NEW LEADERSHIP PREPARES THE BSD FOR THE FUTURE

ADVANCING THE RED QUEEN

The only reason I’ve lasted this long,” notes Ralph Weichselbaum, MD, who for 21 years has served as chairman of the Department of Radiation and Cellular Oncology, “is because I have a small department. “Plus,” he added, “it was new when I started. There was no predecessor to remember fondly.”

At the monthly meeting of the Divisional Executive Committee, Weichselbaum, the longest-serving of the 21 department chairmen in the University of Chicago Biological Sciences Division, now has 10 new colleagues: two who lead the newly created departments of Family Medicine and Microbiology and eight of whom have predecessors — remembered with varying degrees of fondness. One more new face soon will join them; a search for a new chairman of neurology is under way.

“Our new chairs are the future of the BSD. They will determine how well we set our priorities, spend our resources, focus our research interests and shape our clinical programs,” said James Madara, MD, dean of the division and vice president for medical affairs. “And I’m happy to report that they are stellar. These are physician-scientists any university would die to have.”
A backlog of crucial upper-level vacancies was the first priority to face Madara when he arrived from Emory in mid-2002. The previous dean, Glenn Steele, MD, PhD, had served six years, almost twice the average for U.S. med schools and the longest tenure since Leon Jacobson, MD, stepped down in 1975. Steele left somewhat abruptly, however, early in 2001 to run the Granger Specialty Clinics, a large Pennsylvania-based health care system. At that time, several of the reigning chairs already had announced plans to step down. During the following 18 months, with only an interim dean, a few more began to queue up.

“It presented us with a huge challenge right off the bat, but at the same time a wonderful opportunity,” Madara said. “The sheer number of openings, half of our departments, forced us to think carefully about the priorities and goals of the division as a whole, to consider as a group what sort of institution we want to be in 10 years and what sorts of personalities could help us get there.”

In the fiercely competitive Darwinian world of academic medical centers, “any slowing of pace puts you behind,” noted one of Madara’s most fondly remembered predecessors. Samuel Hellman, MD, dean of the BSD from 1989-94 published his reflections on the occasional joys and frequent sorrows of being a medical school dean in JAMA, a few years after stepping down from the job. “It takes all the running you can do,” wrote Hellman, borrowing a line from the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass, “to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that.”

Without superb leadership at the department level, he said, it would be impossible to prevent regression toward the mean — the relentless tendency for even leading programs to drift back into the pack — much less to move ahead. Keith Moffat, PhD, the Louis Block Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and deputy provost for research, echoed Hellman’s concern. “Department chairs have to be first-rate,” Moffat said, “because if they’re second-rate, to look good they surround themselves with people who are third-rate. That’s when,” he warned, “the rot sets in.”

To expand the department’s academic and research activity and to improve clinical services.

- Emotions: “My desire to act quickly must be tempered by the reality of process.”
- Surprises: “How helpful, supportive, proactive and united the medical school administration has been.”

**Emil Coccaro, MD**
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY
APPOINTED: NOVEMBER 1, 2004

- Came from: MCP Hahnemann School of Medicine in 1999 to be a professor of psychiatry and director of clinical neuroscience and psychopharmacology at Chicago.
- Known for: Research on the neuropharmacologic and genetic mechanisms of mood and personality disorders, particularly in the neurobiology of suicidal and impulsive aggressive disorders as seen in patients with intermittent explosive disorder.
- Chosen for: Achievements as a clinical neuroscientist, interest in collaborative research, and a history of building programs and developing the careers of junior faculty.
- Why he came: “I came to Chicago in 1999 because it was a wonderful opportunity to build a research program. I became chairman to have the opportunity to build a strong collaborative program in psychiatry and clinical neuroscience.”
- Dreams: “To expand the department’s academic and research activity and to improve clinical services.”

