

The Williamson Translational Research Building will provide critical space for expanding Geisel's efforts to move scientific discoveries into patient care.



AT THE CROSSROADS OF DISCOVERY AND PATIENT CARE

A new Geisel School of Medicine building on the Lebanon campus will connect scientists and physicians like never before.

“TO TACKLE ANY OF THE PRESSING PROBLEMS IN HUMAN HEALTH and biomedical science these days requires multiple viewpoints,” says Duane Compton, Senior Associate Dean for Research at Geisel. “A single approach gives you a single view of a problem. That’s why collaborating across disciplines—something that Geisel researchers excel at—is so important.” A new five-story building planned for the medical school’s Lebanon campus will make such collaboration between Geisel researchers and Dartmouth-Hitchcock clinicians easier than ever and, most importantly, will accelerate the movement of discoveries from research labs into patient care.

The Williamson Translational Research Building, named in honor of Peter and Susan Williamson, will provide critical space for growing Geisel’s strongest research disciplines—particularly cancer, the neurosciences, microbiology and immunology, molecular pathology, clinical outcomes, and health policy. It will also enable the school to invest in disciplines necessary for translational research to flourish—biomedical informatics, computational genetics, and clinical trial management, to name a few.

Dartmouth Medicine recently put a few questions to Compton about this transformational project.

DARTMOUTH MEDICINE: What is translational research and why has it become such a hot topic in academic medicine?

COMPTON: Translational research is all about *translating* discoveries made in research labs into better, safer

care for patients, and then bringing lessons learned in the clinic back to the investigators. Translational research has become a major focus because of the promise that recent biomedical advances—such as gene sequencing—hold for improving human health.

DM: Plans for a translational research building began several years ago. What makes this the right time to move forward with this project?

COMPTON: In 2007, Dr. Peter Williamson and his wife, Susan, made a landmark gift commitment to support the construction of a translational research building for the medical school. A year later, the economy collapsed and nearly all Dartmouth College building plans were put on hold, including the Williamson Building. Now, with the

stronger economy, fundraising momentum growing, and the need for additional research space intensifying, it's imperative that we move forward with the building.

DM: How will this building advance medical science at Geisel and Dartmouth-Hitchcock?

COMPTON: Proximity is one of the most important determinants of multidisciplinary collaboration. The researchers occupying the building will be organized by research theme rather than by department. So a biophysicist might be working next to a pharmacologist, and they'll be just a short walk from an immunologist and a computational geneticist. The building will also provide a physical link between the existing research buildings on the Lebanon campus, so it will really be a hub for interaction between researchers and caregivers in many disciplines.

DM: How will the Williamson Building advance Geisel's strategic goals?

COMPTON: A top priority of Geisel's 2020 Strategic Plan is the recruitment of additional research faculty members in several key disciplines. The Williamson Building will allow for this growth, and it will be a tremendous asset in attracting top scientists. By bringing investigators from multiple disciplines together in the same building, we'll stimulate collaborations and, ultimately, more large, multi-investigator grants.

DM: How will the Williamson Building benefit students?

COMPTON: Medical students, graduate students, and even undergraduates will gain exposure to translational research and multidisciplinary science by working with researchers in the Williamson Building. With a larger research faculty, made possible by the building, we'll also be able to expand some of our current graduate programs and launch new programs—in biomedical informatics, for example. And the auditorium in the building will be an important educational space for Geisel and Dartmouth-Hitchcock.

DM: What role does philanthropy have in the Williamson Building?

COMPTON: Philanthropy is pivotal for this project because it creates a foundation for the future—physically, with the new building, and programmatically, through endowed professorships and research funds that can be leveraged to obtain outside grants. Philanthropy will fund approximately \$40 million of the building's cost, with nearly \$29 million already committed. Peter and Susan Williamson's leading gift commitment got us off to a great start, and we'll be looking to other visionary philanthropists to help us close the gap.

Jon Gilbert Fox



The late Peter Williamson, MD, and his wife, Susan.

Leading by example

Peter Williamson, a 1958 graduate of Dartmouth College, was never one to do things by half-measures. As a world-renowned neurologist, he pioneered treatments for intractable epilepsy, and, at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, he built one of the nation's top epilepsy referral centers. As a collector of vintage cars, he owned some of the world's finest classic Bugattis. And as philanthropists, he and his wife, Susan, were passionate about advancing education and medicine through their giving.

Both a researcher and a clinician, Williamson appreciated the importance of translational research—the interplay between basic research and patient care, in which each informs and advances the other. His contributions to Dartmouth-Hitchcock and the medical school as a physician, as a professor, and as the leader of the \$250-million Transforming Medicine Campaign were felt broadly across the medical community. The naming of Dartmouth's new translational research building recognizes Peter and Susan Williamson's landmark \$20-million gift commitment to the Transforming Medicine Campaign in 2007.

Sadly, Peter Williamson did not live to see fundraising for the building completed or construction begun. But he died knowing the gift he and Susan had made would stand as an example of the power of philanthropy to transform lives, and with the hope that their generosity would, in his words, “stoke the philanthropic fires” with gifts of all sizes.