

OUR BASIS OF STRENGTH

Board of advisors' chair hopes to advance translational medicine



ROBERT TEPPER APPROACHES medicine with the compassion of a caregiver, the curiosity of a scientist and the enthusiasm of an entrepreneur. After years heading research and development at Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Tepper cofounded Third Rock Ventures with two

colleagues who shared his passion for disruptive technologies that hold promise for the future of medicine. Tufts Medical Center honored Tepper and his cofounders with the Ellen M. Zane Award for Visionary Leadership in March 2015.

Following a decade on the board of advisors to the School of Medicine and the Sackler School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences, Tepper became chair of the board a year ago. He earned his medical degree from Harvard and is an adjunct faculty member there and at Massachusetts General Hospital. He is married to psychiatrist M. Lynn Buttolph, J74.

Tepper spoke with *Tufts Medicine* about his guiding vision for the medical school.

What drew you to get involved in the board of advisors, and what keeps you interested?

Initially, I became interested in joining the board through my longtime colleague, the former dean, Mike Rosenblatt. He and I had taught together at MGH and Harvard, and I was struck by his vision for Tufts. I also got to know Harris Berman quite well and enjoyed his passion for leadership and particularly his affinity for developing medical students into fine physicians.

Through your work you are connected to many different medical schools and other academic institutions.

What differentiates Tufts Medical School from its peers?

There are several things. One is the close-knit relationship between faculty and students. You can appreciate that by walking the halls and talking with the students. I've also been struck by the interactions between students. There's a very communal atmosphere.

What do you hope to accomplish as chair of the board of advisors?

One key area that many medical schools, and research institutions in general, are dealing with is the strain on

research funding. Overcoming that requires a creative approach. The board and I are thinking about how to broaden the resources available to Tufts researchers.

What should Tufts School of Medicine be thinking about for the future? Where do the opportunities lie?

Research in neuroscience is a unique strength of the medical school and will be important for the future of medicine. Currently there are 5 million Americans with Alzheimer's disease. That number will increase to 10 million by 2025. Based on its expertise in this area, Tufts is in a strong position to have an important impact on Alzheimer's and other neurological diseases (see "The Alzheimer's Hope," page 14).

Another opportunity stems from the school's expertise in population health. It's very important to deliver health care in context of the population that you're dealing with. I've been impressed with the many programs at Tufts that go beyond the treatment of medical disorders to take into consideration the social and economic aspects of health.

As a founder of Third Rock Ventures, you have an innovative approach toward medicine and biomedical research. How does this perspective play into your role as a Tufts advisor?

One of the areas we think about at Third Rock Ventures is how to translate important research into new treatments for patients. Translational medicine is becoming important in education and in allowing discoveries to become great new therapies. I enjoy the opportunity, in my role on the board, to connect Tufts investigators with individuals in the industry who have interest in the area they're studying.

Your bio says that you participated in the 1972 Munich Olympics. Were you an athlete?

(Laughs) I wasn't an athlete—I get a lot of flack from my kids for having that in my bio. The Olympics were hiring young folks from all over the world to help out as ushers and things like that. I got to be exposed to a lot of great things, like how a complex, international event comes together, and I got to know some of the athletes, both current and previous, including Jesse Owens, who had competed in the 1936 Olympics. But it was also the first modern-day Olympics to be struck by a terrorist event. It made an impact on me in a number of ways. I got to see a lot, but I didn't bring home a gold. —**JOANNE BARKER**