

Message from the Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs



With this second excellent issue, *Medicine at Michigan* is achieving our goal of providing a significant new link to our alumni/ae and many other interested friends of the U-M Medical School and U-M Health System. The magazine is one of numerous terrific developments during the Sesquicentennial Celebration. We hope that many of you will come this October 1 for the formal Convocation and again next October for the conclusion of the celebrations. We are also supporting numerous events at specialty society meetings around the country. The Sesquicentennial Calendar appears on the back page of the timeline, before page 33.

Your Medical School and Health System are in a bold investment mode. We completed fiscal year 1999 in good shape, with increases in inpatient and outpatient volume, many clinical initiatives, and high ratings of patient satisfaction for the Hospital and Health Centers and very good HEDIS® (Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set) measures for M-CARE. Competition for our student and residency positions is intense. Our Biological Sciences Scholars Recruitment Program has already brought us six spectacular beginning faculty. Allen Lichter is well-established as dean. And we are in the midst of a system-level strategic planning process to proactively shape a positive future with synergies among our educational, research, patient care, and technology transfer missions.

I want to focus my comments on the Life Sciences Initiative President Lee Bollinger has launched for the University. A First Amendment legal scholar, he is intensely curious about the “biology revolution.” He and we believe the life sciences will influence medicine and public health, our economy, our society, and our views of ourselves, much as the physics revolution has shaped the past century. As Francis Collins, on leave from the U-M to head the National Human Genome Research Institute at NIH during this decade, wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (7/1/99), the program “to map the human genetic terrain” may rank with the great expeditions of Lewis and Clark, Sir Edmund Hillary, and the Apollo Program. A century ago, Sir William Osler wrote that the ambitions of medical research were “to wrest from nature the secrets which have perplexed philosophers in all ages, to track to their sources the causes of disease, to correlate vast stores of knowledge [in 1902!], that they may be quickly available for the prevention and cure of disease.” We and others now have ideas and instruments to pursue those goals on a grand scale.

In May 1998, President Bollinger appointed a special Commission on the Life Sciences with 19 prominent faculty from relevant departments across the University. Their February 1999 report proposed a theme of “Understanding the Complexity of Living Things,” with

research and education bridging molecular, cellular, organ system, whole organism, and ecosystem approaches, as well as the ethical, policy, legal, and social ramifications. They built on strengths here to recommend five related areas for investment: genomics and complex genetic disorders; chemical and structural biology; cognitive neurosciences; bioinformatics, bioengineering, and biotechnology; and theory and modeling of complex systems.

President Bollinger, Provost Nancy Cantor, and I went arm-in-arm to faculty meetings in various schools and colleges to elicit comments, which were generally very positive. By May we took a proposal to the Board of Regents to establish a Life Sciences Institute, with 30 new faculty, a director who would report to the president, and an investment of \$200 million from University and Health System reserves, to be multiplied with grants and gifts. The regents expressed strong support and approved the initial steps. In July they gave approval for development of a Life Sciences Institute Building south of Palmer Drive on central campus, within sight of the Medical Center, with a linking building along Washtenaw and a pedestrian bridge over Huron. New space to support the Life Sciences Institute is also planned on the medical campus and North Campus. We expect the resulting research and technology to help lift the University to even higher standing nationally, and to sustain our leading-edge role in clinical care.

A complementary development, the State of Michigan Life Sciences Research Corridor, has attracted national media attention. Governor Engler, joined by the presidents of Wayne State, Michigan State, U-M, and the emerging vanAndel Research Institute in Grand Rapids, signed into law July 19 the first of an intended 20 annual appropriations of \$50 million from the tobacco settlement funds to support collaborative research, shared facilities and equipment, and initiatives to stimulate new companies and corporate growth in the life sciences arena — with the long-term intent of diversifying the Michigan economy.

Thus, for those of you elsewhere, there will be much to see on future visits to Ann Arbor. For those of you here, there will be numerous opportunities. We welcome your ideas and suggestions and applaud your own good works. Go Blue!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gilbert S. Omenn, M.D." in a cursive style.

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