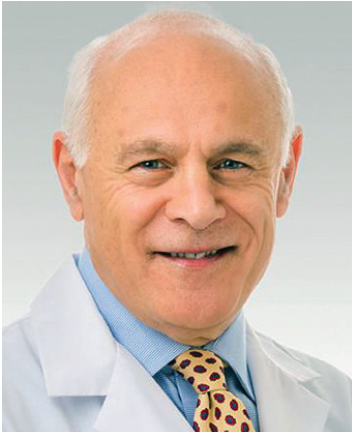


# *A Letter from the Division Chief*

January 2024



**John Varga, MD**

**Chief, Division of  
Rheumatology**

**Department of  
Internal Medicine**

It has been my great privilege to helm the Division of Rheumatology for the past three years. Our Division's clinicians, administrators, research staff and learners go "above and beyond" to provide exceptional patient care, offer the best rheumatology training in the nation, and make significant advances in the science and practice of rheumatology. Let me briefly share some highlights from the past year.

Our rigorous Fellowship program, directed by Dr. Rory Marks, continues to attract outstanding applicants. Our four Fellows graduating this June are embarking on their careers armed with an exceptional fund of knowledge and solid foundation as life-long learners. We are immensely proud that our recent graduate, Dr. Ajay Tambralli, was awarded a career development grant from the RRF to pursue research in neutrophils and inflammation. Under the leadership of Dr. Jason Knight, recognized for his scientific contributions with the 2023 Henry Kunkel Young Investigator Award of the American College of Rheumatology, our T32 NIH grant is gaining fresh momentum. The T32 brings together outstanding U-M investigators from across the campus and diverse fields as faculty for training rheumatology investigators.

Our clinicians deliver exemplary care to patients with the most challenging and severe rheumatic diseases across the state and the region, with over 27,000 annual visits at five clinical sites. Our special programs of excellence in lupus, scleroderma, APS and vasculitis continue to mature and garner national recognition. These programs bring together expert clinicians and investigators from diverse fields to work as coordinated teams. Our faculty are also playing key roles in the development of multiple ACR guidelines. We have held well-attended meetings for clinicians and for the community focusing on scleroderma, lupus and vasculitis. Additional meetings are already planned for the coming year.

Our division hosts one of the preeminent rheumatology research programs in the nation and the world. Our research is second to none in its quantity, significance, and breadth, encompassing the epidemiology, pathogenesis, treatment and prevention of lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, gout, anti-phospholipid syndrome and vasculitis, not to mention pain, fatigue, psoriatic disease, myositis and rare monogenic entities, as well as observational studies, clinical trials and health service research. Scheduled for Spring 2024, our research programs will receive a major boost from the creation of a new Autoimmunity and Inflammation Research Hub located in state-of-the-art facilities at the North Campus Research Complex. Michelle Kahlenberg MD, PhD was recently appointed Research Vice Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine. Additionally, our faculty are engaged in service, not just to their patients, but to our diverse communities, including the Medical School, the American College of Rheumatology, the Rheumatology Research Foundation and other professional organizations.

As our new clinical Pavilion rises, our scientific discoveries deepen our understanding of rheumatic diseases and challenge scientific paradigms, our special programs of excellence grow and the next generation of clinicians and investigators emerge. I look forward to an exciting year of continued discovery, mentoring and caring.

*John Varga, MD*