Mentoring

In Homer’s epic story of the Trojan War, before Odysseus leaves his family to engage in battle, he asks his friend Mentor to oversee the care of his son, Telemachus, until he returns home to Ithaca. The responsibility was great and the duration of the responsibility was long. Even after the war Odysseus was lost at sea for 10 years, and his wife Penelope came under great pressure by avaricious local suitors to choose a new husband. Mentor continually fulfilled his oversight duties, and on one occasion when he was away from Ithaca, the friendly goddess Athena assumed the form of Mentor, urging Telemachus to cast the suitors out of the house and set sail for his father. It appears that even the gods recognized the value and influence of Mentor.

In the odyssey that we call an academic career, the successful scholar has usually been guided by a caring mentor who continually offers wise counsel. If that paradigm is so successful, is it possible to institutionalize a system to foster mentoring for all young faculty members? Many senior members would answer affirmatively.

Certain questions naturally arise. For assistant professors, who is your mentor? If you are a senior faculty member, can you identify the mentors for each of the junior faculty in your division? How does one measure the quality of the mentor and the mentoring relationship? Do departments with more successful and more satisfied faculty have higher quality mentoring.

I have asked Division Chairs to assign a mentor for all assistant professors and seek a brief outline of the specific goals of the faculty–mentor relationship. That outline will be examined as part of the annual review of individual faculty members by the Division Chair. Furthermore, the Department of Internal Medicine will organize a small team to outline succinctly a mentoring statement for the faculty.

The journey from assistant to full professor takes approximately 10 years. Our goal in the Department is to keep all young faculty on course and avoid getting lost at sea.

Richard P. Wenzel, M.D., M.Sc.
William Branch Porter Professor and Chair
Department of Internal Medicine

Dr. Arun Sanyal Receives NIH K-24 Award

Dr. Arun Sanyal, Associate Professor, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, has received an NIH K-24 award of $554,655 for a 5 year study entitled “Studies of Mechanisms and Treatment of Liver Disease.” The K-24 grants are ‘career development grants’ that allow the principal investigator “protected time” to focus on research.

According to Dr. Sanyal, the study will focus on two broad areas: portal hypertension and complications of cirrhosis of the liver. The study’s goal is to develop treatment modalities for both areas.

Dr. Sanyal’s long term interest in non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) gave him the incentive to pursue the K-24 grant. “There is an increasing appreciation that NASH is a common liver disease, possibly affecting as much as 5% of the population. 10-20% of patients with NASH may develop cirrhosis,” said Dr. Sanyal. Although there are no definitive studies yet, indications are that the incidence of NASH is related to the incidence of obesity in the U.S., especially among children and adolescents. Specifically, Dr. Sanyal will be studying the role of insulin resistance and mitochondrial abnormalities in liver cells in the genesis of NASH. The goal is to use these findings to develop treatment protocols for NASH.

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Dr. Gabriel M. Makhlouf Receives AGA Distinguished Achievement Award

Dr. Gabriel M. Makhlouf, Professor, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, has received the American Gastroenterological Association’s Distinguished Achievement Award. In making the presentation at the May 1 meeting, the President of the AGA, Dr. Donald Castell made these remarks:

“Considered one of the most outstanding gastrointestinal physiologists of the modern era, Dr. Makhlouf is Professor of Medicine and Director of Gastroenterology Research at the Medical College of Virginia [sic]. His seminal research on the role of the gastrin in the stomach led him to propose the first model of paracrine and neural regulation of gastrin secretion.

During his medical career, Dr. Makhlouf has made major contributions in the field of basic gastroenterology, in particular as it relates to receptors and intracellular signaling pathways through which smooth muscles are regulated. In addition, he has made enormous contributions to our understanding of how gut peptides regulate gastrointestinal functions. The impact of his research in his field has made him a prolific author, and he has published more than 150 peer-reviewed articles. An influential teacher, Dr. Makhlouf has trained many investigators, some of whom are now premier investigators in their own right.

AGA is proud to present Dr. Makhlouf with the AGA Distinguished Achievement Award.”

Other Honors, Awards, and Offices:

Dr. Lisa Kaplowitz. Associate Professor, Division of Quality Health Care, has been selected as a member of the year 2000 Class of Fellows in the Hedwig van Amerigen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine Program for Women at the Medical College of Pennsylvania, Hahnemann Campus.

Dr. Christopher Wise, Associate Professor, Division of Rheumatology, Immunology and Allergy, has been elected as a faculty member of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. Housestaff members elected are: Dr. Scott T. Forrest, Dr. Pierre Virgilio Pavot, and Dr. Jane L. Rozycki.

The Adult Sickle Cell Program

From Dr. Tom Smith, Associate Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology: “Congratulations to Wally Smith, M.D., John Roberts, M.D., and Virginia Smith, RN, FNP, for progress in the Adult Sickle Cell Program. Comparison of utilization data from MCVH Decision Support show a significant shift of utilization from inpatient and emergency departments to scheduled outpatient visits over the past three years. Admissions went from 278 to 210, average length of stay went from 5.9 to 5.0 days, and emergency department visits went from 293 to 211 when comparing FY 96 to FY 98.

The Mentoring Program

The Department of Internal Medicine has instituted a program whereby all Assistant Professors will have an academic mentor. The goal of the mentoring program is keep young faculty members on course for high academic achievements and promotion.

