businesses, creating new jobs and stimulating the economy—and is now growing even bigger. What an amazing story for Westchester County and an incredible resource for this region.”

Forged from a partnership across the county, state, federal government, private enterprise and NYMC, the BioInc@NYMC list of “founding grandparents” (those credited with creating and seeding the incubator) is extensive. The incubator’s origin story cannot be told without Robert W. Amler, M.D., M.B.A., vice president for government affairs and dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice. “The notion that Westchester County could become a major contender in the tri-state’s biotech cluster began to emerge around 2005. It was around 2011 when Westchester’s business leaders approached me with an ambitious proposition: a new biotechnology incubator, formed through a private-public collaboration and located at NYMC to drive innovation and industry growth in the Hudson Valley Region,” Dr. Amler recalls.

“Was it possible? Would it be profitable? Could we really create an incubator with the power to drive biotech innovation while creating value for the College? The idea was met with both excitement and a healthy dose of skepticism,” recalls Dr. Amler. To figure this out, Edward C. Halperin, M.D., M.A., chancellor and chief executive officer at NYMC, assembled a committee to conduct an economic viability analysis. Touring biotechnology incubators across the country, the committee learned from the victories and mistakes made by incubators that came before. “A
senior member of the Touro leadership walked up to me and said ‘Rob, you should go for it.’ Soon after that we won the State’s financial support and that’s when I knew BioInc@NYMC was more than just a pipe dream.”

A MODEL FOR BIOTECH INNOVATION IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

Today, BioInc@NYMC is recognized as a model for biomedical innovation in the region—a hotbed for scientific successes over the past five years. Take for example the work being done by Barry Kappel, Ph.D., M.B.A., president and chief executive officer of Sapience Therapeutics. “We could not have achieved the scientific advances we’ve reached over the past few years without the resources and support of BioInc. The flexibility afforded here has allowed us to remain right-sized as our organization and needs have grown from a single lab bench to multiple laboratories,” Dr. Kappel says.

Echoing this sentiment, Mark Zemel, S.M., M.B.A., the founder and chief executive officer of DigiTouch, Retia Medical, MOE Medical Devices (three clients of BioInc@NYMC), says, “The support from the BioInc and the extended New York Medical College community has provided my startups with access to state-of-the-art facilities and superior researchers for collaboration, which has enabled us to attract investment, grow rapidly and achieve major milestones such as FDA clearance.”

The incubator’s record for promoting scientific innovation is only matched by its record of economic success. While university-based biotech incubators are notorious for losing money, BioInc@NYMC has generated an economic impact of more than $16 million while supporting nine start-up companies, which have collectively filed 33 patents. Four of these startups have brought products to market since coming to BioInc@NYMC. “From the start, our priority was creating and maintaining an incubator that was both innovative and profitable for the College. We wanted to make sure BioInc@NYMC never operated at a loss,” explains Dr. Amar. “It never has.”

THE NEXT CHAPTER

BioInc@NYMC’s expanded meeting space, modern event areas and shared-space desks create an environment where entrepreneurs can bounce new ideas off each other, talk shop, collaborate and generally support each other. With the new space, the incubator will hold more programs and new training series around topics like applying for Small Business Innovation Research grants, finding investors and building your board of directors.

“Heading into the next phase, the expansion will allow us to attract more clients into our incubator thereby expanding our ability to help promising biotechnology companies achieve success,” says Dr. Amar. In addition, a new focus for the incubator will be drawing in more NYMC faculty by creating a more robust tech transfer operation. An operation wherein faculty are encouraged to disclose their inventions, where the research group helps identify market worthy inventions and helps decide which inventions should be patented. “With more NYMC faculty-led companies, we can create more student internship opportunities, summer jobs and employment opportunities for our Ph.D. and masters students,” Dr. Amar explains. Dr. Halperin concludes, “For the past 160 years since the College’s inception and the past five years for the incubator, I can say collectively, we have an honorable past, a great present and an exciting future.”
MEDISPROUT: Re-Imagining a World without Physician Burnout

Samant Virk, M.D., told his wife that he would be home early, but he was hours late. Again. Almost 15 years into his clinical career specializing in neurology and interventional spine, Dr. Virk was burnt-out from 12-hour plus work days and frustrated by the broken health care system in which (according to Dr. Virk) only 27 percent of a clinician’s time is time spent treating patients. When his wife challenged him to do something about it, he did. Thus, MediSprout was born.

MediSprout is a HIPAA-compliant telehealth startup aimed at fixing the inadequacies of the health care system by optimizing the time of both the patient and the physician. MediSprout’s virtual video product VD2MD provides a platform for virtual visits. “By reserving time for only in-person appointments where you can add the most value, the service allows physicians to see more patients, make more of an individual impact—and run a more efficient, profitable practice,” Dr. Virk explains. Further boosting physician efficiency, the app can convert data directly into electronic medical records allowing physicians to spend less time filling out paperwork.

With his product in the market and already in use at a major New York City-based hospital when the COVID-19 crisis hit, Dr. Virk says when he developed MediSprout, he never imagined the kind of impact it could have on the health care industry, physician colleagues and patients during such a historic and challenging time. “To put it into perspective, each week over a three week period during the pandemic, MediSprout created and launched a telehealth solution for a major health system in the New York metro area with more than 1,000 individual providers, including administrators and scheduling staff, joining from each hospital,” he says. “The message to us was clear – telehealth is a lifeline to staying connected to patients and fostering their health and well-being, while keeping those on the front lines safe and patients secure at home.”

SAPIENCE THERAPEUTICS: Addressing Cancer’s Greatest Unmet Needs

In 2015, inspired by his life-long dream to launch his own biotechnology firm, Barry Kappel, Ph.D., M.B.A., resigned from his job at a biotechnology company to launch Sapience Therapeutics. As president and chief executive officer of Sapience, Dr. Kappel set his focus on unlocking treatments for the deadliest, most difficult-to-treat forms of cancer. “We have a vision of developing molecules that combine the best properties of traditional chemical-based drugs and newer biologic-based drugs, providing opportunities to hit therapeutic targets that these other classes of molecules cannot.”

When he learned about NYMC’s biotech incubator located at the heart of Westchester County, Dr. Kappel, a Westchester native, says he jumped at the opportunity to bring his startup to NYMC. “With the resources available to us at BioInc@NYMC, we were able to launch Sapience right here in Westchester,” he explains. “We could rent a small lab bench for just a reasonable price, and as our needs grew, BioInc has allowed us to grow accordingly and remain right-sized as an organization.”

SWEET DEFEAT: Crushing Your Cravings for Sweets

Americans have an unhealthy affinity for sweets, consuming an average of three pounds of sugar each week, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. To combat this unhealthy addiction to sugar, Sweet Defeat has found a new clinically proven way to keep a sweet tooth at bay. Inside BioInc@NYMC, Cara Cesario, Ph.D., the chief scientific officer of Sweet Defeat has spent the last four years developing scientifically proven products to quell sweet cravings using the active ingredients in Gymnema Sylvestre—a plant used for centuries in Eastern cultures.

The active molecules, called gymnemic acids, bind to the sweet taste receptors on the tongue, temporarily inhibiting the ability to taste sweets. In January 2020, Sweet Defeat launched two new products, a fast-acting oral spray and chewing gum, to reduce consumption of and desire for high-sugar foods.
MKM VENTURES: Creating Affordable, Accurate and Easy-to-Use Medical Solutions

Few entrepreneurs embody the startup mindset better than Mark Zemel, S.M., M.B.A., the founder and chief executive officer of three thriving biotech startups. Retia Medical develops highly accurate, easy-to-use, cost-effective cardiac output monitors for high-risk surgeries and critically ill patients. Moe Medical Devices, LLC, focuses on developing cold electrical plasma systems used to treat nail and skin disease while DigiTouch creates a blood pressure monitor system which allows patients to monitor their own blood pressure with a simple push of a button on their smart phone. In fact, the DigiTouch’s blood pressure monitor was piloted at Westchester Medical Center’s Department of Anesthesiology—a collaboration Mr. Zemel says was made possible because of a connection through BioInc@NYMC.

FIGHTING CANCER, Creating First-in-Class Treatments, Filling Unmet Needs

Long before he became president and chief scientific officer of innovative drug discovery startup, Affina Biotechnologies, Alexander Vinitsky, Ph.D., was fascinated with biology and chemistry as a child. It is that fascination that inspired him to found Affina. “The goal of finding a therapeutic drives us both intellectually and spiritually,” he explains. Today, Affina Biotechnologies is developing a small molecule technology that is the basis for the development of a first-in-class treatment for late-stage ovarian cancer and another for a novel approach to cholesterol reduction.

Also housed at BioInc@NYMC, two additional powerhouse startups are aimed at first-in-class cancer drug development. Akeso Therapeutics is developing allogeneic cell therapy for difficult-to-treat cancers. SHY Therapeutics is developing small molecules as anti-cancer therapeutics for unmet medical needs.

Dr. Amar

“Heading into the next phase, the expansion will allow us to attract more clients into our incubator thereby expanding our ability to help promising biotechnology companies achieve success.”
After decades of tireless efforts to halt America’s diabetes epidemic, nothing seemed to move the needle — until now. According to a recent study from the Centers for Disease Control, after a 20-year increase, new diabetes cases are in decline. It is the first sign that efforts to stop the nation’s diabetes epidemic are working.

Among those leading the charge is New York Medical College (NYMC) to prevent and treat diabetes on several fronts: from population studies to curriculum enhancements, and from targeted cellular therapies to community nutrition programs. The College’s initiatives have drawn national attention, broke new ground and opened new pathways for patients, physicians and scientists.

PREVENTION AS A CURE

Jerry L. Nadler, M.D., MACP, FAHA, FACE, dean of the School of Medicine and professor of medicine and pharmacology, has treated many diabetes patients as an endocrinologist. As a researcher, he continues NYMC’s work with JDRF’s Network for Pancreatic Organ Donors with Diabetes to identify whether a virus is triggering the immune response involved in causing type 1 diabetes (T1D), also previously known as juvenile diabetes. They are exploring if some form of the Coxsackie virus is a possibility. “We’re part of a worldwide collaboration to identify the virus and possibly develop a vaccine,” Dr. Nadler says. “We’re also pursuing a new treatment that inhibits the enzyme causing inflammation of the pancreas cells. If we can stop the inflammation of the cells that make insulin, we can possibly prevent the damage that leads to diabetes.”

Dr. Nadler recently received a five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to continue this research with investigators at Harvard University and the University of Chicago. He is involved with funded research to study the link between obesity, diabetes and heart disease and identify a new target for treatment to preserve beta cell functions and reduce heart disease. He is also interested in the associations of type 1 and type 2 diabetes (T2D) with COVID-19 related mortality.

In his leadership role at NYMC, Dr. Nadler has focused on including guidelines for nutrition and healthy eating into the curriculum for medical students, helping address the T2D that often arises from lifestyle.

“Studies have shown most medical students feel uncomfortable providing information to patients on proper nutrition and healthy eating. Given that nutrition plays a key role in disease prevention, we want our students to understand the science and feel comfortable guiding patients,” Dr. Nadler explains. “Students need to be educated on the science of nutrition, healthy eating opportunities and lifelong wellness through diet.”

With hospital affiliates of NYMC integrating treatment and prevention programs to address diabetes, medical students have the opportunity to partner with nurses, pharmacists and nutritionists in several initiatives throughout the region.

As a physician, Dr. Nadler seeks to eradicate the threat of diabetes—one patient at a time—by citing his own experience. “I have a family history of diabetes. Several years ago, I found that I was gaining weight...
and my glycated hemoglobin levels were rising, placing me at risk for diabetes. I made a conscious choice to increase my physical activity and change my diet. I lost more than 40 pounds, I’ve kept it off for two years; and I say to patients: ‘If I can do it, you can do it.’”

OUTREACH REDUCES RISK
Maureen Kennedy, M.S. ’04, Dr.P.H. ’11, assistant professor and director of the Division of Epidemiology in the Department of Public Health, School of Health Sciences and Practice, focuses on the causes and conditions driving diabetes with a broad, population-based view. “While epidemiology often focuses on infectious disease, it’s just a small piece of public health,” she explains. “The picture isn’t complete without thinking about chronic disease, too, especially given the crossover between infectious disease and chronic disease.” The challenge with chronic diseases, she adds, is the difficulty of curing them. “Chronic diseases are not going away quickly,” she says. “It’s not as easy as taking antibiotics or a few pills. It’s behavioral changes – not a quick fix.”

Like Dr. Nadler, Dr. Kennedy’s efforts have personal meaning. “My mother is diabetic and manages her condition well, but my grandmother lost a leg from the disease,” she says. “So, my public health studies have a powerful connection to my life and family history.”

Dr. Kennedy has directed analytical research studies regarding childhood obesity, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, in addition to diabetes and prediabetes. But these conditions often occur together, so that studying one can shed light on others. “Chronic diseases are so intertwined,” she explains.

In 2018, Dr. Kennedy and her epidemiology capstone class performed an extensive population study regarding diabetes using National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data. With cross-sectional survey analyses, the data captures trends over 12 years to shed light on potential risk factors for disease. The results surprised Dr. Kennedy and her students. “We’ve always known that poorer populations, obese populations and elderly populations, age 60 and over, have the highest risk of [type 2] diabetes,” she says. “But the NHANES data showed an increased prevalence of diabetes in middle-class populations, people who were overweight—not obese—and 40-to-59-year-olds. That is telling and important, because it tells us we need to broaden our target audience for intervention and initiatives for prevention.”

Dr. Kennedy plans to monitor the prevalence of diabetes in overweight populations, especially as weight issues can begin in childhood and busy families rely on fast food or impulsive choices. “We might not associate being overweight as being unhealthy but if it will make someone more susceptible to diabetes, we should,” she says. “And to a large extent, weight is driven by eating habits.”

Dr. Kennedy wants to hone in on the condition of prediabetes as another prevention strategy, drawing on her background in clinical laboratory sciences to analyze clinical data to support those newly at risk. “We have a wealth of opportunity here for collaboration,” she says.
Dr. Nadler emphasizes the connection between public health and patient care is an important piece to the puzzle. “The technology that distracts us, the temptation to grab fast food, the lack of access to nutritious options – all these are working against our health,” he says. “The idea that you can get diabetes without obesity might be surprising; but the fact is that certain types of fat, called central fat or visceral fat, are not always visible on the outside. That central fat leads to inflammation, which leads to diabetes.” Many fad diets do not work because they are not sustainable and exercise alone is not enough to address the problem. “Reducing our portion sizes, making better choices and eating more slowly are critical,” he says. “Our community programs hope to promote that lifestyle change.”

BETA TESTING
Other basic science researchers at NYMC are peering not through broad lenses, but through microscopes. One is Ercument Dirice, Ph.D., assistant professor of pharmacology, who recently joined NYMC from the Joslin Diabetes Center at Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Dirice’s interest in diabetes began when he saw friends with type 1 diabetes halting activities for insulin injections. “I was curious why they had to inject insulin every day.” Knowing that insulin regulates blood glucose levels, Dr. Dirice began to research methods to prolong the survival of the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas, known as pancreatic islets, that are destroyed as diabetes progresses.

One lab study used gene therapy to isolate a molecule called TRAIL, introduce it to islets in rats and transplant the islets into diabetic mice to study how resistant they were to cell destruction. “We found that islet cell survival was two to three times better in animals treated with TRAIL,” says Dr. Dirice. The same year, he began looking for molecules that would stimulate regrowth of these cells. Because diabetes is an attack the body wages against its own tissue, he focused on the T-cells that regulate the body’s immune response. He found that at the onset of diabetes, the T-cells secrete certain proteins, called cytokines and chemokines, that can promote regeneration of beta cells, in mice. “We wondered: What if we increased the beta cells before the T-cells begin to attack the islets?” he says.

Over six years, stimulating beta cell growth in mice managed to keep diabetes at bay, and immune cells tamed, for two years in mice. He is now pursuing a follow-up study to increase the beneficial types of T-cells, which suppress the spread of toxic T-cells. “We found that when we increased the proliferation of beta cells, we found islets were protecting themselves from destruction and suppressing the immune system’s attack,” he says. “That combination is exactly what we seek in fighting T1D.” Looking more closely into the mechanism, Dr. Dirice wondered whether certain beta cell peptides were able to hide from or dodge the immune system’s attack. He is now working on isolating beta cells to evaluate their traits. “If we have a subgroup of beta cells that is completely protected from any immune attack, toxic agent or environmental stress, we can create beta cell replacement therapies to extend that population of cells resistant to destruction. If we can bolster the absolute number of beta cells, it would be a promising approach for T1D patients.”

Dr. Dirice is also working with the Department of Surgery to develop a library of pancreatic tissue samples, which will help with “bench-to-bedside” translational research.

