



Q&A WITH DEAN COMPTON

AFTER THE FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF DUANE COMPTON'S appointment as dean of the Geisel School of Medicine, *Dartmouth Medicine* sat down with him to discuss his role, his academic and research experience, and his goals for the school in the coming years.

“Our faculty, students, and staff are a trove of great ideas. I enjoy talking with them and hearing their ideas that we can build on.”

Q: WHAT PERSUADED YOU TO TAKE ON THE ROLE OF DEAN?

Compton: It was a confluence of things really. Perhaps foremost is the opportunity to continue working with such a talented group of faculty, students, and staff. It's an honor to be able to serve as dean and to work with people who are so dedicated to our school and its missions.

I also have incredible support from the president, provost, and Board of Trustees, as well as the Geisel Board of Overseers.

I hope that my service helps create a sense of continuity in the dean position that helps our forward momentum in the school.

Q: HOW HAS YOUR TIME AS INTERIM DEAN INFORMED YOUR THINKING GOING FORWARD?

Compton: Probably too much to cover in one interview but here are a few things that I have found to be vital in

leading our organization.

Communication is very important, and meeting with and hearing from all constituents in the school is also important. I am going to be more proactive in meeting with groups in the school to make sure that there is bi-directional communication.

Our faculty, students, and staff are a trove of great ideas. I enjoy talking with them and hearing their ideas that we can build on.

People respond to open and honest dialogue. I am very straight-forward with people and transparent around the administration of the school, and I think people respect that.

Q: WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR GEISEL IN THE COMING YEARS?

Compton: My overarching goal is to see our faculty flourish in their efforts in research and teaching. More tangibly, my goals include continuing to evolve

our medical curriculum. We've made great strides in this area, and need to keep evolving and refining the curriculum to ensure that our graduates are best prepared to practice medicine in a very complicated and ever changing health-care landscape.

Another goal is to support the research efforts of our faculty. Our programs span from basic science to clinical translation to health services and I believe that the full spectrum of those is needed to make significant impacts on health and health-care.

Philanthropy plays a critical role in helping us support our programs and we are working with the college in developing a campaign strategy that will take our programs to the next level. I am also focused on developing the case statements that reflect our overarching strategic goals for the comprehensive-fundraising campaign.

Q: WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING PART OF YOUR JOB?

Compton: The most rewarding aspect of the position is being able to help people reach their goals. In the past few years there were a lot of challenges as we worked through some reorganization steps, but within that time of change, we were able to take some positive steps to help people and groups become more successful. That has been very rewarding.

“The most rewarding aspect of the position is being able to help people reach their goals. In the past few years there were a lot of challenges as we worked through some reorganization steps, but within that time of change, we were able to take some positive steps to help people and groups become more successful. That has been very rewarding.”

Q: WHAT KEEPS YOU AWAKE AT NIGHT?

Compton: First, I would say the proposed changes to the federal budget. The stance taken by the Trump administration toward research and education—as illustrated by his proposed dramatic budget reductions to these areas—is somewhat terrifying. I have confidence that Congress will appropriate budgets that more rationally support the programs designed to ensure the future strength of our country. If the proposed cuts do materialize, that would have a devastating effect on academic medical centers across the United States, and I fear it would take us years to recover in terms of lost innovation and competitiveness in health care and biomedical science.

Second, is the overall morale of faculty and staff. We have gone through a lot of change in the past few years and I don't know anyone who did not feel the stress of those changes. I want to help build a vibrant and dynamic environment where people are excited about their work and feel secure, and many of the changes were designed to get us to that goal. But, I know that many people are still working through the stress related to the changes from the past few years, and I need to help everyone cope with that stress so that they can be more successful.

Q: WILL YOU BE ABLE TO CONTINUE YOUR RESEARCH AND MENTORING?

Compton: I am still running a research program and mentoring four graduate students and two postdoctoral fellows, and I have active funding from the NIH to support that work. My time needs to be carefully balanced so I can continue devoting the appropriate level of effort to that program and to those students and postdocs. I am very impressed by how my students and postdocs have assumed greater independence and responsibility as my time shifted more toward administration.

Q: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH?

Compton: We study chromosome segregation during cell division. Each one of us receives one copy of chromosomes from our father and one copy of chromosomes from our mother. Each time a cell divides—and that happens millions of times in our bodies each day—the chromosomes that we got from mom and dad are precisely segregated into two sister cells. This process repeats every time a cell in our bodies divides and it ensures that every cell has the same set of chromosomes. But something about that process goes wrong in cancer cells, because those cells have abnormal numbers of chromosomes and also have unusually high rates of chromosome segregation errors. Our work is focused on how normal cells maintain such precision in the segregation process, what is going wrong in the tumor cells to cause such rampant chromosome shuffling, and finally devising strategies based on that information to selectively target the cancer cells without harming normal cells.
