NEW YORK

Education, Research, and Patient Care

Weill Cornell Medical College on York Avenue in Manhattan

An Interview with
Dr. Laurie H. Glimcher, Dean, Weill Cornell Medical College

EDITORS' NOTE *Dr. Laurie Glimcher is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, and a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. She also is a member and past President of The American Association of Immunologists, which awarded her the Huang Meritorious Career Award in 2006 and the Excellence in Mentoring Award in 2008. She also was elected to The American Society of Clinical Investigation, from which she received the Outstanding Investigator Award in 2001, and to the American Association of Physicians and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She has authored more than 350 scientific articles and chapters, including studies that have been published in leading journals such as Science, Nature, Cell, Journal of Clinical Investigation, and Cancer Cell. Glimcher received her B.A. magna cum laude in 1972 from Harvard University and her M.D. cum laude in 1976 from Harvard Medical School.*

Dr. Laurie H. Glimcher

INSTITUTION BRIEF *Weill Cornell Medical College (weill.cornell.edu) is among the top-ranked clinical and medical research centers in the country. Founded in 1898 and affiliated with what is now New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Weill Cornell Medical College is divided into 24 basic science and patient care departments that focus on the sciences underlying clinical medicine and encompass the study, treatment, and prevention of human diseases. Weill Cornell Medical College is accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education of the American Medical Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges.*

What excited you about the opportunity to come to Weill Cornell Medical College?

The more I learned about Weill Cornell, the more attractive the opportunity to lead this outstanding institution became. Thanks to the amazing success of my predecessor, former Dean Antonio Gotto, and the dedication and generosity of our Board of Overseers, Weill Cornell is poised to expand its biomedical research enterprise with the construction of a new medical research building, which will double the research space at Weill Cornell.

As someone who has focused her career on biomedical research, this was a dream job; an opportunity to fill a new research building with the best and brightest physician-scientists in the country, in alliance with New York-Presbyterian Hospital – the number one hospital in New York City. When I think about the number of great institutions here, I would suggest that New York City could become the nation's center for innovation in biomedical research, clinical care, the translation of discoveries into cures, and the education of a new generation of physicians and physician-scientists. All it takes is the mobilization of resources and the cooperation among institutions to leverage those resources. This is the perfect time for us to begin to discuss how to synergize our strengths throughout New York City in medicine and academia.

The three-pronged mission of Weill Cornell is education, research, and patient care. How integrated are those elements?

One can't look at them separately. The major goal of our Medical Center is to make the patient the center of everything we do. Whether you make the patient the center by training the next generation of physicians or via discovery of new therapeutics and treatments for human disease, or whether one is delivering clinical care bedside, the goal is the same.

I want to break down any silos that exist between the clinicians, the scientists, and the educators.

Have the range of programs you're offering evolved?

We have great students here and also in Qatar, where we have a vigorous medical school, and the medical education curriculum is always changing.

The last time Weill Cornell officially reorganized its medical school curriculum was 1996. Well before I arrived, efforts were underway to take a thorough look at how we teach our students and to add in new courses that addressed the emerging health care needs of this country.

We need to train our students to work together as teams, to deliver integrated care, to be the most compassionate physicians they can be, and to be science-savvy. We're entering an era where it's going to be very important for the bedside clinician to understand the concept of personalized or precision medicine and to know which technologies are available to offer the patient the best care.

I tell our students, no matter which discipline you go into, remember that we are here to treat human disease and the patient is the center of everything we do.

Do you worry that the medical field is not attracting top talent?

We had close to 6,000 medical student applicants for 100 slots. So we continue to see absolutely outstanding young people. Most young people want to become doctors because they really want to be of service to others.

A group of our medical students founded a community clinic that is open to anyone in the community who needs health care but doesn't have access to it. The students raised money for, staffed, and found faculty to oversee the clinic and close to 40 percent of the class volunteers in this community clinic. They've now attracted sufficient resources to hold the clinic two nights a week as opposed to just one.

Weill Cornell is also very strong in global health, so we're not only in Qatar, but also in Tanzania, where we helped found the Weill Cornell Bugando Program; in Haiti with GHESKIO; and in Brazil. A sizable proportion of our students gain international experience during their medical school years. We're going to make global health an official part of our curriculum as a concentration.

Is this genuinely an industry where innovation is at the forefront of all that you do?

Yes. We are in the midst of a health care crisis whose solution is daunting. Our goal, quite simply, is to fund scientific research that leads to new ways to prevent and treat disease and to translate the findings of basic science into the most advanced treatments for patients as quickly as possible.

The U.S. spends $200 billion annually on Alzheimer's disease alone. One out of two people over the age of 85 will develop Alzheimer's – that is going to amount to over $1 trillion in health care costs for Alzheimer's disease alone. That doesn't take into account the emotional and financial toll these patients take on caregivers. So we have to figure out how to prevent this disease and treat it and that can only be accomplished by discovery research.

Are there strong opportunities in this field for women at senior levels?

One of the first things I did as Dean was to create an Office of Faculty Development so we could make sure we are mentoring our faculty, male and female, at all levels.

We want to harness the talent of 100 percent, not 50 percent, of our population.

We also recently founded a child care center at Weill Cornell. So we're making some progress but there's plenty of room for growth. ●