It is a privilege to serve as the first associate chair for clinical research, a position created to foster training of clinical investigators and to develop an efficient and user-friendly infrastructure to support patient-oriented clinical research. The establishment of this position is a reflection of the department’s commitment to promote clinical research and to support our faculty who are engaged in clinical research. This past year, the department received a $72 million grant from the Southwest Oncology Group (SWOG). The funds support the ongoing activities of SWOG clinical community oncologists, including Laurence Baker, DO, assistant chief of Hematology/Oncology, to develop cancer control and prevention clinical trials. The grant also supports two of the largest National Cancer Institute-funded prostate cancer prevention trials. With the first six destination programs now underway, and more to be announced in the coming months, clinical research will play an essential role as we move novel treatments discovered at the bench to cutting-edge care in the clinic.

During this past year, I have been working with the Medical School Office of Research, the Institutional Review Board, the Division of Research Development and Administration and the Michigan Institute for Clinical Health and Research (MiCHR) to assure that we have a coordinated approach in expanding our clinical research program. As a first step, a survey was conducted among 220 faculty engaged in clinical research to identify the barriers to success. These fell into three areas, which we are addressing simultaneously:

- Infrastructure, including physical space to evaluate patients and to perform study procedures
- Budgetary assistance such as guidelines for preparing budgets, readily accessible research price lists and tools to track clinical research billing
- An efficient system for regulatory and contract approval

Let me share a few examples of our progress.

With regard to infrastructure, as of July 2008 two rooms in the Taubman Center were allocated for evaluation of research patients. Approximately 100 to 120 patients have been seen in this clinical research facility each month since then. In January 2009, a clinical research laboratory equipped with a -80°C freezer and a refrigerated centrifuge was established to facilitate processing and short-term storage of biosamples.

We are also working on ways to simplify, streamline and automate the budget development process. This includes a budget preparation tool that can also be used to estimate break-even points and to track clinical research billing. This tool currently is being piloted and we hope will be launched shortly. We have also been working with the Medical School Office of Research and the University Hospital Finance and Billing departments to have a comprehensive research pricing list that is current and easily searchable online and to standardize research discounts across departments.

A key part of our mission is faculty development. In this regard, we are partnering with the MiCHR on a new faculty orientation program and on a formal mentoring program for fellows and junior faculty doing clinical research. We also work closely with the MiCHR to provide supplemental funding to our faculty who succeed in securing Clinical and Translational Science Award pilot grants and KL2 awards. During 2008, we provided more than $300,000 to support MiCHR pilot grants. We feel that this is an important investment—these pilot studies will generate important preliminary data leading to additional funding from other agencies such as the National Institutes of Health.

A final, yet significant endeavor is our effort in making the regulatory and contract approval process more transparent and efficient. We recognize time is precious for our faculty and are working hard to help them comply with the complex and ever-changing regulations that surround clinical research in the most expeditious manner.

There are many additional and important steps we will institute as we continue to build upon our successes. I’m humbled by the opportunity to help lead the clinical research program at this important time, and I look forward to continued success in the coming year.