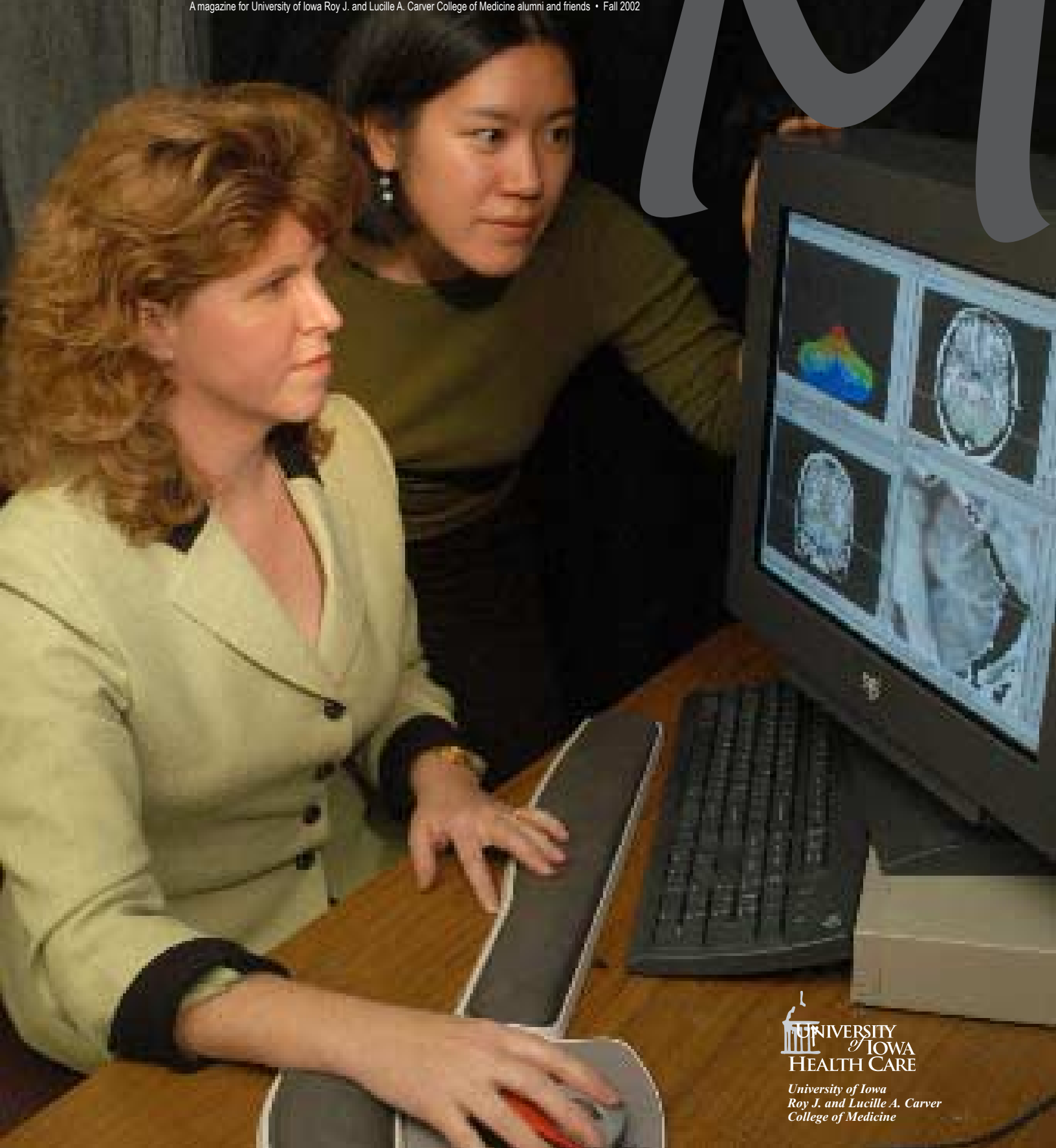


medicine

A magazine for University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine alumni and friends • Fall 2002



 UNIVERSITY
OF IOWA
HEALTH CARE

University of Iowa
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver
College of Medicine

Medicine Women

building on tradition

*dedication and
innovation keep iowa
a welcoming place for
women in medicine*



In February 1857, the UI's first gathering of female scholars met on campus. Outnumbered two-to-one by their male classmates, the women adhered to the same daily schedule of chapel at 7:45 a.m. and classes until 5 p.m. As their first semester drew to a close, four women presented a session based on their academic work. The title: "Home Education and Home Influences."

