



# A 167-Year Legacy

An Interview with Robert I. Grossman, MD,  
Saul J. Farber Dean and Chief Executive Officer, NYU Langone Medical Center

**EDITORS' NOTE** Dr. Robert Grossman assumed his current responsibilities on July 1, 2007. Grossman joined NYU in 2001 as the Louis Marx Professor of Radiology, Chairman of the Department of Radiology, and Professor of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Physiology and Neuroscience. Grossman was awarded the Javits Neuroscience Investigator Award by the National Institutes of Health in 1999 for his work on multiple sclerosis. Alongside his award-winning research, Grossman has been a passionate educator and widely published scholar. He has trained over 100 fellows, many of whom occupy prominent positions worldwide, and has authored over 300 publications and four books, including *Neuroradiology: The Requisites*, a best-selling textbook that has sold over 40,000 copies and has been translated into Japanese, Spanish and Turkish. He also served as Editor-in-Chief of the *American Journal of Neuroradiology* from 2005-2007 and serves on the editorial boards of several scientific journals. Grossman received his MD from the University of Pennsylvania.



Robert I. Grossman

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** One of the world's premier academic medical institutions for 167 years, NYU Langone Medical Center ([www.med.nyu.edu](http://www.med.nyu.edu)) continues to be a leader in patient care, education, and scientific research. NYU Langone Medical Center is internationally renowned for excellence in areas such as cardiovascular disease, dermatology, neurosurgery, urology, cancer care, orthopaedics, rehabilitation, plastic surgery, minimally invasive surgery, transplant surgery, infertility, and children's and women's health.

## Will you outline NYU Langone Medical Center's history and some key priorities for its future?

This really is an amazing place. NYU Langone has a 167-year legacy. We were founded by some preeminent physicians in the mid-19th century, and we have produced some of the greatest doctors and scientists in the world, including a number of Nobel Prize winners. A lot of great talents in medicine and bioscience have crossed our path. We pride ourselves on offering patient-centered care. We have incredible physicians who are steeped in the tradition of taking care of patients and

treating patients as people. We are probably going to raise more money this year than any other academic medical center in the country has ever raised in a single year, as far as we know. These funds will go toward a transformation of our campus, including a new pavilion, major renovation to Tisch Hospital, and our new Cancer Center programs.

## How do you define what makes an institution like NYU Langone unique?

Each institution has its own characteristics and qualities. For us, it's about the legacy. Taking care of patients and the underserved has been the fundamental mission of this institution for the past 167 years, giving us a different perspective. That purpose shapes the context of our teaching and practice. We really are concerned for people regardless of whether they can or cannot pay. The quality of care is always the same. There's one class of service throughout the entire enterprise, and that's unusual.

## Is technology playing a major role in the way the Medical Center operates?

Technology makes patients' lives better. When I started in medicine, before CT [computed tomography] and MRI [magnetic resonance imaging], there was exploratory surgery. This is largely unnecessary thanks to advances in diagnostic technology. Technology has provided a precise window on the pathophysiologic processes in the body. Technology gave us minimally invasive procedures and shortened hospital stays, helping reduce pain and suffering. Technology is a savior for patients.

## When you think about how technology has improved the medical results, are you amazed at its evolution?

I like to say I was there at the creation. Some of my work directly impacted the diagnosis of stroke, multiple sclerosis, and other neurological conditions, so I appreciated what it was like before, and yes, it's astounding. I'm such a fan of technology because it fundamentally enabled a paradigm shift. The pendulum really swung the other way after 1984 with the implementation of the first high-field clinical MRI. Radiologists were becoming the diagnosticians, and now, in the 21st century, they are the diagnosticians by and large.



## How has the doctor-patient relationship changed over time?

It's more challenging now for a host of reasons. Patients are more demanding and have access to large volumes of information from the Internet, not all of it accurate. Also, government compliance issues make the physician's relationships more complex, because you have third-party payers and malpractice concerns – different facets that complicate a doctor-patient relationship. But despite that, the essence of the doctor-patient relationship – one human being trying to help another – is unchanged.

## What enticed you to join NYU Langone?

In 2001, I came to NYU Langone as head of radiology. It was a wonderful opportunity, and I believed I could add some value. It was a very unusual place. At the interview, a radiologist on the committee asked how I, a highly academic radiologist, would treat the average radiologist. That was such an interesting question because it addressed concern for another person. That was different from many other institutions where individuals voiced concerns only for themselves.

## As Dean, what key areas are you focused on?

Fund-raising, developing a vision, focusing on where we're going, managing people, and letting others have opportunities to do their jobs are key priorities. One thing you learn is that either you're going to do everything, in which case you're not going to have time to do anything, or you're going to pick and choose the areas that you really need to personally focus on. The most important thing I need to do is be involved in philanthropy. That doesn't mean I'm not involved in other things, but I have to defer to other people who can do those things, so that I can do my thing.

## How important is it not to lose some of NYU's tradition while bringing a modern touch to it?

Our legacy is really the foundation on which we build. This place has had incredible deans. All of them have a legacy, and they've all done important things. Right now, I like where we sit. I think it's our time. I'm fortunate to have the opportunity to be here. I really am. ●

NYU Langone Medical Center