Welcome New Housestaff!

New energy characterizes a bright class of 50 first-year residents arriving from California, Texas, Iowa, Connecticut and many other states. VCU/MCV students are well represented and have been praised by their R-1 colleagues for their friendly interactions and warm welcoming. In response to the question ‘why did you choose VCU/MCV,” most cited the happiness of the Internal Medicine housestaff, the strong training program led by Dr. Michael Edmond, the diverse patient population, and the excellent faculty teaching.

We are very near and possibly have achieved our goal of a top-20 training program. Of all the applicants, we select 1½ percent to join our housestaff program. We have one of only 12 tracks for Women’s Health in the U.S., led by Dr. Wendy Klein. Over a third of all medical schools are represented on our housestaff, and over 50% of all applicants to any program in Internal Medicine in the U.S. apply to our program.

The Medical Education team also includes strong leadership in primary care (Dr. Beth Huber), information systems (Dr. Jonathan Perlin), medicine-pediatrics (Dr. Suzanne Lavoie), and general medicine (Dr. Margaret Roberson). This year’s new chief residents also on the team include Dr. Paul Sievert, Dr. Philip Tarkington, Dr. Wes Shepherd, and Dr. Elke Krueger. We will continue to refine our popular training program, strive to develop increasing rigor, and to create a culture for lifetime learning and high professional and ethical standards.

Please make an effort to welcome the new class of residents to our Department and extend a special welcome to the new chief residents.

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

Dr. Tom Smith Appointed Chairman of the Division of Hematology/Oncology

Dr. Tom Smith, Associate Professor, has been appointed Chairman of the Division of Hematology/Oncology. Dr. Smith thinks that his Division has a great deal of unrealized potential. “We are tops in clinical care, especially within our region. We have a world renowned rural cancer outreach program. We have a leading edge in phase I, translational research program. We have leading research in apoptosis (programmed cell death), platinum compounds in chemotherapy, and drug resistance. We have cutting edge research in thrombosis and coagulation. In spite of all this, we are not well known,” said Dr. Smith. He adds that the School of Medicine, MCVH, and VCU all recognize the quality of cancer care and research, but national recognition is necessary in order to continue to develop these programs.

Dr. Smith has several short-term and long-term goals. In the short-term, he sees the need to recruit new faculty to support the burgeoning cancer outreach program (see related article), to support clinical research, and to support the promising basic research programs already underway. He also sees the need to improve relationships with community practices. “Our colleagues in the community have a lot of clinical expertise to offer. They represent potential opportunities for our fellows and residents. There is also the potential for expanding clinical trials. It doesn’t matter to me whether patients participate in clinical trials here, or in the community. What does matter is they have the benefit of trials,” said Dr. Smith. In return, faculty members have much to offer community practices, such as expertise in coagulation disorders, in high-dose chemotherapy, stem-cell transplants, translational therapy, as well as phase I and phase II programs that can provide drugs to patients not otherwise available.

In the long-term, Dr. Smith would like the Division to be recognized among the top 25 programs in the country in clinical and basic research. He wants to be able to take advantage of the outcomes research already underway and put it into practice. “We have a lot of talent in outcomes research, such
On July 1, the Department of Internal Medicine will begin the new Hospitalist Program. A hospitalist is an inpatient specialist. Recognizing the increasing complexity of inpatient care, and the need for increased efficiencies in areas with a concentration of managed care plans, a few academic medical centers began experimenting with inpatient specialists a few years ago. The University of California at San Francisco has been especially successful with their model.

Dr. Steven Freer, Assistant Professor, Division of General Medicine and Primary Care, is the Medical Director of the Hospitalist Program. “I have always enjoyed the special challenges of treating acutely ill patients. Having looked closely at the development of hospitalist programs nationally, I believe that such a program will work well at MCVH for the inpatient medical services. Dr. Wenzel agreed and has been an enthusiastic advocate of starting our own program,” said Dr. Freer.

