

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

by Harold M. Maurer, M.D.

a banner headline prominently displayed in the Omaha World-Herald announces: "UNMC Achieves Goal of Doubling Research Dollars."

Another headline in the Lincoln Journal Star proclaims: "UNMC Research Group Reverses Heart Failure."



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Finally, banner headlines run in daily newspapers throughout the state, from Norfolk to Scottsbluff, Grand Island to North Platte,

announcing: "UNMC Scientists Regenerate Diseased Liver."

These headlines, which we hope will someday run in these Nebraska newspapers, illustrate our goals at UNMC. Our plan for the future is simple: We want to rank among the leading academic health sciences centers. Three key ingredients are necessary: patient care, education and research.

Through our partnership with Nebraska Health System, the patient care component of this three-part plan is secure. NHS continues to grow its market share in the Omaha area. UNMC consistently attracts the best students from Nebraska and the region. One example of the quality students we attract is the first-year classes at our College of Dentistry.

Their incoming grade-point average consistently ranks first among all the dental schools in the country. Harvard and all the others can't touch us.

Our research component, however, must continue to move forward. Last year, we received \$31 million in research grants and contracts. I am pleased with our progress, but not satisfied. We can do better. Much better.

I've challenged our scientists to double our research grants in five years, and triple them in 10.

Recently, our top scientists gathered to set a course for realizing these goals. To begin the process, they were asked to step back and predict what our Nebraska newspapers might be saying about the University of Nebraska Medical Center in five years.

Their predictions included such words as "innovation," "breakthrough" and "discovery."

The University of Nebraska Medical Center has the foundation in place for achieving these lofty goals, including work in progress to achieve medical breakthroughs that will improve the quality of life for people in Nebraska and beyond.

Back to the present, for a moment. Nebraska newspapers recently have included coverage of the work of some of our outstanding and innovative researchers:

—Richard Finnell, Ph.D., and his team of researchers created the world's first genetically engineered mouse model to explain how folic acid protects against common human birth defects. This discovery will

help researchers to better understand how the transport of folic acid within the cell protects against such birth defects as neural tube defects and cleft lip and palate. Dr. Finnell is director of UNMC's Center for Human Molecular Genetics.

—Carol Pullen, Ph.D., just received a five-year, \$1 million grant to bring rural nursing education into people's homes. Dr. Pullen is an assistant dean and associate professor for our College of Nursing.

—John Chan, M.D., received a \$3.24 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to characterize and predict the behavior of all major forms of B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which could lead to novel therapies for patients with lymphoma.

You'll read in this edition of *UNMC Discover* about a researcher who recently received an \$8 million, five-year grant. Irving Zucker, Ph.D., is one of our best. His goal is to study the cause of chronic heart disease and develop innovative treatments.

The brilliant minds of Drs. Finnell, Pullen, Chan and Zucker and other UNMC faculty are focused on helping us achieve our goal and working to improve the quality of life for the people we serve.

Improving the health of all Nebraska is our mission.

When I look back and see how far UNMC has come, I can't help but smile. When I look forward and see how far we want to go, I can't help but feel exhilarated. The opportunity for UNMC to achieve world-class status is now. It's one we plan to take. *d*