The College of Medicine at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has achieved nearly 130 years of phenomenal growth and success in teaching, clinical care, research and service since our founding in 1879. As Arkansas’ only medical school, we train the majority of the state’s physicians. We strive to help them acquire not only the ultimate in medical skills, but also the professional and ethical standards that will ensure the very best care for patients. Our world-class clinicians and researchers serve on the forefront of medical advances. Our faculty are on staff at UAMS Medical Center, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, the UAMS Area Health Education Centers and numerous other clinics and facilities providing services throughout the state of Arkansas and for patients from around the world.
Welcome to a New Era

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One for the Books

There are certain years in the history of an institution that go down in the books as landmarks. This is one of those years for UAMS. As you read this issue of University of Arkansas Medicine, the reasons will be abundantly clear.

The most visible change was the January opening of the state-of-the-art hospital that replaces most of the patient-care service areas of the 1956 hospital building. This issue’s “In the Spotlight” section looks at how the new hospital enhances key clinical programs.

But excellent facilities are only part of the equation. For example, our cover story (see page 4) shows how our Cardiovascular Medicine Division is making strides thanks to the creative, visionary leadership of its new director, David Rutlen, M.D., along with outstanding faculty and the new hospital’s cardiology facilities. Other stories show what sets our Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Emergency Department and other programs apart.

This year also marks a new chapter in our history with the opening of UAMS-Northwest, our satellite campus based in Fayetteville. As you’ll read on page 17, a pilot group of College of Medicine students will begin their junior clerkships there in July. The campus is one of many steps we’re taking to ensure that Arkansas has the numbers of physicians it will need in the decades ahead.

Our medical students appreciate the historical significance of the new hospital and the satellite campus. We think you’ll enjoy reading about their volunteer efforts during the hospital move (see page 11). Not surprisingly, many of our alumni remember a similar excitement when the previous hospital opened in 1956 (see page 12).

Needless to say, UAMS has come a very long way since those first years on West Markham. And for the past 23 years, I. Dodd Wilson, M.D., has been a major force in the institution’s growth into a world-class academic medical center. He served as dean of the College of Medicine for 14 years and as chancellor since 2000. At the end of this year, as Dr. Wilson steps down, we’re marking the end of a remarkable era – and the beginning of a new one under newly appointed Chancellor Daniel W. Rahn, M.D. (see page 16).

Please join me in extending a heartfelt “thank you” to Dr. Wilson, and a warm welcome to Dr. Rahn.

Debra H. Fiser, M.D.
Dean, College of Medicine
Vice Chancellor, UAMS
PATIENTS (MODELS HAPPILY ENJOYING THEIR NEW SPACIOUS ROOMS). FLOWERS, BALLOONS ETC...
The opening of UAMS’ new hospital isn’t just a story about a stunningly beautiful medical facility. Most significant, College of Medicine leaders say, is what the hospital that opened in January will enable UAMS to do. It will greatly augment initiatives to grow and enhance clinical programs. It will enhance privacy and allow more patient-centered care. With additional beds, the high-tech hospital will help faculty physicians to work more closely with referring physicians and provide many more patients with the very best care.

“The new hospital is a tremendous springboard for us to move into the next phase of UAMS and the College of Medicine,” said Charles W. Smith, M.D., executive associate dean for clinical affairs. “Without a doubt, it is helping us to become an even more robust medical center and to continue to expand our impact in Arkansas and beyond.”

Featuring spacious, all-private rooms, the new hospital gives UAMS Medical Center a total of 437 patient beds – 333 adult beds and 64 newborn beds between the 540,000-square-foot new building and the existing Harry P. Ward Patient Tower, which opened in 1999, and 40 beds in the adjacent UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute, which opened in December 2008. Rooms are designed for the comfort of patients and families, with sleeper sofas and other amenities that allow loved ones to stay nearby.

A new Emergency Department and state-of-the-art Neonatal Intensive Care Unit are just a couple of the features of the new building, which replaces most of the patient care services of the previous hospital, which opened in 1956. The new hospital has larger intensive and intermediate care units, additional operating rooms, a larger diagnostic lab and radiology facilities.

While providing an ideal clinical setting, the new hospital also is a boon to the College of Medicine’s mission to train the next generation of Arkansas physicians. Patient rooms have plenty of space for residents and medical students making rounds with faculty physicians, and nearby conference rooms, equipped with computers, enable faculty and trainees to privately discuss cases.

“The new atmosphere is much more conducive for training, as well as for providing comfort, hope and healing for our patients,” Smith said.

“Without a doubt, it is helping us to become an even more robust medical center and to continue to expand our impact in Arkansas and beyond.”

Charles W. Smith, M.D.
When Essie Ashford arrived at UAMS one morning in January, her left main coronary artery was so critically narrowed that she immediately needed a stent procedure just to survive long enough to make it into surgery. A dedicated trauma elevator in the Emergency Department rushed the 65-year-old widow from Little Rock up to the state-of-the-art Catheterization Laboratory in the new UAMS hospital – which had opened just a few days earlier. After a life-saving stent procedure to hold the artery open, and then open-heart surgery to bypass four blockages, Ashford recovered in the new Cardiac Intensive Care Unit and later in a spacious, family-friendly private room.

“Having a heart attack is a pretty harrowing experience, but I’m here today by the grace of God and the excellent people and hospital at UAMS,” Ashford said.

