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One of Dr. Charles J. Yeo’s first initiatives as the new Samuel D. Gross Professor and Chair of Surgery was to establish a Division of Surgical Research and to appoint Thomas N. Tulenko, PhD, Professor of Surgery, Biochemistry and Molecular Pharmacology, Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, as Director. Along with Dr. Tulenko, the new division is comprised of researchers Susan Lanza-Jacoby, PhD, Assistant Professor of Surgery and Pathology, Anatomy and Cell Biology, as well as vascular surgeon Paul DiMuzio, MD, PhD, Research Associate Professor of Medicine, and Ihseda Arafat, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor of Surgery and Radiology, who is currently devoting most of his time to surgical research.

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“All of us were already conducting funded research at Jefferson,” Dr. Tulenko says, “but now, as a division, we also have a voice in establishing the direction of the department. As Director, I sit on the executive committee that advises on department policy, and can bring matters up to the committee on behalf of the research staff. This also puts us in better touch, through other division directors, with the clinical surgeons. We’re looking forward to improved communication and more collaborative efforts between surgeons and researchers as a result.”

Surgical research at Jefferson falls into three broad areas: cardiovascular, diabetes and cancer. As for specific research currently in progress, Dr. DiMuzio is developing designer blood vessels for arterial grafting (see article on page 2 of this issue of Jefferson Surgical Solutions). Along with work in vascular disease and cardiac disease, Dr. Tulenko is conducting a National Institutes of Health-funded study of Smith-Lemli-Opitz Syndrome, a fatal metabolic disease that causes multiple birth defects. Dr. Shi’s research centers on artherosclerosis, Dr. Arafat’s largely on pancreatic biology, and Dr. Lanza-Jacoby’s on breast cancer, the latter two scientists are also conducting research in the area of pancreatic cancer.

Speaking of which, Dr. Yeo’s arrival at Jefferson has also paved the way for expanded research in pancreatic cancer, his primary area of interest. “He’s putting together an exciting multidisciplinary research team, involving both clinical and basic research.”

Dr. Tulenko reports, “One component of this program will be development of better surgical protocols. But a larger part will focus on the genetics of the disease to develop effective screening of patients with an eye toward slowing or even preventing pancreatic cancer.”

Dr. Tulenko is confident that the blended research between basic scientists and clinicians that characterizes both the new Division of Surgical Research and pancreatic cancer research program will further strengthen Jefferson’s competitive position for obtaining grants and attracting talent (the department hopes to recruit at least two new researchers in the near future). “As a world-class surgeon, Dr. Yeo will bring a lot of attention and resources to Jefferson. His influence, as well as the recent establishment of the Center for Translational Medicine and the recruitment of Dr. (Richard) Pestell as Director of the Kimmel Cancer Center, make this an exciting time for researchers at Jefferson.”

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