Were they studying "women's work" at a time when women were not regarded as scientists or scholars? Or did their colloquy predict an issue that would remain important for women in academe? "Home influences" — what we might today call "work/life issues"— continue to play a significant role in the development of women as students and faculty.

The status of women at the UI and the Carver College of Medicine is more than a numbers game. Women are well-represented among medical students, and the number of women faculty has never been higher. Women hold leadership positions in the College, serving as department heads and deans. The College has maintained a commitment to recruiting and retaining women for decades.



But in spite of their visible presence on campus, women continue to face challenges — both real and perceived — that affect how they pursue their careers and their lives.

The UI was the first university west of the Mississippi to admit women on an equal basis with men. Today it is one of many universities in a position to ensure that women have the learning and work environments necessary to develop future generations of physicians and scientists.

Supporting the pipeline

Before they become women in medicine, half of the world's potential brain surgeons, physiologists and internists are young women in college. For many years, the number of women and men in undergraduate programs has been fairly equal, so concerns here are not based on census, but on attrition.

"It is well-documented nationally that we lose many of our bright, capable women, especially those in math and science-based programs, during the first and second years of undergraduate study," said Chris Peterson Brus, director of the UI's Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) program. "Much of this loss has been pegged to difficulty finding community, less aggressive use of support resources, and the accelerated pace of math and science-based courses."

Brus said young women often weed themselves out of math and science majors prematurely. "These women have such high standards for themselves that when they hit a gate-keeping course early on and perhaps get through with a C, they doubt their ability to be competitive in anything. Some even change their majors based on one grade."

Undergraduate women at Iowa have the benefit of WISE programs, including a residence hall learning community and peer mentoring. "We also have had the good fortune of having medical students talk with our young women about the realities of medical school, panels of working physicians who address issues of career paths, and the talents of Cathy Solow (director of admissions for the College), who has led many sessions for WISE on the ins and outs of applying to medical school," Brus said.

Finding balance in academics: Peggy Nopoulos, MD



"I have a wonderful job and I feel very privileged," Peggy Nopoulos said. "I get paid for doing what I love to do." What she loves to do is study the brain, teach and provide care for people with brain disorders.

A UI associate professor of psychiatry, Nopoulos is rapidly developing a research program that promises new insights into the relationship between facial anomalies like cleft lip and palate and brain abnormalities that can result in cognitive disorders. She also was recently named program leader for the College's Doris Duke Clinical Research Fellowship Program for medical students.

Nopoulos feels lucky in another way, too: She's never felt that being a woman constrained her career at Iowa. She should know, having completed her medical degree ('89) and graduate training ('93 R, '94 F) at the UI before joining the faculty.

"I've never felt that I wasn't supported here," she said, noting that roughly half the students in her medical school class and residency were women. The adjustment came when Nopoulos entered academic medicine, where men greatly outnumber women among tenure-track faculty.

This disparity has given her plenty of food for thought, Nopoulos said. Simply put, career and family are difficult for many women to reconcile. "Right about the time when women forge careers as independent researchers, that's when they're starting families," she said. "Clinical practice allows the flexibility to work part time, whereas academic medicine does not."

As true as that might be for many women, it hasn't been Nopoulos' experience. Instead, the mother of four has found academic life accommodating to family obligations, partly because her schedule allows her to work at home when she needs to.

The academic environment in the College has been just as important, Nopoulos said, noting that Robert Robinson, MD, Paul W. Penningroth Professor and head of psychiatry, "is very aware of the need to support women in research." Moreover, Nopoulos's primary role model and mentor has been Nancy Andreasen ('70 MD), the internationally renowned expert on brain imaging and schizophrenia.

Now, with her own research taking shape, Nopoulos finds a wider circle of colleagues eager to share their knowledge and help her pursue her work. "I feel like I've been welcomed with open arms," she said.



Practicing a different style of leadership: Laurie Fajardo, MD



Arriving at the UI Department of Radiology this summer, Laurie Fajardo did what most new department heads might. She assessed personnel and technology needs, expanded residency and fellowship programs, and identified strategic research investments.

But her first priority was talking to faculty in one-on-one meetings. She also arranged a reception for technical and support staff, trying to get as many perspectives as possible.