“Mrs. Ashford’s situation was very, very critical,” said David Rutlen, M.D., a professor and director of the Division of Cardiovascular Medicine in the College of Medicine’s Department of Internal Medicine. “The entire UAMS team did a fantastic job caring for her, and the cardiac and other facilities of the new hospital were a wonderful environment for providing this care and for Mrs. Ashford’s incredibly rapid recovery.”
A Passion for Program Building

A nationally known leader in clinical cardiology, Rutlen came to UAMS last July from the Medical College of Wisconsin, where he served as chief of the Division of Cardiovascular Medicine and director of the Froedtert & Medical College Cardiovascular Center. He previously was chief of cardiology at the Medical College of Georgia, after holding faculty appointments at Harvard Medical School, where he received his medical degree, and at Yale University School of Medicine. Under his leadership, the cardiology programs at Georgia and Wisconsin expanded dramatically.

“My passion is for building high-quality, efficient, expanding cardiovascular programs, and that is what we are doing here at UAMS,” said Rutlen. “It’s all about improving clinical access for patients, making our systems function more efficiently, constantly focusing on quality of care, and recruiting highly trained, expert faculty who are enthusiastic about joining a medical center that has the resources to grow into a huge program.”

Rutlen has focused on reorganizing the Cardiology Clinic and enhancing appointment scheduling with the UAMS Appointment Center. He also is working with the Physician Call Center to streamline patient consults and transfers and to improve other services for referring physicians. As result, new patient visits are expected to be up as much as 25 percent by the end of Rutlen’s first full year at UAMS.

Expertise for Any Heart Problem

“Our cardiology program is structured like a private practice within an academic environment,” Rutlen said. “Each patient has his or her own cardiologist to see them in clinic and care for them in the long-term. But procedures are performed by the fellowship-trained subspecialists on our faculty who do each of those things best. The same cardiologist isn’t going to read the patient’s echocardiogram and perform a catheterization and implant a pacemaker.”

In Essie Ashford’s case, Rutlen is her private cardiologist. He saw her initially on the morning of her heart attack and has provided follow-up care. Rajesh Sachdeva, M.D., an assistant professor in the division and director of the cardiac catheterization labs at UAMS and the Central Arkansas Veteran’s Healthcare System (CAVHS), performed her stent procedure.

Rutlen said Sachdeva, along with Barry Uretsky, M.D., who recently joined the CAVHS staff and the UAMS Cardiovascular Medicine Division, demonstrate the faculty’s caliber. For example, they are the only interventional cardiologists in Arkansas who perform a highly sophisticated angioplasty procedure that can open up chronic total blockages in coronary arteries that otherwise would require open heart surgery. In conventional angioplasty, a catheter is threaded down through the coronary artery to the blockage so that a small balloon can be inflated to widen the passage and restore blood flow. Unfortunately, it often fails if the blockage is lengthy and has been in place a long time. But the far more complex procedure performed by Sachdeva and Uretsky uses a second catheter to simultaneously approach the blockage from the opposite direction, improving the success rate.

Uretsky, a professor in the division, is internationally known for his clinical work and research. He is one of a small number of cardiologists in the United States who does an advanced procedure called balloon valvuloplasty to repair the scarred mitral heart.
The procedure is the method recommended by the American Heart Association, but because so few are trained to do it, most patients end up having open heart surgery. In March, Uretsky successfully performed the procedure on a woman who was in the middle of her fifth pregnancy — and for whom open heart surgery would have posed a very serious risk to both her and her baby.

“We have the expertise to manage the most complex and even rare cardiac cases,” Rutlen said. “Patients can rest assured that no matter what their heart problem is, they can come to UAMS and receive personalized, ongoing care from their own cardiologist while benefiting from the experience of a whole team of colleagues with very focused subspecialty skills.”

The new hospital facilities buttress Rutlen’s plans for growth. For the first time, UAMS has separate labs dedicated to catheterization and electrophysiology procedures, and Rutlen has recruited a director of electrophysiology to start in July.

“Logistically, it’s great.”

Rutlen and Molavi said the arrangement of the facilities will allow UAMS cardiologists and surgeons to perform more hybrid procedures that combine heart bypass surgery with angioplasty (stent) treatments tailored to the specific needs of individual patients. Molavi and cardiothoracic surgeon Gareth Tobler, M.D., an associate professor of surgery, performed what is believed to be the first such hybrid procedure in Arkansas late last year, successfully opening two blockages in the coronary arteries of a Jacksonville woman using angioplasty, and then performing an arterial graft (bypass) to open a third blockage.

“The hybrid approach enabled Dr. Molavi and Dr. Tobler to use the procedure that was best for each blockage, and that ensured the best possible...
treatment for the patient,” said Rutlen. “They are really on the forefront of cardiology and cardiovascular surgery.”

The new hospital also features a spacious Cardiac Non-Invasive Laboratory that enhances patient flow and provides more comfort for patients undergoing echocardiographic procedures. “The suite is really extraordinary,” said Ibrahim Fahdi, M.D., who directs the UAMS lab and the coronary care units at UAMS and CAVHS.

“Two of our rooms are designed and specially equipped to help us train the next generation of cardiologists,” Fahdi said. “This is such an important part of our mission, and the new facility improves our ability to provide hands-on training on sophisticated techniques.”

As wonderful as the new hospital is, sometimes the best option for patients in rural Arkansas is not to have to travel to Little Rock for certain follow-up services. Traditionally, a patient with an implanted cardiac device such as a pacemaker or implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) has to return to the cardiology clinic for adjustments. But Fahdi, who also directs UAMS’ Cardiac Telemedicine Program, has an alternative.

“We have developed a pilot program that allows us to recalibrate these devices for patients in Helena using real-time interactive telecommunication equipment,” he said. The eastern Arkansas community is located 120 miles from Little Rock and has no cardiologists. In coordination with the UAMS Center for Distance Health and the UAMS Delta Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Fahdi guides specially trained nurses through the calibrations, saving patients a five-hour round trip to Little Rock for a 20-minute procedure.