“Dr. Nadler is supportive and providing everything possible for my diabetes research; and his expertise and background in islet cell and beta cell biology is a complement to my approach,” he explains. “We are now poised to research unidentified molecules, testing on mouse and human beta cells, signaling pathways and islet biology.”
New York Medical College's fight against diabetes stretches back nearly a century, as professors and deans made discoveries that shaped understanding and treatment of the disease. “We are proud to have a tradition of groundbreaking diabetes research,” Dr. Nadler says. “I look forward to carrying on the legacy by rebuilding our efforts.”

ISRAEL KLEINER, PH.D., was a biochemist who first identified the effects of an extract on the pancreas, observing that it lowered blood sugar in animals. It would later be known as insulin. After working at the Rockefeller Institute and Tulane University, he joined NYMC in 1919 as a professor of physiological chemistry, serving as dean from 1921 until 1925. In 1948, he became the director of the Department of Physiological Chemistry. Dr. Kleiner co-authored highly regarded textbooks such as Human Biochemistry (with James M. Orten) and Laboratory Instructions in Biochemistry (with Louis B. Dotti). He was the 1959 recipient of the Van Skye Award in Clinical Chemistry from the New York Academy of Sciences.

RACHMIEL LEVINE, M.D., former professor and chair of the Department of Medicine at NYMC, was a pioneering physician and leading diabetes researcher who broke new ground by discovering the role and function of insulin in glucose metabolism in 1946. His findings were controversial, as they defied the belief that glucose molecules could travel freely across cell membranes, without dependence on insulin. In 1960, Dr. Levine joined NYMC and the following year, he received the highest honor from the American Diabetes Association. Building on his findings, Dr. Levine supported scientists in developing the first genetically engineered insulin for humans, called Humulin. In the 1980s, Dr. Levine worked with Dr. Nadler at City of Hope, a major cancer research center in California.

START-UPS AND SOIL

Dr. Nadler highlights BioInc@NYMC, the biotechnology incubator on campus, as a source for cutting-edge research and a key partner for fighting diabetes. Among the biomedical start-ups within BioInc@NYMC is a company researching a method for reducing cravings for sugar, which can contribute to T2D.

Furthermore, he says, Westchester County and the Hudson Valley are rich in resources to support healthy lifestyles: organic farms, culinary centers and acclaimed chefs committed to sustainable eating.

“With our affiliate hospitals, research labs, bio-incubator and regional landscape, we are uniquely positioned to have a major impact on diabetes,” Dr. Nadler says. It’s an environment ripe for synergistic research, including Dr. Nadler’s most recent collaboration—a $804,755 NIH-grant for research to be conducted in collaboration with Dr. Dirice and Raghu Mirmira, M.D., Ph.D., professor of medicine at the University of Chicago, aimed at developing new anti-inflammatory treatments for T1D and T2D. “In my view, the future is bright.”

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As COVID-19 arrived in New York, leaving its indelible mark on our lives, unbelievable acts of selflessness, innovation and resiliency also began to surface, leaving their own imprint. These acts were no more apparent than here at New York Medical College (NYMC), where our community of students and alumni, health advocates and health care providers, educators and scientists, stepped up to ease suffering in this time of COVID-19.
LEADERSHIP AT THE FRONTLINE

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC AND ERadicating MISINFORMATION

On January 31, 2020, one day after the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus a global health emergency, NYMC’s Center for Disaster Medicine and Touro College and University System (TCUS) hosted a symposium, “Coronavirus: What We Know, What We Don’t Know, and What You Need to Know.” The event took place at the Touro College Midtown Manhattan campus to educate policymakers, health care professionals, the media and the public on the imminent viral crisis. Among the speakers that day were Mark Levine, New York City Council member and chair of the New York City Council Committee on Health, Mary Foote, M.D., senior medical coordinator for communicable disease preparedness at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Sherlita Amler, M.D., M.S., Westchester County commissioner of health and clinical associate professor of pediatrics, adjunct professor of public health and senior fellow in the Center for Disaster Medicine.

At the time, no one expected the event would evolve into a series of symposia showcasing a variety of experts and topics as the pandemic progressed and changing its name to “Coronavirus: What Have We Learned? How Can We Use What We Have Learned?”. NYMC and TCUS have hosted nine such symposiums, eight of them virtually, setting the stage for NYMC’s role as a resource during unprecedented times.

But as COVID-19 spread across the world, so too conspiracy theories and fast-moving misinformation began spreading across the U.S.—impeding our ability to slow the spread. As a barrage of questions surrounding the rapidly spreading COVID-19 cropped up, former Chief Medical Officer of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) Robert W. Amler, M.D., M.B.A., dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice (SHSP) and vice president for government affairs, established himself as a leading voice in public health on the novel coronavirus. Along with numerous members of the NYMC leadership and faculty, Dr. Amler addressed millions of Americans via numerous news media outlets including Dr. Oz, NBC 4 New York, Fox News, HuffPost and Business Insider. Using their voices to strike down dangerous misinformation, NYMC’s faculty became a leader to educate the masses on how to protect ourselves and our loved ones, from this never before seen strain of Coronavirus.

By May, NYMC had established itself as the trusted source for questions related to COVID-19. Thus, as more and more New Yorkers turned to NYMC as a go-to hub for COVID-19 information, New York State Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, tapped NYMC to host the Governor’s daily press briefing. On two occasions, May 7, 2020, and June 9, 2020, during the heart of the crisis, the Center for Disaster Medicine at NYMC hosted Governor Cuomo’s daily noontime press briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic.

FACULTY AT THE FRONTLINE

FACULTY MEMBER PUTS HIS OWN DISASTER TRAINING TO THE TEST

As the assistant director of the Center for Disaster Medicine, George Contreras, M.P.H., M.S., M.E.P., CEM, FACEM, has spent countless hours training New York State’s first responders so they are prepared to provide the best possible care—even in the worst possible situations. For the better part of 2020, Mr. Contreras, who is also an assistant professor at the Institute of Public Health in the SHSP, put his own lessons to use during the worst health crisis most of us have ever seen. Working as a paramedic in New York City during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak and facing emotionally grueling work and a rapidly climbing death toll, Mr. Contreras provided emergency care to the critically ill while treating the patients he served with empathy and dignity. Describing one such incident in which a patient died in his ambulance, Mr. Contreras recalls:

“I realized because this person died in my ambulance, the next step for this family—for this patient—was going to be the city morgue,” Mr. Contreras said. “This was going to be the last time that family was going to see that person for another two weeks, if that. They were distraught. On this street corner in New York City, in the middle of the night, I decided to allow the family to say their final goodbyes right there in the back of the ambulance,” he continued. “I never thought my ambulance would become an ad-hoc funeral home and be the site for a wake in the middle of the night.”

FILLING A CRITICAL ROLE VIA TELEHEALTH

Carol Karmen, M.D., professor of medicine at NYMC and physician at the outpatient practice at Westchester Medical Center (WMC), was at the heart of the crisis when COVID-19 first hit the region. “Patients came to our hospital from all over the tri-state area to be tested for COVID-19 when they could not find testing closer to home. Many of these patients found themselves ill with the virus but without a doctor. Some chose to go immediately to the emergency room which was, at the time, inundated with patients,” Dr. Karmen explains. “When we realized that this was occurring, my colleagues and I offered to evaluate and treat patients infected with COVID-19. Not being able to see patients in-person, we offered our care through video-consultation.”
According to Dr. Karmen, once she and her colleagues had established care of a new patient, they consulted with them many times after their initial presentations. “Follow-up was crucial to their recovery.” Within those first few months, Dr. Karmen and the outpatient group took care of approximately 700 patients infected with COVID-19. “Although these visits were not customary, since in-person consultations are what we were used to, we provided a vital service to the patients in their time of need,” Dr. Karmen says.

PROVIDING POST-VENTILATOR CARE
As the COVID-19 crisis strained hospital resources, all eyes turned to the critically low supply of ventilators. But, according to Luis F. Riquelme, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, BCS-S, associate professor of speech-language pathology (SLP) and director of the Pediatric Dysphagia Certificate Program in the SHSP, getting COVID-19 patients on a ventilator is only half of the story. “Due to the well-publicized shortage of life-saving ventilators, the media often covered stories in which patients had been fortunate enough to gain access to ventilators. These patients’ stories presumably finished at the time of extubation,” Dr. Riquelme explains.

Not so. Case in point: in the hospital in Brooklyn where Dr. Riquelme and his team of NYMC SLP clinical instructors work, approximately 30 percent of patients admitted were intubated and placed on mechanical ventilation. According to Dr. Riquelme, “Once extubated, patients needed varying amounts of oxygen support to breathe on their own. The next question became, “Can the patient swallow safely, limiting the risk of aspiration?” In the context of this virus, explains Dr. Riquelme, providing post-extubation care became much more challenging. “Recovery patterns for patients with COVID-19 remain mostly unknown. Some symptoms improve gradually, others suddenly and still others take even longer than usual to subside.”

STUDENTS AT THE FRONTLINE
MED STUDENTS SUPPORT THEIR BRETHREN IN HEALTH CARE
Days after the shutdown began, a virtual room full of medical students momentarily shed their white coats to become project managers—organizing nearly 200 of their peers volunteering at the epicenter of our nation’s COVID-19 pandemic.

From providing assistance at NYMC’s affiliate hospitals—including Westchester Medical Center, Good Samaritan Hospital and NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan—to delivering food, and setting up childcare and dog walking services for faculty working long shifts for days at a time on the frontline, the student volunteers stepped up to do their part in both small and large ways.

Under the supervision of faculty advisors, “A growing swell of medical students across all four classes worked together to fill the unmet needs at NYMC’s affiliate hospitals and within our own College community,” explains Jennifer Koestler, M.D., senior associate dean for medical education. “Our students stepped into the role of project managers, organizing volunteers to work at our major clinical sites. A hallmark of our student body is that they are tremendously humanitarian and whole-hearted,” Dr. Koestler says.

MED STUDENTS GRADUATE EARLY TO ENTER THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19
When the School of Medicine (SOM) Class of 2020 first entered medical school four years prior, no one could have predicted they would graduate early to fight a dangerous global contagion. Yet that is exactly what happened on April 8, 2020—when more than 100 NYMC med students completed their undergraduate medical education a month in advance of their scheduled commencement ceremony so they could support the over-taxed hospitals facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pandemic Perspectives
As a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) hit New York in early March of 2020, New York Medical College (NYMC)’s faculty physicians, scientists, health care professionals and experts had a ground level view of the unfolding pandemic. Given their unique vantage point, they were ideally suited to share their voices on this unprecedented crisis. As the pandemic raged on, our experts led commentary on topics ranging from public health, research on vaccines, bioethics and religious values, politics and COVID-19’s impact on businesses and the economy. Pandemic Perspectives is a compilation of best-in-class editorials, written by experts at NYMC who, amidst one of the most chaotic times in recent history, mastered the art of editorial writing to better provide the public with accurate unedited information and insights.

Read Pandemic Perspectives at: www.nymc.edu/pandemicperspectives
Patrick Kennedy, M.D. ’20, matched as a resident in internal medicine at Greenwich Hospital where he accepted the hospital’s offer to start his residency early. “When I first learned about the option for early graduation, I knew I had to opt in. New York Medical College has given so much to train us, and I was pleased to have the chance to utilize the training at a time when it was needed most,” he explains.

**ALUMNI SUPPORTING THE FRONTLINE**

**DR. HENRY SAPHIER DONATES $100,000 IN SUPPORT OF COVID-19 RESEARCH**

Henry Saphier, M.D. ’61, member of the Board of Trustees and former president of the SOM Alumni Association, is a steadfast supporter of NYMC including the 2018 establishment of the Saphier Family Translational Science Fund for the SOM to provide immediate vital and critical resources. As the COVID-19 crisis took root in our community and across the nation, Dr. Saphier made a gift of $100,000 to the fund to be used in support of the research underway at NYMC to validate a novel rapid diagnostic approach to track the presence of SARS-CoV-2 and diagnose COVID-19 using a colorimetric reverse transcription loop-mediated isothermal amplification (RT-LAMP) that will provide accurate detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA within 30 minutes.

**DAYS OF GIVING RAISES MORE THAN $530,000 FOR STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS**

For two days in June of 2020, the NYMC community came together to raise $536,723 for student scholarships. A group of generous donors contributed funds to match the 233 gifts made during Days of Giving 2020. The additional funds, dedicated for scholarship support, came at a time of great magnitude when the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in financial hardships for some students who feared they may have difficulty remaining in school.

**LEARNING AND OPERATIONS AT THE FRONTLINE**

**GOING REMOTE**

In March 2020, when Governor Cuomo announced the “New York State on PAUSE” executive order, shuttering NYMC’s in-person learning—the College pivoted to become fully online, seemingly overnight.

The ability to transition from in-person to online was largely due to the agile thinking, tenacity and leadership of the College’s eLearning team, led by Denton Brosius, Ph.D., associate dean for eLearning and director of Educational Technology, Donna Tartaglione Berger, assistant director for eLearning, and William Gibbons, Learning Management System (LMS) administrator in the SHSP.

It was also due to earlier investment in a new eLearning infrastructure, implemented the prior year.

The year before the COVID-19 crisis hit, the eLearning team had been transitioning to its new Canvas Learning Management System, an eLearning platform that provides academic content, resources, lessons, assignments and grading functions. “All courses were already created and in place for our switch to virtual learning. This was a huge advantage for us,” explains Ms. Berger.

During those first chaotic weeks of quarantine, Ms. Berger recalls adapting to an online platform while creating best practices for faculty as well as students. For example, the eLearning team succinctly created a Canvas site for students with time management tips and worked with faculty to implement best practices in teaching and learning strategies. “Our faculty worked 24/7 on finding ways to support and engage students through Canvas during this new normal,” recalls Ms. Berger. “It seems like years ago… but I do remember the level of stress as we entered the ‘unknown’ with this pandemic. We all stayed focused, did all we could, and our faculty and students have risen to the challenge. They have all done an amazing job of adapting to this situation.”

**ADAPTING THE CLINICAL TO THE VIRTUAL**

Meanwhile in the SOM, the staff of the Clinical Skills and Simulation Center (CSSC) answered the challenge of virtual learning by piloting virtual standardized patient assessments for most of the clerkships as well as for the pre-clinical years through a combination of platforms including Zoom and LearningSpace. The sessions seamlessly provided a collaborative experience for students to continue to hone their clinical skills for conducting the patient interviews, exhibiting strong interpersonal communication skills, strengthening clinical reasoning and utilizing best practices for clinical documentation.

“This is also a great opportunity and a robust method for teaching students how to navigate telemedicine,” said Katharine Yamulla, M.A., CHSE, senior director of competency-based assessment and clinical skills education and director of the CSSC. “Moreover, the team-based approach to clinical reasoning discussions has been appreciated by students, faculty and standardized patients alike.”

The CSSC was one of the first clinical skills programs in the northeast to develop these cutting-edge programs, according to Ms. Yamulla. The CSSC staff continues to find additional ways to subsidize clinical learning at a time when students need it the most.

“In any situation, wherever there is darkness—any negative impact—there is always some light. For the COVID-19 crisis, this new collaborative spirit represents that light.”  

Dr. Amar
MEDICAL SCHOOL ADMISSIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

NYMC’s ability to troubleshoot admissions interviews in the time of COVID-19 exemplifies innovative thinking and out-of-the-box leadership. “We met as a team and had members provide recommendations for how to interview applicants,” explains Karen Murray, M.D. ’99, associate dean for admissions for the SOM and associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology.

“We ultimately decided to go virtual for the entire season which subsequently became the consensus of all medical schools in the nation. We then identified a user-friendly platform that would allow us to continue with our Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) format, which we believe will provide the most objective evaluation of the applicants.”

CLINICAL AFFILIATES AT THE FRONTLINE

At the fourth COVID-19 symposium hosted by NYMC and TCUS in June, Edward C. Halperin, M.D., M.A., chancellor and chief executive officer at NYMC, moderated a panel of experts who shared lessons learned during the pandemic. Faculty guest speakers who were still in the throes of the crisis at NYMC’s clinical affiliates shared their perspectives and insight into the future of the COVID-19 crisis.

John T. Pellicone, M.D., FACP, FCCP, FAACVPR, chief medical officer, NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan and assistant professor of medicine, and Renee Garrick, M.D., vice dean and chief medical officer, WMC and professor of clinical medicine, shared their thoughts on lessons learned during the pandemic with the foresight of a second wave or “twindemic,” coinciding with flu season.

“One of the most important things we learned was the importance of having the flexibility to expand critical care and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) services. We were able to do that by converting a Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) to a makeshift ICU and we were ready to change our on-call floor to make them workable ICU rooms in a very short period of time,” Dr. Pellicone said. “The flexibility to convert rooms and fill them with appropriate staff was one of the most important lessons learned.”