“It may be a different style of leadership,” she said. “If you study research on how the genders exert their leadership skills, I suppose this goes along with the female style – team-building, consensus-building and networking.”

Open communication, she said, is key to addressing challenges confronted by women, underrepresented minorities and junior faculty, and such efforts bring widespread benefits. “Development programs that institutions create to help female faculty can prove equally helpful to male faculty,” Fajardo said.

Originally from St. Louis, Fajardo worked as an intensive care and clinical research nurse at Barnes-Jewish Hospital. Intrigued by research, she earned a bachelor’s degree at Washington University and entered medical school at the University of Chicago.

Fascination with technology and the applications of imaging across specialties drew her to radiology, a field with relatively few female role models. She completed residency and joined the faculty at the University of Arizona, becoming chief of mammography and breast imaging in 1990. She was named vice chair of radiology at the University of Virginia in 1994, then five years later accepted a full professorship at Johns Hopkins.

Her experience has made her an advocate of mentoring for junior faculty. Likewise, being a parent — she had her first child during residency and another in 2000 — has shaped her feelings about policies that balance career and family.

“I think women come to appreciate flexibility a little more. You see more women job-sharing and cross-covering,” she said. She notes that radiology groups increasingly adopt flexible staffing policies in a competitive job market.

Academic institutions need to make similar efforts to keep good faculty and foster their development. “You need to invest as much energy and resources in the retention side of the equation,” Fajardo said. “You really have to be committed to having your people be better than you are.”

“These programs provide a strong network of academic and social support, the warmth of community, a wealth of role models, and the opportunity to experience a safe place in which to ask questions, be assertive and find your own voice — all qualities of a good physician.”

Believing in the system

Although she didn’t realize it at first, Kimberly Ephgrave, MD, associate dean for student affairs and curriculum at the College, expected bias in her career.

“I had blinders on,” she said, remembering her reaction to an early position’s salary — one less than that of male counterparts. “My husband pointed out that the salary was below national norms, and I said, ‘that’s not bad considering that I’m female.’”

Drawn to surgery, Ephgrave survived in a specialty that wasn’t known for being woman-friendly. Encountering comments like “I wouldn’t let my wife run around with blood all over her,” she learned to seek out women mentors. Today she is glad to see more and more women finding success her field.

“There are all kinds of women in leadership roles at Iowa,” she said. “Surgery is in the top percentage of proportion of female faculty members, and that trend accelerated after Carol Scott-Conner became chair.”

In addition to managing her own path through academic medicine, Ephgrave works with medical students just starting to determine how to balance their roles as physicians and spouses/parents/human beings. In the past decade, the percentage of medical students who are women has leveled off at about 45 percent. Both female and male students seek ways to maintain satisfying professional and personal lives.

“Everybody is more focused on having time for themselves,” she said of the challenges that students of both genders confront, noting that many students gravitate toward fields perceived to permit more time away from work.



“Medicine and surgery are losing top students to dermatology,” she said

Steps are being taken at the national level to address these concerns — the new legislation limiting residents to 80 hour workweeks may help significantly. At the UI, Ephgrave said, College leadership also has been key.

“When Dean Kelch arrived he asked for a task force on the status of female faculty, and then he threw his weight behind it,” helping the survey to garner an 85 percent response rate, Ephgrave said. “He doesn’t harangue the faculty, but his actions have always supported women.”

Creating the environment

What does supporting women mean in an academic medical center? More often than not, it means creating an environment that enables women to be physicians and scientists as well as spouses and mothers.

“The more women you have, the more important family issues become,” said Susan Johnson (’73 BA, ’76 MD, ’80 R ob-gyn, ’85 MS), the College’s associate dean for faculty affairs. Women who are married or partnered generally have to think of any job hunt as a dual search, and many also must consider the needs of children when choosing how to proceed with their careers. Many men, of course, share these concerns, but family has traditionally had a larger impact on women’s careers.

“There are data that look at what keeps women from advancing in academic medicine, and the variable is kids,” Johnson said. “Women who didn’t have children were on par with men (in terms of salary, rank and so on). I think a lot of women decide they’re not going to sacrifice time with their kids. But our system needs to find a way to help these women continue to participate in academic medicine.”