Fahdi believes it is the first program of its kind in the country, and the Cardiovascular Medicine Division plans to expand it to other communities.

Rutlen said the talented faculty – including innovators such as Fahdi – was part of what drew him to UAMS last year. “I was very excited, because it was readily apparent that this is a superb academic medical center,” Rutlen said. “And with the new hospital being built, everything was in place for building a very successful cardiology program.”
Laura Adkins of Little Rock, a research data manager at UAMS, is grateful for the privacy and comfort of the NICU following the birth of her son Jake, who was born with respiratory distress syndrome. “The NICU is truly ideal,” she said. “We have been so impressed with the care we’ve received. It is truly world class.”
Nothing may be more precious to the parents of a hospitalized premature newborn than spending private time with their new baby. That can be tough in a typical Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), where many babies along with vital equipment and caregivers are often crowded into very little space.

But the UAMS’ new NICU isn’t your average intensive care nursery.

“The new NICU has transformed how we take care of babies in every aspect,” said neonatologist Ashley Ross, M.D. ’00, an assistant professor of pediatrics who co-directs the nursery along with Kristi Palmer, M.D. “Because we have private rooms, families can participate in the care of their baby like never before. It helps them to connect and bond, and it improves outcomes for babies.”

Outstanding outcomes have set the UAMS NICU apart for years. Because of the focus on high-risk pregnancies in UAMS’ maternal-fetal medicine program, more than half of the 2,000 babies born at UAMS Medical Center every year require specialized neonatal care in the hospital’s NICU. These include more than 200 very low birth weight (VLBW) babies weighing less than 1,500 grams – one third of all VLBW babies born in Arkansas. For the very smallest group (500-750 grams), the survival rate at UAMS is 91 percent, far surpassing the national rate of 83 percent.

The 64-bed NICU occupies the entire fifth floor of the new hospital building and is about 10 times the size of its predecessor. All 58 rooms are private, and six are equipped for twins. Rooms feature pull-out sleeper sofas and recliners along with the sophisticated equipment and monitors that help babies as young as 23 weeks gestation to survive.

“Studies show that high levels of stimulation negatively affect premature babies,” said Palmer, a neonatologist and assistant professor of pediatrics. “But with private rooms, we can control the levels of lighting, noise and other stimuli. It is amazingly quiet throughout the nursery, even when it is very busy.”

Twenty suite-like rooms designed for less critical neonatal care can accommodate a patient bed for a mother who is still hospitalized, but not critically ill. “This is taking family-centered care to the next level by keeping babies and moms together when possible,” said Ross. The NICU also has a family support area with a kitchen, showers, laundry, computer access and six additional sleeping rooms with twin beds.

The NICU was meticulously planned by Palmer, Ross and Whit Hall, M.D. ’73, a professor and chief of the Pediatrics Service at UAMS. Hall directed the NICU for 15 years before recently stepping down to focus on research, telemedicine programs and statewide neonatal outreach. “The facility is top-notch, and it will allow us to do more of the innovative clinical research that our faculty neonatologists have been doing for many years,” Hall said. “Not only does this research expand our understanding and improve neonatal outcomes over the long term; it also means Arkansas’ tiniest and sickest newborns have access today to the very best, most cutting-edge care available anywhere.”

The NICU will provide the setting for new research, led by Hall, into the effects of private rooms and family-focused design on neonatal and parental stress. Another new study will explore a non-needle form of acupuncture, called electro-acupuncture, for preventing pain during heel stick procedures, the most common method of drawing blood in newborns. Research into UAMS’ neonatal telemedicine initiatives also will begin soon.

Hall said some of the most promising research is being done by Jeffrey Kaiser, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics who has had long-term funding from the National Institutes of Health to investigate the causes of brain injury in pre-term neonates.

“Intraventricular hemorrhage – IVH – is probably the leading cause of adverse long-term effects in premature babies, and Dr. Kaiser’s work is making strides toward preventing this devastating complication,” Hall said, adding that the UAMS NICU has one of the lowest IVH rates in the nation.

Whit Hall, M.D. ’73, is chief of the Pediatric Service at UAMS.
Patients, families and visitors of the new UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute are often struck by the building’s open, three-story atrium brightened by a glass facade, and the effect is not incidental.

“The architecture is symbolic of our goal to shed light on mental illness and eliminate its stigma,” said G. Richard Smith, M.D. ’77, director of the Institute and chairman of College of Medicine Department of Psychiatry.

The $32 million, six-floor building is one of only nine psychiatric institutions in the country combining research, education, and inpatient and outpatient care. The 110,000-square-foot facility is adjacent to the hospital’s west wing and linked through the hospital lobby. It was built simultaneously with the hospital and opened a bit earlier, in December 2008.

Most inpatient services began on two floors in February, returning inpatient psychiatric care to UAMS for the first time in more than 30 years. The Institute has 40 beds, including 10 dedicated for children ages 2-12, 10 acute-care beds for adults and 10 dual-care beds for psychiatric patients who also have medical conditions.

The Institute was designed to enhance patient comfort and safety while providing faculty and staff with ample space and resources. These include the Helen L. Porter and James T. Dyke Brain Imaging Research Center as part of an MRI unit dedicated for psychiatric clinical care and research. More than 50,000 patient visits are expected each year in the Walker Family Clinic, which consolidates many outpatient services and specialty programs such as treatment for depressive and post-traumatic stress, addictive, eating and other disorders. The Fred and Louise Dierks Research Laboratories are home to the nationally recognized Center for Addiction Research and the Substance Abuse Treatment Clinic.

