



Anil Shanker, M.S., Ph.D.

Dear Meharrians:

I began my tenure as the Interim Vice President for Research and Innovation in July 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these unprecedented times, our researchers have shown significant progress in scholarly activities as measured by publications, patent filings, and receipt of extramural research funding from various sources. These achievements reflect the strong culture of research and innovation at Meharry that began in the early 1970s during the College's "Renaissance Period" under the leadership of President Lloyd C. Elam.

After 50 years, we are once again on the verge of evolution and transformation. In 2015, President Barack Obama declared precision medicine as a national priority. This initiative is now possible thanks to scientific advances such as high throughput genomics, proteomics, and imaging technologies. Extremely large databases encompassing genetics, epigenetics, lifestyle, and environmental factors are available to generate algorithms that identify molecular networks as well as highly specific and personalized treatments for individual patients. New single-cell high-throughput technologies are bound to transform symptom-based intuitive medicine to evidence-based personalized medicine. This advancement will depend on the recognition of molecular networks guided by precision data science and bioinformatics.

To address unique challenges of the College, President James Hildreth called for a campus-wide introspection of our core values and processes. This led to the development of the Meharry 2026 Sesquicentennial Strategic Plan, which necessitates an alignment of all research in pedagogy, biomedical sciences, clinical sciences, and community health as well as policy initiatives toward health equity. Highly collaborative, transdisciplinary research programs guided by a strong foundation in basic sciences are now more important than ever. Dr. Hildreth describes the plan as a way for "the college to adapt to change and take a proactive posture rather than being trapped in a reactive mode where creativity and innovation are stifled".

We at the Office for Research and Innovation aim to guide our researchers and students to opportunities that match their talents and expertise, and to support all Meharrians in their pursuit of new knowledge, skills, and potential. My first and foremost agenda is to propel Meharry to the 21st century with regards to research and innovation in our efforts to accomplish the vision of Meharry 2026. There is a long road ahead of us, but with our energy, passion, and creativity, I am confident that we can accomplish this mission together.

I thank all Meharrians for all you have done—and continue to do—for Meharry. I am proud to be a member of this remarkable family. Let us strive for a safe, engaging learning environment for greater success!

With gratitude and hope,

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