A VCU Health System

Recent data suggest that 45% of U.S. academic health centers are failing to meet their budgets based on operations alone. Only when investment incomes are considered are they marginally profitable. The root cause is the passage of the Balanced Budget Act with reduced reimbursement for medical services. Currently, academic centers face a number of challenges requiring increasingly rapid response times for optimal positioning. A streamlined administration is essential, and most centers have moved in that direction.

Led by our President and Vice-President for Health Sciences, VCU is moving to a unified Health System. The Medical School, the Hospital, and the Practice Plan need to coordinate their management not only for efficiency but also for an ability to respond to a host of opportunities that turbulence always brings.

The details of the new system are being drafted now, and it will be important for the architects of change to create a transparency for VCU constituents. With a clear management lens by which we can gain access to the structure and process of change, we can move the culture in close alignment. No doubt this will be forthcoming and should give us new opportunities to reshape an exciting environment in modern medicine.

Richard P. Wenzel, M.D., M.Sc.
William Branch Porter Professor and Chairman

Mary Helen Hackney, M.D.
Named Director of the Rural Cancer Outreach Program

Dr. Mary Helen Hackney, Associate Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology has been named Director of the Rural Cancer Outreach Program. The first and one of the most successful outreach programs at VCU, Rural Cancer Outreach recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

“The Outreach Program is an excellent way for VCU and the Massey Cancer Center to serve the Commonwealth of Virginia. Part of the mission of a research center such as Massey is to interact with the community and reach as many lives as possible,” said Dr. Hackney. She personally likes Outreach because it is a great opportunity to serve as a physician, reaching people who wouldn’t otherwise have access to advanced cancer care. “Bringing benefits to people with difficult illnesses fulfills a physician’s need to serve,” she said.

Currently the Rural Cancer Outreach Program has five off-campus clinics. The Program is more than patient care. Education is offered to local providers in end-of-life care, pain management, new treatments, and cancer prevention. “We interact with the local primary care physicians and nursing staff on a daily basis. They are sine qua non to the success of the program. The local nurses have bravely learned how to work with these patients, and have gained the confidence they need to work with difficult issues. The Outreach Program is a wonderful educational opportunity for us as well. When we load the van in morning, the physicians and nurse practitioners are accompanied by housestaff, medical students, social work students, and pharmacy students,” said Dr. Hackney.

Dr. Hackney foresees need for continued program development. To facilitate communication, a better computer network and computer access between the sites is being developed.

Mary Helen Hackney, M.D.
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Dr. Hackney

Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, M.D.

Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, M.D., Professor, Division of Cardiology, joined our faculty in 1986 after earning a medical degree and completing his residency at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and completing a three-year fellowship in cardiology at the Duke University Medical Center. For most of his tenure at VCU he has been the Director of Electrophysiology at the McGuire VA Medical Center, holding the same position at MCVH since 1990.

“I have been very lucky to have outstanding partners at VCU. Together we have made unique and outstanding contributions to cardiology,” said Dr. Ellenbogen. He credits his colleagues Dr. Mark Wood, Associate Professor, Dr. Henry Clemo, Assistant Professor, and Dr. Richard Shepard, Assistant Professor, with the collective successes they have had in devising new therapies. For example, the Electrophysiology Lab is at the forefront of new ways to treat congestive heart failure with pacemakers. “Although usually used to treat arrhythmia, we are implanting permanent pacemakers to treat CHF. Biventricular pacing is an entirely new therapy,” said Dr. Ellenbogen.

Dr. Ellenbogen has been instrumental in making these therapies available to a wider geographic patient population. He and his team members travel to Mary Washington Hospital in Fredericksburg, as well as Bon Secours St. Mary’s, Memorial Regional Hospital in Hanover, and HealthSouth and Columbia/HCA Henrico Doctors and Johnston-Willis hospitals in Richmond.

