Some classmates celebrated their five-year reunion, while some celebrated their 50th at the Medical Alumni Reunion and Clinic Day for the WSU School of Medicine. Generations of WSU physicians joined together in May to celebrate their own accomplished careers, to catch up with friends and to support continuing programs at their alma mater.

Calier Worrell, M.D., representative for the class of 1956, earned the veteran physician honor for gathering more than half his remaining classmates to celebrate their 50-year reunion and to pass wisdom along to others. When he was a student, WSU was one of the smallest medical schools in the country, now it is among the largest. At 80 years old, Dr. Worrell still sees pediatric and adolescent patients five mornings a week at his Grosse Pointe, Mich., practice.

"After all these years, I know so much, I can’t think about retiring yet," he said. Dr. Worrell credits Wayne State for allowing him and his classmates to learn by doing, "It’s a great, progressive school, and doctors learn from experience," he said. "We really got a lot of it.”

Kevin Sprague, M.D., '80, president-elect of the Medical Alumni Board of Governors, assumed official duties from President Paul Chuba, M.D., '92, as the gavel was passed and a new alumni season began.

Distinguished Alumni Awards were presented to Daniel Steinberg, M.D., Ph.D., '44, and Mary Territo, M.D., '68. Dr. Steinberg is professor of medicine, emeritus, at the University of California San Diego, where he has concentrated his career on lipids and lipoproteins and the underlying mechanisms of atherosclerosis. He is currently working on a book called “The Cholesterol Wars,” a history of the battle to get acceptance of treatment of hypercholesterolemia as a national public health goal. Dr. Territo serves at the University of California Los Angeles where she is vice chair for academic affairs in the Department of Medicine and director of the hematopoietic stem cell transplantation program. Her research focuses on the use of chemotherapy and bone marrow transplantation in the treatment of patients with hematologic disorders and malignancies.

Dr. Kouichi Tanaka, ’52, flew in from California to present the Distinguished Alumni Award to Dr. Territo and to connect with his own classmates.

Two non-alumni honorees received Lawrence M. Weiner Awards for their service to the school. They are John Crissman, M.D., former dean of the WSU School of Medicine, and Gloria Kuhn, D.O., Ph.D., vice chair for academic affairs in WSU’s Department of Emergency Medicine. Additionally, eight students were honored with awards and scholarships.

The continuing medical education program featured topics in geriatric medicine, shoulder surgery, otolaryngology and osteoporosis.
Abu Ghraib detainees served by Dr. Flynn, WSU alum

"When I became a doctor, I said I would help people. That’s what I’ll do. I’m not a judge or a jury. I just care for human beings," said Lisa Flynn, M.D., ’93. Those words are especially profound when you consider who Dr. Flynn’s patients were over the past two years: Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib, war prisoners, suicide bombers, innocent civilians, translators and soldiers – both Iraqi and American.

Dr. Flynn, 39, a major and surgeon in the Army reserves, has already done two tours of duty in the Iraq war: first in 2003 when she helped in Fallujah; then from August 2005 just before the war in Iraq began in 2003. "I got a phone call on a Monday and left Friday. My family was very nervous, of course. And at the time, I was doing surgery and vascular surgery at five Detroit-area hospitals. I had only one partner to cover my practice. It really caught all of us off guard," she said.

"I was near Fallujah for about 90 days, but I only operated on 11 patients in that time. We saw more than that in the ER, but some only needed stitches, etc., and didn’t go to surgery. We were part of a highly mobile forward surgical team, known in the Army as an FST. We were on the front lines, but did damage control surgeries for American soldiers who were too injured to make it farther back behind the lines for medical care. Remember, at that time, we were on the offensive, citizens were happy to see us, there was no real insurgency threat, and people were busy ripping down Sadam Hussein statues. The level of danger didn’t seem as bad then."

The Abu Ghraib assignment was much different. The facility, once a known torture chamber, is now used by the Army medical unit for health care provisions and as a detainee holding area. Dr. Flynn and another orthopaedic surgeon were the only two surgeons providing care there. She served six months at Abu Ghraib, treated more than 200 patients, and was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the entire time.