It’s 2:00 on a busy Monday afternoon in the UAMS Emergency Department. Among the many patients is a man who has cut his hand at work and a woman with severe abdominal pain. An auto accident victim is being cared for in a trauma room. But patients are moving smoothly from the spacious waiting room to triage stations and then to private exam rooms, and the place is remarkably quiet.

“This is an Emergency Department that is second to none,” said Marvin Leibovich, M.D., chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine. “It was designed to help us efficiently provide the very best trauma and other emergency care and, most of all, to enhance the comfort and privacy of our patients.”

At over 35,000 square feet, the department is three times the size of the previous facility. It features three private triage rooms to assess patients’ needs and 31 private exam rooms with removable walls to expand the capacity in the event of a large-scale emergency. The department’s three trauma rooms are equipped as operating rooms, and a dedicated trauma elevator provides fast access from the hospital’s helipad and to key hospital services such as operating suites, labor and delivery and intensive care units.

A decontamination room stands ready for patients who were exposed to chemicals or radiation, and three negative pressure airflow rooms are available for highly contagious or immune-compromised patients. UAMS is the only hospital in Arkansas with a computed tomography (CT) scanner actually in the Emergency Department, so patients don’t have to be transported for imaging.

“UAMS has highly experienced, compassionate emergency physicians and nurses, outstanding trauma surgeons and extraordinary hospital facilities,” Leibovich said, noting the current effort in Arkansas to launch a statewide trauma system.

“With our new state-of-the-art Emergency Department, we are well positioned to be a premier Level 1 Trauma Center for the citizens of Arkansas.”
After months of planning and rehearsing, more than 1,000 physicians, nurses, employees and volunteers moved 274 patients out of the 53-year-old UAMS hospital and into the new facility. Scheduled for just one weekend in January, moving the hospital’s 18 departments and all those patients was no easy task.

When College of Medicine students were called to lend a hand, sophomore Beth Weiss volunteered to help coordinate their efforts. “The volunteer response was literally overwhelming,” she said. “My e-mail inbox was over its limit in just a few hours after sending the initial request for volunteers. It was awesome to see that so many students wanted to be a part of this historic move.”

About 110 medical students participated. Teams were assigned to specific wards and moved patients in four-hour time blocks. The first ward to move early Saturday morning was the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Weiss and classmate Dragon Do were among the first to assist in escorting each baby to their new home.

“We first helped the nurses move a tiny set of twins to their new and very spacious room,” Weiss said. “With the parents, nurses and volunteers all filing one behind the other and pushing equipment that was connected to each other with wires and tubing, I am sure we looked like some odd sort of parade. The parents looked so proud as their daughters got settled in their new room, and I know that the new NICU will be a blessing for the parents as well as the staff as they care for those little twins.”

UAMS leaders said the move went very smoothly because of the extensive planning and the dedication of the many staff members and volunteers.

Sophomore Austin Bell enjoyed working with patients and hospital staff. “As a second-year student, I’ve had very little patient interaction so far, so this experience was great,” he said. “It was fun to see patients so excited about their new rooms.

Student volunteers also appreciated getting a close-up look at the contrast between the old hospital and the new one. “It definitely gives me a greater appreciation for just how amazing and state of the art our new hospital is and how lucky we are to have such a facility at UAMS,” Weiss said.
When UAMS moved to West Markham Street more than 50 years ago, students and residents—much like those of today—knew they were witnessing the start of a new era. Some even had a role in making the 1956 hospital a reality.

By the late 1940s, the tiny, aging hospital on McAlmont Street had become obsolete, and the College of Medicine risked losing its national accreditation. Tom Wortham, M.D. ’53, said students got involved in Arkansas Gov. Sid McMath’s efforts to pass a cigarette tax to fund a new hospital and medical school building. “We spent a whole summer lobbying legislators,” he said. “Our motivation was to save the medical school.” The tax passed in 1951.

Wortham, who now serves as a Family and Preventive Medicine Residency preceptor at UAMS, was a resident himself when it was time to move in June 1956. Newspaper accounts tallied 84 vanloads of equipment and three caravans of National Guard ambulances. “We rode along with our patients, taking oxygen tanks or whatever we needed,” Wortham recalled. Patients and residents were awed by the new hospital. “We felt like we had just joined the modern world,” he said. “Finally, we had a facility to match the training we were receiving.”

Pediatrician and UAMS professor emeritus Betty Lowe, M.D. ’56, remembered that summer. “More than half of our class stayed in town to intern at the new hospital,” she said. “For its time, it was modern and absolutely gorgeous. It was very significant for Arkansas, and we wanted to be a part of it.”

Because it was summer, few students were involved in the move itself. Joseph Bates, M.D. ’57, helped move lab equipment for the Department of Medicine, where he was doing research and later would become a faculty member. After the new hospital opened, some students earned money for tuition as temporary staff. “I worked for three months as a charge nurse at nights on 3C,” said Richard B. Clark, M.D. ’58, who later became an anesthesiologist and faculty member. Little Rock radiologist Clyde Glover, M.D. ’57, worked as an assistant in the pediatric emergency room.

“The difference between the old hospital and the new one on Markham was like darkness to daylight,” Glover said.
Lance and Jill Adams refused to accept the opinion that amputation was the only option for their son’s left leg, despite hearing that from a handful of orthopaedic surgeons. Doctors had found a deformity in Landon’s leg at birth. The infant was diagnosed with proximal femoral focal deficiency (PFFD), a congenital defect in which the proximal femur does not fully develop in utero and is partially absent, such that the entire limb is shortened.

