



Mantosh Dewan, MD, HS '79, was named president of Upstate Medical University in November 2020.

# A Force Multiplier

During an unprecedented year, President Mantosh Dewan has elevated Upstate Medical University by inspiring and supporting its greatest asset: Its people.

BY RENÉE GEARHART LEVY

**O**n a Saturday in early February, Mantosh Dewan, MD, HS '79, president of Upstate Medical University, and Robert Corona, DO, CEO of University Hospital, traversed the halls of the hospital with a vaccine cart, visiting every nursing unit to offer the COVID-19 vaccine on the spot. "We wanted to reach the people who hadn't gotten the vaccine because they were too busy or because they had concerns about it," says Dr. Dewan. "We wanted to be out there supporting the people who are doing very hard work and doing it so well."

That's been Dewan's goal since he took the helm of Upstate as interim president in December 2018, to raise the profile of the institution by helping each of its 10,000-plus employees to "be better."

It's a leadership philosophy he draws from his 41 years as a practicing psychiatrist. "With the physician/patient model, the goal is to work with the individual patient to make them better," he says. "I've found leadership and working with people not much different. My job is to work to have 10,000 terrific people do even better. It's actually quite simple. You pick the very best people and then empower them and support them to do their work."

It's clearly working. To say Dewan took over at a tumultuous time is an understatement. The institution's previous two presidencies had ended

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abruptly. Dewan agreed to provide stable leadership while a search for a permanent successor was underway. The arrival of a global pandemic brought unprecedented stress to the hospital system while upending the University's educational model. National political turmoil and a reckoning over systemic racism contributed to an overall sense of anxiety for many of the University's employees and students. It should have been enough to scare anyone off.

Instead, Dewan has been lauded for Upstate's contributions in the fight against COVID-19, including clinical trials for vaccines and treatments and breakthrough biotechnology research. Upstate's chief of infectious disease, Stephen Thomas, MD, was named lead principal investigator for Pfizer's global Phase 3 clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccine and co-authored a paper on its efficacy published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. In partnership with Quadrant Biosciences, Upstate co-developed the Clarify COVID-19 test, the world's number-one ranked saliva test according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The test is accurate for detection of all common strains of the virus and also detects asymptomatic cases. Additional development of wastewater testing and a COVID pooled surveillance testing program have allowed colleges and universities across the state to meet the demands of regular testing for students, faculty and staff on campuses, and has been used by other entities, including Syracuse University and the Albany International Airport.

In September 2020, the State University of New York (SUNY) Board of Trustees issued a commendation to Upstate Medical University and Dewan for "exceptional leadership in combating the COVID-19 pandemic." The commendation extolled Dewan for his work in advancing the technological and scientific research to ensure the ability of SUNY campuses to continue providing "world



President Dewan with students on Match Day 2021



Dr. Dewan circa 2000

class education and student services in the face of a global pandemic” and further recognized members of the Upstate community and their “steadfast commitment to keeping our students, campuses and communities safe.”

But Dewan is typically humble in accepting any credit. “We’ve always had these shining stars. But it really took the deep darkness of a pandemic to allow these stars to shine,” he says.

**D**ewan was named president of Upstate Medical University in November, surprising himself more than anyone. “It’s certainly an honor and a privilege but I did not see myself in the role,” he says. “I’ve always loved being a professor and treating patients.”

But those around him have long thought otherwise, including former Upstate President Gregory Eastwood, MD, who encouraged Dewan to apply for the position. “Dr. Dewan has made extraordinary contributions to Upstate for so many years,” says Eastwood, now SUNY Professor. “He would be well qualified to lead Upstate at any time in our history, but that is especially so now. His remarkable leadership during the COVID pandemic has been reassuring and inspiring to all of us faculty, staff, and students throughout Upstate.”

“Dr. Dewan has held every

### VITAL STATISTICS

**Birthplace:** Bombay, India

**Education:** Elphinstone College; T.N. Medical College, Bombay University

**Publications:** Thirty-five books or book chapters and 75 papers and hundreds of presentations on topics ranging from brain imaging and the economics of mental health care to psychotherapy and medical education. He served on the editorial boards of the *Annals of Clinical Psychiatry and Surgical Neurology*.

**Honors:** Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association; Scientific Achievement Award from the Indo-American Psychiatrists Association; Exemplary Psychiatrist Award from the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill; the 2010 George Tarjan Award from the American Psychiatric Association; appointed SUNY Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Behavior Sciences in 2009; designated a SUNY Exemplary Chair in 2011.