"We cared for so many different types of people. For the most part, they were very appreciative and grateful. We helped injured civilians who were thrilled to have American doctors helping them. We treated Iraqi translators and their families. I treated one member of the Iraqi National Guard four times in our emergency department in just six months. After each gunshot wound or shrapnel injury, he was begging to get back to work. He was passionate about having his country back in order. He just wanted to fight for stability," Dr. Flynn said.

"On the other hand, we were constantly threatened. Detainees, who were not prisoners of war, but were waiting for their day in court, were kept in restraints, under secure supervision. I operated on a man’s arm after he tried planting a bomb and it exploded. We were healing people who had tried killing us. But it’s not always clear-cut. Sometimes, the Iraqi soldiers would hire innocent kids to plant their bombs, and the kids didn’t even know what was going on. The lines are fuzzy, but our work was clear. Provide the same quality medical care to all patients, regardless of their stories or circumstances."

While some medical personnel report major conflict between their professional duties to a patient and their loyalties to their country, Dr. Flynn said human rights are the only important issue. "Some of the younger medics and the military police had a harder time, but we have good training, and I’m not exactly a young kid on the convoy. I was just taking care of sick people."

Dr. Flynn said she never witnessed any incidents or hints of detainee or prisoner abuse. In fact, she arrived at Abu Ghraib after the 2003 scandal, so at that time, the Army kept very close watch to ensure nobody violated the rules. "We were there to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people," she said. "Cruelty certainly won’t do that. We’re Americans and we’re above that."

The medical ward she worked in consists of a small tent hospital set inside a warehouse. The warehouse protects workers and patients from the frequent mortar attacks and small-arms fire that pepper the base. There is a 20-bed medical ward, a small ICU area, an OR, and space for a pharmacy, lab and x-rays. Medical experts work through interpreters to help detainees.

For six months, Dr. Flynn slept on a cot in an isolated area of the warehouse next to the hospital. She was thankful for the simple things like flush toilets, soap, playing with her dog and peace of mind.
Hands-on public health official appreciates WSU training

Just like the mutating viruses and pandemics he studies at the World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Dr. Steven Wiersma is forever changing and adapting to remain ahead of the trend. With his eye on the national and international threats that impact public health, Dr. Wiersma’s dynamic perspective takes him to new continents and job positions frequently.

As of August, he is transitioning from medical officer in the Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals for the WHO to become the associate director for science, managing viral hepatitis at the CDC in Atlanta. With the WHO in Geneva, Switzerland, Dr. Wiersma dealt more with hepatitis B, for which there is a vaccine. Now, back in the United States, he is working on tools to combat hepatitis C, for which there is no real treatment.

“Public health officials like me sometimes find it hard to explain the magnitude of the problem to people who don’t feel personally sick or concerned,” he said. “Hepatitis C is an emerging issue, but it’s not as exciting as mad cow disease. It sounds technical, there’s a bunch of alphabet soup involved, nobody talks about it much. As a public health generalist, I’m most concerned about the pressing issues like the pounds piling up on people causing the obesity epidemic. We need to protect people from known diseases with measurable burdens and also potential problems with estimated burdens.”

“As Florida’s head epidemiologist in the 1990s, Dr. Wiersma did both. He handled the first U.S. case of intentional anthrax poisoning, West Nile virus in a human, and mad cow disease, among many other less sexy outbreaks including malaria, encephalitis and TB. Where does a doctor and epidemiologist get training to handle these public health threats? The Wayne State University School of Medicine first – then Zaire, Frankfurt, Saudi Arabia, Zambia, Eritrea and other pivotal stops along the way. The son of an oncology nurse and social-worker father, Dr. Wiersma accepted a position at the WSU School of Medicine in the 1980s to get serious medical training. He told CNN, “To my parents’ chagrin, I turned down the University of Michigan for a more blood-and-guts setting.”

He came to Detroit from Grand Rapids and immediately began to grasp an appreciation for the practice of medicine as bigger than one’s single patient or isolated community. He was intrigued by differences in patient populations and his three-month student elective in Africa set up his public health curiosity. He graduated in 1987 and has been on the road and in the field ever since.