During his career, Dr. Ellenbogen has written 120 scientific papers, 75 articles, 132 abstracts, and presented over 75 invited lectures. He has authored two textbooks on pacemakers, and contributed chapters to six other textbooks.

Dr. Kenneth Ellenbogen, M.D.

Kenneth Ellenbogen, M.D.

Honors, Awards & Offices

Dr. Rita Willett, Assistant Professor, Division of General Medicine and Primary Care, has been selected to receive the School of Medicine Educational Innovation/Educational Research Award for teaching excellence.

Dr. Curtis Sessler, Professor, Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, has been appointed Chairman of the Pulmonary and Allergy Drugs Advisory Committee of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration through the year 2000.

Dr. Sessler also serves as a member of the Critical Care Working Group on Reimbursement, a group of critical care specialists representing the major national critical care organizations. The group is charged with working directly with the Healthcare Financing Administration (HCFA) to address ICU billing and reimbursement issues. Dr. Sessler represents the American College of Chest Physicians, an organization for which he is also Governor for the State of Virginia and a member of the Board of Regents’ Executive Committee.

Dr. Rakesh Kukreja, Associate Professor, Division of Cardiology, has been appointed to the editorial board of the American Journal of Physiology: Heart and Circulatory Physiology.

Faculty in the News

Dr. Wendy Klein, Associate Professor, Division of General Medicine and Primary Care, was featured in FiftyPlus magazine on women’s health issues.

Dr. Richard P. Wenzel, Professor and Chairman, had an editorial published in the July 28th issue of Boston Globe concerning Dr. Jerome Kassirer, the recent editor of the New England Journal of Medicine.

Invited Lectures

Dr. J. James Cotter, Assistant Professor, Division of Quality Health Care, presented a lecture entitled “Special Care for People with Alzheimer’s Disease in Assisted Living Facilities,” at the Annual Meeting of the Virginia Association of Health Care, September 13, 1999, Richmond.

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Dr. Hackney

oped, supported by a grant from the Massey Cancer Center. Practice guidelines are being developed and she would like to see them fully implemented. The continued growth of the program requires additional physicians and nurse practitioners. For example, the newest site in Emporia began with five patients a day, and is now seeing 25 patients a day.

“Other Outreach Programs have tried different models. Ours has proven to be very effective for carrying out the mission of the Massey Cancer Center. I look forward to building on the success of my predecessor,” said Dr. Hackney.
The MCVH Bone Marrow Transplant Unit is located on the 10th Floor of North Hospital. The Unit provides high-tech cancer treatment to patients with difficult to treat conditions. Chemotherapy destroys normal cells as well as cancer cells, because it is not always the best course of treatment. In particular, bone marrow is susceptible to damage by chemotherapy, leaving patients defenseless just when natural immunities are most needed. A bone marrow transplant involves collecting bone marrow from a patient, administering a single high-dose of chemotherapy, and then replacing the bone marrow, thereby avoiding damage to the bone marrow.

“We still perform bone marrow transplants, but typically, the procedure we perform now involves harvesting or collecting stem cells, and then replacing the stem cells after chemotherapy. Stem cell transplant, first performed about 10 years ago, involves collecting stem cells directly from the blood. It’s easier and safer than bone marrow transplants,” explained Dr. Saul Yanovich, Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology, and Medical Director of the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit. Stem cells are immature blood cells found in the bone marrow that can differentiate into red or white blood cells or platelets. Either procedure requires a two to six week stay because the patients have to be isolated and closely monitored during the period when their immune systems are recovering. Medication is used to aid recovery and protect the patient from infections.

The MCVH Bone Marrow Transplant Unit was established in 1988. In 1996 it was expanded from three to 16 beds, and combined both inpatient and outpatient units in one setting. “We are unique at MCVH in being the first BMT unit to integrate all levels of treatment. With our system, the nurses are more familiar with each patient, and there is better coordination of care,” said Dana Hudson, BMT Nurse Coordinator. In fact, the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit has a closely knit team of physicians, nurses, clinical researchers, and specialized social workers. In addition to Dr. Yanovich, attending physicians include Dr. John McCarty, and Dr. Brian Mitchell, both Assistant Professors in the Division of Hematology/Oncology.

