

## Continuous Improvement

An Interview with Robert I. Grossman, M.D.,  
Saul J. Farber Dean and Chief Executive Officer, NYU Langone Medical Center



Helen L. and Martin S. Kimmel Pavilion rendering by Ennead Architects

**EDITORS' NOTE** Dr. Robert I. Grossman assumed his current post in July of 2007. He joined NYU Langone Medical Center in 2001 as the Louis Marx Professor of Radiology, Chairman of the Department of Radiology, and Professor of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Physiology and Neuroscience. In 2010, he received the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine's (ISMRM) Gold Medal for his pioneering research in magnetic resonance in medicine and biology. In addition, he was named a Distinguished Graduate



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of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Bordeaux, France. Dr. Grossman has authored over 300 publications and five books, including *Neuroradiology: The Requisites*. He also served as Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Neuroradiology from 2005 to 2007. Grossman received his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.

**INSTITUTION BRIEF** One of the world's premier academic medical institutions for over 170 years, NYU Langone Medical Center ([www.med.nyu.edu](http://www.med.nyu.edu)) continues to be a leader in patient care, education, and scientific research. It is internationally renowned for evidence-based clinical care across an array of specialties, including its five leading clinical areas: cancer, cardiology and cardiac surgery, musculoskeletal, neurology and neurosurgery, and children's services.

### What differentiates NYU Langone and how has it remained an industry leader?

What differentiates NYU Langone is our extraordinary group of physicians and employees who make us who we are. There is a unique spirit here and a culture that is hard to replicate. In fact, many employees have been here for 25 to 35 years. The people who work here care deeply about patients and do an excellent job. It's more than just a job to them – they are proud to be at NYU Langone and their pride permeates that performance.

### How would you describe the makeup of NYU Langone?

The institution consists of Tisch Hospital, Rusk Institute for Rehabilitation Medicine, Hospital for Joint Diseases, and now Hassenfeld Pediatric Center. The first three have long histories, as does our pediatric services, and the new floors of the pediatric center, which will be quite extraordinary

when it fully opens in a few years, were made possible through an incredibly generous \$50 million gift that the Hassenfeld family made in 2011. Hassenfeld Pediatric Center comprises the full array of services for newborns, children, adolescents, and young adults, who receive the most comprehensive and advanced care by teams of pediatricians and pediatric specialists.

### How critical has it been to consistently offer quality service?

We're a highly metric-driven institution and we're transparent about our quality. We want to be seen as a leader in health care quality, and as demonstrated by several objective metrics, we believe we are.

We have created an atmosphere where people are focused on quality from top to bottom, and results show that our efforts are already benefiting our patients, their families, and the medical center as a whole. This year, we were awarded five stars for "Overall Performance" and ranked one of the top 10 academic medical centers in the country for patient quality and safety by the University HealthSystem Consortium (UHC). Additionally, we ranked first among the nation's top academic medical centers for both overall recommended care and surgical care by WhyNotTheBest.org, an online tool tracking performance on various measures of health care quality using CMS data. And we were just one of two hospitals in the city awarded an "A" Hospital Safety Score by the Leapfrog Group for excellence in patient safety. The rating signifies the medical center's overall capacity to keep patients safe from infections, injuries, and medical and medication errors.

### You also maintain a leadership position in research. How is that emphasized?

Research is fundamental to an academic medical center like ours and we have invested considerably in this mission; in doing so, we have attracted some of the best talent in the world. This is combined with the enormous legacy of research we have here to begin with, stretching back over 170 years.

We stand on the achievements of the discoverers who fundamentally changed medicine. In fact, medical historian Dr. David Oshinsky said the two institutions that have contributed most to research in the U.S. are NYU Langone and Johns Hopkins.

### How do you define your role and what makes the most impact?

There are a lot of facets to the job of Dean and CEO. A leader must possess critically important qualities including self-awareness, humility, emotional intelligence, authenticity, transparency, and integrity. Your word is really important and you must try to fulfill everything you say. People may not agree with your ideas but they know when you're coming from a place of integrity and honesty, and they relate to that.

You also need a vision that you articulate and you need to drive that vision and translate it into reality. It isn't good enough to just be a visionary.

### When you're ranked number one, how do you maintain your edge and continue to innovate?

First, we are extremely passionate about the patient care we deliver and the results we achieve, but it isn't good enough to get good results one time – it's a journey toward continuous improvement; you're never perfect. So we're constantly trying to improve. That is one of the most important aspects of what we do here every day.

Additionally, to distinguish ourselves from our competitors and enable sustained growth, we introduced five institutional shared goals to be met by 2015. These include breaking ground on the new, state-of-the-art 830,200 square-foot Helen L. and Martin S. Kimmel Pavilion; improving our financial margin; launching our new Curriculum for the 21st Century; increasing our National Institutes of Health-funded research awards; and growing our ambulatory visits to most effectively position us to meet the shift from inpatient to outpatient care for many services. It is critically important to have – and achieve – goals. And it's not just a few people in administration accomplishing these goals; it's the entire body of the medical center. Everyone at the medical center is involved – we all have to do our part and recognize that we are vital to making things happen at our institution.

At my investiture five years ago, I quoted Winston Churchill, "The price of greatness is responsibility." I truly believe that everyone at our institution has taken on the responsibility to play an integral role in all that we have achieved.

### Do you ever take time to reflect on the success of NYU Langone?

I'm not a reflective type. I'm always looking forward to what we have to do next. There is a lot to accomplish and our focus is on excellence. We're not perfect, but we do strive to approach perfection. ●