The Primary Care Consortium: A Positive Experience

In July 1997 the Primary Care Consortium (PCC) was founded by combining the primary care clinical practices of the Departments of Internal Medicine, Family Practice, and Pediatrics. The new organization is a cooperative effort between these departments, but would not be thriving without the backing of the practice plan, and the Vice President for Health Sciences and Dean of the School of Medicine, Dr. Hermes Kontos.

With over 18 months of experience behind it, the PCC is proving itself a success. A large portion of the credit goes to Dr. Mary Nettleman, Associate Professor and Chair of the Division of General Medicine and Primary Care. Dr. Nettleman is the Medical Director of the PCC.

Dr. Nettleman describes the PCC as a new model of primary care, contrasting with the department-oriented, self-contained model of a few years ago. “VCU/MCV realized that primary care is part of the larger organization, and not an enterprise unto itself. The old model is not efficient, stable, nor cost-effective. PCC repositioned primary care to recognize the realities,” said Dr. Nettleman. She recently served on an expert panel at the New Orleans meeting of the Society of General Internal Medicine, discussing the success and attributes of the PCC. Many academic medical centers are interested in restructuring their primary care, but are unsure on how to proceed. The PCC is providing a model for other institutions.

continued on page 2

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

Medical Grand Rounds
Wednesday, March 24: 12 Noon to 1 PM
“Managed Care and Physicians’ Covenants”

Medical Science Building Auditorium

by
Jerome P. Kassirer, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief
The New England Journal of Medicine

Treating Patients as You Would be Treated

In the January 28, 1999 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine, two studies show that inpatient morbidity and mortality were lower in teaching hospitals than non-teaching hospitals. The editor-in-chief, Dr. Jerome Kassirer, identified a third study from Harvard also favoring the process of care in teaching hospitals.

Since we practice medicine at an academic teaching hospital, we may be inclined to feel secure with the new information. However, the third study noted above showed that non-teaching hospitals scored better on nursing care. Furthermore, a large study of Massachusetts hospitals showed greater patient satisfaction in non-teaching hospitals, that apparently do better with the human aspects of care.

Dr. Kassirer, who will give Medical Grand Rounds at VCU/MCV on Wednesday, March 24, 1999, suggests that we at teaching institutions do what we can to know our patients better, communicate more clearly and more warmly, and treat all patients with dignity. He adds that our practice plan administrators need to redouble their efforts to make appointments easier to organize. The golden rule applies, and we have a great deal to learn from community practices.

Medical Grand Rounds
Wednesday, March 24: 12 Noon to 1 PM
“Managed Care and Physicians’ Covenants”

Medical Science Building Auditorium

by
Jerome P. Kassirer, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief
The New England Journal of Medicine

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

Dr. Mary Nettleman

PROGRESS NOTES

continued on page 2

Page 1
Honors, Awards & Offices

Steven Grant, M.D., Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology, has been appointed Associate Editor of the American Association of Cancer Research’s journal, Clinical Cancer Research.

Jonathan Perlin, M.D., Ph.D., M.S.H.A., Assistant Professor, Division of Quality Health Care, has been appointed Quality Section Editor for Hospital Physician, a monthly with circulation of over 500,000.

Richard K. Sterling, M.D., FACP, Assistant Professor, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, has been elected to Fellowship in the American College of Physicians - American Society of Internal Medicine.

continued from page 1 The Primary Care Consortium

Success in the PCC is not measured by profitability. In fact, it runs at a deficit. Community practices realize most of their profitability from ancillary revenue, however, primary care at VCU/MCV does not have these means. However, the PCC has demonstrated that there are almost thirty times as many charges generated in our system for every dollar of charges generated in primary care. In recognition of the importance of primary care to the institution, VCU/MCV and MCVH support the PCC. “A good accounting system, a solid reliable budget, and accountability are of paramount importance in an enterprise that runs at a deficit. We have to be efficient, productive, cost-effective and still have a good place to come to work. We established productivity standards based on community practices, and have been able to meet or exceed those standards. However, receipts haven’t grown along with productivity,” said Dr. Nettleman.

As evidenced by the productivity, Dr. Nettleman says the faculty in the PCC is first rate. They see the PCC as their career, and are committed to the institution. She says the best thing she can do with the faculty is listen since they often have excellent ideas and are in a position to effect changes. “Get a good faculty, and a good staff, and the rest is easy,” said Dr. Nettleman.

Dr. Nettleman believes the biggest accomplishment so far was the very formation of the PCC. All stakeholders had to be willing to relinquish significant funding and control. “The cooperation exhibited by all the stakeholders speaks well to the institution,” said Dr. Nettleman. She also has high praise for the PCC staff: Susie Beirne, Administrator, Wendy Walker, Clinical Supervisor, and Troy Ross, Accountant. “The PCC is a framework for moving forward into the future, and gives us a future to look forward to,” said Dr. Nettleman.

Faculty in the News

Dr. Richard P. Wenzel, Professor and Chairman, was featured in a front page article in the San Francisco Examiner, Sunday, February 21 edition. Dr. Wenzel a world expert on nosocomial infections, was contacted by the Examiner to discuss a bacterial outbreak associated with sutures that the newspaper had been investigating for two months.

Dr. Michael T. Wong, Assistant Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases, was featured in the Thursday, February 11 edition of the Richmond Times-Dispatch in an article on telemedicine and its use in examining and treating inmates of correctional facilities.