His first training took place in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, where he spent three months working with a surgeon and public-health doctor who inspired him. “I had a payback I owed the Air Force – they’d paid for my medical school. So I decided that instead of specializing, I’d give the work of GP (general practitioner) a try. The international public-health thing had really attracted me,” he said. “So, I went into the Air Force, got assigned to Germany for four years. Got stuck for eight months in the Gulf War, living in a tent. Got a lot of public-health training there, too.”

After the Air Force, Dr. Wiersma completed a master’s in public health at Johns Hopkins and began his real fixation with preventive medicine, public health, epidemiology and international medicine. And it was there he became a World Health Organization employee assigned to Zambia to tackle malaria, pneumonia, HIV, TB and population programs. If it weren’t for a near fatal car crash and other circumstances, Dr. Wiersma would probably still be in Zambia, propagating preventive medicine with his wife, Petra, a German physician he met while she trained at Children’s Hospital. Petra has accepted a training position at the CDC in epidemic intelligence. “Essentially, she’s going to be a disease detective,” Dr. Wiersma said.

When his three children (currently 16, 14 and 4 years old) reached school-age, Dr. Wiersma moved back to the states to tackle infectious-disease epidemiology, in concert with the CDC, in his homeland. Now, he manages a national and global health portfolio through cooperation of a number of organizations. “We all have something to learn from one another,” he said.

After seeing the devastation of disease and knowing the details of major health threats around the world, what does Dr. Wiersma fear most? “The flu,” he said.


– DR. STEVEN WIERSMA
Spring Fling supports medical students

Hula hoops and Hawaiian shirts gave medical students a deserved spring break. Spring Fling, sponsored by the Medical Alumni Association, provides medical student programs with fun, frivolity, prizes and moral support, in addition to traditional student programs.

Fourth-year student Adrian Smith and Terrance Heath agree that their son Parker inspires them to do more for kids.

Spring Fling hosts distinguished WSU alums

The Cosmos Club in Washington D.C. is a famous and prestigious social club that has hosted intellectual meetings of the country’s major scientific, literary and art societies since the 1800s. It is credited with the establishment of the National Geographic Society; and in August 1940, was the site of discussions that laid the foundation for the Anglo-American radar partnership that was instrumental in winning World War II. Although it didn’t make historical news, on May 8, 2006, the club hosted alumni from the Wayne State University School of Medicine and WSU attendees of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) annual clinical session for a fruitful meeting of the minds and social discourse.

Dr. John Malone, Jr., who hosted the event said, “ACOG’s national meeting agenda is similar to that of WSU’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. With discussions of hot topics like genomics, stem cells, cloning, and simulation training, we are happy to see that WSU alumni are shaping the field across the country, and WSU students are actively learning and advancing that field.”

Child well-being and protection are goals of Dr. Imirowicz

While doing his pediatrics rotation as a medical student at WSU in the early 1990s, Richard Imirowicz felt like the job was a little too run-of-the-mill for him. "We were helping kids fight colds and giving vaccinations – and those things are important, to be sure. But my parents are engineers and I guess I like to find out more about how people work. Once I was exposed to pediatric psychiatry, I knew that's how I wanted to spend my life. I like the face-to-face time with the kids. And I like to think that I can improve and lengthen life for some very troubled patients and their families."

Richard Imirowicz, M.D., ’92, now serves as a physician, child psychiatrist, and assistant medical director for the John L. Gildner Regional Institute for Children and Adolescents (JLG-RICA), a community-based, public residential, clinical, and educational facility serving children and adolescents with severe emotional disorders. JLG-RICA is an interagency program operated by the State of Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Montgomery County Public Schools.

Dr. Imirowicz is part of a multidisciplinary team that counsels fourth to 12th-grade students who are not part of the mainstream classroom. His patients suffer from severe AD/HD, post-traumatic stress disorders, Asperger syndrome, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia and psychotic episodes. His program allows for 100 day-students and 80 residential students, who may require more aggressive mental-health treatment.

"The kids really progress here. We have lots of resources; our maximum class size is nine kids and we have two teachers per class. The program is pretty intense, but we are able to mainstream some kids and get help for the entire family. We are filling a very important need," he said.

