The past year saw significant changes in the Medical Service. Some of them are highlighted here. In a major change, undertaken to simultaneously improve patient care and the educational opportunity for residents, Saint Louis University Internal Medicine Resident Staff were assigned full-time to the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU). At first, they only took care of half of the patients, but their role now has been expanded to include all of the patients in the MICU. The current MICU team is made up of an attending physician, three upper level residents and two first year residents. The physicians of the Pulmonary Section (Drs. Carlos C. Daughaday (Chief), Michael B. Lippmann, Thomas M. Birkenmeier, and Kaharu C. Sumino) helped develop the curriculum for this new team and serve as attending physicians. In addition, the physicians of the Cardiology Section (Drs. Alan R. Maniet, Jr., (Chief), Preben Bjerregaard, Ali A. Ehsani, Megumi Taniuchi, Wade H. Martin, Michael Forsberg, Abhinav Diwan, and Daniel E. Friedman) participate in the teaching program and supervise the care of patients who primarily have cardiology problems. Each upper level resident takes call in-house one night in three. The first-year residents do not take night call.

In conjunction with the MICU changes, the number of first-year Saint Louis University residents per inpatient ward team was reduced from two to one, and the number of ward teams was increased from three to four. The number of inpatient ward teams staffed by Washington University also is four. Each of these eight teams has a faculty member from Saint Louis University or Washington University as an attending physician, an upper level resident as team leader, one first year resident, one or more third-year medical students and, from time to time, a fourth year medical student on elective. Attending rounds are made daily, at least six days a week. On rounds, the teams may be joined by nurses, social workers, and clinical pharmacists. None of the members of these eight teams takes night call. Instead, an upper level resident and two first-year residents function as a night float team to admit patients to the hospital and to care for Medical Service inpatients outside of the MICU. The upper level resident and one of the first-year residents are from Washington University. The other first-year resident on the night float team is from Saint Louis University.

The Medical Service has eight subspecialty Sections, and each of them is undergoing changes to improve access of Veterans to the best possible medical care, to assure excellent educational programs for resident physicians and medical students, and to be productive in research. Three of these Sections (Gastroenterology, Dermatology, and Cardiology) prepared formal proposals to develop their Sections during the past year. All were approved by management and are being implemented. As requested in their proposal, the Gastroenterology Section now occupies a former inpatient ward (6 South), which is being renovated and outfitted to greatly increase endoscopy capacity; and a limited program of screening colonoscopy has begun. This screening program will expand as renovations are completed and additional new staff positions are filled. Approximately 26,000 of our patients should undergo screening colonoscopy according to current criteria.

Dr. Mary Burton has recently returned to the VAMC one day per week to help with endoscopy, and additional endoscopists are being recruited. Besides Dr. Burton, the current physician members of the Gastroenterology Section are Drs. Brian K. Dieckgraefe (Chief), Marc S. Levin, Yassir A. Ashraf, and Fasiha Kanwal plus
several others who participate in the Section without compensation. Three physician Assistants (Sara Koeper, Cathey Cawthorne, and Susan K. Nicholson), a secretary (Cynthia J. McManus), several nurses, technicians, and many other people also contribute importantly to the success of the Section. We regret to report that a highly valued member of the Section, Dr. Rehan Iftikhar recently submitted his resignation and is moving to Arizona.

The Dermatology proposal called for a significant increase in staff and for the space to accommodate them. Accordingly, new positions have been requested and approved, not only for physicians but also for midlevel providers and other personnel needed for a comprehensive, modern Dermatology Section. Recruitment to fill these positions has begun. Dr. Ian K. Hornstra, who currently is part-time at the St. Louis VAMC, has agreed to become full-time Chief of Dermatology to develop and lead the Section, and Dr. Wei Wei Huang has accepted a full-time position as a general dermatologist. During the coming months, we expect to bring MOHS surgery in-house and to add a dermatologist with expertise in dermatopathology.

The Cardiology proposal called for certain functions currently housed in the Pathology and Nursing Services to be moved into the Cardiology Section. Thus, the Heart Station, which was removed from the Cardiology Section several years ago, is returning from the Pathology Service to Cardiology, and we expect that telemetry, which currently is managed by the Nursing Service, will be managed by the Cardiology Section in the future. As the result of another important development in Cardiology, we look forward to becoming a major resource for VISN 15 in the area of electrophysiology. A new state-of-the-art electrophysiology laboratory was requested by Drs. Bjerregaard and Maniet and approved for purchase during the current academic year. It should be installed within a few months. The electrophysiology service also is being bolstered by the addition of Dr. Daniel E. Friedman, who recently joined our Medical Staff as the second full-time electrophysiologist. In addition, another electrophysiology technician is being recruited.

Although only half of the Sections in the Medical Service are highlighted in this report, it should be noted that the other four Sections (Hematology/Oncology, Infectious Diseases, Nephrology, and Rheumatology) are busy, productive, and growing. Some of their accomplishments will be featured in future reports.