

IMPACT

UAMS
College of Medicine
Internal Medicine

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Edward T. Yeh, M.D.

Message from the Chairman

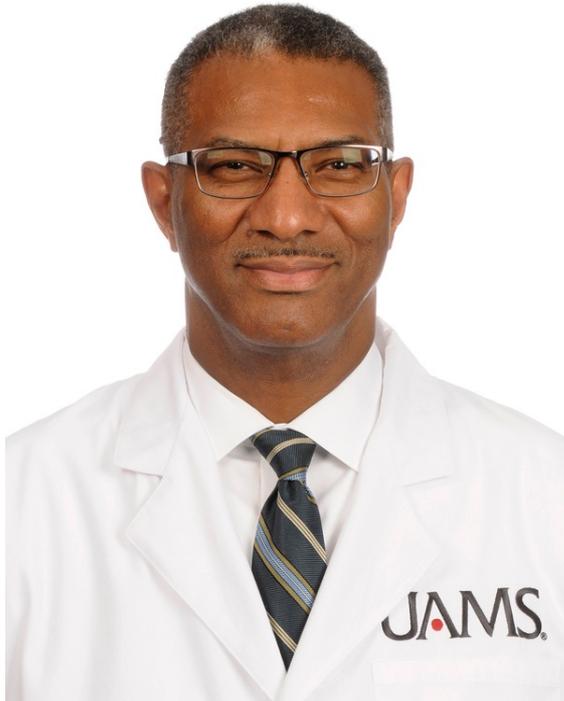
This issue of IMpact highlights the aspiration of our department to create a diverse, equal, and inclusive environment as the basis for our growth.

The DEI committee, chaired by Dr. Larry Johnson, was formed in May 2021 and the first meeting was convened on June 24, 2021. The committee consists of faculty, staff and medical resident. I am impressed by the enthusiasm of the committee members in participating and generating creative plans to address the DEI challenge for our department. Their efforts and goals are described in detail in this Impact.

A special thanks is due to Natalie Moore for staffing the DEI committee. Her tireless effort is another reason that the DEI efforts have flourished.

I would like to encourage all of you to be an active participant of this effort. A website will be created to receive your input and suggestions. Furthermore, annual awards will be established to recognize your contributions.

Improving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Internal Medicine



Larry G. Johnson, M.D.

Dr. Johnson is the head of the Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Internal Medicine, and under his leadership, the committee has held a series of meetings designed around identifying issues within the department, prioritizing change that can be made immediately, and planning for long-term holistic change.

A visible DEI project that originated from these initial meetings was the beginning of a planned series of DEI Grand Rounds, which presents speakers with an opportunity to share oft-neglected aspects of hospital medicine within the context of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, the residents' Cultural Day was created, along with the preliminary pieces of an academic mentorship program.

Dr. Lipschitz is in charge of the strategic plan for the DEI committee, but Dr. Johnson hopes to receive more feedback from the department, using focus groups and other social frameworks to bring much-needed insight as to the problems that need to be addressed. The committee wants to be intentional about the changes made, and Dr. Johnson has targeted things within the control of the Internal Medicine department as the more immediate changes to focus on.

The goal for Internal Medicine is to build an inclusive culture as a department that is grown by who is recruited, hired, and cultivated among the faculty and staff. The time is right for change on this systematic level as there is a strong interest within the department population for meaningful growth. Dr. Yeh, Dr. Johnson, and the entire DEI committee are determined to move forward with projects that align with the UAMS Vision 2029 Strategic Plan and beyond.

Dr. Lipschitz's efforts in strategic planning should enable us to address deeper issues among our members and to develop equitable approaches to a more inclusive workforce and leadership. In the minds of people within the department, larger societal issues are often present that permeate into the workplace, affecting the work environment. Discovering a way to address those issues in Internal Medicine is an important and necessary challenge that the Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is eager to tackle head on.



Riley Lipschitz, M.D.

A Strategic Plan for Changing the Culture

As part of the Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Internal Medicine, Dr. Lipschitz is devising a strategic plan for how to further diversity and inclusion as a department.

One of the first developments of that strategic plan is the hiring of a research assistant to help with the DEI initiatives, and it will be the task of this individual to survey the faculty, staff, and residents to identify the state of the department; through one-on-one interviews, small groups, and focus groups, the goal is to ascertain areas in need of improvement.

Without a comprehensive understanding of how the department interprets the state of DEI initiatives as well as general impressions of where practical changes could be made, a strategic plan will lack direction and follow-through. And the committee wants to avoid that and implement successful changes.

Dr. Lipschitz and her fellow committee members plan to strategize accordingly, identifying both short-term and long-term goals. Some changes can be put into place quickly. Others will take time. Using the recommendations from the research survey, Dr. Lipschitz and her colleagues will construct a timeline for what is going to happen.



Elena Ambrogini, M.D.

