



# Letter from the Chair: Building on a Legacy of Excellence



L. Scott Levin, MD, FACS, FAOA



This year's Chairman's letter will be the last time I share my perspective as the leader of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at Penn Medicine. On June 24, 2024, I will hand over the command of the department to Dr. Benjamin Kyle Potter, MD, FACS (Colonel, US Army Retired). I could not be prouder to have Dr. Potter succeed me. As a West Point graduate and distinguished surgeon scientist, he has served our country with distinction, leading on the battlefield, in the classroom, the research laboratory, and as Chairman of Surgery at Walter Reed National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. As an accomplished and innovative Orthopedic Oncologist, he has dedicated his career to limb salvage, extremity reconstruction, and amputee care. I want to recognize Dr. Greg Farwell, who served as Chair of the Penn Search Committee. Dr. Farwell stewarded the search process with grace and skill. Andrew Duncan and I have already been working with Dr. Potter to assure an orderly transition in departmental leadership.

Before writing this, I compiled the previous 14 years of UPOJ Chair letters that I have written and read each one of them. It seems like yesterday that I arrived at Penn on July 1, 2009, at 0600. I remember meeting that first day with our residents and reviewing with them my expectations—"Levin's rules" as they are known: teamwork, communication, strong work ethic, and professionalism. These themes have not changed in 15 years. That day at 6pm, I held my first faculty meeting. I remember saying to the faculty, "I work for you; you do not work for me. We will work together to create success across our missions. My job is to help you succeed in your career by providing guidance, resources, and support to allow you to realize your goals." The measure of our team's success over the last 15 years has been the development, first and foremost, of people. They collectively have led to our success as a department. Recruiting and retaining the right people were essential to establish the programs that we've developed. These include new procedures and innovations in clinical care, expansion of educational opportunities for our medical students, residents, fellows, and faculty and most critically the advancement of musculoskeletal science that remains for our department a necessity and not a luxury.

During my recruitment in the spring of 2009, I requested space and resources to establish the Penn Human Tissue

Laboratory. Completed in 2011, the HTL has supported each of our missions by providing a platform to develop new surgical procedures, serving as a valuable resource for our trainees, and functioning as a research laboratory focused on anatomy. The HTL has benefited those from the Penn community as well as visiting anatomy research scholars from around the world, such as China, Israel, and Italy.

In parallel to the construction and opening of the Human Tissue Laboratory, Penn Medicine supported the development of a Vascularized Composite Allotransplantation (VCA) program. Penn is one of the few centers in the world that has performed upper extremity transplantation. Building on the success of the upper extremity VCA program in adults and children, a world-class uterus transplantation program was established by Katherine O'Neill and Nawar Latif from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

The Orthoplastic approach to extremity reconstruction in the domains of trauma, tumor, and infection was introduced upon my arrival and has been promoted as a multidisciplinary enterprise that treats patients from around the world. Penn Presbyterian Medical Center is the home of the Penn Orthoplastic Limb Salvage Center. The center attracts patients who are told that the only treatment for a compromised limb is amputation. Using our skills and collaborative spirit, we salvage extremities heavily based on the principles and practices of reconstructive microsurgery. Doctors Samir Mehta, Stephen Kovach, and I have led these efforts. I could not be prouder of this clinical program.

In 2009, I arrived at Penn Medicine with a clinical skill set that has been shared with my colleagues and, most importantly, with patients to enhance their quality of life. These include programs that address sternal instability following heart surgery the use of vascularized fibula grafts for the treatment of avascular necrosis of the hip (See youtube), the Orthoplastic approach to limb salvage, the use of medial femoral condyle microsurgical transplantation for foot and ankle reconstruction, establishing the 3C pediatric protocol at Children's Hospital for extremity vascular injuries, and the living donor liver transplant program using the operating microscope for hepatic artery anastomosis.

