

patients there are homeless or on state assistance due to chronic psychiatric disorders, and 25% to 30% have substance abuse problems, says Dr. Stephen Brockway, director of the clerkship.

Factors: Ahmed recalls one patient, admitted for alcohol withdrawal, whom he presented during daily rounds. “He would always say that he was suicidal or homicidal . . . because that was his cry for help. I think I learned a lot from that patient,” Ahmed says, “whether it was his socioeconomic factors—such as being homeless—impacting his clinical outcomes, or whether I was just learning about the physiology of alcohol withdrawal.”

Presley enjoyed her stint on the West Coast, too. “The nurses, occupational therapists, and social workers participate in rounds with residents, med students, and attendings,” she says. “I am very impressed with how easily the staff adjusted to incorporating a medical student into the team.”

Option: As clerkships are added in other specialties, Nierenberg anticipates that every DMS student will have the option to do a rotation at CPMC. “It could really broaden the horizons of our students . . . and I think they would end up being stronger physicians if they had the advantage of this additional experience, on top of the terrific training that they already get here at DHMC and the VA.

“This is not in any way to replace” current training sites, Nierenberg adds. “It’s like icing on the cake that’s already there.”

MATTHEW C. WIENCKE

INVESTIGATOR INSIGHT



In this section, we highlight the human side of biomedical investigation, putting a few questions to a researcher at DMS-DHMC.

William Rigby, M.D.
Professor of Medicine and of Microbiology and Immunology

Rigby studies the regulation of the immune response at the molecular level and runs rheumatology clinical trials; he also cares for patients with rheumatoid arthritis. He joined the faculty in 1987.

How did you decide to go into medical research?

I come from a family of physicians. My father would describe his operations at the dinner table. I considered almost every discipline in medicine, yet always knew research had a special attraction. However, few are prepared for the frequent failure that is innate to basic scientific research. I certainly wasn’t and failed multiple times before and during medical school. After working full-time as an emergency room physician, I decided to give research one more chance. I still remember the feeling of using a microscope on a cold, rainy April Friday in 1983 and realizing that there was something interesting going on down there.



What advice would you offer to someone contemplating going into your field?

Be sure that you love what you do and that you find happy people to work with. After that, it’s a piece of cake.

What activities do you enjoy outside your work?

Hiking, biking, skiing, cooking, gardening.

What historical event would you most like to have been at?

I’d probably pick the Battle of Britain during World War II, in order to witness the courage of a society inspired by great leadership.

What was your first paying job?

My first job was in high school in Los Angeles—working at A&B Chevy on Westgate and Wilshire. I became familiar with an impact wrench, a grease gun, and some truly memorable people.

What about you might surprise people?

There are so many things. How about that I worked on a kibbutz as a plumber’s helper and considered emigrating to Israel?

Where do you do your best thinking?

I wish I knew. I’d go there more often.

What is the greatest frustration in your work?

The ever-growing intrusion of regulatory bodies into nearly every aspect of medicine and medical education. Who regulates the regulators?

And the greatest joy?

Realizing that you have made a difference, whether it’s uncovering a scientific puzzle, taking care of a person, consoling a family member, or teaching a student or resident. And the greatest personal joy is family.

What is the accomplishment of which you’re proudest?

Raising two great kids.

Finish this sentence: If I had more time I would . . .

Hurry less and enjoy the moment more.

What’s your favorite movie? Favorite poem?

My favorite movie is *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*. And my favorite poem is “Forgetfulness” by the American poet Billy Collins.

Who was your scientific mentor?

Michael Fanger, Ph.D., who came to DMS in the early 1980s and catalyzed the growth of a great immunology program. He has played so many roles in my career, including teacher, editor, advocate, and friend.

What do you admire most in other people?

Personal warmth, a happy outlook on life, and an ability to elicit the same from others.