“We weren’t prepared to see amputation as our answer,” Lance Adams said. “We wanted to try and save our son’s leg.” The couple from Carl Junction, Mo., found James Aronson, M.D., who over the course of 18 years would lengthen Landon’s limb more than seven inches.

Aronson, a professor of orthopaedic surgery and pediatrics in the College of Medicine, is a leading practitioner and early pioneer of the Ilizarov bone-lengthening technique in the United States. To add length in developmental stages, an external fixator is placed around the bone and a series of pins are inserted to connect and hold the bone in place while it lengthens and heals.

“When I approach a family and a patient as early in their first year of life as Landon, I have to introduce the problem to the patient, I have to tell them what potential things we could do to help it and help them make a decision for which route to go,” Aronson said. “Landon was always optimistic and his parents were very patient, understanding and determined to give Landon the best chance.”

Saving Landon’s leg meant multiple surgeries and multiple trips for the family from Missouri to Arkansas Children’s Hospital in Little Rock.

“The bottom line is, we were able to work as a team together and save his leg,” Aronson said. “Landon was able to grow up, go to school and play sports. Throughout all of this, he has become a wonderful, adapted person.”

Aronson has seen many patients grow up to become happy, healthy adults – and he has watched every milestone in the process. Landon, now 19 and a college student, “graduated” as Aronson’s patient in July 2008.

“Working with the family to do all this, we become very close,” Aronson said. “We work as a team. It’s an 18- to 20-year contract with a family that is very involved. When they are old enough and I have to say ‘goodbye’ it is, of course, emotional. It’s kind of like a parent saying goodbye to their child.”

James Aronson, M.D., with an external fixator used to gradually lengthen bone.
Purushottam B. Thapa, M.D., M.P.H., (left) visits with senior and upcoming UAMS psychiatry resident Laura Conley in the lobby of the new State Hospital shortly before graduation in May.
As a teacher, his philosophy is about learning as much from his students as he hopes they learn from him. Purushottam B. Thapa, M.D., M.P.H., brings this approach to create a nurturing and supportive environment that allows his students to thrive.

"Teaching is an equal learning experience for everyone involved," said Thapa, an associate professor in the College of Medicine (COM) Department of Psychiatry. "I draw so much energy from my medical students and residents. They keep me young, rejuvenated and focused. They ask very insightful questions, and at times I have to scratch my head and say, ‘I’ll have to get back to you.’"

Thapa teaches psychiatry residents and junior medical students at the Arkansas State Hospital, where he is the section chief and training director of the teaching unit and a staff psychiatrist. He also serves as assistant director of research at the Arkansas Mental Health Research and Training Institute, and an adjunct associate professor of epidemiology in the UAMS College of Public Health.

Though he has had a long career, it wasn’t so long ago that Thapa himself was a resident.

Originally from Nepal, Thapa began his career as a surgeon and government medical officer. He moved to the United States in 1984 and studied public health and subsequently did epidemiology research for more than a decade at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville, Tenn. His wife’s appointment as a junior faculty member in the Department of Anesthesiology at UAMS brought him to Little Rock in 1998. It was here that he decided to pursue a psychiatry residency.

“I had been out of clinical medicine for nearly 20 years, and although I enjoyed my research career very much, deep inside I always missed the patient contact,” he said. “All of a sudden, I felt like I had found my vocation with psychiatry. I have to thank my wife for that.”

Teaching is an equally heart-felt vocation for Thapa. In the six years since he joined the faculty, he has won numerous teaching awards including the COM’s Junior Golden Apple Award four times, presented annually by juniors to the faculty member deemed as their best clinical teacher, and the Senior Golden Apple Award once. He has received the Gold Sash Award, presented by seniors, twice. He has been chosen as the Outstanding Teacher for Residency Education by psychiatry residents twice. Other awards include the COM Master Teacher Award in 2006, the Chancellor’s Faculty Teaching Award in 2007 and being nominated by students and chosen as a national finalist in the Association of American Medical College’s Humanism in Medicine Award in 2006.

“He’s the perfect role model for students like me who are going into psychiatry,” said Laura Conley, a graduating senior. “He really cares about his patients and he spends as much time working with students to become that kind of quality physician.”

Every psychiatry resident rotates through the unit for three to four months, and a good portion of the junior medical class rotates through every six weeks. Thapa encourages medical students to be active and not just become “observers” on the unit. He expects them to jump right in and interview patients, give pertinent feedback and figure out how to best treat the patient.

“This is very important because most medical students do not take up psychiatry as their specialty,” Thapa said. “However, if they go into private practice in a primary care specialty, over 50 percent of the patients that they treat will have some kind of psychiatric disorder. Having a good, healthy understanding of psychiatric illnesses and how to manage them will help them provide better care for their patients.”

After all, patient-centered care is the reason Thapa found psychiatry to be so rewarding. “As teachers, we are training the new generation of Arkansas physicians and hope that we are able to influence them so that they become believers in the role that psychiatry plays in making a positive difference in our patients’ lives.”
Jeanne Y. Wei, M.D., Ph.D., has been named executive director of the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging (RIOA) at UAMS and chair of the Donald W. Reynolds Department of Geriatrics in the College of Medicine. Wei had served since 2002 as professor and executive vice chair of the Department of Geriatrics and as a staff physician in the RIOA and in the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC) at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS).

Wei received her medical degree and a doctorate in pharmacology from the University of Illinois in 1975. She completed an internal medicine residency and a cardiology fellowship at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. She continued her training in a National Institutes of Health staff fellowship at the National Institute on Aging. In 1980 she joined the faculty at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. She later became director of the Division on Aging at Harvard and chief of the Gerontology Division in the Department of Medicine at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. She is a national leader in geriatric medicine and research.

