

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

HELLING AIMS TO ELEVATE UMHC'S GENERAL SURGERY PROFILE

For more information contact Patrice Guilfoyle at (601) 815-3940 or pguilfoyle@pubaffairs.umsmed.edu.

JACKSON, Miss. – Dr. Thomas Helling, the new chief of the Division of General Surgery, arrived at the University of Mississippi Medical Center with a mission – to build an identity and visibility for the group of physicians providing outstanding surgical care.

He said many of the elements needed for a strong division are in place, such as minimally invasive surgery, breast, liver, pancreatic and colorectal surgery. His goal is to develop further expertise in endocrine surgery and promote the division both internally to through the Medical Center's clinical programs, University of Mississippi Health Care, and externally to surrounding communities.

"The hope of the Department of Surgery is to both increase the overall volume of surgery done here and referrals for specialized surgery while increasing clinical research in those areas we're trying to develop. Research is important to further understand some of these diseases and may augment our effectiveness in treating them," Helling said.

Helling earned the M.D. at the University of Kansas Medical School and completed residency training at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a transplant fellowship at the University of Colorado. A Kansas native, Helling spent most of his career in the Kansas City area as a practicing surgeon and faculty member of the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Before joining UMHC, he was chair of the Department of Surgery at Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center in Johnstown, Penn. His special area of interest is in surgery of the liver and pancreas.

"I saw the opportunity to be involved in a strategic vision to identify the Medical Center as the tertiary-care facility for the state and recognition as the place to go for surgical care. Dr. (Marc) Mitchell has a lot of enthusiasm and energy to see that this strategic vision is carried out," Helling said.

Mitchell, Department of Surgery chair, said he's proud to have Helling at the helm of the division. Helling trained with Dr. Thomas Starzl, the legendary organ transplant surgeon who pioneered liver transplants.

"He's going to help build the Division of General Surgery. What we want is to have an emphasis on complex general surgery problems, liver tumors, complex cancers and endocrine surgery," Mitchell said.

Raising the profile of the division comes at a time when the number of general surgeons is declining nationwide. Mitchell said it's estimated that 80 percent of surgeons nationally enter fellowships, meaning more are choosing to specialize.

"There's a big discussion going on around the country about the future of general surgery," Mitchell said.

Surgeons who serve rural or disadvantaged areas have been of particular interest to Helling. He said disadvantaged populations are often underinsured or uninsured, and as a result, may be compromised in their health care. Additionally, physicians are less inclined to live in rural areas because of fewer staff members to support an intense workload and long hours of being on call.

Also, general surgeons in private practice often feel the pinch of malpractice insurance costs, the burden of operating a business and a heavy patient load. Academic medicine is often an attractive choice for general surgeons who have an interest in teaching and research and the departmental support of other skilled colleagues.

Helling said all the functions of an academic medical institution should work together to both educate and heal.

"I think it's important these efforts be collaborative and provide the patients multispecialty care," he said.

12-2-09

Please forward this message to colleagues who might be interested. If you wish to be removed from this list or know of a colleague to add, send an e-mail message to: LAGriffin@pubaffairs.umsmc.edu.

The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. University of Mississippi Health Care represents the clinical programs of the Medical Center and includes University Hospitals and Health System and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's citizens. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at 601-984-1100 or visit us on the Web at <http://info.umc.edu/>.