**Family:** Wife Anita; son Amant, who works in finance in New York City; daughter Radhika Fliegel, an attorney in Los Angeles; and three grandchildren.

important leadership position at Upstate Medical University and understands how the University and the state work together. You combine that with an approach to leadership that combines achieving results with compassion for the students and faculty, I think it’s an unbeatable combination,” says Lawrence Chin, MD, dean of the College of Medicine.

“He is what author Liz Wiseman would say is a ‘Force Multiplier,’” adds Corona. “He makes everyone feel valued and feel smarter. He leads by example.”

Dewan has always been drawn to people’s stories and once thought he would become a journalist. He became interested in medicine when his mother had spine surgery. Her neurosurgeon became a family friend and a role model. In medical school at Bombay University, Dewan discovered psychiatry. “It was the perfect mix of brain and mind and stories and people,” he says.

But in India, psychiatry training followed the British model, which was biologically based. Dewan was interested in the therapeutic approach of U.S. training. “I was convinced that the training would be not only significantly different, but better,” he says.

Although he didn’t know a single person who had trained in the United States, Dewan arrived in Syracuse for his residency in psychiatry at Upstate



Medical University in 1975, along with his wife Anita. They never left.

After completing his training in 1979, Dewan joined the faculty as an assistant professor of psychiatry, rising through the ranks, and was named a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in 2009. He served as department chair, director of undergraduate education, director of residency training, and served as interim dean of the College of Medicine from October 2016 to June 2017.

Although he's had plenty of opportunity to go elsewhere, Dewan had no desire to leave, finding intellectual excitement within Upstate's Department of Psychiatry. "It's a small department populated by

kind, brilliant people who provided a stimulating environment to debate everything from psychiatry and medicine to philosophy and law," he says. "It's the only program I have ever seen where disagreements are not swatted down but celebrated." He cites former colleague Thomas Szasz, MD, who wrote *The Myth of Mental Illness*, an argument against the field of psychiatry. "How wonderful to be in a department that can raise that question."

From early on, Dewan was most interested in treatment-resistant patients, which became the topic of his first book, *The Difficult to Treat Psychiatric Patient*. "In a perverse way, I kind of enjoyed being defeated," he says. "Every session was a challenge when you didn't do well. It forced

me to retreat and say, 'what can I do now? How can I reach this person in a different way?' In medicine, we talk about the science and art of medicine, but we sometimes forget the poetry of medicine where you have to try something that is really out of the box."

That ability has served Dewan well over the last year. He also points to his 45-year tenure at the institution and the relationships developed during that time. "I cannot imagine coming from outside and stepping into the role of president. Just learning the system and making relationships with people would be a very long process before you could start to be effective," he says.

One of those long-time colleagues is Frank Middleton, PhD, associate professor of neuroscience and physi-



Along with University hospital CEO Robert Corona, DO, President Dewan visits with nursing staff to offer the COVID-19 vaccine.

ology. “I first met Mantosh Dewan almost 25 years ago, when he was a faculty member in psychiatry and I had just read some of his forward-thinking research in schizophrenia,” says Dr. Middleton, who joined Upstate as a faculty member shortly after Dewan became chair of psychiatry. “From the outset, he has always offered his support of my research ideas, seeking to build the neuroscience research portfolio on campus through strategic hiring and investment in cutting-edge science.”

In the past year, that’s gone to a new level. Middleton, who developed a saliva test to diagnose autism, was working on a saliva test to diagnose concussion when he turned his attention to a test to detect COVID-19. With the support of the institution behind him, he was quickly successful developing a saliva test that can be used on 12 samples at once.

“His research is both brilliant and very practically useful,” says Dewan. “Our job was to help get the infrastructure to support that work.”

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In the beginning, testing machines were very difficult to obtain. “We were lucky in getting the support of SUNY Chancellor Maltras and Governor Cuomo to get us machines to extend Dr. Middleton’s lab,” says

Dewan. “We did basically very little and he did both the science and the running of the samples from morning to very late at night.”

Middleton sees it differently. “Dr. Dewan has been an extraordinary advocate for the translational impact research can have on clinical practice and public health,” he says. “I would never have succeeded in creating an FDA-authorized individual and pooled saliva test without President Dewan and his vigorous endorsement and sponsorship of the work it took to bring it to fruition. He simply inspires the best in all of us, as all exceptional leaders do.”