Dr. Imirowicz recalls his psychiatry training at Detroit Receiving Hospital, which helped him learn many practical skills and life lessons. "In ways, you feel helpless – mostly when you are only providing temporary treatment like getting the intoxicated person sober for a day or fixing a small problem that's part of a bigger chronic illness. But you also learn that there is much to be done; that psychiatric conditions are not a patient's fault; that rape victims need to be treated with special care; and that people with mental disorders can lead functional, independent lives in many cases."

Not all physicians are cut out for this work. Dr. Imirowicz admits. We need 50 percent more specialists nationwide, he said. It's intense work that requires intense training. He went to Yale for residencies in general psychiatry and child psychiatry, and says he uses both sets of training, since he spends lots of time counseling parents of the school-age children, who may have the same familial disorders.

Now that he’s the parent of 3-year-old Parker, Dr. Imirowicz says he is more motivated and empathetic to parents than ever. "Sometimes it’s exhausting getting kids the help they need, but we have to keep our kids well and we have to protect them, no matter what it takes."

Dr. Imirowicz and his family live in Chevy Chase, Md., although he still visits the Detroit area regularly to see his parents and siblings.
Alumna expresses outrage at health hazards from chemicals and nuclear radiation

If second-hand cigarette smoke is a recognized health hazard, imagine the downwind cancer-causing effects of nuclear power plants and radiation leaks. “Why aren’t we up in arms, marching in the streets, yelling at Congress and the nation’s health agencies?” asked Janette Sherman, M.D., ’64. “What’s wrong with us? Why aren’t we outraged? Why are we accepting this cancer epidemic as something natural?”

Dr. Sherman’s book, “Life’s Delicate Balance: Causes and Prevention of Breast Cancer,” is a wake-up call to health care professionals and the public. A specialist in internal medicine and toxicology who has examined some 8,000 worker patients over 25 years, Dr. Sherman believes the root cause of cancer is in carcinogens: chemicals, including pesticides, endocrine disrupters, and nuclear radiation that are contaminating the environment.

Rose Marie Williams, president of the Cancer Awareness Coalition, said “Finally, scientific answers telling us what does cause cancer. And it’s not all in our genes!”

According to Dr. Sherman, there are serious consequences of these exposures. “Of special note is the fact of persistent chemicals that will be a source of exposure long after their use – in water bodies where they have been deposited, in dust that blows in the wind, and in human fat tissue where they are stored until an event such as weight loss releases the chemicals back into the system,” she argues. She notes that approximately 5 to 10 percent of breast cancers are accounted for by genetics, but the other 90 percent are generally unexamined.

In strongly crafted editorials regarding power plants and local public health issues from Brooklyn to Pennsylvania to India to Iraq, Dr. Sherman doesn’t mince words. “How much more asbestos, PCBs, solvents, nuclear wastes, and power plant emissions will we tolerate before we do something? Clearly governmental agencies are failing to protect the health of the public. How did we allow cancer to become the No. 1 killer without noticing it?”

Dr. Sherman acknowledges that there are natural sources of radiation from the earth and outer space. What is important is the difference between natural radiation and that generated by nuclear power plants. “Every plant, in the course of operation, continually gives off some 200+ radioactive elements. Some of these have short half-lives, some long; they emit beta, gamma and alpha radiation of varying energies. They are taken up by living plants, animals and humans and concentrate in various organs in the body,” she said. “There are safer, less costly ways to generate electricity. These include solar, wind, natural gas, and hydroelectric power. And conservation is important. Some 15 to 20 percent of U.S. electrical power comes from nuclear plants. It is very likely that if the public understood the contribution of nuclear power to cancer in children and adults, and fetal and neonatal loss, that most citizens would be more than willing to cut their use of electrical power by 20 percent to prevent the illnesses and losses that so many are currently bearing.”

Dr. Sherman earned an undergraduate degree in biology and chemistry from Western Michigan University and a medical degree from WSU. She has worked in radiation and biologic research at the University of California nuclear facility and at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory at Hunter’s Point in San Francisco. From 1976-1982, she served on the advisory board for the EPA Toxic Substances Control Act. She has been an advisor to the National Cancer Institute on breast cancer and to the EPA on pesticides. Currently, she is adjunct professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at Western Michigan University and research associate and lecturer with the Radiation and Public Health Project. She has published more than 70 scientific articles and several popular books about chemical exposure and disease.

