

# InFocusNewsletter

Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

*Fall 2024 Issue*

## Welcome to the InFocus Newsletter!

This is the updated official newsletter of the Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Department. Our goal is to build community and connection by bringing you highlights from across the department on a quarterly basis.

## One Year as Chair



We recently sat down to have a conversation with our Chair, Dr. George Netto, about his first year leading the department.

### **Can you believe it's already been a year?**


It's hard to believe – and it's actually a little more than a year now, about 15 months. There are two factors that made it feel like it went very fast. The first is that I'm enjoying it tremendously. The second is that there is a lot to do and when you're busy, time flies.

### **What are you most proud of or happy to have achieved in that first year that you've been here?**

First and foremost, it is getting to the place where I feel I'm part of the amazing team here. It didn't take long at all before I felt that this is my new home, departmentally and institutionally. I am also happy that we have built out a very collaborative leadership team both on the faculty and the administrative sides. Finally, I am proud of our growth. We've been able to attract a lot of talent across the board, including in areas like AI and computational to support the future success of the department.

### **What's the biggest thing that surprised you as you were starting to get to know the department in the past year (or 15 months)?**

This is a remarkable department of pathology. We are on the frontlines, and we have a lot of differentiating factors, cell therapeutics, the amazing neurodegenerative program, all the emphasis on computational and diagnostic innovation are just some examples. Having said that, we're not perfect. While it is not unusual for a high-powered established department to have gaps, I must say I was a bit surprised by how much work still remains.



In a way that is good because it gives me the opportunity to contribute! I am hoping I can help the team with streamlining operations, process improvement strategies, and moving forward with integration both with our downtown and regional partners.

**How would you characterize the culture at Penn and how is it different from other places that you've been?**

If I have to pick one word it would be collaborative. It is extremely collaborative. I know everybody says that, so I will take it a step further. It's not just collaborative in the science, it's collaborative in every aspect here. For example, the clinical operation of the almost 20 departments we have at Penn Medicine is quite complex and among department chairs, I see everyone coming together, providing guidance, sharing lessons learned and being very supportive. For me as a new chair that was tremendous. Also, within the department, the number of people who are willing to step up and help with all of the tasks that we have ahead of us is impressive and beyond what I have observed before. The majority of faculty and staff are motivated and driven to achieve a common goal. There is a strong sense of pride in being a member of Penn Medicine and being a part of a leading academic institution.

**Now for a more fun question. What is your favorite thing about Philadelphia or the Philadelphia area? And then follow that up with what's the weirdest thing about the Philadelphia area that you've noticed?**

Nice one. Let's talk about the favorite. The Eagles. I'm also working on adding the Phillies to the list. Being someone who didn't grow up in this country it is taking me a while to come around to baseball. But the Eagles? I was a fan before, and now I can claim it as my sport team. We love living in Center City; My wife Ruby and I enjoy the restaurants, the museums, the performing arts venues. I got the opportunity to travel around to all our regional partners and I was so taken by the nature and the beauty of the surrounding area, which is something I wasn't previously familiar with.

For the second part of your question, I guess the noise you have to adjust to when living in Center City – the motorbikes and ATV's with loud music turned way up as they drive around, took some getting used to.

**Final question - what are you most looking forward to in the next 5 years?**

We just launched the process of developing a strategic plan with our partners at Penn Medicine Academy. I'm looking forward to engaging everyone, all the working groups and group leaders to put together a roadmap for where we want to be in the next three to five years. I'm looking forward not only to the formation of that plan, but also to its implementation. My goal is to maintain the distinction of being a top five funded research program in the country, and to integrate our clinical enterprise into one system with complete harmonization among the six, and hopefully soon 7, hospitals that Pathology serves. Our goal is to make it so that our patients, no matter where they enter the system, receive the same high-level quality of care that they deserve.

**Thank you so much for your time!**

Thank you!

# A Look Inside the RBO

On September 18, 2024, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine's Research Business Office (RBO) held its inaugural **RBO Open House**. Faculty who joined the Department over the past three years were invited to learn more about the RBO, see their space, and meet some of the staff.

After opening remarks and staff introductions, Luellen Fletcher, Associate Director for Path BioResource Administration and Operations, described the Core Resource Laboratories and service centers that are available to all faculty. She also discussed the Path BioResource team, who help provide all investigators access to high quality, cost-effective, advanced technology services, as well as the scientific expertise to use these technologies effectively in their research efforts. Luellen even had some giveaways for attendees - Path BioResource information cards and pens.

Gina Barone, RBO Coordinator, gave an overview on several HR/payroll topics, primarily focusing on required information for various job requisitions, visas, and processes for temporary and student workers. Director of Fiscal Operations Christine Yoo described the sponsored projects/grants and administrative support that the RBO provides and reviewed several policies surrounding proposal submissions and Concur expense reports. After the presentations, Christine led a lively Q&A session to round out the event.

