



New faculty welcomed

VCU Department of Family Practice welcomes five new faculty members.

Melissa Bradner, M.D., joined the faculty of the Department of Family Practice in 1999 when she completed her residency at the VCU Blackstone Family Practice program. Bradner was a fellow in the department's Faculty Development Fellowship Program from 1999-2000. Her responsibilities include serving as the physician coordinator for the international VCU Primary Care Partnership sponsored by the American International Health Alliance. Bradner has served as co-director of the VCU Foundations of Clinical Medicine course for M1 and M2 students, and is now the director of the M3 Family Practice Clerkship. In addition to her academic duties, Bradner is the medical director of the city of Richmond, Department of Public Health 10th Street Clinic, and is a staff physician for VCU Student Health.

Sutton Hamilton, M.D., joined VCU Blackstone Family Practice faculty in the summer of 2001. Hamilton is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He completed his family practice residency training at Franklin Square Residency in Baltimore and completed a Faculty Development Fellowship at the University of Cincinnati in 2001. Hamilton's responsibilities at the Blackstone program include teaching the evidence based medicine curriculum and coordinating clinical research projects within the residency program.

Rebecca Johnson, M.D., joined the VCU Shenandoah Valley Family Practice Residency faculty as the associate director in July 2001. A native of Northern Virginia, Johnson graduated from Eastern Virginia Medical School. She completed her family practice residency in 1997 at the Martin Army Community Hospital in Fort Benning, Ga. Johnson served in the Army until 1999 and then served as a faculty member of the ETSU Johnson City Family Practice Residency program.

Thomas Alan Ball, M.D., joined the VCU Shenandoah Valley Family Practice Residency program in April 2001 as a new faculty member. Ball graduated from the University of Virginia School of Medicine, where he completed his residency training in 1993.

James R. Lundy, M.D., joined the Front Royal faculty of the Shenandoah Valley Family Practice Residency program in August 2001. Lundy graduated in 1998 from the University of Alabama School of Medicine and completed his family practice residency training at the Harrisburg Family Practice program in 2001.

Whitehurst-Cook speaks at Annual White Coat Ceremony

The VCU School of Medicine chose Michelle Whitehurst-Cook for her emulating role as physician and faculty member of the Department of Family Practice to speak to incoming students at this past year's sixth annual White Coat Ceremony. The ceremony, held in the Medical Sciences Building on the MCV Campus, focused on the responsibilities of physicians and their roles in taking care of and caring for patients. Following the welcoming remarks from the deans of the School of Medicine, Whitehurst-Cook addressed the students on the school's values — patient care, humanism and professionalism.

Dr. Dickie Newsome introduced Whitehurst-Cook, describing her as “one of the busiest faculty members here,” referring to her role as chair of the admissions committee for the school. She is a physician who “walks the talk,” Newsome said, referring to her extensive work with the underserved in Virginia. Born in Lawrenceville, Va., Whitehurst-Cook graduated from The College of William and Mary and attended medical school at VCU, graduating in the class of 1979.

Whitehurst-Cook welcomed all the new medical students to VCU, stressing that each one of them was carefully scrutinized and selected because of “special qualities” he or she possessed. She spoke of the White Coat Ceremony as a “right of passage” and instructed the students to carry themselves as professionals. She stressed that the white coat is a symbol only, and that it represents the goals of altruism — to help, to comfort and to heal.

Whitehurst-Cook also told the students that the humanitarian role of the physician has never been more important; that they have a responsibility to teach others and to show respect for all others with whom they come in contact. “Ideal physicians,” she said, “have superb listening skills, admit mistakes, admit when they don't know something — but make a commitment to finding out, hold hands with patients to comfort them when giving bad news, and are willing to care and to be partners in that caring” with their patients. She stated that if a physician is willing to do those things, the reward comes in seeing how much the patients care about the physician in return.

Finally, Whitehurst-Cook told the students that “there is no such thing as too involved” with patients. She stated that each student would develop his or her own level of comfort over time, but that it should always be remembered that it is a “privilege and honor that patients put their lives in your hands” and that it is a physician's duty to “reciprocate with compassion and excellence in care.”

Money raised for mission trip to Honduras

In July of 2002, a team of dedicated VCU medical students and experienced physicians will embark on a humanitarian mission to Honduras, Central America. Honduras is the poorest nation in Central America and its people face numerous serious health care challenges. According to the World Health Organization, 50 percent of the people live in poverty, 39 percent of the children are malnourished, and diseases such as malaria pose a threat to Hondurans of all ages. Natural disasters, including Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and

Hurricane Michelle in 2001, have made these problems even worse and brought more urgency for help that the medical team can provide.

While in Honduras the group will be working with the organization Nuestros Puqueños Hermanos. Students and doctors will receive people in NPH's external clinic, check children from the organization in their internal clinic, and provide health care and medicine for elderly people through Ciudad Blanca. They also will take part in Brigadas Médicas, a monthly medical mission to a rural village without health care.

The students have scheduled several fund-raising events to help raise money for the trip, including a venipuncture and injection workshop for first-year medical students at VCU. The workshop was held on Jan. 19 and was both a valuable and enjoyable learning experience for all who participated. Several groups helped to make the workshop a success, including Susan Tatu, head nurse at VCU Student Health, and the VCU Family Practice Residency Programs, who contributed funding for supplies. The residency programs are those at Blackstone, Chesterfield, Fairfax, Hanover, Riverside and Shenandoah Valley.

Positions are still available for physicians who would like to go to Honduras. Contact Reena Chitwal at reena_c@email.com for more information.