**T. Conrad Gilliam, PhD**
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN GENETICS
APPOINTED: SEPTEMBER 1, 2004

- Came from: Columbia University, where he was the John E. Bunge Professor of Genetics and Development, director of the Columbia Genome Center, adjunct professor in the Department of Biomedical Informatics and co-director of the Joint Centers for Systems Biology.
- Known for: Studies on the genetic determinants of common heritable disorders — including schizophrenia, autism, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder and cardiovascular disease — using novel genomic and bioinformatic approaches.
- Chosen for: Building an interdisciplinary team of genomic and bioinformatics scientists within the Columbia Genome Center (both areas needed development at Chicago)
- Why he came: “A convergence of events made Chicago the place to be: an established leadership in theoretical genetics, the Genome Revolution and its volumes of DNA sequence data, and the desire to use this information to solve biomedical problems. I came here to build science at the interface of genetics, genomics and evolutionary genetics. There is tremendous opportunity here given the university’s association with the Argonne National Labs.”
- Dreams: “I want to help build the genomic and bioinformatics infrastructure that will enable us to harvest the vast information that can be gleaned by comparing DNA sequence variation. I want to see the day when this information is used to transform the practice and delivery of health care.”

Emotions: “Thinking people ‘no’ and asking for things to which I may not be entitled. I’m practicing on my family. The younger children just cry, the older ones know I’m kidding.”

Surprises: “The scientists I was unable to recruit at Columbia who have already accepted faculty slots here, which validates my vision. Also, the Dixie Kitchen and Rusty Shop [a local, Southern-style eatery].”

**S. Murry Sherman, PhD**
DEPARTMENT OF NEUROBIOLOGY, PHARMACOLOGY & PHYSIOLOGY
APPOINTED: JULY 1, 2004

- Came from: State University of New York-Stony Brook, where he was the leading professor of neuroscience and anatomy in the Department of Neurobiology and Behavior.
- Known for: Studies of the thalamus and its relation to the cortex, especially how thal- amus controls the flow of information to the cortex and participates in further cortical processing via cortico-thalamo-cortical circuits.
- Chosen for: “Beats me. I don’t go in for introspection.”
- Why he came: “This was a no-brainer! all around. Best offer of any place I considered. My kids already lived in the Midwest, Ann Arbor and Madison. My wife and I love Chicago.”
- Dreams: “I hope to see neuroscience built up at Chicago. It’s already strong. I hope to be part of making it stronger.”

Emotions: “Beats me. I don’t go in for introspection.”

Surprises: “Why do. I do my homework. It’s hard to surprise me.”

Chairsing a department can be a chore, admits Weichselbaum — a first-rate leader himself — “an honor and a privilege, an opportunity, but also a difficult, challenging, time-devouring responsibility.” It requires sufficient research credentials to retain the respect of the faculty as well as genuine clinical skills, some administrative facility and sufficient interpersonal skills to keep a highly diverse cluster of fiercely independent scientists and physicians motivated, productive and collegial, “all in an environment of relentless underlying financial pressure — which we pretend doesn’t exist.”

It was into that tumult the division sought to recruit its new leader. After a series of faculty meetings, the division leadership drew a blueprint for the types of leaders they wanted. They had to be first-rate scholars, of course, and have a reputation for organization and attention to detail. “But most of all,” Madara said, “we wanted people who were collaborators by nature, people who were willing and eager to cross boundaries, to ask fundamental questions and chase after answers wherever that took them.”
Olaf Schneewind, MD, PAD
DEPARTMENT OF MICROBIOLOGY (newly formed)
APPOINTED: JULY 1, 2004

Came from: University of Chicago since 2001; before that, professor of microbiology and immunology at University of California-Los Angeles.
Known for: Research on how pathogenic bacteria cause human disease. Since 2003, principal investigator of the Great Lakes Regional Center of Excellence for Biodefense and Emerging Diseases, a consortium of 18 institutions funded by the NIAID to study such diseases as anthrax, botulism, tularemia, hemorrhagic fever viruses and plague. Also principal investigator for the Regional Biocontainment Laboratory at Argonne National Laboratory. Chosen for: The rare ability to apply the tools and knowledge of genetics and biochemistry safely to the job.

The next step was to find such people. A search committee of six to 10 people, none from the affected department, was assembled for each vacant chair. Committee members had to be top scholars themselves, who knew the field and the people in it, but also those with "taste" in academics, Madara said.