Dr. Mike Cancro, Vice Chair for Faculty Development and Academic Affairs, and Associate Vice Chairs for Faculty Development and Academic Affairs Drs. Zubair Baloch and Mike Milone provided faculty support and guidance during the planning and implementation of the Open House.

RBO Open Houses will be held twice every fiscal year. Look for more information soon about the spring 2025 Open House, which will be open to all faculty.

Thank you to the planning team, the RBO, and the attendees for making this inaugural event so successful!

## Photo Features

A lot of great events and celebrations have taken place across the department over the past three months; click on any of the images below to see more great photos from recent department events.



PPMC Halloween Celebration



Dr. Brooks Retirement Party



PMX Week



Lynn Barthlow Retirement Party



NIH Ranking Toast



IDAAY Community Fair

Additional event photos can be found on the Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Department website: <https://pathology.med.upenn.edu/department/PLM-Newsletter>



**PLM Inclusion, Diversity, Equity,  
and Anti-Racism (IDEA) Committee**

Stay up to date by checking out the IDEA committee's website:

<https://pathology.med.upenn.edu/department/diversity-and-inclusion>

## Wellness

Stay up to date or join the committee by checking out the department Wellness website:

<https://pathology.med.upenn.edu/department/wellness>



# Fall Town Hall



Missed the recent Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Department Virtual Town Hall?

[Watch the recording here.](#)

## How LGH Weathered the CrowdStrike Storm

On July 19, 2024, Penn Medicine was one of many systems and companies around the world impacted by the CrowdStrike Outage. CrowdStrike is an endpoint security vendor whose primary technology is the Falcon platform, which helps protect systems against potential threats in a bid to minimize cybersecurity risks. The July event might be considered the largest IT outage in history and was triggered by a faulty software update, affecting millions of Windows systems.

At Lancaster General Health, a variety of systems were affected, including Mobile Heartbeat (telephones used for internal communication), Electronic Medical Records, PennMed Aware (emergency notification system), remote pharmacy units, and connectivity between systems used for placing orders, receiving samples, and resulting laboratory tests. Tower-based computers were affected, but VDI computers were accessible. By having a mix of VDI and tower-based computers, LGH was able to continue operations without going into full downtime operations.

The Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Departments across all Penn Medicine entities have been working collaboratively on Business Continuity Planning for the last year and came together for an After-Action-Review of the CrowdStrike outage event as well. The detailed instructions and planning for an extended downtime has helped us all navigate the issues that arose from the CrowdStrike event. From sharing documents within our MediaLab document control system to developing plans to send specimens to sister hospital laboratories for testing – it has been a very proactive and positive experience. Planning for the continuation of services, or “business as usual,” has forced the laboratories to look at every detail possible from testing, operations, supply chain management, staffing, tracking of quality concerns and corrective actions, reporting proficiency testing, and patient reportable results to the DOH.

While we hope to never experience an event of this magnitude again, our planning has made us more prepared to weather any storm that comes our way.

# Pathology Centralized Resources Keeps It Clean!

Pathology Centralized Resources (PCR) is a small, department-based service center that provides for basic lab needs, shared equipment, and repairs that are essential to P&LM researchers in the Stellar-Chance Laboratories and John Morgan Building.

Led by Lab Resource Coordinator Olga Ortiz, the PCR team includes Nelson Ortiz and Stephen Lamb, who help track daily operations and overall maintenance, as well as Vivian Zambrana, who provides glass-washing and autoclave services for the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease Research (CNDR) lab. This team was especially important during COVID, helping maintain social distancing in shared equipment rooms and elevators and providing masks, alcohol spray bottles for cleaning, and everything else labs needed to keep their research going.

Last year, with the help of Project Manager Penny Sevin, the PCR team connected with Pristinology, a company that specializes in laboratory deep-cleaning, to take apart and clean individual PI biosafety cabinets and hoods. After the success of that first project, the team then contracted Pristinology to clean all of the Pathology research cold rooms. This involved the team coordinating with labs to move freezers and samples out of the rooms, generally over a weekend, then back once the cleaning was completed. From the dramatic before and after photos supplied by Pristinology, one can see this initiative has improved the overall Pathology research environment, as well as benefited the science. Next up for the cold rooms: new flooring!



## Recent Awards and Honors



Penn Medicine Quality and Safety  
Awards Ceremony

Additional awards and honors can be found on the Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Department website: <https://pathology.med.upenn.edu/department/PLM-Newsletter>

## Did you know?

You can submit ideas and/or feedback on this newsletter by clicking the links in the footer below. These links will be on every newsletter, and we always welcome your input.

## Join the Newsletter Committee

Interested in contributing to future InFocus Newsletters? Email Bridget Callaghan [bridgemc@pennmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:bridgemc@pennmedicine.upenn.edu)

*Published on behalf of the Penn Medicine Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.*

*Have an idea for a future PLM InFocus Newsletter? Submit it [here](#).*

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