

PITTMED

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ou learn to know a beacon in a storm.

—Seneca

Dear Pitt Med Readers,

I am honored to serve as the new dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and introduce the first issue of Pitt Med magazine published under my leadership.

This issue arrives when we are living through an incredible “new normal”—amid an unpredictable pandemic, civic unrest and a tenuous economy. This vortex of challenges is precisely where great medical and research universities like Pitt can serve as beacons. Science, innovation and collaboration have never been more important—or more necessary.

Here at Pitt Med, life presses on with renewed energy. In August, our first-year medical students made history with an extraordinary virtual white coat ceremony and their own class oath—a new tradition for Pitt. Our clinical faculty and trainees have been caring for patients at full capacity. Our educational leaders have been busy welcoming medical students to classes, online and on campus. And our investigators have been conducting research at warp speed to create critical knowledge, including urgent elucidations related to COVID-19.

The ensuing pages speak to some of these efforts. Our special report checks in on our faculty and students, who have been working tirelessly to understand, treat and prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19.

The idea for our cover story took shape this summer, following the murder of George Floyd and a University-wide charge to focus the lens of examination inward and assess our own systems and structures. The place where race intersects with medicine is hardly uncharted territory. But writer Elaine Vitone zeroes in on racism in medicine—how discrimination and inequity damage health. More to come on how Pitt people are removing structural barriers and increasing diversity, equity and inclusion.

It's worth noting that the corresponding art for this piece is by Ms. Jasmine Green, a Pitt alumna, Pittsburgh local and, using her own term, an “artist.” Green's paintings—which we commissioned for this issue—will soon be on proud display in Alan Magee Scaife Hall. You can read more about Green in the contributors' box on the preceding spread.

This issue also spotlights groundbreaking work happening on campus that's likely to carry real-world benefits for patients and clinical care teams alike. These advancements include a newly unveiled type of immunity, a new vaccine delivery option for protecting against tuberculosis and a way to leverage robotics to sharpen the immune system's attack on cancer cells.

So, while 2020 has reminded us—in stark clarity—of the capriciousness of life, it's also laid bare a quieter truth: That Pitt Med's firm commitment to training the best doctors, finding new cures and creating a more equitable society is needed now more than ever. I invite every one of you to join us in this mission and support our students, faculty and staff as we continue to negotiate this new normal—and thrive within it—in the year to come.

Stay safe and be well.

Anantha Shekhar, MD, PhD

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