‘PEZ Lady’ dispenses joy

You could not believe the nose prints up against my window,” says Kate Clay, the director of DHMC’s Center for Shared Decision Making. When her office was on the Medical Center’s main mall, kids and grownups alike would press their noses to her office window to admire her colorful collection of PEZ dispensers. Her office is no longer in as prominent a location, but she still displays a rotating, seasonally appropriate selection there (at least some of her spring-themed dispensers).

Over the last 20 years, Clay has collected more than 350 of the whimsical candy dispensers, which feature the heads of cartoon, movie, or holiday characters. Total strangers will often strike up conversations with “the PEZ lady,” and children are delighted when she lets them choose a dispenser for themselves from her bag of extras. She once gave a Smarties dispenser to a cancer patient whose wife was decorating a Smarties-theme room at home. “The one thing he didn’t have was a Smart PEZ,” says Clay. “I did.”

Although “people are here because they’re ill,” she observes, “a little comic relief brings a lot of joy.” L.S.C.

‘Poetic’ prose wins prize

Piece of prose about a poet—the cover story in the Spring 2009 issue of Dartmouth Medicine (picture below)—has won the top writing prize of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). The article, about former New Hampshire and U.S. poet laureate Donald Hall, received the AAMCs Robert G. Fenley Award of Excellence in the Solicited Articles category.

Titled “The Poetry of Caregiving,” the story was written by freelancer Susan Salter Reynolds, who has been starved recently,” he says. “So it’s taking multiple iterations and resubmissions for people to get funded.”

But Radiology, for example, saw its research income more than double. The final version of the bill appropriated an extra $10.4 billion to the NIH, more than $8 billion of which was directed to be used to fund research.

Of course, Green notes, that money will be disbursed by the NIH and may stand to search will change in years to come. That’s why she thinks it’s important to focus on what DMS can control—ensuring that every grant proposal has the best possible chance of success.

Opportunities: Green says, for example, that there are opportu

DMS Research Funding 2003-2008 ($1,000,000)

| Year | Amount
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$140,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>$130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>$110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>$90,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DMS’s research income reflects the decline in recent years in the NIH budget.

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

James Duffino, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology

Duffino studies the biology of mammalian stem cells with the goal of determining if these cells are the site of breast cancer initiation. He is scientific director of the Comprehensive Breast Program at the Norris Cotton Cancer Center and came to DMS in 2001.

When you were very young what did you want to be?

I was convinced that I would be a park ranger at Acadia National Park.

What is the greatest joy in your work?

Training the people in my lab and sharing in their success.

And the greatest frustration?

The amount of time I spend finding and retaining funding. The last several years have been difficult in terms of federal funding, but I’m fortunate that there are many private foundations that support breast cancer research and they have been exceedingly generous.

Of what professional accomplishment are you most proud?

My lab was among the first to isolate mammary stem cells and show that they are capable of regenerating a functional mammary gland. I still love doing that experiment.

If you could travel anywhere that you’ve never been, where would you choose to go?

Patagonia. There is an incredible variety of terrain, and between the active volcanoes and the constant flow of the glaciers you almost get the sense that this is a planet that is still evolving in a largely undisturbed way.

What about you would surprise most people?

I occasionally take a short nap in my office. I get up early to work on papers or grants, and as a result I tend to hit a wall around 2 a.m. For me, a 20-minute nap is the only way to salvage any productivity in the latter part of the day. I guess it is one of those rare times when professionalism and productivity diverge.

Do you always have a working hypothesis in the lab?

Yes! I find it hard to develop good, focused expectations without one. The danger, of course, is that a hypothesis can start to seem so attractive that it gets transformed into a model before there is sufficient data to warrant that. The risk is that you “marry the model,” which can blind you to specific pieces of data because they don’t fit the model. In the past three to four years there have been many surprises that serve as a reminder to remain critical of our models.

What do you admire most in other people?

Passion and determination. It amazes me what a single person can achieve when they get behind something they truly believe in.

What three people would you like to have over for dinner?

I’m lucky because I get to have dinner with the three most important people in my life every night. But if we’re talking about guests, I would choose Barack Obama, Lance Armstrong, and Greg Mortenson. Anyone who’s unfamiliar with Mortenson should read Three Cups of Tea.

Hollywood is doing a movie of your life. Who plays you?

I really like Kevin Spacey because of his versatility, though I think that versatility would be pushed to its limit in an effort to make what I do seem glamorous enough for Hollywood.

What if professional accomplishment are you most proud?

My lab was among the first to isolate mammary stem cells and show that they are capable of regenerating a functional mammary gland. I still love doing that experiment.

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

James Duffino, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology

Duffino studies the biology of mammalian stem cells with the goal of determining if these cells are the site of breast cancer initiation. He is scientific director of the Comprehensive Breast Program at the Norris Cotton Cancer Center and came to DMS in 2001.

When you were very young what did you want to be?

I was convinced that I would be a park ranger at Acadia National Park.

What is the greatest joy in your work?

Training the people in my lab and sharing in their success.

And the greatest frustration?

The amount of time I spend finding and retaining funding. The last several years have been difficult in terms of federal funding, but I’m fortunate that there are many private foundations that support breast cancer research and they have been exceedingly generous.

Of what professional accomplishment are you most proud?

My lab was among the first to isolate mammary stem cells and show that they are capable of regenerating a functional mammary gland. I still love doing that experiment.