Women faculty and administrators note that Iowa’s history of equal treatment has set a welcoming tone on campus. At the College, making the tenure system and faculty tracks more flexible are

Advancing a culture of fairness: Pam Geyer, PhD



Ask Pam Geyer’s daughter, Jessica Mehegan, how she spent her summer, and her answer will be the same as her mom’s: hanging out with fruit flies. For 12-year-old Jessica, spending some time in the lab was a way to learn about how her mom spends her days.

For Geyer, UI professor of biochemistry, it was a chance to expose her daughter to science and math at an age when many girls are struggling to decide if getting A’s is as important as getting dates. It’s a variation on a struggle that Geyer lives every day — balancing her role as scientist with that of mother and wife.

In the lab, Geyer’s attention is devoted to insulators in the cell nucleus, specifically those of *Drosophila melanogaster* (hence her daughter’s “summer job”). But learning more about how insulators work could have implications for diseases like muscular dystrophy and cancer.

Geyer was once one of very few people in this field — and one of very few women in her department. “Now it’s up to 25 percent women, so it’s getting better,” said Geyer, who received a doctorate in biochemistry from Ohio State University. Before coming to Iowa, she did an NIH-funded fellowship at Johns Hopkins, and was a visiting professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

As director of the UI Medical Scientist Training Program, Geyer is in a position to help women entering academic medicine shape their careers, though she’s concerned that women comprise only about a third of physician-scientist students. Talk among academics frequently turns to tenure issues, but Geyer tries to stay away from such daunting topics with new students getting used to academic medicine.

“I make sure I’m visible to them, but I don’t talk about a timetable,” she said. “They’re just coming out of college and many are not married. I do wonder how they’ll all make a go of it.”

Geyer is quick to point out that the UI was the first university west of the Mississippi River to admit women and men as equals, and says the University is still, happily, bound by that history. “Iowa’s culture of fairness makes it different here than it is at other institutions,” she said.



Forging ties with mentors: Robin Davisson, PhD



As a UI undergraduate, Robin Davisson ('88 BS, '91 MA, '94 PhD pharmacology) thought the way to turn a fascination with biological science into a career was to become a physician. Then she began a senior honors project with Kim Johnson, PhD, F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor of Psychology and UI professor of pharmacology, and discovered an irresistible alternative.

"I wasn't fully aware of the opportunities to get a PhD and do research as a career," Davisson said. "That year in Kim's lab completely changed my mind about wanting to go to medical school. I got really excited about doing research."

Two aspects of research resonated with Davisson: the pure joy of discovery and the realization that research training would provide the basic tools to explore any scientific question. Since obtaining her doctorate in pharmacology and joining the UI Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology as an assistant professor, she has explored cardiovascular disease development.

Combining genetic manipulation and physiological measurement of animal models, Davisson is unraveling some of the complex processes behind cardiovascular function and disease, including the causes and effects of chronic high blood pressure.

"In science, through every stage of your training and even as junior faculty, you need to have mentors and role models," Davisson said, "and you always have to look for the best ones that you can find." She tells young scientists to seek out the top person, male or female, to provide advice and guidance. But she also values the UI's commitment to promoting women.

As she continues her career, Davisson enjoys the opportunity to work with other UI faculty and to mentor young researchers.

"There is an amazing array of experts, and to be able to call on these people for advice and expertise or send a student to another researcher's lab to learn a new technique is invaluable," she said. "The UI is an incredible place to do science and train the next generation of researchers."

two important steps to prevent talented physicians — female or male — from having to choose a career or a life.

"Iowa is unusual in that we have a woman-friendly tenure clock," Johnson said. Extensions of up to two years can be granted when children enter a family, and a faculty member can choose to work part time and have her tenure clock extended proportionately.

Faculty also have the option of being on the traditional tenure track or the clinical track, which does not require research. Some analysts raise concerns about women avoiding the traditional track in favor of the clinical, potentially reducing the number in line for leadership. Johnson, however, does not see reason for alarm so long as institutional conditions are right.

"I see women choosing the clinical track when they could have been successful on the tenure track. I think a lot of junior faculty aren't as concerned about the traditional tenure track. That's a generation gap that we'll see change academic medicine," she said.

"Women should not be asked to make a decision between family and medicine," Johnson added. "It's the system that needs to make a commitment to being more flexible."

Women may have prompted academic institutions to assess their practices and expectations, but the emerging changes benefit both women and men, maintaining Iowa's traditional interest in gender equity. Though the UI's first class of women could not have anticipated all of today's "home influences," the balance of academic work and life that their 1857 colloquy title suggested may be finally getting its due.