Dr. Sherman was recently honored with a National Research Center for Women & Families Mother’s Day Foremothers’ Award for her advocacy for environmental health. More information on her and her book can be found at: www.janettesherman.com.

Dr. Sherman, outraged by the careless use of toxic agents, visits with Dr. John Malone at a recent WSU alumni event in Washington.

“How much more asbestos, PCBs, solvents, nuclear wastes, and power plant emissions will we tolerate before we do something? Clearly governmental agencies are failing to protect the health of the public. How did we allow cancer to become the No. 1 killer without noticing it?”

Dr. Newcomer conducts neuroendocrinology research in St. Louis

A summer job at a psychiatric facility inspired John Newcomer, M.D., to delve into the neurosciences and pursue a career that would help individuals with mental health problems. "I had taken a summer job at a psychiatric facility, and I saw a person who came in acutely psychotic," he said. "After about two or three days of antipsychotic therapy, however, she was much better. She wasn't completely healed by any means, but she was able to engage in rational and meaningful conversations with her family again. I was struck by the dramatic changes that must have been occurring in her brain."

Dr. Newcomer completed an undergraduate degree at Brown University, returned to his hometown of Detroit to complete his medical degree at Wayne State University in 1985. He recalls Detroit's Lafayette Clinic, where he met expert National Institutes of Health-funded researchers and developed an interest in neuroendocrinology. "It was intrigued by the tremendous amount of uncharted territory in neuroscience," he said. He went on to pursue residency training in psychiatry and a research fellowship at Stanford University.

He is now a professor of psychiatry, psychology and medicine at Washington University in St. Louis. His major area of research is the metabolic effects of antipsychotic drugs in people with schizophrenia. Dr. Newcomer lived in St. Louis briefly as a child, while his father, an FBI agent, was investigating organized crime, was on assignment there. "I remember seeing the arch halfway constructed," he recalls. "I have a vivid image of that in my brain." When he returned to St. Louis in 1990 to continue his own career, the Gateway Arch was long complete.

Dr. Newcomer and his family are settled in St. Louis. While starting a research unit, he continued studies of glucocorticoid effects on memory that he began at Stanford, and he became interested in the effects of insulin and glucose on memory. Through his investigations, he encountered disease- and treatment-related disturbances in glucose metabolism. "It turns out that patients with major mental disorders have elevated metabolic risk," he explained. "Psychiatric patients have increased morbidity and mortality in comparison to the general population from conditions like cardiovascular disease and complications associated with diabetes."

People with certain psychiatric disorders are at risk for obesity, high cholesterol or hypertension, certain psychiatric drugs can contribute to weight gain and insulin resistance. Those same drugs are also linked to an increased risk of a problem with blood lipid levels called dyslipidemia, and diabetes.

With funding from the National Institute of Mental Health, Dr. Newcomer is studying the metabolic effects of antipsychotic drugs in people with schizophrenia and he's launching a similar study in children treated with antipsychotic medicines. As medical director of the Center for Clinical Studies at Washington University, Dr. Newcomer and his colleagues conduct industry-initiated and investigator-initiated studies to find drugs that treat symptoms with fewer side effects.

In addition to his university work, Dr. Newcomer is involved in advocacy and policy issues. Since 1997, he's been chairman of the Drug Utilization Review Board for Missouri Medicaid, trying to make the best prescription drugs available to Missouri's Medicaid patients at the best prices the state can negotiate. Dr. Newcomer points out that the top three drugs, in terms of Medicaid dollars spent per month, are antipsychotic medications. "It's interesting because we know that some of these drugs are linked to risk for high cholesterol and diabetes," he said. "Those problems are expensive to treat, too. Our board is very interested in strategies to reduce medical risk and cost in people with psychiatric symptoms, while also preserving access to all the psychiatric medications needed for treatment of the severe mental disorders found in our Medicaid population. These complex problems lead to a lot of concerns and some complex dynamics involving the legislature, the pharmaceutical companies, the governor's office, physicians and patient advocacy groups."

