



UPMC Alumna Reflects on Her Training as She Steps into UTHealth Houston Presidency

Former UPMC intern, resident, and research fellow Melina R. Kibbe, MD, has been named president of University of Texas (UT) Health Houston and the Alkek-Williams Distinguished Chair. She recently reflected on how instrumental her UPMC training has been on her leadership path.



“My general surgery training at UPMC was truly transformative. Those were the years that defined who I am as a surgeon, a scientist, and a leader,” she said. “The lessons I learned — and the mentors who guided me, including Dr. Simmons and Dr. Billiar — instilled in me a sense of curiosity, resilience, and purpose that continues to guide my decisions today. I remain profoundly grateful for that experience and would choose the Pitt program all over again without hesitation; it was one of the best decisions of my life.”

Dr. Kibbe shared the following lessons learned during her time at UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh:

- Stay endlessly curious.
- Hard work always pays off.
- Surgeons truly can do it all.
- Patients must always come first.
- Eat when you can, sleep when you can — and never mess with the pancreas.



Dr. Kibbe has held many other leadership positions throughout her career. She serves as editor-in-chief of *JAMA Surgery* and is a prolific author, having written more than 300 peer-reviewed publications, reviews, and book chapters, as well as presenting more than 240 abstracts nationally and internationally. She is a former president of the Association for Academic Surgery and has been inducted into the American Society for Clinical Investigation and the National Academy of Medicine. Before joining UTHealth Houston, she was dean of the University of Virginia (UVA) School of Medicine, James Carroll Flippin Professor of Medical Science, and chief health affairs officer at UVA Health.

Dr. Kibbe's research focuses on novel drug-eluting therapies for patients with vascular disease and how such therapies impact the vasculature. She has been funded as a principal investigator by the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, American Heart Association, and American Medical Association.

At UTHealth, she will start by listening and learning: "I want to hear from the people who make UTHealth Houston exceptional — what they are most proud of, what drives them, and where they see opportunity," she says. Then she will embark on a university-wide strategic planning process.

She offers this advice to surgeons early in their careers: "Follow your passion relentlessly. When you pursue what truly inspires you, the work will never feel like just a job — it will become your calling. Don't let anyone convince you that something can't be done; instead, be the one who shows that it can. Step up, lead boldly, and make an impact."