

Dr. Peterson
Emory/Georgia Tech Predictive Health Symposium
Monday, December 13, 2010

On behalf of Georgia Tech, I am honored to welcome you to this sixth annual symposium on Predictive Health. We are proud to partner with Emory University for The Predictive Health Institute. It is one of a growing number of institutional partnerships between the two universities, building on a track record of working together for decades.

This conference is attracting national attention as the conversation is shifting from biomedicine to a focus on health—how to measure it, and novel approaches to keeping people healthy.

By bringing together national healthcare leaders and biomedical scientists at this conference, we can explore a variety of perspectives on a new model of healthcare for the 21st century.

There is limitless potential to combine interdisciplinary strengths in public health, policy, biosciences, and biotechnology to help facilitate the transformation from a disease care system to a health care system.

Most of the world's most pressing problems will require an interdisciplinary approach, and Emory and Georgia Tech are leading the way.

Between the two campuses, we have an estimated 200 faculty and 400 to 500 students involved in health-related activities and research.

When Georgia Tech and Emory formed the academic department of Biomedical Engineering – the Wallace H. Coulter Department, 13 years ago, I don't think either university had any idea how quickly it would achieve national preeminence. It is now ranked #2 among graduate and undergraduate biomedical engineering programs in the U.S.

It is amazing to think that something that didn't even exist a little over a decade ago is now number two in the nation.

The Predictive Health Institute is a shining example of a partnership that allows us to bring together the expertise from multiple disciplines at two institutions to usher in a new era in healthcare. We are hopeful that there will be increasing Emory-Georgia Tech interactions in Predictive Health, including graduate educational programs.

The research that we are doing together will help us develop the tools for a new century of medicine. Technology plays a key role in what we will be able to accomplish together to help people, possibly throughout the world.

As we work together to define the unique intrinsic and environmental factors that predict disease risk for individuals, we can shift from a focus on treating diseases to one of defining and maintaining health.

For the next two days you will be talking about environmental factors in health. I just returned from what I now believe is the planet's most brutal environment, but practically devoid of any damage from humans. I was privileged to participate in a five-day site visit review in Antarctica sponsored by the U.S. Antarctic Program and the NSF. If you think it was cold in Atlanta last week, you should try 50 below at the South Pole! I learned a great deal about how extreme cold can impact health. We were issued an extremely cold weather emergency survival bag and were told to keep them with us at all times. At first I thought they were being melodramatic, but I heard some stories that made me a believer.

I feel privileged that I was in good enough health to participate in the trip. Health allows you to experience life's opportunities to their fullest.

Of all the issues and challenges facing our society today, I think we can all agree that health is the most fundamental. Maintaining health, and hopefully delaying disease onset, is a key to reducing healthcare costs and improving quality of life.

What we are doing at Georgia Tech and Emory, and what each of you do in the field of predictive health and healthcare, is transformational. Thank you for what you do every day to impact so many lives. We're glad you're here today, and we're looking forward to great things from you.