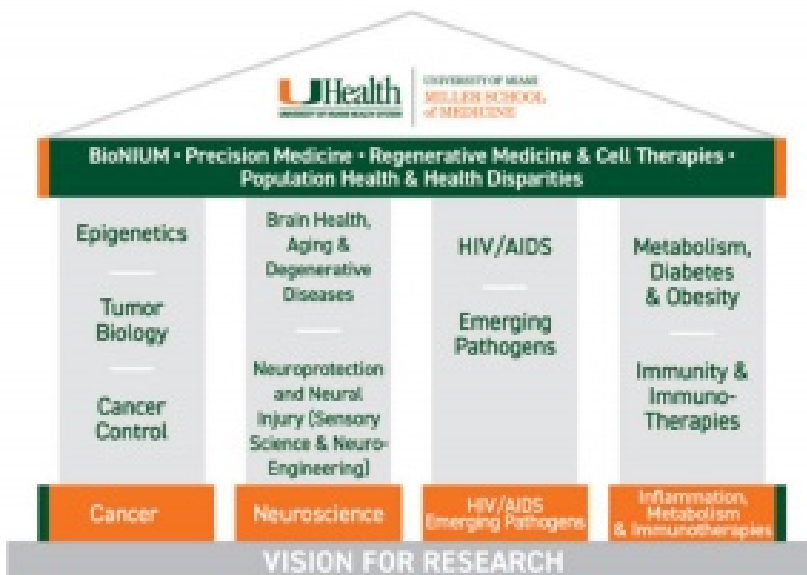


A Research Plan for Pre-eminence

Under new leadership, and with strong faculty input, the Miller School of Medicine has developed a dynamic strategic plan for research



On October 7, nearly 100 members of the Miller School of Medicine faculty gathered for a retreat to put the final touches on a new strategic plan for research. Joining them, and offering his own thoughts, was Dean Edward Abraham, M.D., who sponsored

the retreat and who, since taking charge, has quickly demonstrated a strong commitment to the school's research mission. Two months earlier, on August 16, he had named Carl Schulman, M.D., Ph.D., M.S.P.H., professor of surgery and a long-time faculty member, executive dean for research. Schulman led the retreat, which approved a strategic plan built around four thematic areas, each with two or three specific focus areas (see diagram). Here he outlines the strategic plan and its goals, how it was developed, and the critical importance of research to our medical enterprise.

Why have we been developing a new strategic plan for research?

Research is the lifeblood of our academic medical system, the foundation on which our clinical care stands.

That said, our research efforts require both direction and focus. Locally, we are in a very competitive environment of health care providers. Nationally, we are in competition for recognition, for funding, and for the best students and faculty. We have to play to our strengths, those areas in which we are already far ahead of most institutions. Dean Abraham uses the word “pre-eminence” when he talks about this. By that he means to focus on areas in which we can be not just one of the best, but the best.

It is important to note that the development of our new strategic plan is a faculty-driven, faculty-led effort that has been underway for some time. In January, we had a smaller retreat, followed by a faculty survey in May, and a faculty committee that met in July to analyze the responses and put together a series of proposals. Overall, nearly 500 Miller School faculty members have participated. We now have a working roadmap of our strategic plan.

How is that roadmap laid out?

We have four thematic areas: 1.) Cancer, 2.) Neuroscience, 3.) HIV/AIDS and emerging pathogens, and 4.) Inflammation, Metabolism and Immunotherapies. In each of these areas, we have high-performing teams conducting impactful and innovative basic, translational and clinical research, and there is excellent opportunity for continued growth.

Each overarching theme has its own specific areas of focus. For cancer, they are epigenetics, tumor biology and cancer

control. For neurosciences, they are brain health, aging and degenerative diseases; neuroprotection and neural injury; and sensory science and neuroengineering. For inflammation, metabolism and immunotherapies, they include diabetes and obesity, as well as immunity and immunotherapies.

How were the thematic and focus areas selected?

We wanted to determine which areas were not only strong, but consistently strong. To do that, we performed a statistical analysis of proposal volume, proposal dollars and award dollars going back to 2012. Cancer, neuroscience, HIV/AIDS and diabetes were consistent leaders. These areas also tie in to the federal government's emphasis on funding team science with a translational focus. In fact, there was strong overlap between our areas of research strength and the leading conditions and diseases in the NIH's research funding budget.

We also used the May survey to determine areas of faculty research interest. We invited 1,164 faculty members to participate, and we received 261 responses. Faculty members were asked to indicate up to 10 areas of interest using the NIH keyword list. The top 10 responses were neuroscience, nervous system, brain, immune system, cancer biology, neurological disorders, cellular biology, immunology, cardiovascular system and clinical trial.

Ultimately, to make the list a research area had to meet six qualifications:

- Significant faculty interest
- Significant extramural funding

- Priority area in NIH funding
- Competitive advantage in local, national and international landscape
- Related to a potential UHealth service line and/or important population health
- Emerging scientific area identified by faculty

What will connect these disparate areas to help keep the overall research effort on track?

We determined that our plan also needed to include technologies and platforms that overlapped with multiple thematic and focus areas. These four “bridging platforms,” as we call them, are biomedical nanotechnology, precision medicine including genetics, regenerative medicine and cell therapies, and population health and health disparities.

What about research being conducted here that doesn’t fall into this framework?

We don’t want our researchers to think that this is all we are going to work on and that nothing else matters. That is not the case, but these are going to be our priorities for the near future. The strategic plan is intended to guide the next three to four years of our journey toward what the Dean calls “sustainable extraordinary impact.”

How does this plan fit in with our clinical care?

Our goal is to make UHealth the only place anyone will want to go to for cutting-edge care in all of the thematic and focus areas. We need to differentiate ourselves in a very crowded market. In South Florida, we have a lot of strong health care

entities, but none of the others have an academic research powerhouse associated with them. If we can improve our brand image by showing that our care is supported by amazing research, it will be a differentiator for us.