Daniel W. Rahn, M.D., president of the Medical College of Georgia, has been appointed the next chancellor of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. The University of Arkansas Board of Trustees unanimously appointed Rahn on March 24. He will assume the post by January 1, 2010.

Rahn will succeed I. Dodd Wilson, M.D., who is stepping down after nine years as chancellor and 14 years of previous service as dean of the College of Medicine (COM).

"I can't think of an institution or organization that is more important to the people of this state and region than its public academic medical center," Rahn said during the trustees meeting. He praised UAMS’ commitment to improving health through medical care, research and training future physicians and other health professionals.

Since 2001, Rahn has led Georgia's major public health science center as president of the Medical College of Georgia (MCG) and senior vice chancellor for health and medical programs for the University System of Georgia. Previous posts at MCG included vice dean for clinical affairs in the School of Medicine and senior vice president for medical affairs and chief medical officer for MCG Health Inc.

Rahn received his medical degree from Yale University School of Medicine in 1976. He completed his residency in internal medicine at Yale-New Haven Hospital, followed by a fellowship in rheumatology at Yale. He was on the faculty at Yale for 12 years before joining the Medical College of Georgia in 1991.

Wilson came to Arkansas in 1986 from the University of Minnesota, where he was a professor and vice chairman of the Department of Medicine. As dean of the UAMS COM from 1986 to 2000, Wilson oversaw substantial growth of the college’s programs. The recruitment of a number of outstanding, internationally prominent clinicians and scientists, along with major increases in federal research funding, helped to raise the COM’s profile nationally. He was named executive vice chancellor in 1994.

Since becoming chancellor in 2000, Wilson has led the largest expansion in UAMS history, including the 540,000-square-foot hospital that opened in January and several other building projects that have enhanced the campus’ clinical, education and research programs.

Wilson expanded UAMS’ health care and outreach services throughout the state, increasing the number of Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) and overseeing the development of eight Regional Centers on Aging. He also spearheaded the creation of the UAMS-Northwest satellite campus. Among many honors, Wilson was inducted into the COM Hall of Fame in 2008 and received the college’s Distinguished Service Award in May 2009.
First Students Head to Satellite Campus in July

Six College of Medicine (COM) students who just completed their sophomore year in Little Rock will begin their junior rotations at UAMS-Northwest, the new satellite campus, in July.

The satellite campus, based at the old Washington Regional Hospital in Fayetteville, was developed to help stem anticipated growing shortages of physicians and other health care workers. The campus will coordinate essential clinical training sites, preceptors and patients for third- and fourth-year medical students and eventually residents. Junior medical students will complete the same clerkships as their classmates in Little Rock, but they won’t rotate through traditional multi-week blocks devoted to individual disciplines. Instead, students will experience multiple clerkships longitudinally integrated over each semester.

“The new campus has a very promising curriculum for someone who is interested in primary care,” said Drew Lewis, one of the pilot students. “Students from similar programs have liked it and have done well on the (United States Medical Licensing Examination) Step 2. I’m excited to be a member of the first Northwest class,” he said.

The satellite campus is vital to the COM’s plans to expand enrollment. As the college incrementally increases the freshman class from 160 to 200 students, the additional students progressing through medical school each year will come to UAMS-Northwest for their junior rotations and senior electives. Enrollment increases start this fall with an entering class of 174 freshmen.

UAMS-Northwest also will house satellite pharmacy, graduate nursing and allied health education programs.

New Surgery Chair Brings Experience, Broad Expertise

Richard H. Turnage, M.D., has been appointed professor and chair of the Department of Surgery. Turnage previously served for eight years as professor and chair of the Department of Surgery and holder of the John C. McDonald, M.D., Endowed Chair in Surgery at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in Shreveport. His expertise includes acute lung injury research, general and trauma surgery, and start-up and administration of statewide trauma systems.

Turnage received his medical degree from the LSU-Shreveport in 1983. He completed an internship and residency in general surgery at the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor, where he also completed a research fellowship and joined the faculty. In 1992 he was recruited to the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. Four years later he became vice chair of the Department of Surgery at UT Southwestern and chief of the Surgical Service at the Dallas VA Medical Center, posts he held until returning to LSU in 2001.

In Memoriam

W.T. “Tommy” Dungan, M.D., a pioneer in pediatric cardiology and professor emeritus who served in the Department of Pediatrics for 50 years, died March 8, 2009. He was 78. Dungan served in the U.S. Air Force Medical Corps as chief of pediatrics at the Eglin Air Force Base hospital in Florida before joining the UAMS faculty as Arkansas’ first pediatric cardiologist in 1959. He established the Heart Center at Arkansas Children’s Hospital (ACH) and helped it to grow into a world-class program. Dungan served terms as medical director and chief of staff at ACH and held leadership roles in many Arkansas medical organizations.

Thomas E. Andreoli, M.D., a distinguished professor in the departments of Internal Medicine and Physiology and Biophysics and the Nolan Professor and Chair Emeritus of Internal Medicine, died April 14, 2009. He held faculty and leadership posts at Duke University, the University of Alabama School of Medicine and the University of Texas Medical School in Houston before becoming chair of Internal Medicine at UAMS in 1988. He stepped down in 2004 to focus on teaching, research and patient care. He was editor-in-chief of “Andreoli and Carpenter’s Cecil Essentials of Medicine.”
Endowed Chairs

The endowed chair is the highest academic honor that a university can bestow on its faculty. Those named to a chair are among the most highly regarded scientists, physicians and educators. The endowed chair also recognizes the honoree or the generosity of those who made the chair possible.