According to Dr. Garrick, planning, careful communication and the ability to be flexible and nimble were key lessons learned. “We re-staffed the ICUs by taking the surgical and anesthesia staff to create COVID teams,” she explained. “We essentially staffed two hospitals—a COVID-positive hospital and the ambulatory care pavilion which was a COVID-free hospital.”

RESEARCH AT THE FRONTLINE

UNPRECEDENTED COLLABORATION

When the global pandemic was officially declared with no vaccine nor proven drug treatment in sight, new innovative collaborations sprouted up across the nation between leading research institutions, pharmaceutical companies and hospitals. Among them—an innovative collaborative clinical drug trial by NYMC and Regeneron Pharmaceuticals launched at WMC within the first few weeks. Seeking a partner with whom to establish a clinical drug trial that could be used to treat critically ill patients with COVID-19, Regeneron proposed the collaboration—not only for NYMC’s state-of-the-art virology labs and internationally regarded experts but—because of the College’s decades-long involvement in the annual development of the influenza vaccine.

Leading the charge for NYMC in conjunction with WMC—Lawrence DeLorenzo, M.D., professor of clinical medicine, joint chief, Division of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine, director of the Medical ICU and medical director of respiratory therapy at WMC, Donald Chen, M.D., assistant professor of medicine and hospital epidemiologist for the Infection Prevention and Control Team at WMC, and Alison Lennox, M.D., clinical assistant professor of medicine—were tasked with working on the clinical trial to test the efficacy of a drug to treat COVID-19. Specifically, they tested the drug Sarilumab, (trademarked as Kevzara by Regeneron and the Paris-based pharmaceutical company Sanofi), which is known to inhibit inflammation.

While that clinical test did not result in a treatment, Salomon Amar, D.D.S., Ph.D., vice president for research at NYMC and senior vice president for research affairs at TCUS, says this collaboration is a silver lining amidst these harrowing times. “In any situation, wherever there is darkness—any negative impact—there is always some light. For the COVID-19 crisis, this new collaborative spirit represents that light.”

Speaking to what the future may bring for NYMC in the context of COVID-19, Dr. Amar says, “Once the word is out that NYMC is a mover and shaker in a very prominent high profile clinical trial, other companies may be tempted to come back to us for other things. Not just in the context of COVID-19 trials, but in other trials down the road.”

RESEARCH ON RAPID DIAGNOSTIC TESTING FOR COVID-19

Since the pandemic began, researchers around the world have been working to develop a rapid diagnostic approach to test for the highly infectious Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). At NYMC, research is underway to validate a novel
rapid diagnostic approach to track the presence of SARS-CoV-2 and diagnose COVID-19 using a colorimetric reverse transcription loop mediated isothermal amplification (RT-LAMP) that will provide accurate detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA within 30 minutes.

The study, which is being done in collaboration with Weill Cornell Medicine, is an expansion of an earlier project in which a group at Cornell, including Ebrahim Afshinnekoo, SOM Class of 2021, designed and optimized a rapid LAMP assay to detect SARS-CoV-2 infection from nasopharyngeal (NP) swab specimens and oropharyngeal (OP) swab lysates in specimens taken from COVID-19 patients at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center. The work has now expanded to validate the method across several different clinical sites, including NYMC, Medical College of Wisconsin, Columbia University and Weill Cornell Medicine, with Mr. Afshinnekoo leading the coordination across all sites. With the assay already proven to be effective on NP and OP swabs, testing on saliva samples is now being done and if successful could lead to easier, more widespread testing.

In addition to Mr. Afshinnekoo, the team includes Humayun K. Islam, M.D., Ph.D., interim chair of the Department of Pathology and clinical professor of pathology, who serves as principal investigator of the study, while Jerry L. Nadler, M.D., MACP, FAHA, FACE, dean of the SOM and professor of medicine and pharmacology, and Lori W. Solomon, M.D. ’99, M.P.H. ’09, chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine and clinical associate professor of family and community medicine, will serve as co-investigators. Melinee D’Silva, M.S., laboratory manager in Dr. Nadler’s lab, will assist with collection and preparation.

“Once cleared as a clinical diagnostic assay, the LAMP test has the potential to be integral to the SARS-CoV-2 testing platform at NYMC, its various clinical sites and the TCUS at large and we will establish NYMC as one of the few sites in the U.S. developing a rapid test using saliva,” says Dr. Nadler.

LOOKING BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

When the population is vaccinated, when a treatment is found and when the world is adjusting to its new normal, NYMC will have earned its place in this historical event. The NYMC community will remember the kindness and empathy they experienced and the resiliency they witnessed and will use the opportunity to continue to examine “What Have We Learned? How Can We Use What We Have Learned?” to help ensure future generations will not have to endure another pandemic of this magnitude. While post-pandemic life will be different, great things will continue to happen at NYMC.

New York Medical College and Pandemics Past

When future generations look back at the COVID-19 pandemic, they will learn of the remarkable resiliency of the New York Medical College (NYMC) community and the tremendous effort put forth to stop the spread, find a treatment and care for those affected by it. But this was not the first pandemic in which NYMC left its mark.

Royal S. Copeland, M.D.
(1868–1938), was dean of NYMC from 1908 to 1918. He left the College to serve as president of the New York Board of Health during the influenza pandemic of 1918 and is credited for his proactive approach including quarantining the sick, monitoring case numbers, educating the public and regulating personal behavior while reassuring New Yorkers and maintaining calm in the city. His prominence continued as he served as a United States Senator from New York from 1923 until his death in 1938.

In the spring of 2009, NYMC was tapped by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop seed stock of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus that was quickly spreading throughout the world. The CDC sent Doris J. Bucher, Ph.D., associate professor of microbiology and immunology, traces of the novel influenza virus, which contained a unique combination of influenza genes not previously identified in animals or humans. In an astounding 23 days, Dr. Bucher and her team were able to grow the seed stock virus. The H1N1 swine seed was completed on May 21, 2009 and shipped to the CDC for analysis. The seed virus was designated NYMC X-179A in recognition of New York Medical College and was the first vaccine seed virus completed by any participating laboratory. The CDC began shipments to vaccine manufacturers on May 26, 2009, for production—keeping the pandemic in check.

NYMC X-179A and its higher yielding version, NYMC X-181, were used by vaccine manufacturers as a component through 2016 when mutations resulted in an update. Dr. Bucher’s lab continues to produce high growth reassortant seed viruses for the influenza vaccine, ultimately used to produce 400 to 500 million doses of flu vaccine annually.
Leading the Way in the Fight against Tick-Borne Disease

Lyme disease is on the rise. So is NYMC’s leadership in the fight to stop tick-borne illnesses.

When it comes to Lyme and tick-borne disease, the statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) paint a foreboding picture. The CDC estimates 300,000 Americans are diagnosed with Lyme disease annually, while the number of new cases of tick-borne disease rose by 22 percent over the prior year. The good news—New York Medical College’s (NYMC) expertise in the arena of tick-borne disease is also on the rise. From groundbreaking Lyme-disease diagnostics and novel treatments for deadly tick-borne infection, to research that shines new light on Lyme disease mimicry, a phenomenon in which Lyme manifests symptoms of Alzheimer’s and other neurological diseases. Dr. Ollar’s published report “Neurologists Take Heed, Lyme Neuroborreliosis Mimicry is Afoot,” was presented at the Fourth Annual Lyme Disease in the Era of Precision Medicine Conference last year in New York City.

Dr. Ollar, who has written numerous articles on the topic of Lyme neuroborreliosis mimicry manifesting Alzheimer’s-like symptoms versus true Alzheimer’s disease, will be commencing an investigation in his hometown of Milford, Pennsylvania, where there are an estimated 280,000 Alzheimer’s cases, but no statistics for Alzheimer’s cases where patients test positive for Lyme neuroborreliosis.

“In my previous study of patients from Pennsylvania with Lyme disease, 20 percent of these patients were shown to have neurological consequences mimicking the classic symptoms of ALS [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis], MS [multiple sclerosis], Parkinson’s Disease and Alzheimer’s. It’s a real problem yet, few people are looking at mimicry today.” Dr. Ollar says his dual background in neurology and microbiology gives him a unique perspective and he is among a small group researching the correlation today.
“Every year, some Lyme disease patients are misdiagnosed with serious, untreatable chronic conditions such as ALS, MS, early onset Alzheimer’s disease, epilepsy and Parkinson’s disease with no hope of recovery,” said Dr. Ollar. “When patients are assumed to have an autoimmune disease, they are even put on corticosteroids to suppress their immune systems, an unfortunate outcome for a patient with a chronic infection. The emotional trauma to patients and their loved ones that result when Lyme neuroborreliosis has been misdiagnosed with an untreatable neurological disease is devastating.”

Dr. Ollar’s research has found that if patients are diagnosed in the early stages of Lyme disease and treated with intravenous antibiotics that target the bacteria, patients may make a full recovery. For example, Dr. Ollar points to the recent, high-profile case in which, “the famous country western singer Kris Kristofferson has become a poster child for Lyme neuroborreliosis which was misdiagnosed as Alzheimer’s disease.”

Dr. Ollar said the takeaway is this: “It is the utmost importance to develop new lab-based assays for improved early and accurate detection of neuroborrelial infections and other tick-borne infections. It would be extremely useful for a clinician to have assays that monitor the efficacy of therapy as a function of changes in the pathogen load and eventually clearance of the pathogen from the patient. And it is incumbent upon all physicians, to be ready to think outside the box when it comes to considering the possibility of a potential microbial agent as the ‘raison d’être’ of patient neuropathology.”

NEW TREATMENT FOR A (SOMETIMES) DEADLY DISEASE

It may be a lesser known tick-borne illness, but babesiosis can be deadly particularly in the elderly, the very young and those with a compromised immune system. According to the CDC, this potentially deadly tick-borne infection mimics malaria—and it is on the rise in the suburbs north of New York City, on Long Island and in coastal Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut. “It’s a lot like malaria at its worst. It is caused by parasites which are primarily transmitted by a tick bite. The number of reported U.S. cases of babesiosis continues to grow—yet the current treatment for babesiosis is often ineffective for immuno-suppressed patients,” explains Gary P. Wormser, M.D., professor of medicine, microbiology and immunology, and pharmacology, and vice chair of medicine for research and development.

That is about to change. In a groundbreaking study, Could the Drug Tafenoquine Revolutionize Treatment of Babesia Microti Infection by Dana G. Mordue, Ph.D., associate professor of microbiology and immunology, and Dr. Wormser, published in The Journal of Infectious Diseases, the pair discovered that the drug Tafenoquine, which recently gained FDA approval to treat the parasite that causes malaria, may also be extremely successful for the treatment of babesiosis.

“Disease severity can range from asymptomatic to fatal,” explains Dr. Mordue, who says these asymptomatic cases can sometimes pose the greatest threat to public health. “Individuals who are asymptomatic can remain carriers of the parasite in their blood for more than a year. As a result, transfusion transmitted babesiosis has become a serious problem because blood donors can donate contaminated blood without knowing they are infected,” she says. “Developing potent drugs for babesiosis that rapidly kill parasites, even in immune-suppressed individuals, would be a tremendous advance for treatment,” she says.

Clinical trials on Tafenoquine as a treatment of babesiosis can be expected within the next two years. In the meantime, Drs. Wormser and Mordue say that, since Tafenoquine is a drug that is already approved by the FDA, physicians can currently use the drug for babesiosis off-label—which is particularly good news for immune suppressed individuals.
BIG BREAKTHROUGHS IN LYME DIAGNOSTICS

It has been forty-five years since the first Lyme disease case was identified in Old Lyme, Connecticut. Yet over the course of the past four and a half decades, there has been little improvement in Lyme diagnostics. “The two-tier serological test, developed in the mid-1990s is still the recommended lab test used to support the clinical diagnosis of Lyme disease,” explains Paul M. Arnaboldi, Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology and immunology. “The sensitivity of these tests is so low in early disease that positivity is usually less than 50 percent at the time a patient first seeks medical care.”

The arena of Lyme disease diagnostics is on the verge of changing: Dr. Arnaboldi has been relentlessly working to improve Lyme disease diagnostics since he arrived at NYMC nine years ago to join his mentor-turned-cohort, Raymond Dattwyler, M.D., professor of microbiology and immunology, and medicine.

Dr. Arnaboldi is trying to develop a single-step test which should improve the ability to diagnose Lyme disease accurately and effectively—even in the early stages of the disease. “In our lab, we are achieving sensitivities as high as 70 percent while maintaining high specificity,” he explains. Dr. Arnaboldi is modifying antigens used in the first test so there will not be a need to use the lower sensitivity second test. This new approach is about mapping epitopes, the part of an antigen molecule to which an antibody attaches itself. “We’re doing epitope mapping where we look for individual parts of the proteins that are unique to Borrelia and will only bind to the antibody activated in people who have had Lyme disease—ignoring other infections. We express these parts of the protein as short peptides which can be combined from multiple targets to create a sensitive and specific assay,” he says.

Last spring, a new assay from BioRad was approved by the FDA. “Some of the peptides that we have identified have been included in the new [BioRad] Total Lyme assay which is presently coming to market,” he says. Though the new test was not approved to be a single-step test, it is still a step in the right direction.

Now, Dr. Arnaboldi, along with Dr. Dattwyler, have set their sights on developing a point-of-care product which will deliver the new single-step test in which a physician can run tests in the office. “We are collaborating with a lab out of UCLA to create a point-of-care Lyme test,” he says. “Working with Drs. Dino DiCarlo and Aydogan Ozcan at UCLA, we will put our antigens into their novel multiplex platform which can be used for rapid diagnosis directly in a physician’s office. Instead of having to take blood and send it off to a lab, the physician will be able to perform a test in the office and have results for the patient in less than 15 minutes,” he explains.

GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION OF EXPERTS

Beyond the work being done by NYMC’s impressive faculty experts, NYMC has an impressive body of students who are already gaining attention in the field of tick-borne disease.

Take for example, Abrar A. Alsurayhi, an epidemiology student in the public health program in the School of Health Sciences and Practice, who is completing a practicum focused on major tick-borne diseases in the U.S. and their tick vector.

Intrigued by the field of tick-borne illness after she took an entomology class that studied vectors, vectors’ lifecycle and related diseases, Ms. Alsurayhi broached the topic with Amy Anshel, R.N., D.N.P., FNP-BC, associate dean for student experience, associate professor of public health and environmental sciences and director for the Applied Practice Experience, who helped identify the public health opportunity for Ms. Alsurayhi and introduced her to Dr. Mordue, who mentored her.

“The objectives of my project are to determine the public health risk of disease transmission in the United States, particularly in the Northeast, geographically map diseases transmitted through ticks in the United States and describe the epidemiological profile of the diseases. I will also develop guidelines for public health on the prevention of tick diseases and education,” Ms. Alsurayhi says.

Another emerging talent in the field of tick-borne disease is medical student Avery Wilson, School of Medicine Class of 2022, the Robert B. Nadelman Research Fellowship in Infectious Diseases award recipient, who used his fellowship to conduct a summer research project looking at host-pathogen interactions during the early stages of *Borrelia burgdorferi* infection, the causative agent of Lyme disease.

Working under the mentorship of Mary M. Petzke, Ph.D., assistant dean for medical student research and assistant professor of microbiology and immunology, Mr. Wilson says he was interested in identifying genetic factors that make it
As one of the nation’s foremost Lyme disease experts who has been contributing breakthrough research in the arena of tick-borne disease for the span of his 40-year career, Dr. Wormser was shocked to find a tick he hadn’t yet encountered. The exotic Haemaphysalis longicornis (H. longicornis), also known as the longhorn tick, was new to New York.

Dr. Wormser confirmed the new species through a collaborative effort with the New York State Department of Health and Fordham University.

“In 2017, this tick species was found on a sheep in New Jersey. It had not been known to exist in New York,” Dr. Wormser says. Since then, “H. longicornis ticks have been identified in New Jersey, several other states including West Virginia, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and now in New York State. No human in the United States was known to have been bitten prior to this,” he says.

In 2019, at the LDDC, Dr. Wormser cared for another asymptomatic patient who was bitten by this tick species. “This tick appears to exist in sun exposed areas on the ground, unlike what is expected for the deer tick. This tick is clearly a concern for farm animals where it can cause anemia, a reduction in milk production from cattle and potentially transmit diseases. The potential consequences for the health of persons bitten remains to be determined,” he says. “But what is clear is that there is the emergence of a completely new tick species in the United States.”