Pre-transplant coordinators are Dana Hudson, RN, BS, and Angela Buskey, RN, BS. They arrange the necessary screenings and tests, scheduling, provide the needed patient education, work with the referring physicians and social workers, and evaluate the patients for several available protocols. Crystal Oley, BS is the Post-transplant Coordinator, responsible for assuring financial support, the long term medication plan, transport, and scheduling the numerous follow-up visits. The team includes Research Specialists Kathy Chandler, MS and Leigh Amateau, BS, who are responsible for working with the numerous clinical trials in the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit. Other integral team members are Peggy Bishop, Nurse Practitioner and Cathy Lantz, RN, MS, AOCN, both of whom specialize in oncology care.

The following letter was received by Dr. Richard Wenzel:

I am writing to you on behalf of my physician, Mary Ann Peberdy, M.D. During the last several years I have been a recipient of Dr. Peberdy’s dedicated and competent services. I find her to be a patient and caring physician who possesses that certain sensitivity precious few doctors display these days. She not only attends to my medical condition, but through every procedure I have undergone, she graciously addresses my emotions without making them seem insignificant.

Just the other day, one of my employees spoke with Dr. Peberdy about a rare medical problem. Dr. Peberdy suggested a physician at VCU and offered to check with her office to schedule an appointment. It is her nature to be as helpful as possible.

It is the standards of professionals like Dr. Peberdy who have built your institution’s sterling reputation.

The following letter was received by Carl Fischer:

I write to praise Dr. George Vetrovec. Recently I developed unstable angina and went to him for help. He quickly admitted me to the CCU, and within hours an angioplasty and stent placement were expertly performed for a critical coronary artery occlusion. I have no doubt that any delay or mishap might have cost me my life, and I am extremely grateful to Dr. Vetrovec.

But I praise Dr. Vetrovec not just for his clinical acumen and extraordinary procedural talents. At all times he was extremely attentive to all aspects of my care. When I was discharged from MCVH, he let me know that I could contact him directly day or night. When I had a post-procedural concern, he was available to the covering physician, even though it was a Sunday morning, and Dr. Vetrovec was out of town. Several times Dr. Vetrovec called me at home at night just to make sure I was doing well.

Simply put, Dr. Vetrovec is a physician’s physician – the cream of the crop who is expert in both the science and art of medicine. He embodies the best in medicine: skill, dedication, and compassion. MCVH is fortunate to have Dr. Vetrovec and I am ever grateful that it does have him.
VCU Department of Internal Medicine Defeats UVA in Softball Finals

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The SCOPE Study

Michael B. Edmond, M.D., MPH, Donna McClisht, Ph.D., and Richard P. Wenzel, M.D., M.Sc., along with coauthors from the University of Iowa, have recently reported the three year results of the SCOPE Study (Surveillance and Control of Pathogens of Epidemiologic Importance). The report was published in *Clinical Infectious Disease*, 1999, 24:239-244.

The study focused on infections caused by bacteria resistance to antibiotics. “The resistance of some organisms is increasing rapidly, making the infections harder to treat, and resulting in longer hospital stays,” said Dr. Edmond.

This study is significant because it is national in scope. The study team looked at over 15,000 nosocomial infections in 49 hospitals. The hospitals were chosen for geographic diversity, and represent all sections of the continental U.S. The northeast U.S. was found to have higher rates of resistant infections. The cause of this finding is uncertain.

Dr. Edmond noted that the SCOPE study is unique. Similar studies by the CDC have focused on ICU and hospital-wide infections. The SCOPE study covers a wide area, is conducted with the cooperation of academia, the pharmaceutical industry, and multiple institutions. It is the first nongovernmental surveillance project for nosocomial infections.