



## Physician at Work

### When prognosis is poor, achieving the best outcome



By the time patients reach the office of neurosurgeon **Joseph M. Piepmeier, MD**, their life expectancy is likely to be limited. But even in these terminal cases, with few treatment options available, Piepmeier finds reason for hope.

“Many of the patients I see, I know the first day I see them that they have a fatal problem,” Piepmeier says. “But we’re going to try to prolong their life and sustain a high quality of life for the time they have left.”

Because it’s not always possible to remove a brain tumor without damaging the brain, Piepmeier must weigh the benefits of surgery against possible effects on the quality of life. And that leads to a search for new treatments. Although the bulk of his work takes place in the operating room—he performs 200 surgeries a year—Piepmeier is also involved in clinical research as he seeks new ways to help patients. He works with radiation therapists as well as other specialists. “We have some terrific new technologies, such as the gamma knife, which really extends what we can do for patients,” he says. Piepmeier is also involved in a clinical trial of a new treatment modality known as convection-enhanced delivery, in which a targeted toxin is infused into the brain through catheters over four days. “Instead of giving it by mouth or by vein, we are actually infusing it into the brain,” he says. His clinical research also includes a study with Anthony van den Pol, PhD, on viruses that attack and destroy brain tumors.

His focus, as always, is on his patients.

“These patients have cancer in the brain. You can’t imagine a more immediate recognition of what’s really important in life and what’s not. The immediate focus of their life is right here, right now. It’s a terrific challenge but it’s a wonderful place for a physician to be,” he says. “If you can

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*Robert Sherwin is the director of the Yale Center for Clinical Investigation and Tesheia Johnson is the chief operating officer of the center, which will make it easier for investigators to design and implement research studies. Pediatric endocrinologist William Tamborlane (below) is the deputy director of the center. As a physician who also conducts clinical research in diabetes and metabolism in children, he serves as both a role model and mentor to younger doctors.*

## A shot in the arm for clinical research

*Initiative provides tools for YMG clinicians to test new therapies.*

An ambitious new research initiative at the School of Medicine, intended to make it easier for clinicians to conduct research studies, is scheduled to be fully operational in early summer.

“Our hope is that this will be a shot in the arm for a significant expansion of clinical research at Yale,” said **Robert S. Sherwin, MD**, the C.N.H. Long Professor of Medicine and director of the new Yale Center for Clinical Investigation (YCCI). **Tesheia Johnson, MBA, MHS**, associate director for clinical research at the medical school, is the new center’s chief operating officer.

The YCCI, which was established in late 2005 and is funded by the largest-ever grant to the medical school, represents a major expansion of the General Clinical Research Center housed at Yale-New Haven Hospital. The YCCI will have two locations, one for intensive studies that require patients to remain in the hospital, and a second at 2 Church Street South, which will focus on community-based and outpatient research. The new facility on Church Street South, with better parking and easier access, will open up new space for research, Johnson said. “This is the first time we will have an accessible space for research subjects.”

YCCI’s mission is to streamline the process for investigators as they design and implement research studies, helping them through the complex regulatory requirements of local, state and federal agencies and funding entities. “It isn’t easy



to embark on a clinical study any more,” Sherwin said. “We’re trying to create an infrastructure to make it easier for investigators to get through the process.”

A key component of the center is training for clinicians so they can learn to design and conduct scientifically credible studies. “People who do clinical research get medical training, but often do not have sufficient training to deal with the science side,” Sherwin said.

To fill that gap, YCCI’s educational core is based in the Investigative Medicine Program, which offers advanced training to MD fellows starting careers in translational or clinical research. In April the first group of YCCI Scholars, comprised of 15 junior faculty members, were named. They will receive salary support and funding to devote at least 75 percent of their time to clinical or translational research. They will also receive mentoring from established clinical scholars.

Other plans call for bringing clinical, basic science and public health researchers together on proj-

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## Physician at Work *continued*

translate new ideas and novel therapies to these patients who are in very hopeless situations, that's a big attraction."

**Name:** Joseph M. Piepmeier, MD.

**Title:** Nixdorff-German Professor of Neurosurgery.

**Area of expertise:** Neuro-oncology.

**Place of birth:** Knoxville, Tenn.

**Age:** 57.

**College:** Duke University.

**Med School:** University of Tennessee School of Medicine.

**Training:** Internship and residency in neurosurgery at the Yale School of Medicine.

**Family:** Married to Patty Pedersen, director of university corporate and foundation relations; son Bion, 22, and daughter Mary, 20.

**What is most challenging to you in academic medicine?** Most of the patients I deal with have a fatal disease for which there is no good treatment. Cancer in the brain is a big challenge for everyone.

**What is most rewarding?** When I can make a difference. When I can prolong life and improve function, it is terrific.

**What do you like most about your practice?** I enjoy the surgery. It's fun and it's challenging. I really enjoy teaching residents.

**Personal interests or pastimes?** Reading history, playing golf and a new passion, sporting clays, a variation of skeet shooting.

**Last book read:** *1421: The Year China Discovered America*, by Gavin Menzies.

**What would you do to improve our clinical environment if you had a magic wand?** I would encourage more active involvement in clinical trials and more attention towards bringing novel therapies to patients.

## YCCI *continued*

ects, providing support for junior faculty interested in translational research, encouraging joint projects between community and Yale physicians and creating a website that will keep community members informed about what's happening at the center and how they can get involved.

"YCCI finally creates structure for clinical research activities of the clinical faculty," said **David Leffell**, MD, deputy dean for clinical affairs for the medical school and director of the Yale Medical Group. "One of the big challenges for clinical trials is coordinating the many pieces, ranging from regulatory operations to managing the clinical trial once it's up and running. In the past, each faculty member was left to fend for him or herself. YCCI will eliminate a lot of those barriers."

The center is funded under a five-year, \$57.3 million Clinical and Translational Science Award from the National Institutes of Health. It is part of a major national initiative known as the NIH Roadmap for Medical Research, which is intended to simplify the process for researchers to move laboratory discoveries into human studies. Key participants in the Yale grant are the Yale schools of Nursing and Public Health and the Combined Program in the Biological and Biomedical Sciences.

"Ultimately, we need to translate basic science to the clinical arena, and then from clinical to the community," Sherwin said. "If we don't do that, we're only publishing papers, not improving health."

For more information about YCCI visit <http://ycci.yale.edu>.

## NEW ROOM FOR NURSING MOTHERS

Following the success of the Mothers' Room at the Sterling Hall of Medicine, a second room that provides a private, comfortable place for nursing mothers to breastfeed or pump breast milk has been approved and is under renovation at The Anlyan Center (TAC). The new room is scheduled for completion at the end of May and will be open to faculty, staff, students and visitors to Yale Medical Group.

The new room will be Room N212B at TAC, which can be entered through N212A.

The first Mothers' Room is located in the Sterling Hall of Medicine, C-Wing, E level, Room L0007. The rooms can be reserved for half-hour or hour-long intervals by calling the Customer Service Center at 785-4620 or sending an e-mail message to [bs&o.customerservice@yale.edu](mailto:bs&o.customerservice@yale.edu). A list of all the lactation rooms at Yale can be found at [www.yale.edu/worklife/breastfeeding](http://www.yale.edu/worklife/breastfeeding).

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