NEW TICK SPECIES IDENTIFIED AT NYMC

In June 2018, a patient from Yonkers, New York, walked into the NYMC Lyme Disease Diagnostic Center (LDDC) seeking to know if the tick—which he had removed from his leg earlier that morning—carried bacteria associated with Lyme disease. Having received treatment earlier that day from his local physician, he was directed to Westchester County’s most established walk-in clinic dedicated to treating Lyme disease and other tick-borne infections, and Dr. Wormser, the Center’s founder and director.

more or less likely for the bacteria to move into the blood from the skin, leading to systemic infection. He explains, “When you get a tick bite, the skin is the first to encounter the bacteria before it makes its way through the skin, into the blood and then disseminates to the different parts of the body. But sometimes that does not happen—the disease is never disseminated,” he explains. “I want to learn why there are patients who are infected with the same variety of bacteria for the same amount of time and one patient will have disseminated disease and the other will just have a localized infection in the area that was bitten.”

To find out, he took tissue samples from patients with disseminated Lyme disease and patients who had non-disseminated Lyme disease, harvested RNA, then mapped it to the human genome and the bacterial genome. “We looked at which genes were being expressed differently,” Mr. Wilson explains. The results of Mr. Wilson’s research are expected to be published this year.

REMEMBERING A WORLD-RENOWED RESEARCHER: Robert Nadelman, M.D.

Over the course of his career, the late Robert Nadelman, M.D., worked tirelessly to shed light on the clinical and laboratory manifestations of tick-borne diseases. As a world-renowned expert in the field, he authored hundreds of studies and was interviewed by countless national media outlets including NBC, Fox and The New York Times, to name a few.

On March 6, 2018, after more than 30 years of service to NYMC in his role as professor of medicine, the globally renowned researcher and well-loved educator and mentor, died at the age of 62. Soon after his students endeavored to find a way to honor the memory of their esteemed teacher.

“He was the epitome of the clinician scientist, a prolific researcher and a compassionate and skilled infectious diseases physician who was a dedicated mentor of young physicians-in-training, and a genuinely supportive colleague,” said Mary M. Petzke, Ph.D., assistant dean for medical student research and assistant professor of microbiology and immunology. “At the request of several students we decided to establish a summer research fellowship in Dr. Nadelman’s name to support summer research in infectious diseases by a rising second-year medical student,” Dr. Petzke said.

In May 2019, the inaugural Robert B. Nadelman Research Fellowship in Infectious Diseases was awarded to its very first recipient—Avery Wilson, School of Medicine Class of 2022. [Read more about Mr. Wilson’s research in the feature story].

“He was the epitome of the clinician scientist, a prolific researcher and a compassionate and skilled infectious diseases physician who was a dedicated mentor of young physicians-in-training, and a genuinely supportive colleague,” said Mary M. Petzke, Ph.D., assistant dean for medical student research and assistant professor of microbiology and immunology. “At the request of several students we decided to establish a summer research fellowship in Dr. Nadelman’s name to support summer research in infectious diseases by a rising second-year medical student,” Dr. Petzke said.

In May 2019, the inaugural Robert B. Nadelman Research Fellowship in Infectious Diseases was awarded to its very first recipient—Avery Wilson, School of Medicine Class of 2022. [Read more about Mr. Wilson’s research in the feature story].

“Through students like Mr. Wilson, we can continue to celebrate Dr. Nadelman’s remarkable life,” said Dr. Petzke.
One floor, two exceptional community-focused health care services. The location of New York Medical College’s (NYMC) new Family Health Center, just steps away from the Touro College of Dental Medicine’s (TCDM) dental health clinic, Touro Dental Health (TDH), symbolizes not only an innovative collaboration between these two distinguished institutions but also represents the heightened awareness between both professions of the intricate connections between oral health and systemic health.

The co-location of these clinics provides unprecedented opportunities for cross-discipline consults for patients, training for students and research collaboration for faculty. “I’ve been working toward an outpatient family medicine practice on campus for a decade,” says Lori Solomon, M.D. ’99, M.P.H. ’09, director of the Family Health Center, clinical associate professor and chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine. “To be able to support and partner with the dental school on this makes it all the more exciting.”
Researchers are still discovering the full extent to which oral health and systemic health are intertwined, but the connection is no longer in doubt. One of the pioneers in this field is Salomon Amar, D.D.S., Ph.D., professor of dental medicine at TCDM, professor of pharmacology and microbiology and immunology at NYMC, vice president for research at NYMC and senior vice president for research affairs for the Touro College and University System.

“We established circa 1996 that the mouth is the perfect reservoir for potential dissemination of bacteria into the system, especially with people who have advanced gum disease,” Dr. Amar says. “If the mouth is heavily infected, brushing pushes that bacteria on a regular basis into the bloodstream and beyond.”

Dr. Amar discovered a link between advanced gum disease and heart disease. “We’re still investigating whether the bacteria from the mouth causes an inflammation in the blood, which then aggravates existing arteriosclerosis, or if the bacteria itself lands in the heart and directly elevates the inflammatory response. The end result translates into advanced cardiovascular inflammation.”

He also documented a similar connection between advanced gum disease and aggravated rheumatoid arthritis. “The story repeats itself,” says Dr. Amar. “Either the bacteria itself or the elevation of inflammation in the bloodstream has an impact on the joints.”

Dr. Amar also made a surprising discovery among obese patients with advanced periodontal disease: They had an impaired immune response in response to infection. In one study, lean individuals were able to overcome influenza in about seven days. For obese individuals, it took three to four weeks to clear the infection. “It was the opposite situation of what we witnessed with cardiovascular inflammation,” he explains. “The periodontal disease, associated with obesity, prevented them from mounting a normal inflammatory reaction. As a result, the bacteria remained floating around their system completely unattended.”

This mouth-body connection has led to changes in how dentists and physicians approach patient care. “With these discoveries, the dental field has moved into a full partnership with the medical profession,” Dr. Amar says. “There are now questions on medical patient history forms about periodontal disease. Dental forms might ask about cardiovascular disease, diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis. There is greater awareness about this connection.”

I was ecstatic at the idea of having the Family Health Center next to Touro Dental Health. There are very few dental schools in the country that have incorporated a primary care health facility within a dental health care clinic. — Dr. Myers

A PERFECT PARTNERSHIP
Ronnie Myers, D.D.S., dean of TCDM, was already well acquainted with the mouth-body connection. Early in his academic dentistry career, he served as director of the General Practice Residency Program at Columbia University—Presbyterian Hospital.

“The connection between taking care of patients’ oral health and systemic health became part of my foundation,” he says. “So, I was ecstatic at the idea of having the Family Health Center next to Touro Dental Health. There are very few dental schools in the country that have incorporated a primary care health facility within a dental health care clinic. The fact we could educate our students right from the beginning about how primary care and oral health are so intertwined made the proposal a no-brainer. We didn’t need to give up much space in order to welcome a program that will bring inherently great results for all of our patients.”

Dr. Myers found a like-minded partner in Dr. Solomon. She, too, had previous experience with dental-medical collaboration in her career. For two years, she saw patients at a federally qualified health center in Connecticut that housed both a dental and medical clinic. “It was the first time I had a chance to collaborate with dentists,” she says. “I realized just how little I knew about oral health, its impact on overall health and how little the medical community addresses oral health. I recognized what a wonderful opportunity we had to provide both dental and medical services to our patients.”

A FULL SPECTRUM OF CARE
The opportunity to serve as director of a faculty-run family health center on the NYMC campus is “a dream come true,” says Dr. Solomon, an alumna of NYMC. “What drew me here as a student was a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to give students interested in primary care some early experience in the specialty. Having the Family Health Center on campus furthers that mission. It gives students an opportunity to see family care from an early stage.”

Open Monday through Friday, the Family Health Center takes appointments and walk-ins for a full spectrum of primary care and urgent care services for all ages. Both Dr. Solomon and her medical assistant are bilingual, making the center a welcome, comfortable point of service for Spanish-speaking patients. “In addition to community members, we’ve had a lot of students and staff who have been using our center, because it’s so convenient and close,” Dr. Solomon says. “It’s surprising how many people haven’t seen a physician in years, because the majority of primary care is now delivered by nurse practitioners and physician assistants.”

A typical rotation among the three exam rooms, one of which is wheelchair accessible, might include an EKG in one room, a Hepatitis B vaccine in another.
and pregnancy testing in the third. On another rotation, Dr. Solomon might provide an asthma treatment, administer a hearing test or conduct a hospital follow-up.

“I think the medical profession has been so focused on specialty high-tech care that we’ve forgotten what family medicine is,” says Dr. Solomon. “It’s seeing people through the transitions of their life, whether it’s marriage, planning a family or caring for people as they age. We’ve forgotten how important continuity of care and relationships are in managing a patient’s health.”

If a patient in either the Touro Dental Health clinic or the Family Health Center doesn’t have a relationship with a care provider, the centers provide direct referrals between them. “We have an incredibly strong bi-directional referral base,” says Dr. Myers. “If Dr. Solomon assesses that a patient needs oral health intervention to control their diabetes, she can send the patient to us. If we on the oral health side determine from a patient history and examination that an individual is pre-diabetic, we will send them to Dr. Solomon. Walking the person across the hall in either direction will hopefully impart better outcomes to the patient’s overall care.”

Soon after the Family Health Center opened, fourth-year dental student Abigail Schwartz took advantage of the adjacent center’s expertise to help a patient with elevated blood pressure. “He needed to get a medical clearance before we could treat him, but he hadn’t seen a physician in ten years,” Ms. Schwartz says. Previously, such patients would be referred to the emergency room or advised to find a physician. “Instead, we were able to walk him over to the Family Health Clinic that day and get him an appointment,” she says. “They diagnosed him with hypertension and they prescribed him medication to manage his blood pressure. He is now scheduled to come back to us for his dental appointment.”

Such cases involving a direct versus a handoff referral represent just one of many opportunities for cross-discipline research between NYMC and TCDM faculty. There is also a wealth of data that can be analyzed from the Touro Dental Health clinic’s intake forms, which evaluates five different risk assessments. “In addition to caries (cavity) risk and periodontal risk,” says Dr. Myers, “we screen patients for cancer, tobacco and obesity – all three of which directly impact a person’s overall health.”

MORE OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Both Drs. Myers and Solomon see much room for growth ahead in terms of not only collaboration and services, but also physical space. “The Family Health Center doesn’t have a huge footprint now, but we have room to expand,” says Dr. Solomon. “We planned for it.”

She envisions opening a student-run free clinic at the Family Health Center one evening each month. “Our current student-run clinic is in New York City in partnership with NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan. This would provide an additional opportunity for students right on campus to participate in service learning, where they’re doing community service, while at the same time learning medicine and how to help people navigate some of the other things that impact health, like insurance status and living conditions,” Dr. Solomon explains.

Dr. Myers is also working with NYMC to develop interprofessional programs to benefit both dental and medical students. “Our dental students will be able to be involved firsthand in the overall assessment of patients,” he says. “The medical students will, in turn, learn from our faculty and students about the head, neck and oral exam of our patients.”

Such collaboration, Dr. Solomon believes, is a hallmark of modern medicine. “Family medicine and the medical practice in general, has become very collaborative over the years,” she says. “It’s about multiple professions working together. For our students to see and take part in that collaboration between dental health and medical health gives them an opportunity to better understand how we’re part of a larger system.”
CHRISTIAN BOWERS, M.D., Lives to Save Lives

BY ANDREA KOTT, M.P.H.

The office that Christian Bowers, M.D., occupies is not typical. Instead of the classical collection of medical diplomas, his walls are adorned with college soccer trophies, his photo as an All-American forward and his four children’s artwork. Two framed etchings of the brain and a certificate from the Swedish Neuroscience Institute, whose insignia appears on his down jacket, are all that suggest his medical specialty. But it takes only a query about his choice to pursue a career in medicine instead of soccer for Dr. Bowers to expound on the passion he feels for his work as a neurosurgeon, professor and mentor, and the incomparable satisfaction he finds in performing lifesaving brain surgeries, leading clinical research to improve patient outcomes, and preparing medical students and residents to do the same.

Becoming a brain tumor surgeon wasn’t on Dr. Bowers’ radar growing up, first in Southern California, then in Seattle, and Salt Lake City. “I wasn’t that serious of a student,” he quips. He discovered the importance of access to health care in the surprising setting of Chicago’s South Side inner-city neighborhoods where he served two-years as a full-time Spanish-speaking missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints between his freshman and sophomore years of college. “I saw many immigrants without access to even the most basic health care needs, and it shocked me because I had never had to consider a world where that existed. That reality changed me forever and I realized that I really just wanted to help serve people who were in dire need of a skilled physician. My time in the South Side reinforced my calling was to help people as a doctor,” says the assistant professor of neurosurgery and associate program director of the neurosurgery residency program. He particularly wanted to help the underserved, an aspiration he fulfills at NYMC at his weekly neurosurgery clinic for charity care and underserved patients. “I grew up around affluence and materialism, and it helped me realize that when treating patients with life-threatening neurological conditions, it doesn’t matter what kind of car you drive or where you went to school or any of the superficial things that people spend their whole lives obsessing over.”

Dr. Bowers became passionate about neurosurgery at Georgetown University School of Medicine, where he graduated in 2009. He completed neurosurgical training at the University of Utah School of Medicine in Salt Lake City, and later, at the Swedish Neuroscience Institute, in Seattle, where he completed his skull base and brain tumor fellowship in 2017.

Neurosurgery fascinates him, but what move him most are his relationships with patients and families. “I love the human vulnerability aspect of neurosurgery and the unbreakable bond that is forged between my patients, their families and myself,” says Dr. Bowers, who is the medical director of neurosurgical oncology and a board-certified neurosurgical attending physician at Westchester Medical Center. “There is an extremely special relationship formed when you perform surgery on someone’s brain.”

Since completing his neurosurgical training, Dr. Bowers has built an already extensive record of accomplishments and publications. At NYMC, he introduced a minimally invasive approach to brain surgeries that uses a thin tube to excise deep-seeded lesions. For his work to develop a telehealth ICU protocol that uses algorithms to remotely track sedation levels of intubated patients, he won the prestigious 2019 Neurosurgery Research and Education Foundation (NREF) “Young Clinical Investigator Award.” This is conferred to only two neurosurgeons a year in the entire country. Moreover, he spearheaded a six-week neurosurgery summer clinical research elective that has exponentially increased medical student research and clinical participation in neurosurgery. “I want to give students an understanding of what clinical medicine is like while they are still plodding through their pre-clinical years in order to give them some hope for their future, and I want to bolster their resumes by teaching them how to do research and publish.”

Meanwhile, he oversees approximately 20 research projects, most focusing on frailty in elderly populations. “We do surgery on people who are 80 and 90 years old, many of whom have multiple medical problems and are on blood thinners,” he explains. “We want to maximize who we can operate on safely using minimally invasive techniques so that we can achieve better outcomes.”

Dr. Bowers always wanted to help people and, between his work as a neurosurgeon, teacher and mentor, he gets to do it every day. “I love the difference I get to make in people’s lives, and I genuinely love my job and coming to work every day.”

The Office of Communications, New York Medical College
Motivated by the knowledge that melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer—is 95 percent curable when detected early, Elizabeth D. Drugge, Ph.D., M.P.H. ’12, assistant professor in the Division of Epidemiology, Department of Public Health in the School of Health Sciences and Practice, is on a mission to improve early melanoma detection with time-lapse photography.

In November 2019, her efforts paid off, when the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology published her most recent study, “Correlation of Total Body Photography Frequency and Invasive Melanoma Depth.” That study suggests a recommendation for annual screening for those at high risk for melanoma and highlights the value of time-lapse photography as an aid to early detection. According to Dr. Drugge, this just scratches the surface of the work she hopes to accomplish in this area.

“There is not enough information on melanoma prevention,” she says. “The goal is to use the time-lapse photography to define melanoma growth rate to improve screening guidelines.”

When Dr. Drugge first came to New York Medical College (NYMC), it was to complete her postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Pharmacology in the lab of Michal Laniado Schwartzman, Ph.D., professor and now chair of the department. “This was a very exciting time in the discovery of the role of arachidonic acid metabolites. I remember rehearsing our presentations for a program project review in front of Sir John Vane, recipient of the Nobel Prize for his work on prostaglandins.”

Dr. Drugge’s experience in cell culture strengthened after her fellowship led first to a project culturing human adipocytes, then to subsequent research on skin cancer detection using time-lapse imaging, where she took the lead as the director for research. Intrigued by the challenges of clinical research, Dr. Drugge was driven to return to NYMC to earn a Master of Public Health degree in epidemiology in the School of Health Sciences and Practice.

Now, armed with expertise in epidemiology, pharmacology and dermatology, as well as experience in both clinical and bench research, Dr. Drugge says, “What excites me the most about this job is the interface between the basic sciences and public health. I’m inspired every time I get the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from the varied disciplines.” She is currently working with Nicholas R. Ferreri, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology and course director for molecular pharmacology, on his NIH-funded study aimed at exploring the mechanisms that regulate salt-sensitive hypertension in the kidney.

“Exciting things are happening in Dr. Ferreri’s lab where he had the great idea to explore his theories in humans,” she says. Having gained access to data and samples from the DASH-sodium trial, “We are trying to see if regulatory mechanisms identified in the mouse are also happening in the human.”

