

Message from the Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs



This issue of *Medicine at Michigan* emphasizes our commitment to excellence in teaching of medical students and house officers and mentoring of Medical School faculty. A particularly effective initiative is the Medical Education Scholars Program, which has enabled 12 faculty from diverse fields each year to develop innovative projects and personal evaluative skills with guidance from faculty and staff in the Department of Medical Education.

On the research side, we highlight stem cell research, as President Bush did for the nation on August 9, 2001, which seems so long ago now. From neuronal cell differentiation and organogenesis to pediatrics, hematology, anesthesiology and oncology, prominent U-M researchers are at the forefront of stem cell research. Such research is embedded in our University-wide Life Sciences Initiative, which will make the terms “genomics,” “proteomics,” and “bioinformatics” familiar to physicians and the public in the decade ahead.

In this context, I presented the winter commencement address at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids on December 8, 2001, about life sciences developments in the state and at the U-M. After recognizing the origins of Grand Valley State University in the tumultuous 1960s, I used the 1968 movie *The Graduate* as a touchstone for today. As you may recall, to Dustin Hoffman’s question about what he should do with his life came the answer, “plastics...the future is in plastics!” Well, for the graduates of 2001, this speaker responded that “the future is in genomics” — embracing scientific, medical, and public health applications of new knowledge about genes and proteins, and the social and ethical contexts.

In April we will break ground for the Biomedical Sciences Research Building (see page 12). Across Huron Street are the Life Sciences Institute and its associated buildings, due to open in mid-2003. In the meantime we are utilizing our present research space intensively, thanks to the success of our faculty in markedly increasing research grant support for their ideas and programs.

We have similarly bold plans for the expansion of our clinical facilities — including ambulatory and major surgery suites, clinics and support areas; the Cardiovascular Center; a replacement children’s and women’s hospital; the Depression Center; and expansion of the Kellogg Eye Center.

Our physicians, nurses and staff continue to enhance the quality and patient-centeredness of clinical care, and our top-rated M-CARE HMO has managed to stay ahead of the curve in dealing with the challenging pressures from payors. No one knows what the health care policy framework may be just a few years from now — but it is most unlikely that the taxpayers and corporations who pay for the vast majority of health-care services will permit the open-ended patient and physician choices that have emerged from the broad attack on HMOs and “managed cost” (it was hardly

“managed care” most places). The pendulum is likely to swing back to cost containment in the face of costly new drugs, an aging population, and the need to cover the uninsured, all raising expectations for our services.

On a personal note, I want to share with you my letter of December 17, 2001, to President Bollinger on the occasion of our joint announcement that I will step down as executive vice president of medical affairs at the end of July 2002.

“Dear Lee—

As we have discussed, it is wise to take stock periodically during one’s career and life. I am well into my fifth year as the University’s first EVPMA, truly a full-immersion role. You and I and our many colleagues have accomplished essentially all of the major initiatives we laid out at the start in 1997: enhancing the academic base in the Medical School, creating the vision of the University of Michigan Health System, assuring excellent financial stewardship and creative leadership of the Hospitals and Health Centers, M-CARE, and the Medical School, and greatly strengthening ties with the rest of the campus, notably through the many facets of your Life Sciences Initiative. In addition, we have laid out a capital plan for research and clinical buildings that will require much of this decade to complete. I am confident that our successors will sustain these efforts, including the progressive rise in national standings of the Medical School, Hospitals, and M-CARE.

It is time for me to plan an orderly return to my interests in academic research and public policy, greatly enriched by my experience as EVPMA and my continued involvement in genetics and life sciences. I am keen to relate at the scientific level, not just the administrative level, with our fine faculty in these areas. And I welcome the opportunity for a leave.

Meanwhile, however, I am eager to assist Interim President Joe White over the next several months of transition for the University by continuing as EVPMA until 31 July, as we have agreed.

My best wishes to you and Jean as you move to New York City.

*Sincerely yours,
Gilbert S. Omenn, M.D., Ph.D.”*

I am focused on assisting Interim President White and positioning the Health System, with my able colleagues, for the long-term. To all of the alumni of the U-M Medical School and the much larger community engaged in this splendid U-M Health System, my thanks for your wonderful efforts on behalf of the School, our patients, our students, our community and each other.

My wife, Martha Darling, and I have become deeply involved in the Ann Arbor community and in affairs of the state of Michigan and greatly enjoy these activities and the many associated friendships.

My best wishes to all of you.

Gilbert S. Omenn, M.D., Ph.D.
U-M Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs and
CEO, U-M Health System