The mentor will be chosen by the assistant professor in concert with the Division Chair. Periodic meetings will occur during which time the mentor will review the academic mission of the department, the assistant professor’s CV, and his or her progress in teaching, clinical care and research.

Each year, division chairs will carefully examine the mentor’s activities and success as part of the annual review of faculty. A grade for mentoring will be given by the Division Chair and will be reviewed with the Chair of the Department.

Faculty in the News


Dr. Lisa Kaplowitz, Associate Professor, Division of Quality Health Care, was featured in the May 11 edition of Style Weekly where she was identified as one of the 100 most influential Richmonders of the century and cited for her work with HIV/AIDS patients and for being instrumental in founding the VCU HIV/AIDS Center.

Community Service

For over 40 years Dr. Lyman Fisher has volunteered to do summer camp physicals for children attending the Salvatin Army Summer Camp. Unable to do the physicals this year, Dr. Tom Smith, Associate Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology has volunteered to fill in. Dr. Smith will be assisted by Dr. Laurie Lyckholm, Assistant Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology, and Dr. Mary Helen Hackney, Assistant Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology.

Dr. Smith intends to make this an official on-going commitment, and will enlist the help of several medicine-pediatrics residents.
News From Information Systems: Visit The Internal Medicine Web Site

Rather than having your internet browser start up with Netscape, or some other service, configure your browser so that “Home” is the Department of Internal Medicine Web Site. Our site was completely redesigned at the end of 1998, and is updated frequently. The address is:

http://views.vcu.edu/internal-medicine/inm/new.html

On it you will find descriptions of the department, its divisions, residency program, fellowships, and other activities. Click on “Events and Current News” for announcements of interest to the faculty, a schedule for Internal Medicine Grand Rounds, and a list of personal web pages at VCU, a local search engine for VCU web resources, and a link to the Internet research service, Dejanews.

For the researcher, such important resources as Current Contents, Science Citation Index, and Grateful Med now are easily accessible from our web site. You will also find links to the VCU faculty and staff email and phone directory, a list of personal web pages at VCU, a local search engine for VCU web resources, and a link to the Internet research service, Dejanews.

Many of us use electronic calendars in the office, at home, and on laptop or a Palm Pilot. One of the problems is keeping the various copies on our various computers synchronized. Now VCU Computing offers a new software — Netscape Calendar — that solves this problem. It utilizes the modern computer client-server approach: the appointments are stored on a central server in VCU Computing. The calendar users access and manage the calendar with a Calendar client program that may be installed on any computer (in the office, at home, on a laptop) and interacts with the server via the Internet. The Netscape Calendar permits the user to access from anywhere, via the Internet, a single copy maintained on the VCU server. It also provides a high degree of reliability in case of software/hardware crashes. VCU computing, like any industrial computing center, rigorously backs up the records of the calendar server. Users can restrict access to their calendar to those who need to have it, and the calendar is very discreet. Check it out at http://views.vcu.edu/ucsmcv/resources/calendar_server.htm.

This service of University Library Services has most of the features of Reference Update that many of us had subscribed to in the past (and which will no longer be available after June 1999). It allows the user to structure one or more personal search strategies and run them periodically against the current Tables of Contents of a large number of journals. There is even a provision for exporting records from the search directly into reference databases such as Reference Manager or ProCite. The link is:


If you need help, John D. Jones Jr. (jджones@vcu.edu) in the library is the person to contact.

Occasionally faculty inquire about an internal email system that enables wide communication among faculty and staff. The mailing list, DMF-L, exists exactly to serve this purpose of facilitating communications on any subject that any member of the list considers relevant. The notices for Medical Grand Rounds are regularly sent over this list, and some other administrative information is also communicated here, but the list has not been extensively used thus far. If you have something you wish to announce generally, a conference or an opinion, compose the message and send it to either Vlad Olchanski, Ph.D., volchans@hsc.vcu.edu, or Shaun Ruddy, M.D. ruddy@hsc.vcu.edu

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Faculty Publications


Invited Lecture:

Dr. Anton Schoolwerth delivered a talk entitled “Metabolic aspects of systemic pH regulation,” at the Seventh Annual Conference in Renal Physiology at the Quebec Society of Nephrology on April 23. The talk was given in honor of Dr. Guy Lemieux.

“Insulin resistance seems to play a central role in many conditions – diabetes, obesity, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, all of which come under the common umbrella of ‘Syndrome X,’” said Dr. Sanyal. “Clinically, we have become sensitive to the fact of seeing more NASH patients each week. Little is known currently about the condition. The similarities among these patients led us to develop a hypothesis that insulin resistance leads to the development of NASH.”

Many of these patients have more than one component, thus treating them requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Other faculty members who work with Dr. Sanyal with NASH patients include Dr. John Clore, Professor, Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism, and Dr. Glen Van Tuyle, Associate Professor, Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics.

continued from page one, Dr. Arun Sanyal

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Dr. Paul Fairman and Dr. Laurie Lyckholm Voted “Best Teacher” by the School of Medicine Class of ‘99

Dr. Paul Fairman
“I meet the students in the second year respiratory course. It’s a special opportunity to introduce them to material I enjoy. It’s fun to work with the students and have them intellectually stimulated. I am honored by this recognition.”

Dr. Laurie Lyckholm
“There is no greater honor for a professor than to receive this kind of recognition from the students. It’s also an honor to be chosen to share this award with Dr. Fairman.”