Yet, when asked to describe her proudest professional accomplishments, Dr. Drugge includes her work mentoring students from across many disciplines—from medical students and residents, to physical therapy and public health students, to basic science researchers. Students like Denise Serrano-Eanelli, Dr.P.H. ’19, whose doctoral project focused on the utility of the electronic Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST) end-of-life care in advanced care planning in New York State, and has presented this research to stakeholders. “Dr. Drugge guided me through the analysis, as we went through my entire dataset with a fine-tooth comb—helping me understand which tests were needed and putting my data through rigorous analysis,” Dr. Serrano-Eanelli says.

“Epidemiology is a giant ‘toolbox’ that can be used to analyze a lot of different things. Teaching students across different schools and programs to access this toolbox is one of the things I love most about my job,” Dr. Drugge explains. “The challenge is being able to help investigators understand the value of their results in the context of the quality of the data. When you get a great student who you can help dig into the data and then discover some interesting findings, the excitement is contagious, and rewards are endless.”
XIU-MIN LI, M.D., M.S., Studies the Potential of Medicinal Herbs to Treat Illness

BY ANDREA KOTT, M.P.H.

Pouches bulging with dried Chinese herbs crowd the shelves in the laboratory of Xiu-Min Li, M.D., M.S. There are tendrilled fritillary bulb, rhizomes and hundreds of other medicinal plants and flowers that are actively being investigated all over the world for their anti-inflammatory, anti-allergy, anti-cancer, anti-fungal and other therapeutic properties. “Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has been used in human beings for 2000 years,” says the ebullient Dr. Li, professor of microbiology and immunology and of otolaryngology at New York Medical College (NYMC) since 2018. “I have a database of 300 to 400 Chinese herbs. Some, like ginseng, ginger and cinnamon, are viewed as dietary supplements, but they also have significant medicinal functions.”

Dr. Li has harnessed the medicinal power of Chinese herbs since graduating from the Henan University of Chinese Medicine in Zhengzhou, China, in 1983. After completing a postdoctoral research fellowship in clinical allergy and immunology at The John Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1997, she became a founding faculty member of the Jaffe Food Allergy Institute at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. There, she began research into using botanical formulations to treat asthma and food allergies, especially in children, a population wherein prevalence is increasing.

Dr. Li observed an association between asthma and elevated levels of immunoglobulin E (IgE), the antibody that the immune system produces in response to an allergen, and the herbal medicines that could reduce abnormally elevated IgE. She also saw that IgE levels rose in response to certain foods, like peanuts, tree nuts, fish and eggs. “Peanut allergy accounts for the majority of fatal and near fatal adverse food reactions in the U.S., and at present, there is no satisfactory treatment,” Dr. Li says. “FAHF-2/EB-FAHF-2 is the first FDA-approved botanical investigational new drug (IND) under clinical trials for multiple persistent food allergy and the first botanical IND trial that includes children.” Additionally, Dr. Li is investigating biomarkers whose presence in children’s blood indicate food sensitivity and therefore might spare them the ordeal of clinical testing. “There’s no good diagnosis for food allergies other than triggering symptoms and monitoring reactions in the hospital,” she explained. “We have established a protocol in which we challenge cells in a test tube to see how biomarkers react.”

A widely published author who holds numerous patents, Dr. Li is board certified in herbolgy and acupuncture. She is also working on establishing a center for integrative medicine for immunology and wellness to support research on asthma, food allergy, eczema and other inflammatory conditions, including chronic pain and obesity. “I want my research to benefit my patients and other people’s patients,” she says. “People are suffering. They can’t wait 10 to 20 years for treatment. They need something safe and effective now.”
A legend among teachers of gross anatomy, he leaves students on the cusp of their medical careers with his scientific, ethical and philosophical wisdom.

For more than three decades, Matthew A. Pravetz, O.F.M., Ph.D. ‘88, was one of the first faculty members New York Medical College (NYMC) students encountered during their earliest days on campus. His big smile, soothing voice and calm demeanor made the fledgling students feel at ease as they anxiously embarked on their education. Now after 37 years of service to NYMC, Dr. Pravetz, who held the titles of professor of cell biology and anatomy, anatomy program director and assistant dean for basic sciences, retired on July 31, 2020, returning to his roots to assume a leadership position in the Order of Friars Minor. He will be fondly remembered by thousands of NYMC graduates as a beloved teacher, counselor and mentor, as well as the one who introduced them to their “first patients.”

THE EARLY YEARS

Dr. Pravetz entered the Franciscan Order, founded by St. Francis of Assisi, as a novice in 1964 while continuing his science studies at Saint Francis College in Brooklyn, New York, eventually earning master’s degrees in anatomy, biomedical ethics and cellular physiology. He decided to become a full-fledged priest in the order, and later decided to pursue his passion for teaching and received permission to pursue a Ph.D. full time in 1982.

During his graduate studies at NYMC he taught anatomy and neuroscience to students. The late Eugene Wenk, Ph.D. ’72, who directed the anatomy course at the time, saw tremendous potential in him and, upon his graduation, offered the newly minted Ph.D. the position of assistant professor and co-director of anatomy.

MAKING A MARK AT NYMC

Dr. Pravetz’ love for teaching students the fine art of the intricacies of the human body was rivaled only by his satisfaction of teaching them compassion and empathy. His impact went beyond just medical students. He was instrumental in the education of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (D.P.T.) and speech-language pathology (SLP) students in the School of Health Sciences and Practice and most recently students in the Touro College of Dental Medicine at NYMC. “Dr. Pravetz was instrumental in the design of the anatomy course for speech-language pathology when the program began. He was careful and deliberate in his work to ensure that the course provided the specific content needed for students in medical speech-language pathology,” says Kate Franklin, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, associate professor and chair of the Department of Speech-Language Pathology. “Everyone in our department has always appreciated his oversight and ongoing commitment to the education of our students.”

His influence went far beyond the anatomy lab and lecture hall as well. He chaired the steering committee of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for NYMC’s first accreditation and served as chair or co-chair for several accreditation cycles thereafter. He developed and taught the basic sciences component of the Faculty Practice In-Service Seminar Program, a continuing education program for health care providers, moderated the residency panel at the annual Student Physician Awareness Day (SPAD) and served on the School of Medicine (SOM) Admissions Committee and as an interviewer.

Dr. Pravetz got to know every new SOM class during the intense gross anatomy course during the first block of medical school. Each year a highlight of the SOM White Coat Ceremony was Dr. Pravetz’ talk “My Child—A Doctor?” While comforting and reassuring the audience of families...
and friends that their loved ones would not only survive but thrive in medical school, he also recounted the trials and tribulations of the young doctors-to-be. The crowd would delight and erupt in laughter as Dr. Pravetz—like a stand-up comedian—broke out his bag of props—textbooks, medical equipment and other daily accessories of a first-year medical student and stacked them high on the podium.

Dr. Pravetz’ connection to students continued long after the anatomy course ended. He officiated at least one marriage of students, every year—some years there were two. “In a few cases, I was ‘blamed’ for the wedding, since it was I who unwittingly assigned the future bride and groom to the same dissection table where they first met, and the rest became history,” he jokes. Dr. Pravetz also baptized many babies of students, faculty and staff.

**INNOVATOR AND VISIONARY**

Dr. Pravetz followed the Franciscan vow of living a life of simplicity, so perhaps it was divine intervention to make him one of the first faculty members to put his course material online at the dawn of the NYMC website. At the time, most faculty were reluctant to do so as they were unsure of the value of the novel technology called the Internet.

“As course director of anatomy and embryology, Matt Pravetz continued a tradition of excellence and implemented pioneering innovations that kept the course as one of the pillars at NYMC. His keen sense of humor and smile lightened the ambiance at any meeting, regardless of the size,” says longtime colleague and friend Kenneth M. Lerea, Ph.D., associate professor of cell biology and anatomy, assistant dean for master’s programs in the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences and course director for histology and cell biology. “Students will always remember his idioms during lectures, such as ‘this is cocktail party stuff,’ or my favorite, ‘almost always, except when it’s not.’ His teaching approach is masterful, effective and deeply appreciated by students and faculty.”

Joseph D. Etlinger, Ph.D., professor and chair of the Department of Cell Biology and Anatomy concurs. “Matt Pravetz has been one of the most beloved and respected professors at NYMC. We laugh because every year many of the student reviews of the anatomy course say ‘Dr. Pravetz is the best professor I ever had.’”

Dr. Pravetz was also responsible for bringing the Convocation of Thanks, an emotion-filled ceremony to honor the anatomical donors, to NYMC in 1989. But he is quick to point out how the students took ownership of the event to organize it each year with just some guidance from him. The annual spring tradition allows first-year medical students, and most recently, D.P.T., SLP and dental students, to express their gratitude through music, prose, poetry and art, to those who bequeathed their bodies to further the study of medicine. The standing-room-only event provides the audience of families and friends of the donors with closure, while students appreciate the opportunity to express their feelings about the individuals, respectfully referred to as their first patients.

Laura Rendine, administrator of the Department of Cell Biology and Anatomy, worked with Dr. Pravetz for more than 30 years as the coordinator for the Body Bequeathal Program. “Dr. Pravetz was always thoughtful, caring and encouraging. The Body Bequeathal Program is a very sensitive program and its success is due to Dr. Pravetz’ understanding and compassion for the donors’ families,” she says.

**HONORS, ACCLAMADES AND ADVICE**

Dr. Pravetz is a three-peat winner of the NYMC chapter of the American Medical Women’s Association Gender Equity Award for his efforts in promoting a gender-fair environment for the education and training of physicians and assuring equal opportunities for women and men to study and practice medicine. He is also a distinguished member of the Robert Goldstein Society, an honor reserved for faculty who have been honored with Excellence in Teaching Awards for more than ten years.

Just before his official retirement, during the 2020 virtual commencement ceremony, Dr. Pravetz was recognized with a Resolution of the Board of Trustees of NYMC thanking him for being a beloved teacher, counselor and mentor, to generations of students, faculty and staff, and wishing him Godspeed on the next chapter in his life’s journey.

Upon retirement, Dr. Pravetz earned the distinction of being named professor emeritus of cell biology and anatomy.

Dr. Etlinger sums it up by saying, “Matt Pravetz is one of a kind, being a Franciscan Friar and ordained Roman Catholic priest as well as an accomplished anatomist. This unique background may explain his success in combining a special humanistic approach to the teaching of our students.”

When asked if he would like to leave any words of wisdom for the NYMC community, Dr. Pravetz says, “NYMC has a long history of care and compassion for people at the margins of society. Do not ignore your vision of those living in the periphery.”
ALUMNI and DONOR Events

Founder’s Dinner 2019

New York Medical College (NYMC) hosted its annual Founder’s Dinner at the Surf Club on The Sound in New Rochelle, New York, on September 18, 2019. More than 325 College supporters gathered for a festive evening to celebrate NYMC’s proud history and promising future, honor distinguished community leaders and alumni for their impactful achievements. The event raised more than $400,000 for student scholarship and other important initiatives.

The gala honored: Robert A. Barish, M.D. ’79, M.B.A., with the William Cullen Bryant Award; Jean Marie Malecki, M.D. ’79, M.P.H., FACPM, with the Alfred B. DelBello Distinguished Service Award; and Ira D. Glick, M.D. ’61, with the Jackson E. Spears Award. The inaugural Distinguished Alumni Award was presented to Anton Bennett, Ph.D. ’93, who was selected for the honor by fellow alumni in the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of honorary Doctor of Science degrees to Regeneron co-founders Leonard S. Schleifer, M.D., Ph.D., president and chief executive officer, and George D. Yancopoulos, M.D., Ph.D., president and chief scientific officer. NYMC and Regeneron, a leading science and technology company, have been collaborative partners since the company’s founding in 1988. The synergy has resulted in NYMC students and faculty gaining invaluable access and exposure to efforts in human genetics, animal model development and drug discovery and development at Regeneron, while providing Regeneron access to NYMC resources including some of the brightest minds in academic biomedical sciences. Most recently the relationship resulted in NYMC and Regeneron partnering to develop a clinical drug trial to treat critically ill patients with COVID-19 at Westchester Medical Center.

Founder’s Dinner 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the 2020 Founder’s Dinner into a virtual event where the NYMC community gathered online to demonstrate their unwavering support on October 21, 2020. Leadership, inspiration and education, were the themes of the video viewed by College supporters, while a live chat feature kept the audience engaged with each other. The event honored distinguished community leaders and alumni and paid homage to the students and faculty on the frontline of the pandemic.

The virtual Founder’s Dinner raised more than $305,900 that will be used to ensure NYMC’s continued success in educating the next generation of physicians and health care providers and conducting lifesaving biomedical research. The presenting sponsors were the NYMC Board of Advisors, Boston Children’s Health Physicians and Westchester Medical Center.

The 2020 Founder’s Dinner recognized Mayor of New Rochelle, Noam Bramson and former New York Yankee, Mariano Rivera and his wife Clara Younce Rivera for their leadership and support of their community, New Rochelle, once a Coronavirus hot spot. The evening also paid tribute to Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D., principal deputy director of the National Institutes of Health; U.S. House Representative Nita M. Lowey; and all of the NYMC alumni and faculty members who have served or currently serve as health commissioners in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Other honors of the evening went to alumnus Ronald L. Arenson, M.D. ’70, chair emeritus of the Department of Radiology and Biomedical Imaging, University of California, San Francisco, who received the William Cullen Bryant Award, established to recognize those remarkable individuals who, in the tradition of the College’s founder, William Cullen Bryant, demonstrate seminal leadership in health care, science, education, business or the arts. Tiffany E. Channer, MPH, ’13, MLS (ASCP) CM, assistant administrative director of laboratories and quality manager, received the Distinguished Alumni Award, an honor that is voted for by fellow alumni in the School of Health Sciences and Practices.
In November 2019, more than 150 School of Medicine (SOM) alumni and their guests spent a weekend reminiscing with old friends and classmates at the SOM Annual Reunion. Members of the Classes of 1959 through 2014, reunited for an evening of dining, dancing and camaraderie followed by brunch and campus tours on Sunday. Special recognition was given to the Class of 1969 as they were presented with gold diplomas to celebrate their 50th anniversary of graduating from medical school. Judith Kupersmith, M.D. ‘69, and Joel Kupersmith, M.D. ‘64, were presented with Alumni Association Medals of Honor for their accomplished careers and their desires to inspire as physicians, mentors and leaders.

The 2020 SOM reunions were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but alumni still had a chance to gather virtually via Zoom reunions during the month of August. Each evening, members of the Classes of 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975A, 1975B, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2010 gathered online to share their latest news and recall stories about their medical school days. “It wasn’t the same as being together, but our alumni appreciated the opportunity to see each other virtually and share their personal stories and accomplishments with their classmates,” said Tara Alfano, director of alumni relations. “We hope to see everyone in 2021.”
Unlocking the Power of PTPs to Regulate Cell Behavior

BY KRISTIN BAIRD RATTINI

How do protein-tyrosine phosphatases (PTPs) regulate cell signaling pathways and lead to the development of disease? Those questions drive the work of Anton Bennett, Ph.D. ’93, the Dorys McConnell Duberg Professor of Pharmacology and Professor of Comparative Medicine at the Yale School of Medicine.

Throughout his tenure at Yale, Dr. Bennett has unlocked just how crucial of a role that PTPs play in cell function. “PTPs are a very highly regulated family of enzymes involved in modifying proteins,” he explains. “Those modifications allow enzymes in our body to be either switched on or off, and so PTPs control the ability of a cell to work properly. Understanding how PTPs are involved in switching enzymes on and off can lead us to knowledge about basic cellular functions, but it has also led us to uncover pathways in which these enzymes when dysfunctional can cause human disease. And what we’ve been able to do is connect those altered PTP functions to a variety of different human diseases such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.”

For example, he discovered that a particular PTP known as MAPK phosphatase 1 is overexpressed in individuals with obesity and type 2 diabetes. Using genetic knockout models in mice, Dr. Bennett eliminated the expression of MAPK phosphatase 1 and then fed the mice a high-fat diet. The mice no longer gained weight and their ability to respond to insulin improved significantly. “We’re now researching how we can target MAPK phosphatase 1 pharmacologically to come up with new therapeutic strategies for obesity and/or type 2 diabetes.”

He also discovered that mutations in a PTP known as SHP-2 lead to the activation of pathways in the heart that cause a congenital heart disease called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, or enlargement of the heart. “By identifying targets that SHP-2 interacts with, we can work out how to disable SHP-2 aberrant activity during development,” Dr. Bennett says.

During his decade as co-director of the Integrative Cell Signaling and Neurobiology of Metabolism Program at Yale, he has assembled a team of 12 faculty investigators from varied backgrounds to work toward a common goal: to understand the underpinnings of metabolism in health and disease. “We’re able to answer questions in
unique ways based upon our faculty members’ different perspectives,” he says.