Clerkship offered through HRSA grant funding

The VCU Department of Family Practice received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Health Professions to enhance the M-III Clerkship by using computer-based CD-ROM technology. Funding provided by HRSA will support the development of eight cases — to be designed around a medical topic and including psychosocial aspects of care and skills development — distributed on CD-ROM for students to complete while at their clerkship sites. The CD-ROM technology allows the cases to include brief video clips, interactive interviewing situations, PowerPoint slides and self quizzes.

The first case covers evaluation of a pediatric gastrointestinal disease patient. VCU faculty members with grant-supported time are scheduled to develop the remaining cases in the series.

It is expected that students will eventually complete two cases a week. The cases will be supplemented by in-person or online discussions facilitated by faculty members to further assist student learning. When students return from their clerkship experiences, they will complete an OSCE evaluation with cases similar to those covered on the CD-ROMs.

For further information about this program, contact Carolyn Peel, M.D., at cpeel@hsc.vcu.edu.

What draws students to family medicine?

(Second, third and fourth year medical students who have a strong interest in family medicine or who have selected family medicine as their specialty choice were interviewed to answer this question.)

In a time when many in medicine are wondering about the rewards of being a physician, students are still drawn to the fundamental values and joys of family medicine: the doctor-patient relationship, the breadth of medical practice, the variety of patient population and the opportunity to provide long-term care. VCU's M-III clinical year is when students have exposure to the major areas of medicine and begin to sort out their interests and aptitudes. Students who tend to enjoy all the clinical rotations, and are especially drawn to the interpersonal aspects of medicine, often select family medicine careers. They are energized by the psychosocial aspects of medicine and like the variety and breadth of practice.

Interest in family practice/primary care was sparked early on for some students. One student said, "Since early childhood, my image of a physician was a family doctor." Another indicated that by middle school and high school she was beginning to think about herself as a physician and by M-III year she knew family practice was the best fit for her. Encounters with impressive role models such as one's family physician, a parent who was a physician or FCM preceptors got the students' attention.

The students interviewed were attracted to family medicine for similar reasons. First and foremost is the doctor-patient relationship. Each student values a long-term relationship with his or her patients and wants to make a difference in the patients' lives. These students believe, by knowing their patients and the family, they can provide better health and medical care. The variety of the patient population and the variety of diagnoses seen in the office are very appealing. One student mentioned that she really liked being the first in line with diagnoses and treatment. The task of sorting out the medical puzzles a group of patients present on any given day, keeps the day-to-day life of the family practitioner interesting and challenging — never dull. Having a teenager in one room, a grandmother in another and an infant and new mom in another examining room adds to the richness of practice.

A flexible lifestyle option is another appealing characteristic of family medicine. Family physicians practice in rural, urban or suburban settings. Special interest fellowships and added certification are available for family physicians in areas such as sports medicine, geriatrics and obstetrics. They serve as emergency room physicians, work part time, job share and find many creative ways to adapt their medical practice to family and life style needs. One student interested in international relief work sees family medicine as the specialty that will allow her to provide the broadest health and medical care and adapt her schedule to her desire to spend several months a year doing relief work.

Family practice is a specialty that is supported by a strong national organization, the American Academy of Family Physicians. CME programs and national workshops are available to assist the family doctor, who must stay up-to-date and well prepared for the required recertification exam every six years.

They have worked with "real life" family practitioners — excellent role models who are very bright, enjoy what they do and are loved by their patients. The variety of their patient population and the health and medical challenges keep their days from being too predictable. Today's family physicians continue to develop innovative management and practice methods to address challenges, and today's opportunities continue to abound for the 2002 family practitioner.

Mentor retires after 40 years

Family and friends of Dr. James (Jimmy) Harris gathered in December to celebrate the professional achievements and outstanding service of Harris. After 40 years as a community physician in Blackstone, Va, he is retiring.

A native of Blackstone, Va., Harris attended Hampden-Sydney College and served in the U.S. Marine Corp. He attended medical school at the University of Virginia and completed his internship at MCV Hospitals. He began his medical practice in Blackstone in 1961 where he joined his already established brother, Epes.

Harris is well known in Virginia as a pioneer in the formation of the family practice specialty and he was an original founder of the VCU Health System's Family Practice Residency in 1970.

In his tribute to Harris, Steve Spence, M.D. program director, said, "For 40 years he has given his heart and soul in caring for this community ... along the way he has helped to train hundreds of doctors and medical students, imparting his knowledge and gentle bedside manner into their repertoire of skills ... during the 18 years I have known him, I have never seen him have a bad day. To know him is to respect him, to know him is to love him, to know him is to strive to be like him."

In addition to his physician and faculty roles, Harris has served as mayor of Blackstone for the past 20 years, as an elder in the Blackstone Presbyterian Church, as president of the Virginia Municipal League, and as a member of the admissions committees for the University of Virginia and for VCU. He received the VCU Dean's Award for Community Service, and was named Family Doctor of the Year in 1990 by the Family Physicians across the commonwealth of Virginia.

Woolf elected to institute, named editor of monthly

Steven H. Woolf, M.D., M.P.H., professor and director of research for the Department of Family Practice, recently received two distinguished honors. In Oct. 2001, Woolf was elected to the Institute of Medicine. Current active members elect new members from among the candidates chosen for their major contributions to health and medicine or to related fields such as social and behavioral sciences, law, administration and economics. Both an honor and a commitment, election to the institute requires members to devote a significant amount of time to committees engaged in a broad range of health policy issues.

Woolf also was named editor of BMJ USA. Launched in Feb. 2001, BMJ USA is a monthly national edition of the BMJ. Currently this publication is distributed to about 100,000 U.S. physicians specializing in family medicine, general practice, internal medicine or cardiology.