Although the idea of the hospitalist is not new, until recently it had not gained favor in this country. As managed care has changed practice patterns, and the patients being admitted are more acutely ill, the need for inpatient specialists has become apparent. “The demands of inpatient and outpatient care are different, and it is increasingly difficult for physicians to do both efficiently and well,” said Dr. Freer. “The skills required of inpatient and outpatient physicians have diverged. Most primary care physicians don’t admit many patients, so it makes intuitive sense to cede those duties to an inpatient specialist who does.” Just as a subspecialist who performs a particular procedure becomes very proficient, a hospitalist becomes proficient in treating acute illness, is more available to respond to developments quickly, and is more efficient in accessing and using resources only as required.

Dr. Freer points out that there are other advantages to a hospitalist program. “The familiarity of working regularly with a group of experienced inpatient attending physicians should improve relations and patient care,” said Dr. Freer. “The nursing and support staff, social workers, and case managers becoming familiar with the hospitalist’s style, methods, and expectations. Other departments gain similar advantages by frequent contact with familiar attending physicians. Housestaff and students can expect more teaching and guidance from hospitalists whose time is dedicated to the inpatient service. Patients’ and their families’ satisfaction is improved by dealing with a physician who is more available then one trying to balance an office practice with occasional inpatient obligations. Most places that have implemented hospitalist programs find satisfaction levels very high across all of these areas.”

Rather than add a new General Medicine inpatient service, the Hospitalist Program will be assigned one of the general medicine teams and the Faculty Attending Service. Joining Dr. Freer on the Hospitalist Program will be Dr. Andy Pinson, Assistant Professor, Division of General Medicine and Primary Care, and new faculty members Dr. Clay Beveridge, Assistant Professor, and Dr. Rajat Garg, Assistant Professor.
Cancer Outreach Marks Ten Years

This year marks the Tenth Anniversary of the Massey Cancer Center Rural Outreach Program. The event was celebrated at a ceremony and reception in the Medical Science Building on June 10, recognizing and honoring the physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners and support staff who have contributed to the success of the program over the past ten years.

The Program was founded in response to the National Cancer Institutes Cancer Control Initiative. Investigators discovered that persons in rural areas of Virginia did not have access to oncology care. Cancer deaths were much higher than national averages in these areas. Rather than require the patients to travel to MCVH, the Rural Outreach Program partnered with five community hospitals, and established clinics at these sites. The five rural sites are: Community Memorial Health Center in South Hill, Southside Community Hospital in Farmville, Rappahannock General Hospital in Kilmarnock, Greensville Memorial Hospital in Emporia, and Buchanan General Hospital in Grundy. Each of these hospitals serves a rural population of about 50,000 and is distinguished by a shortage of health-care providers and a high proportion of elderly and minority patients.

Dr. Gordon Ginder, Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology and Director of the Massey Cancer Center, said “a big part of the problem was the reluctance of patients to travel to urban treatment centers. Rural doctors have related stories of patients refusing treatment for curable conditions because of the distance they would have to travel. This program has made a difference in the lives of Virginia’s rural population.”

Beginning with a handful of patients, the Program has grown to over 3,500 being treated or followed. Cyndy Simonson, Nurse Practitioner with the Program praises the nurses at the Outreach Clinics, “beginning with none, there are 18 oncology nurses and 3 nurse practitioners in total at the sites. These professionals have answered the challenge of cancer care, becoming skilled oncology specialists. Most of these nurses have taken advanced courses, sat for a national certification exam, and become certified in oncology care.” Dr. Mary Helen Hackney, Assistant Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology, and Acting Associate Director for Cancer Outreach, agrees that the clinic nurses are integral to the success of the Program. “Obviously, we can’t be at the clinics all the time. These skilled and courageous professionals become our eyes, ears, and hands.”

Success of the Program is evident in some outcomes:
- breast conservation rate at one of the rural clinics reached 70%, twice the national average, a year after the program started
- 10% of patients at each site are registered in NCI trials, whereas previously there were none
- results have shown that treating patients in rural settings is less expensive than urban settings

The Rural Cancer Outreach Program has been supported since its inception by a combination of public funds granted by the Virginia General Assembly, and private donations.