In 2017, he won the Blavatnik Innovation Award, created to promote high-risk, high-reward projects. “That was a very proud moment,” he says. He is using his grant to develop new tools and compounds against MAPK phosphatases for the treatment of diseases, such as fibrosis. “Fibrotic tissue disease accounts for up to 40 percent of deaths worldwide,” he says. “But there aren’t many good treatments because it hits so many different types of tissue. So, this research is extremely high risk, but the impact could be huge if we are successful.”

Dr. Bennett also serves as director of Minority Affairs for the Graduate Program in Biological Biomedical Sciences at Yale. During his tenure, the program has doubled the number of underrepresented groups who enter the program and maintain an impressive retention rate of 90 percent. That role, as well as his recent recognition as NYMC’s first Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences Distinguished Alumni Award honoree, reinforce for him the vital importance of graduate education. “NYMC has done a really good job in training its graduate students,” he says. “By supporting the efforts of graduate education in the future, it can continue its excellence in biomedical research.”

MILESTONES
Alumni Achievements

STAY IN TOUCH
We would love to share your most recent news and accomplishments in the next issue of the Chironian. If you have any recent professional accomplishments or developments, published a book, or have any family news to share, please let us know.

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Connect with us on LinkedIn
Follow us on Instagram. @nymedcollege

The 10s

Zachary Ehrlich, M.P.H. ‘17, works for the New Jersey Department of Health as a registered environmental health inspector and manufactured food regulatory program standards coordinator and worked on the COVID-19 emergency team during the global pandemic. He was inducted into the Delta Omega Honorary Society in Public Health in May 2020 and received the Vincent R. Zurawski Award for meritorious contributions to the field by the New Jersey Environmental Health Association in March 2020.

Simone E. Edwards, M.P.H. ‘10, Dr.P.H. ‘15, was named director of Healthcare Management and Transformation, Special Projects at Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey. Dr. Edwards is a member of the board of the Empire State Medical Association, the state affiliate for the National Medical Association. She is a devout health care strategist, Master’s level professor, and mentor who works to champion diversity and inclusion in the health care field.

Lieutenant Junior Grade Taquanta Feely, M.P.H. ‘16, was commissioned in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps as an environmental health officer. She graduated from the USPHS Office Basic Course on July 19, 2019 and was assigned to the Indian Health Service in Phoenix, Arizona.
Medical Center, participated in the World Health Assembly at the World Health Organization in Geneva in May 2019, proposing a new resolution on emergency care which she co-wrote. The resolution was adopted with no amendment.

Akshat Jain M.D., (GME ’11), M.P.H., a faculty member at Loma Linda University School of Medicine and School of Public Health, established the first treatment program for sickle cell and hemophilia patients in the Inland Empire of Southern California. He is the recipient of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin 2020 Presidential Young Physician Award and a 2020 recipient of a 9th Principals and Teachers Award sponsored by Thar Santhana, Simply Jairp and Rajasthan Foundation.

Robert Donnarumma, M.D. ’10, M.P.H. ’20, was named chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at Saratoga Hospital in Saratoga Springs, New York, responsible for care at the hospital’s Alfred Z. Solomon Emergency Center and urgent care centers in Wilton and Queensbury. He also serves as medical director of the COVID-19 testing tent, the stroke program and the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program at Saratoga Hospital and serves as its representative on the Regional Medical Advisory Committee.

The 00s

Philippe Douyon, M.D. ’07, wrote Neuroplasticity: Your Brain’s Superpower, a motivational guide to inspire people to better understand their brains, improve their health and create the life they were meant to live.

ALUMNI PROFILE

Joanne Kurtzberg, M.D. ’76

A Pioneer in Cord Blood Transplants and Therapies

BY KRISTIN BAIRD RATTINI

Sometimes, game-changing scientific discoveries happen when you are looking for something else. Early in her medical career, Joanne Kurtzberg, M.D. ’76, was studying placental tissue to characterize a novel form of leukemia when she realized the cord blood stem cells contained within the samples held tremendous untapped potential. “The stem cells in cord blood were more potent, and of greater volume, than those in bone marrow,” she says.

That breakthrough was the first of many that have propelled Dr. Kurtzberg’s career as an internationally renowned expert in pediatric hematology, blood and marrow transplantation and umbilical cord blood banking. Throughout her tenure at the Duke University School of Medicine, she has championed novel applications of cord blood, particularly in the emerging fields of cellular therapies and regenerative medicine.

Dr. Kurtzberg’s study, which initially tended to focus solely on the area of leukemia research, led to great strides in the cord blood stem cells field. She was the first to describe CD7-positive leukemia, and she collaborated with Nobel Prize-winning biochemist Gertrude Elion to develop Nelarabine, a highly effective chemotherapy drug now routinely used for T-cell leukemia patients.

As her work on cord blood stem cells advanced, Dr. Kurtzberg discovered that donor cord blood does not have to be as close of a match as bone marrow for use in a transplant. “Cord blood ultimately became an alternative donor source for blood stem cells for transplant and has filled a niche for patients who didn’t have a matching donor through another route,” she says.

In 1998, she launched the Carolinas Cord Blood Bank, one of the world’s largest public cord blood banks. It currently has an inventory of about 45,000 units collected at 10 sites. “We’ve distributed close to 4,000 units for transplant to patients around the world,” she says.

Under Dr. Kurtzberg’s leadership, Duke established its renowned pediatric transplant program and pioneered transplants for children with inherited metabolic diseases that affect the brain. “We were the first to show that cord blood corrects these diseases if the transplant can be performed early enough in the course of the disease,” Dr. Kurtzberg says. “It has led me to be involved in policy for newborn screening, in the hopes that these diseases will be added to the roster for screening.”

As director of the Marcus Center for Cellular Cures, known as MC3, Dr. Kurtzberg continues to expand the boundaries of cord blood applications. MC3 brings together physicians and faculty across medicine and engineering at Duke to develop novel therapies.
Judith M. Watson, M.P.H. ‘07, was appointed chief executive officer of Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center, Inc., a federally qualified health center comprised of eight sites.


Jesse Pelletier, M.D. ‘03, is a founding team member of Halodine, an FDA-registered OTC drug designed by a team of physicians experienced in antiviral research to help prevent the transmission of infectious virus aerosols. Halodine has proven efficacy against SARS-CoV-2 and is administered to the nose and mouth before and after masking or other PPE physical barriers and is applicable for broad use as an additional layer of chemical protection at the source of COVID-19 infection whenever there is increased risk of exposure. It has been designated as a core intervention in the COVID-19 reduction efforts.

Scott T. LeRoy, M.S. ’97, M.P.H., is health officer for Caroline County, Maryland, where a new Mobile Health Care Services provides important addiction treatment to individuals in some of the most rural parts of the county, where there is limited transportation and access to care.

Gigi Weiss, M.S. ’97, director of rehabilitation services at RVNAhealth, received the 2019 Innovation Award by the Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home, given each year to an association member agency or individual who embraces change and consistently strives to use new methods and technologies to optimize home health, hospice or personal care delivery.

Shari B. Gold, M.P.H. ’96, is vice president of Quality and Patient Safety, at Bergen New Bridge Medical Center, in Paramus, New Jersey. She leads all aspects of quality and performance improvement, regulatory compliance, clinical risk management, and patient/resident safety for the 1,070-bed organization.

The Center has already published on its development of a cell called DUOC-01. The cell’s ability to remyelinate the brain in animal models holds promise for multiple sclerosis patients. The Center’s work on an infusion treatment for autism also has attracted significant attention. “We have lab data that shows we’ve suppressed neuroinflammation, and we’re hoping that will change behavior in autistic children,” Dr. Kurtzberg says.

Such advances were not in the realm of possibilities during Dr. Kurtzberg’s studies at New York Medical College (NYMC), where she gained her first exposure to transplants. “We didn’t even use the words ‘stem cell’ back then,” she says. As evidenced by her Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplant Consortium, Dr. Kurtzberg’s keen ability to identify and develop promising applications for cord blood stem cells continues to change the lives of pediatric patients around the world.

Most recently Dr. Kurtzberg is leading a clinical trial approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to determine if infusions of human cord tissue mesenchymal stromal cells (hCT-MSC) are safe to treat children with COVID-19 and Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) and can suppress the hyper-inflammatory response and positively impact the symptom course and duration, as well as the long-term effects of this life-threatening syndrome. The Department of Pediatrics at New York Medical College (NYMC) is one of three centers participating in the study.

Dr. Kurtzberg is also conducting a study involving the use of hCT-MSCs to treat adults with COVID-ARDS (acute respiratory distress syndrome), a serious and sometimes fatal complication of a COVID-19. The data is being collected as preliminary pilot data for a larger multicenter source comparison study comparing hCT-MSC to bone marrow-derived MSC.
a painful tumor of the skin. The conditions that can present as in recalling the 25 different created Philip R. Cohen, M.D. ’83, published in Critical Care Medicine. Jesse S. Greenblum, M.D. ’80, joined the clinical faculty at Florida State University College of Medicine full time in July 2019. Previously he was the medical director of Halifax Care for Women in Ormond Beach, Florida, following more than 30 years of private practice in obstetrics and gynecology on Amelia Island, Florida.

The 80s

Victor Sloan, M.D. ’89, and his daughter, An-lin, each received the New Jersey State Governor’s Award for Public Service. Dr. Sloan was recognized for serving as a volunteer faculty member in a rheumatology teaching clinic, at Rutgers–Robert Wood Johnson Medical School for the past 21 years. His daughter’s award was for raising $62,000 for enrichment programs for an orphanage in China.

Sam Stea, M.D. ’89, a physician and climate activist, wrote The Edge of Elsewhere, published in September 2020. It is set in a world reeling from ecological collapse and lacking color where a young trio discover a notebook that takes them back to New York City 1971. The group rediscovers the beauty of the natural world and fights to restore that beauty before time runs out.

Elizabeth M. Jaffe, M.D. ’85, the Dana and Albert “Cubby” Broccoli Professor of Oncology, Department of Oncology, and deputy director, Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, was elected to the National Academy of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

David Bleich, M.D. ’83, published his first book, The Diabetes LIFEMAP.

Philip R. Cohen, M.D. ’83, created a memory aid to assist clinicians in recalling the 25 different conditions that can present as a painful tumor of the skin. The acronym, “CALM HOG FLED PEN AND GETS BACK,” was inspired by the children’s book, Charlotte’s Web, and the paper he co-authored was published in Clinical, Cosmetic and Investigational Dermatology.

The 70s

Myles Pensak, M.D. ’78, received the Daniel Drake Medal, the highest honor awarded by the University of Cincinnati (UC) College of Medicine. The Drake Medal honors living alumni and faculty for outstanding achievements in biomedical science as evidenced by major significant contributions to medical research or for a distinguished career as a clinician-teacher. Dr. Pensak is the Helen Bernice Broidy Chair of the Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at the UC College of Medicine. He also is a professor of neurosurgery and holds additional leadership roles as senior associate dean for clinical affairs at the College of Medicine, CEO of UC Physicians and chief of physician services at UC Health.

John T. Repke, M.D. ’78, was honored by the Penn State University College of Medicine with the establishment of the John T. Repke, M.D., FACOG, Annual Lectureship in Maternal and Fetal Medicine. Dr. Repke was chair of Penn State’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology from 2002 until his retirement in 2017. He was the 1999 recipient of the New York Medical College Alumni Medal of Honor.

ALUMNI PROFILE

Jesse Rosenblatt, M.P.H. ’07
Parleys Hotel Expertise into Increased Patient Satisfaction

BY ANDREA KOTT, M.P.H.

The only way Jesse Rosenblatt, M.P.H. ’07, squeezes in an early-morning, hands-free phone call is while driving to one of the many skilled nursing homes that he oversees for CareRite Centers, state-of-the-art nursing and rehabilitation facilities.

Mr. Rosenblatt is the regional director of marketing and business development for CareRite’s New York/New Jersey Region. But as COVID-19 struck nursing homes, he donned a second hat, his licensed nursing home administrator’s hat—making extra sure that residents and staff are getting the care and support they need.

“I’ve been trying to keep everything as normal as possible in all of our facilities every single day during the pandemic to make sure that our residents are getting the best care,” says Mr. Rosenblatt, as he begins a day of traveling from Westchester County to Long Island to Brooklyn and back. “I’m reaching out to employees who are recovering from COVID to find out how they are doing, and how we can get them back to work as quickly and safely as possible so that patients don’t miss a beat in their care.”

He lives to help others. Mr. Rosenblatt began his career in the hotel industry after earning his bachelor’s in hospitality administration from Boston University. Then, he used his “hotelering” expertise to make sterile corporate environments more appealing places to work. It was Mr. Rosenblatt’s deep desire to help people that persuaded him to apply his hospitality know-how to patient care. “I really wanted to make a difference in people’s lives.”

Understanding that, when patients get the care they need, they do better; and, when providers know patients’ needs, they provide better care, Mr. Rosenblatt helps health care facilities achieve both. “Every health care facility wants to become a destination of choice,” he says. “Even health care facilities with the best clinical minds need a supporting cast that will support patients’ minds, bodies and spirits in order to be successful.”

One of his prior projects entailed improving emergency room care at Chilton Medical Center in Pompton Plains, New Jersey. In collaboration with the emergency department head and nursing staff, Mr. Rosenblatt instituted a system of informing patients of their care plans involving treatment, admittance or discharge, within 30 minutes of registration. “While they waited, the non-clinical staff made sure their needs were being met,” he
Explains. The result: the medical center earned a 99 percent percentile national ranking in patient satisfaction.

At CarePoint Health Hoboken University Medical Center, an affiliated clinical site of New York Medical College, he introduced nursing best practices like using whiteboards for sharing patient information to help raise the quality of care. Mr. Rosenblatt also implemented a noise reduction program, ‘Help Us Support Healing,’ to promote greater patient consideration.

To improve the quality of care for chemotherapy patients at NewYork-Presbyterian (NYP) Hospital, he replaced daily ice cream cups with easier-to-ingest milkshakes—pushing the hospital’s national patient satisfaction rating into the 99th percentile.

While at NYP, Mr. Rosenblatt earned his Master of Public Health from the School of Health Sciences and Practice (SHSP). “For every event going on in the world, there is a public health dimension that helps you to understand how you can help others,” says Mr. Rosenblatt, who recently joined the SHSP Alumni Leadership Council and sits on the executive board of Visiting Nurse Services in Westchester.

Mr. Rosenblatt has brought his skills and expertise to CareRite Centers. “I understand what it takes to partner with the best hospitals and am creating top clinical and specialized programs and building relationships with administration and physicians throughout the area,” he said. He also oversees the service dimension of every situation, which includes reducing hospitalizations and returning patients from rehabilitation to home as quickly as possible and with all the necessary services in place.

Looking back at his successful career, Mr. Rosenblatt credits the NYMC faculty and leaders who guided him, plus friends, family and co-workers. “I love making a difference in people’s lives.”

The 60 s

Glen Joshpe, M.D. '69, published a book, The Pack, an action-packed tale with suspense, murder and romance when an ex-SEAL comes across a stash belonging to the mob.

In 2019, Steve Berger, M.D. '67, M.P.H., published 430 books, 120,000 single-space pages, three million words, 229,000 linked references, 35,000 graphs in a series electronically generated from a massive database that follows the field of infectious diseases. All volumes are indexed (ISBN) and are updated yearly.

Richard Lefleur, M.D. '66, retired from NYU Langone as professor of surgery and radiology after 45 years. He is married with children and grandchildren. “I miss all my med school friends. It was a great four years from 1962 to 1966. I got a great medical education. It was tough at times, but a wonderful life afterwards,” he writes. “I just turned 80....imagine that! What an autobiography I could write.”

Robert Harwood, M.D. '62, is retired and living in Scottsdale, Arizona, and still enjoys the outdoors and hiking in the desert.

Michael Schlossberg, M.D. '62, writes “I have been fully retired for 19 years and live in Atlanta. My wife and I are still avid art collectors and specialize in master drawings and sculpture of the 18th, 19th and early 20th century. We have been included in the top 100 art collectors in the United States six times by Art & Antiques magazine. We spend one month in Paris every year, except this year due to COVID-19. We enjoy spending time with our children and grandchildren. My son is an M.D. and has a large medical practice in Athens, Georgia, a chip of the old block.”

Carl M. Marchetti, M.D. '60, was recently honored by the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America with the naming of the training room at the new National Scouting Museum at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. The room contains a display of significant events in his life both in scouting and as a medical leader. Dr. Marchetti recently retired as president of Meridian Practice Institute, a partner company of Meridian Health. He served as senior vice president of Medical Affairs at Jersey Shore University Medical Center for 26 years.
The 50s
Andrew Dadagian, M.D. ‘59, finally retired after 31 years of solo practice. He was also chief of ENT at St. Luke’s Hospital in Massachusetts. “Now I can fully enjoy my 11 grandchildren and my 40 plus years as a New England Patriots Season ticket holder. I’m not as fleet of foot but getting by with my wonderful wife, Barbara Davison, R.N., whom I met during my senior year at Flower and Fifth Avenue Hospital,” he writes.

