



NEIL B. FRIEDMAN, M.D.

AGE: 55. **Hospital affiliation:** Mercy Medical Center. **Training:** Medical degree from the University of Maryland School of Medicine, residency at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, fellow of the American College of Surgeons. **Specialty:** Breast cancer surgery. **What convinced you to pursue a career in medicine?** It's the only thing I wanted to do since I was 16 years old. I'm the first one in my family to become a physician. I literally told my parents, 'I'm going to be a doctor, a surgeon, that's what I want to do.' I've always liked helping people and it fit my personality. **What sorts of moments tell you that it was the right career decision?** When patients come back after treatment and you see the relief in their faces, the gratitude, and they give you a big hug. **What was the most difficult case you ever handled?** I think the most difficult cases are when I'm facing a young woman I know has young children, and she ends up having multiple positive nodes, and I know her prognosis is not terribly good—those are always the hardest ones. **What do you see as the biggest challenge facing American health care in the coming years?** The cost of medicine continues to go up and up, in particular, cancer drugs. We are getting better and better at identifying the different characteristics of tumors and developing drugs that treat those particular tumors based on those characteristics. The problem is, these drugs are extremely expensive. **If you weren't a doctor, what would you be?** I would probably run a construction company. I love big buildings. When Mercy's Bunting Center was under construction, I'd watch the work every day. The foreman let me put on a hard hat and I was climbing ladders, checking out the progress of the work.