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

John C. Ansel, M.D., was invested as the first recipient of the Thomas Jansen, M.D., and Frances B. Jansen Chair in Dermatology at UAMS Dec. 4, 2008. A nationally recognized leader in the field, Ansel has been a professor and chairman of the Department of Dermatology and a professor in the Department of Ophthalmology since July 2008. Jansen, now retired, was a national pioneer in dermatology who helped establish UAMS’ program in the 1950s and then served as department chairman for two decades. The endowment was funded with gifts from Jansen’s colleagues, former trainees and friends and family.

Ammar N. Safar, M.D., became the inaugural recipient of the Martha Wood Bentley Chair in Ophthalmology at UAMS April 8, 2009. Safar is a professor of ophthalmology and director of the Vitreo-Retinal Service in the Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute (JEI) and the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System. Safar also has been active in resident training and research into age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy since joining the faculty in 2001. The chair was established with a gift from the late Martha Wood Bentley, who was a longtime supporter and member of the JEI Advisory Board.

Kent McKelvey Jr., M.D. ’96, was invested as the first recipient of the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Chair in Clinical Genetics at UAMS May 14, 2009. McKelvey is an assistant professor in the Division of Genetics and director of cancer genetics services in the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute. The chair was established in memory of Rockefeller, the philanthropist who served as Arkansas’ lieutenant governor from 1996 until his death in 2006. The endowment will help establish an adult Down syndrome clinic in the Division of Genetics.

Gregory B. Sharp, M.D. ’84, was invested as the first holder of the John H. Bornhofen, M.D., Chair in Child Neurology at Arkansas Children’s Hospital (ACH) January 14. Sharp serves as a professor and chief of the Pediatric Neurology Section in the College of Medicine and is medical director of the Neurophysiology Lab at ACH. Bornhofen is an associate professor of neurology and has worked at ACH for more than 40 years. The chair was endowed with $1 million from the ACH Allocation Committee, composed of faculty and hospital staff leadership.

John Fowlkes, M.D., was invested March 3 as the inaugural recipient of the James H. Hamlen II Endowed Chair in Pediatric Endocrinology at Arkansas Children’s Hospital (ACH). Fowlkes is a professor and chief of the Division of Pediatric Endocrinology and vice chairman of research in the Department of Pediatrics. A bequest of more than $4 million to ACH from the estate of Little Rock businessman James H. Hamlen II has created endowed chairs in otolaryngology, endocrinology and pulmonology, and a permanent endowment for the Audiology and Speech Pathology Program at ACH.
The benefits of physical activity are obvious: increase your stamina, flexibility and strength. But for third-year obstetrics and gynecology resident Jenny Gregory, M.D. ’06, it’s more about improving your well-being. “Exercise is an absolute de-stressor,” she said. “While the physical health rewards are obvious, the emotional benefits are so crucial. It’s fun and uplifting and an instant way to boost your mood or gain energy.”

Despite her hectic schedule, Gregory manages to carve out a couple of hours a week to teach group fitness classes at the UAMS Fitness Center. And that commitment of time is helping other residents and medical students to de-stress.

Her classes combine high-energy dance moves with martial arts and traditional aerobics for an intense cardio workout. “Kickboxing requires strength, endurance, technique and focus,” Gregory said. “It mandates your mind and soul as well as your body.”

An avid dancer, she started tap, jazz and ballet at age 3. “I’ve always been athletic and dance is my true passion,” she said.

Gregory began taking kickboxing classes in college, and an instructor encouraged her to get certified to teach. She has been teaching kickboxing for nine years. “It was a struggle to fit in exercise initially during medical school,” she said. “I kept it up for both the fitness and the personal enjoyment. It keeps me emotionally charged and that is very important. It’s all about balancing your life.”

The fitness guru pursued a career as an obstetrician and gynecologist because she always has been interested in women’s health, which relates to the rewards of teaching fitness classes.

“I love to see women take charge and take care of themselves,” Gregory said. “It’s so good to see the participants really enjoy it and get engaged. It has helped people feel more empowered and confident.”

“Exercise is an absolute de-stressor. While the physical health rewards are obvious, the emotional benefits are so crucial. It’s fun and uplifting and an instant way to boost your mood or gain energy.”

Jenny Gregory, M.D. ’06, finds time in her hectic schedule as an obstetrics and gynecology resident to teach kickboxing.
Founders Society

Since 1994, the Founders Society has allocated its annual fund earnings to educational programs and tools that the College of Medicine’s original founders couldn’t have imagined. In February, members approved a $50,000 contribution to help develop the new Division of Genetics, which will provide an academic home for education, clinical and research programs relating to the increasingly important field of genetics. The Founders Society has approximately 300 members who have collectively given $39 million to the COM. Members have pledged or given $10,000 or more to COM endowments.

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Lee B. Parker, M.D.
When a five-year-old patient of pediatric dermatologist Jay Kincannon, M.D. ’85, was diagnosed with an uncommon skin disease at UAMS in 2007, she and her family had to travel to Dallas for dozens of crucial treatments using a special phototherapy machine.

They didn’t want other Arkansans to have to do the same, so the family of Helen Woodyard — her parents Bill and Peyton, grandparents Bill and Susan Woodyard and Ellie and Gary Roberts, M.D., and others — did something extraordinary. They held a fundraising event and waged letter-writing campaigns, raising $70,000 to buy UAMS a UVA-1 phototherapy machine.

“The machine is state-of-the-art,” said Kincannon, a professor of dermatology. “We are extremely fortunate to have this at UAMS and will use it to its fullest potential.” The machine is being used for treating skin diseases and for clinical research.

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List includes members as of May 20, 2009.