As the committees began their searches, each department launched its own self-study to assess aspirations, strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, experts from nationally visible departments at other universities — people who combined broad experience with a penchant for raw, blunt candor — were invited to examine each department, make recommendations and suggest names of scholars who might be a good fit.

From these suggestions, calls to colleagues, even advertisements in specialty journals, the committees assembled lists of names and eventually identified five to 10 willing and capable candidates for each position. Each one was invited to visit, "kind of like a first date," Madara said, to learn their interests, how they think, how they relate to people.

Unlike a first date, though, the committee then calls their references. A subset, those who show real promise, get asked back. The second visit is "a bit more rigorous," he said. "We drill down. We want details." At this point the candidate is invited to bring along his or her spouse. Candidates at this level start looking at schools and sampling the local real estate market.

By the third date the field has narrowed drastically and the relationships start to get serious, with each partner probing for hidden flaws while searching for signs of commitment. Candidates present public seminars on their research. They meet all the department's faculty, clinical and basic scientists. Unlike at most institutions, they also start meeting researchers outside the department, even faculty from the social or physical sciences and from Argonne National Laboratory.

"For most schools that's probably incidental," Madara said, "but for us it's routine." By the standards of the major academic medical centers, Chicago is fairly small. "While we can't compete with schools like Yale or UCLA on sheer size, we compete quite well on research productivity and we tend to win by being distinctive," he said. "Our primary difference — our history and our future — is this ingrained habit, almost an addiction, of cross-disciplinary work. Our size just means that the boundaries we choose to disregard are closer together."

Although the same process produced all 10 new chairmen, the results have been diverse in terms of the talents they bring. Richard Baron, MD, for example, a pioneer in abdominal imaging and former chairman of the Department of Radiology at the University of Pittsburgh, brought a new level of financial and administrative acumen to the radiology department, having founded and run one of the country's largest academic professional physician practices, with 1,400 providers and a $400 million annual budget.

"I think there was a strong attraction for someone with a clinical research background," Baron said, "who could also understand and help manage one of the hospital's key financial drivers."

On the other hand, Steven Goldstein, MD, PhD, an authority on ion channel signaling who became chairman of pediatrics in July 2004, brought a stellar reputation for basic research into the molecular mechanisms of disease. He also demonstrated unsuspected bargaining skills by negotiating a package that brought his entire research team from Yale, along with permission to hire 30 new clinical and research faculty in the coming years and the go-ahead to create the Institute for Molecular Pediatric Sciences, all capped by the completion in February of a spectacular new children's hospital.

The most recent recruit, pulmonologist Joe “Skip” Garcia, MD, brings perhaps the most all-encompassing curriculum vitae to the university's largest and most diverse department: medicine. A professor in three departments and several research centers at Johns Hopkins University before coming to Chicago in May 2005, Garcia brings a reputation for pathbreaking research in the basic science of lung biology, for innovative clinical research on lung injuries and edema, and a history of starting and building new programs.

The people who run and administer this institution...the people who run and administer this place are among the smartest and most enthusiastic people on the planet."
Arthur F. Haney, MD
DEPARTMENT OF OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY
APPOINTED: APRIL 14, 2003

Came from: Duke University, where he was the Roy T. Parker Professor and director of reproductive endocrinology and infertility in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Known for: Work on reproductive endocrinology, infertility and the prevention of adhesions following gynecoscopic surgery.

Chosen for: “Perhaps my ability to thrive in the ever-changing world of academic health care.”

Why he came: “This was a department with real strengths but also the opportunity to develop into one of the best in the U.S. I was offered the resources to make a difference, to build up the research effort and to recruit good new people. Plus, this is a venerable institution in a great city.”

Dreams: “To create a spectacular department for tertiary care, the best in Chicago and the Midwest, with strong programs in pre-natal diagnosis, infertility, complex pelvic surgery and gynecologic cancer care.”

Weakness: “A lack of patience. I want to get things done now and that can be challenging in any academic institution.”

Surprises: “MIDWESTERN VIRTUOSIC. People are wonderful here, far less virulent than on the East Coast. And the university is small enough that you get to know people from a wide spectrum of departments.”