Ronald J. Pion, M.D. ‘56, a pioneer in telemedicine and telehealth, offers strategic assistance to companies involved in the virtual practice of medicine and serves as an advisor to Zoom as well as to several health care investment capital firms. Having recognized at an early stage the benefits technology and new media bring to the practice of medicine, he became a pioneer in medical telecommunications and has worked in that area for more than 30 years. He served as a full-time medical correspondent for KNBC television in Los Angeles and founded the Hospital Satellite Network, the nation’s first daily satellite-delivered television service providing programming for hospital-based health professionals and patients. He co-developed and hosted a nationally syndicated, daily television series, “Group One Medical” and was host of “Milestones in Medicine,” a regular Sunday night feature of Lifetime Medical Television. Dr. Pion remains dedicated to facilitating learning on the part of patients and their families, assisting in disease prevention, health promotion and wellness enhancement.

The 40s
Jerrold Wheaton, M.D. ‘47, celebrated his 99th birthday and the publication of his autobiography, The View From The End Of The Road. “My publisher’s comment was that it reads more like fiction,” he writes.

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IN MEMORIAM

Alumni

Mary Gore, M.P.H. ’99, died on July 25, 2020. She was 74.

Khang N. Thai, M.D. ’93, died on July 9, 2019. He was 52.

Sarah O. Addo-Yobo, M.S. ’87, died on June 27, 2020. She was 80.

Craig W. Gordon, M.D. ’84, died on May 24, 2019. He was 62.

Adam Duhan, M.D. ’81, died on June 21, 2019. He was 68.

Edward J. Kirby, M.D. ’81, died on June 2, 2019. He was 64.

John Fiore, M.D. (GME ’79), died on February 8, 2019. He was 94.

William J. Dean, Jr., M.D. ’64, died on April 14, 1920. He was 79.

Edward J. Tracey, M.D. ’58, died on January 22, 2020. He was 92.

Robert P. Christmann, M.D. ’65, died on April 14, 1920. He was 79.

William J. Dean, Jr., M.D. ’64, died on January 9, 1996. He was 86.

Harvey M. Bloom, M.D. ’62, died on November 13, 2019.

Charles P. Cavaretta, M.D. ’61, died on May 17, 2019. He was 83.

Paul F. Cotter, M.D. ’61, died on June 8, 2019. He was 84.

Robert Gonshorek, M.D. ’61, died on August 9, 2020. He was 86.

Robert L. McGuire, M.D. ’61, died on April 10, 2019. He was 84.

David E. Williams, M.D. ’61, died on October 4, 2019. He was 86.

Louis J. Aventuro, M.D. ’60, died on October 26, 2019. He was 85.

James F. Castleman, M.D. ’60, died on December 23, 2019. He was 84.

Thomas E. Donnelly, M.D. ’60, died on January 24, 2020. He was 85.

Robert J. Fitzgerald, M.D. ’60, died on March 4, 2019. He was 84.

John R. Tomec, M.D. ’60, died on July 1, 2019. He was 87.

Richard E. Alpert, M.D. ’59, died on July 17, 2020. He was 87.

Stanley P. Filewicz, M.D. ’59, died on October 4, 2019. He was 85.

Richard W. Hale, M.D. ’59, died on April 3, 2020. He was 86.

Kenneth W. Lennox, M.D. ’59, died on February 19, 2020. He was 86.

Thomas C. Halliday, M.D. ’58, died on May 11, 2020. He was 86.

Donald K. Jones, M.D. ’58, died on June 25, 2019. He was 87.

John A. DeAngelis, M.D. ’57, died on August 12, 2019. He was 91.

Allen W. Fanslow, M.D. ’55, died on May 7, 2019. He was 90.

Dale V. Fardelmann, M.D. ’55, died on January 22, 2020. He was 92.

Francis J. Kane, M.D. ’53, died on August 3, 2020. He was 91.

Robert G. McManus, M.D. ’53, died on December 7, 2019. He was 92.

Marie T. Zipf, M.D. ’53, died on February 20, 2019. She was 92.

Earl L. Shook, M.D. ’52, died on September 8, 2020. He was 96.

John W. Carrier, M.D. ’51, died on October 8, 2020. He was 85.

Thomas E. Hales, M.B.A., former member of the Board of Trustees, died on September 14, 2020. He was 85.

Lawrence R. Shapiro, M.D., professor emeritus of pediatrics, died on November 20, 2018. He was 82.

Frank N. Traganos, Ph.D., professor emeritus of pathology, died on August 1, 2020. He was 74.

Guy Valiquette, M.D., associate professor of medicine, died on November 14, 2019. He was 71.

Robert E. Zickel, M.D., professor and chair of orthopedic surgery, died on June 9, 2020. He was 90.

Board of Trustees

Gerald W. Cunningham, M.B.A., former member of the Board of Trustees, died on September 14, 2020. He was 85.

Dr. Mark Hasten, chair of the Board of Trustees, died on February 28, 2020. He was 92.

Dora A. Sorell, M.D. (GME ’72), died on May 27, 2019. She was 97.

Ronald Gade, M.D. ’69, died on November 16, 2019. He was 75.

Joseph J. Fay, M.D. ’68, died on December 8, 2019. He was 82.


Robert P. Christmann, M.D. ’65, died on April 14, 1920. He was 79.

William J. Dean, Jr., M.D. ’64, died on January 9, 1996. He was 86.

Harvey M. Bloom, M.D. ’62, died on November 13, 2019.

Charles P. Cavaretta, M.D. ’61, died on May 17, 2019. He was 83.

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David E. Williams, M.D. ’61, died on October 4, 2019. He was 86.

Louis J. Aventuro, M.D. ’60, died on October 26, 2019. He was 85.

James F. Castleman, M.D. ’60, died on December 23, 2019. He was 84.

Faculty

Iradge Argani, M.D., professor emeritus of pathology, died on November 5, 2020. He was 91.

Hoo G. Chun, M.D., professor of medicine, died on June 13, 2020. He was 75.

Ronald J. Hagadus, M.D., clinical associate professor of ophthalmology, died on February 1, 2020. He was 93.

Shawn F. Manning, M.L.S., instructor of family and community medicine, died on January 8, 2020. He was 56.

Donald Orlic, Ph.D., professor of cell biology and anatomy who served as acting chair of the department from 1974 to 1976 and 1986 to 1988, died on January 19, 2019. He was 86.

Tamiko Sato, M.D., associate professor of cell biology and anatomy, died on February 22, 2019. She was 91.
NEW YORK MEDICAL COLLEGE REMEMBERS

Iradge Argani, M.D., Professor Emeritus of Pathology

Respected and beloved mentor, physician and researcher, Iradge Argani, M.D., professor emeritus of pathology at New York Medical College (NYMC), died on November 5, 2020 at the age of 91. Dr. Argani was also an attending pathologist and director of clinical pathology at Westchester Medical Center (WMC). He served as interim chair of the Department of Pathology from 2005 to 2009, retiring from his clinical pathology posts in 2005. Dr. Argani obtained his undergraduate medical education at the University of Tehran and completed his postgraduate education in the United States and Canada. At the age of 34, he was appointed chief of pathology and clinical laboratories and director of the Blood Bank at Fordham Hospital in the Bronx, with an appointment as guest investigator at the Rockefeller University, followed by directorships of pathology at St. Elizabeth Hospital and St. Claire’s Hospital and Health Center in Manhattan.

In 1965, Dr. Argani discovered the protein-secreting cells causing the macroglobulinemia in the leukemia-like blood disorder Waldenstrom, which was published in the journal Laboratory Investigation. Later he became director of the Blood Bank of Kings County Hospital and director of clinical pathology at State University of New York (SUNY) Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York, and was appointed associate clinical professor of pathology at the SUNY Downstate Medical Center College of Medicine.

Dr. Argani was a diplomat of the American Board of Pathology and held the distinction of being certified in hematology, immunohematology and blood banking, and anatomic and clinical pathology, as well as immunology and allergy by the American Boards of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics. In 1978, Dr. Argani joined NYMC as professor of clinical pathology and director of clinical pathology at WMC where he created a world-class clinical pathology service providing training for scores of residents, while pursuing his research interests in cystic fibrosis.

Dr. Argani was an exceptional teacher of pathology and was honored with teaching awards by virtually every graduating class he taught. In addition, two graduating medical school classes honored him by dedicating their yearbooks to him. In 1993, Dr. Argani was inducted into the Robert Goldstein, M.D., Society for exceptional faculty who have won excellence in teaching honors for ten consecutive years. He was a member of Alpha Omega Alpha, the honor medical society and a recipient of a Gold Certificate for Excellence in Teaching from the NYMC Department of Pathology and a medal and a certificate of distinguished service from Westchester County.

Gerald W. Cunningham, M.B.A., Former Member of the Board of Trustees

Astute business leader and loyal generous supporter of New York Medical College (NYMC), Gerald W. Cunningham, M.B.A., died on September 14, 2020, at the age of 85. He served as a member of the Board of Trustees from 1989 to 2009.

For more than 40 years, Mr. Cunningham operated one of the largest taxi fleets in New York City. He served as the president of the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade and was a confidant to many political and industry leaders. He was also active in the Mayor’s Committee on Water Conservation, the Advisory Council of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission and the Business Labor Working Group.

Mr. Cunningham was involved in numerous civic and charitable activities, including the former St. Clare’s Hospital and Health Center and Saint Agnes Hospital. In 1982 he received the Presidential Achievement Award and two years later was named “Man of the Year” by the New Rochelle Boys and Girls Club. In 2002 he received the NYMC William Cullen Bryant Award for distinguished leadership. He was a Knight of Malta.

Mr. Cunningham received his B.S. in economics and his M.B.A. from Cornell University and was honored with the 1986 Cornell Alumni Achievement Award. He served honorably as a Captain in the United States Air Force.

Ronald J. Hagadus, M.D., Clinical Associate Professor of Ophthalmology

Dedicated and caring ophthalmologist, Ronald J. Hagadus, M.D., clinical associate professor of ophthalmology, died February 1, 2020, at the age of 92. A longtime faculty member, Dr. Hagadus was on staff at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary and Westchester Medical Center and had private practices in Bedford Hills and New Rochelle, New York.

His distinguished career was marked by many honors and awards including the President’s Award for Outstanding Teaching and Dedicated Service from the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary. Dr. Hagadus was an honorary member of the Society of Ophthalmology of Poland, a recognition he received for his outstanding contributions to the advancement of Polish children with glaucoma.

A resident of Bedford Hills, New York, he served on the Town of Bedford Recreation and Parks Advisory Board and the Town of Bedford Veterans Advisory Committee. He was a former trustee of the Kosciuszko Foundation of New York.

Dr. Hagadus and his wife, Maria, who predeceased him in 2014, were regular guests each year at the School of Medicine Honors Day, where they proudly presented the James Matthew Hagadus, M.D., Good Physician Award of New York Medical College to a member of the graduating class. They established the award in 1986 in memory of their son, James M. Hagadus, M.D. ’84, who died of cancer when he was a resident. The award honors a School of Medicine graduate who, in addition to exhibiting academic achievement, demonstrates those special intangible qualities of compassion, sensitivity, intuition and independence of spirit and intellect that make a doctor “the good physician.”

Thomas E. Hales, M.B.A., Former Member of the Board of Trustees

Respected businessman, community leader and philanthropist Thomas E. Hales, M.B.A., died on October 8, 2020, at the age of 83. He served as a member of the Board of Trustees from 2000 to 2011. Mr. Hales will be remembered for his deep sense of commitment to the community.

Mr. Hales received his B.B.A. from Iona College, cum laude, and
his M.B.A. from Pace University. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Dominican College, which also named him Person of the Year in 2000.

Mr. Hales served in the U.S. Army Signal Corp. He began his career as a certified public accountant at Price Waterhouse & Co., and then founded Thomas E. Hales & Co., a regional accounting firm. Mr. Hales was chief executive officer of Image Maker, a photo finishing company, and Town & Country Liquors, the second largest wholesaler in Massachusetts.

As chairman, president and chief executive officer of Union State Bank, Mr. Hales is credited with establishing the firm as one of the Hudson Valley’s leading financial institutions that was listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

A grateful recipient of a double-lung transplant in 2007, he was an avid supporter of Donate Life and advocated for opt-out organ donation in New York State.

Mr. Hales has spearheaded numerous philanthropic activities contributing to numerous organizations. In 2009, his generous donation funded the renovation of the Basic Sciences Building lobby which is named the Thomas E. and Alice Marie Hales Lobby in honor of him and his wife.

Mr. Hales’ humanitarian efforts and outstanding contributions were widely recognized. He received the 1999 Corporate Citizen Award from the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs of New Rochelle; Iona College’s Trustees Award in 2000; the prestigious Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2003; the Westchester County Business Journal’s Business Leader of the Year Award in 2004; the William Cullen Bryant Award from New York Medical College for distinguished leadership in 2008; and the John F. Heimerdinger lifetime of service award from Westchester Medical Center in 2017.

Lawrence R. Shapiro, M.D., Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics

Highly respected pioneer in the field of genetics, Lawrence R. Shapiro, M.D., professor emeritus of pediatrics, died on November 20, 2018, at the age of 82. Dr. Shapiro began his career at New York Medical College (NYMC) in 1975 when he was appointed to the faculty of the School of Medicine. One year after his appointment, he was called upon to create the Division of Medical Genetics at NYMC and Westchester Medical Center.

In Dr. Shapiro’s ten years serving as director of medical genetics, he developed a clinical genetics program that grew to satellite outreach in seven counties of the lower Hudson Valley. He also served as director of the Regional Medical Genetics Laboratory at Letchworth Village, a residential institution in Rockland County, New York, for the physically and mentally disabled of all ages.

Dr. Shapiro was a pioneer in research on Fragile-X syndrome. His instrumental findings included some of the first prenatal diagnoses of the syndrome.

He was named to Castle Connolly’s Top Doctors and New York Magazine’s Best Physicians consecutively from 2001-2013. Contributing to numerous textbooks, editorials and peer-reviewed literature, Dr. Shapiro served as medical advisor for many boards and was a member of several multiple committees at the local, state and national level.

Incredibly passionate about his work, Dr. Shapiro was not idle even in retirement, working part-time as a clinical geneticist for the Center for Breast Health at Good Samaritan Hospital in Suffern, New York. Through teaching students and caring for his patients, he always maintained a sense of humor.

Frank N. Traganos, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Pathology

Distinguished and prolific researcher, Frank N. Traganos, Ph.D., professor emeritus of pathology, died on August 1, 2020, at the age of 74. Having joined the New York Medical College (NYMC) faculty in 1991, Dr. Traganos retired in 2014 holding appointments in pathology, microbiology and immunology and in medicine. Prior to joining NYMC, he worked at Sloan-Kettering Institute in New York City for two decades in the field of cytometry and its application to cancer research.

At NYMC, Dr. Traganos also served as associate director of the Brander Cancer Research Institute, founded to help scientists study the basic mechanisms involved in control of cell proliferation, DNA repair and cell death as they relate to the differences between normal and cancer cells—and was manager of the cytometry core facility.

Always very active in both teaching and administration in the Master’s and Ph.D. programs in the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences, Dr. Traganos authored or co-authored more than 250 research reports, reviews and book chapters in scientific journals and publications in his areas of interest, including the cell biology-study of mechanisms involved in control of cell cycle progression and cell death in model systems and clinical material.

Robert E. Zickel, M.D., Former Professor and Chair of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery

Devoted and esteemed teacher and mentor, Robert E. Zickel, M.D., professor and chair of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery from 1995 until his retirement in 2001, died on June 9, 2020, at the age of 90.

Prior to joining the New York Medical College faculty in 1995, Dr. Zickel was a clinical professor of orthopedics at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, director of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center and former chair of the orthopedic section of the New York Academy of Medicine.

A veteran of the Korean War, he was deployed in 1953 as an officer with the 515th Ordnance Company. Dr. Zickel was promoted to 1st Lieutenant before being deactivated in 1954 and continued to serve in the U.S. Army Reserve until his honorable discharge in 1957.

He was nationally recognized for designing and patenting the Zickel Supracondylar Femoral Nail, a device to repair fractures of the femur. Dr. Zickel was a member of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons and the American Orthopedic Association.
Through Giving, Vincent Vigorita, M.D. ’76, Walks in His Father’s Footsteps

“I come from a culture of giving,” says Vincent Vigorita, M.D. ’76, a generous and steadfast benefactor of New York Medical College (NYMC), whose $50,000 donation to the School of Medicine’s (SOM) 2018 Day of Giving was one of many gifts that he has made since graduation. Dr. Vigorita attributes his philanthropic mindset to the core values instilled by his parents, which were deeply ingrained in him and his three siblings. “My parents believed it was extremely important not to take anything for granted and to give back.”