A Career Mentorship Program for Women and Minorities

Dr. Ambrogini is working alongside other faculty members to develop a mentorship program, dedicated women and other underrepresented minorities, with the goal of increasing retention and helps guide to academic careers at UAMS. The program would apply to current fellows and residents, with the hope of expanding it to medical students.

The mentorship program would provide the opportunity for participants to establish relationships with their mentors; to offer support and counsel; to build professional connections; to identify career goals; and, overall, to create an environment of inclusion. It would ensure that mentees have all of the available resources to become faculty at UAMS.

Currently, Drs. Ambrogini, Moore, and Singh are establishing the framework of how the mentorship will function and recruiting more mentors.

With the combined effort of the Division Directors and Program Directors, this program will promote mentoring within the Department with the goal of including more women and minority faculty, and thus increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the department.



Preparing Medical Students for Success

Dr. Tariq has worked tirelessly for the last ten years to support the interpersonal, psychological, and professional success of minority students at UAMS; in this process she has learned a lot about the needs of students from historically excluded backgrounds and communities.

Traditionally, excellence in medicine has been tied to success with standardized tests like the MCAT, STEP scores and GPA, but Dr. Tariq has been working to highlight all of the other qualities of accomplished and consummate medical professionals—grit, compassion, empathy, activism, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and all of the other necessary markers of excellence.

Sara Tariq, M.D.

Historically excluded students in medical school typically feel that they are not part of the culture; they still identify as outsiders despite studying alongside peers from more advantaged backgrounds. What Dr. Tariq has been working toward is a culture change where these minority students feel supported and where the faculty, no matter their own personal background or biases, understand how best to navigate conversations with and supplement the professional or academic needs of these students.

One major success has been the post-baccalaureate, pre-med program called Medical Scholars in Public Health, which welcomed an inaugural class of 15 students from 45 applicants. The program will guide students toward a Master of Public Health degree while also providing mentors, 1:1 coaching, and MCAT prep courses. The goal is to prepare the students for the challenges of their professional trajectory and to give them the tools they need to be successful for medical school or other healthcare professional programs.

Dr. Tariq spends much of her time studying the intersection of health care and racism; she points out that ALL individuals carry unconscious biases, and in order to become the most effective health care providers, we need to identify these biases and work to counter them. That includes the need for embracing discomfort; Dr. Tariq was the first to establish a comprehensive LGBTQ curriculum in the medical school. She also required unconscious bias training for all second year medical students. She believes these experiences are necessary in order to care for patients from different communities and understanding their needs. All of these efforts help the change the culture at UAMS and in this state.

The leadership from Dr. Yeh, the years of work from Dr. Tariq, and the commitment of the DEI committee members all aim to bring the department to a point of intentional focus on diversity and inclusion, where departmental culture is clearly defined and where the focus of the faculty and staff is on orienting themselves to positive growth towards equity and inclusion.

Eliminating Stigmas in Patient Medical Charts



Emily Kocurek, M.D.

Part of the initial developments in building a DEI committee was to institute a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Grand Rounds within Internal Medicine. And that resulted in Drs. Tariq and Grimes sharing a presentation on how to chart with sensitivity and how to avoid stigmatizing language by identifying it and adjusting how medical charts are written, considering patient access to the documentation and the new dynamic that brings to the physician-patient relationship.

Following that presentation, Dr. Kocurek was struck by how that predicament has not been addressed in a scholarly, systematic way. Patients can now read their own notes and their access to that information can present some challenges when physicians and other health care professionals are not conscious of the language that they use when adding notes to medical charts.

There are several angles from which Dr. Kocurek and her fellow researchers are trying to tackle the problem with stigmatized language.

First, they are working to expose residents to qualitative research methods instead of quantitative. Alongside those efforts, residents are reviewing literature and interviewing patients about charting language. Are there regional biases or specific receptions to certain language? Once physicians identify what language is insensitive, then they can proceed to reformat how they write notes.

Second, the team working to develop a program that screens for language within medical charts, vastly increasing the speed and efficiency of building a database from which to conduct research. Software that can improve the systematic approach to this problem will only benefit those involved with the research.

Lastly, this is an interdisciplinary project. Physicians are not the only ones contributing to patient medical charts. And some language is pervasive, even extending to established terminology in medical coding. Patient charts that are flagged for various reasons additionally present non-written stigmatic markers to consider and to challenge. It will take a concentrated effort from all staff involved with medical charting to combat this issue.



Pearl McElfish, Ph.D.

Celebrating Community-Based Outreach and Research Excellence

Led by Dr. Pearl McElfish, the Division of Community Health and Research in the Department of Internal Medicine, based in Northwest Arkansas, has combined superlative health care research with meaningful community outreach. Their efforts have resulted in a \$10 million grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) that will enable them to increase the scope of their outreach programs and to further build COVID-19 vaccine confidence in medically underserved communities across the state.

