

# Department History

## Stephanie Cartier

Providing quality orthopaedic treatment for all New Mexicans, regardless of ability to pay, is the central mission of the University of New Mexico Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation. Every aspect of the program reflects that mission, and the department has made great strides since its inception nearly 40 years ago to offer the most comprehensive care available in the state.

Founded in 1970 with the hiring of the first department chair, Dr. George Omer Jr., an internationally recognized leader in hand surgery, the UNM Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation has a long tradition of excellence. Omer and Dr. Moheb Moneim, the second chair of the department, gradually built a diverse team of orthopaedic experts to provide outstanding treatment. "This program is successful because of the vision of our previous leaders, and our program continues to be clinically strong," said Dr. Robert Schenck Jr., the current chair of the department. "We have been able to find the right mix of people who enjoy being orthopaedic physicians, each with a unique personality, but who share the same common denominator of commitment to our mission of patient care for all patients from all walks of life."

With 32 faculty members in every orthopaedic specialty, as well as in physical therapy, the department offers an exceptional range of care. Every physician has completed highly specialized fellowship training in his or her area of expertise, and the department is home to some of the only such specialists in the state.

Academics are central to the program, and provide a tremendous benefit for patients. "We are a teaching facility. Our primary reason for being here, other than being a safety net for patients, is the education of residents and medical students. Because of that, we need a wide variety of procedures for their experience," said Schenck. "With that, we have a lot of resources for patient care and expertise for patient care management."

Over the years, the residency program has made remarkable achievements, and is consistently listed as one of the best orthopaedic residencies in the West by the Residency Review Committee. The 5-year program is training 25 residents in all aspects of orthopaedic surgery, with collaborations throughout the region.

As an academic center, the department is heavily invested in research, and has plans to expand efforts in the next 5 to 10 years. Current strengths are focused on clinical activities, biomechanical studies, and patient outcomes. The department collaborates with UNM Main Campus and has had tremendous success with civil engineering.

The pediatric orthopaedic team is studying bone metabolism and bone health in children and adults to determine ways to combat osteoporosis and vitamin D deficiency. They are also examining the impact of cultural diversity on care and outcomes, based on New Mexico's unique cultural mix of Native Americans, Hispanics, and Whites.

Cutting-edge research, combined with top-notch faculty representing every orthopaedic specialty and a nationally recognized residency program have helped to enrich care offered to all residents of New Mexico. The UNM orthopaedic team has 5 clinics, including general orthopaedics, faculty, sports medicine, Lobo Athletics, and pediatrics, and operates in 3 facilities.

With such outstanding accomplishments, growth is inevitable. UNM and the UNM Health Sciences Center are building a hospital and clinic based on the West side, the Sandoval Regional Medical Center. "Our team looks forward to creating, in conjunction with the UNM Health Sciences Center, a strong orthopaedic presence on the West side to complement what is currently being built by Presbyterian," said Schenck. The new medical center is scheduled to open in the summer of 2012.

While looking to the future with anticipation, Schenck, who has been Chair of the Department since 2006, is also focused on what worked to build the program, and insists on building on that foundation. "Integrity comes first; it's the basis of everything we do. Second, we are committed to being open to new ideas as we advance. Third, we are working to cultivate excellent physicians, but encouraging humility. With those three things, I believe we can completely move forward to where we want to be in the future," said Schenck. "This is a very exciting time for our team. We have great satisfaction in what we do, the patients we care for and how we provide care with our own practices as well as working with residents. We in the department feel very fortunate that we can work here."