1999 Achievement Awards

On June 3, a special Grand Rounds was held for the presentation of the Achievement Awards for the 1998-99 academic year. Award recipients were as follows:

Best Faculty:  Dr. Alpha A. “Berry” Fowler  
Dr. Paul Fairman  
Dr. Todd Gehr

Muren Award for Best Fellow:  Dr. Shawn McLane

Best Residents Awards:  
Outstanding Housestaff Clinician:  Dr. Diana Chalmeta
Scholar’s Prize:  Dr. Meredith Drummond

Arthur Klein Memorial Award:  Dr. Laurie Han

After the award presentations, the faculty, fellows, and residents were treated to the National ACP-ASIM Award Winning Presentation of Dr. Ryan Mire.

continued from page one:  Dr. Tom Smith is new Division Chairman

as Dr. Bruce Hillner (Professor, Division of General Medicine and Primary Care), who is a recognized world leader in decision analysis and outcomes research, and Dr. Lynne Penberthy, (Assistant Professor, Division of Quality Health Care), who is an expert in analyzing large databases,” said Dr. Smith. Finally, Dr. Smith would like to move into a true service line method of care delivery with agreed upon plans of care for each patient. A written plan of care can be followed, measured, and analyzed for effectiveness. It also promotes accountability, standardization of care, and efficiency. Dr. Brian Mitchell, Assistant Professor, Division of Hematology/Oncology, has already begun projects in standardization of care and improvement in hematology/oncology clinical service. Dr. Smith is excited about some initiatives already in place. In September, the Thomas Hospice Palliative Care Unit will open. This will be one of the very first hospice and palliative care units in an academic medical center. The Unit will allow VCU/MCV to move to the forefront of palliative care, treatment, and research. In another areas, the Hemophilia Treatment Center, under the direction of Dr. Marcus Carr, will provide treatment for coagulation disorders and new opportunities for research.

He is also proud of the education program in his Division. “Within the past five years or so our fellowship program has come to be recognized as top notch. We have wonderful fellows. One of ours, Dr. Harold Chung, won the Best Fellow Award. We are attracting the best and brightest post-graduates, both here at VCU/MCV and from other residency programs.”
Honors, Awards, and Offices

The following faculty, fellows, and housestaff have recently earned re-certification as Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support Providers:

Scott Borelli, M.D.
Scott Choi, M.D.
Berry Fowler, M.D.
Steven Freer, M.D.
Amy Foxx-Orenstein, D.O.
Adil Habib, M.D.
Ahmed M. Hegab, M.D.
James E. Kempton, M.D.
Jay Kuenmerle, M.D.
Suzanne Lavoie, M.D.
Andy Pinson, M.D.
Anton Schoolwerth, M.D., MSHA
James Shaw, M.D.
Richard P. Wenzel, M.D., M.Sc.

Joy Zeh, Nurse Practitioner, Division of Quality Health Care, has won statewide award as One of the Ten Most Outstanding Nurses in Virginia for her work with the VCU HIV/AIDS Center and HIV Clinic.

Connie Thompson-Bodkins, Nurse Manager, Medical-Surgical Outpatient Clinics, Carol Burnham, Terrie Pendleton, Allison Creger, and Ellen Gerzston from the HIV Clinic were nominated jointly by HUD as a “Best Practice Program” for establishing the HIV Guest Houses. Their awards will be presented at the July “Building a Better Tomorrow in 1999” HUD symposium.

Four faculty members in the Division of Nephrology have been granted the designation of American Society of Hypertension Specialist in Clinical Hypertension. There were over 600 applications for this designation and only 250 were chosen by the ASH Credentials Committee after a thorough review of applications. The faculty members are as follows:

Dr. Alvin Zfass, Professor, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, is the recipient of the American Gastroenterological Association’s 1999 Distinguished Clinician Award. Dr. Donald Castell, President of the AGA, said “This year’s Distinguished Clinician recipient exemplifies the very highest qualities we all look for in a physician.”

Todd Gehr, M.D.
Elizabeth Ripley, M.D.
Anton Schoolwerth, M.D., MSHA
Domenic Sica, M.D.