Dr. Hunter “Patch” Adams Presents at Grand Rounds

Imagine being in medical practice in this country for 28 years and never holding malpractice insurance, nor ever charging a patient for services, nor ever submitting an insurance claim. That is the unusual, real life practice of Dr. Hunter “Patch” Adams who spoke to medical students, housestaff, and faculty at the February 11 Grand Rounds. He was wearing a tie, but it blended into his loud clown shirt, and baggy trousers. His presentation was entitled “Medicine for Fun, Not Funds!” Dr. Adams is a 1971 graduate of VCU/MCV.

Speaking in soft, serious tones, Dr. Adams described himself as a social innovator. He explained his belief that compassion and service are the most important aspects of medical practice. After graduation, he founded a free hospital in a large house along with six other professionals. They struggled for 12 years on donations alone. When that was no longer sufficient, Dr. Adams applied for grants, going 0 for 1,400. At the urging of friends, he wrote a book of his experiences and beliefs. The book caught the attention of movie producer Mike Farrell (who portrayed B.J. Hunnicutt on M.A.S.H.) who transformed the book into a screenplay and movie. With his new notoriety, Dr. Adams finally has the attention of large foundations, and is expecting adequate funding for a planned 40-bed hospital in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, which he described as one of the most underserved areas in the United States. The expected funding will also build and operate orphanages in Russia. Dr. Adams mused on the irony of watching someone else produce a book he wrote that he sold for $500,000, but never submitted an insurance claim. He now has the notoriety he never thought he would have.

Dr. Adams believes one of the most important parts of medical practice is to dis-
New Faculty Member: Introducing Louise H. Cragg, M.D.

Dr. Louise H. Cragg, Assistant Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology, joined our faculty last October. A native of Canada, she earned her medical degree from the prestigious McGill University in Montreal, after earning a bachelor of science degree at McGill. After completing a residency in internal medicine at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, she accepted a fellowship at the University of Minnesota in hematology/oncology. After completing her fellowship, she returned to McGill to accept an appointment as Assistant Professor and Assistant Physician in oncology.

Dr. Cragg's long time fascination in the biology of cancer led her to specialize in hematology/oncology. During her fellowship, she studied the effect of iron chelators on iron-mediated DNA damage. She also worked on a retrospective analysis of transplant patients, in a study designed to determine the prognostic significance of leukemic involvement of the central nervous system in bone marrow transplant patients with acute myeloid leukemia. Dr. Cragg is now looking forward to collaborating with Drs. John Roberts and Steve Grant in clinical research in oncology.

Since joining our faculty, Dr. Cragg has been on the team of oncologists working the Outreach Program. The Outreach Program travels to rural hospitals in Farmville, Greenville, Emporia, Kilmarnock, and Tappahannock, bringing state-of-the-art oncology care to underserved areas.

Dr. Cragg reports that the adjustment to Richmond has been easy. “I miss the French culture of Montreal a bit, however I have found Richmond to be a very friendly place,” said Dr. Cragg.

Clinical Activities

The following letter was received by Dr. John Roberts:

I have to tell you that you have been a great help with all your information. I’m happy that you were the one I was recommended to see. In the last week, I have spoken to at least 20 other cancer patients who had few good things to say about their doctors providing any up to date advice on the subject. It has been my experience that few physicians take the time to keep patients as well informed as you have me, nor do many of them care what happens after one leaves the office. Thank you for being in the minority of those who do care.

The following letter was received by Dr. Mary Nettleman:

I am writing this memo to make you aware of the support and assistance that I have received from members of your department during my orientation at MCVH. In particular, I want you to know how appreciative I am for the advice and guidance I have been given by Dr. Peter Boling. Dr. Boling has offered both excellent counsel and practical assistance toward my efforts to enhance the care of geriatric patients in the Department of Medical-Surgical Nursing and elsewhere in the hospital. He has also helped in my efforts to discharge patients who no longer have acute medical needs to the most appropriate post-hospital environment. I simply cannot thank him enough for his efforts on the behalf of the geriatric patients at MCVH.

In addition, I want to bring to your attention the assistance of Dr. Jerry Aldhizer. He assisted me and a social worker in finding inpatient hospice care for a geriatric patient who no longer wanted to pursue aggressive medical treatment. The family of the patient expressed to me their sincere regard for Dr. Aldhizer’s efforts and I wanted to share their thanks with you.

The following letter was received by Dr. Velimir Luketic:

I just want to say thank you to all the doctors, nurses, and transplant coordinators for giving me a new life. I had a liver transplant...and I returned to work after just a little over 8 months of post-surgical recovery. I feel great and I owe my life to you all. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are all really special people and my family and I are so thankful for what you all have done for us. Thank you.

Geriatric Conference Announced

The 10th Annual Williamsburg Geriatrics Conference: Recent Advances in Geriatrics will be held March 26-28. For additional information, please call 804-675-5088 or 804-675-5000, extension 4740.

The Conference is endorsed by The Virginia Geriatrics Society. Sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs Employee Education Systems. Attendees can earn 18 hours Cat 1 AMA PRA credits and/or 16.75 prescribed hours by AAFP.
Faculty Publications


Grants

Drs. Michael Godschalk and Hana Ayele, Section of Geriatrics, Division of General Medicine and Primary Care, have been awarded a $17,500 grant from Mead Johnson to study the compliance of oral supplements by elderly outpatients.

Dr. Michael Godschalk was also recently awarded a $90,000 grant for Glaxo-Wellcome to study the safety and efficacy of a new drug treatment of BPH.

Dr. Michael Godschalk has also recently received an award of $120,000 from the Milkhaus Labs to study a new drug for the treatment of refractory prostate cancer.

Dr. Cynthia McMurry, Section of Geriatrics, Division of General Medicine and Primary Care, has been awarded a $47,000 from Novartis to study the effects of Aoledrenate and Aredia in the treatment of tumor-induced hypercalcemia.