Dr. Newcomer enjoys cooking and traveling with his wife, Barbara Freedman, a psychotherapist, and his two children.

"It turns out that patients with major mental disorders have elevated metabolic risk," he explained. "Psychiatric patients have increased morbidity and mortality in comparison to the general population from conditions like cardiovascular disease and complications associated with diabetes."

– Dr. John Newcomer, M.D.
Class Notes

1976
Steven Braff, M.D., has been appointed chair of the Department of Radiology at the University of Vermont College of Medicine and physician leader of radiology at Fletcher Allen Health Care. He was a founding board member of the Clinical MRI Society, a national society with more than 1,000 physician members. He and his wife, Martha, reside in Stowe, Vt. The Braffs have two children: Rebecca Braff Maxwell, who has a Ph.D. in engineering from MIT, and Sam, who is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Vermont College of Medicine.

1977
Rosalind Griffin, M.D., was inducted into the American College of Psychiatrists at the annual meeting in Puerto Rico in February.

William O’Neill, M.D., the longtime director of the Division of Cardiovascular Disease at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, is leaving Beaumont Hospital to become executive dean of clinical affairs at the University of Miami’s Miller School of Medicine. Besides overseeing the medical school’s patient care divisions, he will be in charge of a 144-bed hospital that the university plans to open in four years.

1978
Mary Ann Bauman, M.D., is a resident medical expert on KWTV NEWS9 in Oklahoma City, Okla., and medical director for women’s health and community relations for Integris Health. Dr. Bauman has written a book, “Fight Fatigue: Six Simple Steps to Maximize Your Energy,” which has been released by Tate Publishing.

1987
James D. Grant, M.D., of Bloomfield Hills, Mich., was elected to the Michigan delegation of the American Medical Association.

1993
Partha S. Nandi, M.D., of Rochester Hills, was elected to the Michigan delegation of the American Medical Association.

1994
Barbara Hanna, M.D., is currently practicing OB/GYN in her private practice, Women’s Center/Health Care Physicians, PLLC, in Lincoln Park, Mich. Dr. Hannah has also worked as a medical missionary and has traveled to both South Africa and Jamaica and was honored with the Grace A. Cubb Missionary Award for outstanding missionary work.

1995
Leland Babitch, M.D., and Cheryl Carpenter (WSU Law, ’95) are happy to announce the birth of their second son, Dylan Carter Babitch, on January 20, 2006. Their oldest son, Bradley, born on January 14, 2005, is coping with the new competition.

1999
Elizabeth Zide, M.D., was married on March 27, 2004, to Vincent Hosfield. The couple had their first child, Serena Lily Hosfield, on November 13, 2005. Dr. Zide became board certified in emergency medicine in June 2004.

2000
Shyam Bhakta, M.D., completed fellowship training in cardiovascular disease at Case Western Reserve University/University Hospitals of Cleveland in Ohio. He is pursuing advanced training in interventional cardiology at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver.

2005
Therese Franco, M.D., is completing her first year in the primary care internal medicine residency at the University of Connecticut.

BoV member honored by Women of Wayne

Jan Bertsch, a School of Medicine Board of Visitors member and WSU alumna from the business school (’79), received a special recognition award from the Women of Wayne, WSU’s women’s alumni association.

Bertsch was one of five WSU alumnae listed in the Automotive News list of 100 leading women in the North American auto industry for 2005. She serves as Vice President and CIO, Chrysler Group and Mercedes-Benz Sales.

Jan Bertsch celebrates professional achievement in the company of her daughter, Amanda.
Send us your news

Let your classmates know what you’ve been doing.

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Phone ____________________________ E-Mail ____________________________

☐ My news for class notes is attached

Do you know an alum whose accomplishments should be highlighted in alum notes? If so, please provide us with their contact information.

Name ____________________________ Phone ____________________________
Accomplishment ____________________________

Name ____________________________ Phone ____________________________
Accomplishment ____________________________

Mail this form to: Wayne State University School of Medicine, Alumni Affairs, 6F University Health Center, 4201 St. Antoine, Detroit, MI 48201
Or call toll-free: (877) WSU-MED1, Or email information to: alumni@med.wayne.edu

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