Following a successful career as a pharmaceutical executive and an academic clinical pharmacologist, Paul Desjardins, D.M.D., Ph.D., DA75, retired in 2011. He is considered one of the world’s experts in acute pain and pain control models. The drugs Desjardins investigated during his career include the active ingredients in commonly used pain relievers, such as Advil and Tylenol, which are used by millions of dental patients every day. As the chair of the Board of Advisors for Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, Desjardins enjoys serving as a resource for students and alumni and lending his extensive knowledge and experience. Prior to assuming an executive role in the pharmaceutical industry at companies such as Pfizer Consumer Healthcare and SCIREX Corporation, Desjardins served as an associate dean for academic affairs from 1992 until 1998 at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, New Jersey Dental School. Desjardins also led the American Dental Association’s Commission on Dental Accreditation’s adoption of competency-based accreditation standards for dental schools in the U.S. He has said that Tufts prepared him for one of the most satisfying careers he could have ever imagined, and he welcomes any opportunity to give back. Blueprint asked him to share his perspectives on health care, the university, and his own volunteerism.

Q. You’ve done a lot of research on pain control. What are the implications for dental medicine and related fields?
A. During my professional lifetime, I have seen acute pain become relatively well managed. For example, not so long ago, many patients dreaded having their wisdom teeth extracted. Today, it is almost routine that patients are treated with anti-inflammatory drugs and pain relievers before surgery—and this works very dramatically to reduce both pain and swelling. Understanding how to safely decrease inflammation post-surgery has been one of the keys to better patient care in the dental office. We have developed medications with fewer serious side effects but there are still many challenges in diagnosing and managing the dozens of chronic pain conditions seen every day by dentists and physicians. There are also many painful disorders like fibromyalgia that we are just starting to understand.

Q. What is most gratifying about your work with the Dental Board of Advisors?
A. Working with the Board of Advisors gives me the opportunity to brainstorm the big picture of where our school is going and how we will get there. I have particularly enjoyed knowing the 20 or so amazing advisors who really love the dental school and who also realize that this is one of our opportunities to share time, skills, and support to shape the dental school of the future. I enjoy seeing our aspirations for what Tufts can provide for its students come to life in the student experience. I also participate to ensure that Tufts graduates are among the leading clinicians and scientists who will develop new pain control knowledge and translate it to better care for patients. During each board meeting we have the opportunity to hear about novel programs from faculty and students. These discussions are priceless.