“...we clearly stemmed the tide,” Madara said. Funding from the National Institutes of Health has gone up 28 percent since 2002. Research space has increased and will go up dramatically when the Center for Integrative Science, the largest research building on campus, opens this fall, to be followed by another new building with wet-lab space for medicine, pediatrics and cancer research in spring 2008. And the Pramukh School of Medicine rose three spots in the latest rankings of U.S. News & World Report after they incorporated NIH funding for faculty member, which placed greater emphasis on distinction as opposed to sheer size.

Lupus and Immunology Research, and Steven Kent, PhD, who became the first director of the Institute for Biophysical Dynamics, designed to foster scientific collaborations between physical and biological scientists. In 2004, internal candidates Geoffrey Greene, PhD, took over leadership of the Committee on Cancer Biology, Michelle LeBeau, PhD, became director of the Cancer Research Center, and David Melton, MD, established a new Center for the Study of Health and the Social Sciences with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In 2005, Elizabeth McNally, MD, PhD, was chosen as director of the newly created Institute for Cardiovascular Research.

At five to ten candidates each, times 10 new chairs, with one more search still under way, plus heads of various committees and centers and other senior faculty, “that’s a lot of seminars,” Madara said, sounding just a little weary, “a lot of dinners.”

Although the results have been splendid and deserve celebration, there is “no time to rest on our laurels,” he acknowledged.

“Theoretical basis for such anxiety dates back more than three decades. In 1973, looking at a different problem, University of Chicago theorist Leigh Van Valen postulated the Red Queen hypothesis. Thinking not about research or hospitals or universities but about the co-evolution of predators and their prey, such as bacteria and their hosts, Van Valen suggested that in an evolving system, “continuing development is needed just in order to maintain relative fitness.”

Thirty-two years later, mounting competition has brought some of the “red-in-tooth-and-claw” aspects of nature to the world of health care, education and research. In the old days, “if you ran very fast for a long time,” as Alice did with the Red Queen, “you’d generally get to somewhere else.” Now, Madara said, that’s only the beginning.

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Bernard G. Ewigman, MD, MSPH
DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY MEDICINE
APPOINTED: SEPTEMBER 1, 2002

Came from: University of Michigan-Columbia (a 28-year stint), where he was a medical student, resident, fellow, junior faculty and eventually professor and director of the Center for Family Medicine Science.

Known for: Innovative work in applying the specialized tools of clinical epidemiology to the field of family medicine, outcomes research on ultrasonic diagnosis among pregnant women, epidemiological research on the causes and prevention of child abuse and neglect, and founding of a national academic-practice consortium for translating research into practice.

Chosen for: “Experience and national reputation in practice, teaching, research and administration in academic and community settings.”

Why he came: “To start a new research-oriented family medicine department that serves a defined community on the southeast side of the Chicago area — a rare opportunity.”

Dreams: “To build a small department that is recognized for leadership in research, training academic family physicians and providing exemplary service to the community. It’s going very well so far, but more slowly than I would like.”

Weakness: “Unrealistic expectations of myself and others. My brain seems to lack the this-cannot-be-done circuit.”

Surprises: “The degree to which collaboration across disciplines occurs and is valued here.”

Richard L. Baron, MD
DEPARTMENT OF RADIOLOGY
APPOINTED: SEPTEMBER 1, 2002

Came from: University of Pittsburgh, where he was founding president and CEO of the University of Pittsburgh Physicians Practice Plan and professor of radiology. He was chairman of radiology from 1990-99.

Known for: Groundbreaking work in abdominal imaging. Also, starting and running one of the country’s largest academic physician practices.

Chosen for: “Strong clinical research background and extensive administrative experience. ‘Hospital radiology is truly big business, and I had run a very large department.”

Why he came: “I turned down the position a few years earlier but had faith in the new leadership — people with personal presence, strong vision and commitment.”

Dreams: “Build an unrivaled institution-wide resource for imaging with new equipment and faculty expertise. Build bridges to other departments and a partnership with a leading vendor. We now have such a relationship with Philips Medical Imaging.”

Weakness: “I take on too much work.”

Surprises: “The ease of interactions and how frequently they occur between the basic scientists in the Department of Radiology and the faculty physician-radiologists.”