Dr. McElfish has also been instrumental in conducting seminal research alongside the hospital's community efforts. Her published article "[COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy: Race/ethnicity, trust, and fear](#)," was the most-downloaded article to be originally published in *Clinical and Translational Science* (CTS) in 2021, with over 11,000 downloads.



Ahmed Abuabdou, M.D.

Hospital Recognition for Inpatient Hospice Initiative

Dr. Ahmed Abuabdou has been instrumental in leading the initiative for inpatient hospice care during the pandemic; his expertise and guidance have helped to spur on the hospital's work in this regard and to ensure the best quality of care in the midst of a difficult time. This passion and commitment generally functions outside of a faculty member's FTE allotment, so UAMS recently formally recognized and thanked him for his time and willingness to help when needed.

We, too, are grateful, Dr. Abuabdou, for your tireless efforts to meet the needs of our patients and go beyond what is asked of you!

2022 Clinical Legend Mentor Award



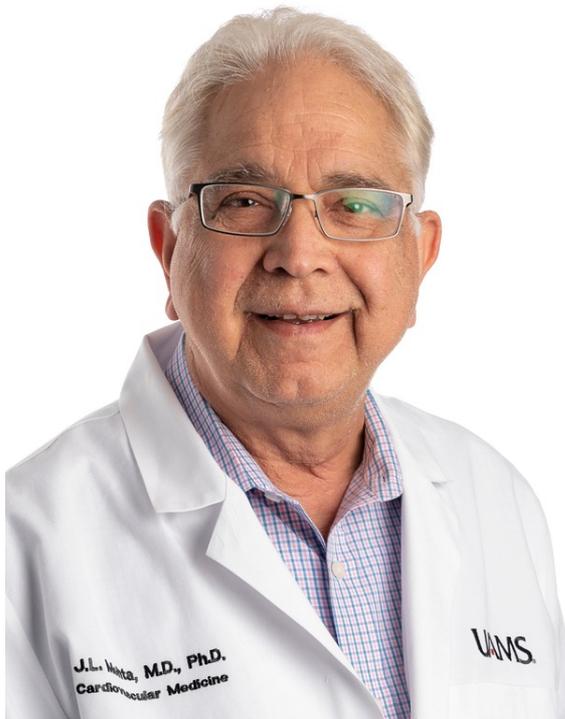
Larry G. Johnson, M.D.

At the inaugural UAMS Mentor Recognition Day, Dr. Larry Johnson was selected as the recipient of the 2022 Clinical Legend Excellence in Mentoring Award and was thanked for his commitment to the mentees he has guided over the years.

Dr. Smyth personally congratulated him, remarking "Thank you for investing your time, energy and thought into the success of your mentees. Your generosity of spirit is appreciated!"

Congratulations, Dr. Johnson!

Capturing A Lifetime of Work in Cardiology



J.L. Mehta, M.D., Ph.D.

A cardiologist with more than 40 years of professional experience and over 10,000 patients throughout an accomplished medical career, Dr. Mehta, Distinguished Professor and Stebbins Chair in Cardiology, has attended men and women of all stature, backgrounds, and nationalities.

He has published extensively and practiced comprehensively. And in that time, he has tried to understand what causes heart disease. From the absence of the disease during his impoverished childhood in India to the acute presence of it during his professional life in the US surrounded by a relatively affluent patient population, Dr. Mehta has identified factors that are linked to increased risk of heart disease.

In his new book [*Heart Disease: It Is All In Your Head and What To Do About It*](#), he explores what really causes heart disease based on his personal life, global travel, and 45 years of clinical practice and research.

His thesis is that mental stress, separation from family, and the progressive loneliness that humans have felt with the advent of social media, affluent living, and the global pandemic all act as stressors that heighten blood pressure, increase the likelihood of diabetes, and ultimately lead to more prevalent heart disease.

Dr. Mehta believes that we have a personal, community, and governmental responsibility to address the issues that we face today and to combat the stress and other factors that are adversely affecting our health. At a time when we have never been more isolated, we must work to connect with each other and rebuild the interpersonal support structure for our mental and physical health.

Thank you to everyone in the Internal Medicine department striving for excellence; advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion; connecting with our local communities across the state; going above and beyond your professional responsibilities; mentoring the next generation of health care providers; and seeking to understand how our social lives and physical health are intertwined.

It's been a strong start to 2022, and we look forward to what comes next!

The Department of Internal Medicine is the largest department in the College of Medicine at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. The department is home to approximately 150 full-time faculty members, 81 residents, and 68 fellows serving two residency programs and twelve fellowship programs. Dr. Edward T.H. Yeh, a cardiologist and physician/scientist, is a pioneer in the field of onco-cardiology.

Questions, comments, or suggestions for future newsletters? Email Devon Norris at DLNorris2@uams.edu, Natalie Moore at NMoore@uams.edu, or Gloria Townsend at TownsendGloriaJ@uams.edu.

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