Basic science research includes co-stimulatory blockade to optimize tolerance of vascularized composite allografts, ex vivo limb preservation funded by foundations, and DOD-funded patient-reported outcome studies in hand transplantation. Educational advances include establishing

the Orthoplastic Fellowship. The Division of Sports Medicine established the Penn Cartilage Program, led by Jim Carrey, Brian Sennett, and Rob Mauck. We recently established the Penn Nerve Center, a collaborative effort among plastic surgeons, orthopedic surgeons, and neurosurgeons, co-directed by Dr. Zarina Ali and myself. We have established a fully Penn Integrated Hand Service that, in my opinion, is the foremost academic hand service in the United States. We have expanded several research platforms, including the VA hospital, which recently led to an \$8.25 million grant by Robert Mauck and colleagues, which included many stakeholders from the MSK community.

Renovations of the Mackay Labs in the Stemmler building, expansion of the VA laboratory space (Translational Musculoskeletal Research Consortium), building the Penn Medicine University City (PMUC) Musculoskeletal Institute, and garnering funds for the Biedermann Biomechanics Lab are examples of physical plant expansions that have benefited Penn Orthopedics. We raised six endowed chairs, including the Abramson Family Foundation Sarcoma Chair, the Abramson Family Foundation Fund for Adult Reconstruction, the Ralston Chair, the WW Smith Endowed Chair, the Hans Jorg Wyss Fund for Immunology and VCA Research, and the Wyss Lorich Orthopedic Trauma Educational Fund.

New educational programs were established for our residents, including the Michael Kelly Wharton School of Business Leadership Program and the Medical Education Track created by Dr. Cara Cipriano. We also established an exchange with Monaco for the shoulder and elbow fellow with Tristan Lascar, MD, which provides an international experience for shoulder education. We established new named lectureships that include the Heppenstall Lecture, the Sam Bal Lecture, the Nakos Lecture, the June Wapner Lecture, and the Vincent Arlet Lecture.

Affiliate partnerships with the Granview Orthopedic Group, Princeton Orthopedics, and Bayhealth were created, expanding our presence in our region. Working with the health system, we developed a community orthopedic arm at Chester County Hospital. We established a Women's Health Initiative within the Division of Sports Medicine and in partnership with the Department of Family Medicine. Other firsts include the development of the Musculoskeletal and Rheumatology Service Line and the Penn Spine Center. We established a relationship with Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children in hand and microsurgery, spine, and oncology. We created an Advisory Council for Orthopedics to facilitate development and highlight the advances of the department. Diversity was increased in terms of women in orthopedics as well as underrepresented minorities at the resident, fellow, and faculty levels.

Penn Orthopedics was rated the number one department in the country three years ago with regard to NIH funding, and for the last two years has been ranked number two. We have partnered with the health system to provide care for the Philadelphia Flyers, Philadelphia 76ers, as well as US Squash, and the Philadelphia Union soccer team. We established annual courses in microvascular surgery (the Penn Flap Course) that attract attendees from around the world. We have expanded fellowship positions in adult reconstruction, spine surgery, and Orthoplastic Surgery. The expansion of advanced practice providers has been exponential. Fifteen years ago, there was one nurse practitioner in the department. Today, we currently have over 45 physician assistants. The growth of the faculty has been exponential, as well as the doubling of the budget in the Mackay Laboratory. Tenure-track research faculty that have been hired all have been successful with regard to peer-reviewed funding from the NIH and other granting agencies.

In summary, things look quite different today than they did 15 years ago. Each of our achievements has been a team effort. I embrace the acronym "T.E.A.M." This stands for: "Together Everyone Achieves More." As a team, we have achieved a lot. However, our work is never done. We always must keep our eyes on the horizon and look ahead to new frontiers to conquer. It is easy to be sidetracked by turbulent waters, stormy seas, and clouds that obscure our path going forward. I have questioned myself several times as the leader of this great department and asked several times, "What can I do better? Where am I ineffective? What must I do to improve our department over time?" Each leader has a style and a personality, strengths, and weaknesses. I hope that my strengths have advantaged the department. In cases where I have shortcomings, I know that other members of our team have stepped forward and provided support and direction in areas where I've been less effective. I am most grateful for that support.

The state of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Penn Medicine is strong. We will get stronger and have more impact in the years ahead. Our new leadership, faculty skill and expertise, and dedication to our missions will be directed to new horizons. I have been honored to serve as the chairman for the last 15 years. It is time to step aside and facilitate the continued success of our great department.

With gratitude and respect for all,

LSL