Announcement from COM Dean

John Sparks, M.D., has announced his intention to resign as chairman of UNMC's pediatrics department. He has agreed to stay on as chairman through the conclusion of the search to name his replacement. I will begin this search immediately. At the conclusion of the search for his replacement he will remain on the faculty as a Professor.

Dr. Sparks, a 1972 Harvard Medical School graduate, joined UNMC in January of 2008 as Chair of the Department of Pediatrics. Under his leadership the number of pediatric specialists caring for children in Omaha has doubled - from 90 in 2007 to more than 200 today. Additionally, Pediatric clinical research trials - the gateway to the newest and best therapies - have increased from seven in 2007 to 213 in 2016. Outpatient specialty clinic visits at Children's have skyrocketed from 35,000 in 2009 to more than 100,000 in 2016. Children's/UNMC now have 15 fellows in nine approved programs; in 2007, there was one fellow.

Under Dr. Sparks' steady leadership, the department of pediatrics has grown substantially to become nationally recognized for its excellence in all the missions of academic medicine.

Please join me in congratulating Dr. Sparks on a job well done leading the department and wish him the best as he continues his career at UNMC.

Welcome New Faculty

The following individuals have joined the Department of Pediatrics beginning July 1st

Cardiology

- Jean Ballweg, M.D.

Critical Care

- Laura Ortmann, M.D.

Emergency Medicine

Contact Us

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Newsletter Back Issues

Previous issues are available on the UNMC Pediatrics website (Link).

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Bruce Gordon, M.D. to Lead Office of Regulatory Affairs

When Bruce Gordon, M.D., first was approached about joining the Institutional Review Board, he demurred.

"I don't have time," he told Ernie Prentice, Ph.D., director of the IRB.

"We'll put you down for three years," Dr. Prentice said.

"Well, maybe one year," Dr. Gordon allowed.

"Great, three years," Dr. Prentice responded. Twenty-five years later, Dr. Gordon is the new assistant vice chancellor for regulatory affairs and the executive chair of the IRB. Working with Dr. Prentice for a quarter century on issues of research ethics, he found not just a career path but a calling.
"It really is fascinating," Dr. Gordon said. "It is great for someone who likes to think about ethics, and rights and justice, and someone who uses debate and discourse as a route to better understanding. And I was raised that way -- my family upbringing is arguing around the table, constantly questioning things -- and IRBs are particularly well-known for arguing, and for questioning.

"But I've been particularly enamored of the ethical aspects related to the involvement of human beings in research -- the idea of protecting human subjects, and of facilitating the conduct of ethical research involving human subjects."

Dr. Gordon, who will oversee key components of the human research protection program at UNMC, UNO and at Children's Hospital & Medical Center, is taking over at a challenging time. In January 2017, the federal government issued sweeping revisions to the Common Rule, the 35-year-old regulations that governed human-subject research.

"The agencies were very receptive to advice from the field," Dr. Gordon said. "There are some big changes in there -- changes which will reduce regulatory burden, changes which will improve the protection of human subjects, but changes that are going to require some dramatic modifications in the way we practice and the things we do.

"So that's an incredible challenge," he said. "There are a lot of nuances that we're going to have to figure out -- but some of these are really good modifications that have been long overdue."

He is buoyed by the staff at the IRB, and he credits Dr. Prentice with creating a strong culture of attention to detail and attention to the big ethical picture surrounding the review of human-subject research. He also points out that he has been working in a leadership role at the IRB for many years.

"I'm not really coming into a new situation," he said. "And I'm dealing with a group of really smart, really dedicated individuals, and that's Ernie's doing. He set up the office to function well, so I can step in very easily.

"Yes, there will be some course changes to reflect the new rule and to better support our stakeholders, but fundamentally, the core processes are intact and work well."

(Published in UNMC Today, July 26, 2017, by John Keenan)

Congratulations, Dr. Lois Starr!

Lois Starr, M.D., medical director of the Munroe-Meyer Institute, recently received the Association for Molecular Pathology's Global Young Investigator Poster Award for the poster she presented at the annual AMP meeting in Berlin. Dr. Starr's poster was titled "New Syndrome: First Patient with Heterozygous Deleterious PIG-Q Mutations Causing a GPI-anchor Biosynthesis Deficiency." The research work for the poster was part of Dr. Starr's clinical translational...
research Ph.D. program. Dr. Starr was selected to deliver a platform presentation of her work at the conference.