

a letter from the dean



A scientist at heart (science nerd!), I often find myself thinking about the principles of homeostasis and how they lie at the foundation of our biology and physiology. Homeostasis is defined as the tendency of a system to maintain internal stability despite changing environmental conditions. An oft-cited physiological example of homeostasis is how our bodies maintain near constant temperature despite external conditions in our environment that range from frigid winter mornings to sweltering summer humidity.

We don't notice our biological and physiological processes actively working to keep our systems properly tuned until something traumatic happens. Trauma can knock our systems far from their center. With body temperature, we have all experienced a fever as our body temperature is elevated far from normal in response to the trauma caused by an infection. Inevitably, we all experience trauma that can knock us off center—physical, physiological, psychological—during our lives.

The ability of our systems to bounce back to normal following trauma reflects the resiliency of homeostatic systems. Resilience is receiving a lot of attention in medicine as an important aspect of wellness—how our moods and cognitive skills remain stable, and how we bounce back from psychological trauma, is key to maintaining good mental health and overall well-being.

The flip side of resilience is burnout.

It is no secret that the burnout rate among medical students and physicians is higher, in comparison to the general population, and on the rise. It is also true that healthcare professionals, including physicians, are often reluctant to seek help in mitigating emotional and mental stress. The stories in this issue reflect what we are doing at Geisel to mitigate burnout, destigmatize mental healthcare, and instill healthy lifelong habits—from how our medical education program has been designed to accommodate self-care to formal efforts prioritizing student wellness beyond the curriculum.

In a piece about the prevalence of imposter syndrome—an internalized fear of being exposed as a fraud that is associated with burnout—Dr. Roshini Pinto-Powell, Associate Dean of Students and Admissions, writes about the importance of how acknowledging and sharing our own stories of self-doubt may help students resolve theirs. A third-year student reveals how the sudden and unexpected death of her father during her first year of medical school and her long struggle with grief, led to advocating for open and accepting conversations about mental health issues within the student population. And in a story about Geisel's commitment to physician wellness, we examine how collaboration among faculty, staff, and students is changing the school's environment by creating effective and accessible programs to strengthen mental health support and well-being.

All of these stories highlight aspects of our commitment to training resilient medical students who become resilient physicians.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duane A. Compton".

DUANE COMPTON, PHD
DEAN, GEISEL SCHOOL OF MEDICINE