

Academic Affairs

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It was with great anticipation that I returned to the Bayou Country in April of 1999 to become Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer of the Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation (AOMF). The Crescent City beckoned me back following a cold 13 years in Michigan (previously I was Chief of Pediatric Cardiology at Tulane University Medical Center).

In addition to the climate, hospitality, food, and entertainment of New Orleans, what convinced me to accept a position at AOMF was Ochsner's strong history. With the institutions' greater than half a century of excellence and innovation in patient care, as well as firm, important core values of education and research, I was proud to become a member.

Upon arrival, I found a graduate medical education program that includes 22 independent/free-standing accredited AOMF sponsored programs. Seven additional programs affiliate Ochsner Foundation Hospital with one of the New Orleans medical schools as a major participating hospital in the medical school program. Four more programs have been established as jointly integrated programs belonging to AOMF and one or other of the local medical schools. Additionally, we have six independent programs where there is no accreditation currently available through the ACGME. The total GME program involves almost 300 house staff.

The research division includes core laboratories of cellular immunology, molecular genetics, molecular oncology, molecular immunodiagnostics, hepatology, cellular neurophysiology, and healthcare assessment. There is ongoing physiology research in the areas of endocrinology, vascular surgery, kidney stones, and hypertension at Ochsner's main

campus, the Pennington Research Unit, and the Coolidge West animal surgery facility. There is designated clinical research ongoing in the areas of cardiac catheterization, human dynamics, nephrology, gastroenterology, infectious disease, rheumatology, surgical neurology, diabetes, and pediatrics on the main campus, The Ochsner Cancer Institute, and the Baton Rouge Clinical Research Unit. To support these research activities there is an AOMF commitment greater than 10 million dollars.

I also discovered many challenges facing academics at Ochsner that are familiar throughout the healthcare industry. With the education programs primarily funded through hospital operations, the challenge of the Balanced Budget Act combined with diminishing hospital revenues make it very difficult to continue the type of support the institution has enjoyed for educational programs. On the research side, there is the continuing challenge of attracting and retaining, as well as funding, high caliber clinical and laboratory investigators.

It is important to have a firm academic vision. The Ochsner institutions have a strong heritage of academic excellence and we intend to continue to build on these accomplishments with clear goals and objectives. With a strong academic vision we will have clear accountability relative to academics throughout Ochsner. By having clear priorities, we can confront and overcome economic threats and coopt our strong clinical enterprise into the bolstering and furthering of our academic endeavors.

To accomplish this, we began an Academic Visioning process last fall involving all of the stakeholders throughout the entire organization that is enabling us to map out the future of Ochsner academics. Our academic growth and success will be fostered by establishing accountable leadership to ensure that we enhance the value of academics. Each segment of our institution has a role in academics. Key components of this visioning will include measuring performance by outcome objectives, financial goals, and individual and program performance metrics.

I am excited about our ability to maintain, develop, and cultivate Ochsner's academic status. In combination with our excellent clinical programs, our academic commitment will ensure that Ochsner continues to be a healthcare leader.

It is anticipated that our academic visioning program will be finished at the time this issue is published. In the next issue of *The Ochsner Journal*, I will elucidate the important aspects of our academic vision: the keys to our successful future.