Thank you!
Dedicated Dola
Dola Searcy Thompson, M.D., has served the College of Medicine for six decades

Dola Searcy Thompson, M.D. ’49, began her career in anesthesiology in the 1950s, when few physicians entered the specialty and anesthesia departments were few and far between at medical schools around the nation.

Thompson went on to serve UAMS and the College of Medicine for six decades, as a resident, professor, department chair and finally as an energetic alumna who is recognized for her scholarship, academic leadership and excellence in anesthesia care.

As a medical student, the Little Rock native met and married Bernard W. “Bernie” Thompson, a classmate who later became a professor of surgery at UAMS. After graduating, the Thompsons moved to California, where Dola interned at Women’s and Children’s Hospital of San Francisco. “The hospital was founded by women physicians, because at that time it was difficult for women to get on a hospital staff,” she said. “It was comfortable working in a hospital with so many women.”

Thompson was leaning toward a career as a pediatrician, but an anesthesiologist with whom she was working demonstrated various anesthesiology procedures and encouraged her to pursue the discipline. “It was a new and challenging field of medicine,” she said. “There was a dire need for anesthesiologists, and there just weren’t many in practice.”

In 1950, Thompson returned to Little Rock and became the first resident physician in the newly established UAMS Department of Anesthesiology. After residency training, she went into private practice in Little Rock for a few years. In 1959, she became chief of the Division of Anesthesiology at the Little Rock Veteran’s Hospital and an assistant professor of anesthesiology at UAMS, where she later was promoted to associate professor.

In 1974, Thompson was named professor and chair of the Department of Anesthesiology – becoming only the second full-time female department head at UAMS. Her contributions included providing anesthesia care in University Hospital, directing the residency program and teaching medical students. Thompson updated anesthesia equipment in the operating rooms, improved monitoring capability, established a post-anesthesia care unit and opened and directed the Surgical Intensive Care Unit. She also expanded the anesthesia teaching service at Arkansas Children’s Hospital and the VA hospital.

“I retired fully in 1991 so I could lend a hand in other ways, and I’ve enjoyed what I’ve done since then,” Thompson said. She has remained active in UAMS and the College of Medicine Alumni Association – including serving with Bernard Thompson as 1949 class agents, and becoming members of the Founders Society and the UAMS Society of the Double Helix. Bernard died in 2003. Dola now serves on the Dean’s Alumni Advisory Board. The College of Medicine is raising funds to create a Dola S. Thompson Endowed Professorship in Anesthesiology to honor her and benefit the department’s educational programs, students, residents and faculty.

In 2006, a new chapter began in Thompson’s life. She married John Pauly, Ph.D., a professor emeritus in the Department of Anatomy at UAMS who had served as chairman from 1967 to 1983 and then as vice chancellor for academic affairs and sponsored research until 1992. Also in 2006, Thompson was inducted into the College of Medicine Hall of Fame. “It was the most prestigious recognition in my long career,” she said.

But the greatest satisfaction of all? That, Thompson said, “comes from having a big part in teaching residents who went on to provide excellent anesthesia care to many patients in Arkansas and various places in the country.”
Fred O. Henker, M.D. ’45, explored the links between hope and recovery while serving as a faculty member and psychiatrist at UAMS for 31 years. He also recognized the intrinsic value, saying, “Hope is a satisfaction unto itself, and need not be fulfilled to be appreciated.”

Henker joined the faculty in 1958 and retired as a professor emeritus in 1989. He specialized in psychosomatic illness, treating patients who were dually diagnosed with mental and physical illness, and issues related to death and dying. He died of Parkinson’s disease in 2005.

G. Richard Smith, M.D. ’77, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and director of the UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute, was one of the many medical students and residents he influenced. “Dr. Henker was always the patient’s champion and advocate,” Smith said. “As such, he inspired me to always keep the patient as the single, central issue in health care.”

Virginia Henker said her husband reveled in his work. “He loved students and residents most of all,” she said. “He loved to teach.”

Henker had many interests. He was an avid rock hound, collected Native American artifacts and was a Master Gardener. He was passionate about history and wrote appreciative monographs about UAMS’ eight founding physicians.

The Henkers kept close ties to UAMS through the years, and Virginia remains active in the Founders Society and other activities. Fred Henker was posthumously inducted into the College of Medicine Hall of Fame in 2006.

The writings will be featured in a College of Medicine history Web site now under development.
Welcome to a New Era

Page 2 Beyond Beautiful: UAMS' new hospital enhances clinical programs.

Page 4 Heart Smart: Cardiovascular programs poised for growth (cover story).

Page 8 Family Space: NICU transforms care of fragile babies.

Page 10 Care and Hope: The Psychiatric Research Institute sheds light on mental illness.

Page 10 Second to None: Emergency Department designed for efficiency and comfort.

Page 11 On the Move: COM students help patients settle into new hospital.

Page 12 1956: Alumni remember the move to Markham.

Page 13 A Leg Up: James Aronson changes lives with bone-lengthening procedure.

Page 14 Teaching with Tenderness: Puroshottam B. Thapa earns accolades.

Page 22 Dedicated Dola: Dola Scathy Thompson has long served UAMS.
The College of Medicine at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has achieved nearly 130 years of phenomenal growth and success in teaching, clinical care, research and service since our founding in 1879. As Arkansas’ only medical school, we train the majority of the state’s physicians. We strive to help them acquire not only the ultimate in medical skills, but also the professional and ethical standards that will ensure the very best care for patients. Our world-class clinicians and researchers serve on the forefront of medical advances. Our faculty are on staff at UAMS Medical Center, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, the UAMS Area Health Education Centers and numerous other clinics and facilities providing services throughout the state of Arkansas and for patients from around the world.

Cardiology and other programs are growing thanks to great leaders and superb new facilities.