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Dr. Vigorita attributes his actions to the deep concern for others that his parents modeled. “My mother gave her whole life selflessly and lovingly to her children and their friends,” he says. “But the most important reason for my giving to NYMC is to sustain the memory of my father who was an exceptional human being.”

Dr. Vigorita’s father, John L. Vigorita, M.D. ’44, was a successful surgeon in private practice in Manhattan with his wife as his office manager. But he reached beyond a comfortable life and medical practice to contribute more. “Dad had a successful solo practice and four kids in college when, in the middle of his career in 1970, he got up and went to Vietnam as a volunteer physician for four months,” Dr. Vigorita recounts. “All of Vietnam was ravaged by war and needed doctors. My father could have been killed any day he was there, but he felt committed to helping people in distress. I was at Williams College at the time demonstrating against the war, and he was half-way around the world surgically removing shrapnel from injured Vietnamese civilians.”

The example that his father set has influenced Dr. Vigorita’s every contribution to NYMC, and there have been many, most notably his 2018 Day of Giving donation—the campaign’s largest gift—which established the John L. Vigorita, M.D. ’44 Memorial Scholarship. He made a similar gift several years earlier, which named an examining room in the Clinical Skills and Simulation Center for his father. In addition, he and his wife Patricia hosted a NYMC SOM Alumni Association gathering at their Amagansett, New York, home in the summer of 2017. Dr. Vigorita sits on the SOM admissions committee and is a member of the Board of Advisors.

Widely recognized for his clinical and academic achievements, Dr. Vigorita feels grateful for—and has given generously to—all of his alma maters, including Poly Prep Country Day School in Brooklyn, where he was chair of the Board of Trustees for many years and Williams College in Massachusetts. He says, the experiences and education he received at each school played a significant role in helping him prepare for medical school. Yet, he expresses his deepest appreciation for the College. “NYMC gave me the opportunity to become a physician and I will never forget that.”

He credits his first-rate medical education at NYMC for propelling him into his residency at The Johns Hopkins Hospital and his fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan. “The education I got at NYMC was superb,” he says. “My clinical rotations at Metropolitan Hospital, Westchester Medical Center and Flower-Fifth Avenue Hospital were exceptional in the exposure it gave me to all types of patients and illnesses.” His professors at NYMC were also exceptional, he adds. “I quote many of them to this day when I give lectures,” says Dr. Vigorita, who is a professor of pathology and orthopaedic surgery at the SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, has published more than 90 papers in peer-reviewed journals, and whose textbook Orthopaedic Pathology (Wolters Kluwer) is in its third edition. His books have been reviewed favorably in The New England Journal of Medicine, the Journal of the American Medical Association, and the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery.

Of all Dr. Vigorita’s gifts to NYMC, the scholarship in his father’s name holds particular importance, given the serious challenges that exorbitant medical school costs and debt pose to most students. “Undergraduates are already coming out of college with debt and face significant additional debt for medical school,” he notes.

Yet, he is optimistic about the future of medicine and of NYMC. “I wouldn’t be actively engaged at NYMC if I thought the school was not focused on the right things,” he says. “I’m very pleased with what Dr. [Edward C.] Halperin has done with the College, including his efforts to increase diversity and his successful efforts illuminating the great history of the College, which includes moving beyond prejudices that discriminated against women, African-Americans, Jews and Italian-Americans like my father. The school is in solid hands with the Touro College and University System,” he says.

Through his giving, Dr. Vigorita is delighted to support the College and future generations of physicians, and most importantly, to memorialize his father. “My wife and I feel very fortunate to have the means to contribute to NYMC in his memory.”
Carol L. Karmen, M.D., Honors Her Father’s Legacy
With the Arthur Karmen, M.D., Award for Outstanding Scientific Research

BY ANDREA KOTT, M.P.H.

One patient has a curious infection. One has a coyote bite. Another needs to talk. For internist Carol L. Karmen, M.D., each case is an opportunity to care. For the students she mentors, each case is an opportunity to research and learn.

Ever since her undergraduate days at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, where she spearheaded a study on bilirubin toxicity in newborns, Carol Karmen has loved research. At New York Medical College (NYMC), she is a well-known champion of student research and mentorship, passions she inherited from her late father, Arthur Karmen, M.D., in whose honor she has established the Arthur Karmen, M.D., Award for Outstanding Scientific Research, which she presented for the first time at the 24th Annual Medical Student Research Forum in 2020.

“Throughout his career, my father mentored students, colleagues, lab techs, anyone who would come to him asking to participate in research,” said Dr. Karmen, who presented the inaugural award to Jacob Hehir and Nadera Rahman, members of the School of Medicine (SOM) Class of 2022, for their project, “Differences in Vestibulo-Ocular Reflex Measured During Rotary Chair Testing of Patients with Vestibular Migraine vs. Vestibular Neuritis/Labyrinthitis.” “My father considered mentoring his most important role, and he would be thrilled to see that we are helping medical students accomplish their goals,” she said.

Her father would also be pleased to know how much the Karmen award winners, like Nadera Rahman, value research. “Contributing to scientific advances and research projects that translate into how we care for patients and improve their quality of life is something I am very passionate about and deeply committed to pursuing, which made receiving this award all the more meaningful,” Ms. Rahman said.

A devoted physician, scientist and educator, Arthur Karmen, M.D., graduated from what is now the New York University (NYU) Grossman School of Medicine, and went on to work at some of the country’s most prestigious research institutions, including the National Heart Institute of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). From the NIH, he moved to Johns Hopkins University, where he continued his work in nuclear medicine. He then became NYU’s director of clinical laboratories, and later, the first chair of the Department of Laboratory Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, where he retired as professor emeritus in 2012 at the age of 82.

“He was brilliant,” Dr. Karmen said of her father, who may be best known for identifying the enzyme glutamic-oxaloacetic transaminase (SGOT/AST) that is released into the blood following a heart attack, when he was just a third-year, 22-year-old medical student. “He was provided with an empty laboratory and a $200 stipend, but obstacles and lack of funding did not stop him from ultimately making his seminal contribution to the field of medicine,” she said. His assay in cardiac and liver disease, with minor modifications, is still used in laboratory testing worldwide. He also holds several patents including a patent for a re-capable needle. As chair of the Department of Laboratory Medicine, he pushed for the automation of blood analyses. “He worked tirelessly to improve clinical laboratory testing through automated methods to expedite testing and reduce cost,” she said.

Following in her father’s footsteps, Dr. Karmen, professor of medicine, who just celebrated her 30th year as a faculty member at NYMC, has received numerous faculty appreciation awards from students. On any given day at Westchester Medical Center, third-year medical students shadow her during their medicine clerkship. She prepares students for the detective work of primary care by challenging them to research questions that inevitably arise during clinical encounters. “Every clinical problem presents a question,” she explained. “If there’s something that brings up a question, then the information is likely to be of value to other internists. We should always be searching for answers to improve medical care.”

A devoted mentor like her dad, Dr. Karmen offers students various opportunities to conduct research. She creates some of these opportunities by drawing on patient visits to produce “clinical vignettes,” which students investigate in their efforts to answer important medical questions. For example, after examining a patient who sustained a coyote bite in his backyard, Dr. Karmen directed students to research internists’ overall knowledge about the prophylaxis for rabies. “Do we understand what we’re supposed to do when someone is bitten by a wild animal?” she asked. “What’s going on in suburban environments that we have coyotes running around in our backyards?”

Last summer, three of Dr. Karmen’s mentees took advantage of the opportunity to help her research and write a chapter in a textbook, by Rifat Latifi, M.D., professor and chair of the Department of Surgery, on the role of the primary care physician in caring for elderly patients requiring emergency surgery. “Medical students
usually do not get the chance to write book chapters,” Dr. Karmen said. “We met every week over the summer and made outlines and assignments. Each student wrote a section.”

One such student was Patrick Kennedy, M.D. ’20, who is completing his residency in radiology. “Working on this chapter introduced me to the world of research and gave me a lot more confidence,” Mr. Kennedy said. “Now I feel more comfortable taking on other research projects. I would also like to be a mentor like Dr. Karmen and help other students in the future.”

Dr. Karmen brought eight medical students to the annual Society of General Internal Medicine Mid-Atlantic States meeting in Pittsburgh, where they presented posters, gave presentations and answered questions about their research—essential preparation for residency interviews. “Application for residency is no longer just about grades and test scores,” she said. “Programs want to know what sort of scholarly activity, projects and research a student did in medical school. One of my students told me that he was asked about his research in each and every residency interview.”

Nothing makes Dr. Karmen happier. “Mentoring students and knowing that I’ve helped them gives me tremendous satisfaction,” she said. It also gives her another way of honoring her father’s legacy. “When I walk into the office every morning, the students are waiting for me and my colleagues to teach them something. I feel very strongly about that responsibility.”

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Assuming the presidency of the School of Medicine (SOM) Alumni Association is a role Joseph L. Giamelli, M.D. ’02, has been preparing for since his days as a medical student at New York Medical College (NYMC). After earning his Bachelor of Science degree from Manhattan College in Riverdale, New York, he became an actively engaged medical student at NYMC for four years and his involvement has never wavered. He has been an active member of the SOM Alumni Board of Governors since his graduation including several executive positions—most recently vice president.

Dr. Giamelli, a pediatric cardiologist, succeeds Charles W. Episalla, M.D. ’88, M.S. ’87, who served as president for four years. In addition to serving as president of the SOM Alumni Association, a role he assumed on July 1, 2020, for a two-year term, Dr. Giamelli is currently associate professor of pediatrics and house advisory dean for the SOM, providing mentorship and guidance for medical students throughout their tenure at NYMC and beyond.

While a medical student at NYMC, he served as a senator in the SOM Student Senate for four years and was president of the Student Senate during his fourth year when the Senate’s priority was revitalizing the SOM honor code. He was selected to be the student speaker at the 2000 Academic Convocation and served as chair of the phonathon for the first alumni endowed scholarship campaign.

At graduation, he received the William Cullen Bryant Award, presented annually by the NYMC Board of Trustees to a graduate who achieved a distinguished academic record and contributed outstanding service to the College community and student body, a Cor et Manu award for excellence in leadership and community service, and the Dr. Lester J. Schultz Memorial Scholarship for academic achievement. In 2019, Dr. Giamelli was inducted into Alpha Omega Alpha, the national medical honor society, as an alumni inductee.

He completed his residency in pediatrics and was chief resident at Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital at Westchester Medical Center, followed by a three-year pediatric cardiology fellowship at Cohen Children’s Hospital/Northwell Health. Dr. Giamelli then furthered his knowledge and skills as a senior fellow, at Boston Children’s Hospital, where he assisted in various complex cardiac procedures in the field of cardiac catheterization and intervention. After completion of his sub-specialty training, he joined Boston Children’s Health Physicians, to provide skilled patient care and services in the areas of pediatric cardiology and cardiac intervention.

Dr. Giamelli provides pediatric cardiology consultation services and outpatient clinical care throughout the Hudson Valley and lower Connecticut and continues to share his expertise at Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital, where he is a vital contributor to pediatric inpatient and intensive care using interventional procedures and the latest technology to provide cutting edge care for the smallest and sickest of patients.

He volunteers and dedicates his time in the surrounding community to promote pediatric and cardiovascular health awareness. Dr. Giamelli is currently the president of the board of directors on the American Heart Association –Westchester County/Hudson Valley Regional Board to increase awareness and prevention strategies for adults with heart disease and children with congenital heart defects.

Dr. Giamelli is ready to take on the challenges the SOM Alumni Association will face during this difficult time. “In an era where clinical interaction and involvement are a major resource for our students, the pandemic has drastically reduced their options. First- and second-year medical students are still unable to shadow physicians in their practices or in a hospital. It has been especially difficult for our fourth-year medical students who have taken on the new normal of Zoom interviews and tours for the residency application process,” explains Dr. Giamelli. “Moving forward we want to continue to provide financial funds for scholarships and additional resources for our students to adapt to these new times.” The Alumni Association is finalizing the donation of their pledged $100,000 scholarship fund.

The SOM Alumni Association will also shift its focus to provide easier access to the wealth of alumni specialties. They are hosting several specialty Zoom sessions with panels of alumni and students. “For fourth–year medical students who are unable to visit their future residency programs, we are hoping to connect them with our alumni at these sites via Zoom so they can feel more comfortable asking the difficult questions and gather more information about the residency program,” says Dr. Giamelli. “The Alumni Association remains committed to serving as a supportive community to our alumni as well as our future alumni.”
Adam E. Block, Ph.D., assistant professor of public health, partnered with his wife, Lauren Block, M.D., M.P.H., a primary care physician at Northwell Health and an associate professor at the Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell, to create *Kelly Stays Home: The Science of Coronavirus*, a free e-book to educate children ages 5 to 12 about the science behind the COVID-19 pandemic and ease their anxiety about it. They followed up with *Kelly Goes Back to School: More Science on Coronavirus* to help families transition back to school and *Kelly Gets a Vaccine: How We Beat Coronavirus*, to explain how vaccines work and how they will help stop the pandemic.

In early summer, NYMC hosted a free community webinar: *Summer Camp: Is It Safe, Yet?*, part of the “Meet the Doctors” series. Moderated by Jennifer Rickert, M.B.A, vice president of communications and strategic initiatives, panelists Robert W. Amler, M.D., M.B.A., dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice and vice president of Government Affairs, and Peter DeLucia, M.P.A., assistant commissioner of the Bureau of Public Health Protection for the Westchester County Department of Health, provided insight into the new safety protocols put in place to keep campers safe.

On two occasions during the heart of the crisis, the Center for Disaster Medicine hosted New York State Governor Andrew M. Cuomo’s daily press briefings on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Albert Kwon, M.D., assistant professor of anesthesiology, was part of a team of MIT engineers and physicians who developed Spiro Wave, a bridge device that offers key ventilation functions to help less critically ill patients breathe, so health care facilities can better ration their ICU ventilators. The inexpensive alternative for ventilation, which automates the standard manual process of squeezing by hand an emergency resuscitator bag or Ambu bag, obtained FDA Emergency Use Authorization.

A group of medical students led by Katherine French and Alessandra Piscina, members of the School of Medicine Class of 2022, developed an online resource guide for Westchester County. The live document, available in English and Spanish, is a centralized location for laypersons to learn about COVID-19 and the social resources available including food banks, childcare services, housing resources, employment information, resources for specific communities—such as health care providers, people with disabilities, senior citizens, undocumented immigrants, and others—as well as domestic/sexual violence resources and mental health services.
Lillian Huang, an M.S. candidate in the Basic Medical Sciences Program in the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences, spearheaded a personal protective equipment (PPE) collection drive to donate to Westchester Medical Center, White Plains Hospital, NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan and Brookdale University Hospital and Medical Center. Her efforts were a success thanks to the support of the local community including residents, hotels, nail salons, tattoo parlors and construction companies.

Robert W. Amler, M.D., M.B.A., dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice and vice president for government affairs, who is a former regional health administrator at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and former chief medical officer at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, quickly established himself as a leading voice in public health during the pandemic and was sought out as an expert by hundreds of media outlets reaching millions of readers and viewers worldwide.

In early March, Robert W. Amler, M.D., M.B.A., dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice and vice president for government affairs, and George W. Contreras, M.P.H., M.S., M.E.P., CEM, FAcEM, assistant director of the Center for Disaster Medicine and assistant professor in the Institute of Public Health, were guests on The Dr. Oz Show to demonstrate N95 face mask fitting and sensitivity testing.

More than 100 students from the School of Medicine Class of 2020 graduated early, beginning their medical careers early to provide much needed medical support to the over-taxed hospitals facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shreya Makkapati, SOM Class 2021, rallied the NYMC community to participate in Mask Transit, a grassroots organization that distributes masks and educational material about mask hygiene to vulnerable populations. She is co-director of the New York City chapter and donation chair for the Boston chapter of Mask Transit, which continues to expand and has chapters in ten states and has distributed more than 70,000 masks.
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Water, by its very nature, ebbs, flows, and conforms to its surrounding; it can exist as a single drop or merge seamlessly into great oceans of force. A wave at its tipping point encapsulates all phases of water from a vague mist to the vast blue void of the endless sea. *Tipping Point* was created during respite periods while studying for the United States Medical Licensing Examination Step 1. This dedicated time challenges students to learn an ocean’s worth of knowledge while testing their grit, resiliency and dedication. To an outside observer, most students are calmly working at their studies, yet strong forces of emotion toll beneath the surface.

*Tipping Point* by Jamie Rojas, School of Medicine Class of 2022, *Oil paint on canvas*