That work continues to make a major impact. SUNY has mandated that all on-campus students system-wide get tested every week. On March 15, Upstate Medical and partner Quadrant Biosciences opened a second lab funded by SUNY, this one on the SUNY-Buffalo campus. The lab is able to process 150,000 tests a week, increasing total testing to 350,000 tests per week across SUNY, with results being returned to campuses within 24 hours.

**B**ut Dewan stresses that COVID-19 is only one threat. “We have lots of strengths. I’m confident we will be able to build on our successes of the last year so that we can shine in many other areas where we have superb people that have been eclipsed a little bit during the pandemic,” he says.

In the last two years, for example, Upstate has made important additions to community health through expanded services for cardiac care, urology, cancer, and neurosurgery, and the openings of the Adolescent Inpatient Psychiatry Unit, and the Golisano Center for Special Needs. The Nappi Longevity Institute will open in 2023. In March, Upstate opened SUNY’s first Level 3 Vector Biocontainment Lab, allowing researchers to collaborate on counter-



Frank Middleton, PhD, explains his research to New York Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul and Dr. Dewan.



Upstate's Black History Month Observance in 2020

measures for emerging public health threats such as SARS CoV-2, Lyme disease, Powassan encephalitis, West Nile encephalitis, Zika virus disease, Chikungunya virus disease, Dengue fever, and malaria. Overall, research grants increased 15 percent and faculty published 44 percent more papers than the year before.

And in February, Forbes ranked Upstate Medical University number 35 out of 500 Best Large Employers, the highest of any medical school or hospital in New York.

"I'm very optimistic," says Dewan. "We have built an infrastructure that will serve us well and I think we have changed our culture in a way that has become more efficient and kind."

Part of that culture shift is an emphasis on collaboration. While University Hospital is unique as the only regional medical center and academic medical center in the region, Dewan says Syracuse is fortunate to have three other very good hospitals and he hopes to collaborate with all of them. He cites one recent example as a partnership with the VA Medical Center to start a joint residency program in family medicine. He also supports the development of joint degree programs between the College of Medicine and Syracuse University.

"It would be great to combine

our strengths," says Dewan. "Dean Larry Chin is working to extend our degree offerings, potentially the ability to earn an MD/JD, an MD/MPA, MD/MBA, or an MD with a master's from the Newhouse School. I can see the next Sanjay Gupta on CNN coming from Upstate/Newhouse. We should be able to attract a wider range of students who are interested in combining these things."

Upstate is preparing to seek approval from the LCME to offer an optional three-year curriculum, essentially eliminating the fourth year typically spent on electives and interviewing. "If approved, we will offer that option beginning in 2023," Dewan says.

In the meantime, Upstate has committed to increasing the size of the incoming College of Medicine class from 170 to 185 over a three-year period, with a plan to add five additional students to the incoming class in each of the next three years. At the same time, the College is also making substantial efforts toward diversity, he says. "The 2019 entering class had about 11 percent underrepresented students; the class that just started in 2020 has 23 percent underrepresented students," Dewan says.

Upstate will also take part in a new SUNY Pre-Medical Scholars Pipeline Program to help more Educational Opportunity Program students into

SUNY medical schools. "The new SUNY for All Pre-Medical Scholars Pipeline Program will be a deliberate and well-executed mechanism to increase much-needed diversity in our medical school and across the state," says Dewan. "This program will allow more young men and women from a wider variety of backgrounds pursue their dreams of becoming a doctor."

In January, the Medical Alumni Foundation held its annual Career Advisory Networking event, held for the first time virtually. Students who joined the psychiatry break-out room were likely surprised to find President Dewan there ready to offer advice. "There wasn't a president category, so I chose psychiatry," he jokes.

As always, Dewan reveled in sharing his experiences and the rich array of career options with students considering the field. But he also very much enjoyed connecting with the alumni who had logged in from various locales. "I would love for them to be closer connected because they have enormous talents that we can tap into," he says. "I'd like to have a regular networking exchange, both to keep abreast of their accomplishments and for them to feel as proud of their institution as we do."

It all goes back to his interest in people and their stories. Whether it's his patients, students, faculty, researchers, or alumni, Dewan is their champion.

"The past year has been an incredibly challenging time for all of us, but at the same time, incredibly gratifying, given that we've done so well," says Dewan. "I've always had faith in Upstate and was confident we could meet the challenge. We have done so in spades." ■